



SHAKESPEARE AND HAMLET

(R. Atkins as Blackadder, the editor & H. Laurie as Shakespeare)
1989

(Blackadder is looking through some papers. There's a knock at the door.)

Blackadder	<i>Come The door opens, and a man steps in.</i> Bill! Bill, good to see you. <i>They shake hands.</i>
Shakespeare	Sorry I was late – the traffic was a bitch!
Blackadder	Good to see you. Well, the play's going well, isn't it? Looks like we've got a bit of a smash on our hands.
Shakespeare	Well, it, er, seems to be OK, yeah.
Blackadder	They always seem to go for the ones with the snappy title: Shakespeare: 'Hamlet'. Perfect! Perfect.
Shakespeare	Act Three may be a bit long, I don't know...
Blackadder	Act Three may be a bit long... In fact, generally, I think we've got a bit of a length problem.
Shakespeare	Oh?
Blackadder	It's five hours, Bill, on wooden seats, and no toilets this side of the Thames.
Shakespeare	Yeah, well, I've always said the Rose Theatre is a dump, frankly. I mean, the sooner they knock it down and build something decent, the better.
Blackadder	Exactly. So that's why I think we should trim some of the dead wood.
Shakespeare	"Dead wood"?
Blackadder	Yeah, you know: some of that standup stuff in the middle of the action.
Shakespeare	You mean the soliloquies?
Blackadder	Yeah, and I think we both know which is the dodgy one.
Shakespeare	<i>getting upset</i> Oh? Oh? Which is "the dodgy one"?
Blackadder	Erm... "To be ... nobler in the mind ... mortal coil ..."; that one. It's boring, Bill. The crowd hates it — Yawnsville.
Shakespeare	Well, I don't know about that. It happens to be my favourite, actually.
Blackadder	Bill, you said that about the avocado monologue in 'King Lear', and the tap dance at the end of 'Othello'.
Shakespeare	Absolutely not! You cut one word of that, and I'm off the play.
Blackadder	Bill, Bill... the King has got his costume change down to one minute. Hamlet's out there ranting on about God-knows-what in that soliloquy of yours and Claudius is already in the wings waiting to come on with that very funny codpiece — waiting!
Shakespeare	<i>very upset; stands</i> All right, all right, you can just cut the whole speech altogether!
Blackadder	Bill, Bill, Bill... Why do we have to fight? It's long, long, long. We could make it so snappy...
Shakespeare	"Snappy"?
Blackadder	Yeah, you know: give it some pizzazz. How's it begin, that speech?
Shakespeare	<i>sits</i> "To be."
Blackadder	Come on, come on, Bill.
Shakespeare	"To be a victim of all life's earthly woes, or not to be a coward and take Death by his proffered hand."
Blackadder	There, now; I'm sure we can get that down!
Shakespeare	No! Absolutely not! It's perfect.
Blackadder	<i>preparing to write</i> How about "To be a victim, or not to be coward"?

Shakespeare	<i>shrugs</i> It doesn't make sense, does it! To be a victim of what? To be coward about what?
Blackadder	OK, OK. Take out 'victim'; take out 'coward'. Just start "To be, or not to be."
Shakespeare	You can't say that! It's gibberish!
Blackadder	But it's short, William, it's short! Listen, it flows: "To be, or not to be; that is the question." D'de, d'de de de, d'de d'de de de! OK?
Shakespeare	You're damn right it's the question — they won't have any bloody idea what he's talking about!
Blackadder	Well, OK, let's leave that and go on. "Blah blah blah blah blah, slings and arrows" — good! action; the crowds love it — "take up arms" — brilliant — "against those cursed doubts that do plague on man" — eugh... Getting very woolly there, Bill. Plague's a bit tasteless at the moment — we've had letters, actually. "...and set sail on a sea of troubles" — this is good: travel; travel's very popular. So let's just take out the guff and see what we've got. "...to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take up arms against a sea of troubles"! Good!
Shakespeare	I resign. <i>stands</i>
Blackadder	Bill, it's brilliant!
Shakespeare	It's absolute crap! What is he talking about? He's going to put on a bow and arrow and potter down to the seaside? This is Prince Hamlet, not King Canute! He <i>might as well</i> kill himself if that's the best idea he can come up with.
Blackadder	Creative thinking, Bill! Hamlet; perhaps he <i>should</i> top himself!
Shakespeare	In Act One?
Blackadder	Well, yeah, well, look we must think about bums on seats, Bill. Let's face it: It's the ghost that's selling this show at the moment. Joe Public loves the ghost; he loves the swordfights; he loves the crazy chick in the see-through dress who does the flower gags and then drowns herself. But no-one likes Hamlet — no-one.
Shakespeare	<i>disgusted</i> All right, then, I'll kill him off for you. <i>picks up paper and quill</i> Ermm... <i>reads</i> "Aye; there's the rub. To die, to sleep..." <i>writes</i> "Whoops! (Hamlet falls off the battlements)" <i>puts down paper and quill</i>
Blackadder	Bill, Bill, Bill; I can see, I can see you're annoyed. I'm sorry. Hamlet has his moments. The mad stuff is very funny. It really is hysterical. But all I'm saying, Shakey, is let's just shorten this one terribly dull speech.
Shakespeare	...and all I'm saying is no. You cut one word, and you can take my name off the credits.
Blackadder	All right. I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll trim this speech, and you can put back in those awful cockney gravediggers.
Shakespeare	The both of them?
Blackadder	Yeah.
Shakespeare	And the skull routine?
Blackadder	Yep — the whole sketch.
Shakespeare	All right, then; you've got a deal — and we'll see which one history remembers. <i>turns to leave</i>
Blackadder	Bill, I love you! <i>William Shakespeare exits</i>
Shakespeare	Temperamental git!