

GREAT
LAKES
THEATER

TEACHER PREPARATION GUIDE



DIAL “M” FOR MURDER

BY FREDERICK KNOTT

DIRECTED BY CHARLES FEE

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Winter 2015

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Dear Educator,

Thank you for your student matinee ticket order to Great Lakes Theater's production *Dial "M" for Murder* by Frederick Knott, which will be performed in the beautiful Hanna Theatre at Playhouse Square from February 27th through March 22th.

When murder calls...hang up! Deception, betrayal, passion and greed prove potent ingredients for a perfect mystery in this intense and darkly gripping thriller, famously filmed by Alfred Hitchcock. Ex-tennis professional Tony Wendice married his wife Margot for her money. Now he plans to kill her for the same reason, convinced that she is having an affair. When his precise murder plot goes awry, can he improvise an equally deadly plan B? The exciting ending of this psychologically suspenseful story, which has thrilled audiences for decades, will leave you breathless at the edge of your seat.

This guide is designed – through essays, discussion questions and classroom activities – to give students both an introduction to, and a point of entry for, a personal exploration of *Dial "M" for Murder*. We offer special thanks to Jodi Kirk for her outstanding contributions to this guide.

Great Lakes Theater is proud to provide you with the finest in classic theater and the necessary educational resources to support your work in the classroom. We are thrilled that you will be coming to see us and we welcome your input on how best to support your classroom preparation for our work. Please let us know what you think!

Sincerely,

Kelly Schaffer Florian
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A NOTE TO STUDENTS: WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATER



You may or may not have attended a live theater performance before. To increase your enjoyment, it might be helpful to look at the unique qualities of this art form — because it is so different from movies or video.

The live theatrical performance not only involves the actors on the stage; it is meant to involve you, the audience, in ways that film and television cannot. In truth, although you are sitting in an auditorium and the actors are on stage, there is very little separating the audience from the performers. How you react to the play *deeply affects* the actors. Something as seemingly trivial as whispering or unwrapping a candy bar can distract them and disrupt the mood and tone of their performance. Due to the important relationship between actors and audience members, there are certain, perhaps obvious, provisions of live theater we wish to call to your attention.

In the Hanna Theatre, it is important to know that the taking of pictures, either with or without a flash, is strictly prohibited. Also, it is essential that all electronic equipment, including cell phones, music players (even with headphones), alarm watches, etc.,

be completely powered off once you have entered the theatre. Even the glow from a silent cell phone (used for text messaging, or posting social network updates, for example) can be very distracting to fellow audience members, even if you try to mask it under your hand or an article of clothing. Our goal is to provide every person in the audience with the best possible theatrical experience, so we appreciate your respectful cooperation during the performance.

Other differences live theater provides: in film or video, the camera and editing define what we will see. In the theater, however, each of us works as a camera and editor, choosing his or her personal points of focus. And in the Hanna Theatre, you should know that often we do not use microphones. As audience members you'll need to actively listen and "tune in" to the sound of the unamplified human voice.

As for our lighting and scenery, it might surprise you to know that these are not necessarily meant to be realistic. In this production, for example, there are design elements that are abstract or metaphorical.

The theater's ability to focus on human experience — distilled through the dialogue and behavior of people on stage and enhanced by the scenery, costumes, lighting, music and dance — is a centuries-old tradition. Being part of the communal magic when performer and audience connect — whether at a baseball game, music concert or theater performance — cannot be duplicated.

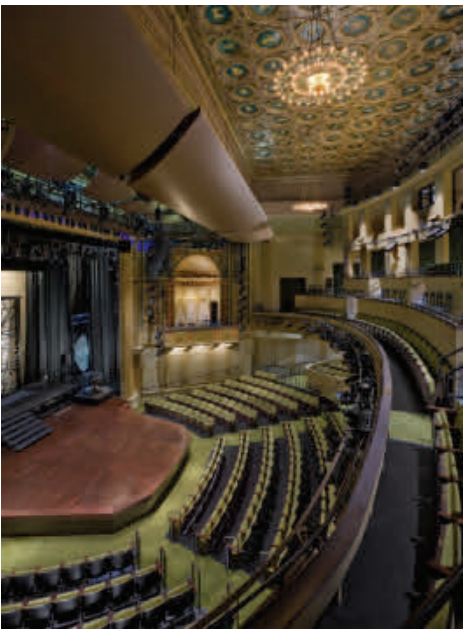
The performance you will see at Great Lakes Theater will happen only once. It is unique and personal. Though this play will be performed more than a dozen times, the performance you see belongs only to you.

We hope you enjoy it, and we'd like you to share your response with us.

GLT: OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE



Tom Hanks and fellow company member Bert Goldstein.



The beautifully renovated Hanna Theatre

Since 1962, Great Lakes Theater (GLT) has brought the world's greatest plays to life for all of Cleveland. In 1961, the Lakewood Board of Education president persuaded a Shakespeare troupe, led by Arthur Lithgow, to make Lakewood Civic Auditorium its home. The theater that opened its doors on July 11, 1962 as Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival presented six Shakespeare plays in rotating repertory. In exchange for free rent, the company provided student matinee productions. The repertory was expanded in 1965 to include non-Shakespearean classics as a result of an exchange of productions with Princeton's McCarter Theater. The Company outgrew its original home at Lakewood Civic Auditorium and, in 1982, made the move to the Ohio Theatre in PlayhouseSquare, launching the revitalization of downtown Cleveland's Theatre District.

In 2001 the Company was searching for a new Producing Artistic Director, and the Board sought a candidate with well-established business skills as well as artistic leadership. Charles Fee was selected for his commitment to Shakespeare and his reputation for building Idaho Shakespeare Festival into a highly successful regional theater. GLT recommitted itself to its founding core values: Shakespeare, rotating repertory and an acting company of the highest caliber. During Fee's tenure, the company has been recognized for its artistic excellence, winning the *Northern Ohio Live Magazine Award* for excellence in Theater in 2005 after three years of being a finalist, as well as *The Free Times Reader's Choice Award* for Best Performing Arts Group in 2006, and for eliminating the inherited accumulated net deficit of over one million dollars.

The Company has also been a revolutionary producing model unlike any other in America to create cost efficiency and enhance our artistic product. We now exchange our repertory productions with Idaho Shakespeare Festival (ISF) in Boise, Idaho and Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival (LTSF) in Nevada. This deep collaboration between independent producing organizations is a first in American theater. With this visionary model now fully in place, GLT, ISF, and LTSF are able to deepen the artistic quality of the work on our stages, share our production costs, maximize our resources, and provide nearly year-round employment to our resident company of artists.

Now, GLT has entered into a new phase, making the historic Hanna Theatre in Playhouse Square its home. The renovation of the Hanna Theatre, as well as the creation of GLT's first endowment fund, is part of our *Re-Imagine A Classic* Campaign to ensure GLT's future. Our new home in the Hanna features a hydraulically operated thrust stage, a first for this region, and innovative and intimate seating where no seat is farther than eleven rows from the stage. We believe that this extraordinary theater experience will revolutionize the way Northern Ohio experiences classic theater.

Great Lakes Theater is one of only a handful of American theaters that have stayed the course as a classic theater. With a plucky history of bucking economic trends to strive for and nurture the highest artistic quality, it remains a distinctive and significant cultural resource in an extraordinary American city.

WHY WE LOVE MYSTERIES



Edmund Wilson

By Margaret Hnat, Assistant Professor of English at Cuyahoga Community College

In some circles, the detective story has been dismissed as escapist fiction for the uneducated. In fact, American literary critic Edmund Wilson expressed his disappointment with the genre in a series of three essays published in *The New Yorker* magazine in 1944-1945. Wilson's criticisms of mystery stories are typical: They are formulaic, the characters are flat and contrived, the stories are pointless, and suspense is created merely because the reader wants to find out whodunit.

What makes Wilson's judgment of the genre so legendary is the bitterness with which he expresses his opinion. He describes Agatha Christie's writing as "...of a mawkishness and banality which seem to me literally impossible to read." Additionally, he describes the genre as "completely dead" and admits that he began "to nurse a rankling conviction that detective stories in general profit by an unfair advantage in the code which forbids the reviewer to give away the secret to the public — a custom which results in the concealment of the pointlessness of a good deal of this fiction and affords a protection to the authors which no other department of writing enjoys."



Agatha Christie

Despite Wilson's rancor, the genre continued to grow. At its height during what is dubbed the Golden Age of the detective story (the period between the two world wars), the genre still enjoys immense popularity today. One only need check out the mystery page on the *Goodreads* website or scour the web for the many reader and author blogs to gauge the enormity of its readership. In fact, *Publishers Weekly* reports that in 2012 e-books represented 24 percent of spending in the mystery/detective category and 35 percent and 37 percent of spending in paperback and hardcover mysteries, respectively. Additionally, Kristi Chadwick writes that in a limited 2013 survey of public libraries, *Library Journal* found that 55 percent of its respondents reported that mysteries were their most popular circulating genre in terms of e-books. The report also found that mysteries made up 24.1 percent of print collections.



P.D. James

What accounts for this genre's popularity? Many essays have been written to answer that very question. More than 50 years after Wilson's diatribe, Dartmouth professor G.J. Demko felt compelled to answer Wilson's criticisms, and in 2009 mystery author P.D. James published her book *Talking About Detective Fiction* which includes a response to the genre's naysayers. While Demko emphasizes reader engagement and reality of character and place, James takes the argument to its core: She asks, "And why murder? The central mystery of a detective story need not involve a violent death, but murder remains the unique crime and it carries an atavistic weight of repugnance, fascination and fear." When addressing the genre's so-called formulaic structure, James points out that sonnets are highly formulaic — and are not dismissed because of that traditional octave-sestet pattern.

But it's not just the puzzle, or as Wilson would put it, the "sleight-of-hand trick" which engages the reader. The murderers, says Demko, are "just like us." So are the victims and detectives. In the three main sub-genres of detective fiction, readers find



Margaret Maron



Sue Grafton



Tony Hillerman



William Kent Kreuger

characters from all walks of life. In the amateur, the private investigator, and the police procedural, authors create characters and social climates that not only engage readers but also allow insight into the human condition. For example, Margaret Maron's amateur sleuth Deborah Knot works within the conflicting attitudes of the Old South and the New South. Sue Grafton's private investigator Kinsey Millhone is not merely a tough female counterpart of the likes of Sam Spade. Instead, she wrestles within an environment beset with modern social ills from prostitution to government corruption to sexism. Tony Hillerman's police procedural series takes place on the Navajo reservation and explores Navajo traditions and culture. More recently, William Kent Kreuger's 2014 Edgar award winner for best novel, *Ordinary Grace*, is a coming of age story that some readers have compared to Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* because of its powerful themes and vivid, realistic characters and locale.

Detective fiction, including *Dial "M" for Murder*, (more thriller than mystery), rises above Wilson's charges of the pointlessness of the genre. According to P.D. James, the genre plays an important role in readers' lives. She states that the detective story's popularity stems from its ability to help us cope with the tension, anxiety, and responsibility that come along with daily life. They are especially popular when life poses such challenges when solutions seem futile. James writes, "And here in the detective story we have a problem at the heart of the novel, and one which is solved by human ingenuity, human intelligence and human courage. It confirms our hope that, despite some evidence to the contrary, we live in a beneficent and moral universe in which problems can be solved by rational means and order restored from communal or personal disruption and chaos."

Indeed, the problem at the heart of *Dial "M" for Murder* is solved with ingenuity, intelligence, and courage. And while the audience knows whodunit, we, along with Inspector Hubbard, are in a race against time to prove both means and motive. But it's not merely the suspense that keeps our attention. It's the characters, just like us, who find themselves in dire circumstances. The story is ultimately cathartic, and as James points out, ultimately reassuring.

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FREDERICK KNOTT: THE RELUCTANT WRITER



By Carly Higley, Utah Shakespeare Festival

For someone who received a substantial amount of fame and acclaim for his ingenious and unorthodox plots, Frederick Knott has a remarkably slim list of credits to his name. These plays and screenplays, however, were so successful that they allowed him to thrive in his beloved Manhattan for the last thirty years of his life, adding nothing further to his literary accomplishments (Tom Vallance, “Frederick Knott [<http://www.Independent.co.uk>, 26 December 2002]). As his wife told Douglas Martin of the *New York Times* in a 2002 interview, “He hated writing. He wrote only for the money” (20 December 2002, 15). It is extremely fortunate, then, that he was still in need of finances when he contrived the play and, later movie adaptation, *Dial M for Murder*, or we might not be enjoying it at this year’s Utah Shakespeare Festival.

Frederick Knott was born 28 of August 1916 in Hankow, China, the son of well-to-do Quaker missionaries (Elaine Woo, “Frederick Knott, 86” [*Los Angeles Times*, Obituaries, 22 December 2002]). During this time, the foundation was laid for his career with the stage when he and his sister Jean listened to records from Gillbert and Sullivan plays with Knott then staging his own versions in the family garden. At ten years of age his parents sent him back to England for formal education at the Quaker approved schools of Sidcott and Oundle, followed by four years at Cambridge from 1934 to 1938. During this time he played tennis for Cambridge and was by all accounts a gifted competitor. He would have competed at the most prestigious of all tennis tournaments, Wimbledon, had not World War II occurred (Vallance). As it was, he served Britain admirably in the Royal Artillery for the duration of the war (Woo).

After the war, he tried his hand at screenwriting for several years with little success until the simple sound of a gunshot became the muse for a masterpiece (Vallance). Knott later said in an interview: “I was always intrigued with the idea that somebody would plan a crime, and then you see that everything doesn’t turn out right. You can plan a murder in great detail and then put the plan into action and invariably something goes wrong and then you have to improvise, and in the improvisation you trip up and make a very big mistake”(Ronald Bergen, “Frederick Knott: Playwright and screenwriter preoccupied with the question of the perfect crime” [<http://www.TheGuardian.co.uk>, 16 January 2003]).

He spent the following eighteen months confined in a small “chalet” next to his parents’ estate in Sussex, purchased in 1948, doing very little but eating, sleeping, and writing about his idea (Bergen). Indeed, there were many days he spent entirely in pajamas where the only other soul he saw was his mother, when she would drop off meals (Vallance). Apparently, he wasn’t the only one intrigued by the idea of a planned murder gone awry because the success of the result, *Dial M for Murder*, continues to capture audiences over fifty years later. Amazingly, Knott was turned down seven times when he offered it to various producers, including August McLeod who was superbly confident that, “the play as a whole would cause little interest” (Martin). In 1952, just before Knott was about to accept that his screenplay was a failure, the BBC offered to produce it as a ninety-minute “television play.” The production enthralled audiences and caught the eye of a very shrewd producer, Sir Alexander Korda (Martin). Recognizing the big screen potential of the play, he persuaded Knott to sell the rights to him for a paltry £1,000 before selling it in turn to Warner Brothers for

£175,000 (Vallance). However, it was not all disappointment that Knott experienced during this time period. At a party following a Broadway performance, he met his future and lifelong wife, Ann Hillary, who later revealed, “I took one look at Frederick and was absolutely fascinated.” The feeling was mutual and they wed in 1953 (Vallance).

Meanwhile, Warner Brother’s entrusted the rights to *Dial M for Murder* to the skilled hands of Alfred Hitchcock, who entrusted Knott himself to write the screenplay. During the shooting of the movie, Knott stayed with Alfred Hitchcock and his family, and the two similar, scheming minds got along so well that a lasting friendship was formed (Vallance). In 1954 *Dial M for Murder* premiered at the cinema, and a legend was born.

Encouraged by his success, Frederick Knott tried his hand outside the suspense genre with the play, *Mr. Fox of Venice*, but to no avail; His gift was weaving sinister suspense stories, and all future theatrical success fit into that category, most notably the plays *Write Me A Murder* in 1961 and *Wait until Dark* in 1966 (Bergen). In 1967 *Wait until Dark* was made into a film starring Audrey Hepburn as a blind woman who destroys the lights in her house, leveling the field as she confronts three intruders (Bergen). The film was tremendously popular, and Audrey Hepburn received an Oscar nod for her performance (Vallance).

Frederick Knott had a mind that was a potential money pot. Maurice Evans, who played the lead in *Dial M for Murder* at Westminster Theatre in 1952, described him as “a particularly meticulous writer. The fascinating web of clues, counterclues, and red herrings that so intrigued theatre audiences is typical of the way his mind works. . . . Every detail of his plot is placed with the deadly accuracy of stroke in a championship tournament (Vallance).

The lucrative potential of his genius plot lines generated a demand for more stories of morbidly fascinating themes, but Knott had no desire to accommodate any request. No amount of money offered could change his mind. Though he had two complete plays already constructed in his head, he could not be induced to ever pen a word of them to paper (Woo). “He was perfectly happy the way things were,” related his wife (Vallance). Knott spent the last three decades of his life with his wife in New York enjoying the fruits of a few strokes of genius and the company of friends until his death on December 17, 2002 (Martin). Mrs. Knott described their life together as “a marriage as perfect as any I can imagine”(Vallance). Frederick Knott is survived by his wife and son, two grandsons, and a legacy of literary intrigue.



Frederick Knott and Grace Kelly on the set of *Dial "M" for Murder*, 1954.



Alfred Hitchcock in a *Dial M for Murder* (1954) - movie publicity still.



Alfred Hitchcock, Grace Kelly and Robert Cummings.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF OUR ADVERARIES

By Heidi Madsen, Utah Shakespeare Festival

In the words of Aristotle, “a man may wrong his enemies because that is pleasant; [but] he may equally wrong his friends because that is easy” (*Rhetoric* 1373, 3-5). However important the who and the how are to a story, it is the endlessly seductive why that is most imperative. Anyone may commit a crime; but it is the often hidden aspects of a situation, the psychological motivations behind the action, that are so complex and powerful. As Brian Boyd points out, this information catches our attention not out of some idle or even morbid curiosity, but because it is so strategic to our survival; “we need to understand the psychology of our adversaries,” because a predator can just as easily take the form of friend or foe (*On The Origin of Stories; Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* [Cambridge Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009] 281).

Though happily married for half a century, playwright Frederick Knott wrote two successful stage thrillers about husbands who put their wives in mortal peril—with one important difference: in *Wait until Dark*, the husband endangers his wife unknowingly; in *Dial M for Murder* the husband truly wants his wife dead. This husband, Tony Wendice, knows of his wife Margo’s attachment to another man; and, yet, his gruesome plan is not a lover’s crime of passion. In fact, if one were to classify *Dial M for Murder* as one of Georges Polti’s thirty-six dramatic plots, it would not be Murderous Adultery, or even An Enemy Loved, but most fittingly that bold number nine: Daring Enterprise.

Dial M for Murder is intricately plotted “with the deadly accuracy of a stroke in a championship tournament;” but, much of the character and story development occur in the back-story even before the opening scene (Evans, Maurice qtd. in *The Independent*, “Frederick Knott,” Thursday December 26, 2002, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/Frederick-knott-612029.html>). A retired tennis champion, Tony is accustomed to fanfare and posh living, but the salary for any professional athlete in the 1950s was not as sizable as it is today. Tony’s plan, then, is to “snap up” one of his female fans with a large bank account; he almost ties the knot with “a tubby Boston deb with five million dollars [but] finally settles for Margo and her ninety thousand pounds (18). The couple may have lived happily ever after, except that while Tony is away playing the grass courts in America, Margo falls for Max Halliday—a crime writer for an American weekly television series. Tony begins to worry what will happen if Margo leaves him. He agonizes, “All of these expensive tastes I’d acquired while I was at the top . . . big tennis had finished with me—and so, apparently, had my wife” (20).

According to Carolyn Wheat all of the basic ingredients of suspense fiction are found in the Fairy Tale. The hero, or heroine as is the case here, takes a journey which involves tests, enemies—even a brush with death. “Snow White tames the huntsman whose mission it is to kill her . . . and Gretel passes the ultimate test when she tosses the old witch into her own oven” (*How To Write Killer Fiction* [Santa Barbara, California: John Daniel & Company, 2003], 98). Not unlike these gentle maidens who possess no formal skills of defense, Margo Wendice will need to improvise in order to survive. On her journey she will face a type of huntsman (Captain Lesgate, aka Charles Alexander Swann, who was at Cambridge with Tony), engage in a deadly contest with a scarf and a pair of scissors, endure imprisonment and



Robert Cummings as Mark Halliday, Ray Milland as Tony Wendice and Grace Kelly as Margo Wendice in the 1954 movie of *Dial “M” for Murder*.

prosecution, and learn of Tony's treachery. Fortunately for Margo, in fairy tales "people or things that at first seem insignificant or powerless, can become the best friend a hero or heroine ever had" (Wheat, 101). Her old friend Max is visiting from the States.

Though Frederick Knott could not have anticipated the modern day obsession with dramatized forensics and criminal profiling, his character Max Halliday is a 1950s pioneer in the experimental world of television murder mystery. On paper, Max "kills" one person per week—deciding who, how, and why by randomly drawing from three corresponding hats. Max is no professional detective like Holmes or Perot, but he does sort through crime scene potpourri like a player in a game of Clue, and criminal combinations such as Mrs. Peacock, in the library with a candlestick are his area of expertise. He believes in the perfect murder—on paper. "And I think I could plan one better than most people," he innocently brags to Tony on the evening of the planned murder, "but I doubt if I could carry it out" (32). Why? "Because in stories things turn out as the author plans them to. . . . In real life they don't—always" (32).

Frederick Knott's debut play *Dial M for Murder* opened in London in the summer of 1952, and in New York a few months later with slight changes to the script (for example, the M in the title referred to a British phone exchange which would be meaningless to an American audience). It was performed in thirty countries, and in 1954, a screen version adapted by Knott and directed by Alfred Hitchcock was released. Such an unemotional study of the art of murder and the darker impulses which motivate one human to harm another seems tailor-made for Hitchcock.

Additional motifs that may have attracted the great director to this work include characters who play tennis and swirl brandy; but, one of the most "Hitchcockian" features in Knott's play is the staircase—a symbol employed in German expressionism to denote emotional identity, or the landscape of the mind. A disciple of expressionist film, Hitchcock used the staircase to illustrate different emotions, to heighten suspense, and to convey movement either toward or away from danger. In *Dial M for Murder*, it is the place (on the fifth step) where Tony hides the key to his apartment and it is a crucial site of plot reversal and recognition.

Up until the moment of the awful death scene, the audience knows that Tony is in control and that Margo has little chance of survival; we watch even as Tony listens to the sounds of the horrid struggle, and then her choking voice in the phone; Margo is not dead. What makes *Dial M for Murder* so compelling is not the fact that a man carries out a plot to murder his wife, but because when everything in his seemingly perfect plan A fails, he is nearly able to extemporize his way to freedom with a brilliant plan B. As he asks himself "Well, what do I do next?" Tony's composure and cleverness are so great that an audience might even begin to overlook his faults and cheer on his escape; but he never truly develops into a likable villain, or even a bad guy we love to hate such as Count Fesco from Wilkie Collins' great detective story *The Woman in White*, or the admirably terrifying Mrs. Danvers in *Rebecca*. It is not too disappointing, then, when Margo and Max—with some help from Inspector Hubbard of Scotland Yard—manage in the end to "push Tony into his own fire."



PRELIMINARY COSTUME DESIGN & RESEARCH

BY KIM KRUMM SORENSON



Dial M For Murder - Great Lakes Theater, 2015



Tony I.1, I.2

BESTWAY 2325 3" CABLE-STITCH PULLOVER CLUB COLOURS CAN BE ADDED



Dial M For Murder - Great Lakes Theater, 2015



Tony I.3

Dial M For Murder - Great Lakes Theater, 2015



Tony II.1

Dial M For Murder - Great Lakes Theater, 2015



Max II.1



Dial M For Murder - Great Lakes Theater, 2015



Max I.1

PRELIMINARY SCENIC DESIGN & RESEARCH

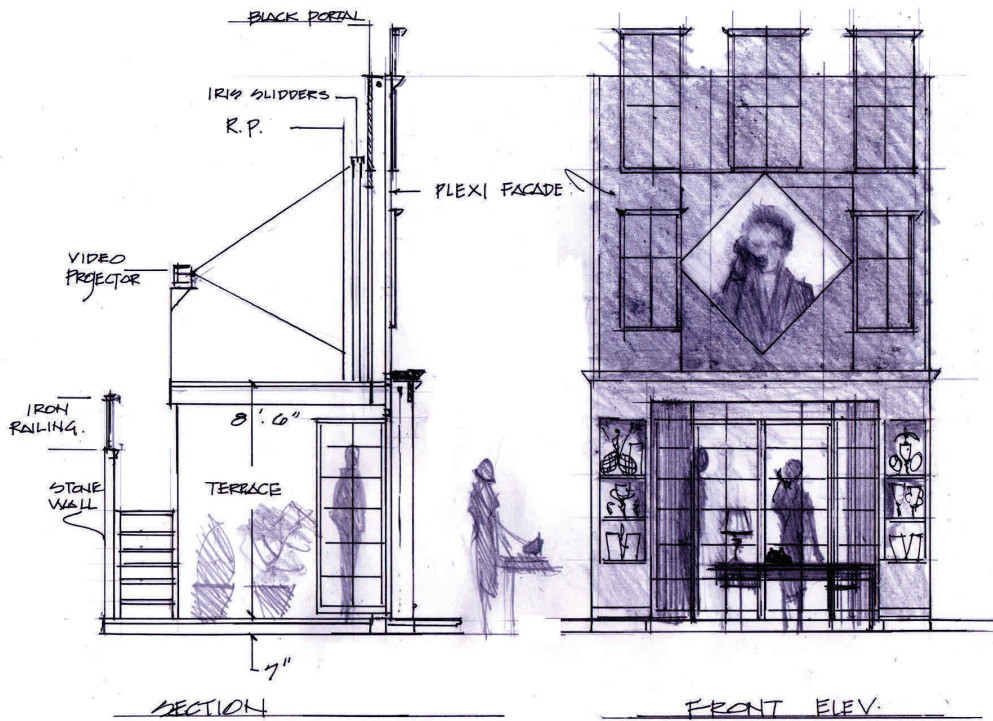
BY RUSSELL METHENY



Photos of the model.



DIAL 'M' CENTER STAGE FACADE & SECTION VIDEO PROJECTION



Scenic design research.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: PRIOR TO ATTENDING THE PERFORMANCE

1. What elements are needed to create a good mystery? What role does suspense and surprise play in good story telling?
2. What is your favorite TV drama or mystery? What makes it compelling to watch?
3. What are the tell tale qualities of anti-hero? Who is your all-time favorite anti-hero? Why?
4. Who is your favorite detective? What makes them great?
5. Define evil? Who decides what is right and what is wrong? Is morality an innate quality or is something that we are taught? What, if any, are universal moral laws? What role does good and evil play in our understanding of morality? What pushes people to act on their baser instincts? Does everyone possess a dual nature? If so, what determines our core nature and what controls our behavior/actions?
6. Is there such a thing as a “perfect” crime? What does it feel like when a “sure fire” plan to get away with something blows up in your face?
7. What role does deception and betrayal play in your everyday life? When, if ever, is it okay to lie or misrepresent the truth? What is the worst lie you ever told? How did you get caught?
8. Have you ever been so overcome with a powerful emotion, such as jealousy or ambition, that it affected your behavior or relationship with others? What does it feel like to be out of control? What does it take to rein in or mask those feelings? When — if ever — is it appropriate to express or act upon our so called 'dark' side?
9. Define ambition. What drives you? Have you ever stepped over the line of what you thought was right or moral to get what you wanted? What feelings surfaced after that questionable act? Was obtaining your desire worth the cost? Explain your answer.
10. What motivation keeps you from straying into the realms of deception, lies and betrayal — a personal moral code, societal or religious guideposts, guilt, the fear of getting caught or the threat of parental, personal or legal consequences?
11. What makes you a good or a bad liar? Who in your life is the most gullible and believes just about any story you tell? Who never fails to sniff out the truth? What is the worst lie you have ever told? How did you get caught? What were the consequences?
12. Have you ever amended an action or ended a relationship because you knew that you were hurting or betraying someone you loved or cared about? In order to redeem yourself and repair trust, is it necessary to confess and own up to your actions or is it best to let what is unknown remain unknown? Explain your answer.
13. What does it take for you to truly trust someone? When are your suspicions ignited? Once betrayed, is it

possible to rebuild trust? How? What does it take for you to truly forgive and move forward?

14. Do you think there is a recipe for success when creating a commercially successful play or film? What formulas have you noted that Hollywood and Broadway producers use again and again?
15. What do you imagine it takes to produce a suspenseful thriller on stage? What makes you jump out of your seat? What clues do you look for when watching a mystery? What does it take for you to personally lose yourself in the story and journey of the characters? Is this type of transcendence more difficult at a live performance? Why? How does the experience of witnessing live performance differ from going to the movies or sitting in front of the TV?

HOW TO WRITE A REVIEW

MORE HOW AND LESS WHAT

A theater review is not a book review, you do not need to summarize what happens. Provide the necessary background so the reader knows the name of the play and the basics of what kind of play it is, and then move into your commentary. You do not need to explain WHAT the play is, instead write about HOW successfully it was presented.

THE ACTOR NOT THE CHARACTER

You can hate the decisions a character makes, but how well did the ACTOR perform the role? Was their behavior appropriate to the part as written? Feel free to share your opinions, comparing or contrasting their work with other actors with whom you are familiar.

WHAT IS DIRECTION?

Maybe you have heard of a “director” in theater or film, but do you know what they do? It is not a director’s job to tell the actors how to say every line, but they are the person responsible for creating the general mood and concept for the production. What was your impression of the production as a whole? Was it too funny for a serious play? Or not amusing enough for a comic play? Use words to reflect back to the director how successful the production is as a whole.

DON’T FORGET THE DESIGN

The set you see and the sound design you hear are also unique to this one production of this play. Describe what you see and hear, but also be sure to make clear how successful these designs are to telling the story of the play.

IN CONCLUSION ...

While it is not necessary to give a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” your concluding sentence should summarize your impression of the production as a whole.

THEATER REVIEWS IN THE NEW MEDIA

Reviews in news websites may be 1000 words, they may be as brief as 300 words. Can you write a one-page review? Can you write a 100 word review, to post on Facebook? Do you think you could create a 140-character review that sums up the production for posting on Twitter?

A sample review written by a student follows this page.

— *David Hansen, Education Outreach Associate*

A SAMPLE REVIEW WRITTEN BY A STUDENT

“Gambit”: More Poetry Than History — Mark Wood

If Aristotle was correct when he said that poetry “is a higher thing than history,” then “Royal Gambit,” which opened Friday night at Pentacle Theater, is, I suppose, on the right track.

For those who were expecting a representational treatment of the life of England’s Henry VIII, “Royal Gambit” was a shock, if not a disappointment. Those who sought poetry got it, although of a very dogmatic and simplistic sort.

This unusual, highly presentational play by Hermann Gressieker, directed by Ed Classen, is an indictment of modern man as a ruthless opportunist. The Tudor king is a representative of a rationalizing, shifty society which has become “superior to the highest” while “wallowing in the depths.”

As Henry uses the banners of “reason” and “humanism” to obtain then dispose of his six wives, so modern man uses them for his own pleasure and glorification, uses them to wage war in the name of peace, to hate in the name of love.

Such is the grim theme pleasingly presented by a company of seven actors, who performed their roles energetically, if unevenly. The presentational acting style employed here is difficult to perfect. It should be theatrical, yet believable; aimed at the head, yet acceptable to the heart.

Louise Larsen was a standout as Catherine of Aragon, Largely because she utilized this presentational approach and was not afraid of open theatricality. Her flamboyant stage presence, which needed to be toned down in her recent role in “Last of the Red Hot Lovers,” found full vent here.

Henry's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, was portrayed by Gale Rieder, who quickly became an audience favorite. Her thick accent was letter-perfect and her direct humor was a welcome contrast to the bitter satire of the rest of the play.

The other four actresses—Kathy Stratton, Marcia Engblom, Polly Bond and Patricia Sloan—each had their exceptional moments. However, they generally seemed tied to more conventional, representational acting styles.

Ron Fox was superb in the role of Henry. Tuxedoed, leering with the look of a demonic marionette, the vacant stare of a deranged orator, Fox dominated the stage fully, commanding both in voice and stage presence.

The technical elements of the play were more than adequate. Musical accompaniment was appropriately sparse and simple.

At one point the play, King Henry roared, “In my realm I decide what constitutes tragedy!” Ironically, Gressieker strips modern man not only of his possibilities as a tragic figure worthy of any sympathies at all. In the final moments of the play, Catherine of Aragon announces the death of modern man and the birth of a new era. It is a scene of great hope, but it is not as profound as her earlier pronouncement to her husband that “the ways of the world are not so cut and dried!”

For my own part, I wish that “Royal Gambit’s” statement were not so cut and dried. By making man out to be such a simple monster the play defeats its own purposes and turns poetry into scathing dogma, which is probably even less interesting than, say, history.

<http://faculty.chemeketa.edu/jrupert3/eng105/Annrev.html>

ACTIVITIES

TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE

Have your students sit in a circle — you can divide the group into smaller groups if necessary (no less than 8 or so) — and have each student tell two truths about themselves and one “lie.” After everyone in the circle has shared their experiences, go back and try to assess which two experiences were the truth and which was the lie. Have students try to identify how they made their assessment. Was it based on previous knowledge, body language, absurdity of the event, etc.? The real purpose of this exercise is to get the class talking about how we share information – of what we hide, what we embellish and what we authentically share. Is not sharing the details of an experience or encounter a type of deception? Have you ever embellished a story or experience so much or so frequently that the true reality of what happened gets blurred? Brian Williams, noted anchor for the NBC nightly news, has just been suspended for bending “his” truth and/or recounting of an event. Weigh in on this topic. Was it right to suspend him without pay? Was his ownership and apology of this misrepresentation enough to clear his name?

MAGIC MYSTERY TOUR

Have your students watch a movie from the thriller/slasher/horror/mystery genre or an episode from a classic TV detective/mystery series (*Murder She Wrote*, *Columbo*, *The Hardy Boys*, *Nancy Drew* or even *Scooby Doo*) or a current forensic/cop/investigation favorite like *NCIS*, *Perception*, *Criminal Minds*, *Castle*, or *Law and Order* to examine the ways stories of murder and horror are shared. Note common threads, character types, plot twists and the way suspense and possibly retribution is woven through out. Split the class into small groups and have them work together to conceive the next pop thriller that will garnish both critical acclaim and commercial success. Once plot lines have been shared and reviewed, have each group write and perform a key scene from their script.

METAPHOR, IDENTITY BINGO & SOCIAL ATOMS

In the play *Dial “M” for Murder*, most of the plot line centers on the audience’s perception of who we think the main characters are and what we imagine they are capable of doing. The following exercises explore the idea of public vs. private selves, perception and stereotypes. These activities provide a fun and often thought-provoking entry into the many ways we are perceived by others and can open up dialogue about how literary characters – in books, theater and film – are seen, understood and evaluated. Try to steer the conversation toward the way character traits can be revealed and/or hidden.

- **CLASS DETECTIVE & CHARACTER METAPHOR**

Have one student volunteer to be the “detective.” Have the detective go outside the room, while the rest of the class chooses the “suspect.” The detective re-enters the room, prepped to ask a series of questions. He/she will elicit clues about the “suspect” by interrogating the class utilizing questions/metaphors (i.e. If the suspect were a car, a color, a sound, an instrument, etc.). The class will answer the detective’s questions

based on their best understanding of the chosen classmates' overall essence. The detective has three chances to solve the mystery.

- **IDENTITY BINGO**

Have every member in the class submit a sheet with three things that no one or only a few people they know may know about them. Construct a grid that includes one selection from each member in the class. Next class period, hand out the sheets and have the class mingle and determine which selection belongs to which student. The first student to complete either a horizontal, vertical or diagonal line on the grid calls out "BINGO" and wins the game. The objective of this exercise is to get your students talking to each other and perhaps learning and sharing about themselves in a new way.

- **SOCIAL ATOMS & DEBRIEFING**

As a group, list the stock characters that are repeatedly seen in thrillers mysteries, cop shows, slasher films, etc.. What qualities are generally associated with each prototype?

One of the qualities of any great mystery comes from the introduction of various suspects. Many times we misconstrue the full essence of various individuals because of mislabeling, stereotyping and false assumptions. Sometimes, our first impressions or gut impressions of people are right on the money. The following exercise examines the ways in which we tend to group and/or categorize ourselves and others. Have the class get into a circle. Students are asked to remain in the circle until the facilitator calls out a quality, skill or personality trait. Once the quality or activity has been called out, each student is asked to move and physically connect to the person that they feel best represents that quality, skill or personality trait. They will be asked to silently note how the groupings change with each question and to silently take in where they fit in to the social "atom." Take your time when calling out the various personality traits and/or qualities. Remind participants that THIS IS A NON-VERBAL EXERCISE!

Please move to the person who is most likely to:

- *help you figure out your math homework
- *score the winning basket in a championship game
- *protect you in a street fight
- *keep a secret
- *bake the best cookies
- *make you laugh out loud
- *cause trouble
- *break someone's heart
- *shop the longest and find the best bargain
- *talk themself out of any situation
- *give the best advice about dating
- *become America's next reality TV star
- *to get married and have eight kids
- *graduate with honors from Harvard
- *rat someone out
- *to make a million dollars as a successful CEO
- *skip school

-
- *read 15 books during summer break
 - *have a summer fling
 - *go sky diving
 - *talk back to their teacher
 - *play on the playground
 - *get a piercing
 - *run a marathon
 - *cry at a movie
 - *get in an argument with their parent
 - *get in an argument with a stranger
 - *write a poem
 - *dance in public
 - *hide their feelings
 - *lie for a friend
 - *speak out

DISCUSSION: Were you surprised by some of the qualities you were identified with? Do people's perceptions of who you are match with your sense of who you are? What are some of the things people would be surprised about if they really knew you? Can you change people's perceptions of who you are? Have you ever changed the way you act or behave to match other people's perceptions? How do labels and perceptions — whether based on personal truths or stereotypical generalizations — shape who you are? How did your perceptions of the various characters assist in determining fully understanding and appreciating the play?

WRITING PROMPTS/JOURNAL ENTRIES

A LOVE NOTE AND OR SCENE

Write the letter that Max wrote to Margot. Take your time, for it not only will highlight their back story, it must also be a letter worthy of keeping. Write the Max and Margot's break-up scene that took place a year before the events of the play take place.

A LITTLE R & R (Research & Relate)

Have students break into small groups and investigate the biography and works of our most beloved and successful mystery writers – past and present – such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Stephen King, Sue Grafton, James Patterson, Michael Connelly or Gillian Flynn and share their findings with the class. Form a mystery/thriller reading group that meets to share and discuss each month's (or quarter or semester) selection.

WRITING PROMPTS:

“Marrying for money is like...”

“The best revenge happens when...”

“Betrayal feels like...”

“In order to lie, you have to...”

“I feel guilty when...”

“I would never reveal ...”

“I will never confess that I...”

“I feel anxiety when...”

“Movies are most suspenseful when...”

“It creeps me out when...”

“Jealousy provokes...”

“Love inspires...”

“Forgiveness happens when...”

“Redemption is possible if...”

“In order for trust to exist....”

“When I misrepresent the truth, I always....”

“Good liars...”

“My parents never believe me when I....”

“I get suspicious when...”

“In order to get away with a deceitful plan or action, you have to...”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: AFTER ATTENDING THE PERFORMANCE

1. What were your favorite aspects of this production? How did the visual elements — the set, costume and lighting design — aid in the telling of this classic thriller? What actor do you believe had the most fully realized characterization? What was it about his or her performance that drew you in?
2. *Dial “M” for Murder* has many surprising plot twists. What surprised you the most? Why do we like to be scared? Was there a moment in the play when you screamed or were startled? When did it occur? What role does shock and surprise play in the creation of a good mystery? How did those moments of shock aid in your enjoyment of GLT’s current production?
3. What were your first impressions of Max, Margot and Tony? What did you think about Tony’s relationship with Margot? What was not being said about Margot and Max’s relationship?
4. In what way, if any, does Max’s profession — a writer for murder mysteries — set up and later impact the play? Max states that there are five important motives for murder:

Why is the motive for killing. You’ve got to have a motive you know. There are only five important ones. Fear – jealousy – money – revenge – and protecting someone you love. I just write them down on pieces of paper and pick one out of the hat.

Do you agree? In your opinion, what is Tony’s true motivation?

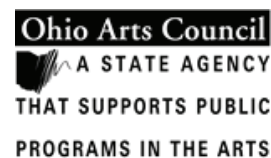
5. The first scene of the play provides a great deal of exposition and sets up not only the relationship and history of the three main characters but lays out important information that we, the audience, may need to figure out the mystery. What plot elements stood out and either guided or mislead you in the unfolding of the failed murder attempt, the blackmailing and killing of Lesgate, the entrapment of Margot and the unraveling of Tony’s lies and cover ups?
6. There is an old saying, “*the devil is in the details.*” How did playwright Frederick Knott use this adage to his advantage in shaping this story? How did the production and/or actor choices highlight some of those details?
7. The play was written in the early 1950s. How does the era of the piece influence the way you understand and think about the characters and their relationships? How did the actors present themselves differently? How would you define the “style” of the piece? Think of other period pieces – movies and/or television shows – that depict a certain time in history (*i.e. Mad Men, The Tudors, That 70’s Show, Pride and Prejudice, Shakespeare in Love*). Other than costumes, how do the actions of the performers shape our understanding of a particular era? What struck you about performers in the GLT production?
8. Do you think Margot and Tony ever loved one another? Explain. Explore the connection between Margot

-
- and Max. Why did she end the relationship? What do you suppose was in the letter? Why did she keep it?
9. Do you think Margot truly trusted Tony? When do you believe that Max becomes suspicious of Tony's actions and intentions? What does it feel like to be fooled by someone's outward appearance? What makes Tony a believable liar?
 10. Do you think Tony ever cared for Margot? What do you believe bothers Tony most about Margot's entanglement with Max? Is it ever possible to reestablish trust once it has been eroded and doubt sets in? How do you imagine Tony's actions would have changed if Margot had simply told him the truth about her relationship with Max? Would love set the stage for forgiveness and healing? Have you ever been betrayed by someone you thought you loved and/or trusted? What, in your view, is unforgivable? Where do you, personally, draw the line?
 11. In your mind, what was the fatal flaw in Tony's seemingly well thought out plan?
 12. What was your reaction to Tony's blackmailing the murder for hire, Lesgate? In what ways were you surprised by the ease in which Tony was able to improvise his way through his initial encounter with Inspector Hubbard? What is it like to have to cover up something? In what way, if any, did the actor portraying Tony reveal his underlying frustration and anxiety? What does it take to remain cool in moments of crisis?
 13. What are your thoughts about Inspector Hubbard? What makes him a great detective? What did you think of his plan to trap and convict Tony?
 14. What do you imagine happens to the characters after the final scene? How does Tony fare in jail? What happens to Max and Margot? What personality traits and/or character flaws shape and color their future? Is redemption or forgiveness part of the scenario? Discuss.
 15. What is different about thrillers on stage and the movies? In what ways did GLT's current production engage your modern sensibilities? *Dial "M" for Murder* was made into a movie in 1954. It was directed by the great Alfred Hitchcock and featured film luminaries Ray Milan and Grace Kelly. Do you think the script is worthy of a remake? If you were a Hollywood producer, who would you cast in the main roles? Much of the play is dated, including the title and main plot point of calling a home land line from a pay phone as well as other references such as mending silk stockings and latch keys, etc. If you were given the task of contemporizing the script, what changes would you make?

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ABOUT GREAT LAKES THEATER



Charles Fee, Producing Artistic Director

The mission of Great Lakes Theater, through its main stage productions and its education programs, is to bring the pleasure, power and relevance of classic theater to the widest possible audience.

Since the company's inception in 1962, programming has been rooted in Shakespeare, but the company's commitment to great plays spans the breadth of all cultures, forms of theater and time periods including the 20th century, and provides for the occasional mounting of new works that complement the classical repertoire.

Classic theater holds the capacity to illuminate truth and enduring values, celebrate and challenge human nature and actions, revel in eloquent language, preserve the traditions of diverse cultures and generate communal spirit. On its mainstage and through its education program, the company seeks to create visceral, immediate experiences for participants, asserting theater's historic role as a vehicle for advancing the common good, and helping people make the most joyful and meaningful connections between classic plays and their own lives. This Cleveland theater company wishes to share such vibrant experiences with people across all age groups, creeds, racial and ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds.

The company's commitment to classic theater is magnified in the educational programs (for both adults and students) that surround its productions. Great Lakes Theater has a strong presence in area schools, offering an annual series of student matinees and, for over 30 years, an acclaimed school residency program led by teams of specially trained actor-teachers.

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greatlakes theater.org