The Tain of *Hamlet*

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For Angie, Charlotte, and TJ

“*Where’s the last piece goes?”*

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FOREWORD

This book began as part of a book on symmetry in *Hamlet*, a project to which I expect to be able to return some day. As I began writing what was intended to be a short historical background chapter for that book, I found that the standard history of Shakespeare's most famous play refused to sit easily in my mind. On what basis had generations of scholars and students been allowing to drift into orthodoxy the idea that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a reworking of a lost play (the so-called ur-*Hamlet*) by Thomas Kyd? The reference by Thomas Nashe in 1589 to "whole *Hamlets*" was something I had been acquainted with for some time, but I had presumed there must be more to the historical record in support of this attribution, since so many fine scholars seemed so sure of it. Before I could repeat the attribution in my book, I wanted to be sure there was more to go on than a speculative interpretation of a set of cryptic taunts against "English Seneca" by Nashe. The search for more evidence in support of Kyd's authorship of a *Hamlet* play proved bootless. As one who has long had a penchant for completing puzzles—jigsaws, crosswords, brainteasers, anything designed to test the mind, but also for which a clear solution is achievable—this missing piece caused me no end of consternation and sleepless nights. Notwithstanding the absence of any direct reference to the authorship or origins of the play to which Nashe refers, could the historical record be scoured for any other kinds of evidence? And, importantly, might the vagaries of the so-called "bad" Quarto of 1603 contain any clues to the early origins of the play? I felt obliged, then, to seek to solve the puzzle of *Hamlet*'s origins in two different fields of textual inquiry: examination of the historical records in correspondences, official documents, diaries, and such like on one hand and close textual analysis of the Q1 *Hamlet* on the other hand, with both complemented by the wealth of existing groundwork. A couple of years further along the track in this direction, it became clear to me that I was no longer writing the book on symmetry in *Hamlet*, as the mysteries of the play's origins, its variant texts, and its atypical pathway to publication had overtaken me and demanded a book of their own.

Following this realisation, I was involved in a very long but enjoyable discussion with Brett Hirsch at the 2010 conference of the Australian and New Zealand Shakespeare Association, causing us to miss two sessions in a row. The question of method had been raised. We were both quite sure

that neither of us were proponents of the New Historicism, at least not in the forms that it had taken in the 1980s and 1990s and which were now in decline as the new focus on materialism was in the ascendancy. Yet there remained for both of us a necessary question of the text or, to be precise, of the different kinds of texts through which we might hope to access the cultural and social contexts of plays in the early modern period. For my part, a certain affinity for cultural history had been in full bloom for many years, before I returned to Shakespeare Studies after a decade-long detour into the worlds of literary theory, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis. To the question of method, then, I suggested that my attempts to answer these mysteries of *Hamlet*'s origins and its different textual forms were adhering to methods derived from both cultural history and textual scholarship; the name I gave to what I was doing—and what I think a good many scholars are already doing exceedingly well in the wake of New Historicism—was textually-evidenced cultural history. The reader will find within the pages of this book an insistence that the extent to which Nashe's diatribe could be seen as "evidence" of Kyd's authorship, for example, must be subject to an examination of the purpose for which Nashe was writing. A notation made by Philip Henslowe of a performance of *Hamlet* at Newington Butts in 1594 is, I think, a more reliable source document by virtue of the kind of document it represents—an entrepreneur's formal record of assets and returns—and an eye witness account by Thomas Lodge of a performance of *Hamlet* at The Theatre in 1596 also rates highly as a form of evidence. Nashe's text drifts more obviously to the literary end of the spectrum, so we should be prepared to read it, accordingly, in terms of the way that it engages with the literary world in which it is produced. As for *Hamlet*, it too represents a form of evidence of its own history of *having been made* for some purpose that we seek on this side of history to discern. We do not seek some "authentic" form of Shakespeare's play in a textually-evidenced cultural history; rather, my goal here after years of searching and no small measure of educated speculation is to explain how it might be possible that two very different versions of the play can co-exist while at the same time bearing witness within their words, their punctuation, their nomenclature, and their marginalia to a long history of theatrical revival and revision in writing.

L.M.J.

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The task of writing a book that seeks to question a number of long-held assumptions within Shakespeare Studies, especially those in relation to the play that most see as the pinnacle of Shakespeare's achievement, can seem a somewhat solitary enterprise at times. Yet the solitary is always propped up by the solidarity of the collegial environment in which I have been able to work over the past six years on this project. My immediate gratitude is therefore extended to the membership of the Australian and New Zealand Shakespeare Association (ANZSA), many of whom have patiently talked through the ideas I propose here. In particular, my deep appreciation goes out to Gayle Allan, Darryl Chalk, Brett Hirsch, Mark Houlahan, and David McInnis for their unwavering support and generous friendship throughout. During this project, I have also found receptive audiences for my work at the biennial conferences of the Australasian Universities' Languages and Literatures Association (AULLA) and, most recently, at the conference of the Perth Medieval and Renaissance Group (PMRG). As I write this, I am preparing to present some of the findings of this book at the 2013 meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America (SAA), and I graciously thank Kirk Melnikoff and Zachary Lesser for paving the way for the seminar on Patrons, Professional Drama, and Print Culture to be listed on the program at this event. At all such scholarly meetings, I am heartened by the number of people who, having no doubt referred to "Kyd's *Hamlet*" at one time or another—indeed, I myself habitually used the phrase until undertaking this project—are nevertheless receptive to new arguments.

For their sage counsel at various stages of this project, I would like to thank a number of inspirational scholars, including Mary Floyd-Wilson, Penny Gay, John Sutton, Lyn Tribble, Robert White, and Paul Yachnin. I also register here my everlasting debt to Lloyd Davis—who supervised my Masters level dissertation on New Historicism—for being among other things a good friend and an ideal role model in rigorous scholarship, professional conduct, and collegial hospitality. Lloyd passed away in 2005, but his enduring legacy continues to resonate with the growth of ANZSA and the strong Australasian presence at meetings of the SAA and the International Shakespeare Association (ISA). I hope that this book will be worthy of Lloyd's memory.

In addition to the community of scholars within Shakespeare Studies, I am thankful for the many colleagues and friends—too many to name here in person—who continue to make me feel that this research is valued and valuable. This project would not have been possible without the assistance in various forms of The Public Memory Research Cluster, the School of Humanities and Communication, and the Faculty of Arts at the University of Southern Queensland, including a period of funded academic leave in 2010 (although due to an internal restructure that is underway at present, by the time this book appears in print, none of these entities will exist as such any longer). I am especially grateful to Chris Lee for his ongoing material and intellectual support for my research and its many vicissitudes. I acknowledge as well the vital impetus given to my research by the staff and students who have contributed to the Shakespeare's Audiences project within PMRC and to the USQ Shakespeare-in-the-Park Festival (for which material support is provided by the wonderful staff at Artsworx), along with all of the students to whom I have taught Shakespeare over the years.

Finally, special mention goes to my wife, Angie, and my two adorable children, Charlotte and TJ, both for their unswerving belief in me and for providing joyous daily reminders that there are indeed many more glorious things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in my philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

"TAIN'T NOT THY MINDE"

A question to begin: why "The Tain of *Hamlet*"? Perhaps this question presupposes another more direct question: what is a "tain"? Importantly, I begin with a presumption that no reader is likely to ask, "what is *Hamlet*?" This book assumes that its readers will possess some familiarity with the play—most people in the English-speaking world, and I suspect in many non-Anglophone parts of the world as well, will have at least heard of William Shakespeare's play about the Prince of Denmark and his dead father, both of whom bear the name Hamlet. What, then, is this other possibly unfamiliar word doing in the title of this book, and what does it mean? "Tain" is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* thus: "thin tinplate; tinfoil for mirrors." The word is French in origin, altered from *étain* (meaning tin) to refer to the thin tin backing developed within mirror production in Europe during the Renaissance. The tain of a mirror is thus the metallic coating placed on the reverse side, providing the mirror with its capacity to reflect light. Why "The Tain of *Hamlet*", then? When we look at a mirror, we do not see the tain; instead, we see ourselves and our surrounds in reflected form. Despite the fact that the tain constitutes the whole of the space of the image we see in the mirror, it also recedes from us absolutely: the opposite of being out of sight, out of mind, the tain is wholly in sight but out of mind. The Ghost of old Hamlet might even use this word, if we accept that punctuation marks in the Second Quarto (Q2) of the play are not used in error. In any version with which the reader is perhaps more familiar—that is, in any version that has been edited or at least simply based on the First Folio (F) text—the Ghost reveals the nature of his death at the hands of his own brother, but then attempts to absolve his wife of any blame:

> But howsomever thou pursues this act
> Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive
> Against thy mother aught; leave her to heaven (1.5.84-86)[1]

In the Q2 presentation of the same lines, the text is all but identical but additional punctuation is included on each line:

> But howsomeuer thou pursues this act,
> Tain't not thy minde, nor let thy soule contriue
> Against thy mother ought, leaue her to heauen,[2]

The editors of the Folio edition of 1623 removed the apostrophe, giving us the version that is now standard, but I am at least intrigued by its presence in the Q2 version. The reader might argue that the apostrophe creates confusion in the pentameter, since the resulting "Tain it not thy minde" creates one too many syllables, but I would counter that the following line is also one syllable too long, unless one elides the first vowel, and in any case an apostrophe would be used to elide the extra syllable in "Tain't."

This change in punctuation also leads to a subtle but significant change in meaning. In the standard version, the Ghost tells Hamlet to *neither* taint his mind *nor* contrive his soul *against* his mother—two predicates; one noun—but the additional punctuation in Q2 changes the role of the verb significantly: however you pursue this act, tain not your mind with it, nor should you contrive your soul against your mother. In the Q2 version, if the apostrophe is deliberate, the Ghost is advising Hamlet not to back his mind with the act of revenge so completely that it will be reflected in all he sees. The word "tain" was almost certainly available to Shakespeare. As an abbreviated form of "obtain," "tain" ("*taygne*") existed in English by around the beginning of the sixteenth century.[3] At this time, though, Venetian mirror manufacturing reached new heights, with refinements in tin backing, as described by Vannuci Beringaccio in *De la Pirotechnia* (1540).[4] As a rival mirror manufacturing industry sprang up in France in the latter half of the century,[5] the French "*étain*" became synonymous with the process. Public fascination with mirrors rose sharply, and extended to knowledge of the manufacturing process: in 1576, George Gascoigne's poem "The Steele Glass" used a description of the mirror manufacturing process as an extended metaphor for contemporary society.[6] Gascoigne did not actually use the word "tain" in his poem—he thrice instead uses the word "foil," a word that was also commonly used at that time to refer to the backing of a mirror[7]—but this was not for want, and it is not hard to imagine the gregarious word hunter Shakespeare seeing the Anglophone form of the French term as a worthy term for his own mirror metaphor in *Hamlet*. As the framing word for this book, then, the Ghost's imperative speaks directly to us. Indeed, this book adopts the view that the critical approaches to Shakespeare's most famous play reveal that critics have invariably "tained" their mind with the play, causing it to appear fully reflective in their eyes. We have, in other words, spent so long reading the play for its capacity to reflect ourselves that we have lost sight of the thing itself.

This idea that the play is habitually read reflectively is nothing new, and indeed Martin Scofield begins *The Ghosts of Hamlet: The Play and Modern Writers* with the observation that this play "is a spectacular and ductile medium: it has reflected its readers and been used as material by other writers … for it is a mirror in which every man has seen his own face."[8] The "tain of *Hamlet*" is thus imagined as the play *sans* a reflective gaze. Such an approach is not without several attendant problems. We do a grave disservice to the history of literary criticism if we pretend that we can ever shake off the yoke of our situated knowledge in the encounter with literatures of the past. To the reader unfamiliar with such arguments, I shall not provide a detailed account here; rather, it might suffice to note that critics—as well as anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and many others—have long recognised that we always interpret the past through the lens of the present. The "lens" analogy is echoed deliberately, of course, because I want to make a distinction between two different types of optical device. When we say that we interpret the past through the *lens* of the present, we do not mean that the past is seen as a *reflection* of the present. Precisely because the past *is* past, we understand it through knowledge of what comes after it, and this includes ourselves. What we find in the past is thus in some degree a product of the kinds of questions we ask of the traces of the past at our disposal. The "lens of the present" is how we put the past into perspective or give it focus, to extend this optical analogy. The turn toward historicism in literary criticism in the past three decades has involved an acknowledgement of the role of historical understanding in shaping the image we have of the past. We should no longer ask, for example, what Shakespeare "meant" by a play or sonnet. The question was already anathema to critics in the days before the historicist turn, with the observation that appeals to the authority of what a writer "meant" fell into the trap of "intentional fallacy," leading to concerns related to biography rather than to criticism.[9] In literary historicism, the author is no longer anathema but is generally disregarded on the basis that we cannot know the mind of the dead, but also on the grounds that the attempt to know the mind of the dead does not bring us closer to understanding the literature of the past in a historical sense, *as past*.

When we think of a reflective gaze, as distinct from a lens through which we seek to gain some sense of the past as past, on the other hand, we imagine a collapse of historicity. There is a distinction to be made here between *reflectiveness* and *reflexivity*. The reflexive view is conscious of the role of the viewer in shaping the object at which it looks, as is the case in a historicist approach, for example. Reflectiveness is not conscious of a viewer as a key agent in the construction of the image, so when the viewer

appears in the object, it is assumed that this is a quality of the object rather than a product of the gaze through which the object is being seen. Let us consider the example of Hamlet's most famous line: "to be or not to be," he asks, and in an age when teen suicide occurs with alarming frequency, we find that Hamlet can speak directly to us. Indeed, his concerns *reflect* those of our own society. The question of whether or not Hamlet is in fact contemplating suicide in this soliloquy will be revisited later, as will many assumptions about what happens in this play, based as they tend to be on viewing the play via a reflective gaze, but at this point it is worth noting that Hamlet presents this dilemma that seems to reach out to us as if it were also ours. The historicity of our reading is in this fashion removed from view, and is collapsed into the immediacy of a *reflection*, like the one-to-one image in a mirror.

The goal of this book is to get to the other side of the reflective *Hamlet* that has bedazzled us for so long, to seek to apprehend the play with a far fuller sense of its historical distinctness. In this introductory section, I will argue that even the most influential literary criticism has found *Hamlet* to be particularly resistant to anything except a reflective gaze, and the same could possibly be said of all of Shakespeare's plays. Yet it is *Hamlet* that, to a greater extent than any of Shakespeare's other plays, reinforces the point I am making about the nature of reflectiveness as it applies to plays in particular. One reason why the analogy of the reverse side of a mirror is a compelling approach to this play for me is that *Hamlet* uses the mirror analogy explicitly in relation to plays in setting up its central meta-theatrical device, the play-within-the-play with which Hamlet determines to "catch the conscience of the King" (2.2.540). In Act 3, Scene 2, Hamlet prates at the players with instructions on how he would like *The Murder of Gonzago*, and especially the lines he has artfully inserted into the play, to be played: "anything so / o'erdone is from the purpose of playing whose end, / both at first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere / the mirror up to Nature" (3.2.19-22). The Mousetrap, as Hamlet later calls it, should work as a trap to detect the King's guilt for the murder of old Hamlet—and, for that matter, any degree of culpability on the part of Gertrude—just because plays do, according to their purpose, provide a reflection to the viewer.

Yet the play also shows us that the "Nature" up to which *The Murder of Gonzago* holds a mirror is not completely straightforward. As many fine critics have argued, Claudius may not be impelled to flee purely by dint of his guilty conscience; rather, the text of the play and Hamlet's glossing of the action lead Claudius to seriously suspect Hamlet of plotting to kill him in order to usurp the throne. [10] The one thing we never seem to entertain in relation to the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet* is what *it* means, on its own

terms. Yet there are snatches of dialogue between the characters observing *The Murder of Gonzago* that should lead us to think there is some measure of interest in what the play really means: Ophelia asks of the dumb show, "what means this" (3.2.129) and Claudius asks if there is offence in "the argument" (3.2.226), for example. I suggest that the Mousetrap works *as a trap* because Hamlet is aware that the spectators will become distracted by wanting to know what the play means rather than being conscious in any reflexive way of their own gaze. Gertrude is asked how she likes the play and her response is of course to relate to the extent to which the character of the Queen "doth protest too much" (3.2.224), and Claudius sees himself in the character of the King (and not in Lucianus, importantly). The trap works by catching the spectators in the moment of seeing themselves in the play, even though they are unaware of being drawn into doing so. The play scene within *Hamlet* thus teaches us and its theatre audience a vital lesson about the nature of textual criticism: if we become *too* invested in knowing what a text really means, on its own terms, we blind ourselves to our own reflectiveness, and therein resides the trap of criticism.

While this book seeks to reach back past a reflective gaze to examine *Hamlet* on its own terms, then, it will aim to avoid claims that hinge solely on an appeal to the authority of what the original "really means" and will be concerned with questions of *how* to bypass a reflective gaze, given that this approach to the play has become so deeply entrenched. The methods I employ will hinge on questioning assumptions, testing historical evidence, and treating interpretation as a starting point for new questions about the play rather than as the end of our investigation. What I offer, therefore, is not a conventional literary criticism, at least not if by that sobriquet the reader is given to think of an approach to the text in which reading "the play" and providing an elucidation of what "it means" are paramount. I will add a few more words on method toward the end of this introductory section, but for now I shall merely stake a claim for the methodological orientation within which inquiry will be framed. In what follows in this introductory section, I offer a brief history of the reflective gaze to come to some sense of the size of the basilisk. To avert our gaze sufficiently well to be able to glimpse the surface against which we have for so long projected our reflections, I suggest, we must attend to the minutiae of historical details relating to the play text's production, for performance and print, but always with reference back to the text. The historical record provides crucial evidence about the nature of the play text, but also adds to our broader understanding of relevant historical contexts, enabling us to construct a rich cultural history around the practices of dramatists and writers, their patrons, and the printers whose legacy is the printed word

upon which we now gaze and from which a seemingly limitless range of interpretations and performances are extrapolated. The morass of details we can compile about the history of the text presents no obstacle to textual or dramatic interpretation; rather, it acts as a crucial reference point for our gaze, steering us away from reflectivity, enabling us to look awry.

A Brief Pre-History of the Reflective Gaze

In *Hamlet without Hamlet*, Margreta de Grazia has paved the way for a treatment of *Hamlet* on its own terms, by developing a reading of the play which does not focus on the character of the Prince.[11] This may strike the reader as a somewhat incredulous claim: that the play could be read on its own terms by removing the character whose name graces the title, who is on stage for the greater part of the performance, and about whom most of the other characters speak at some point. Indeed, the role of Hamlet would seem most obviously to *demand* our attention. This is true, that the role of Hamlet demands attention, so long as we attend to this role at least in part *as a role*. As de Grazia observes from the outset, the Hamlet she would do without is "the modern Hamlet, the one distinguished by an inner being so transcendent that it barely comes into contact with the play from which it emerges."[12] For at least two hundred years, criticism of the play has been focused on the *character* of the Prince, that is, his innermost qualities, his personality, his psychology, or as Hamlet himself proclaims: "that within which passes show" (1.2.85). For de Grazia, Hamlet is literally grounded in the play by virtue of the prominence placed on land and inheritance in the machinations of the plot, but the critical heritage begun at the turn of the eighteenth century disengaged the character of the Prince from this plot to focus on his modern characteristics. In de Grazia's reading of the play, then, it is the earth—on which the characters walk, from whence they come and to which they shall return, which lay before them as domain or dominion, and the scale of which must be overcome in undergoing travel to distant lands—that provides a focus for reinterpretation. Importantly, de Grazia is as interested with the problem that staging the earth presents to the performers as with the conceptual or metaphorical significance of the land in Shakespeare's own time. In the graveyard scene, the grave is not only the objective correlative of Hamlet's ruminations on mortality; it is the locus of a good deal of the action, and must therefore be factored into stage design and blocking. Such considerations lend weight to a reading of the play on its own terms, within the context of its production.

In many ways, the current book is positioned as the continuation of a trajectory that begins with de Grazia's book. Yet I wish to re-orient this

trajectory slightly by revising the picture that de Grazia paints of a critical heritage divided into two halves of roughly equal duration—the schism is identified as taking place around the turn of the eighteenth century, two hundred years after *Hamlet* is taken to have been written and some two hundred years before the current moment. The first two hundred years of the reception of *Hamlet*, de Grazia observes, typically involved viewing the play as somewhat outdated or behind the times, whereas from around 1790, culminating in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's highly influential lecture of 1811, the view emerged that it is in Hamlet's character—which would later be defined as thoroughly modern—that *Hamlet* holds the greatest degree of interest.[13] I do not dispute these observations: that the play was widely received as outmoded for much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is clearly evident from the examples de Grazia provides as well as from other sources toward which she gestures; and it is without doubt that the play usually became either lauded or dismissed after 1811 based on criteria tied to modern conceptions of character, motivation, and so on. What I am inclined to question, however, is why the task of getting back to the plot and its premise should lead de Grazia to want primarily to cast off the post-1800 Hamlet alone. Does this not lead us still to confront the distortion created by two hundred years of reception from 1600 to 1800? The devil in de Grazia's reading, rendering such concerns untenable, is in fact to be found in the detail. While the Acknowledgements articulate this concern with the post-1800 view—"I hold Hamlet responsible. I mean the modern metaphysical Hamlet"[14]—and this is echoed in the Introduction and in the title of Chapter One ("Modern Hamlet"), de Grazia's readings of historical materials provide a far more fluid arrangement than the story of the schism *circa* 1800 portrays. In other words, while de Grazia frames her reading of *Hamlet* with this observation that there is a clear break in *Hamlet* criticism around 1800, her detailed account of the four hundred years of performances, reception, and criticism of the play shows that the break is not quite so abruptly schismatic after all.

In his personal copy of the 1598 edition of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Works*, Shakespeare contemporary Gabriel Harvey names *Hamlet* and other works among a series of marginal notes. Harvey's notes are used by de Grazia to support two key points of interpretation: first, Harvey's note that the play particularly appealed to "the wiser sort" supports the idea that *Hamlet* was already an old or dated play in the mind of its first audiences;[15] second, in the list of the best works in English, "auncient & moderne," Shakespeare's works are included only in the latter category, meaning that by association *Hamlet* was understood by Harvey and his contemporaries to be a rather "modern" play.[16] This is not a case of de Grazia contradicting herself; on

the contrary, the point of these opening forays in her chapter on the rise of the modern *Hamlet* is to establish that the term "modern" was very much in flux in Shakespeare's time. I think we can add here that what looks like a potential contradiction in Harvey's notes is a sign of what we have been calling the reflective gaze: if Harvey categorises the play as "modern" (in so far as it is not an "ancient" text for the purpose of his comparison), he is nevertheless making a claim about the modern audience to whom he feels the text will appeal and, in so doing, he makes an assessment of the nature of this audience.

The next text cited in de Grazia's history of the reception of *Hamlet*—Anthony Scoloker's *Daiphantus, or the Passions of Love* (1604)—shows further evidence of a reflective gaze. Attribution of this poem to Scoloker is a matter of scholarly convention, since the author's "An. Sc." has never been conclusively linked to a historical personage, but then neither has any better alternative been proffered.[17] The aspect of this poem that interests de Grazia most is its observation that *Hamlet*'s popularity hinges on the title character's antics, and while Scoloker wishes for a similar degree of popularity for his own text, he wonders if it might be better to "displease all" instead.[18] The poem's fuller title is telling of possibly another level of reflection upon Shakespeare's play: *Daiphantus, or the Passions of Love, Comicall to Reade, But Tragicall to Act: As Full of Wit, as Experience*.[19] The title voices the idea that what seems comical in print is more likely to be deemed tragic in actuality or—noting the word "Act"—in performance. Here is the key role that *Hamlet* plays for Scoloker: he divulges his search for a suitable style, and finds favour in "Friendly Shake-speares Tragedies, *where the* Commedian *rides, when the* Tragedian *stands on Tiptoe: Faith it should please all, like Prince* Hamlet."[20] In Hamlet, for Scoloker, then, we find the perfect admixture of that which is comical to read but tragic to act. The character reaches out to Scoloker beyond its fictional moorings because it provides the best analogy he can locate for a description of his own and his hero's love madness. It is an analogy that provides a model for overcoming the author's anxieties about the discrepancy between print and life.

In the first two decades of the seventeenth century, some of the best evidence we have of the popularity of *Hamlet* comes from references to the play in the work of other playwrights of the time. It is worth recording at this point that the *Hamlet* we believe to have been written in or around 1600 was, we also know, not the first play to have been performed under that name during Shakespeare's life. As early as 1589, in his preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon*, Thomas Nashe lamented the rise of "English Seneca"—to wit, English playwrights who wrote plays after the manner of

Greek tragedian Seneca—to whom he credits the capacity to write "whole *Hamlets*, I should say hand-fulls, of tragical speeches."[21] Based on a pun that Nashe uses on the word "Kidde" later in the same text, many scholars have attributed this play to Thomas Kyd, author of *The Spanish Tragedy* (presumably written before 1588).[22] The diary of Philip Henslowe records a performance of *Hamlet* at Newington Butts in 1594 and Thomas Lodge wrote in *Wit's Misery* in 1596 about a "ghost which cried so miserably at The Theatre like an oyster-wife, *Hamlet*, revenge."[23] More on these early references in Chapter One, in which we consider issues related to the date and sources for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The problem of the earlier version of *Hamlet*, which some scholars call the "ur-*Hamlet*," is that no text of it has survived, and there are continuing debates about its author, with Kyd being the most commonly cited candidate. Given the absence of the full text, we cannot know for sure if there are allusions to this earlier play in other work of the period. There are, however, numerous direct allusions to the *Hamlet* that we know in a number of plays after 1600: Yorrick's skull is explicitly referenced both in Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton's *The Honest Whore* (1604) and in Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606); George Chapman, John Marston, and Ben Jonson parody some aspects of *Hamlet* in *Eastward Ho!* (1605); and as late as John Webster's *White Devil* (1609-12) the madness of Cornelia shows signs of the continuing influence of the depiction of Ophelia's decline.[24] While *Hamlet* remained a target for parody, the fact remains that these parodies did not fade quickly. If, as de Grazia rightly asserts, the play was already old in its own time, it would nevertheless maintain its age well, and its influence on Shakespeare's fellow playwrights was to endure for over a decade.[25]

Parody is not necessarily, of course, a sign of a reflective gaze; it *is* an index of endurance. Thus, we might conclude that for many years, aided possibly by a run of published versions of the play as well as revivals on stage, playwrights for the Jacobean stage could reference the play without their allusion missing its source text. Rather than seeing their own work in *Hamlet*, as would be true of the reflective gaze, the parodists nevertheless take up aspects of *Hamlet* into theirs. Where there is a continuous line of playwrights, particularly popular allusions will continue to be used by new generations, codifying into dramatic standards. In 1640, Abraham Wright penned a short assessment of "Hamlet. A Tragedie by Shakespeare," in which he judged the play to be "indifferent," although the part of Hamlet was good "for a madman", and he added that the graveyard scene was "a good scene" but since bettered by *The Jealous Lovers* (the play by Thomas Randolph, first performed in 1632).[26] That this well known scene was in Wright's estimation since bettered does not diminish the possibility that

Randolph is nevertheless also taking Shakespeare's play as a source that is bound to be familiar to *his* audience. The gravedigger scene would in fact remain one of the dramatic standards of post-Caroline theatre, during the Interregnum period. Whereas the theatres in London were closed down in 1642, itinerant actors would continue to perform short plays illegally, with a version of the graveyard scene enacted around 1647 and later under the name of *The Grave-Makers*.[27] As Peter Holland observes about these short plays or "drolls," abbreviated performances "resonantly echo the complete texts to which they bear witness, but they also signify that these drolls are aimed, at least in part, at an audience that is fully aware of their sources."[28] Only a few years after Wright proclaims Randolph's graveyard scene to be superior to Shakespeare's, then, a disenfranchised acting community relied on their audience to be more familiar with the scene in its earlier version in order to have something by which to remember the heyday of the theatres at a time when being in possession of a play text or attending a play were considered heretical activities.

While such dramatic standards concentrated into abbreviated versions of popular plays proved to be the lifeblood of the theatre throughout the Interregnum period, the closure of the theatres for nearly twenty years did constitute a significant break in continuity. On the other side of what we can rightly call a "rupture," the popular plays of yesteryear were given a new lease on life by being reworked for the tastes of the new age. In 1661, only a year after the defeat of the Puritans, *Hamlet* was to become the first Shakespeare play to be staged with perspective scenery, adding newfound depth and realism to the performance.[29] Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor point out that such increased realism "supported the growing interest in the definition of characters who were individuals rather than types,"[30] but I am inclined here to add that these innovations mark the end of the link that the play had previously established with a now demolished Globe Theatre and *its* audiences. Hamlet complains to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that "this goodly frame the earth seems / to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy / the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this / majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why it / approacheth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent / congregation of vapours" (2.2.264-69), but is at the same time also directing the attention of the Globe's audience to its architecture and fittings: the earth seems a sterile promontory (the stage jutting out from the back of the visible space); this most excellent canopy the air (the open top of the Globe) is nevertheless bounded by ornamental fretting or "golden fire" along the roofing. Cynthia Malone has observed that in the context of its early performances, Hamlet's "frame" locates its speaker simultaneously within a cosmic frame, between heaven and earth,

and "specifically within the microcosmic frame of the Globe."[31] We shall revisit this issue in Chapter Three, but I mention it here to make the point that before perspective scenery was to become part of the reality of staging Shakespeare's plays, the players would call attention to their immediate surrounds in order to establish a clear link between the fictional world of the play and the world of the theatre with which it remained co-extensive. *Hamlet* may provide other ways in which this link was reinforced for its earliest audiences: critics have long recognised topical references in the play to the so-called "War of the Theatres,"[32] and indeed there have been suggestions that conflicting textual evidence about Hamlet's age—is he sixteen or thirty?—may be attributed to Shakespeare's concession to the age of the actor who played the principal role, Richard Burbage.[33] There are numerous other claims that might be made about topical references to historical events of the time, as we shall see, but in the specific references to The Globe, the warring of theatrical factions, and perhaps the actor in question, we find a play that marks a precise historical territory for itself. With the changes to which the play is subjected after 1660, I suggest we witness a breakdown of this earliest connection between the play and its immediate theatrical contexts.

I contend further that by rending the play from its moorings, which it had established in and of itself, the Restoration theatrical tradition enabled the emergence of a newly reflective approach to the play. What had struck Shakespeare's contemporary Scoloker as the peculiar value of *Hamlet*—its self-conscious conflation of life and theatre, experience and wit, enabling him to picture his own love madness in that of both his hero and Hamlet—presented itself as a problem for the Restoration stage as it began to view Shakespeare's play reflectively. When Hamlet refuses to kill Claudius, apparently kneeling in prayer, in Act 3, Scene 3, *after* he believes he has confirmed the King's guilt by The Mousetrap exercise, his ensuing speech addresses his desire to both kill the King and condemn his eternal soul to damnation: "that his soul may be as damned and black / As hell whereto it goes" (3.3.94-5). To the Restoration ear, this was unthinkable, since surely no mortal can decide the fate of another's soul. Thus, for over two hundred years, as de Grazia notes, post-Interregnum dramaturgy typically relied on deliberate omission of these troublesome lines, or indeed on removal of the whole soliloquy, in staging and often in print, for their response to this dilemma.[34] Yet the problem for the Restoration actor and audience alike is ultimately not that these lines are unthinkable in and of themselves—many a villain in Shakespeare or elsewhere is guilty of statements as execrable as these. Instead, the problem is that Hamlet, the noble Prince, utters them. In one respect, the lines are thus problematic because, as de Grazia points

out, they rely on the sense that the character of the Prince is inconsistent with such sentiments. We might also suspect that the particular intensity with which the dilemma is expressed time and again in both dramaturgical and critical considerations of the play for well over the next century gives to the problem a deeper sense of investment: put simply, those who found these lines to be troubling may have done so because they *identified* with the speaker and attributed to him a character inconsistent with some of the sentiments he voices in the play.

Ironically, I suspect, this identification with Hamlet may stem from the fact that *Hamlet* had been one of the plays that maintained a link, however tenuous, to the English pre-Interregnum theatre, through its presence in the drolls performed during the period of rupture. To Sir William Davenant, the play must have occupied a lofty position: when the bans on the theatres were lifted in the Restoration, a duopoly was created by Charles II, with extant plays of the pre-Interregnum period divided up between Davenant's own Duke's Company and Thomas Killigrew's King's Company—among Shakespeare's more popular plays, Killigrew secured the rights to *Othello*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Julius Caesar*, whereas Davenant had to content himself with only *Hamlet*.[35] Indeed, of the 36 plays recorded in Shakespeare's First Folio, only nine were distributed to Davenant for his company's use. If this distribution of rights may seem inequitable, perhaps Davenant knew at least that *Hamlet* was more current than most due to the connection it retained with the past via the playing of *The Grave-Makers* in more recent years, and he did not oppose the division.[36] Davenant's first step was to seek to make the play newly relevant by rewriting significant sections of the dialogue and offering a somewhat abbreviated version even though his company was quite at liberty to perform the play in its entirety: Davenant's company cut the play to about three-quarters of the length of the Q2 text.[37] Thus, the identification with the play stems in part from the strong, continuous link it presented to the pre-Interregnum period but in order to be able to identify fully with the play and its lead character both become altered to fit a vision that was more suited to the tastes of the time. This is a form of reflection in which the gaze wishes to see the viewer in the object, but finding distortions, undertakes corrective procedures on the object—not on oneself—to fit the reflective object to the desired image of the self.

This same corrective procedure characterises the subsequent history of reception of the play, during which time there has never been any period in which it has completely diminished in popularity or critical attention. De Grazia notes that the critical view of the play throughout the eighteenth century was not entirely positive, typified by the Augustans' attempts to

establish the superiority of the dramatic unities espoused by the ancients.[38] Furthermore, as Thompson and Taylor point out early in their introduction to the Arden 3 edition of *Hamlet*, there has been a late twentieth-century push to supplant *Hamlet* with *King Lear* for the title of the greatest of Shakespeare's plays.[39] With regards to the Augustan critics, we should note that their approach to *Hamlet* was echoed in their approach to *all* of the "barbarous" art of the English Renaissance, which naturally suffered by comparison with the art of the ancients; indeed, we can observe that *Hamlet* actually emerges time and again in the criticism of this period as one English Renaissance text that could be used to mount a defense of the achievements of the recent past. Rather than being a sign of the diminution in importance of *Hamlet*, then, Augustan criticism helps us to understand the degree of investment these critics had in the play: as de Grazia argues, the Augustan critics acknowledged in *Hamlet* a difference in kind from the drama of the ancients, Shakespeare's play being character-driven whereas the classical plays were typically plot-driven. It is thus in their defense of the play against their own, arguably unreasonable, standards that Augustan critics contributed to the investment in *character* in their interpretation of *Hamlet*, at the expense of plot-based interpretation. With regards to more recent debates about the superiority of *King Lear* over *Hamlet*, we shall simply note that in no way does this lead to any decline in critical attention to the latter and may even have contributed to renewed interest in both of these plays—Thompson and Taylor observe that there has certainly been no decrease in the numbers of books about *Hamlet*, performances of the play, or film versions in the last few decades.[40]

The emergence of the character-based interpretation of the play during the eighteenth century is a sign of a corrective procedure being employed by Augustan critics, even as their own lofty standards prevented them from identifying with the play on the basis of its plot, lacking as it was in adherence to the classical unities. Thus, they renew their investment in identifying with Hamlet as a person, which leads the question of the delay of his revenge to eventually work its way to the fore. Rather than seeing the criticism of Coleridge as the break from an older critical tradition, the reading of a brief history of a reflective gaze shows us that Coleridge's character-based interpretation—he uses the term "psychology" to help him explain Hamlet's contradictions—is a link in a longer tradition of seeing oneself reflected in the play's troubled protagonist. In William Christie's account of Coleridge's literary lectures, we see a man who deliberately fashioned a version of Hamlet that was well understood to be a *reflection of the critic*: "Coleridge's friends all recognized the extent to which his Hamlet was modelled on himself."[41] William Empson once famously

wrote that the "Hamlet problem," meaning the question of his delay, "did not seem to become one until the end of the eighteenth century.... nearly two hundred years had to go by before anyone had even a glimmering of what it was all about."[42] In Empson's pared down account, there *is* a clean break with the invention by Coleridge of a psychological Hamlet, but de Grazia gives us too much detail to be able to collapse back onto a similarly clean historical divide. Using the same history that de Grazia maps, I have sought to show that a history of the performance, reception, and criticism of the play from 1600 to 1800 bears witness to a gradual reduction in the plot-driven, topical version of the drama and the emergence of a character-focused reading as dominant. Rather than any neat divide *circa* 1800, we confront instead a more complex history of underground attempts to retain *Hamlet* as a link with the pre-Interregnum English theatre, of efforts made to refashion Hamlet in the image of a new era, paradoxically, in order to validate the link to the past, and of the continual imperative to adopt the reflective stance in relation to a play widely (if not universally) regarded as Shakespeare's greatest.

Telmah: Question of Method

I have observed that the establishment of a reflective gaze during the eighteenth century was linked to the use of corrective procedures in order to make the play—or at least the character of the Prince—fit the image of oneself that the viewer sought to identify in Hamlet. The same is then ultimately also characteristic of *Hamlet* criticism or reception in the last two hundred years. Coleridge's influential interpretive step of reading the protagonist's inconsistencies and deferrals as psychological is one such corrective procedure. When he adopts the term "psychology" to describe the mental procedure illustrated by Hamlet's seemingly inconsistent words and actions, Coleridge states in relation to the term that it is much needed in that early nineteenth-century moment: "beg pardon for the use of this *insolens verbum*: but it is one of which our language is in great need. We have no single term to express the Philosophy of the Human Mind."[43] A term adopted to explain Hamlet's character is thus necessary because it addresses a perceived gap in the state of knowledge at the time of writing. To meet this need by providing psychological readings of Hamlet, as de Grazia points out, Coleridge must divest "Hamlet" from the plot; indeed, Coleridge explicitly contends that Hamlet's characteristic state of mind is to be cut off from the events around him.[44] It is Coleridge's argument, in other words, that the play is itself defined by Hamlet's hermetically sealed off introversion, but this explanation is also necessary to tell us something

about ourselves, something that is missing in a reader's stock of concepts with which to account for that moment in time, *circa* 1811. For de Grazia, then, Coleridge's argument regarding Hamlet's plot-resistance begins with a fundamentally flawed premise and is not supported by the text. For this reason, I describe Coleridge's strategy as corrective—it radically alters the text via unsupported interpretation to make it reflect his impression of the needs of *his* age.

Not all corrective procedures require such a radical or unsupported take on the play. Many critical readings of the play are certainly defensible with reference to the text itself, yet I think it is invariably the case that the most influential readings of *Hamlet* since at least 1800 do involve some distortion or at least selective framing of the text, reflective of the present view of themselves or of a discipline. I also suggest that these readings are influential simply because they so closely reflect the particular view that pertains at that time as orthodoxy. For example, as Thompson and Taylor observe, the Anglo-American *Hamlet* after Freud was a typically domestic drama, disregarding or omitting altogether the character of Fortinbras and the political events of the play, whereas in Eastern and East-central Europe during the Cold War, the play would be most typically read and performed as "a political play enacting the possibility of dissent from various forms of totalitarianism."[45] Perhaps the most influential of all readings of *Hamlet* is to be found in J. Dover Wilson's *What Happens in Hamlet*, published in 1935, which has become a firm point of reference—whether in agreement or dispute—for nearly all *Hamlet* criticism since.[46] Dover Wilson prefaces his reading of the play with an admission that he had first been inspired to pursue this intellectual pathway after reading a 1917 *Modern Language Review* article in which Walter Wilson Greg had raised objections to some of the plot contrivances employed in *Hamlet*.[47] Among several objections, Greg indicated that Shakespeare had made a mess of the play-within-the-play device, meaning that Claudius simply does not see his own actions mirrored in the performance, which in turn must cast doubt for us on the truthfulness of the Ghost's account of his murder. Wilson's response to this is emphatic, and was to develop over the course of the next eighteen years into his staunch defense of *Hamlet* against its newest detractors.

As Terence Hawkes has shown in his brilliant essay, "*Telmah*," written some fifty years later, Dover Wilson's defense of the play betrays a deeply held commitment to a number of scholarly and social orthodoxies that are not disclosed.[48] The corrective procedure employed by Dover Wilson is thus an attempt to correct what is perceived as an incorrect procedure by a preceding critic. Hawkes demonstrates that Dover Wilson's defense of the play is motivated by a conservative reaction to the Bolshevik revolution

and newly proposed education reforms, among other factors, in the early decades of the twentieth century. Dover Wilson had seen in Greg's reading of the play an attack in the first instance on Shakespeare's greatness and, secondarily by association, on the literary heritage of Great Britain and the civilizing potential of the great works of art. Against the procedure applied by Greg, Dover Wilson's dogged defense of the play calls on a subsequent procedure in which the play is corrected in accordance with the orthodox conservative standpoint, for which it also becomes an exemplar. Dover Wilson's silence on the potential for his reading to be a reflection of these broader concerns is telling when we note that in the prefatory comments addressed to Greg, he asserts, "ever since Coleridge first caught sight of his own face in the mirror that Shakespeare held up to nature, critics of *Hamlet* have gone astray largely through neglecting to concentrate upon the words of the text and the details of the action which are the first concern of an editor."[49] That Greg was himself first and foremost an editor of Shakespeare's works makes this assessment particularly damning, yet Hawkes helps us to see that these comments rebound upon the hand that penned them: the gaze through which he concentrates upon the words of the text and the details of the action reveal in *Hamlet* the face of Dover Wilson and *his* stoic adherence to an orthodox standpoint. We may even sense that the manner in which he approached the task of defending the play was Hamlet-like in its initial agitation—Hawkes suggests this too[50]—but also in its protracted method of mounting a full case before avenging the murder of the Bard. His particular reading of *Hamlet* is quite simply Dover Wilson's own Mousetrap with which to catch the conscience of his predecessor.

Perhaps we should be careful, though, to not reject criticism simply for non-disclosure of vested interests. Might Dover Wilson's words be viewed after all as a compelling statement of method that is difficult to refute? He is surely right that a critic's task is to concentrate upon words themselves in order to determine their meaning. Yet we have already noted here that *Hamlet* provides us with a warning against unreflexive focusing of one's attention on the meaning of words. In the two years after the publication of *What Happens in Hamlet*, a number of critics already argued in relation to Dover Wilson's reading of the play that it does not attend adequately to issues of stagecraft, and in his preface to the second edition, he concedes this point, to his credit.[51] Indeed, he records his hope that his contribution to *Hamlet* scholarship will lead ultimately to better productions. The point I wish to make here is that there are words and then there are words—that the words upon which the critic concentrates may not be the same words upon which another critic or a reader from a different background will end

up gazing. Dover Wilson berated Greg *as an editor* for not attending to the words of the play, yet it was as an editor that Greg was in the process of developing what would be his lasting legacy: an approach to bibliography and textual history that sought to explain how early modern plays existed in a variety of forms. Greg was aware that editorial practice must involve dealing with the question of textual processes or of how words come into being, and this resulted in a willingness, albeit reluctantly, to consider the possibility that Shakespeare's play was not the product of a single act of creative genius, and that the text we now read was an expression of any number of attempts to deal with the problems posed by the play. We shall return to the editorial tradition that Greg initiated, but we can simply note here that in the later writings in which he expounded his theories about textual process, he retained a Dover Wilson-like defense of the Bard as the progenitor of all that is "fair" in Shakespeare's *oeuvre*—his assessment of the textual problems in Q2 *Hamlet*, for example, came down to Greg's judgment that "there was little that was foul about it and the chief trouble is the incompetence of the printing."[52]

The question may be, therefore, how can we switch off the reflective gaze long enough to get close to the play without seeing ourselves in it, to see the tain of *Hamlet*? The answer for Hawkes would be uncomplicated and to the point: we cannot. While I cite Hawkes here for his exceptional reading of Dover Wilson's immediate motivations, it is clear that he seeks not to offer an alternative "true" meaning of *Hamlet*. Instead, he offers a reading of the play he calls *Telmah*, which is of course *Hamlet* in reverse. In this brief reading of *Telmah*, he suggests that the play from which it is derived and with which it is in fact wholly consonant is written in such a way that the audience is compelled to follow its action simultaneously in the modes of both posteriority and subsequence: what comes before; what comes after. The play begins looking backwards—"has this thing appeared again tonight?" (1.1.20); "this dreaded sight twice seen of us" (1.1.24); and so on—and continues to recount a series of events that have already unfolded previously.[53] The central premise of the Mousetrap is also that it will work because it functions as "action replay" to events already having occurred and which have already been recounted in replay by the Ghost.[54] The trouble for modern readers is that we are unaccustomed to thinking of Shakespeare's plays other than "as a structure that runs a satisfactorily linear, sequential course," so it becomes necessary to think of *Telmah* as an entirely new play with a circular, recursive structure rather than a linear one in order to cast off the shackles of our inherited notions.[55] His account of Dover Wilson's defense of the Bard gives Hawkes the justification for undermining these inherited notions, and to demonstrate how deeply such

notions have become entrenched over time. I am, like Hawkes, committed to recognising these inherited notions within the context of ideological and institutional imperatives; that is, to be *reflexive* about received wisdom by inquiring with an open mind. Unlike Hawkes, I am dubious of the notion that only an entirely new play will suffice in undermining the orthodoxies that pass for accounts of the meanings of Shakespeare's texts.

When Hawkes offers *Telmah* in place of *Hamlet*, it is clear that his intellectual trajectory exhibits inherent resistance to the old play itself, as well as to the critical heritage to which Dover Wilson's defense belongs. In *That Shakespeherian Rag*—in which "*Telmah*" was reprinted only a year after its initial appearance—and in *Meaning by Shakespeare*, Hawkes would argue after 1985 against any possibility of "genuine access to final, authoritative or essential meanings in respect of Shakespeare's plays"; rather, he would maintain, "all we can ever do is use Shakespeare as a powerful element in specific ideological strategies."[56] While he may not have been aware of it at the time, Hawkes was issuing the terms under which "presentist" Shakespeare scholarship would gain validity during the next two decades.[57] As a reaction to what is perceived within Shakespeare Studies as the excesses of historicist readings and a drift toward situating plays within a historical context for the purpose of reinstating some sense of authorial intention or, worse, of "doing Shakespeare" in order to situate the critic within a long heritage of canonical criticism,[58] presentist critics eschew any thought of being able to reliably imagine the past as past: what is past is lost and is beyond recovery except as some imaginative creation within the present moment. For Hawkes and many who have followed, it is appropriate primarily to attend to questions of what Shakespeare's texts or any text, for that matter, mean for us, here and now, and to be genuinely reflexive about what such questions tell us about ourselves and our world. These are not unfair claims, not by any means.

Against these claims, while I agree no final, authoritative, or essential meaning can be recaptured—as if such a thing ever existed in any case—I contend that "all we can ever do" is surely *more* than baulk at the gates of history. Importantly, Hawkes himself takes the path of history in order to demonstrate how particular critical approaches are mired in their moment. Even as he argues that we cannot recover the essential meaning of a play that is more than four centuries old, he presents this historically situated account of Dover Wilson's reading of Shakespeare. Hawkes maps *this* text into a political and institutional context in order to hark back to a sense of what was *really* going on in the background of Dover Wilson's writing. It is along such lines that we can read Hawkes as a prime example of how to read method: we need not look for the essential meaning of play, but we