

**92NY SPRING 2023 LITERARY ARTS PROGRAM**

**DANEZ SMITH, ROBIN COSTE  
LEWIS, JAMES IJAMES AND  
SAHEEM ALI**

**STUDENT RESOURCE GUIDE**



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The 92nd Street Y, New York  
1395 Lexington Avenue  
New York, NY 10128

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# WELCOME NOTE

“The job is to make the poem the poem and to make it have a life whether it’s on the page or being performed.”—**Danez Smith**

“You know, we all know what it means to be sung to. And poetry is very close to that. So, I wanted to do it that way, so I could keep my reader close. I didn’t want to put distance between me and my reader.”—**Robin Coste Lewis**

“*[FAT HAM]* wants to be the most flavorful thing that somebody could experience.”—**James Ijames**



What do these writers have in common?

They believe that the act of reading one’s poetry aloud brings them closer to you, which is what they desire.

They investigate history.

They examine Black joy and culture and explore the experience of being alive and living in a world often dangerous for Black people.

They want you to “write the shit out of that poem so that way when somebody reads it they can have the experience that you intended them to have.”<sup>1</sup>

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1 “Danez Smith on Poems as Conversations.” *The Creative Independent*, <https://thecreativeindependent.com/people/danez-smith-on-poems-as-conversations/?q=green>.

They care deeply about friendship – that “first & cleanest love” – and celebrate it in their work.<sup>2</sup>

They read a lot and talk with their friends about what they are reading.

They think about artistic lineage and ancestry and pay homage to “a tree of writers” who came before them – writers like James Baldwin, Lucille Clifton, Toni Morrison, and August Wilson.<sup>3</sup>

They want you to know that words matter – and for you to get pleasure in finding the language to describe the world as you are experiencing it and the world you want to build.

You will be reading work by these writers through your participation in a literature program produced by The 92nd Street Y, a cultural and community center in Manhattan, where for 80 years writers and artists have been coming to share their work with New Yorkers and more recently with audiences from around the world. You will be tuning in to live events at 92NY to hear these writers, as well as theater director Saheem Ali, read from and talk about their work. We hope you will have the chance to generate some of your own writing and submit it for inclusion in a digital anthology published by 92NY. Your English teacher signed you up for this program. You didn’t have a say in it, but we hope you’ll be happy that your teacher made this choice. We’re so glad to have you as a part of our community!

-92NY Center for Arts Learning & Leadership Team

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2           Sehgal, Parul. “‘Homie,’ a Book of Poems That Produces Shocking New Vibrations.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 7 Jan. 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/07/books/review-homie-danez-smith.html>.

3           “Living in the Process: An Interview with Danez Smith.” *Nashville Review*, 1 Dec. 2018, <https://as.vanderbilt.edu/nashvillereview/archives/15083>.

# 92NY LIVE EVENTS

**Tuesday, March 7, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM**

Poets Danez Smith and Robin Coste Lewis read and discuss their poetry and take questions from the student audience.

**Monday, April 3, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM**

Playwright James Ijames and theater director Saheem Ali discuss the making and production of Ijames's play *FAT HAM* – a reinvention of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* – and take questions from the student audience.

# DANEZ SMITH



Danez Smith is a celebrated poet, writer and performer from St. Paul, Minnesota. Smith is the author of three poetry collections including *HOMIE* and *Don't Call Us Dead*, which circle their Black, queer, and HIV positive status.<sup>4</sup> Among the most acclaimed poets of their generation, Smith is celebrated for their “deft lyrics, urgent subjects, and performative power.”<sup>5</sup> Smith’s poetry explores themes of identity, intersectionality, intimacy, trauma, and healing to examine and unravel “the stories we tell about ourselves and each other, and imagine how we can tell those stories differently.”<sup>6</sup>

Smith was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, and was raised by their mother and grandparents in the Selby neighborhood of St. Paul. As a child, Smith had “had a very difficult relationship with reading.” They said, “I couldn’t read for the first few years of elementary school. In third grade, I had a teacher who told me if I knew how to read, I could read video-game magazines.”<sup>7</sup>

With that spark of inspiration, Smith discovered their love of reading, specifically poetry: “There were books that stood out for me as a kid,” Smith said. “‘The Skin I’m In’ [by Sharon G. Flake] — I read that book over and over. I think I started to become a bigger reader as I started to get into poetry — Toni Morrison and James Baldwin and even Mark Twain.”<sup>8</sup> In high school, Smith continued

4 “Danez Smith.” Smith College, [www.smith.edu/academics/poetry-center/danez-smith](http://www.smith.edu/academics/poetry-center/danez-smith).

5 *Don't Call Us Dead* | Graywolf Press. 5 Sept. 2017, [www.graywolfpress.org/books/dont-call-us-dead](http://www.graywolfpress.org/books/dont-call-us-dead).

6 Jiang, Kehan. “Imagining Better Gods: An Interview With Danez Smith.” *Public Books*, 30 Nov. 2018, [www.publicbooks.org/imagining-better-gods-an-interview-with-danez-smith](http://www.publicbooks.org/imagining-better-gods-an-interview-with-danez-smith).

7 Hertzell, Laurie. “Impassioned Twin Cities Poet Danez Smith Is a Troubadour for Our Turbulent Times.” *Star Tribune*, 15 Sept. 2017, [www.startribune.com/impassioned-twin-cities-poet-danez-smith-is-a-troubadour-for-our-turbulent-times/444227783](http://www.startribune.com/impassioned-twin-cities-poet-danez-smith-is-a-troubadour-for-our-turbulent-times/444227783).

8 Ibid.

to immerse themselves in writing and began performing their poetry: “I’m a poem nerd. Some people binge-watch a season of something, some people learn everything they can about sonnets for three hours.”

It was in college that Smith started to think seriously about a career in the arts as a First Wave Urban Arts Scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where they earned their BA.<sup>9</sup> College also provided a community where Smith found language that reflected their identity: “[In college] I got to interact with a lot of trans folks and a lot of gender-nonconforming folks and genderqueer and gender-fluid folks, and I think through my beautiful friendships and interactions, I started to find language that described how I felt inside a little more.”<sup>10</sup>

Two years after graduating college, Smith published their debut poetry collection, *[insert] boy* (YesYes Books, 2014) – a deeply personal exploration of the body, gender, race, and violence – which earned the Kate Tufts Discovery Award and the Lambda Literary Award.<sup>11</sup> Their second collection, *Don’t Call Us Dead* (Graywolf Press, 2017), was a finalist for a National Book Award, making Smith the first nonbinary poet to be nominated. In this fierce and evocative collection of poems, including “Dear White America,” Smith centers the Black queer body in their confrontation of everyday violence and police brutality in an America “where every day is too often a funeral and not often enough a miracle.”<sup>12</sup>

Smith’s latest book, *HOMIE* (Graywolf Press, 2020), is a critically-acclaimed “anthem about the saving grace of friendship. Rooted in the loss of one of Smith’s close friends, this book comes out of the search for joy and intimacy within a nation where both can seem scarce and getting scarcer.”<sup>13</sup> Of the collection, Parul Sehgal of *The New York Times* writes:

I’d like to invent or order up new adjectives to describe the startling originality and ambition of Smith’s work [...] Each poem feels like a maze designed to take the poet and the reader to some new destination, some new understanding. Smith applies shocks to the language, twists tenses at will. Nouns spring into verbs [...] The word ‘poem’ becomes an act of force.<sup>14</sup>

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9 Poetry Foundation. “Danez Smith.” *Poetry Foundation*, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/danez-smith](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/danez-smith).

10 *Danez Smith: A Poet Finding Freedom Through Language* | Wisconsin Alumni Association. [www.uwalumni.com/news/danez-smith-a-poet-finding-freedom-through-language](http://www.uwalumni.com/news/danez-smith-a-poet-finding-freedom-through-language).

11 Poetry Foundation. “Danez Smith.” *Poetry Foundation*, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/danez-smith](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/danez-smith).

12 *Don’t Call Us Dead* | Graywolf Press. 5 Sept. 2017, [www.graywolfpress.org/books/dont-call-us-dead](http://www.graywolfpress.org/books/dont-call-us-dead).

13 *Homie* | Graywolf Press. 21 Jan. 2020, [www.graywolfpress.org/books/homie](http://www.graywolfpress.org/books/homie).

14 Sehgal, Parul. “‘Homie,’ a Book of Poems That Produces Shocking New Vibrations.” *The New York Times*, 7 Jan. 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/01/07/books/review-homie-danez-smith.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/07/books/review-homie-danez-smith.html).

Throughout their career, Smith has stayed true to their roots in spoken word, captivating audiences across the US and internationally with their performances, and earning awards and nominations including the 2011 Individual World Poetry Slam finalist. Smith is also committed to helping young artists find their voice: Smith taught briefly in St. Paul's public schools after graduating college and also served as the festival director for the Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Slam in 2014.<sup>15</sup>

Smith is a founding member of The Dark Noise Collective, a “multiracial, multi-genre collective featuring some of the most exciting, insightful, and powerful spoken word artists performing today” who have made it their mission to rework and rewrite the standards of the literary world.<sup>16</sup>

Smith currently lives in Minneapolis near their people.

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15 Poetry Foundation. “Danez Smith.” *Poetry Foundation*, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/danez-smith](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/danez-smith).

16 Mijares, Natasha. “The Dark Noise Collective: A Profile.” *F Newsmagazine*, 4 July 2019, [fnewsmagazine.com/2016/04/the-dark-noise-collective-a-profile](http://fnewsmagazine.com/2016/04/the-dark-noise-collective-a-profile).



# ROBIN COSTE LEWIS

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Robin Coste Lewis is an American poet, artist, and scholar whose first collection, *Voyage of the Sable Venus*, won the National Book Award for Poetry in 2015. Simultaneously vulnerable and fierce in her poetry, Lewis is also “an astute cultural critic, alert to the complexities of race and the Black female voice.”<sup>17</sup>

Lewis was born in 1964 in Compton, California. At a very young age, she moved with her mother and father to the nearby suburbs of Carson, where “the sounds of Saturday morning were merengue and Creole and the crinkling of newspaper in her parents’ bed.”<sup>18</sup> In her poem “Frame,” which reflects on her childhood, she writes about her mother ordering books that “pretended the world was prettier than it was: ‘So that I could see a photograph of an uncommon colored body — besides a burnt body, or a bent body, or a bleeding body, or the murdered body of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’”<sup>19</sup>

Lewis credits her upbringing in Los Angeles and “all of the diverse manifestations of Blackness that took root here”<sup>20</sup> to her ongoing interest in the lineage of language, the body, and Black culture in her work: “‘Language is the bones of our existence,’ says Lewis, who describes her roots

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17 “Robin Coste Lewis: Poetry and Literary Author, Speaker | PRH Speakers Bureau.” *Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau*, 25 Apr. 2019, [www.prhspeakers.com/speaker/robin-coste-lewis](http://www.prhspeakers.com/speaker/robin-coste-lewis).

18 “A Door to Robin Coste Lewis’s Los Angeles.” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 24 Apr. 2016, [lareviewofbooks.org/article/a-door-to-robin-coste-lewiss-los-angeles](http://lareviewofbooks.org/article/a-door-to-robin-coste-lewiss-los-angeles).

19 Fleishman, Jeffrey. “Voices of the City: Robin Coste Lewis’ Fierce and Arresting Poetry Has Its Roots in Compton.” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 Sept. 2017, [www.latimes.com/books/la-ca-jc-robin-coste-lewis-voices-20170928-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/books/la-ca-jc-robin-coste-lewis-voices-20170928-story.html).

20 “A Door to Robin Coste Lewis’s Los Angeles.” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 24 Apr. 2016, [lareviewofbooks.org/article/a-door-to-robin-coste-lewiss-los-angeles](http://lareviewofbooks.org/article/a-door-to-robin-coste-lewiss-los-angeles).

as Afro-Creole. ‘Identity as a fluid thing. Culture as a fluid thing. I’m not interested at all in saying what Black ain’t because Black culture and Black diasporas are scattered all over the world and it’s such a beautiful thing. I feel like if we fix Black culture, we’ll stop looking for it and stop finding it. I always want to keep looking.’<sup>21</sup>

It was in part her love of language that prompted Lewis to save money from her high school job to move to New York City at age 17, where she landed an internship at the iconic Kitchen Table Press, an activist feminist publisher founded by and for women of color: “My job there was to put books in a box — it just so happens that when I arrived, the book just so happened to be *Home Girls* [A Black Feminist Anthology] [...] This production work behind the scenes was my fortunate entry into the world of being a writer.” It was at Kitchen Table that Lewis met and attended readings by iconic writers, including Audre Lorde. These early experiences in the literary world inspired Lewis to pursue a degree from Hampshire College, where she compared African and South Asian diasporic literature and earned her B.A. in 1989.<sup>22</sup>

Lewis was teaching at Wheaton College in Rhode Island and writing fiction when she was called home to Los Angeles after the death of her maternal grandmother, Dorothy Mary Coste Thomas Brooks. Under her grandmother’s bed, Lewis discovered “a suitcase containing hundreds of photographs—some in black-and-white, some in color, some posed, others candid—that were a record not only of Lewis’s large extended family but of worlds that had vanished, of decisive moments that had come and gone during the Second Great Migration, of which Lewis’s family, which originated in Louisiana, had been a part. It was unclear who had taken the photographs, but, by collecting the images and storing them together in that suitcase, Brooks had created a kind of narrative. It fell to her granddaughter to place it within the larger history of humanity.”<sup>23</sup>

This discovery initiated a creative journey of over two decades, though one that was marked by personal tragedy early on: a terrible accident in 2001 that caused extensive brain damage. Doctors told Lewis that she wouldn’t be able to write more than one line a day, so she “worked on a line every day in her mind,”<sup>24</sup> prompting a transition from writing prose to poetry. This process led to her debut poetry collection, *Voyage of the Sable Venus and Other Poems*, a breathtaking meditation on the themes of race and desire in representations of the Black female figure throughout history.

21 Fleishman, Jeffrey. “Voices of the City: Robin Coste Lewis’ Fierce and Arresting Poetry Has Its Roots in Compton.” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 Sept. 2017, [www.latimes.com/books/la-ca-jc-robin-coste-lewis-voices-20170928-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/books/la-ca-jc-robin-coste-lewis-voices-20170928-story.html).

22 Als, Hilton. “Robin Coste Lewis’s Family Album.” *The New Yorker*, 19 Dec. 2022, [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/12/26/robin-coste-lewis-family-album](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/12/26/robin-coste-lewis-family-album).

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

Both deeply personal and vastly expansive, the collection weaves “Lewis’ family history into a wider trajectory from ancient Egypt to present-day [...] New York City and New Orleans.”<sup>25</sup>

Her most recent book, *To The Realization of Perfect Helplessness*, marks the journey that began in her grandmother’s house. The collection “pushes the limits of language and image,” utilizing the family archive and centering Black intimacy to retell and reframe the often whitewashed history of race, migration, and the Black diaspora.<sup>26</sup> Of the collection, Kevin Young of *The New Yorker* writes:

*To the Realization of Perfect Helplessness* is interested in ancestry and other types of relationships, including those between photography and testimony, between work and pleasure, between ancient migrations and the Great one, between exploration and exploitation. (The book’s middle section is a long poem about the Black Arctic traveler Matthew Henson, a quotation from whom names the collection.) Its achievement is cosmic and sonic, realizing in its black pages the connection of the photo album to the record album, rendering poems and photos, the fleeting and the immortal, kin once again.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to her published collections, Lewis’s work has appeared in various journals and anthologies, including *The Massachusetts Review*, *Callaloo*, *The Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review*, *Transition*, and *VIDA*. Lewis holds a PhD in Poetry and Visual Studies from the University of Southern California, an MFA in poetry from New York University, an MTS in Sanskrit and comparative religious literature at Harvard’s Divinity School, and is the writer-in-residence at the University of Southern California. The recipient of a 2019 Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellowship and a 2019 Guggenheim Fellowship, she was the 2019–2022 poet laureate of Los Angeles. Lewis currently lives in New York City.<sup>28</sup>

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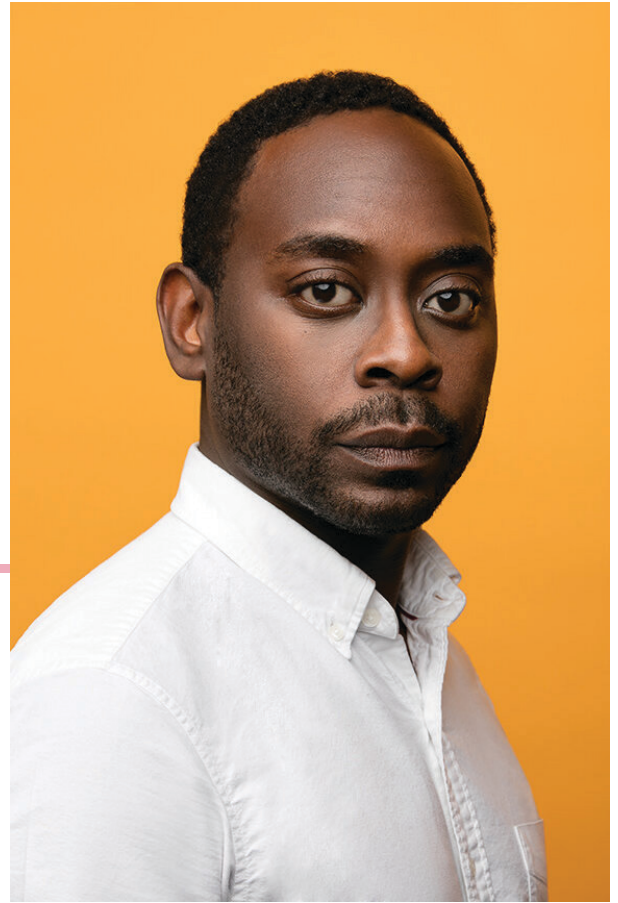
25 Poets.org - Academy of American Poets. “Voyage of the Sable Venus and Other Poems.” *Academy of American Poets*, [poets.org/book/voyage-sable-venus-and-other-poems](https://poets.org/book/voyage-sable-venus-and-other-poems).

26 Young, Kevin. “‘To The Realization of Perfect Helplessness,’ by Robin Coste Lewis.” *The New Yorker*, 21 Nov. 2022, [www.newyorker.com/magazine/poems/11/28/to-the-realization-of-perfect-helplessness](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/poems/11/28/to-the-realization-of-perfect-helplessness).

27 Young, Kevin. “‘To The Realization of Perfect Helplessness,’ by Robin Coste Lewis.” *The New Yorker*, 21 Nov. 2022, [www.newyorker.com/magazine/poems/11/28/to-the-realization-of-perfect-helplessness](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/poems/11/28/to-the-realization-of-perfect-helplessness).

28 Poets.org - Academy of American Poets. “Robin Coste Lewis.” *Academy of American Poets*, [poets.org/poet/robin-coste-lewis](https://poets.org/poet/robin-coste-lewis).

# JAMES IJAMES



James Ijames is a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, director and educator. His plays and devised works “examine how class and gender intersect with race, often drawing inspiration from historical texts, the media, and stories of his own family.”<sup>29</sup>

Ijames was born in Bessemer County, a small town in North Carolina. Ijames was heavily involved in arts from a young age, performing in band and choir in school. Ijames comes from a family of artists, performers and storytellers: “I come from a family of people who [...] take on the characteristics, the voice of the people they’re telling the story about. That feels utterly natural to me – to tell a story by embodying the truth of the thing that you’re trying to get at.”<sup>30</sup> It was Ijames’ grandmother who inspired him to write his first play when he was thirteen years old: “They did it at church and I saw people say the things that I wrote. I was like, ‘Oh. This is amazing.’ It never was something that I thought that I could do for a living until I got to college and thought I kind of want to do this.”<sup>31</sup>

Ijames was pursuing his interest in theater at Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA, when his professor recommended he audition for a production of *Once on This Island*. Ijames then went on to receive an MFA in Acting from Temple University in Philadelphia. When asked about his transition from performing to writing, Ijames said, “I think I’m a really different writer because I’ve acted for so long. Actors think about texts differently – character and stage directions really different from the

29 “Fellows Friday: Q&a With Playwright James Ijames.” *The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage*, 25 Oct. 2018, [www.pewcenterarts.org/post/fellows-friday-qa-playwright-james-ijames](http://www.pewcenterarts.org/post/fellows-friday-qa-playwright-james-ijames).

30 Jessica Bedford. “James Ijames on ‘Fat Ham,’ the South, and Embodying the Story.” *Southern Review of Books*, 12 July 2021, [southernreviewofbooks.com/2021/05/04/fat-ham-james-ijames-interview](http://southernreviewofbooks.com/2021/05/04/fat-ham-james-ijames-interview).

31 Ibid.

way that someone who's been a playwright their whole career thinks about these things. I always lead from curiosity because that's where actors lead from. [...] My writing gives people the planks to build whatever they want to build."<sup>32</sup>

After graduating from Temple University, Ijames stayed in Philadelphia, where he built a vibrant creative and professional network: Ijames was a founding member of Orbiter 3, Philadelphia's first playwright producing collective, and is the co-artistic director of The Wilma Theater. His plays have also been produced across the country, including at The National Black Theatre (NYC), Steppenwolf Theatre (Chicago, IL), Shotgun Players (Berkeley, CA), and The Public Theater (NYC).

Ijames was the 2022 Pulitzer Prize in Drama recipient for his most recent play, *FAT HAM* – a funny, poignant work that deftly transposes *Hamlet* to a family barbecue in the American South to grapple with questions of identity, kinship, responsibility, and honesty.

Juicy is a queer, Southern college kid, already grappling with some serious questions of identity, when the ghost of his father shows up in their backyard, demanding that Juicy avenge his murder. It feels like a familiar story to Juicy, well-versed in Hamlet's woes. What's different is Juicy himself, a sensitive and self-aware young Black man trying to break the cycles of trauma and violence in service of his own liberation. From an uproarious family barbecue emerges a compelling examination of love and loss, pain and joy.<sup>33</sup>

*FAT HAM* had its world premiere in a streamed production at The Wilma Theater in 2021 and then appeared at The Public Theater from May through July 2022, in a run of live performances directed by The Public's Associate Artistic Director Saheem Ali.

Ijames performed an abridged version of *Hamlet* in college, which sparked the idea to reframe the play, centering the Black experience and bringing the source text "a little closer to my experience by putting it in the mouths of people that look like me and sound like me, that have my rhythms and eat the kind of food that I grew up eating."<sup>34</sup> When asked why he set the play at a barbecue, Ijames said: "I knew that setting it in that space meant that there was the potential for a lot of things to happen. People play spades, get engaged, get into very intense arguments about who made what

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32 Ibid.

33 "FAT HAM." *The Public Theater*, [publictheater.org/productions/season/2122/fat-ham](https://publictheater.org/productions/season/2122/fat-ham). Accessed 22 Jan. 2023.

34 Paulson, Michael. "James Ijames on Winning a Pulitzer and Making 'Hamlet' a Comedy." *The New York Times*, 10 May 2022, [www.nytimes.com/2022/05/09/theater/james-ijames-fat-ham-drama-pulitzer.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/09/theater/james-ijames-fat-ham-drama-pulitzer.html).

dish and love on each other at barbecues. [...] I grew up having the same sort of anticipation about a barbecue as I did about Christmas morning because I knew the aunts and uncles and cousins were going to be together; there was going to be a real family community created.”<sup>35</sup>

Ultimately, *FATHAM* is a deeply personal retelling of the classic play: “The rhythms of this group of people is like the rhythms of my family. [...] My sister was amazingly funny. She had a comeback for anybody in any situation that was both biting and hilarious at the same time. I’ve never had that as a person in my everyday life. I’ve only been able to create that on a page. That’s a part of why the things in the play are funny because that’s what you have to do, you know? It’s the thing that you do to heal, the thing you do to release the tension in your body that can kill you.”

Ijames lives in South Philadelphia.

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35 *TDF Stages: A Juicy Interview With Pulitzer-winning “Fat Ham” Playwright James Ijames.* [www.tdf.org/articles/2877/A-Juicy-Interview-with-Pulitzer-winning-Fat-Ham-Playwright-James-Ijames](http://www.tdf.org/articles/2877/A-Juicy-Interview-with-Pulitzer-winning-Fat-Ham-Playwright-James-Ijames).

# SAHEEM ALI



Saheem Ali is a New York-based director of plays and musicals, with an emphasis on new work and plays that contemporize and expand Shakespeare.<sup>36</sup> Throughout his career, Ali has been celebrated for creating full-bodied productions that balance spectacle and naturalism, and “ask challenging questions about identity, and, lately, the responsibility of citizenship.”<sup>37</sup>

Ali was born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya. He developed a love of the arts from a young age, but, before the age of 15, the only live performances he had seen in Kenya were “acting skits in [his] high school assembly hall and comedy shows on the government-sponsored television network.”<sup>38</sup> That year, Ali traveled with his father – an airline pilot – to London, where he convinced him to buy a ticket to a production of *Grease*. In a reminiscence published in *The New York Times*, Ali compares experiencing the show to “sitting in a wind tunnel. [...] All the emotions were supersized, the dancing was electric, the singing was stupendous, the actors were unbelievable. I was in heaven. I didn’t want it to end.”<sup>39</sup>

Back in Nairobi, Ali couldn’t stop thinking about *Grease* and decided he had to reproduce it. With the support of his friends and neighbors – who donated their time and money to the production – Ali directed, choreographed, designed and starred in his very first production: a “very makeshift, highly illegal, passion-fueled Nairobi premiere of *Grease*.”<sup>40</sup>

36 “Saheem Ali.” *National Endowment for the Arts*, 21 June 2022, [www.arts.gov/stories/podcast/saheem-ali](http://www.arts.gov/stories/podcast/saheem-ali).

37 *What Should We Do?* [www.whatshouldwedo.com/blog/director-saheem-ali](http://www.whatshouldwedo.com/blog/director-saheem-ali).

38 Ali, Saheem. “‘Grease’ in a Nairobi High School: Saheem Ali on His First Time Directing.” *The New York Times*, 15 Feb. 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/02/15/theater/grease-in-a-nairobi-high-school-saheem-ali-on-his-first-time-directing.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/15/theater/grease-in-a-nairobi-high-school-saheem-ali-on-his-first-time-directing.html).

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

After high school, Ali emigrated from Kenya to the United States to attend college at Northeastern University in Boston, MA, where he earned a BA in Theater. Ali then moved to New York City to earn an MFA in Directing from Columbia University. Over the next decade, Ali launched a vibrant career directing and workshopping new plays and staged readings all over the city and beyond including at Playwrights Horizons, Atlantic Theater, Playwrights Realm, Roundabout, New York Stage & Film and PEN World Voices.

In 2014, Ali conducted a workshop of Dominique Morisseau's *Facing Our Truth* at The Public Theater. Over the years, The Public Theater (home to Shakespeare in the Park) became an artistic haven for Ali, where he has directed various Shakespeare adaptations, including *Twelfth Night*, *Merry Wives*, and a four-part radio play presentation of *Richard II*. Ali's deep love and appreciation of Shakespeare began when he was a teenager:

“What speaks to me in [Shakespeare's] plays, is the human condition and the human experiences. [...] My first Shakespeare was in Kenya. I was in a production of *Romeo and Juliet* when I was a teenager. It was an all-Black company, so it wasn't imbued with a sense of elitism or colonialism or [being] white. I entered Shakespeare with a company of people of color, and now that just goes hand in hand. So, whatever the connotations are, I strongly believe in dismantling the barriers for people having an appreciation for Shakespeare, whether it's because they feel they aren't smart enough or haven't studied him or because they aren't white. All these barriers are manufactured, so I made it part of my mission, whenever I work with Shakespeare, to show that it doesn't matter who's embodying the characters. Because, at its essence, what they're going through, we all go through as human beings.”<sup>41</sup>

In 2020, Ali was named Associate Artistic Director at The Public. Commenting on his new role, Ali said, “I've been an ardent admirer of The Public since I first immigrated to this country from Kenya, with the dual dream of becoming an artist and an American citizen. I'm absolutely thrilled to be calling it my new artistic home.... As a theater community, we must continue to ask what we can do better and consider the ways in which we have been inadvertently but effectively complicit in the tenets of white supremacy and anti-Blackness.”<sup>42</sup>

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41 Raymond, Gerard. “Joy in the Park: A Conversation With Director Saheem Ali About Merry Wives.” *Slant Magazine*, 23 July 2021, [www.slantmagazine.com/theater/saheem-ali-interview-merry-wives-shakespeare-in-the-park](http://www.slantmagazine.com/theater/saheem-ali-interview-merry-wives-shakespeare-in-the-park).

42 “Off-Broadway's Public Theater Taps Saheem Ali and Shanta Thake as Associate Artistic Directors.” *Playbill*, 16 Dec. 2021, [playbill.com/article/off-broadways-public-theater-taps-saheem-ali-and-shanta-thake-as-associate-artistic-directors](http://playbill.com/article/off-broadways-public-theater-taps-saheem-ali-and-shanta-thake-as-associate-artistic-directors).

In 2021, Ali embarked on a magnificent “occasion to celebrate Blackness”<sup>43</sup> when he teamed up with writer James Ijames to present his Pulitzer Prize-winning play *FAT HAM* to live audiences for the first time, reinventing Shakespeare’s masterpiece to create what *The New York Times* calls “a hilarious yet profound tragedy smothered in comedy.”<sup>44</sup> This spring, Ali will make his Broadway directorial debut when *FAT HAM* premieres at American Airlines Theatre.

Ali is a Usual Suspect and former Directing Fellow at New York Theater Workshop, SDC Sir John Gielgud Fellow and Shubert Fellow. He has been featured in *American Theatre*, *The New York Times*, and *The Lark Blog*. He currently lives in New York City.

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43 Phillips, Maya. “‘Fat Ham’ Review: Dismantling Shakespeare to Liberate a Gay Black ‘Hamlet.’” *The New York Times*, 27 May 2022, [www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/theater/fat-ham-review.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/theater/fat-ham-review.html).

44 Ibid.



**DANEZ SMITH**

# my president

today, i elect jonathan, eleven & already making roads out of water  
young genius, blog writer, lil community activist, curls tight  
as pinky swears, black as my nation i trust the world in his tender  
blooming hands, i trust him to tell us which rivers are safe to drink  
& which hold fish like a promise

& i elect eve ewing, who i know would ms. frizzle the country  
into one big classroom where grandmas finger paint  
the national budget & uncles stand around smoking blacks  
plotting on stars for our escape she could walk to the podium  
at her inauguration & say, *the future is now*, & we'd all marvel  
at the sun & moon looping the sky like a gif as the cars learned  
to fly & our skin grew bulletproof

& colin kaepernick is my president, who kneels on the air  
bent toward a branch, throwing apples down to the children & vets

& rihanna is my president, walking out of global summits  
with wine glass in hand, our taxes returned in gold  
to dust our faces into coins

& my mama is my president, her grace stunts  
on amazing, brown hands breaking brown bread over  
mouths of the hungry until there are none unfed

& my grandma is my president & her cabinet is her cabinet  
cause she knows to trust what the pan knows  
how the skillet wins the war

& the man i saw high kicking his way down the river?  
he is my president

& the trans girl making songs in her closet, spinning the dark  
into a booming dress? she too is my president

& shonda rhimes is my president

& nate marshall is my president

& trina is my president

& the boys outside walgreens selling candy  
for a possibly fictional basketball team are my presidents

& the bus driver who stops after you yell wait! only twice  
is my pres

& the dude at the pizza spot who will give you a free slice  
if you are down to wait for him to finish the day's fourth prayer  
is my president

& my auntie, only a few months clean, but clean  
she is my president

& my neighbor who holds the door open when my arms  
are full of laundry is my president

& every head nod is my president

& every child singing summer with a red sweet tongue is my president

& the birds

& the cooks

& the single moms especially

& the weed dealers

& the teachers

& the meter maid who lets you slide

& the cab drivers who stop

& the nurse's swollen feet  
& the braider's exhausted hands  
    & the bartender  
    & beyoncé  
    & all her kids  
        & the rabbi  
  
    & the sad girls  
  
        & the leather daddy who always stops to say good morning  
  
& the boy crying on the train & the sudden abuela who rubs his back  
& the uncle who offers him water & the drag queen who begins to hum

o my presidents!  
my presidents!  
my presidents!  
my presidents!

show me to our nation  
my only border is my body

i sing your names  
sing your names  
your names

my mighty anthem

# from “acknowledgments”

you save me half a bag of skins, the hard parts, my fav, dusted orange with hot

o

you say we can't go to the bar cause you're taking your braids out

i come over, we watch madea while we pull you from you

o

you make us tacos with the shells i like & you don't

o

i get too drunk at the party, you scoop my pizza from the sink with a solo cup, all that red

o

you, in the morning, bong water grin, wet chin

o

you, in the lawless dark, laughing like a room of women laugh

at a man who thinks his knowledge is knowledge

o

‡

i text you & you say, *i was bout to text you, bitch*

o

you cook pork chops same way i do, our families in another city go to the same church

o

you, rolling a blunt, holding your son, is a mecca

O

you invite me out for drag queens on the nights i think of finally [ ]

O

you pull over in Mississippi so i can walk a road my grandfather bled on

O

you gave me a stone turtle, it held your palm's scent for a week

O

‡

i call your mama mama

O

you request like a demand, *make me some of that mango cornbread*

i cut the fruit, measure the honey

O

you & you & you & you go in on a dildo for my birthday

you name it drake, you know me

O

a year with you in that dirty house with that cracked-out cat was a good year

O

at the function, i feel myself splitting into too many rooms of static

you touch my hand & there i am

O

*do you want to be best friends?*

a box for yes, a box for maybe yes

O

‡

did our grandmothers flee the fields of embers so we could find each other here?

O

friend, you are the war's gentle consequence

O

i am the prison that turns to rain in your hands

O

you, at my door the night my father leaped beyond what we know

O

the branches of silence are heavy with your petal

O

you smell like the milk of whatever beast i am

# undetectable

soundless, it crosses a line, quiets into a seed  
& then whatever makes a seed. almost like gone  
but not gone. the air kept its shape. not antimatter  
but the memory of matter. or of it mattering. it doesn't  
cross my mind now that it whispers so soft it's almost  
silence. but it's not. someone dragged the screaming boy  
so deep into the woods he sounds like the trees now.  
gone enough. almost never here. daily, swallowed  
within a certain window, a pale green trail on the tongue  
the pale green pill makes before it's divvied among  
the ghettos of blood, dissolves & absolves  
my scarlet brand. ritual & proof. surely science  
& witchcraft have the same face. my mother  
praises god for this & surely it is his face too.  
regimen, you are my miracle. this swallowing  
my muscular cult. i am not faithful to much.  
i am less a genius of worship than i let on.  
but the pill, emerald dialect singing the malady

away. not away. far enough. for now.

i am the most important species in my body.

but one dead boy makes the whole forest

a grave. & he's in there, in me, in the middle

of all that green. you probably thought

he was fruit.

# little prayer

let ruin end here

let him find honey

where there was once a slaughter

let him enter the lion's cage

& find a field of lilacs

let this be the healing

& if not let it be

# from “summer, somewhere”

if you press your ear to the dirt  
you can hear it hum, not like it's filled

with beetles & other low gods  
but like a tongue rot with gospel

& other glories. listen to the dirt  
crescendo a kid back.

come. celebrate. this  
is everyday. everyday

holy. everyday high  
holiday. everyday new

year. every year, days get longer.  
time clogged with boys. the boys

O the boys. they still come  
in droves. the old world

keeps choking them. our new one  
can't stop spitting them out.



**ROBIN  
COSTE  
LEWIS**

**AN EXCERPT FROM**

***TO THE REALIZATION OF PERFECT HELPLESSNESS***

Lately, every morning, after a night  
of lucid insomnia, my first thought is always  
the same: Fourteen billion years—

*our planet began fourteen billion years ago.*

I just lie there.

Thinking.

Presenting

Baby Robin Kelly Lewis  
Born at White Memorial  
On 10/15/64 Time 8:06 PM.  
Weight 7 Lbs. 7 Ozs.

My Parents

Barbara +  
Henry Lewis



Then I move—slowly—forward,  
millennium by millennium, trying  
to see everything

that has taken place until  
I arrive at the present moment—me  
lying in my bed.

Lately, I think about all of the other humans—  
now extinct—whose DNA spirals  
inside of our own DNA.

Then I remember  
that we will one day—soon—be extinct, too.  
*Fourteen billion years.*

I am terrified by the idea  
of my own death, but my cells scoff  
at the idea of four paltry *centuries*.



Sometimes, instead of going  
forward, I try to go farther back—  
beyond fourteen billion years.

I try fifteen billion, sixteen  
billion, sixty billion—long before  
our planet was ever created.

Sometimes, the small girl in me wonders  
if all of our universes are a roux roiling inside  
a large stone cauldron,

inside the warm midnight-blue  
kitchen of the infinite Black Sorceress  
alive inside my cells.



I have been  
    thinking about you  
        again today,  
  
as I do—  
    so often—think of you,  
        wondering  
  
if people can see the sky  
    of our childhood  
        the way we still see (the sky)  
  
whenever we think  
    of each other.  
        Well, not see, but feel—  
  
the way  
    every feeling  
        has a trillion eyes.



# Summer

Last summer, two discrete young snakes left their skin  
on my small porch, two mornings in a row. Being

postmodern now, I pretended as if I did not see  
them, nor understand what I knew to be circling

inside me. Instead, every hour I told my son  
to stop with his incessant back-chat. I peeled

a banana. And cursed God—His arrogance,  
His gall—to still expect our devotion

after creating love. And mosquitoes. I showed  
my son the papery dead skins so he could

know, too, what it feels like when something shows up  
at your door—twice—telling you what you already know.

# Art & Craft

I would figure out all the right answers  
first, then gently mark a few of them wrong.  
If a quiz had ten problems, I'd cancel  
out one. When it had twenty, I'd bite my tongue

then leave at least two questions blank: \_\_\_\_\_.

A *B* was good, but an *A* was too good.

They'd kick your ass, call your big sister  
*slow*, then stare over your desk, as if you'd

snaked out of a different hole. Knowing  
taught me—quickly—to spell *community*  
more honestly: *l-o-n-e-l-y*.

During Arts and Crafts, when Miss Larson allowed

the scissors out, I'd sneak a pair, then cut  
my hair to stop me from growing too long.



**JAMES**  
**IJAMES**

# CAST OF CHARACTERS

**JUICY** is thicc. 20-21, Black. He's beautiful. He is lonely. He is smart. A kind of Hamlet.

**TEDRA** is Juicy's mother. 45-50, Black. She is a good mother. A kind of Gertrude.

**REV** is Tedra's husband. 45-50, Black. Her dead ex-husband's brother. Pig farmer and pit master. Electric. A kind of Claudius. Same actor as PAP.

**OPAL** is one of Juicy's only friends. 19-20. Black. She loves Ham and worries about him. A kind of Ophelia.

**LARRY** a boy that is attracted to Juicy. 21-23. Black. A marine. Trying to heal from PTSD. Has a secret. Awkward. A kind of Laertes.

**RABBY** is Larry and Opal's mother. 40-45. Black. Tedra's friend. Semi-churchy but honestly she just wanna drink and praise the Lord. A kind of Polonius.

**PAP** is the Ghost of Juicy's father. Appears 45ish. Black. Was in prison for killing someone cause their breath stank, til he got shanked on the way to dinner. A kind of Hamlet's Father. Same actor as REV.

**TIO** is clever. 20-40. Black or Afro-Latinx. Juicy's cousin. Oldest friend. A kind of Horatio.

# SETTINGS

**Where:** A house in North Carolina. Could also be Virginia, or Maryland or Tennessee. It is not Mississippi, or Alabama or Florida. That's a different thing all together.

**Time:** The American south, to me, exist in a kind of liminal space between the past and the present with an aspirational relationship to the future that is contingent to your history living in the south. All that to say...I'm writing this play from inside the second decade of the 21st century. This world aesthetically sits anywhere in the 4-6 decades preceding the current moment.

# EXCERPT 1 FROM *FAT HAM*

This excerpt features a conversation between Juicy and Tio about meeting Juicy's dead father's ghost and the implications of their encounter, briefly interrupted by Juicy's mother Tedra.



TIO

What's wrong with you? Look like you seen a ghost.

JUICY

I did.

TIO

Weeeeeeeeeerd.

JUICY

My father.

TIO

See!!! I told you!

*TEDRA enters. Tedra is wearing a veil.*

TEDRA

Told you what?

JUICY/TIO

Nothing.

TEDRA

You like my veil?

JUICY/TIO

Isn't it nice.

TEDRA

Well, congratulate me, Juicy!

JUICY/TIO

...Congratulations...

TEDRA

Oh! It looks so good. You've done a great job. Ooo! Tio, can you do me a favor, can you go down to the Walmart and get some beer and a couple bags of ice.

TIO

You got some money?

TEDRA

I'mma pay you back.

TIO

How much?

TEDRA

Couple of six packs. We got people coming over.

TIO

Aight.

JUICY

I thought you said a small reception.

TEDRA

It's just Rabby and the kids. You'll be glad to see them.

JUICY

Sure.

TEDRA

I gotta get changed.

*Tedra starts to head inside the house.*

JUICY  
Don't you miss him?

TEDRA  
Who?

JUICY  
Pap.

TEDRA  
My memory of him won't let me miss him.

JUICY  
Whoa.

TEDRA  
If you think about something every day...you not really remembering it. It's just there. Like heartburn.

JUICY  
It's pain.

TEDRA  
It's nothing, honey.

JUICY  
He was awful but he wan't nothing.

TEDRA  
He not here.

JUICY  
So...Should I wear the pink or turquoise?

JUICY  
Turquoise.

TEDRA  
Thank you baby.

*Tedra exits into the house.*

Damn, yo mamma so fine.

TIO

That's what I'm told.

JUICY

She been fine our whole lives. Used to have wet dreams about your mamma.

TIO

She's your aunt.

JUICY

By marriage.

TIO

Oh. Right. What was I thinking?

JUICY

It's all good. No harm.

TIO

I think my uncle had my father killed.

JUICY

Juice!

TIO

Now, my father wants me to kill my uncle.

JUICY

Juuuuuuuicy! Like Revenge?

TIO

Yeah.

JUICY

What you gonna do?

TIO

I ain't never killed nobody.

JUICY

TIO

I think it's probably mad hard.

JUICY

Exactly.

TIO

Maybe you could do it metaphorically.

JUICY

Nah, that's what I thought too but, and no he means for real for real.

TIO

He won't know. He dead.

JUICY

Maybe I could kill him.

TIO

Maybe. Maybe that's a big maybe.

JUICY

I feel like...you know...I should...uh...I should maybe consider thinking about...you know?

TIO

That's a pickle.

JUICY

I could do it.

TIO

It's one thing to wish someone would disappear and actually killing them...you know?

JUICY

Yeah.

TIO

You still love your Pops?

JUICY

I...uh

TIO

Not sure?

JUICY

I don't know. I don't think of it as whether I love him or don't love him. I just...I mean. He my daddy. That means something.

TIO

Does it? I was talking to my therapist about you.

JUICY

Wait, what...

TIO

Yeah. And he said...These cycles of violence are like deep. Engrained. Hell, engineered. Hard to come out of. Like, your Pop went to jail, his Pop went to jail, his Pop went jail, his Pop went to jail and what's before that? Huh? Slavery. It's inherited trauma. You carrying around your whole family's trauma man. And that's okay. You okay. But you don't got to let it define you.

JUICY

That was way deeper than I was expecting.

TIO

I've been working on me lately and since you are a part of my life I guess I'm working on you too.

JUICY

Wow. Thank you.

TIO

You family man.

# Excerpt 2 from *FAT HAM*

This excerpt features a family game of charades, in which characters have to act out clues that quickly take on greater meaning.

\* \* \*

JUICY

Let's uh...let's play a game. It's a barbecue ain't you supposed to play games at a barbecue.

TEDRA

Oh! I think that sounds like a good idea.

REV

I don't.

RABBY

What you wanna play baby? You know I love a party game, now!

REV

I don't.

JUICY

Charades.

RABBY

Ooooooh snap!

REV

Really?

TEDRA

I think it might be fun.

REV

That ain't fun.

RABBY

Lissin...I dominate at charades.

TEDRA

Come on Rev. Let's play.

*Tedra grabs a bowl and some loose paper from the house.*

LARRY

Never played Charades.

RABBY

Yes you have!

LARRY

When?

RABBY

We used to play it all the time.

TEDRA

Alright everyone write down a movie or a tv show or a book.

JUICY

Like they read.

TEDRA

What you say, Juicy?

JUICY

A good book indeed.

TEDRA

Oh. Okay.

*Everyone starts scribbling down things on the little slips of paper. Each of them should do about 8 or 9. Juicy looks up at us while he's writing. Only Opal sees him do this.*

JUICY

I have heard

That guilty creatures sitting at a play  
Have, by the very cunning of the scene,  
Been struck so to the soul that presently  
They have proclaimed their malefactions.  
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak  
With most miraculous organ.  
I'll have these players  
Play something like the murder of my father  
Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks.  
I'll tent him to the quick. If he do blench,  
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen  
May be the devil, and the devil hath power  
T' assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps  
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
As he is very potent with such spirits,  
Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds  
More relative than this. The play's the thing  
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of...the...King. Cook. He is a cook in this play.

*Juicy sees Opal seeing him talk to the audience. She looks out to see us too.*

OPAL

You weird Juicy.

JUICY

Do you ever feel caught?

OPAL

Don't analyze me. You the caught one.

JUICY

I don't know what to do.

OPAL

You could leave. Just run away.

JUICY

Nah. Don't wanna leave my momma.

OPAL

You could become like him. You could get hard and mean and cold. Deadly.

JUICY

I don't think I can do that.

OPAL

That's what I'm gonna do.

JUICY

Don't do that.

OPAL

I don't got that many options. At least then I can just be whatever I want...cause everyone will be afraid of me. You know?

JUICY

What do you think I should do?

OPAL

You could stand to be more honest?

JUICY

You just had that. Didn't have to think about. That was just there.

OPAL

Y'all always think you more complex than you actually are.

JUICY

Yeah.

OPAL

What he thinks is your weakness gonna save you Juicy.

JUICY

How do you know that?

OPAL

Trial and error.

*Everyone has put their slips into the bowl. Tedra jiggles the bowl.*

TEDRA

Alright! Who's going first?

RABBY

We gotta pick teams first. How about the boys against the girls?

REV

This is some bullshit.

RABBY

Or we could do families.

OPAL

How about the old people vs the young people.

RABBY

Who you calling old?

OPAL

Momma you're old and you acting like an old person by over reacting to being called old.

RABBY

I can't stand her ass sometimes.

TEDRA

Fine. Let's do the elders. How's that Rabby? Against the Youngin'.

*They shift themselves into opposing positions.*

TEDRA

Okay. This is lovely. Okay. Uhhhhhhhhh Juicy. Guess Rick James' birthday.

JUICY

...Why...

TEDRA

To determine who goes first.

JUICY

April 12th.

TEDRA

Rev?

REV

February 1st.

TEDRA

That is exactly right.

REV

Of course it is. I know everything about Rick James. I live and breathe Rick James.

TEDRA

That means our team goes first. Okay. Rabby you go.

*Rabby digs in the bowl. With great excitement.*

RABBY

Alright alright alright. Okay.

JUICY

No talking.

RABBY

Oooooooooo.

*Rabby makes the gesture for Movie.*

ELDERS

Movie!

*Rabby holds up four fingers.*

ELDERS

Four words!

*Rabby indicates 3rd word*

TEDRA

Third word.

*Rabby uses her right hand to hitch hike thumb to the right.*

TEDRA

Hitchhike!

REV

Thumbs up!

TEDRA

That's not a movie.

REV

Yes it is!!

*Rabby clears throat. She slows down the motion.*

REV

Right?

*Rabby does finger on the nose!*

TEDRA

Do the Right Thing!

RABBY

Yes!!!

REV

Haha! Look at that! One point for us!

TEDRA

See this is fun! Aight Youngins its your turn.

*Larry hands the bowl to Juicy.*

LARRY

Go on Juicy.

JUICY

I'm not good at the acting part. I'm better at the guessing.

REV

You all gotta go. You might as well get this ass whooping over with.

*Juicy pulls a slip out of the bowl.*

JUICY

Okay.

*Juicy makes the gesture for a book.*

YOUNGINS

Book!

RABBY

Who put a book in there?

*Juicy clears his throat.*

RABBY

I'm just saying it's supposed to be movies, TV shows and celebrities.

TEDRA

Shhh.

*Juicy holds up five fingers.*

RABBY

Five words.

TEDRA

Rabby you not on they team.

RABBY

Sorry I get excited. I get excited.

*Juicy holds up four fingers.*

LARRY

Fourth word.

*Juicy acts out stirring a pot. It's pretty good.*

OPAL

Cabbage patch.

LARRY

Stirring.

*Rev laughs!*

OPAL

Batter? Mixing?

LARRY

Cooking.

*Juicy indicates that Larry is getting warmer.*

OPAL

Cook!

*Juicy touches his nose. Holds up three fingers.*

YOUNGINS

Third word.

*Juicy mimics stabbing. Murder violence.*

LARRY

Oh damn.

OPAL

Air traffic controler!

JUICY

Huh.

RABBY

No talking!

LARRY

Stabbing.

OPAL

Killed.

*Juicy touches his nose. Juicy holds up two fingers.*

LARRY

Second word.

*Juicy points at Rev.*

Old man. OPAL

Hey! REV

*Juicy stares at Rev. Something knowing in the stare.*

Uncle? LARRY

Pit master! OPAL

Preacher! LARRY

*Juicy touches his nose.*

The Preacher Killed the Cook! The Preacher Killed the Cook! LARRY

Bingo! Yahtzee! JUICY

*Rev stands and walks closer to Juicy.*

I don't know that book. Is that a new book? TEDRA

*Rev glares at Juicy. Juicy stands his ground.*

I'm done playing games. Y'all excuse me? REV

No Rev don't go! TEDRA

I'm done playing. REV

TEDRA

No. Come one...this is a party!

*Rev exits to the house. Tedra stands up.*

TEDRA

What you do Juicy?

JUICY

What you talking about?

TEDRA

Is that really a book?

JUICY

I don't know.

TEDRA

Let me go see about him.

*Tedra exits to the house. Rabby, Larry, Opal and Juicy sit. Through the patio window we can see Rev arguing with Tedra. The sound of the argument is muted.*

OPAL

What happened?

JUICY

Leave me alone.

OPAL

What I do to you?

*Juicy exits the backyard away from the house.*



**WILLIAM  
SHAKESPEARE**

# FROM *HAMLET*: SELECTION FROM ACT I, SCENE V

This selection corresponds with Excerpt 1 from *FAT HAM*. In this selection, Hamlet grapples with encountering his dead father's ghost and confides in his friends about what has been asked of him.



HAMLET

O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?  
And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart;  
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,  
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!  
Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat  
In this distracted globe. Remember thee!  
Yea, from the table of my memory  
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,  
That youth and observation copied there;  
And thy commandment all alone shall live  
Within the book and volume of my brain,  
Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven!  
O most pernicious woman!  
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!  
My tables, --meet it is I set it down,  
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;  
At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark:

*Writing*

So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word;  
It is 'Adieu, adieu! remember me.'  
I have sworn't.

HORATIO

[Within] My lord, my lord,--

MARCELLUS

[Within] Lord Hamlet,--

HORATIO

[Within] Heaven secure him!

HAMLET

So be it!

HORATIO

[Within] Hillo, ho, ho, my lord!

HAMLET

Hillo, ho, ho, boy! come, bird, come.

*Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS*

MARCELLUS

How is't, my noble lord?

HORATIO

What news, my lord?

HAMLET

O, wonderful!

HORATIO

Good my lord, tell it.

HAMLET

No; you'll reveal it.

HORATIO

Not I, my lord, by heaven.

MARCELLUS

Nor I, my lord.

HAMLET

How say you, then; would heart of man once think it?  
But you'll be secret?

HORATIO & MARCELLUS

Ay, by heaven, my lord.

HAMLET

There's ne'er a villain dwelling in all Denmark  
But he's an arrant knave.

HORATIO

There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave  
To tell us this.

HAMLET

Why, right; you are i' the right;  
And so, without more circumstance at all,  
I hold it fit that we shake hands and part:  
You, as your business and desire shall point you;  
For every man has business and desire,  
Such as it is; and for mine own poor part,  
Look you, I'll go pray.

HORATIO

These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

HAMLET

I'm sorry they offend you, heartily; Yes, 'faith heartily.

HORATIO

There's no offence, my lord.

HAMLET

Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio,  
And much offence too. Touching this vision here,

It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you:  
For your desire to know what is between us,  
O'ermaster 't as you may. And now, good friends,  
As you are friends, scholars and soldiers,  
Give me one poor request.

HORATIO

What is't, my lord? we will.

HAMLET

Never make known what you have seen to-night.

HORATIO & MARCELLUS

My lord, we will not.

HAMLET

Nay, but swear't.

HORATIO

In faith,  
My lord, not I.

MARCELLUS

Nor I, my lord, in faith.

HAMLET

Upon my sword.

MARCELLUS

We have sworn, my lord, already.

HAMLET

Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

GHOST

[Beneath] Swear.

HAMLET

Ah, ha, boy! say'st thou so? art thou there,  
truepenny?  
Come on--you hear this fellow in the cellarage--  
Consent to swear.

HORATIO

Propose the oath, my lord.

HAMLET

Never to speak of this that you have seen,  
Swear by my sword.

GHOST

[Beneath] Swear.

HAMLET

Hic et ubique? then we'll shift our ground.  
Come hither, gentlemen,  
And lay your hands again upon my sword:  
Never to speak of this that you have heard,  
Swear by my sword.

GHOST

[Beneath] Swear.

HAMLET

Well said, old mole! canst work i' the earth so fast?  
A worthy pioner! Once more remove, good friends.

HORATIO

O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!

HAMLET

And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.  
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. But come;  
Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,  
How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,  
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet  
To put an antic disposition on,  
That you, at such times seeing me, never shall,  
With arms encumber'd thus, or this headshake,  
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,  
As 'Well, well, we know,' or 'We could, an if we would,'  
Or 'If we list to speak,' or 'There be, an if they might,'  
Or such ambiguous giving out, to note

That you know aught of me: this not to do,  
So grace and mercy at your most need help you, Swear.

GHOST

[Beneath] Swear.

HAMLET

Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!

*They swear*

So, gentlemen,  
With all my love I do commend me to you:  
And what so poor a man as Hamlet is  
May do, to express his love and friending to you,  
God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in together;  
And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.  
The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right!  
Nay, come, let's go together.

*Exeunt*

# FROM *HAMLET*: SELECTION FROM ACT III, SCENE II

This selection corresponds with Excerpt 2 from *FAT HAM*. In this selection, Hamlet has asked a group of actors to perform a pointed scene in front of an audience, including his uncle and mother.



HAMLET

So long? Nay then, let the devil wear black, for  
I'll have a suit of sables. O heavens! die two  
months ago, and not forgotten yet? Then there's  
hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half  
a year: but, by'r lady, he must build churches,  
then; or else shall he suffer not thinking on, with  
the hobby-horse, whose epitaph is 'For, O, for, O,  
the hobby-horse is forgot.'

*Hautboys play. The dumb-show enters*

*Enter a King and a Queen very lovingly; the Queen embracing him, and he her. She kneels, and makes show of protestation unto him. He takes her up, and declines his head upon her neck: lays him down upon a bank of flowers: she, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in a fellow, takes off his crown, kisses it, and pours poison in the King's ears, and exit. The Queen returns; finds the King dead, and makes passionate action. The Poisoner, with some two or three Mutes, comes in again, seeming to lament with her. The dead body is carried away. The Poisoner wooes the Queen with gifts: she seems loath and unwilling awhile, but in the end accepts his love*

*Exeunt*

OPHELIA

What means this, my lord?

HAMLET

Marry, this is miching mallecho; it means mischief.

OPHELIA

Belike this show imports the argument of the play.

*Enter Prologue*

HAMLET

We shall know by this fellow: the players cannot  
keep counsel; they'll tell all.

OPHELIA

Will he tell us what this show meant?

HAMLET

Ay, or any show that you'll show him: be not you  
ashamed to show, he'll not shame to tell you what it means.

OPHELIA

You are naught, you are naught: I'll mark the play.

PROLOGUE

For us, and for our tragedy,  
Here stooping to your clemency,  
We beg your hearing patiently.

*Exit*

HAMLET

Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?

OPHELIA

'Tis brief, my lord.

HAMLET

As woman's love.

*Enter two Players, King and Queen*

PLAYER KING

Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round  
Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orbed ground,  
And thirty dozen moons with borrow'd sheen  
About the world have times twelve thirties been,  
Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands  
Unite commutual in most sacred bands.

PLAYER QUEEN

So many journeys may the sun and moon  
Make us again count o'er ere love be done!  
But, woe is me, you are so sick of late,  
So far from cheer and from your former state,  
That I distrust you. Yet, though I distrust,  
Discomfort you, my lord, it nothing must:  
For women's fear and love holds quantity;  
In neither aught, or in extremity.  
Now, what my love is, proof hath made you know;  
And as my love is sized, my fear is so:  
Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear;  
Where little fears grow great, great love grows there.

PLAYER KING

'Faith, I must leave thee, love, and shortly too;  
My operant powers their functions leave to do:  
And thou shalt live in this fair world behind,  
Honour'd, beloved; and haply one as kind  
For husband shalt thou--

PLAYER QUEEN

O, confound the rest!  
Such love must needs be treason in my breast:  
In second husband let me be accurst!  
None wed the second but who kill'd the first.

HAMLET

[Aside] Wormwood, wormwood.

PLAYER QUEEN

The instances that second marriage move  
Are base respects of thrift, but none of love:  
A second time I kill my husband dead,  
When second husband kisses me in bed.

PLAYER KING

I do believe you think what now you speak;  
But what we do determine oft we break.  
Purpose is but the slave to memory,  
Of violent birth, but poor validity;  
Which now, like fruit unripe, sticks on the tree;  
But fall, unshaken, when they mellow be.  
Most necessary 'tis that we forget  
To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt:  
What to ourselves in passion we propose,  
The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.  
The violence of either grief or joy  
Their own enactures with themselves destroy:  
Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament;  
Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident.  
This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not strange  
That even our loves should with our fortunes change;  
For 'tis a question left us yet to prove,  
Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love.  
The great man down, you mark his favourite flies;

The poor advanced makes friends of enemies.  
And hitherto doth love on fortune tend;  
For who not needs shall never lack a friend,  
And who in want a hollow friend doth try,  
Directly seasons him his enemy.  
But, orderly to end where I begun,  
Our wills and fates do so contrary run  
That our devices still are overthrown;  
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own:  
So think thou wilt no second husband wed;  
But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

PLAYER QUEEN

Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light!  
Sport and repose lock from me day and night!  
To desperation turn my trust and hope!  
An anchor's cheer in prison be my scope!  
Each opposite that blanks the face of joy  
Meet what I would have well and it destroy!  
Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife,  
If, once a widow, ever I be wife!

HAMLET

If she should break it now!

PLAYER KING

'Tis deeply sworn. Sweet, leave me here awhile;  
My spirits grow dull, and fain I would beguile  
The tedious day with sleep.

*Sleeps*

PLAYER QUEEN

Sleep rock thy brain,  
And never come mischance between us twain!

*Exit*

HAMLET

Madam, how like you this play?

QUEEN GERTRUDE

The lady protests too much, methinks.

HAMLET

O, but she'll keep her word.

KING CLAUDIUS

Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in 't?

HAMLET

No, no, they do but jest, poison in jest; no offence  
i' the world.

KING CLAUDIUS

What do you call the play?

HAMLET

The Mouse-trap. Marry, how? Tropically. This play  
is the image of a murder done in Vienna: Gonzago is  
the duke's name; his wife, Baptista: you shall see  
anon; 'tis a knavish piece of work: but what o'  
that? your majesty and we that have free souls, it  
touches us not: let the galled jade wince, our  
withers are unwrung.

*Enter LUCIANUS*

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king.

OPHELIA

You are as good as a chorus, my lord.

HAMLET

I could interpret between you and your love, if I  
could see the puppets dallying.

OPHELIA

You are keen, my lord, you are keen.

HAMLET

It would cost you a groaning to take off my edge.

OPHELIA

Still better, and worse.

HAMLET

So you must take your husbands. Begin, murderer;  
pox, leave thy damnable faces, and begin. Come:  
'the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge.'

LUCIANUS

Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing;  
Confederate season, else no creature seeing;  
Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,  
With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,  
Thy natural magic and dire property,  
On wholesome life usurp immediately.

*Pours the poison into the sleeper's ears*

HAMLET

He poisons him i' the garden for's estate. His  
name's Gonzago: the story is extant, and writ in  
choice Italian: you shall see anon how the murderer  
gets the love of Gonzago's wife.

OPHELIA

The king rises.

HAMLET

What, frightened with false fire!

QUEEN GERTRUDE

How fares my lord?

LORD POLONIUS

Give o'er the play.

KING CLAUDIUS

Give me some light: away!

ALL

Lights, lights, lights!

*Exeunt all but HAMLET and HORATIO*





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