

British Theatre Guide

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Hotel Elsinor

Susanna Hamnett (with adapted text from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*)

Plant[UnLtd]

Riverside Studios, Hammersmith

25 April–3 May 2025

There have been many versions of *Hamlet*, and, to some extent, this is another.

We have a thespian family with all its quirks and oddities playing out in the space of a small room at Hotel Elsinore. There's Mum, Greta Elder, played by Susanna Hamnett, and her two teenage children, Henry and Olivia, played by Hamnett's real-life children Joshua MacGregor and Lily MacGregor. Their recently deceased Dad, Henry Elder, whose ashes sit in a carefully placed urn on a coffee table, joins them in spirit. The idea is that his ashes would be scattered at the Elsinore Shakespeare Festival where Henry was meant to play every part of *Hamlet* in his much practised, one-handed masterpiece. Given Henry's demise, the family has instead brought him along so that they can pay their respects.

As the 70-minute narrative unfolds, the many strains of this repressed, awkward family quickly show themselves. Amid all of this, they get a phone call revealing that in Henry's will, they are expected to demonstrate their word-for-word knowledge of *Hamlet* and perform the play in his place as a three-hander.

Mum Greta, a seemingly overshadowed actress who has put her career on hold in favour of her late husband's, jumps at the chance to once again shine as Gertrude. But she has two resentful teenagers who have clearly resisted pressures to follow in their father's footsteps and who now cannot abide their mother's attempts to rope them into acting various parts in an abridged *Hamlet* in order to please the Artistic Director of the festival.

The performances are strong, and many will be able to relate to the dynamics of the modern family that are innovatively weaved around parts of *Hamlet*, with the recurring theme of a play within a play. But the Elder family's dialogue fails to even come close to the flow, intensity or depth of the words spoken by members of Hamlet's dysfunctional clan, and there's a notable difference in zeal with which the actors deliver the Bard's lines compared to those of their present-day family.

But the physicality of the players is impressive, adapting a limited space and sparse set into different scenes from *Hamlet*. And it's this simple staging by Steve MacGregor along with the lighting by The Swallow Theatre and Daisy Grindrod at the Riverside's studio theatre that keeps the spotlight entirely on the characters in front of our eyes.

It's a cosy family affair, both on and off stage, with Susanna Hamnett and Joshua MacGregor as the main directors for a piece of theatre that's mostly deserving of better patronage than it received on the night I attended.

Reviewer: [Shiroma Silva](#)