WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

HAMLET

FULLY ANNOTATED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION, BY BURTON RAFFEL

WITH AN ESSAY BY HAROLD BLOOM

The Tragedy of

Hamlet

PRINCE OF DENMARK

THE ANNOTATED SHAKESPEARE

Hamlet

William Shakespeare

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For my four sisters: Catherine, Teresa, Joan, and Martha

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Written four centuries ago, in a fairly early form of Modern English, *Hamlet* is a notoriously dense, complex text of remarkable depth and beauty. Many of the play's social and historical underpinnings necessarily need explanation for the modern reader. But what needs even more, and far more detailed, explanation are the very words.

> 'A did comply with his dug, before 'a sucked it. Thus has he, and many more of the same bevy that I know the drossy age dotes on, only got the tune of the time and, out of a habit of encounter, a kind of yeasty collection, which carries them through and through the most fanned and winnowed opinions. And do but blow them to their trial, the bubbles are out.

This is Hamlet himself, in act 5, scene 2, speaking to his friend and companion, Horatio, about Osric, an outrageously fashionable courtier who has just left them. Hamlet is profoundly disgusted by Osric's speech and behavior. But in the most basic of all senses of "meaning," what is this fiercely contemptuous speech all about? What is it (what are its words) *saying?* Longtime schol-

ars of Elizabethan literature have learned to fully understand; they delight in teaching the play to those less well learned. But what can the unlearned, trying to read *Hamlet,* make of what surely often seems to them, in passages like that just quoted, a kind of weirdly surrealistic jumble?

> *Hamlet.* 'A[1] did comply[2] with his dug,[3] before 'a sucked it. Thus has he, and many more of the same bevy[4] that I know the drossy[5] age dotes on, only got[6] the tune[7] of the time and, out of an habit of encounter,[8] a kind of yeasty collection,[9] which carries them through and through[10] the most fanned and winnowed[11] opinions. And do but blow them to their trial,[12] the bubbles are out.[13]

I believe annotations of this sort create the necessary bridges from Shakespeare's four-centuries-old English across to ours. The only "difficult" word I have not explained is "dote"; the omission is deliberate. Many readers new to matters Elizabethan will already understand this still-current, and largely unchanged, word. "Tune,"

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1 he
2 observe the formalities of politeness
3 the nipple of his nurse's breast
4 company, crowd (primarily used with reference to women)
5 scum-filled, rubbish-ridden
6 "only got" = "have/have acquired/caught only"
7 style, frame of mind
8 "an habit of encounter" = "a settled/habitual/rote way of face-to-face meeting"
9 "yeasty collection" = "fermenting/restlessly turbid/frothy/foaming collection/summary/abstract"
10 "through and through" = "from beginning to end, over and over again"
11 "fanned and winnowed" = "(long since) thoroughly blown about and sifted"
12 examination, test, proof
13 popped, extinguished

meaning "melody," is of course a word familiar to all speakers of the language. But its sense, here, "style, frame of mind," will not similarly be clear. The same is true of such familiar expressions as "only got" and "through and through." Some readers, to be sure, will comprehend their unusual, historical meanings without glosses. And when it comes to words like "dote," those who are not familiar with the modern meaning will easily find a clear, simple definition in any modern dictionary. And they may be obliged to make fairly frequent use of such a dictionary: there are a good many words, in *Hamlet,* to be found in modern dictionaries and not glossed here. But there are just as surely readers who will not understand Shakespeare's intended meaning, absent such glosses as I here offer. And it seems to me my editorial responsibility to guarantee as complete verbal accessibility as I am able to provide. I followed the same principle in compiling *The Annotated Milton,* published in 1999, and classroom experience has validated that decision. Classes of mixed upper-level undergraduates and graduate students have more quickly and thoroughly transcended language barriers than ever before. This allows the teacher to move more promptly and confidently to the nonlinguistic matters that have made Milton a great and important poet. Shakespeare's language is more or less equally difficult. No one who has not understood the *words* of *Hamlet* can either fully or properly come to grips with the imperishable matter of the play.

Not all of *Hamlet* will appear so impenetrable. But the inevitable forces of linguistic change, operant in all living tongues, have inevitably created wide degrees of obstacles to ready comprehension—not only sharply different meanings but subtle, partial shifts in meaning which allow us to think that we understand when, alas, we do not. Speakers of Dutch and German, too, expe-

rience this shifting of the linguistic ground. Like Early Modern English (ca. 1600) and the Modern English now current, those languages are too close for those who know only one language, and not the other, to be able readily to recognize just what they correctly understand and what they do not. In the very first scene of *Hamlet,* for example, when the sentry Francisco directs Barnardo, arriving on the castle's guard platform in the darkness of night, to "Stand and unfold yourself," we can pretty reasonably guess what "unfold" might have meant, in Shakespeare's time. To make things both plain and definite, however, I have in this edition glossed "unfold" as "reveal, disclose, identify," giving the neophyte modern reader the security of certainty as well as what is I think a useful sense of the word's range, in Shakespeare's time. But I have also glossed "stand," because it is precisely the sort of misleading "false friend" I have been talking about. It does not in fact mean what we mean by "stand," which is "stand up" as opposed to "sit down." Rather, it means "halt, stop"—which might perhaps be guessed at, but equally well might not even be noticed by a modern reader, who knows perfectly well what "stand" means to him or her.

I have sometimes annotated prosody (metrics), though only when that has seemed truly necessary or particularly helpful. My standard for the few prosodic usages I have glossed is not so much ad hoc as it is founded both in long experience in the classroom (I taught my first university class in fall 1948) and my clear perception of a powerful paradigm shift in general literacy. Books have been, not surprisingly, the place where people have learned to read. It seems to me apparent that for almost a century books have been losing that position, being to a significant extent replaced first by movies and now, even more meaningfully, by a variety of electronically generated screens. Inevitably, those screens

are heavily visual and minimally language-oriented. This is not the place to descant on such subjects, but the subtitle of my essay "Freshman Decomposition" seems to me to say what needs saying: "not the same freshmen." (The essay appears in *Palo Alto Review,* Fall 2001.) In glossing prosody, as in glossing words, I believe we have no choice but to deal with the students we actually have, not with the largely no longer extant students we either once had or deeply wish we still had. It is my belief that we will not have such students again.

The notation used in discussing prosody, as in indicating pronunciation, follows the extremely simple form used in my *From Stress to Stress: An Autobiography of English Prosody* (see "Further Reading," near the end of this book). Syllables with metrical stress are capitalized; all other syllables are in lowercase.

I have annotated, as well, a limited number of such other matters, sometimes of interpretation, sometimes of general or historical relevance, as have seemed to me seriously worthy of inclusion. These annotations have been most carefully restricted: this is not a book of literary commentary. It is for that reason that the glossing of metaphors has been severely restricted. There is almost literally no end to discussion and/or analysis of metaphor, especially in Shakespeare. To yield to temptation might well be to double or triple the size of this book—and would also change it from a historically oriented language guide to a work of an unsteadily mixed nature. In the process, I believe, neither language nor literature would be well or clearly served.

In the interests of compactness and brevity, I have employed in my annotations (as consistently as I am able) a number of stylistic and typographical devices:

- Words or phrases separated by either a comma or a forward slash (/) are supplementary to one another. I have used the former sign in brief (usually one- or two-word) annotations, and the latter sign in longer annotations.
- Alternative but complementary meanings are usually indicated by *and;* contrasting meanings by *or;* and meanings that might be both complementary and contrasting by *and / or.* These meanings are placed in parentheses, to highlight them for the reader. Instances of special interest are set off with lowercase arabic numerals, (1), (2), and so on.
- Except for proper nouns, the word at the beginning of all annotations is in lowercase.
- Unresolved uncertainties are followed by a question mark, set in parentheses (?). Textual differences have been annotated only when the differences seem either marked or of unusual interest.
- Annotations of more common words have not been repeated. The note annotating the first instance of more common words is followed by the sign ★. Readers may easily track down the first annotation, using the brief "Finding List" at the back of the book.
- When particularly relevant, "translations" into twenty-first-century English have been added, in parentheses.

The most important typographical device here employed is ★ placed after the first (and only) gloss of words and phrases very frequently used in Hamlet. *I have provided an alphabetically arranged listing of such words and phrases in the "Finding List" at the back of the book. This distinctly telegraphic listing contains no annotations—simply the words or phrases themselves and the page and note numbers where the annotation of the words or phrases can be found.*

INTRODUCTION

History is littered with "solutions" to the ineffable, entrancing, will-o'-the-wisp "meaning" of *Hamlet*. Perhaps the most charming of all was that of the delightfully insane fellow, who shall here go nameless, so convinced that the answer to the perpetual puzzle lay hidden under the stones in Elsinore castle—and he knew just which stones, too—that he persuaded the benevolent Danes to let him turn over exactly those stones, still lying quietly in place after all these centuries. He turned them over, one by one. And he looked. And what he found was dust, and dirt, and a few bugs.

No one, I think, can or ever will "solve" *Hamlet*. In the first of the three sections that follow, I want to discuss the pre-history of the play—or, more exactly, what we know and what we do not know about that history. It has, as I shall explain, a profound relevance for puzzling out the meaning of what William Shakespeare wrote. In the second section, I want to discuss aspects of the play's two chief characters, Hamlet and Ophelia. There is no need to set out even the general range of more than three hundred years of proposed "solutions." The earlier period is neatly recorded, with generous (and quite fascinating) excerpts in Horace Howard Fur-

ness's 1877 Variorum Edition. Modern criticism is summarized and analyzed, with remarkable objectivity, in Gottschalk's 1972 study. In the third and last section of this Introduction, I will briefly discuss textual sources and the editorial principles responsible for the text of the play as here presented.

The Pre-History of Hamlet

The first link in the Hamlet story is the likely but unprovable assumption that, at some distant and unknown time, a bloody family feud much like other bloody family feuds occurred somewhere in Scandinavia. Storytelling was without question a prime art, in all ancient heroic societies, and Scandinavia (from Iceland all the way across to Finland) developed some of the world's finest tales. (We know most of them under the general heading of "sagas.") The particular blood feud that began the Hamlet story, however, had a rather special twist of high fictive interest. The central figure was seeking revenge against an uncle who had murdered the young man's father, who was also the murderer's brother. Too powerless to be able, as yet, to effect that revenge, the young man sought refuge, successfully, in pretended madness.

Amhlaide is how Hamlet was named, in the next link in the story, which is also our first written record of the principal character's name, though not yet of the tale proper. We do not have a whole work, but only a fragmentary mention in still another account, Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda,* dated to ca. 1230. Snorri's mention of Amhlaide attributes it to what he tells us us is an Irish lament, probably of the tenth century A.D. Clearly, the name Amhlaide is a Celtic adaptation, based on a Scandinavian original. In this lament, put into the mouth of a mourning widow, Amh-

laide is described as a Dane, and as the killer, in a historically ver-
ified battle that took place in 919, of the widow's husband, a king
named Niall. This first documentary record indicates the living
nature of the Hamlet tale, though without further knowledge of
the lament itself we have no idea of exactly what its narrative na-
ture may have been. Nor do we know what the general shape of
the Hamlet tale proper then was, or whether it took something
like its later form first in Ireland or after it had been exported
back to Scandinavia. Plainly, however, there had been an exporta-
tion of the tale to Ireland, whatever form it may have taken: this
was yet another link in the haze-filled background of the Hamlet
tale. Stories of no large inherent interest do not travel well. This
one obviously did.

But by the time of the next link in the story's development,
datable to Denmark and to the early thirteenth century, we can
see that the Hamlet story has advanced a large step toward Shake-
speare's play. An ecclesiastic in the service of a Danish bishop,
Saxo Grammaticus (ca. 1150–1216), compiled a *Historia* (or *Gesta*)
Danica, "Stories/Deeds of the Danes." Saxo wrote in Latin; he may
have been working from assorted sources also in Latin, though we
do not know. Now we are given a prince, Amletha, whose father,
the king of Denmark, was murdered by his brother, Fengo. Fengo
then married his brother's widow, Gerutha. Fengo plainly meant
to finish his capture of the throne by murdering Amletha, but the
prince pretended insanity (one did not, could not, kill the mad)
and produced a veritable storm of crazed acts to verify his in-
vented but protective madness. He would throw himself into
muck and rub filth all over his face and clothes. Taken to a forest
by his uncle's men, to test his sanity more closely, Amletha was
careful to mount his horse backwards, setting the reins on the