

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-29400-3 - Aspects of Hamlet: Articles Reprinted from Shakespeare Survey

Edited by Kenneth Muir and Stanley Wells

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ASPECTS OF *HAMLET*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-29400-3 - Aspects of Hamlet: Articles Reprinted from Shakespeare Survey

Edited by Kenneth Muir and Stanley Wells

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ASPECTS OF *HAMLET*

ARTICLES REPRINTED FROM *SHAKESPEARE SURVEY*

EDITED BY

KENNETH MUIR

EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

AND

STANLEY WELLS

GENERAL EDITOR OF THE OXFORD SHAKESPEARE
AND HEAD OF THE SHAKESPEARE DEPARTMENT
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

LONDON · NEW YORK · MELBOURNE

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-29400-3 - Aspects of Hamlet: Articles Reprinted from Shakespeare Survey

Edited by Kenneth Muir and Stanley Wells

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521294003

This collection © Cambridge University Press 1979

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

This collection first published 1979

Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2009

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

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Main entry under title:

Aspects of Hamlet.

CONTENTS: Leech, C. Studies in Hamlet, 1901–1955.

Jenkins, H. Hamlet then till now.

Foakes, R. A. The art of cruelty: Hamlet and Vindice [etc.]

1. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616. Hamlet.

I. Muir, Kenneth. II. Wells, Stanley.

III. Shakespeare survey.

PR2807.A957 822.3'3 78–18100

ISBN 978-0-521-22228-0 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-29400-3 paperback

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-29400-3 - Aspects of Hamlet: Articles Reprinted from Shakespeare Survey

Edited by Kenneth Muir and Stanley Wells

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>List of plates</i>	page vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
Studies in <i>Hamlet</i> , 1901–1955 by CLIFFORD LEECH (SS 9, 1956)	i
<i>Hamlet Then Till Now</i> by HAROLD JENKINS (SS 18, 1965)	16
The Art of Cruelty: <i>Hamlet</i> and <i>Vindice</i> by R. A. FOAKES (SS 26, 1973)	28
‘Form and Cause Conjoin’d’: <i>Hamlet</i> and Shakespeare’s Workshop by KEITH BROWN (SS 26, 1973)	39
The Prince of Denmark and Claudius’s Court by JULIET McLAUHLAN (SS 27, 1974)	49
<i>Hamlet</i> and the <i>Moriae Encomium</i> by FRANK McCOMBIE (SS 27, 1974)	64
‘To say one’: An Essay on <i>Hamlet</i> by RALPH BERRY (SS 28, 1975)	75
<i>Hamlet</i> and the Power of Words by INGA-STINA EWBank (SS 30, 1977)	84
Critical Disagreement about Oedipus and <i>Hamlet</i> by NIGEL ALEXANDER (SS 20, 1967)	102

PLATES

BETWEEN PAGES 54 AND 55

- IA Gertrude's bedroom (iii, iv): James Bailey's design for Michael Benthall's production, 1948. The platform and arches were permanent features of the set
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon]
- B A view from the dress-circle of the permanent set (known as 'the bread-board') designed by Michael Northen for Michael Langham's 1956 production, in which Alan Badel played Hamlet
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon]
- II Leslie Hurry's basic set for Peter Wood's production, 1961, as arranged for the graveyard scene (v, i)
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon]
- III A 1, iii: Ophelia (Helen Mirren), Polonius (Sebastian Shaw), and Laertes (Christopher Gable) in Trevor Nunn's production, 1970. The lutes provided an ironic foreshadowing of Ophelia's mad scene (see Plate XI)
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon]
- B 1, iii: Polonius (André van Gyseghem) with Laertes (Stuart Wilson) and Ophelia (Yvonne Nicholson) in Buzz Goodbody's modern-dress production at The Other Place, 1975
[Photo: Joe Cocks]
- IV A II, ii: Hamlet with the players in Peter Wood's production, 1961. *L. to r.*, Ian Richardson as Guildenstern, David Buck as Rosencrantz, Ian Bannen as Hamlet, Tony Church as First Player
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon]
- B III, ii: Hamlet's advice to the players: Robert Helpmann in Michael Benthall's production, 1948
[Photo: Angus McBean – Harvard Theatre Collection]
- V A III, ii: The play scene in Michael Benthall's production, 1948, in which Paul Scofield (seen here) alternated as Hamlet with Robert Helpmann. Diana Wynyard (*l.*) as Gertrude, Anthony Quayle as Claudius, and Claire Bloom (*r.*) as Ophelia
[Photo: Angus McBean]
- B The same scene in Buzz Goodbody's production, 1975. *L. to r.*, Terence Wilton as Second Player, Bob Peck as First Player, Stuart Wilson as Fourth Player, Charles Dance as Third Player
[Photo: Joe Cocks]
- VI III, iii: The prayer scene in Michael Benthall's production, 1948: Robert Helpmann as Hamlet and Anthony Quayle as Claudius
[Photo: Angus McBean – Harvard Theatre Collection]
- VII III, iii: The prayer scene: David Warner as Hamlet and Brewster Mason as Claudius in Peter Hall's production, 1965
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon]

- VIII A III, iv: 'Look here, upon this picture, and on this': Michael Redgrave, with coin and locket, in Glen Byam Shaw's production, 1958; Googie Withers as Gertrude
[Photo: Angus McBean – Harvard Theatre Collection]
- B The same scene in Peter Wood's production, 1961: Ian Bannen and Elizabeth Sellars
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon]
- IX A III, iv: The closet scene: Ben Kingsley as Hamlet and Mikel Lambert as Gertrude in Buzz Goodbody's production, 1975
[Photo: Joe Cocks]
- B III, iv: Hamlet (David Warner) and Gertrude (Elizabeth Spriggs) on the Queen's bed; Peter Hall's production, 1965
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon. Photo: Gordon Goode]
- X IV, v: The mad Ophelia: Dorothy Tutin in Glen Byam Shaw's production, 1958
[Photo: Angus McBean – Harvard Theatre Collection]
- XI IV, v: The mad Ophelia, obeying the 'bad' quarto's direction 'playing on a lute' (cf. Plate III A). *L. to r.*, David Waller as Claudius, a courtier, Christopher Gable as Laertes, Helen Mirren as Ophelia, and Brenda Bruce as Gertrude, in Trevor Nunn's production, 1970
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon]
- XII V, i: The Gravedigger (David Waller) and Hamlet (David Warner) in the 1966 revival of Peter Hall's 1965 production
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon]
- XIII V, i: The graveyard scene in Trevor Nunn's production, 1970. Alan Howard as Hamlet, Barry Stanton as First Gravedigger, Ralph Cotterill as Second Gravedigger, and Terence Taplin as Horatio
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon]
- XIV A V, ii: 'Come, begin,/And you, the judges, bear a wary eye': the beginning of the duel in Trevor Nunn's production, 1970. Christopher Gable as Laertes, Peter Egan as Osric, Alan Howard as Hamlet
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon. Photo: T. F. Holte]
- B V, ii: The duel, in Peter Wood's production, 1961: Peter McEnery as Laertes, Ian Bannen as Hamlet
[Photo: Angus McBean – Harvard Theatre Collection]
- XV V, ii: The dying Hamlet: Terence Taplin as Horatio, Alan Howard as Hamlet in Trevor Nunn's production, 1970
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon. Photo: Donald Cooper]
- XVI V, ii: The catastrophe: Peter Hall's production (1965, revived 1966). Donald Burton as Horatio, David Warner as Hamlet, Anne McPartland as Gertrude, Brewster Mason as Claudius, and Michael Jayston as Laertes
[Reproduced by permission of the Governors of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon]

PREFACE

Shakespeare Survey 9 contained the retrospective account of *Hamlet* criticism (1901–55) by the late Clifford Leech. Since then books and articles on the play have shown no signs of drying up, and it may put the present collection in perspective if we give a short survey of criticism written during the period. We shall make use of the yearly reviews which are one of the most valued features of *Shakespeare Survey*.

Some of the best criticism of *Hamlet* has appeared in books which cover a wider subject. We may instance chapters in the following: *Form and Meaning in Drama* by H. D. F. Kitto (1956); *The Business of Criticism* by Helen Gardner (1959); *The Story of the Night* by John Holloway (1961); *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* by Norman Rabkin (1967); *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies* by Nicholas Brooke (1968); *Shakespearean Design* by Mark Rose (1972); *Shakespeare's Living Art* by Rosalie Colie (1974); *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies* by Ernst Honigsmann (1976).

Other good criticism has appeared in articles and pamphlets: Harold Jenkins' British Academy Lecture (1963) on 'Hamlet and Ophelia', Fredson Bowers' series of short papers which together form a valuable study of the hero (e.g. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, xv, 1964; *PMLA*, lxx, 1955) and Stephen Booth's 'On the value of *Hamlet*' (in *Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama*, ed. Norman Rabkin, 1969) are among the most interesting.

The main debate during the past twenty years has been between those critics who deplore Hamlet's character and those who admire it. Rebecca West devoted a large section of *The Court and the Castle* (1957) to the play. Like Madariaga, she gives a wholly hostile account of the Prince whom she stigmatizes as egotistical, cruel, a callous murderer, in a word as a 'bad' man, while Ophelia is 'disreputable'. She does not really explain how it is that the common man, as well as most critics of the past, has taken a more favourable view of the character. L. C. Knights in *An Approach to Hamlet* (1960) has modified his earlier harsh verdict on the Prince given in *Explorations*; but he still thinks that the Ghost was tempting him to evil and he will not allow that Hamlet's reference to the fall of the sparrow means that he has submitted to the will of God. To Eleanor Prosser, in her brilliantly argued book, *Hamlet and Revenge* (1967), the Ghost is what Hamlet feared it might be, the devil in his father's shape, tempting him to commit mortal sin—even though, as she admits, Hamlet's father had been murdered by Claudius. Neither Knights nor Prosser tells us what Hamlet ought to have done.

As a contrast to these three critics we may take the contributors to *Hamlet: Stratford-upon-Avon Studies* 5, edited by J. R. Brown and B. Harris (1963), who all agree that Hamlet was heroic and, on balance, a good man. This is expressed eloquently by G. K. Hunter and Patrick Cruttwell, wittily by T. J. B. Spencer, and implicitly by R. A. Foakes and J. K. Walton. In the same year Kenneth Muir expressed similar views in *Shakespeare: Hamlet*, supporting them by demonstrating that in their context the sickness images refer not to the hero but to the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-29400-3 - Aspects of Hamlet: Articles Reprinted from Shakespeare Survey

Edited by Kenneth Muir and Stanley Wells

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

corruption in the Court of Elsinore; and Stanley Wells in *Royal Shakespeare* (1976), commenting on Peter Hall's production of the play, argues too for the more favourable interpretation of Hamlet's character. Maurice Charney's *Style in Hamlet* (1969) includes a good analysis of the imagery of the play, together with some more pedestrian discussion of other aspects of style. Harold Fisch in *Hamlet and the Word* (1971) is another critic who defends the hero, stressing that his real problem is to govern instinct by moral law and that he has to act in the random circumstances of real life. One of the best and most subtle of recent books on *Hamlet* is Nigel Alexander's *Poison, Play and Duel* (1971) which, with the help of iconography and a wide knowledge of drama, illuminates many passages in the play.

A few years earlier Harry Levin in *The Question of Hamlet* (1959), under the headings of Interrogation, Doubt and Irony, had provided one of the most stimulating interpretations of the play. Finally, there is a very salutary book by Morris Weitz, *Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism* (1964). This distinguishes between the four functions of criticism—to describe, to explain, to evaluate, and to theorize about poetics. Only the first of these processes, Weitz argues, involves answers that are true or false. Even though description in criticism of a play is not so clearly defined as this would suggest, Weitz has some useful things to say about the mistakes which arise in *Hamlet* criticism from confusing the four processes. We 'hope we have reformed that indifferently with us' in the essays included in the present collection.

It should be added that *Shakespeare Survey 30* (1977) contains several interesting articles on *Hamlet*, of which we have been able to include only one.

The present volume is illustrated with photographs of post-war productions of *Hamlet* selected from the Royal Shakespeare Company's files at the Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon. Thanks are due to the Theatre's librarian, Miss Eileen Robinson.

KENNETH MUIR
STANLEY WELLS