

HAMLET WITH EXTRA CHEESE

By Michael Fountain

Copyright © 2005 by Michael Fountain, All rights reserved.

ISBN 1-60003-147-1

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this Work is subject to a royalty. This Work is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

RIGHTS RESERVED: All rights to this Work are strictly reserved, including professional and amateur stage performance rights. Also reserved are: motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, information and storage retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

PERFORMANCE RIGHTS AND ROYALTY PAYMENTS: All amateur and stock performance rights to this Work are controlled exclusively by Brooklyn Publishers, LLC. No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this play without securing license and royalty arrangements in advance from Brooklyn Publishers, LLC. Questions concerning other rights should be addressed to Brooklyn Publishers, LLC. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Professional and stock fees will be set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. Any licensing requests and inquiries relating to amateur and stock (professional) performance rights should be addressed to Brooklyn Publishers, LLC.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid, whether the play is presented for charity or profit and whether or not admission is charged.

AUTHOR CREDIT: All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this play must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production of this play. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line where no other written matter appears. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the play. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s).

PUBLISHER CREDIT: Whenever this play is produced, all programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice:

Produced by special arrangement with Brooklyn Publishers, LLC

COPYING: Any unauthorized copying of this Work or excerpts from this Work is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this Work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Brooklyn Publishers, LLC.

HAMLET WITH EXTRA CHEESE

by
Michael Fountain

ACT I

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

CHARACTERS

7 M, 3 F, 5 Either Gender

CLEOPATRA	Queen of Egypt
CHARMAIN and IRIS	serving maids to CLEOPATRA; they fan her with peacock feathers throughout the play
PTOLEMY	younger brother to CLEOPATRA; in competition for the throne of Egypt
JULIUS CAESAR	military dictator of the Roman Empire
MARK ANTONY	student to CAESAR and later the lover of CLEOPATRA
BRUTUS	another student to CAESAR and later his assassin
CASSIUS	leader of the plot to assassinate CAESAR
ROMAN MOB/ SENATORS	a fickle mixed group of 2-3 or more actors; they carry protest signs with opposing slogans on either side
SOOTHSAYER	a fortuneteller
OCTAVIAN	nephew to JULIUS CAESAR; in competition with ANTONY for control of the empire; later known as Caesar Augustus
SCRIBE	a literate Egyptian with a hieroglyphic notepad
CROCODILE HUNTER	wildlife expert and television personality

PRODUCTION NOTES

The world is full of bare stage productions of Shakespeare. Because the characters and themes in classical plays are universal, you have the advantage of making sets and costumes as simple or as complicated as you wish.

Macbeth has been performed with gangsters instead of Scotsmen, set in Haiti with voodoo witches, and placed in a burger joint with ambitious fast food managers. Hamlet can be produced in royal Denmark or a modern corporation, where the ghost appears on security cameras.

Some traditions are spelled out in the text and the audience expects them: Hamlet is dressed in black and Richard the Third has earned his deformity after all these years. That being said, it might be interesting to have an Asian Hamlet who wears white as the color of mourning, or a beautiful Richard whose ugliness is on the inside, but let's not push our luck.

Imagination and improvisation are required. These plays were first produced as workshops for teaching the major plots, with little more than a plastic crown for Cleopatra and a tissue for Desdemona's handkerchief.

When mounted as a full-scale production, students provided their own costumes and props. Some were as simple as a sheet for a toga, and some were full-scale Egyptian costumes for Cleopatra. For the Scotsmen in Macbeth, plaid blankets were worn as cloaks.

We change scenes quickly by having a large wooden box covered with a variety of sheets and drop cloths; it becomes a throne, a cave, a ship, or a lonely cliff.

We are blessed in our community with a costume, magic and novelty shop crammed full of inexpensive props, hats and tchotchkes (useless junk that can be priceless in your production). Remember, it only has to look good from a distance!

SPECIAL EFFECTS

We use an overhead projector and a backdrop sheet to broadcast shadow puppets and lighting effects. These effects can be simple or elaborate, depending on your imagination and the student talent available.

By using shadows, we have been able to show Lady Macbeth leaping from a tower, Duncan being stabbed, Prometheus' liver being eaten by a

vulture, Don Quixote charging the windmill, and Moby Dick sinking the Pequod. One easy but striking effect uses the shadow projector to show Rochester's mad wife dancing on a rooftop surrounded by flames in Jane Eyre.

Shadow puppets can be made from tagboard and colored transparencies. Use dowel rods or lengths of wire to move the limbs. They can even interact with live actors, as when a life-size actor is menaced by the monstrous shadow of a dragon.

STAGE FIGHTING

By making and enforcing a few basic rules, we have practiced and staged hundreds of fights without serious injury. If eyes were gouged out, they were handed back after rehearsal.

1) Use a "safety word" such as "STOP!" All movement stops, without exception or arguments. "STOP!" is the universal signal that Someone Is About To Get Hurt. Those unable to comply are banished and have to watch others "fighting" from the sidelines. This is usually punishment enough to insure compliance in the future. It helps to be rigid and draconian about this during the first few rehearsals.

2) KEEP COUNT as you "attack" or "defend". Counting means that both actors know where the blow is aimed and how it is to be blocked. In this, stage fighting is very similar to learning a dance. Both actors count out loud until the movements are memorized.

3) ONE PERSON ATTACKS, THE OTHER DEFENDS. When starting out, we took turns "attacking" or "defending". Make sure both actors know Who's Who before practicing a move. Do not "attack" unless you know your partner is ready. Disobeying this rule is grounds for immediate exile.

4) ALWAYS USE THE SAME PATTERN OF "ATTACK". The count of "One" means a blow to the defender's left arm, which is blocked BEFORE IT ACTUALLY TOUCHES THE BODY. "Two" means a blow to the defender's right arm. "Three" means the defender's left leg; "Four" is an attack on the defender's right leg, which again is blocked by the defender. Every step of your fight is counted out as you proceed. As we gained in confidence, we added a showy step "Five", which looked (to the audience) like a cleaving slash at the defender's head.

5) START SLOW. As muscle memory sets in, you will be able to increase your speed to performance level.

STUNTS

After a few days' rehearsal, some students will be ready to add stunts to their fight repertoire. The simplest, and easiest to demonstrate, is a slash at the legs on the count of "Three", at which time the defender leaps into the air. ALWAYS KEEP THE COUNT and ALWAYS START SLOW. Like a dance, your stage fighting is limited only by your imagination, your ability to follow safety rules, and your willingness to practice.

BATTLE SCENES

We imitate mass combat with a very simple trick. At the beginning of rehearsal, every student has a fighting partner on the opposing side. These partners rehearse a stage fight using the steps above. The director carefully blocks out their positions.

When the cue is given for battle, students rush on stage, find their marks and engage their fighting partner. From the audience's point of view, it looks like a dangerous melee, but is actually quite safe as long as the rules are followed. After these steps are mastered, the "survivors" can add a second fight with another partner.

PROPS AND WEAPONS

We start by mastering bare-handed "combat", then slowly adding props, gags and stage weapons. One of our best "fights" pitted swordsmen against a baker armed with loaves of French bread. Reinforcements armed with pastry turned the tide. Any prop can be used for defense or offense SO LONG AS YOU KEEP THE COUNT.

For sword fighting, we use dowel rods heavy enough to last through rehearsal but light enough to snap if a blow lands accidentally. Be ready to replace them often, but dowels are cheaper than bones. As long as actors follow the rules, safety should not be a problem. Waving a prop near someone's face, unless it is part of the scene, is grounds for dismissal.

So long as you START SLOW, KEEP THE COUNT and FOLLOW THE PATTERN, you will be surprised at the initiative, imagination and enthusiasm of the participants.

A much more detailed and informative plan for student stage fighting can be found in SHAKESPEARE SET FREE: Teaching Twelfth Night and Othello, from Washington Square Press. You will find many other sources in the library and on the internet. Sometimes community theatres have a fight coach willing to volunteer.

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

(much abused by Michael Fountain)

At Rise: Enter CLEOPATRA, fanned by CHARMAIN and IRIS and followed by PTOLEMY.

CLEOPATRA: Dear Diary: another boring day as the Queen of Egypt.

PTOLEMY: Whatcha doin', huh? Whatcha doin'?

CLEOPATRA: Bathed in ass's milk; had pearls dissolved in vinegar for lunch; assassinated little brother... ***(stabs PTOLEMY and HE staggers off dying)*** P.S. - that Roman general, Julius Caesar, is so cute!

CAESAR: ***(enters)*** I came, I saw, I conquered. What's next on the agenda? Hm, subdue the Gauls... check. Hunt down pirates... check. Oh, hi, Cleo...

CLEOPATRA: He knows my name!

CAESAR: Redesign the calendar... check. Have decided to name the seventh month after myself... Julilicious? No... September, October, Caesarborer... that's it! April, May, June, Caesarborer...

CLEOPATRA: Dear Diary: same old same old.

PTOLEMY: ***(staggers back, only wounded)*** Whatcha doin', huh? Whatcha doin'?

CLEOPATRA: Up and down the Nile on my barge; was worshipped as a goddess - AGAIN; assassinated little brother... ***(poisons PTOLEMY and HE staggers off dying)*** P.S. I can't wait to hook up with Julius C! The way he slaughters thousands and combs his hair to cover that little bald spot, is so cute!

CAESAR: Okay... cross the Rubicon... check. Help crush slave rebellion... check. Conquer Egypt... check.

CLEOPATRA: Dear Diary: They won't let me in to see Julius! Have decided to smuggle myself in, rolled up in a carpet.

(CHARMAIN and IRIS wrap CLEOPATRA in a carpet and deliver her to CAESAR)

CAESAR: What this? Do not open until Christmas? But that won't be invented for another fifty years! ***(unrolls carpet)***

CLEOPATRA: Surprise!

CAESAR: I'll say! I was expecting Claudette Colbert or Liz Taylor.

CLEOPATRA: Ah, Caesar, together we shall -

PTOLEMY: *(still not dead, moving between them)* Whatcha doin', huh? Whatcha doin'?

(CLEOPATRA hands PTOLEMY a prop bomb; CAESAR lights the fuse, PTOLEMY skips offstage; a pause, then an explosion and a cloud of confetti.)

CLEOPATRA: Together we shall rule the world.

CAESAR: Sounds great! Oh, wait, let me check my planner... hmm, I have business in Rome right up through the Ides of March... what's April look like to you?

CLEOPATRA: *(sighs)* April is the cruelest month...

CAESAR: Tell me about it. So, can I... call you later?

CLEOPATRA: Of course you can, you most powerful man in the world, you. *(exits)*

SOOTHSAYER: *(enters)* Caesar! Beware the Ides of March!

CAESAR: Beware the Ides of March? And who are you?

SOOTHSAYER: I'm a soothsayer. Silence! I shall say the sooth!

CAESAR: So get on with it then.

SOOTHSAYER: Look, buddy, I've had it up to here with your attitude. I only have one line, and I'm going to milk it for everything it's got. Some of us don't get to play "Master of the Roman World." Some of us don't get to play "Cootchi-coo with the Queen of the Nile." Some of us just have to play the Soothsayer.

CAESAR: So say it then.

SOOTHSAYER: *(dramatically)* Cae-sarrrr! Bewarrrre... *(rolls his eyes at CAESAR, making him wait for it)* The liliides... of March!

(CHORUS applauds. SOOTHSAYER bows and exits.)

CAESAR: Ides, ides... what is that, the fifteenth?

(Enter ANTONY and BRUTUS, followed by the ROMAN MOB carrying placards saying "Hail Caesar!", "Make Julius Emperor Now", etc.)

ANTONY and BRUTUS: *(together)* Hail, Caesar!

CASSIUS: *(a beat too late)* Uh, Hail.

CAESAR: What news, Marc Antony? What news, my noble Brutus?

ANTONY: The Roman mob is tired of this crazy republican mess. They just want their bread and circuses. They want to abolish the Republic and make you the Emperor.

MOB: Hooray for Julius Caesar, Down with the Senate, Who needs a Republic? etc.

CAESAR: Aw, shucks. For little old me? Really, you shouldn't have...

BRUTUS: The Roman Senate is very angry with you. The senators are accusing you of trying to make yourself a dictator.

(Enter SENATORS to stand by CASSIUS and BRUTUS.)

CAESAR: Stupid senators - always trying to spoil my fun! Who's the skinny one, there?

ANTONY: That is Cassius, my lord.

CAESAR: Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look. He thinks too much; such men are dangerous.

BRUTUS: Aren't you afraid of going to the Senate? I mean, it is the Ides of March...

CAESAR: Cowards die many times before their death; the valiant never taste of death but once.

CASSIUS: Then taste this, you tyrant!

(CASSIUS and SENATORS attack and stab CAESAR.)

CAESAR: **(on his knees)** Well at least I can always count on you, Brutus. Hand me a bandaid and some Neosporin, would you? Maybe some aspirin...

BRUTUS: Gee, I don't know... I kind of think the Senators have a point.
(stabs CAESAR)

CAESAR: *Et tu, Brute?* Then fall, Caesar! **(dies)**

CASSIUS: The tyrant is dead! Hooray for our side!

MOB: Hooray for our side! Hooray for Cassius and Brutus!

ANTONY: Friends, Romans, Countrymen! Lend me your ears! Did you know that if elected, Caesar promised you bread, circuses, and a big tax cut to be paid for later?

MOB: A tax cut? Oh, goodie, etc.

ANTONY: It's those tax and spend liberals in the Senate that have murdered your hero, Julius Caesar! If you elect me, I promise to carry on the legacy of Julius Caesar! I want to be the Education Emperor!

MOB: Grr.... hooray for Antony! Death to Brutus and Cassius!

CASSIUS: Curse you, Antony! I knew we should have gotten a recount!
(kills himself with his own sword)

BRUTUS: So much for campaign finance reform. This really isn't working out the way I planned. Hold this for a second, will you?
(runs onto his own sword and kills himself)

ANTONY: Well, here I am, master of the Roman world.

CLEOPATRA: **(enters, running into ANTONY'S arms)** And here you are, Master of the Roman World.

ANTONY: Peel me another grape, would you, dear?

CLEOPATRA: Of course, my angel.

OCTAVIAN: **(enters)** Aren't you forgetting someone?

CLEOPATRA: Who? Who did we forget? **(looks around)** Did we forget about anyone?

OCTAVIAN: You forgot about me, Octavian, nephew to Julius Caesar, later to be known as Caesar Augustus!

ANTONY: Oh, that pencil-necked geek.

OCTAVIAN: I'm the pencil necked geek who's been taking care of business, while you've been spending your time playing footsie with Miss Congeniality, here. Remember all those staff meetings that you couldn't be bothered to attend? Remember those homework assignments you never bothered to hand in? Remember, Mister "I'm too cool to stay in school?"

ANTONY: **(yawns, takes another drink of wine)** Yeah, so?

OCTAVIAN: Well, now the chickens have come home to roost. While you've been hanging out with this Egyptian cupcake, I've been doing all the hard work of keeping the Roman Empire running. And I've decided to make some changes in top management.

ANTONY: **(still lounging)** Whatever...

CLEOPATRA: Talk to the hand, 'cause the goddess ain't listening.

OCTAVIAN: By the way, Marc Antony, did you remember to tell Cleopatra that you're still married to my sister?

(ANTONY does a spit take.)

CLEOPATRA: What? You're married?

ANTONY: Cleo, let me explain...

CLEOPATRA: Explain this, you rat! I'm taking my navy and going home.
(exits)

OCTAVIAN: Surrender, Antony! Your pharonic floozy has ratted you out! Give up now and I'll go easy on you before I feed you to the lions.

ANTONY: Oh this false soul of Egypt! Well, Cleopatra may have run out on me, but I can still whip you, Octavian! I still have my army behind me - ready, boys?

(ROMAN MOB, carrying swords and spears, have tiptoed away from ANTONY and gather behind OCTAVIAN.)

ROMAN MOB: Right behind you, chief!

OCTAVIAN: You're yesterday's news, Marc Antony. You have kissed away kingdoms and provinces. The Roman lions are too good for you - I think the Egyptians might enjoy feeding you to the sacred crocodile.

ANTONY: Betrayed by a pretty face! Scribe!

(SCRIBE enters and crosses back and forth for the following exchange between ANTONY and CLEOPATRA.)

ANTONY: Take a message to Cleopatra: Dear Cleo: Roses are red, the Nile is blue; Please come back to me, or I'm crocodile poo.

CLEOPATRA: **(reads the message, addresses SCRIBE)** Tell him I dropped dead, and I hope he does too. Tell him my dying words were "Antony, most noble Antony." And then come back and tell me how he takes the news.

ANTONY: **(reads her answer)** Cleopatra dead? All is lost! **(takes out his sword and stabs himself)**

CLEOPATRA: Well, how did he take it?

SCRIBE: **(beat)** Not well.

ANTONY: What, still not dead? I can't do anything right!

CLEOPATRA: **(goes to him)** Oh, sweetie, you know you're always your own worst critic.

ANTONY: I lived like the prince of the world, and now - **(dies)**

OCTAVIAN: All right, Cleopatra, we know you're in there - come out with your hands up! You're coming with me back to Rome, where you have a starring role in my victory parade.

CLEOPATRA: *Moi*, Cleopatra, Queen of the Nile, in a supporting role? I'd rather die first! **(to IRIS and CHARMAIN)** Fetch me the you-know-what. Give me my robe. Give me my crown. I have immortal longings in me.

CHARMAIN: Your majesty, here is the royal snake handler with the royal you-know-what.

CROCODILE HUNTER: **(with thick Australian accent, carrying a basket and rubber snake)** Crikey! This 'ere's the deadly Egyptian asp! Isn't 'e beautiful? This little buggah's so venomous, you don't even have to be in the same room with 'im. 'E could just bite your footprints while you were out of town for the weekend, and you'd be stone dead by Labor Day!

IRIS: I forgot to warn you that the royal snake handler IS a royal pain in the you-know-what.

CROCODILE HUNTER: 'Oo! Didja see how he's wrigglin'? What I'm doing right now is REALLY irritating him, and the fascinating thing about the Egyptian asp is that he only bites when someone REALLY gets on his nerves...like this! And shouts in a loud voice... like this! Let's see what happens if I poke at him, like this—oh, buggah! **(drops dead)**

Thank you for reading this free excerpt from HAMLET WITH EXTRA CHEESE by Michael Fountain. For performance rights and/or a complete copy of the script, please contact us at:

**Brooklyn Publishers, LLC
P.O. Box 248 • Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406
Toll Free: 1-888-473-8521 • Fax (319) 368-8011
www.brookpub.com**

Do Not Copy