

The English Theatre of Hamburg

Established 1976

Presents

DEATH KNELL

(Totenglocke)

A Thriller by James Cawood

Premiere on 6 September, 2018

Preview Performances on 3, 4 and 5 September

Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours;

Matinee Performances at 11.30 Hours on Tuesdays
and Fridays beginning 11 September

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Dear English Teachers, Students of English and Friends,

The English Theatre will premiere **DEATH KNELL** by James Cawood on 6 September, 2018, with the usual preview performances at reduced prices on 3, 4, and 5 September. Bookings for this thriller have already started. See the cover of this study guide for dates and times of performances. The text of the play may be obtained at theatre@samuelfrench-london.co.uk or www.amazon.com Teachers interested in being invited to a dress rehearsal of the play on 2 September, 2018 should write to marketing@englishtheatre.de

About the Author and the Play

Our Associate Director, Paul Glaser, recently interviewed James Cawood, the author of **DEATH KNELL**, in London. The author says that he set the play in the Scottish Highlands because that is where, as a child, he spent a lot of time wandering about. He often came across the type of crumbling hunting lodge which he features in the play and which seemed magical and mysterious to his young eyes at the time. Cawood says that a lot of people actually still go to the Highlands to run away from something, hide or restart their lives just as two of the characters do in **DEATH KNELL**.

His gripping new play has already toured Great Britain, and has an intricate plot full of twists and turns and unexpected surprises that have kept audiences on the edge of their seats from start to finish. It begins with Henry, a thriller playwright in his late 40's, and his wife Evelyn in their renovated hunting lodge in the Scottish Highlands where they moved to get away from the noise and hectic life in London. Evelyn, being a recovering alcoholic, regularly travels to London for rehab sessions. Or is that really why she goes there? Jack, a young actor Henry has seen in a play in London, is invited to come up north to the hunting lodge to audition for the lead in Henry's new play. Or is that really why Henry has invited him? And what about the mysterious Inspector who appears claiming he is investigating a series of murders in the area?

Nothing is what it seems in Cawood's latest thriller. He writes for an audience that wants a good time, he says. True, his plays are about murder and death, but, according to the author, that can be very entertaining. Be prepared to be shocked and kept constantly guessing; and witness a series of blood curdling murders, performed by a phenomenal cast of actors straight from London.

James Cawood's first play, **STONE COLD MURDER**, was produced here in our 2013-2014 Season.

A summary of
DEATH KNELL

A thriller by James Cawood

Setting: A renovated hunting lodge in the highlands of Scotland, 40 yards from a loch and 20 minutes to the nearest neighbor.

Time: The present. Both acts are played out in real time, consecutively from beginning to end. There are no time jumps or scene changes within the acts.

Act I

A thunderstorm with heavy rain is raging outside. A car pulls up and Evelyn comes into the house. It is late afternoon. Evelyn is the wife of Henry Roth, who is a playwright—a thriller writer to be more precise. Several months ago they moved up to this desolate place to get away from the noise and hectic life in London. Evelyn is a recovering alcoholic who regularly visits a private clinic in London for therapy, so the move to the highlands is beneficial for her recovery. Henry comes into the room after hearing Evelyn come in. He has been watching a re-run of BLOODLUST on TV. It is the most successful play he has written so far and the only one to be adapted for television.

Henry tells Evelyn about the new play he has just finished called DEATH KNELL. He tells her that while she was in the clinic he was inspired and wrote like a madman, and that he personally took the manuscript to his publisher in London instead of emailing it to him. Evelyn finds it strange that he went to his publisher's office, which is a ten-minute walk from the clinic, without visiting her.

Henry asks Evelyn for the bank card she has been using for shopping. He does not allow her to use her own account. She wants to talk to him about this but he stops her by saying, "*I can love you but I can't trust you.*" Henry asks her if she bought some whiskey and she gets it for him. He pours himself a drink and sips it right in front of her, knowing that alcohol is a temptation for her.

As the evening progresses, Henry asks Evelyn to read to him from the newspaper. It is his favourite part of the evening. Evelyn reads an article about the "*Ghoul*", a serial killer who has been murdering female victims all over the country. The latest murder took place not too far from where they live now. Evelyn is disturbed, but Henry finds it exciting. The article also mentions that the investigation is headed by Chief Inspector Lazan of the Met police.

Henry surprises Evelyn by informing her that they are about to receive a visitor that evening—an actor Henry chose for the lead role in his new play, after seeing him in another play in London. Evelyn argues that she does not feel strong enough to play hostess yet. Henry tries to calm her by saying that the actor is coming to see him and read from the play, not to be waited upon by her.

When Jack, the young actor, arrives, Evelyn goes upstairs to change. Jack was told by Henry not to inform anyone that he was coming up to Scotland. Jack assures Henry that he has not done so. He was also instructed to bring three items for the audition that could be described as essential props for a murderer, since this is the type of character Jack will portray in Henry's play. Jack has brought a pair of black leather gloves, a length of rope and a large knife.

Henry is impressed by the items Jack has chosen, saying that they are "*very Hitchcock*". He suggests that rather than reading from the script they should do some role-play to see if Jack can "*get into the mind*" of a sociopath. As Jack gets into his role he walks around Henry with the big knife which he places on the playwright's neck. Just then Evelyn comes back into the room and is shocked by what she sees. It is an awkward moment. The men explain that they were just role-playing and Henry introduces Jack to Evelyn.

During the conversation that follows, Henry reveals that he knows Jack and Evelyn are having an affair. At first, they both deny it and ask for proof. Henry produces some pictures he has taken of the two of them in Jack's apartment in London. He explains to them that he had a deal with the clinic

whereby the clinic should call him as soon as Evelyn checked in. A few months ago those phone calls stopped and Henry found out that Evelyn herself had cancelled the appointments. She would, however, still call him and make up stories about the therapy and the progress she was making. Henry consequently decided to follow her and find out what she was doing.

Shaken by this, Evelyn breaks off her relationship with Jack and leaves the house. Jack is heartbroken. Henry then reveals his plan to Jack. He has no intention of divorcing Evelyn and losing half his fortune. He suggests that Jack kill her. Jack cannot believe what he is hearing. Henry explains that he asked him to bring the props to be used for a real murder. And the reason for Jack coming up to Scotland without telling anyone was to help insure a perfect murder. There was to be no proof he was ever there. Jack thinks Henry's plan is insane, but when Henry mentions a large sum of money the young man would get, he decides to commit the murder. Henry tells Jack that as soon as the murder is accomplished, the money will be transferred to his account.

Jack leaves to find Evelyn, and Henry goes upstairs. When Evelyn comes home no one seems to be there. Suddenly, Jack comes in and attacks her. She manages to break free and stab Jack with the knife. Jack dies. Henry comes rushing downstairs. He sees that Evelyn has received a nasty knife wound on her arm in the struggle and that she is in shock. Henry instructs her to roll up the body in a rug and weigh it down with some rocks. She must put the body in a boat, row out into the middle of the loch and throw it overboard. He assures her that no one will ever find out.

Act II

A month has passed and it is shortly before Christmas. Henry is looking for Evelyn and he finds her outside in the freezing cold. She is still very much shook up by the terrible incident. The wound on her arm is not getting better. She wants to see a doctor, but Henry refuses. A doctor would become suspicious of the knife wound and questions would be raised, he warns her.

Evelyn tells Henry that she "sees" Jack everywhere and wakes up hearing his voice at night. One night she could have sworn he was right there watching her sleep. When she looked again he was gone, but his scent still lingered in the room. Henry tells her it is understandable that she is having visions, but that it is all in her head.

To make her feel better he gives her an envelope containing her own bank card and account details. He has a friend at the bank who set up the account. Henry will, of course, pay into it at first. Then, maybe, when she is feeling better, she could get a job, or work from home to earn her own money.

This makes Evelyn very happy. When she goes to the desk to sign the bank card she finds some letters. Henry has just gone into the kitchen to make her a cup of tea. When he returns, he finds her reading the letters. They are blackmail letters stating, "I know what you've done", "Someone knows of your crimes", "The truth will come to the surface", and "I'll see you soon". Henry brushes them off as being written by some crazed fan or a bad joke by his publisher. Nevertheless, Evelyn is very disturbed by them.

Suddenly, there's a knock on the door. It is Chief Inspector Lazan from the Met Police. Henry lets him in. He says he is there to investigate the "Ghoul" murders. At first Henry and Evelyn are relieved that he is not there to ask questions about Jack's disappearance, but then Lazan produces a photo of Jack as part of his investigation. Henry and Evelyn pretend not to know the person in the photo. As it turns out, Jack has had many aliases. When Lazan first mentions him he calls him Mathew Reed. The Inspector soon tells them that he knows that the young man has been at their house. When he also tells them that he knows they have lied, Evelyn breaks down and confesses to what happened. Lazan shocks them with the news that Jack is not at the bottom of the loch but was spotted in town that very afternoon. All of them fear that he could be in the house right now. Lazan pulls out his gun and starts searching the premises upstairs. The light goes out. There are noises and Evelyn runs to the kitchen for a knife. She gives it to Henry to defend her. Lazan comes running back into the room. In the darkness Henry mistakenly thinks he is Jack and stabs him. Lazan dies.

Now Henry and Evelyn are convinced that Jack is the “Ghoul”. Lazan lies dead on the floor. Evelyn takes his gun and is about to leave the house. She does not want to sit around and wait to be killed. She opens the front door and Jack is standing there. He plunges his knife into her and she dies. Jack then explains to Henry that he is the serial killer whom the Inspector has been searching for. He says how easy it was, therefore, for him to “slip into the mind of a killer” as Henry requested him to do for their role-play session a month ago. He has come back for his money, having fulfilled his task. Now Henry must fulfill his end of the bargain.

Henry goes to the computer and transfers the money, claiming that he still has Jack’s bank details. Just as Jack is about to go, however, he sees a bank card on the floor. He picks it up and sees that it is his. When he looks at the card Henry used, he sees that Henry has transferred the money into Evelyn’s new account. Henry explains that the police would see a transfer into Jack’s account and he would be seen as an accessory to murder. A fight ensues. Henry gets hold of Lazan’s gun and shoots Jack. Jack falls to the floor.

But then Jack starts to laugh and stands up. He explains to Henry that there were blanks in the gun. He goes on to explain that none of this would have been possible without his partner Evelyn. As he says this, Evelyn gets up. They both take a mock bow. Henry is shaken to the core. He asks how this is possible. Evelyn and Jack explain that over the past months they have planned this meticulously, down to the last detail. Henry learns that Lazan really is dead but that he is not Chief Inspector Lazan, he is Jack’s roommate, an out of work actor.

The whole thing about the “Ghoul” was fabricated. Evelyn had pretended to read about it in the newspaper, making sure to drop Lazan’s name in the narrative. They now have the knife Henry used to murder Jack’s roommate (aka Lazan) with his blood on it, and Henry’s fingerprints are on it too. Jack and Evelyn now have the upper hand and dictate terms. Henry is to transfer enough money into Evelyn’s account each month so she and Jack can enjoy their life together.

Henry says they might have the knife and the gun with his fingerprints, but there also has to be a motive, which he does not have. Jack and Evelyn tell him that the blackmail letters were carefully drafted by them on Jack’s roommate’s computer. So yes, Henry does have a motive. “*You just murdered your blackmailer*”, Jack tells Henry. One letter states, “*I’ll see you soon*”. The roommate’s train ticket is proof that he was here.

They explain that the computer used to type the blackmail letters is now in their possession. So if Henry misses even one month’s payment, the computer along with the knife with Henry’s fingerprints and the roommate’s blood on it will be anonymously sent to the police investigating the disappearance of Jack’s roommate.

They leave and Henry is left alone. *Curtain*

MULTIPLE CHOICE EXERCISE

1. What is a lake in Scotland called? (a. lake, b. loch, ghoul)
2. What is Henry’s profession? (a. playwright, b. director, c. actor)
3. How many props does Henry ask Jack to bring with him? (a. 2, b. 3, c. 4)
4. What title does Lazan have? (a. Chief Inspector, b. Head of Police, c. CEO)
5. Why is Evelyn going to therapy (a. She’s nervous, b. She’s a sociopath, c. She’s an alcoholic)
6. What kind of bullets were in the gun? (a. real ones, b. wrong ones, c. blanks)
7. How does Henry describe Jack’s choice of props to commit a murder (a. very Spielberg, b. very Hitchcock, c. very Scorsese)
8. What is the title of Henry’s most successful play (a. BLOODLUST, b. BLOODLOST, c. BLOODLOSS)
9. Lazan is really (a. Evelyn’s cousin, b. Jack’s roommate, c. a Chief Inspector)
10. Who has the upper hand at the end of the play? (a. Henry and Jack, b. Evelyn and Henry, c. Jack and Evelyn)

INTERPRETATIVE EXERCISE

1. Describe how the characters are not what they seem to be at first.
2. Are the characters in this play realistic? Why or why not?
3. Why is being scared or shocked entertaining?
4. Do you sympathize with anyone at the end of the play? Why or why not?