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Back to Basics: Thinking about the *Hamlet* First Quarto

Steven Urkowitz

It is the theory which decides what we can observe.

—Albert Einstein

We often like to think that we examine literary texts without prejudice, but one of the great insights of contemporary criticism leads us to explore and challenge even the possibility of our own critical objectivity. Nevertheless, Shakespearean textual analysis generally has been accorded an extraordinary place in the hierarchies of critical specialties because it seems so objective and scientific. What could be more controllable and removed from subjective interpretive passions than bibliography? But the debates and decisions that find their way into the agate type of textual commentaries in fact boil with unexpected and irrational passion. Anyone attending the regular seminars on textual studies at annual Shakespeare Association of America conferences can report tales of psychologically gory frays, furies, and frustrations.

In his New Arden edition (1982), Harold Jenkins vividly testifies to the emotional power of arguments in support of the current theory that the First Quarto of *Hamlet* derives from a process that includes memorial reconstruction: "Objectors to 'memorial reconstruction' as the explanation of the bad quartos have sometimes complained that there is no contemporary 'testimony' to such a practice; but if you come upon a mutilated corpse you don't deny a murder because nobody has reported one. The evidence is in the texts themselves" (19–20). This kind of rhetoric and argumentation in textual studies of *Hamlet* has until recently effectively

discouraged almost all other scholars from any close examination of "the texts themselves"—the First Quarto, Q1 (1603), the Second Quarto, Q2 (1604–5), and the Folio, F (1623). Even among bibliographically sophisticated scholars, few students of *Hamlet* look even briefly at the earliest printed version of this play, the so-called "bad" First Quarto. The assertion that we have a "mutilated corpse" in this text discourages most of us from asking interesting questions: for example, "What should we do with sections, themes, and characterizations self-consistent within Q1 but quite different from the later texts?" However unsavory or defunct the First Quarto of *Hamlet* may appear to Harold Jenkins, it yet deserves enlightened study. Following the current fashion of bibliographic studies, by discussing only those qualities of Q1 that may be thought of as pathological, textual critics have inadvertently discouraged and effectively prevented others from examining the very evidence they declare primary. Further, even a mildly skeptical review of research currently accepted as the critical foundations of opinions about Q1 *Hamlet* reveals that much of the fierce rhetoric denouncing that text amounts only to bluster and misrepresentation.

Several widely held beliefs are used to justify the general attack on Q1 *Hamlet* illustrated by Jenkins's comments. These shared common beliefs within the editorial community have achieved the status of dogma, and challenges to them have met with cries of outrage and derision. The beliefs themselves do not rely on any coherent methodology or set of verifiable observations, but together they form a litany of great power. The most often and most clearly stated belief is that Shakespeare never could have written anything as bad as some of the verse found in Q1. A less widely discussed but influential belief holds that the shorter printed quartos could not have been drawn from authorial first sketches because Shakespeare, it is imagined, would not have wasted time enlarging a short draft into a longer version. Supposedly Shakespeare would have known that his impracticably long scripts would have to be cut down anyway to fit into a two-hour limit for stage presentation; therefore as a practical man of the theater he would not revise by enlarging. A third belief involves the bibliographic interpretation of orthographic similarities between the Q1 and Q2 text of *Hamlet*. It is argued that since Q1 is believed to be taken from a memorially reconstructed manuscript and Q2 from Shakespeare's own foul papers, typographical quirks that the two printed quartos share—spelling, punctuation, or the layout of type on the page—could only have

occurred if the compositors of Q2 occasionally consulted the printed text of Q1 itself. Although this seems to have little impact on the texts themselves, actually this belief justifies editorial control over variant texts that otherwise could not be claimed. A fourth belief holds that passages that appear to be incoherent in the Q1 text could have been generated only by some illicit form of transmission; they could not have been part of an authorial draft, nor could they have been prompted by confusion in an authorial manuscript. These beliefs—each based on studies published by reputable scholars—support the general theory that the “bad” quarto of *Hamlet* was generated by some extraordinary method of literary corruption (cf. Craig 1961, 75–83).

This essay questions the theory, evidence, argumentative methods, and conclusions about the 1603 *Hamlet* accepted without question in recent editions of the play. It also introduces several kinds of evidence that as yet have been passed over in *Hamlet* textual studies and seem to contradict the established view.

1

Fluellen. . . . If you marke Alexanders life well, Harry of Monmouthes life is come after it indifferent well, for there is figures in all things.

Unlike scholars studying the wealth of material showing the composing processes of writers like Keats, Dickens, Yeats, or Faulkner, we do not have any example of Shakespeare's working drafts of his own plays. Without authentic sketches, notebooks, or holograph foul papers, we have no sure way of knowing how Shakespeare's scripts may have developed. Although textual scholars generally agree that Q2 *Hamlet* was drawn from Shakespearean foul papers, we don't really know whether or not there were preliminary “fouler” drafts, and critics disagree about whether or not the Folio text of *Hamlet* represents Shakespeare's later thoughts (Werstine, “Textual Mystery” 1988). Recent work on *King Lear* argues that Q1 *Lear* represents an earlier stage of Shakespeare's composition than is found in the Folio, but we simply do not have any evidence that would allow us to say it was his “earliest” attempt at a written script. By assuming that “foul paper” copy behind certain printed texts of Shakespeare's plays necessarily means “first draft” copy, critics too confidently believe that in those texts they have caught the record of the artist in his typical and unvarying experience of composition. Take for exam-

ple George Hibbard's characterization of Hamlet's first soliloquy as it appears in the Q1 text (ed. *Hamlet* 1987):

By no stretch of the imagination can the Q1 version ["O that this too much griev'd and sallied flesh"] be regarded as a first draft. We know what a Shakespearean first draft looked like from the examples that have survived by accident, and especially from the twenty-three lines, 4.3.292–314 of *Love's Labour's Lost* which should have been deleted but were not. They end in incoherence, or something very like it, but there is no incoherence in their evolution up to the last three lines, where its appearance seems to have led Shakespeare into deciding to begin the whole passage afresh. (85)

Hibbard assumes without argument that the accidentally undeleted lines from *Love's Labour's Lost* that are followed by a smoother rewriting of the same material represent the only possible pattern of Shakespearean composition or revision.

Hibbard offers his readers a type-facsimile of the first *Hamlet* soliloquy, but he introduces it as part of his narrative of the hypothetical reporter's work, immediately prejudicing a reader's perceptions against it as an independent verse passage (84). And unlike his own edited version of the speech from the Folio, and unlike other textually interesting passages to be found in his edition's appendix of material unique to Q2, when demonstrating the badness of the "bad" text Hibbard further prejudices his readers against the cited Q1 passage because he reproduces old spelling, old typographical conventions, and uncorrected press errors.¹ Hibbard generates a hypothetical psychodynamic history of the Q1 soliloquy growing from an inchoate eruption of a reporter's dullard memory:

Able to make something of speeches and dialogue bearing fairly closely on the action, [the reporter] is badly at sea when confronted by the Prince's passionate outburst. . . . Some phrases, and even some lines, stick in his head; but he has no idea of the order in which they occur or of the way in which they are related to one another. The outcome of his effort to recall what he hears is, to use his own words, "a Chaos."

Hibbard exaggerates. The two texts, for example, begin with distinct but recognizably confident and Shakespearean ideas and language. Q1 reads:

O that this too much grieu'd and sallied flesh
Would melt to nothing, or that the vniuersall

Globe of heauen would turne al to a Chaos!
O God within two moneths;

(Q1, B4r.4–7; 1.2.129–32)

The Second Quarto offers this alternative:

O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,
Thaw and resoluë it selfe into a dewe,
Or that the euerlasting had not fixt
His canon gainst seal[f]e slaughter, o God, God, . . .

(Q2, C1r.31–34; 1.2.129–32)

Although the First Quarto then lurches irregularly but quickly into Hamlet's horror over his mother's marriage, "within two moneths; no not two: married, / Mine vncl," Hibbard and other textual commentators fail to acknowledge that the supposed reporter's version picks up in its brief, jerking rhythm the longer fits and false starts of the Second Quarto's twenty-line circumambulation—"But two months dead, nay not so much, not two, . . . and yet within a month, / Let me not thinke on't . . . why she / O God" etc.—before Hamlet arrives at "married with my Vncl." The reporter somehow managed a chaos distinctly parallel in effect as the author's supposed "original."

If we were not forewarned that the reporter was at work, the first three lines of the soliloquy in Q1 would pass very nicely for genuine. We have elsewhere heard of "the universal world" and "universal earth," in *Henry V* and *Romeo and Juliet*, so "universal globe" seems quite Shakespearean. And in a distinct linguistic parallel to Q1's use of "chaos," Richard Plantagenet sees his own disordered body "like to a chaos." At least at the outset, the Q1 soliloquy may appear significantly different from Q2, but it is not significantly worse than Q2.

Another felicity of the reporter's version: "*grieu'd and sallied flesh*" happens to be a hendiadys, the rhetorical figure where pairs of nouns or adjectives linked by "and" are used in place of a noun and its modifier, as in "the *perfume and suppli*ance of a minute" or "thy *knotted and combined* locks" (Wright, "Hendiadys" 1981). *Hamlet* is peculiarly rich with instances of this figure, and "grieu'd and sallied flesh," if not Shakespeare's, is nevertheless *someone's* poetic figure unique to the Q1 text. It is not a chaotic accident, and it resembles uncannily the sixty-plus hendiadys found in the later printed versions.

In both quarto versions, the soliloquy desperately avoids and then compulsively repeats the tormenting conjunction of the

Queen and Hamlet's uncle. Hibbard claims that "muddle is written all over it," but the same whirling reversals, interjections, and unresolved expectations appearing in Q1 also shape Q2. Hibbard imagines that "the reporter could not reconstruct the speech because he had never properly understood it. A failure to comprehend compounds the errors due to failure to remember," but Hibbard himself has perhaps failed to comprehend or has merely forgotten the extraordinarily erratic structuring of this speech in Q2 (85).

The same kinds of variation may be found in the alternative texts of a different soliloquy. I have been told by one editor that the First Quarto version of Hamlet's "rogue and peasant slave" soliloquy equally brands that text as a piracy. In its earliest printed version it begins "Why what a dunghill idiote slaue am I?" while the second printed text has "O what a rogue and pesant slaue am I." The second sounds better and has the imprimatur of "genuineness" on it because we memorized it in high-school English class. But "dunghill idiote slaue" cannot be called necessarily un-Shakespearean. Shakespeare's imagination elsewhere conjoins "dunghill" and "slave": in *King Lear* we find "Throw this slave upon the dunghill." Hamlet's "dunghill idiot slave" also cousins the "rascal bragging slave" (2H4, 2.4.228) in Shakespeare's "genuine" writing. We need not scorn a line or a phrase in Q1 simply because it is unfamiliar in that spot, but editorial discussions of the Q1 text repeatedly hold it up to such facile criticism.

Continuing with this same soliloquy, the first version offers two lines where the second has ten:

Why these Players here draw water from eyes:
For Hecuba, why what is Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?
(Q1, E4v.36–F1.1; 2.2.551–60)

Is it not monstrous that this player heere
But in a fixion, in a dreame of passion
Could force his soule so to his owne conceit
That from her working all the visage wand,
Teares in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
A broken voyce, as his whole function suting
With formes to his conceit; and all for nothing,
For Hecuba.
What's Hecuba to him, or he to her,
That he should weepe for her?

(Q2, F4v.13–22; 2.2.551–60)

The conventional argument would propose that the hypothetical reporter forgot the ten-line version and had to invent the two-line text as replacement, an elegant improvisation. As with the earlier soliloquy, however, in no way may the first printed text be considered chaotic. We should at least consider the possibility that irregularity and brevity may characterize even a fluent author's drafts. Perhaps Hibbard is correct about the chaotic reporter, but contrary to Hibbard's characterization of it the reporter's work is not everywhere as bad as he claims. Hibbard denies any possibility that Shakespeare may have occasionally composed tentatively, picking his way through a problem he himself did not yet understand; like most Shakespearean editors, Hibbard instead fosters unverifiable expectations about his playwright's artistic composing process.²

Drawn from a different artist, who unlike Shakespeare left detailed records of his working process, a Fluellen-esque analogy suggests a different way to think about the "bad" quarto texts:

Beethoven has left us the record of innumerable sketches of almost all his works. Nottebaum, who published selections from many of Beethoven's sketchbooks, had the wisdom to make a comment that has been neglected by other pious hero-worshippers from Sir George Grove onwards. He notices that these sketches show every conceivable variety of method; . . . but Grove expresses an innocent surprise that the sketches of some of Beethoven's greatest things are often abjectly commonplace, and he fails to connect this with facts equally noteworthy to him, that the handwriting is a vile and rapid scrawl and that the sketches are exceedingly numerous. . . . What Beethoven's sketches show is that he did not take pains at the wrong time. He scrawled any cliché that would mark the place where an idea ought to be, and when he had advanced to sketching whole sections of a work, . . . he often found it easier to begin again from the beginning and copy out the unaltered parts of his sketch, so that the act of writing had the same continuity as the flow of his thoughts, rather than tinker at isolated passages. (Tovey 1941, 79–80)

Like Beethoven's manuscript drafts, some passages in Q1 *Hamlet* are only minimally different from their later printed versions, a few passages seem to be made up of stock theatrical clichés from other plays and other authors, and some seem quite Shakespearean but unlike the later printed versions.

Shakespeare may have been completely unlike Beethoven in his methods of composition, but the absence of documentary evidence is insufficient reason to rule out the possibility that an early draft may have been so sketchy or confusedly inscribed that they

led a compositor to set what we find in Q1. For example, a puzzling passage from Q1 seems to indicate a writer's confusion in the demarcation and order of speeches in the manuscript underlying the printed text. Several questions and answers appear in a jumbled order: for example, rather than question-reply, question-reply we find question-question, reply-reply.

Enter King, Queene, Corambis, and other Lords.

King How now son Hamlet, how fare you, shall we have a play?

Ham. Yfaith the Camelions dish, not capon cramm'd,
feede a the ayre.

I father: My lord, you playd in the Vniuersitie.

(Q1, F2v.34–F3r.2; 3.2.93–95)

Sidney Thomas argues that this incoherence could only have come from a sloppy memorial reporter's manuscript.³ But it is possible that a composing playwright (or a composing reporter, for that matter) inscribed the first exchange—Question: "how fare you . . ."; Reply: "the Camelions dish, not capon cramm'd, feede a the ayre"—and continued drafting the scene. Then later he returned to write a second question and reply—"shall we have a play?" "I father"—on the same page in a position next to the first. Perhaps he found space only in a margin, or perhaps the writer was not sure which of the two exchanges should go first. Imagine for a moment that the passage in the manuscript underlying Q1 contained two trial beginnings for the exchange, one here printed normally, the second printed in uppercase letters.

Enter King, Queene, Corambis, and other Lords.

King How now son Hamlet, how fare you, SHALL WE HAVE A PLAY?

Ham. Yfaith the Camelions dish, not capon cramm'd,
feede a the ayre.

I FATHER:

My lord, you playd in the Vniuersitie.

One hypothetical option for this hypothetical reconstruction would be the following:

Enter King, Queene, Corambis, and other Lords.

King. Shall we have a play?

Ham. Aye, father. My lord, you played in the University?

Another equally hypothetical option:

Enter King, Queene, Corambis, and other Lords.

King. How now son Hamlet, how fare you,

Ham. Y faith, the Camelion's dish, not capon cramm'd.

I feed o'th'air.

King. Shall we have a play?

Ham. Aye, father. My lord, you played in the University?

In the first of these hypothetical reconstructions of the script underlying Q1, we have an instance of the King forcibly bringing the planned action forward as soon as he enters. In the second hypothetical version we would have the King again passing over without remark a possibly rude reply from his stepson. (Further, when in Q1 Hamlet jauntily addresses the King as "father" he initiates a form repeated in four other speeches in that text—once on F4 later in this scene and three times on G4—but never in the later versions.⁴) In the garbled Q1 text or in my tentatively reconstituted forms of its underlying manuscript, the King wants to get on with the business of the play. In contrast the King in the Q2 text quickly becomes silent after Hamlet's talk of capons and chameleons.

*Enter Trumpets and Kettle Drummes, King, Queene,
Polonius, Ophelia.*

Ham. They are comming to the play. I must be idle,
Get you a place.

King. How fares our cosin Hamlet?

Ham. Excellent yfaith,
Of the Camelions dish, I eate the ayre,
Promiscram'd, you cannot feede Capons so.

King. I haue nothing with this aunswer Hamlet,
These words are not mine.

Ham. No, nor mine now my Lord.
You playd once i'th Vniuersitie you say,

(Q2, G4v.36–H1r.9; 3.2.90–99)

This set of textual alternatives—between a direct call to action in Q1 and a circumspect or oblique avoidance of confrontation for the King at the moment of his entry into an entertainment—appears again in the play's final scene. There the Q1 King pushes for the duel to begin where instead the Q2 King forestalls the main event.⁵

Each of these instances demonstrates that the Q1 text is not simply a chaos, no matter who may have been responsible for assembling its underlying manuscript. If we consider alternative

models of Shakespeare's composing process, or even of the hypothetical reporter's composing process, and if we try to recover the sense behind the printed First Quarto text, then we may not have to castigate so relentlessly the *Hamlet* First Quarto for its intermittently and provocatively "clumsy" style. Contrary to the denigrating characterizations of it made by contemporary editors, the Q1 text should command and, I believe, demonstrably repays close attention to its version of *Hamlet*.

2

Pol. This is too long.

Ham. It shall to the barbers with your beard.

Although theater historians repeatedly have shown that performances of Elizabethan plays could be of indeterminate length, editors of *Hamlet* in the 1980s still routinely suggest that the script of *Hamlet* was reduced from some greater length in order to accommodate a shorter playing time in English Renaissance theaters. Editors invoke an imaginary chasm between on the one hand Shakespeare as a writer of unproducibly long plays and on the other his own acting company constrained to only two-hour presentations in its London playhouses. Editorial analyses of textual and artistic relationships among any of the three early printed versions of *Hamlet*, not simply the nature of the First Quarto, are colored by this stubbornly held but erroneous belief. For example, Philip Edwards in 1985 claims that the Folio text cannot have been drawn from a genuine working promptbook:

At 3,535 lines it is only 140 lines or so shorter than the second quarto, and as Greg said it cannot 'suggest any serious attempt to shorten the play' (*Shakespeare's First Folio*, p. 317). The average length of plays at the time was under 2,500 lines. Plays varied in length, of course, and it is clear that both Shakespeare and Jonson were given to writing very long plays. Even so, there is no chance of a play of over 3,500 lines being acted in full. If it is an acting version we are looking for, it will be something nearer the length of *Macbeth*, or the first quarto of *Hamlet*. (Edwards 1985, 20)

Edwards cites Alfred Hart as his source for the average length of plays. But an examination of Hart's work on Elizabethan play-scripts reveals that he misrepresents and massages his data to

support conclusions directly contradicted by many documents that he either did not know of, or misinterpreted, or suppressed.

Alfred Hart argued that the "bad" quartos were all much shorter than the genuine Shakespearean texts because, he claimed, playhouse working scripts had to be cut down to roughly two hours' playing time (1934, 77–153). The piratical actors supposedly responsible for the short first-quarto texts such as *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet* were familiar only with severely truncated performing versions rather than the longer literary texts that Shakespeare submitted to his company. Hart's demonstration of this hypothesis depends initially upon a series of grossly misleading arithmetic calculations. For example, in order to conclude that the typical English Renaissance play was about 2,400 lines, Hart first removes from his sample any plays by Shakespeare and Jonson because their atypical length would disrupt the more general norm he wishes to establish. Even without the statistically-significant long plays of Jonson and Shakespeare, Hart's simple average disguises the distribution of his sample. Although his "bottom line" figure is about 2,500 lines for the "average" play, his own tabulations show that out of 185 texts only one-third of his sample is close to that average (table II, *Homilies*, 83). His data show that plays did not even approximately conform to this length. Instead there seems to be one large group of short plays of around 2,000 lines, another large group of plays running 2,600–3,000 lines, and a relatively even distribution throughout the remainder of the range from 1,600 to 3,200 lines. A simple average of such a sample disguises rather than reveals anything about the ways playwrights may have limited or extended their scripts. If Shakespeare and Jonson's plays are included in the sample, the 2,400-line average would shift upward, and we would discover a large number of plays forming a previously hidden third cluster at the high end of the scale. Hart's average speciously misrepresents the complex distribution of the play-lengths: his interpretation of even his own skewed sample oversimplifies its possible significance. Rather than yielding an average length, such as we might expect from a single species of green beans, for example, Hart's figures show that there were many short plays and many long plays, more like grapes and bananas.

Further, by the easy expedient of dismissing contrary literary evidence, Hart also claims that London acting companies restricted themselves to two-hour playing times. Citing references from scripts such as the *Romeo and Juliet* Prologue, "the two houres

trafficque"—but excluding as irrelevant Jonson's Induction to *Bartholomew Fair*, "two houres and a halfe and somewhat more"—Hart concludes that two hours was the precise, practical, and generally accepted limit for any staged play. Although plays were performed throughout most of the year, Hart conjectures that winter afternoon darkness would keep out of the repertory of professional companies all plays that took longer than two hours to perform. But he cites without awareness of its contradictory testimony Webster's complaint that *The White Devil* was "acted in so dull a time of Winter, presented in so open and blacke a Theatre, that it wanted . . . a full and understanding Auditory" (*Homilies*, 112). Evidently at least this one play (the extant text of which runs roughly 3,000 lines) was performed even though the cold winter sky dimmed into darkness.

Hart argues nevertheless that as a rule Shakespeare's plays, no matter how long in their pristine authorial form, were cut down to roughly 2,400 lines in performance by his own acting company. According to Hart, Shakespeare "knew that at least a quarter of each play, including much of his finest poetry, would not be spoken on the stage" (*Homilies*, 152). Building even further upon his hypothesis about a severely enforced time-limit, Hart elsewhere says, "*Hamlet* Q1 has suffered the most severe abridgment, mainly because the full text is 600 lines longer than that of any other of these plays. Removal of 1360 lines from Shakespeare's longest and most famous play in order to reduce it to standard size may seem sacrilege to the arm-chair idolators of the play and the poet, but the stage history of the play is one long chronicle of increasing abridgment" (Hart 1942, 124).⁶

Hart's hypotheses and his evidence are directly contradicted by extant theatrical documents and social records. For example, W. W. Greg has shown that although cuts were indeed made on promptbook scripts, no cuts made specifically to reduce long plays to a standard length may be found in manuscripts used to regulate actual performances in Elizabethan theaters. Some short plays were cut severely, some long plays were not reduced at all. "On the evidence we are bound to believe that plays differed considerably in length and performances in duration" (*Shakespeare First Folio*, 145–47). Ann Jennalie Cook and Andrew Gurr call attention to many more contemporary citations of three-hour and longer performance times in English Renaissance theaters. We hear of a gallant who "goes to Gyls, where he doth eate till one; / Then sees a Play till sixe, and sups at seven" (Cook, 141); the front matter of the 1647 Beaumont and Fletcher Folio speaks of "the three

hovers spectacle" offered by a play; again, in the playhouse "few here repent / Three hours of pretious time, or money spent" (Cook, 174). Gurr also proposes a relaxed interpretation of the duration of dramatic performances: "In the absence of watches, of course, and the kind of precise timekeeping which only became necessary when railway timetables were invented, an hour was a fairly flexible device. The likely duration of most performances . . . was nearer three hours" (33). At 1,200 lines per hour (Hart's estimate) even a 3,800 line *Hamlet* wouldn't strain anyone's patience (see Gurr 1987, 33–34).

Hart's hypothesis about a strict adherence to a two-hour traffic of a play still carries great authority. Decades after Greg's findings were published, and soon after Cook and Gurr, we are still led to believe that Shakespeare regularly wrote unproducibly long plays, which were then cut down by his acting company to fit into a two-hour time limit on the Globe playhouse stage: "Why in the first place Shakespeare should on this occasion as on many others have written a play manifestly too long for theatrical presentation is a far-reaching and unsettling question" (Edwards 1985, 24). A theory such as Hart's long outlives its evidentiary support. The length of Q1 *Hamlet* may perhaps have resulted from playhouse cutting as Hart suggests, but the evidence and arguments offered by Hart fail to demonstrate that hypothesis.

Hart's tenacious theory appeals particularly to textual critics because it reinforces their own presuppositions about Elizabethan stage practices and their own fantasies about Shakespeare's relationships to his scripts. Greg offers the most poignant example of the belief that deep down in his bardic heart Shakespeare really was a textual critic, concerned with the publication of his own plays, creating texts aimed at the printing houses rather than the theaters: "It is foolish to suppose that Shakespeare was indifferent to the fate of his own works. The mere length of some of his plays, of *Hamlet*, of *Richard III*, of *Coriolanus* for example, must have made it difficult to produce them in their entirety on the stage, and suggests that he had an alternative mode of publication in view. In the quiet evening of his days at New Place, did Shakespeare ever discuss the possibility of printing with the cronies who visited him there?" (*Shakespeare First Folio*, 2–3).

Greg's charmingly domestic but completely unfounded speculation about the relationship between Shakespeare's long scripts and playhouse productions of them directly contradicts the results of his own research, yet Greg here provides the model for equivalent statements by recent editors of *Hamlet*. The invented

anecdote overwhelms the accumulated contrary evidence.⁷ And editors in this instance seem to follow their leader's fantasy rather than his scholarship.

3

Dolph. Then did they imitate that which I compos'd . . .

If Q1 *Hamlet* descended from an authorial draft even very distantly prior to the manuscript underlying Q2, then there would be few problems explaining the occasional orthographic similarities found between the printed Q1 and Q2 texts. Through a process of repeated copying and typesetting, both editions could transmit authorial or scribal quirks. But because Q1 is said to be descended from a reporter's independent manuscript, its spelling, capitalization, and punctuation normally would not resemble those found in the Q2 text, which other evidence indicates was probably drawn from an authorial manuscript. However, occasional similarities do appear. It is then reasonably suggested that Q2 was typeset from an independent manuscript, but that the compositor also had at hand and ready to use as a possible guide through the tangled manuscript an exemplar of the First Quarto. And beyond any question, the ornamental title pages of Q1 and Q2 resemble one another. The degree of consultation of the *subsequent* material is another matter, and the hypothetical dependence is supported by a patchwork of different kinds of notably ambiguous bibliographic evidence—such as spelling, punctuation, and spacing—open to a variety of equally probable alternative explanations. But the most important evidence that the compositors of Q2 made some use of Q1 is to be drawn from the indentation of typeset speech prefixes in the opening dialogue.

Harold Jenkins, for example, repeatedly stresses the probative value of these speech-prefix patterns in the two quartos: "Exactly how and to what extent Q1 was used in the printing of Q2 is a matter of dispute, but that it *was* used is shown by a number of little similarities, among which a curious typographical correspondence is conclusive. . . [46] . There is, and must be, general agreement that Q1 was used in some way, at least for the first act. . . [48] . The business of the speech prefixes shows that the Q2 compositor (X) must have begun with Q1 open before him" (49). G. R. Hibbard vigorously concurs—"The decisive evidence for some dependence of Q2 on Q1 comes at the play's opening"

(99)—and like Jenkins he credits W. W. Greg as the first textual scholar to notice the interesting correspondence. Greg describes the evidence in one of his long footnotes in *The Shakespeare First Folio*: “Q1, continuing the practice with which it first started, prints speakers’ names and text level on the left as far as Horatio’s speech at 1.30, where for the first time it indents the speaker. Q2, on the other hand, begins by indenting the text (setting the speakers full out) but after the entrance of Horatio and Marcellus it switches into agreement with Q1, printing 11.24–29 level with the speakers, and then from 1.30 indents the speakers, again as in Q1” (331). To ease a reader’s comprehension of these typographic variants, Hibbard offers in his Oxford edition reduced but very clear facsimiles of the two opening pages in question (78–79).

Despite the rhetorical certainty voiced by his followers, Greg evidently felt that his argument is not necessarily as air-tight as our recent editors would have it. As with many of Greg’s most troubling demurrals, he embedded his remark within a diffident parenthesis in the same footnote quoted in my preceding paragraph: “(It is true that Q2 is sometimes inconsistent in the matter of indentation later on, e.g. on sigs. F2v–3r)” (331–32).⁸ Considering Greg’s evasive citation of strong evidence contradicting this speech-prefix hypothesis, perhaps it is not surprising that Jenkins in his brief summary fails to report the anomalous indentations Greg cites. G. R. Hibbard however quotes directly Greg’s argument *for* the hypothesis, but he coyly omits Greg’s parenthetical warning about the possible unreliability of his speech-prefix evidence: instead Hibbard replaces the caveat with three spaced periods (Hibbard 100).

As interpreted by contemporary editors, Greg’s observation of the shifting format for the speech prefixes demonstrates that these specific typographical irregularities in Q2 which appear also in Q2 could arise only if Q2 had been set by a compositor who was consulting a copy of Q1. But (as Greg’s parenthesis should warn the wary) this inference is not necessarily correct. Although the typeset form of Q1 could possibly be the source of a similar irregularity in Q2, peculiarities or similarities of the copy underlying both Q1 and Q2 also could have led to the same anomalous indentation pattern. If there were such prior manuscript similarities then we might expect to find variations in these same speech prefix indentations not accountable for by a simple lineal descent of Q2 from Q1; and indeed we find such variations.

First, it is necessary to consider the correspondence of the spots in the text where indented speech prefixes begin to conform to

regular usage. Here, for my own more plodding goal of untangling the web of arguments believed so convincing by others, I must rather painstakingly describe the shifting patterns so economically rendered by Greg. As he notices, on the first page of dialogue in Q1 every line—with the exception of the title and the stage directions—begins flush with the left margin. The compositor of Q1 indented neither speech prefixes nor subsequent lines of dialogue when a speech ran more than one line. “Normal” indentation of the speech prefixes in Q1 begins after the fourth line of the second page of text, B1v, after the end of Marcellus’s seven line speech (which began with an unindented speech prefix on the opening page). On the corresponding first page of Q2, however, the two speeches that run longer than a single line (Francisco’s, with no equivalent in Q1, and Barnardo’s, which takes more than one line in Q1 also) have their subsequent type-lines (those not initiated by a speech prefix) indented rather than set flush with the left margin. And on the second page, B1v, the compositor of the Second Quarto continues setting subsequent speeches, none longer than one line, flush with the left margin. The string of short speeches ends in this text as well at a speech by Marcellus that runs to seven lines. But here the Q2 compositor for the first time sets the initial line of each speech *and* the continuing lines flush left. After the same long speech for Horatio, in the middle of B1v, the compositor of these pages in Q2 begins to set speech prefixes “normally.” Because the shift from anomalous to normal indentations for the speech prefixes happens precisely at the end of the first page in Q1 but not until the middle of the second in Q2, the compositor of Q2, the argument goes, must have been following his Q1 antecedent. Although held as a profoundly convincing argument by an entire generation of textual scholars and editors, this imaginative reconstruction of the motives and actions leading to the artifacts we find in Q1 and Q2 strangely ignores questions that might be raised by even a minimally skeptical observer.

If the compositor of Q2 were indeed taking from Q1 his cues about how to set the speech prefixes, is it possible that he would have failed to notice the relationship between speech-prefix indentation and the page turn? Perhaps it is not enough to ask whether or not the Q2 compositor was copying Q1. I believe we might better understand the relationships between the extant texts and their underlying copy if instead we imagine the two compositors and the manuscripts they likely had before them. We first should speculate about why the Q1 compositor may have

adopted the anomalous pattern to begin with. He has a playscript to set into type. If it resembles other manuscript plays, the first sheet of paper has perhaps forty or fifty lines of writing. To the left of a folded margin he would see speech prefixes, and to the right of the fold would be speeches, each beginning on a new line. Unlike any other play in the Elizabethan repertory, *Hamlet* (in any of its early versions) begins with a series of very short speeches. In the manuscript underlying Q1, the compositor would see that only two of the first fifteen speeches run more than a single line. As with other opening pages of printed plays, it seems likely that this compositor was concerned with creating a visually attractive layout.⁹ But if he typeset the short speeches of the opening dialogue with conventionally indented speech prefixes, the reader's eye would see the first letters of a long string of indented prefixes for one-line speeches as if they formed a "true" visual margin, and the "anomalous" speeches with more than a single line would have the opening letters of their second lines jutting left into the gutter of the page. Faced with this problem, the compositor, it seems, chose to break the usual pattern of indenting speech prefixes; instead, he set all lines flush. He broke out of that pattern at the first convenient moment, after the speech for Marcellus beginning at the foot of his first page and continuing four lines into his next page. The pattern seems to have been dictated by the design requirements created by the extraordinary opening dialogue of the manuscript underlying Q1, and the choice for making the change would not have been affected if the text were to be set seriatim or if it had been cast off for setting by formes.

Imagine the compositor of the Second Quarto. He or his fellow had set or eventually was going to set the title page imitating the title page of the First Quarto, "The Tragicall Historie of HAMLET, Prince of Denmarke." But the job at hand was the first page of text, and as a sign that this page was recognized as a different problem, the opening page of text begins with the slightly different display title, "The Tragedie of HAMLET Prince of Denmarke." The opening dialogue of the manuscript held by the compositor also offered significantly different speeches, but the design problem for this compositor was still roughly the same: he had an even longer string of predominantly one-line speeches broken by a two-liner, a three-liner, and a seven-liner. What will he do?

Three and a half centuries later, W. W. Greg proposes that the Second Quarto compositor takes his cue from the First Quarto,

and Greg's disciples agree. But instead, contrary to Greg's hypothesis (and in accord with his tentatively phrased parenthetic demurrer), it seems rather more likely that this compositor invents his own alternative aesthetic solution. He *indents* the lines not beginning with speech prefixes. No matter how forcefully Hibbard, Jenkins, and others may claim otherwise, I believe that we observe an alternative rather than an imitative typesetter's way of improving the appearance of his ornamental opening page.

The point of transition between anomalously-indented speech prefixes and normally indented speech prefixes in both Q1 and Q2 indeed comes at the end of Marcellus's seven-line speech, "Horatio sayes tis but our fantasie. . . ." This long speech after about twenty lines of very brief speeches changes the indentation problem for the Second Quarto compositor. For the compositor of Q1, the transition came after the end of the first page of dialogue, so he seems to have used the page-turn as a fortuitously simple place to shift from one style to the next. The compositor of Q2 could have used the same solution, changing style at the page-turn, but he did not. Instead he waited until he came to Marcellus's long speech, seven lines into his second page. Rather than introduce a stylistic bump, even one cushioned by the page-turn, the compositor of Q2 chooses to shift from the "indented dialogue" form of his page B1r to an unindented form for both speech prefix and dialogue at the first chance he gets, at the beginning of Marcellus's long speech, the seventh line of B1v. Then he makes a final change at the conclusion of Marcellus's speech after the thirteenth line of that page.

The strictly bibliographical similarities of these speech prefixes between Q1 and Q2 call attention to the bibliographic differences between the two patterns. In their textual analyses, Jenkins and Hibbard ignore or suppress the bibliographic differences between the compositorial choices made in Q1 and Q2.

Recall Greg's suggestion: "(It is true that Q2 is sometimes inconsistent in the matter of indentation later on, e.g. on sigs. F2v-3r.)" We may profitably examine the other passages where inconsistent indentations appear, in order to weigh the alternative appeals of Greg's hypothesis and my own. The beginning of one particularly suggestive example (not cited by Greg) coincides with the beginning of a passage that first appears in print in Q2, on F1r, running from line 22 until the end of the page. According to Fredson Bowers and John Russell Brown, the same compositor who set the opening dialogue also set signature F (see Brown 1955 and

Bowers 1955). In the passage on F1r, three prose speeches that run for more than one type-line are set with both their speech prefixes and their remaining lines indented. Prose speeches are set normally again on F1v and F2r, but then at the eighth line of F2v two speeches for Hamlet have their prefixes set flush left and their continuing lines indented.

The same pattern again appears after the players' entry on F3, continuing to the end of the page. The compositor here could not have been imitating Q1, since the first irregular segment has no counterpart in the text of Q1. The first anomaly continues in Q2 beyond the limit of material not in Q1, extending into a passage where the equivalent Q1 prefixes are perfectly regular. The coincidence of textual material not in Q1 and typographical irregularity not in Q1 suggests some relationship between typography of Q2 and possible irregularity in what must have been manuscript copy underlying Q2.¹⁰ Further, it also eliminates any *necessary* belief that the compositor of the first pages of Q2 has to have been influenced by Q1 when he set the opening dialogue. Greg recognized this problem only after 1951, and he called attention to it (demurely, modestly) in 1955 in a parenthesis embedded in a footnote (*Shakespeare First Folio*, 331–32). Later editors of *Hamlet* have ignored or e-Greg-iously suppressed his warning.

Instead of confident methodology and orderly verification of hypotheses, the record of textual analysis of this particular problem reveals an alarming imaginative rigidity about matters of fact and interpretive judgment. And editors want us to trust their editions because they claim for themselves such exquisite prudence.

4

Fri. O she knew well,
Thy loue did reade by rote, that could not spell:

Instead of the seeming certainty of dependence based on bibliographic demonstration, for support of the hypothesis that Q2 was set with occasional consultation of a Q1 exemplar we are left with two coincidental instances of erroneous commas as terminal punctuation (described by Greg, *Shakespeare First Folio*, 331, quoted by Hibbard, 100) and a group of oddly spelled words which the two texts have in common. The orthographic evidence

Jenkins summarizes—"unusual spellings in which the two quartos agree" (Jenkins, 47)—may be traced back to John Dover Wilson's *Manuscript of Shakespeare's "Hamlet"* and to Alice Walker's "Collateral Substantive Texts" (1955). Here the argument for the partial dependence of Q2 upon an exemplar of Q1 tacitly postulates that the manuscript underlying Q1 has no "visual" connection to Shakespeare's own manuscript or to a manuscript tradition that could otherwise account for Q1's orthography resembling that of Q2; "unusual" spellings of Q1 therefore came from the "reporting actor's" pen:

We note further correspondences extending through the first act. Unusual spellings in which the two quartos agree include the phonetic *pollax* (1.1.66), *ship-writes* (1.1.78), *sallied* (1.2.129), *pre thee . . . studient* (1.2.177), *Capapea* in italic, *trouchions*, *gelly* (1.2.200, 204, 205), *glimses* (1.4.53), *the Nemeon Lyons nerue* (1.4.83), *wharffe* (1.5.33), *Angle linckt*, the unmetrical *leaprous*, *allies* (1.5.55, 64, 67), *i'st* (1.5.119, 148), *sellerige* (1.5.159). (Jenkins 47; line numbers refer to his edition)

Although at first sight a daunting list, by digging through the *OED* and old-spelling concordances G. R. Hibbard shows that all but three spellings cited by Wilson, Walker, and Jenkins—*strikt*, *ship-writes*, and *glimses*—were common in Elizabethan hands and in Shakespearean printed plays ("Common Notes" 1986; ed. *Hamlet* 1987, 100; Hibbard misses the *OED* citation of *glimse* as a usual Elizabethan spelling, so we are really down to two uncommon spellings in the list). Hibbard nevertheless argues that in addition to these few words, several commas, and three of the four unexpected capitalizations Q1 and Q2 have in common do still serve to support the dependency hypothesis: "These coincidences in spelling and capitalization might not amount to much by themselves, but taken *in conjunction with the bibliographical evidence cited by Greg, which is crucial*, they leave little room for doubt that compositor X [responsible for setting sigs. B and F] had a copy of Q1 to hand and referred to it when setting his first stint that accounts for practically the whole of what is now Act 1" (100; emphasis added).

Contrary to Hibbard, I would argue that we have significant "room for doubt." Since Greg's evidence of speech-prefix indentations is shaky, as Greg alone among the bibliographers seems ready to admit, and since all but two of the twenty-odd shared spellings also fail to stand up as worthwhile evidence, then perhaps this cornerstone of the bibliographical foundation of editorial treatments of *Hamlet* should be open to reexamination.

5

The Spinsters and the Knitters in the Sun,
And the free maides that weaue their thred with bones,
Do vse to chaunt it: it is silly sooth. . . .

Another principal foundation for contemporary treatment of the *Hamlet* First Quarto, G. I. Duthie's *The "Bad" Quarto of Hamlet*, illustrates the limiting conceptual framework, the circularity of argument, and the failure of theatrical imagination found also in other analyses of the "bad" quartos as memorial reconstructions.¹¹ Instead, Duthie's work continues to find universal acceptance by contemporary editors.

Most of Duthie's examples meant to illustrate the mental processes of the hypothetical reporter of the staged *Hamlet* instead simply demonstrate that both the Q1 and Q2 texts of *Hamlet*, by whomever and in whatever order they were composed, have densely interrelated verbal structures. As he traces the resemblances between the two texts, Duthie finds that "the complexity of composition of this blank verse in Q1 is becoming more and more apparent; not only are elements [from Q2] brought together from scattered passages in the full text, but passages in that text are split up and their elements redistributed" (100). Duthie postulates that this complex manipulation of text could have been accomplished only by a reporter transcribing from memory a performance of *Hamlet*.

Although he has a low opinion of the reporter's memory and skill, the occasional but necessarily accidental elegance of the reporter's juggling of Shakespearean poetic fragments stimulates repeated exclamations of surprise from Duthie. For example, italicized in the passage below are phrases Duthie highlights as instances of memorially manipulated Q1 text:

Well sonne Hamlet, *we in care of you: but specially
in tender preservation of your health,*

The which we price euen as our proper selfe,

It is our minde you forthwith goe for *England*,

(G4r.20–23; 4.3.40–43)

The sentence beginning "Well sonne Hamlet" breaks off abruptly after "our proper selfe," and the King's circumlocutions about his beneficial intentions toward Hamlet then shift to a straightforward declaration of his will: "It is our minde. . . ." This instance of the grammatical figure *aposiopesis* may well result from

a scribal or compositorial omission, or from the hypothetical reporter's failure of memory. It may also perhaps signal a moment when an author abandoned a "first shot" at the speech (after "our proper selfe") but failed to mark it for omission. And it may even be a purposeful design to mark the moment when the King gives up his mask of politeness, ungrammatically and abruptly asserting instead a strict authoritarian manner. The nearest equivalent to this passage in Q2 reads,

Hamlet this deede *for thine especiall safety*
Which we do tender, as we deerely grieve
 For that which thou hast done, must send thee hence.
 (K2v.9–11; emphasis added)

In this text the King smoothly negotiates his announced purpose without the purposefully or accidentally broken grammar of Q1.

Passing over the dramatic content of the lines, Duthie instead concentrates on the possible sources for any words found in Q1 but not in Q2. He notes that the First Quarto uses "tender" as an adjective while the Second Quarto has it as a verb. This transformation of the grammatical function of "tender" leads Duthie into a fascinating associative tour:

The verb "tender" [i.e., the Q2 usage] here has formed in the reporter's mind an association-link with *Henry V* II ii 56–59:

We'll yet enlarge that man,
 Though Cambridge, Scroop, and Gray, in their dear care
 And tender preservation of our person
 Would have him punished.

Thus "tender", a verb in *Hamlet* IV iii 40, becomes an adjective in Q1 xi 156, as in *Henry V* II ii 58, and the alteration entails a borrowing (with modifications) from that play, namely, the words "in care of you" and "in tender preservation." The borrowing is indissolubly bound up with a fragment of the authentic *Hamlet* text; for the words "but specially", embedded in the borrowed material, are clearly derived from a vague recollection of "thine especial safety." (93)

Although Duthie's sample words might to a skeptical observer seem rather commonplace and likely to be available from many other possible sources in a verbal community, they merely introduce more extravagant gatherings. After the reporter's fluid memory lifts and moves text from the "genuine" *Hamlet* and *Henry V*, while writing the passage from 4.3 he next anticipates and

juggles his own errors, which are yet to be made later in his pirated Q1 *Hamlet*:

"Tender" having become an adjective, the verb "price" is substituted for it (Q1 xi 157). Now in Q1 vi 4–5 [i.e., sig. D3r.18, 2.2.4–5] the verb "tender" is an anticipation of IV iii 40: and not only is that passage anticipated but also the confusion of it with the lines quoted from *Henry V*; this accounts for the words "our care to him" in Q1 vi 5. It is extraordinary that, anticipating 4.3.40, the reporter should retain "tender" as a verb and yet also partially foreshadow the confusion of the later passage with *Henry V*, which confusion caused him to use "tender" as an adjective in [the Q1 equivalent of 4.3]. (93–94)

Duthie's ingenuous astonishment at his invented reporter's virtuosity—"it is extraordinary that . . ."—seems almost reasonable. But his argument asks us to perform two gymnastic suspensions of disbelief. First we must forget that authors revise their own work by such conventional methods as substituting one word for another, changing the order of words or phrases, adding a word used earlier in a composition, eliminating a repetition tried out in an early draft, or even recalling a particularly apt turn of phrase from a different play.

Next, to follow Duthie's argument we must grant to the hypothetical reporter all the resources of composition that in our first exercise we denied to an author. The reporter performs all the wild and wonderful linguistic exercises that—in studies of multiple drafts and editions of other poets' works—we have been trained to recognize and to appreciate. Such professional skepticism set aside, however, we follow Duthie as he points out for us an "interesting confusion" this reporter generates in the Q1 script of *Hamlet*, now that he has been licensed to manipulate the original. In Q1, Duthie argues,

the King desires that Rosencrantz and Guildensterne 'will *labour* but to *wring* from' Hamlet the cause of his distemperance. Almost certainly the reporter has at the back of his mind a passage in Act I scene ii of the full Shakespearean text. Laertes has begged the King's permission to return to France; the King asks if he has his father's consent: ". . . He hath, my lord, *wrung* from me my slow leave / By *laboursome* petition." (94)

Duthie properly concludes that "the juxtaposition of 'wring' and 'laboursome' on the one hand and 'labour' and 'wring' on the other can hardly be coincidence" (94). But Duthie's rhetorical clarity and "almost" certainty disguise a far simpler source of

these conjoined concepts. The verb "wring" and the idea of painful work form verbal clusters elsewhere in Shakespeare's writings. *Measure for Measure* has "those that *wring* under the *load of sorrow*" at 5.1.32; and *Titus Andronicus* offers "Yet wrung with wrongs more than our backs can bear" at 4.3.49. Although possibly the same reporter also had strong recollections of these other plays, it should at least be noted that, as Duthie says, these clusters generate "extraordinary" and "interesting confusions" mostly because the hypothetical pirate and substantial playwright both string together the same associative linguistic chains.

However interesting the possible genetic derivation of words in these equivalent passages may be, Duthie ignores their surrounding dramatic context: the first meeting between Hamlet's parents and Hamlet's friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The two quartos represent utterly and irreconcilably distinct plans for stage action. In the Q2 text the Queen is an active participant, vigorously shaping the interview and controlling the stage movement at its end. She "takes the stage" and gives commands to the two young men and bystanding courtiers, and she probably escorts them to one of the stage doors. (I deduce this since she fails to overhear the conversation between the King and Polonius immediately following the exit of the two young men.) In sharp contrast, the Queen in the Q1 text stands solely as an adjunct to the King. She says nothing of substance, and the two young men initiate their own exit.

To accede to Duthie's argument we must agree that at the very same moments when for the King's role the reporter was interweaving subtle tones of language resonating from a scene hundreds of lines earlier in the genuine version he nevertheless forgot the extremely simple actions performed by the Queen in the later text.¹² Perhaps reporters actually worked this way, but some demonstration of their capacities ought to be derived from evidence rather than from the fertile possibilities of speculation.

While Duthie wonders at the diverse capacities of his "reporter," he also limits the information a reader might need to form alternative interpretations of the data. He restricts his discussions to segments of dialogue misleadingly isolated from surrounding contexts. When in Q1 a speech for Corambis concludes with a non sequitur, Duthie seems to demonstrate how associative tricks of the hypothetical reporter's memory provided the bits out of which the confused sentence was formed.

At one point in Q1 scene viii [i.e., Flv, 3.1] the metre breaks down seriously, and the text becomes incoherent. . . . The lines in which the Q1 text deteriorates so strikingly run

Therefore

I hold it meete, if it so please you,
Else they shall not meete, and thus it is.

(105)

Duthie observes that the repeated word “meete” appears once in an equivalent passage from 3.3 in Q2, and that the word “meeting” also appears once in Polonius’s part in 2.3 from the Q2 version. Therefore, “having remembered ‘meet’ in one sense from III iii 31, the reporter immediately remembers the same word in another sense from II ii 213” (106). Duthie finds other distantly scattered words and phrases from Q2 resembling this passage that “it is clear”—and “probably,” and “it is therefore all the more likely,” and “quite possibly”—thrust themselves into the reporter’s text. Duthie concludes with a rhetorical flourish: “It is by now quite obvious that in the passages with which we have been concerned the Q1 text is a patchwork of words and phrases (often quite commonplace) remembered from widely separated sources in the full play.” And so he moves confidently forward to another decontextualized passage equally compounded from bits and pieces and memorial *disiecta membra*.

But in his excitement about finding distant analogues and sources, Duthie somehow slips past the problem for which he called our attention to this passage initially,—namely, the deterioration evident in Corambis’s non sequitur, “and thus it is.” Duthie again avoids speculating about how his hypothetical reporter may have left such an incoherent smudge when he was successfully weaving all those snippets from elsewhere. Even within the tight constraints of the passage he examines, how, we may ask, could Duthie’s reporter be so good at remembering and patching and yet be so bad at recognizing his own incoherence? That is not a question raised by those adhering to the memorial reconstruction schema, but perhaps it should be.

In a somewhat cruel irony, it seems that if we draw back only a little to get a slightly broader view of the passage, we discover that Duthie’s elaborate exercise was made necessary not by the text of Q1 but rather by his myopic concentration on the word, phrase, and line as his limits of discourse. Looking only one line further in the Q1 text, we see that Corambis’s incoherence has also been noticed and commented upon by a sharpeyed critic who observed Corambis’s confusions 340 years before Duthie labored over it:

Therefore

I holde it meete, if so it please you,

Else they shall not meete, and thus it is.

King. What i'st *Corambis*?

(F1v.23–26)

The speech abruptly loses its status as a bizarre and complicated track of a reporter's memorial reconstruction. Instead, the incoherence of Q1 represents a purposefully scripted delineation of Corambis's character. The old man begins his sentence and stops before he says what is "thus." The King then prompts him to continue: "What i'st Corambis?" Had Duthie thought about the scripts of *Hamlet* as plans for action and as designs for dialogue imitating common human speech, he would not have had to tangle himself in such nets of explanation. Alfred Hart also comments on the King's reply to Corambis's incoherent speech-ending, but he reports it as if it were a bizarre metatheatrical exclamation spoken out-of-character by the actor playing the King and then transcribed by the memorial reporter: "Another piece of such nonsense occurs in the next scene, when Corambis begins to outline his plan for espionage: 'Madame, I pray be ruled by me: . . . and thus it is.' No wonder Claudius stands amazed and gasps, 'What i'st Corambis?'" (*Stolne and Surreptitious Copies*, 102). Both Duthie and Hart evidently believe that only an actor may generate such incoherent texts, while a university-trained councilor (who also condescendingly criticizes actors' performances) never could have been so portrayed onstage by Shakespeare.

Corambis suffered from a very similar senescent quirk earlier in the Q1 text when he was rehearsing his spy-messenger, Montano.

Mon. My lord, that will impeach his reputation.

Cor. I faith not a whit, no not a whit,
Now happily hee closeth with you in the consequence,
As you may bridle it not disparage him a iote.

What was I about to say,

Mon. He closeth with him in the consequence.

Cor. I, you say right, he closeth . . .

(D2r.30–36)

The italicized line in the passage here abruptly returns to the subject Corambis had finished with two lines previous, and the jump back and the return forward seems to throw Corambis's mind out of gear. This disjunction of "normal" conversational flow in his speech here at D2r.30–36 and again at F1v seems to be one of the defining characteristics of the role Q1 calls "Corambis."

Examination of the dramatic contexts of Duthie's imaginatively

reconstructed memorial “road to Xanadu” reveals that at least this aspect of his influential study, like Hart’s arithmetical average play-lengths, “is silly sooth.” Instead of closing off further analysis of the First Quarto, as it inadvertently seems to have accomplished since its publication, Duthie’s work may be more appropriately mined for its accumulation of parallel passages showing a theatrical imagination at work.

6

if I drowne my selfe wittingly, it argues an act, & an act hath
three branches. . . .

As a correlative problem rising from the recent *Hamlet* editors’ faith in earlier work by critics such as Greg, Hart, and Duthie (seemingly without attempting any independent verification of these long-accepted hypotheses), other kinds of evidence have been left unexamined. For example, in the three texts of *Hamlet* we find a series of single-word or single-phrase variants: the same spot appears differently in all three texts. Some of these “three-way” variants erupt in passages otherwise identical or nearly identical in the three texts. Editors conventionally ascribe these substitutions to the Q1 reporter’s memory when they appear in that text; they label as Shakespeare’s “originals” the versions found in Q2; and variants found in F are considered either as authorial changes, as actors’ changes, or as scribal or compositorial errors or corrections. The simplest instance may illustrate the interplay of the texts:

- | | |
|----|--|
| Q1 | <p>I haue heard
The Cocke, that is the trumpet to the <i>morning</i>,
(B2v.26–27)</p> |
| Q2 | <p>I haue heard,
The Cock that is the trumpet to the <i>morne</i>,
(B3r.25–26)</p> |
| F | <p>I haue heard,
The Cocke that is the Trumpet to the <i>day</i>,
(TLN 148–49; 1.1.149–50)</p> |

To explain *morning*, then *morne*, and finally *day*, Philip Edwards (31) and the Oxford editors (*Textual Companion*, 401) offer a string of at least seven separate agents—inscribing, copying, perform-

ing, remembering, recopying, and composing at least four different underlying manuscripts leading to the three extant printed versions.

Although not immediately apparent when examining a single variant in one text together with an equivalent in one other text, an obvious but hitherto unasked question seems to force consideration of itself when we look at a variant in three texts at once. We know that an author will tamper with or poke at a single word or phrase, an entrance or an exit, repeatedly changing it until it "feels" right. And surrounding words and phrases will sometimes stay untouched and sometimes be rewritten. But, considering that single-word variants in Q1 were supposed to have been made by someone other than the person or persons responsible for the readings in Q2 and F, how does the Q1 text repeatedly contain a substitute for the very same word or phrase divergently represented in the other two texts? How could the varying hypothetical conjunctions of playwright, pirate, scribe, and compositor behind these texts all manage to jiggle the same inexplicably unstable word or phrase?

Observe the following three-way variants:

Q1 *Marc.* It faded on the crowing of the Cocke,
Some say, that euer gainst that season comes,
Wherein our Sauours birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long,
And then they say, no spirite *dare walke abroade*,
The nights are wholesome, . . .
(B2v.34–B3r.3)

Q2 *Mar.* It faded on the crowing of the Cock.
Some say that euer gainst that season comes
Wherein our Sauours birth is celebrated
This bird of dawning singeth all night long,
And then they say no spirit *dare sturre abraode*
The nights are wholesome, . . .
(B3r.33–38)

F *Mar.* It faded on the crowing of the Cocke.
Some sayes, that euer 'gainst that Season comes
Wherein our Sauours Birth is celebrated,
The Bird of Dawning singeth all night long:
And then (they say) no Spirit *can walke abroad*,
The nights are wholesome, . . .
(TLN 156–61; 1.1.157–62)

Although *possibly* accidental and caused by different writers, we should question skeptically the involved reasoning that would so explain, for example, why Hamlet speaks of a recorder's "most delicate musick" in Q1 (F4v.32), "most eloquent musique" in Q2 (H4r.21), and "most excellent Musicke" in F (TLN 2230; 3.2.359). Our own experience with drafting and revising suggests that an author well might produce such a string of readings, but accident?

Q1 But see the Sunne in russet mantle clad,
Walkes ore the deaw of yon hie *mountaine top*,
Breake we our watch vp,
(B3r.7–9)

Q2 But looke the morne in russet mantle clad
 Walkes ore the dewe of yon high *Eastward hill*
 Breake we our watch vp . . .
(B3v.3–5)

F But looke, the Morne in Russet mantle clad,
Walkes o're the dew of yon high *Easterne Hill*,
Breake we our Watch vp, . . .
(TLN 165–7; 1.1.166–68)

Three-way variants appear in contexts where the surrounding material offers a variety of other minor variants that do indeed resemble transcription errors, although it should be pointed out again that of course authors as well as scribes and composers may introduce such variants.

- Q1 . . . the Glo-worme shewes the Martin
To be neere, and gin's to pale his vneffectuall fire:
Hamlet adue, adue, adue: remember me. Exit
(C4v.24–26)
- Q2 The Gloworme shewes the matine to be neere
And gins to pale his vneffectuall fire,
Adiew, adiew, adiew, remember me.
(D3v.8–10)
- F The Glow-worme showes the Matine to be neere,
And gins to pale his vneffectuall Fire:
Adue, adue, Hamlet: remember me. Exit.
(TLN 774–76; 1.5.89–91)

A disconcerting irony in a study of the transmission of words to be remembered: when Hamlet himself records the Ghost's words he inscribes, in all three texts, "adeu, adeu, remember me," not the exact words of any of the Ghost's three scripted alternatives.

Perhaps orthodox interpreters of the Hamlet texts can explain these three-way variants as accidents of transmission. Indeed, Wells and Taylor (1987) elsewhere think of the earliest printed quartos of other plays as memorial reconstructions of Shakespeare's own revisions, revisions he made after composing the version underlying the Folio. They do not consider the possibility for Q1 *Hamlet*, however. And G. R. Hibbard in this volume considers several instances of large-scale three-way variants as authorial versions. In any case, the repeated correspondence of author-like triple-alternative readings of words and phrases has never been studied as a distinct phenomenon suspiciously different from memorial or compositorial error. Instead, habitual editorial denigration of the First Quarto text has discouraged examination of potentially "positive" verbal relationships among the three versions.

7

The only reason to labor through the kinds of data such as are here presented is finally to come back to the basic documents with fresh eyes. We may once again choose to look at the First Quarto of *Hamlet* as a theatrical document without solely belaboring its bibliographical faults, knowing that it may be a lesser thing, unpolished, badly transcribed, fundamentally different from Q2

and F in important ways. I believe we may discover that the Q1 text drew its basic shape from an earlier or a later manuscript or performance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, or from an earlier or a later manuscript or performance of the Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men's *Hamlet* (if for some reason we wish to distinguish the individual playwright-player-shareholder from the creative matrix in which he developed, refined, and practiced his art throughout his life). Or we may find that Q1 descends from an earlier or later manuscript or performance of someone else's *Hamlet*, or some combination of these and other entirely unsuspected agencies. But we should recognize that the Q1 text of *Hamlet* may profitably be studied as a product of the same theatrical industry that generated the works of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson. If we can analyze the virtues of *Gorboduc* and *A Faire Quarrel*, there is no reason not to study Q1 *Hamlet* as a drama with characteristics interestingly contrasted to *Hamlet* Q2 and F. Until quite recently, few scholars have devoted any attention to the positive qualities of any "bad" quartos. Instead scholars have been struggling only to see why these texts were bad, how they got that way. My own task in this essay has been to test some aspects of the traditional evaluative processes, to show that they themselves demand self-conscious evaluation, long overdue, and to encourage the readers of modern editions to look for the rich and unexpected pleasures that may be found in the earliest printed versions.

Like patriarchal ghosts, W. W. Greg, G. I. Duthie, Alfred Hart, and other textual scholars impose their doctrines, interpretations, and tasks on our contemporary editors of *Hamlet*. The dominant model for these early critics was that they should create and justify a single "authoritative" version of the play: "Shakespeare's *Hamlet*." But the revered reputations of eminent scholars should not prevent modern researchers from reexamining basic documents afresh, testing earlier hypotheses, measuring and weighing alternative explanations of complex data. If we fail to test their work not only with the tools they have left us but also with those that we have developed ourselves, then certainly we would have paid too great a price for filial piety in Shakespearean textual criticism.

Recently the unitary patriarchal model has been amended slightly to allow consideration of Shakespearean alternative versions: Shakespeare's two *King Lears*, Shakespeare's two *Hamlets* (Q2 and F), or even Shakespeare's three *Hamlets* (Taylor and Warren 1983; Urkowitz 1980, 1986; Hibbard 1987; Sams 1988; and Werstine 1988).¹⁴ I am suggesting that we seriously or,

rather, lightheartedly consider not only authoritative Shakespearean versions but also possibly unauthoritative versions. What harm would come if readers could see how the three early texts transform *Hamlet* into different fluid shapes, even though we cannot be sure about the provenance of each word or even each scene? Given the communal nature of ensemble performance, and given the revisions of the scripts they performed (changes made by or commissioned by performing companies), and given the intricate weaving of texts out of new and old material from literary and dramatic sources, we may find that the very concept of "Shakespeare" as an individual artist may for some purposes turn out to be merely a useful functionary construct. Instead we may learn to be happy dealing with the three earliest texts of *Hamlet* along with the four most recent editions of *Hamlet*, along with the nine current productions of *Hamlet*, along with the two or three easily accessible videotapes of *Hamlet*, along with the hundred hottest critical analyses of *Hamlet*. Editors fiercely insist that they produce "authoritative" *Hamlets*, which they defend against all other authoritative *Hamlets*. But theatrical art fiercely resists such authority by the very nature of its ephemeral performances. We should learn to smile at editorial enthusiasms even while we appreciate editorial learning, yet we must also distrust that dogmatic insistence on the concept of authority that drives each new authoritative edition into print.¹⁵ Getting back to the basics should mean reexamining our methods and our goals in preparing texts for study.

Notes

1. Randall McLeod shows the presuppositions and consequences of editorial treatments of the data usually presented to readers of modern editions: see "Marriage" 1982; and "Gon. No more" 1983. McLeod's point was made also by Hubbard 1920, 7. Although Greg recognized the power of Hubbard's argument shortly after it was published, Hubbard's analysis otherwise disappeared from subsequent studies of Q1 *Hamlet* (*Abridgements* 1923, 259n, 271n.).

2. For a challenging analysis of creativity and creative processes in many different fields and periods, see John-Steiner 1985.

3. Although he objects strenuously to my methods and conclusions, I wish to thank Sidney Thomas for bringing this variant to my attention in his Shakespeare Association of America paper, 1988 (5–6), the basis for Thomas's essay in the present collection.

4. It is interesting to note that at his exit from 4.3, after Hamlet calls the King "father" three times in the span of only three speeches, he abruptly calls him "mother": "farewel mother. / *King* Your louing father, Hamlet. / *Ham.* My mother

I say: . . .” With his mother standing by in the First Quarto text only, Hamlet for the first time openly rather than slyly affronts the King, speaking as if the King were suddenly turned effeminate or hermaphrodite. And Hamlet never again names him “father.” The five uses by Hamlet of “father” to address the King, unique to the First Quarto, may perhaps display a dramatic conceit tried out and then dismissed.

5. For a description of this later moment in *Hamlet*, see Urkowitz, “‘Well-sayd’” 1986, 49–54.

6. Hart ingenuously fails to consider that the social conditions of dramatic performances changed radically after 1642. The factors governing a West End production of *Hamlet* in 1942, for example, would include curtailed operations of Underground transportation, threats of bombing, wartime power restrictions, the custom of long intervals for refreshments, and other conditions completely unrelated to problems faced by a company in London in 1603.

7. I wish to thank the initial anonymous reader of this essay for *Shakespeare Quarterly* for inadvertently directing my attention to Greg’s several discussions of the length of Shakespeare’s scripts.

8. In its first appearance, Greg’s observation of the imitative indented speech prefixes did not include the notice of later inconsistencies. See Greg, *Editorial Problem* 1951, 64n.

9. In a search through ninety printed scripts from the English Renaissance I found that almost all had typographically irregular opening pages of dialogue inconsistent with the typography of the later pages: ornamental capitals, speech prefixes centered on the page rather than flush left or indented, speech prefixes spelled out fully rather than abbreviated, or combinations of these patterns.

10. Perhaps coincidentally, these anomalies are found in the outer forme of F. Yet another similar spot with unindented speech prefixes appears in Q1 *Richard III* at E3r in a passage with textual variants resembling those at the opening of *Hamlet*. And the 1597 Quarto of *Loves Labors Lost* has many long passages with anomalous patterns of speech-prefix indentations. Without the kind of rigorous analysis Peter Blayney applied to the 1608 *King Lear* quarto, and perhaps not even then, we simply can’t tell just what led to these anomalous patterns.

11. See Duthie, “*Bad*” *Quarto* 1941. For recent studies of other memorial reconstruction arguments, see Urkowitz, “Reconsidering” 1986, primarily on D. L. Patrick and his followers; “‘If I Mistake’” 1988; and “Good News” 1988.

12. To account for (among others) the immense differences between the Queen’s role in Q1 and Q2, the Oxford editors offer an explanation first suggested by E. K. Chambers: “The part of Gertrude in performances of the lost play (the *Ur-Hamlet*) would have been taken by a boy actor; a boy actor of the late 1580s or early 1590s could well be a hired man in 1600–3, playing parts like Marcellus and Voltemand. Such hypotheses cannot be proved, but they do demonstrate that a simple mechanism of contamination exists” (Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion* 1987, 398). However simple, this hypothesis discreetly avoids speculating on how the reporter so seamlessly integrated the Queen’s role from the *Ur-Hamlet* into its “new” Shakespearean matrix. His accomplishment suspiciously resembles professional playwrighting, specifically the composition of “duplicate” plays described by Knutson 1988.

13. One example which tests the rule occurs in Q1, Q2, and F *King Lear* 4.6.186ff., where the compositor of the Second Quarto regularizes an interrupted speech found in Q1, and the folio offers a third alternative. See Urkowitz, *Revision* 1980, 23–26. However, the three-way variants found in

Hamlet would not have been generated by a normalizing scribe or compositor to change peculiarly theatrical usages into more conventional expressions.

14. Paul Werstine (1988) properly (albeit irritably) argues that we should not turn the early printed versions of Shakespeare's plays into icons magically endowed with Shakespearean essence in each piece of type or arrangement of scene. Following Foucault, Werstine argues that "the search for origins [is] ultimately futile and misleading" (26), and he implies that all recent "revisionist" work on *King Lear* and *Hamlet* is modeled on that search. Nevertheless, efforts at endowing alternative scripts, whatever their origins, with meaning may lead us to transcendent or at least intense aesthetic experiences. At issue for Werstine seems to be the problem of whether a "real" experience may be derived from a text with *unknowable* authority. While interesting to many contemporary critical communities, this is not such an important problem for those engaged in the essentially antirational and multidimensional experiences of theatrical performance rather than the deductive linearities of most bibliographical and literary analysis.

15. Two *King Lear* projects offer alternative approaches: the Oxford *Complete Works of Shakespeare* prints edited versions of the Quarto and Folio, and Michael Warren gives photofacsimiles of the *Lear* quarto and Folio along with a separately bound edition of Q and F arranged in parallel on facing pages with variant uncorrected and press-corrected states of each line displayed in separate columns; see Warren, *Complete "King Lear"* 1989.