

SERMONS, PLAYS AND NOTE-TAKERS: HAMLET Q₁ AS A 'NOTED' TEXT

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THE ACTOR-PIRATE

In the eighteenth century, when Shakespeare editors first came into being, only two texts of *Hamlet* were known, one printed in 1604 in quarto (now called Q₂), and one in the Folio of 1623 (F). But in 1823 Sir Henry Bunbury discovered a third version of *Hamlet* 'in a closet at Barton'.¹ Dated 1603, it was the first and earliest printed text of the play (now known as Q₁). It was also, as shocked scholars realized, the 'worst'. As one of the earliest commentators on the text, Ambrose Gunthio (probably J. P. Collier) asked, 'Can any one for a moment believe that Shakspeare penned this unconnected, unintelligible jargon?'² Since then, critics have repeatedly drawn attention to *Hamlet* Q₁'s incoherence, inconsistencies, ellipses, reworkings and loose ends, generally concluding, with G. R. Hibbard, that 'the text itself, . . . is a completely illegitimate and unreliable one'. So how did such a text come about – and why?³

Finding an answer is difficult, partly because the text is not equally 'bad' – or even 'bad' in the same way – throughout. Running at about 2200 lines (the other texts are Q₂ c.3800 lines, F c.3570 lines) *Hamlet* Q₁ is more filled with gaps and summaries than the other texts. Yet its earliest pages are fairly true to Q₂ and F, while some later sections are quite accurately represented, including speeches by the Ghost and Horatio. Though some passages reflect their *Hamlet* counterparts almost line-by-line, even if full of synonyms and rephrasings, others are partially, and some entirely, 'new'.

Early explanations for *Hamlet* Q₁ included the notion that it combines Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with

bits of the lost earlier text on which it was based, the 'Ur' *Hamlet*; or that it is Shakespeare's rough draft. Yet *Hamlet* Q₁ contains textual moments from *Hamlet* Q₂, thought to be a pre-performance text, and F, thought to be a post-performance text – meaning that, in chronological terms, it seems to be the middle text of the three. Another early explanation was offered by 'Gunthio': that *Hamlet* Q₁ must have been 'taken down piecemeal in the theatre, by a blundering scribe'.⁴

There were good reasons for believing that *Hamlet* Q₁ had been constructed by scribes in the audience. Several sermons of the 1580s and '90s had been published not from authorial texts, but from notes taken down by the congregation in 'characterie', an early form of shorthand; if sermons could be 'taken' in this way, why not plays? Anthony Tyrrell's *A Fruitfull Sermon* of 1589, for instance, broadcasts on its title-page that it has been 'Taken by Characterie'; Stephen Egerton's *Ordinary Lecture* (1589) is, says its title-page, 'taken as it was uttered by characterie'. Henry Smith's *Sermon of the Benefite of Contentation* (1590) is also 'Taken by characterie'; while his *Fruit[full]*

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¹ Sir Henry Bunbury, *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas Hamner* (London, 1838), p. 80.

² Ambrose Gunthio, 'A Running Commentary on the Hamlet of 1603', *European Magazine*, 1:4 (1825), 339–47 at 340.

³ G. R. Hibbard, ed., *Hamlet* (Oxford, 1987), p. 69.

⁴ Gunthio, 'Running Commentary', 340.

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Sermon (1591) 'being taken by characterie, is now published for the benefite of the faithfull'. So usual did it become to publish sermons from audience's shorthand 'characterical' notes in the 1590s that 'L.S.' had to explain, when he provided his own sermon text in 1593, that in this instance 'Taken it was not from the Preachers mouth by any fond or new found Characterisme'.⁵

It was the evidence of these sermons that led W. Matthews, in the 1930s, to learn 'character' in order to determine whether it really could be used to capture Shakespeare. He recorded his conclusions in a series of articles: that character' has too few words – 550 (if particles are included) – to record a literary text; that it is too difficult a system to be used at speed; and that, using pictorial symbols to represent words – in principal it could be 'read' by a foreigner – it is anti-literary, recording only the meaning, not the sound, of any text.⁶ He and other scholars then worked on the two further shorthands published before *Hamlet* Q1: brachygraphy (1590), which was also pictorial; and stenography (1602), the first phonetic shorthand. They found inadequacies in all of them, and dismissed the entire notion of scribes in the audience.

In 1941, G. I. Duthie, in *The 'Bad' Quarto of 'Hamlet'*, accepted Matthews's rejection of shorthand, adding that a shorthand writer, confronted with a word he did not know, would be brought to a standstill, and suggesting that visible note-takers in the audience would, anyway, have been caught and removed. He then offered his preferred explanation for the origin of *Hamlet* Q1. Summarizing ideas promoted by Dover Wilson, but originating with Tycho Mommsen in 1857, Duthie argued that *Hamlet* Q1 had been stolen by a traitor-actor who had been involved in the play's production. As Duthie saw it, the hireling who had played Marcellus and Lucianus 'stole' the text of *Hamlet*, reproducing his own part(s) and memorizing what he could of the others. Hence the reason, he said, that Marcellus's part was 'good'. Since Duthie, most scholars have accepted the idea that *Hamlet* was taken by a traitor-actor; in 1992 Kathleen Irace furthered it with her computer-based analysis of the part of Marcellus: she suggested, however, that

the Marcellus player was reconstructing an adapted form of *Hamlet* from memory.⁷ As *Hamlet* Q1 had long been said to be a 'pirate' text, 'pirate' meaning, bibliographically, a work belonging to another which has been reproduced without authority, the actor-thief was said to have been a 'pirate' – picking up on a joke first made by Alfred Pollard in his *Shakespeare's Fight with the Pirates* (London, 1917). Over time, however, the joke has been forgotten, and the player of 'Marcellus' has come to be called the 'actor-pirate', despite the fact that a 'pirate' is a plunderer of ships, not a land thief.

The glamorous word 'pirate', and the confused notions that it accrued, may have kept alive the theory of the actor-thief. No longer was *Hamlet* Q1 a disappointingly inaccurate text; it was now an enthralling record of insubordination inside Shakespeare's very playhouse, run, or masterminded, by a rogue 'pirate' actor. Yet the actor-pirate theory is inherently problematic. Even in 1.1, Marcellus, as well as Horatio and Bernardo, 'make mistakes' and 'have recourse to synonyms'.⁸ More damning still for an actor-based theory is the fact that 'Marcellus' misremembers his own cues. An actor's 'part' for Marcellus – the script that an actor would receive, consisting of his lines and cues – made from Q2/F would look like this, with the words 'desperate with imagination' cueing 'Let's follow':

—————[desperate] [with] imagination.
Let's follow; 'tis not fit thus to obey him.
—————[will] [this] come?
Something is rotten in the State of Denmarke.

But in Q1, Marcellus's part would look like this – with 'desperate with imagination' cueing 'something is rotten' and 'will this sort' cueing 'Let's

⁵ L. S., *Resurgendum* (1593), A3r.

⁶ W. Matthews, 'Shorthand and the Bad Shakespeare Quartos', *Modern Language Review*, 27 (1932), 243–62; W. Matthews, 'Shakespeare and the Reporters', *The Library*, 15 (1935), 481–500.

⁷ Kathleen Irace, 'Origins and Agents of Q1 *Hamlet*', in Thomas Clayton, ed., *The Hamlet First Published* (Newark, 1992), pp. 90–122.

⁸ Hibbard, ed., *Hamlet*, p. 80.

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follow' – meaning that the cues are reversed and misremembered:

—————[desperate] [with] imagination.
 Something is rotten in the state of *Denmarke*.
 —————[will] [this] sort?
 Lets follow, tis not fit thus to obey him.

Marcellus also does not remember to give out his cues to his fellow actor. Q2/F has

Mar. And Leedgemen to the Dane,
Fran. Give you good night.
Mar. O, farwell honest souldiers . . .

But Q1 has instead 'And leegemen to the Dane, / O farewell honest souldier', meaning that Marcellus neglects to stop at his cue for Francisco.⁹ It is unfortunate for the actor-pirate theory that it does not take acting into account.

There are further problems with the actor-pirate explanation. All of the early pages of *Hamlet* Q1, not just Marcellus's part, are relatively 'good', but the more the play progresses, the more is sense, rather than word, recorded. This demands an actor who begins the play with verbal recall, but who, over time, becomes more retentive of sense than sound: a change particularly unlikely for an actor, who usually remembers sound over meaning. Moreover, though in Act 1 the text is sometimes better when Marcellus is on stage, that notion falls apart later in the play, as Paul Werstine points out. Not only are lines surrounding the putative actor-pirate often as bad as lines elsewhere, but also, conversely, sometimes 'Q1 . . . provides us with a better version of some Q2/F dialogue when the putative reporters are off than it . . . does when they are on.'¹⁰ Attempts to explain this have resulted in casting the 'pirate' in ever more roles. Though on the one hand said to be a temporary, hireling actor, with no qualms about stealing the playhouse's property, the actor-pirate has, on the other, been said to have played Marcellus, Voltemand ('Voltemar'), Lucianus, Prologue, Second Gravedigger, Churlish Priest, an English Ambassador and a scattered selection of mutes – thus becoming one of the most continuously staged players in *Hamlet*.

The question of actor-piracy, moreover, depends on fusing two different ideas together: that actors might be textual thieves (for which there is no evidence); and that people with very good memories were able to steal plays (for which there is plenty of evidence). In Spain, there are records of men who could hold entire plays in their heads. Luís Remírez, in 1615, was said to be able to reproduce a *comedia* having heard it three times; while Lope de Vega in 1620 inveighs against audience-members who make their money 'by stealing the *comedias* . . . saying that they are able to memorize them only by hearing them'.¹¹ Maguire points out, however, 'in neither case are actors involved in the reconstruction'.¹² Both instances in fact bolster the argument for locating textual theft amongst the spectators. Moreover, the Spanish memorizers are praised, or blamed, for being unusual: not anyone could perform such feats of memory, and these men are said to have trained with textual theft in mind.

Recently, the more general idea that *Hamlet* Q1 comes directly from a single actor at all has been implicitly questioned by the work of Paul Menzer, who shows the text to be, because of its poor cues, unstageable; while Lene B. Petersen indicates that *Hamlet* Q1 is not simply 'memorial': its features of repetition and simplification, though reminiscent of folktales and ballads, render it neither fully authorial nor fully 'oral'.¹³

Given problems with the 'actor-pirate' theory, this article will return to the explanation for which there is historical evidence: audience notation.

⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet* (1604); William Shakespeare, *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet* (1603). Unless otherwise noted, all textual references to *Hamlet* are to these versions, in their original printed states. All quotations that are essentially the same in Q2/F are quoted from Q2.

¹⁰ Paul Werstine, 'A Century of Bad Shakespeare Quartos', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 50 (1999), 310–33 at 320.

¹¹ Roger Chartier, *Publishing Drama in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1998), p. 29.

¹² Laurie Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 106.

¹³ Paul Menzer, *The Hamlets* (Newark, 2008), p. 24; Lene B. Petersen, *Shakespeare's Errant Texts* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 142.

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This is an idea that has been revisited with respect to *King Lear* in P. W. K. Stone's excellent *The Textual History of King Lear* (London, 1980), which argues that *King Lear* Q1 is a reported, but not a shorthand, text, and Adele Davidson's *Shakespeare in Shorthand* (Newark, 2009), which argues conversely that *King Lear* Q1 is a shorthand text, and that it was copied from manuscript, not from an audience report. Both books deserve to be better known than they are, but both saddle themselves with a quarto that is particularly receptive to other explanations, and further limit themselves by insisting on one notation, shorthand or otherwise, for bringing the play about.

This article, changing the terms in which Matthews and Duthie originally asked and rejected the shorthand option for *Hamlet* Q1, will investigate not whether one person, using one form of shorthand, on one occasion, copied Q1 *Hamlet*, but whether some people, using any form of handwriting they liked, on any number of occasions, could have penned *Hamlet* Q1. It considers evidence that plays, like sermons, were noted during performance; it looks at what might constitute 'note traces' in the text of *Hamlet* and asks why watchers might want to capture in notes – and then publish – the uttered performances that they heard.

NOTERS AT CHURCHES AND
PLAYHOUSES

As there is detailed evidence about the way congregations rendered the sermons they heard into written texts, this section will start by examining church practice; it will then turn to other oral performances captured in text – parliamentary speeches – before looking, finally, at plays. Did the theatrical audiences sometimes transcribe what they heard?

Just as contemporary students are expected to take notes in lectures to facilitate their memorizing and learning, so congregations in early modern England were expected to take notes at sermons 'for the helping of their owne memories' while listening, and 'for their owne private helpe and

edification' afterwards.¹⁴ As Lady Hatton wrote to her son Christopher in Cambridge, 'Heare sermonns', enjoining him to 'strive to take notes that you may meditate on them'.¹⁵ John Brinsley, in his educational treatise *Ludus Literarius* (1612), recommends instilling the note-taking habit in children as early as possible. In order to 'cause every one to learn something at the sermons' he suggests that young children, if they can write at all, 'take notes'. The distinction between partial 'notes' and whole sermons, however, was permeable; Brinsley goes on to suggest that children in the highest forms at school should 'set downe the substance exactly'.¹⁶

As literacy increased over time, churches became so full of noters as to resemble schoolrooms. In 1641 'boys' at sermons are castigated for turning the communion tables into a surface on which to write, 'fouling and spotting the linnen' in the process.¹⁷ By 1644, Robert Baillie, participating in the Westminster Assembly, recorded that in England 'most of all the assembly write, as all the people almost, men, women, and children, write at preaching'; by 1651 Lodewijck Huygens went to church in Covent Garden and found 'In the box next to ours three or four ladies . . . writing down the entire sermon, and more than 50 other persons throughout the whole church . . . doing the same'.¹⁸

Preachers from the 1590s onwards had to decide what to think about the sea of 'noters' that confronted them. Stephen Egerton concluded, carefully, in 1592, that

I do not mislike the noting at Sermons, but rather wish it were more used then it is, so it were used to keepe the minde more attentive in the time of hearing, to

¹⁴ Robert Rollock, *Five and Twentie Lectures* (1619), π4r; Stephen Egerton, *A Lecture* [1603], A6v-A7r.

¹⁵ Edward Maund Thomson, ed., *Correspondence of the Family of Hatton* (London, 1878), p. 3.

¹⁶ John Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius* (1612), p. 255.

¹⁷ Ephraim Udall, *Tò Prepon Emchariotichòn* (1641), C2v.

¹⁸ Robert Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 2 vols. (1775), vol. 1, p. 414; Lodewijck Huygens, *The English Journal, 1651–1652*, ed. and trans. A. G. H. Bachrach and R. G. Collmer (Leiden, 1982), p. 55.

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helpe the memorie after hearing, that men might be more able afterwards to meditate by themselves, and to conferre with others.¹⁹

He may have been affected by the fact that the popularity of preachers could be measured by the number of noters they attracted.

Naturally, notes of sermons by popular preachers had a tendency to make their way to the press. Sermons that are described as having been ‘gathered’, ‘taken’, or ‘received’ from ‘the mouth’ of a preacher, advertise that they are printed from notes and are not directly ‘authorial’. John Dod’s *The Bright Star* claims, on its title page, to have been ‘gathered from the mouth of a faithfull pastor by a gracious young man’ (1603); William Crashaw printed sermons by William Perkins, ‘taken with this hand of mine, from his owne mouth’ (1605); while Robert Rollock’s *Scots Certaine Sermons* (1599) were likewise printed from a text ‘we / fand in the hand of sum of his Schollers quha wrait at his mouth’.²⁰ Such texts draw attention to the two body parts they manifest, mouth and hand, highlighting their inscribed orality, rather than their literary features.

One ramification of the noting habit was that notebooks needed to be created capable, in size terms, of recording about an hour’s worth of preaching (sermons at the time being measured by the hour-glass).²¹ Rather than taking to church the pens, ink, sand, knives, paper and blotting-paper that permanent text required, congregations seem often to have opted for ‘tablebooks’ – small notebooks that could be written on with graphite pencils or soft-metal pens. In 1625, Hall refers to the man who ‘in the midst of the Sermon pul[s] out his Tables in haste, as if he feared to leese that note’ (in fact all he actually records is ‘his forgotten errand, or nothing’): tablebooks were a stylish accoutrement, and some people wanted to draw attention to the fact that they had them.²² Those who hoped to be ‘noted’ (‘seen’), flourishing the writing implements that advertised their literacy and their piety, were the subject of a weak pun repeatedly used. The playwright Thomas Heywood, in a 1636 text he himself noted from utterance (it is ‘taken’ from the ‘mouthes’ of two

phoney-prophets), depicts a religious hypocrite as one who, ‘In the time of the Sermon . . . drawes out his tables to take the Notes, . . . still noting who observes him to take them’.²³

Tablebooks had several advantages: they encouraged continuous writing, as they were not reliant on dipping a pen in ink; they were portable – surviving examples are 16mos in 8s; and they were economical, as they could be wiped clean with damp bread or a wet sponge once their notes had been transcribed onto a permanent medium.²⁴ Daniel Featley depicts, using the well-worn pun, the ‘noted noters of sermons’, as they prepare to attend a church: they ‘cleanse their table-books, especially before your fast sermons’.²⁵

A second ramification of the noting habit, especially for those who wished to take an entire sermon, was that speedy writing became a goal: the more swiftly one could write, the more sermon one could gather. As early as 1569, John Hart’s *Orthographie* had recommended using italic rather than secretary hand when taking notes, and avoiding unsounded or unnecessary letters; in effect, he had created the first shorthand, though his was still reliant on the alphabet. From then on, ever more pictorial shorthands came into being, as ‘by the benefite of speedy writing, the whole body of the Lecture, and sermon might be registred’ while otherwise ‘no more remaineth after the hower passed, then so much as the frailtie of memory

¹⁹ Stephen Egerton in William Cupper, *Certaine Sermons* (1592), A7r.

²⁰ William Perkins, *M. Perkins, his Exhortation to Repentance* (1605), A7v; Robert Rollock, *Certaine sermons . . . Preached . . . at Edinburgh* (1599), A6r-v.

²¹ Laurie Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 97.

²² Joseph Hall, *The Works* (1625), p. 187.

²³ Thomas Heywood, *A True Discourse of the Two Infamous Upstart Prophets, Richard Farnham . . . and John Bull . . . with their Examinations and Opinions taken from their Owne Mouthes* (1636), p. 3.

²⁴ H. R. Woudhuysen, ‘Writing-Tables and Table Books’, *eBLJ* (2004), 1–11 at 4; Peter Sallibrass *et al.*, ‘Hamlet’s Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 55 (2004), 379–419, 385.

²⁵ Daniel Featley, *Sacra Nemesis* (1644), p. 77.

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carieth away'.²⁶ By the time charactery made its way into print in 1588, several other forms of shorthand were already extant, though 'none' of them, maintained charactery's inventor Timothie Bright, was 'comparable' with his own.²⁷ As Bright also patented his own system, ensuring no one could teach, print or publish any new form of 'character' for the next fifteen years,²⁸ other systems were forced underground. Edmond Willis, whose shorthand was not printed until 1618, for instance, had been using it for the previous twenty years; it was the method employed to note the sermons of Nicholas Felton between 1599 and 1602, as a surviving manuscript attests.²⁹ By the time Willis printed his *Abreviation of Writing by Character*, London was crammed not so much with shorthand books as with shorthand teachers who had 'with their Bills . . . be-sprinkled the posts and walls of this Citie'.³⁰

Some shorthands never made it into print. Most, after *Orthographie*, whether logographic or phonetic, were reliant on new symbols, which meant that publication was expensive: the new characters needed to be carved onto special types, or engraved onto plates, or, as was the case with John Willis's *Stenographie*, which could be bought 'charactered' or 'uncharactered', inked in by hand on every page. So though by 1641 'short-hand writing' was 'usuall for any common Mechanick both to write and invent', it is impossible to tell how many systems there were at any particular period, and how they related to one another.³¹ What can be said is that at least the following different shorthands were being discussed by name – each name representing a different 'brand' – in London by the 1650s: brachygraphy, brachyography, cryptography, polygraphy, radiography, semigraphy, semography, steganography, stenography, tachygraphy, zeiglography.

As Arnold Hunt in his brilliant *Art of Hearing* makes clear, however, texts that claim to have been taken by shorthand often contain mistakes traceable to longhand; shorthand involved longhand when that was necessary, and the shorthand-longhand distinction is not entirely useful.³² Besides, as Richard Knowles reminds us, longhand itself also

remained popular for notes:³³ shorthand, after all, comes after the desire to note, and is a consequence of that desire, not a cause. Oliver Heywood, writing about the 1650s, records that his wife would take, at sermons, 'the heads and proofes fully and a considerable part of the enlargement'; she, he observes, 'writ long-hand and not characters', making clear that longhand might be sufficient – and that both long- and shorthand were 'usual' for sermon notes at the time.³⁴ Many were committed to the shorthand cause, however. In 1634, Samuel Hartlib, in an excess of zeal, proposed sending volunteer shorthand writers to every single sermon preached in London, with the aim of preserving all of them.³⁵

Whether notes were gathered in longhand or shorthand, or a mix, they tended to end up in longhand. Notes taken during sermons were helps towards remembering an entire sermon later, and were often rewritten at home. Margaret Hoby, for instance, went to the popular 'Egertons sermons' in 1600, afterwards 'setting downe' – writing in a permanent medium – 'some notes I had Colected'; Gilbert Freville made a longhand commonplace book in 1604 from 'the notes, taken . . . at sev[er]all sermons of Mr. Stephen Egertons preached at

²⁶ Stephen Egerton, *An Ordinary Lecture* (1589), A2r.

²⁷ Timothie Bright, *Characterie* (1588), A8v. A 1586 shorthand letter preserves an earlier form of charactery than that printed by Bright. See Max Förster, 'Shakespeare and Shorthand', *Philological Quarterly*, 16 (1937), 1–29 at 11.

²⁸ Adele Davidson, *Shakespeare in Shorthand: The Textual Mystery of 'King Lear'* (Newark, 2009), p. 34.

²⁹ W. Matthews, 'A Postscript to "Shorthand and the Bad Shakespeare Quartos"', *Modern Language Review*, 28 (1933), 81–3 at 83.

³⁰ Edmond Willis, *An Abreviation of Writing by Character* (1618), A3r.

³¹ John Wilkins, *Mercury, or, The secret and swift messenger* (1641), pp. 98–9.

³² Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590–1640* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 144–6.

³³ Richard Knowles, 'Shakespeare and Shorthand Once Again', *PBSA*, 104:2 (2010), 141–80.

³⁴ J. H. Turner, *The Rev Oliver Heywood, B.A., 1630–1702*, 4 vols. (Brighouse [England], 1881), vol. 1, p. 58.

³⁵ Vivian Salmon, *The Works of Francis Lodwick* (London, 1972), p. 62.

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Black friers', his texts extending to up to two thousand words.³⁶ John Manningham's longhand surviving sermon records are fuller still: consisting of texts that are up to four thousand words long, they roughly match the length of the sermon itself.³⁷ Given the habit of rewriting sermon notes at home in order to free a tablebook for reuse, to expand shorthand for other readers, or to create the fullest *aide memoire*, the process of note-taking in whatever form easily became (re)writing. A final, written up, sermon might well come to seem the possession of the note-taker – for its gaps had been filled by the note-taker's words, and it had been inscribed, and reinscribed, in the note-taker's hand.

Perhaps this accounts not just for the regularity with which noters then published the sermons they had gathered but for their habit of boasting about it. Edward Philips's *Certaine Godly and Learned Sermons* proclaim on their title-page that they are provided 'as they were . . . taken by the pen of H. Yelverton of Grayes Inne Gentleman, 1605'; William Perkins's *A Cloud of Faithfull Witnesses*, brags on its title-page that it is 'published . . . by Will. Crashawe, and Tho. Pierson . . . who heard him preach it, and wrote it from his mouth' (1608). Publishers too, were ready to reveal that the sermons they were issuing were published against the will of the preacher; this gave purchasers the delightful *frisson* of acquiring something that was morally improving and, as it was not designed for them, illicit. Of Henry Smith's *Sermon of the Benefite*, 'Taken by characterie', 'it were not the authors minde or consent that it shoulde come foorth thus' (1590); the doctrines in Dod's *The Bright Star* 'were received from his mouth, but neither penned nor perused by himselfe, nor published with his consent or knowledge' (1603).³⁸

Though some preachers printed their own sermons, others, who suddenly discovered their sermons in print, were outraged, publishing correctives to 'bring this boate to land, which the owner never meant should see the shore'.³⁹ It is often only the correctives that reveal that the earlier texts were 'stolen' in the first place: 'Some (I know not who) . . . have presumed to printe the *Meane in Mourning*, altogether without true judgement,

or calling me to counsell therein' writes Playfere at the front of his revamped *Pathway to Perfection* (1596); in front of his new *Meane in Mourning* he records that 'this sermon hath been twice printed already without my procurement or privitie any manner of way. Yea to my very great grieve and trouble' (1596).⁴⁰ Preachers who did not mind their sermons being published never reveal the theft – meaning that probably more printed sermons of the period are 'taken' than is known about.

What is noticeable, however, is that Playfere's correctives, like those of his fellow preachers', are not hugely different in substance from the 'bad' texts that preceded them. Partly this is because preachers did not write entire texts before preaching, but spoke from notes of their own; the published 'bad' texts were the most complete records available of what had been preached.⁴¹ But partly this is because the substance was fairly well represented – it was the verbal texture that had been lost. What is corrected the second time round by preachers is not so much content as style, which some think of as too full of flourishes, and others as not having flourishes enough – the point being, either way, that the text does not sound 'authorial'. Though Dod's *Plaine and Familiar Exposition* was first published 'By noters hand', explains 'E.C.', it is now revised by the author, and appears 'In grave and sober modest weede, not garishly bedeckt'.⁴² Playfere is particularly explicit on the subject: the two previous, noted, editions of *The Meane in Mourning* 'were but wooden sheathes. Or if there

³⁶ Matthews, 'Shakespeare and the Reporters', p. 492.

³⁷ Matthews, 'Shakespeare and the Reporters', pp. 491–2, 494.

³⁸ Henry Smith, *A Sermon of the Benefite of Contentation* (1590), A3r; John Dod, *The Bright Star* (1603), A2r.

³⁹ Edward Philips, *Certaine Godly and Learned Sermons* (1605), A5r.

⁴⁰ Thomas Playfere, *The Pathway to Perfection* (1596), A2r–v; Thomas Playfere, *The Meane in Mourning* (1596), A2r.

⁴¹ Mary Morrissey, 'From Pulpit to Press', *Politics and the Paul's Cross Sermons, 1558–1642* (Oxford, 2011).

⁴² E.C. 'A friendly counsell to the Christian reader, touching the Author and his booke', in John Dod, *A Plaine and Familiar Exposition* (1604), A3v.

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were any mettall in them, yet it had not an yvorie but a dudgin haft, being blunt and dull, without any point or edge', an explanation that illustrates, in its very phrasing, the importance to him of the striking 'literary' image his sermons had lost.⁴³

Naturally, Londoners, habituated to noting by education and church, responded not only to preachers but to other speakers by inscribing them: public utterance tended to lead to text. Note-takers filled parliament, relying on tablebooks to create records they would afterwards write up – William Holt, on 13 March 1607, attended parliament with 'tables in his hand, and was seen to write diligently'; Sir Francis Bacon, reporting on a conference he had attended about Scotland, 'professeth to omit some answers by reason that his tables failed him'.⁴⁴

It will come as no surprise that spectators went to playhouses, too, with notebooks in their hands. Often, like the congregation show-offs, they were interested in waving their books around while collecting tiny snippets of text – which may explain why playwrights of the period so often wrote in sententiae and instantly quotable passages ('sound-bites' in today's parlance). 'Gulls' in the theatre are described who 'will not let a merriment slip, but they will trusse it up for their owne provision':⁴⁵ they gather jokes from plays to repeat later as their own. Lawyers, too, in their most carefully designed choleric rants, were said to be making use of 'shreds and scraps dropt from some Stage-Poet, at the Globe or Cock-pit, which they have carefully booke up'.⁴⁶ Many went to plays to gather the newest word into their tables, as Shakespeare parodies, when Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost* uses the word 'peregrinat' and the fascinated Nathaniel 'Draw[s] out his Table-booke' to record it (TLN 1752–5).⁴⁷ What was collected at plays might include staging details, as well as dialogue, for these could function, like a theatre programme today, as a token or memento of performance. The playwright Cyril Tourneur writes about a man who saw an entertainment without writing equipment: 'Many . . . pretty *Figures* there were expressing the meaning of these *Maskers*', mourns the man, 'which, for lack of a note booke,

are suddainlie slipt out of my memorie'.⁴⁸ But playwright Thomas Dekker writes of plays that were comprehensively gathered. Describing the accession of King James as a play, he declares: 'it were able to fill a hundred paire of writing-tables with notes, but to see the parts plaid . . . on the stage of this new-found world'.⁴⁹

There was, then, nothing covert or hidden about noters in the audience; confident playwrights, like confident preachers, assumed the practice of noting reflected the worth of the play. Fletcher and Massinger, for instance

dare looke
On any man, that brings his Table-booke
To write downe, what againe he may repeate
At some greate Table, to deserve his meate.⁵⁰

Playwrights did, however, fear malicious noters in a way that preachers did not. Several refer to spectators who gather passages because they dislike them, or intend to misinterpret them later out of context: 'if there bee any lurking amongst you in corners, with Table bookes . . . to feede his ——— mallice on, let them claspe them up, and slinke away, or stay and be converted' suggests Beaumont.⁵¹ Cordatus, spokesman for Ben Jonson, defensively turns upon the audience members he calls 'decipherers': '(where e're they sit conceald) let them know, the Authour defies them, and their writing-Tables'.⁵² As noted passages, favourable and otherwise, would also have to be retranscribed at home to clear table-books, extant theatrical commonplace books are

⁴³ Playfere, *Pathway*, A3r.

⁴⁴ Chris R. Kyle, *Theater of State* (Stanford, 2012), p. 68.

⁴⁵ Barnaby Rich, *Faultes Faults, and Nothing Else but Faultes* (1606), B4v.

⁴⁶ Thomas Trescot, *The Zealous Magistrate* (1642), C3v.

⁴⁷ Non-*Hamlet* Shakespeare quotations are taken from Charlton Hinman's *Norton Facsimile* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968) of the Folio, and use the through line numbering (TLN) of that edition.

⁴⁸ Cyril Tourneur, *Laugh and Lie Down* (1605), F2v.

⁴⁹ Thomas Dekker, *The Wonderfull Yeare* (1603), C1v.

⁵⁰ Frances Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Custom of the Country in Comedies and Tragedies* (1647), p. 25.

⁵¹ Francis Beaumont, *The Woman Hater* (1607), A2r.

⁵² Ben Jonson, *Every Man out of his Humor* (1600), H2r.

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generally in longhand, though that reveals nothing about the gathering process.⁵³

Early performances of *Hamlet* were, it seems, attended by noters, as a surviving passage suggests. In 1623 William Basse republished his popular book *A Helpe to Discourse*. Designed for the conversationally inadequate, the book provided a series of questions or riddles with their ideal answers. One of its new 'ideal' exchanges includes the following question (Q) and the perfect answer for it (A):

Q. What Birds are those that are called Prophets twice born?

A. The cock: first an egge from the Hen, after a Cock from the Egge: they foretell seasons and changes of weather, according to the Verse:

Some say for ever 'gainst that season comes,	say that Q1; sayes that Q2, F
Wherin our Saviours birth is celebrated,	
The Bird of dawning singeth all Night long,	
And then they say no spirit dares walk abroad,	
So sacred and so hallow'd is that tune .	dare walke Q1; dare sturre Q2; can walke F
W. Shakes ⁵⁴	gratious . . . hallowed Q1; hallowed . . . gracious Q2, F time Q1, Q2, F

Basse's passage differs verbally from all three printed *Hamlet* editions (they also all differ from one another, though the lines are spoken by the putative actor-pirate Marcellus); Basse also neglects to print altogether a couple of lines found, in some form, in all three texts: 'The nights are wholesome, then no plannets strike, / No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charme' (Q2). Most telling, though, is the fact that Basse's version declares that it is the bird's 'sacred and hallow'd . . . tune' that prevents spirits walking, rather than the 'hallowed and gracious . . . time', Christmas, that keeps the spirits at bay. As 'tune' and 'time' are unlikely to be misheard, but are quite easy, through minim error, to be misread, Basse is almost certainly printing notes originally written at the theatre (the error is unlikely to be compositorial, as it is retained in subsequent reprintings of the book).⁵⁵ If so, his

notes may have been in longhand, as 'un'/'im' is an alphabetical error.

People did, though, also take notes using shorthand in the theatre – particularly when they were trying to capture a whole text. In a passage published in 1615, George Buc, Master of the Revels since 1610 (and granted its reversion in 1603), recorded of brachygraphy that 'by the means and helpe therof (they which know it) can readily take a Sermon, Oration, Play, or any long speech, as they are spoken, dictated, acted, & uttered in the instant'.⁵⁶ George Buc's profession will have made him particularly conscious of the way plays (and he specifies a 'play' rather than a 'passage' of play) were 'taken' in the theatre; he may too have seen the print consequences of brachygraphy, as, from 1606 onwards, he had been the licenser of playbooks for publication. He is joined by playwright Thomas Heywood who, in 1637, published a prologue that puffed the revival of his play *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody*. Heywood reminded the spectators that the version of the play that they had bought – first published in 1605 – had come about disingenuously: 'some', he charged, 'by Stenography drew / The plot: put it in print: (scarce one word trew:)'.⁵⁷ Heywood's new prologue assumes an audience that 'knows' that 'stealing' plays – or,

⁵³ For more on the note-taking audience and their commonplace records, see Tiffany Stern, 'Watching as Reading: The Audience and Written Text in the Early Modern Playhouse', in *How to Do Things with Shakespeare* ed. Laurie Maguire (Oxford, 2008), pp. 136–59.

⁵⁴ William Basse, *A Helpe to Discourse* (1623), pp. 249–50 (annotation mine; bold mine, here and throughout).

⁵⁵ Though Basse may have deliberately adapted his text to fit his new, commonplace, context, his wrong sense that the entire passage is about birdsong – and hence his choice of it – seems itself to have its origins in mistranscription.

⁵⁶ George Buc, *The Third Universitie of England* (1615), p. 984.

⁵⁷ Thomas Heywood, 'A Prologue to the Play of *Queene Elizabeth*', *Pleasant Dialogues and Dramma's* (1637), p. 249. Though G. N. Giordano-Orsini in 'Thomas Heywood's Play on The Troubles of Queen Elizabeth', *The Library*, series 4, 14 (1933–4), 313–38 at 338, suggested that the play had been pirated, he was jumping on the 'actor-pirate' bandwagon; even then he conceded that stenography may have been used 'supplemented from the memories (and perhaps from the "parts") of two or more of the actors'.

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it is here suggested, their scenarios, to be filled with ‘untrue’ text later – through shorthand was possible in 1605; a ‘noter’ himself, as this article has shown, Heywood is likely to be particularly conscious of other note-takers. He had, in 1608, recorded that several of his plays had ‘(unknown to me, and without any of my direction) accidentally come into the Printers hands, . . . (coppied onely by the eare)’:⁵⁸ these were plays taken, as sermons had been, against their author’s will and, as Heywood emphasizes, not from any kind of written text, but from heard performance.

Other playwrights articulated in more round-about ways their fear that what started as (shorthand) notes might end up as illegitimate printed text. John Webster writes a dialogue exchange concerning note-taking at court in *The Devils Law-Case*. ‘You must take speciall care, that you let in / No *Brachigraphy* men, to take notes’, says Sanitonella, explaining that the result will be ‘scurvy pamphlets, and lewd Ballets’; his notion was that shorthand led to distasteful publication.⁵⁹

Printed plays, however, do not habitually articulate the varying processes that brought them to the press, as sermons do, so it is harder to identify noted texts amongst them. This is partly because a company, rather than a playwright, was likely to ‘own’ a play manuscript – meaning that playbooks generally reached the press without authorial paratexts; they were, as one 1607 writer put it, usually ‘published without Incriptions unto particular Patrons (contrary to Custome in divulging other Bookes)’.⁶⁰ Nevertheless ‘corrected’ playtexts were sometimes released, presumably by companies, in the wake of errant ones: *Romeo and Juliet* Q2 explains on its title-page that it is ‘newly corrected, augmented, and amended’ (1599), thus casting aspersions on the previous text – a practice that also worked well as advertising: *I Henry IV* used it even though simply reprinting the earlier edition. Such printed title-pages are reminiscent of that for Henry Smith’s rectified [*The*] *Affinitie of the Faithfull*, ‘Nowe the second time Imprinted, corrected, and augmented’ (1591). *Hamlet* Q2 is similarly ‘Newly imprinted and enlarg’d to almost as much again as it was, according to the true and

perfect Copy’ (1604), strongly suggesting that *Hamlet* Q1 is defective, and not directly authorial. As to why a company might release a correct text when an incorrect one was doing the rounds – the answer is probably pragmatic: once a text was being sold anyway, it might as well be sold in its most accurate form. Besides, as playhouses were also sites where playbooks (and sermons) were offered for sale, there was some logic in being able to market, to the sitting audience, texts that advertised and promoted the theatre.⁶¹

The vocabulary used by sermons for illegitimate texts is matched by that adopted by some playtexts – suggesting a similar process is responsible for both. So sermons printed poorly from notes are often depicted as wounded bodies: they are ‘mained copie[s]’, texts printed ‘with intollerable mutilations’, ‘lame and unjoynted’ or, taking the metaphor further, with ‘whole lims cut off at once’.⁶² Playtexts employ the same language. Beaumont’s *Philaster*, and *Arethusa* had been ‘mained [sic] and deformed’, and then ‘laine . . . long a bleeding, by reason of some dangerous and gaping wounds, . . . in the first Impression’.⁶³ Heminges and Condell, introducing Shakespeare’s Folio, even adopt the ‘limbless’ metaphor when describing the earlier quartos (including *Hamlet* Q1, though they appear to extend their blame to all previous publications): ‘(before) you were abus’d with . . . copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of injurious impostors, . . . those, are now offer’d to your view cur’d, and perfect of their limbes’.⁶⁴ As this vocabulary makes clear, the errant sermons and plays are damaged (“wounded”) versions of the whole works

⁵⁸ Thomas Heywood, *The Rape of Lucrece* (1608), A2r.

⁵⁹ John Webster, *The Devils Law-case* (1623), H1v.

⁶⁰ *The Statelie Tragedie of Claudius Tiberius Nero* (1607), A3r.

⁶¹ See Stern, ‘Watching as Reading’, pp. 136–59.

⁶² *The True and Perfect Copie of a Godly Sermon* (1575), Aiv; L. S., *Resurgendum* (1593), A3r; John Andrewes, *The Brazen Serpent* (1621), A3v; Henry Smith, *The Benefite of Contentation* (1591), A2r.

⁶³ Francis Beaumont, *Philaster* (1622), A2r.

⁶⁴ ‘To The Great Variety of Readers’, in William Shakespeare, *Comedies, Histories and Tragedies* (1623), A3r.