



# I Hate Hamlet



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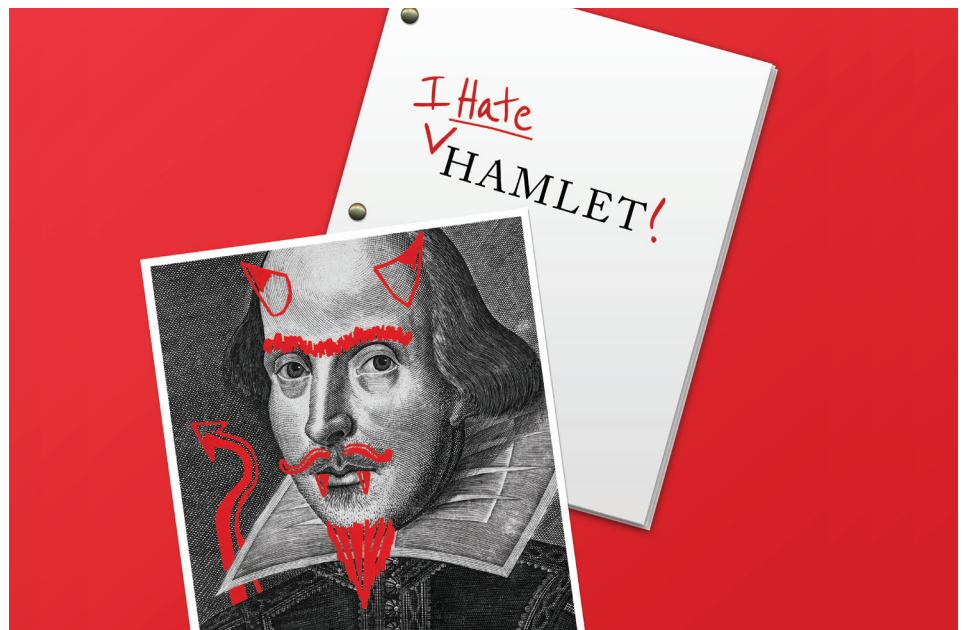
*Spotlight on Learning* is provided to students through a grant provided by the George Q. Morris Foundation

## Approx. running time:

2 hours minutes, including one fifteen-minute intermission.

## Student Talk-Back:

There will be a Student Talk-Back directly after the performance.



## I HATE HAMLET

March 20 - April 4, 2015

By Paul Rudnick

Directed by Art Manke

## Paul Rudnick

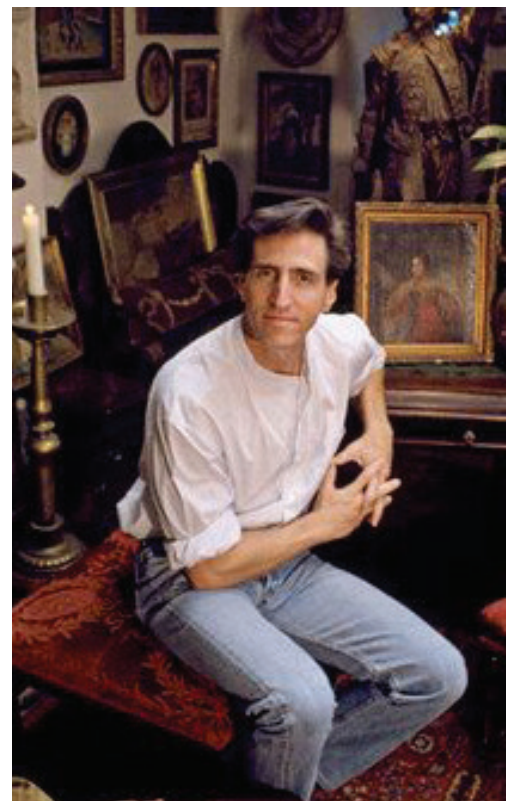
by Dramaturg Alexandra Harbold

*"Paul Rudnick is a champion of truth (and love and great wicked humor) whom we ignore at our peril."*

—David Sedaris

### PAUL RUDNICK (Playwright)

Hailed by the *New York Times* as "one of our pre-eminent humorists," Paul Rudnick is a playwright, screenwriter, essayist, and novelist. His plays include *Jeffrey*, which won an Obie Award, an Outer Critics Circle Award, and the John Gassner Playwrighting Award; *Valhalla*; *The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told*; *Regrets Only*; and *The New Century*. His screenplays include *Sister Act*, *Addams Family Values*, and *In & Out*. A frequent contributor to *The New Yorker*; Rudnick has also published essays in *Vanity Fair*, *Esquire*, *Vogue*, and *The New York Times*. Secretly, he also pens a monthly satirical film review column for *Premiere* magazine under the nom de plume "Libby Gelman-Waxner."



# Rudnick on *I Hate Hamlet*

by Dramaturg Alexandra Harbold

In a 2007 essay for the *New Yorker*, Paul Rudnick recounts how he came across a listing for “a medieval duplex” while apartment hunting in New York City in the late eighties. Upon seeing the apartment, he discovered that it had once been the rented residence of legendary actor John Barrymore. Barrymore, “The Great Profile,” that “Olympian Hamlet, devastating seducer, and everyone’s favorite scoundrel,” had refashioned the fourth floor brownstone apartment as his own Gothic hideaway (replete with theatrical plaster and ironwork, wooden beams, and stained glass), christening it “The Alchemist’s Corner.”

Barrymore had hired a carpenter to build a staircase up to the tinned roof. He then stole the man’s tools, urging him to abjure his rules, square, and level as he made his measurements and calculations; Barrymore wanted the resulting architecture to be as rough-hewn and poetic as possible. He then turned to landscaping the roof, sans thought about drainage or the weight of the 35 tons of topsoil he had distributed onto the rooftop. Barrymore planted wisteria, cherry trees, and grape vines, and installed a fountain, flagstone paths, and beehives, creating his very own penthouse estate.

Paul Rudnick, inspired by his habitation under Barrymore’s “bastard Jacobean roof” began to dig into the actor’s history and discovered that Barrymore had resided in the brownstone just prior to his celebrated run of *Hamlet*. Rudnick began to write a novel about a young television star from LA who has moved into Barrymore’s former home just as he is about to play the Dane at Shakespeare in the Park. It quickly became apparent to Rudnick that the novel should be a play: “Is my apartment haunted? Of course it is. The ghost wrote the play. If you dislike it, blame him. If you enjoy yourself, then by all means shower me with compliments, and I’ll be happy to pass them on.”



# John Barrymore

by Dramaturg Alexandra Harbold

(1882-1942) Born John Sydney Blythe, Barrymore was the youngest child of great comic actress Georgiana Drew Barrymore and British-born stage actor Maurice Barrymore (original name, Herbert Blythe). John and his siblings Ethel and Lionel were the next generation of “the Royal Family of the American Theatre.”

Barrymore resisted going on the stage, instead deciding to pursue a career as a painter. He attended King’s College, the New York’s Art Student League, and worked briefly as an illustrator but was ultimately drawn back to the stage, calling the theatre “the easiest place to earn a decent living.”

Barrymore became a matinee idol, playing rogues, madmen, and lovers in silent films, talkies, and on stage (and often seducing his leading ladies on screen and off). In 1922, he undertook *Hamlet*, the creative endeavor which would define his legacy. For months, Barrymore studied intensively with voice coach Margaret Carrington; she advised Barrymore to disregard all precedents and to explore Shakespeare’s play as a modern script never before performed.

Barrymore described Hamlet as “a normal, healthy, lusty young fellow who simply got into a mess that was too thick for him. . . . He was a great fencer, an athlete, a man who led an active, healthy life. How can you make a sickly half-wit out of a man like that? Can you imagine how this quick-witted young fencer made love to Ophelia in the Elsinore garden? Polonius was a wise father, when he warned Ophelia to watch out for that fellow.” With typical irreverence, Barrymore told producer Arthur Hopkins, “I want him to be so male that when I come out on stage they can hear my balls clank.”

John Barrymore’s *Hamlet* ran for 101 performances, surpassing Edwin Booth’s record, and could have run much longer. The night of his farewell performance in New York, the theatre box office was forced to turn away over 1,000 people.

*John Barrymore as Hamlet. 1922.*



# Synopsis of *I Hate Hamlet*

Andrew Rally, the up-and-coming young star of a recently canceled television series, has just arrived with real estate agent Felicia Dantine at what is to be his new apartment in New York City. Rally, a native of Los Angeles, is more than a little put off by the Gothic trappings of the old brownstone. The fact that the apartment once belonged to the legendary actor, John Barrymore, does little to dissipate Rally's reservations. He is doubly disturbed, as he is soon to perform the difficult part of Hamlet, the role made famous by Barrymore—and he is to do it onstage, away from the glitter of Hollywood.

Rally and Dantine are soon joined by Rally's agent, Lillian Troy, and his girlfriend, Deirdre McDavey. Troy, many years ago, had a brief fling with Barrymore in this very apartment. Excited, Dantine claims she is able to communicate with departed spirits and suggests they summon Barrymore to verify Lillian's claim. Encouraged by Deirdre, Dantine begins the séance.

Andrew is told to think of a question to ask Barrymore—perhaps some advice on playing the role of Hamlet. When Andrew shouts out, “I hate Hamlet!” the curtains blow, and lightning illuminates the room, briefly casting the shadow of the striking profile of a man upon the wall. Andrew alone sees the shadow.

After the séance, Andrew and Deirdre are alone in the old apartment. Their conversation turns, as it often does, to Deirdre's unwillingness to have sex prior to marriage, much to Andrew's disappointment. When Deirdre retires for the evening to the upstairs bedroom, Barrymore, resplendent in full Hamlet costume, appears to the stunned Andrew. Barrymore explains that he makes himself seen to every young actor who is facing the daunting role of Hamlet and is in desperate need of help. The remainder of Act One is taken up with Barrymore's brash coaching of Andrew—both in acting, and in the ways of love, culminating with a mock, but swashbuckling, sword fight in the apartment.

By Act Two Andrew is deeply into the role of Hamlet, dressing the part and brooding darkly in the apartment which is now decorated like a medieval castle. He still has misgivings but receives a final encouraging speech from Barrymore on the opening night of the production.

Sadly, all does not go well. Andrew's performance is, at best, weak. Furthering Andrew's angst is the discovery that Deirdre has been seduced in the night by Barrymore. Deirdre agrees that Andrew's performance was awful, but, because he did not give up, in her eyes he has become the bravest and most noble man she has ever met—which is what she has been seeking.

In the end, Andrew declines a new television offer and opts to pursue a life on the stage. Barrymore tells him, “There it is! The glory of Shakespeare. Hamlet has changed you. Altered your course.”

After teaching Andrew one last lesson—how to bow properly—Barrymore leaves. Andrew bows dramatically to the audience, and the curtain falls.

## Characters

**FELICIA DANTINE:** Andrew Rally's real estate broker, Felicia Dantine claims that she can speak to the dead; however, her séance arranged to speak with the ghost of Barrymore appears on the surface to have been a failure.

**ANDREW RALLY:** Young and popular, Andrew Rally is a television actor and star of a recently canceled soap opera. He just moved to New York City from Los Angeles, where he will soon be playing Hamlet on stage. He is both overwhelmed and chagrined by the challenge, because it is the stage, not Hollywood, and because it is perhaps the most difficult role every written. However, he has unwittingly moved into the apartment of the deceased John Barrymore, perhaps the greatest Shakespearean actor who ever lived.

**DEIRDRE MCDAVEY:** Attractive and emotional, Deirdre McDavey is Rally's girlfriend. She is committed, much to his annoyance, to “saving herself” until they are married.

**LILLIAN TROY:** Rally's agent, Lillian Troy is in her early twenties but remembers fondly an affair she had with John Barrymore many years ago, in the apartment Rally now lives in.

**JOHN BARRYMORE:** A legendary actor, John Barrymore, or, rather, his ghost is still quite active (in many ways) and appears to help Rally in the nuances of both acting and love.

**GARY PETER LEFKOWITZ:** A cocky, pompous television producer, Gary Peter Lefkowitz gave Rally his first big break. He wants Rally to move back to Los Angeles to film a new television series and can't understand why he isn't jumping at the chance.



L-R: Alyssa Gagarin, Nell Gwynn, Sybil Lines, Ben Rosenbaum.

# OUR EQUITY CAST



*J. Paul Boehmer  
(John Barrymore)*

**ART MANKE** (Director) is a five-time winner of the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award and is nationally recognized for his productions of a wide range of classics, musicals and new work. This is his first production at PTC.

**J. PAUL BOEHMER** (Barrymore) Paul has worked on Broadway and extensively in regional theatre. Coinciding with another of his passions, sci-fi, Paul has been cast in various roles in many episodes of *Star Trek*. Paul's love of literature and learning led him by nature to his work as a narrator for Books on Tape, his latest endeavor. This will be his third appearance at Pioneer Theatre Company.



*Nell Gwynn (Felicia Dantine)*

**ALYSSA GAGARIN** (Dierdre) debuts at Pioneer Theatre Company. Other credits include: *Our Town* (Ford's Theatre), *Something's Afoot* (Goodspeed), *Summer of '42* (Buck's County Playhouse), *Gypsy* (Signature Theatre) and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Shakespeare Theatre Company); TV/Film: *Show Me A Hero* (HBO).



*Todd Cerveris  
(Gary Lefkowitz)*

**TODD CERVERIS** (Gary) Broadway credits include *South Pacific*, *Twentieth Century*. Off-Broadway premieres include *Almost, Maine*, *The Booth Variations*, *The Butcherhouse Chronicles*, and *Somewhere, Someplace Else*. He toured nationally the original touring companies of *War Horse*, *Spring Awakening*, and *Twelve Angry Men*. Film & television includes *Allegiance*, *The Affair*, *White Collar*, *Nurse Jackie*, *One True Thing*, *Law & Order*, *Living and Dining*.



*Sybil Lines (Lillian Troy)*

**NELL GWYNN** (Felicia) makes her Pioneer Theatre Company debut. She is known locally for her work with the Salt Lake Acting Company, where she has been in *Rapture*, *Blister*, *Burn*; *Good People*; *The Exit Interview*, *God of Carnage*, *The Persian Quarter* and *Angels in America*. She has also worked with Plan-B and Flying Bobcat locally. Favorite NYC credits include: *Candy & Dorothy*, *Kiss & Cry* and *Counsellor At Law*.



*Alyssa Gagarin  
(Deidre McDavey)*

**SYBIL LINES** (Lillian) returns to PTC after *Lost in Yonkers*. Her theater credits include the Royal Shakespeare Company for two years and Broadway (*Bedroom Farce* with John Lithgow, *Waiting in the Wings* with Lauren Bacall, *Lettice & Lovage* with Maggie Smith and *Aren't We All* with Lynn Redgrave). Her screen credits include *Edge of Night*, *Hogan Family* and *Murder She Wrote*.



*Ben Rosenbaum (Andrew Rally)*

**BEN ROSENBAUM** (Andrew Rally) debuts with Pioneer Theatre Company. Other productions include appearances at The Denver Center Theatre Company, The Guthrie Theater, The Acting Company and Gremlin Theatre. TV/Film appearances include *When Calls The Heart*, *HOPE*, *Distance Makes*.