Author's Pen and Actor's Voice

Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre

Robert Weimann

edited by

Helen Higbee and William West

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK www.cup.cam.ac.uk
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011–4211, USA www.cup.org
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

First published 2000

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Times 10/12pt [VN]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 781302 hardback
ISBN 0 521 787351 paperback

Contents

1 Performance and authority in *Hamlet* (1603)

Although *Hamlet*, as Anthony Scoloker noted in 1604, was perceived as a play that "should please all,"[1] its textual history tells a different story. If, as Philip Edwards observed, the "study of the early texts of *Hamlet* is the study of a play in motion" (8), the element that is most in question (and in motion) is the circulation of cultural authority itself. At issue is the fluid, composite source of this authority, its unsettled and dispersed locations between the writing and the production of the play. The unstable linkage between the texts and the performances of *Hamlet* can perhaps best be explored at the point of its own intervention in the forms and functions of playing. At this crucial point – rare in the entire history of the Elizabethan theatre – the actual circulation of authority in the performed play appears revealingly at odds with what in Q2 and F is taken to authorize in no uncertain terms the "purpose of playing" (3.2.20).[2]

In the so-called 'bad' quarto *Hamlet*, relations of writing and playing find themselves in a state of entanglement and differentiation that has a more subdued echo in the difference between the authorial amplitude of the Second Quarto (1604) and the more theatrical qualities of the Folio text (1623). Between these texts, there resonates a cultural preference in response to either the literary needs of "goose-quills" or the practical requirements of "common players" (2.2.344; 349). This preference is not something statically given but connects with a play, even an entire theatre, "in motion." As Harold Jenkins has suggested, Rosencrantz's reference to writer-dominated children's stages that "are now the fashion" may reflect "the fickleness of a public favour which readily transfers itself from the old established to the upstart" (Jenkins [ed.] 472). But this "fickleness" attests to more than the ups and downs of "public favour"; rather, it participates in an emergent set of cultural changes at the turn of the century that, as I shall suggest in a later chapter, went hand in hand with a process of cultural differentiation and reform. While Hamlet's own preference in the Folio text appears to be in defense of those berattled "common stages" (342), the lines of socially divergent theatrical options appear far more confusing and potentially divisive as soon as we look more closely at the

traditionally underestimated 'suspect' text of the First Quarto (1603).

In this version, the recasting of the most hallowed soliloquy in the play and its *mise-en-scène* is a case in point. Here, Polonius (in Q1 called Corambis) prepares for Hamlet's entrance and King Claudius provides the cue; but five lines after Hamlet has entered, the King's withdrawal is yet to come (the future tense is unmistakable).

Cor. [. . .] Your selfe and I will stand close in the study,
There shall you heare the effect of all his hart,
And if it proue any otherwise then loue,
Then let my censure faile an other time.
King. See where hee comes poring vppon a booke.
Enter Hamlet.
Cor. Madame, will it please your grace
To leaue vs here?
Que. With all my hart. *exit.*
Cor. And here *Ofelia*, reade you on this booke,
And walke aloofe, the King shal be vnseene.
Ham. To be, or not to be, I there's the point,
To Die, to sleepe, is that all? I all:
No, to sleepe, to dreame, I mary there it goes,
For in that dreame of death, when wee awake,
And borne before an euerlasting Iudge,
From whence no passenger euer retur'nd,
The vndiscouered country, at whose sight
The happy smile, and the accursed damn'd.
But for this, the ioyfull hope of this,
Whol'd beare the scornes and flattery of the world,
Scorned by the right rich, the rich curssed of the poore?
The widow being oppressed, the orphan wrong'd,
The taste of hunger, or a tirants raigne,
And thousand more calamities besides,
To grunt and sweate vnder this weary life,
When that he may his full *Quietus* make
With a bare bodkin, who would this indure,
But for a hope of something after death?
Which pusles the braine, and doth confound the sence,
Which makes vs rather beare those euilles we haue,
Than flie to others that we know not of.
I that, O this conscience makes cowardes of vs all,
Lady in thy orizons, be all my sinnes remembred.
Ofel. My Lord, I haue sought opportunitie, which now
I haue, to redeliuer to your worthy handes, a small remembrance, such tokens which I haue receiued of you.[3]

Although this version presents us with an unusual, indeed perfectly staggering degree of departure from what, according to Q2 and F, Shakespeare

wrote in the longer versions, we should be wary of dismissing it, as generations of editors did, as 'corruption' *tout court*. Aside from any evaluative parameters, Hamlet's speech epitomizes in miniature more than anything a reduction in the authority of the author of Q2 in the playtext of Q1.[4] We are confronted with highly mobile and thoroughly contingent relations between the poetics of writing and, as can be shown, certain nonliterary preferences for another "purpose of playing." My reading of the passage, moving from what it says to how it is staged and, finally, received, will emphasize three points.

Semantically, in its uses of language, this version of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech foregrounds a perspective on the hardness of ordinary living that is markedly different from what we have in the received soliloquy. Eliding the question "Whether 'tis nobler in the *mind*" to "take arms" against hostile circumstances (3.1.56; 58), the utterance replaces the purely intellectual, stoical, and culturally elevated forms of resistance by an entirely plain, everyday horizon of harsh living, one that at least in part is inspired by an undisguised awareness of inequality in social relations.[5] "Scorned by the right rich, the rich curssed of the poore" moves in a semantic space that verbally as well as socially is far below "the proud man's contumely," the "law's delay," and the "insolence of office" (3.1.70–72). If the oppression of the "widow" and the wrong of the "orphan," not to speak of the "taste of hunger," is more predictable, it is for all that more physically concrete than the desperate metaphor of using weaponry against a "sea of troubles" (58). In the longer versions, the repeated imagery of battle ("shocks/ That flesh is heir to" [61–62])[6] is subsumed under a naturalized and socially elevated notion of inheritance. The First Quarto avoids this; rather than debating, in Edwards' phrase, "which of two courses is nobler" *vis-à-vis* the continuous punishing hostility of life itself, the early quarto has more brevity and directness, characteristically without letting go of the indiscrete language of the body, as in "To grunt and sweate vnder this weary life."

Dramaturgically, the differences in Q1 are even more significant. The *mise-en-scène* of the speech, inseparable from its uses of language, reveals an extraordinary, swift, even perhaps blunt directness, an acceleration of stage business that presupposes a sovereign command of and an extreme fluidity in the uses of theatrical space. There is none of the preparatory action motivating and anticipating the withdrawal of Gertrude, Claudius and Polonius *before* Hamlet's entrance ("*King.* Sweet Gertrude, leave us two [. . .] *Pol.* Withdraw, my lord" [3.1.28; 54]). Instead, his entrance *precedes* their withdrawal. There results a simultaneity in the staging of the scene that works in so far as, in view of the continuing presence of four major characters on stage, the appearance and stage representation of

Hamlet is not automatically integrated into the scene at large. If anything, Hamlet's entrance provides, as it were, a cue for the unhurried subsequent withdrawal of the others. It is as if there is no need for him, as yet, to honor an iconic frame of reference marked by represented characters such as Corambis or the Queen. It is only six lines later, through the act of speaking the speech, that a fully representational status accrues to his performance practice. Thus, Gertrude can take her leave, Corambis find his place in hiding, and Ofelia assume her pose, all *after* the player playing Hamlet, here the observed of all observers in the audience, has come onto the stage. Far from constituting the unified site of a dramatic scene that, in a fiction, would be dominated by psychologically compelling signs of symbolic action, Hamlet enters and lingers on the threshold between role-induced perception, seeing and hearing, and an actor's more neutral presence, for whom the unity of place and the logic of perception do not obtain. At the frontiers of his absorption by the symbolism of a fully integrated space of dramatic action, the player, as it were, can resist his being lost in a unified scene until the last moment. In other words, the physical presence of the leading actor on stage helps defer what closure we have in the opening of this scene. Literally, the visible player comes first, the fiction of 'invisible' concealment second, not vice versa. The demands of performing on an open stage go hand in hand with a dramaturgy that, after almost 400 years, appears far from inefficient, let alone despicable. Thus, a modern actor (Peter Guinness) playing the role of Q1 Hamlet can express his "joy to have that muscularity and directness," while another performer of the same role (Christopher McCullough) observes that "There are all sorts of clues in the play about how actors were working; [. . .] we're seeing the possibilities of theatrical energy, of the way space was used, of how actors related to audiences [. . .] the First Quarto is giving us clues about the much more open-ended nature of the Elizabethan theater" (Loughrey, "Q1 in Recent Performance" 125; 126).

Finally, in the entire cast of the "To be, or not to be" speech, we can observe how a peculiar type of *audience response* is invited by a specific and yet far from univocal mode of theatrical transaction. As far as it is at all possible to isolate this type of response, it appears to be more strongly in favor of a mode of presentation that is contiguous with, and yet different from, that representation which, in the strict sense of 'impersonation,' constitutes an inward self through soliloquy. (I shall elaborate the distinction between presentation – the performant function – and representation, the rendering of imaginary events and characters, at greater length in chapter 4.) As modern actors like Guinness and McCullough have suggested, for Hamlet to say, "I there's the point," is to address spectators rather than his own interior state of mind. His altogether abrupt turn to Ofelia (in

his last line) indicates that little or no transition is required to return from a *platea*-like address to genuine dialogue. The presentation of this speech can be viewed as integral to an audience-oriented transaction whereby the action comes to fruition in a moment of display, which *is* the act of delivery.

The uses of such display on an open-ended stage, together with the relative prominence of a presentational mode of delivery, needs to be seen in a larger context. In the First Quarto, the lines of division between drama, show, and ceremony tend to be more easily blurred than, say, in Q2. This blurring of boundaries between dramatic action and theatrical display, representation and presentation, may well have been in response to, but also in aid of, circumstances characteristic of the itinerant stage. As the *Records of Early English Drama* and other archives (to which I shall return) indicate, Elizabethan traveling players continued to rub shoulders with all sorts of jugglers, dancers, singers, tumblers, and related showmen. Performers such as these were relatively unconcerned with the symbolic, let alone iconographic, dimensions of their actions. Their concern was to get the show across, that is, to privilege *vis-à-vis* the audience an *immediate* – literally: an iconographically and symbolically 'un-mediated' – space for delivery. Thereby, the responsiveness of spectators was implicated in the very transaction itself, in the sense that the skill and competence in the speaking of the speech were offered to them as worthy of public display.

It seems difficult to ignore this rather undifferentiated background of late sixteenth-century performance practice when the dispersed and "distracted" (4.3.4) circuit of authority in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is to be accounted for. In the Elizabethan theatre, the diversity of cultural practices and interests must have been particularly pronounced wherever the imaginary world-in-the-play, that is, the dramatic representation, engaged and was engaged by the material and economic logistics of playing-in-the-world of early modern England. As the concluding chapter will argue, Shakespeare quite deliberately used the threshold between the stage-as-imaginary-world and the stage-as-stage; at least in part this threshold overlapped with the line of "cultural difference" that Leah Marcus has persuasively traced between "orality and writing as competing forms of communication within the Renaissance playhouse" (Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance* 176).[7] Once the gap between these two types of communication is seen to participate in an unfolding spectrum of differences among all sorts of cultural practices, conventions, and expectations, new questions about the "distracted" circuit of authority arise. Could it be that there was a link between the instability of a Shakespearean text like *Hamlet* and its openness to altogether diverse standards in poetics, performance, and production?

As an entirely provisional answer, I propose not to complicate further what hypotheses or highly circumstantial evidence we have about the theatrical provenance of Q1 *Hamlet*; nor would I wish to link this text to the problematic assumption that, primarily, the play derived from an act of memorial reconstruction.[8] Instead, let me look more closely at the first printed version of *Hamlet* for what evidence we can glean about this 'open' circulation, in the production process, of diverse cultural discourses, interests, and functions. Here, Hamlet's advice to the players is perhaps the most tantalizing scene in Shakespeare's theatre – a scene in which the administering of cultural authority itself is staged and dramatized. In the First Quarto, this site is marked, uniquely, by an astonishing difference in what, in Q2 and the Folio text, is called "the purpose of playing" (3.2.20).

> And doe you heare? let not your clown speake
> More then is set downe, there be of them I can tell you
> That will laugh themselues, to set on some
> Quantitie of barren spectators to laugh with them,
> Albeit there is some necessary point in the Play
> Then to be obserued: O t'is vile, and shewes
> A pittifull ambition in the foole that vseth it.
> And then you haue some agen, that keeps one sute
> Of ieasts, as a man is knowne by one sute of
> Apparell, and Gentlemen quotes his ieasts downe
> In their tables, before they come to play, as thus:
> Cannot you stay till I eate my porrige? and, you owe me
> A quarters wages: and, my coate wants cullison:
> And, your beere is sowre: and, blabbering with his lips,
> And thus keeping in his cinkapase of ieasts,
> When, God knows, the warme Clowne cannot make a iest
> Vnlesse by chance, as the blinde man catcheth a hare:
> Maisters tell him of it. (F1-F2)

As Harold Jenkins pointedly observes in a note, Quarto 1 "provides, ironically enough, an instance of the thing complained of"[9] in Hamlet's advice. The Prince, "thus" performing a clown's "cinkapase of ieasts" and, with another "thus," so "blabbering with his lips," is telling the players what not to do, but he does so by doing it himself. Thereby, he can in one and the same speech collapse two different orders of authority in the purpose of playing. One follows humanistically sanctioned, mimetic precepts associated with Donatus and Cicero, the other – in the teeth of their rejection – the contemporary practices of Tarlton and company. By formally rejecting the latter while actually cashing in on them (even, as John Dover Wilson and George Ian Duthie have shown, drawing on jests that Tarlton is on record as having used[10]), the First Quarto exemplifies one important area of divergence in the genealogy of the Elizabethan theatre.

It is that divisive area which, taking a phrase from Sidney's poetics, I suggest serves as a catalyst for what "contrarietie" we have on Elizabethan stages.

The Prince of Denmark, in his rehearsal of the clown's stale jokes, proceeds to do what his humanist alter ego declares to be against "some necessary point in the Play." When Hamlet's advice culminates in the Prince dis-playing the clown, even the empathy-cherishing, Stanislavski-inspired critic will have difficulty accounting for this in terms of representational cogency. The least that can be said is that the quasi-performance of these jests indecorously exceeds the purpose of instructing the players; these "frivolous jestures" (Richard Jones' term) certainly do not serve the protagonist's disguise or any other strategy of concealment or revenge. If anything, this specimen of clowning is "far unmeet" for that matter of "worthiness"[11] that, in the longer texts, Hamlet's plea for a poetics of neoclassical discretion seeks to convey to the players. In fact, the Prince's demand, "mend it all together," is more than contradicted by Hamlet's "cinkapase of ieasts." Even if, as is likely, the Prince through overemphasis burlesques these jests, his travesty is in line with an ancient, almost ubiquitous practice of unscripted, unsanctioned performance. Prince Hamlet himself embodies a site on stage where – to anticipate Polonius' phrase – the "law of writ and the liberty" (2.2.401) of the performer clash. Rather than unambiguously disapproving (as the Q2 Hamlet does) of what in both the moral and the social sense of the word is "villainous" (3.2.44) in clownage, the 'suspect' Hamlet is double-dealing somewhat in the vein of Ambidexter in *King Cambises*, who says, "Now with both hands will you see me play my parte" (Adams [ed.], line 783).[12] As, handy-dandy, the princely agent and the "villainous" object of reform exchange places, there emerges a "bifold authority" in Hamlet's own purpose of playing. The ambidextrous capacity for both recommending and undermining the self-contained Renaissance play aids both the representation of character and the presentation of such conceits as befit the fond sport and frivolous game of jesting mother-wits. Although Hamlet's duplicity is not nearly as blatant as that of the old Vice Ambidexter, the cultural difference is within the configuration of the protagonist himself. Since this difference here clearly affects his own "purpose of playing," it goes significantly deeper than the distantly related contrast, in the language of Q2 and the Folio, between Hamlet the humanist courtier and Hamlet the "rogue and peasant slave," the "John-a-dreams" (2.2.550; 568).

Here, the First Quarto, if it is recasting a previously given text, does not invalidate its writer's authority from any ideological point of view. It is the social semantics, the cultural semiotics, and the dramaturgy, rather than the politics of the play that point to what Kathleen Irace in her recent

edition of the play calls "the reasons behind the differences between Q1 and the longer texts."[13] Nor can the text be viewed as an aggressive counter-version indicating "actor's voice." What theatrical practices, agencies, and interests are here projected already participate in a moment of cultural 'reform' and differentiation. Even so, the culturally inclusive uses of language – unsettling at least momentarily the identities of prince and clown – collude with an instability in both the text and the purpose of playing; thereby they affect both the staging and, closely connected with it, the significations of the text. Here we have very much a "mixed" composition that, in Hamlet's advice to the players, slides easily between the representation of character – the character of a princely Maecenas – and the presentation, à la Tarlton, of "such conceits as clownage keeps in pay" (Cunningham [ed.], Prologue 2). Between them, there is no single, overriding, unified "purpose of playing." Again, I am deliberately using the phrase from Hamlet's advice to the players in Q2 and F1 in order to suggest that the singular form ("the purpose," as used by the Prince) is far from being an adequate description of late Elizabethan performance practice.

In order to study the coexistence, even interaction of diverse modes of playing, I propose to look at the Nunnery scene in the First Quarto. Here – to return to a distinction made earlier – the presentational purpose of playing throughout commingles with the representation of character. In this scene, where the protagonist is shown in his most eccentric moments, his eccentricity must have displayed something eminently worthy of show, an exceptional kind of exhibit. Accordingly, Ofelia is made to *present* the Prince of Denmark to the audience a few lines after his "To be, or not to be" speech, where, in Q2 and F, his "unmatch'd form" is said to be "Blasted with ecstasy" (3.1.159–60).

Ham. To a Nunnery goe, we are arrant knaues all,
Beleeue none of vs, to a Nunnery goe.
Ofel. O heauens secure him!
Ham. Wher's thy father?
Ofel. At home my lord.
Ham. For Gods sake let the doores be shut on him,
He may play the foole no where but in his
Owne house: to a Nunnery goe.
Ofel: Help him good God.
Ham. If thou dost marry, Ile giue thee
This plague to thy dowry:
Be thou as chaste as yce, as pure as snowe,
Thou shalt not scape calumny, to a Nunnery goe.
Ofel. Alas, what change is this?
Ham. But if thou wilt needes marry, marry a foole,

For wisemen know well enough,
What monsters you make of them, to a Nunnery goe.
Ofel. Pray God restore him.
Ham. Nay, I haue heard of your paintings too,
God hath giuen you one face,
And you make your selues another,
You fig, and you amble, and you nickname Gods creatures,
Making your wantonnesse, your ignorance,
A pox, t'is scuruy, Ile no more of it,
It hath made me madde: Ile no more marriages,
All that are married but one, shall liue.
The rest shall keepe as they are, to a Nunnery goe,
To a Nunnery goe. *exit*
Ofe. Great God of heauen, what a quicke change is this?
The Courtier, Scholler, Souldier, all in him,
All dasht and splinterd thence, O woe is me,
To a seene what I haue seene, see what I see. *exit* (E-E2)

With the exception of one truly dialogic phrase ("At home my Lord"), Ofelia's utterances, being neither addressed to nor received by Hamlet, are dominated by a presentational mode throughout. Referring to Hamlet in the third person, she qualifies her distance from participation in the represented scene by an articulation of dismay about the eccentric actions of the Prince of Denmark. In her early interjection, "O heauens secure him," and, even, "Help him good God," the figures of Christian invocation and compassion that characterize her response (and involvement), may yet predominate. This is very much the case in Q2 and F1, where Ophelia's interjections are distinguished by even stronger signs of pity and piety ("O, help him, you sweet heavens!" [3.1.133]; "Heavenly powers, restore him!" [141]). However, it is only in the First Quarto that Ofelia, in her reference to Hamlet, twice proceeds to a purely demonstrative "this" as something pointed at rather than spoken to: "Alas, what change is this?" – "Great God of heauen, what a quicke change is this?" It is true, the rhetoric of interjection continues to draw on figures of piety and perplexity, but the iteration itself reduces the capacity for effectively subsuming the presentational *gestus* under a characterizing representation, on Ofelia's part, of pious concern and consternation.

All this while, Ofelia is made to point out, even perhaps point at, a virtuoso display of mad humor. With gender relations as his theme (always a favorite of audiences), Hamlet himself performs an outrageous piece of misogamy, richly dressed with misogyny. While the texts of the two quartos here are more or less identical, only the First Quarto Hamlet goes to the length of a seven-fold iteration of "To a Nunnery goe." In doing so, the Prince uses the phrase scandalously, like a refrain or a signature tune,

not unlike Iago's "put money in thy purse," or the punning, ambidextrous Vice harping upon the titular theme of the play in *Like Will to Like* or *The Tide Tarrieth No Man*. And whereas Q2, not irretrievably crossing the frontiers of dialogic representation, has, "I say we will have no moe marriage" (3.1.147), Q1 is closer to F in that Hamlet's use of the plural form distinctly swerves from a dialogic stance. Almost certainly, the plural in his "Ile no more marriages" correlates to an open stage, *platea*-like position, as does the duplicity in the enhanced iteration of the refrain that juggles with two meanings ('nunnery' could also denote a brothel). From this spatial position, the protagonist in Q1 can more consistently ignore the conventions of represented dialogue and harangue not Ofelia, but a plurality of spectators, among them, men ("wisemen know [. . .] What monsters you make of them") but especially the women (the plural form in "your paintings" is unmistakable, as it is in "you make your selues another" [face], where F has "your selfe"). The resulting effect must have been an uncanny blending of alarm and laughter, extreme dismay and reckless merriment.

There is then, as the briefest comparison could establish, in the First Quarto more of a fluidity in relations between a Renaissance dramatist's "pen" and a sixteenth-century "actor's voice." Such a comparison is especially revealing if we assume, as I think we must, that Q1 *Hamlet*, "a version specially abridged for performance on tour,"[14] was adapted and reconstructed by traveling members of Shakespeare's own company. In these conjectured circumstances, the textually established area of divergence in the purpose of playing can be motivated rather nicely, even with some cogency. However that may be, the same writer's authority appears to be either partially absent or short-shrifted; the demands of performance practice are strongly asserted and inform at least some of the features of the play. Thanks to the work of scholars like Sally-Beth MacLean, Alan Somerset and contributors to the *Records of Early English Drama* series, we have for good reasons come to revise the anti-provincial bias of a previous generation of critics: provincial touring, we must assume, can no longer be viewed as "the enforced banishment to the bucolic backwaters that touring has often been taken to be" (Somerset, "How chances it" 50; 60).[15]

Still, in its remove from a stringently sustained authorial authority and in greater proximity to all sorts and conditions of performance, the First Quarto *Hamlet* would more strongly foreground the presentational voice and delivery of the performer. But the play, even as it was relatively open to such multiple purposes of playing as departed from the poetics of self-contained Renaissance representations, would remain deeply indebted to a unique "author's pen." What ultimately we have is, in Thomas

Clayton's acute observation, "a far from homogeneous, 'mixed' text, excellent in part but also divided against itself and apparently in 'authority'" (Clayton, *The 'Hamlet' First Published* Introduction 23). In other words, the First Quarto was marked by a hybrid source of authority, one that was as "divided against itself" as the double-dealing poetics that, simultaneously, informed Hamlet's antic clowning and his own advice against it.