

SOME NECESSARY QUESTION OF THE PLAY:
THE SO-CALLED UR-HAMLET

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ABSTRACT

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By Dale Lisa Flint

The objectives of this Master's thesis are as follow: to explore the controversial historiography of the non-extant, pre-Shakespearean “Ur-Hamlet”; to determine the critical means by which the Ur-Hamlet's authorship has been attributed to Thomas Kyd; to examine the validity and pertinence of the Oxfordian claim; to re-evaluate the evidence that supports Shakespearean authorship; to champion the possibility of long-neglected alternate theories, such as collaboration; and to investigate the implications. By integrating performance theory with traditional Shakespearean criticism, this thesis problematizes certain long-held assumptions in regards to creative process, authorship, and the ontology of an authentic Shakespearean text. Concerned less with truth than with critical perception thereof, this thesis hopes to illuminate the reason why a work that arguably never existed remains one of the most highly underrated touchstones of orthodox Shakespearean scholarship.

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Thank you to my family: your encouragement has been my strength.

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Thank you to the Shakespearean scholars whose work I herein criticize: forgive an upstart crow; I am beautified by your feathers.

for CNF

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Old English spellings, including the substitution of “f” for “s,” are retained in citations from Hamlet Q1, Der Bestrafte Brudermord, and other contemporary Elizabethan documents. Since this thesis has largely to do with the notion of corrupt texts, the author feels it is necessary to limit the amendments of modern-day editors, in order to more fully appreciate the fluidity of Elizabethan English. Scholars’ various spellings of “Shakespeare,” i.e., “Shakspeare,” and “Shakespearean,” i.e., “Shakespearian,” have also been preserved.

In scholarly texts, the name given to the lost, pre-Shakespearean play that is the subject of this thesis is alternately punctuated “ur-Hamlet,” ur-Hamlet,” “Ur-Hamlet,” “Ur-Hamlet,” either italicized, underlined, or, in some instances, neither. The author of this thesis feels it is inappropriate to highlight the prefix “ur,” a scholastic device designed to artificially differentiate between the earlier and later versions. While there may be some meaning to the manner in which a scholar chooses to punctuate the title, the author feels the significance is negligible. Therefore, in all citations, the title has been standardized to “Ur-Hamlet” for consistency and ease of reading.

All Hamlet citations are taken from the Variorum. Citations from other Shakespearean plays are taken from The Riverside Shakespeare, as representative of a popular, modern editorial edition.

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Introduction: some necessary point in the Play

Ham. *And doe you heare? let not your Clowne fpeake
More then is fet downe, there be of them I can tell you
That will laugh themfelues, to fet on fome
Quantitie of barren fpectators to laugh with them,
Albeit there is fome neccessary point in the Play
Then to be obserued: O t'is vile, and fhewes
A pittifull ambition in the foole that vfeth it.
And then you haue fome agen, that keepes one fute
Of ieafte, as a man is knowne by one fute of
Apparell, and Gentlemen quotes his ieasts downe
In their tables, before they come to the play, as thus:
Cannot you ftay till I eate my porrige? and, you owe me
A quarters wages: and, my coate wants a cullifon:
And, your beere is fowre: and, blabbering with his lips,
And thus keeping in his cinkapafe of ieasts,
When, God knows, the warme Clowne cannot make a ieft
Vnleffe by chance, as the blinde man catcheth a hare:
Maifters tell him of it.*

players *We will my Lord.*

Ham. *Well, goe make you ready.*

- The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke¹

Before the performance of The Mouse-Trap, Hamlet gives the players a pep talk. The speech is found in all extant versions of the play, but the first published edition contains an added aside meant to drive home Hamlet's last point, a stern admonition to the clowns, warning them not to upstage the show by their antics. The specificity of the

¹ William Shakespeare, Hamlet: The New Variorum Edition, ed. Horace Howard Furness, 2 vols. (1877; New York: Dover Publications, 2000) 2: 64-5.

charge leads many to assume Shakespeare had a personal grudge.² William Kempe was a popular comic actor in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, but he left the company from 1599 to 1602³ to join a rival troupe. Whether Shakespeare had any part in Kempe's leaving is unknown, but the bit was apparently excised upon his return. Other critics speculate a less dramatic scenario, believing the monologue was simply cut for time, Hamlet being an extraordinarily long play; or perhaps it was a printing error. Regardless, the extract is unfamiliar to most readers. Modern day editors do not refer to the First Quarto of Hamlet, as it is called, except with scorn. It is thought to be a corrupt text, mangled by second-hand reporters, covertly published without the blessings of either the playwright or his theatre company. Nevertheless, the above selection nicely encapsulates the major themes of this thesis: authorship, creative process, performance theory, and the ontology of an authentic Shakespearean text.

Scholars interpret the monologue in its entirety to represent Shakespeare's own theatrical philosophy, especially since so much of it aligns with modern theory and practice. This self-fulfilling prophecy is inherently problematic. Shakespeare's creative process is patently unknowable; it may only be deduced through inference and indirect sources, and never conclusively. Furthermore, it is awkward to assume any Shakespearean text stems wholly from the author's personal attitude or bias. To do so removes the passage from its context, which is necessarily subjective, and in this

² G. B. Harrison, ed., introduction, Hamlet, by William Shakespeare (1948; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1952) xiii-xiv.

instance, arguably ironic: Why does Hamlet patronize the actors with a spontaneous lecture when throughout the play he marvels at their abilities? Hamlet is a great fan of the theatre, but he is no actor. He is, in good part, defined by his inability to dissemble, except in feigning madness, a device with method in't. Is the speech no more than a pedantic set piece?

In his advice to the players, Hamlet reminds them to stay true to the words of the playwright. The actors are professionals on tour. The Murder of Gonzago is a popular revenge play, not caviare to the general, but pleasing to the million. They are ready when Hamlet requests it to be performed, even willing to memorize an extra “twelve or sixteen lines” of the Prince’s composition. In essence, Hamlet hypocritically champions the inviolability of a script that he is all too eager to corrupt, transforming the original author’s Murder of Gonzago into The Mouse-Trap. His motivations are not pure but plain: the play is bait to catch the conscience of the King, and that objective overrules any sentimental attachment to the textual integrity of a pedestrian sideshow. But the monologue is pertinent for many other reasons: it illustrates the dichotomy between a playwright’s script and an actor’s performance; it argues, albeit a bit disingenuously, for the superior authenticity and primacy of the text in theatrical interpretation; and it condemns an actor’s interpolations as “vile” or “villainous.” The Mouse-Trap is an anonymous play, written by Shakespeare. Critics love to speculate which lines are

³ E.K. Chambers, ed., introduction, The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, by William Shakespeare, eds. E.K. Chambers and Walter Morris Hart (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1917) x.

Hamlet's. Some are very certain they know, including Harold Bloom, Janet Adelman, etcetera, but hardly any two agree. It depends what the critic is trying to prove.

In the main, the text of the First Quarto has proved endless fodder for scholars. Markedly different from the play's succeeding editions, the poetry is less elegant, the characterization more crude, and the text highly abridged. Critics have conjectured the following hypotheses to explain the disparity: authorial revision by Shakespeare, piratical and/or poor memorial reconstruction by hack reporters, a combination of the two factors, or unknown. Certain aspects, including alternate character names, changed order of scenes, and unfamiliar incidences of plot, lead many to suppose that the First Quarto may be a conflation of two versions of Hamlet, Shakespearean and pre-Shakespearean. This hypothetical pre-Shakespearean play is conveniently termed the "Ur-Hamlet." According to doctrine, it is no longer extant.

This thesis investigates the controversial historiography of the Ur-Hamlet from a myriad of perspectives. Chapter One offers a systematic breakdown of the evidence surrounding the existence of an early version of Hamlet playing the London stage by 1589. Chapter Two explores the means by which critics have customarily determined the authorship of this early version of Hamlet. Chapter Three discusses two widely divergent, modern-day heterodox offshoots of the Ur-Hamlet authorship debate, transitioning into less traditional territory. Chapter Four considers the prospect of authorial revision, and the possibility of extant Shakespearean rough drafts. Chapter Five

offers a complete deconstruction of the conventional definition of an authentic Shakespearean text.

By virtue of the topic, this thesis necessarily problematizes certain long-held assumptions in traditional Shakespearean criticism, which, as will be demonstrated, has stagnated in its reliance on outmoded methodologies, exacerbated by less than rigorous academics, characterized by an idolatrous bias unique to secular study. This thesis will examine the question of authorship as it pertains to the Ur-Hamlet, but promises no definitive conclusions, being more concerned with scholars' perception of reality rather than actual truth, unknowable by the sheer lack of physical evidence. By deifying their mortal subject, scholars purport to safeguard the sanctity of the canon. However, much to their undying frustration, they lack the Holy Grail, a single extant Shakespearean manuscript. Railing against the presumed interpolations of actors and other pirates, condemning sloppy publishers' errors, scholars lament Shakespeare's apparent unwillingness to oversee even the authorized editions of his works. It falls upon the editors of Shakespeare's plays to ascertain which portions of which texts are genuine, and should be included, and which are corrupt. This leads into dangerous academic territory, whereby scholars are asked to make value judgments based on a preconceived picture of Shakespeare as preternatural genius.

Unfortunately, in its all-consuming quest to determine what constitutes an authentic Shakespearean text, orthodox scholarship has lost the big picture and committed its gravest sin: neglecting to integrate a responsive textual analysis with the

requisite performance theory. Not only is the theory of collaboration rarely discussed, Shakespeare is not even granted a creative process! Such are the foibles of mere, earthly playwrights. Even more remarkable is the disdain shown to performance, ostensibly the dramatic endgame, but in many critics' views, vitiating. This canonization, while well meaning, is not good; it is contrary to the best interests of theatre history research. By removing Shakespeare's plays from the context of their creation, scholars relegate them to practical irrelevance, whereby they become museum pieces to be admired, but not touched. Shakespeare and his contemporaries had no such illusions regarding the sacredness of their theatrical endeavors. Play scripts were a means to an end, a blueprint for performance that enlivened, not tainted, the text. This thesis will attempt to return Shakespeare to his rightful place in the world of the profane, hoping to create a faithful perspective on the historical, collaborative evolution of his most magnificent work.

Chapter One: Foul Papers

There are three distinct, extant English versions of the play Hamlet: the First Quarto of 1603 (Q1), the Second Quarto of 1604 (Q2), and the First Folio of 1623 (F). Modern-day equivalents of the paperback book, the quartos were brought about by the popularity of the stage version, perfect for the everyday reader, cheaply mass-produced. The First Folio was a much more momentous undertaking. Published seven years after Shakespeare's death, the volume is commonly considered to be the definitive collection of the author's work, compiled by Shakespeare's fellow company members, actors and shareholders in the Globe Playhouse, Henry Condell and John Heminge. "Folio" means "leaf" in Latin; the volume's "leaves" or pages were folded only once, to grand effect, as compared to the much smaller quarto, with its leaves pressed into fours. When it was published in 1623, the First Folio sold for about a pound,⁴ approximately fifty dollars today. Of the initial one thousand printed, about two hundred and fifty still survive.⁵ In all three published versions, not to mention a little-known seventeenth century German adaptation, there exists a different Hamlet. No doubt they are all kin, but critics are less than kind. The precise nature of each work's relationship to the others, even the order of composition, remains an endless source of controversy and confusion.

⁴ Doug Moston, introduction, Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies: A Facsimile of the First Folio, 1623, by William Shakespeare (New York: Routledge, 1998) vii.

⁵ Moston v.

On July 26, 1602, Hamlet was entered in the Stationers' Register.⁶ No author is listed, but in 1603, the First Quarto of Hamlet appears, proudly bearing the playwright's name: "William Shake-fpeare."⁷ Evidently, the play had been in production for quite some time, the title page advertising that "it hath beene diuerfe times acted by his Highneffe feruants in the Cittie of London : as alfo in the two V-niuerfities of Cambridge and Oxford, and elfewhere."⁸ Printed to meet the demands of Hamlet's popularity onstage, Q1 is a bit of a rarity, as only two original copies survive, the first not having been discovered until the late date of 1823.⁹ Scholars dub Q1 the "bad quarto." Very short, it anticipates Q2 in character and structure, but its bare-bones delineation of the primary action is bereft of nuance, thought and psychology, the very aspects that epitomize Shakespeare's Hamlet.

Divided as to the significance of Q1, critics theorize four widely divergent and complex scenarios: one, it is "Shakespeare's youthful first draft,"¹⁰ a text upon which the playwright later expanded; two, it is a corrupted, second-hand reporting of this first draft,¹¹ not Shakespeare's actual words, but a reconstruction thereof; third, it is a pirated,

⁶ Tucker Brooke, Shakespeare of Stratford, eds. Wilbur L. Cross and Tucker Brooke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926) 119.

⁷ Henry N. Hudson, introduction, The Tragedy of Hamlet, by William Shakespeare, eds. Ebenezer Charlton and Andrew Jackson George. (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1909) xxiv.

⁸ Shakespeare, Hamlet 2: 37.

⁹ W.W. Greg, foreword, The 'Bad' Quarto of Hamlet: A Critical Study, by George Ian Duthie (Cambridge: University Press, 1941) ix.

¹⁰ Ron Rosenbaum, "Onward and Upward with the Arts: Shakespeare in Rewrite," The New Yorker 13 May 2002: 71.

¹¹ Henry N. Hudson, Shakespeare: His Life, Art and Characters, 4th rev. ed., [2 vols.?] (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1872) 2: 258.

“mutilated version of the whole,”¹² based on the authentic, completed version. This hypothesis necessitates Q1 being posterior to not only Q2, but as some have postulated, the Folio version as well. However, in the unraveling of Q1’s many mysteries, there lies a final caveat, and an infinite frustration. Myriad aspects of Q1 do not correlate with either Q2 or F, but which curiously align with the German adaptation, soon to be discussed. Scholars have no explanation for this other than to postulate that Q1 must contain bits and pieces of a lost play, presumably as authored by someone other than Shakespeare. In this final fourth scenario, Q1 presents a confused amalgamation, an intermingling of the past and present, “not represent[ing] the play as it stood at any stage, pre-Shakespearian or Shakespearian, in its development.”¹³ For scholars, Q1 is an effective No Man’s Land.

Q2 and the First Folio are both believed to be reliable texts, but in editorial decision-making, Q2 receives the most deference. Christened the “good quarto,” Q2 is assumed to have derived from the playwright’s “foul papers,” the designation given in textual analysis for “a playwright’s original, unpolished manuscript.”¹⁴ As “it is extremely probable that behind any given ‘good’ Quarto there lies a Shakespearian manuscript,”¹⁵ Q2 is believed to represent the closest approximation of Shakespeare’s

¹² Barrett Wendell, William Shakspere: A Study in Elizabethan Literature (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894) 250.

¹³ George Ian Duthie, The 'Bad' Quarto of Hamlet: A Critical Study (Cambridge: University Press, 1941) 273.

¹⁴ Charles Boyce, Shakespeare: A to Z (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1990) 202.

¹⁵ Duthie 5-6.

finished draft of Hamlet. It is the basis for nearly all modern editions, even though it lacks a speech found only in the former: “How all occasions do inform against me [...]”¹⁶ Perhaps Shakespeare cut the speech as unnecessary, or added it later in revision. Editors will normally include any additional material found in the First Folio to Q2 to create the definitive, “full-text” Hamlet.

While the First Folio would appear to be the superior version, published with the authority of Shakespeare’s fellow company members, it is slightly abridged, cut for performance, and therefore “contaminated by theatrical experience.”¹⁷ Although scholars believe it “is the closest version we have to Shakespeare's original performance texts,”¹⁸ they condemn its various emendations as being contrary to the wishes of the playwright, merely “for the sake of shortening the performance; and any editor who should content himself with reprinting the folio [...] would present but an imperfect notion of the drama as it came from the hand of the poet.”¹⁹ The notion that anyone, including a contemporary, would be presumptuous enough to alter one of Shakespeare’s works has created certain indignation among commentators. In a very strange and virulent piece of criticism, an early scholar named Appleton Morgan attacks editors Heminge and Condell for their seemingly ruthless cuts. He imagines a grand conspiracy, hypothesizing that

¹⁶ Shakespeare, Hamlet 1: 324.

¹⁷ Bernice W. Kliman, “Introduction to the Enfolded Text of Hamlet,” 1996, ed. Bernice W. Kliman, Global Language Resources, 14 August 2002 <<http://www.global-language.com/enfolded.intro.html>>.

¹⁸ Moston iii.

¹⁹ J. Payne Collier, Shakespeare: Complete Works, History, Life and Notes (New York, Cleveland: World Syndicate Company, Inc., 1925) n.pag.

“Heminge and Condell” was in fact a pseudonym for an unknown person with strange and secretive motivations.²⁰

While his theory is absurd, Morgan’s is not an isolated opinion, for this sort of attitude, albeit in slightly more benign form, is prevalent throughout the literature. Regardless, the attack hardly seems fair when directed towards Condell and Heminge, who, in their Introduction to the Reader, proclaim their honest and humble intentions:

It had bene a thing, we confeffe, worthie to haue bene wifhed, that the Author himfelfe had liu'd to haue fet forth, and ouerfeen his owne writings; But fince it hath bin ordain'd otherwife, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envie his Friends, the office of their care, and paine, to haue collected & publifh'd them; and fo to haue publifh'd them, as where (before) you were abus'd with diuerfe ftolne, and furreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and ftealthes of injurious impoftors, that expos'd them: even thofe, are now offer'd to your view cur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all the reft, abfolute in their numbers, as he conceiued the [sic].²¹

The last four words in the preceding quote form the basis of every Shakespearean editor’s quandary. How, when the quartos “have a number of highly important passages that are

²⁰ Appleton Morgan, ed., introduction, Hamlet and the Ur-Hamlet: The Text of the Second Quarto of 1604, with a conjectural Text of the alleged Kyd Hamlet preceding it (New York: The Shakespeare Press, 1908) xxvii-xxviii.

not in the folio [while] [...] the folio has a few, less important, that are wanting in the quartos”²² do scholars select Shakespeare’s words, “as he conceived them”? All three texts, Q1, Q2, and F, are inexorably linked, variations on a theme, both major and minor in scale. Are such phraseological differences the result authorial revision or outside influence? “In view of the incessant alteration made in dramatic works which hold the stage anywhere, it would be folly to assume the complete integrity of any text in the whole series of Shakspere's [sic] plays.”²³

The literary history of Hamlet is complicated further by evidence that it was being performed in Germany at the turn of the seventeenth century, and possibly as early as the 1580s. It was one of many Shakespearean plays to reach that country, including Romeo and Juliet, Julius Ceasar, and King Lear.²⁴ The English translation of Der Bestrafte Brudermord (Fratricide Punished) (BB) bears remarkable similarities to Hamlet, both Q1 and Q2. Predictably, the dates are uncertain. The earliest postulated debut is 1586, when London actors toured both Denmark and Germany, two of whom, “having been in Elsinore, returned to England and joined Shakespeare's company.”²⁵ It is unknown whether or not Shakespeare made this journey, but if Hamlet was not yet part of the actors’ repertory, perhaps it was on this trip that the idea for the play initially formed.

²¹ John Heminge and Henrie Condell, introduction, Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies, by William Shakespeare, rpt. in Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies: A Facsimile of the First Folio, 1623 (1623; New York: Routledge, 1998) 7.

²² Hudson, Shakespeare 2: 258.

²³ Wendell 210.

²⁴ Horace Howard Furness, ed., appendix, Hamlet: The New Variorum Edition, 2 vols. (1877; New York: Dover Publications, 2000) 2: 115.

Although the first contemporary reference to BB is not until 1626, most critics agree it was probably first performed in the late sixteenth century. BB is very short and in prose, a stage worthy Hamlet, although in “very degenerate form.”²⁶ While it follows the same basic plot of the English versions, BB contains numerous exchanges not found in any other source, examples of which will be explored in the final chapter. Scholars believe such scenes may derive from a lost play:

This early drama had never been printed, and the stage-manuscript doubtless perished in Shakespeare's revision; but its general character and even the main outlines of its plot are discernible in a crude German adaptation, Der bestrafte Brudermord, and in the mutilated 1603 quarto of Hamlet. Even in Shakespeare's finished revision as represented in the second quarto of 1604 the chief features of the older play are still retained.²⁷

Scholars label this hypothetical lost play the “Ur-Hamlet,” “ur” being a German prefix, meaning “early” or “original.”²⁸ Forming the foundation for generations-worth of rumor and speculation, the Ur-Hamlet is rarely discussed anymore, branded the “authentic ghost of Shakespeare scholarship.”²⁹ History has left little in the way of clues.

²⁵ Morgan xviii.

²⁶ Harold Jenkins, ed., introduction, Hamlet, by William Shakespeare (1982; London: Thomson Learning, 2000) 112.

²⁷ Joseph Quincy Adams, A Life of William Shakespeare (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923) 303.

²⁸ Isaac Asimov, Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare, 2 vols. (New Jersey: Random House Value Publishing, Inc., 1970) 2: 100.

²⁹ Harold Bloom, Shakespeare: the invention of the human (New York : Riverhead Books, 1998) 395-396.

There is no primary evidence in the matter of the Ur-Hamlet. Indeed, there are no editions of a dramatic Hamlet, as authored by Shakespeare or anyone else, prior to the publication of the First Quarto in 1603. However, there is no question that Hamlet existed as a popular theatrical production by 1589, with scholars estimating its debut as early as 1585. Could “this older drama be one of Shakespeare’s earliest works”³⁰? Unfortunately, the circumstances of the play’s composition “are as shrouded as Hamlet’s textual condition is confused.”³¹ The 1580s comprise Shakespeare’s alleged lost years, when history has no record of the playwright’s life, dealings or whereabouts. Certainly, most Elizabethan children were familiar with the myth of the warrior Prince Amleth, an ancient legend dating back centuries before Shakespeare.

Originally recorded by Saxo Grammaticus in the late twelfth century, the tale was first published in 1514. In the sixteenth century, Francois de Belleforest translated the myth into French, and featured it in his popular volume, Histoires Tragiques, which received multiple printings in England, its complicated bibliographical history spanning 1559 to 1582. Histoires Tragiques is the presumed “principle source of the Ur-Hamlet, which would doubtless have added the Ghost, the dumb Show, and the fencing match.”³² In Belleforest, the story ends happily, with Hamlet avenging his father and recovering the throne. Perhaps the Prince in the old play ended triumphantly as well. Critics imagine

³⁰ Furness 2: 5.

³¹ Bloom, Shakespeare 383.

³² Frank Kermode, introduction, Hamlet, by William Shakespeare, The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974) 1137.

Shakespeare's genius in the reworking of a stereotypical revenge tale into an existential tragedy. With his typical verbosity, Harold Bloom envisions the fantastic transformation:

Prince Hamlet, Renaissance wit and skeptic, reader of Montaigne and London playgoer, breaks with both the Belleforest Hamlet and the Hamlet of Shakespeare's original drama [...]. The Ghost speaks of his uxorious passion for Gertrude, and we realize with a start that this refers back not to the father Horwendil but to Amleth, who in the old story is undone at last by his excessive love for his treacherous second wife. In so confounding the generations, Shakespeare gives us a hint of levels of complexity that may leave us only more baffled by the final Hamlet, but that also can guide us partway out of the labyrinth.³³

Breaking with traditional scholarship, Bloom imagines Shakespeare as the author of the original Hamlet, believing this protracted period of composition to be the key to Hamlet's many mysteries, as well as to Shakespeare's ultimate genius, a trace of which can be seen in the playwright's alteration of the original characters' names: by making father and son share the same name, not only does Shakespeare eliminate the unmelodious "Horwendil," but provide useful material for critics seeking insight into the protagonist's complicated psychology. It is unknown whether the Ur-Hamlet employed Belleforest's traditional names for the supporting characters, but, significantly, the play was entitled Hamlet, not Amleth.

Published in 1608, The Hystorie of Hamblet is an English translation of Belleforest that some have surmised may have preceded Shakespeare's play. One of the foremost editors of Shakespeare, Edmond Malone, states quite definitively in the Variorum Hamlet that Shakespeare's play "was formed" on the Ur-Hamlet "with the aid of the old prose Hystorie of Hamblet."³⁴ However, most believe that the publisher of the Hystorie of Hamblet was "probably influenced by the popularity of Shakespeare's play,"³⁵ aspects of the storyline indicating this sequence of events. For instance, Hamlet's line, "A rat!" before he stabs Polonius is not in Belleforest, but it is in the English translation, suggesting that the anonymous author of the prose tale had seen the stage version.

Spanning seven to fourteen years prior to the play's initial publication, there are three confirmed, contemporary allusions to Hamlet, references that specifically do not concern the legend of Amleth, made popular by Belleforest in Shakespeare's day. In 1589, Thomas Nashe (Nash) mentions Hamlet in implied association with a playwright most scholars believe was pointedly not Shakespeare, proof, some say, the man from Stratford was not the author of the early tragedy. In 1594, theatre manager Phillip Henslowe records the first known performance of Hamlet, but critics think this was neither Shakespeare's play, nor the play's first performance. In 1596, pamphleteer Thomas Lodge, in a fit of sarcasm, compares the actor playing the Ghost of Hamlet's

³³ Bloom, Shakespeare 387-8.

³⁴ Edmond Malone, appendix, Hamlet: The New Variorum Edition, 2 vols. (1877; New York: Dover Publications, 2000) 2: 5.

father to an “oister wife,” hardly complimentary. As will be shown, scholars concede that the “Hamlet story appeared in England as a play at some point before 1589,”³⁶ but, most interpret the data as confirmation the novice playwright had little to no part in its creation.

In 1589 or thereabouts, Thomas Nashe composed prefatory remarks for the Menaphon, a salutary book written by his friend Robert Greene. According to Dyce in his edition of Greene’s Works, the Menaphon may actually have been printed as early as 1587, but “the surer date [...] is 1589.”³⁷ Contained within Nashe’s extremely esoteric ramblings is an allusion to Hamlet, as well as the suggestion that Thomas Kyd, or another playwright like him, was the author. Because it has become such an integral part of the Ur-Hamlet debate, every word sifted for its significance, the eighth paragraph of Nashe’s Epistle is here reprinted nearly in full.

But least I might seeme with these night crowes, *Nimis curiosus in aliena republica*, I’le turne backe to my first text, of studies of delight; and talke a little in friendship with a few of our triuiall translators. It is a common practise now a daies amongst a sort of shifting companions, that runne through euery arte and thriue by none, to leaue the trade of *Nouerint* whereto they were borne, and busie themselues with the indeuours of Art, that could scarcelie latinize their necke-verse if they should haue neede;

³⁵ Hudson, Hamlet xiv.

³⁶ Harrison xxii.

³⁷ Furness 2: 6.

yet English *Seneca* read by candle light yeeldes manie good sentences, as *Bloud is a beggar*, and so foorth; and if you intreate him faire in a frostie morning, he will affoord you whole *Hamlets*, I should say, handfulls of tragical speaches. But 'o grieffe! *tempus edax rerum*, what's that will last alwaies? The sea exhaled by droppes will in continuance be drie, and *Seneca* let bloud line by line and page by page, at length must needes die to our stage: which makes his famisht followers to imitate the Kidde in *AEsop*, who enamored with the Foxes new fangles, forsooke all hopes of life to leape into a new occupation; and these men renowncing all possibilities of credit or estimation, to intermeddle with Italian translations [...]. Sufficeth them to bodge vp a blanke verse with ifs and ands [...].³⁸

Although Nashe's true meaning after more than four centuries' lag is all but indeterminable, his vague reference to "the Kidde" has caused quite a sensation, "a study of the context [leading] students to the opinion that, according to Nash, Kyd was the author of the Ur-Hamlet."³⁹ While the implication provides fuel to the authorship fire, the passage's most important contribution to history is its positive identification of a production of Hamlet playing on the London stage by 1589. The theatrical connotation is demonstrated by Nashe's use of "Hamlet" rather than "Amleth," the phrase "tragical speeches," and the overall context of the paragraph, in which there is a "direct reference

³⁸ Thomas Nashe, "To the Gentlemen Students of both Vniuersities," preface, Menaphon, by Robert Greene, Menaphon and A Margarite of America, ed. G.B. Harrison (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1927) 8-9.

³⁹ Albert E. Jack, "Thomas Kyd and the Ur-Hamlet," PMLA 20 (1905): 729.

to the stage,⁴⁰ albeit in a haughty tone. Nashe and Greene were educated dramatists, so-called University Wits, a nickname given by modern scholars who credit them, and others in their circle such as John Lyly and George Peele, with “the development of Elizabethan drama in the 1580s.”⁴¹ Possessed with “superior educations in a profession that had always been somewhat disreputable at best,”⁴² Wits such as Nashe and Greene resented the success of unschooled playwrights, who, in their estimation, were nothing more than literary bootleggers ransacking the classics for an audience of penny-paying groundlings. Unfortunately, their vituperation has far outlasted the popularity of their plays.

On June 9, 1594, Philip Henslowe, proprietor of the Rose Theatre, chronicled in his diary the first recorded performance of Hamlet. However, there is reason to assume it had debuted sometime prior, as it is not marked with Henslowe’s customary signifier, ‘ne,’ for a new production.⁴³ Scholars believe this was not Shakespeare’s play, but “a revival of the old Hamlet”⁴⁴ that belonged “to the ‘eighties.”⁴⁵ It was performed contemporaneously with at least two other Shakespearean plays. Tucker Brooke states, “In June, 1594, a combination of the Admiral’s and Chamberlain’s companies, in which Shakespeare was presumably included, performed there [at Newington Butts]. Among the

⁴⁰ John W. Cunliffe, “Nash and the Earlier Hamlet,” PMLA 21 (1906): 195.

⁴¹ Boyce 682.

⁴² Boyce 682.

⁴³ Duthie 76.

⁴⁴ Duthie 76.

⁴⁵ Kermode, Hamlet 1136.

plays then acted were Andronicus, The Taming of a Shrew, and Hamlet.”⁴⁶ However, in footnotes to this passage, Brooke states that this Hamlet was “[p]robably the pre-Shakespearean version, by Kyd.”⁴⁷

Although there is no existing manuscript of this pre-Shakespearean version, scholars are quite certain it was not the masterpiece that survives today. In his lengthy 1596 essay, Wit’s Miserie and the World’s Madnes: Discovering the Devils Incarnate of this Age, Thomas Lodge contributes to the Ur-Hamlet’s reputation as a bit of low-class entertainment. Cataloguing the divers evils that plague mankind, the author alludes to a fiend he calls “Hate-Virtue” that “looks as pale as the Vizard of ye ghost which cried so miserally at ye Theator like an oister wife, *Hamlet, revenge*.”⁴⁸ The picture is not pretty: an actor who out-Herods-Herod trampling about the stage, making a mockery out of one of the greatest masterpieces of the Western world. Propitiously, the phrase, “Hamlet, revenge” is not present in any surviving edition of Shakespeare’s play; therefore the playwright is distanced from the insult. Nonetheless, the expression was a common catchword for almost a decade, indicating deeply rooted disdain, friendly ridicule, or both. It is certainly a sign of the play’s popularity.

While the writings of Nashe, Henslowe, and Lodge form the bulk of the evidence regarding the Ur-Hamlet, there are other circumstantial pieces of the puzzle to consider, including a reference to Shakespeare in association with Hamlet in the late 1590s, five

⁴⁶ Brooke, Shakespeare 131.

⁴⁷ Brooke, Shakespeare 131.

years before the publication of Q1. Gabriel Harvey records in manuscript form the following in a 1598 edition of Chaucer's Workes: "The younger sort takes much delight in Shakespeares Venus, & Adonis: but his Lucrece, & his tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke, haue it in them, to please the wiser sort."⁴⁹ Harvey may have inscribed his comments years after the publication of the book, which is the reason why most scholars dismiss this piece of evidence, even though it is a potential link between Shakespeare and the lost play. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Harvey chooses to associate Hamlet with Shakespeare's early narrative poetry, rather than the later tragedies, to which the drama might be the most obviously compared.

Passages from plays by Shakespeare's early contemporaries, Thomas Kyd and John Marston, are directly reminiscent of Hamlet. The Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd, authored circa 1588, contains situations and snatches of dialogue almost identical to the surviving Hamlet, which many critics think may be due to a "common source. Something has to be allowed for coincidence and a possible influence of The Spanish Tragedy on Shakespeare; but these cannot adequately explain why so many features of The Spanish Tragedy have an analogy in Hamlet.⁵⁰ The complicated relationship between The Spanish Tragedy and Hamlet forms the focus of the following chapter. Lesser known, but just as significant is John Marston's Antonio's Revenge. The

⁴⁸ Thomas Lodge, The Complete Works of Thomas Lodge 1580-1623? (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1963) 62.

⁴⁹ Gabriel Harvey, Gabriel Harvey's Marginalia, ed. G. C. Moore Smith (Stratford-upon-Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1913) 232.

⁵⁰ Jenkins 97.

similarities between Marston's and Shakespeare's plays are such that scholars have adjusted their previous chronology: "The belief that there was not sufficient interval between the two plays to allow either to imitate the other has recently led some scholars to ascribe their likeness to a common source in the lost pre-Shakespearean play which is conveniently referred to as the Ur-Hamlet."⁵¹

More parody than imitation, the Satiromastix (Satiro-maftix. OR The vntruffing of the Humorous Poet) was written by Thomas Dekker and John Marston chiefly at the expense of rival playwright, Ben Jonson. By 1601, the mock Poet's War was in full force. Featuring the tag line "Hamlet, revenge," the following dialogue confirms that, at the turn of the century, the Ur-Hamlet still loomed large in the theatre-going public's consciousness.

Afini. Wod I were hanged if I can call you any names but Capitaine and
Tucca.

Tuc. No. Fye'st; my name's Hamlet revenge: thou hast been at Parris
garden, hast not?⁵²

The symbiotic relationship between the Ur-Hamlet, The Spanish Tragedy, and Antonio's Revenge, as well as the Satiromastix's jesting all serve to establish two important facts about the Elizabethan theatre scene: first, the revenge tragedy was a popular genre; second, the early Hamlet was a popular play within that genre. Although scholars may

⁵¹ Jenkins 8.

⁵² Thomas Dekker, Satiromastix, [ed. John Pearson?], The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker 4 vols. (1602; London: John Pearson, 1873) 1: 229.

wish to derive additional significance from the association, the evidence affords no more, and, indeed, no more is necessary.

Considering Shakespeare was a working dramatist at the time of the Ur-Hamlet, and that his own company was performing the piece, it is a bit remarkable that most critics do not believe the playwright contributed to it. In their reasoning, scholars consider one major piece of contemporary evidence, and that by way of omission, which they feel negates any possibility of Shakespearean authorship. In Francis Meres's Palladis Tamia: Wit's Treasury, published in 1598, the writer mentions Shakespeare, along with a list of his plays, but not Hamlet:

As the foule of *Euphorbus* was thought to live in *Pythagorous*: fo
the fweet wittie foule of *Ouid* liues in mellifluous & hony-tongued
Shakepeare, witnes his *Venus* and *Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his fugred Sonnets
among his priuate friends, &c.

As *Plautus* and *Seneca* are accounted the beft for comedy and
tragedy among the Latines: fo *Shakepeare* among y Englifh is the moft
excellent in both kinds for the ftage; for Comedy, witnes his *Getleme of*
Verona, his *Errors*, his *Loue labors Loft*, his *Loue labors wonne*, his
Midfummers night dreame, & his *Merchant of Venice*: for Tragedy his

Richard the 2., Richard the 3., Henry the 4., King Iohn, Titus Andronicus,
and his *Romeo and Iuliet*.⁵³

Meres's list leaves room for questioning, especially in regards to Love Labors Won; however, as for the missing Hamlet, "if we are to be guided by its omission from the Meres list and the unanimous opinion of Shakspearean critics,"⁵⁴ scholars see the absence of any mention of the play as proof Shakespeare could not possibly be the author of the early version. Otherwise, Meres would surely have included it in what appears to be a definitive list of the playwright's works to date. Even if Meres did not mean it as such, no doubt Hamlet would have merited at least as much attention from the author as King John. Henry Hudson agrees, believing the "date of composition of the first draft of Hamlet falls within July, 1602, the later time limit (*terminus ante quem*), and 1598, the earlier time limit (*terminus post quem*),"⁵⁵ clarifying, "Hamlet is not mentioned by Meres in the Palladis Tamia, published in 1598, which gives a list of twelve noteworthy Shakespeare plays in existence at that time. This establishes 1598 as a probable *terminus post quem*."⁵⁶

The "*terminus ante quem*" is established by the 1602 entry in the Stationers' Register, which, although anonymous, remains the first universally accepted contemporary reference to Shakespeare's Hamlet. The Stationers' Company was

⁵³ Francis Meres, Palladis Tamia, ed. Arthur Freeman (1598; New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1973) 281-282.

⁵⁴ Cunliffe 193.

⁵⁵ Hudson, Hamlet xxiii.

⁵⁶ Hudson, Hamlet xxiii-xxiv.

England's first copyright organization, licensed by the government to protect the rights of its members. This included booksellers, printers and publishers, but not authors, for whom the organization had little care. Publishers were at liberty to issue books without first having them registered, but such works could then be freely reprinted without fear of reprisal. Infractions to the system took the form of fines and confiscation of printing materials, but even the worst abusers sometimes went unpunished. Condell and Heminge in the Introduction to the First Folio speak of spurious editions of Shakespeare's plays, "diverse stolen, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of injurious impostors."

Orthodox criticism believes Shakespeare's Hamlet was written sometime between 1598 and 1602, but most scholars narrow the date to 1600-1601. Frank Kermode states, "The facts as we know them suggest, at any rate, that he rewrote the old play in 1600."⁵⁷ Harold Jenkins, editor of the most influential modern edition of Hamlet, the 1982 Arden, concurs, "A date between the middle of 1599 and the end of 1601 appears thus beyond dispute."⁵⁸ His "immediate source of Hamlet was an earlier play on the same subject [...] [that] is not extant and was apparently never printed [...]."⁵⁹ In truth, if Shakespeare was in the process of revising Hamlet at the turn of the seventeenth century, then he was doing so under the shadow of the older play, for the "audience knew the story."⁶⁰ Northrup Frye acknowledges "Hamlet seems to be the first play of Shakespeare in which

⁵⁷ Kermode, Hamlet 1136.

⁵⁸ Jenkins 1.

⁵⁹ Jenkins 82.

he is deliberately competing with a well-known earlier play on the same subject.”⁶¹ As an illustration, Frank Kermode notes the “unusual obliquity of the opening [...]. [...] [One] has almost to assume an audience that knew the story and was willing to be teased by indirection.”⁶² Henry Hudson believes Shakespeare was “profoundly influenced”⁶³ by the structure of the source play, for, as Jenkins declares, “of the incidents which make up Shakespeare's plot some at least of those not in Belleforest were added in the Ur-Hamlet.”⁶⁴ In fact, critics assume the influence from Belleforest was negligible when compared to that of the source play: “In all probability Shakespeare had before him only the earlier play on the subject already referred to.”⁶⁵

Although the Ur-Hamlet is not extant, this seemingly insurmountable obstacle has not prevented scholars from attempting to reconstruct it. Examining stylistic and linguistic variations, critics hypothesize which portions of the surviving editions, particularly Q1 and BB, they believe to be “pre-Shakespearean,” grafted onto the post-Shakespearean text by second-hand reporters. Kermode confirms, “Attempts to reconstruct the Ur-Hamlet have to rely largely on Q1 and the German play.”⁶⁶ Such experimentation inevitably proves unsatisfactory: the scholar’s methodology is based on little more than intuition, and the accuracy of the reconstructed text can never be verified.

⁶⁰ Harrison xxvi.

⁶¹ Northrop Frye, Northrop Frye on Shakespeare, ed. Robert Sandler (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1986) 82.

⁶² Kermode, Hamlet 1138.

⁶³ Hudson, Hamlet xv.

⁶⁴ Jenkins 98.

⁶⁵ Chambers, Hamlet xii.

However, critics cannot be swayed from their course of impious stubbornness: Hamlet has that within which passeth show, and so does Hamlet; in Shakespeare's tragedy lies the ghost of the early play, crying not "revenge," but "remember me."

Appropriately, it is the Ghost of Hamlet's father that receives the most attention in all reconstructions of the Ur-Hamlet. Lampooned as an "oister wife" by Thomas Lodge, the phrase "Hamlet, revenge" ridiculed by Dekker and Marston, the notoriety of the character was such that Harold Bloom believes "Shakespeare cut the part severely in revision."⁶⁷ If the Ur-Hamlet's Ghost were a tyrannical figure, this would certainly be in keeping with the Senecan revenge genre, a dramatic style replete with "blood and revenge [...] [and] a marked tendency to moralizing and soliloquy."⁶⁸ If the play was a bit short on depth, surely it pleased the fans who crowded the theatres to see Marlowe's Tamburlaine or Kyd's Spanish Tragedy. The Ur-Hamlet is even thought to have featured a device similar to that found in the latter, namely, a play-within-a-play: "if the old play of Hamlet should ever be recovered, a similar interlude, I make no doubt, would be found there."⁶⁹ Kermode believes the Ur-Hamlet added not only the Ghost and the dumb show, but also the fencing match at the end,⁷⁰ no great leap of faith as such would be the obvious prelude to the denouement of a revenge tragedy. Kermode shares the opinion of other scholars that the Ur-Hamlet followed the basic storyline established in Belleforest;

⁶⁶ Kermode, Hamlet 1136.

⁶⁷ Bloom, Shakespeare 389.

⁶⁸ Hudson, Hamlet xv.

⁶⁹ Malone 2: 6.

⁷⁰ Kermode, Hamlet 1137.

it was crowd-pleasing entertainment, yet artistically mediocre, until Shakespeare “made something new and wonderful out of it.”⁷¹ Rowse supposes the adaptation was so extraordinary that it is “no wonder the predecessor did not survive.”⁷²

Supposedly, this early Hamlet, much maligned by scholars, is now lost. Pondering the significance of such presents certain unavoidable challenges. Some scholars simply see the problem as insoluble, and refuse to speculate. Collier states, “how far that lost play might be an improvement upon the old translated ‘Historie’ we have no means of deciding, nor to what extent Shakespeare availed himself of such improvement.”⁷³ In The Sources of Hamlet; with an essay on the legend, the author, Sir Israel Gollancz, declares in spite of the book’s title that it “is not my purpose in this volume to discuss at length the sources of the English play.”⁷⁴ In the similarly entitled Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, Geoffrey Bullough is even more ambivalent: “Shakespeare may have gone direct to Belleforest or he may not; he may have used the Ur-Hamlet much or little; he may have drawn on The Spanish Tragedy. Surmise helps us little to ascertain the imaginative process shaping his play.”⁷⁵ W.W. Greg gracefully epitomizes the extreme range of scholarly attitude towards the Ur-Hamlet. The context of his commentary is the Q1 controversy, a different debate, but one

⁷¹ A. L. Rowse, Shakespeare the Man, rev. ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988) 161.

⁷² Rowse, Shakespeare 161.

⁷³ Collier n.pag.

⁷⁴ Sir Israel Gollancz, The Sources of Hamlet; with an essay on the legend (1926; New York: Octagon Books, 1967) 85.

⁷⁵ Geoffrey Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, 8 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973) 7: 18.

that is entirely relevant: “One is tempted to say that those writers who have maintained their critical balance have failed to arrive at any very certain conclusion, while those who have had a significant conclusion to propound have commonly let their enthusiasm outrun their discretion.”⁷⁶ In essence, the conservatives’ noncommittal stance is just as disappointing as the zealots’ fanaticism. If, according to Bullough, “surmise helps us little,” then the issue is dead, for scholars’ only tool is surmise, fruitful imagination coupled with a scientific spirit. Research in regards to the Ur-Hamlet is necessarily compromised by the lack of primary evidence, but indirect methods of approach, when employed responsibly, can yield surprising conclusions.

Scholars who thoughtfully investigate the Ur-Hamlet must re-examine their own preconceived notions about Shakespeare, for the evidence surrounding the early play’s existence impugns certain orthodox understandings about the author’s life and process, not to mention playmaking in general. Questions scholars might ask include the following: What is the ontology of an authentic Shakespearean text? How does a scholar determine the level of corruptibility when there are no manuscripts? How do the practicalities of production shape the playwright’s text? Are emendations by actors and other theatrical practitioners associated with the production necessarily a corruption? Could the concept of the Shakespearean canon extend to embrace a myriad of focal points for evolution? Does the notion of theatre as a collaborative art cheapen Shakespeare’s legacy? The problem of the Ur-Hamlet is deceptively difficult, for

Shakespearean critics find it challenging enough to determine the authorship of extant works, let alone those that no longer exist. George Ian Duthie, author of the foremost study on Q1, submits, “The dangers of applying subjective literary criticism to textual problems is strikingly illustrated by the fact that different critics refer the same material to Kyd, to Shakespeare, and to an anonymous third-rate hack-writer.”⁷⁷ Fortunately, modern textual criticism provides some needed insight.

The historiography of King Lear all but mirrors that of Hamlet. On May 8, 1605, a tragedy entitled The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his three daughters, Gonorill, Regan, and Cordella was entered in the Stationers’ Register. According to scholars, this version is not Shakespeare’s, but of another, anonymous playwright’s hand. It had been performed by the Queen’s Men prior to 1594, but had never before been published. Like the Ur-Hamlet, the old King Lear “is the most important single source”⁷⁸ of the later play. Unlike the Ur-Hamlet, the early King Lear actually exists, similar in plot structure to the Shakespearean version, but ending happily, without the horrible death of Cordelia. Scholars have devised two possible scenarios to explain the existence of the alternate copy. First, King Lear is a memorial reconstruction of the “authentic” play, not Shakespeare’s text as he composed it, but a representation thereof; in which instance, Shakespeare drafted King Lear prior to 1594, at age twenty-nine or thirty, far earlier than most believe probable. Second, King Lear is an old play, written by someone

⁷⁶ Greg ix.

⁷⁷ Duthie 90.

other than Shakespeare, who, ten years later, adapted it nearly scene for scene, and line by line. Shakespeare cannot even be “said to have added the tragic conclusion, for although he knew the old play he treats the source material in an entirely different key from that of King Leir.”⁷⁹

The establishment finds neither of these hypotheses satisfactory, so they devise a third: King Leir was an earlier source, but one a minor one at that, which Shakespeare brilliantly reworked. Critics draw parallels between the complicated historiographies of Hamlet and King Lear, two tragedies that, compared to the rest of the canon, “show an apparent infinitude that perhaps transcends the limits of literature.”⁸⁰ As the Ur-Hamlet no longer remains, King Leir provides “firmer grounds for seeing the transformation Shakespeare could work on a play, one of which there can be no doubt about his significant borrowings.”⁸¹ Citing the obvious connection, Harold Jenkins declares that the example of King Lear “gives us no reason to pre-suppose that he would rigidly adhere to the scheme of an earlier play [such as the Ur-Hamlet]; and apart from the general improbability, there are signs in Hamlet itself that he did not.”⁸² Unfortunately for Jenkin’s argument, even a superficial reading of King Leir demonstrates Shakespeare’s

⁷⁸ Frank Kermode, introduction, King Lear, by William Shakespeare, The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974) 1249.

⁷⁹ Peter Alexander, ed., introduction, King Lear, by William Shakespeare (1958; New York: The Heritage Press, 1959) 757.

⁸⁰ Bloom, Shakespeare 476.

⁸¹ Irvin Leigh Matus, Shakespeare, IN FACT (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1994) 131.

⁸² Jenkins 100.

indebtedness to the source play, if indeed, as Jerome McGann indicates, there even was such a thing:

[I]f scholars were misguided in their assessments of the two original printed texts of King Lear – if [...] these are not two *relatively corrupted* texts of a pure (but now lost) original, but two *relatively reliable* texts of two different versions of the play (as we now think) – then our general methods for dealing with such texts [are] called into serious question.⁸³

The topic of the early King Leir, like the topic early Hamlet, is by and large ignored by mainstream criticism, proving a Shakespearean text need not be missing for its significance to be missed.

⁸³ Jerome McGann, A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 4.

Chapter Two ~ To Imitate the Kyd

Among Shakespeare's greatest early successes was the Henry VI trilogy, a history cycle chronicling England's War of the Roses. The plays were so popular that in 1592 they merited his first public mention as a playwright. Unfortunately, the review was none too favorable. In Robert Greene's Groats-worth of Witte bought with a million of Repentance, the pamphleteer and University Wit blasts Shakespeare in a deathbed diatribe:

Base minded men all three of you, if by my miserie you be not warnd: for vnto none of you (like mee) sought those burre to cleave: those Puppets (I meane) that spake from our mouths, those Anticks garnisht in our colours. Is it not strange that I, to whom they all haue beene beholding: is it not like that you, to whome they all haue beene beholding, shall (were yee in that case as I am now) bee both at once of them forsaken? Yes, trust them not: for there is an vpstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and beeing an absolute *Iohannes fac totum*, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Robert Greene, Groats-worth of Witte, bought with a million of Repentance, ed. G.B. Harrison. (1592; New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1966) 45-46.

There is some dispute about the authorship of this passage,⁸⁵ Shakespeare eliciting jealousy from many of his contemporaries during this time. What follows is the most commonly accepted explanation: Greene had fallen upon hard times, the attack on Shakespeare written during his last illness, probably from the plague, while living in drunken poverty with his prostitute mistress. His resentment was palpable, never having attained the respect of his peers, whom he viewed as his artistic and intellectual inferiors. Eighteenth century critic Edmond Malone imagines the original Henry VI plays were actually of Greene's authorship, the phrase, "beautified with our feathers," alluding to Shakespeare's reworking of Greene's text, specifically, the 1594 and 1595 quartos. Shakespeare stole the dying playwright's last grasp at glory, putting the final nail in his coffin. While later scholars have adopted this theory, Malone's logic is flawed. As explained in his Dissertation, the critic believes that Shakespeare could not have been the author of the original plays because "[c]ertain passages were surely too bad to be the poet's, or bad in the way that Shakespeare never was."⁸⁶ Peter Alexander counters, "Why the works of a writer who boasted a degree from both Universities should have been turned over to an illiterate new-comer is hardly to be understood."⁸⁷ To all but specialists, this is a dead issue. Alexander's conclusion is the more commonly accepted, but his analysis is no more sound than Malone's.

⁸⁵ Katherine Duncan-Jones, Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from his Life (London: Thompson Learning, 2001) 43.

⁸⁶ Peter Martin, Edmond Malone: Shakespearean Scholar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 121.

⁸⁷ Peter Alexander, Introductions to Shakespeare (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1964) 13.

Born a little more than a hundred years after Shakespeare's death, Edmond Malone is an enigmatic and gregarious figure in literary history, the first Shakespearean critic of note. As a researcher and biographer he faced the enormous task of separating fact from fiction in the labyrinth that was eighteenth century Shakespearean lore. In 1778, he set about trying to put Shakespeare's works into chronological order according to composition, a novel idea for the time, but Malone saw it as an integral part of understanding Shakespeare's creative and developmental processes. By concentrating on the early part of Shakespeare's career, Malone examined questions of how and when Shakespeare first began writing for the stage. The early controversy surrounding the Henry VI plays is emblematic of the problems associated with studying the Ur-Hamlet. The question of authorship is paramount to understanding history, but the truth is murky, and facts are hard to come by. Malone does not believe Shakespeare was responsible for the Ur-Hamlet, but unlike his theory regarding the authorship of the Henry VI trilogy, he is far from definitive in his opinion, which he wholeheartedly qualifies.

In the 1821 Variorum Hamlet, Malone's argument is printed posthumously, and retained in the 1877 edition:

It is manifest from [the Menaphon] that some play on the story of Hamlet had been exhibited before the year 1589; but I am inclined to think it was not Shakespeare's drama, but an elder performance on which [...] his

tragedy was formed. [...] Perhaps the original Hamlet was written by Thomas Kyd.⁸⁸

In the same volume of the 1877 Variorum, critic Howard Staunton continues, “the allusion to Hamlet would seem directly leveled at our author’s tragedy. But then interposes a difficulty on the score of dates. Shakespeare, in 1589, was only twenty-three [sic] years old, - too young, it may be well objected, to have earned the distinction of being satirized by Nash as having ‘run through every art’[...].”⁸⁹ Staunton acknowledges that Nashe’s “run through every art” is reminiscent of Greene’s “absolute *Johannes factotum*,” or jack-of-all-trades. In fact, he rejects Shakespeare as the subject of Nashe’s paragraph based on only one fact, which he unfortunately gets wrong. In 1589, the playwright was twenty-five, not twenty-three; perhaps the critic had in mind the earlier date given by Dyce: “It is asserted, too, on good authority that an edition of the Menaphon was published in 1587, and if that earlier copy contained Nash’s Epistle, the probability of his referring to Shakespeare is considerably weakened.”⁹⁰ Although Staunton doubts Shakespeare was the author of the Ur-Hamlet, he interestingly makes no assertion on the part of Kyd.

Some of the scholars quoted in the Variorum argue on behalf of Shakespeare. Taken from his Shakespeare Manual, F.G. Fleay boldly theorizes, “I have little doubt that the early Hamlet of 1589 was written by Shakespeare and Marlowe in conjunction

⁸⁸ Malone 2: 5-6.

⁸⁹ Howard Staunton, appendix, Hamlet: The New Variorum Edition, 2 vols. (1877; New York: Dover Publications, 2000) 2: 7.

[...].”⁹¹ Although Marlowe was possibly Shakespeare’s greatest influence in the beginning stages of his career, this is one of the only instances in which his name figures into the Ur-Hamlet discussion, as Fleay’s theory is not so much dismissed as ignored. C.A. Brown submits that the Ur-Hamlet’s Ghost, a known departure from Belleforest, proves that Shakespeare must have been the author of the early play, for the character “is so important, so wonderful an invention for the dramatic effect of the story, that I cannot imagine it belonged to any but Shakespeare.”⁹² Contrary to Brown, many critics are reluctant to ascribe the creation to Shakespeare, whom they assume must have tempered the part in revision, adding “enormous subtleties that the Ur-Hamlet did not have.”⁹³ These minor quibbles aside, the topic of the Ur-Hamlet in the Variorum is thereafter laid to rest.

Although Thomas Kyd’s authorship of the Ur-Hamlet is far from proven, there is a “practical unanimity of opinion among students of the subject.”⁹⁴ Nearly every scholar who mentions the Ur-Hamlet defaults to this position, prefaced only by the occasional, meek qualifier.

- “[...] unless we are misled by a wellnigh incredible conspiracy of coincidences, Kyd must be the object of Nash's attack, and,

⁹⁰ Staunton 2: 7.

⁹¹ Frederick Gard Fleay, Shakespeare Manual (London: Macmillan and Co., 1878) 41.

⁹² qtd. in Variorum 2: 6.

⁹³ Asimov 2: 101.

⁹⁴ Jack 729.

consequently, the author of the early Hamlet-tragedy to which he derisively alludes.”⁹⁵

- “Kyd may also be the author of an early version of Hamlet [...] the balance of probabilities seems to incline towards Kyd’s having in fact written such a play.”⁹⁶
- “It has been suggested with some plausibility that this early Hamlet was written by Thomas Kyd, author of The Spanish Tragedy.”⁹⁷
- “[The Ur-Hamlet] is usually thought to be the work of Thomas Kyd. It was never published and has not survived.”⁹⁸
- “the reference to ‘whole *Hamlets*’ may suggest that Kyd was the author of the so-called ‘Ur-Hamlet’”⁹⁹
- “it would appear that the source play was written by Kyd or a close imitator of his”¹⁰⁰
- “[...] evidences of Kyd's authorship of it have become practically conclusive.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Frederick S. Boas, ed., introduction, The Works of Thomas Kyd (1901; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955) xlv.

⁹⁶ J.R. Mulryne, ed., introduction, The Spanish Tragedy, by Thomas Kyd (1970; New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1991) xii.

⁹⁷ Chambers, Hamlet viii.

⁹⁸ William F. Hansen, Saxo Grammaticus & the Life of Hamlet: a translation, history, and commentary (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983) 67.

⁹⁹ Charles Nicholl, A Cup of News: The Life of Thomas Nashe (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 52.

¹⁰⁰ Kenneth Muir, Shakespeare’s Sources (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1957) 110.

¹⁰¹ Boas xlix.

- “we cannot justly regard Kyd's authorship of it as anything less than probable”¹⁰²
- “some resemblances [...] suggest that the earlier Hamlet was also Kyd's”¹⁰³
- “innuendo however points to Kyd as the author an earlier Hamlet”¹⁰⁴
- “it seems likely that [Nashe] was here referring to Thomas Kyd”¹⁰⁵
- “probably by Thomas Kyd, the author of The Spanish Tragedie”¹⁰⁶
- “a hypothetical Ur-Hamlet, a lost play written probably by Kyd”¹⁰⁷
- “We know that there was an older play by Thomas Kyd [...]”¹⁰⁸
- “usually thought to be the work of Thomas Kyd”¹⁰⁹
- “written either by Kyd or an imitator of his”¹¹⁰
- “was known to Shakespeare from Kyd”¹¹¹

The crux of the argument that favors Thomas Kyd lies in Nashe's preface to the Menaphon. Malone derived his opinion from the Menaphon, as did Staunton, as do the

¹⁰² Jenkins 84.

¹⁰³ Frye 82.

¹⁰⁴ Bullough 7: 16.

¹⁰⁵ Harrison xxii.

¹⁰⁶ Hudson, Hamlet xv.

¹⁰⁷ Piotr Sadowski, “The Dog's Day in *Hamlet*: A Forgotten Aspect of the Revenge Theme,” Shakespeare and His Contemporaries, eds. Jerzy Limon and Jay L. Halio (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1993) 160.

¹⁰⁸ T.S. Eliot, Elizabethan Essays (New York: Haskell House, 1964) 57.

¹⁰⁹ Hansen 67.

¹¹⁰ Bullough 7: 16.

legions of other critics who have followed in their wake. There is no other external evidence to support Kyd's authorship. Because of one obscure paragraph, scholars have determined Shakespeare was not the original author of his greatest tragedy.

Thomas Nashe, like his friend Robert Greene, was unhappy with the state of the arts. Together they commiserated, writing self-righteous diatribes in lofty language, illustrating their superior education and intellect. As G.B. Harrison quaintly states, "Nashe was a very young man and loved clever obscure writing."¹¹² In particular, Nashe had a grudge against the popular theatre, and the vagaries of common artists who made their living by ransacking the classics for their entertainment value. These lowborn playwrights were so unschooled that they could barely read English, let alone the original language of the texts they reshaped. The bulk of Nashe's preface to the Menaphon is focused on this complaint, a protest against shoddy English-Latin translations, especially the corruption of works by such eminent authors as the Roman tragedian Seneca.¹¹³ Within this context comes a reference to a playwright or playwrights, together with an allusion to "whole Hamlets," and the very cryptic, "to imitate the Kidde in Aesop." This paragraph, published in 1589, but perhaps as early as 1587, is the first contemporary evidence of a "pre-Shakespearean," theatrical Hamlet. Scholars believe it all but proves Thomas Kyd was the author of the early tragedy. Much can be rebutted.

¹¹¹ A. L. Rowse, ed., introduction, Hamlet, by William Shakespeare, The Annotated Shakespeare (1978; New York: Greenwich House, Crown Publishers, Inc., 1988) 1725.

¹¹² Harrison xxii.

¹¹³ Jack 746.

Rather than being an obstacle, the density of the passage has only served to pique scholars' curiosity, as they tirelessly scan every line for its potential significance, glomming on to such phrases as "noverint," "intermeddle with Italian translations," "ifs and ands," and "English Seneca." The most potent connection is the apparent pun on Kyd's name, but even this poses its own unique set of problems, not the least of which is the accuracy of the allusion. Critics point to Nashe's emphasis on Seneca, and Kyd's highly derivative use of the revenge model. However, as Malone illustrated centuries ago, the chronology of events is paramount. Above all, critics must prove Nashe had only one figure in mind, a difficult task when, throughout the passage, he employs the plural. The vague description then must be made to fit the person of Kyd better than any other. Could a "Kidde" by any other name have written such play? That is the question.

According to Nashe, the mysterious playwright (or playwrights) left "the trade of Nouerint, whereto they were borne." While not much is known about Kyd's personal life, his father was a lawyer, or "noverint," and therefore the dramatist may justly be said to have been born into that profession, although from "the few scraps of legal jargon in The Spanish Tragedy and Soliman and Perseda we can infer no more than that Thomas was his father's son."¹⁴ Unfortunately, the reference is all but meaningless, "noverint" being a generic term used in Elizabethan times to denote any sort of clerk or lowly scribe. Even if Nashe did mean to imply that the author of the Ur-Hamlet worked in law, this proves nothing, for Shakespeare has long been supposed to have had a legal background,

judging from The Merchant of Venice, Measure for Measure, and even Hamlet: “There’s another; why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddits now, his quilletts, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks [...]”¹¹⁵ London society at the turn of the seventeenth century was nothing if not litigious; most of what is known about Shakespeare’s life derives from the various lawsuits and court documents he filed. The fact that Kyd’s father was a lawyer is not enough evidence to link him to the Menaphon, or to justify preferring him to Shakespeare.

Nashe’s comment that these “famisht followers” of Seneca “intermeddle[d] with Italian translations” has led to the obvious conclusion that the subject of Nashe’s diatribe translated Italian, which Kyd did. “Unless or until this piece of evidence is explained away, Kyd’s claim to the original Hamlet must be considered to have the preference.”¹¹⁶ Like most of the paragraph, however, the reference is vague, and may be easily dismissed. “That Kyd knew Italian and translated it is admitted by all. This fact by itself proves little, because Italian was so generally known by literary people of the time [...]”¹¹⁷ True, Shakespeare never translated Italian, but certainly, the playwright intermeddled with English translations thereof, for “Italian influences [...] were from the start powerful with the bard of Avon,”¹¹⁸ perhaps holding even more sway than Latin.

¹¹⁴ Arthur Freeman, Thomas Kyd: Facts and Problems (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) 12.

¹¹⁵ Shakespeare, Hamlet 1: 386-387.

¹¹⁶ M.W. McCallum, “The Authorship of the Early Hamlet,” An English Miscellany (1901; New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969) 295.

¹¹⁷ Jack 737.

¹¹⁸ Jack 748.

Nashe's low opinion of his subject is illustrated in his biting remark, "Sufficeth them to bodge up a blanke verse with ifs and ands." Searching for a relevant parallel, Sarrazin believes Nashe's insult stems from the following two snatches of dialogue The Spanish Tragedy.¹¹⁹

And with that sword he fiercely waged war,
 And in that war he gave me dangerous wounds,
 And by those wounds he forced me to yield,
 And by yielding I became his slave.¹²⁰

If love's effects so strives in lesser things,
 If love enforce such moods in meaner wits,
 If love express such power in poor estates [...].¹²¹

As perhaps an even more pertinent example, Schick and Boas cite The Spanish Tragedy's second-act line "What, villaine, ifs and ands."¹²² Regardless of which extract scholars prefer, Nashe's jibe seems entirely applicable to Kyd. However, some believe the connection is erroneous. Prominent critic, George Ian Duthie states, "each [quote submitted by the aforementioned scholars and others] exemplifies an intentional rhetorical device,"¹²³ most specifically not "bodging." Albert E. Jack concurs, "Surely no

¹¹⁹ Jack 738.

¹²⁰ Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy, ed. Simon Trussler (1997; London: Nick Hern Books, 1999) 25.

¹²¹ Kyd 70.

¹²² Jack 738.

¹²³ Duthie 70.

one can reasonably assent to the contention that [...] we have a clear reference to the Spanish Tragedy when those making the contention do not agree as to what line or lines the words refer to.”¹²⁴

Although Shakespeare’s Hamlet is “admittedly not directly based on any play of Seneca,”¹²⁵ it is no doubt indebted to the Roman archetype for its style and structure.¹²⁶ Scholars believe the lost play was perhaps even more so. Nashe’s association of “whole Hamlets” with “English Seneca” naturally leads to this conclusion, yet it is no great stretch of the imagination. Seneca was a tragedian from the time of Christ, but his work was of profound influence to the playwrights of the Elizabethan stage, introducing, among other contributions, the five-act division.¹²⁷ Although critics consider Seneca’s plays more as literature than performance pieces, the playwright’s theatricality is undeniable, the stereotypical Senecan revenge tragedy chock-a-block with action: murder, insanity, ghosts, revenge, blood, and gore. Thomas Kyd’s most famous drama, The Spanish Tragedy, also called Hieronimo, is highly indebted to the Roman model,¹²⁸ as was probably the early Hamlet, featuring a plot “of the bloody, melodramatic type which Kyd had rendered popular in Hieronimo.”¹²⁹ Kyd, as a playwright who “had Seneca’s dramas at his fingers’ ends,”¹³⁰ is a natural candidate for the type of

¹²⁴ Jack 738.

¹²⁵ Duthie 62.

¹²⁶ Adams 303.

¹²⁷ T.S. Eliot, Elizabethan Dramatists (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1963) 27.

¹²⁸ Freeman 65.

¹²⁹ Adams 303.

¹³⁰ Boas xvii.

condescension evinced by Nashe. Scholars who favor Kyd's authorship easily make the connection between the two, but it is not the complete picture.

Kyd and Seneca differed "in their dissimilar attitudes to revenge."¹³¹ T.S. Eliot in his Elizabethan Dramatists elaborates:

The most significant popular play under Senecan influence is of course The Spanish Tragedy [...]. [...] But in The Spanish Tragedy there is another element, not always sufficiently distinguished from the Senecan, which [...] allies it to something more indigenous. [...] The Spanish Tragedy, like the series of Hamlet plays, including Shakespeare's, has an affinity to our contemporary detective drama. The plot of Hieronimo to compass his revenge by the play allies it with a small but interesting class of drama which certainly owes nothing essential to Seneca [...]."¹³²

Eliot's comment is notable for he, like other critics, allies The Spanish Tragedy with Hamlet, but in doing so, he suggests a deeper commonality rooted in "something more indigenous" to the Elizabethan theatre scene. Like the Ur-Hamlet, The Spanish Tragedy is theoretically based on a non-extant source, a "lost romance,"¹³³ yet, on a fundamental level, the influences shaping the play's development are too countless and complex to trace back to a single, literary origin. One of the defining characteristics of The Spanish Tragedy "is its lack of reliance on a simple narrative source. [...] Kyd drew on so many

¹³¹ Howard Baker, Induction to Tragedy (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1939) 117.

¹³² Eliot, Dramatists 29-30.

¹³³ Freeman 50.

uncorrelated writings in forging his play that the frame story itself is nearly lost in accretions and various details.”¹³⁴ The Senecan influence is hardly cause for comment. It proves nothing in regards to the identity of Nashe’s target, for the “most we can say is that those whom [Nashe] is attacking wrote Senecan dramas, and so did Kyd.”¹³⁵ So did Marlowe. So did Shakespeare. So did every Elizabethan playwright, as “scarcely a dramatic contemporary of Kyd’s escaped the Senecan influence.”¹³⁶ Emblematic of the half-truths the Menaphon engenders is Malone’s early statement, “Shakespeare [...] does not appear at all indebted to Seneca; and therefore I do not believe that he was the person in Nash’s contemplation.”¹³⁷ Malone neglects to mention Titus Andronicus, a work that Geoffrey Bullough in his Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare: Volume VII terms “ultra-Seneca[n].”¹³⁸ In conclusion, it is necessary to note that the passage in the Menaphon ridicules playwrights who are “unable to read Seneca in the original,”¹³⁹ videlicet, they “could scarcely latinize their necke-verse if they should haue neede,” requiring English translations. Kyd used “his Seneca thoroughly in the original,”¹⁴⁰ a fact glossed over by scholars, who excuse the discrepancy as Nashe’s “scurrilous depreciation of his rival’s classical attainments.”¹⁴¹ Either Nashe is “stretching a satirist’s license to its

¹³⁴ Freeman 50.

¹³⁵ Duthie 67.

¹³⁶ Jack 737.

¹³⁷ Malone 2: 6.

¹³⁸ Bullough 7: 59.

¹³⁹ Frederick Gard Fleay, A Chronicle History of the Life and Work of William Shakespeare (London, 1886) 119.

¹⁴⁰ Boas xlv.

¹⁴¹ Boas xlvi.

limits,”¹⁴² or “these words are so far from true that Nash cannot here be speaking of Kyd.”¹⁴³ In this instance, Nashe’s criticism is far more applicable to Shakespeare, who, as more poet than pedant, was “a very careless student of literature.”¹⁴⁴

So far, Nashe’s description fits Kyd’s profile, but could be made to suit many others as well. To narrow the focus on Kyd, scholars rely on Nashe’s phrase, “*Seneca* let bloud line by line and page by page, at length must needs die to our stage: which makes his famisht followers to imitate the Kidde in *AEsop*, who enamored with the Foxes new fangles, forsooke all hopes of life to leape into a new occupation [...]” The significance is difficult to ascertain. For years, scholars searched for the origin in Aesop, but to no avail. They now believe the reference to “Kidde” stems from the May Eclogue in Edmund Spencer’s Shepherd’s Calender:¹⁴⁵

Tho out of his packe a glasse he tooke:
Wherein while kiddie vnawares did looke,
He was so enamored with the newell,
That nought he deemed deare for the iewell.¹⁴⁶

Because it is such a clumsy allusion, there is absolutely no consensus as to Nashe’s meaning. As explained by Duthie, Osterberg, in his highly influential Studier over Hamlet-teksterne, believes the awkwardness of the connection proves Nashe was

¹⁴² Boas xlv.

¹⁴³ Jack 740.

¹⁴⁴ Brooke, Shakespeare 140.

¹⁴⁵ Bullough 7: 16.

reaching for pun on Kyd's name,¹⁴⁷ a satisfactory explanation for most scholars, who have sought little reason to question further. Kydian editor, J. Schick, states that “this is indeed, I think, calling things by their names; surely Nash points here with his very finger to the person of Kyd.”¹⁴⁸ Harold Jenkins, who is untroubled by the lack of a definitive reference, concurs, believing Nashe’s equivocation to be a function of his satirical vein: “Of course Nashe never says that it is Kyd who is the object of his ridicule; but [...] it would surely be naïve to assume that what is not literally spelled out is therefore not implied.”¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Kyd’s own leading biographer remains unconvinced, declaring that the pun, “taken alone, is insufficient to attach the whole passage and its reproaches to Thomas Kyd.”¹⁵⁰ Other critics agree. The identification “must stand or fall by the allusion,”¹⁵¹ but “if, however, nothing unmistakably in the context points to Kyd, there is nothing in the words ‘the Kidde in Aesop’ to give the slightest reason for thinking here Nash's mind was on Kyd.”¹⁵² To wit, the accuracy of the pun is entirely dependent upon other substantiating factors, such as the link to “noverint,” all of which have been demonstrated to be highly inconclusive.

¹⁴⁶ Edmund Spenser, *The Shepherd's Calender*, ed. W. L. Renwick (London: The Scholartis Press, 1930) 70.

¹⁴⁷ Duthie 73-75.

¹⁴⁸ Schick, J., ed, *The Spanish Tragedy*, by Thomas Kyd (London: J.M. Dent and Co., 1898) xi.

¹⁴⁹ Jenkins 84.

¹⁵⁰ Freeman 43.

¹⁵¹ Duthie 71.

¹⁵² Jack 736.

Counter to the emphasis placed on Kyd, Nashe plainly refers to a *group* of writers “who shared to a certain extent the same characteristics.”¹⁵³ While some believe Nashe’s “use of the plural [...] is evidently a mere rhetorical device,”¹⁵⁴ even those who support Kyd admit “the ridicule is, ostensible at least, not of one man but of a class of writers.”¹⁵⁵ Harold Bloom imagines Nashe’s diatribe arose from a general resentment shared by the University Wits towards what the critic calls “the School of Marlowe, comprising Marlowe, Shakespeare and Kyd.”¹⁵⁶ Freeman surmises a “socio-artistic split in the eighties between the self-educated artisans of the drama like Kyd and Shakespeare and the college men like Nashe, Marlowe, and Greene.”¹⁵⁷ By aligning Marlowe with Nashe and Greene, Freeman narrows the most likely candidate or candidates to either Kyd or Shakespeare, or both. If Nashe had a particular grudge against Kyd, he had no reason to be so roundabout.

The Menaphon would surely have been lost to history were it not for the controversy surrounding the Ur-Hamlet. Cunliffe believes the paragraph illustrates two important points: “(1) Nash had a dramatist or dramatists in mind in this paragraph; (2) it is perfectly clear that Nash knew of a Hamlet drama, and this paragraph does throw some light upon its authorship.”¹⁵⁸ On this question of authorship, however, Cunliffe is strikingly silent, offering no theories for or against. In truth, scholarship by and large

¹⁵³ Duthie 57.

¹⁵⁴ Boas xx.

¹⁵⁵ Jenkins 84.

¹⁵⁶ Bloom, Shakespeare 395-396.

¹⁵⁷ Freeman 47.

ignored Kyd until the discovery of the Menaphon, the reference to the Ur-Hamlet contained therein hearkening the little known playwright's resurrection:

For some reason, the dramatist Kyd almost entirely dropped out of public notice during the 17th and 18th centuries. [...] It was one of the achievements of 19th century scholarship to restore Kyd to his place among the great Elizabethan dramatists. In this restoration, a single paragraph from Nash's prefatory Epistle to Greene's Menaphon has played a conspicuous role.¹⁵⁹

The emphasis placed on the Menaphon is an example of "a reversed order of logic."¹⁶⁰

Freeman, Kyd's leading biographer, continues, "I would not wish to use Nashe's preface alone to establish the authorship of Shakespeare's source."¹⁶¹

Thomas Kyd was not an extraordinarily renowned playwright, but his popular success with The Spanish Tragedy must have impacted the young man from Stratford. Direct echoes of The Spanish Tragedy may be found in a few of Shakespeare's plays, including 3 Henry VI, Much Ado About Nothing, and The Taming of the Shrew.¹⁶²

Arthur Freeman extols The Spanish Tragedy's symbolic use of stage areas, heralding Kyd as the first playwright to realize "the full theatrical potential of a fundamentally

¹⁵⁸ Cunliffe 199.

¹⁵⁹ Jack 729.

¹⁶⁰ Freeman 42.

¹⁶¹ Freeman 42.

¹⁶² Freeman 132.

elementary stage.”¹⁶³ This innovation may be seen in Titus Andronicus as well as Hamlet, which are both extremely imaginative in their emblematic entrances and exits. However, in order to judge the exact nature of Kyd’s influence on Shakespeare, there must be no doubt that The Spanish Tragedy came before both Titus Andronicus and the early Hamlet; otherwise the impact would be the reverse. Understanding the timeline is critical. Unfortunately, the “sole source of external evidence for many of the supposed facts of Kyd’s life,”¹⁶⁴ is the Menaphon, another bit of reversed logic.

Scholarship is sorely lacking in regard to Thomas Kyd, and the significance of his works has been arguably overstated. In truth, Kyd is a bit player about which very little is known; “references to Kyd personally are few, no more than two of which [...] fall before his death.”¹⁶⁵ The paucity of research on his life contrasts mightily with the emphasis granted him in the Ur-Hamlet debate. Although rarely discussed, even Kyd’s claim to The Spanish Tragedy, his most popular play, is still essentially in doubt, not having been recognized until more than a hundred and fifty years after his death, when, in 1773, Thomas Hawkins names Kyd as author based on a reference in Thomas Heywood’s 1612 Apology for Actors, which assigns the play to a “M. Kid.”¹⁶⁶ Edmond Malone confirms the “only tragedy to which Kyd’s name is affixed [is] (Cornelia).”¹⁶⁷ Freeman states ironically that it is “characteristic of the career of Thomas Kyd that his major

¹⁶³ Freeman 115.

¹⁶⁴ Jack 732.

¹⁶⁵ Freeman 39.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Heywood, An Apology for Actors: Containing three briefe Treatises (1612; London: The Shakespeare Society, 1841) 45.

surviving work remained unattributed to him during his own era.”¹⁶⁸ The critic is surprisingly unruffled, admitting that there is no “external evidence whatever of Kyd's authorship,”¹⁶⁹ excepting a mid-seventeenth century bookseller's attribution:

We have no record of any English printing of Kyd's play between 1633 and Dodsley (1744), but the booksellers continued to hawk it. [...] Archer's catalogue of 1656 lists the play twice: 'Hieronimo, both parts/H[istory]/Will. Shakespeare', and 'Spanish Tragedye/T[ragedy]/Tho. Kyte'. Archer's latter attribution, although perhaps offset by his flyer on Shakespeare, is the sole seventeenth-century corroboration of Heywood on the authorship, and has gone curiously unremarked.¹⁷⁰

As Freeman suggests, of particular note is the bookseller's attribution of Hieronimo to Shakespeare. The confusion is justified, for playwrights other than Thomas Kyd are known to have had a hand in the development of the play. According to Henslowe's diary, The Spanish Tragedy was revived “ne” thirteen times in 1597, signifying something new about the production; in 1601, Henslowe records advance payments to Ben Jonson “vpon hn writtinge of his adicians in geronymo,” for additions he allegedly made thereafter.¹⁷¹ As the success of Hamlet brought about repeated publications, so too with The Spanish Tragedy: “Between 1592 and 1633 nine separate

¹⁶⁷ Malone 2: 6.

¹⁶⁸ Freeman 49.

¹⁶⁹ Freeman 49.

¹⁷⁰ Freeman 119-120.

¹⁷¹ Freeman 122.

editions of The Spanish Tragedy remain to us, testimony to the enormous popularity of the play in its own day.”¹⁷² Complicating the matter of the play’s spotty textual history is the existence of a lost companion piece, not to be confused with the “lost romance,” contemporarily referred to as the “spanes commodye.” Scholars believe relics of this non-extant play are to be found within First Part of Jeronimo published in 1605.¹⁷³ Freeman conjectures that the ‘spanes commodye’ was “a comedy (possibly slapstick) predicated on the tragedy,”¹⁷⁴ composed in order to profit on the popularity of the tragedy. The lost play is anonymous.

In sum, scholars believe Thomas Kyd was the author of the Ur-Hamlet for two reasons: he is the supposed subject of the eighth paragraph of Nashe’s preface to the Menaphon; he is the author of The Spanish Tragedy, a revenge drama similar in plot and structure to Hamlet. Neither reason is substantive enough to withstand scrutiny. Ignoring the evidence that many playwrights contributed to The Spanish Tragedy, the relationship of The Spanish Tragedy to Hamlet is enormously difficult to define. A third companion piece, Titus Andronicus, complicates things further. As for the positive identification of Kyd with Nashe’s bit of obscure writing, Nashe plainly uses the plural; he has a particular group of dramatists in mind, and his descriptions may apply to any one of them; among the more likely members of this group are Thomas Kyd and William Shakespeare. Scholars favor Thomas Kyd, but for no discernable, rational reason, even

¹⁷² Freeman 117.

¹⁷³ Freeman 176-177.

¹⁷⁴ Freeman 177.

ignoring evidence that suggests Kyd was probably not the author. In 1594, three new plays were added to the Lord Chamberlain's Men's roster: The Taming of the Shrew, Titus Andronicus, and Hamlet: "at no time did the company stage The Spanish Tragedy, or anything else by Kyd."¹⁷⁵ Indeed, at no time did the company stage anything by the name of "Ur-Hamlet."

The justification for preferring Kyd to Shakespeare is predicated on bias. This is the result of a number of factors, not the least of which is the Ur- Hamlet's undeservedly poor reputation among critics as "terribly overdone,"¹⁷⁶ a "shabby old melodrama."¹⁷⁷ Tucker Brooke mourns the loss of the source play, "a shoddy piece of work,"¹⁷⁸ but admits that its "well merited oblivion"¹⁷⁹ was perhaps a deserved fate. According to the orthodox view, the author of such a melodrama was probably no more than a second-rate hack, "a cribber of 'tragical speeches' from Seneca."¹⁸⁰ This certainly does not fit with the vision of the greatest poet in the English language. Fortunately, the scenario has a happy ending, as Shakespeare "as usual, knew what he was doing. It was not the first time he had used shoddy material as the springboard for a play."¹⁸¹ The playwright made the old work new again, more relevant and topical, "modern to his generation."¹⁸² In his

¹⁷⁵ Bloom, Shakespeare 398.

¹⁷⁶ Asimov 2: 100-101.

¹⁷⁷ Marchette Chute, Shakespeare of London (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company Inc., 1949) 227.

¹⁷⁸ Tucker Brooke, ed., introduction, Hamlet, by William Shakespeare, Shakespeare's Principal Plays, eds. Tucker Brooke, John William Cunliffe, and Henry Noble MacCracken. (1914; New York: The Century Co., 1924) 484.

¹⁷⁹ Brooke, Hamlet 484.

¹⁸⁰ Matus 146-147.

¹⁸¹ Chute 228.

¹⁸² Harrison xxviii.

revision, Shakespeare surely borrowed elements of the source play; Chambers thinks much was retained. In this, he allows the author of the early work quite a bit of credit, although not the genius of Shakespeare:

Probably [Shakespeare] kept the framework of the plot, including the ghost, the play within a play, and the somewhat sanguinary final scene. Shakespeare was careful never to invent his own plots; his art lay rather in using old bottles to contain his quite new wine. But the dialogue, the characters, the psychological motive - these are his and his alone, and it is in these that the greatness of Hamlet lies.¹⁸³

If Shakespeare did not invent the plot of Hamlet, then some other playwright, one who wrote mediocre revenge tragedies, did. Thomas Kyd becomes the perfect stooge. His Spanish Tragedy, seen as the precursor to Hamlet, provides the final proof, but, again, critics' logic is reversed.

The first recorded performance of The Spanish Tragedy occurred on March 14, 1592, but, based on its attitude towards Spain, the play is probably pre-Armada, or 1588.¹⁸⁴ Critics such as G.B. Harrison¹⁸⁵ and Joseph Quincy Adams¹⁸⁶ imply that the popularity of The Spanish Tragedy brought about the Ur-Hamlet, yet this order of events is far from a foregone conclusion. Most critics, regardless of their convictions vis-à-vis authorship, prefer the opposite scenario. Orthodox critic and proponent of Kyd, Harold

¹⁸³ Chambers, Hamlet viii.

¹⁸⁴ Freeman 76-77.

¹⁸⁵ Harrison xxii.

Jenkins believes that “without the Ur-Hamlet, The Spanish Tragedy might not have been possible.”¹⁸⁷ Unorthodox critic and proponent of Shakespeare, Harold Bloom agrees, “The more rational supposition is that Shakespeare's first Hamlet influenced The Spanish Tragedy, and that any effect of Kyd's squalid melodrama on the mature Hamlet was merely Shakespeare's taking back of what initially had been his own.”¹⁸⁸ Adding to the confusion, Adams observes how The Spanish Tragedy was revised over the years, most specifically not by Kyd: “One must not confuse the ‘additions’ to Hieronimo, or, as it is now called, The Spanish Tragedy, with the work of Kyd. The additions represent Hieronimo as really mad, and show, I think, the influence of Shakespeare's popular revision of Hamlet.”¹⁸⁹ Thus, Shakespeare’s revision of an anonymous author’s Hamlet prompts an anonymous revision of The Spanish Tragedy. Ultimately, the relationship is so symbiotic that it “is impossible to define.”¹⁹⁰

The close connection between The Spanish Tragedy and Hamlet may in fact suggest that they were not of the same authorship. The manner in which Hamlet “even as it emerges in Shakespeare's revision, copies the famous Hieronimo, at times echoing its phraseology, suggests that it might have been a slavish imitation of Kyd rather than an original work by that versatile author.”¹⁹¹ Freeman concurs, “Reflections of The Spanish

¹⁸⁶ Adams 120.

¹⁸⁷ Jenkins 97.

¹⁸⁸ Bloom, Shakespeare 398.

¹⁸⁹ Adams 303.

¹⁹⁰ Bullough 7: 17.

¹⁹¹ Adams 303.

Tragedy in Shakespeare's plays fall more toward imitation than parody.”¹⁹²

Reverberating with Nashe’s “to imitate the Kidde,” this insight may actually prove closer to Nashe’s meaning than the current interpretation, such as it is. Late nineteenth century scholar, Morgan Appleton published a full reconstruction of the Ur-Hamlet in 1908 entitled, Hamlet and the Ur-Hamlet: The Text of the Second Quarto of 1604, with a conjectural Text of the alleged Kyd Hamlet preceding it. In his Introduction, even he confesses, “I really cannot see any reason for calling it Kyd's save the above noted resemblance of the plot to the plot of one of Kyd's plays, which to me seems rather a reason were one needed, against his authorship [...]”¹⁹³

The two plays have as much in common with one another as they both have with Titus Andronicus, a work that may prove an even more apt point of comparison. Titus Andronicus is the third tone in the triad: all three plays were composed in the same era; all shared the stage during the early 1590s; all feature a tale of revenge; all are of disputed authorship; all are disparaged by critics; all were wildly popular. In 1614, Ben Jonson ridicules the fans of such plays, satirically commenting, “He that will swear Jeronimo or Andronicus are the best plays yet, shall pass unexcepted at, here, as a man whose judgment shows it is constant, and hath stood still, these five-and-twenty, or thirty years.”¹⁹⁴ Scholars link the three plays in discussion. Chambers writes, “There was certainly an earlier Hamlet, probably by another hand, which one may think of as a

¹⁹² Freeman 131-132.

¹⁹³ Morgan xxi.

¹⁹⁴ Ben Jonson, Bartholomew Fair, ed. E. A. Horsman (1614; London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1960) 11.

sufficiently crude piece, pulsating with blood and revenge, in the manner of The Spanish Tragedy and Titus Andronicus.”¹⁹⁵ The interrelationship between the three plays is further demonstrated by the supposed existence of a lost “Andronicus,” like the Ur-Hamlet, thought to have been authored by Thomas Kyd, but the basis of this theory “rests wholly upon speculation, and the basis of the speculation is no more than (1) parallelism in the plots of Andronicus, Hamlet, and The Spanish Tragedy, (2) a few rather puzzling verbal coincidences, which have a non-Shakespearian ring, and (3) a few scraps of evidence”¹⁹⁶ such as the above quote from Ben Jonson. Freeman avoids the debate “because these are essentially Shakespearian questions.”¹⁹⁷

Shakespeare’s authorship of Titus Andronicus has been the subject of much debate. The quarto version is anonymous. “Frances Meres attributed Titus to Shakespeare and that, followed by the verdict of Heminge and Condell, who admitted the play to the First Folio, is strong testimony.”¹⁹⁸ However, many scholars have their doubts. Frederick Gard Fleay writes, “That this play is not by Shakespeare is pretty certain from internal evidence.”¹⁹⁹ Titus Andronicus has the regrettable reputation as being Shakespeare’s worst work, a “blood-boltered melodrama”²⁰⁰ that is “one of the

¹⁹⁵ E.K. Chambers, Shakespeare: A Survey, rpt. of var. essays, 1904-1908, preface by E.K. Chambers, 1925 (1958; New York: Hill and Wang, 1962) 183.

¹⁹⁶ Freeman 175.

¹⁹⁷ Freeman xiii.

¹⁹⁸ Ivor Brown, Shakespeare (1949; New York: Time, Inc., 1962) 160.

¹⁹⁹ Fleay, Chronicle History 280.

²⁰⁰ Brown 160.

stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written.”²⁰¹ Early scholarship rejected it entirely: “The play is nothing more than a series of scenes of licentiousness and murder, and many devotees of Shakespeare are loud in their insistence that he had nothing to do with it, or at most merely polished up the verse.”²⁰² Victorian critics saw Titus Andronicus’s extreme violence as an affront to morality and were “anxious to find grounds for devaluing its place in Shakespeare’s career or even dismissing it from the canon of his works altogether.”²⁰³ If Shakespeare contributed anything to the piece, it was in the more lyrical scenes; Ivor Brown submits, “He left his mark amid the carnage.”²⁰⁴

Some scholars are more generous in their estimation of Titus Andronicus, though their enthusiasm is oftentimes lacking. In generous fashion, Barrett Wendell states that, when read in isolation, Titus Andronicus “does not seem so bad.”²⁰⁵ Critics’ distaste for Titus Andronicus is such that they surmise Shakespeare’s ulterior, financial motivations, the play being a “great money-maker for his company,”²⁰⁶ an “exercise [...] that Shakespeare, inexperienced as he was, could not take seriously except from the angle of box-office returns.”²⁰⁷ A.C. Bradley begrudgingly concedes “even if Shakespeare wrote the whole of it, he did so before he had either a style of his own or any characteristic

²⁰¹ Eliot, Dramatists 31-32.

²⁰² [Walter J. Black, ed.], The Complete Works of William Shakespeare with Themes of the Plays (New York: Walter J. Black, Inc., 1937) xxvii.

²⁰³ Jonathan Bate, ed., introduction, Titus Andronicus, by William Shakespeare (1995; Walton-on-Thames Surrey, UK: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd, 1997) 3.

²⁰⁴ Brown 160.

²⁰⁵ Wendell 67.

tragic conception.”²⁰⁸ Given that Titus Andronicus was written at the outset of playwright’s career, Bradley’s statement seems obvious: naturally Shakespeare had not yet attained the dramatic power of his later years. As an apprentice piece, Collier maintains that many of the play’s passages “are remarkable indications of skill and power in an unpractised dramatist,”²⁰⁹ yet the scholar grants that Shakespeare’s authorship of the play may only exist in a “qualified sense.”²¹⁰

The haste with which critics dismiss the authenticity of Titus Andronicus is not in line with the facts. The play may not be wholly Shakespearean, but there are others that are just as questionable, which do not receive half the abuse. Disturbed by the play’s wanton violence, rash critics prefer to excuse such qualities as the work of another hand, rather than investigate how the drama fits within the broader spectrum of Shakespeare’s career. Such is the folly of “bardolatry,” a condition first identified by George Bernard Shaw. He meant the term as an ironic slur, but such critics as Harold Bloom make no excuses: “Bardolatry [...] seems to me only another name for authentic response to Shakespeare.”²¹¹ E.K. Chambers nicely elucidates the phenomenon. The context of the following paragraph stems from a discussion on the disputed authorship of Titus Andronicus, which Chambers accepts as genuine.

²⁰⁶ Adams 135.

²⁰⁷ Anthony Burgess, Shakespeare (1970; Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, Ivan R. Dee Inc., 1994) 91.

²⁰⁸ A.C. Bradley, introduction, Shakespearean Tragedy, by Bradley (1904; New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1959) 14.

²⁰⁹ Collier n.pag.

²¹⁰ Collier n.pag.

²¹¹ Harold Bloom, Hamlet: Poem Unlimited (New York : Riverhead Books, 2003) 7.

A survey of the accumulated literature on the subject is disconcerting, in the evidence which it affords of the small extent to which literary history [...] has come into contact with the scientific spirit. [...] [Shakespearean critics] have generally started from a sentiment; either the sentiment of conservatism, which resents the questioning even of a literary tradition as a dangerous disturbance of the foundation of things; or the sentiment of what may be called Shakespeareolatry, which resents the ascription to ‘our Shakespeare’ of anything which the sentimentalist chooses to consider unworthy work, as being of the nature of an insult to his genius.²¹²

One facet of bardolatry is the tendency towards “rhetorical absolutism,”²¹³ a term coined by Laurie E. Maguire in Shakespearean Suspect Texts. It is a righteousness coupled with paranoia; afflicted scholars are resistant to change, resistant to outside views, resistant to process, resistant to anything bad, even if it belongs to the playwright.

In determining the authorship of Titus Andronicus or the Ur-Hamlet, the question of “worthiness” becomes paramount, as scholars will not admit any writings into the canon deemed undeserving. This naturally predisposes them against certain controversial works, such as Titus Andronicus. To discredit the legitimacy of such on the basis of so little is erroneous in the extreme. It is a mode of thinking that constrains the inimitability of Shakespeare by placing him in an aesthetic box not of his own device, furthering the

²¹² Chambers, Shakespeare 32-33.

²¹³ Laurie E. Maguire, Shakespearean Suspect Texts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 87.

notion of a preternatural genius, but not allowing for growth as an artist. The mood is shifting. Shakespearean authorship of Titus Andronicus has now been satisfactorily settled, and indeed, much of the current criticism has been favorably revisionist in its estimation of the early piece. Bloom champions its innate post-modernism, believing “it prophesies [...] Artaud.”²¹⁴ Having witnessed Peter Brook’s famed production, calling it “among the five greatest theatrical experiences of my life,”²¹⁵ Jan Kott is loud in his praise as he highlights the great theatricality of the piece, elaborating that what may seem laughable on the page can be thrilling for an audience. The illiterate groundlings of the Rose Theatre would no doubt have agreed, rape, dismemberment, cannibalism, hand chopping and all.

The squeamish Victorian reaction to Titus Andronicus is understandable; the play is neither for prurient tastes nor sensitive stomachs. More perplexing is scholars’ rejection of the Ur-Hamlet, ostensibly on similar grounds. The one illuminates the other. As MacCallum notes, those scholars “who attribute Titus Andronicus to Shakespeare, will find no intrinsic difficulty in the supposition that he may also about the same date have written a Hamlet in Kyd’s manner, ferocious, over-strained, vengeful [...]”²¹⁶ The “glint in the eye of the maker of Titus Andronicus isn’t altogether extinguished in Hamlet,”²¹⁷ for like Titus Andronicus, “Hamlet is a magnificently constructed piece of melodrama, with enough blood and pageantry and swordplay to please the sleepest ten-

²¹⁴ Bloom, Shakespeare 83.

²¹⁵ Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary (1964; New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1974) 353.

²¹⁶ McCallum 285.

year-old.”²¹⁸ Shakespeare’s great tragedies, Othello, Macbeth, King Lear, and Hamlet, all share this quality: “Until we understand that there is an aspect in which these great tragedies and this grotesque Titus Andronicus may rationally be grouped together, we shall not understand the Elizabethan theatre.”²¹⁹

Critics’ derogatory attitude towards the Ur-Hamlet is unwarranted and suggestive of a larger issue. While commonly cited as justification, the disparaging remarks of Nashe and Lodge are not substantial proof of anything. Ridicule was common currency among Elizabethan dramatists and pamphleteers, all trying to outdo one another with wit and verbosity; Nashe, in particular, was no exception. “No one has thought it worth while to suggest any motive, plausible or otherwise, for Nash's concealing his personal opinion of Kyd. Certainly it was not his own native reserve nor over-sensitiveness at the pain he might cause another.”²²⁰ Kyd suffered his own brand of humiliation for The Spanish Tragedy, for no play’s prologue endured “so many parodies or travesties as Andrea’s [;] but we should not be led to believe that Kyd's contemporaries and successors found Andrea's lines altogether ridiculous in themselves.”²²¹ Freeman believes it was “an undirected spoof on an extremely familiar passage.”²²²

Likewise, the contemporary ridicule of the Ur-Hamlet is no more than a sign of the play’s success; the early Hamlet was popular enough to be satirized. Even the phrase

²¹⁷ Bloom, Poem Unlimited 55.

²¹⁸ Chute 229.

²¹⁹ Wendell 69.

²²⁰ Jack 733.

²²¹ Freeman 80.

“Hamlet revenge!” jokingly used by Shakespeare’s fellow playwrights “bespeaks the original popularity and perhaps even the post-Shakespearian currency of a pre-Shakespearian Hamlet.”²²³ While some believe “Shakespeare's work would not be ridiculed by his own company in his own theatre”²²⁴ as in Dekker’s Satiromastix, Rowse submits this rivalry was all “no doubt good box-office, as Shakespeare hints; so we must not take it too seriously, any more than he did.”²²⁵ Regardless, observer’s opinions are subjective and indicative of little; this is demonstrated by the ever-changing attitudes towards Titus Andronicus, incidentally, the playwright’s greatest box office success. In addition, if by Shakespeare, the early Hamlet would be a nascent effort on the part of the playwright. As such, its artistic deficiencies, whatever they might be, must be excused as part of the author’s developmental process. The 1589 Hamlet was probably a very different play than the version that is now extant, but this is no cause for rejection. Henri Fluchere eloquently divides the two eras.

In this first period there are no soliloquies, like Hamlet’s, in which questions are asked and dilemmas appear insoluble: ‘to be or not to be’ [...]. Whether it be Kyd's Spanish Tragedy (?1589), Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus (1592), or Marlowe's Jew of Malta (?1590), the climate is the same: that of a world where violence knows no fetters, where passions are

²²² Freeman 80.

²²³ Freeman 174.

²²⁴ Duthie 77.

²²⁵ Rowse, Hamlet 1726.

wild beasts, decked out with no unwonted graces, where action is held up by obstacles only to be precipitated the more violently.²²⁶

According to the Principle of Parsimony, the simplest explanation to a phenomenon is usually the most correct. Barring strong evidence to the contrary, of which there is none, the most logical candidate for authorship of the early Hamlet is the playwright who was responsible for the later Hamlet, especially when there is circumstantial corroboration to support such a theory. The leading nominee, Thomas Kyd, is merely a convenient figure for critics who insist anyone but Shakespeare wrote the Ur-Hamlet, “someone whose name, like his play itself, is lost to history.”²²⁷ Tellingly, even Kyd’s chief biographer wishes no part in the conversation, believing the problem to be essentially Shakespearean,²²⁸ yet Shakespearean authorship is neither favored, nor adequately debated; this is due to the Ur-Hamlet’s early date of composition.²²⁹ As mainstream scholarship is reluctant to admit credence to the theory of authorial revision, some other playwright, not Shakespeare, must have authored the Ur-Hamlet. Critics insist upon this point even when they make no claim on the part of Kyd.²³⁰ Consequently, the Ur-Hamlet was “bad.” If it was good, then Shakespeare was merely an adroit, but still secondary, collaborator, having done little more than patch up an established play. Here, the conclusion doubles back on itself: the Ur-Hamlet was an

²²⁶ Henri Fluchere, Shakespeare and the Elizabethans (1956; New York: Hill and Wang, Inc., 1962) 31.

²²⁷ Matus 127.

²²⁸ Freeman 175.

²²⁹ Duthie 76.

²³⁰ Hudson, Shakespeare 2: 259.

awful play, so Shakespeare could not have been the author of it. Critics have elevated Thomas Kyd, a virtually unknown playwright, to author of the only significant source of Shakespeare's Hamlet. However, in doing so, they are left in an unanticipated quandary.

How do scholars protect Shakespeare's central role in the creation of his greatest masterpiece while simultaneously distancing him from its primary source? There are no satisfactory conclusions to be made without leaps of faith and fallacies of logic, and the reasoning is so circular that it collapses. When the rules of scholarship are as lax as this, critics interpolate evidence to support predetermined conclusions, manipulating history to suit their desired ends. Unfortunately, much of the Ur-Hamlet debate has been ceded to radicals, tainting any rational discussion. Although beyond the fringe, these unconventional critics have co-opted the argument with vigor. In many instances, the rigorousness of their research puts mainstream scholarship to shame.

Chapter Three: Orthodoxy's First Line of Defense

The entire documentary record for the first half of Shakespeare's life is as follows: his birth is recorded in the Baptismal Register of Stratford-on-Avon "1564 April 26 Gulielmus filius Johannes Shakspere"; no other document mentions William Shakespeare for eighteen years; a record of issue of marriage license, Episcopal Register, Diocese of Worcester, on November 27, 1582, showing that "Wm Shaxpere" and "Annam Whateley de Temple Grafton" were licensed to marry; the next day, on November 28, 1582, the register notes that "Willm Shagspere" and "Anne Hathwey of Stratford in the dioces of Worcester, maiden," are permitted to marry with only one reading of the banns; on May 26, 1583, the Stratford Baptismal Register records the birth of "Susanna, daughter to William Shakespere"; on February 2, 1585, "Hamnet & Judeth, son and daughter to William Shakspere" are born.²³¹ None of these records was known until the early eighteenth century. Everything else about the first half of William Shakespeare's life has been reconstructed. 1585 through 1592 are known as the "lost years" because no records exist: nothing about Shakespeare's connection to the theatre, his development as a poet, his ascent to high society, his intimate knowledge about Italy, court life, soldiering, heraldry, law, and so forth. When William Shakespeare made the hundred-mile journey to London, he left behind a wife and three children. No one knows

²³¹ Brooke, Shakespeare 1-6.

for certain how or why he left, but by the early 1590s he had established a reputation in the London theatre world, Robert Greene mentioning the upstart player in 1592.

By 1593, the name “William Shakespeare” begins appearing as both the author of published poetry, and in connection with the theatre, but there are few mentions of him personally; those that do concern property purchases and minor litigations: in 1596, he (along with three others) has a restraining order placed against him; in the same year, he is listed in the tax records as a resident of Southwark, London; in 1597, the year that his son died, Shakespeare bought New Place in Stratford for 60 pounds; in 1599, he is listed among the owners of the Globe Theater in London; in 1601, Shakespeare’s father died and was buried in Stratford. From 1604 to 1611, Shakespeare does not appear in any London records, except as a partner in a purchase that would not have required his presence. Four documents place him in Stratford during this time, all revolving around tax or money issues. He wrote his will in early 1616, and revised it in March of that year, a month before he died, virtually unacknowledged. Nothing in Shakespeare’s will mentions books, manuscripts, literary patrons or friends. There are six surviving signatures, each different and practically illegible. On his grave’s original monument, Shakespeare was represented as holding a sack of grain. In 1747, this was changed to a quill pen, presumably for the tourists.

Despite Shakespeare’s many biographers, and the volumes of speculation written about his life, romances, deer-poaching escapades, sailing adventures, and the like, absolutely nothing is known for certain. This vacuum has left the door wide open for all

sorts of conspiracy theories. The authorship controversy that supposes “William Shakespeare” is a pen name, and the man from Stratford a convenient dupe, began very early and has persisted, despite the extreme resistance of orthodox scholarship. Famous doubters include Mark Twain, Sigmund Freud, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Malcolm X, Charlie Chaplin, Walt Whitman, and Leslie Howard. The first candidate to be seriously put forth as a possible claimant to Shakespeare’s throne was Francis Bacon, but others have included Christopher Marlowe, and even Queen Elizabeth. Unable to resist a good mystery, literary sleuths have looked for clues in the strangest of places, using ciphers, cryptograms, and anagrams, rearranging lines of Shakespeare, making maps of letters. The most popular anagram among advocates of Francis Bacon is derived from the longest word in Shakespeare, “honorificabilitudinitatibus,” found in Love’s Labor’s Lost. Refashioned into the Latin “Hi ludi F. Baconis nati tuiti orbi,” the phrase translates roughly as “these, Francis Bacon’s offspring, are preserved for the world.” Proponents of Shakespearean authorship, also known as Stratfordians, are not above such game playing. The King James Bible was published in 1611. Shakespeare was forty-six in 1610, the year in which the unknown authors would have been putting the final touches on their work. In the forty-sixth psalm, the forty-sixth word from the top, not including the title, is “shake”; the forty-sixth word from the bottom, not including the closing “selah,” is “spear.” William Shakespeare’s name is an anagram for “here was I, like a psalm.”

This is of course all just fun, but because the authorship debate is shackled with such pseudoscience, it is very easily dismissed. Orthodoxy rejects the topic entirely as

the pursuit of cranks and eccentrics. Nevertheless, there is one sect, the Oxfordians, which makes them a little nervous. Their legions growing, the Oxfordians have identified a unique candidate in the personage of the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, Edward de Vere, a nobleman who lived from 1550 to 1604. First discovered by the unfortunately named John Thomas Looney, the case for de Vere was first outlined in Looney's 1920 "Shakespeare" Identified, later reprinted in a 1975 two-volume set with six hundred additional pages of corroboration compiled by attorney Ruth Loyd Miller. Much of the information regarding de Vere's life comes from this landmark study. In recent years, the cause has been taken over by Charlton Ogburn, who in 1984, sought to rebut every last claim by the Stratfordians, point by point in the exhaustively studied, nine-hundred page, The Mysterious William Shakespeare: the myth and the reality. Due to the influence of Ogburn's book, which has received begrudging respect even from its opponents, much emphasis will be placed on Ogburn in this chapter.

The Oxford claim is strong. Whereas hardly anything is known about the man from Stratford, events in Oxford's life closely parallel the Shakespearean myth. Edward de Vere was "certainly a personable and gallant young man; but he was also selfish, arrogant and persistently quarrelsome."²³² As a member of the court of Elizabeth I, he spent much time abroad, frequently traveling to Italy, a country of which he had intimate knowledge, the setting for many of Shakespeare's plays. Admitted to one of the Inns of

²³² Christopher Hibbert, The Virgin Queen: Elizabeth I, Genius of the Golden Age (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1991) 126.

Court, Oxford was well trained in law, another defining characteristic of the playwright. As a lover of the stage, the Earl was a patron of the Blackfriars theatre. One uncle, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, was a pioneer of blank verse. Another was Arthur Golding, famous translator of Ovid's Metamorphoses, the poet whose "sweet witty soul" "lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued" Shakespeare. Golding was deVere's private tutor. Oxford's father died when he was twelve, and his mother quickly remarried; he was assigned as ward of Lord Burghley, the model for Polonius. Perhaps his rough childhood accounted for him being a bit of a hothead. "Early in his career he skewered to death an under-cook with his fencing sword. He was prone to the most vicious quarrels, including with his wife."²³³ Oxford was married to the daughter of Lord Burghley. The relationship was turbulent and jealous, accusations of adultery on sides, although his wife was later proved innocent, a situation reminiscent of Othello, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and others, the fear of cuckoldry being an ever-present theme in Shakespeare's works.

Born in 1550, Edward deVere was fourteen years older than Shakespeare; this difference in ages may help reconcile some of the lingering confusions about the poet's life. The speaker of the sonnet cycle is an older man. The poems contained therein are of a personal nature, most of them dedicated to a youth, whom many suppose was the Earl of Southampton, a close friend of Oxford's. Shakespeare's narrative poetry, among his most popular early work, is also so dedicated. The sonnets were not published until five

years after deVere's death, and the Folio does not include the narrative works. Ogburn suspects a cover-up. On title pages, "Shake-speare" is often hyphenated, characteristic of a pseudonym. Pen names were not uncommon, especially for a nobleman writing for the stage, and deVere composed poetry as a young man. In 1578, he was hailed for his talents by Gabriel Harvey, who, in front of the Queen, singled out the Earl as a man whose "countenance shakes speares."²³⁴ The Queen was fond of the young poet. "She encouraged him in his patronage of men of letters and musicians, praised his own lyrical poems, which were indeed of exceptional and surprising beauty [...]."²³⁵ The following is one of his early pieces.

Fain would I sing, but fury makes me fret,
 And Rage hath sworn to seek revenge of wrong;
 My mazed mind in malice so is set,
 As death shall daunt my deadly dolours long;
 Patience perforce is such a pinching pain,
 As die I will or suffer wrong again [...]²³⁶

While DeVere's use of alliteration is heavy-handed, the poem is effective, showing promise, not to mention a strong sense of the iambic line. Others were impressed with DeVere's writing. He is listed first in Francis Meres' 1598 compilation, Palladis Tamia:

²³³ Ian Wilson, Shakespeare: The Evidence (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993) 19.

²³⁴ Charlton Ogburn, The Mysterious William Shakespeare: the myth and the reality (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1984) 774.

²³⁵ Hibbert 127.

²³⁶ qtd. in Joseph Sobran, Alias Shakespeare (New York: The Free Press, 1997) 249.

Wit's Treasury as one of the best writers of comedic plays, although nary a one survives: “[...] the beft for Comedy amongft vs bee, *Edward Earle of Oxforde*, Doctor *Gager* of Oxforde, Maifter *Rowley*, [...] eloquent and wittie *John Lilly*, *Lodge*, *Gafcoyne*, *Greene*, *Shakefpeare*, *Thomas Nash*, [...]”²³⁷ It is the Palladis Tamia to which most scholars refer as proof Shakespeare had not written Hamlet prior to 1598, otherwise the passage detailing the playwright’s works would surely have mentioned it. Scholars’ traditional dating of the plays is of paramount importance to the Oxfordians. They remind orthodoxy that the complicated theatrical history of Hamlet is not an isolated instance in the author’s canon; many early references to Shakespearean or psuedo-Shakespearean plays abound.

Oxford died in 1604, at least seven years before most scholars believe Shakespeare composed The Tempest, among other works. This would seem to create inevitable difficulties for Oxfordians, but they have devised their own timeline. Ogburn’s book is replete with arguments over the traditional dating of Shakespeare's plays, voluminous reasons for placing King Lear, The Tempest, Winter's Tale, Henry VIII, etcetera, in the 1570s - 1590s.²³⁸ “The truth is, proof is wholly lacking that any of Shakespeare's plays were written after 1604 [...]”²³⁹ Ogburn believes Hamlet was written over an extended period of time, the completed text containing various contemporary and autobiographical allusions circa 1582 - late 1590s. No doubt, the play

²³⁷ Meres 283.

²³⁸ Ogburn 382-390.

²³⁹ Ogburn 382.

is the product of a learned, experienced, mature, grounded playwright. Ogburn believes this sways the timeline in Oxford's favor: "To imagine the provincial villager writing Hamlet at twenty-four, within a year of his purported arrival in London and four years before the relatively youthful Venus and Adonis, would surely be to defy common sense."²⁴⁰

Although Ogburn supposes Oxford continually revised the piece, he cites 1586 as the probable year of Hamlet's first completed draft. He identifies the following contemporary allusions to illustrate his point. England's pre-1588 naval preparations against Spain coincide with Marcellus's first act speech ("Why such impress of shipwrights [...]"²⁴¹) dating this passage as pre-Armada. The "ridicule of euphuism" employed in Osric's dialogue ("Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him."²⁴²) was fashionable in the early 1580s, but out of date at the turn of the century. Details of Hamlet's Danish court, including the drinking of robustious healths, are reminiscent of a letter describing a 1582 diplomatic mission to Denmark made by Lord Willoughby, incidentally Oxford's brother-in-law. In Polonius's categorical listing of plays ("The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited [...]"²⁴³) Ogburn sees a satire of Philip Sidney's Apologie for Poetry (The Defence of Poesie), published in 1595, but written as early as 1583. In it,

²⁴⁰ Ogburn 390.

²⁴¹ Shakespeare, Hamlet 1: 13.

²⁴² Shakespeare, Hamlet 1: 429.

Sidney divides poetry into “speciall denominations. The most notable be the *Heroick*, *Lyrick*, *Tragick*, *Comick*, *Satyrick*, *Iambick*, *Elegiack*, *Pastorall*, and certaine others [...]”²⁴⁴ Sidney also tediously notes that “some *Poesies* have coupled together [sic] two or three kindes; as the *Tragicall* and *Comicall*, whereupon is risen the *Tragicomicall*.”²⁴⁵ Oxford did not like Sir Philip Sidney, and the feeling was mutual. At times, the two fought madly, the latter reprimanded by the Queen for refusing to apologize for calling the nobleman a “puppy.”²⁴⁶ Sidney received a mortal wound in battle and died a hero’s death in 1586. Ogden maintains that it would have been “unthinkable” to spoof the author after such a tragedy: “Hence [for all these reasons] Hamlet must have been introduced by September 1586.”²⁴⁷

Ogden supports the notion that the 1603 quarto was an unauthorized memorial reconstruction of the play, published without permission, and champions the same theory in regards to King Leir, the early King John, and other such disputed texts. Mainstream scholarship argues that a different, anonymous author was responsible for these early versions of the plays. Incredulous by such convoluted theories, Oxford offers his defense of the playwright: “And so once again we have Shakespeare debased to a ‘cobbler’ of second-hand plays and collaborator with inferior playwrights. Yes, he reworked old plays - his own; and he had an awkward collaborator - his youthful self: can we doubt

²⁴³ Shakespeare, Hamlet 1: 172.

²⁴⁴ Philip Sidney, The Defence of Poesie, ed. Albert Feuillerat, The Complete Works of Sir Philip Sidney, 3 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1923) 3: 10.

²⁴⁵ Sidney 3: 22.

²⁴⁶ Hibbert 126.

that that was how it was?”²⁴⁸ Although Ogburn’s book is meticulously studied, its claims are obviously too radical for traditional scholarship to admit. However, rather than counter his argument, the majority (notwithstanding such middling retorts as Irvin Leigh Matus’s Shakespeare, IN FACT) has remained eerily silent. Resigned, Ogburn understands the politics of their disregard: “Orthodoxy’s first line of defense against dissent is to ignore it.”²⁴⁹

Curiously, Ogburn’s ideas regarding Oxford’s creative processes are remarkably similar to those of Harold Bloom regarding Shakespeare’s. Harold Bloom is one of the leading modern-day proponents of Shakespearean authorship of the Ur-Hamlet. Although Bloom is obstinate in his objection to pen-name conspiracy theories, the two have more in common with each other than with mainstream scholarship. Both Bloom and Ogburn believe the idea that Kyd wrote the Ur-Hamlet is preposterous. Both deride the notion that Kyd had any creative influence on Shakespeare. Bloom unequivocally states, “Popular as it was, The Spanish Tragedy is a dreadful play, hideously written and silly; common readers will [...] not get much past the opening, and will find it hard to credit the notion that this impressed Shakespeare.”²⁵⁰ Ogburn thinks their relationship may have been one of apprentice-master, speculating, based on Kyd’s 1593 testimony to the Star Chamber, that Kyd may have been a member of deVere’s household for as long

²⁴⁷ Ogburn 696.

²⁴⁸ Ogburn 392.

²⁴⁹ Ogburn xvii.

²⁵⁰ Bloom, Shakespeare 398.

as six years.²⁵¹ The implication is clear: Hamlet and The Spanish Tragedy, “attributed to Kyd on the strength of a single reference many years later,”²⁵² were both composed at a time when Kyd was living with and learning from “Shake-speare.”

Both Ogburn and Bloom believe Hamlet was a deeply personal work, continuously revised by the author. Ogburn imagines the playwright “going back to it almost as long as he lived, putting more and more of himself into it,”²⁵³ while Bloom suggests Hamlet “may have been gestating in Shakespeare for more than a decade”²⁵⁴ and that he perhaps “never stopped rewriting it, from the early version, circa 1587-89, almost down to his retreat back to Stratford.”²⁵⁵ As is evident, both critics consider the concept of the Ur-Hamlet fictitious and misleading. Ogburn contends that it is an early mention of the completed play. Bloom asserts that it is an early version or draft, now “embedded in the palimpsest of the final Hamlet.”²⁵⁶ Bloom conveniently ignores, or refuses to state his opinions on the matter of other such disputed texts, supposing the extended composition period of Hamlet to be unique. Discussion of the 1594 King Leir is notably absent, even striking, as the critic makes a point of mentioning a mysterious, outdated allusion contained within the final draft of the play:

[Edmond] is a Marlovian figure not in that he resembles a character in a play by Marlowe, but because I suspect he was intended to resemble

²⁵¹ Ogburn 694.

²⁵² Ogburn 694.

²⁵³ Ogburn 697.

²⁵⁴ Bloom, Shakespeare 383.

²⁵⁵ Bloom, Shakespeare 391.

Christopher Marlowe himself. Marlowe died, aged twenty-nine, in 1593
 [...] By 1605, when King Lear was written, Marlowe had been dead for
 twelve years [...].²⁵⁷

Surely, Ogburn would underscore Bloom's inconsistency: a passionate stance on the Ur-Hamlet, but ne'er a word on the neglected Ur-Lear?

Orthodox theory supposes that Shakespeare's completed Hamlet is of the same period as The Merry Wives of Windsor. Both Bloom and Ogburn reject this theory on the basis that the former's artistic merits so far outshine the latter's as to make the idea of them contemporaneous all but inconceivable. While a bit off-topic, their respective opinions as to the circumstances which brought about The Merry Wives of Windsor are relevant to this discussion, for they deal with all of the issues that have been so far discussed: the challenge of dating Shakespeare's works; the biases against "substandard" plays; the question of authorship in pseudo-authentic pieces; the notion of authorial revision and adaptation; and the assumptions scholars make about Shakespeare's life, motivations, and creative processes. To account for an apparently unsatisfactory timeline, one adopted by mainstream scholarship, both Ogburn and Bloom have constructed two entirely different, but highly creative scenarios, each illustrating how resourceful and varied Shakespearean scholarship can be. True to form, Ogburn believes

²⁵⁶ Bloom, Shakespeare 411.

²⁵⁷ Bloom, Shakespeare 503.

The Merry Wives of Windsor was initially written far earlier than is traditionally supposed:

Orthodoxy, making the writing of the Wives contemporary with that of Hamlet - and apparently scholars are really capable of believing that - is stumped to account for its embarrassing lameness. [...] We are asked to believe that having created in the Falstaff of Henry the Fourth the greatest comic character in literature, irrepressible and irresistible in circumstances that would crush with shame a mortal unable to draw unblushingly on limitless resources of wit, Shakespeare would descend to the Falstaff of the Wives, a fatuous and continually humiliated dupe of transparent japes. If we are to make sense of the matter, I think we must believe that the Wives was originally written by a Shakespeare still far from finding his talent, probably before 1580, that in it he had a character who foreshadowed the later Falstaff in being fat and chronically the butt of fate [...] and that he took up the play again much later and added to it, especially the character of the Host, who blows in like a gust of high-spirited glibness and is Falstaffian, and the parts in blank verse, notably the scene with the Fairies.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ Ogburn 392

Bloom, who imagines himself as his own Falstaff, is horrified by the “rank imposter”²⁵⁹ found in The Merry Wives of Windsor, and so fabricates a sinister scenario:

There remains the puzzle of why Shakespeare subjected the pseudo-Falstaff to so mindless a laceration, really a bear baiting, with “Sir John-in-love” as the bear. As a lifelong playwright, always quick to yield to subtle patrons, statist censors, and royal performances, Shakespeare in his deepest inwardness harbored anxieties and resentments that he rarely allowed expression. He knew that Walsingham's shadowy Secret Service had murdered Christopher Marlowe, and tortured Thomas Kyd into an early death. [...] We do not know the mode or manner of Shakespeare's own death. Yet something in him, which he perhaps identified with the authentic Falstaff, rejected where he most loved, and solitary, like the poet of the Sonnets, may have feared further humiliations. I have to conclude that Shakespeare himself is warding off personal horror by scapegoating the false Falstaff in this weak play.²⁶⁰

Mainstream scholarship rejects Ogburn's theory of the early Hamlet, for obvious reasons. Why does it reject Bloom's? Since the early nineteenth century, when it was a hot topic of conversation among critics, discussion of the Ur-Hamlet and Shakespeare's possible authorship thereof has reached an impasse.

²⁵⁹ Bloom, Shakespeare 316.

²⁶⁰ Bloom, Shakespeare 318.

Although written by an esteemed, if controversial, Yale professor, Harold Bloom's book is not academic. There is much passionate conjecture, but little documentation, and, frustratingly, no bibliography. Bloom alludes to as much in his introduction to the reader, declaring that his book "is a personal statement"²⁶¹ and a "departure from most traditional Shakespearean scholarship."²⁶² The bulk of his chapter on Hamlet is devoted to an emotional defense of the theory that Hamlet was one of Shakespeare's very first plays, written as a tribute to his young son. Citing Peter Alexander as his inspiration, Bloom dismisses the common assumption that Kyd was the author of the early version, and indulges in what can only be termed as metaphysical ramblings on the subject: "Was the first Hamlet a tragedy at all? Did the prince die, or did that only come later, the price of his apotheosis as an intellectual consciousness?"²⁶³ Though a bit over-the-top in the psychological implications of his theory (i.e., "We can say that Hamlet the intellectual ironist is somehow conscious that he has to live down his crude earlier version."²⁶⁴), Bloom extols an enthusiasm for his subject that is compelling and infectious, even if his wit, not the soul of brevity, outruns his discretion. More problematic is the sense that his heavy concentration on this particular aspect of Hamlet's historiography is brought about by less than altruistic motivations.

Rather than searching out the facts, and making an unbiased judgment as to the ramifications, Bloom commits the cardinal sin of *wanting his theory to be true*, because it

²⁶¹ Bloom, Shakespeare xvii.

²⁶² Bloom, Shakespeare xiii.

²⁶³ Bloom, Shakespeare 389-390.

beatifies Shakespeare, his “mortal god.”²⁶⁵ Objectivity is not a factor; Bloom believes “it wise to confront both the play and the prince with awe and wonder.”²⁶⁶ Not content with the tragedy’s current status as the most hailed drama in the English language, Bloom longs to elevate Hamlet into an even more exalted sphere: “The Pirandellian effect [...] is greatly enhanced *if* Shakespeare's new protagonist is trapped inside Shakespeare's earliest play, now blasted apart to admit the fiercest inwardness ever achieved in a literary work.”²⁶⁷ [Italics mine] In his manipulation of history, Bloom assigns the playwright untold motives, secret disappointments, the hint of a personality that forever evades. Bloom muses, “[Hamlet’s] freedom partly consists in not being too soon, not being early. In that sense, does he reflect Shakespeare's ironic regret at having composed the Ur-Hamlet too soon, almost indeed at his own origins as a poet-playwright?”²⁶⁸ The popular press reviews of The Invention of the Human were generally favorable, although one reporter succinctly comments, “A good editor could have cut 50 pages of repetitions, and Bloom never actually argues his ostensible thesis [...] though he asserts it often enough.”²⁶⁹ As for Bloom, he admits his dwelling on the Ur-Hamlet was excessive, offering a “postlude”²⁷⁰ five years later entitled Hamlet: Poem Unlimited, claiming the

²⁶⁴ Bloom, Shakespeare 402.

²⁶⁵ Bloom, Shakespeare 3.

²⁶⁶ Bloom, Poem Unlimited 7.

²⁶⁷ Bloom, Shakespeare 401.

²⁶⁸ Bloom, Harold. Shakespeare: the invention of the human. (New York : Riverhead Books, 1998) 407.

²⁶⁹ David Gates and Yahlin Chang, “King of the Canon: Harold Bloom on why Shakespeare still rules,” Newsweek 2 November 1998: 76.

²⁷⁰ Bloom, Poem Unlimited 1.

latest book “is the fulfillment of my desire to remedy my prior obsessiveness”²⁷¹ with the Ur-Hamlet.

Scholarship has not been particularly receptive to Bloom’s idea and others like it for reasons that are myriad and complex. Critics have postulated a reasonably acceptable scenario with Kyd; it is a hypothesis that aligns well with orthodox theory, which contends that Shakespeare adapted freely from sources, and was quick in composition. In general, the Ur-Hamlet is simply not discussed, which leads to the assumption that scholars are apathetic, resigned to the fact that until new evidence is discovered, the truth will always be indeterminable, and the discussion moot. Couple this with a perceived lack of significance, and the issue becomes a quaint relic. Perhaps, however, the neglect of the Ur-Hamlet is ultimately due, not for these reasons, but for that the subject quickly devolves into entropy. How do scholars explain earlier versions of King Lear, King John, The Taming of the Shrew, the Henry VI trilogy, and so forth? What about pre-Shakespearean references to plays that are not extant, but which bear titles remarkably similar to those later published, such as A Wynters nightes pastime, registered in 1594?²⁷² Bloom handily explores the issue in isolation, but other critics do not have that luxury. An Ogburn disciple, Joseph Sobran, describes how scholars have solved this very complicated problem

²⁷¹ Bloom, Poem Unlimited 2.

²⁷² Ogburn 781.

by positing an earlier play as the chief source of Shakespeare's version. They call this supposed lost play the Ur-Hamlet, and they assign its authorship (on evidence it would be hyperbolic to call slender) to Thomas Kyd. In this way a difficult fact has been disposed of with an ingenious inference, and the inference itself is treated as fact.²⁷³

The Oxfordians have solved this problem to their satisfaction, but they, too, indulge in their own form of bardolatry: Oxfordolatry? Gordon Cyr, a former Executive Vice President of the Shakespeare-Oxford Society, proclaims,

I remember reading that Hamlet was a sort of patchwork based on something called the Ur-Hamlet, with the scenes taken in almost the same order. [...] This was very disturbing information – that Shakespeare had done nothing more than take something from an inferior playwright and witch it up.²⁷⁴

Ogburn feels likewise. He favors the theory of memorial reconstruction to explain the “inferior” passages in disputed texts, chastising scholars such as Dowden and Chambers for believing the earlier King John to be of another playwright's authorship: “Yes, these outstanding scholars actually consider Shakespeare so failing in inventiveness and imagination as to have required for a prop an inferior existing drama to lean upon - the

²⁷³ Sobran 155-157.

²⁷⁴ qtd. in James Lardner, “Onward and Upward with the Arts: The Authorship Question,” The New Yorker, 11 April 1988.93.

game-poacher of Shakespearean legend become a play-poacher.”²⁷⁵ Stretching his readers’ credulity, Ogburn suspects deVere was not only responsible for Shakespeare’s works, but for those of the playwright’s contemporaries, including John Lyly, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Lodge, Robert Greene, George Peele, and Thomas Kyd. Ogburn sees these fellows as imitators, railing against critics such as Chute and Rowse for their descriptions of Shakespeare as an old-fashioned borrower of other author’s works: “Such denigration of Shakespeare [...] has been constitutional with Stratfordianism. No one who comprehends Shakespeare's genius could go along with it - or need do so. [...] [Shakespeare was] the originator, the fountain from which the others imbibed.”²⁷⁶ Ogburn’s thoroughly researched book, complete with notes and an extensive bibliography, stands in stark contrast to the meandering scholarship displayed by Bloom in The Invention of the Human. However, his idolatrous stance is no less in evidence: same worship, different god.

The Oxfordian viewpoint is relevant to the Ur-Hamlet debate, but it is nonetheless outside the scope and intent of this paper, which has less to do with investigating conspiracies, than deconstructing orthodox theory and perception. Towards this end, the Oxfordian approach contributes in the following manner. The Oxfordians place a great deal of emphasis on the evidence that suggests many of Shakespeare’s plays were in existence long before he could have possibly written them. This highlights the problem

²⁷⁵ Ogburn 384.

²⁷⁶ Ogburn 383.

of dating an Elizabethan performance piece by its script's publication, for the one might have little to do with the other, the more accurate records of the 1590s giving "purely fortuitous support to the conventional dating of Shakespeare's plays. Early performances are much less likely to be heard of."²⁷⁷ Recognition of this fact has caused some scholars to rethink the conventional timeline of Shakespeare's works. Cairncross, in particular, unorthodoxly dates Shakespeare's works as 1587-1603, Hamlet as circa 1589,²⁷⁸ a position Ogburn applauds, with some qualification:

Cairncross deserves great credit for his perspicuity and independence of mind. But the latter never extended to his questioning the orthodox view of the authorship, at least openly. This meant that he could not push composition of the plays back before the late 1580s. To find that Shakespeare wrote his plays much earlier than had been surmised, he also had to find that he had to write them "in much more rapid succession."²⁷⁹

The acceptance of alternative viewpoints is increasing, as shown by Amy Freed's recent success with The Beard of Avon, a "playful romp through the notoriously knotty 'authorship question' [...] [that] nominates so many candidates – from the currently popular Edward de Vere on up to the Virgin Queen herself – that the silly controversy

²⁷⁷ Ogburn 383.

²⁷⁸ A.S. Cairncross, The Problem of Hamlet (London: MacMillan and Co., 1936) 185.

²⁷⁹ Ogburn 390.

collapses in upon itself.”²⁸⁰ In an interview with The San Francisco Chronicle, Freed relates why she believes the authorship question is completely serious:

Find me one writer who doesn't think it's important. Coleridge and Twain were fascinated. Dickens was scared ('I tremble every day lest something should come up'). Once you understand who Shakespeare is as a writer and what he's capable of, the admiration and competition and fascination are huge. It's not so much for who he is as how he got that way, especially if he came from the background he's purported to have come from.²⁸¹

Freed's irreverent attitude towards her subject is found in her next ironic remark, "For any writer, playwrights in particular, it's Shakespeare as mirror. I see Shakespeare as waitress."²⁸² As an actress and acclaimed playwright, short-listed for the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for Freedomland, her perspective is uniquely practical, like many theatre artists, having spent the early part of her career working in restaurants. She asks, "Now, did I have the necessary humility and proper sense of perspective to write a play about Shakespeare? No, thank God, or I'd never write anything."²⁸³ The Beard of Avon was among the most produced new plays of the 2002 season, staged at major theatres across the United States and Canada, including the American Conservatory Theatre in San

²⁸⁰ Robert Hurwitt, "Whose Lines Were Those Anyway? 'Beard' Unmasks Shakespeare," San Francisco Chronicle 18 Jan. 2002: D1.

²⁸¹ Steven Winn, "Bard or 'Beard?' Playwright Amy Freed Has Fun with Shakespeare's Life," San Francisco Chronicle 8 Jan. 2002: D5

²⁸² Winn D5.

²⁸³ Winn D5.

Francisco, the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, the South Coast Repertory Theatre in Costa Mesa, and CanStage in Toronto.

Obviously, a larger perspective is needed, one that includes the perspectives of Shakespeare students from all walks of life, including playwrights like Amy Freed, who, in particular, spent years researching the subject. Autonomy in scholarship deserves encouragement not ridicule. There is no doubt that the Oxfordians have made one of the most compelling arguments in regards to the Ur-Hamlet: it does not exist, and never has; there is only Hamlet. In essence, the issue for orthodoxy is not authorship, although it ostensibly masquerades as such. Traditional Shakespearean criticism has failed on three counts: it does not allow for creative process; it treats the performance text as literature; and it ignores the collaborative nature of theatre. As Charles Vere, Earl of Burford, descendant of Oxford, states in his lecture tour, "If you get Shakespeare wrong, you get the whole Elizabethan era wrong."²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ "Shakespeare Oxford Society Home Page," 1995-2001, Shakespeare Oxford Society, 20 Sept. 2003 <<http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com/>>

Chapter Four: Shakespeare in Rewrite

From 1578 to 1592, there is a dearth of information regarding Shakespeare's activities and whereabouts, nothing to indicate how or why he began writing for the stage. Presumably, in 1587, he was still in Stratford, where "there is a record of his sanction."²⁸⁵ History yields little else, excepting that "by 1592 he was already so established a dramatist as to be grouped by Robert Greene with Peele and Marlowe."²⁸⁶ The late 1580s, early 1590s, are Shakespeare's "lost years." Much has been surmised, yet one thing is certain: at some point Shakespeare made his way to London. It is unlikely that he made the trip alone. England had laws against "master-less men"; those traveling by themselves would be suspect, open to charges of vagrancy. Over the years, London's top theatre companies all toured Stratford, no less than five visiting between 1586 and 1587.²⁸⁷ Perhaps one of the troupes was shorthanded, and Shakespeare, at the tender age of twenty-three (yet already married with three children), having no better prospects and four mouths to feed, signed on as an apprentice.

If this scenario is true, Shakespeare's early instruction as a playwright under the guidance of the company's senior members was likely practical: mending the plays of others, practicing his newfound craft as a musician might do scales, studying the basics, then learning to improvise. With his first known tragedy, the blood-soaked Titus

²⁸⁵ Wendell 8.

²⁸⁶ Wendell 23.

Andronicus, he achieved a resounding box office success. How did he feel about such? There are no personal records, diaries or letters from this or any other time. Shakespeare's method, motivations, creative inspiration, thought processes, objectives, mentors, relationships with fellow company members are all completely and totally unknown: but that does not mean they did not exist.

In the eighteenth century, Edmond Malone established the fundamental concept that to assess the evolution of Shakespeare's process, a chronological order of the plays must first be established. As Barrett Wendell confirms, "To study the development of any artist, we must know something of the order in which his works were produced [...]."²⁸⁸ Many critics have labored after this fashion, but with limited success: the most that has been determined is a division of periods, or epochs: the vibrant, youthfulness of the early comedies; the patriotism of the Tudor histories; the growing cynicism of the problem plays; the nihilism of the dark tragedies; and the hopeful redemption of the late romances. G. B. Harrison detects an incipient pattern, dividing Shakespeare's "poetic style [...] into four periods: Early, Balanced, Overflowing, and Final."²⁸⁹ This extraordinarily vague interpretation of the timeline is the Stratfordian Achilles' heel, a weakness that the Oxfordians exploit to their advantage in the authorship debate; the early Hamlet is but one example, but it is perhaps the most potent, being that there exists

²⁸⁷ Duncan-Jones 28.

²⁸⁸ Wendell 4.

²⁸⁹ Harrison xv.

four succeeding versions of the play, the chronology of their composition extraordinarily muddy. Could these be drafts? Orthodoxy is hesitant to acknowledge the possibility.

Critical attitudes towards one particular version, Hamlet Q1, provide an important touchstone in regard to two areas of the Ur-Hamlet debate: creative process, and the ontology of an authentic Shakespearean text. The latter will be detailed in the following chapter. This chapter is concerned with how the Shakespearean community views authorial revision, and the possibility of extant drafts. While Shakespeare's process is unknowable, his method may be viewed piecemeal through the tangible artifact of a rough draft, if such a one remains. The only clues that exist are the surviving texts. Understanding their chronological relationship to one another is paramount: "If, then, we could determine the exact relation in which the three forms [i.e., the English versions] stand to one another, we should learn a good deal about Shakespeare's dramatic method as shown in the deliberate modification of his first ideas."²⁹⁰ All three (four) versions of the tragedy derive from a common point of origin; the Ur-Hamlet is the recognized primary source of the later play; it is the first rough draft, whether or not Shakespeare was author for it. The early play is now ostensibly lost, but scholars believe remnants of it are contained within Q1. Q1 has been rejected as a potential rough draft for some admittedly legitimate reasons. Nevertheless, an innate prejudice against the existence of any Shakespearean rough draft inevitably colors the discussion.

²⁹⁰ Chambers, Hamlet v.

The Shakespearean community by and large rejects the idea of rough drafts, believing the playwright “wrote rapidly”²⁹¹ and without revision. The notion is long-standing, stemming from remarks made by Shakespeare’s contemporaries, readily accepted by scholars as proof of absolute fact. In their Introduction to the First Folio, Heminge and Condell write of the playwright, “His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he vttered with that eafineffe, that wee haue fcarfe receiued from him a blot in his papers.”²⁹² Ben Jonson chimes in with his facetious remark: “I remember, the players have often mentioned it as an honor to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penned), he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, would he had blotted a thousand.”²⁹³ As further evidence, Harold Jenkins sees a “vagueness as to minor characters, evident from the stage directions, [which] suggests that these are being created by Shakespeare as he writes.”²⁹⁴ Not all would agree. From the Porter in Macbeth to The Taming of the Shrew’s Christopher Sly, Shakespeare humanizes even the smallest roles with personal touches. In default of this, critics point to the plays’ rapid rate of publication as an indication of Shakespeare’s writing tempo. This is terribly problematic, but it fits well with the common conception of Shakespeare as “a supremely

²⁹¹ Rowse, Hamlet 1729.

²⁹² Heminge and Condell 7.

²⁹³ Ben Jonson, Timber, or Discoveries, rpt. in Ben Jonson and the Cavalier Poets: Authoritative Texts Criticism, ed. Hugh Maclean ([c. 1630?]; New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1974) 404.

²⁹⁴ Jenkins 100.

inventive poet who had no call to rework his previous plays when he could always move on to a new one.”²⁹⁵

Consequently, the rejection of rough drafts is tied to the notion of Shakespeare as genius. In critical analysis, scholars are consistently deferential, reverent and awed by their subject: Shakespeare is the “father of our drama,”²⁹⁶ an “unknown god.”²⁹⁷ Shakespeare’s lack of attention to details is well noted, but such inconsistencies are typically excused as “the sins of a great but negligent”²⁹⁸ playwright who “lacked the conscience of the artist who is determined to make everything as good as he can.”²⁹⁹ In other words, Shakespeare could have done better if he had so desired, or was not so beholden to the practicalities of the stage. Even Shakespeare’s alleged “borrowing” of sources is placed in favorable light, his method not plagiarism, but “alchemy, which transmutes baser materials into something infinitely rarer.”³⁰⁰ Truly, none of the author’s plays inspires more adulation than Hamlet. The play “is essentially a work for the student of Genius,”³⁰¹ centered on a protagonist that “is itself a pure effusion of genius.”³⁰² In his Preface to the 1877 Variorum Hamlet, Horace Howard Furness puts the play on par with the Bible.

²⁹⁵ Jenkins 5.

²⁹⁶ Samuel Johnson, Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. (1960; New York: Hill and Wang, 1967) 50.

²⁹⁷ Frank Harris, The Man Shakespeare (New York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1909) 3.

²⁹⁸ Bradley 68.

²⁹⁹ Bradley 69-70.

³⁰⁰ Matus 132.

³⁰¹ William Maginn, Shakespeare Papers (London, 1860) 277.

³⁰² William Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays (1817; London: Oxford University Press, 1975) 82.

And what a tribute it is to SHAKESPEARE'S genius! Here, at last, we may venture to set a limit to his imagination. Not even he could have imagined such a fame. No one of mortal mould (save Him 'whose blessed feet were nailed for our advantage to the bitter 'cross') ever trod this earth, commanding such absorbing interest as this Hamlet [...]. No syllable that he whispers, [...] but it caught and pondered as no words have ever been, except of Holy Writ.³⁰³

Those critics for whom academic inquiry is synonymous with the veneration of Shakespeare hold a certain philosophical premise as gospel: Shakespeare never wrote anything bad. Thus, every draft was final. As one of the most influential editors of Shakespeare, Harold Jenkins, proclaims, "There has been too much irresponsible conjecture about Shakespeare's supposed revisions of supposed earlier attempts."³⁰⁴ Indeed, the time for responsible conjecture is past due. If Hamlet was written by Shakespeare in the beginning part of his career, revised by him throughout, *and* evidence of such remains, it holds enormous implications for orthodoxy's view of him as an artist. But first, they must admit the possibility. Acceptance must be leant to the various texts. Auspiciously, there is a movement afoot that promises to do just that, a significant challenge to orthodoxy, unique as it portentously originates from within.

³⁰³ Furness 1: xii.

³⁰⁴ Jenkins 5.

Two separate projects are underway. One is The Enfolded Hamlet, sponsored by Global Language Resources. The work of Bernice Kliman, The Enfolded Hamlet collates the texts of Q2 and Folio into one, highly readable edition; it has yet to be published in paperback form, but is freely available on the internet at <http://www.global-language.com/enfolded.html>. Notices have been favorable:

Reading ‘The Enfolded Hamlet’ is almost like attending a Hamlet rehearsal; one can imagine Shakespeare trying out alternate readings in the theatre of his mind. And it makes a more persuasive case than any academic treatise that, when we read the alternate versions of Hamlet, we are catching glimpses of Shakespeare at work, Shakespeare hovering over the text and fine-tuning: Shakespeare in rewrite.³⁰⁵

By legitimizing the multiple versions of Hamlet, Kliman lends credence to the theory of authorial revision. Whether or not this is her intent, or merely a byproduct, is unclear. Notably, Bernice Kliman is also the editor of The Three-Text Hamlet: Parallel Texts of the First and Second Quartos and First Folio, important for its acknowledgement of the First Quarto, ignored in most editions.

Although Kliman’s contribution is meaningful, she was not the first to attempt the publication of parallel texts. In 1882, the New Shakspeare Society of London sponsored A Four-Text Edition of Shakspeare’s Hamlet ... in Parallel Columns edited by Teena Rochfort Smith, age twenty-one. The edition was to feature the First and Second

Quartos, as well as the Folio version. The fourth text would be an editorially revised conflation authored by Smith. Although very young, Smith was an esteemed member of the Shakspeare Society, secretary to founder Frederick Furnivall, and, some have rumored, his mistress.³⁰⁶ Despite her alleged involvement with Furnivall, Smith showed talent and ingenuity, inventing a format that consisted of “six different type faces and a formidable battery of asterisks, daggers, and other symbols in order to classify variants (including spellings) and to indicate their extent.”³⁰⁷ Tragically, one year after beginning her task, Smith died from injuries sustained in a fire. The Four-Text Edition was never completed, and Smith was forgotten until 1998, when Ann Thompson revived interest. Thompson is the editor of Arden’s Third Series Edition of Hamlet. Although yet to be published, it will reportedly include all three versions of Hamlet, rather than a single, editorially conflated text. No small move, Thompson’s approach promises to revolutionize the conventional methodology of her predecessor, Harold Jenkins, whose work has long been recognized as definitive. The implications are enormous, a veritable paradigm shift. As traditional scholarship begins to recognize all the myriad versions of Hamlet as legitimate, this, in turn, validates the notion of an evolutionary process, and the idea that Shakespeare may have composed Hamlet in drafts, Q1 potentially being the first.

Some have postulated that Q1 is the Ur-Hamlet, “a stageworthy version of the tragedy in the 1590’s that a printer might bring out in 1603 so as to cash in upon the

³⁰⁵ Rosenbaum 77.

³⁰⁶ Ann Thompson, “Teena Rochfort Smith, Frederick Furnivall, and the New Shakspeare Society’s Four-Text Edition of *Hamlet*,” SQ 49 (1998): 133.

onstage success of a ‘new’ Shakespearean Hamlet.”³⁰⁸ More often, Q1 is imagined as an intermediary piece, “based on Shakespeare’s Hamlet at some stage in its history, but evidently also reflecting material not in the later authorized texts.”³⁰⁹ Scholars such as W. G. Clark and W. A. Wright believe the work to be generally Shakespearean, “mixed with a great deal that is not his.”³¹⁰ Boas, editor and proponent of Kyd, supposes that the majority of the verse in the latter half of the play is “unmistakably pre-Shakespearean. The vocabulary and the rhythm are not those of the master-dramatist at any stage of his career [...]”³¹¹ Boas obviously wishes to substantiate his position on Kyd, but this point in particular can be rebutted. Beginning line 1422, a penitent Claudius attempts to pray, “Moft wretched man, ftoope, bend thee to thy prayer, / Aske grace of heauen to keepe thee from defpaire.”³¹² The rhyme scheme of the couplet fits Prospero’s epilogue: “And my ending is despair, / Unless I be reliev’d by prayer [...]”³¹³ In the earlier part of the play, Corambis (Polonius) offers a precept to his daughter not found in any of the other editions: “Come in *Ofelia*, fuch men often proue / Great in their wordes, but little in their loue.”³¹⁴ Compare to Twelfth Night, Act Two, Scene Four: “We men may say more,

³⁰⁷ Thompson 128.

³⁰⁸ Alan C. Dessen, “Weighing the Options in Hamlet Q1,” The Hamlet First Published, ed. Thomas Clayton (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992) 76.

³⁰⁹ Kermode, Hamlet 1136.

³¹⁰ qtd. in Variorum 2: 33.

³¹¹ Boas xlix.

³¹² Shakespeare, Hamlet 2: 69.

³¹³ William Shakespeare, The Tempest, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, The Riverside Shakespeare (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974) 1636.

³¹⁴ Shakespeare, Hamlet 2: 47.

swear more, but indeed / Our shows are more than will; for still we prove / Much in our
vows, but little in our love.”³¹⁵

Q1 and the Ur-Hamlet conjure a similarly dismissive attitude. Matus pronounces,
“The one thing that the Ur-Hamlet and the 1603 quarto definitely have in common is that
both have been considered ridiculous: the former in its own time, the latter in ours.”³¹⁶

Matus is a staunch Stratfordian. However, his argument that Shakespeare is the author of
every work that bears his name wavers a bit in regards to Q1, which Matus pointedly
distances from the playwright: “No printed version of a play of Hamlet exists before the
garbled text published in 1603 and blamed on Shakespeare.”³¹⁷ If Q1 were an early draft,
“it would have taken witchcraft to transform it into the later version.”³¹⁸ Of particular
ridicule is Q1’s version of Hamlet’s “to be or not to be” soliloquy:

To be, or not to be, I there’s the point,
To Die, to fleepe, is that all? I all:
No, to fleepe, to dreame, I mary there it goes,
For in that dreame of death, when wee awake,
And borne before an euerlafting Iudge,
From whence no paffenger euer retur’nd [...].³¹⁹

³¹⁵ Shakespeare, William, Twelfth Night, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, The Riverside Shakespeare (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974) 420.

³¹⁶ Matus 146.

³¹⁷ Matus 127-128.

³¹⁸ Matus 147.

³¹⁹ Shakespeare, Hamlet 2: 56.

Critics not only lambaste the text, but also mock any scholar who might see value in it: “[One] who can believe, for example, that the Q1 text of Hamlet’s ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy is the work of Shakespeare, can believe anything [...] No one can seriously contend that Shakespeare wrote this farrago of nonsense at any stage of his career [...]”³²⁰ Grant White laments the soliloquy’s state of shambles in what reads like an eloquent funeral dirge:

Like the shadow of a fair and stately building on the surface of a troubled river, it distorts outline, destroys symmetry, confuses parts, contracts some passages, expands others, robs color of its charm and light of its brilliancy, and presents but a dim, grotesque, and shapeless image of the beautiful original [...].³²¹

Rarely does any critic acknowledge that the reason Q1’s soliloquy “sounds vaguely familiar, and comical too, [is] because the speech is now so famous.”³²² Surely it is possible that this passage, which, for many scholars, has come to represent the apex of Shakespearean achievement, required more than a single draft. Apparently, more critics prefer to believe that it sprung fully formed from the author’s brain.

Traditional criticism is reluctant to ascribe Q1’s shortcomings as proof of authorial revision. Thus, Q1 must be “corrupt,”³²³ “a piracy.”³²⁴ Jenkins refuses to

³²⁰ Sidney Thomas, “Hamlet Q1: First Version or Bad Quarto?” *The Hamlet First Published*, ed. Thomas Clayton (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992) 251

³²¹ qtd. in *Variorum* 2: 28.

³²² Moston viii.

³²³ Hudson, *Hamlet* xxvi.

accept the alternative, the idea that Q1 could be an early Shakespearean version of the tragedy. He admits the notion is doggedly prevalent, and is strikingly defensive in his rejoinder:

It is as well therefore to state that all those theories which view Shakespeare's Hamlet as progressing to its final shape via one or more rewritings and which have contributed to the conception of Shakespeare as an artist much given to the revision of his own past work are quite without evidence or plausibility.³²⁵

Duthie sums up the underlying rationale, arguing that critics who believe bad quartos may be evidences of early drafts “seem to impute to Shakespeare a most extraordinary development from quite miserable ineptitude in his early days to complete perfection within comparatively few years.”³²⁶ The theory is problematic because it is specifically predicated on a value judgment, i.e., “quite miserable ineptitude,” in opposition to which E. K. Chambers nicely counters, “I do not believe anyone has a sufficiently acute critical sense to say definitively of such [disputed passages in Q1] that they are or are not Shakespeare's.”³²⁷

In many instances, the poetry and characterization of Q1 is different in a manner that suggests not adulteration of the original, but an outline destined for elaboration. For example, Ophelia's ‘courtier, scholar’ soliloquy:

³²⁴ Harrison xxiii.

³²⁵ Jenkins 19.

³²⁶ Duthie 50.

Great God of heauen, what a quicke change is this?

The Courtier, Scholler, Souldier, all in him,

All dafht and fplintered thence, O woe is me,

To a feene what I haue feene, fee what I fee.³²⁸

Referencing this passage, Chambers admits that it is “markedly inferior in richness of vocabulary and depth of thought. [However, such] differences appear to point directly to revision.”³²⁹ The editor of the 1877 Variorum Hamlet, Horace Howard Furness, concurs:

Shakspere must have dropt verse from his mouth, as the fairy in the Arabian tales dropt pearls. It appears to have been no effort to him to have changed the whole arrangement of a poetical sentence, and to have inverted its different members; he did this as readily as if he were dealing with prose. In the first copy we have, ‘as if increase Of appetite had grown by what it look'd on.’ In the amended copy we have, ‘by what it fed on.’ Such changes are not the work of short-hand writers.³³⁰

Q1 is very much shorter than Q2. Q2’s expansion, however, “is mainly in the contemplative and imaginative parts, little being added in the way of action and incident.”³³¹ In other words, Q1 is an essential Hamlet, the differences between it and the

³²⁷ Chambers, Hamlet 226.

³²⁸ Shakespeare, Hamlet 2: 58.

³²⁹ Chambers, Hamlet 224.

³³⁰ Furness 2: 15.

³³¹ Hudson, Shakespeare 2: 261-262.

later versions being more “of refinement, finish, adaptation.”³³² The Second Quarto deepens the characterization of the 1603 version. In Q1’s closet scene, the Queen protests her innocence and promises to assist Hamlet.³³³ In Q2, she is a much more ambiguous character, her complicity in Hamlet’s father’s murder unknown. While Duthie believes that “in making the Queen explicitly deny her knowledge of the murder the person responsible for the Q1 text is only putting more directly and crudely what is implicit in Q2 itself,”³³⁴ Chambers disagrees: “It was Shakespeare’s intention that Hamlet should stand alone.”³³⁵ Furness similarly acknowledges, “The character of Hamlet is fully conceived in the original play [Q1], whenever he is in action [...]. It is the contemplative part of his nature which is elaborated in the perfect copy.”³³⁶

Many critics, even those who believe Shakespeare did not write the original play, believe that some sort of “extensive and important revision”³³⁷ occurred, and that Q2 is, for all intents and purposes, a “second draft.”³³⁸ In this scenario, Q1 is a reconstruction of Shakespeare’s “first revision of the [Ur-Hamlet] in 1601,”³³⁹ not a true rough draft, but a representation thereof. For scholars, this is an important distinction.

We must express our decided opinion [...] that the original sketch was an early production of our poet. The copy of 1603 is no doubt piratical; it is

³³² Wendell 256.

³³³ Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 2: 72.

³³⁴ Duthie 195.

³³⁵ Chambers, *Hamlet* 225.

³³⁶ Furness 2: 15-16.

³³⁷ Chambers, *Hamlet* vii.

³³⁸ Hudson, *Hamlet* xxiii.

unquestionably very imperfectly printed. But [...] the essential differences between the sketch and the perfect play, - differences which do not depend upon the corruption of the text, - can only be accounted for upon the belief that there was a considerable interval between the productions of the first and second copy, in which the author's power and judgment had become mature, and his peculiar habits of philosophical thought had been completely established.³⁴⁰

Critics do not wish to acknowledge Q1 as authentic Shakespeare, but they must concede that it represents some iteration of Shakespeare's creation, for if Q1 is not Shakespeare's, i.e., it reflects the pre-Shakespearean version, then, as Furnivall declares, "the credit of three-fifths of the character of Hamlet, and about one-half of the working out of it, belong to the author of the old Hamlet."³⁴¹ E. K. Chambers confirms "if the bulk of [Q1] is not Shakespeare's, then there was another Elizabethan dramatist as great as Shakespeare himself, who has left no other sign of his existence."³⁴²

Whether Shakespeare revitalized an old, formulaic piece, or was the author of it all, Hamlet compresses decades of effort. Critics, regardless of persuasion, reflect on how the play pits the old against the new, "the inevitable clashing between the stage tradition with its framework of the old blood-and-revenge drama and the rich intellectual

³³⁹ Adams 304.

³⁴⁰ Furness 2: 17-18.

³⁴¹ qtd. in Chambers, Hamlet 226.

³⁴² Chambers, Hamlet ix.

and emotional character of the central figure as conceived by the mature Shakespeare.”³⁴³

Hamlet is an archaic warrior with a modern consciousness; certainly he underwent the most transformation in revision. While the characters around him remain trapped in world that is two decades old, Hamlet is unique, self-aware. He is his own play; Denmark is a prison. This dissonance is not always appreciated. F. A. March complains that the “character of Hamlet is not brought to unity. Some passages seem to have been taken up from the old play, in which Hamlet has a different character from Shakespeare's prevailing thought of him.”³⁴⁴ This Hamlet is “at once pre-Shakespearean and postmodern.”³⁴⁵ Rowse submits

On the threshold of this decade [the 1600s] we meet one of its great masterpieces. Dramatically speaking, it is transitional, in itself spanning all three periods [1580s, 1590s, and 1600s], harking back even to the first [...] as well as looking to the future: hence [...] the feeling a lot of people have that all Shakespeare is in it.³⁴⁶

Yet, Rowse argues that the theatrical origins of Hamlet predate Shakespeare:

“Shakespeare took the old play and made something new and wonderful out of it - no wonder the predecessor did not survive.”³⁴⁷ It is difficult to argue with Rowse, a scholar who adopts the characteristic smugness of much orthodox criticism: “As an Elizabethan

³⁴³ Hudson, Hamlet xv.

³⁴⁴ qtd. in Variorum 2: 187.

³⁴⁵ Bloom, Poem Unlimited 126.

³⁴⁶ Rowse, Shakespeare 160-161.

³⁴⁷ Rowse, Shakespeare 161.

historian I have been able to settle once and for all the dating of the Sonnets and the chronology of the Plays. [...] In short, we now have the definitive biography of our greatest writer, all confusions cleared up and problems settled [...].”³⁴⁸

The argument thus far has been as follows: Q1 is a mediocre play, a degradation; Shakespeare had no part in it; however, if Shakespeare had no part in it, the better part of Hamlet belongs to the author of the Ur-Hamlet; Hamlet belongs to Shakespeare; Shakespeare is and is not the author of the Ur-Hamlet. Matus declares, “Without the Ur-Hamlet for comparison, we cannot make any judgment on Shakespeare’s use of and alterations to his presumed source, other than hazard the guess that it was an improvement.”³⁴⁹ Matus prefaces his seemingly sensible comments with a baffling qualification: “Putting aside matters of standard theatre practice and the work of merely mortal playwrights [...]”³⁵⁰ Was Shakespeare not a mortal playwright? Could Hamlet have been one of Shakespeare’s first plays? In regards to the theory of revision, MacCallum states, “There is nothing in this that is inherently improbable.”³⁵¹ Peter Alexander concludes “we may, since there is no contrary evidence, assume that the early Hamlet was Shakespeare's own first version of the piece that we now have in its revised and final form.”³⁵² Bloom believes it was conceived as early as 1587,³⁵³ Ian Wilson

³⁴⁸ Rowse, Shakespeare xii.

³⁴⁹ Matus 131.

³⁵⁰ Matus 131.

³⁵¹ McCallum 284.

³⁵² Alexander, Introductions 162.

³⁵³ Bloom, Shakespeare 392.

thinks perhaps 1586.³⁵⁴ Cairncross dates Hamlet between August 1588 and August 1589,³⁵⁵ and submits that there is good cause for believing it was by Shakespeare.³⁵⁶

There are structural and thematic reasons for supposing a protracted period of composition, conceivably by the same author (as maintained by Bloom, Ogburn, and others outside the traditional realm), beginning in the late 1580s, and spanning two decades of thought, rework and revision. The most obvious point of reference is Hamlet's interminable length. Practical theorist, Jan Kott, supposes, "Hamlet cannot be performed in its entirety, because the performance would last nearly six hours. One has to select, curtail and cut. [...] It will always be a poorer Hamlet than Shakespeare's Hamlet is [...]."³⁵⁷ While Kenneth Branagh, director and star of a few full-text productions, disagrees, submitting that the length offers "a much more comfortable playing experience for the actor,"³⁵⁸ most scholars "don't see how an uncut Hamlet could ever have been performed under Elizabethan conditions."³⁵⁹ The groundlings may have gotten restless. Perhaps "just this once Shakespeare wrote partly out of a purely private compulsion, knowing he would have to slash his text with every staging,"³⁶⁰ although Bloom confesses this idea "is heresy to virtually all modern Shakespeareans."³⁶¹

³⁵⁴ Wilson, 440-441.

³⁵⁵ Cairncross 83.

³⁵⁶ Cairncross 185.

³⁵⁷ Kott 58.

³⁵⁸ Kenneth Branagh, introduction, Hamlet by William Shakespeare: Screenplay and Introduction by Kenneth Branagh (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996) xiv.

³⁵⁹ Frye 82.

³⁶⁰ Bloom, Shakespeare 390.

³⁶¹ Bloom, Shakespeare 390.

T. S. Eliot's famous pronouncement that Hamlet "is most certainly an artistic failure"³⁶² stems from the play's "superfluous and inconsistent scenes."³⁶³ Hamlet is a thematic jumble, "inexplicably confused as drama,"³⁶⁴ replete with riffs that have no ostensible bearing on the development of the plot. Such arguably gratuitous insertions, while adding depth and psychology, a nod to current events, run contrary to what most critics believe about Shakespeare, who, as a practical man of the theatre, must have had least one eye on the box office returns. Supposedly, Shakespeare saw his immortality in his narrative poetry, not in his plays, which, as a form of creative expression, were cheap; they were mass entertainment, a pop-art commodity. Hamlet is a would-be thriller, a stock revenge tragedy guaranteed to excite, but one in which all of the action is exasperatingly delayed due to the existential musings of its protagonist. Such a philosophically dense (and long) piece would not have guaranteed to hold the attention of an audience accustomed to cockfights and public executions as entertainment. This begs the question of Shakespeare's motivation. Do critics "love too much the partial truth of a purely commercial Shakespeare, who took the cash and let renown go"³⁶⁵?

Shakespeare's investment in Hamlet seems beyond the practical. Although Henri Fluchere is "not much inclined to the view that the curve of Shakespeare's production follows merely the incidents of his life,"³⁶⁶ the tragedy is rife with autobiographical

³⁶² Eliot, Essays 58.

³⁶³ Eliot, Essays 59.

³⁶⁴ Kermode, Hamlet 1135.

³⁶⁵ Bloom, Shakespeare 417.

³⁶⁶ Fluchere 27.

references, the play “distorted by the pressure of a personal emotion.”³⁶⁷ Hamlet is Shakespeare’s “most personal play,”³⁶⁸ with more of the playwright “himself in this play than in any of his others.”³⁶⁹ As such, it inspires fantastic scenarios for scholars looking for a window into Shakespeare’s life. Anthony Burgess admits his fascination with finding anything that would reveal something of the playwright, believing that “given the choice between two discoveries - that of an unknown play by Shakespeare and that of one of Will’s laundry lists - we would all plump for the dirty washing every time.”³⁷⁰ Among the more outrageous and far-flung connections he makes is his comparison of Claudius to Shakespeare’s own brother. Crediting James Joyce’s Ulysses, among others, Burgess writes,

Will’s wife was Anne. In Richard III the villainous eponym seduces an Anne. He is hunchbacked and he limps. In Hamlet another brother seduces the widow of a man whose son’s name is close enough to the name of Will’s own son - Hamnet. [...] The brother’s name is Claudius, which means a limper. Richard III and Claudius conjoin in the real brother Richard.³⁷¹

Burgess admits the dangerous nature of such speculation (Shakespeare’s brother “may have been an upright well-made young man who loved his eldest brother and respected

³⁶⁷ Kermode, Hamlet 1135.

³⁶⁸ Rowse, Hamlet 1728.

³⁶⁹ Harrison xxviii.

³⁷⁰ Burgess 10.

³⁷¹ Burgess 25.

his sister-in-law.”³⁷²), but the critic silences “the little cracked fanfares of caution”³⁷³ in a fanciful reconstruction of Hamlet’s opening performance. In this, Burgess makes note of another personal allusion in the character of Ophelia, probably based on a young woman from Stratford. Katharine Hamlet (a.k.a., “Katherine Hamlett”) drowned in the Avon when Shakespeare was fifteen-years-old. The coroner’s conclusion read that her death was “*per infortunium* [by accident] and not a case of *felo de se* [suicide] whereby she was entitled to Christian burial.”³⁷⁴ Rowse supposes, “It is unlikely that he would forget that, and with it her name [...]”³⁷⁵ Burgess narrates,

With Ophelia's death, Shakespeare comes straight home to Warwickshire and his boyhood. Kyd's Hamlet play [i.e., BB] made Ophelia die by falling over a cliff-edge; Shakespeare drowns her amid a profusion of Warwickshire flowers [...]. This periphrastic information about flower-naming is so irrelevant here [...] that one has to conclude that Will has allowed Warwickshire reminiscences totally to swamp the business in hand. For he is thinking of a girl who lived not a mile from Stratford when he was a boy, and who drowned herself - some said for love - in the Avon. Her name was Kate Hamnet [sic]. She merges with Ophelia and his own dead son.³⁷⁶

³⁷² Burgess 25.

³⁷³ Burgess 9-10.

³⁷⁴ qtd. in Duncan-Jones 23.

³⁷⁵ Rowse, Hamlet 1729.

³⁷⁶ Burgess 181-182.

Burgess favors the traditional explanation of the Ur-Hamlet's authorship, but he also notes, in an unrelated chapter, that Shakespeare "had written his plays straight off, without drafts."³⁷⁷

While the story of Katharine Hamlet is of great interest, there is no connection so provocative as the relationship between the protagonist and the playwright's son. Shakespeare's only male heir was born in 1585. The earliest estimates suggest that the first draft of Hamlet was written in 1585. Shakespeare named his son Hamnet, which of course hearkens back to the mythological Amleth. Taking into account the fluidity of the English language at this time, both son and hero essentially share the same name. According to "early tradition,"³⁷⁸ Shakespeare played the ghost of Hamlet's father, a parallel to his real-life role. In Ulysses, James Joyce beautifully expounds on the significance:

Hamlet, I am thy father's spirit

bidding him list. To a son he speaks, the son of his soul, the prince, young Hamlet and to the son of his body, Hamnet Shakespeare, who has died in Stratford that his namesake may live for ever.

Is it possible that that player Shakespeare, a ghost by absence, and in the vesture of buried Denmark, a ghost by death, speaking his own words to his own son's name (had Hamnet Shakespeare lived he would

³⁷⁷ Burgess 231.

³⁷⁸ Rowse, Hamlet 1729.

have been prince Hamlet's twin) is it possible, I want to know, or probable that he did not draw or foresee the logical conclusion of those premises: you are the dispossessed son: I am the murdered father: your mother is the guilty queen. Ann Shakespeare, born Hathaway?³⁷⁹

Scholars believe the deaths of Shakespeare's son and father presage the fifth act's sudden shift in tone. Hamnet Shakespeare died at age eleven in 1596, leaving William Shakespeare without a male heir. John Shakespeare, William's father, died in 1601, just prior to when critics believe Hamlet was in its final stages of completion. "Whatever relation this had to Hamlet has to be conjectural, and was most eloquently propounded by James Joyce's Ulysses."³⁸⁰

- Sabellius, the African, subtlest heresiarch of all the beasts of the field, held that the Father was Himself His Own Son. The bulldog of Aquin, with whom no word shall be impossible, refutes him. Well: if the father who has not a son be not a father can the son who has not a father be a son? When Rutlandbaconsouthamptonshakespeare or another poet of the same name in the comedy of errors wrote *Hamlet* he was not the father of his own son merely but, being no more a son, he was and felt himself the father of all his race, the father of his own grandfather, the father of his unborn grandson who, by the same token, never was born [...]³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ James Joyce, Ulysses (1914; New York: Random House, 1946) 186-187.

³⁸⁰ Bloom, Poem Unlimited 126.

³⁸¹ Joyce 205.

After having spent the first four acts of the play in a dyspeptic disposition, struggling with his duty and his conscience, a more matured Hamlet returns from the voyage to England. He is in a rhapsodic mood, older, less frantic, resigned, but at peace. More than any other aspect of the play, the last act is what defines Hamlet as a transcendental masterpiece, rather than a great revenge tragedy. When John Shakespeare died in 1601, William no longer had a father or a son. He was putting the final touches on his play. Bloom notes, “A mourning for Hamnet and for John Shakespeare may reverberate in Horatio's (and the audience's) mourning for Hamlet. The mystery of Hamlet, and of Hamlet, turns upon mourning as a mode of revisionism, and possibly upon revision itself as a kind of mourning [...]”³⁸² Other critics acknowledge this aspect. Burgess imagines, “This part of the Ghost reminds him of how much death he has seen - this year his father, not so many years ago his son. He, a living father, is about to play a dead one. The living son of the play has very nearly the same name as the son who died. How strangely things work out.”³⁸³

Many critics, including Ivor Brown³⁸⁴ among others, suppose Hamnet's death is not only reflected in the final act of Hamlet, but in the “deathscene of young Arthur in King John.”³⁸⁵

Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,

³⁸² Bloom, Shakespeare 400.

³⁸³ Burgess 176-177.

³⁸⁴ Brown 174.

Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
 Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
 Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;
 Then, have I reason to be fond of grief?

- King John (3: 4: 93-98)³⁸⁶

This heart-wrenching passage may be further proof that Shakespeare incorporated autobiographical elements into his plays. Hamlet is a personal play. Bloom interprets the connection to mean Shakespeare was attached to it from the beginning; after all, the protagonist and the playwright's son share the same name. Should not this be convincing?

Truthfully, there is no external evidence for believing that Shakespeare began revising Hamlet prior to 1601. There is reason for preferring him to Kyd, which is why scholars such as Bloom have glommed onto the notion; but in this instance, the temptation to let imagination run wild is all too strong: the link with the name is exaggerated to fulfill a fantasy. While Shakespeare was undoubtedly familiar with the old myth, his twins were named after their godparents and neighbors, Hamnet and Judith Sadler.³⁸⁷ His son's birthright was less prophetic than coincidental. Like Hamlet, the origins of King John are also nameless. It "may have been written as early as 1590, or as

³⁸⁵ Joyce 206.

³⁸⁶ William Shakespeare, King John, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, The Riverside Shakespeare (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974) 785.

³⁸⁷ Rowse, Shakespeare 32.

late as 1595 or even 1596.”³⁸⁸ Bloom suspects that “Shakespeare first composed King John in 1590 and severely reworked it in 1594-95,”³⁸⁹ but critics are far from unanimous. Most believe the original play was not Shakespeare’s. The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England was published anonymously in 1591, then printed again in 1611 and 1622, both of the later editions bearing Shakespeare’s name. “In effect, all the English critics agree that he did not write it [the early version], though scarce any two of them agree who did.”³⁹⁰

Since autobiographical elements alone cannot set the date for Shakespeare’s composition of Hamlet, scholars reconcile the timeline by analyzing topical allusions. The play’s theatrical in-jokes reveal the petty rivalries of the Elizabethan theatre scene, the friction with the Boy’s Companies,³⁹¹ and the Poet’s War between Shakespeare and Jonson.³⁹² Supposed references to actors in Shakespeare’s company include the clowns Will Kempe³⁹³ and Dick Tarleton.³⁹⁴ Other esoterica: the names Rosencrantz and Guildenstern may be traced to a 1577 memoranda by Duke Frederick I of Wittenberg. The document reads,

1577 In utraque fortuna ipsius fortuna esto memor Jorgen Rosencrantz.

1577 Feredum et sperandum P Guildenstern.

³⁸⁸ Bloom, Shakespeare 51.

³⁸⁹ Bloom, Shakespeare 51.

³⁹⁰ Hudson, Shakespeare 2: 11.

³⁹¹ Rowse, Hamlet 1726.

³⁹² Bloom, Poem Unlimited 24-25.

³⁹³ Bloom, Poem Unlimited 73-74.

³⁹⁴ Rowse, Hamlet 1728.

Haufniae [Copenhagen] sthen Builde tull Wandass.³⁹⁵

While fascinating, such trivia is “suggestive to the imagination rather than to the reason,”³⁹⁶ which is why not much emphasis has been placed on it here. The existence of a contemporary allusion may signify nothing more than a production revival, demonstrating the potential for textual corruption. Like the event horizon of a black hole, this is the point at which science breaks down.

³⁹⁵ qtd. in Morgan xv.

³⁹⁶ Chambers, Hamlet xiii.

Chapter Five: “The Acting Version”

Philip Henslowe, proprietor of the Rose Theatre, documents the first recorded performance of Hamlet in June of 1594, although it had no doubt debuted sometime prior. The year leading up to this historic entry was a turbulent one for the theatre companies in London. For much of the 1593-1594 season, the plague consumed the capital city, and the authorities closed the theatres. Edward Alleyn and the Admiral’s Men were forced to abandon their rivalry with Lord Strange’s Company, and the two set out on a joint tour of the provinces together. Early on, the Lord Strange’s father died, bequeathing to Ferdinando Stanley a new title, the Earl of Derby. Thus, Strange’s Men became Derby’s Men. Unfortunately, less than a year after his father passed, the Earl of Derby also departed, leaving the players without a patron. Henry Carey, Baron Hunsdon, Lord Chamberlain to Queen Elizabeth agreed to offer his protection, so the Lord Strange’s Men turned Derby’s Men became known as the Lord Chamberlain’s Men.

After the 1593-1594 tour, the Admiral’s Men returned to the Rose Theatre under the management of Philip Henslowe. Apparently, Henslowe also owned or leased a theatre in the London suburb of Newington Butts. It is at Newington Butts that the earliest known performances by the Chamberlain’s Men, under the patronage of Lord Hunsdon, occurred. Over the course of ten days, in June of 1594, perhaps in co-operation with the Admiral’s Men, they performed four plays: a biblical drama entitled Esther and

Ahasuerus, Titus Andronicus, The Taming of a Shrew, and Hamlet.³⁹⁷ “The old Hamlet, it appears, had belonged to the Pembroke's Men; but when the troupe was dissolved in 1593-94 the manuscript was purchased, along with The Taming of the Shrew, Titus Andronicus, and other plays, by the Chamberlain's Company.”³⁹⁸ The Pembroke's Men had also gone on tour the previous year, but theirs was a financial failure. In debt to Philip Henslowe, they were forced to sell costumes, and, some believe, the plays in their repertory. Cairncross supposes the Pembroke's Men was Shakespeare's first company.³⁹⁹ William F. Hansen believes “Shakespeare's company evidently purchased”⁴⁰⁰ Hamlet, possibly from the Pembroke's Men; some believe it was simply passed down from the Lord Strange's Men. Shakespeare has been associated with both companies. Many plays shifted hands at this time:

What happened to Kyd's play [the Ur-Hamlet] as property after the break-up of Lord Strange's Men? We know that the Admiral's Men took over a number of play-books including Tamar Cham and The Battle of Alcazar, and that others fell to the Chamberlain's Company (Henry VI, Titus Andronicus). Hamlet was played once by the combined companies in 1594, but never by the Admiral's Men thereafter; the old version existed before 1589, of course, and it is reasonable to suppose that its book was among the spoils of Lord Strange's Company which accrued to the

³⁹⁷ Chute 135-36.

³⁹⁸ Adams 303-304.

³⁹⁹ Cairncross 87.

Chamberlain's. A third category of material, however (Orlando Furioso, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, The Jew of Malta), seems to have fallen, perhaps through publication, into the public domain, or at least into joint or multiple proprietorship by agreement. The Spanish Tragedy may have been such a play, for there is evidence at least of dual auspices after 1594.⁴⁰¹

According to an epitaph most believe to be authentic, Richard Burbage, leading actor of the Chamberlain's Men, once played Hieronimo. The elegy is the evidence of "dual auspices" to which Freeman refers:

hee's gone & wth him what A world are dead.
 which he reviv'd, to be revived soe,
 no more young Hamlett, ould Hieronymoe
 kind Leer, the Greved Moore, and more beside,
 that lived in him; have now forever dy'de⁴⁰²

Burbage was much beloved, a "towering and original figure of the King's Men, one whose loss the court noticed rather more than Shakespeare's."⁴⁰³ In truth, there are no significant eulogies of the playwright other than those published in the prefatory epistles of the First Folio, compiled seven years after Shakespeare's death. As Ben Jonson writes, Shakespeare's works are his memorial:

⁴⁰⁰ Hansen 67.

⁴⁰¹ Freeman 121-122.

⁴⁰² C.M. Ingleby, Shakespeare, The Man and The Book, 2 vols. (London, 1877, 1881) 2: 170-171.

My Shakefpeare, rife; [...]
Thou art a Moniment, without a tombe,
And art aliue ffill, while thy Booke doth liue,
*And we have wits to read, and praise to giue.*⁴⁰⁴

As stated in their Introduction to the Reader, the editors of the First Folio, John Heminge and Henrie Condell, endeavored to reproduce Shakespeare's works as the playwright "conceived them," claiming that the volume represents the definitive, authoritative texts of all the plays. However, as it was printed so many years after Shakespeare's death, many modern day editors believe the Folio versions of the plays, while reliable, have been tainted by the passage of time, and the vagaries of practical wear and tear. In regards to Hamlet, most editors actually prefer the Second Quarto to the Folio, which they believe is the "acting version," cut for performance. As "it is unlikely that Shakespeare exercised supervision over the printing of any of his works,"⁴⁰⁵ it is difficult to determine whether the playwright would have approved of such abridgement. Even while he lived, Shakespeare had little recourse against the adulteration of his plays, which were owned by the theatre companies to which he sold them. Once recorded in the Stationers' Register as the property of the publisher, he had no rights at all.

⁴⁰³ Wilson 400.

⁴⁰⁴ Ben Jonson, preface, Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies, by William Shakespeare, eds. John Heminge and Henrie Condell, rpt. in Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies: A Facsimile of the First Folio, 1623. (1623; New York: Routledge, 1998) 9.

⁴⁰⁵ Brooke, Shakespeare 117.

The Stationers' Register was England's first attempt at enforcing a universal copyright law. As such, it was an imperfect system: violators were subject to fines and confiscation of property, but frequently went unpunished. Any work could be published and distributed in England without being recorded in the Register, so long as the censor approved it; however, in such an instance, the work was entirely unprotected, and could be reproduced freely. The Register was the authorized body charged with protecting the publisher's patent; it had little concern with the individual rights of the author.

Shakespeare never published any of his plays himself and many were published only posthumously. This "was not because there was no reading public; publishers were only too ready to print his plays."⁴⁰⁶ Theatre companies kept them "unpublished in their own interests,"⁴⁰⁷ for to "dispose for a pittance of plays that were drawing good houses did not seem sound policy."⁴⁰⁸ Plays were published only if they were exceedingly popular, or to steal an unauthorized edition's thunder, never by default. The threat from plagiarizers was real, so theatre companies took extra precautions, including the use of cue-scripts that only contained a particular character's lines and cues. "No actor, therefore, had a full copy of the text, so that the danger of the play's falling into the hands of a printer was slight."⁴⁰⁹

Actors owned the theatre companies that owned the plays. Plays were reworked, and frequently not by the original author. "There was constant rehandling of old pieces

⁴⁰⁶ Alexander, Introductions 21.

⁴⁰⁷ Duthie 2.

⁴⁰⁸ Alexander, Introductions 21.

with attempted ‘modernisation,’ as we might say.”⁴¹⁰ Thomas Kyd was a victim of this. The 1602 Spanish Tragedy contains an additional three hundred lines not found in the 1599 text,⁴¹¹ theoretically the result of “joint or sequent auspices for the play.”⁴¹² If and when theatre companies chose to publish one of their popular plays, the conditions of publication were unlikely to have been ideal, for “the best printers of the day were not the ones who brought out cheap play quartos.”⁴¹³ In an essay regarding the haphazard nature of Shakespearean punctuation, George Bernard Shaw traces the elaborate path of a Shakespearean play from foul papers to cue-script to mass publication:

First, Shakespear wrote a play. It may be presumed that he punctuated it; but this is by no means certain. [...] From it the scrivener copied out the parts for the actors, and made a legible prompt copy. [...] The copies so produced were then marked at rehearsal in all sorts of ways by all sorts of people for all sorts of theatrical purposes. Thus marked, they were fair copied again by a scrivener - possibly the same, possibly another - for the printer. [...] And so we get two opinionated scriveners, a whole company of actors and stage officials, and a tradition-ridden compositor, between Shakespear's holograph and the printed page.⁴¹⁴

⁴⁰⁹ Adams 306.

⁴¹⁰ Brown 167-168.

⁴¹¹ Freeman 117-119.

⁴¹² Freeman 130.

⁴¹³ Brooke, Shakespeare 117.

⁴¹⁴ George Bernard Shaw, “Shakespear: A Standard Text,” Times Literary Supplement, 18 Mar. 1921, rpt. in Shaw on Theatre, ed. E. J. West (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958) 139-140.

Thus, sifting through the quagmire, editors search for the true Shakespearean text, “the real Hamlet,” untouched by meaner hands, the actors, scribes, printers, publishers, and pirates, who all contributed to the devolution of the authentic play. The quest to find this pure text leads to the paradox that defines the Ur-Hamlet debate: it is a lost play; it never existed; it was never lost; it still exists. It may be found in the nether reaches of two reviled and ridiculed pseudo-Shakespearean works, Hamlet Q1 and Der Bestrafte Brudermord.

Q1’s deviations are the source of much dispute, and to detect a clear pattern of thinking or consensus is nearly impossible. The essence of the argument “is whether, in the Quarto of 1603, we have the first draught of Shakespeare's tragedy, which the author afterwards remodeled and elaborated”⁴¹⁵ or whether “it is merely a maimed and distorted version.”⁴¹⁶ As it was the first edition to see print, many critics from previous generations naturally assumed it was an earlier version of Shakespeare’s Hamlet. The guiding wisdom in current scholarship, however, favors an alternative theory: Q1 is a surreptitious, posterior version, memorially reconstructed, probably from Q2.⁴¹⁷ Q1 is “an exceedingly corrupt text,”⁴¹⁸ “an imperfect, garbled, and interpolated version of the completed play,”⁴¹⁹ “a pirated edition,”⁴²⁰ “not an original of Shakespeare's play but a

⁴¹⁵ Furness 2: 14.

⁴¹⁶ Furness 2: 14.

⁴¹⁷ Duthie 273.

⁴¹⁸ Adams 307.

⁴¹⁹ Grant White, qtd. in Variorum 2: 27.

⁴²⁰ Alexander, Introductions 162.

reconstruction of it.”⁴²¹ The theory of memorial reconstruction has many proponents, and Jenkins is among the most insistent, explaining how Q1 may have come to pass.

What we have to suppose is that a group of actors, wishing to perform a play of which they had no book, would make a book from what could be remembered by one or more of their number who had acted in the play before. A corollary is that such a text would need to be not so much accurate as actable [...].⁴²²

Remarkably, Jenkins believes the 1603 Q1 derives not from the 1604 Q2, but from the 1623 Folio version, “which it often concurs with in variant readings and for the most part follows in cuts.”⁴²³ He was not the first critic to make such an observation. Employing the royal “we,” Collier examines the significance of this relationship:

But although we entirely reject the quarto of 1603, as an authentic Hamlet, it is of high value in enabling us to settle the text of various important passages. It proves, besides, that certain portions of the play, as it appears in the folio of 1623, which do not form part of the quarto of 1604, were originally acted, and were not, as had been hitherto imagined, subsequent introductions.⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ Jenkins 19.

⁴²² Jenkins 20.

⁴²³ Jenkins 21.

⁴²⁴ Collier n.pag.

In essence, the illegitimate Q1 legitimizes the cuts made in the Folio, confirming “that the surreptitious text of 1603 and the authentic text of twenty years later had a common origin.”⁴²⁵ Scholars recognize Q1 as an acting text, reconstructed by or for performance.

Collier supposes Shakespeare’s script was stolen by a printer who “surreptitiously secured a manuscript of the play.”⁴²⁶ The precise nature of this manuscript is a point of contention, for Q1’s deviations cannot merely be explained as the result of typographical errors. Chambers characterizes Q1’s errors as “manifestly due to mishearing and not to misreading,”⁴²⁷ and thus concludes “it was founded upon some hasty notes, taken in shorthand or otherwise, by some agent of this bookseller's during a performance at the theatre.”⁴²⁸ Copying the dialogue “short-hand from the players' mouths,”⁴²⁹ the reporter probably needed to supplement what he had heard. Since aspects of Q1 are word-for-word, scholars infer that a player from the production must have aided the process.

As Marcellus’s speeches, “and to a less degree the speeches of others while Marcellus is on stage, are more faithfully rendered than the bulk of the play,”⁴³⁰ scholars identify the nameless actor as the prime suspect.⁴³¹ As Marcellus is a small role, this actor probably played other parts in the production as well. Judging by the faithfulness of certain character’s speeches to the later versions, Joseph Quincy Adams imagines the

⁴²⁵ White qtd. in *Variorum* 2: 28.

⁴²⁶ Collier n.pag.

⁴²⁷ Chambers, *Hamlet* 221.

⁴²⁸ Chambers, *Hamlet* vii.

⁴²⁹ Furness 2: 14.

⁴³⁰ Jenkins 21.

⁴³¹ Harrison xxiii-xxiv.

player “acted in succession as Marcellus, Voltimand, one of the traveling players, one of the soldiers in Fortinbras' army, the second grave-digger, the churlish priest, and one of the ambassadors from England.⁴³² Perhaps the actor, disgruntled with the company, contrived to make a little money at his former employer's expense: “That the actor of such minor roles should be a hired man, who afterwards left or was turned off by the company, taking his memory with him, is plausible enough.”⁴³³

The theory of memorial reconstruction dates back at least to the mid-nineteenth century, when, in 1857, Tycho Mommsen writes:

I apprehend that I discern two hands employed, one after the other, upon this Hamlet, the one being probably that of an actor, who put down, from memory, a sketch of the original play, as it was acted, and who wrote very illegibly; the other that of a bad poet, most probably a ‘bookseller's hack’, who, without any personal intercourse with the writer of the notes, availed himself of them to make up this early copy of Hamlet.⁴³⁴

Unfortunately, as scholars add increasing layers of qualifications, they stretch the feasibility of their hypotheses. Unable to reconcile the difference in quality between the last three acts and the first two, as well as the increased departure from Q2 as the play progresses, Chambers simply offers, “The reporter may have grown tired of his task.”⁴³⁵ Duthie recognizes the hand of another playwright at work who “when he could remember

⁴³² Adams 307.

⁴³³ Jenkins 22.

⁴³⁴ qtd. in Duthie 26.

only (or chiefly) the general drift of a passage in the full play, rendered it in regular blank verse of his own composition, often stringing together words and phrases gleaned from his memory of various passages strewn throughout the authentic text.”⁴³⁶ Such convoluted theories are the hallmark of memorial reconstruction.

No doubt, many plays in Shakespeare’s time were subject to fraudulent reproduction, however the theory of memorial reconstruction, especially as it applies to Q1, is not without its difficulties. One of the most challenging is the problem of omission, or when a text lacks a notable speech, as for instance Hamlet’s “What a piece of work is a man [...],” found in Q2 and the Folio, but not in Q1. Omissions such as this “may result simply from defective memorial transmission. Alternatively, it may be due to deliberate excision in abridged acting versions.”⁴³⁷ Those who support the idea that Q1 is an earlier draft would offer that such examples are proof of authorial revision, demonstrating “internal evidence that the original sketch and the augmented and perfect copy of Hamlet were written under different influences and habits of thought.”⁴³⁸ Besides the issue of omission, the theory of memorial reconstruction cannot explain certain distinctive characteristics of Q1, most significantly the character names of Polonius and Reynaldo, who in Q1 are renamed Corambis and Montano. Duthie blames the reporter who “may simply have attached the names of the old play to his version of

⁴³⁵ Chambers, Hamlet 226.

⁴³⁶ Duthie 143.

⁴³⁷ Duthie 52-53.

⁴³⁸ Furness 2: 18.

the text of Shakespeare.”⁴³⁹ Jenkins insists, “Polonious, not Corambis, was the original name in Shakespeare's play.”⁴⁴⁰ Therefore, “whether through design or confusion,”⁴⁴¹ Corambis, and ostensibly Montano, is a holdover from the earlier play, a remnant of the Ur-Hamlet.

As the theory of memorial reconstruction, by itself, is inadequate, critics add three more provisos: Q1 is a memorial reconstruction of (1) Shakespeare's first draft, with (2) pre-Shakespearean insertions, potentially created (3) after Shakespeare's final draft was complete. Scholars submit that an earlier draft of Shakespeare's play, based on the Ur-Hamlet, was in existence by 1601; Chambers believes Q1 represents this version,⁴⁴² as does Harrison.⁴⁴³ Adding credence to the theory, after Q1 was published in May of 1603, the theatres closed for six months due to the plague: “Shakespeare may have utilized this interval of leisure further to improve the play.”⁴⁴⁴ This hypothesis would appear to be in direct opposition to Jenkins, who, like many others supposes that Q1 post-dates the Folio version, printed 1623; yet, remembering that Q1 is a memorial reconstruction, the two are actually not at odds, the infamous, unnamed reporter being an ever-present factor in the timeline. No one knows when the script for Q1 was actually compiled, just that it was brought about in time to capitalize on the success of the stage version.

⁴³⁹ Duthie 227.

⁴⁴⁰ Jenkins 34-35.

⁴⁴¹ Jenkins 34-35.

⁴⁴² Chambers, Hamlet 226.

⁴⁴³ Harrison xxiv.

⁴⁴⁴ Adams 309.

Scholars blame this “surreptitious stenographer”⁴⁴⁵ for Q1’s pre-Shakespearean insertions, creating a text based on Shakespeare’s first Hamlet in performance, “eked out”⁴⁴⁶ by “some transcript of the old play in its unaltered form.”⁴⁴⁷ A sensitive subject, critics are convinced of vestiges such as the name “Corambis,”⁴⁴⁸ but are divided as to other extracts. The reporter’s identity is unknown. Chambers believes “it was pirated by James Roberts.”⁴⁴⁹ Roberts is not listed on the title page of Q1, just the publishers “N.L. and Iohn Trundell” (Nicholas Ling and John Trundell). Q2’s title page states that the play was “Printed by I.R. for N.L.” (James Roberts for Nicholas Ling).⁴⁵⁰ Chambers assumes that, in the interim between 1603 and 1604, when Shakespeare was finishing his final revision of Hamlet, “Roberts or Ling came to terms with the company, and was allowed to publish a second and authorized edition from the poet’s manuscript.”⁴⁵¹ Whether or not Roberts was the responsible party has not been decided; Chambers is the only major critic to offer an opinion. The rest are silent, but the point may be moot.

While it may be true, the notion of a second-hand reporter is also just a convenient device. Regardless of his identity, he must exist, for critics will not accept the idea of Q1 as an accurate representation of Shakespeare’s words. It may be a version of his first draft, but one that is “very far from reproducing the dialogue of the play as it was

⁴⁴⁵ Morgan xix-xx.

⁴⁴⁶ Brooke, Hamlet 485.

⁴⁴⁷ Adams 307.

⁴⁴⁸ Fleay, Shakespeare Manual 41.

⁴⁴⁹ Chambers, Hamlet xi.

⁴⁵⁰ Chambers, Hamlet vi.

⁴⁵¹ Chambers, Hamlet xi.

presented upon the stage.”⁴⁵² While simultaneously distancing Q1 from Shakespeare, critics reject the idea that it bears the smallest resemblance to any other playwright’s version, including the lost play, excepting the odd “pre-Shakespearean” turn of phrase.⁴⁵³ To acknowledge otherwise would give the anonymous author too much credit, making Shakespeare “a plagiarist and [the author of the Ur-Hamlet] one of the greatest poets of all time.”⁴⁵⁴ Shakespeare receives all the glory and none of the blame, the theory of memorial reconstruction subscribed to by default. Jenkins is among the chiefest offenders, employing the theory of memorial reconstruction to not only distance Shakespeare from Q1, but from the source play:

It has often been suggested that details from Belleforest may have been transmitted through the Ur-Hamlet. Yet the words of the Queen's vow are manifestly echoes from The Spanish Tragedy and her dialogue with Horatio is partly put together, after the reporter's customary fashion, from recollections of the Shakespearean text [...] It follows that these speeches of the Queen peculiar to Q1 do not preserve passages of the Ur-Hamlet. [...] The most we can say is that if the reporter had previously acted in the old Hamlet, some recollections of it, as of other plays, may have mingled with his attempts at reproducing Shakespeare's.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵² Chambers, Hamlet vii.

⁴⁵³ Chambers, Hamlet ix.

⁴⁵⁴ Wilhelm Creizenach, qtd. in Jenkins 116.

⁴⁵⁵ Jenkins 33-34.

In other words, Jenkins supposes that passages long-thought to be relics of the early play are actually leftovers from The Spanish Tragedy, the result of “an actor's familiarity with Kyd's lines on the stage.”⁴⁵⁶ Here, Jenkins follows Duthie: “At the end of the Closet-scene in Q1 the Queen offers Hamlet her active assistance in his duty of revenge [...]. [...] the last two lines [in her speech] contain the words not of Gertrude in any authentic version of Hamlet but of Bellimperia in The Spanish Tragedy [...].”⁴⁵⁷ Duthie does not believe this is a trace of the Ur-Hamlet by Kyd, but rather the reporter's confusion. With this scapegoat, all hints of the old play are purged. Shakespeare owes nothing to his source, all deviations and discrepancies the desecration of another hand. Cairncross sees the echoes of other plays in Hamlet as proof *against* the notion of an Ur-Hamlet: “Further, there is now no reason, that can be derived from Q1, to suppose that there was any Ur-Hamlet, or that Kyd was its author; if it ever existed, it might even more safely be attributed to Shakespeare himself, or, with equal justification to Marlowe, or Chapman, from all of whom echoes have been found in the First Quarto.”⁴⁵⁸ Orthodoxy has not welcomed this opinion.

Astonishingly few scholars have questioned whether or not Shakespeare may have made a distinction in regards to the multiple versions of his play. The playwright does not appear to have acted proprietarily towards any his creations (except perhaps his narrative poetry), so why should scholars assign him a different attitude? Adams feels

⁴⁵⁶ Jenkins 31.

⁴⁵⁷ Duthie 196.

⁴⁵⁸ Cairncross 69.

Shakespeare must have been greatly provoked that the play, which had won him fame both in London and at the universities, should be offered to the reading public in so corrupt a form [i.e., Q1]. Yet he had no recourse at law, and the only way he could protect his reputation was to issue a correct and authorized edition. This, however, he did not at once do.⁴⁵⁹

He did not at once do because “Shakespeare in no instance authorized the publication of his plays.”⁴⁶⁰ Collier also supposes that Q2 was printed as an attempt to clarify the “mistakes” of Q1, but believes Shakespeare was probably not personally involved in the publication of either one, allowing the “most mangled and deformed copies of several of his greatest works to be circulated for many years, and did not think it worth his while to expose the fraud, which remained, in several cases, undetected, as far as the great body of the public was concerned [...]”⁴⁶¹ The public was not concerned, because the public did not know the difference; but theatre companies were financially motivated to protect their rights. Shakespeare, the playwright, had little legal control. However, as a high-ranking company member of the King’s Men, and shareholder of the Globe playhouse, he certainly held some sway. Either Shakespeare was not the figure of importance that history has assumed, or he made no such distinction in regards to the so-called fraudulent editions of his works. Based on results, he did not care.

⁴⁵⁹ Adams 308.

⁴⁶⁰ Collier n.pag.

⁴⁶¹ Collier n.pag.

Memorial reconstruction implies a corruption of the playwright's text, which, of course, necessitates a definitive version. Scholars assume that Hamlet existed in such a form, but offer little in the way of defense. In the absence of an authorized manuscript, editors reckon

that every line likely to have been written by Shakespeare must be preserved, and that their job is to reconstruct a monolithic Hamlet, containing everything in both Q2 and F that's missing from the other. No doubt they're right as editors, though whether Shakespeare really wrote such a definitive Hamlet is by no means certain.⁴⁶²

Q1 is usually left by the wayside in such editorial confluations, because most scholars do not believe it represents a true Shakespearean draft. Interestingly, they will concede its probable authenticity as a performance text, "an abridged transcript prepared for the company's use while traveling,"⁴⁶³ noting in particular its abundant stage directions, which "show what actually happened at a performance and are most interesting."⁴⁶⁴ This recognition is frequently offered in the form of a veiled insult, as in Duthie's estimation that Q1 is "an illegitimate provincial acting-version."⁴⁶⁵ "Illegitimate" is an unfortunate choice of word, and unnecessarily damning. The "bad quarto" may well represent "the Hamlet the Elizabethan audience actually got."⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶² Frye 83.

⁴⁶³ Adams 307.

⁴⁶⁴ Harrison xxiv.

⁴⁶⁵ Duthie 269.

⁴⁶⁶ Frye 82.

Elizabethan actors only had cue-scripts. Every production was a memorial reconstruction. Performing in all sorts of locales, to all sorts of audiences, players on tour needed to adapt. Perhaps the script adapted with them. According to the gravedigger's calculations in Q1, by the time Hamlet comes back from England, Yorick's skull has lain in the earth twelve years. In Q2, it is twenty-three years. In Q1, Hamlet is nineteen; in Q2, he is thirty. In Shakespeare's day, the actor most famous for the role of Hamlet was Richard Burbage. Born in 1571, Burbage was nineteen in 1590, thirty-three in 1604. Scholars resist thinking in such terms. Duthie hates the idea: "No audience would make the computation necessary to discover the hero's age from the data supplied by the Clown [...]. [...] As for Q1, with so much room for bungling and failure of memory, it would be foolhardy to over-emphasize any detail contained in it."⁴⁶⁷ As Duthie makes much of many minor details, it is disingenuous for the scholar to disregard a point of evidence simply because it does not align with his greater theory. The discrepancy in ages not only points to a textual revision for practical purposes, it explains why Hamlet seems so much younger in the first half of the play, which, in terms of character, probably did not undergo as much revision as the final act. Despite Duthie's insistence upon Q1's illegitimacy, he makes an interesting, if measured, concession: "There is [...] no necessary relation between the legality or illegality of a publication and the quality of the

⁴⁶⁷ Duthie 231.

text which it contains. It is, however, difficult to imagine such a theft as practically possible.”⁴⁶⁸

The theft, as it were, traveled all the way to Germany. During outbreaks of the plague, London authorities closed the theatres. English actors were often away from home, traveling not just the provinces, but also the Western European continent. The end of the sixteenth century was popular time for touring, when “no less than three companies of English comedians started on professional visits to the courts of various German princes.”⁴⁶⁹ The Spanish Tragedy was one of their favored productions, presented “presumably in English, at Frankfurt-am-Main in 1601.”⁴⁷⁰ Later translated by Jacob Ayrer of Nurnberg, a German version was published in a 1618 collected edition, but the original clearly dates prior to 1602.⁴⁷¹ Also performed during this time was Der Bestrafte Brudermord (BB), or “Fratricide Punished,” a highly abridged sixteenth century German adaptation of Hamlet. Still extant, the text presents one of the most impenetrable puzzles in Shakespearean lore. Not only does BB contain strange episodes not found in any of the later editions, such as Hamlet foiling a pair of wily bandits, the script itself seems to conflate both Q1 *and* Q2. Since many critics believe Q1 is partially derived from the Folio version, with pre-Shakespearean insertions, this means that BB is an amalgamation

⁴⁶⁸ Duthie 10.

⁴⁶⁹ Furness 2: 115.

⁴⁷⁰ Freeman 136.

⁴⁷¹ Freeman 136.

of the Ur-Hamlet, Q1, Q2, and the Folio, perhaps predating them all. In essence, BB blurs the lines between text and script, playwright, translator, actor and creator.

BB's date of debut is uncertain. Leicester's players visited Denmark in 1585, where "it may have been written, appropriately enough, for performance."⁴⁷² According to Albert Cohn's Shakespeare in Germany and Thomas Heywood's Apology for Actors, King Frederick II of Denmark entertained a group of English actors recommended to him by the Earl of Leicester in the late 1580s, the exact date uncertain. The King died in 1588, however, so that year sets the terminus. In 1586, five of these actors departed Denmark for Saxony, in northern Germany; the identities of two of the players confirmed as Thomas Pope and George Bryan.⁴⁷³ Chambers supposes that a third player, identified only as "Will" was Will Kempe. All three "had joined the Chamberlain's (then Lord Strange's) company by 1593."⁴⁷⁴ Although some have postulated that "Will" might have been Shakespeare, or, at the very least, that Shakespeare was a member of Leicester's company,⁴⁷⁵ most assume that in 1586, the playwright was still in Stratford, "never [...] [having] traveled abroad with his company."⁴⁷⁶ It is through Pope, Bryan, and Kempe that critics suppose Hamlet "would have come into Shakespeare's hands."⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷² Chambers, Hamlet ix.

⁴⁷³ Furness 2: 114-115.

⁴⁷⁴ Chambers, Hamlet ix.

⁴⁷⁵ Duncan-Jones 31.

⁴⁷⁶ Morgan xiii.

⁴⁷⁷ Chambers, Hamlet ix.

As was the custom for many plays brought over from England,⁴⁷⁸ the German Hamlet was undoubtedly first performed in English, then later translated. Proving its native origins, scholars point to an exchange of dialogue uniquely relevant to an English audience, not so much for a German: in BB, the King commands that Hamlet be sent to England. The Prince jocosely retorts, “Ay, ay, King; just send me off to Portugal, so that I may never come back again. That’s the best.”⁴⁷⁹ Early scholar, Dr. Latham first identified the significance of the allusion in 1872. In 1589, the English forces lost more than half their ranks in a disastrous expedition to Portugal: out of twenty-one thousand soldiers, eleven thousand perished.⁴⁸⁰ The passage is not found in any of the later editions, including Q1, proving “that the custom of ‘gagging’ or ‘localizing’ a play, from time to time, was a custom of Shakespeare's day quite as constantly as in our own.”⁴⁸¹ In addition, the reference “helps us to a date for the Ur-Hamlet.”⁴⁸²

Remembering that the first contemporary reference to the early Hamlet occurred in 1589, many critics believe Der Bestrafte Brudermord represents a German translation of the lost play. Bernhardt believes it to be “a weak copy of the old tragedy which preceded the Quarto of 1603,”⁴⁸³ reproducing, as Brooke states, “roughly the text of the pre-Shakespearean Hamlet as acted in Germany by English actors about the year

⁴⁷⁸ Furness 2: 115.

⁴⁷⁹ Der Bestrafte Brudermord, appendix, Hamlet: The New Variorum Edition, ed. Horace Howard Furness, 2 vols. (1877; New York: Dover Publications, 2000) 2: 135.

⁴⁸⁰ Furness 2: 115.

⁴⁸¹ Morgan xxii.

⁴⁸² Morgan xxiii.

⁴⁸³ qtd. in Variorum 2: 115.

1600.”⁴⁸⁴ BB is very short, about half the length of the abridged First Quarto, its prose dialogue stilted, but its plot remarkable for its fidelity, containing “most of the Shakespearean action, often corresponding scene by scene, if in the barest form,”⁴⁸⁵ providing even a clearer “explanation of Hamlet's status at the Danish court.”⁴⁸⁶ As early as 1872, scholars suspected that the Ur-Hamlet was “preserved either wholly or partially in this translation into German.”⁴⁸⁷ With great conviction, Appleton Morgan evinces his certainty “that here at last we find a vestige of the very Ur-Hamlet we are searching for; and that if we retranslate this Brudermord back into English we will arrive at a very fair conception indeed of what that required Ur-Hamlet was like.”⁴⁸⁸ However, this realization is often accompanied by distress at the ensuing implications.

While BB is “closer to Q1 than to the texts we know,”⁴⁸⁹ it does not appear to be wholly indebted to it.⁴⁹⁰ One curiosity “noted by all who have touched upon the subject of this German play”⁴⁹¹ is the character of Polonius, renamed “Corambis” in Q1 and “Corambus,” in BB, a likely holdover from “the counselor's name in the old English tragedy of 1589.”⁴⁹² Also, the subtitle of the play, “Prinz Hamlet aus Daennemark,” demonstrates “that the adapter of the German play at least did not go to Belleforest for his

⁴⁸⁴ Brooke, Hamlet 484.

⁴⁸⁵ Jenkins 113.

⁴⁸⁶ Morgan xxi.

⁴⁸⁷ Furness 2: 118.

⁴⁸⁸ Morgan xix.

⁴⁸⁹ Frye 82.

⁴⁹⁰ Duthie 258.

⁴⁹¹ Furness 2: 120.

⁴⁹² Brooke, Hamlet 485.

tragedy,”⁴⁹³ whose hero was the mythological Amleth. Therefore, BB and Q1 must share a common origin; however, since BB also corresponds with Q2,⁴⁹⁴ the precise nature of the relationship is undefined. W. W. Greg maintains, “That there is a fundamental connection between the 1603 text and the Brudermord can hardly be doubted, yet the latter is certainly not derived from the former.”⁴⁹⁵

Critics now categorize Der Bestrafte Brudermord as posterior to the later printed versions, interpreting the German play’s similarity to the English texts as the product of poor memorial reconstruction. As evidence of this, Jenkins asserts that BB’s “dialogue sometimes lacks the context which in Shakespeare makes the point clear,”⁴⁹⁶ ignoring the possibility that such inconsistencies might be more readily explained as the result of poor translation. The theory of memorial reconstruction is not sufficient to fully unravel the mystery; so scholars accede that certain passages must be remnants of the early Hamlet, embedded in the German play. Assuming that the Ur-Hamlet remained close to its source in Belleforest, scholars make note of the following: in BB there are passages that do not parallel Q1, and vice versa; in each instance, these episodes seem to echo the mythological source in Belleforest.

Duthie suggests the “obvious hypothesis” is that these vestiges of Belleforest “preserve traces of passages in the old Hamlet,”⁴⁹⁷ citing the following examples: the

⁴⁹³ Furness 2: 120.

⁴⁹⁴ Duthie 253.

⁴⁹⁵ Greg xi.

⁴⁹⁶ Jenkins 115.

⁴⁹⁷ Duthie 202-203.

episode with the two bandits (“probably reintroduced as being more exciting in action”⁴⁹⁸); the reference to Portugal dating the play circa 1589 (“it would have little point after the turn of the century, over ten years after the disaster, and none at all outside England”⁴⁹⁹); the Prologue (“seems to be Kyd's style”⁵⁰⁰); and Ophelia's suicide off a mountain top versus ‘accidental’ drowning (“Does the German version preserve the original manner of her death, incompletely altered by Shakespeare?”⁵⁰¹). Conceding the link to an outside source in Belleforest, Jenkins devises a complex scenario to explain how such a script may have come to pass; for all its wordiness, Jenkins’ conclusion amounts to a negative proof:

BB oddly corresponds with Belleforest in some details which Shakespeare omits. [...] [Together] they suggest more than coincidence, and since it is difficult to postulate an actor with a first-hand knowledge of Belleforest, the most probable explanation is that they came into BB from the Ur-Hamlet, and if so through an actor who had taken part in it. We must therefore accept that some vestiges of Shakespeare's source-play may have been preserved in BB, and these may even suggest that the source-play followed Belleforest fairly closely: but since they can only be ascribed to the Ur-Hamlet when there is nothing to correspond to them in

⁴⁹⁸ Duthie 260.

⁴⁹⁹ Duthie 262.

⁵⁰⁰ Duthie 264.

⁵⁰¹ Duthie 266.

Shakespeare, BB cannot show us, except negatively, the use that Shakespeare made of it.⁵⁰²

Scholars are reluctant to ascribe too much of BB to the “pre-Shakespearean” version. Duthie, who is so articulate in his repudiation of the German play, admits his greatest fear, declaring, “If in the main the Brudermord represents the old Hamlet, then the latter resembled Shakespeare's full play very much more than I should be prepared to suppose was the case.”⁵⁰³ Jenkins likewise confesses,

In theory of course this [BB] could be the Ur-Hamlet. But all those who hold such a theory commit themselves to the belief that Shakespeare, while no doubt heightening effects with powerful diction and writing in some brilliant soliloquies, was for large parts of Hamlet content to follow a source-play step by step, not only incident by incident but often speech by speech. To object to such a view is not bardolatry; it is merely to resist the absurd. For although I am not sure, not having written one, how a masterpiece is created, I cannot believe that one has ever come into being that way.⁵⁰⁴

Therefore, BB must be a memorial reconstruction; a text that Jenkins supposes “was evolved by a group of actors whose collective memory embraced more than one version

⁵⁰² Jenkins 121-122.

⁵⁰³ Duthie 253.

⁵⁰⁴ Jenkins 116.

of the play.”⁵⁰⁵ Unlike the players of Shakespeare’s time, modern-day scholars apparently cannot embrace the same.

Regardless of its supposed legitimacy, scholars acknowledge BB as an “acting version,”⁵⁰⁶ compiled and performed “by a varied group of actors with experience of different Hamlets and a readiness to put their memories to use.”⁵⁰⁷ Although BB has all but been erased from history, one commentator, J. C. Trewin, remembers seeing a late 1950s production, translated into English, by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. He relates the experience in his book, Five & Eighty Hamlets:

It presents, in the flattest prose dialogue, what occurred when English strolling players in Germany at the end of Elizabeth's reign were asked to act the Hamlet play much talked about (maybe the First Quarto?). Having nothing in their repertory, they cheerfully cooked up a script, no doubt from actors in the group who had experienced different versions. This product of composite enthusiasm was translated into German, and what we have now is the German text rendered back into English with a bizarre result. The pomping folk could not be much of a hand with the poetry or philosophy, but they knew that the plot ought to serve. It did, and it does.

⁵⁰⁵ Jenkins 118-119.

⁵⁰⁶ Hudson, Hamlet xv-xvi.

⁵⁰⁷ Jenkins 122.

What we saw that night in Birmingham was the reduction of the tragedy to swift bathos [...].”⁵⁰⁸

While not an academic, this reviewer, having actually seen a production of BB, lays claim to an experience that most scholars who practice in the theoretical realm can only imagine. In regards to the purpose of his book, the theatre critic states, “This is not, I must repeat, an exercise from the study; it lives in the theatre. Many scholars, abandoning their seclusion, have now recognised the need [...] for examining the texts in performance as well as in abstract theory.”⁵⁰⁹

The theatricality of Hamlet is undeniable. It is a play with momentous themes, and, at least in the final scene, enormous action. Even more so, it is a play *about* theatre, “probably the best of all textbooks on the purposes of playing.”⁵¹⁰ At the start of the drama, Hamlet seems to be in mourning for his father. Nay, *he is*, he knows not seems. He *seems* to be mad. He *is* mad. He cannot act. He marvels at the players who *can* act. He tells them *how* to act, how to *seem*. The players’ emotions dwarf his own. They are not real. They are *more real* than he, Hamlet, who is frozen by *to be or not to be*. Let be... At Hamlet’s core is a play: a play within a play. For the audience, who watches Hamlet, who watches the King, who watches the performance of The Mousetrap, Hamlet is a play-within-a-play-within-a-play-within-a-play.

⁵⁰⁸ J.C. Trewin, Five & Eighty Hamlets (1987; New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1989) 107.

⁵⁰⁹ Trewin x.

⁵¹⁰ Bloom, Poem Unlimited 10.

The theatrical dimension of Hamlet is essential to compassing the story. Yet surprisingly few scholars are willing to fathom Hamlet inside a theatre. In Shakespeare: the Invention of the Human, famous Bardolator Bloom exhibits a strong bias against performance, extolling the benefits of reading Shakespeare versus attending a theatrical production. He rails against the miserable performances of King Lear through which he has suffered,⁵¹¹ condemning also Kenneth Branagh's film version of Much Ado About Nothing⁵¹² as well as Ralph Fiennes's performance of Hamlet.⁵¹³ Bloom questions, "How should we begin reading Hamlet, or how attend it in performance, in the unlikely event of finding the play responsibly directed?"⁵¹⁴ Shakespearean scholars' predisposition against performance is longstanding. In 1860, Maginn writes,

Yet am I well convinced, it is impossible that any one of Shakspeare's dramatic works - and especially of his tragedies [...] - ever could be satisfactorily represented on the stage. [...] But of no play is this more strictly true than it is of that strange, and subtle, and weird work, Hamlet.⁵¹⁵

William Hazlitt agrees, "We do not like to see our author's plays acted, and least of all, Hamlet. There is no play that suffers so much in being transferred to the stage."⁵¹⁶ In The Life of the Drama, Eric Bentley explains the mindset of "literary persons": "their

⁵¹¹ Bloom, Shakespeare 476.

⁵¹² Bloom, Shakespeare 192.

⁵¹³ Bloom, Shakespeare 409.

⁵¹⁴ Bloom, Poem Unlimited 7.

⁵¹⁵ Maginn 275-276.

position really is not that the theatrical dimension doesn't exist but that they wish it didn't."⁵¹⁷

Understanding the difference between literature and performance changes the nature of the Ur-Hamlet debate. A literary text is a fixed, unchanging document: a silent monologue delivered by the author to the reader, who then becomes the interpreter of the author's intentions. A script is an artifact of performance. Much like a musical score, it is a record of the lines spoken aloud in a production, a dialogue between author and audience, but mediated by actors in the moment. Because every performance is different, a script is always potentially mutable. In his analysis of the complicated textual history of The Spanish Tragedy, Freeman wonders "whether we are genuinely in possession of a script 'as acted' or of a literary amplification."⁵¹⁸ What is important is not necessarily an answer, but the acknowledgement of a difference. While no opinion in Shakespearean criticism remains unchallenged, all extant editions of Hamlet are routinely deemed authentic "as acted." By virtue of this fact, none should be considered corrupt.

⁵¹⁶ Hazlitt 87.

⁵¹⁷ Bentley, Eric. The Life of the Drama. (New York: Atheneum, 1964) 148.

⁵¹⁸ Freeman 106-107.

Conclusion: Some Necessary Question of the Play

***Ham.** [...] And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them; for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the mean time some necessary question of the play be then to be considered; that's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. Go, make you ready.-*

- The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark⁵¹⁹

There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in any Shakespearean scholar's philosophy, and of all the author's plays, none prompts more awe, love, heated debate, and rampant speculation than Hamlet. Lest its reputation should precede its worth, critics take great care in the preservation of this living artifact, passed from generation to generation for over four hundred years. From its point of origin in the creative nexus of the author's brain to the soon-to-be released Third Series Arden edition, Hamlet has weathered the storm of potential ruin, safeguarded by its popularity with audiences, and the ark of the First Folio, published seven years after Shakespeare's death. There are no manuscripts. All posterity has are the remnants, four entirely different versions of the play, including an anonymous, bastardized seventeenth-century German translation. For most of bibliographic history, the Shakespearean editor's duty has been to unearth the true Hamlet beneath the rubble. This is their covenant, a crusade requiring the faith of a true believer, and the fortitude of Moses to

carry the stone tablets across the centuries' desert. Faced with the ravages of time immemorial, however, the scholar's stance becomes less righteous than primal, guarding against the onslaught of potential corruption with the ferocity of, well, an orthodox critic, the ultimate mother bear.

Unfortunately, in Shakespeare's time, there were no such mother bears, only Harry Hunks, and he had no interest in pop-culture preservation. Times were tough, but, in the Bear Garden, Harry was a star. Tied to a stake in the center of the arena, he bravely fought the rabid dogs set on him for sport, while an appreciative audience laughed and cheered and wagered a bright penny on the outcome. This blood sport was not blood thirst, but custom; suitable entertainment for the masses when a good public execution was not on the marquee: yesterday, a cockfight; tomorrow, an alligator baiting. Elizabethans were neither delicate, nor squeamish, nor clean, nor quiet, and Bankside, beyond the city limits and outside the immediate authorities' jurisdiction, was an especially rowdy place. Across the River Thames, the district was reached by ferryboat or London Bridge, the former adorned with the heads of traitors on spikes, a warning to all who passed. In the midst of Bankside's taverns and brothels, entrepreneur Philip Henslowe built the Rose Theatre, home to the Admiral's Men and countless other nameless bands of actors.

The year is 1587. The Chamberlain's Men had not yet been formed; they were still the Lord Strange's Company, soon to be Derby's Men. The Pembroke's Men were

⁵¹⁹ Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 1: 230.

still performing, although they were in dire financial straights, in debt to Henslowe. A shrewd businessman, Henslowe kept immaculate records. His theatre was in a prime location, and business was booming. Everyone went to the playhouse, from peasants to noblemen: a few extra coins could buy a seat with a cushion, but a groundling's price of admission was cheap, standing-room-only, close to the stage. There was talk of a new play, Hamlet. Shakespeare was twenty-three, and newly arrived in London.

In truth, no one knows where or when the first performance of Hamlet occurred. No one knows who, singular or plural, wrote it. In Pre-Restoration Stage Studies, W. J. Lawrence notes that, according to Henslowe's Diary, of the one hundred and twenty-eight new plays performed between 1597 and 1603, seventy were composite.⁵²⁰ This startlingly large figure does not allow for "collaboration after the fact,"⁵²¹ such as in the instance of The Spanish Tragedy, a play that was continuously revised by unknown authors for years after its initial run.

The Ur-Hamlet is not an isolated phenomenon in the author's canon. There is scarcely a work attributed to Shakespeare that is not disputed. Some exist in "pre-Shakespearean form" such as King John, King Lear, the Henry VI trilogy, and The Taming of a Shrew, not to be confused with The Taming of *the* Shrew, italics mine. Some titles bearing curious similarity to later plays exist in the historical record but not in

⁵²⁰ William J. Lawrence, Pre-Restoration Stage Studies (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927) 349-350.

⁵²¹ Sam Schoenbaum, Internal Evidence and Elizabethan Dramatic Authorship (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966) 223.

print, such as The historie of Error performed at court in 1577.⁵²² Some like Love's Labors Won, a play named by Meres as one of Shakespeare's finest comedies, are totally non-existent, scholars weakly speculating that the actual title later became All's Well That Ends Well. More than half of Shakespeare's plays, nineteen to be precise, were not published until seven years after the playwright's death. Chambers submits that if the authorship of a disputed work remains indeterminable after a reasoned investigation "we must be content to leave the anonymous plays anonymous,"⁵²³ but most scholars cannot bear the idea.

"When Rutlandbaconsouthamptonshakespeare or another poet of the same name in the comedy of errors wrote *Hamlet*"⁵²⁴ no one knew who he was: "Meres mentions a Shakespeare without a Hamlet, and Nash a Hamlet without a Shakespeare: although perhaps it was not quite as impossible then as now to separate master and masterpiece [...]."⁵²⁵ For more than a hundred years after Shakespeare's death, no one cared a hoot. "Simultaneously with this tardy recognition of his greatness, there seems to have been first awakened the consciousness that the text of his plays was egregiously corrupt."⁵²⁶ The Stratford Tourist trade was born in the eighteenth century; so was "Shakespeare," playwright-genius. Swift on the heels of this newfound glorification comes the idea that very few of the artifacts we possess from this time of selective printing are valid. The

⁵²² Ogburn 774.

⁵²³ Chambers, Shakespeare 38.

⁵²⁴ Joyce 205.

⁵²⁵ Morgan viii.

fact that the world knows so very little about the playwright's life becomes an asset; "Shakespeare is everyone and no one."⁵²⁷

Scholars, critics, commentators, actors, lay-people, and fanatics have written tomes about Shakespeare's life and times, incredibly detailed personal biographies, all fictive accounts based upon *what life must have been like in such-and-such a place in such-and-such a time*. Again and again, the biographer invariably returns to a final self-portrait. God made man in His image. Shakespeare makes us in his own:

- Can we conceive of ourselves without Shakespeare? By "ourselves" I do not mean only actors, directors, teachers, critics, but also you and everyone you know.⁵²⁸
- [...] trying to work out Shakespeare's personality was like looking at a very dark glazed picture in the National Portrait Gallery: at first you see nothing, then you begin to recognize features, and then you realize that they are your own.⁵²⁹
- Reading Shakespeare is sometimes like looking through a window into a dark room. You don't see in. You see nothing but a reflection of yourself unable to get in. An unflattering image of yourself blind.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁶ F. J., preface, Shakespeare: Complete Works, History, Life and Notes, by J. Payne Collier (New York, Cleveland: World Syndicate Company, Inc., 1925) n. pag.

⁵²⁷ Bloom, Shakespeare 487-488.

⁵²⁸ Bloom, Shakespeare 13.

⁵²⁹ Sam Schoenbaum, Shakespeare's Lives (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) ix.

⁵³⁰ Sher, Anthony. Year of the King. 1985. (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994) 36.

- We have been so used to this tragedy [Hamlet] that we hardly know how to criticise it any more than we should know how to describe our own faces.⁵³¹
- “I have struggled, to the limit of my abilities, to talk about Shakespeare and not about myself [...]”⁵³²
- We need not repine at the lack of a satisfactory Shakespeare portrait. To see his face we need only to look in a mirror. He is ourselves, ordinary suffering humanity [...] We are all Will. Shakespeare is the name of one of our redeemers.⁵³³

In times of immense world chaos, a thesis on an obscure aspect of Shakespearean history has often seemed pointless and irrelevant. Terrorism, genocide, war, WMD, SARS, and a host of other sinister acronyms pervade the evening news. What place does Shakespeare have amongst the chaos? In the Introduction to his film diary of Hamlet, Kenneth Branagh quotes famous soccer manager, Bill Shankly, on the importance of his sport: “It’s not a matter of life or death. It’s much more important than that.”⁵³⁴ Shakespeare is the name of one of our redeemers. But there is no Shakespeare, not as critics have defined him. His plays, our “secular Bible,”⁵³⁵ were the product of collaboration, in every sense of the word, whether composite or “after the fact.” Much

⁵³¹ Hazlitt 81.

⁵³² Bloom, Shakespeare xx.

⁵³³ Burgess 238.

⁵³⁴ Branagh xv.

⁵³⁵ Bloom, Shakespeare 716.

like the joint authorship of the Judeo-Christian King James Version, poetic Scripture to which Shakespeare probably contributed, the precise nature of the collaboration, *who wrote what word when*, will never be determined, because such a distinction did not exist at the point of inception, the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. *What if Shakespeare did not make the world in his image? What if we made him in our own?* What a piece of work is a man! Bloom maintains that Shakespeare invented the human. *What if the human invented Shakespeare?* No one has ever claimed Shakespeare was original. The tale of Amleth dates from the twelfth century. Shakespeare's stories are ancient, their roots in the oral tradition, the oldest form of "memorial reconstruction." They are as transcendental as life itself, no more no less, reflective of the primal human urge to empathize, communicate, and share each other's stories. The play is the thing, and it is enough. "But to say of Shakespeare that he makes good theatre is rather funny. And there is little doubt that Titus Andronicus is a play by Shakespeare, or rather a play adapted by him. But so is Hamlet for that matter."⁵³⁶

⁵³⁶ Kott 346.

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