

Resseuça

Early Modern Literary Studies

Jesús Tronch-Pérez. *A Synoptic Hamlet: A Critical-Synoptic Edition of the Second Quarto and First Folio Texts of Hamlet*. SEDERI, Universitat de València, 2002. 407 pp. ISBN 84-370-5381-1.

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1. Various editions of *Hamlet* since Jennen's first collation in 1773 and Timmins' 1860 parallel-text edition have attempted to present the original texts of the play - First Quarto, Second Quarto, and First Folio - in ways that make them easy to read and compare. Others are currently in development (notably Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor's Arden 3, and the New Variorum edition under the management of Bernice Kliman). The latest effort to reach print is Jesús Tronch-Pérez's *Synoptic Hamlet*.
2. This edition's central technique is wonderfully simple and effective - Second Quarto variants are printed slightly above the line, with First Folio variants slightly below. (See [Figure 1](#), Hamlet's first soliloquy: the angle brackets indicate that "sullied" is an emendation or alteration by the editor.) Rows of dots are used for passages where one edition has no text. It's very easy to "read" the two versions, compare variants both large and small, and with the help of excellent notes, consider the implications and relative merits of those variants. The edition's dual line numbering - through line numbers down the left side and act/scene/line numbers on the right (keyed to the 1974 Riverside) - makes it easy to cross-reference to other editions. Understandably, given Q1's lesser authority and wide variance from the other texts, its readings are not part of the synopsis (many Q1 variants are presented in the textual apparatus).

Figure 1

- 313 *Hamlet*. O that this too too <sullied> flesh would melt,
solid
- 314 Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew, 130
- 315 Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
- 316 His canon 'gainst <self-slaughter.> O God, O God!
self-slaughter.
- 317 How <weary,> stale, flat, and unprofitable
weary,
- 318 Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Seems
- 319 Fie on't, ah fie, fie, 'tis an unweeded garden 135
O
- 320 That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
- 321 Possess it merely that it should come thus
merely. That to this,
- 322 But two months dead, nay, not so much, not two—

3. Unlike editions like the *Enfolded Hamlet* and *Three-Text Hamlet*, [1] which present the sources pretty much as printed, Tronch-Pérez has created something of a hybrid between those editions and a standard critical edition. He modernizes the spelling, and corrects what seem to him to be printers' errors and impossible and (this is where things get a bit dicey) "obscure" readings. The goal is to strike a balance between "respecting the qualities of the textual versions of *Hamlet* here edited, and making the texts and their differences adequately available to the modern reader":

I set out to prepare a reading critical edition in modern spelling that may surmount not only the difficulties of facsimiles and documentary transcripts...but also the awkwardness of parallel presentations. This being a critical edition, the editor's interpretation 'filters' the original texts for readers and saves them the effort of interpreting obscure or impossible readings and of resorting to the minute letter of the textual apparatus.

4. The edition often attains to both these goals. But in contrast to the transparency of old-spelling, "non-critical" editions, in this edition the reader often needs to resort to the textual apparatus to figure out what's being filtered, and how - rather than relieving him of that need. To modernize spelling, for instance, the editor often has to choose an interpretation (and exclude others). So the reader must resort to the apparatus and notes to figure out what interpretation is driving a given modernization choice. For close, critical readers - who presumably comprise the audience for this work - the corrections and modernizations often actually interfere with straightforward "reading."
5. It's easiest to impart the value and difficulties of Tronch-Pérez's approach by looking at a well-known and vexing crux: Hamlet's sullied/sallied/solid flesh in the first line of his first soliloquy (Figure 1). The textual apparatus provides the following.

313 sullied] Wilson, fallied Q2-5 Q1. solid] F1-4.

The note on the line reads as follows.

313 **sullied/solid** Sullied: «Soiled, polluted» (ppl. a). The present edition has interpreted Q2's original 'fallied' as a variant spelling of 'sullied' (Bowers 1956: 44), although sallied could also mean "assailed" (Furnivall) or "assaulted" (Hubbard). Cf. l. 932. Commentary continues in Long Note.

(The double angle brackets indicate a definition, here from the *OED*; the Long Note is transcribed here in a footnote [2], as is the referenced note to l. 932, Polonius's "You laying these slight sallies/sulleyes on my son".)

6. "Sullied" and "solid" are the two most likely modern readings (and "sullied" is arguably just a modernization of Q2). They are justifiably presented as such for easy apprehension. But the reader must go to the apparatus to discover "sallied," with its multivalenced meanings. And he must sort through tangled centuries of editorship to parse those innocent-looking angle brackets.
7. This edition's "Let be" passage (ll. 3671-73) likewise requires the reader to consider Tronch-Pérez's renditions (with punctuation changes to Q2), plus the two originals in the apparatus, rather than merely considering the two already troublesome originals. The apparatus gives readings from several editions, the note gives clear (and reasonable) paraphrases of the two originals, and a two-page long note reviews reasoning and approaches by all the major editors. Excellent annotations such as these would be easier to use if the reader could refer just to the main text rather than the apparatus-if the edition leaned more toward being conservative and "synoptic," presenting the original texts in easily comparable layout (as it does at l. 932), and less toward being "critical." It's not so much a problem of approach as of degree.
8. That issue aside, I don't hesitate to say that this is one of the most impressive editions of *Hamlet* ever produced. Almost every significant textual issue is addressed in well-considered detail, including definitions from the *OED* and others, citation of important editors' approaches, and cogent analysis by the present editor. The notes don't have the breadth that you find in Jenkins, much less Furness - they wisely hew more to textual discussion than to interpretation - but this edition provides all the textual commentary a critical reader could ask for, both in quantity and quality.
9. The text, apparatus, and notes are supported by the most up-to-date and comprehensive essay available (43 pp.) on the play's textual provenance and the scholarly debates surrounding it. (Not surprisingly, Tronch-Pérez concludes that those debates "have only resulted in tentative and sometimes contradictory explanations that always contain some problematic point in their argument and ultimately depend on assumptions concerning, and reflect subjective views on, literary production and transmission.") Another twenty pages explains the aims, approach, and principles of the current edition, and a twenty-five-page bibliography will satisfy all but the most inveterate. There is, unfortunately, no index.
10. For my part, I will continue to turn first to *The Enfolded Hamlet* (in print and online) and *Three-Text Hamlet* (especially where Q1 issues are significant) for their largely unmediated and fairly easy-to-compare presentations of the original texts, and to the searchable though unedited transcripts on the [Internet Shakespeare Editions](#) site. But this edition has become my next recourse, when I seek editors' opinions (including now, prominently, Tronch-Pérez's opinions). Anyone with even a small collection of Hamlet editions should own this one. Graduate libraries should not think twice about the purchase. And future editors will ignore it--both its content and its approach - to their own scandal.
11. For buyers, *A Synoptic Hamlet* has one major advantage (aside from its reasonable 24-euro price): unlike *Enfolded* and *Three-Text*, you can actually order a copy - though not quickly or without parsing a bit of Spanish. (It's not available on Amazon, for instance - U.S. or U.K. -

nor is there an order site for the publisher.) I ordered mine by email after querying for shipping costs to Seattle (12.15 euros airmail), and received it more than a month and a half later. The address is: Publicacions Universitat de Valencia, Carrer del Batxiller 1 - 1, E-46010 Valencia, Spain. Fax: 34 (Spain) -63864067. Email: publicacions@uv.es.

Notes

1. *Enfolded Hamlet* online: <global-language.com/enfolded.html>. Bertram, Paul and Kliman, Bernice W., eds. *The three-text Hamlet : parallel texts of the first and second quartos and first folio*. New York : AMS Press, 1991.

2. Long note on line 313:

sullied/solid F1's 'solid' seems to connect better with 'melt, | Thaw and resolve itself into a dew', a connection that Jenkins finds too obvious (436-7). Wilson notices "something incongruous" in the "fat Burbage [the actor who first played Hamlet in Shakespeare's times] thumping himself on the chest" and pronouncing 'solid flesh' (1934: 312). He also observes that Shakespeare employes 'sullied' with an image "of flecks or spots upon a surface of pure white", and here "Hamlet is thinking of snow begrimed with soot and dirt, as it often is in melting, and wishing that his 'sullied flesh' might melt as snow melts in time of thaw" (312-3). Against Wilson's commentary, Hibbard reminds us that "*OED* defines [solid], using these very lines of Hamlet as an example, thus, 'hard and compact'" (383). He argues that "Hamlet says nothing about snow, he refers to flesh; and, as anyone who has watched snow melting knows, when the snow goes the dirt remains"; that "the whole process of solid becoming liquid, becoming vapour seems to have interested Shakespeare" (and quotes LUC 592-4, WIV 3.5.116 and 4.5.97); and that since "solidity is closely associated with earth", "it is the flesh, the solid earthy part of himself that Hamlet wants to shed".

Wilson defends 'sullied' by arguing that "the words 'sullied flesh' are not merely the keynote of the First Soliloquy, but one of the principal motifs of the whole play" (1934: 314), since the play is dominated by images of contamination and self-disgust. For Kittredge, who points out a "curious coincidence of phraseology (weary, solid and melt)" in 2H4 3.1.47-9, Wilson's "explanation of sullied as indicating that Hamlet regards his own flesh as defiled by his mother's incest is far-fetched, and solid is obviously correct". Sisson finds 'sullied' "artificial and false to the context" (1956) and paraphrases F1 as "If only we could escape from this flesh of mortality by its own deliquescence (for we may not seek escape by suicide). But it is too, too solid for that wish'. Cf. 'solidity and compound mass' [l. 2432]. The Quarto sullied probably derives from sollid in the copy". Jenkins and Andrews, who adopt Q2's variant here, recognize a possible wordplay on both senses. Kittredge also acknowledges that "Sullied may well be a form of solid, due to confusion of pronunciation between [short o and short a]. Cf. such forms as farren for foregin; clatpole for clotpole; [etc.]". See note 56, and Cercignani (114). Jenkins points out that "solid is already implicit in flesh", and "though 'too solid flesh' escapes tautology, sullied enlarges the meaning as solid does not" (437). See also Bowers (1956), Weiss, Flatter (1960), Ware, Yamada, Bjork, Willson, and Monitto.

Note to line 932:

sallies / sullies Sally: "A breaking forth from restraint; an outburst or transport" (n1 4), and perhaps "witticism, piece of banter, lively remark especially by way of attack upon a person or thing" (Pyles: 130). Sully: "a stain, blemish" (n; earliest quotation.); Shakespeare's only use of this word. Q2's reading 'fallies' is usually regarded as a legitimate variant spelling of 'sullies' (Bowers 1956: 44), as the present edition regarded Q2's 'fallied' in l. 313. Yet here the present edition has been more conservative in order to allow the possibility of alternative meanings (similarly in l. 217, 250, 2966, 3809). 'Sallies' refers back to the 'flash and outbreak of a fiery mind' (l. 925), while 'sullies' recalls 'taints of liberty' (l. 924).

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HOME PAGE

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