

Young Shakespeare's
Young Hamlet
Print, Piracy, and Performance



Terri Bourus



Young Shakespeare's Young Hamlet



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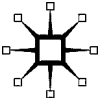
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For Rocky, who never stops fighting for me

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Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	ix
<i>The History of Text Technologies: General Editor's Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
Prologue: Questions	1
1 Piratical Publishers?	11
2 Piratical Actors?	35
3 Piratical Reporters?	69
4 How Old Is Young?	101
5 Young Shakespeare?	137
6 Revising <i>Hamlet</i> ?	181
Epilogue: Conclusions and Rebeginnings	209
<i>Notes</i>	213
<i>Works Cited</i>	265
<i>Index</i>	281

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Illustrations

Figures

- 4.1 A 30-something Gertrude (Imogen Stubbs) tries to pacify a sulky, adolescent Hamlet (Ben Whishaw) in the second scene of *Hamlet*, dir. Trevor Nunn (Old Vic, 2004). Photo by Alastair Muir 118
- 4.2 The Queen (Terri Bourus) kneels and swears to conspire with her son Hamlet, still dressed in the threateningly offensive teenage combination of Marine Corps jacket and swastika armband (Thomas Cardwell) in *Young Hamlet*, dir. Terri Bourus (Hoosier Bard, 2011). Photo by John Gentry 125
- 4.3 An out-of-control teenage Hamlet (Ben Whishaw) in the “Mousetrap” scene in *Hamlet*, dir. Trevor Nunn (Old Vic, 2004). Photo by Alastair Muir 126
- 4.4 A teenage Hamlet (Joshua McGuire) comforted by Ophelia (Jade Anouka) in a touring production of *Hamlet*, dir. Dominic Dromgoole (Shakespeare’s Globe, 2011). Photo by Fiona Moorhead 127
- 4.5 A teenage Hamlet (Thomas Cardwell) berates a grandfatherly Corambis (Stephen Scull) in *Young Hamlet*, dir. Terri Bourus (Hoosier Bard, 2011). Photo by John Gentry 129
- 4.6 Hamlet (Thomas Cardwell) in the “Mousetrap” scene in *Young Hamlet*, dir. Terri Bourus (Hoosier Bard, 2011). Photo by John Gentry 130

Tables

- 2.1 Possible “actors’ additions” 47
- 2.2 Irace’s list of “actors’ additions” in the 1603 edition 50

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The History of Text Technologies: General Editor's Preface

Texts and images are not just isolated, inert material objects; they are also material agents, made by material agents, catalyzing other material agents. As D. F. McKenzie's phrase "sociology of texts" implies, the relationship of one text to others entails relationships to human makers and human users. Texts cannot be separated from the various, overlapping, and restless human technologies through which those texts are created and then do the cultural work that texts do. To recognize that texts depend upon technologies does not imply any simplistic technological determinism. But that recognition does encourage us to focus on change rather than stability: changes in technology, changes in culture, and the changing relationship between the two.

Text/image technologies have historically been irresistibly invasive and transformative. Unlike most areas of humanities research, the history of text technologies is not limited to a particular nationality, language, or geographical area. "The technologizing of the word," as Walter Ong called it, is best understood as the multimillennial evolution and dispersal of increasingly complicated, comprehensive, and multisensory artificial memory systems that have driven human cultural evolution. Those memory machines, because they are prosthetic, are proximity engines, recording some part of a culture in a portable form that can then be transmitted and translated into another culture. Travelers like Marco Polo and John Smith could record their own transnational experience in text-packages, which then traveled even more extensively than they had. Texts are travelers, pioneers, immigrants, and founding fathers. The text that has influenced European and American cultures more than any other, "The Book," the Bible, migrated from Hebrew and Greek into Latin and then into every European and most native American vernaculars. Texts are time-traveling technologies, too, what Joseph Roach calls "time portals": they can connect two cultures

separated by time as well as space. Through texts, Dante could feel a profound personal relationship to Virgil, who had been dead for more than a thousand years, and Montaigne could write one of the most powerful expressions of his own individuality through an essay, "On Some Verses of Virgil." The study of text technologies thus is the ideal engine of interdisciplinary transformation and integration in the humanities, because those technologies for textualizing words and images cross the boundaries that separate nations, ethnicities, and religions. Against the fragmenting of the humanities into ever-smaller identity categories, this series studies the mechanisms by which inherited identities are connected and transformed.

Those mechanisms are not only material, economic, and political but also aesthetic. As they enable, exploit, extend, transform, or resist certain artistic possibilities, text technologies are inevitably also aesthetic technologies. They create media platforms that shape, and are shaped by, evolving and contested generic categories and ideals. The collector's interest in the medieval illuminated manuscript, the Dürer print, or the seventeenth-century French folio as an *objet d'art* in its own right mirrors the bibliographer's interest in artisanal routines and material products of the book trade. The history of the forms of texts is also a history of human culture in its largest sense, a history that speaks to how we use texts and images to establish ways of thinking, means of knowing, practices of living, assemblings of identity, and definitions of "the beautiful."

Such histories do not simply turn toward the past as an escape from the present. They frame and shape our understanding of possible transnationalisms, possible synesthesias, possible genres of humanness. These histories are explorations of incarnate becomings. And we hope that they will come to be a part of every reader's own becoming.

Certainly, *Young Shakespeare's Young Hamlet* has been a part of my own becoming. It is a study of the changes between the three early texts of *Hamlet*, and of how those English texts change a French Renaissance novella about medieval Denmark. In tracing the relationship between textual change and textual stability, Terri Bourus challenges the paradigms that have governed our assumptions about early modern publishers, piracy, memorial transmission, the relationship between the media of manuscript and performance, the changing technologies of note-taking and the rise of professional reporters. I edited *Hamlet* thirty years ago for the Oxford University Press edition of *Shakespeare's Complete Works*. Bourus has convinced me that I was wrong about the early texts of *Hamlet*, wrong about the 1589 reference to *Hamlet*, wrong about the

date(s) of Hamlet, wrong about Shakespeare's changing relationship to the play. Even readers who disagree with this original and transformative book will need new evidence to answer the questions that Bourus raises: this book will change our research agendas, and our understanding of the most famous play in English.

GARY TAYLOR

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Acknowledgments

This book has been a long time coming and so I've not only accumulated a lot of debts along the way, but also owe a lot of accumulated interest to people who believed in me enough to invest in my work. The first among them is my longtime teacher, mentor, and friend, William Proctor Williams. Through him I first became fascinated with the early modern book trade and he has continued to contribute to my research in the years since, providing invaluable feedback on many drafts of this book. I can never thank him enough.

Two scholars from Indiana University (IU) guided me through the morass of grant-writing and the other research needs of a new tenure-track teacher-scholar: the late Albert Wertheim and the late Peter Lindenbaum. Would that they were here to see this work come to fruition. John G. Rudy led by example and taught me to listen to my heart and to remain steadfast in my belief in the life of the mind—no matter what. Rare book curators, John Goldfinch and the staff at the British Library, and Stephen Tabor and the staff of the Huntington Library, gave me indispensable time and personal assistance. An NEH grant allowed me valuable sustained research time in Antwerp, Oxford, and London, as did several New Frontiers' Grants from IU. Ralph M. Cohen at the American Shakespeare Center first offered me the opportunity to combine performance and scholarship. Two research theatres—Blackfriars in Staunton, Virginia, and Shakespeare's New Globe in London—have been essential to the development of this project, and more generally to my attempts to negotiate the relationship between my career as a professional theatre practitioner and my career as a professional scholar. Dean William Blomquist, at the IU School of Liberal Arts at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, has consistently and generously supported my scholarship and my theatre work, and understood the importance of that combination; so too has IU president Michael McRobbie.

I could not have finished this book without the support of my colleagues and my many wonderful students, past and present; the generosity and professionalism of our department administrative assistant, Wanda Colwell; or the tech-savvy assistance of my former student and current administrative assistant for the New Oxford Shakespeare (NOS) project, Chad Andrews. Finally, Gary Taylor invited me to collaborate on NOS precisely because he believed in the importance of uniting the practicalities of performance with the practicalities of book production and scholarly editing. He also helped me to create Hoosier Bard Productions, and to test my theories about a young Hamlet in performance. All the cast and crew of that 2011 Hoosier Bard production have left their mark on this book, especially our own young Hamlet, Thomas Cardwell.

George Walton Williams, Jay Halio, and Thomas L. Berger read the earliest incarnations of what would become this book and encouraged and advised me. Most recently, Andrew Gurr, Gabriel Egan, John Jowett, MacDonald P. Jackson, and Gary Taylor read and commented on a late draft; Mark Bland, David Gants, Farah Karim-Cooper, and Laurie Maguire read individual chapters. They each, in their own ways, saved me from many mistakes and inspired me to many new thoughts.

Finally, *Hamlet* is a play about family and I am lucky in the one that surrounds me. I owe to my grandmother, the late Catherine Margaret Welch Jackson, and to my mother, the late Elizabeth Anne Jackson Bourus, my lifelong fascination with music, dance, and the love of a good story. To my nine sisters and brothers, my sense of humor and wonder, and of the possible. And especially to my children, Mary and Katharine, Amy and Albert: you are always at the center of my heart and are, therefore, central to this and all of my work.

Prologue: Questions

“I’ll call thee Hamlet!”

Between 1603 and 1623, three radically different versions of a play called *Hamlet*, all attributed to Shakespeare, were printed in London. Why?

The first two versions were published by one publishing house, and the third by its successor. Why?

Between 11 June 1594, and 24 January 1637, a play called *Hamlet* was repeatedly performed in and around London, always by the same acting company. Why?

The first of the three printed versions makes Hamlet much younger than the other two. Why?

Our collective failure to provide a satisfactory answer to the first question is due, in part at least, to our failure to remember the second, third, and fourth. More generally, the failure to solve all four problems results from a collective misremembering that began in 1825.

* * *

The relationship between the three early printed versions of *Hamlet* is the most complicated and important textual problem in the study of Shakespeare. But it is not just an editorial or bibliographical technicality. All three versions reproduce many of the same sentences and stage directions, but each of the three preserves some dialogue and action that is not present in the other two, and each of the three contains unique errors. The three tell the story in different ways, and those differences affect our sense of the play’s meaning, sometimes locally, sometimes globally. Moreover, references to a tragedy about Hamlet stretch for the entire length of Shakespeare’s career, from 1589 to the posthumous publication of his *Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies* in 1623. More than any other of his plays, *Hamlet* has remained constantly in the theatrical

repertoire; but it was also the first of his plays to be canonized by a university scholar as appropriate reading for “the wiser sort,” and the first to be printed in a way that called attention to its literary quotability. It has never lost that elect status among connoisseurs of literature. The problem of the three texts matters to anyone interested in one of our culture’s most celebrated achievements, but it also matters to anyone interested in the relationships between theatre and print, spectators and readers, ephemeral voices and the seemingly fixed authority of ink. It matters to anyone curious about Shakespeare’s development as one of the world’s most influential artists. It matters to anyone trying to teach a 400-year-old play to high school and college students.

This multifaceted problem cannot be solved by the application of any single method. But because Shakespeare has become such a vast international enterprise, scholars who wish to make a contribution to our understanding of his work almost inevitably are forced to become specialists in a single method. Thus, Paul Menzer, himself a playwright with much personal theatrical experience at the American Shakespeare Center, has given us several original insights into issues related to the staging of the early texts of *Hamlet*.¹ But Menzer is not a bibliographer or an historian of print culture. Neither is Brian Walsh, who has illuminated Shakespeare’s theatrical evolution from the very different perspective of sixteenth-century theatre history and contemporary performance theory.² On the other hand, Patrick Cheney explores Shakespeare’s “counter-laureate authorship” and *Hamlet*’s “literary eternal” through a sophisticated readerly analysis of the texts, but he pays no attention to the practicalities of early modern performance or early modern book production.³ Andrew Murphy does pay attention to the long archival history of Shakespeare as a printed text, a text read in specific editions by many different kinds of readers,⁴ and Zachary Lesser has situated early printed editions in the social and political context of the individuals who published them.⁵ But neither Murphy nor Lesser is a performer, a theatre historian, or a biographer. Hugh Craig has used computers and statistics to clarify or solve many authorship problems in early modern drama—but he is not a bibliographer or a performance scholar.⁶

The people who are supposed to combine all these talents—bibliography, the history of the book, biography, chronology, authorship, theatre history, performance, the history of critical readings—are editors. Indeed, most editors do juggle these methodologies to a greater or lesser degree. But the nature of their task as editors is to prioritize the confined space of a printed book, to prioritize one text over another, and to accept the priorities set by a publisher. I am an editor myself; indeed, I

have edited *Hamlet*.⁷ But the publisher allowed me to print only a single version of the play—and my publisher was not unusual in that respect. The 1986 Oxford University Press edition of Shakespeare’s *Complete Works*, revised in 2005, is famous for printing two versions of *King Lear*, instead of just one;⁸ the Norton edition of Shakespeare’s *Works*, based on that Oxford text, actually printed three versions of *King Lear*. But both those publishers prioritized *King Lear* over *Hamlet*, giving us multiple *Lear*’s but only a single *Prince of Denmark*. The twenty-first-century Arden Shakespeare (“Arden 3”) published all three versions of *Hamlet*—but two of them were lumped together in a more expensive and less accessible separate volume, treated as mere appendices to the diamond in the crown, the 1604 version.⁹ And the most recent edition of Shakespeare’s *Complete Works*, the so-called RSC Shakespeare, flaunts its theatrical credentials, but prints only a single version of *Hamlet*.¹⁰ Since the nineteenth century, the single version of *Hamlet* contained in most editions of Shakespeare, including textbooks, combines elements from all three of the original seventeenth-century texts, thereby producing a fourth text that was probably never performed or read in Shakespeare’s lifetime, but which is for most people “the” *Hamlet*.

But editors are not the only people forced to choose a single text. Theatres must do the same. Has any theatre ever produced all three versions of *Hamlet*, and run them in repertory? Teachers, too, face the same problem. Very few undergraduate Shakespeare courses survey all of his works; even if we include *Hamlet* in the syllabus of our “Introduction to Shakespeare,” the constraints of time compel us to teach, as best we can, only one version of it. Those theatrical and pedagogical limits in turn loop back to publishers, who want to print the book most likely to sell the largest number of copies. What publishers publish and teachers teach inevitably affects what audiences expect, and therefore what theatres feel pressured to supply. The historical reality of three different early printed versions is overwhelmed by the self-reinforcing spiral created by the interactions of publishing, performing, and teaching. All those institutions share a benign desire for simplicity; they want a single text to serve as a shared reference point for different constituencies (students, teachers, scholars, actors, and directors). Together, those institutions create a powerful present-tense pressure for us all to replace the real historical diversity with a single, familiar, magical object. One text to rule them all.

By invoking these institutional pressures, I do not question the intellectual integrity of any individual scholar, theatre-maker, publisher, or teacher. But we are all influenced by what we have been taught; we are

all “schooled” to interpret Shakespeare only in some ways but not others. Research monographs about Shakespeare’s early texts do not usually consider pedagogy alongside print-shops and theatres, but I think they should. The history of reading is a crucial component of the history of print, and reading begins in schools. As teachers, Liam E. Semler reminds us, “we are engaged in practices that shape and limit the ways students will perceive the world and we ourselves are shaped and limited by the disciplines enveloping us.” On a daily basis, we are shepherded, frustrated, and deformed by the “micro-managerial business models” of “educational institutions . . . increasingly driven by formal procedures that coercively standardize, itemize and instrumentalize teaching and learning,” which “tell us what is important and what is nonsense” and “fuel our automatic eruptions of scorn towards ‘manifestly’ absurd or wrongheaded notions.”¹¹ One of those “manifestly” absurd notions is that Shakespeare wrote the first play about Hamlet. Another is that the first play about Hamlet is preserved in the first printed edition of *Hamlet*.

To entertain such heterodox ideas, to unlearn assumptions that we don’t even realize that we are making, we have to resist the institutional spirals that pressure us to be satisfied with a single, standardized text of *Hamlet*. Since those pressures depend upon interacting and interlocking disciplines, our resistance must also harness the engines of all those disciplines. We cannot set print against performance, or authors against readers, or history against biography, or pedagogy against research. Instead of these static binaries, I propose to emphasize the double helix of what I like to call “dramatic intersections.”¹² Within the global community of people interested in Shakespeare’s work, we need more interaction between book historians and theatre practitioners. Every author, after all, was first a reader, and never ceases to be one. Before he wrote a line of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare read the story of “Amleth” in François de Belleforest’s *Les Histoires Tragiques*: a French version of a Latin version of a Danish tale. Shakespeare was also an actor; by 1595 certainly, and probably by mid-1594, he was a sharer in a joint-stock acting company; in 1599 he became part-owner of a theatre. His texts were transmitted by stationers *and* actors, received by readers *and* spectators, and Shakespeare’s own writing was stimulated not only by his reading but also by his watching and hearing other plays. When Shakespeare, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, wrote the version of *Hamlet* most familiar to us, he had probably already acted, personally, in an earlier version of *Hamlet*, and he had certainly watched the reactions of audiences to performances of that earlier version of *Hamlet* by his own

acting company. We cannot trust any model of Shakespeare's practice as a writer, any method of Shakespearian interpretation, that limits itself to one element of this double helix of creative interaction.

Dramatic intersections, in fact, happen throughout the process of creating, adapting, performing, reading, remembering, teaching, and directing a play. They are the points of reaction that structure the very nature of the experiment, for every performance is an experiment, every book and every theatre and every classroom a kind of laboratory, and at any given point there is a dependency on both memory and anticipation, the leap of an electric spark across the juncture of before and after.¹³ Rather like racers in a tag team where one runner strains hard and fast to get to the next, they intersect for one brief moment—long enough to pass the baton—but it is upon those intersections that the success of the race is based. Certainly, Shakespeare's historical success as a global cultural agent depends upon the circulation and preservation of his work in the forms of books, of performances, and of lesson-plans.

Imagine the motion of a text—let's call it "*Hamlet*"—in the four-dimensional space-time of our culture. From a Writer comes the script, created in response to that individual's own reading of books and own experience of the theatre, whether as practitioner or consumer or both. The Writer hands off that script to the next point of the triangle, the Transmitter, a category which envelops the financier-producer, the actors, the physical space and mechanics of the theatre, but also the publisher, the composers and booksellers, the mechanics of printing, and the physical location of the bookshop. But these two tracks of transmission also interact: actors are readers, publishers and booksellers may be playgoers, people who publish plays certainly have an interest in their marketability, which will initially be based in large part upon their success in the theatre. But their success in bookshops also will have the effect of advertising the vicarious experience for sale in nearby theatres, and their theatrical success will encourage spectators leaving a performance to buy an unbound, cheap, printed copy of the play being peddled to them as they exit.¹⁴ So the success of a play in one transmission-track increases its prospects for success in the other. Books are not the same as performances, theatres are not the same as bookshops, but they intersect and interact.

The Transmitters hand it off to the Receivers, who may be audiences or readers. But those two categories also adjoin and interact. Two of the men who printed early texts of *Hamlet* also owned (at different times) the monopoly on printing playbills, which advertised daily performances in the London theatres; those two printers interacted with

theatre companies on a daily basis, year after year. Moreover, many people who go to the theatre also read books, and people who read plays may also watch and listen to them being performed—or may know playgoers, who have recommended a particular title. The intersections and interactions continue. The writer responds to readers and spectators of his work (and other writers' work), but a play-writer also responds, indeed first responds, to the actors who read, memorize, embody, and perform his words. The actors, in turn, respond not only to the writer's catalytic text but also to the members of the audience, the watchers and listeners, who energize and reward (or not) and in any case always affect an actor's moment-by-moment, live, physical interpretation of the script. The audience's responses will determine, at the most basic level, whether the play is given another performance at all. Likewise, the booksellers respond to readers who are also customers, sometimes regular customers, whose reading choices determine the financial viability of a bookshop.

The creative double spirals of book and theatre, object and performance, are continually moving and interacting. While the play-writer is alive, the responses of actor-readers, the responses of the reader-market and audience-market, will restimulate and redirect his own creativity, leading in some cases to revisions of the original script, in other cases to the creation of entirely new plays, incorporating the lessons he has learned from his earlier ones. The writer's death, or retirement, ends his own participation in the spirals, but the end of his own race simply passes the baton on to other writer-interpreters, from Thomas Middleton to Tom Stoppard and on into a writerly future we cannot imagine. Long after the first writer dies, his words are remembered, and actor-readers, writer-adapters, teacher-students, keep reading and reinterpreting them. The intersections and the spirals continue, as long as the memory of the play survives, either in the hardware of a material text or the webware of a human memory.

But there are holes in this model. I have been imagining the category "Transmitter" as containing both actors and publishers; I have been imagining the category "Receiver" as containing both audiences and readers. But what if the actor, or the reader, switches categories? What if the categories intersect? If you've gone to a cinema in England in the last 20 years, you will have seen, before the movie started, a short plea by Federation against Copyright Theft (FACT), warning about the legal and economic consequences of pirating a movie. In the darkness of a cinema, a spectator can now record an entire film on an iPhone or other portable video camera.¹⁵ In the same period, the global music

industry has been devastated, and reshaped, by the fact that any customer with an internet connection can now download songs without paying for them. As historian Adrian Johns has demonstrated, debates about piracy and intellectual property, about “the nature of the relationship we want to uphold between creativity, communication and commerce,” began with the invention of the printing press.¹⁶ In the twentieth century, one of the most influential textual theories about the early printing of Shakespeare’s plays claimed that some of them were the work of “pirates,” and the twenty-first-century Arden edition of *Hamlet* considers that the 1603 edition may be a “bootlegged” text; indeed, Johns cites that “unauthorized quarto of Shakespeare’s play” as one of the famous episodes of piracy “cited repeatedly” in our own debates about “the definitive transgression of the information age.”¹⁷ As readers, or performers, how can we distinguish between the pirate and the writer?

This is only one of the problems with the category “Writer.” Shakespeare was an actor, but also a reader, so he belonged to all three categories; they intersected, daily, in his life, his body, his neurons. But in this he was not unique. Publishers are also, often, writers, and they are certainly, always, readers. Other playwrights have also been actors or directors, other writers have been printers, most writers have inscribed and copied their own works, thereby transmitting them to other people. Some readers and spectators write down their responses to what they have read or seen; indeed, our knowledge of early performances of *Hamlet* depends on such memories, sometimes preserved in manuscript, sometimes in print. Individuals can move between different categories, just as texts do.

I look at the early texts of *Hamlet* in terms of these dramatic intersections, creative spirals, and suspected piracies. I have focused upon the first edition, printed in 1603, because it raises most of the problems that have defeated or confused previous scholarship. Also, because it is less familiar, that text opens up relatively unexplored territory. For centuries, editions of the later, canonical version of *Hamlet* have been printed in thousands of editions and translations, in uncounted millions of copies, each corrected by editors and updated with modernized spelling, punctuation, and typography, all designed to make the play more immediately accessible to actors, students, and readers. The 1603 edition, by contrast, was invisible for centuries, and when rediscovered was most often reproduced in unedited, uncorrected transcripts, and in the unfamiliar, alienating costume of old spelling, old punctuation, old conventions of printing and performance. The canonical *Hamlet* has

been treated as a poem and a play; the first edition has been treated as a document. Consequently, although I have worked for many years with the original documents (and am myself preparing a digital transcript and a new scholarly edition of those documents), in this book I quote the 1603 version in the same way that scholars, critics, and actors routinely quote the later versions: in an edited text with modern spelling and punctuation. For the same reason, I have generally ignored differences in the spelling of the characters' names (Ofelia/Ophelia, Leartes/Laertes), which are of dubious authority and no significance.

As my title already makes clear, this book argues that the 1603 text represents Shakespeare's earliest version of the play, a version written in the late 1580s, a version that imagines Hamlet as a volatile teenager, in the turmoil of his first love affair, and in rebellion against his mother, his stepfather, and the adult world generally. All six chapters of the book can be read independently, and each chapter will interest some readers more than others: Chapter 1, for instance, will appeal most to historians of the book trade, and chapter 4 will be most engaging to readers interested in performance practices. But my conclusion depends upon the cumulative interaction of all six chapters. In chapter 1, I trace the intersections between printers and publishers who transformed two manuscript versions of *Hamlet* into Nicholas Ling's printed editions of 1603 and 1604. This examination establishes the legitimacy of both publications as reading texts in their own time. In chapter 2, I turn from the book trade to the commercial theatre, and reconsider the relationship between the 1603 edition and early modern actors. This chapter demonstrates that theories of "memorial reconstruction" by an actor-thief cannot account for the 1603 text. In chapter 3, I turn from actors to audiences. This chapter argues that the 1603 text cannot be dismissed as the work of spectators, surreptitiously taking notes during a performance of the play in order to sell their bootlegged text to an unscrupulous printer. These first three chapters all focus upon the history of communication through the media of performance, manuscript, and print; all three consider, and reject, anachronistic claims about piracy. But the claims about piracy are also bolstered by the rejection of authorial revision. For the rest of the book I challenge the piracy narrative by focusing on the alternative theory: that the 1603 text represents an early version of Shakespeare's play. Chapter 4 supports that theory by returning to the play's French source, reconsidering the age of the protagonist, then tracing the related ages of three male characters (Laertes, Fortinbras, Osric) and two female characters (Ophelia and the Queen). Age has political consequences, particularly in a royal family. I

relate those issues of age, gender, and politics to the often-demonstrated actability of the 1603 text, and in particular to the women's roles in that version. In chapter 5, I turn from the age of the characters to the age of the text itself. I connect the dots between various pieces of evidence about the intersections between a play called *Hamlet* (which was being performed in London and elsewhere for at least 14 years before it reached print) and an actor-playwright called Shakespeare (who was active on the London stage during those same years). This chapter connects the theatrical world of the late 1580s to the text printed in 1603, and challenges the traditional assumption that Shakespeare did not begin writing plays until 1591. In chapter 6, I return to the intersections between the three printed texts, and explore the implications of the theory of revision on our assumptions about the date and meaning of the canonical, expanded play that we almost always read, teach, and perform. I conclude that *Hamlet*, the most important of his works in terms of the subsequent history of his reputation, was also the play most important to Shakespeare himself, and that it began, in 1602, the run of great tragedies that are his most conspicuous contribution to world culture.

This study, like every account of intersections, is all about relationships. The relationship of one playwright to other writers, living and dead, and to his readers, living and unborn. Shakespeare's relationship to his son, his father, and a young woman named Katherine Hamlett. Shakespeare's relationship to other actors, and the relationship of actors to a script. The relationship of a play, interpreted through the actors, to the audience. The relationship of the early modern stage to the early modern printing house. The interactive relationships between the businessmen who manufactured and sold the printed texts and the readers engaging with words on those printed pages. All these dramatic intersections reflect back to the writer who first took up pen, ink, and paper and created (and recreated) *Hamlet*, a play about the intersection of "the fell incensed points of mighty opposites."

But *Hamlet* is also, of course, a play about memory, in particular a play about the memory of the dead. I imagine the intersections of Writers, Transmitters, and Receivers as a double helix, an image that invokes the biochemical memory-mechanism by which our species reproduces itself. Actors have to memorize their lines. Compositors have to remember words and phrases for long enough to set them into type. Readers have to remember what they have already read (in this text, and other texts) in order to make sense of what they are reading; audiences have to remember what they have already seen (in this play, and other

plays) in order to make sense of what they are seeing and hearing. As anyone knows who has witnessed someone they love descending into the oblivion of Alzheimer's disease, all relationships depend upon memory. Shakespeare has been dead for almost four centuries, and our relationship to him, in the library or the classroom or the theatre, depends upon continual renewal of the memory of his texts. The texts of *Hamlet* printed in the early seventeenth century preserve for us, in a material form, the memory of what a dead writer wrote, what dead performers performed, what dead readers read. Those original printed texts, those embodied memories of the dead, are the ghosts that beckon us, that force us, like Hamlet himself, to ask "What may this mean?"

CHAPTER 1

Piratical Publishers?

“What do you read, my lord?”

Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* premiered at the Edinburgh Festival on 24 August 1966. A version of the play then transferred to the National Theatre at the Old Vic, where it opened on 11 April 1967. A version of the text was published by Faber and Faber that year, and the play also opened on Broadway. Asked outside the theatre what the play was about, Stoppard answered (notoriously), “it’s about to make me rich.” As the copyright holder, he received royalties for performances, book sales, and translations. It has been often reprinted and anthologized. Stoppard revised the first edition, and also directed the 1990 film, further transforming playscript into screenplay.¹ Stoppard retained ownership of the texts of all these incarnations.

Shakespeare, by contrast, could not have retained ownership of the play that inspired Stoppard’s. Almost everything we know about Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* comes from editions printed between 1603 and 1623. But those machined texts did not belong to Shakespeare, and he would have received no percentage of the profit from book sales. Copyright, in the modern sense, was not created until the eighteenth century. The profits would have gone, instead, to a stationer: a printer or bookseller or publisher who belonged to the Stationers’ Company.² To understand the early texts of *Hamlet* we must therefore understand the early modern book trade. Unfortunately, “book-trade fallacies have flourished” in textual and literary studies, especially in studies of Shakespeare.³

The Worshipful Company of Stationers, granted its royal charter by Queen Mary on 4 May 1557, controlled almost everything to do with

the book business. It printed the books; it sold the books; it regulated the conduct of printers and booksellers. However, since the Stationers' Company was also an association of craftsmen and shopkeepers (much like the Butchers, Goldsmiths, Merchant Taylors, Cordwainers, and other London companies), it combined commercial with fraternal aspirations. Members of the Company of Stationers feasted on cakes and ale on Ash Wednesday, feasted at the election of Company officers, feasted for the annual replacement of the paper windows of print shops, and the like.⁴ The social aspect of Company life was no doubt enhanced by the fact that (with the exception of the small university towns of Oxford and Cambridge) the Company's charter confined printing in the kingdom to the old medieval walled and incorporated City of London. Consequently, in Shakespeare's lifetime, nearly the whole book trade was crammed in and around St. Paul's Cathedral and its environs.⁵ Thus, we must not imagine the business in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in terms of modern large multinational corporations. Think of it, instead, in terms of cottage industries, like a modern dental office, or a local independent bookstore—or, even more precisely, a twenty-first-century microbrewery (an artisanal manufacturing business that often owns its own retail outlet but also seeks wholesale customers). Few printers had more than one press, and even a large operation such as the Jaggards' in the 1620s seems to have engaged fewer than 15 people, including apprentices.⁶

Into this fraternal business environment came the fraternal texts of a play called *Hamlet*. It made its first appearance in print in 1603, no earlier than the end of May. We know its date so precisely because the title page declares that the play had been "acted by his Highnesse servants." The male pronoun "his" refers to King James I, and the word "servants" specifies a company of actors that included William Shakespeare and Richard Burbage, which was rechristened (and upgraded) from the Lord Chamberlain's Men to the King's Men on 19 May 1603.⁷ Modern scholars typically refer to this textual object as "Q1 *Hamlet*."⁸ Seventeenth-century readers would have recognized it as a "quarto play-book."⁹ As Lukas Erne observes, that phrase "encapsulates genre (play), medium (book), and format (quarto) to designate a product with a distinct cultural valence that differs from both the prestigious folio and the smaller-format poetry book."¹⁰ Like most other quarto playbooks, the 1603 edition of *Hamlet* could almost certainly have been purchased for six pence, retail, and most copies were probably sold without a hard binding. Another, longer edition with the same title, author, and publisher—which scholars now call "Q2 *Hamlet*"—was published near

the end of 1604.¹¹ We know its date so precisely because some copies of the title page are dated “1604,” and others are dated “1605.” This double dating is not unusual.¹² It indicates that printing was completed late in 1604, and that some copies were printed with the later date so that they would still seem “new” throughout the following year. The older a book, the harder it was to sell at full price.¹³

The dates of these two editions are clear enough, but they continue to be misunderstood. The 1603 edition is a Jacobean book, and therefore it could not “have been read during the uneasy final months of Elizabeth’s reign,” as one Shakespeare scholar claimed in 2012.¹⁴ More importantly, the dates indicate that *Hamlet* sold quickly. A second edition by the same publisher appeared within, at the most, 18 months of the first, or perhaps as few as 12 or 13 months.¹⁵ In the wider context of Shakespeare in the early London book trade, this is not surprising. *Venus and Adonis* was published in four editions in four successive years, then twice in 1599; *Richard II* had three editions in 1597–98; *1 Henry IV*, three editions in 1598–99; *Lucrece* was published twice in 1600; *Richard III* and *Love’s Labour’s Lost* were each published twice in 1597–98.¹⁶ As a book, *The Tragical History of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* was Shakespeare’s first Jacobean bestseller, and it did much better in bookshops than *King Lear*, *Troilus and Cressida*, or the *Sonnets*.¹⁷ There is absolutely no evidence for the recent conjecture that the second edition of *Hamlet* was “very probably” printed and distributed when “unsold copies” of the first edition remained in stock, which the publisher “still wanted to unload,” perhaps “even at a discount.”¹⁸ Since the publisher owned what we would now call the copyright, he did not need to finance a second edition until he had unloaded the first. A new edition could be printed quickly enough, once he had exhausted his stock. Even if he acquired another or better manuscript, he had no incentive to rush it into print. No one else could infringe his exclusive right to print that title, so why should he? In any case, why would he want to finance another edition if the first had sold poorly? Moreover, the conjecture assumes that only the publisher had an investment in “unsold copies” that he might have to “sell off” at a discount. Although the publisher certainly retained a fraction of the print-run to sell in his own retail bookshop (perhaps 10%), most of the copies of the first edition would have been sold or traded, at wholesale prices, to other booksellers.¹⁹ Those other booksellers had also invested their meager capital in copies of the first edition. With unsold stock on their hands, they would be most unlikely to purchase from him any copies of the new edition.²⁰ They would also probably, understandably, be annoyed if he published a premature and