

A Concise Companion to
**SHAKESPEARE
AND THE TEXT**

Edited by Andrew Murphy



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Note on Texts

When quoting from the 1623 First Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays, contributors use Charlton Hinman's facsimile edition, using Hinman's "through line number" (TLN) referencing system. When using modern texts, contributors indicate individually which edition they are quoting from. Contributors use standard referencing of F for Folio and Q for Quarto, numbered according to edition (e.g. F1 = First Folio; Q2 = Second Quarto). When quoting from texts which lack page numbers, signature numbers are used instead.

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Introduction: What Happens in *Hamlet*?

Andrew Murphy

One of the most tiresome questions faced by Shakespeareans on a regular basis is, without a doubt, “But did he *really* write the plays?” In some respects, this is not at all a difficult question to answer. While conspiracy theorists and cryptologists may well combine to unearth secret codes in the texts which demonstrate that Francis Bacon or Queen Elizabeth I took time out of their busy schedules to knock off somewhat more than three dozen substantial plays, the actual documentary evidence which survives from the time clearly indicates that it was indeed the grammar-school boy from Stratford who was the author of the works ascribed to him and not, say, some modest aristocrat with a surplus of time on his hands. But the issue might, more interestingly, be approached from a different angle. If we agree that Shakespeare wrote the texts that are ascribed to him, then exactly what do we mean by that? If, for example, we walk into a bookshop and buy a copy of *Hamlet*, can we confidently say that Shakespeare is the author of the words of the play that sit between the covers of the edition?

To bring this question more clearly into focus, it will be helpful to look at an extended sequence from *Hamlet* in a particular modern text. One of the most highly regarded editions of the play from the latter half of the twentieth century was Harold Jenkins’s Arden 2 text, first published in 1982. I would like to examine here an extended section of Jenkins’s Act III, scene i, which includes, of course, what is conventionally Shakespeare’s best-known piece of writing,

the “To be, or not to be” soliloquy. Immediately before the soliloquy, the king, queen, and Polonius discuss Hamlet’s strange behavior, with Ophelia in attendance, largely silent. At the end of his soliloquy Hamlet engages in an exchange with Ophelia, which culminates in his “Get thee to a nunnery” outburst.

How does Jenkins’s edition square with the texts we have inherited from Shakespeare’s own era? We do not, of course, have any manuscript edition of *Hamlet* from the Renaissance – indeed, no manuscript of any of Shakespeare’s plays has survived. We do, however, have three early printed texts. The first of these, the First Quarto (Q1, published in 1603), is quite an odd text, and it is difficult to square it with the other two. It is one of a small number of early editions that present attenuated (and sometimes rather garbled) versions of some of Shakespeare’s plays. The Second Quarto, Q2 (variously dated 1604 and 1605), provides a longer and more coherent text, as does the version of the play included in the First Folio (F1) collected plays volume, published in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare’s death. Q2 and F1 are generally very similar to each other, though there are significant differences between them in some sections of the play.

The first thing we notice in turning back to the earliest editions is that Jenkins’s designation of this section of text as Act III, scene i, is nowhere to be found. Q1 and Q2 have no act or scene markers at all. The F1 text of the play begins with “*Actus Primus. Scæna Prima.*” and it provides a “*Scena Secunda*” and “*Scena Tertia*” for the first act before moving on to “*Actus Secundus,*” then “*Scena Secunda.*” Beyond this scene, there are no further divisions in the text; in effect, the entire remainder of the play is Act II, scene ii. Jenkins tells us in his textual notes that he takes his act and scene designation from a quarto published in 1676 – this is a theatrical text of the play prepared by Sir William D’Avenant. So, the particular division of the text that we find here dates from sixty years after Shakespeare’s death.

Immediately after the act and scene designation, Jenkins provides a stage direction: “*Enter KING, QUEEN, POLONIUS, OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN.*” Q1 has no equivalent of this stage direction, partly because it compacts a number of scenes into a condensed presentation at this point in the play. Q2 and F1 do have an equivalent direction, but both add “*Lords*” to the list of characters to be brought on stage. Where have the Lords gone, in Jenkins’s text? In omitting them, he tells us that he is following Edward Capell’s 1768 edition, and he explains in a note that “The *Lords* of Q2 and F presumably originated with Shakespeare, who then omitted to make use of them.

There is no appropriate . . . point at which they could retire" (274). For Jenkins, then, the Lords are superfluous and, if Shakespeare was responsible for inventing them, Jenkins believes he subsequently forgot that he called them into existence. We might say, however, that their absence or presence does make a difference to the text. With the Lords (albeit silently) present the scene provides a more social and less private vision of the world of the play: they make it less a "domestic" drama, we might say.

As we move forward through the text we find further variations in the stage directions. The immediate next direction is uncontroversial: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit at line 28 of Jenkins's text, and they have an equivalent exit in Q2 and F1 (Q1 lacks an exit largely because of the way its narrative is reconfigured). However, after his line 42, Jenkins indicates an exit for the Queen and no such exit is included in either Q2 or F1. Checking Jenkins's textual notes, we find that he has taken this stage direction from Lewis Theobald's edition of 1733. Intuitively, the change does make sense, in that, at Jenkins's line 28 (following Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's exit), the King has said "Sweet Gertrude, leave us too" and the Queen responds "I shall obey you." Since Ophelia's "Madam, I wish it may" at line 42 is addressed to the Queen, Jenkins, following Theobald, has indicated the earliest (and most natural) point at which she can exit the stage. However, it is worth noting in the current context that the direction is again a departure from the text as it has come down to us in the earliest editions.

Next we come to the sequencing of exits and entrances at the point where Hamlet arrives on the stage. Here we find a high level of variation. Jenkins brings the King and Polonius off immediately after Polonius's line "I hear him coming. Let's withdraw, my lord." He is following F1 here, as Q2 marks no exit at this point. Hamlet's entrance is then differently configured in F1 and in Q2: in F1 he comes on after Polonius's line (and, therefore, after Polonius and the King have exited), whereas in Q2 he comes on before Polonius's line (and, therefore, presumably, just as Polonius and the King are starting to leave, though, as we have seen, Q2 gives them no explicit exit). In one sense, this is a rather trivial point, but it could be said to resonate with traditional debates over the question of the extent to which Hamlet suspects that Ophelia has been set up by the King and her father – a question which much exercised John Dover Wilson in the book from which this introduction takes its subtitle (see also references to Wilson's edition of *Hamlet* below).

We have seen that Jenkins takes his exit for Polonius and the King from F1, but, in fact, F1 offers just a blanket "*Exeunt*" and Jenkins adds to it "[*King and Polonius*]." Here, he tells us in his notes, he is again following Capell's text, though he registers that Nicholas Rowe's edition of 1709 expanded F1's *Exeunt* to "*all but Ophelia*." In one way, of course, this again makes intuitive sense, since Ophelia needs to be on stage to pick up Hamlet's cue of "Soft you now, / The fair Ophelia!" and she has no re-entrance in any of the texts in advance of this line. But there is a strange ambiguity here too in that all four characters (the King, Polonius, Ophelia, and Hamlet) are, in fact, somewhere within the stage space for the duration of both "To be, or not to be" and the nunnery exchange. In F1, we might say, the King, Polonius, and Ophelia are all equally withdrawn from Hamlet, whereas Jenkins, following the editorial tradition dating back to Rowe, leaves Ophelia in a kind of "limbo" where, if we read her exclusion from the exit direction in a strictly literal sense, she may perhaps be placed to hear his depressed musings on death and self-destruction.

Returning to the very beginning of the scene again, we will remember that Jenkins's first stage direction calls for the entrance of "KING, QUEEN, POLONIUS, OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN" and, during the course of the scene, the Queen is specifically named in the dialogue (by the King) as "Gertrude." However, if we track the character names back through the earliest editions, we find a different picture emerging. Polonius is absent from Q1; his equivalent in that text is called "Corambis." Likewise, in Q1, Hamlet's student friends are named "Rossencraft" and "Gilderstone" rather than "Rosencrantz" and "Guildenstern," and the Queen is named "Gertred" (or "Gerterd" [F1v]) and not "Gertrude." In Q2, we find characters called Rosencraus and Gertrard. It is only in F1 that the names assume the general form (with variations in spelling, but the same essential pronunciation) that Jenkins adopts. That he should opt for Rosencrantz and Gertrude in preference to Rosencraus and Gertrard is somewhat odd, given that his stated policy is, for the most part, to follow Q2 as his base text (74–5). In both cases, he suggests that the Q2 names may be misreadings of the originals (163, 423), but it is hard not to feel that the real deciding factor here may simply be the burden of tradition: everyone who knows *Hamlet* knows these characters as Rosencrantz and Gertrude, and to tamper with them would have risked Jenkins embroiling his edition in real controversy – controversy of the kind which was prompted by the editors of the 1986 Oxford University Press *Complete Works* when they changed Falstaff's

name to Oldcastle (see David Bevington's and John Drakakis's chapters in this volume).

Moving on from text divisions, stage directions, and character names, we come to the text of the dialogue itself. Here it is useful to cut directly to Hamlet's soliloquy. To begin with the syntactical division of the speech, both Jenkins and F1 break the soliloquy down into six sentences, though their divisions are rather different from each other. Thus, for example, where F1's first sentence runs through seven and a half lines, to end at "That Flesh is heyre too?," Jenkins's first sentence ends in the fifth line, at "by opposing end them." While both begin a sentence at "To die, to sleep," F1 ends this sentence at "Must giue vs pawse," while Jenkins uses a dash here and carries the sentence on to end at "so long life." The contrast with Q2 is even more striking. This text breaks the soliloquy down into just two sentences. The first is a full 27 lines long, terminating at "we know not of." Though quite different from each other in terms of the number of sentences they present, Q2 and F1 share a tendency to moderate the flow of the soliloquy using commas. In six separate places in the speech both Q2 and F1 deploy a comma where Jenkins has no punctuation at all. Oftentimes these commas come at line endings, as in the closing lines of the soliloquy (quoting from Q2):

And enterprises of great pitch and moment,
With this regard theyr currents turne awry,
And loose the name of action.

Both Q2 and F1 have line-end commas here, while in Jenkins the lines run on. The effect, in the early editions, is to slow the tempo of the soliloquy as it comes to a conclusion.

We have seen that the punctuation and syntactical segmenting of the text differ between Jenkins's edition and the texts first published. As the quotations taken directly from the early editions make clear, there are also variations in the words that appear on the page. In some cases, these changes simply mark the difference between modern and Renaissance spelling conventions, with Shakespeare's era lacking formalized rules for "correct" spelling. Jenkins is producing specifically a "modern spelling" edition and so he eliminates Renaissance variations from his text. In most cases, this is simply a matter – as in the instance of the lines from Q2 quoted above – of substituting "their" for "theyr," "turn" for "turne," and so forth. However, it is also the case that Renaissance spelling can often carry a