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**A Cliff in Denmark:
An Adapturgical Exploration of Hamlet**

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
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Abstract

The story of Hamlet is commonly attributed to William Shakespeare and has been adapted consistently by playwrights, poets, novelists, musicians, artists, and filmmakers since the Elizabethan playwright's day. However, Shakespeare himself was an adaptor, with his Hamlet taking inspiration from Scandinavian and Icelandic histories. This research follows my own personal adaptation of the Hamlet narrative, using the characters, themes, and scenes as sources to draw from for the creation of a new play that uses Hamlet as the base of a palimpsestuous engagement.

Through a series of workshops and rehearsals with two groups of actor/participants, I draw upon the images and ideas that are associated with Hamlet as 'memes' of the core Shakespearean text to write a 45-minute play. This play re-contextualises the Hamlet narrative to a 21st Century, New Zealand context, depicting a contemporary look at the depression and anxiety that can be read into the original character, and the way that the people in the character's life affect the outcomes of the story.

This process recognises the adapturgical (a portmanteau of adaptation and dramaturgy) tools which are useful while adapting and transforming a script like Hamlet into a contemporary context.

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Introduction

Adaptation has featured heavily in theatre throughout history. Whether it be classical dramatists adapting myth and legend, to the adaptation from page to stage, from page to musical, from stage to screen (and vice versa). The adaptation of one author's work to another's is how humans have told stories since we gained the ability to; the transference of knowledge, of oral storytelling, oral to written, and written to the masses. In recent history, it seems that adaptation to the stage has become a more prevalent occurrence, for example, of the 22 Tony award for Best Musical nominees between 2015-2019 (69th to 73rd) 19 have been adaptations of books, films, albums, or pre-existing musicals/reviews; 2016 and 2018 saw all the nominees in this category being adaptations.¹ Adaptation is the fuel of this research. The rhetorical 'Why?' of adaptation is what has interested me; Why this specific text? Why this form? Why these choices? These questions I apply to the core text of this research and its subsequent adaptations. Why did Tom Stoppard and Jean Betts choose William Shakespeare's Hamlet as the text that they adapted? Why did they choose to focus on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Ophelia respectively? Why was this the story they wanted to write?

I have been interested in adaptation for a number of years now, with a particular interest in how adaptation translates over different forms. A text of notable interest for me for some time was H.G. Wells' 'The War of the Worlds', and how that has been adapted over multiple forms; Orson Wells' 1938 radio drama, two (at least) notable film adaptations (Haskin's 1953 film and Spielberg's 2005 film), and the pop-cultural phenomenon that was Jeff Wayne's 1978 concept album (which in turn was then adapted to a stage production), among many more. The more I

¹ This included Dominique Morriseau's 'Ain't Too Proud' and Irene Sankoff & David Hein's 'Come From Away' which aren't based on specific texts, but instead real events/biographies (unlike Lin-Manuel Miranda's Hamilton which is based on Ron Chernow's biography of Alexander Hamilton), however, I feel the distinction between texts and real events should not create a divide between the two.

looked at pop culture, the more I realised how much it was built upon adaptation and intertextuality, something which became evident when looking at films from the 1980s. Filmmakers of the 1980s, especially in the horror genre, remade films from the 1950s, as love letters to the films they grew up with. I think specifically of films like John Carpenters' *The Thing* (1982)² or David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986)³. A similar phenomenon is being seen again in the last decade, with filmmakers and creatives remaking and referencing works from their childhoods that influenced them. Simply just think of the numerous remakes and sequels that seem to be screened weekly in cinemas. This comes into play in the world of theatre also. I commented on the prevalence of film-to-musical adaptations at the Tonys as this is the same phenomenon. The box-office success of many of these remake/reboot films meant that the same could (and in some cases did) apply to these theatrical 'reboots'. The musical version of *Beetlejuice*, based on Tim Burton's 1988 film, became one of the most successful Broadway productions of 2019. Other musicals in this vein would be the likes of: '*Hairspray*' (2002), '*The Producers*' (2001), '*Billy Elliot*' (2005), '*Kinky Boots*' (2013), '*Once*' (2012), '*Mean Girls*' (2017), '*Legally Blonde*' (2007), and countless stage versions of Disney films. The phenomenon is not new however, the musicals of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice were all based on preexisting texts, biblical and autobiographical alike, aside from their short musical '*Cricket*'. One of my personal favourite musicals is Howard Ashman and Alan Menken's *Little Shop of Horrors*, a musical based on the 1960 film of the same name, which in turn is a possible adaptation of two short stories by Arthur C. Clarke (*The Reluctant Orchid*)⁴ and John Collier (*Green Thoughts*). I make mention of this as Ashman's words on adaptation are insightful into the way that I view the process and point of adaptation:

When you're adapting, you're taking a point ... adapting is saying 'this is what struck me about that thing I saw, about that thing I read about this, this story that appeals to me' ...

² A remake of the 1951 Christian Nyby film '*The Thing From Another World*'

³ A remake of the 1958 Kurt Neumann film of the same name.

⁴ The Clarke story is said to be inspired by the H. G. Wells story *The Flowering of a Strange Orchid*

so the process of communicating your experience to another person is what adaptation is. I saw [The 1960 Little Shop of Horrors film] as hip and funny and smart in a certain way and I want you to have the experience that I had when I saw that film, so I transform it. (Hahn, 2018, 0:25:13 - 0:25:40)

This idea of presenting to an audience my way of seeing a text like Hamlet, the concepts and moments that interest me, the possibility of giving an audience a different and individual way of understanding and relating to moments and characters, ideas and feelings, is what draws me to writing adaptations, what draws me to creating new meaning from preexisting material. Indeed this is true for directing any piece of theatre, the vision that a director has is usually the one that the audience receives. But what I believe Ashman here is meaning is that the transformational power of adaptation is what is so appealing. Being able to see/hear a core text in a certain way, a way that the person sitting beside you is seeing it, or the last person who checked that book out of the library read it, and having the chance to bring your fresh ideas to that text in your own way is something which draws adaptors, dramaturgs, and directors alike to adaptation.

Shakespeare also seems to be a place of significant adaptive inspiration for many stage and screen writers. Aside from the aforementioned Betts and Stoppard, there are a significant number of popular works which draw from the metaphorical Shakespearean fountain of youth. I myself have drunk from the metaphorical well in my previous work, 'Four Kings'. The play was an adaptation and synthesis of various Shakespearean plays and characters, and localising them into the context of a New Zealand university flat party. Each character was a synthesis of a few different Shakespearean characters, for example one character was a synthesis of Macbeth, Petruchio, and Ferdinand (Love's Labour's Lost), while another was Richard III, King Lear, and Caliban. While writing the play I began to understand key ideas which led me to this thesis; ideas of the importance of trusting what I see as important or interesting from the core text, how to translate character/intention/language from a classical Elizabethan form, into a

contemporary New Zealand understanding, and most importantly, trusting that both the actors and audience will understand references, characters, and intentions; not having to hold their hand to come to understandings throughout the process.

In a natural, scientific sense, adaptation is how a species survives, mutating genetics to fit the species' new or changing environment; story telling acts in a very similar way. Think of the change from the oral tradition to the written word; with oral storytelling, details may change as the story is passed on, becoming more suitable to fit the context of that storyteller. When the Brothers Grimm travelled Europe collecting folk tales, they heard multiple versions of the same story with minor details changed relating to the region in which they heard the story, and used the more common details in their story collection thereby creating their own versions of the stories which became the eventual stories most children were raised on, and theatrical adaptation is no different. A text may have had a specific meaning and understanding in the time it was written, but as history progresses, the meaning of the text may be diluted or lost to a modern audience. I think of the works of Aristophanes, whose comedies were so ingrained with the political landscape of late 5th Century BCE Athens that many of the jokes pointed towards political figures of the time would be lost on many contemporary audiences, who may not be well versed in Athenian politics. Or even Shakespeare's 'Love's Labour's Lost', which often makes references and jokes to school in Elizabethan times, which are no longer relatable as schooling now has changed so much since Shakespeare's time. So it is the job of the adaptor to breathe life into the text to make it survive in its new environment. That isn't to say that an adapter's aim is to retain the core text, but instead to transform a text to one that can potentially survive longer than the original or previous could alone. We see this often with the likes of Shakespeare, whose plays are regarded as some of the best works of English literature, however it has become such a common subject taught in high school English classes (often to much disdain from the students, as prior experiences at school had proven to me) that it seems

the general public regard Shakespeare is for scholars, for those who understand the language. The public expects to hear the language spoken in RP (Received Pronunciation) English, by the likes of Lawrence Olivier, Orson Wells, or Ian McKellan, as perpetuated by pop-cultural references. This idea is the opposite of how it was in Shakespeare's day, where his plays were for the general public, and enjoyed by commoner and nobility alike, and was performed in what we now know as OP, an accent closer to what was more commonly spoken at the time. Actor and Director John Bell, speaking in Heffernen (2009) likens Shakespearean plays to the Blockbusters of the day:

He was the biggest, no.1 box office dramatist of his day and I think it's that clever combination of providing something for everybody. So you get your philosophy, and your provocative thought. You get your love scenes ... It's got all the great soapy elements. It's got clowns... and of course it's got the sword fight at the end, which is the equivalent of the car chase in today's movies... make it as exciting as possible (0:26:00).

This concept is something which hasn't seemed to have been passed on to the general public today. I think back to my high school English and Drama classes where the mere mention of Shakespeare was met with the sound of groans, expletives, and general annoyance. Or even recently when talking to work colleagues about my plans to adapt Hamlet for my thesis, their reactions were generally a mix of 'Oh, Shakespeare's pretty difficult though', 'oh, well, good luck with that', or 'I never understood Shakespeare'. That isn't to say that Shakespeare's texts are a dying commodity. The likes of the Sheilah Winn Shakespeare competition exists for NZ high school students, breathing new and different life into the 400+ year old words, giving young actors a chance to perform in a Shakespeare outside of NCEA assessments. I myself performed in and directed a number of short scenes at high school. In fact the scene I directed from The Tempest (act 3 scene 2) went on to influence part of my writing in Four Kings.

I talk about Shakespeare's Hamlet as the original text, only in the sense of my adaptation. It is well recorded that the Hamlet narrative is not the sole creation of Shakespeare's. Indeed, only a few decades prior to the publishing of his version, an anonymous writer, thought to be either Thomas Kyd or even Shakespeare himself, published a text believed to be Shakespeare's source of inspiration. The now lost text is known to us now as the 'Ur-Hamlet'. However, this is not the only original source of the narrative. The Scandinavian text *Gesta Danorum* by the historian Saxo Grammaticus around the 12th century features a history of Amlethus, a prince whose uncle murders his father to marry his mother to become king, and who feigns dullness in order to trick his uncle into thinking nothing of him while plotting his murder "Fearing lest too shrewd a behaviour may wake his uncle suspect of him, feigns dullness... lack of wit... a very freak of nature" (Gollancz, 1967, pp. 18-22). Around a similar time the Norse text *Prose Edda* of Icelandic historian Snorri Sturlusson features one of the earliest references to a character called Hamlet, with minor similarities to the Hamlet narrative. I make note of these early texts to note that Shakespeare himself was an adaptor over all of his work. Hamlet is just one of many of Shakespeare's texts that take inspiration from ancient prose and poetry. As an adaptive text, Hamlet survives like the Grimm Fairy Tales, as adaptive works from existing stories yet are what people often turn to as the commonly known rendition of said story. From there, other authors, playwrights, and artists of all kinds, use these adapted texts as the core of their adaptive process. Potentially in the future, there could be another adaptation of these works that becomes what is seen as the core version of that text, and thus the cycle continues.

The Shakespeare Hamlet text is interesting when looking at it through the lens of mental health as we recognise and are able to diagnose it today. There are suggestions throughout the text that Hamlet, Ophelia, and to an extent Gertrude all suffer from some form of mental illness, particularly depression and anxiety. These three characters' are all spurred by grief at the loss

of patriarchal figures in their lives, Hamlet and Gertrude at the loss of King Hamlet, Hamlet's father and Gertrude's husband, and Ophelia at the loss of her father Polonius. Grief is at the core of the narrative. Without grief, there would be no plot to the story. Hamlet would not become obsessed with the true nature of his father's death; he would not turn towards his depressive and anxious states and not be able to act upon the impulses he has; he would not have his concerns over his place within his kingdom when usurped from his place as king by his step-father; he would not have his suspicions around Ophelia's true motives, thereby not causing her downfall into the manic state which she becomes and eventually taking her own life. It is the mental health narrative that really drives Hamlet's motives throughout the play. So the question becomes, when adapting this narrative to (in the case of this research) a contemporary, New Zealand perspective, via my subject position of someone who lives with depression and anxiety, what motives stay in the text? How does Hamlet's depression change in the new context I am placing the narrative within? What can a contemporary, millennial, Kiwi Hamlet have to say about the treatment of mental health today?

Literature Review

The mental health narrative in Hamlet and its adaptation has been tracked by multiple theorists and practitioners in the English and Theatre Studies fields. Hamlet's character has been discussed by the likes of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Ronald David Laing, who each brought their own valuable philosophical and psychological understanding to the characters' psyche, specifically when considering the masculinity and mental health apparent in the text. On the other hand, valuable information can be gained from looking to the adaptation of the texts, especially when reading into the concepts of intertextuality, palimpsests, and mimesis. These concepts open reading into meanings that we as practitioners can impose on texts, and therefore for the audience.

The following chapter is separated into three subsections: Pop Cultural Hamlet, Hamlet's Mental Health and Gender, and Dramaturgical and Adapturgical. There are texts throughout that do not simply focus on one of these aspects, but are places where they work in with the theoretical narrative of my research. I have chosen to format these subsections in the same way that I would have approached my knowledge, beginning with my pop-cultural understanding of the text, then moving to the underlying subtext of the narrative that I aim to look at, and finally the theoretical and dramaturgical approach to the physical aspect of the work.

Pop Cultural Hamlet

Abele (2007) discusses the generational divide in understanding the Hamlet character and story in terms of the Generation X adaptations of Hamlet in film during the 1990s and early 2000s. Her article 'Gen-X Hamlets: Imitating the Dane to Find a Personal American Masculinity'

looks at the 'slacker' films of Tony Scott, Amy Heckerling, and Michael Almeredyda⁵ and how these portray versions of Hamlet struggling to understand their place in the world, trying to understand what it is about them as a person, and 'them' as a generation, that is important and special. The social pressures imposed upon them are the spur in the side of their mental struggle, similar to Shakespeare's Hamlet, whose societal place in the world that has been thrust upon him is one of the catalysts of his arc. Abele writes of these Gen-X Hamlets:

These parodic Hamlets do not distill the original play's meaning into a sound byte; rather they demonstrate an openness to new explorations of this rich mine. The integrity of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* more than survives these slacker experiments... [they] create a new personal order, a new set of values that offers the sense of self and integrity that they can believe in and follow... recognising their individual potential; instead of accepting limitations imposed by society (p. 109).

This idea that each generation's Hamlet's having separate social concerns which impact their sense of self and integrity interests me, especially when looking at that same concern through the lens of a Millennial/Gen Z, what social concerns now impact that Hamlet? How does a new generation, building upon the history before them, view and run with the ideas, moments, and characters of Hamlet, and what does this change within the meaning of the play? Abele writes in terms of film, so I will add a film to the mix as a possible example of this next generation Hamlet. Richard Ayoade's 2010 film 'Submarine' can be viewed as an example of just this. The film is a coming of age story set in Wales, its plot and characters have similarities to a Hamlet, a young man struggling with his sense of self, a distant (not dead) father struggling with depression, a mother who has an affair with the neighbour, and a young girl struggling with the mortality of her parents. As opposed to the Gen X sense of place in society, Ayoade's film suggests that the next generation Hamlet isolates this sense of place on a smaller scale,

⁵ True Romance, 1993; Clueless, 1995; Hamlet, 2001 respectively.

struggling to find his sense of place among his family and friends, turning his concern from extra-personal to interpersonal, from society as a whole to the close community one surrounds them self with. This concept is something which I will go on to explore during my physical research process.

The book *Shakespeare/Not Shakespeare* (Desmet et al, 2017) features various essays focusing on less obvious examples of adaptations of Shakespeare. For example Kristin N. Denslow writes the chapter 'Guest Starring Hamlet: The Proliferation of the Shakespeare Meme on American Television' in which she discusses how the 'meme', "a form of cultural shorthand... immediately suggests an interpretive framework for the viewer" (Denslow, 2017, p. 97), of the ghost of Hamlet's father has been used and reinterpreted to fit the specific context of the TV show. She writes on how the sitcom 'Arrested Development' uses Hamlet to represent various characters, moments, and plot lines over its seasons. For example, each of the Bluth brothers "embodies one facet of Hamlet's character" (Denslow, 2017, p.108), but, specifically, the author references:

Though George Sr. never dies in the series, he is arrested and imprisoned, escapes to Mexico, fakes his own death... he is a constant nagging presence in the sons' lives... [He] manages to watch his own funeral from the attic of Michael's home. The verticality associated with the ghost in *Hamlet* adaptations... reappears here where the "ghost" of George Sr. haunts the family from the attic... they are trapped in a circular narrative of repetition and failure produced by a father who refuses to be present *or* absent (Denslow 2017, pp. 108-109).

The concept that the very specific moment of Hamlet being haunted and told what he should do by the ghost of his father can be completely repackaged and delivered in a new form is exactly what Denslow (2017) means by 'meme': "all memes are works of creative repackaging

that still retain the memory of the old meme” (p. 109). This then begs the question, what can one call an example of the Ghost ‘meme’? Denslow defines it as: “the haunting of a son by the ghost of his deceased father, an action that produces some form of inaction or indecision in the son” (p. 98). So then by this definition, does my earlier suggestion of Submarine fit this meme? I would argue that it does as in the film Oliver’s father isn’t dead, but he is a guiding voice that Oliver listens to; in a way he becomes a ghost of himself when he sinks into his depressive state. He is an ever-present patriarchal figure that guides Oliver, as Polonius would say ‘To thine own self, be true’. But by the definition Denslow gives of the meme, this version doesn’t match the mold. This is then something for myself to consider when in the adapting/writing process, what is an audience going to recognise as Hamlet or at least the image of a Hamlet ‘meme’. This is something that could be answered by Casey (2017), in his essay ‘HypeRomeo & Juliet: Postmodern Adaptation and Shakespeare’. Here, Casey discusses similar ‘memetic’ concepts to Denslow although he uses the term ‘rhizome’, taking its meaning from the botanical definition for the subterranean plant stem that allows an extra shoot to grow from the mother plant. He writes in relation to the anime series Romeo X Juliet: “For many fans and critics, adaptations are evaluated subjectively and unsystematically; they identify works as ‘Shakespearean’ in the same manner that US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart recognized hard-core pornography in 1964 - they know it when they see it” (Casey, 2017, p. 59). This quote potentially answers my posed question, an audience will recognise a Hamlet narrative or a version of the Hamlet meme when they see/experience it. It is possible to recognise Hamlet, or Shakespeare, or indeed any other text, in things that aren’t inherently that. Casey discusses the idea of ‘Fakespeare’, something that is Shakespeare-like, but not necessarily Shakespeare derived. It is the idea of Shakespeare, what we as audience members expect to recognise, that fuels adaptations like the aforementioned Submarine⁶. He writes “That this image of

⁶ Casey doesn’t use Submarine as a reference text in his chapter, I use it only as my pop cultural/filmic touchstone.

Shakespeare (or this image of the play) is disconnected from any original reality is irrelevant” (Casey, 2017, p. 61). It is the adaptation that becomes the ‘real’. The meme takes on its own life, disconnected to its original form. We recognise it as an adaptation because it harkens back to the imagery and memetic ideas associated with the play. Memetic imagery is the feeling an audience member feels when they see an actor hold something like you would expect to see Hamlet holding Yorik’s skull, or Juliet on the balcony, or John Cusack holding a boombox over his head in ‘Say Anything’. It is the pre-existing, palimpsestuous associations that the imagery holds, as opposed to an overt reference or adaptation.

Following on from this idea, Desmet’s (2017) essay ‘*Dramas of Recognition: Pan’s Labyrinth and Warm Bodies as accidental Shakespeare*’ discusses how audiences can find Shakespeare in un-Shakespearean texts. Anyone who knows *Warm Bodies* will recognise its inherent Romeo and Juliet parallels, however Desmet raises the point of the book’s author, Isaac Marion “discover[ed] Shakespeare’s tragedy in his evolving fiction and then adjust[ed] details to solidify the analogy...” (p. 285). She goes on to discuss the film adaptation and its furthering of Marion’s accidental adaptation, writing: “R [the Romeo character] becomes human... by transforming himself into a filmic simulacrum of Shakespeare’s character... R becomes recognizable as Romeo through a post-textual Shakespearean congeries of filmic adaptation... a direct and self-conscious quotation from Romeo and Juliet” (Desmet, 2017, pp. 286-287).

Desmet (2017) goes on to note an accidental Hamlet within Guillermo Del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth*, outside of just the lead character’s name being the same as Hamlet’s love. She talks of Ofelia-as-Hamlet as “the sly haunter of Denmark’s dark corners, waiting for his cue to act [who] outdoes her Shakespearean prototype” (Desmet, 2017, p.280). Although this may be true, that there are similarities in their characters, the story holds more similarities to fairy tale tropes, which make sense for the story Del Toro creates. Desmet goes on to write: “In the absence of

direct authorial testimony, textual allusions, or strong structural parallels... a claim for appropriation becomes exponentially more difficult to sustain” (p. 281). What this then suggests is that in order to create an adaptation, the text must contain more than a passing resemblance to the base text. Pan’s *Labyrinth* isn’t an adaptation of *Hamlet* because it doesn’t contain structural similarities to it past the lead character lurking in the shadows waiting to strike and the ‘evil’ step parent. On the other side of this is the oft-mentioned *Submarine*, which contains more of those structural parallels, even if it isn’t intentionally *Hamlet*.

Following the lines of these chapters, we come to understand the tropes of Shakespeare via the popular interpretations of the texts. It is the recurring images, the oft and ill repeated lines, the moments and beats that people have connected to for centuries that form our understanding of Shakespeare and his plays, in a similar way that people understand and recognise famous horror characters like *Dracula* or *Frankenstein*. It boils down to my previous point of memetic imagery, the translation of ideas, moments, characters, themes etc. via culture. Shakespeare becomes the ultimate palimpsest. His plays themselves often being adaptations of pre-existing stories which now become layered with 400 years of performance and pop culture. To quote Isaac Marion in Desmet’s (2017) essay: “... there are themes so deeply ingrained in the human consciousness that they keep popping up through-out history, by design or by accident” (p. 284).

This isn’t a singular concept, in Heffernan’s (2009) documentary, *‘An Obsession with Hamlet’*, actor Robert Alexander (who played Claudius in the 2008 Bell Shakespeare Company’s *Hamlet* that the documentary covers) notes an interaction he had: “A woman I spoke to said ‘Oh yes I remember going to see *Hamlet* with my husband. I was astounded by how many clichés were in it.’ Not realising, of course, that somebody had to write those clichés originally” (Heffernan, 2009, 0:11:00). This quote solidifies the idea of *Hamlet* as a core text, a base reference text where the clichés, or as Denslow would put it, the memes, that we associate with the *Hamlet*

which have woven themselves into the fabric of theatre and literature so much that it is plausible for an audience to think that the original Hamlet is full of clichés which originated within that text, or at least became the major text which solidified those clichés.

Hamlet's Mental Health and Gender

Rotstein's *Hamlet and Psychiatry Intertwined* (2018) presents Hamlet through multiple psychiatric and psychological lenses in order to bring understanding to the various aspects of the character. Rotstein mentions five distinct stages in the mental health diagnosis of Hamlet over the course of the plays psychiatric discourse: 'Melancholic Hamlet', 'Manic-depressive Hamlet', 'Freudian Hamlet', 'Hamlet's Divided Self', and 'DSM Hamlet'. Rotstein discusses each of these as an idea using evidence from specific relevant depictions of Hamlet in theatre and film; for example the 'Melancholic' Hamlet is referenced to the 18th century actor David Garrick, as well as John Philip Kemble, active in the late 18th and early 19th century, linking their Hamlets to a melancholy spurred by the overwhelming loss of the characters father, but as Rotstein writes "Melancholia struggles to explain Hamlet's moments of rash, reckless action" (p. 648). Melancholia was what depression was known as at this time, however its definition is far narrower than the definition of depression is today. Minois (2001) makes reference to Jean Fernel's 1607 definition of melancholy: "an excessive amount of [melancholic] humor in the brain was responsible for the somber thoughts that afflict melancholiacs [sic] and lead them to fix their attention obsessively on an object" (Minois, 2001, pp. 98-99). While this definition makes sense when applied to the Hamlet narrative, with Hamlet obsessive over the death of his father and the truth that he needs to uncover, Rotstein is correct in her mention that it does not explain his recklessness.

Rotstein's (2018) definition of the Freudian Hamlet was given status thanks to Freud himself who used Hamlet as an example throughout some of his writing. Rotstein uses Freud's

biographer Ernest Jones as an example of the Freudian Hamlet, which raises an interesting take on the relationship between Hamlet and Claudius: “Jones explains Hamlet’s inaction as a manifestation of empathy and identification with Claudius. Claudius was able to fulfil Hamlet’s own unconscious fantasy of murder and incest” (Rotstein, 2018, p. 649). Rotstein also notes the setting of the Laurence Olivier 1948 film with “overt Freudian leanings. Elsinore castle, a lonely labyrinth surrounded by a raging sea, represents Hamlet’s mind...emphasises the presence of unconscious conflict” (p. 649).

Most interesting to me, however, is Rotstein’s (2018) discussion of ‘Hamlet’s Divided Self’. Rotstein links the idea to Scottish psychiatrist Ronald David Laing, writing: “Laing believed psychosis was a result of a ‘divided self’ - conflicts between the inner person and the persona expressed publicly” (p. 649). This concept, of the split between the personal and public expressions, is something that interests me most when considering the aspects of the character I am interested in and my own personal experience with mental illness which will, inevitably, inform the script writing process; how a person living with depression and anxiety will hide their “true” feelings and put on a public persona. A divided self is a useful form of theatrical conflict in order to discuss themes and ideas as an argument between two aspects of the same person’s psyche. Rotstein references the 2012 Young Vic production and its interesting double casting, specifically the triple casting of Michael Sheen as Hamlet, the King’s Ghost, and Fortinbras:

With Sheen’s own voice... the ghost was Hamlet’s own internalised representation of his father... At the end of the play, Hamlet was buried on the stage and Fortinbras, dressed in black, delivered the play’s concluding lines... Perhaps having progressed through his journey, Hamlet had buried the ‘madness’ and been reborn... Just as Laing would have predicted, Sheen’s Hamlet took a ‘stormy voyage of the heart and mind’ and emerged healed (Rotstein, 2018, p. 649).

The question of ‘what if Hamlet survived the end of the play?’ is possibly answered by this statement. Hamlet returns to Elsinore at the end of the play changed, having grown up somewhat by his time removed from the action at the heart of the court. Is he able to accept his father’s death, his grief being left behind? The idea that he has been reborn, as some form of an emotional Lazarus, will go on to influence later developments in my own process

Wilson’s *‘Literary Clinical Practice: desire, depression and toxic masculinity in Hamlet’* (2018) raises questions regarding how we might view the Hamlet text in a contemporary sense, in fact he writes “... the disorder of Hamlet’s subjective state is both conjoined and in conflict with the community into which he is being dis-integrated. He has that in common with some young adults in the twenty-first century” (p. 281) which relates back to previous considerations around Abele (2007) and Rotstein (2018) regarding the generational changes within the Hamlet narrative. Wilson’s connection between the dis-integration of the character and a feeling felt by many 21st century youth allows a potential avenue of physical exploration in the workshop period, delving into how the 21st century Hamlet would try and potentially fail to make connections between his loved ones in the throes of his grief. Wilson, echoing Jacques Lacan, notes how *Hamlet* is a “tragedy [which] concerns the death of desire itself” (p. 282). Hamlet has a desire to mourn for his father, but is too caught up in the conspiracy of his father’s death to rightfully do so. Wilson also makes connections toward the toxic masculinity present throughout the play, and in relation to Ophelia. He notes “‘Toxic masculinity’... could be an emblem of Hamlet: the image of Claudius’s poisonous serpent crossed with his poisoned rapier begin and end the play, though Hamlet old and young are the victims not the agents of this toxicity” (Wilson, 2018, p. 285). Even though he notes that Hamlet is the victim of the toxicity and not the agent, he goes on to note the affect Hamlet’s abuse of Ophelia has on her mental state. He goes on to note that Hamlet’s abuse of Ophelia is connected to “a stain of (self)disgust that he

finds mirrored in the femininity represented by Ophelia” (Wilson, 2018, p. 286). This disgust of femininity is further explored through the relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude. Following Freud and Lacan, Wilson writes “Hamlet’s depression would be produced because of his unconscious Oedipal wish... Gertrude represents the drive that promotes the object of satisfaction above all else” (p. 288). Hamlet acts out the actions he does in the play for three potential reasons; to take his rightful place as King; to honour the memory of his father (the figure of his grief); to keep the attention and affection of his mother. Wilson argues Gertrude is an object of desire for Hamlet, the last remnant of a prior time when his life was okay. He wishes to connect with his mother on a deeper level than just as Queen and Prince, wanting the Mother/Son connection. Gertrude is, however, in search of instant-gratification (of a sexual nature). Wilson likens Gertrude in the play to our modern “world, albeit technologized in which the choice of objects is automated by selection and search algorithms predicted purely upon what came before” (p. 288). I can again liken this to Wilson’s earlier statement surrounding the dis-integration of the 21st century. There have been many studies into how social media can impact upon someone’s mental health. “There is a vivid relationship between social media use and loneliness, where higher usage of social media showed higher levels of loneliness among users... people who were using the internet to meet new people had higher levels of loneliness than those who used it for research or homework” (Youssef, Hallet, et al, 2020, p. 5). By this understanding, then a link could be made for a contemporary Gertrude who wants immediate sexual gratification, say through social media apps like Tinder or Bumble, as opposed to deeper human connection that Hamlet desires; Gertrude is desire-less while Hamlet is ‘spurned’. “The neurosis of the being spurned looks a little like Hamlet whose desires are rejected by his mother, and who finds in Ophelia the very symbol of that rejection, and indeed that isolation” (Wilson, 2018, p. 289). This is an interesting point when looking at the potential avenues for adaptation. How would Gertrude’s need for gratification manifest itself in a 21st century context?

Then how would Hamlet's need for gratification impact his relationship with Ophelia? Would it be any different?

Gender politics is very important to understanding *Hamlet*. The power plays between Hamlet & Gertrude, Hamlet & Ophelia, and Ophelia & Gertrude reveal important meanings underlying the script. Bialo's '*Popular Performance, the Broadside Ballad, and Ophelia's Madness*' (2013) discusses this exact concept in relation to the songs Ophelia sings in the throes of her madness as well as an interesting discussion on Shakespeare's engagement with popular culture in the play. She writes: "When Shakespeare appropriates ballads for Ophelia's madness, he invokes... shared history and constructs a moment of metatheatricity in which he reflects on his own dramaturgy" (Bialo, 2013, p. 294). This idea of shared history relates to the ideas portrayed in the prior section of this literature search, the layering of meaning (palimpsest) so that an audience experiences another different way of relating to the characters, plot, and themes within the performance is not a new concept. I think back to my earlier statements on the Greek playwright Aristophanes and his abundance of references to the Athenian political landscape of his time. Although the use of pop-cultural referencing like this isn't palimpsest, as it these references were directly written into the script, it is the connection the audience makes with these references that allows the palimpsestuous nature of these references to exist. Each audience member could potentially engage with these moments in different ways, causing separate and differing meanings to exist simultaneously.

Bialo (2013) goes on to write that the inclusion of these songs gave the audience something else to connect to in Ophelia's plight. The sheet music of the songs she sings would have been sold on the streets outside the Globe as the audience entered and left, connecting these characters to the real world, suggesting then that Shakespeare's inclusion of pop-cultural references allow an audience an extra emotional insight into his characters' mindset. Bialo discusses Ophelia's madness from a classist perspective as well as a gender perspective:

Her songs take the form of dialogues between courting couples that allow her to personify male wooers and female beloveds as well as lower - and upper-status women... she is at once the lower-status character expressing desire and the upper-status woman being punished for pursuing her love” (pp. 303-305).

The songs suggest something of Ophelia’s desires, being scorned in love by Hamlet in a similar vein in which Wilson discusses Hamlet being scorned by Gertrude. Bialo notes:

As an obedient daughter, Ophelia initially conforms to patriarchal expectations for elite women when she capitulates to Polonius’s directive to reject Hamlet’s advances. The model of female behaviour that Polonius advances fails, however, and Ophelia ends up with no father, no brother, and no husband... her madness - internalizes the voices of lower-status ballad women as an expression of the sexual desire from which she was prohibited in her sanity” (pp. 300-301).

Linking this to the generational Hamlet representation raised by Abele (2007), if a Gen-X Hamlet is concerned with his place in the world as a macrocosm of the kingdom in the original play, then what would a Gen-X Ophelia look like. If the classic Ophelia is focused on her duties as a woman, what then would a contemporary Ophelia act like, influenced by the contemporary forms of feminism throughout the 20th and 21st century?

Camden (1964) questions the cause of Ophelia’s madness, asking “Is her madness occasioned by her father’s death? By her rejected love for Hamlet? Or by both, in varying degrees?” (p.247) Her opinions, in her aptly named essay ‘*On Ophelia’s Madness*’, discusses the effect both of these men have on Ophelia’s life and mental health. Her relationship with Polonius seems to be difficult for her to live with, almost to a point where Polonius could be seen as gas-lighting his daughter. Polonius tells Ophelia to ignore Hamlet’s advances of love to protect her, and his later diagnosis of Hamlet’s madness to be lovesickness, Camden notes “[Ophelia] is mad for love that she has been forbidden to give him - She is the cause of Hamlet’s

madness... Hamlet's behaviour gives her every reason to believe her father right in his diagnosis..." (p. 248). Hamlet, on the other hand, shows his toxicity through the famous 'Nunnery' scene. Camden discusses this:

Hamlet uses offensive language to her, language that no sensitive girl could endure with equanimity. He asks her if she is chaste, and insults her further with comment on her affected walk and speech, her use of cosmetics, her "wantonness (p. 249).

She further writes on whether Hamlet does or does not actually love Ophelia. This whole question is punctuated again by one of the men in Ophelia's life gas lighting her through the line of Ophelia's "Indeed, my lord, you made me believe it so" (Camden, 1964, p. 249).

This line encapsulates the gas lighting Ophelia goes through in the early stages of the play by both Hamlet and Polonius. The line could be pointed towards both men, as it is their actions and words which Ophelia, whose entire existence in the kingdom is to marry into the nobility of Elsinore, bases her life around. Hamlet's confessions of love and Polonius' affirmations of these loves causes to believe these men. Both lords made her believe it so.

In '*Dionysus in the Mirror: Hamlet as Nietzsche's Dionysian Man*', Pyles (2017) uses the philosopher's references to Hamlet in 'The Birth of Tragedy' to raise points about Hamlet's character progression. Pyles notes how Hamlet begins the play as Nietzsche's 'Dionysian man'; the chaotic, impulsive, mad; and beginning from the conclusion of *The Mousetrap* and following his return from England he is transformed into the 'Apollonian man'; the learned, reasoned, mature. Pyles writes:

Hamlet's past... has been submerged beneath the heavy waters of the Dionysian recognition that none of it is real; it is all only illusion and is therefore meaningless. Only now that this [the play] past has been brought forth and vividly represented by the Apollonian play... he takes up his role in the Apollonian play that is life (p. 140).

Pyles discusses Hamlet's seek for validation, that he must find his place in Elsinore, and his relations to everyone in the court but more specifically his relation to Claudius and Gertrude, the people who are in the position he was supposed to be prematurely thrust. It is his unsuredness that causes him to act outside of what is expected of him, in a 'Dionysian' way: acting chaotically, without actually carrying through many actions. Pyles writes: "In order for Hamlet to take action and escape his Dionysian paralysis, he must learn to play his role in this world of appearances; he must convert his thoughts and actions, his very self, into an Apollonian representation" (p. 136).

Dramaturgical and Adapturgical

The concept of adaptation is one that is at the core element of my research; and from adaptation, concepts of palimpsest, and memesis became the obvious next step Barnette's (2018) *Adapturgy: The Dramaturgs Art and Theatrical Adaptation* features interesting commentary on possible ways of considering adaptation. In Chapter four '*Palimpsestuous Pleasures*', Barnette discusses Elevator Repair Service's (ERS) adaptation of 'The Sound and the Fury'. The title of the chapter suggests the adaptation features palimpsest-like elements to it, specifically from a sound perspective; "sound is a building block of the dramaturgical process" (Barnette, 2018, p. 52). Palimpsest, as Barnette writes, is where "writers would recycle paper that had been previously written on, covering what existed with what they created" (p. 49) meaning that two stories might bleed into one another so a new meaning might be formed, here becomes a concept of where layers of text i.e. text, sound, image; become one in performance. Palimpsest here acts in a similar way one might come to understand intertextuality (or even the concept of a 'meme'), in that meaning, or indeed new meaning, is formed through the understanding of the texts related or associated with it. Where intertextuality may be more referential, as Puschak (2016) writes: "intertextual references can point to genre conventions,

they can point to the texts influences or cultural and historical contexts, but in this new generation of films, more and more the intertextual manifests itself as objects, people, or situations specifically meant to trigger an emotional response in the viewer” (0:01:54 - 0:02:14), palimpsest directly uses the inter-texts as an extra layer of meaning. However in all cases, the impact is what reaction the intertextuality/palimpsest/meme gets from and for the audience Barnette (2018) writes “It is unlikely that any two people will read a palimpsest exactly the same way... when considering the palimpsest, the emphasis is on reception, since it can have such different resonances for different readers (or spectators)” (p. 51). The audience are the receptors of these inter-texts, and it is up to the production itself to be the litmus test of these moments. Barnette discusses how ERS used sound in the rehearsal/workshop period to craft moments and tone for the whole piece

leading the company to embrace the centrality of sound to how they would unlock the mysteries of Benjy’s chapter (p. 56)... creating layers of external elements; i.e. sound, film, movement etc., [that] encourages spectators to make their own connections between the layers they have presented (p. 61).

Later in *Adapturgy*, Barnette (2018) directly discusses her experience adapting from the novel ‘The Red Badge of Courage’, and outlines “the practical ways in which dramaturgical awareness is critical to the task of adapting literary works for the stage, with special attention to ‘the spirit of the source’” (p. 90). Her concept of the ‘spirit of the source’ is important to authentically understanding and adapting a text to the stage, without diluting the core ideas. One idea of Barnette’s which I have begun working with is the idea of finding what personally sticks from the core text, and then adding those aforementioned artifacts to the text. She writes “Our earliest conversations about the novel began with sharing the impressions that stuck with

us most... In early discussions, I bought into the mix images of the medieval hellmouth... as inspiration..." (p. 93).

As mentioned, I have begun working with this idea in preparation for the workshop process, by pulling apart the *Hamlet* and *Ophelia Thinks Harder* scripts and choosing scenes and moments which interest me most, and which I find thematically and structurally interesting. Barnette (2018) also mentions the idea of the uncanny, specifically crafting the script into that "which we are powerfully drawn and of which we are simultaneously terrified... familiar and wholly unknown at once" (p. 92). which is a concept that would be important to keep in mind while crafting the script. This could mean that the audience is surprised at the story that they already know, finding something new within the old (a hopeful goal), as well as having those moments of safety in the recognisable elements of the story, "watching our adaptation was simultaneously familiar and strange, nostalgic and horrible" (Barnette, 2018, p. 102).

Following on from this concept, A.J. Hartley in '*The Shakespearean Dramaturg*' (2005) gives a list of 7 dramaturgical questions to raise while preparing a Shakespearean script which translates well when considering adaptation:

1. Do the lines reveal important elements of the plot?
2. Do the lines develop valuable issues of character?
3. Do the lines contribute valuable mood? What is the 'genre' of the moment...?
4. Do the lines present or re-present significant ideas, themes, or images that collectively define an important aspect of the play?
5. Are the lines particularly pithy or resonant?
6. Are the lines famous?
7. ... what is our audience...likely to get out of the lines as written?" (p. 101) [my paraphrasing].

These seven questions I see as important to keep in mind when considering adaptation from the perspective of audience expectations. Are there moments/ideas/images that the audience expects to see from Hamlet, or Romeo and Juliet, or Macbeth that if they were lacking would leave the audience soured at the conclusion of the performance, or as Hartley (2005) writes “may well produce disappointment or irritation in the company or audience” (p. 101). It makes a practitioner question what can or cannot be tampered with. For Shakespeare purists, diversion from the core tone/written line/image etc. can cause this disappointment or irritation. The contra of this is a want for new and different perspectives, subversions of what we expect to see/hear. Hartley makes the point of saying:

The decision in each case will be affected by the general adaptive philosophy of the production... but will largely be determined - as the third question suggests - by the energy or ‘genre’ of the moment as it might work in performance (p.101).

Methodology

This thesis follows the models of a practice-as-research project. Its aim is to adapt Shakespeare's Hamlet, taking its themes, characters, and ideas, and translating them into a contemporary identity. This research has been carried out in three distinct sections: a workshop period with actor/participants, a solo scriptwriting period, and a rehearsal period with a second group of actor/participants working towards a full performance. All of the actor/participants have agreed to have their real names used in this thesis. The workshop group consisted of Ed, Kelly, and Ruby; the performance group consisted of Conor, David, and Hani. All of the actor/participants have had experience in the local theatre community and all of whom I have worked with on various projects over the last few years.

The research's aim is to look at how a classical text (specifically Hamlet) can be adapted into a contemporary identity, and how ideas the original text discusses, directly or indirectly, the theme of mental health.

Epistemology

I have chosen my epistemological approach to be constructionism. For me, this seems to be the concept that best suits my style of research, especially in a practice-as-research frame. This concept follows the belief that meaning is constructed, it "comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities of our world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 4). Meaning is constructed by the way we engage with our world, whether that be other people, text, etc. This concept seems to fit a process focused on workshops based on adaptation. Meaning already exists (the core text) and our engagement with it allows us to construct our own meaning, or the adaptation. There is no objective truth to the research, because it is based entirely on the meaning that we, the participants and I, construct thanks to

our engagement to the text as well as one another. For example, I chose to work with the participants on the chosen core *Hamlet* scenes, reading these a few times, then asking the participants to put those scenes into their own words, seeing how they would speak those classical scenes in our contemporary, New Zealand vernacular, therefore constructing their own meaning which then was constructed into a new form by myself while writing a script and, taking a dramaturgical approach, piecing the workshopped scenes together. To quote Crotty (1995) “We construct meaning. We have something to work with. What we have to work with is the world and objects in the world” (p.44). In this instance, the ‘world’ is the play, and the ‘objects’ are the words. These are our building blocks, our base upon which we can construct our meanings of the ‘world’ of *Hamlet* and *A Cliff in Denmark*. Kahn and Breed (1995) write of a similar concept in *Scriptwork*:

... use resources in a non-restrictive manner to help understand what is in the play and how it works on its own terms... you want to elicit the script's intention... you do not want to force the script into a predetermined linear, logical construct... (p.35).

Kahn and Breed's (1995) mention of ‘eliciting the script's intention’, from a constructionist point of view, is void in some respects. The script's intention is subjective; one may read a script's intention as one thing, whereas another may read it entirely differently. Here we apply Roland Barthes' concept of the Death of the Author. The author's meaning and intention for their script is null and void from the moment of publication, all those who engage with the text from that moment will construct their own meaning. Indeed this is what my research workshops are doing, constructing our own meaning of a text for the purposes of adaptation. Shakespeare may not have intended to write a mental health narrative into *Hamlet*, it may not be the script's intentional focus, but we as adaptors are constructing that meaning within that script. We place that meaning onto it and make sense of that world from that subject position. “The author is to his text as God... is to his world: the unitary cause, source and the master to whom the chain of

textual effects must be traced...when the author has been found, the text has been explained” (Burke, 1992, p.23-24). The original text only exists as the base platform that supports the structure of another and separate meaning atop it. This is a way of understanding palimpsest. With palimpsests, a base text is rewritten over by another, both act as enhancements of one another, and a new meaning and understanding is constructed by each separate reader. Theatrical palimpsest is no different. If I, as director, choose to use a particular piece of music, particular piece of imagery, video, phrasing etc. an audience member has an experience with that. From their subject position, they craft their own individual meaning through their prior engagement and understanding with all the elements I have used, independent of the meaning I have planned for that element.

Ontology

My ontological approach is a relativist one. Relativism argues that our understanding of the world is subjective to ourselves. We understand the world by our backgrounds, the things we have experienced “...each person experiences and gives meaning to events in light of his or her own biography or experiences, according to gender, time and place, cultural, political, religious, and professional backgrounds” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.9). Working with my constructionist epistemology, a relativist ontology in this practice as research model suggests that the world that will be created via the script I create is influenced by, simultaneously, my understanding of the script and my understanding of my subject position (gender, political, experience etc.). Hence my choice to include a workshop process within this research with actor/participants. Their work in this process is also influenced by their socio-political and personal backgrounds, making for a potentially more open perspective on the text. Here again the idea of palimpsest comes into play. An audience member’s subject position is what influences their understanding of a text, irrespective of the author/director/actors intentions in their layering of theatrical

elements. The way I come to understand a production of Hamlet may be different to the understanding of the audience members sitting beside me. The way that one actor/participants understanding of the scenes from Hamlet that we work from in workshops may be different from another actor/participant they are working with, which in turn may be different from the way I understand and intended to work with that piece of text. It is our relative understanding of our world that influences how we act within it. Although our understandings are separate, this doesn't make them wrong. Opposing or differing viewpoints open up more avenues for exploration and understanding. Wittgenstein references the way that an explorer in a new land comes to understand the native peoples of that land "... we should assume that their thoughts and actions can be understood... Things which seem illogical in our culture, may fit well in other forms of life" (Widdershoven, 1992, p.4, condensing Wittgenstein's words).

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective of this research follows the concept of hermeneutics. The concept of hermeneutics focuses around the idea of analysis and interpretation, "deal[ing]... with products of rational agents to which a meaning can be ascribed. Its basic operation is not explanation... but understanding" (Cushman et al, 2012, p.618). This is a concept which I feel is important to a research project like this. This research focuses on the adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet through a process which early stages revolves around workshops with actor/participants. Thus there are layers of interpretation involved in this process. The actor/participants were tasked with improvising scenes based on their interpretation of certain Hamlet scenes; their interpretation of scene, character, and language. From there, I as researcher/practitioner interpreted their outputs into the context of the script I was writing. Adaptation is interwoven with the concept of hermeneutics from this perspective as Gordon and Jubin (2015) write: "Adaptation is always an act of interpretation, and judgements on the

success of the adaptation will always involve a comparative interpretation of the source text in the light of an interpretation of the adaptation” (p. 6). Adapting from a source text like Hamlet is a task taken by many other practitioners of the arts before me, hence my choice of also looking at the adaptive works of Stoppard and Betts as sources. An audience of the final piece that I produce will experience it through their subject position of their prior understandings and interpretations of other Hamlet texts, whether that be Hamlet itself or the plethora of adaptations, in a similar vein to what myself and my actor/participants also undertake during the research process, which adds to what Barnette (2015) discusses around the concept of palimpsest. If an audience draws understanding from the various aspects of a performance; actors, sound, set, programme notes; through their prior experiences, thereby creating new meaning through this layering of meaning, then their act of interpretation is a hermeneutical activity. If meaning is gained through the interpretation of text, and the biases and worldview of the person interpreting the text influences their interpretation, therefore the layering of understandings that an audience member brings to the text causes a form of palimpsest to occur while viewing a piece of theatre.

Again Gordon and Jubin (2015) write “each act of adaptation involves a new cultural appropriation of the original text, and old texts are kept alive in the contemporary cultural imaginary through these very acts of appropriation” (p. 6). As actor/practitioners, we undertake a hermeneutical process of the countless pop-cultural and academic engagements with the source text, and are therefore influenced by our personal interpretations of those interpretations. Our interpretation of the world around us; our socio-political, cultural, religious, philosophical, gender, sexuality, understandings of the world; is what we project onto the adaptations of the source text.

Cushman et al (2012) write “every hermeneutic effort has to recognize that expression may be distorted by fear but also by techniques of detachment, such as irony and the deliberate use of

fictionality, by which some truth is hinted at in an indirect way. In this sense, the hermeneutics of the artwork is the discipline's most complex and elusive task" (p. 622). I view adaptation and hermeneutics to be two concepts which are intertwined, by which I mean that an adaptation of any text becomes framed by writers' understanding of the text and the contexts they want to bring the core text into. For example, *A Cliff in Denmark's* discussion of mental illness is, in part, framed by my own experiences with mental illness, specifically depression and anxiety, and my reading of the discussion that may or may not be present within the original *Hamlet* script. I say may or may not be present because, although Hamlet and Ophelia both suffer from "madness", we do not know what Shakespeare's intention was when writing *Hamlet*, thus I, as many academics are/have, am projecting a reading upon the script. This is what Cushman et al. (2012) mention when referencing Friedrich Schleiermacher: "...unconscious acts of an author that the interpreter may reconstruct... namely, by rendering things conscious in us that were unconscious in the author" (p. 621). These possibly unconscious acts are a reason as to why I looked at multiple different adaptations of *Hamlet*; Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Betts' *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, and Curtis' *The Skinhead Hamlet*. These adaptations heighten aspects of the original script, through the understanding of their respective author. So, in theory, my understanding is informed by my initial reading of *Hamlet*, as well as my understanding of Stoppard's, Betts', and Curtis' understandings, and also my readings into the academia of *Hamlet*; then my adaptive writing is informed by all of these, as well as my understanding of my participants understandings of my/their understanding. This idea also works with my epistemological approach of constructionism, as these meanings are constructed by the way in which I engage with these adaptations.

Methodology

This research project has been conducted through a practice-as-research model. This choice of methodology means that theoretical research can be put into practice; the work in the literary research phase can, and will, inform my way in which I am physically researching with my actor/participants, and my theoretical understanding will be informed by my physical work. This idea, the merging of theory and practice, known as *praxis* (taken from the Marxist concept of the synthesis of theory and practice, usually from a socio-political understanding) I believe to be integral to the work undertaken in this research. The physical work; the scriptwriting, workshops, performance, etc., has meaning through the theoretical work, and vice versa. Without the practical work, the theoretical work becomes just that, theory. Marin (2007) writes “For our purposes, we defined praxis as a symbiotic relationship between theory and practice, allowing us to reflect on the theatre exercises we engaged in while informing the analysis of the data collected in the process” (p. 85). As a researcher, I must be able to reflect on the practical elements of this research as backed up by the theoretical understanding of the process I am undertaking. Exercises in the workshop and rehearsal phases are informed by my theoretical understanding of adaptation, ensemble, dramaturgy, etc.; my scriptwriting phase is also informed by the same understandings. On the reverse of this, the way in which I come to understand the theoretical research (both from the initial reading and understanding, and the retroactive reevaluation of the theory) is informed by the work I do in this project, as well as previous projects I have worked on. To quote Farrier (2005):

...‘making’ is not empty of thinking in ways that could be considered theoretical, and that thinking is not devoid of a form of creativity. Praxis in this sense is a handy way of thinking about and using theory in the studio when working... Through the use of praxis, the values of theory can be ‘embodied’ in physical situations ... [Theory and practice] are

not discrete or mutually exclusive features but inexorably wedded together (pp. 103-131).

Choosing Practice-as-research as the methodology of this research meant that I was able to create a full piece of theatre in order to see my theoretical considerations to its fullest potential. The ability to create while researching allows a researcher like myself the opportunity to test hypotheses and considerations; especially in a field like Theatre Studies where often we have to put our ideas into action with others, actor/participants, and rely on these participants to see our considerations to their practical applications. Actor/participants are the vessel of praxis for a researcher/practitioner like myself. The ability to test hypotheses and considerations is important to this process for myself as there were multiple instances where an idea that was being explored in the workshop period did not translate across to the scriptwriting. Practice as Research (PAR) gives a researcher/practitioner in the arts in which the artistic expression is the core of the field (i.e. music, theatre, dance, art, etc.) the ability to test their praxis in a way that fully relates to the field of study. PAR is a qualitative methodology, thus the outputs of the research are recorded through the writing of complimentary notes, as opposed to any measurable form of qualitative success. Nelson (2013) writes that PAR research is "...a continuing process of negotiations between... know-how, know-what, know-that" (p. 58). Therefore, while working through a Practice as Research model, a researcher's process is built up through the ability to know-how: "procedural knowledge... gained incrementally... and amounts to a set of actions which facilitate complex tasks" (Nelson, 2013, p. 41-42), know-what: "critical reflection - pausing, standing back and thinking about what you're doing" (Nelson, 2013, p. 44), and know-that "the equivalent of academic knowledge... [and] gained through the experiencing of practices intrinsic to any specific research inquiry" (Nelson, 2013, p. 46). These three facets of research are the qualitative measures of the process, the marrying of the theory, know-that, and the practical, know-how, through the reflective and commentary facet of the

know-what is what makes the practice as research methodology useful to an artistic research process.

Methods

As this research is qualitative research as opposed to a quantitative, the methods of data gathering and research are observation and writing based. There are many methods of data gathering I have used in this research; field notes, participant observation, script writing, pre-existing literature (theoretical and creative), workshops, video, and of course performance. These methods all aid in the unification of theory and practice.

My inclusion of actor/participants early in the research began when I deemed it necessary to include workshops into the research process. This decision came when researching into adaptive dramaturgy, and it was noted that their work on adaptive theatre pieces often began with a group of actors using the original piece, whether it be a play, novel, poem, song etc., and improvising around it. Barnette (2017) makes note of the company Elevator Repair Service's (from here on written as ERS) work on their adaptation of William Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* where she discusses "the palimpsest of adapturgy" (p. 52), specifically in regard to sound in the workshop process. This particular process relied on sound in their early stages of workshops, as she writes:

"Whereas a traditional theatre production calendar might integrate sound during 'tech week'..., for ERS sound in a building block of the dramaturgical creative process... [using sound] accomplishes (at least) two goals: (1) it opens the word 'text' productively, encouraging the consideration of modalities other than words, dialogue, and drama; and (2) it allows us to

likewise expand the understanding of dramaturgical work to include sound” (Barnette, 2007, p. 52).

As opposed to the adaptation of a novel like *The Sound and The Fury* where the language is meant to be read (as most novels are), the Elizabethan theatrical form, the words on the page are meant to be spoken and performed aloud to an audience. In ERS’s workshop, sound was used as a way of allowing the group to come to understand the original text in both their own way and in a unified way “the innovative way that the company clarifies the multiple moments in history that are jumbled throughout the narrator’s mind” (Barnette, 2007, p. 52). Although I didn’t use sound as Barnette means it in this regard, for the adaptation of a Shakespearean play it is important that the sound of the original words are clear and heard in the workshop process.

Throughout the process, notes were made in a field notes book relating to the reflective ‘know-what’ of each workshop and rehearsal, in order to build upon and re-approach certain aspects of the process. These notes were also scanned and uploaded to a shared google drive file for the actor participants to access. During the process, pre-existing media was used for adaptive and referential purposes. *Hamlet*, and the adaptations by Betts, Richard Curtis, and Stoppard were used through the workshops process, while film and songs were used during the rehearsal process for palimpsestuous purposes. Also during the rehearsal process, pre-existing paintings and etchings were used as sources of physical inspiration. Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Hamlet and Ophelia* (1858) was the image which gave us the most inspiration in the rehearsal process, being the inspiration for the staging scene six, between Olivia and Guy. Other images, such as Jerzy Kowal’s *Hamlet* (2017) and John Everet Miles’ *Ophelia* (1851-2), aided in setting tone and feeling without being directly referenced in the performance.

The final version of the play was performed on the night of August 18 2020, to an audience of

members of staff from the University of Waikato Dance, Theatre Studies, and English department, as well as family and friends of myself and the cast.

Analysis

Shakespeare's Hamlet reduces down from the bard's most wordy play, to a story of a young man struggling to find his place in the world he has been raised in, struggling to articulate his thoughts and feelings, and drowning in his own grief. Hamlet is a story of someone struggling with their own mental health. The representation of mental health on the theatrical stage was something that had been of interest to me, and I knew it was something I wanted to explore. Mental health stories aren't something which isn't seen on stage, indeed there are plenty of examples I can think of from a range of forms and genres, including texts from the Shakespearean canon. When looking at the canon through the lens of mental health, King Lear seems to suffer from an age related neurodegenerative disease akin to dementia or Alzheimer's.

From the perspective of New Zealand theatre, I strain to think of mental health stories which have made their way into the mainstream New Zealand canon besides the verbatim piece 'The Keys are in the Margarine'. I must make a note here however that Jean Betts is a New Zealand playwright, and 'Ophelia Thinks Harder' does discuss mental health to some extent, directly relating to the toll the gas lighting of Ophelia has on her mental state, and also the presentation of the Handmaid who goes 'mad', becoming the late-play Ophelia who takes her life in Shakespeare's Hamlet. Depression and anxiety stories seem to be something not portrayed on New Zealand stages commonly, it seems to be the skeleton hiding in the wings. New Zealand has a significantly high percentage of mental health related disorders with an approximate 18.71% of the population in 2017 (Ritchie & Roser, 2018.) The rate of suicide of

men in New Zealand is also significantly higher than that of women⁷ (Green, 2019) with it being noted as roughly around 3 times higher. This statistic is one which has been on my mind during this process. Shakespeare's Hamlet directly deals with the notion of suicide; the play's (arguably) most famous moment and oft repeated line is a consideration of that exact notion: To be or not to be... to die, to sleep...

So to adapt Hamlet as a New Zealander, there are moments and themes in Hamlet which relate back to a New Zealand context; a male lead who struggles with grief, depression, and suicidal thoughts, and a country that struggles with its male population's mental health⁸. The evidence pointed to the perfect combination for a researcher/practitioner like myself who is interested in both adaptation and mental health representation on stage.

To clarify, this interest does not come from a place of tourism; I am not someone wanting to portray the plight of the depressed kiwi on stage as an outsider; in 2018 I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety disorders and had been living with it for a number of years prior. The work of this creative research performance also isn't to say that depression and anxiety is hard to live with, and please show pity for those of us who live with it. My aim, if anything, is to say that you don't have to live with it alone; that the fight isn't just for the one who has the metaphorical black dog in their mind, that there are avenues that one can take in order to find some solace, or help. The plot of Hamlet would be incredibly short if he had tried to talk to anyone rather than dealing with his grief and confusion alone.

Looking at Hamlet through the lens of a mental health narrative, it would be remiss to not mention how the perception of mental health has shifted and changed over the 416 years between Hamlet (quarto two specifically) and now. Minois (2001) accounts a number of 16th and 17th century authors and philosophers writings on the subject of suicide. At this time in

⁷ I use only the gender binary as statistics for non-binary people are not readily available on the main public access data providing websites. This is another issue which I have a personal connection to, but isn't imperative to this research.

⁸ This is a reductive statement, only simplified for emphasis.

history, suicide was still perceived as an act against God in religious circles, and “For a long time melancholia was viewed in moral terms, particularly because its physiological explanations were quite vague, at times whimsical” (p. 98). During this period, there was an increased literary interest in suicide, Minois makes mention that “during [1580-1620] more than 200 suicides appeared on the English stage in 100 plays” (p. 88). The idea that melancholia was viewed as a conflict of morality is interesting to think of Hamlet’s situation. The moral question at the core of the text is, as previously mentioned, the consideration to end one’s own life, and if suicide was an act against god, then morality does come into play there. However, the act of ending one’s life isn’t treated as an act of moral dysfunction, closer to what we understand it as today, an act of uncertainty, confusion, and often fear; or as I wrote in the performance script *‘it’s more of a point you’re driven to isn’t it? Like you’ve hit a wall and you’ve got to decide if you’re going to climb it or sink into the void.’* The moral questions raised in Hamlet aren’t those of an ecclesiastical morality, but of a personal morality; should I take my life to ease my own mental confusion, should I reveal the truth or let everyone live in blind ignorance? These questions are those which push Hamlet’s mental state to the point we see it in the play, and by effect push him to do the reprehensible actions he chooses to do. Minois (2001) furthers this point:

There is no reference to traditional morality in these works; they are ruled by aesthetic criteria and speak only of circumstances and motivations... Shakespeare was not a moralist but rather an observer of the human condition. He offers no formal defense of suicide, and one of his most incisive observations is, precisely, that speech often opposes action (pp. 106-107)

This point Minois raises suggests that Shakespeare, and his contemporaries, viewed voluntary death as something which one comes to from a personal mental state perspective, as opposed to the hegemonic, religious view of a moral deficiency. Minois’ mention of speech opposing action echoes a sentiment shared by many mental health professionals today, that

reaching out to someone, having an ear to talk to and listen, is the most important thing when a person has one of those darker moments mentally.

Workshop Process

The process began with scriptural research. I tasked myself with reading, analysing, and pulling scenes from two major scripts; William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Jean Betts' *Ophelia Thinks Harder*. This task was for me to find scenes within these scripts, *Hamlet* specifically, that were of interest to me as a writer/dramaturg, and ones that I thought would be interesting or useful to see adapted into a contemporary style fitting planned theme of mental health representation on stage, as well as other interesting sections of the play. For the *Hamlet* excerpts, I selected scenes which explored the nature of the characters relationships with one another; Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude, and Hamlet's father figures to be exact. The scenes I chose were as follows:

- Act 1 Scene v "Where wilt thou lead me?" - The first discussion between Hamlet and his father's ghost.
- Act 2 Scene i "My lord I have been so affrighted" - Ophelia discussing her confusing interaction with Hamlet the night earlier with Claudius and Polonius.
- Act 2 Scene ii "words, my lord" - Hamlet playing with his potential madness with Polonius.
- Act 3 Scene i "To be or not to be" - the famous scene between Hamlet and Ophelia, where Hamlet weighs up the option of death, and his rejection of Ophelia's love.
- Act 3 Scene iii "Now might I do it" - Hamlet faltering to kill Claudius as he prays,
- Act 3 Scene iv "The Queens closest" - Hamlet and Gertrude's fight before he kills Polonius.

- Act 4 Scene v “Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark” - Ophelia’s reveal of her madness to the court;
- Act 4 Scene vii “One woe doth tread upon another’s heel” - Gertrude informing Claudius and Laertes of Ophelia’s supposed drowning.

For the *Ophelia Thinks Harder* excerpts I selected scenes/sections which focused on Ophelia as a ‘Hamlet’ style character, hoping to find some ground of similarities for the participants, as Betts (1994) writes in her writer’s note “women are as capable as men of these ‘male’ attributes and qualities... [Ophelia] has at least as much reason as Hamlet to rage and despair” (para.2).

The scenes I chose were as follows:

- Scene 3 “My, look how you’ve grown...” pp. 16-21; Gertrude and Ophelia discussing the image of women and their place in society;
- Scene 4 “You faithless, devious, conniving little bitch...” pp. 29-31; Betts’ adaptation of *Hamlet* 3.i;
- Scene 7 “I will speak daggers to her...” pp. 52-54; Betts’ adaptation of *Hamlet* 3.iv.

It seemed to me that the selected scenes were qualitatively successful in attaining what I had hoped in the workshop process, that being an understanding of the characters in the core text, their motives, relationships, and power dynamics. I knew when I selected my participants for this section of the process that their knowledge of Shakespeare and Hamlet varied; Ed and Ruby had little to none outside of studying Shakespeare in High School drama, although I noted that Ruby had a supposed ‘better’ grasp on Shakespearean language and form than Ed who at times struggled to vocalise the language, an understandable flaw. Kelly, I knew, had a good deal (if not on par or more than I) of knowledge, having been a part of multiple Shakespeare plays before, her skill of understanding the language and being able to translate is something I noted in my field notes: ‘Kelly’s translations are in-depth and eloquent, possibly too much.’ This

variety of knowledge meant that the actor/participants and I aren't focusing on maintaining a core element of Shakespeare in the exercises, and allowing the freedom of improvisation to exist in the workshop space. This part of my process was to focus on new meaning, and how new meaning can be derived from another meaning. So having that freedom to run with a new idea and exploring it in any way was important, as well as having another mind to herd an idea back to a central factor (that being the story of Hamlet).

The first workshop was a tool to introduce *Hamlet* to the participants so that they had some understanding of the story, its characters and their relationships etc. I chose to approach it in four parts. First, I asked the group what they knew about Hamlet, with responses being along the lines of saying 'to be or not to be' while holding an imaginary skull (a cultural faux pas). Kelly knew a decent amount regarding the plot which helped to go over areas I may have skipped past or forgotten to mention, so the exercise was more for the other two who knew far less. However two simple words were enough to spur the minds of the group into their relationship with Hamlet, those words being 'Lion King'. The 1994 Walt Disney film is well known for its adaptive skills, transforming the original tragedy into a family-friendly animated musical about African wildlife, and is potentially many peoples (I know it was mine) of the Millennial/Gen-Z age range's first introduction to Shakespearean texts. It is also interesting to note that all the films in the Lion King franchise are all adapted from Shakespeare or Shakespeare adjacent texts; Lion King II: Simba's Pride (1998) is an adaptation of Romeo and Juliet, following Simba's daughter meeting a lion from a rival pride and them falling in love; Lion King 1 ½ (also known as Lion King 3: Hakuna Matata) (2004) is a loose adaptation of Stoppard's 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead', as it follows Timon and Pumbaa⁹ in and

⁹ Timon and Pumbaa are the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern inserts in The Lion King.

around the events of the original Lion King film. With my bringing up The Lion King, I saw the metaphorical cogs turning in my participants' heads, and so I moved on to the next stage. The second part of this workshop was showing the group a YouTube video which explained the plot and themes in a condensed video. The YouTube channel 'Wisecrack' has a series titled 'Thug Notes' which explains various books and plays in between 5 to 10 minutes. Although these videos are aimed at a younger, high school level audience, I felt it was a simple way of explaining the plot of the play without getting caught too heavily on the details or putting the weight on the areas I wanted to explore, as well as highlighting areas of the text that I have forgotten or passed over while doing my own explanation. These videos explain the plots of well-known novels and plays, followed by a short analysis, similar to the likes of SparkNotes or CliffsNotes, only in a more entertaining and easily consumable medium. The reason for me showing my participants this was that it allowed me to give an overview of the plot (I stopped the video before the analysis section of the video) without me putting emphasis on what I deemed important to my adaptation, negating my subjectivity in favour of an alternative, more objective overview. I am thankful for Kelly's knowledge of Shakespeare for this as well, because her explanation of the plot when I asked the group about their knowledge added another viewpoint of the script to the group's understanding.

Part three saw us working with the script 'The Skinhead Hamlet' by Richard Curtis. This adaptation condenses Hamlet into 5 pages, each scene being around 4 lines of inner city London slang. I wanted to use this as it would be a physical way of understanding the plot without going into the heavy and difficult language of the original. Using this script as a base of knowledge, I then tasked the group to recreate it from memory using their own language and only having beat/scene prompts from me. My hope with this was to solidify their understanding of the plot, its character progression and core moments; as well as this being their first task of improvising as a group, it was important to see how they would work together. Luckily, their

improvising skills and fast understanding of the script meant that they worked well as a group, working fast and naturally, prompting each other if they forgot a moment, and, most importantly, trusting each other.

Curtis' script takes a more comedic approach to the core material, however it was interesting to note that when the group was improvising their own version they took a far more tragic approach as they were possibly trying to make sense of the tone of the original play. However, as we repeated this exercise they began to loosen up with allowing themselves to laugh at moments of accidental comedy that came from improvising. It was interesting to see when they allowed themselves to relieve the tragic tension, and when they returned from the comedic. I used this exercise as a warm-up for the remainder of the workshops, as it was a good energy builder, and it brought the participants' minds back to the story. Part four was me showing the group another video, this time the short film 'The Prince of Denmark - a story vaguely inspired by Hamlet' (Kirkland and Rafalat, 2016). The short film tells the story of a young man returning from university to his family's pub which his dead father ran, but is now being run by his mother and her new husband. I wanted to show this to the group as it shows how you can adapt a story like *Hamlet* to a contemporary and completely different setting, and simultaneously giving it a complete tonal change, which worked well with the previous part and the group playing with the tragic and the comedic.

Following this, we began working with the base *Hamlet* script. The first scene we worked with was Act 2 scene ii, with Ed as Hamlet and Kelly as Polonius. I tried cold reading the script with the two, however Ed's knowledge of how Shakespearean dialogue works was low, so he was finding it difficult, something that I had failed to consider during the planning phase. I decided to show the group the version of the scene in the 2016 Royal Shakespeare Company *Hamlet*, directed by Simon Godwin, so they could hear the way the language moves and flows, so that they might feel more confident in speaking the words in the space. I am not sure whether

this effect was definitely achieved, however it seemed that Ed understood the plot of the scene more at least after viewing, again I cannot confirm whether this was true or not. I must recognise here as well that Ed's understanding of the scene could have been, and likely was, influenced by the way that Godwin had planned in his direction.

I decided to run each scene four times at first. The first run was the cold read, the first time the actors have spoken the words (I did give them the opportunity to read over it first); second, an edited version from me cutting lines from listening on the previous run and giving small directions; third, in the then planned context of a therapist/counsellor session; and fourth, same as the previous but in the contemporary vernacular, letting the actors improvise a contemporary sound that they were accustomed to. I informed the actors that if they get stuck on 'translating' the language to simply drop back into the classical text and continue, returning to modern when they feel comfortable.

The second scene we played with was Act 4 Scene v, with Ruby as Ophelia, Kelly as Gertrude, and Ed as Claudius, although he stepped out after the second run as we let Ruby and Kelly play with the therapist/patient dynamic. Both of these exercises were interesting for the process as it, firstly, let me see where the participants could go as actors, and ideas began to formulate to do with youth anger at society and the way mental health is treated. Specifically, when Ed 'modernised' 2.ii, he began to make comments about pensioners, pensions, and the government which reminded me of one of the early thoughts I had about the piece regarding the generational divide between Millennial/Gen-Z and Gen-X. Ruby on the other hand turned Ophelia's mad ramblings into screams of a woman trying to be heard, suggesting the gender divide. This went on to influence both Ruby and I when we worked on 3.ii in the workshop three, and almost a direct version of this made it into the final performance script. Kelly was just such an attentive and giver, allowing the other two to explore character and meaning, and taking

control and power when necessary for the authority figures she was playing, something which I am grateful for her doing.

In workshop three we were missing Kelly, so it gave me an opportunity to work with Ed and Ruby on Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship. This relationship is one of two at the core of Hamlet, it drives many of the characters motives throughout the original text; without it, Claudius and Polonius would not be able to spy on Hamlet, Laertes would not challenge Hamlet resulting in the mass death in a majority of the core cast, and the assumption of Hamlet's madness being as a result of him pining for Ophelia would not occur.¹⁰ Having Ed and Ruby alone in this workshop allowed us the opportunity for a full session to focus on one of the most famous scenes within the play, Act 3 Scene 1, which begins with the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy, and goes on to see Ophelia confronting Hamlet about what his love means, and if he truly does love him.

In my previous work¹¹ I had already adapted this scene as a talk between two young potential lovers, one of whom (the Hamlet figure) has been gas lit by his friends to believe that his potential lover isn't truly in love with him after all. So for this work I decided to look at it from the opposite end, seeing what two ex-lovers would have to say to one another when the relationship is all said and done.

The process was the same as always; beginning with a cold read of the original text, working towards improvising the scene in modern vernacular. However, I introduced another part to the exercise, asking the two actor/participants to walk around the space while reading, playing with physical walking speed to see what the psychosomatic response would be to the pace of the scene, their delivery, and their intensity in the scene. Following their improvisations, we worked on the scene as if it were two people sitting in a confessional booth, telling two sides

¹⁰ I would note that the other relationship at the core is that of Hamlet and Hamlet Snr., whose revelations to his son drive the lead to commit most, if not all, of his actions.

¹¹ Four Kings

of the same story, which is what made its way into the first version of the script¹², and was further worked on and altered for the final script.

We followed this up by looking at Jean Betts' adaptation of this scene in *Ophelia Thinks Harder*. Betts takes the scene and transforms Hamlet from the confused young man, to someone who can't keep their toxic masculinity in-check. The idea of perspective has influenced the way that the script has formed, and indeed it seems that is the same for the playwrights I've looked at through this process. Many adaptations take influence from a change in perspective from the core play. On the surface level, 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead' transfers the perspective from Hamlet to the titular pair, and 'Ophelia Thinks Harder' does the same for Ophelia. However, both plays go that step further and play with theatrical form.

Script Writing Phase

The aforementioned therapist/counsellor idea is something that I had planned on playing with as a way to explore a modern way of understanding the mental health discussion within Hamlet. I had hoped that it would allow me to create a direct discussion of themes and motives between two characters without it seeming melodramatic, as well as a way to translate soliloquy moments to a diegetic discussion instead of a moment of internal discussion to the audience. However, this is the opposite of the reality. The first version of the script was, in the simplest of terms, melodramatic. The writing was too focused on directly adapting Hamlet into a modern context, explicitly explaining the new contexts placed upon the script, and no room for an audience to understand (or in fact actually see) any form of subtext that may lay within the script. The script was focused on retelling rather than recontextualising Hamlet.

After shelving the script and giving myself room to consider what I had written, a new context reappeared in my head. Prior to this thesis, around completing my last play, the idea of

¹² Which at the time was known as 'Be True'

someone standing at the seaside with the urn of someone he loved in his hand, trying to scatter the ashes but can't, came to me as the beginnings of a possible piece. I had tried working it into a different script I was working on, but that script ended up going nowhere. When the idea came to me again for this piece, it felt like a perfect fit for a recontextualisation of Hamlet. Hamlet is a young man, grieving over the loss of his father, and is unable to move on, the images seemed to line up. A palimpsest of ideas. The first layer being Hamlet (the character); the next layer being the promotional images for the RSC's 2008 production of Hamlet, in which they referenced Caspar David Friedrich's painting *The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, depicting a man clad in black standing at the edge of a clifftop; and the final layer being my image of the man with the urn.

The urn was a simple image, an immediate representation of loss and grief, a continual onstage memento mori. I also knew that it had the capability of creating a moment of tension in which another character grabs the urn and scatters the ashes before the character can, forcing them to let go of the past. This made its way into the new script, now titled *A Cliff in Denmark*, although this was later changed in the late stages of rehearsals.

The naming of the play became a point of discussion during the rehearsal period. I was asked, because it is called *A Cliff in Denmark*, is it actually set in Denmark? My answer was: no, not explicitly. For me, the name is purely referential, a way of signifying its connections to Hamlet to an outside audience. The play borrows ideas and moments from Hamlet, as well as referring to Hamlet as a text that already exists within the cannon of the world of the play. This new script began to be more successful in its intentions to recontextualise Hamlet, rather than just retelling it. Adaptation of retelling can be both simple and complicated. Take for example Jean Betts' play *'Ophelia Thinks Harder'* and Claire McCarthy's film *'Ophelia'*. They both retell the story of Hamlet from Ophelia's perspective; however Betts' version also succeeds in recontextualising Hamlet from a feminist perspective, directly discussing the way in which the

characters in positions of power above Ophelia (Hamlet and Gertrude specifically) control and affect her life and psyche, as well as reworking the language into a contemporary vernacular. McCarthy's 2018 film on the other hand attempts a similar recontextualisation, allowing Ophelia to reclaim her fate of 'madness'. However, this reclaiming of her fate isn't through her disguising herself as a man and escaping the castle with the help of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (whom are also disguised women); McCarthy's film sees Ophelia fake her death¹³ through the help of a witch (who is revealed to be an old lover of Claudius and Gertrude's long lost sister), and escapes to a nunnery to raise Hamlet's child whom she is pregnant with at the time. This film version is an attempt at a more purist re-telling, showing us different perspectives of conversations that happen within the core text. Take the retelling of Act 3 Scene 1, the film rationalises what they add/change to the core text is because the scene is being listened in on by Claudius and Polonius, so the core texts' account of the scene is what they hear. I link this to the conversation of the naming of the play as the name of each of these adaptations suggests their respective engagement with the core text. 'Ophelia' suggests the same story from her perspective, we expect to see Hamlet recreated on-screen; 'Ophelia Thinks Harder' suggests a re-evaluation of the core text, we expect to see direct discussion of Ophelia's psyche in comparison to Hamlet's. My own naming conventions attempt a similar examination of the text. My first script, 'Be True', takes its name from the line 'to thine own self be true'¹⁴ delivered by Polonius to Laertes, possibly suggesting (to those who know) that the play is about Laertes and his experiences outside of the play, as opposed to Hamlet, or to others just a reference to the script that could apply to anything. The second script and title, 'A Cliff in Denmark', I hoped might evoke a more imagistic representation of Hamlet; the evocation of the aforementioned palimpsest of Caspar Friedrich's painting, the feeling of standing at the edge of a precipice of change, and the evocation of the images from Lawrence Olivier's 1948 film in which Elsinore is

¹³ Evoking Sir John Everett Millais's painting

¹⁴ Act 1, Scene iii, line 77

“surrounded by a raging sea, represent[ing] Hamlet’s mind” (Rotstein, 2018, p. 649), especially the images in his version of the ‘To be’ soliloquy, in which Hamlet looks over the edge of the parapets to see the raging sea far below.

In the rewrite, I went back to my metaphorical drawing board of ideas, and considered my literary search findings. I drifted back to the likes of Barnette (2018), with her discussion of where she roots her adaptations, Abele (2007) and her discussion on the generational divide in on-screen Hamlets in the 1990s, and what Hartley (2005) writes about textual dramaturgy. These are all things that I had tried to consider while working on the original script, however evidently my considerations of these theoretical ideas were misconstrued.

The role each character took in the world of the script was important to reflect both the adaptation of Hamlet, and the thematic relevance of the story. Hamish was the ‘straightest’ character, in that he is the most like his original character, he has metaphorically taken the straightest road from Hamlet to A Cliff in Denmark. That isn’t to say that Hamish is a cookie-cutter version of Hamlet, he has made changes along the way, but he is the most recognisably obvious translation. Olivia, the Ophelia character, went from being a victim in the first version of the script, to being a character in a similar vein as to what Betts talks about as a feminine take on the character. This is true in the most literal sense in the final script, as she is the physical manifestation of Hamish’s concerns and anxieties. The ghost of Hamlet’s father goes from appearing in two scenes early in the play, to being an ever present figure even if he is not physically present onstage. He takes on the role as another ghostly figure in Hamish’s mind as well as the ever present figure of the urn in Hamish’s hands. Other characters from the core play exist in odd forms throughout ‘A Cliff in Denmark’; Polonius takes on the role of the disembodied voice of a therapist; the phone hotline psychic Michael the Magnificent is a strange embodiment of both the Players and Horatio, the characters that allow Hamlet the ability to reveal Claudius’ plot; and Gertrude is relegated to one scene towards the end of the play, yet

plays an incredibly important role in that it is her that Hamish has the argument which is the catalyst for his loneliness and the emotional closure with at the end of the play.

The Changing World

Around mid-March 2020, as this research was ready to move into its rehearsal phase, the world was put at a standstill as the COVID-19 crisis became a worldwide pandemic, and the news came that New Zealand would go into a minimum 4 week lockdown period. With this news, my research was cut short in its tracks, as it meant I was unable to begin rehearsing with my new group of actor/participants, and thus my aim of seeing this project through to a full performance for an audience was unlikely, or, as we saw it at the time, impossible. Considering the situation, I have found the irony in that while writing and researching about adaptation in theatre, the world has forced me (and many other creatives) to adapt, the ultimate adaptation in theatre, having to adapt to a world where theatre is impractical. We look back at theatre as we sit in our bubbles and think like Hamlet observing the skull of Yorick with the same sentiment, Alas, poor Theatre, I knew him, a fellow of infinite jest. I also find the irony in the way that, like Shakespeare's son Hamnet who (potentially) died at age 11 of the bubonic plague¹⁵, and whom some scholars often attribute the death of as an inspiration for Hamlet itself¹⁶, my own Hamlet has been cut short by a pandemic.

This is something which all artists are facing in the world currently, as the pandemic is still claiming lives as I write. On March 12, theatres on Broadway decided to close their doors, and have announced that the closedown will continue through until June 7, the longest close

¹⁵ This information is truly unknowable, some attribute his death to the bubonic plague, others attribute it to other factors that contributed to the high child mortality rate of the time, but again this is information we may never know.

¹⁶ As well as other pieces of writing of Shakespeare's, specifically Constance's speech in *King John* (Act III Scene 4)

down in the theatre district's history. In a recent article for The Guardian, Alexandra Villarrel (2020) interviewed various creatives and theatre related people in the US, and this quote stood out:

'People are adapting', [*actor and radio host Seth Rudetsky*] said. Quoting the musical *Closer Than Ever*, he started to sing: 'If someone told me even just a week ago ... I would have said you're crazy, I'd have burst right into tears, but here I am.'

'Yes, the things we plan on happening are not gonna happen," he said. "But, who knows what *will* happen?"' (paras. 18-19)

Thankfully, New Zealand's response to the pandemic was intuitive and successful, and the lockdown restrictions were lifted. The Alert-Level System introduced prior to lockdown allowed the country to understand what was possible and what was not in public and private settings. The move to Alert Level 2, dubbed 'Reduce', included the stipulation that gatherings in buildings are allowed, but are restricted to no more than 100 people. With this, we decided it was possible and safe to meet with my actor/participants (Conor, David, and Hani) and begin rehearsing.

Rehearsal Process

The cast for the full performance of 'A Cliff in Denmark' consisted of David as Hamish, Hani as Olivia and Mum, and Conor as Dad, Therapist, Carny, Guy, and Michael the Magnificent. I approached these actors as I had worked with them before, Conor and Hani in *Four Kings*, and David and I were in the same theatre studies classes in our undergraduate degrees, and I trusted that they would be able to bring the play to life in a satisfactory and entertaining way. During the rehearsal process, I did not work with the cast on the plot or motives in the original Hamlet script in order to have this script exist as its own entity. Imagery

and lines were the ways in which an audience would find the Hamlet-ness within the script and come to understand it.

The rehearsal process opened up avenues to explore the dramaturgical stage elements to bring extra meaning outside of the script and actors performances. I had decided to use audio and visual technologies during the performance to add an extra layer of meaning to certain moments. This idea follows what Barnett (2018) writes about palimpsest. I decided to introduce images that are discussed by the characters, as a way of also introducing the images and ideas discussed to an audience who may not necessarily know what the characters are talking about in that moment. I think specifically of scene eight where Hamish and Olivia discuss the music of David Bowie where behind them played a montage of images such as using clips from various David Bowie songs; specifically Space Oddity (Thompson, 1969), Ashes to Ashes (Bowie & Mallett, 1980), and Blackstar (Renck, 2015); as well as using clips of: various Soviet and United States space missions, from *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (Roeg, 1976) which starred Bowie, from the YouTube video titled 'Suic!de and Ment@l He@lth' (Thorne, 2018) on the channel Philosophy Tube which is the video referenced earlier in the play. Alongside these images, an acoustic cover of Bowie's Rock 'n Roll Suicide by Brazilian artist Seu Jorge (2005) used in the Wes Anderson film *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*. This layering of image, sound, and physical performance is one way of me attempting a palimpsest similar to how Barnette (2018) discusses in her chapter on palimpsest. She talks about how palimpsests are received by audience members differently, despite interacting with the same texts; "the emphasis is on reception, since it can have such different resonances for different readers (or spectators)... by including these excerpts... ERS encourages spectators to make their own connections between the layers they have been presented" (pp. 50-61). So the inclusion of these palimpsestuous layering's means that audience members will connect to the text in unexpected ways, whether it was planned or not. This concept became clear to me recently while seeing two different

productions at a local theatre. The first was a production of Jean Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, directed and performed by friends of mine. In it, they used a very distinct, bright red door at the end of the stage (it was performed in *traverse*), which swings open at the climax of the play. A week later, the company that produced *Four Kings* (my first play) put on a performance of *Basement* by Thomas Sainsbury. The one man play (performed by the producer of 'Kings') follows the character as he tries to break free of the basement apartment he has locked himself in. At the top of the stage was a grey door, with six locks across it. When one of the locks was undone and the latch swung open, I noticed red paint underneath, the same red paint from the production of *No Exit*. Going into the production I know that the team behind *Basement* had borrowed the door from the *No Exit* team, but knowing this didn't impact on my experience of *Basement* *until* I saw the red paint which had been neglected to be covered up. At this point, connections between the two plays were being made in my head; connections which the *Basement* team hadn't planned on being there, but this moment of accidental palimpsest drew my mind to these connections. Palimpsest exists in and out of intention, but audiences will hopefully find themselves making these connections. "... the joy taken in beholding them is in seeing both parts (or layers) and the whole, and appreciating how they work together. (Barnette, 2018, p. 61).

Performance

On the night of Tuesday 18 August, *A Cliff* in Denmark was performed to a small audience of family and friends of myself and the cast, as well as members of the English and Theatre Studies departments. It was interesting talking to the audience after the performance to understand what they understood from all the theatrical elements. One told me that they didn't realise that it was a Hamlet narrative until the final image of the show, as Hamish held the urn in the memetic image of Hamlet holding Yorik's skull. Another commented on the way that the

palimpsest videos added a sense of mental identity to the mind of Hamish. Another commented on the scene in which Olivia delivers her big monologue, and the feminist implications of the female character being a manifestation of a male's mind, yet still delivering an inherently feminist take on the role of Ophelia, and to an extent women, in the Hamlet script and theatre in general.

Conclusions and Reflections

Looking back on this process as a complete project means looking back at the original concept and recognising the differences between what was planned and what the final piece looked like. Initially, I had planned to look at the mental health narrative that was present within Hamlet, and draw that out into a contemporary context. Looking at the core of the final piece, that is certainly present, however my focus turned from the mental health narrative as the core focus of the play, to a piece of the overall process, and adaptation became the main element. The workshops focused on the mental health narrative at its core, how my actor/participants and myself can introduce and explore a contemporary mental health experience to a text from 400 years prior to our work. Although our work in the workshops was an adaptive process, the core intent of this section of the process at this time was a straight adaptation of the mental health narrative, transposing a similar tone of tragedy. However, as discussed earlier, the first script that was written as a result of the workshops elevated the intensity of the tragedy to a melodramatic level. Although this isn't necessarily a bad thing, it wasn't the way I wanted to present the story in its entirety. I did use this heightened, melodramatic tragedy for the scene between Hamish and the Gertrude insert, as a way of portraying the internal dialogue they have with themselves when thinking back on an argument, thinking of the things they wished they had said at the time. I would attribute the full melodramatic to what my original plan was, that being that the adaptation was a transposition of Hamlet into a contemporary setting, asking the

question of how Hamlet's story would change should he be born and raised in a 21st century, New Zealand context? I use the term transposition as that is the closest term to what happened in this section of the process, as this script took the scenes we focused on in workshops and simply played out the plot of that scene in a contemporary setting and language. If I can place the 'blame' on anything, it would be what I focused on in workshops.

The focus at this stage was on the plot of each scene, meaning that my actor/participants' focus was on that as well, rather than any subtext relating to character or theme, as they were not tasked to do so. I recognise that at the time I was focused on the translation of the text from the Elizabethan style into our contemporary vernacular, meaning that the subtext in the scenes was lost on me as well. This was just another experiment in my research which did not produce a satisfactory outcome, and so I changed the focus of my adaptation while writing the second version of the script.

The second script's aim was to take the subtext of Hamlet, the themes and ideas which I viewed as central to the Hamlet narrative, and transform it into my contemporary voice. Similar to what Abele (2007) discusses, I wanted to understand how a Millennial/Generation Z Hamlet would exist; what would be important to that character, and why? My goal was to strip back Hamlet to its bare bones, look at the mechanisms, and understand how it ticks. Hamlet was still a young man, trying to live through his grief after the loss of his father, and the focus on the roles the people around him take in his life is what drives his story. This was the big shift in my research focus, from the translation of text from one time to another, to the interpersonal relationships between the characters and how the way that they are portrayed changes when contemporary thinking is placed upon the classical text. With the mental health narrative still existing from the prior script, the new script now discussed how a male, or masc-presenting, person attempts to understand their place among their peers, family, and professions that interact with them in their life. The Hamlet narrative existed in the script as a referential focal

point which was the road map for the script to follow, but not totally adhere to. It was there, but it wasn't the only thing the script existed as, unlike the first which was Hamlet first and foremost.

I use 'masc-presenting' as someone who identifies as a non-binary person, and as the play presented an unintentionally gender diverse brain. Hamish is written as male, played by a male actor, and Olivia is written as female, played by a female actor. However, the reveal that Olivia is a manifestation created by Hamish to help him work through the issues that are plaguing his mind possibly suggests some form of gender diversity within the character. He creates a female-presenting character as the voice of his mind, with other male voices and characters appearing as unnatural manifestations (excluding his father). This concept wasn't on the forefront of my mind while conducting this research, however it was something that I had considered at separate points, especially towards the end of the rehearsal process. Originally, the voice of 'traditional' kiwi masculinity, Hamish's father, who talks about playing sport, the boys down at the pub, uses words like bloke and matey, continued to haunt Hamish's subconscious up until Olivia tips the ashes out of the urn. He stood over Hamish's shoulder as he stood at the railing telling him to 'hold on, hold me tight, hold me like you'll never let me go', as a way of presenting the stereotypical male figure bottling up their feelings, showing what Steenbergh (2011) references as the "connection between outward performance and the inward experience of emotion" (p. 94). However this was changed in the last week of rehearsals to have the figure of the father appear on stage to embrace Hamish and remind him that it's okay, and he is ready to let go. I wanted to have a moment where the figure of traditional masculinity breaks down and allows a moment of closure between both of Hamish's parental figures, instead of just his mother at the end of the play.

These mental manifestations of aspects of Hamish's inner mind inherently, and without direct intention, depict the Divided-Self Hamlet referenced in Rotstein (2018). This idea of the divided self is in reference to Ronald David Laing, who viewed psychosis as "conflicts between

the inner person and the persona expressed publicly” (p. 649). *A Cliff in Denmark* is a play which is entirely in psychosis, where the lines between reality and fantasy are blurred. The characters are the absolute depiction of Laing’s theory. Hamish is the publicly expressed persona, inherently by being the only physically real character onstage. Olivia and the other minor characters (the Carny, the Therapist, and Michael the Magnificent) are the inner persons of Hamish’s mind causing his psychosis. The layers of reality and fantasy are blurred by the introduction of these characters, but especially Olivia who is the opposing figure of Hamish, the accentuation of his mental illnesses, the one who fights the urge to jump off the cliff, who aids in the letting go of his grief. Olivia is the inner persona at opposing odds with the public persona. It is here that I see the biggest flaw in the play, and the thing that I am most likely to change should I choose to work on this script any further, and that is the reveal of the truth behind Olivia. The reveal that Olivia is a manifestation of Hamish’s mind, while true to the play, is delivered via the script in an over-explanatory way. That isn’t to say that I would change it to be ambiguous, to suggest that this was all real life, but I would re-work it to be more subtle in its delivery of the information. This is a minor change to the script, yet one that I think it would hugely benefit from. This way, the play doesn’t lead the audience blindly, and trusts them to make sense of the world presented to them.

The adaptive process is one of constant trial and error, experimentation, failure and success. One must be able to recognise their subject position and trust themselves to explore the avenues of interest to themselves. The original text exists, it will always exist. It is the role of the adaptor to simultaneously be aware of the text and ignore it. To reference back to it, clarify and confirm their personal intentions and understandings of the script; while at the same time understanding that the original text is not the only thing that exists. Adaptations will always occur, as playwrights, and artists of all kinds, will find some inspiration in the words of another

writer or artist. Meaning will exist in all forms, and it is up to the adaptor and adaptor to present the meaning that interests them. An adaptor has the power to allow someone to experience an existing piece of media through a different lens, a different subject position, while at the same time they experience it through their own. An adaptor is the creator and contributor to a palimpsest, layered with preexisting adaptations and future ones.

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Appendix
Performance Script

A Cliff in Denmark

By James Smith

Lead Characters:

Hamish
Olivia

Minor Character (either physical or voice):

Therapist
Carny
Urn
Guy
Michael the Magnificent
Mum

- ONE - Goodbyes -

Lights up on Hamish, holding an urn. It contains the ashes of his father, Hamish Snr. He holds it and looks at it fondly. Melancholic.

HAMISH: Here we are. Finally. I thought I'd write you something... but... well... you know how I am with words. This is the place right?

Pause.

Silence.

He goes to throw the ashes. He stops.

HAMISH: Sorry, I just... I can't...

He places the urn on the ground and leaves. He quickly returns and picks it up.

HAMISH: How do I do this...? Please tell me...

He sighs. He places the urn on the ground. He takes out a notebook from his backpack and writes a note. He then places the note under the urn.

HAMISH: Maybe someone else can.

Hamish leaves.

Soon OLIVIA enters, crying. She stands on the edge of the stage and climbs the railing. She goes to fall forward, stops herself. She turns around and goes to fall backward, and again stops herself. She stays still, actively contemplating jumping. She soon notices the urn on the ground.

OLIVIA: What?

She picks it up and reads the note

OLIVIA: To whoever finds this note. This urn contains my late father, Hamish Larsen Senior. He wished to be scattered from this clifftop, but I couldn't do it. Please, if you are stronger than I am, scatter my father's remains. Signed, Hamish Larsen Junior.

Well, Hamish Larsen Senior, as you wished.

Hamish enters

HAMISH: Wait! Wait! Sorry, stop, please.

OLIVIA: Who are you?

HAMISH: That's, uhh, that's my Dad you've got there.

OLIVIA: I was going to scatter him, like this note said.

HAMISH: I know, but I changed my mind.

OLIVIA: How do I know that this is your dad?

HAMISH: Why would I lie about something like that? How would I know that it was my Dad?

OLIVIA: I don't know, this urn looks kinda expensive, maybe you want to steal it.

HAMISH: Well, what were you going to do with the urn after you scattered these ashes?

OLIVIA: I was going... going to... I was going to... I don't know. How do I know that this is your Dad?

HAMISH: Why would I lie?

OLIVIA: Show me some ID

HAMISH: What?

OLIVIA: ID, show me, now.

HAMISH: No just give me back my dad.

OLIVIA: ID, now, or I'll toss the whole lot off this cliff and you won't get what you want.

HAMISH: What the fuck...?

Hamish reaches into his pocket, retrieving his wallet. He pulls out his ID and hands it to Olivia. She checks it and hands it back.

OLIVIA: Alright here's your Dad back.

She hands the urn back to Hamish

HAMISH: Thank you.

Silence.

HAMISH: I'm Hamish by the way.

OLIVIA: I know.

HAMISH: Haha, of course, you saw my note. And my ID... haha...

OLIVIA: Yeah...

HAMISH: And you...?

OLIVIA: Olivia...

HAMISH: Nice to meet you Olivia

OLIVIA: Look not to be rude but can I just be alone, please.

HAMISH: Uh, yeah, okay, sorry, I'll just go over here.

OLIVIA: okay

Hamish moves to the other side of the stage. He sits, looking at the urn. He mutters things like 'I'm sorry', 'I don't know what to do', 'I'm not ready', etc.

Meanwhile, Olivia begins taking deep breaths, exhaling loudly like she is preparing herself for what she's about to do. She climbs the rail, facing outward. She continues to breathe deeply. Hamish looks over at her.

HAMISH: Hey careful, you'd probably die if you fell.

OLIVIA: Yeah... I know...

HAMISH: This whole cliff face is a known suicide spot.

OLIVIA: Yeah... thanks... I know...

HAMISH: That's why they put the rail up.

OLIVIA: Why do you think I'm here?

He looks at her, takes note of her clothes, her hair, the tears in her eyes.

HAMISH: Oh... I see...

OLIVIA: And the last horse crosses the finish line.

HAMISH: I'm sorry. Are you okay?

She laughs

OLIVIA: Yeah! I'm fine. I was about to jump off this cliff, and I'm absolutely fine.

HAMISH: Talk to me.

OLIVIA: No offence, but I'd rather not, you know, explain my life to a stranger.

HAMISH: At least I'd be unbiased.

OLIVIA: I don't need another therapist thanks.

HAMISH: I never said I'd be a therapist for you.

OLIVIA: I just don't want to talk about it okay?

HAMISH: Okay...

Silence.

HAMISH: But just so you know, I'm not just gonna sit here and watch you jump.

OLIVIA: Then leave.

HAMISH: What kind of person would I be if I did.

OLIVIA: A normal one.

HAMISH: What kind of people have you met?

She laughs, sadly.

HAMISH: Just come back on the other side of the rail.

OLIVIA: Let me jump.

HAMISH: Please.

OLIVIA: I'm going to jump.

HAMISH: Please.

OLIVIA: You can't stop me.

HAMISH: Fine, go ahead.

Pause. Olivia does nothing.

OLIVIA: Hamish?

HAMISH: Yes.

OLIVIA: Can you help me back over the rail please.

HAMISH: Course.

Hamish helps her climb back over.

OLIVIA: Thank you.

HAMISH: It's fine. I can't just sit by and watch someone do something like that. I'm not some sort of sick weirdo.

OLIVIA: Aren't you?

HAMISH: Well, not for things like that at least.

OLIVIA: Phew.

Silence

OLIVIA: Sorry you had to see that.

HAMISH: What do you mean?

OLIVIA: Me, up on the rail, all that

HAMISH: We all have bad times, sometimes you just need someone there to help you down. Or to push.

OLIVIA: Hah, yeah.

HAMISH: I mean, I've been through some pretty rough shit recently.

OLIVIA: Oh yeah?

HAMISH: Yeah... I mean my dad dying for a start

OLIVIA: Oh of course...

HAMISH: Didn't help that I was already going through my own stuff, like, mentally...

OLIVIA: Oh?

- TWO - K10 Test -

Lighting FX

A disembodied voice can be heard. It babbles out questions at speed.

THERAPIST: During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel tired for no good reason? None of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, most of the time, all of the time? During the last 30 days, how often did you feel nervous? None of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, most of the time, all of the time? During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel so nervous that nothing could calm you down? None of the time, a little of the time, some of the

time, most of the time, all of the time? During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel hopeless? None of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, most of the time, all of the time? During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel restless or fidgety? None of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, most of the time, all of the time? During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel so restless you could not sit still? None of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, most of the time, all of the time? During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel depressed? None of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, most of the time, all of the time? During the last 30 days about how often did you feel that everything was an effort? None of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, most of the time, all of the time? During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up? None of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, most of the time, all of the time? During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel worthless? None of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, most of the time, all of the time?

Hamish tries to answer when he can get a word in. In order he answers: some of the time, most of the time, some of the time, most of the time, most of the time, a little of the time, most of the time, all of the time, most of the time, all of the time.

THERAPIST: I'm sorry, it seems you've got a severe case. You've scored higher than the average.

HAMISH: So it's not golf scores then?

THERAPIST: We've got a lot of work ahead of us

HAMISH: More money for you.

THERAPIST: I'm here to help. You wanted to see me, here you are. You don't have to continue after this session, I'm only suggesting you should for your own sake. Everything here is your own choice

HAMISH: Not everything.

THERAPIST: Oh?

HAMISH: I didn't exactly choose to be here...

THERAPIST: You could've simply not given your name to the receptionist, you could've just turned around and walked out those big doors at the front and gone home. No one's holding you here against your will.

HAMISH: Fine, I'll leave then

THERAPIST: I wouldn't do that if I were you.

HAMISH: Why not?

THERAPIST: We need you here.

- THREE - Popping Pillies -

LX back to the cliff.

OLIVIA: So... depressed then?

HAMISH: Yes.

OLIVIA: Damn dude...

HAMISH: It's pretty common to be honest. Like not that big of a deal. I just pop one of those little guys every day and I'm alright.

OLIVIA: Is that what you want to do for your whole life?

HAMISH: How do you mean?

OLIVIA: Do you want to be popping pills for the rest of your life?

HAMISH: I mean I don't think I have a choice...

OLIVIA: You do though. You don't have to take them

HAMISH: No I don't, but I want to. They help me stay... normal...?

OLIVIA: Normal?

HAMISH: nonono, not normal. They help me... to... uhh... oh god what word am I looking for here...?

OLIVIA: Help you to... What?

HAMISH: Function I guess...

OLIVIA: Don't you feel that your life is just going to be a cycle of like: wake up, pill, normalcy, wake up, pill, normalcy, wake up, pill, normalcy, wake up, no pill, fucked up.

HAMISH: I'm fine with that.

OLIVIA: Why?

HAMISH: Because they let me be me

OLIVIA: But isn't that the opposite

HAMISH: What?

OLIVIA: Isn't it more of the case that they stop you from being the real you? Like, the real you is the you that's depressed, and the pills alter the real you into a happy, passable, normal person?

HAMISH: Sure, like at first I didn't want to have a pill to balance out the imbalance in my brain, but if that's the person that I am without it, then I don't want to be that version of Hamish.

OLIVIA: Then you don't want to be you...?

HAMISH: Have you ever been like that?

OLIVIA: Like what?

HAMISH: Empty. Like you exist, and yet simultaneously, you don't. You can move, and see, and speak, and hear, and all that, but you can't actually feel it. Your heart beats, but you can't feel it. You move, but you just float.

OLIVIA: I know what you mean

HAMISH: You do? You like that?

OLIVIA: I never said I liked it. But when I'm like that I guess I just try to think that if I can make it to the end of that day, and see the next morning, then I'll be fine.

HAMISH: That's optimistic.

OLIVIA: I guess that's the difference between us.

HAMISH: Mental health... it's a lottery...

- FOUR - Spin the Wheel -

LX Change.

Carnival like music (probably Entry of the Gladiators)

A Carny/Showman enters with a big spinning wheel. (think John Candy in Little Shop of Horrors)

CARNY: Ladies and Gentlemen, boys and girls welcome back to Wheel of Misfortune! Last week we had a young man who was lucky enough to get off scot-free, but he'll return in his 40s for a mid life crisis!

We have a cracker of a contestant for your viewing pleasure here tonight. We have a young man by the name of Hamish who's eager to develop a bad case of mental health.

HAMISH: I'm not...

CARNY. As usual, we're here to help his brain to decide which it is! Hamish, are you ready?

HAMISH: No

CARNY: HAHAHAHA great, that's the spirit kiddo. Well go ahead, SPIN THE WHEEEEEEL!!!

Hamish spins the wheel. It stops.

CARNY: Uh Oh!

V/O SOUND FX: DEPRESSION

CARNY: That's right my boy, you're walking away with a special case of depression thanks to the people at Depression inc.

A siren sounds

CARNY: Ooooooh you know what that means ladies and gentle men. Hamish has scored himself with a bonus spinnnnnnnnnn. Go a head Hamish, SPIN THE WHEEEEEEL! You have no choice.

Hamish spins the wheel

CARNY: HAHA!

V/O FX: ANXIETY

CARNY: Aren't you lucky, what a pair! Anxiety, brought to you by the fine folks at What Do People Think of Me.

HAMISH: I...

CARNY: No no, don't speak. You've won depression, a bonus dose of anxiety, and we'll throw in a special case of dissociative disorder thanks to the people at We-fuck-your-brain.com. Okay, now get off my set, ahahaha. We'll be back next time with a young girl by the name of Olivia who wants a sneaky little case you know what. Ahahaha see you next time and don't forget to SPIN THE WHEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEL!

Music

LX Change

- FIVE - Dad's Home -

LX returns to the cliff. Yet something about it is different.

OLIVIA: So the urn.

HAMISH: What of it?

OLIVIA: Why do you still have it?

HAMISH: I don't know...

OLIVIA: Want me to toss it over the edge for you?

HAMISH: Not yet.

OLIVIA: Just pass it to me, it'll be easy.

HAMISH: I don't want to... not yet...

OLIVIA: alright...

Silence

OLIVIA: So, like, you into sports or anything?

HAMISH: Me?

OLIVIA: You're the only one here

HAMISH: You could be talking to dad...

OLIVIA: Oh yeah right, I'll ask him shall I? Ahem. Mr Hamish Senior, sir, are you into sports?

Pause.

No response.

OLIVIA: I don't know why I expected anything else.

URN (as v/o): Oh yeah nah kinda sometimes.

OLIVIA: What the fuck?

HAMISH: What?

OLIVIA: The urn... it... talked...

HAMISH: What are you talking about?

URN: Like I don't actively watch it all that much, I'll watch the odd rugby test and what not. Maybe catch some of the Super games you know. Don't mind a bit of the ol' cricket you know, ahehe.

OLIVIA: It did it again!

HAMISH: Bullshit.

OLIVIA: No I'm serious it's answering my questions.

URN: I used to play a little bit with the boys at the pub. You know the ol' social cricket teams and all that malarkey. But once my knee started to pack up, that was it, you know. Could've kept going and done more damage but I thought I'd better not.

HAMISH: That's so fucking weird.

OLIVIA: RIGHT!

URN: What about you love, what're you into?

OLIVIA: Uhhh....

URN: What's that?

OLIVIA: Ummmm...

HAMISH: Answer it, go on.

OLIVIA: I used to play netball at school...

URN: Oh Netball, oh yeah. Yeah, nah never really tickled my fancy you know. Then again, those little skirts never really looked that good on me ahehehe.

OLIVIA: That's... fair enough...

HAMISH: How is this happening?

URN: I don't know matey, but it sure feels weird on my end.

HAMISH: What's the afterlife like?

URN: Oh you know

OLIVIA: We don't

URN: Oh it's kinda, just, empty. Odd you know. There was this bloke... I don't know if he was a bloke or not... showing me these pictures of, uh, animals and people and shit. Next thing I know I'm being whisked through some sort of, uh, portal or something. Then I wake up as a bloody spider. Ahehe, it's pretty weird matey.

LX returns to normal cliff

OLIVIA: Hamish? Hamish? HAMISH!

HAMISH: What?

OLIVIA: Are you going to answer my question or not?

HAMISH: Huh?

OLIVIA: Are you into sports or anything?

HAMISH: Oh, uhh, not really... not anymore at least... I used to play but not anymore...

OLIVIA: I see.

HAMISH: You?

OLIVIA: Yeah a little. I used to play lacrosse a lot at school actually. That's how I met my last boyfriend actually?

HAMISH: At a school lacrosse game?

OLIVIA: Yeah... Sounds weird I know... But my school only had a boys team, I kicked up a bit of a stink and they let me join the team. At one of the games this guy on the opposite team smacked into me, when I fell I broke my arm. He came and visited me at A&E and we got talking. Then we kinda just, got together.

HAMISH: Cute

OLIVIA: I know right. I was really just taken by him. Then things kinda just got... eee...

HAMISH: Broke up?

OLIVIA: Badly.

HAMISH: Ah

OLIVIA: yeah...

- SIX - He Said She Said -

LX change

GUY: So in swans Olivia, trying to be all pleasant, all "Oh how are you", and I'm like yeah okay I guess. Just living my life, you know... well trying to anyway. I mean now it's a bit difficult now that you're here and that he's... And then she goes, I have these for you, and tries to give me some shit that I had apparently given her, which I didn't...

OLIVIA: I wanted to give him back some momentos he gave me a while ago, you know, love letters and photos and books and shit. I didn't want to hang onto them because they felt... wrong... all things considered. They were bitter, they felt bitter and wrong to hold on to. I felt it was burning a hole in me. He threw it back in my face. He threw it all back... And started calling me things and yelling and... and after everything that's already happened, eventually you start to believe it.

GUY: She doesn't get it. She wouldn't get it. I don't think she'd want to. She doesn't understand what's going on right now. I'm trying to protect her.

OLIVIA: I don't get what he was trying to protect me from, like Jesus I'm a grown woman I don't need you protecting me, especially after I've fucking fallen out of love with him.

GUY: Sometimes I had to ask myself, did I even love her.

OLIVIA: He made me believe so.

GUY: At some point I thought I did... like I think I do... but I think I was wrong...

OLIVIA: Guess that makes me more the fool.

GUY: She's two faced. I saw through it, I've seen through it. She comes across all welcoming and loving and amazing. But she's not. She can be. That's not her. It's all a facade. There's something else underneath. She's a liar. She's fake. She's pushy. And she doesn't know how she makes people feel. It's her that's made me... mad... like this... I mean I saw the messages. I saw the flirting. I saw the suggestive messages back and forth. All eggplants, and water drops, and tongues, and peaches. I practically saw them fucking right there on the screen in front of me

OLIVIA: I've heard it all before... from him. I've been called all these things before. Being a woman in the 21st century of course I have. You can't really avoid it. You get it 24/7 from other people. From the mirror. People are awful, terrifying, confusing. And he's so awful, and terrifying, and confusing, and astounding. Why do I care? Why are we so concerned with how people close to us see us? Things were said, lies were created. I lost friends, all because no-one actually understood what was going on. Everyone took his side. No one wanted to hear what I thought, what was actually happening. But hey, you've always got to have the tragic boy who lost his love, but we've always got to silence the girl apparently. Hamlet is allowed to rise from his madness, Ophelia must fall into it and die. Why must I have an inauspicious mind? Why am I... Who am I? Who am I in my own story? Why am I the one who is lost? Who cares for Ophelia, when Gertrude bears the bad news, when Hamlet loses his family? Who am I? Who cares who I am? You don't. You're all here for him. (*gesturing to Hamish*) You're all here to see him strut and fret about the stage, skull in hand, weeping for his lost father. You're all here to see me jump off this rail here right? For me to stammer and stutter and scream about flowers and the beautiful majesty of Denmark. We can do that play if you want. I can put on my frills and ruffles and cry and scream for you. I can do that. I'm just your puppet really. I'm just the ventriloquist doll for a writer. Because that's how women should be right? Seen but not heard. Should we ice the women, put me in the fridge. I know you want me to be there. So why not let me do it.

- SEVEN - Mortality -

LX returns to cliff

At some point during the last speech Olivia has climbed the railing, ready to jump. She pauses, a mix of fear and confusion crosses her face.

HAMISH: So are you going to jump or not?

OLIVIA: Uhhh.... No... I think I got a bit carried away.

HAMISH: Are you going to come back over?

OLIVIA: No... not yet... Can you come stand beside me?

HAMISH: Um, okay, sure. Hold this...

He hands her the urn and climbs over. She hands it back.

HAMISH: Well. Here we are.

OLIVIA: Here we are.

HAMISH: On the edge of a cliff

OLIVIA: On the edge of a cliff

HAMISH: Just one misstep and that's it.

OLIVIA: Well, probably.

HAMISH: It's the most likely outcome.

OLIVIA: That's why I'm here.

HAMISH: Do you really want to die or are you just contemplating it.

OLIVIA: I don't know yet.

HAMISH: What if you did it and regretted it afterwards?

OLIVIA: I can't regret it afterwards, there's nothing else.

HAMISH: Do you really believe that?

OLIVIA: Yeah. You die, it all goes black, roll credits.

HAMISH: So no heaven, hell, reincarnation etc...?

OLIVIA: Nah that's all bullshit created to keep the proletariat sedated so they don't revolt. 'Religion is the opiate of the masses' and all that.

HAMISH: hm

Silence

HAMISH: I've been contemplating my own mortality a lot lately.

OLIVIA: Aren't we all.

HAMISH: I think that's part of the reason I'm here. Thinking whether I could actually feasibly take my own life or not.

OLIVIA: That's a mood

HAMISH: Yeah so like life's dumb right? It's like we're born, we have shit happen to us, we die. That's it. A select few will impact the world in some way, some will be remembered. But the majority of us just muddle through our lives with no real aim, no real goal, nothing.

OLIVIA: So you're anxious about whether you'll be remembered?

HAMISH: No. I couldn't really give a fuck about that to be honest. I guess I'm more worried about the mark that I leave on other people, like the people around me.

OLIVIA: Is that not the same thing?

HAMISH: No. Not at all. If you're remembered, then you get recorded in the history books, and people make movies about you and all that bullshit. But the mark you leave on the people around you is infinitely more important right? Hitler is in the history books for changing the world, but the guy was an absolute prick. Brando gets remembered for his amazing acting but everyone who knew him called him an asshole. I want to be remembered by the people who loved me for the good things. For compassion, and love and all those noble causes and what not.

Silence

HAMISH: What happens when we die?

OLIVIA: I already told you what I think, we go in the ground and decompose.

HAMISH: Yeah, fine, but what about our consciousness?

OLIVIA: Consciousness is a side effect of being alive.

HAMISH: Ghosts

OLIVIA: Ghosts?

HAMISH: Ghosts. Kinda. You ever seen that movie Coco?

OLIVIA: The Disney one?

HAMISH: Pixar. Yeah.

OLIVIA: No.

HAMISH: In it they kinda talk about memory and consciousness after death. So you die. Right? Simple. Your consciousness lives on somewhere, somehow. And that consciousness lives on as long as the person it came from is remembered. So like, the consciousness of say, Shakespeare, is still alive and well, and probably for the rest of human history. But then take you. When you die, you'll live on as long as your family and friends hold memories of you. Your future ancestors may have your name but they may not necessarily have any actual idea of who you were as a person. And when you're forgotten, that's it, bye bye, your essence is returned to the universe.

OLIVIA: That's pretty morbid

HAMISH: I wouldn't say morbid, it's philosophy

OLIVIA: Well it's something we'll never know the answer to

HAMISH: That's why I need to find a psychic.

OLIVIA: Psychic?

HAMISH: So I can talk to my old man, find out what's after life.

OLIVIA: What the fuck are you on about?

HAMISH: I had this vision... this collection of sound and images, just before, where my dad started talking to me from beyond the grave, and I need to find out if it was real or if it was in my head.

OLIVIA: It was in your head.

HAMISH: No... I don't know... maybe... a psychic would be the way to find out once and for all.

Hamish climbs back over the rail. He grabs out his phone.

HAMISH: You can get psychics over the phone right?

OLIVIA: Sure, why not.

HAMISH: Lets see, ooh here's one, Michael the Magnificent, Medium.

He puts his phone to his ear

LX change

Michael answers on the other end. (Think Simon Russel Beale in Penny Dreadful)

MICHAEL: You've reached Michael the Magnificent, mystic medium for many of mankind. How may I help you?

HAMISH: Yeah, hi, I want to talk to my father. He died.

MICHAEL: I will activate my psychic powers and attempt to reach the spirit world. The rate is \$15 a minute, is that okay with you?

HAMISH: Um... Yes.

MICHAEL: Excellent, if you could just enter your credit card details on your keypad and we can begin.

Hamish enters a series of numbers on his phone.

MICHAEL: and the three numbers on the reverse.

Hamish enters three more numbers.

MICHAEL: Excellent. Now tell me, have you any memoir of your father at hand.

HAMISH: I have his ashes?

MICHAEL: Great, now what I want you to do is put the phone on speaker phone.

HAMISH: Oh okay. Done.

MICHAEL: Now, place the urn atop the phone.

HAMISH: Yup.

MICHAEL: Now, I will recite some words to evoke the spirit of your father.

HAMISH: Okay.

MICHAEL: OH SPIRITS OF THE ANCIENT REALM
BRING THIS DAMNED SPIRIT FORTH
AND SHINE A LIGHT UPON IT'S SHATTERED FORM
SO WE MIGHT COMMUNE WITH A BEING FROM
ANOTHER... REALM....

URN: Where the fuck did you find this guy?

MICHAEL: I'm sensing the name... Hamish, does that mean anything to you?

HAMISH: Yeah that's my name

MICHAEL: Your father wants you to know that it's okay, he's fine, and that there your financial issues will sort themselves out in no time.

URN: You hired a psychic!

HAMISH: Can you ask him what happens when you die?

URN: You die mate, that's it.

MICHAEL: He says, you will ascend to heaven

URN: I bloody well did not.

HAMISH: Wait, dad?

MICHAEL/URN: Yes?

HAMISH: Not you.

MICHAEL/URN: Me?

HAMISH: No him.

MICHAEL/URN: I don't know who you're talking to.

HAMISH: Ugh, wait a sec.

*Hamish picks up the phone and ends the call
LX change*

HAMISH: Right, Dad, what happens when you die?

URN: Why are you so concerned with this?

HAMISH: Uh, um because.

URN: Hamish, it's not something you should really be focused on.

HAMISH: But I need to know.

URN: No you don't. Don't you think you'll be happier living your life in the moment, thinking about your life, instead of worrying about what happens when you eventually cark it?

HAMISH: I... don't... know...

URN: Look there's someone else here who needs you to be present right now. I need you to put aside all this mortality bull shit, and focus on the important. I need you to remember who you are.

HAMISH: What?

URN: See ya.

HAMISH: Dad?

LX change back to cliff

OLIVIA: Jesus Hamish, are you okay?

HAMISH: Yeah...

OLIVIA: You just went entirely blank. You were just staring at the urn, not speaking, not blinking, not moving. I didn't know what to do.

HAMISH: No, no, I'm good. Are you? You look like you've seen a ghost

OLIVIA: I don't... know...

HAMISH: Is it alright if I...?

Hamish opens his arms wide, gesturing a hug. Olivia nods. He embraces her, like a brother would his younger sister. They hold it as long as it feels comfortable, and then a little more. Olivia steps back. She seems different.

OLIVIA: I'm sorry.

HAMISH: What for?

OLIVIA: Everything I did, everything I said...

HAMISH: You didn't do anything...

OLIVIA: I just hope one day you'll be able to see what you did as well, and see it from my side.

HAMISH: I don't know what you mean Olivia...

OLIVIA: Ugh, just drop it.

HAMISH: What?

She doesn't respond.

HAMISH: Olivia?

Again, nothing.

HAMISH: Talk to me?

- EIGHT - Space -

*She speaks, back to her 'normal' self
LX change*

Hamish has become professional, taking on the role of the Therapist

OLIVIA: You know space?

HAMISH: Space?

OLIVIA: Yeah space. The void. The place beyond the sky.

HAMISH: Never been myself, but yes I do know of it.

OLIVIA: What do you think it's like up there?

HAMISH: Cold. Dark. Lonely.

OLIVIA: Sounds nice.

HAMISH: Why do you say that?

OLIVIA: It just seems like a place where you can get away. Be alone.

HAMISH: Correct me if I'm wrong but isn't some of the problem your loneliness? Don't you think that extra step of removal could cause more problems?

OLIVIA: Can't we just talk hypothetically?

HAMISH: Okay then, so, hypothetically speaking, how do you view space?

OLIVIA: Through a telescope.

HAMISH: Ha. Metaphorically speaking then.

OLIVIA: Exactly how you just described. Cold. Dark. Alone. Cold enough to be comfortable.

HAMISH: In the freezing temperatures of space?

OLIVIA: If I were up there I'd be in a pod or something like that.

HAMISH: So not entirely exposed?

OLIVIA: That'd be stupid.

Silence

HAMISH: So why space? Why not somewhere else cold and dark? Why not, say, Antarctica?

OLIVIA: Freedom, weightlessness mostly. You can't feel like you're wading through mud if you're floating above it.

HAMISH: Could you not then, hypothetically, feel like you're swimming through the mud.

OLIVIA: Well, hypothetically, you move involuntarily in space. There's nothing weighing you down because you have no weight.

Silence

HAMISH: Where's this all come from?

OLIVIA: I watched this video the other day. The guy was talking about when he gets bad he pictures he's a Cosmonaut, having to embark on a dangerous mission and leave safety and comfort. Then, while in this terrifying place he has to wait, just wait until he can return to Earth.

HAMISH: Pretty grim.

OLIVIA: Inspiring. I think it's pretty inspirational. But what happens when you don't come back down? Space pioneers died you know. They exploded on the ascent... on the descent... while orbiting. What would happen if they got stuck?

HAMISH: Is this them or you that you're worried about?

OLIVIA: I don't know.

HAMISH: If they got stuck I guess they knew there was some way home.

OLIVIA: Was there?

HAMISH: I guess they just had to believe there was even if there wasn't.

Silence

OLIVIA: You know Space Oddity?

HAMISH: The Bowie song?

OLIVIA: Yeah

HAMISH: Sure

OLIVIA: I think that's what it's about.

HAMISH: Suicide?

OLIVIA: No. Those days, weeks, before suicide. The points where you don't know whether you're going to make it or not.

HAMISH: Is that how you feel now?

OLIVIA: Maybe. I don't know

HAMISH: You say that like it's a choice

OLIVIA: Doesn't everyone choose to commit suicide?

HAMISH: It's more of a point you're driven to isn't it? Like you've hit a wall and you've got to decide if you're going to climb it or sink into the void. Or a railing for that matter.

OLIVIA: But you're still deciding what to do. In Space Oddity he talks about how his ship knows which way to go. Whether he knows it or not, his ship is making the right decision to preserve his life. The ship is his unconscious mind, and the decision may or may not be a conscious one, he still makes it. It sounds weird, but in my head cannon, Major Tom flies off into space to become Lazarus from Blackstar.

HAMISH: I don't see how that's relevant.

OLIVIA: Lazarus flies off into space, becoming almost a God-like deity figure. However, his trauma of abandonment causes him to go mute, he's got scars that can't be seen, ie his mind. Ormen, the place he talks about in the song, isn't actually a place, it's his, like, mindscape. A place where only one candle burns, for one person. That one person is his abandoned self, Major Tom, the person he abandoned to become someone new, someone different, someone removed from himself. That's why in the video we see his space suit left in the middle of nowhere with a bejewelled skull in place of a real skull. I mean look at his name, Lazarus, like the biblical figure of rebirth, that rebirth is him abandoning his last life and becoming someone or something new.

Silence

HAMISH: Ørmen is a village in Norway.

OLIVIA: Wait what? Really?

HAMISH: Yeah

OLIVIA: Shit. I thought I had that whole cross album Bowie universe cracked, and how it all ties in with like Rocketman and a bunch of others

HAMISH: Who abandoned you?

OLIVIA: What?

HAMISH: You can't just pretend not to hear a question

OLIVIA: I think you can work that one out Hamish

'Normal' Hamish returns

HAMISH: What do you mean?

OLIVIA: Look who you're talking to Hamish

HAMISH: You, Olivia, the girl I met while she was trying to jump from a cliff.

OLIVIA: That's me, yes, but you're not seeing it.

HAMISH: What are you talking about?

OLIVIA: You always were kinda dumb.

HAMISH: Olivia, I don't know what you're on about.

He's not getting it. She readjusts the scenario. From here on Olivia takes on the role of Therapist.

OLIVIA: When was the last time you talked to your mother?

HAMISH: Mum? Like, a couple days after Dad's funeral

OLIVIA: What happened?

LX change

HAMISH: I'd just got back from picking Dad's urn up.

OLIVIA: Go on.

- NINE - Mum -

MUM: Hamish!

HAMISH: Yeah, hi mum

MUM: Why are you always so serious? Probably all that time spent hunched over your computer

HAMISH: I don't even spend that much time on my computer.

MUM: Well, I don't know. Boys like you should be outside, playing rugby or skateboarding or something. Exploring girls.

HAMISH: I'm not really looking for that sort of thing.

MUM: What happened with you and O?

HAMISH: I don't know what you mean?

MUM: (*sarcastically*) Sure you don't

Beat

MUM: Look I've been meaning to talk to you.

HAMISH: This can't be good.

MUM: Just listen. Your father's death wasn't exactly easy on either of us.

HAMISH: Pretty easy for you though right.

MUM: And you know things aren't exactly easy financially.

HAMISH: You're going to tell me to get a job, aren't you?

MUM: No. I wasn't actually, so listen before you go jumping to conclusions. Now that you bring it up, yes, you finding some sort of income would be helpful. What I was going to say was, well, I've started seeing someone.

HAMISH: Dad's not even fucking cold yet and your already spreading yourself around town?

MUM: Hamish, please. He's nice. I think you'll like him.

HAMISH: So what... what's gonna happen then? You and him are going to rent out your gash to anyone who wants used goods?

MUM: Grow up you little shit. I'm sorry I'm trying to move on. I'm trying to find someone who can fill the hole that's been ripped from my life.

HAMISH: And you're going to fill it with cock.

MUM: I want stability. I want love, because I'm sure as hell not getting it from my own son.

HAMISH: I'm starting to see why Dad killed himself.

She slaps him

MUM: How dare you. I tried! I tried to help. I don't know what else I could've done. He was impenetrable. He struggled to articulate anything when he was like that.

HAMISH: And now you're destroying the memory of a great man.

MUM: Your father was a drunken arsehole. He was an awful person who didn't deserve anything but got it the way he wanted.

HAMISH: You've got him all wrong.

MUM: Oh grow up Hamish. The sooner you realise how your father really was the sooner you'll be able to pull yourself out of this funk you've got yourself into.

HAMISH: Fuck, Mum. It's not a funk. I'm fucking depressed. Can you not fucking see that? Are you so ignorant to what's going on with me that you can't realise that? Do you even love me?

MUM: Do you not think that I am as well? My husband killed himself and I couldn't do anything about it.

HAMISH: Mum do you love me?

MUM: And I have a son who thinks of me as some cheap whore letting my body out on the street.

HAMISH: Answer me.

MUM: The same son who doesn't want me to be happy with a new man.

HAMISH: MUM! For fucks sake answer me. Do you love me?

Silence

Beat

MUM: I think you should find somewhere else to live.

Silence

HAMISH: Where can I go?

MUM: Right now, that's not my problem.

OLIVIA: And then you left?

HAMISH: I left...

OLIVIA: Where did you go?

HAMISH: Around. Friends house. I just couch surfed for ages. Nothing stable though for months... until...

OLIVIA: Until?

HAMISH: I found myself on her doorstep

OLIVIA: Whose?

HAMISH: and she said that she's sorry for what she did and what she said. But until I could realise what I did to her, she wasn't going to forgive me.

OLIVIA: Exactly

HAMISH: Olivia, I'm sorry.

OLIVIA: I know you are.

HAMISH: There's no excuse for what I did to you. I don't know why I became the person I became. I don't know why I pushed you away in the way I did.

OLIVIA: I can't say that I accept your apology.

HAMISH: I get it.

OLIVIA: Only she can make that call, in person.

HAMISH: huh?

- TEN - Crying -

OLIVIA: We should probably talk about it again.

HAMISH: What?

OLIVIA: Your father's death

HAMISH: No...

OLIVIA: Why not?

HAMISH: I don't know. I just don't want to.

OLIVIA: Do you not know or don't want to tell me?

HAMISH: What do you want me to say? I don't trust you?

OLIVIA: Okay. Dropped.

HAMISH: Thank you.

Silence

HAMISH: It's just...

Pause

OLIVIA: It's just, what?

HAMISH: nevermind...

Silence

The silence hurts

OLIVIA: I'm going to put the question out there. You don't have to answer it. But it needs to be put out into the air. Have you cried?

HAMISH: What do you mean, have I cried? Of course I cried.

OLIVIA: Have you cried since?

Silence

OLIVIA: Okay...

HAMISH: I can't... I can't feel it anymore. It feels so long ago... like a long distant dream... that someone else told me about.

OLIVIA: Have you talked to anyone about it? Mum? Friends?

HAMISH: Dad told me to be strong for her.

OLIVIA: When did he say this?

HAMISH: Doesn't matter. / Does it matter?

OLIVIA: When did you last think about him?

Silence

Hamish doesn't want to reveal anything more about the ghost

He holds it to his chest. He holds it in his chest. He can feel his heart racing.

Anymore silence and he'll reveal it.

OLIVIA: All the strongest men cry.

Relief.

OLIVIA: I think it's important to.

Hamish turns introspective.

Dad appears on stage, sharing a moment of “it’s okay” with Hamish.

They embrace.

Meanwhile, Olivia has taken the urn from Hamish without him realising. She begins making her way over to the rail. Hamish only notices once Dad leaves.

HAMISH: What are you doing?

OLIVIA: What needs to happen for us.

HAMISH: Us? Us?

Hamish takes a moment and realises.

HAMISH: You broke up with me. There is no us.

OLIVIA: I’m not Olivia.

HAMISH: Yes you are.

OLIVIA: No I’m not.

HAMISH: Yes you are.

OLIVIA: Jesus this isn’t a fucking pantomime. No I’m not.

HAMISH: No you’re not.

OLIVIA: Good. Who am I?

HAMISH: You’re me. And I’m you. But you’re me.

OLIVIA: and the last horse crosses the finish line.

HAMISH: I don’t understand.

OLIVIA: I’m you. But I’m also her. At least, your representation of her. In here.

She pokes his head

HAMISH: You’re here though. You’re real. To me, you’re real. I can see you.

He starts panicking, begins breathing faster and heavier

OLIVIA: That’s true, but I’m also not. You want me to be here. So I am.

HAMISH: But you're not real.

OLIVIA: That's also true. But she is.

HAMISH: I don't... I can't... I... don't...

OLIVIA: Take a second. Breathe. Calm down. Come on, breathe Hamish. In one two three four, hold two three four, out one two three four. Do it Hamish. In one two three four, hold two three four, out one two three four. (*Line repeats as necessary*). How do you feel?

HAMISH: Okay...

OLIVIA: Good. Does it make sense yet?

HAMISH: (*pauses, thinks*) no.

OLIVIA: Okay. I'm not me right?

HAMISH: Right...

OLIVIA: I'm a manifestation you've created in your mind.

HAMISH: Okay...

OLIVIA: You're not hallucinating. If anything you're dreaming. You're not going crazy, everything is normal. I'm just... a... ghost... a ghost of Olivia. A ghost to help you work things out in your head.

HAMISH: Sure...

OLIVIA: You need to call her. You need to apologise to her.

HAMISH: Who?

OLIVIA: You know.

OLIVIA: And you need to do this properly. I know what you're going to say, and yes. You can.

HAMISH: What about you?

OLIVIA: I'll always be here, I just may not be me. I might be a voice in your head. I might sound like your father, a gameshow host, a mystic, your mum. I can't be your therapist, we're not qualified for that. That has to be someone else. You can't do it alone.

HAMISH: Thank you

OLIVIA: I'm welcome

HAMISH: ha. Right or course

OLIVIA: Right, I'm off. I'll catch me round

HAMISH: Again, thank you.

OLIVIA: I did nothing. *(pause)* Bye.

Olivia Exits

LX change, it feels more natural

Hamish's mind 'clears', like he's just woken up. He sits on the rail. He takes out his phone, and dials.

HAMISH: Mum? Hey, it's Hamish. Are you sure you don't want to be here? Okay, no yeah, no, that makes sense. No, okay, you're all good. Oh hey, mum? I love you. Okay. bye.

He hangs up and climbs down

He looks at the urn.

HAMISH: Goodbye old man.

He goes to throw it. He doesn't. Instead he places it on the other side of the rail near one of the vertical beams.

HAMISH: May angels sing thee to thy rest. And the rest is silence.

Lights down. They hold on the urn briefly before black

- END -