A Concise Companion to Shakespeare and the Text

Edited by Andrew Murphy

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Shakespeare and the Text

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Note on Texts

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

Introduction: What Happens in *Hamlet*?

Andrew Murphy

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

To bring this question more clearly into focus, it will be helpful to look at an extended sequence from *Hamlet* in a particular modern text. One of the most highly regarded editions of the play from the latter half of the twentieth century was Harold Jenkins's Arden 2 text, first published in 1982. I would like to examine here an extended section of Jenkins's Act III, scene i, which includes, of course, what is conventionally Shakespeare's best-known piece of writing, the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy. Immediately before the soliloquy, the king, queen, and Polonius discuss Hamlet's strange behavior, with Ophelia in attendance, largely silent. At the end of his soliloquy Hamlet engages in an exchange with Ophelia, which culminates in his "Get thee to a nunnery" outburst.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We have seen that the punctuation and syntactical segmenting of the text differ between Jenkins's edition and the texts first published. As the quotations taken directly from the early editions make clear, there are also variations in the words that appear on the page. In some cases, these changes simply mark the difference between modern and Renaissance spelling conventions, with Shakespeare's era lacking formalized rules for "correct" spelling. Jenkins is producing specifically a "modern spelling" edition and so he eliminates Renaissance variations from his text. In most cases, this is simply a matter – as in the instance of the lines from Q2 quoted above – of substituting "their" for "theyr," "turn" for "turne," and so forth. However, it is also the case that Renaissance spelling can often carry a richer sense of meaning than its modern equivalent. Thus "loose" in the above quotation can both signal the sense of "lose" (the meaning which Jenkins chooses for his text) and carry an echo of to let "loose," to release, to let fall. Similarly, in Q2, death is the undiscovered country from which no "trauiler" returns. Jenkins renders this, quite correctly, as "traveller," the logical meaning. But, again, the Renaissance spelling carries within it the notion of "travail," or labor, which is also appropriate to the context.

In modernizing the text, Jenkins is choosing to substitute modern forms for their Renaissance equivalents. But, in some places, the choice to be made is between variations in the actual words being offered by the early editions. As we have seen above, Jenkins opts to accept F1's "Rosencrantz" and "Gertrude" in place of Q2's "Rosencraus" and "Gertrard." In Hamlet's soliloquy, the early texts offer the editor a choice between "theyr currents turne awry" (Q2, G2v) and "their Currants turne away" (F1, TLN 1741). In this instance, Jenkins adopts Q2's "awry," following his base text where, in the case of the character names, he decided to follow F1 instead. This is a simple enough decision, but, elsewhere, the editor of *Hamlet* is faced with more complex problems. For example, Q2 includes some passages which do not appear in F1 and the Folio text also includes material that Q2 lacks. Thus, in the scene where Fortinbras's army marches through Denmark, Q2 alone brings Hamlet on stage to meditate on the soldiers' mission "to gaine a little patch of ground / That hath in it no profit but the name" (K3r). The scene culminates in Hamlet's "How all occasions doe informe against me" soliloquy. Jenkins includes this material in his edition – a predictable enough decision, given, again, that his base text is Q2.

A contrasting instance is provided by the scene where Hamlet, having just returned from England, explains to Horatio what has happened during the course of his voyage. In both Q2 and F1, their conversation is interrupted by the entrance of a courtier (named specifically as "Osricke" in F1), who conveys the king's proposal for the fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes. In Q2, the interruption occurs at the conclusion of Hamlet's

> Dooes it not thinke thee stand me now vppon?
> He that hath kil'd my King, and whor'd my mother,
> Pop't in betweene th'election and my hopes,
> Throwne out his Angle for my proper life,
> And with such cusnage, i'st not perfect conscience?
> (N2r)

The F1 text, however, continues for a further 14 lines before Osricke's entrance and it also makes better sense of "i'st not perfect conscience," ending the phrase with a comma rather than a question mark, and creating, with the next line, a complete question: "is't not perfect conscience, / To quit him with this arme?" (TLN 3571–2). The passage continues, in F1, with Hamlet's expression of regret that "to *Laertes* I forgot my selfe" (TLN 3580). Jenkins decides to include all of these lines in his text, observing in a note that "The absence of these lines from Q2 is difficult to explain except as an accidental omission" (398). Thus Jenkins's general policy is that, where one text provides more material than another, it is best to gather everything together into his own edition.

If we return to Hamlet's soliloquy and turn specifically to the Q1 text of the speech, we are confronted with an even more complex problem. Here is the complete soliloquy, as it appears in Q1:

> To be, or not to be, I there's the point,
> To Die, to sleepe, is that all? I all:
> No, to sleepe, to dreame, I mary there it goes,
> For in that dreame of death, when wee awake,
> And borne before an euerlasting Iudge,
> From whence no passenger euer retur'nd,
> The vndiscouered country, at whose sight
> The happy smile, and the accursed damn'd.
> But for this, the ioyfull hope of this,
> Whol'd beare the scornes and flattery of the world,
> Scorned by the right rich, the rich cursssed of the poore?
> The widow being oppressed, the orphan wrongd,
> The taste of hunger, or a tirants raigne,
> And thousand more calamities besides,
> To grunt and sweate vnder this weary life,
> When that he may his full *Quietus* make,
> With a bare bodkin, who would this indure,
> But for a hope of something after death?
> Which pusles the braine, and doth confound the sence,
> Which makes vs rather beare those euilles we haue,
> Than flie to others that we know not of.
> I that, O this conscience makes cowardes of vs all.
> (D4v–E1r)

This version of the soliloquy, as will be immediately apparent, is radically different from its Q2 and F1 counterparts. Exactly what an editor should do when faced with variation of such a high order is very hard to say. Traditionally, texts like Q1 *Hamlet* have been dismissed as being so anomalous that they do not need to be taken into account when editing Shakespeare. Various narratives have been invoked to try to account for their existence. The theory which found most enduring favor was that the attenuated quartos were the product of "memorial reconstruction" by bit-part actors seeking to make some money by reconstituting the text of a popular play from memory, in order to sell it on to a publisher. This theory made it possible, for almost the whole of the twentieth century, to dismiss the short quartos as wholly irrelevant to the "genuine" text of Shakespeare's plays. However, recent work by Laurie E. Maguire, Paul Werstine, Lukas Erne, and others has radically shaken the certainties of this traditional view. We still do not know exactly what the provenance of these texts is – or, indeed, whether they all share the same kind of history – but, in the present context, it is worth noting that the Q1 version of Hamlet's soliloquy presents us not just with a different set of words from the Q2 and F1 equivalents, but also with a different tone, emphasis, and focus. Where the longer texts of the speech are, broadly speaking, philosophical and abstract, the Q1 version is much more concrete, direct, and political. Where one Hamlet ponders "the proude mans contumely" (Q2, G2r), the other focuses more specifically on "The widow being oppressed, the orphan wrong'd, / The taste of hunger, or a tirants raigne" (Q1, E1r).

Q1 differs from the other early texts of *Hamlet* in many other significant respects. It includes, for instance, a unique scene in which Horatio explicitly outlines Claudius's various acts of treachery to the Queen, leading her to conclude "I perceiue there's treason in his lookes / That seem'd to sugar o're his villanie" (H2v), thus making her a much less ambivalent figure than she is sometimes seen as being, on the basis of her portrayal in the longer texts. In general, Q1 is much more fast-paced and action-oriented than Q2 and F1 and it conforms much more closely to the traditional conventions of the revenge tragedy genre. Dramatically, it might be said to be closer to Zeffirelli's radically cut, accelerated film version of *Hamlet* with Mel Gibson than, for example, the more meditative, stately BBC *Hamlet* featuring Derek Jacobi. Quite where any of this leaves an editor of *Hamlet* is, however, difficult to say.

Over the course of the first half of this introduction, I have focused largely on a single scene from Harold Jenkins's edition of *Hamlet*. I have tried to show how Jenkins's text differs from the original published editions we have inherited from the Renaissance, examining some of his editorial decisions and, in a number of cases, exploring the consequences of these decisions. I have demonstrated how, in many instances, a choice made by Jenkins as editor has served to effect a single particular meaning in the text at the expense of eliminating other meanings or even fruitful textual ambiguities. The purpose of this analysis is not, however, to criticize Jenkins or in any way to belittle his great achievement as an editor. My intention is rather to show what a complex entity the Shakespeare text is and to demonstrate some of the difficulties involved in reducing this complexity to the essentially static format of a print edition.

Our exploration of Jenkins's edition raises a number of fundamental issues about what can and should happen to the Shakespeare text as it is reconfigured for presentation in a modern edition. For instance, what aspects of the text fall entirely within the editor's control? Does the editor have a wholly free hand in modernizing spelling and, if so, what might be lost in eliminating any ambiguities of meaning that inhere in the spelling of the original texts? Is the editor completely at liberty in matters of punctuation and, again, what might follow from this? To what extent should the editor intervene in the presentation of the text in order to make it easier for the reader to find his or her way through it? Should, for example, act and scene divisions be consistently marked as a way of ordering the text on the page? To what extent might such segmenting of the text run against the grain of its being a theatrical document? In the theater, after all, there are no act or scene breaks. Should an editor add or amplify stage directions in order to make the logistics of the action more intelligible to the reader? If this is within the editor's power, then how much information is enough, or too much, or too little? Lengthy, elaborated stage directions were a signature characteristic of John Dover Wilson's Cambridge *New Shakespeare*; in the scene under analysis here he added the direction "*Hamlet, disorderly attired and reading a book, enters the lobby by the door at the back; he hears voices from the chamber and pauses a moment beside one of the curtains, unobserved*" (43). Reading this, it is hard not to feel that Wilson is virtually turning the play into a novel with dialogue, not to mention imposing his own, very specific, reading on the action of the play.

Jenkins, as it happens, explicitly rejects Wilson's suggestion that Hamlet slowly works out that Polonius and the King are spying on him during the course of his exchange with Ophelia. For Wilson, it is this realization – which he reconfirms with a further stage direction that Hamlet "[*remembers the plot*]" (61) – that prompts Hamlet's unexpected question to Ophelia, "Where's your father?" but Jenkins insists that "There is no textual basis for the common assumption that Hamlet's question is prompted by his having just discovered the answer to it" (283). Here, then, Jenkins rejects the reading imposed on the text by one of his predecessors as editor. But elsewhere, as we have seen, he draws quite heavily on the work of other editors in adding to or emending the text. So, for instance, just in the section of the play we have been examining he takes his act and scene division from William D'Avenant's 1676 edition; he follows Nicholas Rowe's 1709 edition in excluding Ophelia from Polonius's and the King's exit; he brings the Queen off stage, following Lewis Theobald's 1733 edition; and he invokes Edward Capell's 1768 text in deleting the "Lords" from the opening stage direction.

All good editors try, as far as they can, to follow their base text wherever they can possibly make sense of it. But, oftentimes, an editor is forced to draw on the extended editorial tradition for help. Thus, for example, in Horatio's description of King Hamlet's battle with the King of Norway, he tells Marcellus and Barnardo that the old king "smot the sleaded pollax on the ice" (Q2, B2r); Q1 also has "sleaded pollax" (B2r) and F1 has "sledded Pollax" (TLN 79). The phrase in its entirety does not make sense: it is certainly possible to imagine King Hamlet smiting the ice with a poleaxe, but it is more difficult to imagine what a "sleaded" poleaxe might be. Jenkins, in common with most editors, solves the problem by adopting the reading of Edmond Malone's 1790 edition: "sledded Polacks." In other words, it is not the ice that King Hamlet smites but, as Jenkins puts it in his note, "Poles borne in sleds" (169). But we should note, of course, that editions published later than the very earliest texts have no real "authority" as such. Malone's solution to this particular textual crux is no more than an elegant guess at a true meaning which most editors feel has been obscured in the earliest editions. So, a question arises as to when it is appropriate for an editor to rely on the work of a predecessor, repeating that predecessor's changes to the text. On what grounds does one accept the emendation of one editor and reject that of another (as Jenkins rejects Wilson's reading of the nunnery scene)?

Returning to the editor's particular role in helping the reader to make sense of the text, we might also ask what level of annotation is appropriate in a modern edition. Whereas the early editions present a text wholly free of commentary, in Jenkins's modern edition, as much as 50 percent (or more) of the page is frequently given over to annotation of one sort or another. At such a great remove from the text's original historical moment this is, of course, inevitable. As long ago as the mid-eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson recognized that the Shakespeare text is replete with topical allusions which quickly become obscure with the passing of time:

> All personal reflections, when names are suppressed, must be in a few years irrecoverably obliterated; and customs, too minute to attract the notice of the law, such as modes of dress, formalities of conversation, rules of visits, disposition of furniture, and practices of ceremony, which naturally find places in familiar dialogue, are so fugitive and insubstantial, that they are not easily retained or recovered. (I, D6r–D6v)

Part of the function of the editor is, precisely, to recover such contextual material and make it available to the reader. But, again, we might ask what the effect is of reading a play when it is heavily freighted with commentary and apparatus. It was, after all, also Samuel Johnson who advised: "Let him, that is yet unacquainted with the powers of *Shakespeare*, and who desires to feel the highest pleasure that the drama can give, read every play from the first scene to the last, with utter negligence of all his commentators" (I, E4r).

The most complicated issue facing an editor is undoubtedly the business of making sense of the relationships among the surviving early texts of any given play. What, for example, lies behind Q2 and F1 *Hamlet*? Or, to put it another way: what was the compositor looking at when he set the text in the printshop? A manuscript in Shakespeare's own handwriting? A copy of the play prepared by a professional scribe? A manuscript that had been used by the King's Men (or their predecessors) for performance? Another printed text? A further question also arises: whatever was in front of the compositor, had it been marked up, amended, annotated, revised, cut, added to, or otherwise changed? And, if so, by whom? By the players, the censor, a professional scribe, or Shakespeare himself? Twentieth-century editors, working within the paradigm of the New Bibliography, had a high level of confidence that they had evolved strategies for answering these questions. R. B. McKerrow proposed some simple tests for establishing whether a play was printed from an authorial manuscript or a playhouse "prompt book," including suggesting that "a play in which the names are irregular was printed from the author's original MS., and . . . one in which they are regular and uniform is more likely to have been printed from some sort of fair copy, perhaps made by a professional scribe" (1935: 464). Likewise, early in the twentieth century, a group of scholars proposed that the "Hand D" that wrote some sections of the manuscript play *Sir Thomas More* was Shakespeare's, thus providing an insight into the characteristics of the playwright's spelling and into idiosyncrasies in his handwriting which might be open to predictable misinterpretation by a compositor (thereby, again, helping in determining whether a printed text was based on an authorial manuscript). Later in the century, another group of scholars proposed that variations in some of the early texts (including *Hamlet*) were an indication that Shakespeare was a revising playwright, who often returned to his texts to update them in one way or another. By the terms of this theory, the omissions/additions that we have logged in comparing Q2 and F1 *Hamlet* have been taken as evidence of Shakespeare's revising hand, cutting and adding to the play some time after its original composition.

The high optimism of the New Bibliographic and, later, Revisionist era faltered as the twentieth century drew to a close. As Paul Werstine has shown, both in his chapter in this volume and elsewhere, it has become increasingly hard over the past decade or so to maintain confidence in the relatively straightforward narratives of textual provenance once so assuredly advanced by editors working within the New Bibliographic (and, latterly, Revisionist) frameworks. Finally, what we are left with is a complex of texts, which often, like so many of Shakespeare's villains, refuse ultimately to account for themselves. As Iago says: "Demand me nothing: what you know, you know: / From this time forth, I neuer will speake word" (F1, TLN 3607–8). It may very well be that, in time, the early texts can be persuaded to speak more about their origins. We may well eventually find a satisfactory narrative that accounts for Q1 *Hamlet* and the other short quartos. We may be able to plot the origins of the longer texts and their interrelationships in a way that is more fully convincing than at present. In the interim, we are stuck with difficult editorial choices and with the interestingly complex textual world that the earliest editions evoke.

What this book seeks to offer, in the main, is an exploration of the parameters and possibilities of this complex world. In the opening chapter of part I Helen Smith provides an insight into the intricacies of bringing a book to print in the Renaissance period, and in chapter 2 Peter Stallybrass and Roger Chartier chart the complex process whereby Shakespeare came to be constituted as an author. Thomas L. Berger and Anthony James West then track the histories of specific Shakespeare texts: the early quartos, in the case of Berger's chapter, and the First Folio in the case of West's.

The second part of the book takes up the issue of the various strategies that have been evolved in an effort to cope with the complexities of the texts we have inherited from the Renaissance. In my own chapter, I trace the attempts that were made in the eighteenth century to map out, for the first time, a systematic and theoretically coherent approach to editing Shakespeare. Paul Werstine analyses the rise of a new, "scientific" mindset within editing as it emerged in the twentieth century and he notes that, while this approach dominated Shakespearean editorial practice for an extended period, ultimately the certainties on which it was founded came to be radically questioned. Leah S. Marcus takes up the issue of how editing has proceeded in the wake of this questioning and, specifically, under the shadow of poststructural interrogations of old textual certainties. Finally, Michael Best indicates how some of the problems mapped out throughout this volume – for example, the existence of multiple, variant texts – can be at least partially solved by deploying the resources of newly emergent digital technologies.

The final part of the volume is dedicated to practical matters. David Bevington takes us through a series of textual cruces in order to demonstrate exactly what the business of editing involves in real terms (with sleeves rolled up and pencil sharpened, so to speak). Sonia Massai helps us to understand what is to be gained by retaining a sense of the separateness of the extended series of individual textual incarnations of a play such as *King Lear*, and the value of cross-reading between them. In the final chapter in this part, Neil Rhodes indicates how new electronic resources can help to shed light on old questions. In a sense, Rhodes brings us full circle here, since the practical exercises he outlines constitute, precisely, an exploration of the world of the material text and its histories that Smith and Chartier and Stallybrass map out in the opening chapters of this volume. John Drakakis rounds off this *Companion* with an overview essay which explores, among other things, the political contexts and ramifications of many of the textual and editorial issues raised in the body of this book.

So: *did* Shakespeare really write the plays? Well, yes, he did, but, as Edward Capell noted in his 1768 edition, "we have nothing of his in writing; . . . the printed copies are all that is left to guide us" (I, 20–1). Capell, himself, imagined that he might "find his way through the wilderness of these early editions into that fair country the Poet's real habitation" (I, 20). He failed; but, then, so has every other editor before and since. George Steevens, characteristically, offered a more realistic assessment of the situation in a prospectus for a new edition, issued in 1766: "there is no single text of Shakespeare that can be depended on; and they are strangely mistaken who talk of restoring it to a state in which it never was" (n.p). Shakespeare's text is, finally, a collaborative venture. He certainly collaborated with fellow playwrights in writing some of his plays (*Henry VIII*, *Two Noble Kinsmen*, for example). It is highly likely that he collaborated with his acting colleagues in shaping his plays to suit the theatrical and commercial requirements of the Renaissance stage. He had no option but to collaborate with the Master of the Revels' office when it censored the plays by, for example, calling for the removal of oaths or of politically sensitive material from the text. But he has also, perforce, entered into a collaborative relationship with his editors, who have set themselves the task of rendering the plays in a form that makes sense to the audience of their own times. So: Shakespeare wrote the plays, but they are also rewritten in every generation by editors seeking to make sense of them from within a cultural field which shifts from generation to generation. The present volume aims, as best it can, to make sense of Shakespeare's text in the context of our own cultural moment and also of our current, imperfect, knowledge of the textual culture of Shakespeare's time.