

DIRECTING HAMLET

a play in two acts

by

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CHARACTERS

- BRIAN (THE ACTOR) Nineteen, above average in appearance but not so much so that it becomes distracting, to others or himself. Could blend into a crowd if he had to.
- THE DIRECTOR (LEE) A man anywhere from forty-five to sixty years. A seasoned veteran of the theatre.

SETTING

A rehearsal space. Preferably an actual stage. There is at least one chair involved. Otherwise the space can be barren or as cluttered as rehearsing on a stage set for another show, with all the props and furniture pushed to the walls to allow the Actor (BRIAN) room in which to work. THE DIRECTOR (LEE) may be set up in the audience or on a corner of the stage. THE DIRECTOR may (or may not) have a table set up for his personal items and scripts. All is left up to the actual production's discretion.

TIME

The play takes place in the immediate present.

ACT I

A rehearsal space (Same Theatre as the actual production is taking place in.)

ACT II

Same location. Fifteen to twenty minutes (*intermission's length*) later.

NOTE:

The lines from Shakespeare's play Hamlet are presented in **BOLD** type when being performed by the ACTOR (BRIAN).

"The rest is silence."

--*Hamlet to Horatio (Act 5, sc2)*
Hamlet
William Shakespeare

ACT I

(At rise:

BRIAN, a young ACTOR of nineteen, sits perched on the front of a folding chair, addressing a group of actors who clearly aren't there. He takes in a deep breath before he begins.)

BRIAN

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you--

THE DIRECTOR

Talk.

BRIAN

--trippingly on the tongue:--

THE DIRECTOR

Just say the words.

BRIAN

--for if you mouth it,--

THE DIRECTOR

Just talk.

BRIAN

Excuse me?

THE DIRECTOR

Keep going. Just say the words

BRIAN

Trippingly on the tongue--

THE DIRECTOR

"Trippingly on the tongue."

BRIAN

Trippingly-on-the-tongue--

THE DIRECTOR

"TRIPPINGLY ON THE TONGUE!"

BRIAN

Trippingly on--

THE DIRECTOR

Drop the accent.

BRIAN

What accent?

THE DIRECTOR

Just say the words. Start over.

BRIAN

(Takes another deep breath.)

Speak the speech, I pray you--

THE DIRECTOR

"Speak the speech": just say the words

BRIAN

Speak the speech, I pray you.

THE DIRECTOR

Start again.

(BRIAN takes another deep breath.)

THE DIRECTOR

What are you doing?

BRIAN

What?

THE DIRECTOR

With your shoulders.

BRIAN

I'm breathing.

THE DIRECTOR

Don't breathe. Just do the damned words.

(BRIAN hesitates.)

THE DIRECTOR

Do you even know what you're saying here?

BRIAN

I believe it's in English.

THE DIRECTOR

No. No, I'm sorry: you're right. Too early. We've just started, haven't we? So, tell me, what are you saying--why are you saying it?

BRIAN

He's talking to a group of actors--

THE DIRECTOR

I.

BRIAN

What?

THE DIRECTOR

I: first person. You're him: "*I'm* talking to a group of actors."

BRIAN

I'm talking to a group of actors . . . telling them not to overact?

THE DIRECTOR

Yeah; I don't see it.

BRIAN

They're not here.

THE DIRECTOR

Then who's here?

BRIAN

Nobody.

THE DIRECTOR

Then talk to me.

BRIAN

I'm telling *you* not to overact.

THE DIRECTOR

Well, that's a little paradoxical, don't you think?

BRIAN

What?

THE DIRECTOR

Nothing; I'm playing. Lighten up.

BRIAN

Hamlet's not a light character.

THE DIRECTOR

Every character has a light s--. . . No, you're right: he can be a brooder . . . but is this one of his brooding moments?

BRIAN

No?

THE DIRECTOR

No?

BRIAN

No.

THE DIRECTOR

No. Then what are you trying to do?

BRIAN

I haven't even done the first line.

THE DIRECTOR

Kid, it's over in the first line. It's all in the first line. The rest of the speech is clarification.

BRIAN

Why would he clarify?

THE DIRECTOR

You tell me.

BRIAN

He likes to hear himself talk?

THE DIRECTOR

Maybe. Why else?

BRIAN

They don't get it.

THE DIRECTOR

Maybe that too. Try it.

BRIAN

Now?

THE DIRECTOR

Good as time as any.

(BRIAN starts again with a deep breath.)

THE DIRECTOR

Don't breathe!

(BRIAN stops he takes this in not knowing what to do. He tries not to breathe through the following:)

BRIAN

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue: but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the t--

THE DIRECTOR

"For if you mouth it as many of your players do."

BRIAN

For if you mouth it--

THE DIRECTOR

(Mouthing:)

"For-if-you-mouth it."

BRIAN

For-if-you-mouth-it-as-many--

THE DIRECTOR

"For-if-you-mouth it,--

(Drops the mouthing:)

"--as many of your players do."

BRIAN

(Following along:)

--as many of your players do, I'd as lief the town-crier spoke my lines.

(A beat:)

What?

THE DIRECTOR

Nothing. Go on.

BRIAN

Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends--

THE DIRECTOR

What the hell was that?

BRIAN

It offends me?

THE DIRECTOR

Your hand: what did you do with your hand?

BRIAN

Nothing.

THE DIRECTOR

What's the line? Go back.

BRIAN

"Nor do not saw the air too much"

THE DIRECTOR

"With your hand, thus." Move your hand on thus.

BRIAN

Thus. But use all gently for in the very torrent, tempest, and as I may say--
(Continues as The Director continues along with him:
BRIAN grows angrier as they BOTH CONTINUE:)

THE DIRECTOR & BRIAN

(THE DIRECTOR quotes simultaneously with Brian but with more constraint:)

--as I may say whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a (temperance?) that may give it smoothness--

BRIAN

Do you want to do this?

THE DIRECTOR

Do you?

BRIAN

Yes.

THE DIRECTOR

Then what's the problem? You need to take five?

BRIAN

Yes.

THE DIRECTOR

Tough. You don't have five. You, Hamlet, don't have five.

BRIAN

The name is Brian.

THE DIRECTOR

You want to be Brian?

(BRIAN does his best not to roll his eyes as The Director continues; he's heard it before.)

THE DIRECTOR (*Continued:*)

--because I don't recall there being a 'Brian' in the script. Did Brian's father die? Is Brian a prince? Did Brian's uncle marry Brian's mother? So I think Hamlet is clearly the more interesting character here. Of course if you want we could name one of the spear carriers Brian. Or we could change around all the names. "My liege--I fear that Rosencrantz and Brian are dead."

(A beat:)

You with me now?

(No reply.)

You have no time. You have one shot. You have a group of no talent actors come into town and you have paid them to act out your play. But if they overact it like they always do the whole damned thing will be lost, right?

BRIAN

Yes.

THE DIRECTOR

Then do it that way. Tell them to stop chewing up the scenery and do it right.

BRIAN

Speak the speech I pray you as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue: for if you--

THE DIRECTOR

Better but not so much anger.

BRIAN

Speak the speech--

THE DIRECTOR

Too saccharin.

BRIAN

Speak the speech--

THE DIRECTOR

You can't piss 'em off, here. You have to win them over.

BRIAN

Speak the speech . . . (*he continues the lines . . .*)

THE DIRECTOR

(Goading Brian along as he continues through the work:)

Chide with them. Earn their respect. Get them to agree. Get them to laugh. Get them to want to do it your way. You have to earn their respect before you--

THE DIRECTOR

Stop. Stop. Go back. What was that?

BRIAN

Can I just do the speech thru once?

THE DIRECTOR

Is that what this is? A speech? Brian, my boy, you're a genius. Thank you. Thank you. OK. Sit down.

(He does.)

THE DIRECTOR

Brian, tell me a story.

BRIAN

What?

THE DIRECTOR

Tell me a story.

BRIAN

About?

THE DIRECTOR

About you. About Brian.

BRIAN

Now I'm Brian?

THE DIRECTOR

For the moment. Talk to me. Tell me anything. Tell me about the time you first kissed a girl. You have kissed a girl?

BRIAN

Yes.

THE DIRECTOR

Did you go all the way? Was there tongue?

(BRIAN is stopped a moment.)

THE DIRECTOR

What was her name?

BRIAN

Kristen.

THE DIRECTOR

Go on.

BRIAN

I was in the fourth grade. It was on a dare. There was me and Jimmy . . . Watterman. We dared each other during recess and after school I walked Kristen home. And . . . when she wasn't looking I . . . kissed her . . . on the lips. She hit me. No tongue.

(Pause.)

THE DIRECTOR

Now, was that a speech?

BRIAN

What?

THE DIRECTOR

Was that your whole "speech"? You see, Brian, there are no "speeches" in the theatre. There are only dialogues. Sometimes one of the parties doesn't say anything but the opportunity to interrupt is always there. Or the information is so short--like your pecking on poor Kristen that--

BRIAN

OK, I get it.

THE DIRECTOR

Exactly.

THE DIRECTOR Continued
(No reply.)

OK?

BRIAN

OK?

THE DIRECTOR

OK?

BRIAN

OK?

THE DIRECTOR

OK.

(A beat:)

Go.

BRIAN

Speak the speech,--

(He stops on the word: "speech".)

THE DIRECTOR

What?

BRIAN

There *are* no "speeches"?

THE DIRECTOR

Not like *you* use the word. "Speech" the way Shakespeare uses the word, yes. It's a matter of definition.

BRIAN

What's the difference?

THE DIRECTOR

It has to do with focus. Do the damned thing.