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Kronborg, the setting of 'Hamlet', built 1575-1584.

'FILTERS' IN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF *HAMLET*

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The present article discusses how different "filters" bring out different aspects in Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* Any treatment of *Hamlet,* be it a stage performance or a reading, reflects the view of the individual director, actor, or critic. I shall argue that although such personal approaches are indisputably individual, they are also an integral and indissoluble part of Shakespeare's play. My discussion will be based on the texts of *Hamlet.* Despite significant differences between Q1, Q2, and Fl, we may state with some degree of confidence that the text of *Hamlet,* authored by William Shakespeare, corresponds relatively closely to that which appears in the modem editions such as those by Dover Wilson (1934); Cyrus Hoy (1963); Edward Hubler (1963); Harold Jenkins (1981 which I use here); Philip Edwards 1985); and G.R. Hibbard (1987). It is true that there are differences between these editions. Compared to the differences at other levels, in other 'filters,' in the text's transference from the printed page to the readers' or spectators' reaction, they are, however, differences of point rather than of essence. It is generally recognized that once *Hamlet* leaves the printed page to become a drama, filters come into play. Even Shakespeare, the dramatist, must have been aware that his work would be subjected to the filter process: a play of 3,700 lines was too long; the full-length text would have to be cut by the

standards of any age, including Shakespeare's, to be performed.

I

One character will suffice for an illustration of the way in which the unavoidable cutting of certain lines or scenes in *a performance will* affect the overall presentation.

Hamlet cherishes a deep-felt scorn for Polonius in 3.2.369-73. The Prince manages to make Polonius look foolish by getting him to say that the same cloud looks first like a camel, then a weasel, and then a whale. If directors and actors decide that, throughout the play, Polonius is to be played as the doddering fool he is traditionally made to look in this scene, this will affect the audience's attitude to Polonius. If his chief councillor is foolish, this implies that Claudius must likewise be a fool. …// 51 …

However, other directors or actors may wish to present Polonius as a crafty politician who passes on to others advice which he himself has learned from experience: his advice to Reynaldo that "by indirections find directions out' (2.1.66) is in no respect out of character. The worldly-wise Polonius is fully aware of the potential danger of royal displeasure towards him and his daughter if he conceals that Hamlet has gone mad because of love: "I hold my duty as I hold my soul, /Both to my God and to my gracious King" (2.2.44-45). Polonius also shows himself a clever psychologist when he makes certain that Claudius has received good news from Norway before Polonius himself confesses that Hamlet's madness may have been caused by Ophelia's "duty and obedience" to her father, viz., the very characteristics that the king would prize in a good councillor. Conversely, Polonius' long-windedness and his forgetfulness ("I was about to say something. Where did I leave?" (2.1.52)) add human weaknesses to the picture: a complex character, and an old man. Yet in the text of *Hamlet*, only Prince Hamlet considers him a fool. The director's and actors' interpretations, however will often be decisive for an audience.

Another filter is what is seen or heard in the specific performance. A few examples: in the first scene, when the Ghost returns, Horatio says "I'll cross it though it blast me" (1.1.130). The ghost does not blast him, and instead, Horatio's speech turns into an appeal:

If thou hast any sound or use of voice, Speak to me.
If there be any good thing to be done
That may to thee do ease, and grace to me, Speak to me.

I suggest that this transformation from fear to an offer of assistance can be effected in performance in several ways: Horatio says he wants to "cross" the Ghost; according to normal usage in printed Elizabethan drama there would be no further stage direction. But there is one in the quarto: "it spreads his armes" (Q2). One way of performing this "crossing" is of course to have Horatio change his tone of voice i.e. to do nothing special (F). Another is to have Horatio hold up the hilt ('the cross') of his sword; in this case Horatio is protecting himself by means of a Christian symbol. A third interpretation may be performed as follows: Horatio crosses himself (or makes the sign of the cross towards the Ghost); the Ghost replies by assuming the pose of somebody who has been crucified. If the Ghost is

played in this way it imparts immediately and beyond a doubt to Horatio (and to the audience) that the Ghost is a Christian soul, a convincingly honest and pitiful Ghost. By such a gesture, Christianity is established as a pervasive ideological force in the play; and the justice meted out at the end is sanctioned by God.

Kronborg, built by King Frederik II. Its guns covering the waters in 260 degrees, Kronborg is one of the outstanding naval fortresses in the world. It guarded the main entrance to the Baltic Sea.

Another well-known scene demands similar filters in performance: this is Claudius' lack of reaction to the dumb-show. One solution is to have Claudius doze or talk with somebody else: to do this is to indicate that Claudius is simply not interested in Hamlet's so-called madness (an attitude which I would consider inconsistent).

Another way of performing this scene is to have Claudius watch Hamlet intently throughout the dumbshow: in this case, he, like everybody else, is aghast at Hamlet's indecent addresses to Ophelia. This tallies with Guildenstern's later claim that the King is distempered with choler. A performance directed on these lines would show that up to that point Claudius has been seriously concerned about Hamlet's welfare: this Claudius may be a villain, but no more so than that he wants his nephew to be a worthy successor to the throne.

From a textual point of view there is a third possibility: to go back several scenes, after the Hecuba-scene, Polonius notes that"This is too long" (2.2.494). Hamlet sarcastically replies that it should be shortened, then adds,"Prithee say on. He's for a jig or a tale of bawdy, or he sleeps." This can be performed as an aside aimed at Polonius; or it can be said out loud. Either way, it may be taken as a comment on what is needed to arouse the interest of the sensual upstart, i.e. Claudius: a mere dumbshow will not make any impression upon him. In this interpretation, the King may well watch the entire dumbshow yet still be too insensitive to get the point.

II

There is a well-known chronological filter: things and attitudes have changed since Shakespeare penned the play nearly 400 years ago. Today we consider the then topical reference to the boy companies (2.2.336-58) slightly irrelevant; it has lost its immediacy; and yet Hamlet connects their popularity with that of Claudius. The Elizabethan, indeed any dramatic audience, is as fickle in its loyalty towards its companies of actors as is that of the common people towards their political leaders.

The reference to the swinish drinking in Denmark, albeit the country was notorious for it in Shakespeare's age, is no longer a telling point; and the King's orders, at pivotal moments in the play, to have cannon fired for his toasts is now mere noisy braggadocio, not an awe-inspiring show of Danish might. To the Elizabethan it fitted in neatly with the contemporary political power of Denmark in Northern Europe: the play still contains many allusions to the might and greatness of Denmark although there is no such corresponding reality in the world of international politics today. …// 53 …

Today we define adultery in a narrower sense than Shakespeare did. So when the Ghost complains about "that incestuous, that adulterate beast" (1.5.42), this may now be interpreted to imply that Gertrude was unfaithful to her former husband while he was still alive, perhaps even that she knew about Claudius' fratricide. To the Elizabethans, it was 'adultery' to be married to one's late husband's brother. In the play, there is more to it; when Gertrude first enters, we are informed that, officially, she has been married to Claudius for political reasons; Claudius has exerted "discretion," and was supported by the councillors whose "better wisdoms ..: have freely gone/With this affair along" (1.2.15-16). Gertrude is a different character today because language, morals, and politics have changed: in the eye of today's beholder, women are no longer automatically pawns in the power game.

Perhaps the greatest time-filter for our understanding of *Hamlet is* the *Hamlet-tradition*, that is, our preconceived ideas about the play; indirectly and directly we have been overexposed to it. The mass of critical opinion has crushed immediacy out of our experience of the play. Everybody knows Hamlet, the embodiment of Danish vacillation. Unlike the original audience of the Globe, we shall never be surprised by the transition from the first to the second scene. At the end of the first scene, Horatio tells Marcellus and Barnado that "As needful in our *loves*, fitting our duty," they must tell young Hamlet about the apparition. In the second scene the opening line is spoken by the king, something quite contrary to what the play's first audience had been led to believe by the opening scene; the King who speaks in scene 2 is not young Hamlet. This bold and startling non-fulfillment of the audience's expectation has been lost in our time because of over familiarity with the play. The effect of Shakespeare's dramatic craftsmanship has been weakened by his own impact on the common cultural heritage.

The courtyard of Kronborg is often used for performances of 'Hamlet'

III

Many themes in *Hamlet* are dealt with according to a textual scheme whereby the theme is first aired with the merest suggestion, then subjected to an increasingly incisive treatment, and finally interwoven with other themes. But the sheer length of the uncut text would disallow its presentation on the stage. Two characters will serve to illustrate this point: one is the Norwegian Prince Fortinbras. In

the opening scene we are given, in passing, two pieces of information: that Denmark is preparing for war against the son of the king of Norway, and that this king was killed in a duel with Old Hamlet. …// 54 … At the opening of the next scene the two separate pieces of information are connected and directed into the right channel by the resolute new ruler of Denmark; his marriage has firmly established internal order, and therefore Claudius turns to international affairs: the Norwegian prince whose father Old Hamlet killed is planning to attack Denmark; however a message to the present Norwegian King, his uncle, (another uncle, a parallel to the situation in Denmark) will set matters right with the young Prince, and the message accomplishes its purpose. Soon the ambassadors return from Norway. Danish intelligence work proved correct; Fortinbras must look for another prey; he vows not to take arms against Denmark, but requests leave of passage to cross Danish territory (2.2.75-80).

We then hear nothing of Fortinbras until Hamlet, frustrated at the very point where he is finally sure that the Ghost was telling the truth, is on his way from the castle to the harbour when he is confronted by an army guided by a code of morals whose main core is honour, courage, valour. Faced with this, Hamlet decides to have no scruples.

From now on Fortinbras makes no appearance until he enters the stage at the very end to ascend (we may be sure) the Danish throne. In the process he also acknowledges that Hamlet's final recognition of death is in itself a kingly achievement: "For he was likely, had he been put on,/ To have proved most royal," thus equating the external with the internal conquest and victory.

My second example of the gradual introduction of a feature in the plot is the Ghost:

(a) Barnardo starts talking about it. (b) It makes its appearance and is identified with somebody who has recently died, that is the old King. (c) The scholar Horatio addresses it, repeating the injunction, the magical three times, that it speak. It disappears, so that (d) Horatio can conclude that the Ghost "bodes some strange eruption to our state" and make the learned analogues to the portents of Caesar's death in Rome. (e) Then the Ghost appears again. This time it succeeds in communicating that it is willing to speak before it vanishes at the crow of a cock. (f) The next reference to the Ghost is Horatio's description of it when they inform Hamlet about it. Hamlet concentrates on externals to have their account verified. Once he is sure the Ghost has his father's form, he resolutely decides to speak to it, and takes the immediate precaution of demanding that the others keep quiet about it. (g) So, at night, while the living King is celebrating, the Ghost reappears, making a deep impression on Hamlet, and having him follow it to a place where it can then (h) tell how the Old King really died, and give vent to its bitterness towards the Queen. … // 55 … The Ghost demands revenge, with two provisos, "Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive/Against thy mother aught" (85-86) and (i) then the Ghost helps Hamlet, by three oaths, and on pain of death, to make the others swear to keep silence.

After thus having set the plot going, the Ghost intervenes only once (in exclusive communion with Hamlet), to remind him that his purpose seems to be blunted. This way of introducing things is found even in linguistic minutiae, in individual speeches and dialogues where one word catches on, as it were, to a more expanded treatment. It also applies to imagery: the play is full of references to war, to guns, to soldiering etc. Two other strands of words and pictures are even more interesting: one refers to plants; to flowers, to gardens. Ophelia listens to Laertes' warnings, finally to specify that she, "an

infant of the spring," would like him, too, to stick to the lectures he gives and to follow the thorny way to heaven instead of treading the primrose path of dalliance (1.3.46-52). At this stage, she also introduces one of the major themes of the play: the opposition of appearance and reality, and of sham and truth. Thus it is in character that much later in the play she hands out symbolic flowers, eventually to find death beneath a willow with garlands and flowers, and to be buried among flowers, laid on her coffin by the queen.

However, there is also a negative botanical strand: after Claudius has fixed international and national affairs, Hamlet notes that all the uses of the world have become to him, "an unweeded garden/ That grows to seed" (1.2.135-36), and that things are rank and gross in nature: he laments the bygone days of his father's reign and, we are (later) told that the old King's life was cut short by an obscure plant poison administrated to him in his peaceful orchard (1.5.59-70). In the closet scene, Hamlet tells his mother to abstain from having intercourse with Claudius in order not to "spread the compost on the weeds to make them ranker" after having linked her action with "rank corruption" (3.4.150), i.e. another poignant strand of imagery.

This latter strand of rottenness and corruption is introduced by Marcellus' brief remark that something is rotten in the state of Denmark (1.4). It is hinted at in the prayer scene with Claudius' admission that his "offence is rank, it smells to heaven" (3.3.36); it is brought out more fully in Hamlet's vengeful speech about the worms that are eating away the body of his enemy, Polonius, (4.3.19-20); and he is moved to threaten Claudius that even a king may go through "the guts of a beggar" (4.3.27-31). This prepares us for the graveyard scene where the worms have done their work on people from all walks of life, and Hamlet comes to accept that in the same fashion as Yorick now evokes only revulsion in him, so also "Alexander died, Alexander was buried" and may have been 'resurrected' as loam used to stop a beer-barrel (5.1.205). …// 56 … The strands of imageries of the wholesome plants, flowers and gardens, and the corrupted weeds eventually combine when flowers are strewn on the dead Ophelia's grave by the corrupted queen.

At the beginning of the present article, I suggested that Shakespeare himself was aware that the text of his *Hamlet* would have to be cut for stage performance. What this means, then, is that the director must decide which characters or which themes are to be developed most forcefully in the production. Can all the appearances of Fortinbras (or of the Ghost) be retained? If not, then which ones? Is the revenge theme to be stressed above all others?

In my opinion, *Hamlet is* a revenge tragedy from a structural point of view only. True, the Ghost demands revenge: but only on Claudius. In the play as a whole, death is meted out in a way which is not truly logical. Hamlet kills Polonius and orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to be executed, at a time when they are, beyond a doubt, only the instruments of Claudius. Gertrude is killed, accidentally, by the King; it is her realization of her own impending death which brings about the revelation that Hamlet is doomed, poisoned by Laertes whom he, in turn, has wounded mortally. Hamlet's words are suggestive: "Thou incestuous, murd'rous, damned Dane" (5.2.330). Here the word order itself indicates that what is uppermost in Hamlet's mind even at this stage is not revenge, but just punishment. Incest comes first to Hamlet's mind, then murder. In the full-length text, the revenge theme is a minor one.

The main theme in the full-length text is the growing awareness of *the reality of death,* of the gradual realisation that we must all die.

This theme is first introduced by Claudius who, in truly regal fashion, turns to family affairs only after having established order at national and international levels, and then rebukes Hamlet in 1.2:

Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet, To give these mourning duties to your father, But you must know your father lost a father, That father lost, lost his....

In his ”mad” exchange with Polonius Hamlet touches briefly on an awareness that the revenge demanded by his father may lead to death: ”Will you walk out of the air, my lord?” he asks. Hamlet replies, ”Into my grave’?” (2.2.206-7). This awareness of death is also dealt with as death as the terminator of action, and of acts: Hamlet considers the act of being, of acting; and, in his soliloquy, he perceives that there is a country from whose bourn no traveller returns and which frees one from the calamities of life. …//57 …

Death is enacted in the dumb-show and in the Gonzago play which finally convinces Hamlet of the Ghost’s veracity; the two shows, mere appearances, reveal Claudius’ guilt. Hamlet then kills the king’s agent, Polonius, by accident (”I know not,” he says, (3.4.25) by a haphazard thrust through the arras-not face to face. Afterwards he explicitly presses home the fact that he, Claudius, must also die: ”A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king” (4.3.27-28). In the next scone, when Fortinbras passes, Hamlet once more sees a face of death, prescient of ”the imminent death of twenty thousand men./ That, for a fantasy and trick of fame/Go to their graves like beds” (4.4.60-62), a correlation of the individual death with those of others, of the multitude. Yet so far death is only an immaterial principle, remote from Hamlet himself.

The Knights’ Hall of Kronborg

In the graveyard scene comes the final realization and fusion: death exists as a material reality to others, to sham as well as to beauty; it is first introduced cynically by the gravediggers; then debated in the dialogue between Hamlet and Horatio; and eventually presented in the skull of Yorick: ”He hath borne me on his back a thousand times, and now-how abhorred in my imagination it is. My gorge rises at it!” A once beloved person has become an abhorrent, disgusting object: ”Where be your gibes now, your gambols. ...”, (5.1.183-85). Even the mighty Caesar dies. And now comes the death that strikes Hamlet at his very heart: we know it is Ophelia who has died, but Hamlet does not until a little later ”I lov’d Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers /Could not with all their quantity of love/ Make up my sum.”

With death so close to his person, Hamlet waives Horatio’s warning prior to the fight with Laertes, ”if your mind dislike anything, obey it” (5.2.213). Hamlet now knows that there is providence in the fall of a sparrow, and that ”if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all.” Accordingly, it is a Hamlet who has come to terms with the reality of death, who moves on to the final catastrophe to meet

his mortal enemy face to face. Unlike all the other characters, including Claudius whose damnation is now ensured, and unlike his father who died ”unhousel’d, disappointed, unanel’d,” Hamlet is prepared for death. By this token, all characters, except Hamlet (and perhaps Ophelia), will come to fast in the fires of Purgatory for the just purgation of sham, lies, and corruption to which they have been a party in the realm of Denmark.

There is also a deeply integrated questioning of *the immortality of the soul,* of the question of salvation and damnation throughout the tragedy. On earth you may be forgiven: Laertes and Hamlet forgive one another. Old Hamlet claims that he could have obtained forgiveness, had he not died unprepared. … // 58 … And it is the very fact that Claudius is trying to obtain forgiveness and might thus save his soul which forces Hamlet to abstain from killing him in the prayer-scene, for Claudius must be killed in ”some act that has no act of salvation in it.”

From now on it is a set of external circumstances that make it impossible for Hamlet to kill Claudius: first because if he murders the King in prayer he will actually reward him; and then because Hamlet is not free to act as he is sent to England under vigilant observation. On the other hand, Hamlet is now assured that his soul will not be damned. Eventually, when he catches the king in a foul act, that of administering poison, Hamlet can send him off to ”the other place.”

The memorial tablet for
Shakespeare in the wall

IV

Another theme is that man *is not a free agent:* he may have choices, certainly, but many external pressures exert their influence. Hamlet’s inability to act entirely on his own is voiced most emphatically by Laertes and Polonius in their talks with Ophelia. (1.3, 17, 28). It is also in evidence elsewhere throughout the play. On meeting the Ghost, Hamlet explains that he must follow it ”My fate cries out. ..” (1.4.81). However, he accepts the Ghost’s commands including the one that he must not taint his mind. He then realises his plight: that he was indeed hemmed in by external forces, by being born his father’s son. With the words, ”The time is out of joint. O cursed spite/That ever I was born to set it right” (1.5.19b-97), Hamlet accepts the role of justice personified. At the same time he must tackle personal problems: getting Ophelia out of the way; ensuring his own soul’s salvation by getting proof beyond any doubt that the Ghost is honest; catching Claudius in a situation where there is no

reprieve; and finally, making sure that his fame, i.e., his reputation, is saved for the following generation, by having Horatio remain behind:”Thou livest. Report me and my cause aright/To the unsatisfied.” (5.2.344-45). Only one character stands out as a potentially free agent: Horatio. But in the end, he, too accepts lasting bonds in passing on the story of Hamlet.

In different ways all the others are hemmed in, impeded in their movements and actions by external obstacles of birth, of duty, of love, of accident. Surrounding Claudius there is a cluster of people bound by allegiance and duty to the king. The philosophy of their existence is brought out, albeit not directly, in the Hecuba-scene; it is then spelled out in detail by Rosencrantz (3.3) where he points out that to the king is ”mortised and adjoined” ”ten thousand lesser things” which are all ruined with it. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the best exponents of this philosophy and suffer their deaths in accordance with this unflinching belief in duty towards the King. …// 59 … So does Polonius. Yet he has the added dimension of also being willing to forfeit his life, provided it is, indeed, he who is mistaken about the cause of Hamlet’s madness.

Polonius is, furthermore, motivated by love for his children. As was the case with Hamlet, it is filial love that brings Laertes back to Denmark from Paris. Love, however, is found in combination with duty in the soldiers whose love for Hamlet makes them inform him of the Ghost’s appearance. In the Ghost’s demands, ”love” is uppermost, whereas Claudius is the only character to claim that it is both a duty to love and a duty to forget, in a passage that I quoted above.

The most pitiful victim of love is Ophelia. Warned by her father and brother, it seems as if she is rejected by Hamlet. It is her ignorance, her innocence of everything around her, of the split between reality and sham, which brings about her death. In Ophelia, love, both at the family level and in her personal affairs, is pure, virtuous, innocent and free in relation to external causes. She obeys her father, and alienates Hamlet. The perverted form of her love is the lust embodied in Claudius and Gertrude, that is love motivated by personal (and in Hamlet’s opinion) impermissible sexuality in an elderly woman; by Claudius’ active wish to possess her; and, finally, in the reality of an unnatural murder behind (of which Gertrude may be unaware).

Another theme is that between *appearance and truth.* It is played out most forcefully in Hamlet’s attempts to find the truth, which finally stands victorious by his insistence that Horatio must tell posterity the truth which Hamlet brought out. This theme is all-pervading: is the Ghost truthful? Horatio did not believe so before he saw it. Does Hamlet only *appear* to love Ophelia in order to bed her? The King ostensibly sent Hamlet to England to get him away from court, but in truth to kill him. The theme appears distinctly in the discussion of acting i.e. the accepted counterpart of reality; as mentioned, the actor cried real tears over a phantom truth and reality. It is the phantom truth and reality of a play that reveal the truth of Claudius’s guilt. And it combines with the theme of the reality of death when Hamlet accepts the reality of the termination of life by physically confronting Yorick’s skull.

The question of honesty is brought out again and again. Hamlet speaks of honesty to Polonius and tests him. He accepts the Ghost’s honesty, but is later to question it, and then again to accept it. He accepts Horatio as honest. He does not accept Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as honest, because his questioning of them (which is initially similar to his questioning of Horatio), brings about an

interrogation instead of commiseration. …// 60 … They are sure that Hamlet's madness is prompted by ambition: "Why, then your ambition makes [Denmark a prison]," to paraphrase Rosencrantz's words. This hypothesis has the ring of truth since Hamlet does complain that Claudius "popped in between the election and my hopes." It is a hypothesis they hold on to. It sits well with Claudius who himself murdered his brother out of ambition. But as it is fundamentally false, unreal sham, ambition adds a new dimension to our understanding of a number of actions: Hamlet spells it out to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, so that, understandably enough, the court is aghast in the play-scene: Hamlet gives us the cast of characters: Gonzago, a Duke; Baptista, his wife; the murderer: Lucianus, nephew to the King (3.2.232-39). In effect the court is justified in believing that Hamlet wants to kill Claudius, the King, out of ambition: it is logical that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern embrace the King's plan of having Hamlet sent to England. But it was a sham, a device to delude some people, and to bring out the truth at another level, the stricken conscience of the King.

The tragedy of *Hamlet* tenders a number of themes that are deep concerns of human beings: feelings about death, free will, justice, duty, and love. As both specialists and general readers will know, the above discussion falls far short of covering all the themes in Shakespeare' play. However, this is not the main thrust of my argument. What I suggest is that the filters imposed on the play of *Hamlet,* in the course of editing, performance, viewing, and reading, are all part of the originality, of the appeal, of *Hamlet:* a literary and dramatic artefact, the creation of the artistic genius of William Shakespeare in the period 1588-1616.

The guns of Kronborg saluting (they are c. 250 years old)

V

At the textual level, there is, as far as I can see, only one place where Shakespeare hinted that one of either two scenes might be omitted: It seems as if a choice is offered between the closet scene and the scene in which Hamlet tells Claudius to his face that he must ultimately die, namely, 3.4.202-219 and 4.3.40-41 My reason for positing this is simply that these two scenes contain the same crucial information for the plot, namely, that Hamlet must go to England: In 3.4.202-219 Hamlet seems to be aware of his imminent departure ("I must to England, you know that"), but the second time it appears to catch him by surprise: "For England?"

It will be appreciated that if this assumption is correct, Shakespeare's immediate collaborators may also have decided on leaving out either the dumbshow or the Gonzago-play, with the consequent changes in the potential interpretations in performance: for example, if the dumbshow is left out,

Claudius' inattention during this first episode presents no problem: …// 61 … Conversely, if the Gonzago-play is cut out, Gertrude's betrayal is not emphasized (since the player Queen's betrayal of her dead husband would not be shown).

At the plot level, however, there is virtually no single scene which cannot be omitted. As we see so splendidly demonstrated, in almost every stage performance the omission of different parts of the full-length play provides new insights, new experiences for the audience. Themes and hence potentials in our interpretation of the play are changed by omission. Suppressions alter the interplay of the words, and hence the potential in our interpretations (in subtle and in less subtle ways) of the artefact of *Hamlet.* For example if 1.1. is cut we still hear about the Ghost in 1.2.189 onwards. Yet without this scene, there is no information that the country is preparing for war; we do not hear that something is amiss; we are not told about the general admiration which Old Hamlet enjoyed; Fortinbras is not introduced as somebody who has a claim, albeit an obscure one, to the lands conquered by the King of Denmark: in short, there is no unrest in Denmark. Furthermore there is no chance of presenting the idea that the justice in the play may be sanctioned by divine powers. However, if the early scene on the rampart is cut, we are presented at the outset with a newly crowned statesman King, with a strong nation and with a sulky prince who has not yet come to terms with the fact that his father has died that death we must all die. In this version, based on the *Hamlet* artefact, there is no civil unrest in Denmark, up to the time when Laertes and his followers rush into the court.

If 1.2 is cut, and the action starts with 1.1 followed by 1.3, we are confronted with political unrest, Claudius is heard of only indirectly, and he appears as a scoundrel, a usurper from the outset; Hamlet is the offended party. In this version of the play, however, we meet a Laertes who stresses his brotherly love for Ophelia and a caring Polonius full of paternal love. The love theme becomes prominent in the play.

If the Fortinbras episodes are left out, we do not meet with Hamlet's psychological counterpart of his own rank. We also lose the turning point in Hamlet's acceptance of his task, that he must execute justice ("O, from this time forth/My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth," 4.4.65-66). And at the end of the play, we lose the added dimension that the Danish throne is cleansed and that the untainted new line of Fortinbras will reestablish national order and decency. At the same time we also lose the interpretation that would condemn Hamlet for handing over the Danish throne to a foreign conqueror.

Excisions of this type can (and do) change themes and emphasis: by leaving out, for instance, Polonius' leave taking of his son and his subsequent machinations to check on him, we lose aspects of paternal love; by cutting out Rosencrantz's deliberations we lose sight of dutiful love for a king; and by any suppression of scenes with the fair Ophelia, the love between man and woman. …// 62 …

On the other hand, it also seems as if some excisions are open to choice: if the Hecuba-play and the graveyard scene are left out, Hamlet is, beyond a doubt a very young man. I will not deny that directors and actors use more delicate excisions than those I just mentioned in their treatments of the artefact of *Hamlet.* It is true that they often go to considerable trouble to decide which speeches, sub-scenes, and characters they should leave out. This is legitimate, for Shakespeare must have been aware-at some level-that this must be done when the artefact is performed. Yet excisions of speeches will

once more change the audiences' perception of characters, of themes, of strands of imagery: the dialectics of, for instance, the botanical strand can be weakened by excisions.

Thus a performance forces those responsible to make a number of decisions. Some of these are 'open' in relation to the text of the artefact: one example will have to suffice. If it is decided that the botanical strand should be strengthened, flowers and plants may form part of the set; such a performance will rely on the lines and visual signals. One overall choice which will profoundly affect the interpretation of the play is climatic: should the play take place in winter time or in summer time?

VI

It is my contention that the imposition of filters on the artefact of *Hamlet* is part of the text created. By writing something which was too long to be played according to contemporary standards, Shakespeare imposed filters on any experience, on any interpretation, of his artefact. There is no definitive interpretation, there is no definitive text of the artefact: the creator created not a play, but an artefact in which filters abound, even at the textual level-a fact amply borne out by the numerous editorial disagreements. The question of the chronology of *Hamlet* is, in one sense at least, a wild goose chase. The crux is simply that to Shakespeare himself there were several *Hamlets* which coexisted as an ongoing and continuous process of revision: QI, Q2 and Fl. No final and complete *Hamlet* ever existed, not even in Shakespeare's mind.

To say this is not to belittle the endeavour to establish critical editions of *Hamlet.* Theories about the genesis of the three different contemporary texts of *Hamlet* serve to show part of the creative work behind the texts, for there is, undeniably, a strong directive mind behind the creation of the *Hamlet* artefact; and editorial work is also a prerequisite for the experience of *Hamlet.* …// 63 … Yet the fact remains that as receptors of the artefact, as editors, critics, as directors and actors, as audience or readers, the artefact forces us to take a stand on a number of points on which we simply cannot reach an agreement, even at the textual level.

The filters of *Hamlet* are a constituent, integral part of the play. They have always been part of the Shakespearean artefact in productions and in readings, in collective and personal perceptions of the play, and even in its very creation. The artefact fulfills deep human needs to say something essential about Man's situation; it is pervaded by our awareness that we must die, by an awareness of the obstacles to free will, by our feeling that justice should be done here and hereafter, and by the exploration of duty and love. These issues are so tightly interwoven in the artefact of *Hamlet* that some of them will survive any imposition of filters in the text, and therefore the play rightfully occupies a central place in our, shared cultural heritage.

Robert Breen as Hamlet in the Kronborg Courtyard (1949)