

ARDEN EDITION

1. “The long reign of Elizabeth was drawing towards its end and there was much anxiety and unease about the future. [...] Recent interpretations have accounted for the apparent excessive focus on Gertrude by identifying her with Elizabeth I and reading the play as a kind of meditation on the ageing and passing of the Virgin Queen.” (p. 38)
2. “The king has no reason to believe that Hamlet knows anything, so his antic disposition is unnecessary, except in so far as it reveals something about Hamlet’s inner state of mind.” (p. 68)
3. “Ham. has no straightforward revenge strategy, and the deaths of the King, Gertrude and Laertes come about almost by accident. But at an earlier stage he has an elaborate stratagem.” (p. 69)
4. “It is surely arguable that part of the fascination of this play is precisely its refusal to give us all the answers and its resistance to yield to any ‘theory’. It is remarkable how much information is withheld from the characters themselves, let alone the audience or reader.” (p. 135)

OUP EDITION, G. R. HIBBARD, 1987

5. “*Ham.* belongs to that period in the history of England—and of Europe—when the assurances of the Elizabethan world, which had so much in common with the mediaeval world, were being invaded and eroded by the ‘new doubt’, as D. G. James calls it, which is so characteristic of the modern world.”
6. “The Prince himself, a student of the University of Wittenberg, [...] is in many ways the embodiment of the Renaissance ideal of *l’uomo universale*.”
7. “[In] Ham.’s soliloquy at the end of Act 2 [...] the Prince [...] accuses himself of inaction, or, to be more specific, of not having ‘fatted all the region kites’ with Claudius’s ‘offal’. He does not say, it is worth noting, that he has ever had the chance to do so. The audience has seen none. [...] The final effect of the soliloquy is to set an audience agog. While the studious reader is still mulling over the question of why Ham. has not yet carried out his task, the theatre waits in suspense to see whether ‘The Mousetrap’ will work.”
8. “Ham., ‘but mad north-north-west’, is, for much of the play’s course, a variation on the court jester, the bitter fool, telling the truth about the King, the Queen, and the courtiers, especially Pol., and doing it to their faces.”
9. “Even before he has so much as heard of the Ghost, much less seen it and listened to it, Ham. evidently has great difficulty in restraining his sense of outrage and disgust at his mother’s incestuous marriage, together with his instinctive loathing of Claudius, from speaking out.”
10. “There may or may not be more than meets the eye in the Prince’s answer to the ‘fishing’ Pol., ‘You’re a fishmonger’. What is certain is that in the theatre it is hilariously funny. The merriment [Samuel] Johnson finds in this tragedy is demonstrably there; and the tragic hero contributes greatly to it.”

11. "Two of the tragedy's major themes [are] spying and roleplaying."
12. "Accident plays an unusually large part in *Ham.*"
13. "The Prince's consciousness is obviously the play's centre."
14. "Our first view of the King and his court should be sufficient to establish their unwholesome nature [...]. The King begins the proceeding with a long formal speech [...] His language is the language not only of art but also of artfulness [...] It is double-talk."
15. "There are two sides to Ham. With Horatio and the soldiers he is all that the Renaissance prince or aristocrat should be [...] In the environment of the court, on the other hand, where the *seeming* that he pounces on in his first speech of any length is so dominant, he is bitter, suspicious, and above all, disillusioned."
16. "The country cannot be healthy and wholesome while its king, who should be the fountain-head of justice, is guilty of fratricide, adultery, and incest. And how will the act of killing the King, who caused this dislocation of things by killing the previous king, serve to remedy matters?"
17. "[When Pol. and Laer. advise Oph. in 1.3,] arrogant ignorance masquerading as knowledge derived from experience has its place in the tragedy."
18. "All three spies [Pol., Guild. and Ros.] bring out a characteristic quality of Ham. that is too often ignored. He has all the *hauteur* of the Renaissance monarch or aristocrat. Sure of his own standing in the world, he can talk easily and familiarly with those who know their places—the soldiers, the actors, the clown in the graveyard—but he will not tolerate any word or action that breaches the rules of decorum."
19. "The effect of Ham.'s tirade [in 3.4] on an Elizabethan audience, brought up to respect the fifth commandment, defies the imagination."
20. "The King is, from the first speech he utters right down to his last words, enslaved to the lie [...] of old Ham.'s death. [...] The Prince, on the other hand, is passionately devoted to the truth. [...] The conflict the tragedy deals with can be seen as a struggle between Falsehood and Deception, embodied in the King, and Truth, embodied in the Prince."
21. "Ham. is powered [...] by his consuming urge to know and to understand. [...] He would be an intolerable prig were it not that he is as honest with himself as he is with others."
22. "[In the dilemma about which is 'nobler' in 3.1, see 3.2.61 ff.,] the man who has chosen the first alternative is Horatio."

CAMBRIDGE EDITION, PH. EDWARDS, 2003

23. "That *Ham.* is a reworking of the basic underlying theme of *Julius Caesar*, namely the commitment of the philosopher-hero to violent action in order to remove an intruder from the government of the state and restore an ideal condition belonging to former times, seems to me undeniable. [The progression from *JC* to *Ham.*] shows up Shak.'s sense of the increasing complexity and difficulty of the problems as he continued to think about them. "
24. "The setting of *Ham.* is not Elsinore but heaven, earth and hell."

25. “[For Goethe,] *Ham.* essentially is a story of the inadequacy and impotence of sensitivity in the face of the stern demands of action. [...] *Ham.*’s impotence is only an extreme form of a powerlessness general to mankind. [For Coleridge] *Ham.* is not a man broken under the weight of too demanding an obligation, but a man incapable of acting. [...] *Ham.* knows perfectly well what he ought to do, and he is always promising to do it, but he is constitutionally averse to action, and his energy evaporates in self-reproach. [For Hermann Ulrici (1806–84), because killing even a fratricide is a sin,] in *Ham.* the Christian struggles with the natural man.”
26. “One of the important achievements of modern scholarship is to have unsettled the Ghost and made impossible to accept his credentials and authority as a matter of course and without question. Much is built on [the] perception that *Shak.*’s guardedness about the Ghost is an essential feature of the play.”
27. “To prejudice the [revenge tragedies] by saying that for the Elizabethans revenge was of course evil or of course acceptable is to defeat them completely.”
28. “Middleton Murry [in *Shak.*, 1936] believed that *Ham.*’s fear of damnation was an immensely important factor in the play, overlooked by us because we provide *Shak.*’s tragic heroes [with our] indifference to an after-life.”
29. Denmark is an elective monarchy as *Ham.* knows quite well (see 1.2.109, 5.2.[64], [340]). But *Shak.* plays off this elective monarchy against his Elizabethan audience’s deep emotional commitment to primogeniture and the right of a son to inherit. [...] For the audience, the [Danish] system is a legalism which runs counter to their instinctive sense of rightness.”
30. “Gertrude’s offence in confusing the two brothers is much deepened in the audience’s eyes later in the first act when they learn that she committed adultery with Claudius while her husband was alive. (There is no mistaking the plain sense of the Ghost’s words [in 1.5.46].) The willingness of this complaisant woman to sleep with either of the two brothers is a forceful image of the failure of discriminating which is central to the tragedy of *Ham.*.”
31. “The ‘antic disposition’ [...] has symbolic significance in denoting that *Ham.*, like Bunyan’s Christian, having received his call, considers himself a pilgrim and a stranger in his own city of Vanity Fair.”
32. “Ophelia’s tragedy, like *Ham.*’s, is the tragedy of obedience to a father.”
33. “The court party [...] are much given to expressing their beliefs in resonant platitudes. Claudius knows the proper response to death, Laertes to sex, Polonius to everything.”
34. “Pyrrhus is [...] another son avenging the slaying of his father (Achilles). But *Ham.* swings into the rant of his second soliloquy not in any desire to emulate the cruel fury of Pyrrhus but out of shame that an actor’s emotion for Pyrrhus’s victim, Hecuba, should outdo his own emotion for Claudius’s victim, his father. [...] The effect of the eloquence of the old play and the actor’s moving performance is to make him confuse doing with exhibition.”
35. “*Ham.* sees his victim [Oph.] as life’s victim. Her innocence cannot survive; she is unavoidably subject to the contagion of living; she will be corrupted by men as inevitably as, being a woman, she will corrupt them. When he says she should go to a nunnery, he means a nunnery. Only if she is locked up in perpetual virginity can she be saved.”
36. “*Ham.* means what he says in the prayer scene. The procrastination theory held that once again *Ham.* was finding some excuse for not acting. This cannot be right, for a minute or two later, thinking he has found Claudius in the ignominious and dishonourable position of eavesdropping [...], he kills him—only to find that it is Polonius.”

37. "From the killing of Pol. the catastrophe of the play stems. This false completion of Ham.'s revenge initiates the second cycle of revenge for a murdered father, that of Laertes for Pol. *That* revenge is successful and ends in the death of Ham. By unwittingly killing Pol., Ham. brings about his own death."
38. "To avenge his father if for Laer. an inalienable duty, whatever may be its status in the eternal world. [...] For Ham. it is quite the contrary. Revenge in itself is uninteresting and foreign. It is only the question of its place as a creative and restorative 'remembering' deed within the values of the eternal world that is important to him."
39. "[Ham.'s] truths are based on a chasm of ignorance. He speaks his words over a grave which he does not know is intended for a woman whose madness and death he is responsible for. The fact of the dead girl punctures his philosophy."
40. "There is no doubt of the extent of Ham.'s failure. In trying to restore 'the beauteous majesty of Denmark' he has brought the country into an even worse state, in the hands of a foreigner."
41. "*Ham.* takes for granted that the ethics of revenge are questionable, that ghosts are questionable, that the distinctions of society are questionable, and that the will of heaven is terribly obscure. The higher truth which Ham. tries to make active in a fallen world belongs to a past which he sees slipping away from him."
42. "We know that Ham. made a mess of what he was trying to do. The vital question is whether what he was trying to do was a holy work or a work of man's imagination. Shak. refuses to tell us. [...] The silence of the Ghost at the end of the play leaves the extent of Ham.'s victory or triumph an open question."

**STEPHEN GREENBLATT, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, NORTON
2005**

43. "The villainous Claudius, fraudulent in almost everything he utters, speaks with oddly convincing tenderness about his feelings for his wife. [...] And Gertrude, for her part, seems equally devoted [...] She is not directly contriving to have her beloved son killed, but her overmastering impulse is to save her husband [in 4.5]."
44. "*Ham.* makes clear that Shak. had been quietly, steadily developing a special technical skill. [...] He had perfected the means to represent inwardness." "The decisive change in the plot [from the *Ur-Hamlet*] enabled the playwright to focus almost the entire tragedy on the consciousness of the hero suspended between his 'first motion' and 'the acting of a dreadful thing.'"
45. "Instead of leading the court to ignore him, Ham.'s madness becomes the object of everyone's endless speculation. [...] By excising the rationale for Ham.'s madness, Shak. made it the central focus of the entire tragedy."
46. "Shak. drew upon the pity, confusion, and dread of death in a world of damaged rituals [...] because he himself experienced those same emotions at the core of his being. He experienced them in 1596, at the funeral of his child, and he experienced them with redoubled force in anticipation of his father's death. He responded not with prayers but with the deepest expression of his being: *Ham.*"
47. "Shak. found that he could immeasurably deepen the effect of his plays [...] if he took out a key explanatory element. [...] The principle was not the making of a riddle to be solved, but the creation of

a strategic opacity. [...] With *Ham.*, Shak. found that if he refused to provide himself or his audience with a familiar, comfortable rationale that seems to make it all make sense, he could get to something immeasurably deeper. [...] The opacity was shaped by his experience of the world and of his own inner life: his skepticism, his pain, his sense of broken rituals, his refusal of easy consolations.”

W. W. LAWRENCE, “THE PLAY SCENE IN HAMLET”, 1919

48. “ If the dumb-show were looked upon by Hamlet as a test, it has failed. Will the king ‘blench’ at Hamlet’s main test, or will he keep his countenance, and Hamlet thus be led to conclude that he is innocent, the Ghost a devil, and the revelations on the midnight terrace false? If the audience are made to feel that Claudius has a good chance thus to escape self-betrayal, the dramatic tension is much increased.”

PIERRE BAYARD, *Enquête sur Hamlet*, MINUIT 2002

49. « L’épistémologie [...] est curieusement traversée par la question de l’hallucination, au sens où la différence de perception y constitue un problème majeur. Et *Ham.*, à l’inverse, est traversé par la question de l’épistémologie. »
50. « Peu importe de savoir qui a raison [en III.4] entre celui qui voit le spectre et celle qui ne le voit pas : les deux perceptions sont légitimes. L’essentiel est leur désaccord, qui interdit l’hypothèse d’un phénomène objectif. [...] Le fait que nous soyons au théâtre change la donne, puisque la mise en scène est contrainte de trancher. [...] La présence scénique du fantôme, attestée par la didascalie mais récusée par Gertrude, prouve que sont représentées sur scène certaines hallucinations des personnages. »

JACKIE PIGEAUD, *Melancholia*, PAYOT 2008

51. [Vision antique de la mélancolie :] « La maladie du Prince peut se communiquer à tout le corps social. »

ELEANOR PROSSER, *Hamlet and Revenge*, STANFORD UP 1967

52. Several modern scholars (...) have firmly established that spokesmen for Elizabethan orthodoxy unan-
imously condemned private revenge. (...) The average spectator at a revenge play was probably trapped
in an ethical dilemma (...) between what he believed and what he felt.