



# THE BILL / SHAKESPEARE PROJECT

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## Text Me, Hamlet: Is this why Horatio's here? No

A couple of days back, I discussed **the three different early versions of *Hamlet*** which are the sources for all editions of the play that followed in the past four hundred years. I noted at the time that the length of the First (or "Bad") Quarto is much shorter than of their the Second Quarto or the First Folio.

Based on the lengths, you would assume that the First Quarto would contain fewer scenes, or at least **not** to have scenes that weren't already in the other versions.

And you'd be right (there is nothing that approaches Act Four, Scene Two in the First Quarto), but you'd also be very wrong as well.

In what would be(come) Act Four in future editions, just after Laertes returns to find his father dead and his sister distract, the Second Quarto and First Folio have the scene where Horatio receives Hamlet's letters from the sailors.

Not so in the First Quarto. Here, we do get a letter scene, but it's different:

*[Enter Horatio and the Queen.]*

HORATIO

Madam, your son is safe arrived in Denmark.  
This letter I even now received of him,  
Whereas he writes how he escaped the danger  
And subtle treason that the King had plotted.  
Being crossed by the contention of the winds,  
He found the packet sent to the King of England,  
Wherein he saw himself betrayed to death,  
As, at his next convers'ion with your grace,  
He will relate the circumstance at full.

QUEEN

Then I perceive there's treason in his looks  
That seemed to sugar o'er his villany.  
But I will soothe and please him for a time,  
For murderous minds are always jealous.  
But know not you, Horatio, where he is?

HORATIO

Yes, madam, and he hath appointed me  
To meet him on the east side of the city  
Tomorrow morning.

QUEEN

Oh, fail not, good Horatio, and withal commend me  
A mother's care to him. Bid him awhile  
Be wary of his presence, lest that he  
Fail in that he goes about.

HORATIO

Madam, never make doubt of that.  
I think by this the news be come to court:  
He is arrived. Observe the King, and you shall

Quickly find, Hamlet being here,  
Things fell not to his mind.

QUEEN

But what become of Gilderstone and Rossencraft?

HORATIO

He being set ashore, they went for England,  
And in the packet there writ down that doom  
To be performed on them 'pointed for him.  
And by great chance he had his father's seal,  
So all was done without discovery.

QUEEN

Thanks be to heaven for blessing of the Prince!  
Horatio, once again I take my leave,  
With thousand mother's blessings to my son.

HORATIO

Madam, adieu.

*[Exeunt.]*

One can see how this could take the place of the Horatio letter scene. It contains much of the same exposition (the king's betrayal, the orders for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern [or in this case, Gilderstone and Rossencraft], and Hamlet's return), as well as what we will later learn from Hamlet directly: that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are sent to their doom. Beyond some clumsy writing (another characteristic of the "Bad" Quarto), we also get one thing found nowhere in our other versions: a clear statement by Gertrude of support for and loyalty to Hamlet and suspicion and barely-contained disdain for the king.

While I can see how this scene could work, I think it makes the last portion of the play weaker. It removes all subtlety and ambiguity from Gertrude's character and the range of performance choices from the actress playing Gertrude.

What I find interesting (beyond this completely substituted scene) is how Horatio is missing from the First Quarto's previous scene with Gertrude, Claudius, and Laertes, a scene in which he appears in the other versions. I'm guessing Horatio was off receiving those Hamlet letters.

But it still doesn't explain why Horatio is in that scene in the first place (er, second place since this is about the Second Quarto... see what I did there?), especially when he gives such seemingly out-of-character cynical and politically savvy advice ("Twere good [Ophelia] were spoken with, for she may strew // Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds." [IV.v.14-5]).

What is he doing there? And why is he channeling his inner Claudius?

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## FOLIOS AND QUARTOS, HAMLET, TRAGEDY

2 Replies to "Text Me, Hamlet: Is this why Horatio's here? No"



**James**

**AUGUST 17, 2018 AT 9:15 PM**

Was he hired by Gertrude to watch Hamlet and report to her? Is that why he is still there two months after the funeral? Does he operate as a spy on his friend and is torn by this? Is that partly what he is referencing when he decries “accidental judgements” and “purposes mistook” in his eulogy to Hamlet? Horatio seems caught up in something and to give him multiple purposes beyond simple loyalty seems to hold more firmly with the play’s themes to me. This odd moment w Gertrude is explained if so. He is in on the conspiracy but, like Gertrude, like Hamlet, his resolve fails him when he sees his another’s soul in true anguish.



**thebillshakespeareproject**

**AUGUST 18, 2018 AT 8:29 AM**

James,

oh, man... I love this... this would make for an incredibly paranoid production... EVERYBODY's watching Hamlet for someone else's purposes... I so dig this!

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