A Hamlet for Our Time

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How to be Hamlet? That was the question facing Robert Icke, the theatre director, and Alex Lawther, the actor, when they met recently in London to rehearse the play from which, it has been quipped, everyone knows at least six words. They were in a spacious, light-filled hall at the Bishopsgate Institute, a Victorian-era structure near the Spitalfields Market. How could they make anew a work that was already being celebrated more than four hundred years ago, when its author walked along the streets directly outside the institute?

Shakespeare lived for a time in St. Helen's Bishopsgate, a parish so close by that he could nearly have covered the distance in the time that it takes most actors to deliver his most quoted soliloquy. In a few weeks, Lawther would be performing as Hamlet at the Armory, in New York City. In the play, the Prince's dead father reappears as a ghost, but Lawther and Icke were contending with ghosts of their own: the accumulated legacies of performers, directors, critics, and other interpreters who have played Hamlet, or seen "Hamlet." In other words: How not to be Hamlet?

Lawther and Icke were going over the Prince's most famous monologue, about suicide, which falls in the middle of the play. Lawther, trying to summarize his character's emotional state, spoke telegraphically: "Seen Ophelia. Scared her. Has a book." (After the soliloquy, Polonius comes across Hamlet and asks what he is reading.) Slight, in jeans, sneakers, and a dark shirt, Lawther, who is twenty-seven, has a soft voice and a gentle manner.

"Had a bad night of sleep," Icke, who is thirty-five, added. Tall and broad-shouldered, with owlish spectacles, he sat cross-legged on the floor in a black denim jacket and black sweatpants.
Lawther said, "The book thing is mysterious to me still."
"It's odd, isn't it?" Icke said. "It's almost like that's what you used to do in the lobby for four hours together." His observations often folded in phrases from the play ("Sometimes he walks four hours together / here in the lobby," Polonius says of Hamlet, when contemplating the source of the Prince's melancholy), but they weren't showy quotations; he was reflexively fitting Elizabethan language into a modern context. Carrying a book around was, Icke suggested, "almost like force of habit-like you're on autopilot."
"Yeah, that's true," Lawther said.
"And then it's a useful shield, isn't it, when you see Polonius?" Icke went on. "Because I can't imagine you are in a fit state to read anything."
Lawther nodded. "So I'm looking at the pages, at the words, not being able to focus on them," he said.
"Maybe you are telling the truth when Polonius says, 'What do you read, my lord?,' and you say, 'Words,' " Icke said, with a laugh. (Hamlet's response is often delivered mockingly.)
Lawther considered Icke's argument. Rocking back and forth on his heels, he ran a hand through his tousled hair. For a moment longer, he was silent. Then he began: "To be. Or-not . . . to be. That is the question."

Icke, one of Europe's boldest theatre directors, is known for restaging, and sometimes rewriting, canonical works in surprising and illuminating ways-often by going back to the page and to first premises, asking questions that performance tradition or textual familiarity can leave unexamined. At the Almeida Theatre, in London, where he was the associate director from 2013 to 2019, he directed his own adaptation of "The Oresteia." His version took bracing liberties with the foundational tenets of Greek tragedy: there was no chorus, and characters died onstage, as they never did for the Greeks.

The show received rave reviews: Susannah Clapp wrote in the Guardian that "you can almost see the dust flying off the old master." (It will be performed in repertory at the Armory with "Hamlet.") In Icke's production of Schiller's "Mary Stuart," the audience arrived at the theatre not knowing which of two actresses-Juliet Stevenson or Lia Williams-would play the title role and which the role of Queen Elizabeth I. An onstage coin flip decided the casting, a high-stakes and thrillingly theatrical move that underlined the arbitrariness of an unstable monarchy.

Icke first staged "Hamlet" in 2017, also at the Almeida, with Andrew Scott in the lead role; the production transferred to the West End later that year. Scott was then best known for his performance as Moriarty, on "Sherlock"-and later played the "hot priest" on "Fleabag"-and this was his first Shakespearean role onstage. The production, in which Denmark was imagined as a chilling surveillance state, incorporated the use of video to powerful effect-the Ghost is initially observed on grainy security footage-and was heralded for its emotional veracity. Especially praised was the immediacy of Scott's performance; even when speaking the character's most familiar lines, he appeared to be thinking and feeling them for the first time.

To prepare to direct Scott, Icke had delved into the literature of grief, reading C. S. Lewis's 1961 memoir, "A Grief Observed," about the death of his beloved wife, and the work of Thomas Lynch, the contemporary poet who is also an undertaker. Whereas earlier generations have viewed Hamlet as neurotically indecisive or Oedipally compromised, the Hamlet of Icke and Scott is undone by grief. "The grief is present before the Ghost is-maybe the Ghost could even be a product of the grief," Icke told me. "Hamlet's black clothes, constant tears, and general disposition are, he says, only the outside trappings of woe-it's what's inside him that counts."

The production was supposed to come to the Armory in 2020, but the pandemic upended this plan. Scott was unavailable to perform the role in New York, and so Icke cast Lawther, another actor best known for roles in film and television. (He starred in the dark-comedy series "The End of the F***ing World" and anchored a particularly harrowing "Black Mirror" episode, "Shut Up and Dance.") Lawther is nearly twenty years Scott's junior, and though much of the production remains unchanged-with several of the lead actors reprising their roles-the play's gravity has been shifted by the presence of a more youthful Hamlet.

"There is no way I can fall back into the version of the play we had, because the version of the play we had was calibrated around an older Hamlet," Icke told me. "For example, in the second scene, when Laertes asks if he can go back to Paris, and Claudius says, 'Of course you can,' and off he goes, Hamlet is sitting there going, 'Great! They are going to let me go back to university-I can't wait, this has been hellish.' And then they say no, and he realizes that he can't get out. I always thought Andrew's Hamlet was doing his Ph.D., or maybe his second Ph.D., and waiting around to be king-and so it's a much bigger deal for that Hamlet that Claudius has popped in between the election and his hopes. But the theatrical logic is very different when Hamlet is an undergraduate, and he just wants to go back to Wittenberg to do his finals. That feels like a completely different story."

Hamlet's grief also has a different weight when the role is played by an actor, like Lawther, who still resembles a teen-ager. The portrayal may be particularly powerful for a contemporary audience aware of the alarmingly high incidence of mental-health struggles among young people today. Icke observed, "The loneliness and vulnerability of Hamlet, the isolation of his feelings and his grieving, and the way that seems to crack into something more dangerous than sadness feels especially sharp in the mouth of someone as young as Alex."

Lawther told me, "Working with Rob, there's a real insistence on treating the text like it's a new piece of work. Everything is up for grabs. Rob is really surgical, and precise, about cutting through all of that

plastic wrapping and trying to work out what is actually happening in a scene, in a way we can understand today." Watching Shakespeare had often left Lawther feeling frustrated, he said, "because I've not understood, and I should have understood." He added, "Hopefully, we are pushing against that. It feels like Rob is trying to make a play that his fifteen-year-old self would have been excited by."

In fact, Icke first read "Hamlet" when he was fifteen, in Stockton-on-Tees, in northeast England. (His speech, which is enthusiastic and often amused, retains a regional accent.) The class analyzed key scenes for weeks. "Hamlet" left Icke cold. "The play never made sense to me emotionally," he told me.

Not until Icke became an undergraduate, at Cambridge, did his engagement with Shakespeare intensify. He began one-on-one tutorials with Anne Barton, the influential critic and scholar, who by then was in her seventies and teaching only a handful of students. "I used to go to her once a week, and write an essay, and argue about text and so on," Icke told me. Barton was married to John Barton, a founder of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Icke developed relationships with both Bartons that endured long past his time as a student. Anne Barton died in 2013. At her memorial, Icke recalled, "a lot of people said they had had the same experience-that Anne kind of took them under her wing, and took their brain out of their head, and made it smarter, then gave it back."

Among the plays he and Barton discussed was "Hamlet." Barton, he learned, was impatient with the character of Ophelia: in her introduction to the Penguin edition of the play, she called Ophelia "naive, passive and dependent." Icke told me, "We talked about 'Why isn't Ophelia's story moving? Why do you never care? Why do you never follow that story-and why is it never clear why she's mad?' I always feel like Ophelia is sidelined in productions, and even in the text." Icke proposed a dramaturgical solution, arguing that the play would work much better if two early scenes were transposed, and Polonius and his two children-Laertes and Ophelia-were introduced before Hamlet is told by his friend Horatio of the sighting of his father's spirit. "I always felt that you were getting Part Two of the more important story before you were getting Part One of the less important story, and that made the less important story feel genuinely irrelevant," Icke explained. "It was always, like, 'That guy's going to see a ghost! And, by the way, here's some advice about your trip to France.' And you think, I don't care about that-there's a ghost!"

Icke's Almeida production contains this structural change, so that Hamlet's complex relationship with Ophelia is introduced-in the form of Laertes warning her to deflect any advances from the Prince-before Horatio informs him of the appearance of the Ghost. "I think it makes a huge difference as to how you are invited to take seriously the Ophelia bit of the story-and it gives me a hugely valued excuse to get Hamlet and Ophelia together alone onstage for a moment," Icke said. The revision not only enriches the emotional dynamic between Hamlet and Ophelia; it frames Ophelia's tragedy-within-a-tragedy as the story of a young woman whose family is so uncertain of its social position that it cannot allow her to pursue her own desires. In this context, it becomes piercing when, after Ophelia's suicide, Gertrude expresses a belated wish that Ophelia had been her son's bride. "You're, like-what? Gertrude was fine with it? Everyone was fine with it?" Icke said. "That was something Anne Barton said that was really helpful to me-that all the ingredients are there for the match to proceed, and what happens is just about insecurity, and that Ophelia doesn't believe in herself enough. There's nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. So much of the play is like that."

Altering the text of "Hamlet" is hardly without precedent. Most modern productions depend on judicious excisions: trimming the lengthy, business-filled gravedigger scene, or taking a knife to the entire subplot in which young Fortinbras, the son of the Norwegian ruler who was defeated by the elder Hamlet, sets about reconquering lands that his father had lost. Uncut, "Hamlet" might run to an

audience-defeating four hours. Elizabethan practice seems to have been to tear much more speedily through the plays-at the original Globe Theatre, performances began at two in the afternoon, which, in the winter, was only a couple of hours before twilight. The prologue of "Romeo and Juliet" refers to its "two hours' traffic of our stage," but Icke told me that no modern production of the play is over so quickly, "partly because we speak more slowly, and partly because we spend more time on the scenery changes and on the silly dances at the party."

In some respects, Icke takes fewer liberties with "Hamlet" than have some other recent versions. A production at the Globe earlier this year replaced the Player King's gnarly "Hecuba" speech with a more accessible scene from "Romeo and Juliet," and turned the gravedigger scene into a modern-language standup routine. The composer Brett Dean's recent opera of "Hamlet," which opened in May at the Met, in New York, dispenses with most of the fretful monologues, turning the story into a sleek potboiler. The casting of a female Hamlet-as happened at the Young Vic last year, in the person of Cush Jumbo-is now conventional enough not to raise eyebrows. Last year also introduced an octogenarian Hamlet: Sir Ian McKellen played the lead in an age-blind production, fifty years after he last had a crack at the role.

Directors and scholars of "Hamlet" have long had to confront the fact that there is no authoritative version of the play. In the early seventeenth century, three different versions were printed: the First Quarto (1603), the Second Quarto (1605), and the First Folio (1623). There are radical differences among them. The First Quarto-sometimes called the Bad Quarto-seems to have been transcribed from the memory of an actor who played the minor role of Marcellus, one of the watchmen. (Scholars have noted that the lines spoken by Marcellus are unusually consistent with later versions.) The Second Quarto is roughly twice the length of the First Quarto and differs from it in about a thousand, sometimes very small, instances. In the "Hamlet" that appears in the First Folio-the first collected works of Shakespeare, posthumously printed in 1623-more than two hundred lines of the Second Quarto have been cut, and seventy lines have been added. In one of the First Quarto's most notable differences, Hamlet's most indelible six words are followed by "Ay, there's the point"-a variation that, on the very rare occasions it is staged, can leave audiences befuddled, as if the actor playing the Prince had forgotten some of the most famous lines in the canon.

For scholars, the differences in the various "Hamlet"s offer a puzzle to unlock: what do they tell us about Shakespeare's revision process, Elizabethan performance practices, and the fallibility of scribes and compositors? In "1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare," James Shapiro, a professor of English at Columbia, gives a close reading of one such discrepancy. In Claudius's confession scene, which appears immediately after the play-within-a-play, Hamlet happens upon the King, who is apparently at prayer, and considers killing him on the spot. In the Second Quarto, Hamlet says, "Now might I do it, but now 'a is a-praying"; the First Folio version reads, "Now might I do it pat, now he is praying." Shapiro writes of this minute textual divergence: "In the earlier version, a more hesitant Hamlet can't take revenge because Claudius is praying. In the revised version, a more opportunistic Hamlet can act precisely because he has caught his adversary off guard but won't, because to do so would mean sending a shriven Claudius to heaven." Shapiro argues reprovingly that modern editors, by combining different bits and pieces from the three versions, have "cobbled together a 'Hamlet' that Shakespeare neither wrote nor imagined."

A theatre director need not observe a scholar's rigor. Although Icke's "Hamlet" hews most closely to the Second Quarto, it incorporates variations from the other versions and modernizes the language at different points. When Icke's Laertes warns Ophelia to ignore Hamlet's overtures, she reminds him not to behave like "a puffed and reckless libertine" who "ignores his own advice"-rather than, as the Second Quarto and the First Folio have it, "recks not his own rede." Icke's textual choices and adjustments have been collated in a new edition of the play, which was edited by Ilinca Radulian, an

associate director on the Almeida production. Icke's version also dispenses with the traditional Act and Scene divisions, which were imposed by an editor in the late seventeenth century. It omits punctuation, too, partly because nobody actually knows how -or if- Shakespeare punctuated his manuscripts. Icke writes in an introduction that his broader aim is "to strip away from the play its weighty literary inheritance, the heavy sense of dusty rules, the clutter of technical terminology, and to return it simply to being sheet music for actors to act."

Among Icke's most consequential textual choices is the inclusion of a scene, from the First Quarto, in which Horatio informs Gertrude that Claudius has plotted to have Hamlet killed on his voyage to England. This has the effect of deepening and complicating the character of Gertrude, whose trajectory through the play, in Icke's hands, involves a gradual realization of the ways in which her own choices-starting with her insistence that Hamlet go not to Wittenberg-have helped bring about the tragic conclusion. (In New York, Jennifer Ehle will play the role.) "If only Hamlet went to Wittenberg, and came back home at Christmas-I always think that would be the ideal outcome," Icke said. "Let him calm down a bit-let him go visit his mates and do his plays. And then you can have a grownup chat with him, and maybe apologize a bit about the speediness of the marriage."

Icke's Claudius-played both in London and in New York by Angus Wright-is a more sympathetic character than is usually portrayed. The production even raises doubts about whether Claudius has in fact committed the murderous deed of which the Ghost accuses him. Icke frames Claudius's confession-"Oh, my offense is rank it smells to heaven / it hath the primal eldest curse upon't / A brother's murder"-as possibly just a product of Hamlet's fevered brain. The scene is normally staged as a scene of prayer, with Hamlet eavesdropping on the King's tormented mutterings. In Icke's version, the Prince hears these words while brandishing a gun at the King. "The deeper you go into that play, in terms of travelling in it through time as an audience, the more you are invited to be suspicious about what Hamlet is seeing," Icke told me. "I don't think you are invited to endorse his perspective. I don't think it's a play about a corrupt world and the one truthful individual in it."

A play as rich as "Hamlet" resists being summed up by any single theme, Icke acknowledged. But exploring the literature on grief-and how the emotion can sometimes become debilitating-helped him find a fresh way of looking at Hamlet's predicament. The Prince, Icke realized, is so paralyzed with grief that he has become a bystander to his own life. Seen in this light, the Ghost's final words to his son-"Remember me"-seemed less like a plea than like an oppressive command. And Claudius's first speech as king, in which he declares that it is "wisest sorrow" to think on his departed brother "together with remembrance of ourselves," struck Icke as emotionally mature. Icke went on, "When do you stop mourning and resume life? When do you stop thinking about your dad and think about yourself? How can a child follow all of his father's advice, about thoughts and clothes and manners, and at the same time 'to thine own self be true'? When does remembering the past start to ruin the future?"

Not every critic has been enthusiastic about the way Icke interrogates canonical works. Michael Billington, the lead drama critic for the Guardian for nearly fifty years, until his retirement from the role in 2019, called Icke's "Hamlet" production "chic yet dotty." Among the decisions that puzzled him was the staging of Claudius's confession scene. "Why, if the king came clean, wouldn't his nephew shoot him?" he wrote. Billington had been even more skeptical of a 2016 Almeida production of "Uncle Vanya," which Icke had set in the contemporary English countryside. "Icke is fighting with phantoms if he assumes that only a radical approach can get to the heart of the play," he thundered.

Icke was unfazed. "I think those arguments are so silly-when people say, 'This is not meant to be done this way.' " he told me. "With Chekhov, it's meant to be done in Russian, with an interval between

every one of its four acts." Claims about tradition are even more questionable when applied to the works of Shakespeare, the original performances of which there is very little documentary evidence.
In 2018, Icke was invited to work at the Internationaal Theatre Amsterdam, the company co-founded by the experimental Belgian director Ivo van Hove. Icke is now an artist-in-residence there. In Amsterdam, he has directed a tense production of "Oedipus" in which the titular figure is portrayed as a modern-day politician anxiously awaiting election results in a "war room" with a large countdown clock. (The critic Mark Fisher said that "the narrative exercises a thriller-like grip, the countdown clock marking time, not only until the election results, but before the secrets of the past explode into the present.") In April, the Amsterdam theatre premiered "Judas," a new play, written and directed by Icke, which explores textual variations among the four Gospels and all the Apocrypha in order to complicate the story of the Biblical traitor.

The downside of his newfound creative freedom, Icke said, is having to make work in Dutch rather than in English. In Amsterdam, he told me with regret, mounting a new Shakespeare production is off the table, at least for now.

Though some critics may disapprove of Icke's approach to Shakespeare, it is far from iconoclastic: the depth of his attention to the plays is an indicator of the depth of his appreciation of Shakespeare's art. Icke said of the Bard, "He's astonishingly, humblingly great. He really is as good as he's cracked up to be. He writes great parts for actors. The plays themselves are deep and resonant and beautiful and moving. And funny! There is a particular relief-pleasure in coming back to works of art which are so profoundly graceful and achieved and full. It reminds you that it's possible." He is, though, impatient with the sometimes calcified performance tradition of Shakespeare, and with any approach to the plays which assumes that their meaning is settled. "Like, where's the hard proof that Desdemona didn't cheat?" he asked me during one of our conversations. "It's always cast really wimpy-like she's twelve and Victorian. But she left her house in the middle of the night to get married! I've never seen a production where the insecurity is plausible. You always think the jealousy makes Othello look like an idiot, because there's obviously not been any infidelity. I think you want to set the pieces up so that it's very plausible, so that by the time you hit the end, and Iago says, 'What you know, you know,' you're, like, 'What *do* I know, mate? I don't know anything.' "

At its best, Icke's method-poring over the text with a scholar's meticulousness but with a dramatist's freedom-has the rare effect of reshaping viewers' experience of a play with which they might have believed themselves familiar. Our understanding of Shakespeare's works has been formed as much by performance tradition as by the words on the page. In one of our conversations, Icke drew on the example of the so-called balcony scene in "Romeo and Juliet," which-as other observers have noted-makes no reference to a balcony at all. The tradition of positioning Juliet on one didn't begin until the eighteenth century. Icke told me, "As soon as you see a balcony, you're dealing with a production that probably hasn't read the play very carefully. To be faithful that way is to be profoundly unfaithful. I want that scene super-teen-age-set in her bedroom-and I want him in through the window, and she locks the door, and there's a bed. That's a much better scene. It's a much more 'Oh, God, are we really going to do this?' scene. They are both so anxious about it-are they married, and are the vows the right vows, and should he get out or should he come in? And it's only at the end of the scene that they get around to admitting that they love each other, because they are being so angsty."

The performance tradition of "Romeo and Juliet" is so strong, Icke asserted, that it drains the scene of any narrative or surprise: "You're just, like, 'Oh, here is the famous bit.' " Given that "Hamlet" is composed almost entirely of famous bits, re-examining what's actually on the page can be all the more unexpected. When I got home one evening from talking with Icke, and found my sixteen-year-old son writing a paper on "Hamlet" for English class, I e-mailed Icke the essay prompt: "'The usurping king is no simple villain but a complex, compelling figure.'" Icke wrote back, "Great question - but tell your

son from me that there is no usurping king in Hamlet. . . . Claudius seems to have been voted in fair and square (it is, after all, an elective monarchy)."

When weighing the question of how his "Hamlet" should be, Icke told me, he found a key insight in the advice that the Prince-who is himself a director and playwright, of sorts-offers to the Players: "Speak the speech I pray you as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue." Icke told me, "British theatre has interpreted that as a line meaning 'Speak the speech as I pronounced it to you before, in an unseen scene.' And it seems to me to be much more simple-that he is saying, 'Speak it to me as I was speaking to you. Just say it normally.' " Icke went on, "So much of Hamlet's advice to the Players is him going, 'Stop overacting. Just make it really conversational.' He says nothing about verse. He says nothing about rhyming couplets-even though the play he is talking about is incredibly formal in its verse, and really punches its rhymes at you, in a fairly medieval way. I had a strong sense that you could find all the beauty and emotional intricacy in the dialogue while making it feel like they talk like that all the time. It didn't have to be this ridiculous overdone exercise, like you're talking to some children who aren't listening."

There are dimensions of "Hamlet" that have ceased to be perceptible to a modern audience-that couldn't be conveyed at the most drearily pedagogical speed-but would have been rivetingly present to Shakespeare's contemporaries. Hamlet's speculation about whether the Ghost is truly his father's spirit returned from the dead, or whether it is an emanation of the Devil, sent to tempt him into evil, would have made a very different impression in a world in which the Church had, only a few decades earlier, written the medieval concept of purgatory out of its theology. "Different parts of the play light up at different times," Icke said. "And others go dark." In Hamlet's final soliloquy, he disparages his own inaction compared with the martial maneuvers of young Fortinbras, who commands an army to battle over a worthless patch of ground in Poland-"to my shame I see / the imminent death of twenty thousand men / that for a fantasy and trick of fame / go to their graves like beds." This moment has taken on a new resonance since the twenty-fourth of February, 2022.

"You try to be as honest as you can," Icke told me. "I am not making it for an audience in the fifteen-nineties. Even if it was one hundred per cent authentic, in terms of every stitch on every actor's body, and every intonation, what you can't change is the landscape inside my head. I am not thinking about Henry VIII making his own church. It is not what I bring into the theatre with me. It is not what I read on my phone before I switch it off for the play. There's a dishonesty, I think, in pretending that is possible. Because the most authentic thing that exists is the relationship between the actor and the audience."

Before there is an audience, though, there is just an actor and a director, together in a rehearsal room, working out in conversation how to speak the speech. At the Bishopsgate Institute, after Lawther had run through the soliloquy, Icke backed up to the lines "For in that sleep of death what dreams may come / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, / Must give us pause." The final words, Icke suggested, were a kind of self-command: " 'Must give us pause'-you're using it to stop the thought, and go, 'O.K. Think about that.' " Icke went on, "But it could also be it connects to what goes just before it-'What dreams may come?' It sounds almost threatening-like the dreams are going to come and stop you in your tracks. The problem is that death-sleep I've been talking about-what dreams are going to show up after we have fallen off the end of the universe?"

Lawther's expression was serious, concentrated, vulnerable. His face seemed haunted by Hamlet's knotty intellection as he turned his own ideas over in his mind. " 'What dreams may come / when we have shuffled off this mortal coil / must give us pause,' " he repeated.
"It's that 'pause' that stops the image," Icke suggested. "You go, 'Yeah, that's what I'm talking about. That's why people don't just kill themselves.' "

"It feels like the videotape suddenly runs backwards," Lawther said.
"Exactly," said Icke. "And it's also clear now, in a way that it wasn't before, that you aren't really talking about killing Claudius in any direct way. Because when you say 'take arms,' I think you are going to say, 'Take arms against Claudius,' and then it doesn't go that way."
" 'Take arms against Claudius and, by opposing, end him,' " Lawther said, his voice ironic.
"But that's kind of what you should be saying," Icke said.
"It is what I should be saying," Lawther agreed.
"This speech feels like it's got more to do with the first soliloquy than anything that happened to you last night in Elsinore," Icke said. "It feels like it picks up on 'If only the everlasting had not fixed / His canon against self-slaughter'-and it just unpacks that thought." He went on, "It's also weird because you don't go, 'Look, I know you are wondering whether I am going to kill my uncle.' You very much take the lead in what we are all going to think about. You don't seem at all embarrassed by going, 'O.K., guys-I've been thinking about suicide.' You don't project any shame."
"That's right," Lawther said. "Not yet."
"It's so weird, this play," Icke said. He reminded Lawther that this speech takes place just one day after Hamlet has seen his father's ghost. But the Prince is lost in his own plot. "None of what's coming next-Polonius, and then 'Oh, my God, Guildenstern! Hi, Rosencrantz!,' and then the Players-none of that takes any real account of the fact that you're supposed to be killing Claudius."
Lawther laughed softly.
So did Icke, who added, "It's almost like you're having the day you would have had anyway."