

What do you mean by ‘Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*’?

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‘What do you mean by ‘Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*?’¹ is a question Edwards asks himself in his introduction to *Hamlet*. The similar question, ‘what does *Hamlet* mean?’², is raised in the edition of *Hamlet* by Thompson and Taylor. Edwards’ answer is that the ideal text of *Hamlet* ‘does not exist in either of the two main authoritative texts, the second quarto and the Folio, but somewhere between them’,³ whereas Thompson and Taylor do not specify their answer, offering the wider view beyond editing texts. They state as follows:

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.⁴

Although the view of Thompson and Taylor is rather ambiguous and does not provide the editorial answer, Edwards and Thompson and Taylor acknowledge that *Hamlet* is obviously one of the most difficult plays to edit.

This essay will venture to find what the text is or what the text should be for modern readers in order to solve the above question. It will give some examples of the problems of editing *Hamlet* but will also make a general comment on editing. It will firstly analyse briefly the main difference of texts of *Hamlet* among the first quarto (Q1) of 1603, the second quarto (Q2) of 1605, and the Folio of 1623, followed by examinations of textual differences in modern editions and textual choices in editing. It will then investigate a problem of language in editing from the perspective of editing his-

tory. It will finally take into account the notion of ‘New Bibliography’⁵ and modernised editions to revisit the question.

As for the three extant *Hamlet* texts, Q1, Q2, and the Folio, a countless number of differences between them can be distinctly discerned. Comparing the length of each text shows that Q2 is the longest text, which is about twice the length of Q1, and the Folio has an omission of about 230 lines from Q2 and an addition of about 77 lines to Q2. Q1 is said to be a ‘bad quarto’ because of its ambiguity in dialogues and some names of the characters — Corambis instead of Polonius, for example. Although Q2 and the Folio are regarded as authorial texts owing to their better conditions, the Folio lacks the essential lines of Hamlet’s soliloquy and Q2 lacks some scenes such as the scene where Hamlet says ‘Denmark’s a prison’.⁶

Despite the fact that Q1 is regarded as a bad text, because of Q1’s perfect length for performance (just two hours), and its front page description which tells us that the text was actually used for performance, Orgel regards Q1 as ‘a performing text for a company on tour’.⁷ However, the way that the printed text of Q1 was different from the performance in those days is witnessed by a playgoer who ‘in 1603 wanted the text of *Hamlet* that she had seen at the Globe would have found the only edition she could buy disturbingly unlike the play she had watched’.⁸ In contrast, it is said that Q2, with the advertisement of ‘the true and perfect copy’, suggests that it ‘includes a great deal more than you could see at the theatre’.⁹ It seems possible that Q2, as well as the Folio, is too long for performance in spite of its concrete theatrical references seen in the stage directions.

Although the connection between the texts and performance of the time brings up complex questions, Q2 and the Folio are more accepted as texts for editing. Taking two authorial substantive texts, editors have demonstrated a tendency to aspire to one perfect copy of *Hamlet* by conflating these texts. Although editors normally select one text for the basis, either Q2 or the Folio, the Q2 based editors adopt readings from the Folio, and Folio based editors take Q2 into account in their editions.¹⁰ Dowden, the first Arden editor of *Hamlet*, introduces his edition as a ‘trustworthy’ one with exhibition of the variations from Q2 and the Folio.¹¹ Although Thompson and Taylor insist that the ‘Arden Shakespeare is associated with single-text, eclectic editions’,¹² it seems that this tendency can be widely seen in other editions.

Regardless of the common tendency of conflating texts, Thompson and Taylor significantly edited three texts separately. Although The New Cambridge Shakespeare series has both *The First Quarto of Hamlet* and *Hamlet: Prince of Denmark*, the latter edition of *Hamlet* is the conflation of Q2 and the Folio, which Edwards idealises. What is remarkable in Thompson and Taylor’s edition is that they choose Q2 for their base text, publishing an additional text as *Hamlet: The Text of 1603 and 1623*. Their faithfulness to Q2 shows that all lines which are drawn solely from the Folio are included in the appendix. Therefore, the following scene which is generally deemed deserving of inclusion in almost all editions of *Hamlet* for centuries is printed as an appendix to the edition:

world'.¹⁴ Thompson and Taylor likewise suggest that 'these lines were omitted from Q2 because of the offence they might cause to Anne of Denmark, wife of James I'.¹⁵ The opposite point of view is expressed by Hibbard who points out that the scene was added to the Folio to 'bring out more fully the evasiveness of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern'.¹⁶

There are no grounds for deciding between the hypothesis that the scene was omitted from Q1 and Q2, or whether it was in fact an addition to the folio. If the scene was omitted from Q2, and if the scene was restricted because of its insult to Denmark, it is an arguable question why other lines which describe the unpleasant state of Denmark — such as 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark',¹⁷ by Marcellus — are not omitted along with the scene above. In any case, what should be noted is the possible involvement of censorship in the period. In order to check whether there are offensive scenes or not, censors were carefully inspecting all promptbooks and publications.

As a result of rigorous censorship, performances were often restricted on account of politically¹⁸ or religiously critical contents, profanatory terms, or bad influences¹⁹ upon social order and audience. It is noticeable that censorship could change the content of a play completely. A concrete example of a play which could not pass the censors is *Thomas More*, in which instance the censor 'Tilney called for substantial alterations' because of the insurrection scenes, and which was altered and added to by other dramatists such as Chettle, Dekker, and probably Shakespeare and Heywood.²⁰

Under these circumstances, it is understandable that on the basis of censorship lines could be omitted or added for the public theatre when it might create a bad image. The aims of censorship were considered justified as drama and the royal family were directly connected in the period. Indeed, the social and political situations were dissimilar in 1603 and 1623. Q1 was published in 1603 which was the year James I acceded (or was about to accede) to the throne, and in 1605 when Q2 was published, the theatre experienced its heyday owing to the ardent support of the queen²¹ and the king. The Folio was published in 1623 which was still under the throne of James I; however, Queen Anne was already dead by then.²² It can be recognised that social conditions in each publishing year are diverse.

In addition to *Hamlet*, distinctive plays which have more than one different substantive texts are *King Lear* and *Doctor Faustus*. The textual difference between the quarto and the Folio of Shakespeare's *King Lear* has been argued over for centuries. Most editions of *King Lear* are normally confections like *Hamlet*; however, *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works* innovatively printed two texts together in one volume: *The History of King Lear* (based on the quarto text) and *The Tragedy of King Lear* (based on the Folio). The editors are assuming that due to over 850 variants and the difference in speakers, 'there are two distinct plays of *King Lear*, not merely two different texts of the same play'. Although the complete works is based on the Folio, they therefore decided to edit both the quarto and the Folio separately in the volume.²³

In fact, Rasmussen mentions about Oxford's *King Lear* that 'the decision to include both Quarto and Folio *Lear* was of major significance, inspiring numerous two-text editions of that play and

launching discussions of version-based editing that have reshaped every branch of editorial theory and practice’. He moreover indicates that despite the fact that it was the time of ‘the radical break’ when ‘the tradition of conflation came to an end and the Oxford Shakespeare ushered in a period of version-based editing’, the 1990s saw two distinctive conflated editions of *King Lear*: R. A. Foakes’ *Arden 3 Lear* and *The Norton Shakespeare*.²⁴ It can be said that a method of editing is repeated over and again.

Corresponding to the edition of the Oxford Shakespeare, Rasmussen included two different texts, Text-A and Text-B, in the Revels’ edition of *Doctor Faustus*. Rasmussen states that in spite of the fact that he was originally planning to edit only Text-A and put Text-B in the appendix, a huge number of complex issues made him give up his first plan, and he ended up editing both Text-A and Text-B in one volume.²⁵ However, Burnett, the editor of the Everyman’s edition of *Doctor Faustus*, mentions that as two extant texts are not original,²⁶ ‘neither version can be said to be categorically superior or preferable’ and both of them are worth researching.²⁷

It can therefore be suggested that each edition of *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Doctor Faustus*, that have more than one text has been edited differently by each editor. This is because the content of each text differs from that of another text, and some missing lines from another text are regarded as important, or even almost indispensable. In spite of a number of inaccuracies, so-called ‘bad’ texts such as *Hamlet*’s Q1 might be worth regarding as a text published in a certain year, because each text published in a different year can show its own characteristics. On the one hand, in order to show how the texts have changed in the period when they were written, editing more than two texts separately in one volume is an admirable attempt. On the other hand, it has to be emphasised that the attempt to make one perfect edition of each play is to make a text of the period *when it was edited* because the intention of an editor is more or less included. The text is the product in which the given editor’s ideas are condensed.

Together with the choice of texts/a text, whether to modernise the language or to keep the original is another difficult task in editing early modern texts. The vagueness and errors of punctuation and spelling present difficulties for editors. As Bevington mentions, ‘whether to edit in modern spelling or old spelling, or to adopt some compromise between the two, is still an unresolved issue in the academy’, and ‘both in critical editions and in texts intended chiefly for classroom use, editors sometimes choose old spelling, especially for certain authors like John Donne’.²⁸ The latter half of this essay will investigate how the current of any particular time influences editing, taking especially into account editions of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century when various editions were introduced as multi-volumes.

Which text to choose for the basis was not important in editing Shakespeare in the first half of the eighteenth century as editors of the time normally based their work on the latest edition. The first editing starts in the beginning of the eighteenth century by Nicholas Rowe, a playwright, chosen aim was to clarify the language of ‘old Shakespeare’. Rowe alleviates the defects of Shakespeare’s plays

by modernising language;²⁹ correcting spelling and punctuation; setting acts and scenes; adding the explanations of places and stage directions. Rowe intended to publish a multi-volume of the work of Shakespeare rather than one volume of complete works, which conforms to the custom and the people of the period. Rowe provided approachable works of Shakespeare to the great generality of readers.

The eighteenth century is the glorious period in editing Shakespeare. Subsequent to Rowe, editing was pursued by noteworthy editors such as Alexander Pope, Lewis Theobald, Sir Thomas Hanmer, William Warburton, Dr. Samuel Johnson, Edward Capell, George Stevens, and Edmund Malone. In 1723-25, although Alexander Pope, a poet, performed admirable work in inserting footnotes — taking the Rowe edition as his precedent, he largely changed Shakespearean language into the period's trend of Greek and Latin style in his own way. Pope also omitted lines when he thought that they were not appropriate as Shakespearean language. It may be because Pope found the quality of language poor in the Folio and quartos. Due to its defects, his edition has tended to be looked at rather critically.

Disagreeing completely with the edition by Pope, Theobald, a playwright, corrected Pope's language and published his edition in 1733 after presenting his counterargument to Pope's edition in *Shakespeare Restored*.³⁰ His detailed footnotes are also remarkable; however, as opposed to the disagreement of Theobald, Gurr who admired the Pope edition claims that 'Pope's principle had a greater force than Theobald could admit even in his own more cautious approach to the anomalies in *The Tempest's* verse'.³¹

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Johnson who is concerned about the different texts issue, downgrades the third Folio, saying that the first Folio is the most valuable edition, and restored the first Folio and early quartos for the first time in the eighteenth century. Also, Johnson radically improved punctuation and added stage directions in order to find general acceptance.³² Despite the fact that the edition of Johnson is generally acclaimed in editing history, Jarvis, who has done comprehensive research on eighteenth century editing, criticises it in various ways, concluding as follows:

Johnson's textual-critical practice, then, does indeed represent a middle way between timidity and presumption: between his insistence that the dull and specialist duty of collation is an indispensable component of competent editing, and his desire that his edition should preserve and add to the accumulated improvements made to Shakespeare's texts by the labours of his predecessors.³³

Although there are arguments both for and against these editions, it is certain that by the contribution of these editors, the works of Shakespeare have deeply permeated the general public since the eighteenth century. The correction of correction by other editors had been significantly done edition

by edition in that century.

About a century later, the concept of editing had changed. The edition which is worth noting is Edward Dowden’s edition of *Hamlet* in 1899 which ‘predated the New Bibliographers’ turn to original spellings’.³⁴ Dowden reveals in his introduction to *Hamlet* how he interpreted its vocabulary and drew parallels between Johnson and Shakespeare, suggesting new terminological explanation.³⁵ Notably, after Dowden, the twentieth century sees modernised editions. Furthermore, Holderness indicates Shakespeare of today as follows:

While we are accustomed in the theatre to seeing Shakespeare’s dramas shifted into modern or historical settings, and punctuated by contemporary themes, the film adaptations mentioned above represent rather the kind of radical re-writing of Shakespeare that was widely practised in the Restoration and eighteenth century theatres, where the Shakespeare text was regarded as raw material for a wholesale reinterpretation of language, narrative and dramatic setting. It can however be argued that these free adaptations are in actuality the ‘Shakespeare’ of today, appropriately translated into modern idiom, just as the radical re-writings of Davenant and Dryden and Tate were the Shakespeare of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’.³⁶

It seems that editions which are adapted to the language of the period are popular amongst general readers; however, some critics insist on the Folio or long quarto as canonical Shakespeare. In fact, Jowett and other editors of the *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works* regard the Folio as canonical, considering the modernised edition from a critical standpoint. Jowett mentions that ‘the spirit of the 1990s was, however, hostile to the new Bibliography, to its polarization of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, and to its optimistic drive to make the convoluted transmission of the text knowledge’.³⁷ Therefore, ‘the New Bibliography had lost much of its erstwhile prestige and authority by the end of the century (the twentieth century), though the editorial methods it advocated had been subject to development rather than outright rejection’.³⁸

In developing Jowett’s theory, Hunter concludes in his discussion of modernised texts that ‘the result, it is to be hoped, is to produce editions which are readable and complex at the same time, taking for granted readers who are serious enough to be able to read a seventeenth-century text without it being modernised for them’.³⁹ The end of the twentieth century to the present time has witnessed a tendency for modernised editions to drop in respectability.

It is unquestionable that the Folio, as well as Q2, is the most influential original text to look at; however, it was published four hundred years ago, introducing the language style and the notion of the time. As Brown states in an article from 1960, when the modernised version was highly accepted, ‘for those who can attempt to interpret the old-spelling, there can nowadays be the photographic reproduction of a first edition; for those who cannot, there should be a critical edition, as fully mod-

ernized as possible'.⁴⁰ Because of availability of various editions in those days, it is readers who have to choose their personal best edition for themselves.

Now is therefore the time when we can read and compare all editions of *Hamlet* so far, to which a large number of editors have applied their skills and dedication in order to pass the play from the early modern period down to readers of the time. As is seen in Q2 and the Folio of *Hamlet*, it has been recognised that there is a huge number of major and minor differences between them, but the differences took place within eighteen years. Eighteen years might not seem to be a long time but a form of government, society, culture, and even a language could change enormously. In fact, Queen Anne and Shakespeare died in the space of those years. As is proved from eighteenth century editors who say that Shakespearean English is 'old', the language has been changing decade by decade.

Although a different approach is taken in this essay, I would like to borrow the words from Maguire's article on the works of editing for my conclusion. 'The task in recovery is not to reduce these oppositions to singularity as did Heminge and Condell, Peter Alexander and the New Bibliographers, but to enable them to co-exist. Editing is, it seems, a matter of life and death'.⁴¹

The point is that the readers of *Hamlet* have accepted the *Hamlet* they have experienced. In any case, three editions of *Hamlet* all convey the *Hamlet* of their day. As is seen in the example of the theatregoer mentioned earlier in this essay, even if performances and printed texts were different, they have all been regarded as *Hamlet*. Besides, even though Q1, Q2, and the Folio are different, they are all called *Hamlet* and the power of the play and the power of Shakespeare-as-source have never been devised. *Hamlet* is a play which has ceaselessly been analysed and newly published for four hundred years. Every single edition left in each period is a legacy, which reflects the variety of the language and diverse interpretations.

Notes

- 1 Philip Edwards, 'Introduction', in *Hamlet*, ed. by Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 31.
- 2 Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, 'Introduction', in *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: General Learning, 2006), p. 17.
- 3 Philip Edwards, p. 32.
- 4 Thompson and Taylor, p. 18.
- 5 For details, see E.A.J. Honigmann, 'The New Bibliography and its critics', in *Textual Performances: The Modern Reproduction of Shakespeare's Drama*, ed. by Lukas Erne and Margaret Jane Kidnie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 77-93.
- 6 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: General Learning, 2006), p.466 (Folio II.2.42).

- 7 Stephen Orgel, 'The Book of the Play', in *From the Performance to Print in Shakespeare's England*, ed. by Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 13-54 (p. 22).
- 8 Peter Holland, 'Introduction: Printing Performance', in *From Performance to Print*, (see Orgel, above) pp. 1-10 (p. 6).
- 9 Stephen Orgel, p. 22.
- 10 Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, 'Introduction', in *Hamlet: The Text of 1603 and 1623*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), pp. 1-39 (p. 2).
- 11 Edward Dowden, 'Introduction', in *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, ed. by Edward Dowden (London: Methuen, 1899), pp. ix-xxviii (p. ix).
- 12 Thompson and Taylor, *Hamlet*, p. 11.
- 13 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: General Learning, 2006), p.466 (Folio II.2.238-67).
- 14 Edwards, p. 140.
- 15 Thompson and Taylor, *Hamlet*, p. 466.
- 16 G. R. Hibbard, *Hamlet* ed. by G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 112.
- 17 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Nail Taylor (see Thompson, above), I. 4. 90.
- 18 *The Whore of Babylon* can be given as an example. See Jean E Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 47-72.
- 19 Rainolds states that performances do not always exert a favourable influence upon audience in terms of gender issues and the problems of diseases. See John Rainolds, *The Overview of Stage-Plays*, in *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Tanya Pollard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 172-77.
- 20 Stanley Wells, 'Sir Thomas More', in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor, and Stanley Wells, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 813.
- 21 Anne is widely known as a play lover, being a patron of Queen Anne's Men and some dramatists such as Ben Jonson.
- 22 Queen Anne died in 1619.
- 23 Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 'General Introduction', in *The Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. by John Jowett et al. (see Wells, above), p. xxxix.
- 24 Eric Rasmussen, 'Editions and Textual Studies', in *Shakespeare Survey Volume 59: Editing Shakespeare*, ed. by Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 35-83 (p. 375).
- 25 Eric Rasmussen, 'The Revision of Scripts', in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. by John D Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 441-60

- (pp. 458-59).
- 26 This is because the original *Doctor Faustus* is lost.
- 27 Mark Thornton Burnett, 'Introduction', in *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, ed. by Mark Thornton Burnett (London: J. M. Dent, 1999), pp. xvii-xxxiv (p. xxviii).
- 28 David Bevington, 'Modern spelling: the hard choices', in *Textual Performances* (see Honigmann, above), pp. 143-57 (p. 143).
- 29 How the language had been changing in the seventeenth century can be seen in the book: Matthew W. Black and Matthias A. Shaaber, *Shakespeare's Seventeenth-Century Editions: 1632-1685* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).
- 30 Simon Jarvis, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Shakespearean Textual Criticism and Representations of Scholarly Labour, 1725-1765* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 61-71.
- 31 Andrew Gurr, 'Editing Stefano's Book', in *Shakespeare Survey Volume 59: Editing Shakespeare*, ed. by Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 93.
- 32 Simon Jarvis, pp. 129-81.
- 33 Simon Jarvis, p. 180.
- 34 John Jowett, 'Editing Shakespeare's Plays in the Twentieth Century', in *Shakespeare Survey Volume 59* (see Rasmussen, above), pp. 1-19 (p. 2).
- 35 Edward Dowden, *Hamlet* (see Dowden, above), pp. x-xi.
- 36 Graham Holderness, *Textual Shakespeare: Writing and the Word* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2003), p. 182.
- 37 John Jowett, p. 8.
- 38 John Jowett, p. 1.
- 39 Michael Hunter, *Editing Early Modern Texts: An Introduction to Principles and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 91.
- 40 John Russell Brown, 'The Rationale of Old-Spelling Editions of the Plays of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries' *Studies in Bibliography* 13 (1960) 49-68 (p. 64).
- 41 Laurie E. Maguire, 'Composition/decomposition: singular Shakespeare and the death of the author', in *The Renaissance Text: Theory, Editing, Textuality*, ed. by Andrew Murphy (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 135-52.

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