

# HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

UPDATED EDITION

Edited by Philip Edwards

# HAMLET, PRINCE OF DEIVING

Updated edition

Edited by PHILIP EDWARDS

King Alfred Professor of English Literature University of Liverpool





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From the publication of the first volumes in 1984 the General Editor of the New Cambridge Shakespeare was Philip Brockbank and the Associate General Editors were Brian Gibbons and Robin Hood. From 1990 to 1994 the General Editor was Brian Gibbons and the Associate General Editors were A. R. Braunmuller and Robin Hood.

# HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

Philip Edwards aims to bring the reader, playgoer and director of *Hamlet* into the closest possible contact with Shakespeare's most famous and most perplexing play. In his Introduction Edwards considers the possibility that Shakespeare made important alterations to *Hamlet* as it neared production, creating differences between the two early texts, quarto and Folio. Edwards concentrates on essentials, dealing succinctly with the huge volume of commentary and controversy which the play has provoked and offering a way forward which enables us once again to recognise its full tragic energy.

For this updated edition, Robert Hapgood has added a new section on prevailing critical and performace approaches to the play. He discusses recent film and stage performances, actors of the Hamlet role as well as directors of the play; his account of new scholarship stresses the role of remembering and forgetting in the play, and the impact of feminist and performance studies.

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# THE NEW CAMBRIDGE SHAKESPEARE

The New Cambridge Shakespeare succeeds The New Shakespeare which began publication in 1921 under the general editorship of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson, and was completed in the 1960s, with the assistance of G. I. Duthie, Alice Walker, Peter Ure and J. C. Maxwell. The New Shakespeare itself followed upon The Cambridge Shakespeare, 1863-6, edited by W. G. Clark, J. Glover and W. A. Wright.

The New Shakespeare won high esteem both for its scholarship and for its design, but shifts of critical taste and insight, recent Shakespearean research, and a changing sense of what is important in our understanding of the plays, have made it necessary to re-edit and redesign, not merely to revise, the series.

The New Cambridge Shakespeare aims to be of value to a new generation of playgoers and readers who wish to enjoy fuller access to Shakespeare's poetic and dramatic art. While offering ample academic guidance, it reflects current critical interests and is more attentive than some earlier editions have been to the realisation of the plays on the stage, and to their social and cultural settings. The text of each play has been freshly edited, with textual data made available to those users who wish to know why and how one published text differs from another. Although modernised, the edition conserves forms that appear to be expressive and characteristically Shakespearean, and it does not attempt to disguise the fact that the plays were written in a language other than that of our own time.

Illustrations are usually integrated into the critical and historical discussion of the play and include some reconstructions of early performances by C. Walter Hodges. Some editors have also made use of the advice and experience of Maurice Daniels, for many years a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Each volume is addressed to the needs and problems of a particular text, and each therefore differs in style and emphasis from others in the series.

PHILIP BROCKBANK
Founding General Editor

What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

To the memory of my great-grandfather

ROBERT EDWARDS

1829-1908

Sexton of St John's Church, Rhydymwyn, Flintshire

### PREFACE

The vastness of the commentary on *Hamlet* gives an editor of the play a rather special freedom. Even if he could read them all, he could not accommodate within the covers of a book an account of the multitude of theories and ideas generated by the play; and to attempt to sum up even the enduring contributions would so overload the work that it would defeat the main purpose of an edition, which is to make an author's work more accessible. This edition of *Hamlet* is selective in its account of what has gone before, and the view of the play presented in the Introduction, the Commentary – and the text – is personal without I hope being idiosyncratic. Everything that I consider essential to the meaning of the play I have endeavoured to discuss; where I consider problems insoluble, or not central, I have avoided prolonged debate.

The text of *Hamlet* presents great difficulties, and any discussion of it affects and is affected by our understanding of the play. I have not therefore been able to separate my account of the text from the main part of the introduction, as is the custom in this series. In trying to offer help towards the understanding of this great and perplexing play, it is essential to make clear at the outset that there is more than one *Hamlet* we might be talking about.

Most of the work for this edition was completed before the appearance of Harold Jenkins's masterly edition in the New Arden series in the spring of 1982. It has nevertheless been of immense benefit to have his work before me since that time, as my commentary frequently acknowledges. All students of *Hamlet* are in debt to Harold Jenkins for the results of his patient and exacting research.

Some of the material in the critical account of the play in the Introduction appears also in an essay, 'Tragic balance in *Hamlet*', in *Shakespeare Survey 36* (1983); I am grateful to the editor of *Shakespeare Survey* for accepting this overlap.

In acknowledging assistance in this edition of *Hamlet*, I ought to start with John Waterhouse in 1942 and Allardyce Nicoll in 1945, from whom I learned so much about the play. In recent times, my greatest debt is to Kenneth Muir, an untiring lender of books, a patient listener, and a generous adviser. John Jowett gave me great help in checking parts of my typescript, and in sifting through recent writings on the play. I am grateful to Joan Welford for typing the Commentary.

This edition was prepared during a period of rather heavy administrative duties in the University of Liverpool. I am most grateful to the University for two periods of leave, and to the University of Otago, the British Academy and the Huntington Library for enabling me to make the most of them.

P.E.

University of Liverpool, 1984

## ABBREVIATIONS AND SHORT TITLES

All quotations and line references to plays other than *Hamlet* are to G. Blakemore Evans (ed.), *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 1974.

Adams Hamlet, ed. Joseph Quincy Adams, 1929

N. Alexander Hamlet, ed. Nigel Alexander, 1973 (Macmillan Shakespeare)

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Bullough Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare,

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Capell Mr William Shakespeare, His Comedies, Histories and Tragedies, ed.

Edward Capell, 1767-8, x

Clark and Wright Hamlet Prince of Denmark, ed. William George Clark and William Aldis

Wright, 1872 (Clarendon Press Shakespeare)

Collier The Works of William Shakespeare, ed. J. Payne Collier, 1842-4, VII

conj. conjectured

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Duthie George Ian Duthie, The Bad' Quarto of Hamlet': A Critical Study, 1941

Dyce The Works of William Shakespeare, ed. Alexander Dyce, 1857, v

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Folio) [see Introduction, p. 9]

Hanmer The Works of Shakespear, ed. Sir Thomas Hanmer, 1743-4, VI Hoy Hamlet, ed. Cyrus Hoy, 1963 (Norton Critical Editions) Jenkins Hamlet, ed. Harold Jenkins, 1982 (Arden Shakespeare)

Johnson The Plays of William Shakespeare, ed. Samuel Johnson, 1765, VIII

Kittredge Hamlet, ed. George Lyman Kittredge, 1939

Knight The Pictorial Edition of the Works of Shakspere, ed. Charles Knight,

1838-43, 1, 'Tragedies'

MacDonald The Tragedie of Hamlet, ed. George MacDonald, 1885

Malone The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare, ed. Edmond Malone, 1790,

Ine Flays and

MLN Modern Language Notes

MSH J. Dover Wilson, The Manuscript of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet', 2 vols., 1934;

reprinted 1963

N & Q Notes and Queries

NV Hamlet, ed. Horace Howard Furness, 2 vols., 1877; reprinted 1963 (A New

Variorum Edition of Shakespeare)

OED The Oxford English Dictionary, 1884-1928, reprinted 1933
PMLA Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
Pope The Works of Shakespear, ed. Alexander Pope, 1723-5, VI

Pope<sup>2</sup> The Works of Shakespear, ed. Alexander Pope, 2nd edn, 1728, VIII

QI The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke, by William Shake-

concern v has / frust asserts)

speare, 1603 (first quarto)

SH

Q2 The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke, by William

Shakespeare, 1604, 1605 (second quarto)

Q 1611, Q 1676 Quarto editions of those dates

RES Review of English Studies

Ridley Hamlet, ed. M. R. Ridley, 1934 (New Temple Shakespeare)

Rowe The Works of Mr William Shakespear, ed. Nicholas Rowe, 1709, v Schmidt Alexander Schmidt, Shakespeare-Lexicon, 2 vols., 1874-5; 2nd edn, 1886

SD stage direction

Spencer Hamlet, ed. T. J. B. Spencer, 1980 (New Penguin Shakespeare)

SO Shakespeare Quarterly

Staunton The Plays of Shakespeare, ed. Howard Staunton, 1858-60, reissued 1866,

Ш

Steevens The Plays of William Shakespeare, ed. Samuel Johnson and George

Steevens, 1773, X

speech heading

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Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, 1950 [references are to numbered

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Verity The Tragedy of Hamlet, ed. A. W. Verity, 1904

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3 vols., 1860

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ΧĪ

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Shakespeare)

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# INTRODUCTION

#### Source and date

The basic though not the immediate source of Hamlet is a twelfth-century story of Amleth in Saxo Grammaticus's Historiae Danicae, which was first put into print in 1514. It is remarkable how much of the primitive legend survives through the successive redactions into Shakespeare's masterpiece. Amleth's father, who has defeated the king of Norway in a duel, is murdered by his brother Feng, who takes his brother's widow, Gerutha, to wife. The murder is not secret. To protect himself and avert suspicion from his plans, Amleth starts acting as an idiot, but his speeches are such a perplexing mixture of shrewdness and craziness that tests are devised for him. One test is to see if he will react normally to a 'fair woman' who is put in his way. He does, but he swears her to secrecy. Then a friend of Feng suggests they should get Amleth and his mother together while he conceals himself in the chamber to listen to them. Amleth discovers the eavesdropper, kills him, dismembers the body and feeds it to the pigs. He returns to the lamenting mother and bitterly attacks her for forgetting her first husband and marrying Feng. Feng now sends Amleth to Britain with two retainers who carry a secret letter to the king requesting the death of Amleth. Amleth gets the letter, substitutes his companions' name for his own - and adds the suggestion that the king should give his daughter in marriage to Amleth. After a time in Britain, Amleth returns home and finds his own obsequies being carried out. He overcomes the courtiers, sets fire to the palace, and kills Feng in his bed, thus exacting 'the vengeance, now long overdue, for his father's murder'. 'O valiant Amleth, and worthy of immortal fame!' says Saxo. Amleth now lies low, uncertain how the populace will take what he has done, but boldly emerges to make a fine speech of justification. 'It is I who have wiped off my country's shame; I who have quenched my mother's dishonour; I who have beaten back oppression...It is I who have stripped you of slavery, and clothed you with freedom... I who have deposed the despot and triumphed over the butcher.' Amleth is made king, and has other adventures before meeting his death in battle.

Here is a success story and no tragedy, but here also is the story of old Fortinbras and old Hamlet, of fratricide and the queen's remarriage, of Hamlet's assumed madness and his riddling talk, of Ophelia being used to test him, of Polonius's eavesdropping and death and the contemptuous treatment of his corpse, of Hamlet's objurgation of Gertrude, of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern accompanying Hamlet to England with a secret commission to have him killed, and the cunning alteration of the commission. Even the germ of the exchange of weapons in the final affray is there.

<sup>1</sup> Oliver Elton's translation of the Latin text is given in Bullough, VII (1973), 60-79.

2

Between Saxo Grammaticus and Hamlet lies a French version of Saxo's story by François de Belleforest, published in his Histoires Tragiques in 1570 (followed by many later editions). It does not appear that the Hamlet story was translated into English until 1608. Belleforest is most conscious of the unchristian savagery of the tale and pointedly remarks that it all happened in pre-Christian times. His account is long, wordy and sententious, but in the incidents of the story he follows the stark version of Saxo closely except in two important respects relating to the queen. She and Feng, or Fengon as he now is, have an adulterous liaison before the king is murdered; Fengon 'used her as his concubine'. Secondly, after Hamlet has convinced his mother of the error of her ways (following the death of the eavesdropper), the queen encourages Hamlet in his vengeance, promises to keep his secret, and hopes to see him enjoy his right as king of Denmark. None of this collaboration between Gertrude and Hamlet is in Shakespeare's play, but it does feature in the first quarto, which we shall be looking at shortly.

As for Hamlet's revenge, Belleforest does not acclaim it as enthusiastically as Saxo does, and clearly recognises that some justification is needed. Hamlet argues that his vengeance is neither felony nor treason, but the punishment of a disloyal subject by a sovereign prince (Bullough, VII, 100). And on the death of Fengon, Belleforest states that this is an occasion when vengeance becomes justice, an act of piety and affection, a punishment of treason and murder.

The most important changes which appear in Hamlet are as follows:

- The murder becomes secret;
- 2 A ghost tells Hamlet of the murder and urges revenge;
- 3 Laertes and young Fortinbras are introduced;
- 4 Ophelia's role is extended and elevated;
- 5 The players and their play are introduced;
- 6 Hamlet dies as he kills the king.

To be added to this list is a more general change of great significance. The setting of the story is moved from the pre-Christian times where Belleforest deliberately placed it to a courtly, modern-seeming period, in which, though England still pays tribute to Denmark, renaissance young men travel to and fro to complete their education in universities or in Paris.

How many of these changes did Shakespeare himself originate? It is impossible to say, because of our ignorance about the Elizabethan *Hamlet* which preceded Shakespeare's. The earliest reference to this play is in a scornful attack by Thomas Nashe on the Senecan dramatists of the day in 1589. 'English Seneca read by candlelight yields many good sentences, as *Blood is a beggar* and so forth, and if you entreat him fair in a frosty morning he will afford you whole Hamlets, I should say handfuls, of tragical speeches.' Five years later, at the end of the disastrous plague period of 1592–4, Philip Henslowe recorded a short season of plays at Newington Butts (south of the Thames) shared by the Lord Admiral's men and the emerging company of the Lord Chamberlain's men, Shakespeare's company, during which, on 9 June

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Preface to Greene's Menaphon; Nashe, Works, ed. McKerrow, 1904-10, 111, 315.

3 Introduction

1594, a play of *Hamlet* was performed. In 1596, Thomas Lodge wrote of one who 'walks for the most part in black under cover of gravity, and looks as pale as the vizard of the ghost who cried so miserably at the Theatre like an oyster-wife, *Hamlet*, revenge!'2

It may be that this old play was not immediately supplanted and driven from the stage when Shakespeare wrote his version. One of the characters in Dekker's Satiromastix (written late in the year 1601) says 'My name's Hamlet revenge; thou hast been at Paris Garden, hast not?' (4.1.121-2); the reference is probably to the older play. The authorship of the earlier play (often called the Ur-Hamlet) is not known. Nashe's attack of 1589 on the 'sort of shifting companions' who bleed the English translations of Seneca dry in order to create their dismal tragedies seems to include three glancing references to Thomas Kyd, the author of The Spanish Tragedy. These men 'leave the trade of Noverint, whereto they were born', which fits Kyd because his father was a 'noverint' or scrivener; Nashe speaks of 'the Kid in Aesop'; and the phrase 'those that thrust Elysium into hell' may well refer to The Spanish Trasedy. But even if Kyd was one of the Senecans whom Nashe was abusing it does not necessarily follow that Nashe meant he was the author of the early Hamlet. He may have been. The relationship between Shakespeare's Hamlet and Kyd's Spanish Tragedy is close and profoundly important. How far that relationship developed through Shakespeare reworking a Kydean Hamlet is impossible to say. The Spanish Tragedy is about the revenge of a father for his murdered son, and includes the presence on stage of the ghost of a dead man, the hero's madness, and a crucial play-within-the-play. The Ur-Hamlet, which was about the revenge of a son for his murdered father, had a ghost urging Hamlet to take revenge, and must have included the assumed madness of the hero, which is among the irreducible constituents of the old story. It seems more likely that the old Hamlet would have preceded The Spanish Tragedy than vice versa.3 They were probably companion plays, the successor very conscious of the predecessor, whether Kyd wrote both plays or not. For the Hamlet story there is a quite definite literary source, as we have seen; for The Spanish Tragedy there is no known source. If one play copies another, and one is based on a known source and the other isn't, there is a strong argument that the play with a source is the earlier. On this argument, the 'madness' of Hamlet in the old play, being part of the traditional story, would be the original, and the madness of Hieronimo in The Spanish Tragedy would be the copy. So we may say that Kyd or one of his fellow-dramatists wrote an early version of Hamlet, that Kyd capitalised on its success in The Spanish Tragedy, which borrowed many of its features, and that Shakespeare, writing a new version of Hamlet which seems very attentive to Kyd's handling of revenge, is influenced by the two similar earlier plays.

Returning then to our question of what changes in the traditional Hamlet story were Shakespeare's, we see that he did not introduce the Ghost. A ghost urging Hamlet to take revenge was an elemental part of the old play; it was what everyone

<sup>1</sup> Henslowe's Diary, ed. R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert, 1961, p. 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Wits Miserie, 1596, signature H4<sup>v</sup> (text reads 'miserally').

<sup>3</sup> Argued by E. E. Stoll in Modern Philology 35 (1937-8), 32-3.

Hamlet 4

remembered. (This one hard fact we have about the contents of the old play may have been, I shall argue, the feature which attracted Shakespeare to it.) Apart from this, if it is the case that *The Spanish Tragedy* cashed in on the success of the old *Hamlet* and imitated it, then there is a strong possibility not only that the old *Hamlet* had its play-within-the-play, but that it had its Laertes too; for the generation of a second revenge action in the middle of the play is the way *The Spanish Tragedy* works. (In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo's vengeance for Horatio is a second motif within the prior revenge scheme of Andrea against Balthasar, which it completes. In *Hamlet*, Laertes' vengeance for Polonius is a second motif within the prior revenge of Hamlet against Claudius; it is only through the completion of Laertes' revenge that Hamlet is brought to the completion of his.)

As for the setting of the play within a renaissance court, one certainly cannot assume that it was Shakespeare who made the transformation. The contrast between the modernity of the characters and the archaic cry of a ghost for revenge is of supreme importance in *Hamlet*, but *The Spanish Tragedy* also accommodates a primitive blood-feud within the setting of a renaissance court and here also it may indicate the nature of the old *Hamlet*.

When did Shakespeare write his *Hamlet?* 'The Revenge of Hamlet Prince [of] Denmark as it was lately acted by the Lord Chamberlain his men' was entered for publication in July 1602 (see p. 9). A very faulty unauthorised text of the play, 'by William Shake-speare', which was published in 1603 (the first quarto), suggests that by then the play had been on the stage for quite some time. Within the play itself, the reference to the great popularity of the children's acting companies as against the adult players (2.2.313-33) is always accepted as a direct reference by Shakespeare to the 'war of the theatres' in London around 1601 and the success of the revived children's companies. The details of this 'war of the theatres' are very vague and shadowy. There is a slanging match with Jonson on one side and Marston and Dekker on the other. Jonson's *Poetaster*, performed by the Chapel boys in 1601, probably in the spring, contains a well-known remark about the professional men-actors. They think of hiring Demetrius (Dekker) and say:

O, it will get us a huge deal of money, Captain, and we have need on't; for this winter has made us all poorer than so many starved snakes. Nobody comes at us, not a gentleman nor a –

(3.4.327-30)

It may well be that a crisis for the men's companies in 1600-1 is what the *Hamlet* passage refers to. This passage is found only in the Folio text; it is one of the most striking omissions from the text of the 'good' quarto of 1604/5. It is my view that Shakespeare added this passage to his original draft as a kind of afterthought before he submitted his manuscript to his colleagues (see p. 19).<sup>2</sup> I think that as he was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 1923, 1, 379–82; 11, 19–21, 41–3. Suspicion that the whole affair was a 'contrived situation' for publicity purposes is expressed by Reavley Gair, *The Children of Paul's*, 1982, p. 134.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Not quite the same thing as the 'later insertion' suggested by E. A. J. Honigmann, 'The date of Hamlet', Shakespeare Survey 9 (1956), 27-9.

finishing his play the success of the children and the plight of his own company suggested to Shakespeare an amplification of what he had already written about the Players turning up in Elsinore because of the troubled times in Denmark and a decline in their reputation (see the notes to 2.2.308–9 and following). If we could be sure of dating the height of the stage-quarrel in mid 1601 we should have a fairly precise date for Shakespeare finishing his play.

A reference which has been much discussed in dating *Hamlet* is in the marginal note made by Gabriel Harvey in his copy of Speght's Chaucer, which runs:

The younger sort takes much delight in Shakespeares Venus, & Adonis, but his Lucrece, & his tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke, have it in them, to please the wiser sort.

The Chaucer was published in 1598 and Harvey signed his name in his copy with the date '1598'. His very long note, which is a kind of assessment of English literature in his time, refers to Spenser (died 1599) and Watson (died 1592) as with Shakespeare among 'our flourishing metricians', but mentions 'Owen's new epigrams' published in 1607. It also contains the statement, 'The Earl of Essex much commendes Albions England' – which certainly suggests that the Earl was alive; he was executed in February 1601. The sense of time is so confused in Harvey's note that it is really of little use in trying to date *Hamlet*.

E. A. J. Honigmann (see note on p. 4) rightly argued that there is very strong evidence that *Hamlet* was written later than *Julius Caesar*, which was being acted in the summer of 1599. Just before the play-within-the-play there is this exchange between Hamlet and Polonius:

HAMLET ...My lord, you played once i'th'university, you say.
POLONIUS That did I my lord, and was accounted a good actor.
HAMLET And what did you enact?
POLONIUS I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i'th'Capitol. Brutus killed me.
HAMLET It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there. (3.2.87–93)

Honigmann points out that it is usually assumed that John Heminges acted both the old-man parts, Caesar in the first play and Polonius in the second, and that Richard Burbage acted both Brutus and Hamlet. 'Polonius would then be speaking on the extra-dramatic level in proclaiming his murder in the part of Caesar, since Hamlet (Burbage) will soon be killing him (Heminges) once more in Hamlet.' There does indeed seem to be a kind of private joke here, with Heminges saying to Burbage 'Here we go again!' But there is also something much deeper – the identification of the two killers, Brutus and Hamlet. Once again, Burbage plays the part of the intellectual as well-intentioned assassin. In both Julius Caesar and Hamlet, a bookish, reflective man, honoured by his friends and associates, is summoned to a major political task requiring complete personal involvement and a violent physical assault. The assassination that is to purify Rome is quickly decided on and quickly carried out. The greater part of the play is devoted to the disastrous consequences of killing Caesar. In Hamlet,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Gabriel Harvey's Marginalia, ed G. C. Moore Smith, 1913, p. 232. See the discussion by Jenkins, pp. 3-6 and 573-4, and Honigmann, 'Date of Hamlet', pp. 24-6.