

# From the playing aim: defining hamlet's text

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In the introduction for *Hamlet* in *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, Gary Taylor writes that “ of all the two-text plays, *Hamlet* comes closest to *Lear* in the scale and complexity of the textual variation apparently resulting from authorial revision” (401). Indeed, *Hamlet*’s three earliest texts each offer distinct glimpses into history; although they have been more or less combined over the course of the twentieth century (and earlier), separately, they each have a different story to tell. As Philip Edwards notes in *The Shakespeare Wars*, “ Everyone who wants to understand *Hamlet* as reader, actor or director, needs to understand the nature of the play’s textual questions and to have his or her own view of the questions in order to approach the ambiguities in the meaning” (qtd. Rosenbaum 30). This will naturally result in individuals reaching their own conclusions about how the play can be best illuminated through its text.

My intention in this essay is not necessarily to crown one edition or textual theory over another. Gary Taylor, Stanley Wells, John Dover Wilson and numerous other scholars have spent countless pages discussing how the texts could have possibly changed from edition to edition; I am only interested in “ how” if it helps to illuminate the effect of these changes. I also have no special interest in Shakespeare’s “ intention” with *Hamlet*, as I feel that this does not have much effect on how we interpret the play now. Rather, I am interested in exploring Janette Dillon’s belief that “ Theatre perhaps looks to scholars to provide a theoretical authentication for its practices, while scholars look to theatre to provide an authenticating material dimension in a slippery intertextual world” (75).

In his 2006 book *The Shakespeare Wars*, Ron Rosenbaum notes that most people who read *Hamlet* have no idea that they are actually reading a version of the play that Shakespeare never wrote, and that his company never performed: “What most of us have read is, rather, an artificial ‘conflation’ or superimposition of conflicting printed texts from his time and immediately afterward...the uncertainties *Hamlet* editors grapple with make crucial differences in the way *Hamlet* is printed, read and played” (30). Indeed, the responsibility of “translating” what is arguably the most influential work in the history of Western literature is an heavy burden to bear. As Rosenbaum explains, the charge of a *Hamlet* editorship has become somewhat of a curse: “the demands of this calling have driven editors to tragedies of their own—drink, despair, obsession, an early grave for at least one” (30).

There are three generally recognized substantive texts of *Hamlet*: the 1603 First Quarto (Q1, or “Bad Quarto”, thought to be either an early draft or a “memorial reconstruction” of the play); the 1604/05 Second Quarto (Q2); and the First Folio (F) of 1623. 1 By and large, the three texts are generally the same in their presentations of plot and character: the major differences lie in the detail. Modern editions of *Hamlet* are compiled of some combination of the Q2 and F texts (or sometimes a conflation of both, as is done with the Norton edition, among others.) This is mostly due to the work of J. Dover Wilson, who in 1934 published his monumental two-volume study, *The Texts of Shakespeare's Hamlet*. In this work, Wilson argued that Q2 was printed from a manuscript which was handwritten by Shakespeare himself. This

seemed to satisfy most scholars of the time and opened the doors for numerous publishers to create their own edited versions of the play.

In 1991, Bernice W. Kliman and Paul Bertram produced *The Three-Text Hamlet: Parallel Texts of the First and Second Quartos and First Folio*, which was the first version to put all three major texts side by side for easy comparison. This edition spoke to a renewed scholarly interest in all three versions of the play, rather than the myriad conflated and edited texts which had been published throughout the twentieth century. Textual scholars had argued for this change, noting that “individual texts constitute different versions of the play and that conflating them produces a text without authority” (Kliman & Bertram xxi)<sup>2</sup>. Kliman followed this text with the 1996 *Enfolded Hamlet*, which “solved a problem that had defeated previous editors of multiple-text Hamlets for generations: How do you represent the variant texts and variant words visually in a way that permits comparison?” (Rosenbaum 87)

Many of these small variants are a line or less of text each, which were added in F. (For example, in 1. 2, F replaces Q2's “Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden” with “Fie on't Oh fie, fie, 'tis an unweeded garden.”) Scholar Harold Jenkins, who dedicated a large part of his research to understanding and explaining these additions, lists sixty-five instances of these “playhouse interpolations”, so named because many appear to have been minor, improvised additions during a performance. Jenkins notes:

[Playhouse interpolations] never add to the sense nor introduce any significant word which the surrounding context does not supply. Many of

them will no doubt seem harmless: perhaps we need not grieve if some continue in performance. A producer will do small damage to the play if he permits the gravedigger to make an extra reference to the skull or Polonius to shriek for help three times instead of once. (qtd. in Hibbard 113).

As I have said, I am more interested in an audience-centered study of these changes. Although the causes of these “ interpolations” are certainly worth study, I prefer to use this essay to discuss larger implications of the textual differences.

The opening line to Hamlet's first soliloquy is perhaps the best known point of debate in Shakespearean editing circles: “ O that this too too (solid/sullied/sallied) flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew” (I. ii. 129-130)<sup>3</sup>. Q2 uses “ sallied”, while the F edition uses “ solid.” Modern editions, as could be expected, have been quite divided on the issue. The Arden edition chose to use “ sullied”, while editors of The New Cambridge and the Norton have decided upon “ solid.” “ Solid” logically corresponds to “ would melt”, and at first glance, it seems as if this would be the best word choice. Tennyson suggested this choice in a letter to F. J. Furnivall in 1883 —“‘Solid flesh’ is only ‘ this weary weight of the flesh, would I were rid of it!’” (qtd. in Ware 490)—indeed, “ solid” does give the impression of mortality stuck inside an inescapable body, of a mind dying to leap from its imprisoning flesh. In *The Absent Shakespeare*, Mark Jay Mirsky agrees, claiming that here Shakespeare introduces the theme of changeability of matter into different states—specifically water—which he will revert back to throughout the play:

...the Ghost, who is indeed flesh thawed, melted, resolved into mist, " into a Dew," (that is, most particularly, non-" object"). Hamlet will become half ghost to himself. Later Ophelia, by drowning, mingling with water, will " Thaw" from her icy virginity to nonexistence. To thaw is to die, a metaphor for suicide, but suicide as an escape from the solid, threatening reality of the world. (71)

" Sallied" is also a possible choice, if it is read as a derivative of " sally": to rush forth, as if making an attack. 4 Therefore, if Hamlet's flesh is " sallied", he may feel as if even his body is attacking him, not to mention " all the uses of this world" (I. ii. 134). However, there are probably better arguments to support the claim that Shakespeare did intend to describe Hamlet's flesh as " sullied." J. Dover Wilson famously changed " sallied" to " sullied" based on a probable a: u compositorial error. As he and Harold Jenkins have both argued, the use of " sullied" adds in the " suggestion of contamination" (Jenkins 437), which Hamlet dwells upon throughout the soliloquy and the play. This, of course, places the focus squarely on the incestuous marriage between Claudius and Gertrude and suggests that Hamlet's flesh is equally " sullied" by the hasty wedding. "'Solid flesh,' Professor Wilson ventured to think, ' was a little ridiculous'" (qtd. in Weiss 219). 5 It seems that the choice of usage in a production comes down to concept. If a director wishes to emphasize the familial aspect of the play, " sullied" might be a better choice. If the play is to be staged as a psychodrama, complete with the stereotypical " brooding Prince", then a director should choose " solid." Some critics might argue that this is a non-issue: the phonetic similarity of the two words might go right over an audience member's head. However, I would argue that the

word choice in this instance serves to color the rest of the monologue and even the rest of the performance. As far as character motivation for an actor is concerned, James Shapiro states that the use of “solid” replaces “Hamlet’s initial sense of being assaulted or assailed...[with] an anguished desire for nothingness that has less to do with his mother’s behaviour than with his own inaction” (342). This is a fundamental character choice which the actor playing Hamlet must address, and being that the word in question is among the first that the Prince utters in solitude, I don’t think the issue is too minor to address.

We then come to one of Hamlet’s most famous utterances: “What a piece of work is a man!” (II. ii. 293-300) The speech is commonly quoted as an exaltation of the unique capabilities of man; however, it also reveals Hamlet’s deep depression and his lack of faith in his ability to act as a man “should”. Q2 and F offer different choices for reading and interpretation. They are more or less similar in choice and arrangement of words: the difference comes in the punctuation. Seen one after the other, the differences and their implications are easily visible:

Q2: What peece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinit in faculties, in forme and moouing, how expresse and admirable in action, how like an Angell in apprehension, how like a God: the beautie of the world; the paragon of Animales; and yet to me, what is this Quintessence of dust: man delights not me, nor women neither, though by your smiling, you seeme to say so.

F: What a piece of work is a man! how Noble in Reason? how infinite in faculty? in forme and mouing how expresse and admirable? in Action, how like an Angel? in apprehension, how like a God? the beauty of the world, the Parragon of Animals; and yet to me, what is this Quintessence of Dust? Man delights not me; no, nor Woman neither; though by your smiling you seem to say so.

J. Dover Wilson argued for the Q2 reading, rejecting the Folio as “ a rhetorical distortion by the actors” (Battenhouse 1078). Theodore Spencer supported the Q2 punctuation, as well: “[it] alone makes sense in terms of Elizabethan psychology...’ ...admirable in action; how like an angel in apprehension; how like a god!’” (qtd. in Muir 51n1) This would have resonated with a Renaissance/early modern audience which was trapped between rejoicing in the progress of man and the distress over the uncertainties which came with this newly-acquired progress.

On the other hand, the series of questions posed in F is of some interest to performers. They express a much heavier doubt about the true capabilities of man. Marvin Rosenberg points to Nietzsche, who saw in this “ growing scepticism about received truth...a despairing perception...that human action cannot affect the eternal nature of things, that man can see ‘ everywhere only the terror and the absurdity of existence” (415-416). This nihilistic reading was echoed in performance by Yuri Lyubimov, who used “ an empty stage, an open grave and a disembodied voice over the loud-speakers” (Smith 17).



It's possible, of course, that the question marks are not marks of self-doubt, but rather Shakespeare's note to the actor to play Hamlet as a thinking hero. Looking at the speech in context, it seems that the F reading might be more dramatically viable. This would be a moving moment in which Hamlet's "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty" is a description of what he could have been if "this goodly frame" had no murderous uncles, no frail women, no Ghosts commanding him to revenge. However, the choice again takes us back to context and concept: if a production's Hamlet is a self-doubting, brooding "thinker", the F reading would be a stronger choice. If, however, we take Hamlet as a man biding his time until the perfect moment to strike arrives, then a Q2 interpretation would fit.

I noted earlier the possibly drastic character choices that could be made from an editor's (or director's) choice between "solid" and "sullied". In Act Three, we will again see that one or two seemingly-small changes have the power to impact our interpretation of the Prince. In the third scene, Hamlet comes upon Claudius praying, and he considers the ramifications of killing his stepfather. The Norton edition follows F: "Now might I do it pat, now a is praying" (III. iii. 73, italics are mine). Q2, however, slightly changes the wording and punctuation: "Now might I doe it, but now a is a-praying" (italics are mine). The minor differences offer the possibility for a monumental change in interpretation. Q2's version implies a hesitant Hamlet who has every opportunity to take revenge at this moment, but for some reason, he cannot. One could imagine a long pause in between realizations: "Now might I do it...but now a is a-praying", the subtext being, "I could kill

him now, but I'd rather not—how can I justify not taking my revenge at this moment, when I have every clear reason to kill him now?—aha! He's praying! I'm saved!" The placement of the comma is also an indicator: it implies a break in the meter in which Hamlet immediately tries to conceive of a way out of this situation.

F's version of the text, however, seems to demonstrate a bloodthirsty Hamlet who is all too willing to take revenge, but will not do it because he prefers Claudius' soul to be "damned and black / As hell whereto it goes" (III. iii. 94-95). The key here is "pat" ("neatly"). Again, the punctuation is an indicator here: "do it pat, now he is praying," shows a clear line of thought and resolve towards action, until he is stopped short by the realization that "he goes to Heaven." The difference here is that Hamlet does not immediately try to think of a way out of the situation; rather, his "way out" is forced upon him. This, in turn, renders a less sympathetic view of Hamlet: if he kills Claudius now, he can have both revenge and the throne. However, he overreaches himself. Hamlet has clearly won the cat-and-mouse game established in 1. 2, but he asks for more than he needs or has any right to ask for. He aspires to play God by attempting to control the state of another's soul (which is clearly God's business and not that of a young Danish prince.) Therefore, a less sympathetic audience member might very well say that Hamlet deserves what he gets by choosing to wait for "a more horrid hint" (III. iii. 88). As Samuel Johnson said of the Prince's decision, "This speech in which Hamlet, represented as a virtuous character, is not content with taking blood for blood, but contrives damnation for the man that he would punish, is too horrible to be read or to be uttered" (qtd. in

Hamletworks CN23506). (It could also be argued that to stab a kneeling, unarmed man in the back would be even more awful an action than waiting until he is sufficiently damned: but that might be fair retribution against a man who poisoned his sleeping brother.)

One of the most significant edits in both content and style is of Hamlet's final soliloquy in 4. 4: "How all occasions do inform against me/And spur my dull revenge!" (IV. iv. 9. 22-9. 23) This monologue appeared in Q2 but is absent from the F. In modern editions, it appears in the Norton, but has been removed by the editors of the New Oxford, who have argued that it is repetitive: "Hamlet going over the same old self-reproachful ground" (Rosenbaum 50). G. R. Hibbard of the Oxford also argues against its inclusion, saying that "the Prince has become unrealistic. A prisoner under guard and on his way to England, he clearly does not have the means he speaks of...[the soliloquy] is anticlimactic and disappointing" (109).

Yet Hamlet's monologue at the end of Act Four contains crucial insights into the character and reveals the progress of the cerebral journey he famously sets out upon at the beginning of Act Three. As Alex Newell argues, "The speech recalls the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy in its thought about thought, in its consideration of thought as a symptom of cowardice, and in the way the movement of thought throughout the speech is accented step by step, the ratiocination making one conscious of Hamlet's mind at work" (134). True, it is in some ways repetitive, but Hamlet is nobody if not a thoughtful character who uses soliloquy to grapple with his intellect and reason.

Alex Newell states that the final speech is integral to the structural design of Hamlet, in which Shakespeare, “ with climactic emphasis...reestablish[es] the essential terms of Hamlet’s preoccupation with revenge” (134). It is, as actor Derek Jacobi says, “ a punctuation mark in Hamlet’s journey” (Maher 110), and producing a Hamlet without it raises major red flags in when it comes to a resolute establishment of the actor and director’s interpretation of the play.

Interestingly enough, two of the most celebrated Hamlets of the modern age, Edwin Booth and John Barrymore, omitted the soliloquy from their performances (Shattuck 243, Morrison 327). However, some other notable performances of the role demonstrate the necessity of the final soliloquy’s inclusion. Mary Z. Maher writes of John Gielgud’s performance in 1944:

...his eyes and face shone with rededication, his voice vibrated with purpose...the closing couplet rang out: “ From this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!”...Via a process of self-communion, the actor “ builds a nobler mansion for his self-accusation” and emerges more decided than he has been...Now he saw an opportunity and embraced it...Hamlet’s state of mind [is] “ clear, noble and resolved” before he went to England, with a “ clear understanding of his destiny and desire.” (14, italics are mine)

Ben Kingsley also describes his performance of the same speech, which “ was set up for by depicting a very macho Fortinbras...[who] had gone beyond being human into something forbidding and despotic.” Kingsley notes that “ this glimpse of reality pushed him into manhood...Seeing destiny marching in front of him, Hamlet makes the ultimate resolution...He

suddenly sees distances, perspectives on his own dilemma...He sees other men...and he says, well, I must join in" (all quotes in Maher 87).

It is here that Hamlet sees Fortinbras acting decisively where he himself has not, and this causes him to understand himself in a completely new light. He uses his reason and his intellect and throws a gauntlet down to Claudius.

From an audience standpoint, if we lose this monologue, we have not seen Hamlet assert clear forward movement: " O from this time forth / My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!" We have therefore lost a sense of purpose from him along with a linear dramatic action which will propel us into the final act. In other words, the play doesn't move. Therefore, a " To be or not to be" without a " How all occasions do inform against me" is a beginning without an end, an introduction without a resolution.

This might be satisfactory for " Hamlet-ologists" such as Ernest Jones and T. S. Eliot, who tend to assert that Hamlet is an inactive, indecisive weakling. However, if we are to see Hamlet as a revenge play and the Prince as a man with a mission, his final act of revenge seems to come from almost nowhere if not for this soliloquy. For all of the debate over its purpose and placement, it seems to me that the dramatic power in this soliloquy is nearly unmatched in the rest of the play. Ron Rosenbaum argues that " the soliloquies define Hamlet", noting Harold Bloom's " grandiose claim" which further strengthens the argument for inclusion: "...that it is in these soliloquies that Shakespeare " invented" a new kind of consciousness in Western culture, a meditative, reflective self consciousness." Hamlet's reflections on the questions of self-consciousness aroused the same ideas within the play's first Renaissance

audiences: “ the soliloquy might be an instance not of self-consciousness but of something more complex: self-conscious self-consciousness, meta self-consciousness” (all quotes in Rosenbaum 50, italics in original). In this light, the soliloquy might have just as much traction on its own as it does within the text; this argument alone should (in my opinion) be enough to retain it in performance.

The dramatic focus of the play also shifts with the removal of the Fortinbras sequence in Act Four. As Claris Glick argues, removing the international aspect of the play focuses the problem on Hamlet's personal turmoil, rather than his place in the world: he is now “ confined to a decadent court” (22). Again, this is an acceptable choice if we want to see the play solely as an examination of the human psyche via the Prince, rather than a look at the machinations of the state and the politics of power. (I prefer to read the play as a combination of both, but with an emphasis on the latter.) The textual edit also alters our view of Claudius's abilities as a King. The Act Four interchange demonstrates Claudius as a ruler who has successfully negotiated peace with a nation which had been intent on overtaking them. This power is one more indication of Claudius' ability to rule well; hence, he becomes much more difficult to openly kill (especially with the only “ proof” of a crime being an encounter with one Ghost.) In the passage, Shakespeare seems to make known his disdain for meaningless war for the sake of national glory. Therefore, the contrast between the cool-headed ruler Claudius and a Norwegian King who “ go[es] to gain a little patch of ground / That hath in it no profit but the name” (IV. iv. 9. 8-9. 9) is emphasized.

The retention of this scene also affects the playing of Hamlet's final words and therefore, the manner in which the audience views the end of the play and Fortinbras' takeover of the Danish throne. The section in question reads: " But I do prophesy th'election lights / On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice" (V. ii. 297-298). If we include Hamlet's earlier exchange with Norway, we are already aware of Hamlet's contempt for rulers such as Fortinbras who sacrifice " two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats" for the " straw" that is Poland (IV. iv. 9. 15-9. 16). Therefore, the tragedy of the state is readily demonstrated. Hamlet can easily read these lines with a heavy air of resignation: better for someone to take control of Denmark, rather than letting the country dissolve into sectarian fighting over minor rulers for the tiny piece of land, although neither option is ideal.

In the instance of Hamlet-as-state-tragedy, Fortinbras' final entrance also portends the loss of a Danish national identity: Denmark is just another patch of land annexed for the greater glory of Norway. (This would especially resonate in productions staged in post-colonial nations still coming to grips with a radically changed identity: Ireland and India especially come to mind.) If, however, we do not include the Act Four scene, our interpretation of the play's end does not resonate quite so heavily with deeper, longer-lasting implications. To us, Fortinbras becomes just another ruler: he is no better or no worse than Claudius. We have no sustaining idea of his foreign policy or his desire for profitless war, save for the mentions of him in 1. 2 and 2. 2. The entire Fortinbras aspect therefore seems a bit disjointed: the problem seems to be solved in Act Two, only to have him almost inexplicably return three acts later to assume control.

Laertes storms the castle at the end of Act Four, and he and Claudius receive news that Hamlet, Polonius' killer, " am set naked on your kingdom" (IV. vii. 42-43). Here we see another point of contention among Hamlet editors. I mentioned earlier that Wilson's change from " sallied" to " sullied" was based on his conviction of an a: u composition error; this is another example of a change based on an assumed composition error. As Bernice Kliman notes, Shakespeare had a habit of writing his lower-case e's with the loop reversed; this supposedly lies behind the many e: d misreadings in the printed texts of his plays (xvii). Nowhere in Hamlet is this more apparent than in this scene:

But let him come.

It warms the very sickness in my heart

That I shall live and tell him to his teeth,

' Thus diddest thou'.

(IV. vii. 52-55, italics are mine)

As demonstrated above, the Norton edition chooses " diddest", adding a footnote explaining, " This which I do now to you, you did to my father." 7 However, Wilson and Jenkins, among others, argue that " diddest" is a misreading, saying that Shakespeare intended to convey the more violent implications of " diest". The study and debate over Shakespeare's " intentions" is a slippery slope, as I've mentioned, however, " diest" seems to make dramatic sense, as well. " Diest" sets up a clear opposition between



Laertes and Hamlet: in both versions, we see a violent entrance by Laertes into the castle; however, “diest” implies a clear willingness to act and exact revenge on the Prince who has wronged his family.

“Diddest”, on the other hand, is a weaker moment, showing all of the sentiment of Laertes’ rage, yet none of the action. This lines him up squarely with the much-accused “undecided, hesitant” Hamlet, who resolved to “drink hot blood / And do such bitter business as the day / Would quake to look on” (III. ii. 360-362), yet stopped short only seventy lines later because Claudius was all too “fit and seasoned for his passage” (III. iv. 86). This comparison removes the immediacy from Laertes’ entrance and therefore removes the power from the scene. In 4. 7, Laertes vows “to cut his throat i’th’ church” (IV. vii. 99), “to show [him]self [his] father’s son in deed / more than in words” (IV. vii. 97-98): exactly what Hamlet has not done. Without “thus diest thou” earlier in the scene, it seems that we don’t quite believe that he will follow through.

Finally, we must look at Hamlet’s dying breath. The Norton edition, in deference to F, marks Hamlet’s last words as “The rest is silence. / O, O, O, O!” (V. ii. 300-301) These “O-groans”—a phrase coined by scholar Maurice Charney—are curious additions, to say the least. At first glance, they seem to be the product of an overzealous actor eager to milk every ounce of tragedy from his performance. (The O’s are a prime example of Jenkins’ “playhouse interpolations”, which I discussed earlier.) We have no record of Shakespeare himself penning the phrase; nor do we have any thoughts from Richard Burbage, the first Hamlet, regarding Hamlet’s last utterances. Ann Thompson

does not discount the possibility that Shakespeare added the O's in himself after seeing Burbage's Hamlet: "Perhaps one can imagine Shakespeare... having seen [Hamlet's swan song] performed...and thinking 'Burbage did rather a good dying groan, I'll put that down to remind me'" (Rosenbaum 77).

It may seem as though we are making a mountain out of this molehill of four single letters, even if they are the last words of the most influential character in Western literature. However, although these O's read a bit superfluously on the page, we are ultimately concerned with the performance of Hamlet's last breath. There are a number of possibilities for interpretation here, and I believe that this interpretation has the power to resonate with an audience long after the house lights come up and they leave the theatre. As Mirsky suggests, the O's "[stress] his agony, his attempt to hold on to life, gives a graphic sense of his passing, not so neat as the Second Quarto, nor so ritualized" (97). Is the dying Prince reacting to his first vision of "the undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns" (III. i. 81-82)? Has he realized that he has been wrong all along, and that God will not judge him kindly for his act of revenge? This concept is especially supported by Hamlet's abbreviated "Death / Is strict in his arrest - O, I could tell you - " [V. ii. 278-279], which seems to refer to a quick sight of the afterlife. These O's even work as a final soliloquy on their own, if played correctly: "they can be transmuted from hollow-looking O's on the page to a tragic aria of grief, each O registering a deeper apprehension of death and terror" (Rosenbaum 38). (Marvin Rosenberg adds, "Os can be most eloquent. [Try them.]")

In addition, we can link Ophelia's recollection of Hamlet's odd behavior in 2.1 as an omen of his final breath: " He raised a sigh so piteous and profound / that it did seem to shatter all his bulk / And end his being" (II. i. 95-97). Alexander Leggatt argues that to Elizabethan audiences, Hamlet's sighs would have been seen as a method of suicide in and of themselves: " bringing one's life to a close, expelling one's spirit. Suicide by sighs" (Rosenbaum 147). (Such a postulation begs another argument: that of Hamlet's suicidal tendencies. The topic of the Prince's depression has spawned countless pages of speculation and debate, which I do not wish to address here. I would rather focus on the ramifications of the addition of the " O-groans" by Shakespeare himself.)

Or should we ultimately agree with the Arden edition and strike the O's from performance? John Russell Brown notes that the O's do not make sense in light of Horatio's following line—" Now cracks a noble heart" (V. ii. 302, Brown " Connotations" 280-281). For Shakespeare and his contemporaries, a breaking heart was equal to a silent death, and in other Shakespeare works, broken-hearted deaths are not accompanied by O's of any sort, e. g. " My heart is great; but it must break with silence" (Richard II, II. i. 228); " The grief that does not speak / Whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break" (Macbeth, IV. iii. 209-10); " But break my heart for I must hold my tongue" (Hamlet, I. ii. 159); ".. this heart / Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws / Or ere I'll weep" (King Lear, II. iv. 283-85).

There is, indeed, a certain finality to Hamlet's last sentence: " The rest is silence." This could ultimately paint Hamlet as a hero: one could imagine him

dying in silence with a half-smile on his face, secure in the knowledge that he has upheld the family name by heeding the Ghost and avenging King Hamlet's death. The final decision, I believe, comes with a director's concept of the play. If Hamlet should die as a hero, having accomplished the task set out for him by the Ghost (and thereby earning his place in Heaven), then the O's should be removed. If, however, we choose to see the Prince as a morose Prince who reluctantly avenges his father's death, only to die with the horrid realization that he was wrong all along, then the use of the O's might appropriately address that concept (that is, if well-handled by a strong actor: mishandled O-groans could easily become melodramatic and silly.)

In this essay so far, I have purposely focused on the differences between the Q2 and F editions of Hamlet; after all, most "major" editions of the play endeavor to strike a compromise between these two editions to various degrees. Most editors of these texts have chosen to base their editions on either Q2 or F, or they have conflated these two longer texts to produce the "fullest" possible version of the play. (These conflated versions include not only the 230 lines unique to Q2 but also the 70 lines unique to F.) Here I will begin to discuss the uniqueness and implications of the Q1 text, which contains numerous differences when compared to the Q2 and F texts. <sup>8</sup> This "Bad Quarto" is regarded by many as "a piracy, a patchwork based on bad shorthand reports, recollection of treacherous actors<sup>9</sup>, and the invention of hack writers" (Hubbard 792). However, it seems fairly possible that most Elizabethan audiences were familiar with the performance of a t