



ON *HAMLET*: A SYMPOSIUM IN PRINT

INTRODUCTION

To anyone in the theatre, it's The Big One. Onstage, the part—"Hamlet, *Prince of Denmark*"—is the pinnacle of several fascinating and demanding roles. Behind or in front of the stage, to everyone, from director to spectator, this play is the ultimate challenge, the complete "mirror held up to nature," a summons to see ourselves more deeply and to feel the world around us more profoundly. The many troupes of actors who have used "Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you" as a warm-up vocal exercise know that those hypnotic lines can be an incantation, a conjuring-up of a quasi-religious faith in the theatre. To any Shakespearean, *Hamlet* is the one dramatic site where we feel that we are, at last, almost in touch with the mysterious, because unbelievably protean, playwright: this is the one play of his we have in drastically different versions, and we know that he worked and re-worked it at the time of the death of his only son, a 12-year-old, named Hamnet. And to anyone at all on the purely spiritual world-wide-web we call World Literature, it is the most profound and inexhaustibly absorbing of stories: a young man is called upon to avenge his father's cold-blooded murder—a simple matter, it would seem. Yet, he doesn't do it. Indeed, he berates himself for not doing it, and, in so doing, becomes the first character in any art to stand outside himself—to look at, and not understand, himself. Why does he not avenge his father's death—at least until the act is virtually forced upon him (and after the

guilty Claudius has also killed Hamlet's mother)? Why indeed? All the responses to that question constitute an essential, if rather unmanageable, skein in our culture.

"Who's there?" It's the opening line—and by the end has become a tantalizingly profound question.

What follows that question is the most fascinating story in literature.

Ahead, the reader will find a conversation about the play conducted, partly, by the light of the silvery moon of recent critical thinking, by OU Shakespearean Niels Herold and OCC science professor and former OU student Joe Kelty; then, a filmography, a study of the major film versions of the play, by former student and current adjunct faculty member Pamela Mitzelfeld—to which I have added an analysis of the most recent of the film versions.

—Brian Murphy

Interminability and Overdoing in Teaching *Hamlet*: *An Exchange of Views between Niels Herold and Joe Kelty*

Whether it is Freud writing in 1899 in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that he had discovered the oedipal complex by reading Shakespeare, or Jacques Lacan writing about the language of the post-structuralist unconscious, Shakespeare's works—and *Hamlet* in particular—have dominated the foreground of theoretical discovery and application. I asked one of my former graduate students, Joe Kelty (himself a veteran teacher at Oakland Community College), to engage with me in a dialogue about the ways in which our understanding of *Hamlet* has been extended, deepened (or in fact radically transformed) under the interpretive gaze of recent critical theories. Before we begin, I want to say first, by way of instigating this exchange of views, that Joe Kelty's interest in critical theory focuses on the concept of *interminabil-*