

Reformatting *Hamlet*: Creating a Q1 *Hamlet* for Television

I have argued that television is a medium that has unique qualities that make it suitable to particular televisual and theatrical styles. Additionally, I have stressed the flexibility that television provides to us to analyze these productions in depth.¹ However, I had not until the summer of 1995 considered using video technology physically to re-edit an existing “full-text” version of a play into a shorter Q1 (so-called “bad” quarto) version. Since the publication of *The Division of the Kingdoms*, many have investigated the “bad” quartos. A quality common in many of the seemingly disparate approaches to the transmission of these printed scripts is that they might provide us insights into actual performances. Operating under the premise that the first printed edition of *Hamlet* may indeed supply such theatrical insights, I re-edited *The BBC TV Shakespeare Hamlet* from its little more than three-and-a-half-hour-long, roughly full-text version into an approximately three-hour version, following the scene structure of Q1. Having completed my reconstruction, I now propose to describe my method and to explore some of the insights I have gained from this exercise.

After my initial background reading of Kathleen Irace’s *Reforming the “Bad” Quartos: Performance and Provenance of Six Shakespearean First Editions* and the essays in Thomas Clayton’s collection *The Hamlet First Published (Q1, 1603): Origins, Form, Intertextualities*, I prepared my working script. Using the Bertram and Kliman *The Three-Text HAMLET* and the Allen and Muir

¹See: (1) “Two *Lears* for Television: An Exploration of Televisual Strategies.” *Literature-Film Quarterly*. 14 (1986): 179-186 (Reprinted in *Shakespeare on Television: An Anthology of Essays and Reviews*. Eds. James C. Bulman and H. R. Coursen. Hanover, NH: UP of New England, 1988 and in the Appendix to James P. Lusardi and June Schlueter. *Reading Shakespeare in Performance: King Lear*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990); (2) “Reading Shakespeare on Television.” Dissertation. University of Maryland, 1988. Director: Maynard Mack, Jr. Readers: Jane Donawerth and Neil Isaacs; and “Jane Howell’s BBC First Tetralogy: Theatrical and Televisual Manipulation.” *Literature-Film Quarterly*. 20 (1992): 326-331.

facsimile of the Q1 *Hamlet* from *Shakespeare's Plays in Quarto*, I marked up the *The BBC TV Shakespeare Hamlet*² in four colors, corresponding roughly to passages in the BBC production with Q1 equivalents, to passages in the BBC production with no Q1 equivalents, to passages cut from the BBC production with Q1 equivalents, and to passages cut from the BBC production with no Q1 equivalents. Because I was re-editing a production based on a conflated Q2/F1 text,³ my interest was primarily in the theatrical impact of the Q1 scene structure and of the resulting shortened playtext; I obviously could not be concerned with the issues that have been raised about the poetical merits of, or lack there of, the Q1 text. However, even with this limited scope, I was faced with many choices of my own that were complicated by what I identified above as "Q1 equivalents" – in that the corresponding Q2/F1 passages were inevitably longer than those in Q1. Further, my reading of Q1 and of commentaries on it led me to conclude that the Q1 Gertrude appears less complicit and problematic than her Q2/F1 counterpart, that the Q1 Claudius appears even more the principal evil presence (one might say "typical" revenge-play villain) than his Q2/F1 counterpart, that Ophelia appears even more used and victimized than her Q2/F1 counterpart, that the Q1 Laertes appears less complicit than his Q2/F1 counterpart, and that the Q1 Hamlet appears more like a revenger than his more problematic Q2/F1 counterpart.⁴ I knew that as I edited the BBC production I would have not only to follow the Q1 scene structure but also to delete some sections within scenes to try to replicate the spirit of Q1.

I needed some operating assumptions because, for one, attempting a line-for-line deletion

²*The BBC TV Shakespeare Hamlet* uses the Peter Alexander *The Works of Shakespeare* (London: William Collins Sons and Company Ltd, 1951) text. It further includes notations from the BBC Television camera scripts to indicate new locations (changes of sets) with descriptions of the set location and time setting, variations of characters in scenes that do not coincide with the start of a scene in the printed text, cuts in the printed text, and occasional notes of a character's movement when that movement is necessary for the comprehension of the action (32).

³Alexander does not even include the Q1 stage direction "*Enter the ghost in his night gowne.*" (3.4).

⁴In this regard, Janice Lull asserts, "the Q1 text affirms the ethics of the postfeudal honor culture, especially the value of heroic individualism, whereas the F text shows Hamlet accepting the newer Protestant ethic by subordinating his individual will to divine providence" (137).

strategy within scenes would surely result in a disjointed, incoherent video. I determined that my bottom line would be to strive to delete as many passages as I could that I identified as being in the BBC but as having no Q1 equivalents, especially those Q2/F1 passages that increase Gertrude's role over that portrayed in Q1. These particular deletions would include some of her speeches (such as her early lines in 1.2) and some of the references to her (such as the Ghost's 1.5.47-53: "O Hamlet, what a falling off was there").

My task was further complicated by Q1 passages for which there are no Q2/F1 equivalents or for which there are significant theatrical differences. The most obvious of these is Q1's Scene 15.⁵ Additionally, I identified four other passages from Q1 that, to me, so significantly altered the theatrical dynamics that I felt they should also be included, but how – that was the question. What I finally decided to do was to have my teenage daughter (and aspiring Shakespearean actress) and myself read the line while I showed on the screen images of the appropriate passages from the Q1 text. With these decisions being made, I proceeded to re-edit the *BBC Hamlet*.

For my Q1 Scene 1 (7:50), I retained the *BBC Hamlet* 1.1 as it was. I identified approximately twenty lines that I labeled as having no Q1 equivalents. I confess that as I began preparing my working script I color coded much more scrupulously than I did as I proceeded. What became obvious to me was that line-by-line comparisons for specific echoes between the texts was less important than investigating how equivalent Q1 passages, which as I have said inevitably are shorter than parallel passages in Q2/F1, were captured in spirit in Q2/F1. In this scene, I also determined that the *BBC Hamlet* included approximately twenty lines that had no Q1 equivalents and cut fourteen lines that did. These discoveries extended throughout all my investigation.

My Q1 Scene 2 (11:30) presented much more interesting choices than Scene 1 had. The King's opening speech is notably shorter in Q1 than in Q2/F1. It begins with "Lords, we here haue writ to *Fortenbra{s}{s}e*," and thus omits much of the exposition of Q2/F1. I began the scene with "young Fortinbras, / Holding a weak supposal of our worth" (1.2.16b-ff), retaining the Fortinbras

⁵In numbering scenes in Q1, I followed the convention of a new scene's beginning after all of the characters present in the previous scene have left the stage.

exposition while omitting the Old King Hamlet exposition. I also retained “to suppress / His further gait herein; in that the levies, / The lists, and full proportions, are all made / Out of his subject” (1.2.30b-33a) and “You cannot speak of reason to the Dane” to “What wouldst thou have, Laertes?” (1.2.44-50) for smoothness. I deemed it necessary according to my operating principles to delete Gertrude’s first and second speeches and move from Hamlet’s “Not so, my lord; I am too much in the sun” to his “’Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother” to try to replicate Q1’s not having Gertrude speak until she delivers her Q1 “Let not thy mother loo{s}e her praiers *Hamlet*” (1.2.118’s “Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet”). I also omitted Claudius’s “But to persever / In obstinate condolement” to “Do I impart toward you” (1.2.92b-112a) because these lines have no Q1 equivalents and did not appear to me to be necessary.

I made few changes in my Q1 Scenes 3 to 6. I left my Q1 Scene 3 (6:20) as it was in the *BBC Hamlet*, but I deleted Hamlet’s lines 17 to 38a in my Q1 Scene 4 (3:10): they had no Q1 equivalents, and I wanted as much as possible to strive for a rapider pace in my re-edited version than existed in the original production. In my Q1 Scene 5 (11:05), I deleted the Ghost’s “O Hamlet, what a falling off was there” (1.5.47-52) because these lines make Gertrude appear more culpable than she appears in the Q1 version. After considering cutting some of Polonius’s⁶ lines from my Q1 Scene 6 (5:40), I let the scene stand as it was in the *BBC Hamlet*.

Of course, the first substantial change in scene structure between the Q1 version and the Q2/F1 versions occurs in Q1’s Scene 7 – where the “To be, or not to be” speech is located. I began my Q1 Scene 7 (40:50) with the first 167 lines of the *BBC Hamlet*’s 2.2. Both Q1’s Scene 7 and Q2/F1’s Act Two, Scene Two, open with the King and Queen welcoming Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.⁷ However, when Polonius enters in Q1, he is accompanied by Ophelia, something that is not the case in Q2/F1. This was a Q1 theatrical dynamic that I could not reproduce by re-editing the *BBC Hamlet*, and one that I find quite interesting. Having Ophelia present when her

⁶I have decided to designate Q1’s Corambis as Polonius throughout this paper.

⁷I will also refer to these two characters by their more familiar Q2/F1 names rather than as Rossencraft and Gilderstone as they are in Q1.

father offers his theory of Hamlet's madness and reads the letter Ophelia received from the prince further emphasizes her being used and victimized. When Hamlet enters the scene in Q1, he is reading just as he is in Q2/F1's 2.2 although the line – "{s}ee where hee comes poring vppon a booke." – is given to Claudius and not to Gertrude: "But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading." At this point, I cut to the *BBC Hamlet's* 3.1.43, where Polonius instructs Ophelia: "Ophelia, walk you here." I cut 3.1.45-55, resuming the scene with the "To be, or not to be" speech and continuing the scene until Claudius says, "There's something in his soul / O'er which his melancholy sits on brood" (3.1.165). From there, I returned to 2.2.170, where Polonius begins to question Hamlet – "How does my good Lord Hamlet?" and followed this with all of the remainder of 2.2. Even though my edited Q1 Scene 7 is somewhat rough, it does replicate the structure of Q1. The relocation of the "To be, or not to be" speech to this point in the play makes much dramatic sense to me. Having Hamlet's meditation on suicide before the arrival of the players, the initial interrogation by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the hatching of the plot to present "The Murder of Gonzago," and the reciting of the "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" soliloquy, I believe, makes dramatic sense. I find it appropriate that Hamlet would have such thoughts at this point and that having them later after he has resolved "to haue {s}ounder proofes" (Q1) – the Q2/F1 "grounds / More relative than this" – appears less plausible. Other directors have also felt this way; one example that immediately comes to mind is the 1969 Tony Richardson filmed version of the Round House Theatre *Hamlet* with Nichol Williamson. One could, of course, argue that the Q2/F1 placement further problematizes Hamlet, showing an intellectual struggling with a conflict between his individual will and his concern for divine providence (cf. Lull 137), but for me the Q1 placement works and works well.

My Q1 Scene 8 (2:10) was the first place I considered it necessary to include an insert from Q1.⁸ I began with the first twenty-eight lines of the *BBC Hamlet* 3.1, in which the King and Queen discuss with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern what they have learned from Hamlet just as they do in

⁸I have included transcriptions of all the inserts I used in an appendix to this paper.

Q1. The next sixteen lines of 3.1 set up Claudius's and Polonius's spying on Hamlet and were obviously not necessary so I omitted them; my insert, however, continues the momentum of Q1 as Claudius, Gertrude, and Polonius discuss attending the play that Hamlet has arranged.

Although I considered some cuts in both my Q1 Scene 9 (20:10) and Scene 10 (4:50), the only actual parts I deleted were the opening thirty-six lines of 3.3 in Scene 10, for which there are no Q1 equivalents.

My next insert came in my Q1 Scene 11 (9:10). I used the first 159 line of 3.4. At Hamlet's "but go not to mine uncle's bed" (3.4.159), I decided that the Q1 conclusion of the scene could not be replicated by attempting deletions to the *BBC Hamlet* version. In the eleven lines of the Q1 insert, Hamlet asks his mother to assist him in his revenge, and she agrees: "I will conceale, con{s}ent, and doe my be{s}t, / What {s}tratagem {s}oe're thou {s}halt deui{s}e." The Q2/F1 lines are plainly not as direct or unambiguous as these are.

My Q1 Scene 12 (4:05) too required some careful decisions. I began it at 4.1.6 just as Q1 begins – "What, Gertrude? How does Hamlet?" (*BBC Hamlet*) – Q1's "Now Gertred, what {s}ayes our {s}onne, how doe you finde him?" After Gertrude's response (4.1.7-12a), I cut both Claudius's and Gertrude's next speeches (4.1.12b-27), included Claudius's "O Gertrude, come away!" and his instructions to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The scene in Q1 then includes a speech in which Claudius announces to Gertrude that he plans to send Hamlet to England, but this information is conveyed later in my Q1 Scene 12, so I did not add an insert here. I next deleted all of 4.2, Hamlet's exchange with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and the first sixteen lines of 4.3, picking up the action with Hamlet's entrance at 4.3.17 and continuing the scene to the end of 4.3. This compression of three Q2/F1 scenes into one replicates Q1, emphasizes the rapidity of the activities after the death of Polonius and, to me, supports Gertrude's pledge to her son in Scene 11 that she will assist him. This Gertrude appears less ambiguous than her Q2/F1 counterpart, who could be played to illustrate the saying "love the one you're with."

My Q1 Scene 13 (0:35) includes only Fortinbras's few lines and follows Q1 in not having Hamlet's discussion with the Captain or his "How all occasions do inform against me" soliloquy.

I began my Q1 Scene 14 (9:00) with an insert in which Claudius and Gertrude discuss Hamlet's leaving and Laertes's arrival. I did not include 4.5.1-34, moving after my insert to Claudius's entrance at 4.5.35. I omitted 4.5.75-107 to capture the Q1 abruptness of Laertes's entrance after the departure of Ophelia and ended my Scene 14 with the remainder of 4.5, which even though it is longer than its Q1 equivalent does capture the same spirit.

As I indicated above, Q1's Scene 15 is the only complete Q1 scene for which there is no single Q2/F1 equivalent. In this scene, Horatio informs Gertrude that Hamlet has safely returned to Denmark, that Hamlet found Claudius's instructions to the King of England ordering Hamlet's immediately being put to death, that Claudius will surely be displeased of these events, and that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go on to England and their imminent deaths. This thirty-six line scene obviates the need for all of 4.6 and parts of 4.7 and 5.2, thus clearly affecting the rhythms of my attempt at replicating the theatrical impact of Q1.

For my Q1 Scene 16 (5:20), I also determined that the first 163 line of 4.7 did not convey the sense of Q1, so I did not include them and instead used another insert. In this Q1 insert, Claudius hatches the plot to dispatch Hamlet with Laertes. In it, Claudius suggests that Laertes's sword will be both unabated and envenomed and that he will in addition have the poisoned chalice available. Q1 here clearly portrays Claudius as the complete instigator of all phases of the plot and, thereby, reduces somewhat Laertes's complicity in Hamlet's death. Scene 16 then picks up with Gertrude's arrival and her announcement of Ophelia's death.

I let the *BBC Hamlet's* Act Five, Scene One, remain intact for my Q1 Scene 17 (15:35). I had considered making some cuts but concluded that they were not necessary. For my Q1 Scene 18 (20:15), I deleted the first seventy-five lines of the *BBC Hamlet's* Act Five, Scene Two, because they had no Q1 equivalents and let the rest of the BBC's last scene stay as it was.

In conclusion, I believe there was some value to the experiment I undertook. Video technology provided me with my first opportunity to act as a director and therein lies both the source of my satisfaction and disappointment with my project. My resulting video does capture some of the spirit of the Q1 text and, therefore, of the Q1 performance dynamics. However, my

biggest disappointment was that I was not able to create a production of what I would estimate to be the two-hour playing time of Q1 (thus replicating the rapid pace of Q1), something that Ralph Alan Cohen did accomplish in his recent Shenandoah Shakespeare Express's *Hamlet* based on the Q1 scene structure. When I saw this production in Harrisonburg, Virginia, on August 12, 1995, it lasted two hours and five minutes. This particular performance was not the one the SSE had toured with earlier in the season; instead it was re-edited and re-blocked for the first time in preparation for the SSE's upcoming trip to the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland, for which the company was allotted two-hour time slots. Nevertheless, after the show, Cohen expressed his confidence that he would be able to reduce the production time by at least those five minutes, and I have no doubt that he did. The difference, of course, was that he was working with "live" actors and I was working with a video production.

What I did accomplish was to replicate some of the dynamics of Q1, especially involving differences between many of the Q1 characters and their Q2/F1 counterparts. I discovered that I could not realize all of the differences I found in Q1; most notably, I could not have Ophelia present when he father talked with Claudius and Gertrude about Hamlet's "madness," a presence that implies her character is portrayed as being even more victimized in Q1 than in the conflated text. Through my deletions and reordering of the *BBC Hamlet*, I was able, however, to suggest some of the other differences, but I found it necessary to include five inserts to do greater justice to these differences in the Q1 portrayals. My re-editing in combination with these inserts reveals a more determined Hamlet and a more evil Claudius, as well as a less complicit Gertrude and Laertes.

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Appendix

Insert One: Q1: Scene 8

King Thanks to you both: Gertred you'l {s}ee this play.
Queene My lord I will, and it ioyes me at the {s}oule

He is inclin'd to any kinde of mirth.
Cor. Madame, I pray be ruled be me:
 And my good Soueraigne, giue me leaue to {s}peake,
 We cannot yet finde out the very ground
 Of his di{s}temperance, therefore
 I holde it meete, if {s}o it plea{s}e you,
 El{s}e they {s}hall not meete, and thus it is.
King What I' {s}t *Corambis*?
Cor. Mary my good lord, this {s}oone when the {s}ports are (done,
 Madam, {s}end you in ha{s}te to {s}peake with him,
 And I my {s}elfe will {s}tand behind the Arras,
 There que{s}tion you the cau{s}e of all his grieffe,
 And then in loue and nature vnto you, hee'le tell you all:
 My Lord, how thinke you on't?
King It likes vs well, Gerterd, what {s}ay you?
Queene With all my heart, {s}oone will I {s}end for him.
Cor. My {s}elfe will be that happy me{s}{s}enger,
 Who hopes his grieffe will be reueal'd to her. *exeunt omnes*

Insert Two: Q1: Scene 11

Ham. Idle, no mother, my pul{s}e doth beate like yours,
 It is not madne{s}{s}e that po{s}{s}e{s}{s}eth Hamlet.
 O mother, if euer you did my deare father loue,
 Forbear the adulterous bed to night,
 And win your {s}elfe by little as you may,
 In time it may be you wil lothe him quite:
 And mother, but a{s}{s}i{s}t mee in reuenge,
 And in his death your infamy {s}hall die.
Queene *Hamlet*, I vow by that maie{s}ty,
 That knowes our thoughts, and lookes into our hearts,
 I will conceale, con{s}ent, and doe my be{s}t,
 What {s}tratagem {s}oe're thou {s}halt deui{s}e.
Ham. It is enough, mother good night:
 Come {s}ir, I'le prouide for you a graue,
 Who was in life a fooli{s}h prating knaue.
Exit Hamlet with the dead body.

Insert Three: Q1: Scene 14

King *Hamlet* is {s}hip't for England, fare him well,

I hope to heare good newes from thence ere long,
 If euery thing fall out to our content,
 As I doe make no doubt but {s}o it {s}hall.
Queene God grant it may, heau'ns keep my *Hamlet* {s}afe:
 But this mi{s}chance of olde *Corambis* death,
 Hath pier{s}ed {s}o the yong *Ofelines* heart,
 That {s}he, poore maide, is quite bereft her wittes.
King Alas deere heart! And on the other {s}ide,
 We vnder{s}tand her brother's come from *France*,
 And he hath halfe the heart of all our Land,
 And hardly hee'le forget his fathers death,
 Vnle{s}{s}e by {s}ome meanes he be pacified.
Qu. O {s}ee where the yong *Ofelia* is!

Insert Four: Q1: Scene 15

Enter Horatio and the Queene.

Hor. Madame, your {s}onne is {s}afe arriv'de in *Denmarke*,
 This letter I euen receiv'd of him,
 Where as he writes how he e{s}cap't the danger,
 And {s}ubtle trea{s}on that the king had plotted,
 Being cro{s}{s}ed by the contention of the windes,
 He found the Packet {s}ent to the king of *England*,
 Wherein he {s}aw him{s}elfe betray'd to death,
 As at his next conuer{s}ion with your grace,
 He will relate the circum{s}tance at full.
Queene Then I perceiue there's trea{s}on in his lookes
 That {s}eem'd to {s}ugar o're his villaine:
 But I will {s}oothie and plea{s}e him for a time,
 For murderous mindes are alwayes jealous,
 But know not you *Horatio* where he is?
Hor. Yes Madame, and he hath appoynted me
 To meete him on the ea{s}t {s}ide of the Cittie
 To morrow morning.
Queene O faile not, good *Horatio*, and withall, com-(mend me
 A mothers care to him, bid him a while
 Be wary of his pre{s}ence, le{s}t that he
 Faile in that he goes about.
Hor. Madam, neuer make doubt of that:
 I thinke by this the news be come to court:
 He is arriv'de, ob{s}erue the king, and you {s}hall
 Quickly finde, *Hamlet* being here,

Things fell not to his minde.

Queene But what became of *Gilderstone* and *Rossencraft*?

Hor. He being {s}et a{s}hore, they went for *England*,
And in the Packet there writ down that doome
To be perform'd on them poynted for him:
And by great chance he had his fathers Seale,
So all was done without di{s}couerie.

Queene Thankes be to heauen for ble{s}{s}ing of the prince,
Horatio once againe I take my leaue,
With thow{s}and mothers ble{s}{s}ings to my {s}onne.

Horat. Madam adue.

Insert Five: Q1: Scene 16

King. Hamlet from *England!* is it po{s}{s}ible?
What chance is this? they are gone, and he come home.

Lear. O he is welcome, by my {s}oule he is:
At it my iocund heart doth leape for ioy,
That I shall liue to tell him, thus he dies.

king Leartes, content your {s}elfe, be rulde by me,
And you {s}hall haue no let for your reuenge.

Lear. My will, not all the world.

King Nay but Leartes, marke the plot I haue layde,
I haue heard him often with a greedy wi{s}h,
Vpon {s}ome prai{s}e that he hath heard of you
Touching your weapon, which with all his heart,
He might be once tasked for to try your cunning.

Lea. And how for this?

King Mary Leartes thus: I'le lay a wager,
Shalbe on *Hamlets* {s}ide, and you {s}hall giue the oddes,
The which will draw him with a more de{s}ire,
To try the mai{s}try, that in twelue venies
You gaine not three of him: now this being granted,
When you are hot in midst of all your play,
Among the foyles {s}hall a keene rapier lie,
Steeped in a mixture of deadly poy{s}on,
That if it drawes but the lea{s}t dramme of blood,
In any part of him, he cannot liue:
This being done will free you from {s}u{s}pition,
And not the deere{s}t friend that *Hamlet* lov'de
Will euer haue Leartes in {s}u{s}pect.

Lear. My lord, I like it well:
But {s}ay lord *Hamlet* {s}hould refu{s}e this match.

King I'le warrant you, wee'le put on you
Such a report of {s}ingularitie,
Will bring him on, although against his will.
And le{s}t that all {s}hould mi{s}{s}e,
I'le haue a potion that {s}hall ready {s}tand,
In all his heate when that he calles for drinke,
Shall be his period and our happine{s}{s}e.

Lear. T'is excellent, O would the time were come!
Here comes the Queene. *enter the Queene.*