



AUDITION PACKET

Women Playing Hamlet

By William Missouri Downs

Directed by Greg J. Anderson

FOR MORE INFORMATION: 218-451-0715 or countyseatgm@aol.com

AUDITIONS: Sunday, Feb. 26 at 6 pm.

***Please note casting may take 1-2 weeks. Those not cast - may or may not receive an individual phone call. Feel free to contact the theater for cast list or further questions.*

WHAT DO I NEED FOR AUDITIONS? Auditions will consist of a cold read from the Acting Sides and possibly other sections from the script. Full scripts are available for perusal upon request. (Including electronically)

Bring a completed audition form and a calendar reflecting any conflicts with you.

VIDEO SUBMISSIONS ARE ACCEPTABLE.

REHEARSAL & PERFORMANCE INFORMATION:

Rehearsals may begin as early as April, 2023

Local Performances to be held: May 18-21 & 15-28 (subject to change)

ABOUT THE SHOW:

Hamlet's a challenge for any actor, but when Jessica is cast as the titular character in a New York production, it sends her into an existential tailspin. It doesn't help that her acting coach is borderline abusive, or that every Starbucks barista with an MFA tells her she's too young for the role. Or that she's somehow managed to make Sir Patrick Stewart her nemesis. Not to mention the fact that she's a woman. How can Jessica figure out "to be or not to be," when she can't even figure out herself? Featuring an all-female cast performing multiple roles, Woman Playing Hamlet is rip-roaring fun for Shakespeare fans and haters alike.

Characters: All Roles will be played by female actors.

There are available roles for a wide range of ages.

Audition Form:

Women Playing Hamlet

Please bring this completed form with you to your audition with calendar and conflicts
(*acting resume and headshots are optional*).

Name _____

Address _____

Home phone _____

Cell phone _____ (Do you text message? Yes / No)

E-mail _____

Occupation _____ Age _____ Height _____

Work or school hours _____

Have you been vaccinated for Covid-19? Yes / No Pronouns _____

If you are familiar with this play, are there any part that interests you?

Would you accept another part if not offered any listed above? _____

Would you consider being an understudy for a role? _____

Would you consider working on the crew or technical team? _____

Do you, **sing**, dance, **play an instrument** or have other special talents? If so, please explain level of skill:

Experience: Although not required, please list some of your theater background.
Some of this information may be used in the playbill for the show.

Do you have ANY conflicts with the rehearsal/performance schedule? _____

Please list ALL conflicts below (be as specific as possible to dates, times). Additional conflicts after being cast may not be accepted?

Casting Agreement:

By accepting a role, I agree to play the role assigned to me to the best of my ability, trusting the judgement of the director and staff. In doing so, I also agree to wear the costumes, makeup and wig or hairstyle of the director's and/or designer's choosing.

Initial _____

Attendance Agreement:

By accepting a role, I agree to attend all rehearsals and performances as defined by the rehearsal schedule. I agree to arrive in a timely matter and be prepared to start when directed to do so. I also agree to abide by all theater rules while at rehearsals and performances.

Initial _____

*Thank you so much for auditioning for the show!
We appreciate your time and interest in the County Seat Theater Comp*

JESSICA. I text, "Don't you get it—to understand *Hamlet* is to laugh at the absurdity of life. (*Growing absorbed:*) For at the moment we laugh we defeat the absurdity, but only for a moment—for when we laugh with Hamlet about the incongruity of society, of politics, of death, of love, the absurdity lingers. Laughter is merely a temporary solution to an eternal problem and Hamlet knows that." (*Beat.*) But before I could hit send, I noticed that the theatre had gone strangely quiet. As a matter of fact, all the actors had stopped. And then Patrick Stewart...

[**POWERPOINT:** A picture of Sir Patrick Stewart with the caption, "Patrick Stewart—Golden Globe and Blockbuster Entertainment Award Winner."]

JESSICA. ...Stepped down, dead center, looked right at me and said, "Young lady, you are an immature, rude, little twit." (*Tears*) ...And somewhere in the recesses of my brain it occurred to me... These are not lines from *Hamlet*. (*Beat.*) In the taxi on the way home, after a silence that lasted well into Brooklyn, my niece finished her doggy bag of Danish fondue and said, "Can I put on my Facebook page that you were yelled at by Captain Picard?"

(*She pulls herself together.*)

JESSICA. That night my cell phone rang. I couldn't believe it. It was Patrick Stewart! I hung up. How did he get my number? He's called three times since. I've never answered. (*Beat.*) What follows may not be exactly what happened. It's not a mirror held up to nature, but it's kinda, sorta how I remember it. Let's start with my old college English professor. This is what he said about a woman playing Hamlet.

(*A self-important, male HUMANITIES PROFESSOR played by a woman enters.*)

HUMANITIES PROFESSOR. (*Lecturing the audience:*) It is obvious that Shakespeare intended Hamlet to be played by a woman. Note that lacking masculine virility, Hamlet uses qualities that are associated with the female of the species.

(*He clicks a clicker:*)

[**POWERPOINT:** A picture of Sarah Bernhardt playing Hamlet. The caption reads, "Sarah Bernhardt as Hamlet."]

HUMANITIES PROFESSOR. (*To audience:*) Qualities such as compassion, diplomacy, and the ability to talk for long periods even when it's obvious that *absolutely no one* is listening.

JESSICA. (*To audience:*) He was a total asshole.

(*He clicks the clicker:*)

[POWERPOINT: A picture of Dame Judith Anderson playing Hamlet. The caption reads, "Dame Judith Anderson as Hamlet."]

HUMANITIES PROFESSOR. (To audience:) Also note that Hamlet does not directly seek revenge against King Claudius, but first makes him suffer—what's more feminine than this?

JESSICA. (To audience:) My freshman year he tried to feel me up after a lecture on *Beowulf*—asked me to stay after class 'cause he said I had unique insights into Anglo-Saxon lit. Walked right into it. I didn't yet know that no one has ever had unique insights into Anglo-Saxon lit.

HUMANITIES PROFESSOR. (To audience:) Hamlet is after all a waffling neurotic who is prone to fits of melancholia and violence—who better to play him than a woman?

JESSICA. (To audience:) Have you ever noticed that humanities professors lead sad unfulfilled lives? I'm okay with that.

HUMANITIES PROFESSOR. (To audience:) This is why so many less-than-manly men are attracted to the role. Such as Jude Law.¹

(He clicks the clicker.)

[POWERPOINT: A picture of Jude Law as Hamlet. The caption reads, "Jude Law as Hamlet, 2008."]

(The HUMANITIES PROFESSOR exits. The PowerPoint fades.)

JESSICA. (To audience:) As you might've already guessed, all the male roles tonight will be played by women. In Shakespeare's day women's parts were played by men so tonight we'll have a little revenge—After all it is *Hamlet*.

[POWERPOINT: A picture of William Shakespeare. The caption reads, "Verbal Scene Painting."]

JESSICA. (To audience:) Not only will women play all the men's roles but also we'll use Shakespeare's own staging technique known as *Verbal Scene Painting*. Shakespeare didn't stage his plays on elaborate sets, instead his characters verbally described the location at the beginning of scenes thereby appealing to the audience's imagination. Here's how it works.

(STARBUCKS ACTRESS enters holding a Starbucks cup.)

STARBUCKS ACTRESS. This Starbucks hath a pleasant seat: the air nimble and sweetly recommends itself unto our gentle senses.²

¹ When this reference becomes outdated please feel free to update.

² *Macbeth* (1.6).

AUDIENCE. Right.

(JESSICA picks up a little black book a la Hamlet and enters the office.)

[POWERPOINT: A picture of a bearded Freudian MALE PSYCHIATRIST. The caption reads, "Dr. Max Feltenberg—Licensed Mental Health Professional. PhD in Clinical Psychology Long Island University."]

(A bearded, Freudian MALE PSYCHIATRIST enters, yes played by a woman.)

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. (Verbal scene painting:) Welcome to my lavish office located near the intersection of Broadway and Central Park West. Isn't my partial view of Columbus Circle and the fine greenery of the Park delightful but soothing?

(He has to lean to see the view.)

JESSICA. (Melancholic—paying Hamlet:) Yes. (Leaning to see the view:) Nice view.

(JESSICA/HAMLET rests on a couch. The MALE PSYCHIATRIST takes up a clipboard.)

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. You are?

JESSICA. Jessica.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. And what brought you in today, Jessica?

JESSICA. I'm... (Dramatic pause) Unhappy.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. Aren't we all?

JESSICA. I have tons of unresolved emotional baggage. My father died.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. How long ago?

JESSICA. Two months, no, not even two.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. Grieving is normal.

JESSICA. And I was jumped over for a promotion at work.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. (Checking off a box on a form:) Which causes anxiety—also normal.

JESSICA. In addition I think I might have an unhealthy sexual attraction towards my mother.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. (Very interested:) How do you know it's unhealthy?

JESSICA. I just sort of assumed that *any* sexual attraction towards my mother was unhealthy.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. Oh. Right. Oedipus complex?

JESSICA. Do women suffer from that?

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. Generally no. (*Checking off a box on a form:*) Let's call it pre-oedipal ambivalence.

JESSICA. In addition I can't seem to take action.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. (*Checking off a box on a form:*) Ah yes, Jimmy Carter Syndrome.

JESSICA. And yet, I have doubts.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. Doubts?

JESSICA. Is the ghost real? Or is it my imagination? Or could it be the devil tempting me?

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. So sorry, ghost?

JESSICA. The ghost of my father—it's been kinda following me.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. (*Checking off several boxes:*) Paranormal activity coupled with demonic possession.

JESSICA. No. I was just thinking that the ghost might be the devil tempting me—I'm not actually seeing devils.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. (*Crossing out the check mark:*) Strike demonic possession. Constipation?

JESSICA. Ah...I hadn't considered that but, yeah, I guess I have been a little constipated. But more importantly I've contemplated suicide.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. Ah yes, that *is* more important. When was the last time you had an orgasm?

JESSICA. Pardon?

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. Your last orgasm? The date.

JESSICA. Ah... I don't generally write down the dates of my orgasms, but let's say it's been a while.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. (*Checking off a box on a form:*) Decreased libido, constipation... Coupled with mood swings?

JESSICA. Now that you mention it, one moment I'm awestruck by the ghost, the next I joke about it. I'm talkative yet silent, given to sudden flashes of anger yet consumed by melancholy.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. When you cough or sneeze do you have leakage?

JESSICA. Leakage?

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. Urine trickle.

JESSICA. What does that have to...

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. I think I know what your problem is.

JESSICA. Really, that fast? (*Improvising with the audience:*) That was fast wasn't it?

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. (*Adding it all up on his clipboard:*) You're...

JESSICA. Yes?

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. Suffering from existential ontological overload.

JESSICA. Ooo, I like how that sounds.

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. In other words... You're hormonal.

JESSICA. Excuse me?

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. Premenopausal.

JESSICA. (*Speechless:*) What...

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. It's rare with women your age but not entirely unheard of. I'm making you a prescription for a monoamine oxidase inhibitors and a tricyclic.

JESSICA. Monoamine what?

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. Antidepressants. In addition I'm starting you on a hormone replacement program.

(*He writes several prescriptions.*)

JESSICA. Wait. Are you saying that I'm having hot flashes?

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. Now I must warn you, these drugs have side effects—including anxiety, insomnia, fatigue, irritability, nervousness, hallucinations and suicidal thoughts. But you already suffer from these so it shouldn't be a problem.

JESSICA. Hold on! Are you insinuating that my profound philosophical insights and neurotic pessimism are a *female* problem?

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. While I'm at it I'm going to throw in a really good vaginal lube. Vagi-Maxer—it's more slippery than synthetic motor oil.

JESSICA. Oh for god sake!

(*JESSICA starts out.*)

MALE PSYCHIATRIST. Wait!

hyperlinked friends will be the first generation in four hundred years who will not get Hamlet. Because you travel light—light on philosophy, light on self. And thus you will forgo the great roles and the existential angst that comes with. Instead you will accept Prozac over Plato, Nicorette over Nietzsche, tranquilizers over tragedy. And thus you will never know snow.

(GWEN heads for the exit. Stops.)

GWEN. Did you know that Shakespeare invented the name "Jessica." It's true. It's one of the seventeen hundred words he invented. Just pulled it out of his ass—that's talent. Real talent.

(GWEN exits.)

JESSICA. Well I'm screwed.

(JESSICA improvises with the audience about how hopeless her situation is. She might even ask their advice on what she should do next. Then...)

(A voice comes from the wings.)

ROSY. Hello?

GILDA. Anyone there?

(ROSY and GILDA, two glamorous soap-opera stars, enter. They're bedecked in perfect wigs, fancy dresses, and dangling diamonds.)

(ROSY is the younger one, she is dramatic and sexy. She pushes a wheelchair in with GILDA the older one who is hard of hearing and who has had a stroke.)

[POWERPOINT: A picture of The Young and the Restless soap-opera logo. The Caption reads, "Gilda and Rosy—Soap Opera Stars—MFAs from the Keanu Reeves School of Acting!"]

ROSY. Jessica!

JESSICA. *(Thrilled to see them again.)* Rosencrantz! Guildenstern!

ROSY. No, I'm Rosy, she's Gilda.

JESSICA. That's what I meant—what are you doing here?

GILDA. We've come all the way from L.A. to save you.

ROSY. She means see you!

JESSICA. Me? You're kidding.

ROSY. *(Taken by the theatre.)* Oh my goodness! This is where you're doing your little drama!

GILDA. What's it called, sweetheart?

JESSICA. *Hamlet.*

GILDA. *(She's hard of hearing)* *The Hobbit?* Yes, I know it.

JESSICA. No. *Hamlet!*

ROSY. It doesn't matter what it's called. The important thing is that you are standing up for your principles. For... For... What's it called?

JESSICA. Art?

ROSY. For art!

GILDA. Can I give some advice?

JESSICA. Sure.

GILDA. You're much too tall to play a hobbit.

JESSICA. No. *Hamlet.*

ROSY. Oh, I do love the smell of an empty stage. *(Upbeat:)* The dust, the filth, the ruined lives— So inspiring!

JESSICA. What are you guys doing in New York?

ROSY. We were passing through on our way to England and thought we'd stop by to let you know that you did the right thing by *not* signing that contract. Do you realize what would've happened if you had taken the part of Rachael Buttonhole's evil twin?

(Beat. ROSY taps GILDA to pick up her cue.)

GILDA. Oh. Your life would be hell!

ROSY. Television acting is a fate worse than death! *(To GILDA:)* Did you know that this morning my limo was late?

(ROSY taps GILDA to pick up her cue.)

GILDA. Again?

ROSY. I had to wait on the curb for nearly twenty minutes. *(To JESSICA:)* You wouldn't want to suffer through that would you?

JESSICA. Well, no, but...

ROSY. And just now, out front, we were mugged by autograph seekers.

GILDA. I'm tired of being admired!

ROSY. You don't want to be mugged by autograph seekers do you?

JESSICA. *(Losing confidence:)* I guess not.

GILDA. We tried.

ROSY. What now?

GILDA. We'd better go; we'll miss our Zeppelin!

ROSY. Boat. We're taking a boat.

GILDA. Our boat!

ROSY. To England!

GILDA. Yes, to England!

(ROSY rolls GILDA off.)

[POWERPOINT: A picture of a crappy New York apartment building. The caption reads, "Gwen's Apartment 164th and Amsterdam."]

(Hyper pissed, JESSICA raps on an apartment door. She pulls a roller suitcase—on the handle is attached a colorful tassel of ribbons. GWEN answers in a bathrobe.)

GWEN. (Verbal scene painting:) Welcome to my tiny apartment. It's only five hundred square feet but because of my innovative use of space and color it feels much bigger—

JESSICA. (Fuming:) You never played Hamlet!

GWEN. What are we talking about—

JESSICA. I went to the Equity office—researched every part you've ever played! They have no record of you playing Hamlet! But you know what I did find? Fifteen years ago, *The Young and the Restless*. And know what else? A Cialis commercial! Who the hell are you to lecture me on Hamlet when you've done soaps and hawked boner pills?

GWEN. And the suitcase?

JESSICA. I'm leaving New York.

GWEN. I'll get you a refund.

JESSICA. No. You need it. I don't live in a crappy rent-controlled apartment, begging my agent for loans and comp tickets. Yes, I asked around, I found out about you!

GWEN. Now you're just being obnoxious.

JESSICA. You called your friends at *The Young and the Restless* and had them plot against me!

GWEN. So what if I did? You paid for a service and I delivered.

JESSICA. Delivered? What? Insults and emotional abuse?

GWEN. You didn't come to me because you wanted instruction on how to play Hamlet!

JESSICA. I didn't?

GWEN. No. You came to me because you wanted to be talked *out* of playing Hamlet!

JESSICA. Did not!

GWEN. Than why did you ask for level two?

JESSICA. *(Beat.)* ...What?

GWEN. At level one I build up your self-confidence, I convince you that you are the perfect person to play the part. At level two I tell you the truth.

JESSICA. Which is?

GWEN. No one is ever ready to play Hamlet. Not Burton, not Bernhardt, not you. Admit it. You wanted me to give you permission to let this extraordinary, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity slip from your fingers.

JESSICA. Why would I do that?

GWEN. Because in order to play Hamlet you must bring your "self" to the role. Up till now you've simply accepted the roles in which life cast you. That's the truth, isn't it? Isn't it?!

(Beat. A tear of realization comes to JESSICA.)

JESSICA. *(Calm at first but becoming frustrated.)* And I change roles on a dime. At work I play the role of an employee, when I'm with my niece I play an aunt, in bed I play the lover, or if cast, the virgin or the harlot. On my way over here, just now, I ran into Quentin Tarantino coming out of the Carlyle Hotel. He offered me a job playing a ninja in his next film. And guess what I did—I instantaneously switched roles and played the thrilled starlet and flirted with him. *(Losing it, tears.)* Who in their right mind flirts with Quentin Tarantino?! And I'm smoking while using Nicorette, which could kill me! And Patrick Stewart is stalking me! *(Beat.)* And I didn't want you to talk me out of Hamlet. I already did that myself. I wanted you to answer a question that's plagued me all my life.

GWEN. Ask.

JESSICA. Who am I?

GWEN. You are the roles you play.

GRAVEDIGGER. What does it look like I be doin'? I be diggin' a grave.

JESSICA. A grave?

GRAVEDIGGER. You've wandered into a graveyard.

JESSICA. You're kidding.

GRAVEDIGGER. And you know why I be diggin' this grave?

JESSICA. 'Cause someone died?

GRAVEDIGGER. 'Cause I be stark *grave*-ing mad. Get it? Stark *grave*-ing. It be a pun.

JESSICA. This is like your job? You dig graves... Like for a living?

GRAVEDIGGER. Graves don't dig themselves. What you be doing here so late at night?

JESSICA. Guess I lost my way. The Port Authority bus terminal is—

(The GRAVEDIGGER pops a human skull from the ground. It wears lipstick and eyelashes.)

JESSICA. Oh my god! You didn't just do that! You dug up a human skull!

GRAVEDIGGER. Happens all the time.

JESSICA. That's so gross!

GRAVEDIGGER. Know why this skull be here?

JESSICA. No.

GRAVEDIGGER. 'Cause of its *cemetery* lifestyle. Get it? Sedentary/*cemetery*. Get it?

JESSICA. Yeah, got it.

GRAVEDIGGER. When you bury a cat you don't dig a grave, you dig a *cat-a-comb*! Get it?

(The GRAVEDIGGER cackles at his joke.)

JESSICA. That's really annoying. *(Improvising with the audience.)* I'm right, right?

GRAVEDIGGER. Did you know that there be over twenty puns in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*?

JESSICA. And most of them terrible.

(The GRAVEDIGGER picks up the skull.)

GRAVEDIGGER. You know who this be?

JESSICA. No.

GRAVEDIGGER. This here *be* Sarah Bernhardt.

JESSICA. Wait. Not *the* Sarah Bernhardt—the great French actress? The first woman to play Hamlet on film in 1900?

GRAVEDIGGER. She said Hamlet is the brain ceaselessly warring against the reality of things. That's why it *be* best played by an intellectual woman.¹⁹

(The GRAVEDIGGER digs up another lipsticked skull.)

JESSICA. I can't believe you did that again!

GRAVEDIGGER. And here be the skull of Nance O'Neil who played Hamlet in 1924. She played to all the lonely women who endure worn-out traditions, and discover oft too late that it *be* better to live as an outlaw than *be* a slave.²⁰

(The GRAVEDIGGER digs up another lipsticked skull.)

GRAVEDIGGER. And here *be* the skull of Anna Dickinson who championed racial equality and played Hamlet in 1882.

JESSICA. Sorry to interrupt but I find it hard to believe that all these great actresses are buried in the same—

GRAVEDIGGER. That's right, they all *be* in the same grave. Dig deeper and you'll find the first open lesbian to play Hamlet, Charlotte Cushman who played the dark prince in 1861, and deeper still and you'll find Fanny Furnival the first woman to play Hamlet in 1741. They all *be* here.

JESSICA. I take it this *be* a dream sequence?

GRAVEDIGGER. Distraught over your failures you wandered the streets of New York for hours. Then you lit a cigarette, but you forgot that you'd already had four sticks of Nicorette in an hour. You received a fatal overdose of nicotine.

JESSICA. Fatal?

GRAVEDIGGER. Okay, made that part up. Just joking

JESSICA. That's nothing to joke about!

GRAVEDIGGER. Hey now, there's no need to lose your *de-composure!* Get it?

JESSICA. Stop it. Just stop!

GRAVEDIGGER. Oh, look at the time, I must *be* goin'.

¹⁹ Paraphrasing Sarah Bernhardt.

²⁰ Paraphrasing Nance O'Neil.

JESSICA. (*Artfully*) To be, or not to be—that is the question:
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
 And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep—
 No more—and by a sleep to say we end
 The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep—
 To sleep—perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause. There's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life.
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
 Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely
 The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
 The insolence of office, and the spurns
 That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,
 When *she herself* might *her* quietus make²³
 With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of?
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
 And thus the native hue of resolution
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
 And enterprises of great pitch and moment
 With this regard their currents turn awry
 And lose the name of action.

(It begins to softly snow—not over the entire stage, just over JESSICA. She looks up at the falling flakes and beams through a gentle tear.)

(The lights fade.)

(The curtain call should have all the ladies—no matter how many you cast—in full Hamlet “inky cloak” attire with rapiers.)

(GWEN's inky cloak should be covered with bird shit.)

End of Play

²³ Note this important line change.