

HAMLET

religious outlooks. New explorations – the discovery of America and increased knowledge of the coastal regions of Africa – widened intellectual horizons, as did the researches of such scientists and astronomers as Galileo, Copernicus and Tycho Brahe. Long-accepted ideas about the nature of mankind and the universe were thus being called into question, and the literature of the period closely reflects contemporary beliefs and uncertainties.

The plot of *Hamlet*

Act I

The ghost of King Hamlet of Denmark, who has recently died, has been seen on the battlements of the castle of Elsinore on two occasions. Horatio, who is a friend of the dead King's son, also called Hamlet, sees it when he joins two officers of the guard. He decides to tell young Hamlet about its appearance. Denmark is threatened by young Fortinbras, the son of the dead King of Norway, who had been defeated and killed by old Hamlet. War seems likely. King Hamlet has been succeeded by his brother Claudius, who has married his widow, Gertrude. Claudius sends emissaries to Norway, and in a brief interview, allows Laertes, the son of his chief councillor Polonius, to return to France. His attention then turns to Prince Hamlet, now his stepson, whom he criticises for still grieving over his father's death. He asks Hamlet not to return to the University of Wittenberg where he has been a student. Hamlet wishes to return, but tells his mother he will obey her when she also asks him not to go. In his first soliloquy, after the others have left the stage, he reveals his depression and his anger at his mother's over-hasty remarriage. Horatio comes in and tells him about the ghost, and Hamlet decides to join the watch.

Laertes, about to set out for France, warns his sister Ophelia against Hamlet's professed love for her. Polonius, after dispensing advice to Laertes, also warns her against the prince. The same night, Hamlet sees the ghost on the battlements. It beckons to him, and he leaves his companions and follows it. It tells him that it is indeed his father's, the dead King's, spirit, and that Claudius had poisoned him, having already won to his lust 'The will of my most seeming-virtuous Queen'. He urges Hamlet to remember the love

INTRODUCTION

he bore his father and to seek revenge for these wrongs. Hamlet swears Horatio and his companions to secrecy, and further, not to betray him if he adopts 'an antic disposition'.

Act II

The first scenes of the second act are centred on Polonius and his family. Polonius commissions his servant Reynaldo to spy on his son Laertes in Paris. Ophelia tells him that Hamlet has visited her in a distraught state, behaving with a strange and nervous intensity, which Polonius assumes to be a sign of 'the very ecstasy' of his love for her. He decides to tell the King and Queen about Hamlet's behaviour. When he goes to see them, they have just finished talking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two friends of Hamlet, whom the King and Queen have summoned to Denmark, hoping that their arrival will relieve Hamlet's depression. Polonius tells the King and Queen that he knows the cause of Hamlet's depression, but first he ushers in two lords who have news from the King of Norway, who has quelled the warlike intentions of his nephew, Fortinbras, towards Denmark.

Polonius then reads from a letter that Ophelia has received from Hamlet which is written in the tone of romantic love. The King is not convinced by this, so Polonius suggests that he and the King observe Hamlet's behaviour towards Ophelia by arranging for her to meet him during his daily walk. Hamlet appears and when Polonius tries to speak to him, Hamlet mocks him with strange questions. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter and talk to Hamlet. After he has questioned them, they admit that they are visiting on the instructions of the King and Queen, not paying him a social call. They tell him that they encountered a troupe of actors on their way and invited them to come to the court, as they were a group that Hamlet admired. The actors arrive, and Hamlet greets them cordially. He asks one of them to recite a speech about the murder of King Priam of Troy by Pyrrhus. He asks the actors to stage a play the following night and incorporate a speech which he will compose himself. Left alone, he reflects on the player reciting the Pyrrhus speech, who wept with the emotion of the words. He contrasts this with his own failure to act on the ghost's words. The speech he will write will portray the murder of his father, and by

INTRODUCTION

his uncle's reactions to the spectacle, he will gauge whether or not the ghost was telling the truth.

Act III

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern tell the King and Queen about the actors, and the Queen sees this as a hopeful sign that Hamlet is coming to his senses. Polonius tells the King and Queen that Hamlet would like them to see the play. The Queen leaves and the King and Polonius hide in preparation for Hamlet's 'secret' meeting with Ophelia. Hamlet is very rude to Ophelia, again behaving as if he were mad. The King sees this as proof that he is clearly not in love, and resolves to send him away to England. Polonius remains convinced that the origins of Hamlet's misery are in rejected love, and he persuades the King to encourage an interview between the Queen and Hamlet, which Polonius will listen to in secret.

Hamlet organises the actors, and asks Horatio to pay particular attention to the King's reaction to the play. The dumb-show – a brief presentation of the play about to be acted – comes in and acts out the murder of a King by a poisoner, who then woos the Queen. The Player King and Queen act out the original scene, with Lucianus, the King's nephew, acting as the murderer and pouring poison into the King's ear. At this, the King rises; Polonius stops the play, and the King and his entourage leave Hamlet and Horatio alone. Horatio confirms that the King reacted with shocked recognition to the play, corroborating the ghost's story. Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Polonius come to Hamlet and inform him that the Queen wishes to see him in her closet.

In the next scene, the King instructs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to accompany Hamlet to England. Polonius tells the King that Hamlet is going to see his mother. Left alone, the King in a soliloquy meditates on his crime and accepts his guilt. He kneels to pray as Hamlet enters. Hamlet wonders about killing him, but decides not to because killing him as he is praying might send him to heaven. He leaves the King alone and goes to see the Queen. She is frightened by his wild and aggressive words and cries out in fear, prompting a cry from the hidden Polonius. Hamlet thrusts his sword through the arras concealing Polonius and kills him. Hamlet

HAMLET

reveals the corpse and is surprised to see Polonius, regretting that it is not the King. He tells his mother to stop weeping for Polonius and shows her two pictures – one of his dead father and one of Claudius. He tells her of Claudius's murder of her first husband, and urges her to chastity and repentance. The ghost appears to Hamlet alone, warning him to speak calmly to his mother. The Queen, unable to see the ghost, thinks Hamlet is mad. He tells her that he is only pretending to be mad. He drags Polonius's body away, after telling the Queen that he knows that he will be sent to England.

Act IV

The Queen tells the King that Hamlet has killed Polonius and that he is mad. Hamlet is brought before the King who says that because of what has happened, he must go to England immediately with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In a soliloquy, the King reveals that he has written letters to be delivered to the King of England that instruct him to kill Hamlet. On the way to the port to board the ship for England, Hamlet's party meet the army of Fortinbras, travelling through Denmark to mount an attack on Poland. In a soliloquy, Hamlet comments on Fortinbras's willingness to sacrifice many men for a trivial cause, while he, with every justification for taking swift action, has done nothing.

The Queen, with Horatio, finds Ophelia singing strange songs, clearly mad. Laertes appears in a rage. The King tells him that his father is dead, but before he can go any further Ophelia comes in again singing her songs. Horatio receives a letter from Hamlet, telling him that his ship bound for England has been intercepted by pirates. The letter says that he has much to tell Horatio and that the sailors who brought the letter will take him to Hamlet. He also encloses letters for the King which Horatio gives to a messenger to deliver. The King and Laertes discuss the murder of Polonius. The King explains that he has not brought Hamlet to justice because of the Queen's love for him and the high regard in which he is held by the common people. The messenger brings the King Hamlet's letter, in which he says that he will visit the King the next day to explain his return. The King asks Laertes if he will allow him to decide on how to deal with Hamlet. He needs a scheme

INTRODUCTION

that will make Hamlet's death look like an accident. He suggests to Laertes that he could participate in a fencing match with Hamlet. Laertes is an expert fencer and would win the contest, but by anointing his sword with poison, he could inflict a fatal blow on Hamlet. The King suggests a second precaution. He will offer Hamlet a drink at the end of the first bout, and he will poison the drinking cup. The Queen enters and tells them that Ophelia is dead, drowned in a pond.

Act V

Two gravediggers in a churchyard are talking about the body they will have to bury. From their conversation, it is clear that it is Ophelia who is destined for the soil. Hamlet and Horatio join the first gravedigger in conversation as he throws skulls up from the earth, and they joke about the nature of death. The King, the Queen, Laertes and the funeral procession appear with Ophelia's coffin. There is to be little religious ceremony as, according to the laws of the Church, she cannot be buried in hallowed ground because of her suicide. Hamlet watches from a distance and realises that it is Ophelia in the coffin. Laertes, grief-stricken, leaps into the grave. Hamlet, coming forward, does likewise. They grapple and Hamlet declares that he loved Ophelia. They are both restrained and Hamlet is led away.

Back at Elsinore, Hamlet tells Horatio about his adventures. On the ship, shortly after leaving port, Hamlet found the letter that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern had been given by Claudius for the English King instructing him to execute Hamlet. He exchanged the letter for one he wrote himself asking for the bearers of the letter (i.e. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) to be executed. Osric, a courtier, comes to tell Hamlet that the King has proposed the fencing contest between him and Laertes and wishes to know if Hamlet accepts the challenge. Hamlet accepts and, on the arrival of the court, the fencing begins. The King offers the poisoned cup to Hamlet, but he declines to take it. The Queen takes it instead and drinks. Laertes wounds Hamlet with the poisoned sword. In scuffling they change swords and Hamlet wounds Laertes. As she dies, the Queen calls out that the cup is poisoned, and Laertes, as he dies, tells Hamlet that the sword has been poisoned and that the

HAMLET

King is to blame. Hamlet then stabs the King. Horatio, seeing that Hamlet has been fatally wounded, wants to drink from the poisoned cup, but Hamlet dissuades him. The army of Fortinbras is heard arriving in the distance, and Hamlet in his death throes gives Fortinbras his blessing for the succession to the Danish throne. Fortinbras comes in with attendants, and Horatio tells him of Hamlet's dying wish. Fortinbras instructs four captains to bear Hamlet's body from the stage as befits a brave soldier.

The characters

Hamlet

Hamlet is the central character in the play. It is his dilemma on which all the action of the play focuses. We do not see him before his father's death, so our information about his personality before the tragedy comes only from the recollections of others. From what we hear, it is clear that he was a popular and well-liked youth: handsome, intelligent and courageous. After his fateful interview with Ophelia in Act III, Scene 1, she laments the loss of his fine faculties:

Th'expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
Th'observed of all observers, quite, quite down!

In the first meeting between himself and his uncle, the new King, he has lost all of his mirth: he is pale, depressed and listless. Hamlet has been affected deeply by his father's death, and by his mother's 'o'er-hasty' remarriage two months after it. When the ghost tells him that his death was murder, and tells him to seek revenge for it, Hamlet is thrown into confusion. A severe strain is put on his emotions in which the complexities of his character emerge.

From this point on his behaviour to the other characters in the play is erratic. Nowhere is this more true than in his scenes with Ophelia, and her reports of his visits to her. From these reports it appears that he is in love with her, but in the 'nunnery' scene (Act III, Scene 1) he shows cruelty and contempt towards her. In contrast to this, his words to her before the performance of the play

INTRODUCTION

(Act III, Scene 2) are affectionate and flirtatious. When he sees the funeral procession and realises that she is dead, his passionate reaction shows that he did indeed love her. His behaviour towards Ophelia has been affected by his negative opinion of all women emerging from his bitterness at his mother's actions. His anguish at her death shows that he regrets his cruelty which has made her a victim of the evil caused by his father's murder.

Some explanation of his erratic behaviour can be given by his wish to appear mad. It is significant that when he makes Horatio and Marcellus swear not to tell anyone about his meeting with the ghost, he also makes them swear not to say anything if they notice him behaving strangely. He hopes to use the feigned madness to allow him time to confirm that the ghost is indeed telling the truth and that Claudius is guilty of the murder. He uses his good judgment of character to manipulate the more gullible characters in the play into believing he is mad. He is sarcastic to Polonius and mistrustful of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He succeeds in convincing Claudius of his madness after the 'nunnery' scene, but despite his confirmation of Claudius's guilt after the play scene, he is still unable to carry out the ghost's demand for revenge.

Hamlet's dilemma is more about inaction than it is about indecision. In his soliloquies, particularly after the confirmation of Claudius's guilt in Act II, Scene 2, he shows that he is in no doubt about how he should act. His problem is taking the opportunity to act. He continually rebukes himself for his failure to act – after the Player's speech in Act II, Scene 2, in the 'To be or not to be' speech of Act III, Scene 1, after his discussion with the Norwegian captain in Act IV, Scene 4. His inaction comes about because of an inability to balance the extremes of his nature – the reasoned argument of his soliloquies and his sudden, unexpected outbursts of violent passion. At the end of the play, it is significant that Fortinbras orders a soldier's burial for him: after much deliberation and self-examination, Hamlet has finally become a man of action.

Claudius

The character of Claudius is seen through Hamlet's eyes in most of the play, and because of Hamlet's justified hatred of him, his view of his uncle is not objective. He is clearly an evil man, motivated by

HAMLET

avarice and ambition, who is willing to kill his brother for what he wants. He is also very cunning in his scheming plans to kill Hamlet. He manipulates other characters such as Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Laertes to carry out his plans, making sure that he is not involved directly. However, it would be wrong to suggest that he has no redeeming qualities. He has a genuine fondness for Gertrude, shown when he tells Laertes that his concern for the Queen's reaction stopped him from bringing Hamlet to justice for the murder of Polonius (Act IV, Scene 7). He shows his humanity in his sympathetic reaction to Ophelia's madness in Act IV, Scene 5. He shows remorse for his crime when he kneels to pray in Act III, Scene 3. This depth of character does not lead us to feel sympathy for him, as at heart he is cowardly and evil, and is guilty of the most appalling crimes.

Gertrude

Gertrude is a weak woman who allows herself to become the unwitting accomplice of evil. She remarries incestuously, according to the teaching of the Church, within two months of her first husband's death. She is devoted to her son as Claudius realises (Act IV, Scene 7), but she does not seem to consider the possibility that his 'madness' could have been caused by his father's death and her own 'o'er-hasty' remarriage. Only later in her reaction to Hamlet's tirade against Claudius does she reveal any understanding of the implications of her actions:

O Hamlet, speak no more.

Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grainèd spots
As will not leave their tinct.

(Act III, Scene 4)

She shows her capability for love and affection in her moving description of Ophelia's death (Act IV, Scene 7). By not mentioning that the death was suicide, she shows sympathy for Laertes's feelings. His passionate action at the graveside (Act V, Scene 1) shows just how considerate she was in this case. Unfortunately, her finer qualities are overwhelmed by her selfishness and her tendency to be easily led.

HAMLET

Ophelia

Ophelia is a gentle, loving and intelligent girl. She is also very beautiful, a quality commented on by several of the characters. She appears to be innocent, but she is also quite able to trade witty remarks with her father and brother in Act I, Scene 3, and is even able to understand Hamlet's bawdy innuendoes in Act III, Scene 2. Her willingness to reject Hamlet's love in Act I, Scene 4 should not be seen as evidence of her lack of love for him, rather as testimony to her loyalty and obedience to her father. Her distressed reaction to Hamlet's cruelty in the 'nunnery' scene (Act III, Scene 1) shows that she has strong feelings for him. Her mind gives way under the combined strain of Hamlet's rejection and her father's murder. In her haunting songs, she loses her inhibitions, singing of sexual love with the poignancy of an innocent and hopeless yearning.

Polonius

Hamlet regards Polonius as an old fool, and takes delight in playing sarcastic games with him to show him up in front of the other characters. Although he is a man past his prime, we see from his conversations with Claudius that he remains a valued courtier and that his counsel still has influence over the King. In his first exchange with his son and daughter (Act I, Scene 3) he shows himself still capable of giving sound advice, in particular with regard to Laertes. His problem is that he is too eager to interfere in other people's affairs. He is an eavesdropper, and it is because of this that he meets his death.

Laertes

Laertes acts as something of a contrast to Hamlet in the early scenes of the play. He is shown to have an appetite for life and a concern for his family, as witnessed by his sound advice to Ophelia about Hamlet's affection for her (Act I, Scene 3). When he hears about his father's murder, he has no hesitation in returning to Denmark from France to seek revenge. His reaction is not tinged with emotional sadness until he witnesses his sister's illness and death. In his collaboration with Claudius in the plot to kill Hamlet, he shows that he can be easily manipulated. He redeems himself at

INTRODUCTION

the end by admitting that this treachery was against his nature, and alerting Hamlet to Claudius's plan.

Horatio

Horatio is the only person that Hamlet can trust throughout the play. In contrast to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he supports his prince and friend whatever the consequences, and is even eager to die with him at the end of the play. He accepts the ghost as real and is clear that his duty is to tell Hamlet about it. Hamlet is fully aware of the value of his friend, who is the only person he will trust with the details of his scheme to unmask Claudius. As he reveals before the play:

For thou hast been
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,
A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
Has ta'en with equal thanks.

(Act III, Scene 2)

It is fitting that Hamlet succeeds in dissuading his friend from killing himself. At the end he remains a spokesman for honest and good people, offering the hope of a new start for Denmark.

Fortinbras

There are several parallels between Hamlet and Fortinbras, as Fortinbras has also lost his father, and his uncle possesses the throne. He is an ambitious man, and is keen to win back the land his father lost when he was defeated and killed by Hamlet's father. When he is instructed not to do so by his uncle, he embarks on his pointless campaign against Poland to win land 'That hath in it no profit but the name' (Act IV, Scene 4). He shows himself to be a man of honour and compassion at the end of the play, when he decides to give Hamlet a soldier's burial.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

These university friends of Hamlet prove themselves to be in complete contrast to Horatio. They are quite willing to serve Claudius at the expense of their friend, and it does not take Hamlet long to begin to distrust them. When he sends them to their deaths

in England he feels no remorse as 'They are not near my conscience' (Act V, Scene 2). They are punished for becoming the puppets of Claudius, although they are not necessarily evil men and there is no specific evidence that they knew they were escorting Hamlet to his death in England.

Language

The play exhibits a broad range of linguistic forms: from subtle and beautiful poetry, to prose filled with puns and other comic word-play. Hamlet uses different forms, dependent on the speaker he is addressing. In his great soliloquies he uses verse, as he does when he talks to his friend Horatio. In contrast, he uses prose when he talks to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and in his sarcastic conversations with Polonius.

The imagery and invention of the language in the play have led to many of the greatest constructions entering into the common stock of English expression. Expressions such as 'the mind's eye', 'to the manner born', 'caviare to the general', 'hoist with his own petard' and 'a dog will have his day', for instance, have all become well-known common phrases. The play employs many similes, metaphors and the puns which were obviously very popular in Shakespeare's day (as, for example, in the various meanings of the word 'lie' in the gravedigger scene, Act V, Scene 1). Some of the vocabulary employed will seem not only unfamiliar, but difficult to a modern reader. One of the best ways of dealing with the text is to read it aloud: the general meaning becomes clearer and the detailed meaning can be understood more readily with the aid of the notes and glossary. There are, of course, words which are no longer used, which present some difficulty, as well as some passages of which the meanings are still obscure. But despite these problems the flow of the play's action remains dominant; the most difficult movements of thought in, say, Hamlet's soliloquies seem natural when they are spoken aloud: they convey his grappling with his conscience, his shifting of ideas, the complex stream of his consciousness. All in all, the play is a masterly presentation of the clash and contrast in characters and in the actions they take.

The achievement

Hamlet is one of Shakespeare's greatest plays. It is also one of the most popular of his great tragedies. Much of this is attributable to the fascination of the characters in the play, and especially the central character of Hamlet himself. The characters lend themselves to many emphases and interpretations, and there are a number of important questions that are left unanswered. Is Hamlet really mad or merely pretending? Why does he behave in such a contradictory way towards Ophelia? Why does he not act on the ghost's instruction, even after Claudius's reaction to the play? Is Claudius very evil, or is his repentance for his crime genuine? Whom does Gertrude love more – her son or her second husband? Was it in keeping with Laertes's nature to turn from honesty to treachery? These questions continue to fascinate new generations of readers of the play and audiences in the theatre.

None of the characters is entirely straightforward – they all react in different ways to different situations. This, combined with the fast-moving action of the play, makes it both intellectually stimulating and exciting. The range of reactions exhibited by the characters is realistic of human nature. Within the play's swift movement, there are variations of tempo. Hamlet seems at times to rush into unpremeditated action in a highly emotional way, whereas at other times he restrains himself when he might well have acted. This apparent vacillation is in fact a mark of his intellectual nature. He is a complex personality, as his speeches often indicate, and of course the situation he faces is both unusual and emotionally charged.

The source of *Hamlet*

The first literary treatment of the story of Hamlet is that of a Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, who in the twelfth century wrote *Historiae Danicae*, an account in Latin of his country's past. In the third and fourth books of this Danish History, which was printed in 1514, he included the story of Amleth. In this, Horwendil, Amleth's father, is treacherously murdered by his brother Fengo, joint ruler with him of Jutland. Fengo marries his brother's widow Gerutha, and Amleth protects himself by pretend-

HAMLET

ing to be mad. The King, suspicious of him, arranges for a beautiful girl to spy on him. A court adviser also spies on him, whom Amleth kills when the spy is concealed in his mother's chamber. He is sent with two companions to England, where, by changing the letters he carries to the King (which direct the King to put him to death) he contrives that his two false companions will be killed in his place. He marries the King of England's daughter and returns to Denmark a year later, on the day his funeral rites are being celebrated, and, helped by his now repentant mother, kills Fengo after he has set fire to the palace, with the courtiers, whom he has made drunk, trapped inside it. He is elected ruler of Jutland and some years later dies in battle. The story may be based on historical legend; it seems to have taken place in the tenth century.

A French author, François de Belleforest, retold the story in his *Histoires Tragiques* (1559–82) – this version of the Amleth story was translated into English in 1608 as *The Hystorie of Hamblet*. François de Belleforest complicates the characters' relationships, for the widow of the murdered King turns out to be an adulteress, Hamblet a bigamist, and Hamblet's Scottish wife marries Wiglerus, another uncle of Hamblet, having conspired with him before and during the battle in which Hamblet is killed by him. The author supplies moralising comment and his version is much longer than that of Saxo Grammaticus.

We do not know whether Shakespeare knew the Hamlet story from reading Saxo or de Belleforest. His main source was probably a lost Elizabethan play – called the *Ur-hamlet* – which was probably based on de Belleforest and may well have been written by Thomas Kyd (1558–94), the author of the very successful revenge play *The Spanish Tragedy* (c.1589). Whatever its authorship, the *Ur-hamlet* was written by 1589 and was performed in the 1590s. There is a reference to it made by Thomas Lodge (1557–1625) in 1596 which shows it contained a ghost, for Lodge described the ghost as crying so miserably in the theatre 'like an oyster-wife, Hamlet, revenge'. Revenge plays were inspired by the work of Lucius Seneca (c.4BC–AD65), a Roman playwright, philosopher and statesman, who took incidents from Greek mythology for his nine tragedies. His treatment was not, like that of the Greeks, restrained. He included horror, very bloody action and highflown

INTRODUCTION

speeches, and he introduced the ghost, a restless spirit urging the avenger to take action and thus achieve vengeance against the character who had caused suffering. The Elizabethans, finding much material to imitate in Greek and Latin literature, particularly seized upon the revenge tragedy, and the influence of Seneca was strong. It may in some cases have come to the Elizabethans through Latin poetry, particularly the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid (43BC–AD17) which dealt with themes from myth and legend. There are some links between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and a pamphlet by Thomas Nashe (1567–1601), *Pierce Penniless His Supplication to the Devil* (1592), the play echoing some phrases of this pamphlet, which describes aspects of the Danish court.

A note on the text

Shakespeare's play was first printed in a quarto edition in 1603; it is now known as the First Quarto (Q1). This edition is much shorter than subsequent versions, and it seems to have been 'pirated', that is, taken down at a stage performance, without Shakespeare's knowledge or permission. The copyist who prepared the text could have used some form of shorthand and could have seen some of the sheets on which individual actors' parts were written or have had access to the prompt-box or prompt-books used in the theatre. Q1 was registered in 1602 at the Stationers' Company which maintained, for the purpose of ensuring copyright, a register of published books. The play was probably written between 1598 and 1602.

A new version, a Second Quarto (Q2), was published in 1604, probably with the approval of Shakespeare: its title page describes it as enlarged to 'almost as much again as it was, according to the true and perfect copy' and indeed it is nearly twice as long as the Q1 edition of the play. This edition was, then, taken from a written version of the play. Three other editions of *Hamlet* were published during Shakespeare's life but the differences between Q2 and subsequent quartos are so slight that they seem to have been reprintings of Q2. After Shakespeare's death in 1616 there appeared the collection of his plays known as the First Folio (F1),

HAMLET

which was published in 1623, the first complete collection. F1 is, after Q2, our best source. The text in it was probably closer to an acting version of the play than the written source for Q2. Most modern editions tend to be based on a conflation of Q2 and F1. This edition largely follows Q2 with some readings taken from F1 and a few readings suggested by earlier editors. The spelling has largely been modernised and the punctuation altered to modern usage. Some alterations have been made to stage directions to clarify the action and some further directions added for the same reason and the spellings of names have been normalised.

Suggestions for further reading

Background works

Shakespeare

BAYLEY, P. C.: *An A.B.C. of Shakespeare. His Plays, Theatre, Life and Times* (1985).

HALLIDAY, F. E.: *A Shakespeare Companion 1564–1964* (1964).

SCHOENBAUM, S.: *William Shakespeare: a Compact Documentary Life* (1977).

The stage

CHAMBERS, E. K.: *The Elizabethan Stage* (4 vols. 1923; 1945).

GRANVILLE-BARKER, HARLEY: *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (I, 1946; II, 1957).

KNIGHT, G. WILSON: *Shakespearean Production* (1964).

NAYLOR, A. M.: *Shakespeare's Stage* (1958).

Social life in Shakespeare's time

KNIGHTS, L. C.: *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (1937).

TILLYARD, E. M. W.: *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943).

WILSON, JOHN DOVER: *Life in Shakespeare's England* (1913).

Hamlet

The text

Facsimile editions of the First Quarto (1603) and the Second Quarto (1604) were published by the Shakespeare Association in 1951 and 1940 respectively. The First Folio was published in 1616.