



Creator's Notes for

*The Play's The Thing*

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With this piece, I aimed to use the graphic novel medium to explore what might be going on inside the space of Hamlet's mind. While the prince's flurry of emotions can be depicted through facial expressions and body language, I also attempted to highlight the richness of the text itself. Shakespeare's text is rife with imagery, so part of the difficulty of adapting the speech was deciding on what could be translated visually.

When I created this entry for the competition, I was also working on my master's thesis which focused on graphic novel adaptations of Hamlet and how they tackled his first soliloquy. It was an opportunity to apply my findings and framework, and to also have a deeper understanding of the adaptation process as a whole.

My studies brought to my attention the differences between a live, staged adaptation and a graphic novel one. The latter mimics the effects of the former, like sound and movement, through visuals alone. The lines are not spoken but written in speech balloons, and the acting is frozen in time and

framed by panels. At first glance, these parameters seem stifling, but many comic adaptations as well as the entries for the Graphic Shakespeare Competition have proved that, with some creativity, comic adaptations of Shakespeare's work can not only look dynamic and entertaining but can also delve into aspects of the text that actual stage productions could not.

In the case of adapting a monologue, comics, unshackled from a physical stage, can take on an almost dreamlike quality when allowed to delve into a character's mind. Images evoked by the text blend with the stage and actors, creating a performance unique to the medium. This was one of the reasons why I chose Hamlet's speech from Act 2: I wanted to capture his thought process in a way that only a purely visual medium could.

At this point in the play, Hamlet has not made much progress in avenging his murdered father, who previously appeared to him as a ghost. Travelling actors had just arrived in Denmark, and with their performances fresh in his mind, he berates himself for not having the same passion to bring his goals to fruition. After a failed attempt to rouse himself into action, he turns to reasoning instead. He resolves to have a play performed identical to his father's murder in order to elicit a reaction from his uncle. Once his uncle reveals his guilt, Hamlet

is assured the spirit of his father is telling the truth, and he could finally move forward with more certainty.

Within this monologue, imagery permeates and affects Hamlet's thought process. The ghost, the theater stage, and its actors blend together in his mind to help him formulate a way forward. I took note of this imagery and weaved it, to the best of my ability, into Hamlet's performance on the page.

The speech begins with him commenting on an actor's performance and connecting it to his own situation, so I framed the second and third pages with curtains and placed him on a stage. The theater in page three was directly inspired by the Globe Theatre. In Shakespeare's time, a trap door that led to a space beneath the stage was often used to represent hell. I made a reference to this convention by having Hamlet fall through the door and into his father's unrelenting gaze. In addition to this being a reference to an earlier scene where the ghost lurks under the stage, it was a way for me to depict both Hamlet's fear of being condemned and his assumption that the ghost may be an evil spirit.

A similar combination of imagery reappears on the final page. Here the spirit is either his father or "the devil," and the two possibilities are depicted side by side, in lighter and darker values respectively. In the next panel, these two values merge

and overwhelm Hamlet, as if he is physically within the throes of his doubt. As his plans moving forward become clearer in his thoughts, however, he parts this seemingly impenetrable doubt like a curtain, revealing a stage. The theater imagery that was previously used to frame his wretched state is now being used to pierce through his uncertainty, in the form of a play within a play.

The way this speech in particular draws attention to its original medium and its source material is another reason why I chose it. I intended to highlight the relationship between theater and graphic novels, and how one is adapted into the other. As a purely visual medium, comics fall short when it tries to be a direct imitation of a staged performance, but it could flaunt its own unique strengths when allowed to adapt a script in its own way. When other graphic novels tackle Shakespeare's plays in the future, I hope they keep exploring the potential the medium has for nuanced storytelling.

