THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

HAMLET

REVISED EDITION

EDITED BY
ANN THOMPSON AND NEIL TAYLOR

THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

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HAMLET

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For John, Sarah and Dixie

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GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

The earliest volume in the first Arden series, Edward Dowden's *Hamlet*, was published in 1899. Since then the Arden Shakespeare has been widely acknowledged as the pre-eminent Shakespeare edition, valued by scholars, students, actors and 'the great variety of readers' alike for its clearly presented and reliable texts, its full annotation and its richly informative introductions.

In the third Arden series we seek to maintain these well-established qualities and general characteristics, preserving our predecessors' commitment to presenting the play as it has been shaped in history. Each volume necessarily has its own particular emphasis which reflects the unique possibilities and problems posed by the work in question, and the series as a whole seeks to maintain the highest standards of scholarship, combined with attractive and accessible presentation.

Newly edited from the original documents, texts are presented in fully modernized form, with a textual apparatus that records all substantial divergences from those early printings. The notes and introductions focus on the conditions and possibilities of meaning that editors, critics and performers (on stage and screen) have discovered in the play. While building upon the rich history of scholarly activity that has long shaped our understanding of Shakespeare's works, this third series of the Arden Shakespeare is enlivened by a new generation's encounter with Shakespeare.

THE TEXT

On each page of the play itself, readers will find a passage of text supported by commentary and textual notes. Act and scene

divisions (seldom present in the early editions and often the product of eighteenth-century or later scholarship) have been retained for ease of reference, but have been given less prominence than in previous series. Editorial indications of location of the action have been removed to the textual notes or commentary.

In the text itself, elided forms in the early texts are spelt out in full in verse lines wherever they indicate a usual late twentieth-century pronunciation that requires no special indication and wherever they occur in prose (except where they indicate non-standard pronunciation). In verse speeches, marks of elision are retained where they are necessary guides to the scansion and pronunciation of the line. Final -ed in past tense and participial forms of verbs is always printed as -ed, without accent, never as -'d, but wherever the required pronunciation diverges from modern usage a note in the commentary draws attention to the fact. Where the final -ed should be given syllabic value contrary to modern usage, e.g.

> Doth Silvia know that I am banished?
> (*TGV* 3.1.214)

the note will take the form

> 214 **banished** banishèd

Conventional lineation of divided verse lines shared by two or more speakers has been reconsidered and sometimes rearranged. Except for the familiar *Exit* and *Exeunt*, Latin forms in stage directions and speech prefixes have been translated into English and the original Latin forms recorded in the textual notes.

COMMENTARY AND TEXTUAL NOTES

Notes in the commentary, for which a major source will be the *Oxford English Dictionary*, offer glossarial and other explication of verbal difficulties; they may also include discussion of points

of interpretation and, in relevant cases, substantial extracts from Shakespeare's source material. Editors will not usually offer glossarial notes for words adequately defined in the latest edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* or *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, but in cases of doubt they will include notes. Attention, however, will be drawn to places where more than one likely interpretation can be proposed and to significant verbal and syntactic complexity. Notes preceded by * discuss editorial emendations or variant readings.

Headnotes to acts or scenes discuss, where appropriate, questions of scene location, the play's treatment of source materials, and major difficulties of staging. The list of roles (so headed to emphasize the play's status as a text for performance) is also considered in the commentary notes. These may include comment on plausible patterns of casting with the resources of an Elizabethan or Jacobean acting company and also on any variation in the description of roles in their speech prefixes in the early editions.

The textual notes are designed to let readers know when the edited text diverges from the early edition(s) or manuscript sources on which it is based. Wherever this happens the note will record the rejected reading of the early edition(s) or manuscript, in original spelling, and the source of the reading adopted in this edition. Other forms from the early edition(s) or manuscript recorded in these notes will include some spellings of particular interest or significance and original forms of translated stage directions. Where two or more early editions are involved, for instance with *Othello*, the notes also record all important differences between them. The textual notes take a form that has been in use since the nineteenth century. This comprises, first: line reference, reading adopted in the text and closing square bracket; then: abbreviated reference, in italic, to the earliest edition to adopt the accepted reading, italic semicolon and noteworthy alternative reading(s), each with abbreviated italic reference to its source.

Conventions used in these textual notes include the following. The solidus / is used, in notes quoting verse or discussing verse lining, to indicate line endings. Distinctive spellings of the base text follow the square bracket without indication of source and are enclosed in italic brackets. Names enclosed in italic brackets indicate originators of conjectural emendations when these did not originate in an edition of the text, or when the named edition records a conjecture not accepted into its text. Stage directions (SDs) are referred to by the number of the line within or immediately after which they are placed. Line numbers with a decimal point relate to centred entry SDs not falling within a verse line and to SDs more than one line long, with the number after the point indicating the line within the SD: e.g. 78.4 refers to the fourth line of the SD following line 78. Lines of SDs at the start of a scene are numbered 0.1, 0.2, etc. Where only a line number precedes a square bracket, e.g. 128], the note relates to the whole line; where SD is added to the number, it relates to the whole of a SD within or immediately following the line. Speech prefixes (SPs) follow similar conventions, 203 SP] referring to the speaker's name for line 203. Where a SP reference takes the form, e.g. 38+ SP, it relates to all subsequent speeches assigned to that speaker in the scene in question.

Where, as with *King Henry V*, one of the early editions is a so-called 'bad quarto' (that is, a text either heavily adapted, or reconstructed from memory, or both), the divergences from the present edition are too great to be recorded in full in the notes. In these cases, with the exception of *Hamlet*, which prints an edited text of the Quarto of 1603, the editions will include a reduced photographic facsimile of the 'bad quarto' in an appendix.

INTRODUCTION

Both the introduction and the commentary are designed to present the plays as texts for performance, and make appropriate

reference to stage, film and television versions, as well as introducing the reader to the range of critical approaches to the plays. They discuss the history of the reception of the texts within the theatre and scholarship and beyond, investigating the interdependency of the literary text and the surrounding 'cultural text' both at the time of the original production of Shakespeare's works and during their long and rich afterlife.

PREFACE

We are very privileged to be able to take our place in the long line of those who have been involved in the transmission of the texts of *Hamlet* for over 400 years. Our debts to our predecessors are apparent on every page, and it has given us great pleasure to enter into a kind of dialogue (a virtual one, in most cases) with so many people who have been this way before. Our immediate predecessor in the Arden Shakespeare series, Harold Jenkins, did his job so well that we felt there was no need to do it again in the same way – one of the many reasons why we are offering a totally different approach to the play. Other editors of the 1980s, notably Philip Edwards and George Hibbard, have been important influences, as have the editorial team (Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery) that produced the Oxford *Complete Works* and its *Textual Companion*. We have been working on our edition at the same time as the Variorum team (Hardin Aasand, Nick Clary, Bernice Kliman and Eric Rasmussen) and have enjoyed many conversations with them as our work progressed; Bernice's 'Enfolded *Hamlet*', generously given away with the *Shakespeare Newsletter* in 1996, has been an excellent quick-reference tool. Outside the Anglo-American tradition of editing, fully annotated editions of *Hamlet* have recently appeared in Germany (edited by Holger M. Klein), Italy (*Il primo Amleto* and *Amleto*, edited by Alessandro Serpieri) and Spain (*A Synoptic 'Hamlet'*, edited by Jesús Tronch-Pérez), and we have valued these perspectives.

We owe an enormous debt to our colleagues on the Arden team, especially to Richard Proudfoot and David Scott Kastan, first for sanctioning this three-text edition from the start (despite some understandable misgivings), and then for helping us through every stage. They have read and reread with unfailing patience and have been overwhelmingly generous in making

constructive suggestions and saving us from egregious errors. We must mention support from the publishers during changing and challenging times, especially Jane Armstrong and Talia Rodgers at Routledge, in the early days of the project; Jessica Hodge, first at Thomas Nelson and then at Thomson Learning, who guided it through the next stage; and finally Margaret Bartley at Thomson Learning, who saw it through to completion. We would also like to thank Fiona Freel, Giulia Vincenzi and Philippa Gallagher at Thomson Learning. We were intimidated to learn that our copy-editor, Linden Stafford, was also the copy-editor for Harold Jenkins's edition of *Hamlet* in the second series of the Arden Shakespeare in 1982, but we have been hugely impressed with her positive attitude to our own enterprise and with her detailed and careful work; she certainly deserves a PhD in Shakespeare studies in general and Arden house style in particular. Our professional proofreader, Annette Clifford-Vaughan, was also most helpful, especially in suggesting numerous minor changes to commentary notes to get the page layout right.

We have benefited from informal consultations with fellow Arden editors at regular meetings in London and Stratford-upon-Avon and at the conferences of the Shakespeare Association of America. Many friends and colleagues have invited us to give papers on our work as it has progressed, and we have learnt a lot from the feedback on these occasions. Students taking Ann's course on '*Hamlet* and its afterlife' in the 'Shakespeare Studies: Text and Playhouse' MA programme (jointly taught by King's College London and Shakespeare's Globe theatre) have been a valued source of input and encouragement. It could be invidious to name individuals, but Peter Donaldson, Akiko Kusunoki, Gordon McMullan, Reiko Oya, Peter Reynolds and Ron Rosenbaum deserve special mention for specific contributions.

We began this project when we were both working at Roehampton Institute (now Roehampton University), and we

are grateful for support from colleagues, especially Bryan Loughrey, and for institutional support, including sabbatical leave. Roehampton also employed Sasha Roberts as a research assistant, and her hard work and enthusiasm were particularly valued in the first years of the project. Since 1999 Ann has received institutional support from King's College London. The Arts and Humanities Research Board (now Council), the British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust have all provided financial support, as have the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Huntington Library, in terms of residential fellowships. Librarians have been very helpful, especially Georgianna Ziegler at the Folger, who alerted us to their wide range of illustrative materials.

We have been able to benefit from a great deal of recent research on Elizabethan theatres and acting companies, and from the experience of seeing several of Shakespeare's plays (including *Hamlet*) performed at the reconstructed Globe theatre in London. New reference works have greatly facilitated our editorial labours: we might instance Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson's *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama 1580–1642*, Naseeb Shaheen's *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays*, and B.J. Sokol and Mary Sokol's *Shakespeare's Legal Language: A Dictionary*. And at last two works on Shakespeare's language have replaced E.A. Abbott's venerable *A Shakespeare Grammar* of 1869, namely Norman F. Blake's *A Grammar of Shakespeare's Language* and Jonathan Hope's *Shakespeare's Grammar*. These have played their part in our work, along with extensive documentation and discussion of UK and overseas performance and criticism. Just as our edition goes to press, we are grateful to Tony Howard for letting us read the typescript of his book on *Women as Hamlet*.

And finally there are the people to whom we are dedicating this edition, who have lived with it patiently for far too long and who will share our profound relief at seeing it in print.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

This volume contains an edited and annotated text of the 1604–5 (Second Quarto) printed version of *Hamlet*, with passages that are found only in the 1623 text (the First Folio) printed as Appendix 1. It is a fully self-contained, free-standing edition which includes in its Introduction and appendices all the supporting materials that a reader would expect to find in an Arden edition. Uniquely, however, we are also offering readers a second volume, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, which contains edited and annotated texts of the other two early versions. This second volume is an entirely optional supplement: the present volume does not depend upon it in any way, and we imagine the majority of readers will be content with just one *Hamlet*. We explain in our Introduction and Appendix 2 our rationale for offering all three texts in this way, and the headnotes to each scene in the commentary contain brief summaries of the principal differences in the handling of the material in the three texts.

Quotations from the three texts, as well as act, scene and line numbers, are taken from these two volumes unless otherwise stated. Of course we hope that some readers will want to study all three texts, since we feel that making them all available in the Arden format is our main justification for adding to the long list of existing editions of *Hamlet*.

Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor
London

INTRODUCTION

THE CHALLENGES OF *HAMLET*

> Lastly, let me entreat, and beseech, and adjure, and implore you not to write an essay on Hamlet. In the catalogue of a library which is very dear to me, there are about four hundred titles of separate editions, essays, commentaries, lectures, and criticisms of this sole tragedy, and I know that this is only the vanguard of the coming years. To modify the words, on another subject, of my ever dear and revered Master, the late Professor Child, I am convinced that were I told that my closest friend was lying at the point of death, and that his life could be saved by permitting him to divulge his theory of Hamlet, I would instantly say, 'Let him die! Let him die! Let him die!'

Thus spoke Horace Howard Furness, one of our many distinguished predecessors as an editor of *Hamlet*, when he addressed the Phi Beta Kappa society at Harvard University almost one hundred years ago in 1908 (Gibson, 220).[1] He was certainly right about the 'four hundred titles' being 'only the vanguard' of the army of publications which was to march through the twentieth century: by the 1990s the average number of publications *every year* on *Hamlet*, as recorded in the *Shakespeare Quarterly Annual Bibliography*, was running at well over 400, an exponential advance comparable to that in 4.4 of the play (in the Second Quarto text only), where Hamlet's

1 Furness edited the massive two-volume Variorum *Hamlet* published in 1877. The library he mentions is presumably the one he helped to create at the University of Philadelphia, and Professor Child is Francis James Child (1825–96), philologist and collector of English and Scottish ballads and songs, who had taught Furness at Harvard from 1857 to 1858, and with whom he maintained contact: see Gibson, 25, 100.

estimate of the Norwegian forces moves from 2,000 to 20,000 men in thirty-five lines. We must therefore begin by acknowledging the extraordinary size of 'the *Hamlet* phenomenon' and the challenge it represents to everyone who confronts it.

The challenge of acting Hamlet

The sheer depth and breadth of tradition weigh heavily on those who tackle *Hamlet*, whether as actor, director, editor or critic. Actors are haunted by their predecessors as well as by their contemporary rivals. Simon Russell Beale's success in the role at the National Theatre, London, in 2000 and on international tour 2000–1, was ascribed by Dennis Quilley (who played Polonius and the Gravedigger) in part to the fact that 'he's said, Let's forget Gielgud and Olivier and John Neville, and just see what the character means' (quoted in Croall, 33); but in a joint *New York Times* interview (8 April 2001) with Adrian Lester, who played Hamlet for Peter Brook at the Bouffes du Nord, Paris, and on tour in New York and London, also in 2000–1, Beale reflected on the difficulty of 'wiping the slate clean':

> There has never been a time when there aren't 800 Hamlets . . . You are aware consciously that there is a history about it. You see this list of Hamlets and you think, 'Oh, my God, no. And there's Adrian opening in five minutes. There's Olivier. There's Gielgud . . . But there's an extraordinary shutoff point when the rehearsal room door closes. Gielgud died the morning we started rehearsals for our *Hamlet*, and you thought, 'This is really weird.' But you have to – as Adrian says – start from scratch.

Gielgud himself made a similar point when asked if he had modelled his performance on any of his predecessors:

> No, I didn't. I thought I had. I thought I would copy all the actors I'd ever seen, in turn, and by then I'd

> seen about a dozen or fifteen Hamlets [including H.B. Irving (Sir Henry's son), Ernest Milton, Henry Baynton, Arthur Phillips, Colin Keith-Johnston and John Barrymore]. Of course, [the elder, Sir Henry] Irving was my god, although I'd never seen him . . . I didn't try to copy, I only took note of all the things he'd done and looked at the pictures of him and so on. But when it came to the [London Old] Vic, the play moved so fast and there was so much of it that I suddenly felt, 'Well, I've just got to be myself', and I really played it absolutely straight as far as I could.
>
> (quoted in Burton, 140)

Previous generations were equally affected: a cartoon from 1804 (see Fig. 1) shows John Philip Kemble (who performed the role from 1783 to 1817) with William Betty on his back, illustrating the sensational competition between the adult performer (Kemble was forty-seven in 1804) and the child actor who astonished London by undertaking the role at the age of thirteen and becoming known as 'the infant Roscius' (see 2.2.327 and n.). Kemble is exclaiming (in a parody of Ophelia's lines at 3.1.159–60), 'Alas! is it come to this / Ah! woe is me / Seeing what I have seen / Seeing what I see!! Oh Roscious –'. There were well-known rivalries between contemporaries like William Charles Macready (who performed the role from 1823 to 1851) and Edwin Forrest (1829–72), and John Gielgud (1930–44) and Laurence Olivier (1937–48) (on the former, see Phelps, 20–21, and Hapgood, 75; on the latter, see Maher, 26, and Olivier, 50).

One of the most famous American Hamlets, Edwin Booth (who performed the role from 1853 to 1891), was apparently haunted by the ghost of his father, Junius Brutus Booth, who had himself played Hamlet from 1829 to 1849: a cartoon of 1875 shows the 'Spirit of the Elder B——h' appearing to 'B——h the Younger' (see Fig. 2). Edwin claimed to have heard his father's voice speaking through the Ghost, and he

1 Cartoon of John Philip Kemble with William Betty on his back, dated 30 November 1804; see p. 3

2 Cartoon of the spirit of Junius Brutus Booth appearing to Edwin Booth, from *New York Times Dramatic News* (October 1875). In the caption the Spirit of the Elder Booth is saying, ‘I am thy father’s Ghost’, and Booth the Younger replies, ‘I’ll call THEE Hamlet, Father’ (see 1.5.9 and 1.4.44–5)

used a miniature of his father in the closet scene. Junius Brutus had died before Edwin's first Hamlet and he saw the performance as a 'sacred pledge'; his biographer records that the role became 'almost an autopsychography' for him (see Shattuck, 3–6).[1] Daniel Day Lewis withdrew from the part in mid-run in 1989 after he allegedly began seeing *his* father (the recently deceased poet Cecil Day-Lewis) on stage at the National Theatre in London (see Davison). The Ghost is indeed often played by an actor who has himself played Hamlet in the past: Gielgud as director used his own voice for the Ghost when he directed Richard Burton in 1964 (the Ghost did not actually appear in this production), and Paul Scofield played the Ghost to Mel Gibson's Hamlet in Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film.

In the past, actors of Hamlet were very much aware of a heritage of 'points', that is details of stage business which had been introduced by their predecessors and had become in effect canonized as part of the acting tradition. They had to make conscious decisions whether, for example, to crawl menacingly across the stage during the acting of *The Murder of Gonzago* in 3.2 (as Edmund Kean had first done in 1814), and whether to overturn a chair on the appearance of the Ghost in 3.4 (as David Garrick had first done in 1742); reviewers would be equally aware of such 'points' and would regularly comment on how they were handled (see more examples at pp. 97–111). This was in part a consequence of what seems to us the extraordinary longevity of particular performances: Thomas Betterton played Hamlet from 1661 until 1709 (when he was seventy-four), Garrick from 1742 to 1776, John Philip Kemble from 1783 to 1817, Edmund Kean from 1814 to 1832 and William Charles Macready from 1823 to 1851. Thus a performance could be polished and embellished over a period of twenty, thirty or

1 It was Edwin's elder brother, John Wilkes Booth, who assassinated Abraham Lincoln on 26 April 1865, an event that caused Edwin to retire from the stage for nine months; he returned, triumphantly, in the role of Hamlet.

more years, with audiences returning again and again expecting minor modifications but no radical changes. Even in the first half of the twentieth century, John Gielgud performed the part occasionally from 1929 to 1945. This simply does not happen in the modern theatre. An individual actor may get the chance to play Hamlet in more than one run (for example, Mark Rylance at Stratford in 1988 and at the London Globe in 2000), but the surrounding production will be completely different and audiences will expect the individual performance to be tailored accordingly. Actors are concerned, if anything, to avoid the 'points' associated with previous Hamlets, though they may unconsciously reinvent them, as when Michael Pennington (212) describes Stephen Dillane in 1994 'copying' a piece of business from a Russian Hamlet in 1839. Film confers a different kind of longevity on a performance, though it is notable in this context that Laurence Olivier's Richard III has proved to be a more dominant (and in some ways inhibiting) influence than his Hamlet.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, the director began to succeed the actor-manager and to occupy a dominant role in the theatre. In the 1950s Eric Bentley imagined a world in which even the author, let alone the actor, was eclipsed by the director: 'To speak of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* will soon be as unusual and eccentric as to speak of Schikaneder's *Magic Flute*. The playwright is just a librettist; the composer's name is Reinhardt, Meyerhold, Piscator, Baty, Logan, or Kazan' (Bentley, 112). The name of William Shakespeare has hardly become as obscure as that of Emanuel Schikaneder, but in some cases the director does indeed triumph over the performer, especially in the continental European theatre and for those working within it, from Edward Gordon Craig's Moscow *Hamlet* in 1911 to Peter Brook's Paris *Hamlet* in 2000. This also applies to films, unless the actor is very well known: we usually speak of the 1964 Russian film as Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* rather than as Innokenty Smoktunovsky's *Hamlet*, but

we might speak of the 1990 film either as Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* or as Mel Gibson's *Hamlet*. Hamlet's own presentation of *The Murder of Gonzago*, given a new title, *The Mousetrap*, and altered by the insertion of 'a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines', prefigures the power of the director to reinterpret and reinvent the play, and 'directors' theatre' has its own history of the anxiety of influence and the pressure to be original (see Wilcock for an extended study of this). In addition to many 'straight' productions of *Hamlet* powered by a strong directorial vision, the twentieth century saw a number of versions of the play presented through a directorial collage or kaleidoscope, including those by Charles Marowitz (*Hamlet Collage*, 1965), Heiner Müller (*Hamletmachine*, 1979), Peter Brook (*Qui est là?*, 1995), Robert Lepage (*Elsinore*, 1995) and Robert Wilson (*Hamlet: A Monologue*, 1995). All these are 'variations' of the play, rearranged for the directors' purposes far more radically than Hamlet proposes to rewrite *The Murder of Gonzago*, but still trading on the cultural capital of 'Shakespeare' and 'Hamlet' and indeed depending on the audience's familiarity with the original. (For more on 'directors' theatre', see pp. 111–17.)

The challenge of editing Hamlet

Of the earliest printed texts of *Hamlet*, three stand out as being significant for the modern editor – those known as the First Quarto or Q1 (1603), the Second Quarto or Q2 (1604–5) and the First Folio or F (1623). Q1 is the shortest of these texts, the only one of the three that could plausibly have been acted in its entirety, but quite different from the others in much of its dialogue and even in the names of some of its characters ('Ofelia' and 'Leartes' have a father called 'Corambis'). Q2 is almost twice the length of Q1 and lacks some famous passages of F's dialogue (including Hamlet's observation that 'Denmark's a prison' at 2.2.242). F is a little shorter than Q2 and lacks some substantial passages of Q2's dialogue (including the whole of Hamlet's soliloquy 'How all occasions do inform against me' at 4.4.31).

While modern actors consciously aim to reject the burden of tradition and 'just see what the character means', 'start from scratch' or 'be themselves', editors do not have this option. We are well aware that we stand (if at all) on the shoulders of giants, or, in Stanley Wells's more modest metaphor, that we constitute merely 'one thin layer in the coral reef of editorial effort' (Wells, *Re-Editing*, 3). On the one hand we must indeed 'start from scratch', having an obligation to edit our text(s) as if no one had ever done it before, but on the other hand, if we emend a word, add a stage direction or even make a significant alteration to a piece of punctuation, we must check to see if any of our predecessors made the same change and be scrupulous about acknowledging that precedent. At times we may envy the very earliest editors their freedom to intervene in the interests of clarification, as with Pope's 1723 emendation of F's 'like most' to 'most like' at 2.2.347 (Folio text only; see Appendix 1), Theobald's 1733 emendation of Q2's 'And Anchors' to 'An anchor's' at 3.2.213 (Q2 text only) or Hanmer's 1744 emendation of F's 'fond' to 'fanned' at 5.2.155 (Folio text only; see Appendix 1): most of these readings now seem obvious and have been accepted by the vast majority of editors. At other times we may deplore the influence of early editions, as with the imposition of an act break in the middle of the closet scene (at 3.4/4.1), first found in the Quarto of 1676 (Q6) and adopted by almost all subsequent editors, despite their inability to justify it (see Appendix 4). The nature of our work involves a laborious reinvention of the wheel and an extreme nervousness about claiming anything at all as original to this edition.

Nevertheless, we would not have undertaken a task on this scale if we had not felt we had something genuinely new and indeed 'original' to offer. When we started, we were aware of the three fine editions of the play that had appeared in the 1980s: Harold Jenkins's for the Arden Shakespeare in 1982, Philip Edwards's for the New Cambridge Shakespeare in 1985 and G.R. Hibbard's for the Oxford Shakespeare in 1987. We

were also aware of the massive and radical work of the Oxford team (Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery) on the *Complete Works* (modern spelling and original spelling versions, 1986) and the *Textual Companion* (1987). Those volumes famously included two texts of *King Lear*, the 1608 Quarto version as well as the 1623 Folio version, and the editors argued, building on the work of scholars such as Steven Urkowitz, Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, that the latter represented an authorial revision of the former. The 'two texts of *King Lear*' became further 'canonized' in the *Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katherine Eisaman Maus (1997).

The Oxford team took a similar line on the relationship between the 1604–5 Quarto and the 1623 Folio texts of *Hamlet* (as did both Edwards and Hibbard in the single-play volumes), namely that the latter is a revision of the former, but they printed only one version. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor later recorded their regret at this decision:

> It now seems obvious that we should have included two versions of *Hamlet*, as we did of *King Lear*, a Folio-based version and one based on Q2 [but] . . . It was not yet at all clear that the rewriting of *Hamlet* was as important for anyone's interpretation of the play as the rewriting of *Lear* . . . [and] *Hamlet* was one of the last plays we edited; we were tired.
>
> (Wells & Taylor, 16–17)

They conceded that the solution they had adopted of printing the Q2–only lines as 'additional passages' was 'hopelessly confusing' and that only a 'determined scholar' with access to the expensive *Textual Companion* would be in a position to reconstruct the Q2 text they had chosen not to print (Wells & Taylor, 16–17). They expressed a hope that their publishers would subsequently make a parallel-text *Hamlet* available but this has not happened. Our decision to print not two but all

three of the early texts of *Hamlet* can be seen on one level as making up for this deficit.

This edition is in two volumes, which print Q2 in the first and Q1 and F in the second. Ideally, we would have printed the three texts either in one volume (printing them in the order in which they were originally published – Q1, Q2, F) or in three, but a variety of practical considerations has led us to settle for a two-volume format. Given that decision, it became necessary to decide on the distribution of the texts between the two volumes. As Q2 is the longest text, it makes sense to put it on its own, since that allows the two volumes to be not too dissimilar in size. Although we have edited, modernized and annotated the texts in such a way that a reader can choose to read each version separately, we are aware nevertheless that not all readers will wish to do this, and we have therefore chosen to provide the F-only lines as 'additional passages' within the Q2 volume. This decision certainly does not arise out of any conviction that Q2 is the one authoritative text, or that if F has any authority it is limited to only those 'additional passages', or that Q1 is a mere curiosity. On the contrary, we believe that each of the three texts has sufficient merit to be read and studied on its own. We fervently hope that readers will study both volumes, experience the imaginative power of all three texts, and explore and weigh the scholarly debates surrounding their origins.

Yet, however much we are committed to the project of producing a multiple-text edition, we have to concede that the Arden Shakespeare is associated with single-text, eclectic editions. We have not produced an eclectic edition, but we feel we must at least provide our readers with the material to read a *Hamlet* within that tradition. And we also have to concede that, if one were forced to choose just one of the three early texts of *Hamlet* as, on the balance of the evidence, the most likely to have authority, it would have to be Q2. This is because (a) the evidence is strong, and there is general agreement among

scholars, that Q2 derives from an authorial manuscript; (b) few scholars in the last hundred years have ever claimed that Q1 is based on an authorial manuscript, no one has ever claimed that it is the most authoritative of the three texts, and Q2 was printed during Shakespeare's lifetime not long after the play was first staged and apparently as a deliberate attempt on the part of Shakespeare's company, and presumably with his consent, to correct and displace Q1; and (c) forceful and, for many, persuasive as the arguments are that F derives from an authorial revision of the play, or a more 'theatrical' text than Q2, there is less than general agreement on either of these points, and, were it to be there, agreement on either point would not necessarily be a reason for attributing more authority to F than to Q2.

Hence we have provided in this volume a self-contained 'Arden *Hamlet*' with all the usual apparatus, including full information about the other text traditionally regarded as 'good' (F) in Appendices 1 and 2 as well as in the textual notes and commentary. But we have also provided modernized and annotated texts of both F and Q1 in a second volume, entitled *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623* (abbreviated henceforth as Ard Q1/F, and to which quotations from these texts refer unless otherwise stated). We are assuming that those who consult this second volume will have the first volume to hand (but not vice versa), so, while the commentary on Q1 is quite extensive, that on F concentrates exclusively on its differences from Q2 (and what previous editors have made of them) and does not repeat glossarial and interpretative notes where F is substantially identical to Q2. (For more extensive discussion of the texts and composition of *Hamlet*, see pp. 76–96 and Appendix 2.)

The choice of text (or in our case the refusal to choose) is perhaps the most fundamental decision an editor has to make, but it is by no means the only one. Arden editions have always been valued for their wealth of annotation and commentary, and, while we were facing a formidably thorough model in Jenkins's Arden edition, it was published as long ago as 1982,

and the Cambridge and Oxford single-play editions had followed soon afterwards. It was apparent that by the time our work appeared there would be some serious updating to be done: there would be twenty or twenty-five years' worth of productions, adaptations, scholarship and criticism to be assimilated and incorporated. Readerships change all the time, and perhaps the UK undergraduate readership has altered most of all in the last twenty years, during which period an elite higher education system where around 10 per cent of school-leavers went to university has developed into a 'mass' system where nearly 50 per cent participate. Pedagogical methods have changed, both at school and at university, so student readers require different kinds of annotation. There is much more emphasis on the plays in performance in modern editions of Shakespeare: editors now engage with issues of staging not just in a 'stage history' section of an introduction but throughout their commentaries. We are also aware of an international readership who will rightly expect *Hamlet* to be treated as an international phenomenon, not as a play exclusively 'owned' by the Anglo-American tradition.

The challenge to the greatness of Hamlet: Hamlet *versus* Lear

Despite what seems to us the formidable status of 'the *Hamlet* phenomenon', we should acknowledge that during the last decade of the twentieth century the status and pre-eminence of *Hamlet* was challenged by R.A. Foakes, who claimed that in about 1960 *King Lear* had replaced *Hamlet* as 'the best, the greatest, or the chief masterpiece of Shakespeare' (Foakes, *Hamlet*, 1), citing numerous critics who take this relative judgement for granted. This late twentieth-century primacy of *King Lear* rested in part on its belated emergence as a stageable text after a long period during which it was regarded as 'Shakespeare's greatest work . . . but not the best of his plays', as A.C. Bradley put it in his influential *Shakespearean Tragedy*

(202), and in part, as Foakes demonstrates, on a shift in interpretation away from readings which had seen it as a kind of redemptive parable in which Lear 'loses the world but gains his soul' and towards those which saw it as a bleak vision of suffering and despair.

This shift may well have been related to the global context of the Cold War when the ever-present threat of nuclear destruction made 'the promised end' envisaged by Kent (*Lear* 5.3.261) seem imminent. Tracing the traditional interpretations of *Hamlet* and *Lear*, and in particular their perceived relevance to political issues, Foakes draws a contrast between them:

> Although Hamlet was, as a character, abstracted from the play and privatized as a representative of everyman by Romantic and later critics, he also became in the nineteenth century an important symbolic political figure, usually typifying the liberal intellectual paralysed in will and incapable of action. By contrast, *King Lear* was depoliticized . . . and until the 1950s the play was, in the main, seen as a tragedy of personal relations between father and daughter, or as a grand metaphysical play about Lear's pilgrimage to discover his soul. All this changed after 1960, since when *King Lear* has come to seem richly significant in political terms, in a world in which old men have held on to and abused power, often in corrupt and arbitrary ways; in the same period *Hamlet* has lost much of its political relevance, as liberal intellectuals have steadily been marginalized in Britain and in the United States.
>
> (*Hamlet*, 6)

He concludes that 'for the immediate future, *King Lear* will continue to be regarded as the central achievement of Shakespeare, if only because it speaks more largely than the other tragedies to the anxieties of the modern world' (224). Foakes repeated these claims when he edited *King Lear* in

1997, but in the same year E.A.J. Honigmann edited *Othello* and argued that *his* play really deserved to be acknowledged as 'the greatest tragedy' (Honigmann, Ard[3] *Oth*, 1 and 102–11). One does often become partisan on behalf of the play one is editing (though there are exceptions to this, as when a woman edits *The Taming of the Shrew*), but this is not just an academic game: as editors of this text (or, rather, these texts) of *Hamlet*, we feel we must engage with the formidable status of the play and the historical and cultural contexts which have generated and continue to generate that status.

Clearly, from the publication statistics mentioned on p. 1, *Hamlet* continues to attract attention both inside and outside the scholarly community: those 400-plus publications per year are categorized in the *Shakespeare Quarterly Annual Bibliography* for 2001 under the headings 'Bibliographies and Checklists', 'Editions and Texts', 'Translations and Adaptations', 'Sources and Influences', 'Textual and Bibliographical Studies', 'Criticism', 'Pedagogy', 'Other', 'Actors, Acting, Directing', 'Film, Cinema, Radio, Television', 'Music', 'Readings, Audio Recordings', 'Stage and Theater History', 'Stage Productions' and 'Theatrical Techniques'. The average number of publications relating to *King Lear* is under 200 and that play has never had the high level of recognition enjoyed by *Hamlet*: it seems unlikely that the average person in London, New York, Moscow or Delhi could quote or identify any lines from *Lear*, while 'To be or not to be' must be the most frequently quoted (and parodied) speech in western and indeed global cultural tradition. Partly because of its supposed unstageability, *Lear* lacks the visual icons generated by *Hamlet*: its most frequently illustrated moments – the opening scene with Lear dividing up a map of his kingdom, and the final scene with Lear's entry carrying his dead daughter Cordelia – would probably not instantly signify '*Lear*' to most people in the same way that the man with the skull, the ghost on the battlements or the woman dead in the water signify '*Hamlet*'. For actors, of course, the title role of Hamlet remains

one in which a young (or younger middle-aged) actor can make his (or indeed her) mark as a potential 'star' early on, while the title role of *King Lear* is an older man's part, the confirmation or culmination of an already successful career. It is even arguable that the political topicality of *King Lear* is already dated, relating as it did to a particular period of history and the dominance of elderly politicians such as Leonid Brezhnev and Ronald Reagan; certainly, as we shall see, *Hamlet* was perceived as being more topical than ever during the final years and collapse of the Soviet Union.

Indeed, there is not much evidence of *Hamlet* being in decline outside the Anglo-American tradition. Books on 'foreign' Shakespeare have proliferated in recent years: a brief list would have to include *Shakespeare on the German Stage*, volume 1, *1586–1914*, by Simon Williams (1990), and volume 2, *The Twentieth Century*, by Wilhelm Hortmann (1998); *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance* by Dennis Kennedy (1993); *Shakespeare in the New Europe*, edited by Michael Hattaway, Boika Sokolova and Derek Roper (1994); *Hamlet and Japan*, edited by Yoshiko Ueno (1995); *Shakespeare and South Africa* by David Johnson (1996); *Shakespeare in China* by Xiao Yang Zhang (1996); *Shakespeare and Hungary* edited by Holger Klein and Peter Davidhazi (1996); *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, edited by Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (1998); *Shakespeare and the Japanese Stage*, edited by Takashi Sasayama, J.R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (1999); *Shakespeare and Eastern Europe* by Zdeněk Stříbrný (2000); *Performing Shakespeare in Japan*, edited by Minami Ryuta, Ian Carruthers and John Gillies (2001); *Painting Shakespeare Red: An East-European Appropriation* by Alexander Shurbanov and Boika Sokolova (2001); and *Shakespeare and Scandinavia* by Gunnar Sorelius (2002). Relevant studies have also appeared in collections such as *Shakespeare and National Culture*, edited by John J. Joughin (1997), and *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, edited by Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer (1999). Most of

these books attest to the traditional and virtually worldwide dominance of *Hamlet*; as indeed does the evidence from the international film industries: *Hamlet* has been knowledgeably described as 'the world's most filmed story after Cinderella', generating over fifty versions and, in that respect, in a completely different league from any other play.[1] The demise of *Hamlet* may have been exaggerated, but what, in fact, does this play mean to modern audiences and readers?

HAMLET IN OUR TIME

> At one time, this must obviously have been an interesting play written by a promising Elizabethan playwright. However, equally obviously, that is no longer the case. Over the years, *Hamlet* has taken on a huge and complex symbolizing function and, as a part of the institution called 'English literature', it has become far more than a mere play by a mere playwright.
> (Hawkes, *Meaning*, 4)

> Most Americans know by heart a few tags from Shakespeare's plays even if they have not read them. A man on the street interviewed by Al Pacino for his documentary *Looking for Richard* [1996], or a Congressman in Washington, D.C. providing sound bites for the six o'clock news, can quote or parody the same rusty speech from *Hamlet* ('B2 or not B2').
> (Taylor, 'Bard', 202)

What does *Hamlet* mean today? How can one get beyond its sheer iconic status and unpack that 'huge and complex

1 This claim is made by Luke McKernan and Olwen Terris, authors of *Walking Shadows: Shakespeare in the National Film and Television Archive* (1994), in their unpublished programme note to the June 1994 season at the National Film Theatre in London, which featured twelve *Hamlet* films.

symbolizing function' to discover why this apparently primitive drama, with its reliance on ghosts and the revenge ethic, nevertheless maintains its power in the twenty-first century? The question is of course impossible to answer in the space of this Introduction: we can only give some pointers towards current debates and hope that readers will also find suggestions in the remainder of the Introduction and in the commentary as to how modern performers and critics are interpreting the play, questioning or reaffirming old readings and finding new ones.

The soliloquies and the modernity of Hamlet

As Gary Taylor implies, and despite his overall argument that Shakespeare's reputation peaked during the Victorian period and is now in decline, *Hamlet* remains famous for its soliloquies, so let us begin with that 'same rusty speech', 'To be or not to be'. If one wants to argue that the First Quarto of *Hamlet* is in any sense a 'memorial reconstruction' of a 'better' text, it seems now incredible that the actor or reporter failed to remember this particular line, which appears in Q1 as 'To be, or not to be – ay, there's the point' (7.115 in our text). Moreover, the entire speech appears in a different place in Q1, during the equivalent of 2.2, much earlier than in the other texts (see pp. 76–96 and Appendix 2), and several modern stagings of Q2/F *Hamlet* have adopted the Q1 placing as being, for their purposes, more logical than the Q2/F placing in 3.1.[1] While Hamlet's soliloquies

1 British examples in the second half of the twentieth century include Michael Benthall directing John Neville at London's Old Vic in 1957; Tony Richardson directing Nicol Williamson at London's Roundhouse in 1969; Ron Daniels directing Mark Rylance at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, in 1989; and Matthew Warchus directing Alex Jennings at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, in 1997. Further examples at the beginning of the twenty-first century include Trevor Nunn directing Ben Whishaw at the London Old Vic and Michael Boyd directing Toby Stephens at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, both in 2004. Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film version, starring Mel Gibson, also adopted the Q1 placing.

are among the best-known and indeed best-loved features of the play, they seem, on the basis of the three earliest texts, to be movable or even detachable: there is no sign in Q1 or F of Hamlet's last soliloquy, delivered after his encounter with the Norwegian Captain at 4.4.31–65 in Q2, and in one modern production this speech was not only cut but replaced by 'To be or not to be' on the grounds that this much later moment is Hamlet's nadir.[1]

'To be or not to be' has of course taken on a life of its own, featuring in endless burlesques, parodies, cartoons and advertisements from the early seventeenth century to the present day. An unusual example of the speech being quoted out of context but quite seriously is when the character played by Robert Lepage in Denys Arcand's 1989 film *Jesus of Montreal* insists on including a version of 'Hamlet's soliloquy' as his condition for taking part in an updated version of a mystery play. The lines from 'to die: to sleep' up to 'fly to others that we know not of' (3.1.63–81) – spoken, of course, in French – make perfect sense as delivered by one of the disciples after the crucifixion and before the resurrection of Jesus.[2] Actors and directors put a great deal of work into the delivery of the soliloquies,[3] and audiences and reviewers repay these efforts by focusing much of their attention on these very famous speeches. Editors and critics build entire theories of the play and its hero on what he says in these monologues. The significance of the last soliloquy, for example, has ironically been highlighted by recent editors who think Shakespeare decided to omit it:

1 See Lavender, 233, discussing Peter Brook's 2000 production with Adrian Lester at the Bouffes du Nord, Paris.

2 Within the film, Lepage's character remarks that he will never be cast as Hamlet, but a fascination with *Hamlet* pervades Lepage's own work as a director and performer in theatre and film up to and including his 1995 multimedia show *Elsinore*, in which he played all the characters.

3 See, for example, the accounts in Shattuck, Gilder, Berkoff, Pennington, Maher and Holmes.

Philip Edwards (who prints it in square brackets) argues that 'it is not one of the great soliloquies' and that it is 'insufficient and inappropriate for Act 4 of *Hamlet*' (Cam², 17), while G.R. Hibbard (who consigns it to an appendix) writes that the lines 'do nothing to advance the action, nor do they reveal anything new about Hamlet and his state of mind' (Oxf¹, 362).

These comments prompt one to ask what exactly is 'great' about 'the great soliloquies' and what is their function in the play. Certainly, it has been widely assumed that they tell us something about Hamlet's state of mind and that in doing so they render him a modern hero.

> Since the end of the nineteenth century, *Hamlet* has been hailed as Shakespeare's most modern play, as the play that itself breaks out of the medieval and into the modern. Hamlet's consciousness, it is said, as dramatized primarily through his soliloquies, is what makes it so precocious.
>
> (de Grazia, 'Soliloquies', 80–1)

As de Grazia herself is aware, this simplistic division between the medieval and the modern has been challenged, not least by medievalists, who argue that the kind of interiority or subjectivity identified by scholars working on the Renaissance as modern can be found much earlier, in the poetry of William Langland and Geoffrey Chaucer, for example (see Aers). And the whole debate has been problematized by recent modes of criticism which associate the process of 'self-fashioning' and the exploration of the essentialist self with a particular historical moment, usually related to the concept of 'bourgeois individualism', which, it is claimed, did not exist before 1660 (see Lee). In a later contribution to the debate, de Grazia ('Time') sees Hamlet's interiority as an early nineteenth-century invention and argues for a rejection of the 'presentist' approach to the play. Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that one of the things about Hamlet that has always fascinated

actors, audiences and readers has been precisely the scope the play gives us to speculate about what he means when he says he has 'that within which passes show' (1.2.85).

But is it accurate to conclude that the soliloquies 'dramatize Hamlet's consciousness'? They surely fulfil a number of different functions, ranging from exposition of the plot to meditation on commonplace topics, and they are often less 'personal' than the soliloquies of, say, Richard III, Iago in *Othello* or Edmund in *King Lear*. The first one (1.2.129–59) is introduced with the stage direction '*Exeunt all but Hamlet*' in both Q1 and Q2 and the equivalent '*Exeunt. Manet Hamlet*' in F, while the third (2.2.484–540) begins 'Now I am alone.' But some of them are not even 'soliloquies' at all: Ophelia is on stage throughout 'To be or not to be' (3.1.55–87), and the audience knows that the King and Polonius are overhearing the speech; in some productions Hamlet addresses it specifically to Ophelia and in some he shows he is aware of the spies. Again in 4.4 Hamlet asks his companions to 'Go a little before' (30), and Q2 has no exit direction for them before his long speech; since they have been instructed to 'Follow him at foot' (4.3.51), it seems more likely that they go upstage rather than just walk off. So the mental picture we all seem to have of *Hamlet*, which is Hamlet alone on stage, is actually realized rather less often than one might think, though some theatrical conventions of act and scene division have tended to emphasize it (see Appendix 4). Curiously, there is an analogy here with one of the most common among illustrations of *Hamlet* (including paintings and photographs of actual performances), which consists of Hamlet alone contemplating a skull that he is holding in his hand: he is not in fact alone at all at this moment in 5.1, but in conversation with the Gravedigger and Horatio. Hamlet-as-icon, however, has to be alone, which is perhaps one reason why many illustrations (and cartoons) show him delivering 'To be or not to be' while holding a skull, conflating two very different moments in the play (see Figs 3 and 4).

3 Cartoon by Phil May of Hamlet with a skull, 1894

In any case, when Hamlet is alone, is he simply thinking aloud or is he rather talking to the audience? Centuries of performance in theatres equipped with proscenium arches and footlights separating the audience from the stage have

4 Cartoon by Patrick Blower of Tony Blair, UK Prime Minister, as Hamlet with a sheep's skull during the 2001 general election campaign when there was speculation that the epidemic of foot and mouth disease would cause a postponement of the poll (taken from the London *Evening Standard*, 16 March 2001)

encouraged the 'thinking aloud' approach and the cinema's convention of the 'voiceover' has enhanced it (notably, for example, in Laurence Olivier's 1948 film, where the camera seems to go inside the actor's head), but from the later twentieth century onwards, performances 'in the round', in smaller studio spaces and in reconstructions of Elizabethan theatres have allowed Hamlets to choose to direct the speeches outwards instead of inwards. Even in conventional theatres, the expectations of actors and audiences have changed: the recording of Richard Burton's performance (directed by John Gielgud and filmed in the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre in New York in 1964) shows him delivering the soliloquies in an internalized

way, making no direct contact with the audience (who feel they can applaud after each speech without breaking the illusion). But in the proscenium–arch Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon in the following year David Warner, in Peter Hall's production, electrified audiences by addressing them directly. Though some reviewers put this down to an instinctual young actor's ignorance of the proper conventions, most commented on the power of this approach as well as its relative novelty. Clearly it could also be dangerous: one night, when Warner asked 'Am I a coward?' (2.2.506), someone shouted, 'Yes!' – which he remembered as one of the most exhilarating moments in his career (see Maher, 41, 51–3). That particular soliloquy, as Emrys Jones points out (*Scenic*, 104–5), has much in common with Richard III's 'Was ever woman in this humour wooed?' (1.2.232–68), in which the character shares with the audience his amazement at what we have just witnessed.

Other soliloquies are more reflective in tone, but the reflections are not always intimate or personal. Hamlet tends to ask 'what is this quintessence of dust?' (2.2.274) rather than 'What am I?', and it has been possible for scholars and critics to disagree totally over whether his most famous speech does or does not tell us of his own suicidal tendencies. The rediscovery of Q1 in 1823 contributed significantly to this debate, since 'To be or not to be' in that text follows a mere five lines after the King's 'See where he comes, poring upon a book' (7.110) (equivalent to 'But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading' (2.2.165) in Q2, where 'To be or not to be' follows some 430 lines later), allowing those who do not want Hamlet to be suicidal to argue that he is simply meditating on what he has read. Whatever one's view of this (and it should be noted that Hamlet's discussion of 'self-slaughter' at 1.2.129–34 is not prompted by any book), it is surely clear that, even if he begins from his own situation, he moves on to more general speculations about the human condition – a tendency featured

again in the maligned 'How all occasions do inform against me' (4.4.31–65), where again Hamlet asks 'What is a man?' (32). Indeed, one of the problems with this particular soliloquy might be that its more personal reflections are downright inaccurate: how can Hamlet claim he has 'strength and means / To do't [kill the King]' (44–5) when he is being escorted out of the country?

Hamlet has the largest part in the play, indeed in the entire Shakespearean canon, but the sheer number of words he utters, in conversation as well as in monologue, does not automatically give us access to 'that within'. The soliloquies give us a sense of his intelligence and his frustration (qualities with which we can easily identify), and dramaturgically they serve the usual end of allowing the character with superior awareness to set up situations of dramatic irony by his confidences in the audience. But centuries of debate demonstrate that in many ways Hamlet remains an opaque character, much in need of Horatio's posthumous interpretation; in the lighter tradition of *Hamlet* offshoots, Horatio's failure to complete and publish his exhaustive *Life and Letters of Hamlet the Dane* becomes something of a standing joke (see, for example, pp. 134–5).

Another problematic legacy of the formidable '*Hamlet* tradition' is the sheer (over-)familiarity of the play's language: it can seem a mere tissue of quotations, causing actors difficulty in making the lines sound fresh. We have lost the rhetorical training of Shakespeare's time and the technical vocabulary of linguistic effects which went with it: we are often impatient with studies of style, rhetoric and metre, preferring to move straight to 'the meaning of the play', that is, to larger patterns relating to themes, characters, historical and religious contexts. Editors are privileged to be able to engage with a text at the level of word-by-word detail, and actors, given enough rehearsal time, are obliged to undertake similar inquiries, but the general tendency of modern criticism has been to overlook verbal intricacy in favour of the larger picture. A scattering of late twentieth-century exceptions to this would include Patricia

Parker's *Literary Fat Ladies* and her essay on '*Othello* and *Hamlet*' ('Dilation'), George T. Wright's 'Hendiadys and *Hamlet*' and Ann Thompson and John O. Thompson's chapter on *Hamlet* in *Shakespeare, Meaning and Metaphor*; all of these explore new versions of traditional 'close reading' approaches, not just to the soliloquies but to the language of the play more generally.

Hamlet *and Freud*

> Though conclusive evidence is hard to come by, it is difficult to read Shakespeare without feeling that he was almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida.
>
> (Eagleton, ix–x)

Is this because in so many ways Shakespeare got in first, anticipating many of the major concerns of later writers, or is it because they were themselves overwhelmingly influenced by him? *Hamlet* has certainly featured in some of the key texts in modern philosophy and psychoanalysis. Marx developed a revolutionary theory of history in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* (1852) through a subversive reading of the Ghost of Hamlet's father (see Stallybrass, 'Mole'). Freud famously first sketched his theory of the Oedipus complex (later developed in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900) in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess in October 1897 in which he argued that, in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's 'unconscious understood the unconscious of his hero' in this way (see Garber, 124–71). More than any other of Shakespeare's plays, *Hamlet* has attracted psychoanalytic critics, and Hamlet and Ophelia have become respectively the iconic representatives of male and female instability.

In his identification of the 'Ophelia complex', Gaston Bachelard discussed the symbolic connections between women, water and death, seeing drowning as an appropriate merging into the female element for women, who are always associated

with liquids: blood, milk, tears and amniotic fluid. Visual images of Ophelia either about to drown or drowning became increasingly popular in the nineteenth century (see Figs 5 and 6, and 4.7.164–81n.). Moreover, as Elaine Showalter has demonstrated, the particular circumstances of Ophelia's madness have made her 'a potent and obsessive figure in our cultural mythology' (78): she represents a powerful archetype in which female insanity and female sexuality are inextricably intertwined. Men may go mad for a number of reasons, including mental and spiritual stress, but women's madness is relentlessly associated with their bodies and their erotic desires. Melancholy was a fashionable disease among young men in London in the late sixteenth century, but it was associated with intellectual and imaginative genius in them, whereas 'women's melancholy was seen instead as biological and emotional in its origins' (Showalter, 81; see also Schiesari). The very word 'hysteria' implies a female physiological condition, originating as it does from the Greek *hystera* meaning womb. King Lear, fighting off his own impending madness, equates '*Hysterica passio*' with the medical condition involving feelings of suffocation and giddiness known to Elizabethans as 'the mother'. Stagings of Ophelia's mad scene (4.5) have always been influenced by prevailing stereotypes of female insanity, from sentimental wistfulness in the eighteenth century to full-blown schizophrenia in the twentieth.

To risk a very crude generalization, the Anglo-American *Hamlet* has often been read through Freud as primarily a domestic drama, with some productions to this day omitting Fortinbras and most of the play's politics (this happened, for example, when John Caird directed Simon Russell Beale at the National Theatre in London in 2000), while in other parts of the world, notably in eastern and east-central Europe during the dominance of the Soviet Union and the Cold War, *Hamlet* has been primarily a political play enacting the possibility of dissent from various forms of totalitarianism (see pp. 117–22;

5 1794 etching by Francesco Bartolezzi from a painting by Henry Tresham of an upright pre-Millais Ophelia 'clambering' to hang her garlands; see 4.7.164–81 and n.

6 Jean Simmons as a post-Millais Ophelia in a photograph taken on set during the making of Laurence Olivier's 1948 film

Stříbrný; Shurbanov & Sokolova). There is, of course, an irony here: would-be subversives in countries of the former Soviet Union have re-read *Hamlet* in order to rebel against the very regimes set up in the name of revolutionary Marxism: the 'old mole' quality of the play can undermine Stalinism as well as capitalism.

Psychoanalytic readings have been particularly influential in the United Kingdom and North America, as we shall illustrate from three representative examples. Janet Adelman's 1992 book, *Suffocating Mothers*, takes the same starting-point as John Caird's production by explicitly eliminating the play's politics. She sees the *Henry IV* plays and *Julius Caesar* as 'oedipal dramas from which the chief object of contention [i.e. the mother] has been removed', so that the father–son relationship can be explored in an uncomplicated way, and she

continues: ‘Before *Hamlet*, this relationship tends to be enacted in the political rather than the domestic sphere’ (Adelman, 11). Her powerful reading of *Hamlet* makes it exclusively a family drama. It foregrounds the return of the mother and the subsequent release of infantile fantasies and desires involving maternal malevolence and the submerged anxiety of the male regarding subjection to the female. *Hamlet* also becomes the watershed between the mother-free romantic comedies and the later tragedies, mainly by admitting the difficult and, for Shakespeare, inevitably tragic presence of a fully imagined female sexuality. This is not to say that Gertrude herself is a completely realized character for Adelman; she sees her as ‘less powerful as an independent character than as the site for fantasies larger than she is’ (30) – fantasies concerning the need for masculine identity to free itself from the contaminated maternal body. And it is those fantasies which set the scene for all the plays that follow: after *Hamlet*’s failure to bring back from the dead the good father who can stabilize female sexuality, the other tragedies ‘re-enact paternal absence’ (35) as the heroes struggle to define themselves in relation to women: ‘for the emergence of the annihilating mother in *Hamlet* will call forth a series of strategies for confining or converting her power’ (36).

Jacqueline Rose puts politics back into *Hamlet* by tracing how influential male readers of the play, Ernest Jones as well as T.S. Eliot, have echoed Hamlet’s misogyny and blamed Gertrude for what they saw as the aesthetic and moral failings of the play overall. Picking up on Eliot’s analogy for Hamlet as ‘the Mona Lisa of literature’, she argues that in his reading

> the question of the woman and the question of meaning go together. The problem with *Hamlet* is not just that the emotion it triggers is unreasonable and cannot be contained by the woman who is its cause, but that this excess of affect produces a problem of interpretation: how to read, or control by reading, a play whose

> inscrutability (like that of the *Mona Lisa*) has baffled – and seduced – so many critics.
>
> (Rose, 97–8)

Femininity itself becomes the problem within the play, and within attempts to interpret it, but paradoxically femininity is also seen as the source of creativity and the very principle of the aesthetic process in other psychoanalytic readings in which the process shifts from character to author: Shakespeare, unlike his hero, can be claimed to have effected a productive reconciliation with the feminine in his own nature.

For Marjorie Garber, our third example of the psychoanalytic approach, the play is more complicated: in her 1987 book, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality*, she writes, 'In *Hamlet* . . . Shakespeare instates the uncanny as sharply as he does the Oedipus complex' (Garber, 127). Freud's sense of the uncanny depends on the revival of repressed infantile or primitive beliefs and the compulsion to repeat: 'What, indeed, is revenge but the dramatization and acculturation of the repetition compulsion?' (129). The father–son relationship is still central, but the Ghost becomes at least as important as the Queen. Freud insisted (*Interpretation of Dreams* (1900); cited in Garber, 165) that *Hamlet* was written immediately after the death of Shakespeare's own father in 1601 and not long after the death of his son Hamnet/Hamlet (in 1596), so was affected by his personal sense of bereavement (see, however, our discussion of dating on pp. 45–60) and his personal interest in a character obliged to transform his mourning into revenge. Garber draws on Jacques Lacan as well as on Freud, especially on his 1959 essay 'Desire and the interpretation of desire in *Hamlet*'. In this reading, the Ghost, as a marker of absence and a reminder of loss, becomes 'the missing signifier, the veiled phallus' (Garber, 130; see also Fink).

But, if the Ghost is absence, invoking him and addressing him produces an effect of unbearable, petrifying presence: Garber draws parallels with the Father-Commendatore visiting

statue in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, but it is Hamlet who is turned into stone. And, in a dizzying final twist, Garber allegorizes not only *Hamlet* but 'Shakespeare' itself, the canon ('"Remember me!" The canon has been fixed against self-slaughter': Garber, 176), as working through the same dynamic as the transference relationship in psychoanalytic practice. 'The transferational relationship Freud describes as existing between the analyst and the patient is . . . precisely the kind of relation that exists between "Shakespeare" and western culture . . . "Shakespeare" is the love object of literary studies . . . The Ghost is Shakespeare' (xiv, 176).

Reading against the Hamlet *tradition*

In an essay on *Hamlet* published in 2002, Richard Levin claimed 'a certain uniqueness in the current critical scene' in that 'I think [the play] presents Hamlet as an individual with a personality and I admire him' (Levin, 215). A few years earlier, Harold Bloom had taken a similar, self-consciously old-fashioned stance when he announced that 'After Jesus, Hamlet is the most cited figure in Western consciousness' and that 'Perhaps indeed it is Falstaff and Hamlet, rather than Shakespeare, who are mortal gods' (Bloom, xix, 4). Both critics can be seen to represent a kind of backlash against contemporary modes of criticism that have, for them, turned away from traditional readings of the play and, in the process, lost touch with the general reader, and indeed the general audience. Their response is to reinstate the importance of Hamlet himself as a character with whom audiences and readers can sympathize and identify. But what is the 'traditional' reading of *Hamlet* and how has it been challenged?

The history of what Levin (215) calls 'the megagigantic body of commentary on *Hamlet*' is a subject of study in itself which has produced a number of helpful surveys and anthologies, from Paul S. Conklin's *History of 'Hamlet' Criticism 1601–1821* in 1947 to David Farley-Hills's ongoing four-volume

Critical Responses to 'Hamlet' 1600–1900, which commenced publication in 1995 (see also Weitz and Gottschalk). New volumes of essays appear all the time, and it is perhaps not surprising that many modern readings of *Hamlet* are as much concerned with interpreting the play 'against' or in opposition to what are taken to be traditional readings of it as they are with producing distinctive new readings. This is quite challenging because, especially when compared with the critical reception of *King Lear*, the critical reception of *Hamlet* was generally positive before the appearance of some of the Freudian and Marxist readings in which Hamlet as a character became more or less 'sick', either through a fixation on his mother or through an intellectual inability to take political action. There have been a few anti-*Hamlet* voices, but by and large Anglo-American and other cultures have taken a favourable view of the play and its hero. So has recent criticism been merely perverse in choosing to read *Hamlet* differently?

A characteristic approach among critics reading 'against' the older tradition is to find in the play itself contradictions and equivocations that challenge simple readings. Terence Hawkes, for example, in his 1986 chapter significantly entitled 'Telmah', sets out to 'read *Hamlet* backwards' (96) and to 'undermine our inherited notion of *Hamlet* as a structure that runs a satisfactorily linear course' (94) by drawing out 'countervailing patterns' such as an 'avuncular chord' (99) which operates against the paternal focus. He maintains that the vitality of *Hamlet* 'resides precisely in its plurality: in the fact that it contradicts itself and strenuously resists our attempts to resolve, to domesticate that contradiction' (117), so that simply to offer an 'alternative' reading would be inappropriate. But he in effect offers a very anti-Hamlet interpretation in which the usurping King is 'no simple villain, but a complex, compelling figure' (100) and he ends by suggesting that when Fortinbras gives orders for the conduct of 'his passage' (5.2.382) he has perhaps stopped talking about Hamlet and is referring to the King. A similar

desire to 'unread' the play, to unsettle its meanings, can be found in Catherine Belsey's chapter 'Sibling rivalry, *Hamlet* and the first murder', which sees the play as a kind of Dance of Death, but one where we have to relinquish the desire for closure and allow the text to 'retain its mystery, its a-thetic knowlege, its triumphant undecidability – and its corresponding power to seduce' (Belsey, 172).

During the 1980s, when Hawkes's contribution appeared, editors and textual critics were making valiant efforts to unsettle *Hamlet* in a different way by displacing the standard conflated text, but some of them also indicated an increasing unease with the play's hero and his achievements. Philip Edwards, in the masterly introductory essay to his New Cambridge edition (1985), is eloquent on his struggle to distance himself from a sentimental, idealized view of Hamlet, especially as the play approaches its climax: 'It is hard to know what right Hamlet has to say ["I loved Ophelia"] when we think of how we have seen him treat her . . . For those of us who to any extent "believe in" Hamlet, Shakespeare makes things difficult in this scene [5.1]' (56). Examining Hamlet's demand for assurance from Horatio at [5.2.62–6[1]] he observes: 'It is difficult to see how we can take this speech except as the conclusion of a long and deep perplexity' (58). He adds, 'It is hard for us in the twentieth century to sympathise with Hamlet and his mission' (60), and he summarizes some of the ways in which the concerns of the play seem alien to a modern audience or reader:

> Hearing voices from a higher world belongs mainly in the realm of abnormal psychology. Revenge may be common but is hardly supportable. The idea of purifying violence belongs to terrorist groups. Gertrude's sexual behaviour and remarriage do not seem out of the ordinary.
>
> (Cam², 60)

1 Edwards prints the slightly longer version of this speech found in F: see Appendix 1.

In the next section of this Introduction we shall look at some of the attempts by modern critics to explore *Hamlet* through locating its belief systems and politics in a specifically Elizabethan context. But Edwards's Hamlet seems not only outdated but a failure who hardly deserves the 'flights of angels' that Horatio wishes would sing him to his rest:

> There is no doubt of the extent of Hamlet's failure. In trying to restore 'the beauteous majesty of Denmark' he has brought the country into an even worse state, in the hands of a foreigner. He is responsible, directly or indirectly, for the deaths of Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. With more justification, he has killed Laertes and Claudius. But if his uncle is dead, so is his mother.
>
> (58)

Unsurprisingly, feminist critics have expressed difficulties with the play, deploring both the stereotypes of women depicted in it and the readiness of earlier critics to accept Hamlet's view of the Queen and Ophelia without questioning whether the overall view taken by the play (or its author) might be different. Marilyn French revived the definition 'problem play' (first applied to *Hamlet* by F.S. Boas in a chapter in *Shakspere and his Predecessors* in 1896 and previously revived by E.M.W. Tillyard when he included *Hamlet* in his 1950 book, *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*) in her 1982 study, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*. When Carolyn Heilbrun reprinted her essay on 'Hamlet's mother' in 1990, she noted that when she had first published it in 1957 she had been 'a feminist waiting for a cause to join'. Subsequent studies have attempted to reclaim the play's women: Ellen J. O'Brien, in 'Revision by excision: rewriting Gertrude', demonstrates how the Queen's role was severely and consistently cut onstage from 1755 to 1900 (and frequently after that) so as to eliminate any possibility of the character being affected by the closet scene, while

renewed interest in Q1 has also fuelled more sympathetic readings of the Queen (see Kehler and Shand).

All Shakespeare's plays mean different things at different times and in different places. Some of them have had their meanings changed quite radically by historical events: it is difficult, for example, for post-Holocaust and post-feminist generations to approach *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Taming of the Shrew* as straightforward comedies. *King Lear* took on new meanings during the Cold War, *The Tempest* comes to reflect the concerns of postcolonial societies and *Othello* is seen in the context of modern racism. Yet one of the most influential modes of recent criticism, New Historicism, has been largely concerned with putting the plays back into the context of their own time. In the next section we shall attempt to explore what this means for *Hamlet* and indeed whether we can be confident of when exactly that time was.

HAMLET IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME

When he was working on *Hamlet*, towards the end of the sixteenth century and at the very beginning of the seventeenth, Shakespeare was in his mid-thirties. His previous experience of writing tragedy consisted of *Titus Andronicus* (1592), *Romeo and Juliet* (1595) and, very probably, *Julius Caesar* (1599, but see pp. 45–60).[1] All three of these generic predecessors had contained revenge as a motivation for the narrative, as had many of the English history plays he had produced during the 1590s. From the mid-1590s Shakespeare had enjoyed an unusual degree of stability in his career as a sharer in the Chamberlain's Men, acting as well as writing for the company. During the decade before *Hamlet*, he seems to have alternated

1 Dates are taken from 'The canon and chronology of Shakespeare's plays', in *TxC*, 69–144.

between writing histories and comedies, the former culminating in *Henry V* and the latter in *As You Like It* (both around 1599).

Hamlet *at the turn of the century*

Shakespeare's only son Hamnet or Hamlet died in August 1596, and his father John was to die in September 1601. It is difficult to dismiss the relevance of these experiences to the writing of *Hamlet*, a play which begins with the death of a father and ends with the death of a son, both called Hamlet, though it is equally difficult to define the precise nature of that relevance with any confidence. Shakespeare scholars, perhaps nervous of overtly biographical readings, have regularly referred to Shakespeare's son as Hamnet rather than Hamlet, pointing out that he and his twin sister Judith were named after Shakespeare's Stratford friends, Hamnet and Judith Sadler, but, as Park Honan notes, 'Hamnet' 'was interchangeable with "Hamlet" – in Shakespeare's will in a legal hand his friend would appear as "Hamlet Sadler" – and among abundant local variants of the same name were (for example) Amblet, Hamolet and even Hamletti' (Honan (90).[1] Shakespeare's father arguably appears twice in the graveyard scene. The Gravedigger's somewhat gratuitous reference to Adam as a 'gentleman' on the grounds that he was 'the first that ever bore arms' (5.1.32–3) reminds us that John Shakespeare had tried unsuccessfully several times to acquire a coat of arms and that his son apparently assisted him in his successful attempt in October 1596, ironically just two months after the death of his own son, who would have inherited this status (see Honan, 21, 38, 228–9). Slender's flattery of Shallow as one who 'writes himself *Armigero*' (i.e. claims the right to bear arms) in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1.1.8) is another

1 See also Greenblatt, 'Hamnet' and *Will*, for further speculations on this possible link.

turn-of-the-century reference to these events. Later in the graveyard scene, in response to Hamlet's question, 'How long will a man lie i'th' earth ere he rot?', the Gravedigger assures him that 'a tanner will last you nine year' (5.1.154–8): we may remember that John Shakespeare was a glover, sometimes described as a whittawer (that is, a specialist in the preparation of soft, white leather), whose trade involved tanning the skins of goats, deer and other animals before turning them into gloves. He was apparently illiterate and when he drew his mark on documents he regularly identified himself as a glover by using either a pair of glover's compasses or a glover's stitching clamp (Honan, 8). It is tempting to follow the suggestion of Robert N. Watson that 'Hamlet's guilt-ridden compulsion to help his tormented father may draw on Shakespeare's own guilt towards his recently deceased and reputedly Catholic father' (Watson, 75), but, as we shall demonstrate below, the play cannot definitely be dated after September 1601. It seems, however, that John Shakespeare had been in poor health for some years before his death, so the play may anticipate rather than reflect that event.

On the national scale, the long reign of Elizabeth was drawing towards its end and there was much anxiety and unease about the future. In the brief discussion of *Hamlet* in the 'Epilogue' to her recent history of the Tudor dynasty, Susan Brigden writes: 'Shakespeare's art is transcendent, Prince Hamlet's questions are for all time, but the play originated in a particular time and place, and its themes were quintessentially those of the Renaissance and Reformation' (Brigden, 364). For her, the lament of Shakespeare's hero that 'the time is out of joint' was topical in 1600. Hamlet embodies lingering doubts about the 'lost world' of traditional Catholicism; he lives in a court poisoned by corruption at the centre; he agonizes over the discrepancy between the 'new worlds' opening up to the human mind and spirit and the inadequacy of individuals to live up to their potential.

Certainly, *Hamlet* has been read as a *fin de siècle* text in a number of ways. A new kind of 'historicist' reading has in fact provided a way of addressing the 'problem' earlier critics had with what they perceived as an excess of sexuality in *Hamlet*. T.S. Eliot famously typified this approach in his statement in 1919 that 'Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her'; hence the play lacks an 'objective correlative' – an appropriate matching of emotion to object (Eliot, 145). Recent interpretations have, in effect, accounted for the apparently excessive focus on Gertrude by identifying her with Elizabeth I and reading the play as a kind of meditation on the ageing and passing of the Virgin Queen.

Such readings have much in common with the influential interpretation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Louis Adrian Montrose, whose essay, '"Shaping fantasies": figurations of gender and power in Elizabethan culture', discusses that play in relation to the cult of Elizabeth with particular attention to the ageing body of the Virgin Queen. The notion of political power being inherent in the body of a woman (particularly an ageing woman) is seen as troubling to male subjects, just like the representation of Hamlet's mother as 'Th'imperial jointress to this warlike state' (1.2.9). The extent to which the present King's marriage to the Queen has consolidated or even ensured his 'election' is not made clear in the play, but Leonard Tennenhouse reads *The Murder of Gonzago* as an effort to 'represent the queen's body as an illegitimate source of political authority':

> Hamlet's attempt at staging a play is very much an attempt on the playwright's part to imagine a situation in which political power was not associated with a female and the aristocratic female was not iconically bonded to the land.
>
> (Tennenhouse, 91)

He argues that it is important for Hamlet to distinguish two separate acts of treason, the seizing of the Queen's body and the seizing of political power, since it is only by separating them and by subordinating the former that the threat to the state can be diminished:

> Hamlet's obsession with the misuse of the queen's sexuality, more than his uncle's possession of the state, transforms the threat of dismemberment into pollution. We might say that, in redefining the nature of the threat against the body politic, Hamlet attempts to stage a Jacobean tragedy.
>
> (96)

In this reading, Hamlet himself seems to become a New Historicist critic who is more comfortable with representations of absolutist male power than with the idea of a powerful woman.

Hamlet has also been seen as a 'succession' play which reflects anxieties about female intervention in patrilinear culture and represents the exhaustion of the old dynasty. Stuart M. Kurland is confident that, 'Unlike some modern readers, Shakespeare's audience would have been unlikely to see in Hamlet's story merely a private tragedy or in Fortinbras' succession to the Danish throne a welcome and unproblematic restoration of order', but would have read the play as looking forward with some trepidation to the not yet certain accession of James I (Kurland, 291). Bruce Thomas Boehrer's more ambitious reading sees *Hamlet* as a play that 'reconstructs history so as to relieve English cultural myth of the twin burdens of Elizabeth's sex and her barrenness' (Boehrer, 64). Working through the complicated set of parallels whereby Gertrude's incestuous remarriage both recalls and refigures Henry VIII's remarriage to Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn, he argues that the play's misogyny works to reassure its contemporary audience:

> In facing and surviving the death of its royal house, *Hamlet* enacts the promised end of Tudor imperial culture: an end feared and contemplated by English monarchs and subjects at least since Henry VIII divorced Catherine of Aragon, and an end that was by 1599 almost inevitable. In affirming an order beyond this chaos, the play may at last manage through wishful thinking to free itself from female influence.
>
> (Boehrer, 77; see also McCabe, 162–71, and Rosenblatt)

If this reading was available for Elizabethan audiences, it was curiously neglected in the Restoration when, as we have seen, Fortinbras (and any idea of the survival of the royal house associated with him) was summarily cut. It might be as reasonable to argue that *Hamlet* projects the possibility that the son of a foreign monarch formerly seen as an enemy (Mary, Queen of Scots) could be acceptable as a king. Steven Mullaney, another critic who finds the centrality of Gertrude in the play problematic, explains it in more forthright terms as a kind of misogyny that anticipated the mourning for the queen: 'The final progress of Elizabeth – the cultural processing of her age, in both senses of that term – was completed long after her funeral procession took place but begun some years before it, when her aging body first announced the proximity of her last days' (Mullaney, 142). But would Elizabethan audiences really have seen the ageing body of their Virgin Queen in Shakespeare's Gertrude, played by a boy actor and, at least according to Hamlet, sexually active to an alarming degree? While these readings have their interest, one would not want to reduce *Hamlet* to a play about the forthcoming demise of Elizabeth, any more than one would want to reduce it to a play about the deaths of John and Hamlet Shakespeare.

More limited claims for the topicality of *Hamlet* are made by Karin S. Coddon and Patricia Parker. Coddon's essay, '"Such

strange desyns”: madness, subjectivity and treason in *Hamlet* and Elizabethan culture’, relates *Hamlet* to the decline and fall of Elizabeth’s former favourite Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, who was finally executed in February 1601, though his star had been declining since 1597 and he had notably lost the Queen’s favour over his disastrous military expedition to Ireland. (The premature and perhaps unwise celebration of this expedition in the Chorus to Act 5 of *Henry V* is a very rare example of an unquestionable reference by Shakespeare to a current event.) She explores the question of Essex’s melancholy or madness, seen at the time as a product of thwarted ambition that became displaced into treason. Hamlet after all complains, ‘I lack advancement’ (3.2.331), a remark which is closely followed by the King’s pious justification for dispatching him to England on the grounds that in Denmark he is a threat to the security of the state (3.3.1–26). Without wanting to make an exact equation between the fictional Hamlet and the historical Essex, Coddon sees the representation of madness in the play as relating to the ‘faltering of ideological prescriptions to define, order, and constrain subjectivity’ (Coddon, 61) and she argues for madness as ‘an instrument of social and political disorder’ (62).

Parker’s essay, ‘*Othello* and *Hamlet*: dilation, spying, and the “secret places” of woman’, has a different sense of the topical relevance of the play. Beginning with Hamlet’s obsession with the ‘secret places’ of women – not only his interest in Gertrude’s sexuality but his lewd references to Ophelia’s ‘lap’ in the dialogue before the dumb-show in 3.2 – she moves into a reading which brings out the play’s representation of a Court full of spies and informers. The King employs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet, to ‘pluck out the heart of [his] mystery’ (3.2.357–8), Polonius sends Reynaldo to spy on Laertes in Paris (2.1), and there are many instances of secrets being hidden or revealed. Parker sees *Hamlet* as being written at a ‘crucial historical juncture’ (Parker, 31) when a state secret service was being developed:

> This sense of both the holding and the withholding of secrets in *Hamlet* . . . [evokes] the emergent world of statecraft contemporary with the play, one that historians describe as increasingly involving the mediation of agents, go-betweens, and representatives across bureaucratic as well as geographic distances, along with the corresponding multiplication of informers and spies.
>
> (Parker, 134–5)

For Robert N. Watson (74–102), Michael Neill (216–61) and Stephen Greenblatt (*Purgatory*), the topical issues are to do with death, religion, and the shift from a culture in which the living could do something for the dead (specifically, they could shorten their time in purgatory by prayers and other actions) to one in which nothing could be done – or in which revenge becomes a problematic substitute. Watson specifically sees revenge tragedy as 'a displacement of prayers for the dead forbidden by the Reformation' (75), while Neill argues that *Hamlet* is written 'against' the popular genre, acknowledging that nothing can be done for the dead, though revenge can be a form of memory. Greenblatt's exploration of 'the poetics of Purgatory' and the intense power of the Ghost in *Hamlet* notes the paradox that 'a young man from Wittenberg, with a distinctly Protestant temperament, is haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost' (Greenblatt, *Purgatory*, 240). Hamlet seems to accept the Ghost's claim to come from purgatory, although the whole conception of purgatory along with the practices that had developed around it had been explicitly denied and rejected by the Church of England in 1563 (235). Perhaps, he suggests, the play represents

> a fifty-year effect, a time in the wake of the great, charismatic ideological struggle in which the revolutionary generation that made the decisive break with the past is all dying out and the survivors hear

> only hypocrisy in the sermons and look back with longing at the world they have lost.
>
> (248)

Or perhaps 'the Protestant playwright was haunted by the spirit of his Catholic father pleading for suffrages to relieve his soul from the pains of Purgatory' (249). But again we run into the problem of the precise date of the play: Greenblatt would prefer not to credit anyone other than Shakespeare with 'the single most important alteration to the old story', the introduction of the Ghost (205), but his desire to make the direct link with the death of John Shakespeare requires him, reluctantly, to accept that it was the anonymous author of the *Ur-Hamlet* (or 'pre-Hamlet') who made this change. While no one doubts that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a late Elizabethan play, it has proved difficult to pin it down more precisely.

The challenge of dating Hamlet

Can we establish a precise date? Our predecessor, Harold Jenkins, wrote in the Introduction to his 1982 Arden Shakespeare edition that 'A conflict of evidence has made its precise date, like most other things about *Hamlet*, a problem' (1). But what do we mean by the 'precise date' of a Shakespeare play? Some later Arden editors (Lois Potter in the 1997 edition of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, for example, or Edward Burns in the 2000 edition of *Henry VI, Part 1*) prioritize the date of the first performance, whereas Ernst Honigmann, in his influential essay on 'The date of *Hamlet*', set out to determine 'when it was written' ('Date', 24). Jenkins was rightly concerned with when *Hamlet* was 'written and produced' (1), but this immediately suggests the possibility of two dates.

In fact, there must be at least three separate significant dates for any Shakespeare play: those of the completion of the manuscript, the first performance and the first printing. In the case of this edition of *Hamlet*, however, we are not dealing with

one printed text but three. Neither are we necessarily dealing with one first performance: the performance history of Q1 is surely different from that of Q2, and F may be different again. And behind the printed text there may be more than one 'completed' manuscript. Furthermore, it is generally held that there was an earlier *Hamlet* play, the so-called *Ur-Hamlet*, either by Shakespeare or by someone else, with its own necessarily different set of dates, and this hypothetical lost play continues to complicate the issue of the date of Shakespeare's play and indeed the issue of its sources. We shall try to indicate in this section why scholars can continue to disagree about the dating evidence and its interpretation.

Was there an earlier Hamlet *play?*

Edmund Malone was the first to suggest that there was a *Hamlet* on the stage in 1589 when, in his Preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon*, Thomas Nashe referred to 'whole Hamlets, I should say handfuls, of tragical speeches' (Nashe, 3.315). In 1594 Philip Henslowe recorded a performance of a play called *Hamlet* at Newington Butts; two years later Thomas Lodge's reference to a 'ghost which cried so miserably at the Theatre, like an oyster-wife, *Hamlet*, revenge' (*Wit's Misery*, 1596) inevitably suggests a play performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men (Shakespeare's company), since they acted at The Theatre playhouse in Shoreditch until late 1596. A slightly later phrase in Nashe's Preface has long persuaded some scholars that this *Hamlet* play was by Thomas Kyd – he describes how Seneca's followers on 'our stage . . . imitate the kid in Aesop' – and Emma Smith ('Ghost writing') has reviewed the enormous lengths to which scholars have gone in order to reconstruct Kyd's lost *Hamlet* and its supposed relationship to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Attempts have nevertheless been made, repeatedly,[1]

1 See, for example, Lewis, 64–76; Gray, 'Reconstruction'; Parrott–Craig, 7–15; Bowers, *Tragedy*, 89–93; Whitaker, 329–46; Bullough, 7.45, 49, 51.

and they continue: G. Blakemore Evans ('An echo of the *Ur-Hamlet*?') has recently written about *Moderatus* (1595), a little-known chivalric romance by Robert Parry, which contains an incident in which a sealed letter is opened, read and then resealed with a signet ring. Evans points out that in all the proposed sources or analogues for the main Hamlet story – Saxo, Belleforest and *The Hystorie of Hamblet* – the King's letter to the King of England, which contains instructions that Amleth/Hamblet be killed, is cut in runic letters on a board, and Amleth has to scrape it clean, reinscribe it and sign it with the forged signature of Fengon. Since Shakespeare is unlikely to have been influenced by Parry, Evans speculates that Parry, who had visited London several times before 1595, may have been recalling the *Ur-Hamlet*.

On 24 June 1626 a company of English players performed a *Tragoedia von Hamlet einen Printzen in Dennemarck* in Dresden. This may well be the German drama, *Der bestrafte Brudermord oder: Prinz Hamlet aus Dännemark*, which was first published in Berlin in 1781 (from a manuscript dated 27 October 1710 but subsequently lost[1]). *Fratricide Punished*, as English scholars call it, is a much compressed version of Shakespeare's plot, done in prose, lacking almost all the soliloquies, Ophelia's songs and the graveyard scene, but with some added scenes, including a Senecan prologue, some added characters and some added farcical business. Scholars cannot agree whether the play derives from Q1 (parallels include the fact that its Polonius equivalent is called Corambus, and the nunnery scene precedes the entry of the players), from Q2 (with which it shares many features not present in Q1) or from the *Ur-Hamlet*. The last of these possibilities was dismissed by Jenkins and Hibbard, but was entertained by most of the nineteenth-century scholars who discussed *Der bestrafte*

1 It was published in the journal *Olla Potrida*, ed. H.A.O. Reichard (Berlin, 1781), pt 2, 18–68.