

"His quarry cries on hauocke":
Is It Shakespeare's Own Judgment
On the Meaning of *Hamlet*?
by J. Anthony Burton

I.

When Hamlet instructs Horatio with his dying breath to tell his story to the world, the sound of Fortinbras' army returning from its Polish campaign is already audible at Elsinore. Arriving a moment after Hamlet dies, Fortinbras speaks out:

Fortin. Where is this sight?
Hor. What is it ye would see;
If ought of woe, or wonder, cease your search.
For. His quarry cries on hauocke. Oh proud death,
What feast is toward in thine eternall Cell,
That thou so many Princes, at a shoote,
So bloodily hast strooke.¹

(V. ii. 371-77)

The phrase "His quarry cries on hauocke" is generally understood more or less as Kittredge explains it: "These dead bodies proclaim that a massacre has taken place. Quarry is the regular word for the game killed in a hunt. Havoc was the old battle cry for 'No quarter' . . . Cries on means simply 'cries out', 'shouts', not 'calls for' or 'exclaims against'."²

I think Kittredge's interpretation is unsound, because "quarry" and "havoc" each have alternate meanings and the dramatic context strongly indicates that Kittredge chose wrongly in both cases. His explanation obscures the real meaning and central importance of the phrase, which appears to be Shakespeare's own summary and closing judgment that the account of Hamlet's fatal struggle with Claudius should be understood as a story of misguided, mutual self-destruction. There is also a great deal within the play to suggest that Shakespeare meant the phrase to be spoken by Horatio instead of Fortinbras, as well as evidence in the First Quarto that Horatio originally did so. My argument for a new interpretation does not require the phrase to be spoken by Horatio, and my argument for reassigning it to him does not depend on the new interpretation. However, each argument, if accepted, is strong additional evidence for the validity of the other.

Kittredge's explanation has Fortinbras saying, in plain English, "This is a real massacre," a vapid and mistaken observation that does not explain anything. Kittredge's prestige has surely diverted attention from the basic flaws of his explanation, beginning with the fact that "massacre" is a dubious way to characterize four bodies lying amidst a large number of onlookers dressed for entertainment rather than war; and, because the word suggests a single aggressor on whom blame can be laid, it dismisses in advance Horatio's promise that, when the facts are known, they will tell a complex story of accidental judgments and mistaken purposes fallen on their inventors' heads. Kittredge's explanation also has Fortinbras deliver a dramatically superfluous explanation to a group of people who know more than he. Neither Horatio nor the audience needs to be told what has just happened on stage; Fortinbras' role is to respond to a sight of woe and wonder, not explain it, and his sententious appraisal is out of place in circumstances that call for a spontaneous expression of astonishment or dismay. Fortinbras' shocked apostrophe "Oh proud death. . ." has the right degree of spontaneity to convey the reaction Horatio leads us to expect, but "His quarry cries on hauocke" intervenes awkwardly between his first sight of the corpses and his reaction to it. Consequently, the first phrase subverts the dramatic effect of the apostrophe to death by defeating its spontaneity and making it sound forced and artificial.

To a battle-hardened field commander fresh from a military campaign in Poland, the mere sight of four corpses (even if we forget to ask how Fortinbras knew who they were) is by itself unlikely to elicit flights of wonder. On the contrary, our few clues to Fortinbras' character show that he was vengeful, ambitious, pragmatic, and generally inured to the horrors of war and violence. Nor is there anything visually apparent in the scene itself to proclaim a recent massacre or suggest the bloody aftermath of a hunt; the four victims all have died of poison and show no signs of serious injury: Gertrude was unmarked, Hamlet only scratched, and the rapier wounds to Claudius ("I am but hurt") and Laertes were not severe enough to appear mortal. Hamlet had no inkling that either he or Laertes were mortally wounded until Laertes confessed having used an envenomed sword, and he stabbed Claudius, expecting to kill him with the poison: "Then venome to thy worke" (V. ii. 320).

II.

Let us look more closely at the meanings of the key words, "quarry" and "havoc." A hunter's quarry is not simply "the game killed," but a

bloody heap of torn flesh consisting of the entrails and undistributed scraps of a slain deer, all laid out on the hide (*cuirée*) as a reward to the hounds after the animal has been dismembered in the field and the desirable parts reserved for distribution according to the laws of venery. When Shakespeare used "quarry" in order to describe a scene of gory carnage, he knew how to make his meaning clear: "I'd make a quarry / With thousands of these *quarter'd* slaves, as high / As I could pick my lance."³ Quartering was the last element in the gruesome punishment for high treason; the criminal was first hanged by the neck, next cut down alive and disembowelled, then beheaded, after which his body was quartered, or divided into four parts, for disposition at the king's pleasure.⁴

But this was not the chief meaning of "quarry" in Shakespeare's day, when hawking was at the height of popularity and its terms were as familiar to Elizabethans as stolen bases and foul balls are to Americans now. For them, "quarry" was the bird flown at by a trained hawk or falcon, and the English practice was to train each kind of hawk for a different quarry; the noblest, gerfalcons and peregrines, for example, were taught to fly at herons.⁵ Beginning with the first act, Shakespeare's frequent use of allusions to falconry builds a context in which it is natural to understand "quarry" in the same sense and, as Hamlet and Claudius both often refer to themselves in falconer's terms, the sport becomes a running image for the contest between them. After the first meeting with his father's ghost, Hamlet calls Horatio to him like a falconer to his bird: "Hillo, ho, ho, boy; come bird come."⁶ Parrying Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's clumsy inquiries, Hamlet warns them not to underestimate him, "I know a Hawke from a handsaw," (II. ii. 394) with "handsaw" widely considered to be a variant or corruption of "hernshaw," an early word for "heron."⁷ He means "I'm sane enough to know the hunter from the hunted," an ironically mistaken opinion that leads him, in turn, to underestimate Claudius in the last act.⁸ He welcomes the travelling players in the same idiom, "wee'l e'ne / to't like French Faulconers, flie at anything we see" (II. ii. 455-56). In the Q2 reading, Hamlet refers to the "pitch"—the height of a falcon's flight before it swoops to the attack—of his own enterprise against the king: "enterprises of great pitch and moment, / With this regard theyr currents turn awry, / And loose the name of action" (III. i. 86-88).⁹

The same image creeps gradually into Claudius' speech, starting with the apprehension that Hamlet constituted a vaguely avian threat over which his melancholy "sits on brood," whose "hatch" will be a danger to Claudius (III. i. 145-46). Later, he pictures Hamlet's unplanned return from the voyage to England as "checking," a falconer's word for

the act of a trained hawk turning from its correct prey to pursue an inferior one. By visualizing Hamlet as a recalcitrant falcon, Claudius places himself in the role of falconer, and enters the metaphorical framework wherein he and Hamlet are each simultaneously hunter and quarry.

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"Havoc" was a military command given at the fall of a besieged town or stronghold that released the victorious soldiers from their customary duty to take and preserve captives as hostages for ransom and freed them to engage in indiscriminate slaughter and looting. It was a rare punitive measure, used against towns that offended against the proprieties of war by "obstinate defense" when there was no possibility of relief from the siege, there being no duty or reason to resist at that point.¹⁰ Moreover, the laws of war apparently made it a strictly royal prerogative to order havoc, and Shakespeare's usage is regularly consistent with this meaning.¹¹ Since the king had a share in all ransoms, the collection of which was a principal means of financing military campaigns, it is easy to see why that source of income was jealously guarded.

A curious aspect of this specifically royal command is that it could have been given by Hamlet just as well as Claudius. Although the Renaissance laws of war are not clear on this point, the sovereign prerogative apparently extended to a prince of the blood who was next in line of succession, the prince royal. If the existence of an elective kingship in Shakespeare's Denmark raises doubts whether the Danish heir apparent had the same authority, Claudius' public designation of Hamlet as his approved successor serves to remove them and confirm Hamlet's privileged status. But Shakespeare does not let his double meaning rest exclusively on the promise of a succession that Claudius is doing everything in his power to prevent. There is a clear reminder in Hamlet's announcement at Ophelia's funeral, "This is I, / Hamlet *the Dane*," that he is also the princely avenger of a murdered father who, as such, can assert an immediate claim to the throne.

Claudius' murder of the old king made his own kingship, in the language of some political theorists, lawless "in entrance," *ex defectu tituli*; but, although the audience might have been gratified to reflect that Hamlet's cause was not entirely lawless, the argument was of no practical value to him, since he had no way to prove the facts. However, the same theorists held that even a lawful king could descend to the legal status of an usurper through misconduct, becoming lawless "in execution," *ex parte exercitii*.¹² In this regard, Hamlet's possession of the treacherous and inculpatory commission to England documented

Claudius' villainy, as damning to him as the Nixon tapes to Nixon, and balanced the long odds against deposing a reigning king by giving Hamlet the power to expose Claudius as a lawless tyrant. There is detail enough in the play to make it clear that Denmark was no safe haven for a lawless or even unpopular ruler. Claudius would gladly have disposed of Hamlet openly but for his fear of provoking a popular uprising, and Laertes showed how easy it was to mount an instant rebellion on the strength of Claudius' possible complicity in Polonius' unexplained death and secret burial. The very inclusion of these details raised politically sensitive issues of disobedience to authority that an Elizabethan playwright would ordinarily avoid, and their appearance here invites us to consider Hamlet as an uncrowned rightful king, whose authority in the matter of "havoc" was not derived from Claudius but in defiance of him.

The reciprocal roles of Claudius and Hamlet as both hunters and prey give "His quarry cries on hauocke" a special aptness for describing a story of mutual destruction by royal adversaries overcome by their own stratagems: "Behold the victim of his own command for all-out slaughter." All four deaths in the last scene were simultaneously the immediate result of both Hamlet's revenge against Claudius and Claudius' mirror-image counterplot against Hamlet. Within the context of *Hamlet* the phrase is perfect in its equivocality, and an Elizabethan would have been hard pressed to say who was the hawk and who the heron.

It is worth noting that the metaphor is reinforced in a remarkable way at the auditory level, because the medial "v" of "havoc" and its second syllable would both have tended to disappear in Elizabethan pronunciation, leaving the word a near if not exact homophone of "hawk" ("hawke" in F1, "hauke" in Q2).¹³ The range of early spellings for "hawk" reflects the close connection and possible common origin of the two words: "hafoc", "heafoc", "havec", "hevec", "hafek," "havek," "heavek," "hewek."¹⁴ If "havoc" and "hawk" were homophones, the phrase could make sense as colloquial sporting English for "the heron sent the hawk out to hunt," preserving the basic image of someone bringing destruction on his own head, although not the added subtlety of a wholesale killing by royal command. The play on words helps to insure that any playgoer who missed the military nuance of "havoc" would still understand the summation, and underscores the importance of ironic reversal as a principal leitmotif.

We can reject any romantic illusion that it would be out of character for Hamlet to order havoc. The arrival of the travelling players exposed his appetite for bloody deeds by reviving his memory of a speech

learned years ago, a particular favorite that he "chiefly loved" and retained well enough to recite perfectly for thirteen lines. Significantly, it is an account of the bloody slaughter at the fall of Troy, of all besieged cities in history the one which the English identified with their own ancient origins and national pride. In words that sound like a formal blazon of Havoc personified, Hamlet describes murderous Pyrrhus in heraldic style, all "sable" and in gory "heraldry," "to take [Q2: total] geulles, horridly *trick'd* / With blood of Fathers, Mothers, Daughters, Sonnes, / Bak'd and impasted with the parching streets . . . with eyes like *Carbuncles*" (I. i. 475-86), and his obvious relish in the recital confirms his readiness for the bloody deeds to follow.

The summary description, "His quarry cries on hauocke," suggests a story of stratagems boomeranging against their devisers, anticipating Horatio's synopsis of "purposes mistook, / Falne on the Inuentors heads," and revealing it as an explicit confirmation that ironic reversal is central to the tragic pattern, of a piece with the sense that the time is out of joint and the state of Denmark rotten, where the established city tragedians are dislocated by child actors who "exclaim against their own succession." Claudius instructs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to "drive" Hamlet to attend the players' performance and arrives to find The Mouse-trap set for himself. There is self-defeating activity everywhere, from the false Danish dogs of Gertrude's phrase, who run counter (i.e., follow a scent in the wrong direction, away from the prey and towards their masters), to hawks who check, engineers hoist with their own petar, and messengers victimized by their own messages; and the whole of Denmark seems at cross-purposes with itself.

Lily Campbell once asserted that "every character in a Shakespear-ean play is engaged in saying exactly what Shakespeare wanted the audience to know and in saying it over and over again," and Hamlet, Claudius, and Laertes do just that, as each in his own characteristic metaphor directly associates himself with an image of ironic reversal.¹⁵ Hamlet proclaimed it poetic justice to overcome an adversary with the adversary's own weapons, sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths without remorse: "they did make loue to this employment. / They are not neere my Conscience, their debate [Q2: defeat] / Doth by their owne insinuation grow: / Tis dangerous, when the baser nature comes / Between the passe, and fell incensed points / Of mighty opposites" (V. ii. 59-63). His brusque dismissal evokes disquieting associations with The Mouse-trap he set for Claudius, because it was a commonplace of Renaissance theology to associate mousetraps with ironic reversal between the mightiest opposites of all, God and the Devil, and thus implies the further irony that Hamlet is as much out of

his depth as his two old friends.¹⁶ His better known expression of the same idea occurs in Q2 only: "tis the sport to have th'engineer / Hoist with his owne petar" (III. iv. 208-09).

Laertes, the portraiture of Hamlet's cause, openly proclaimed his own death as an ironic reversal for which he was culpable: "Why, as a Woodcocke / To mine Springe, Osricke. / I am justly kill'd with mine owne Treacherie. . . . the foule practice / Hath turn'd itself on me" (V. ii. 333-35, 348-49). The same can be said for Laertes' father, who concealed his identity (but not his presence in Gertrude's chamber) just well enough to be fatally mistaken for Claudius. The professional busybody, Polonius, learned too late how risky an occupation it was: "to be too busie, is some danger" (III. iv. 30).

Hamlet's attempt to reconcile with Laertes by disavowing any harm done to him as the unintended result of his own madness fits squarely into the thematic pattern:

*Hamlet is of the Faction that is wrong'd,
His madnesse is poore Hamlets Enemy.
. . . I haue shot mine Arrow o're the house,
And hurt my Mother.*

(V. ii. 188-94)

Within this metaphor, Hamlet's madness is just one more weapon that unexpectedly injures its wielder; and his next words, describing the fencing match as a "Brothers" wager, expand the image into a portrait of him and Laertes as two brothers united in woe by their mother's injury, while foretokening their own imminent union in death. Hamlet fell to Laertes in retaliation for killing Polonius, and Laertes to Hamlet in requital for his treachery, as each created the other's cause by disastrous assumptions about what his filial duty required.

In the same way, Claudius' language signals the convergence of his own destiny with the fortunes of Laertes and Hamlet, as he incorporates their characteristic metaphors of bird hunting and violent explosives into his own recurrent premonitions of self-destruction. "Oh limed soul, that struggling to be free, / Art more ingag'd" (III. iii. 71-72) prefigures Laertes' woodcock simile in the last scene;¹⁷ and his anticipatory vision of weapons that can "blast in prooffe" and kill the user recalls Hamlet's Q2 imagery of explosive military reversals: the engineer hoist with his petar, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern blown at the moon with their own mines. The same preoccupation animates Claudius' explanation to Laertes that his inaction after Polonius' death was out of concern for Hamlet's wide popularity, "So that my Arrowes / Too slightly timbred

for so loud a Winde, / Would haue reuerted to my Bow againe" (IV. vii. 33-35), and the image of a misdirected arrow anticipates Hamlet's use of the same metaphor in his attempted reconciliation with Laertes just before the duel. Preferring to avoid personal risk by letting others serve as his weapons, Claudius sees his worst fears come true as they all become agents of his own destruction. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, sent to escort Hamlet to his death in England, let their incriminating commission fall into his hands and the loud wind of Providence blows him directly back to Denmark. Laertes, another willing and convenient tool, was too slightly timbered for the storm of retribution breaking over Claudius' head and became his destroyer in the end by revealing to the court what Claudius needed most to conceal, "The King, the King's too blame" (V. ii. 351).

All the secondary characters in Hamlet are undone by the unforeseen results of their efforts to promote self-interest and, by offering seven variations on the theme of ironic reversal, they strengthen the case for interpreting "His quarry cries on hauocke" as a further expression of it as well as a description of Hamlet's own situation. The phrase is, if I may say so, a very "Shakespearean" kind of summing-up, putting the central idea in a nutshell while creating a perspective from which to understand its tragic meaning in light of the principal characters' declared intentions. It expresses the dominant theme of ironic reversal and destruction by one's own device in terms of the running images of falconry, hunting, and warfare, integrating the two streams of imagery and confirming Hamlet's description of Laertes' story as a reflection of his own, "by the image of my Cause, I see / The Portraiture of his" (V. ii. 79-80), right down to the self-destruction with which it ended.¹⁸ Elizabethan playgoers would have little trouble recognizing "His quarry cries on hauocke" as the coda to Hamlet's story; Shakespeare follows his usual practice by supplementing it with a partial explanation for the benefit of the stage audience plus the promise of a more complete one later, when he can tell of Hamlet and Claudius' competing claims to the Danish throne, the mutual and deadly hunt between them, and the double sense in which each was at the same time both the cause and victim of its fatal outcome.

The interpretation suggested here cannot, within the limits of this essay, answer the larger questions about the play's meaning, since mutual responsibility does not mean equal fault, and mirror-images are not copies but distortions. Nor is it alone sufficient to prove whether Hamlet's story is tragic or redemptive or, as I believe, both at once. These difficult questions require a broader study of *Hamlet*, proceeding from the fact that Hamlet is faced with a challenge to act justly in

difficult circumstances and taking into account that the setting of the drama extends from Denmark to the Afterworld—towards which the ghost, Hamlet, Claudius, Horatio, and Fortinbras repeatedly turn our thoughts. It remains for us to enrich our understanding of *Hamlet* by connecting these elements with the principle of poetic justice that he who lives by the sword will die by the sword, and the Bowman by his arrow; that the trapper will be trapped, the biter bit, and the deceiver deceived. The idea was a favorite medieval and Renaissance commonplace, found anywhere from the Bible to Aesop, Terence, Plautus, Ovid, Seneca, Chaucer, and Erasmus; and if Shakespeare has made it fundamental to the meaning of *Hamlet*, the connection should be explored thoroughly. The conclusion one draws will depend on one's view of what *Hamlet* is all about, a topic of widespread and intense disagreement over every detail. While it is not the purpose of this essay to interpret the play as a whole, I consider it obligatory to declare my own viewpoint before stating the implications of my argument.

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I see *Hamlet* as the expression of Shakespeare's extraordinary insight into the way that true justice is nothing more nor less than the Golden Rule in action, a cosmic law of cause and effect working directly from its celestial origin into the field of human activity according to the principle "Whatsoever you do unto others you do unto yourself." This is not to say the play is by any means a moral allegory, or to deny its character as revenge drama and popular entertainment. But the way Shakespeare glossed the central action with allusions to divine law, international law, customary law, and the law of the courts bears witness to his view of them all as facets of a greater whole which we are invited to recognize; the events of the play unfold in obedience to that higher law, even as the separate characters work out their destinies according to the demands of plot and character.

I intend to develop these ideas further in a study now in progress but, without exploring them here or resting any part of my argument on their validity, a few points are worth mentioning now. "Revenge" and "justice" were virtual synonyms in Elizabethan English; we, on the near side of Bacon's dictum that revenge is "a kind of wild justice," may think of it as personal, frequently excessive, and bad, and that justice, in contrast, is lawful, proportionate, and good. But in Shakespeare's day the distinction was not yet established; God's justice and His vengeance were one and the same. When the blood of a murder victim cries out from the earth, as it has done since Cain slew Abel, Shakespeare conceived it as crying for justice (*Richard II*) or, interchangeably, for re-

venge (*King John*).

Hamlet's task is to right a grave injustice, with freedom to go about it howsoever he chooses, and nothing in the Ghost's command requires him to commit any foul deeds of his own. Hamlet stamps that freedom with his individual and characteristically Renaissance determination to act only out of personal judgment and conviction, by learning the facts for himself. At the same time, he limits his freedom by electing to carry out his duty in accordance with a number of specifically Christian principles, which he then applies to the facts in a highly questionable way.

Like a set problem in a school examination, the play forces us to address a series of questions: "What was Hamlet supposed to do?" "Did he do it well or badly?" "Why then does Horatio think the Danes can avoid 'more mischance / On plots, and errors'" by understanding his story? Are we supposed to think of Hamlet as an everyday man, no more than his father's son and Claudius' subject; or as the godlike man of his own ideal vision, "the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals," in constant struggle with his earthly grossness? What is it *for him* to be or not to be himself? If Hamlet's death were poetic justice, he must have failed himself in some important respect. But the failure could not be simply his part in causing the deaths of the other victims, because the same evidence tells us that poetic justice required their deaths too. Trying to understand *Hamlet* is like trying to understand the Golden Rule itself, in the sense that one's view of what is right changes with every increase in wisdom and self-knowledge.

I am not by any means proposing a theory of relativism, or asserting that the meaning of the play is simply a matter of subjective opinion. Nor do I agree with those who claim that doubt itself is so integral to *Hamlet* that its meaning lies in its very ambiguity. The meaning I refer to is organic, like all living thoughts, and yet entirely objective and intelligible. Regardless of one's viewpoint about the play as a whole, this meaning is confirmed by a close reading of the text itself; but any attempt to reduce it to a single, fixed interpretation is bound to fail. It is safe only to say that the "meaning" of the play has to include the thought that, in this world or the next, each of us shall reap what we have sown, as Claudius put it, "even to the teeth and forehead of our faults."

III.

If "His quarry cries on hauocke" is recognized as central to the meaning of *Hamlet*, it can point to the solution of other problems in the last scene. Bernard Beckerman demonstrates how Shakespeare regularly

explained his plays in their closings, following a constant pattern that included a wrap-up of the action and a summary of its meaning. The function of each closing was to provide "a culmination of events that have beset the characters throughout the play," where the "uncertainties and confusions in the narrative are dispelled."¹⁹ In a deeper sense, the closing summaries are not so much an explanation of the plays as an authenticated point of departure for closer study, often introducing a view of the facts that might otherwise go unconsidered. Yet, without them, the other tragedies would be as much a mystery as *Hamlet*. What might we make of *Julius Caesar*, without Antony's judgment of Brutus to be "the noblest Roman of them all;" or *Othello*, without the Moor's self-judgment as "one that loved not wisely but too well;" or *Coriolanus*, without "the most noble corse that ever herald / Did follow to his urn?"

Although Beckerman never says so, *Hamlet* is clearly incomplete with respect to the closing pattern he described. Of Shakespeare's eleven tragedies, and the two histories (*Richard II* and *III*) described as tragedies on their First Folio title pages, all but *Hamlet* close with a judgment or clear allocation of responsibility, and a program for restoration of order by either formal sentence, punishment, or reconciliation. It is not likely that *Hamlet* would have been singled out during Shakespeare's lifetime as pleasing to "the wiser sort," if it were as enigmatic then as we find it now.²⁰ The prevailing style of moral exposition called for a well-defined conclusion, in the manner of the other tragedies; so it is fair to ask whether we have lost some meaning that was once felt to be evident.

Anne Barton, one of the few critics to express open dissatisfaction with *Hamlet's* ending, points out the disparity between what is expected of Horatio and his actual performance. She faults Horatio for his "startling" failure to tell Hamlet's story, saying "Horatio astonishes us by leaving out everything that seems important, reducing all that is distinctive about the play to a plot stereotype. Although his tale is, on one level, accurate enough, it is certainly not Hamlet's 'story'."²¹ Robert D. Hapgood, less charitably, dismisses Horatio's summary of Hamlet's story as "a sorry travesty of Hamlet's understanding of it."²² I think both critics are sound in their instincts; and there are good reasons, including textual evidence from Q1, for believing that Horatio originally summed up Hamlet's story quite competently, and was meant to do the same in both Q2 and F1.

The relevant text consists of two elements: Hamlet's dying instructions to Horatio, and Horatio's exchange with Fortinbras immediately after. The Folio reading is as follows:²³

Ham. Had I but time (as this fell Sergeant death
Is strick'd in his Arrest) oh I could tell you.
But let it be: *Horatio*, I am dead,
Thou liu'st, report me and my causes right
To the vnsatisfied.

Hor. Neuer beleeeue it.
I am more an Antike Roman than a Dane:
Heere's yet some Liquor left.

Ham. As th'art a man, giue me the Cup.
Let go, by Heauen Ile haue't
Oh good *Horatio*, what a wounded name,
(Things standing thus vnknowne) shall liue behind me.
If thou did'st euer hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicitie awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in paine,
To tell my Storie.

(V. ii. 337-52)

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Ham. But I do prophesie th'election lights
On *Fortinbras*. he ha's my dying voyce,
So tell him with the occurrents more and lesse,
Which haue solicited. The rest is silence. O, o, o, o.

(V. ii. 361-64)

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Fortin. Where is this sight?

Hor. What is it ye would see;
If ought of woe, or wonder, cease your search.

Fortin. His quarry cries on hauocke. Oh proud death,
What feast is toward in thine eternall Cell.
That thou so many Princes, at a shoote,
So bloodily hast strooke.

(V. ii. 371-77)

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Hor. And let me speake to th'yet vnknowing world,
How these things came about. So shall you heare
Of carnall, bloudie, and vnnaturall acts,
Of accidentall iudgements, casuall slaughters
Of death's put on by cunning, and forc'd cause,
And in this vpshot, purposes mistooke,
Falne on the Inuentors heads. All this can I
Truly deliuer.

(V. ii. 391-98)

What Horatio says in the fifty-five lines of dialogue after Hamlet's death is "startling" for more reasons than Professor Barton offers. To begin with, Horatio had two separate tasks and failed to perform either: he had to clear Hamlet's name by telling his story to the world, and brief Fortinbras thoroughly "more and lesse" on the "occurrents." Fortinbras' prompt arrival sets the stage with typical Shakespearean economy for

Horatio to do both at once and is a sign of authorial preparation for an immediate summary that makes Horatio's inadequate performance doubly surprising.

Beyond his failure to do what Hamlet asked, Horatio's line and a half reply to Fortinbras' "Where is this sight?" is a distinctly unresponsive answer to the question asked. All Fortinbras knows is that there is a "sight" to behold, and the natural thing for Horatio to do is point it out; his "What is it ye would see; / If ought of woe, or wonder, cease your search" misses the mark. Loosely paraphrased as "If you want to see something woeful and wonderful, stop looking," his response is only a thought fragment, an unattached subordinate clause that rebuffs Fortinbras more than it answers him. Grammatically speaking, it is an antecedent phrase, or *protasis*, that raises the expectation of something to come, followed by a disappointing omission of the consequent, or *apodosis*, needed to satisfy it. We expect Horatio to continue with something to the effect of, "Behold, the King and Prince just killed each other!"

IV.

Grammar alone is admittedly no bench mark for textual corruption, especially with Shakespeare, but a fragmentary thought at the center of an already problematical scene invites some effort to explain it. In this case, it invites a fresh look at the First Quarto of 1603, where the corresponding passage avoids the problems of Q2 and F1, and Horatio's answer to Fortinbras is grammatically complete and logically responsive.²⁴

Fortin. Where is this bloody sight?

Hor. If aught of woe or wonder you'd behold,
Then looke vpon this tragicke spectacle.

Fortin. O imperious death! how many Princes
Hast thou at one draft bloudily shot to death?

Despite its standing as a garbled and unworthy version of the play, Q1 is a useful control to consult in dealing with the better texts.²⁵ The language of this passage is a close paraphrase of the more polished Q2 and F1 versions, with exactly the same sequence of thoughts: (a) a *promise* to reveal a sight of woe and wonder, (b) a *declaration* on the scene, and (c) an *apostrophe* to death. The correspondence is heightened by J. V. Cunningham's demonstration that woe and wonder were the Renaissance equivalents of pity and fear, the classic Aristotelean response to tragedy.²⁶ Q2 and F1 lose nothing by omitting the "tragicke" of Q1,

because the promise of "woe, or wonder" is enough to confirm the tragic nature of the scene. The crucial difference is that in Q1 Horatio delivers the declaration as well as the promise, in words that suggest an accompanying gesture of disclosure for the benefit of Fortinbras: "Then looke vpon this tragicke spectacle." I believe the declaration was never meant to be spoken by Fortinbras, and both the Q2 and F1 versions are faulty.

Misplaced lines and garbled passages are common in the texts of Shakespeare's plays, and particularly so with *Hamlet*. A printer could, for example, drop a line from the end of one speech to the beginning of the next if he were working from an actor's "part" or "side," the continuous roll made up of that actor's speeches written out on separate sheets and pasted together in sequence. Each passage in a part began with its cue, *i.e.*, the tail end of the previous speech. E. K. Chambers observed that "from these 'parts' the 'original' would be reconstructed or 'assembled' in the event of destruction or loss."²⁷ The sheet containing Fortinbras' "O proud death" would have begun with all or a portion of "His quarry cries on hauocke." The title page of Q2 tells us that it was "Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie," and if the copy itself had been arranged in actors' parts, then misplacement of the whole phrase in Q2 is easy to explain. However, this conjecture is not necessary to prove my point; without proof of direct transmission from Q1 to the other editions, I am not offering the proposal that Horatio is the true spokesman for Hamlet as a textual argument, since it is not necessary to prove exactly how a mistake occurred to recognize it for what it is. But this does seem to be one of the rare occasions Harold Jenkins speaks of where Q1 "can supply, or guide us to, a reading which both better texts have lost"—in this case, one which reflects Horatio's unique qualifications to sum up the play as a whole, in consequence of both his duty to carry out Hamlet's instructions and his unique knowledge of the facts.²⁸

The phrase "His quarry cries on hauocke" has the same dramatic function as Q1's "Then looke vpon this tragicke spectacle"; it directs attention to the four corpses as the outcome of a tragic conflict. But reassigning it to Horatio transforms it into a grammatical and responsive answer to Fortinbras, as well as the anticipated performance of his duty as Hamlet's confidant and designated spokesman. The emended reading is:

Fortin. Where is this sight?
Hor. What is it ye would see;
If ought of woe, or wonder, cease your search.

His quarry cries on hauocke.
Fortin. Oh proud death,
What feast is toward in thine eternall Cell.
That thou so many Princes, at a shoote,
So bloodily hast strooke.

This simple change allows all three versions to correspond in both grammar and sense. "His quarry cries on hauocke" becomes the *apodosis* that fulfills Horatio's promise of a tragic disclosure. The pointing-out effect is more recognizable in the demonstrative "This" of Q1 and also Q2, which reads "This quarry cries on hauock," but I have chosen to use the First Folio text in this essay for two reasons. First, it is an open question whether F1 is an authorial revision of Q2 and therefore more authoritative, or simply a different version of the same play; in either case, it cannot be safely ignored in making a case for emending the text. And second, if the two texts are equally authoritative variants of one play, the case for making a change is clearer when it does not depend upon arbitrary selection of the most helpful version; although Q2 helps the argument of this essay more than F1, the difference between the two is marginal at most, and in respect to the passage quoted above, only superficial appearance makes Q2 look more helpful. In Elizabethan English, "his" was the genitive of "it" and can thus refer to any or all of the four corpses with the same demonstrative force as the "This" of Q2.²⁹

The punctuation indicates a corresponding emphasis in the speaker's delivery. By Elizabethan convention, the periods setting off "His quarry cries on hauocke" indicate full pauses and call attention to the special importance of the phrase. The new half line following it gives Fortinbras time for an appropriate gesture or gasp of astonishment before blurting out the dismayed apostrophe to Death that exactly conveys the experience of woe and wonder promised by Horatio.

V.

By the standard of Shakespeare's practice in the other tragedies, Fortinbras and Horatio are both permissible candidates for the spokesman's role in *Hamlet*, and to deliver the crucial "His quarry cries on hauocke." Generally, the closing summation is delivered by the chief authority figure on stage. Octavius in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Malcolm in *Macbeth*, Antony in *Julius Caesar*, Lucius in *Titus Andronicus*, Bolinbroke in *Richard II*, and Richmond in *Richard III* are all sovereigns or acknowledged successors to the sovereignty. While the pattern of these plays

seems to point to Fortinbras as the natural spokesman, it actually does not; a closer examination, and the example of two other plays, points more strongly to Horatio.

Albany is chief spokesman in the last scene of *King Lear* and, as Goneril's surviving husband, the highest ranking figure on stage. Edgar and Kent may be the recognized successors, but not by the automatic operation of law; it is Albany who designates them as such. And it is not so much his rank as his kingmaking role and its importance to the restoration of order that defines Albany as the principal authority figure in the closing scene. Horatio is in the same position at the close of *Hamlet*. Although long familiarity now makes us take Fortinbras' succession for granted, it was far from inevitable at Elsinore, where his election still lay in the future. Whatever his right to succession may be, Fortinbras was a presumptively hostile claimant from the Danish point of view, whom the nobility would ordinarily resist with force of arms. In consequence, Horatio still has an essential role to play in the orderly transference of power and, until he tells the electors of Denmark that Fortinbras has Hamlet's endorsement, the transfer of rule remains an unresolved problem clouding the future. Like Albany in *King Lear*, Horatio is the onstage kingmaker, and his power of disposition over the succession establishes him as chief authority figure.

Romeo and Juliet presents a different case. The uncertainties and confusions in the narrative are dispelled by Friar Laurence, whose authority derives from knowledge rather than rank. As the confidant of both Romeo and Juliet, he is the only one who knows of their secret plans and how they have miscarried. Likewise in *Hamlet*, only Horatio knew the facts of King Hamlet's ghostly visitation, of Hamlet's revenge and Claudius' counterplot, and how their secret struggle led to the deaths not only of Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Gertrude, Laertes, but also of each other. Where the revelation of unknown facts is so important to the closure as in both *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, the example of Friar Laurence tips the scales in favor of Horatio. No one else is so well qualified to act as spokesman, or to dispel the uncertainties of the narrative and lay the foundation for a peaceful restoration of order.

In contrast, Fortinbras was ignorant of everything that constituted Hamlet's story and made *Hamlet* a tragedy: Hamlet's mission to avenge his father's murder, Claudius' guilt, the cat and mouse game between them, and the deaths they caused. His first words—"Where is this sight?"—draw attention to his outsider's status and limited knowledge of recent events. Though we are free to suppose he already knew that the king, queen, and prince were all dead, it was beyond Fortinbras'

ability to capture in one phrase the ironic symmetries of a story about two royal hunters, each the other's royal prey, who have just brought death to themselves and devastation to the Danish court. Admittedly, Shakespeare's characters often say things that are ironically pregnant with a meaning of which they are unaware, but this is not such an instance. Unintended irony requires someone to comment on it, or a later occasion for the audience to see the speaker confronted with the unanticipated relevance of his own words. It is a device that has no place at the very end of a play, and none of the spokesmen in the other tragedies delivers a closing statement that takes its meaning from facts beyond his personal knowledge.

VI.

I have tried to show in this essay how the central meaning of *Hamlet* is illuminated in the last scene when, in the phrase "His quarry cries on hauocke," the principal themes and action all converge in "a culmination of events that have beset the characters throughout the play," and we come to see both Hamlet and Claudius as the victims of their own endeavors. Those who reject my proposal for reassigning the phrase to Horatio will have to acknowledge and defend the unstated assumptions on which the time-honored reading depends, among them, that Shakespeare either overlooked the rich double relevance of "His quarry cries on hauocke" when he wrote it or else saw it and vitiated its effect with singular ineptness by giving the words to Fortinbras. Also, that after completing his customary preparation for a spokesman to tell Hamlet's story and sum up the play, he vitiated that effort, too, leaving Hamlet's story untold and the play with nothing but a "travesty" of a summary. And again, that the Q2 and F1 texts ought to remain privileged despite the evidence of Q1 that neither imperfection would exist with Horatio as spokesman; and also, despite the awkwardness with which both interrupt Horatio in mid-thought just where Q1 lets him summarize the whole play, they preserve the same summary in paraphrase by tacking it on to the beginning of the next speech.

This extended sequence of improbable assumptions exists only to support a feature of the received texts which is irreparably discordant. The simple remedy that frees us from the need to defend them and harmonizes the discord is to accept a new explanation for "His quarry cries on hauocke" and then reassign it to Horatio.

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Notes

¹*The First Folio of Shakespeare*, The Norton Facsimile, ed. Hinman (New York: Norton, 1968). Line references are those supplied by Hinman in this edition.

²*Hamlet*, ed. G. L. Kittredge (New York: Ginn and Co., 1939), p. 297.

³*Coriolanus*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. Brockbank (London: Methuen, 1976), I. i. 197-99.

⁴William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), vol. 4, p. 88.

⁵*Hamlet*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. H. Jenkins (New York: Methuen, 1982), I. v. 118, note; *Hamlet, The New Variorum Edition*, ed. F. J. Furness (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1918), I. v. 116, note.

⁶James Edmund Harting, *The Birds Of Shakespeare*, (1871; rpt. Chicago: Argonaut, Inc., 1965), p. 55.

⁷There is an exact parallel in the proverbial "To know a cat from a cony," attested c. 1561 in R. W. Dent, *Proverbial Language in English Drama Exclusive of Shakespeare, 1495-1616* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: Univ. of California Press, 1984), p. 240. Most editors take Hamlet's statement to mean only "I know one thing from another," a pointless assurance in light of his entirely rational and sharp-witted performance during the preceding conversation.

⁸I have shown elsewhere how Claudius inveigled Hamlet into the fencing match with Laertes, by sending Osric to fill his thoughts with misdirected anger at Laertes, a poor woodcock himself, and thus divert his attention from the royal hunter lurking in the background. "Hamlet, Osric, and the Duel," *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 2(1983), p. 5.

⁹The First Folio reads "pith and moment" (III. i. 88). All Q2 quotations are from *Shakespeare's Plays in Quarto*, eds. Allen and Muir (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: Univ. of California Press, 1981), which does not have act, scene, and line references. All those used here are from the Arden edition.

¹⁰E. A. Rauchut, "'Guilty in Defence': A Note on *Henry V*, III. iii. 123," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42 (1991), p. 55. The practice is dramatized in Henry V's confrontation with the citizens of Harfleur (*Henry V*, III. iii). The initial footnote to that scene in the Arden edition, ed. Walter, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1954), discusses the operation of military law in the circumstances.

¹¹*Julius Caesar*, ed. F. J. Furness, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1913), III. iii. 302, note. Furness does not cite any authority for his conclusion, but later scholarship has not shown it to be incorrect, and three early English statutes of war make it a capital offense for anyone but the king to cry havoc. "The Statutes And Ordinaunces To Be Kaped In Time of Warre," "Ordinances Of War Made By King Richard II At Durham, Ao. 1385," "Ordinances Of War Made By King Henry V At Mawnt," *The Black Book of the Admiralty*, 4 vols., ed. Twiss (London: Longman and Co., 1871-1876), vol. 1, pp. 286, 455, 462. Shakespeare regularly associates lawful havoc with the deeds of princes, even when there is no military context; elsewhere, when it would constitute usurpation and unauthorized use to have given the command, he is careful to describe it with disapproval. See *Coriolanus*, III. iii. 272-73.

¹²Robert S. Miola, "*Julius Caesar* and the Tyrannicide Debate," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 38 (1985), pp. 274 ff.

¹³Helge Kökeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1953), pp. 323-327. Wilhelm Vietor, *A Shakespeare Phonology* (1903; rpt. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1963), p. 229. The "v" of "havoc" would be softened and its last syllable lost according to the phonetic rules of Elizabethan English. Kökeritz, *op. cit.*, pp. 283, 327;

E. A. Abbott, *A Shakespearean Grammar* (London: Macmillan, 1901), pp. 347-56.

¹⁴*Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Kuhn, Michigan (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1963), vol. 4 at "hauke."

¹⁵Lily Campbell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1963), p. 112.

¹⁶John Doebler, *Shakespeare's Speaking Pictures* (Albuquerque, NM: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1974), pp. 95-97.

¹⁷Polonius introduced the metaphor in his first act warning to Ophelia to mistrust Hamlet's "springes to catch woodcocks," a fine expression of Polonian cunning, dealing in small game and small thoughts.

¹⁸Shakespeare was not the first to employ the image of a bird of prey slain by an unexpectedly poisonous quarry, and combine it with the image of a hunter caught in his own snare in order to capture the idea of justice by ironic reversal. In about 1565, Thomas Palmer illustrated the proverbial "He that will smite with the sworde, shal be stroken with the scabbarde" with a picture of a raven holding a scorpion in its claws, accompanied by the following verse:

The raven a foule devouring foule
A scorpion vp hath raughte:
By venome of whose taylor, he hath,
What he entended, caught.
Ill comes to him that thinketh yll;
and syn rewardeth sin:
He layes a snare for others baine;
him selfe is faine therein.

The Emblems of Thomas Palmer: "Two Hundred Posees", Sloan Ms. 4794, ed. Daly (New York, AMS Publishing Co., 1988), p. 41. Daly points out in this introduction that, although the undated manuscript remained unpublished until its modern edition, Palmer's emblems were widely admired and known to such members of Shakespeare's circle as Jonson, Drayton, and Camden.

¹⁹Bernard Beckerman, "Shakespeare Closing," *The Kenyon Review*, 7 (1985), p. 810.

²⁰Gabriel Harvey, quoted in *Shakespeare Allusion Book*, ed. Munro (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1932), vol. 1, p. 56.

²¹*Hamlet*, *The New Penguin Shakespeare*, ed. Spencer (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), p. 52.

²²"*Hamlet and Its Thematic Modes of Speech*," in *Perspectives on "Hamlet"*, ed. Holzberger and Waldeck (Cranbury, N.J. and London, 1975), pp. 29-47. James R. Siemon also holds that Hamlet would have been dissatisfied with Horatio's performance, *Shakespearean Iconoclasm* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Univ. of California Press, 1985), p. 212.

²³*The First Folio of Shakespeare*, *op. cit.*, pp. 789-90.

²⁴*Shakespeare's Hamlet: The First Quarto 1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1931).

²⁵Dover Wilson, *The Manuscript of Shakespeare's "Hamlet"* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1934), 1, p. 23. The authenticity and value of the First Folio are defended at length in Albert B. Weiner's introduction to his edition of the play, *Hamlet: The First Quarto, 1603* (Great Neck, NY: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1962).

²⁶*Woe and Wonder* (Denver: Univ. of Denver, 1951), especially chapter 2.

²⁷E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), vol. 3, p.

194; *William Shakespeare* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966), vol. 1, p. 122.

»T.G.B. Jenkins, for example, adopts three readings from Q1 in preference to those of Q2 and F1. *The New Penguin Shakespeare, op. cit.*, p. 375.

»Abbott, *op. cit.*, p. 151.