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Hamlet

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Hamlet

The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare

VOLUME 7

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
EDITED BY JOHN DOVER WILSON



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EDITED FOR THE SYNDICS OF THE
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BY
JOHN DOVER WILSON

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PRINCE OF DENMARK

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Any new recension of a play like *Hamlet*, which is of universal interest and touches scholarship at numberless points, will provoke criticism and discussion from which the editor has much to learn. He will be fortunate too if friends and critics do not draw his attention to material already in print which he has overlooked. The call for a second edition within two years of publication comes too early for me to reap this aftermath to full advantage. Beyond correcting a few misprints I have, therefore, left the type of this volume as it stood in November, 1934, gathering together in supplementary pages additional notes and observations which it seemed profitable to Mr Child and myself to make at this juncture, in the hope of being able to incorporate them, with fresh additional matter, should a third edition ever be required. When these notes concern, by way of correction or expansion, the Introduction, Notes or Glossary of the 1934 edition, the reader's attention will be drawn to the fact by asterisks in the original text, though such notes, it may be observed, form only a part of the new matter. Meanwhile my grateful thanks are due to the many critics, private and public, who have tendered advice or admonition. Reasoned disagreement, indeed, is one of the greatest of services that an editor can receive. For even when the criticism cannot be accepted, it may, and often does, induce further elucidation, if not fresh discovery.

J. D. W.

September, 1936

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To
Q.

HAMLET

I

The plays in this serial edition of Shakespeare have, in accordance with custom, hitherto followed the order originally laid down in the First Folio. With the completion of the fourteen Comedies, however, more than a third of the whole journey has been traversed, and to persevere in the wake of Messrs Heminge and Condell would mean a long trudge through the ten Histories. I therefore propose, not indeed to desert their guidance altogether, but to relieve the rather monotonous scenery of their second stage by an occasional excursion into the highlands of tragedy. The play that comes next to *The Winter's Tale* in the Folio is *King John*; this will be issued after the present volume, with *Richard II* to follow. Meanwhile, we turn aside from the frontiers of Angevin England to Denmark, a Denmark legendary in its setting but with an atmosphere and characters which clearly belong to the age of Elizabeth.

Hamlet has been chosen for several reasons, but chiefly for a personal one. With *The Winter's Tale* Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch ceased to captain the ship of this adventure. That I should wish to dedicate the next volume to him as a slight acknowledgment of encouragement and tolerance extended over twelve years of unclouded fellowship goes without saying. But I wished also to give him something different from the ordinary run of plays. And as I began working at *Hamlet* in 1917 and have been working at it, when time allowed, ever since, this seemed the most suitable offering. A sense of gratitude that spurs me on to undertake the most difficult of editorial tasks now, rather than in the sere and yellow leaf, leaves me more grateful than ever.

The longest of all Shakespeare's plays, and the turning-point of his spiritual and artistic development, *Hamlet* is also the cross-roads of Shakespearian criticism, at which all the highways and every conceivable lane and field-path seem to converge. Furness prudently included it among the earlier plays of his *Variorum Shakespeare*, and published it in 1877. But even at that date he found himself compelled to devote two volumes to it, a distinction not accorded to any text afterwards. The character of its hero, in the words of the best of modern Shakespearian critics, 'has probably exerted a greater fascination, and certainly has been the subject of more discussion, than any other in the whole literature of the world¹.' Yet the problems raised by the text are quite as baffling as those belonging to character, and even more complicated. They are, indeed, fit subject for a lifetime of study. And another life might well be spent upon its exegesis. Owing partly to Shakespeare's vocabulary, which seems richer here than ever before or after, partly to Hamlet's riddling habit of speech, which Shakespeare took over from his source with the 'antic disposition' and greatly elaborated, and partly to what Johnson called the 'excellent variety' of the scenes, which embrace almost every side of Elizabethan life, *Hamlet* stands in more need of commentary than any other play. Finally, there is the difficult and much debated question of topical allusion. While it seems to be agreed upon all hands that *Hamlet* is the most topical play in the whole corpus, unhappily when it comes to interpreting the supposed allusions, agreement almost entirely vanishes.

Even the shallow scratchings of a general editor must throw up more material in these various fields than can be conveniently gathered into a single volume, and, as I have said, my spade will strike somewhat deeper here than on previous occasions. The present volume is more

¹ A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 90.

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than twice as long as most of its fourteen predecessors, yet it must at the same time be more restricted in scope.

Diseases desperate grown
 By desperate appliance are relieved
 Or not at all;

and the only 'appliance' adequate to the situation was the publication of auxiliary studies to ease the pressure upon this one. What follows is then the middle term of a series of three monographs on *Hamlet*, though it stands of course upon its own base and can be read independently of the others. The textual foundations, in previous plays dealt with in a 'note on the copy' running to a few pages, form the subject of the first monograph, already issued in the 'Shakespeare Problems' series under the title of *The Manuscript of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet,'* and that this monograph itself occupies two volumes will show something of the difficulties with which an editor must cope. On the other hand, it was found necessary to reserve full consideration of the dramatic problems for a third monograph called, *What happens in 'Hamlet,'* which is now being prepared and will appear shortly.¹ This does not mean that textual and dramatic topics will be excluded from the notes below. As I have just said, this book claims an independent existence of its own; and while utilising the results of the introductory monograph upon the text, it will also to some extent anticipate those of its sequel. Its own special contribution, however, apart from the presentation of a modernised text based upon the textual investigation just mentioned, is commentary, i.e. the interpretation of what is said and the glossing of words. And how much there was to do in this field alone may be gathered from the length of the glossary at the end of the volume.

The truth is that, despite the overwhelming tide of books and commentary upon *Hamlet*, its problems have never yet been tackled in any fashion that promises

¹ Third ed. published in 1951.

success. The proper foundations and an orderly method have alike been lacking. The literary and psychological critics for example, from Henry Mackenzie in the eighteenth century onwards, have one and all begun at the wrong end by attempting to solve the riddle of Hamlet's character before making sure that they understood the play in which he is the principal figure. As the subtlest of them excellently writes: 'The only way, if there is any way, in which a conception of Hamlet's character could be proved true, would be to show that it, and it alone, explains all the relevant facts presented by the text of the drama.' Unfortunately he continues: 'To attempt such a demonstration here would obviously be impossible, even if I felt certain of the interpretation of all the facts¹.' Yet without that certainty no reading of character possesses any secure foundation, as is evident enough in the ebb and flow of the various theories about Hamlet during the last century and a half. Furthermore, the 'facts' of a play are in their turn dependent on our understanding of the dialogue. Before we can be certain what is happening scene by scene we must first be certain that we fathom the meaning of what the characters say in each scene; or at least what they say at moments of dramatic significance. The existence of cruxes like 'the dram of eale' passage which lie off the main current does not seriously matter. But it does matter that we should follow the movement of Hamlet's mind when he is talking to the Ghost, Horatio and Marcellus in the Cellarage-scene, to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Act 2, Scene 2, or to Ophelia in the Nunnery-scene, because our whole conception of the play may turn upon the interpretation we put upon his words. Finally, before we can be certain what Hamlet or any other character says, we must be certain what Shakespeare wrote, or intended to write.

Thus the establishment of the text comes first, then

¹ Bradley, *op. cit.* p. 129.

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the interpretation of the dialogue, then the elucidation of the plot, and only after all these matters have been settled are we in a position to estimate character. Yet so far no critic has seriously undertaken, or at least rightly undertaken, any of the three preliminary tasks, and the only critic who seems even to have been aware of their importance is Edward Dowden, whose edition of *Hamlet* in *The Arden Shakespeare*, though inconclusive and hesitating, is the most illuminating that has hitherto appeared. The three monographs above mentioned, of which the present volume is one, are then intended as distinct, related and progressive stages in preparation for an attack upon the greatest of all literary problems, the understanding of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. They are preparatory only; they do not solve the enigma of Hamlet's character, still less do they provide that interpretation of the play as a whole which lies behind and beyond character in any great dramatic poem, as the world in our day is beginning to be aware. But studies of the kind must be undertaken before any aesthetic criticism of *Hamlet* is likely to achieve permanence. I am not so foolish as to expect finality for any of my three books, but I can at least claim that the method they exemplify is sound and has never before been tried.

It may appear strange to some that I do not include a history of the making of *Hamlet* among these prefatory studies. Textual history is a theme to which I have devoted a good deal of attention in the 'notes on the copy' of previous volumes, basing my conjectures for the most part upon a bibliographical analysis of the text in question. Such an analysis, however, forms no part of my present purpose. For one thing, I have my hands already overfull without it; for another, the history of a Shakespearian text should not, in my opinion, be attempted until we have made up our minds about Shakespeare's dramatic intentions, and this is just what, in regard to *Hamlet*, the world has hitherto found itself incapable of doing.

In other words, textual history, so far from being an instrument of dramatic criticism, as many modern Shakespearian students seem to imagine, is posterior not only to the three introductory stages just indicated, but also to that final appraisal of the play as a whole up to which they lead. When the dramatic situation is clear, as it is in most plays, to consider how the material (story or drama) from which Shakespeare started has influenced the final form is, of course, not merely interesting but highly instructive. But when this is not so, such an enquiry is attended with great risks. I touch here upon one of the capital fallacies of present-day Shakespearian scholarship to which I shall return later¹.

I do not then propose to pry into the processes of the creation of *Hamlet* or to launch out into speculations concerning the manner in which Shakespeare handled his sources. No introduction to *Hamlet* would, however, be complete without some account of the sources themselves, which are for the most part well known; and the account may be conveniently given before we proceed to our main task.

II

The origin of the story of Hamlet is lost in the mists of antiquity, through which, mingled as it were with sea-spray, we can dimly perceive the common ancestors of the English and Scandinavian races moving in their long ships about the southern shores of the Baltic and across the high seas that divide the Norwegian fiords from Iceland. The name Hamlet, in its Icelandic form of Amlóði, first crops up in an obscure fragment of verse from the Prose Edda composed about A.D. 1230², and a recent attempt has been made to identify the man to whom the Hamlet story belongs with a certain Swedish

¹ v. pp. xlvi–viii.

² I. Gollancz, *Sources of Hamlet*, p. 1.

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King Onela, mentioned in *Beowulf*¹. Whether or not, as the same writer claims, the name be separable into the components 'Anle,' a common Scandinavian name, and 'Óði,' a by-name meaning originally 'furious in battle' and later 'mad,' there seems little doubt that feigned madness was an important element in the saga and a high probability that some folk-lore story of a hero who assumed madness for the purpose of revenge became attached to a historical or semi-historical figure, as apparently happened in the case of David among the Israelites and Lucius Junius Brutus among the Romans. It has even been suggested by some scholars that the Hamlet saga is nothing but a northern version of the tale of Brutus, and there are certainly striking points of similarity between the two, points which can however be explained as embellishments borrowed from Livy by the earliest writer to give the saga permanent literary form. This was Saxo Grammaticus, who at the end of the twelfth century compiled his Latin *Historia Danica*, the third book of which contains that part of the Hamlet story which Shakespeare later made famous. The following is a brief abstract of it.

The father of Amleth, for such is the form of the name in Saxo, a governor of Jutland, to whom the king of Denmark had given his daughter Gerutha in marriage, won fame by slaying the king of Norway in single combat, but encountered the jealousy of his brother Feng, who assassinated him, seized his office and married his wife, thus 'capping unnatural murder with incest².' Young Amleth determined to avenge his father, but in order to gain time and to allay the suspicions of his crafty

¹ Kemp Malone, *A Literary History of Hamlet*, and *Etymologies for Hamlet* (*Review of English Studies*, iii. pp. 259-71).

² The quotations are from the translation by Professor Oliver Elton, *The Tragical History of Amleth Prince of Jutland by Saxo Grammaticus*.

uncle, he feigned a 'foolish and grotesque madness' so that 'all he did savoured of utter lethargy.' Nevertheless, his mad speech concealed 'an unfathomable cunning' and 'he mingled craft and candour in such wise that, though his words did not lack truth, yet there was nothing to betoken the truth and betray how far his keenness went.' Two attempts were made to pierce this disguise: first by means of 'a fair woman' who had been his intimate since childhood and who was thrown in his path in order to seduce him; and secondly by 'a friend of Feng, gifted with more assurance than judgment,' who undertook to spy upon him when he was 'closeted alone with his mother in her chamber.' Of the former trap Amleth was warned by a faithful friend, 'a foster-brother who had not ceased to have regard to their common nurture.' From the second he was saved by his own caution; for, after searching the room, and detecting the man beneath the straw [of the bed], he 'drove his sword into the spot and impaled him who lay hid'; then 'cutting up the body into morsels, he seethed it in boiling water and flung it through the mouth of an open sewer for the swine to eat.' This done he upbraided his mother as 'the most infamous of women'; taxing her with 'wantoning like a harlot' and 'wheedling with filthy lures of blandishment him who has slain the father of thy son'; comparing her conduct with that of 'brute beasts' who 'are naturally incited to pair indiscriminately, and it would seem that thou, like them, hast clean forgot thy first husband'; and bidding her not to lament for his witlessness but rather 'weep for the blemish in thine own mind.' In this fashion, 'he rent the heart of his mother and redeemed her to walk in the ways of virtue; teaching her to set the fires of the past above the seductions of the present.'

Foiled of his purposes, Feng next dispatched Amleth to Britain with 'two retainers . . . bearing a letter graven on wood' which 'enjoined the king of the Britons to put

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to death the youth who was sent over to him.' But while the two slept, 'Amleth searched their coffers, found the letter, and read the instructions therein. Whereupon he erased all the writing on the surface, substituted fresh characters and so changing the purport of the instructions, shifted his own doom upon his companions.... Under this was falsely marked the signature of Feng.' Upon reaching Britain, his companions were hanged and Amleth was received with honour by the king, who gave him his daughter in marriage and marvelled greatly at the wisdom and subtlety of the young man. A year later Amleth returned to Jutland where, having plied Feng and his followers generously with drink, he set fire to the palace, burnt alive all the drinkers within, and slew Feng with his own hand, after first changing swords with him, his own sword having been rendered useless by treachery.

Such is the Hamlet story according to Saxo, and it will be seen that, apart from the character of the hero, all the elements of *Hamlet* are here in germ: fratricide, incest, antic disposition, Ophelia, Horatio, Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the journey to England, the changeling letter and the false seal, even the uncle's love of drink and the exchange of swords in the final scene. Most striking of all is Amleth's long speech to his mother in her bedroom, which gives us the nucleus not only of Hamlet's dagger-words which 'cleft' the heart of Gertrude but also of his first soliloquy. And though Amleth is a very different person from Hamlet, we may find a hint of the latter's melancholy and inaction in his prototype's assumed 'lethargy.' Indeed, Saxo's words 'Quicquid opere exhibuit profundam redolebat inertiam' might almost stand as a motto for Shakespeare's play.

I have emphasised the links between Saxo and Shakespeare because it is generally assumed that the true source of the play was an intermediary version of the story to be found in Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*

(Paris, 1582). Belleforest borrowed from Saxo and expanded the story somewhat; but apart from a definite reference to Amleth's 'over-great melancholy' he made only two new points of which Shakespeare later availed himself, namely that Geruth and Fengon, as Amleth's mother and uncle were now called, had committed adultery before the murder¹ and that Amleth and the 'fair' temptress were lovers. On the other hand, some of the germinal phrases in Saxo, such as the description of Polonius's predecessor as 'praesumptione quam solertia abundantior' and of Gerutha after her shending as 'lacerata mater,' have no parallel in Belleforest. It seems likely, therefore, that both versions influenced the play, perhaps at different stages of its evolution. It should be added that a contemporary English translation of Belleforest, *The Hystorie of Hamblet* (1608), was in turn influenced by the play, seeing that the author of it not only added the words 'he cried, A rat, a rat!' to Belleforest's account of the Closet-scene, but also twice translated 'loudier,' the counterpane beneath which the spy hid himself (in place of the 'stramentum' of Saxo), as 'arras' or 'hangings,' while he inserts 'behind the hangings,' again without warrant, in an earlier passage. Some have supposed that Shakespeare derived his plot from a lost sixteenth-century edition of *The Hystorie*; but there is no evidence of publication before 1608.

And even if an edition twenty or thirty years earlier were discovered, it might still owe something to the play, for it seems tolerably certain that a *Hamlet* was being acted in London in 1589 and quite certain that one existed by 1594. In a preface to the euphuistic romance *Menaphon*, published by his friend Robert Greene in the autumn of 1589, Thomas Nashe sets out in characteristic vein to extol the university scholarship which they shared and to decry other and more successful writers, especially dramatists, who lacked such advantages. As, however,

¹ Cf. note 1. 5. 42-57.

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while mentioning many poets and scholars of whom he approves, he carefully refrains from naming the 'mechanicall mates' and 'vaine glorious tragedians,' it is difficult for the modern reader to follow the drift of his invective; so that the following passage in the Preface has been the theme of much controversy:

It is a common practise now a dayes amongst a sort of shifting companions, that runne through euery Art and thriue by none, to leaue the trade of *Nouerint*, whereto they were borne, and busie themselues with the indeuours of Art, that could scarcely Latinize their neck verse if they should haue neede; yet English *Seneca* read by Candlelight yeelds many good sentences, as *Blood is a begger*, and so forth; and if you intreate him faire in a frostie morning, hee will afford you whole Hamlets, I should say handfulls of Tragical speeches. But O grieffe! *Tempus edax rerum*, whats that will last alwayes? The Sea exhaled by droppes will in continuance bee drie, and *Seneca*, let blood line by line and page by page, at length must needes die to our Stage; which makes his famished followers to imitate the Kid in *Æsop*, who, enamoured with the Foxes newfangles, forsooke all hopes of life to leape into a newe occupation; and these men, renouncing all possibilities of credite or estimation, to intermeddle with Italian Translations: Wherein how poorely they haue plodded, (as those that are neither prouenzall men, nor are able to distinguish of Articles,) let all indifferent Gentlemen that haue travelled in that tongue discerne by their two-pennie Pamphlets¹.

If we assume that, though he uses the plural, Nashe is here attacking a single individual, an assumption which many think unwarranted, it would seem that the person in question had been a scrivener by profession, had written tragedies in the Senecan manner and had turned from these to making translations from the Italian. Not perhaps very distinctive marks of identity in an age when scriveners were many and Italian translations the fashion; yet since all three clues point to the author of *The*

¹ R. B. McKerrow, *Works of Nashe*, iii. 315-16.

Spanish Tragedy and the reference to ‘the Kid in Æsop’ looks like a pun upon his name, it has been widely supposed that Thomas Kyd was the target aimed at.

There will always be found people to challenge suppositions, however plausible; and this one has been questioned by critics as eminent as Sir Edmund Chambers¹ and Dr McKerrow². But Herr V. Østerberg has recently brought it much more definitely into the area of probability and has, in my thinking, gone very near to proving it. Following up Koepfel’s discovery³ that the fable of the kid to which Nashe refers is to be found, not in Æsop as he avers⁴, but under ‘May’ in Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calendar*, he points out that nevertheless Nashe knew what he was doing and had Spenser clearly in mind, since the words ‘enamoured with the Foxes newfangles’ are a palpable echo of Spenser’s lines

He was so enamored with the newell,
 That nought he deemed deare for the jewell.

What then was the point of the allusion? The Spenserian fable, in which ‘Kiddie’ falls a prey to the Fox through curiosity, has little obvious reference to Nashe’s version. Indeed, the sentence ‘which makes his [Seneca’s] famished followers to imitate the Kid in Æsop, who, enamoured with the Foxes newfangles, forsooke all hopes of life to leape into a newe occupation’ shows that Nashe found some difficulty in dragging the fable in, seeing that the kid in Spenser was not famished and did not leap into a new occupation, nor did the followers of Seneca forsake all hopes of life. The conclusion is surely inescapable: his use of the story was not just a chance

¹ E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, i. 412.

² R. B. McKerrow, *op. cit.* iv. 449–52.

³ *Englische Studien*, xviii. 130.

⁴ Nashe was probably led astray by Spenser himself, who writes in the ‘Glosse’ to *May*: ‘This tale is much like to that in Æsops fables, but the catastrophe and end is farre different.’

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literary illustration; it was a deliberate fake to suit the purpose of his satire. In other words Nashe could not do without that 'Kid' because he wanted to hit at Kyd in a punning allusion, just as in his *Anatomie of Absurditie*¹ he hits at Philip Stubbes's earlier *Anatomie* when he speaks of those who 'anatomize abuses and stubbe vp sin by the rootes².'

Furthermore, if Kyd the dramatist be Nashe's mark, then the sly allusion to 'whole Hamlets, I should say handfulls of Tragicall speeches' would lose half its point if Kyd were not known by the readers of *Menaphon* to have written a play of that name. It must be remembered too that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* belongs to the Senecan tradition and is demonstrably full of links with *The Spanish Tragedy*. I was for long extremely sceptical of the theory connecting Kyd with an early *Hamlet*, but the arguments of Herr Østerberg leave little doubt in my mind that a Danish tragedy on the Hamlet theme by Thomas Kyd was the talk of London in 1589.

The next historical clue we have is an entry in the *Diary*, or account-book, of Philip Henslowe, the pawn-broking financial manager of the Admiral's Company, recording the performance of a *Hamlet* at the Newington Butts playhouse on June 11, 1594; and as Henslowe does not mark the play as 'ne,' it was presumably old copy. The Newington Butts theatre was at the time in joint-occupation by his company and the Chamberlain's men, of which Shakespeare was a member at least as early as Christmas in the same year. And that the *Hamlet* belonged to the Chamberlain's and not the Admiral's men is shown by a later reference to it, this time in Thomas Lodge's *Wits Miserie* (1596),

¹ McKerrow, *op. cit.* i. 20.

² V. Østerberg, *Studier over Hamlet-teksterne*, Copenhagen, 1920. English scholars seem to have ignored this important little book, perhaps because it is written in the language of Hamlet's country. Cf. *R.E.S.* (1942), pp. 385 ff.

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which speaks of a certain devil looking 'as pale as the Visard of the ghost which cried so miserably at the Theatre, like an oister wife, Hamlet, revenge'; inasmuch as the Theatre, a playhouse near Bishopsgate belonging to Burbadge, was then in use by his and Shakespeare's fellows. Yet a third reference occurs in Dekker's *Satiromastix*, a reply to Jonson's *Poetaster* and probably performed in the early autumn of 1601 shortly before the appearance of *Hamlet* as we now have it. The plays by Jonson and Dekker were salvos in the 'War of the Theatres' raging at that time, and their characters were mostly caricatures of persons on either side of the dispute. In *Tucca*, the braggart soldier-man, for example, Jonson had burlesqued a certain Captain Hannam, and *Tucca* reappears in Dekker's rejoinder, burning with resentment at the affront. He encounters Horace (Jonson) with his hanger-on Asinius Bubo, and taxes the latter with calling him names, whereupon the following dialogue takes place:

Asinius. Would I were hanged if I call you any names but 'Captain' and 'Tucca.'

Tucca. No fyest; my name's 'Hamlet revenge': thou hast been at Paris Garden, hast not?

Horace. Yes Captain, I ha' played Zulziman there.

The passage has long been a puzzle, because it seems to imply a performance of *Hamlet* at the Swan theatre in Paris Garden, a playhouse which the Chamberlain's men are not known to have used. It was left to the Danish critic aforementioned to point out that while the first half of *Tucca's* speech is spoken to *Asinius*, the question about the Paris Garden is addressed to *Horace*, and that there is no necessary connexion between the two¹. I may add that the colon is a piece of dramatic pointing denoting the pause as *Tucca* turns from one to the other, and that the question to *Horace* was probably

¹ Østerberg, *op. cit.* pp. 24-5.

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intended as an unpleasant reminder of the *Isle of Dogs*, a play performed at the Swan in 1597,* in which Jonson took part both as actor and author, and for which he fell into serious trouble with the authorities. This interpretation is borne out by Tuca's next speech, which gives a succinct biography of Jonson, including a mention of the *Isle of Dogs*, while it may even be that 'Zulziman'¹ was a character in that play whom Jonson impersonated. Dekker, therefore, had no intention of associating *Hamlet* with the Swan, and there is consequently no reason for supposing that the text of that play ever left the hands of Shakespeare's company from 1594 onwards.

How Kyd's play came into those hands in the first place is unknown but not difficult to guess. All the dramatic companies were in very low water during the plague years 1592-94, and there was much shifting of personnel and transference of playbooks. Moreover, the dramatic career of Kyd himself was brought to an untimely end by his arrest on May 11, 1593, upon the charge of being guilty of a 'libell that concernd the State'.² There is thus nothing at all surprising in his *Hamlet*, for whatever company it may have been written, becoming part of the stock repertory of the Chamberlain's men, one of the two troupes which came best out of those troublous years; just as his *Spanish Tragedy* passed into the possession of their rivals, the Admiral's men. In any event, I regard it as certain as any deduction from the tangled and perplexing records of Elizabethan theatrical history can be, that it was purchased some time before June 1594 by Shakespeare's company, and that some time between then and the autumn of 1601 Shakespeare himself transformed it to the marvel of beauty and subtilty which his fortunate heirs call *Hamlet*.

Into the nature of that transformation I do not propose,

¹ Can this be a corruption of Zuleiman or Solyman, the Magnificent?

² F. S. Boas, *Works of Kyd*, p. lxvi.

as I have said, to enter at this time. It is enough to record first that the earliest mention of a Shakespearian *Hamlet* occurs in a note¹ by the Cambridge don, Gabriel Harvey, inscribed in the margin of his copy of Speght's *Chaucer* published in 1598, a note which speaks of the Earl of Essex as still living and must therefore have been penned before February 1601²; and secondly that certain passages in the final *Hamlet*, in particular the reference to the Children of the Chapel and the War of the Theatres at 2. 2. 340-65 and the glance at the defence of Ostend in the soliloquy of 4. 4., cannot have been written earlier than the summer or autumn of the same year³. It looks, therefore, as if Shakespeare may first have handled the play sometime after Lodge's reference of 1596 and then revised it in 1601⁴.

Before leaving the question of origins a word must be said about a different source of the play from that considered above, an Italian and not a Danish source. We do not know what it was, but we can I think be certain that it existed. Of the circumstances and method of the murder of Hamlet's father, upon which so much hangs,

¹ The note, of considerable length, includes this statement: 'The younger sort takes much delight in Shakespeares *Venus, & Adonis*: but his *Lucrece & his tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*, haue it in them, to please the wiser sort.'

² E. K. Chambers (*William Shakespeare*, ii. 197) summing up the evidence writes 'On the whole any date from 1598 to the opening weeks of 1601 seem to me possible.' Cf. also G. C. Moore Smith, *Gabriel Harvey's Marginalia* (Preface); H. J. C. Grierson, *Modern Language Review*, xii. 218; F. S. Boas, *Shakespeare and the Universities*, pp. 27, 256-60.

³ v. notes 2. 2. 335-36, 340-65, and 4. 4. 18 below.

⁴ The reference to 'Hamlet revenge' in *Satiromastix* (1601) a cliché clearly belonging to the old *Hamlet*, does not preclude the existence of a Shakespearian *Hamlet* at that date, seeing that the expression continued in common use until 1620 (v. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, i. 411).

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and which are twice detailed, first in the account the Ghost renders of his own death, and again in the Gonzago play, or rather in the dumb-show that precedes it, there is no hint in either Saxo or Belleforest. The Danish story does not mention poison, sleep or orchard. On the contrary Belleforest expressly states that the deed was done by bloody violence in the banqueting-hall of the palace, while Amleth's father sat at meat. On the other hand, *The Murder of Gonzago* bears all the marks of being founded upon an Italian original; and I see no reason for doubting that Hamlet's words at 3. 2. 262, 'The story is extant, and written in very choice Italian,' were substantially correct. Indeed, there are even indications of a historical foundation for the tale, since according to Dowden, 'In 1538 the Duke of Urbino, married to a Gonzaga, was murdered by Luigi Gonzaga, who dropped poison into his ear¹.' What more likely than that Shakespeare, or Kyd, used a scene from a contemporary play upon this subject for his Play-scene, and in order to make the resemblance exact, altered the Hamlet-story to suit the story of Gonzago?

And if something like this happened, it follows that the character of Claudius was also in large measure derived from, or suggested by, the Gonzago-tale. The murderer in the Danish legend was crafty, it is true: 'The man,' Saxo tells us, 'veiled the monstrosity of his deed with such hardihood of cunning, that he made up a mock pretence of goodwill to excuse his crime, and glossed over fratricide with a show of righteousness.' But he was essentially a man of violence. The Claudius of *Hamlet* is effeminate and Italianate. Not without courage and possessed of considerable intellectual powers, he presents nevertheless a mean and contemptible figure. He is a prey to lust, works by spying, and listens behind

¹ Dowden unfortunately omits his authority. G. Sarrazin instances another Gonzaga murder on May 7, 1592 (*Sh. Jahrbuch*, 1895, p. 169).*

hangings; if murder is to be done, he eggs on others, when he can, to do it for him; and his trump card, when all else fails, is poison—poison in a ‘vial,’ a drinking-cup, or on the point of an unbated foil. It is in keeping with all this that he should put his brother out of the world by an act which could only have originated in decadent Italy, an act which revolts us less by its base treachery than by its hideous and unnatural character. Claudius was a ‘politician’ in the sixteenth-century meaning of that word, a man who lived by dropping poison into other people’s ears, and his supreme crime is but the symbol of his personality. Such a being was bred not at Elsinore, but at some petty Italian court. Yet his insertion into the *Hamlet* frame was a masterly stroke. The man of violence, the Laertes type, is useful as a foil to Hamlet; but for his antagonist it was essential to have a man of great cunning, since one of the main interests of the play is the spectacle of two extraordinarily subtle men engaged in a deadly duel of wits.

Limitations of space forbid discussion of that fascinating and still largely unexplored topic, the intellectual sources of *Hamlet*, and in particular the books which Shakespeare was probably reading shortly before he wrote the play. Let it suffice to say that, as my notes show, I agree with Brandes in finding the influence of Montaigne throughout and with Dowden in believing that Shakespeare was well acquainted with a little book on psychology by Timothy Bright called *A Treatise of Melancholy* published in 1586. The most interesting point about this book is that while its phraseology and ideas seem to have influenced *Hamlet* at several places, the melancholy of the Prince was clearly not wholly derived from it. Apparently Shakespeare read it through with his notions of Hamlet already formed, and found Bright’s conception of melancholy different from his own, although he used hints here and there and caught phrases from other parts of the treatise.

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I turn to the main business of this Introduction, which is to give a brief summary of the book already published on the textual problems, so that the notes that follow may be intelligible, to discuss the exegetical problems which are the special concern of those notes and the glossary, and to glance at one or two outstanding dramatic problems.

Four *Hamlet* texts, belonging actually or by derivation to the period of Shakespeare's lifetime, have come down to us; but two are clearly of much greater authority than the others. Concerning the most debased of all, the German version, *Der bestrafte Brudermord*,* little need here be said. The earliest copy known is a manuscript dated 1710; but the fact that its Polonius is called Corambus, of which the 'Corambis' in the First Quarto is a patent corruption, together with other clues, makes it certain that it is a degenerate scion of the main English stock and at least possible that its derivation belongs to a date before that at which Shakespeare's *Hamlet* took final shape. But though for this reason of some importance for the history of *Hamlet*, and though also at one or two points it throws light upon Shakespeare's meaning, it gives us no help in determining what Shakespeare actually wrote himself.

The First Quarto, which is a pirated text published in 1603 after Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was already in existence, is more to the purpose, though still only in a backhanded fashion. Ever since its discovery in 1821 critics have been debating its origin and composition, to which they have strangely devoted far more attention than to those of the two good texts. There are many theories; but on one point they all seem now to be agreed, namely that whatever may have been the nature of the piracy and however the pirate procured his copy, the

book is in large measure based upon a memorised report of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as performed in 1601 or 1602 on the Globe stage. Thus while its readings possess no independent authority whatever, though some may be relevant to the textual history of *Hamlet*, many of them are of use as corroborating readings in the other and better texts. Furthermore, its stage-directions, which are often fuller than those in the Second Quarto or the First Folio versions, are valuable for the information they give, on the whole probably reliable, about the stage-business at the Globe, and I have not hesitated to borrow one or two for the stage-directions in my text.

The Second Quarto followed the First at the beginning of 1605¹, and that it was intended to supersede it, as the authoritative edition, is clear from the title-page which proclaims it 'newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie.' This and the First Folio text printed in 1623 are the only originals which can claim any material connexion with Shakespeare's manuscript. It is to them, therefore, and to them alone, that an editor must go for the construction of his own text. The *textus receptus* is based upon that of the First Folio and 'improved' by incorporation of a large number of readings from the Second Quarto, a few from the First Quarto, and a score or more arrived at by emendation. It is in short an eclectic text, which has varied a good deal from editor to editor, the main principle of choice between variant readings being the judgment and good taste of the editor in question. Judgment and good taste can never be dispensed with, but they may be assisted by critical bibliography, that is to say by a textual analysis which reveals, or at least enables us to surmise, the nature

¹ It was begun printing in 1604, three of the six extant copies being so dated, but not finished until 1605, this date appearing on the other three copies, the change being probably due to press-correction.