

“For look you where my abridgement comes:” The Playability of Shakespeare’s Variant Play Texts

Sometime in 1599, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men opened the Globe with what very well might have been a performance of Shakespeare’s recently finished *Henry V*. Even if we assume that the roughly 3,000 Londoners who first filled Shakespeare’s most famous theatre did indeed see the final installment of his second tetralogy of history plays, we cannot be sure of what exactly they saw and heard. Like many of Shakespeare’s plays, *Henry V* was first printed in two, very different forms that complicate our understanding of how the play was originally written and/or played. Though questions of the competing texts’ relative authorial and performative authority have frequently been contentious, the last thirty years or so have seen many critics adopt a theoretical middle ground in which both disputed texts of *Henry V* are understood to be of critical interest and historical value.¹

This compromise is made possible by a narrative in which early modern playwrights wrote plays in their idealized, maximal form before turning them over to companies that would, necessarily, reduce and alter the texts according to the needs of performance. It is oversimplification to suggest that any single narrative represents critical consensus regarding Shakespeare’s variant texts; indeed, critics continue to forward a variety of explanations for the play texts of *Henry V*. However, if the narrative of theatrical abridgment does not represent a

¹ For textual and contextual discussions of the variant texts of *Henry V*, see Andrew Gurr, ed., *The First Quarto of King Henry V* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 1-34 and Richard Dutton, “‘Methinks the truth should live from age to age’: The Dating and Context of *Henry V*,” *Hunting Library Quarterly* 68 (March 2005), 173-204. For more detailed arguments regarding the good/bad polarity regarding Shakespeare’s variant texts in general, see Gabriel Egan, *The Struggle for Shakespeare’s Text: Twentieth-Century Editorial Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2010); Random Cloud, “The Marriage of Good and Bad Quartos,” *SQ* 33 (1982): 421-30; Steven Urkowitz, “Good news about ‘Bad’ Quartos” in Maruice Charney, ed., *“Bad” Shakespeare: Revaluations of the Shakespeare Canon* (London and Toronto: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1988); and Paul Werstine, “A Century of Bad Quartos,” *SQ* 50 (Autumn 1985): 310-333.

critical consensus, the narrative itself has only rarely come under direct attack. Even as Janette Dillon (1994) cautions against “A model that puts playhouse and author on either side of text and demands commitment to the first at the price of total rejection of the second...,” the narrative by which maximal/texts were converted into minimal/performance texts has remained for the most part free from serious examination. By separating Shakespeare’s surviving, variant texts into maximal texts that approximate the plays as they were written and minimal texts that represent the plays as they were likely performed, the schema has appeased critics interested in Shakespeare the author as well as critics interested in Shakespeare the company playwright. Like many good compromises, the theory neatly cleaves the corpus of varying texts in half, designating the longer texts as the province of what Lukas Erne calls a “literary Shakespeare,” while protecting the shorter texts as imperfect but vital proxies for the ephemeral “Shakespeare in performance.”²

Though the distinction between minimal and maximal texts understands the competing versions of plays like *Henry V* according to the play texts’ relative fitness for early modern stage, it relies almost exclusively upon the most rudimentary metric of comparison: length according to a play text’s total number of lines. In this chapter, I introduce a more nuanced means of assessment, one that evaluates textual features in the context of early modern performance practices that utilized individual preparation of parts and cues while limiting the amount of group rehearsal. By questioning the theoretical distinction between minimal/performance and maximal/authorial texts, I mean to rethink several of the most common and fundamental assumptions about Shakespeare’s variant play texts.

² Jenette Dillon. “Is There a Performance in this Text?” *SQ* 45 (Spring, 1994), 74-86, 74. Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 20.

The earliest printing of *Henry V* (1600), less than a year removed from its hypothetical first performance, is roughly half as long as the version published twenty-four years later in the 1623 folio. Early readers understood the relationship between the two, printed play texts in a relatively straightforward fashion: critics including Alexander Pope suggested that shorter, less poetically accomplished quarto text was written previous to the 1599 performance and that, sometime between the show's hypothetical opening of the Globe and Shakespeare's death in 1616, it was revised into the extended, "finished" form printed in the First Folio. However, this chronologically straightforward explanation was for the most part abandoned at the turn of the twentieth century as critics began to take more seriously the "diuise stolne, and surreptitious copies" denounced by Heminge and Condell in their introduction to the 1623 Folio. Thanks to the work of the loosely united group of critics referred to as the New Bibliographers, a critical narrative emerged in which the Folio text was understood to have been printed from an authorial copy of the text written prior to the opening of the Globe and the subsequent preparation of the manuscript from which the First Quarto was printed.³

Initially, the narrative constructed piecemeal by the New Bibliography reduced the 1600 Quarto's status to that of a non-Shakespearean text, created via piracy or memorial reconstruction on the part of one or more of its actors. However, in the century since A.W. Pollard (1909) first introduced the idea of a "bad quarto," critical opinion has gradually re-evaluated the historical value of Shakespeare's early quartos; in the last two decades, we have moved increasingly close to a critical consensus returning to the notion that Q1 best represents the play with which the Lord Chamberlain's Men hypothetically opened the Globe. While it is true that many critics have restored the performative authority of the First Quarto, the New

³ See Ernest Honigmann, "The New Bibliography and its Critics." *Textual Performances: The Modern Reproduction of Shakespeare's Drama*, eds. Lukas Erne and Margaret Jane Kidnie (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 77-93.

Bibliographical timeline has remained more or less intact. Even if critical opinion has returned to a position in which the earliest printed text is understood to bear a likely resemblance to the play in performance, most critics appear to believe the manuscript behind the Folio text to have been written first.⁴

As early as 1953, Leo J. Suschko suggested that the Q1 and F texts of *Henry V* were equally authorial, with the shorter Q1 text representing a performance version of the longer, literary Folio.⁵ The idea that the texts shared authority but differed in purpose would languish for a few decades in the wake of the New Bibliographical certainty that Q1 *Henry V* was set from “a bad, or reported, text much abbreviated, often inaccurate and unmetrical, and published, we may be certain, without the authority and consent of the author or his Company.”⁶ Gradually, however, Suschko’s schema found support from critics ranging from Andrew Gurr (2000) to Lukas Erne (2003).⁷ Like Suschko before them, both critics suggest that *Henry V* was written in a form best represented by F, a text “of a length which actors found impossible to reconcile with the requirements of performance.”⁸ Both critics suggest that theatrical preparation resulted in a much shorter text very likely represented by the play as it was printed in the first quarto.

In his introduction to the Cambridge edition of Q1, Gurr suggests that we can be uncommonly certain that the play’s first printing closely resembles its first performance:

The quarto text of *Henry V* printed in 1600 is probably the best surviving example of a Shakespeare play-script as it was first performed by the company that bought

⁴ For five divergent arguments that each suggest or imply a performative function for Q1 *Henry V*, see Alfred Hart, ‘*Stolne and Surreptitious Copies*,’ (Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1942); Leo J. Suschko, *Können die 'schlechten' Quartos der Shakespeare-Dramen abgekürzte Provinzfassungen sein?* (Friedrich-Alexander Universität: Erlangen, 1953); Eric Rasmussen, “The Revision of Scripts,” *A New History of Early English Drama*, eds. Cox and Kastan (Columbia: Columbia UP, 1197), 441-460; Gurr, *The First Quarto*, 1-34; and Erne, *Shakespeare*.

⁵ Leo J. Suschko, *Können*, 42.

⁶ Andrew S. Cairncross, xxx.

⁷ Gurr, *The First Quarto*, and Erne, *Shakespeare*, 131-174, 220-245.

⁸ Erne, *Shakespeare*, 192.

it... The author's script was designed from the outset to be an idealised, maximal text, and every early performance altered it into more realistic or realizable shapes, often at a quite drastic remove from the ideal.... The Folio version of *Henry V* probably approximates to such a 'maximal' text. The quarto version represents something much closer to the 'minimal' text that was actually performed.⁹

Even as such treatment of Q1 avoids charges of memorial reconstruction or piracy, the basic relationship governing the two play texts is largely understood to be the same as it was for Pollard and the New Bibliographers: the play was written in its lengthiest form and altered for, through, or because of performance.

Though varied in terms of particulars, a majority of recent narratives explaining the relationship between the texts of *Henry V* now resemble the paradoxical arguments of Suschko, Erne, and Gurr, suggesting *both* that the 1600 quarto text best represents the play as it was first performed *and* that, despite being printed nearly a quarter of a century later, the 1623 folio text best represents the play as it was first written. Some version of this two-pronged explanation figures prominently in recent critical assessment of all of Shakespeare's plays printed in varying forms: Shakespeare is understood by many critics to have written plays resembling those printed in the Folio while his company is understood to have performed plays that much more closely resembled their shorter, simpler counterparts.

Certainly a text containing more lines would have required additional memorization than one containing fewer. It stands to reason that there may very well have been a point at which a text became absolutely too long to be performed on the public stage. However, as this chapter

⁹ Gurr, *The First Quarto*, 3.

will demonstrate, our insistence that the lengthiest versions of Shakespeare's variant play texts were inherently unplayable has endured even as critics have complicated our understanding of the "two-hour play," theatrical cutting, and the general narrative surrounding Shakespeare's career. If we have reason to believe that length alone may not have rendered a text unplayable, narratives relying upon the distinction between minimal/performance and maximal/authorial texts require a more sensitive and descriptive means of evaluating a text's relative fitness for the early modern stage.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I introduced a methodology designed to understand Shakespeare's play texts in performance by evaluating features of the texts specifically designed to negotiate the unique set of staging practices that governed early modern production, many of which were literally enacted upon the text itself. I posited that not all texts would have been inherently playable according to a process in which the play was sundered into parts, prepared by individual players on their own, and reassembled in as few rehearsals as possible. Focusing on the distribution and patterning of speeches across fifty-nine of Shakespeare's printed play texts, I identified several textual features intended, I believe, to ease the burdens of early modern performance. I argued that Shakespeare and his company distributed speeches in order to minimize the number of cues for which players were responsible during individual scenes and provide extended and frequent time off stage for each player to recover, refocus, or, more hypothetically, review his part. Furthermore, I identified two distinct forms – two-player scenes and speech stems – that would have allowed a player to deliver every other speech, a pattern that may have allowed a player to more easily recognize his next cue while

offering alternatives in the event that the cue was misspoken, misheard, or forgotten.¹⁰ This chapter applies the analysis of speech distribution and speech order to the questions surrounding Shakespeare's variant texts. In terms of their readiness for performance according to early modern stage practices, there is little difference between the maximal/authorial and minimal/performance text: each of Shakespeare's versions demonstrates patterns intended to make performance according to parts easier.

In addition to blurring the distinction between maximal/authorial and minimal/performance texts, the analysis of speeches and speech order complicates related narratives perpetuated by that distinction. If Shakespeare's lengthiest texts were playable, there is little reason to believe they were radically shortened and changed for the sake of performance. While it is possible to imagine a scenario in which a long, playable text was cut into a shorter playable text, comparison with patterns of emendation recorded by the eighteen surviving manuscripts believed to be of theatrical origin suggests that the plays were not abridged by any method attested to by surviving documents. I am more inclined to side with the few critics who have asserted that the later, lengthier plays are the products of revision.¹¹

Returning to the question of *Henry V*, the suggestion that both texts appear to have been prepared to ease the burdens of performance is made less confusing when one remembers that the play's potential debut at the Globe is not the play's only performance of note. While the 1599 performance is shrouded in uncertainty, there is little debate concerning a court performance on 7 January, 1605. Both performances appear to be in some way inaugural, worthy of a new or newly revised text. I posit here that, if the Lord Chamberlain's Men did indeed open the Globe

¹⁰ For the purposes of this study, two-player scenes are defined scenes in which only two speaking characters are on stage. Speech stems are sections of a text containing three or more speaking characters in which one character delivers every other speech.

¹¹ Proponents of revision are discussed in the final section of this chapter.

with *Henry V*, it is likely that the performance was based upon a text closely aligned with the 1600 Quarto, not because the 1623 Folio was unfit for performance but because there is little reason to believe that the equally-performance-friendly lines and speeches unique to the 1623 Folio had even been written. While it is impossible to prove that some of those lines and speeches were written specifically for the 1605 performance, such a schema would make sense of two performance-friendly texts by suggesting that the shorter, “less accomplished” text was written first and revised for a second debut at the court of a new monarch or at some point between 1600 and 1623.

Though speculation regarding subsequent performances worthy of theatrical revision is for the most part beyond my scope here, this chapter advocates a general narrative in which Shakespeare’s variant texts were both written *and* enlarged in order to make performance according to parts easier. More specifically, the chapter documents and categorizes the variations between competing printings of the four plays most commonly understood in terms of maximal/authorial and minimal/performance texts: *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Ultimately, I offer a method of revision by which play texts may have been expanded in such a way that consciously maintained their playability or, in many cases, made them easier to perform. Drawing on contextual studies that support a chronological relationship among Shakespeare’s variant play texts, I argue that Shakespeare’s later variant play texts are the results of one or two singular, authorial revisions designed both to alter the content of the plays and to ensure that Shakespeare’s company would be able to perform the enlarged texts.

Before demonstrating the equivocal playability of Shakespeare’s variant play texts and hypothesizing about the relationship between them, it is necessary to more closely examine the

logical but problematic assumptions responsible for the widespread notion that the best measure of a play texts' relative fitness for the early modern stage is its total number of lines.

2.1 "This is too long"

A survey of the last fifty years of textual criticism demonstrates that brevity and playability appear to be inextricable qualities. Critical assessments of the inherently performative nature of Shakespeare's quartos frequently begin and end with their relative shortness in comparison to later printings. Robert E. Burkhart (1975) refers to the bad quartos as "shortened versions designed for performance." In defense of *Hamlet*'s first quarto, Brian Holderness and Graham Loughrey (1992) insist that "what we do know is that neither the Second Quarto nor the Folio texts... are likely to have represented an acting version: they are both, and especially Q2, inconveniently long." David Farley-Hills (1996) argues that the first quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* is "a shorter version of the text... intended for performance;" his evidence is "the 26 percent reduction or so" that he believes was necessary for production. Also describing *Romeo and Juliet*, Jay J. Halio (1995) argues that Shakespeare "first wrote out a full draft of his play.... Since the draft was too long for a performance lasting two hours or so, a shorter draft was made.... This became the acting version of the play." Stephen Orgel (2002) states that "with very few exceptions, every printed Shakespeare text is far too long for the two to two-and-one-half hours that is universally accepted as the performing time of plays in the period." Andrew Gurr (2004) puts this logic into numbers, suggesting that "2,500 [lines] was close to maximal for a play-script." Finally, the chapter in which Lukas Erne offers backhanded praise for the performative value of the quartos is, tellingly, called "Why Size Matters:...." Though many critics appear to heed Paul Werstine's caution against assuming that a single explanation need

govern the relationship between every pair of varying texts, this survey demonstrates the extent to which a single criterion, length as measured by total number of lines, has dictated the terms of comparison across the corpus of variant texts.¹²

Because length is the principle means of comparison, frequently understood to be more important than when the play texts were printed, a pair of variant texts is most easily described in terms that are binary and oppositional: one text is short while the other is long. The critical assumption that a text's relative brevity is self-evident of its proximity to performance is therefore conjoined with the critical assumption that Shakespeare's longest play texts were "considerably too long ever to have performed in anything close to their entirety."¹³ Both assumptions are reinforced by – and in turn help reinforce – three inter-related assessments of early modern theatrical practices. First, playing companies have been thought to limit typical performances to just over two hours. Secondly, playwrights are thought to have frequently written plays much longer than that length limit. Finally, to reconcile a playwright's lengthy finished product and the limitations of performance, companies are understood to have routinely cut texts for performance, perhaps by as much as half. Taken together, these three features of an

¹² Robert E. Burkart, *The Problem With The Bad Quartos*, (Paris: Mouton, 1975), 22. Graham Holderness and Bryan Loughrey eds., *The tragical historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmark* by William Shakespeare (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 14. David Farley-Hills, "The 'Bad Quarto' of *Romeo and Juliet*," *S. Sur.* 49 (1996), 31. Jay L. Halio, "Handy-dandy: Q1 *Romeo and Juliet*," in *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: Texts, Contexts, and Interpretation*, ed. Halio, (Newark, U of Delaware P, 1995), 137. Stephen Orgel, *The Authentic Shakespeare and Other Problems of the Early Modern Stage*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 238. Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 123. Erne, *Shakespeare*, 220. Part of the conflation of length and difficulty might be accounted for by modern methods of play production. In today's environment, a play that is twice as long would very likely require a rehearsal period up to three times longer than its shorter counterpart because each scene would require blocking and extended discovery through collective rehearsal. Because Shakespeare's plays were produced in an environment in which rehearsal was scarce, it is very possible that length is a less reliable measure of a play's requisite difficulty in its historical context than it would be in our contemporary theatrical environment.

¹³ Erne, *Shakespeare*, 192.

early modern theatrical ecology justify the ubiquitous conflation of brevity and playability. However, these three related features warrant closer investigation.¹⁴

Following the lead of Alfred Hart (1934), most critics have understood the typical early modern play to have lasted two hours, a length attested to by *Romeo and Juliet* as well as a number of other early modern plays. Moreover, critics have understood the “two hours traffic” self-reflexively reported in *Romeo and Juliet* not as an estimate but as a maximum, asserting that “the actors associated with Shakespeare maintained the two-hour time limit with some rigidity.”¹⁵ If true, this limit would certainly render Shakespeare’s lengthiest texts unplayable: most estimates suggest that early modern companies performed at a rate of roughly twenty lines per minute, a performance speed that would render an uncut performance of *Henry the Fifth* more than a full hour longer than that two-hour standard.

If the “two-hour play” was, in fact, a maximum that was enforced by playing companies, early modern playwrights frequently and knowingly wrote plays that were much too long for performance. A number of critics have turned to the claims made by title pages and printed introductions as evidence that playwrights wrote plays that were necessarily shortened for performance. David Scott Kastan (2001) collates authorial complaints lodged in printed play texts as evidence that “although all playwrights would have anticipated that their plays would be shaped by the demands of performance... many playwrights consciously turned to print to preserve their creation in its intended form.” For example, in the forward to the 1640 quarto edition of his *Antipodes*, Brome informs the reader that “[y]ou shal find in this Booke more than was presented upon the *Stage*, and left out of the *Presentation*, for superfluous length (as some of

¹⁴ Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, 23, 26. See also Katherine Irace, *Reforming the ‘Bad’ Quartos: Performance and Provenance of Six Shakespearean First Editions* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1994).

¹⁵ Alfred Hart, *Shakespeare and the Homolies*, (Mellbourne: Mellbourne, UP), 148.

the *Players* pretended).” Brome goes on to insist that the printed text is as “good as should be intended to the allowed *Original*; and as it was, at first intended, for the *Cock-pit Stage*” (L4^r). These claims have become oft-cited evidence regarding one early modern playwright’s response to the seemingly commonplace practice in which a performing company made alterations for the sake of a performance constrained by maximum duration. As noteworthy as Brome’s disclaimer, however, is the relative scarcity of similar complaints. If plays, including the four that are the primary subjects of this chapter, were knowingly written in a form that would have been an hour too long, most playwrights are assumed to have welcomed, or at least been resigned to the necessary and often dramatic reduction of their work.¹⁶

Such a culture of theatrical abridgement has been, in part, substantiated by William B. Long’s (1999) comprehensive examination of eighteen extant manuscripts believed to have been used for theatrical purposes. Long found these manuscripts to feature “extensive cuts” for performance. Each of the eighteen manuscripts feature a number of sections that have been systematically marked with a single line indicating that they are not to be spoken on stage; there is little question that companies frequently cut lines and entire speeches for the sake of performance.¹⁷

However, Long suggests that theatrical cuts had more to do with narrative clarity than length. Long ultimately concludes that most performances did relatively little to the text itself, and that the changes they made served to make the play better, as opposed to simply making it shorter. In describing *Charlemagne or the Distracted Emperor*, Long writes:

¹⁶ David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 17.

¹⁷ William B. Long, “Precious Few,” *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 414-433.

These cuts may have been made to shorten the play; but removing these lines does make Orlando a more active and a more interesting character. I suggest that this is a more theatrically valid reason for the cuts than that of sheer length.¹⁸

In addition to configuring theatrical cutting in terms of narrative and character demands, as opposed to strictly temporal ones, Long points out that no existing theatrical manuscript demonstrates the kind of cuts that would have been required to reduce *F Henry the Fifth* to the form printed in the 1600 quarto. The three most heavily cut theatrical manuscripts, *Charlemagne* (c. 1600), *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (1611), and *The Honest Man's Fortune* (1625) cut 159, 174, and 175 lines respectively; in stark contrast, Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* is 800 lines shorter than Q2; the shorter versions of *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, and *Merry Wives of Windsor* would represent even more severe abridgments, being roughly half as long as their Folio counterparts. If playing companies frequently reduced plays by the "26 percent or so" forwarded by David Farley-Hills, they did so without leaving evidence in our extant corpus of theatrical manuscripts. Of the eighteen manuscripts investigated by Long, none cuts more than 7% of its lines.¹⁹

Furthermore, a theatrical environment in which texts were so severely abridged does not accommodate meta-theatrical evidence suggesting that playwrights were intimately involved with their plays in performance. Tiffany Stern (2000), Paul Menzer (2008), and James Marino (2011) all suggest some version of a process in which a playwright's presence, input, and pen were all central to a play's limited rehearsal and any necessary textual changes. Meta-theatrical references to playwrights as "Poeticke furies" who threaten their actors for the changing of a syllable imply that playwrights would have been unlikely to knowingly write inherently

¹⁸ Long, "Precious Few," 416.

¹⁹ I am indebted here to Aaron Pratt's unpublished essay "Promptbooks and Abridgment: Were Shakespeare's Foul Papers Performed?"

unplayable texts. The relative lack of authorial complaints about theatrical changes in printed play texts suggest that, if they happened at all, theatrical changes similar to those necessary to reduce F *Henry V* to Q1 *Henry V* must have been quite rare. Returning to Brome's complaints, we might remember that he intended the play to be performed on "the *Cock-pit Stage*" and that he did not personally believe the play to be superfluously lengthy. If Kastan is correct to suggest that printed play texts offered the playwright a corrective to theatrical treatment of his play, much of our surviving evidence suggests occasional frustration with the treatment of a specific text, as opposed to a culture in which every play above a certain length was bound to be redacted for the stage.²⁰

Not only does our presumption of a culture of reduction potentially extend beyond the scope of existing evidence, it contradicts one of the few principles we can be fairly certain did, in fact, guide the practices of London's professional companies: thrift. Ros Knutson's essential study of Henslowe's *Diary* (1985) concludes that "From the evidence in the diary, the Admiral's men and Worcester's men (and by association, all adult companies) operated their business as economically as possible." Because we have no evidence of a company expenditure for the sake of reduction, critics have traditionally glossed over the fact that cutting a text to the extent that F *Henry V* would have needed to be cut in order to create Q1 *Henry V* would have constituted a kind of revision. The lack of evidence attesting to such payments suggests that, if such reductions were routine, members of adult companies were willing to engage in a highly specialized and time-consuming textual endeavor without compensation. Even if the companies did not need to pay for textual reduction, the generally sound business practices attested to by

²⁰ Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 87. Paul Menzer, *The Hamlets: Cues, Qs, and Remembered Texts* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated Ups, 2008), 14-39. James Marino, *Owning William Shakespeare: The King's Men and Their Intellectual Property*, (Philadelphia: U of Penn P, 2011), 23-48. Brome, iii, 257. For more concerning Shakespeare's potential involvement with rehearsal, see Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Playing Companies* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1996), 271.

Knutson render unlikely the expenditure of resources – including the costs of paper and the labor of writers, scribes, and copyists – required to sustain a culture in which plays were routinely written overly long and re-written for the sake of performance.²¹

In addition to offering a more complicated theatrical economy than one in which playwrights routinely submitted overly long texts to companies despite knowing full well that at least a quarter of that text would go un-played, critics have recently complicated our understanding of the two-hour play as a standard that would have required such practices in the first place. Steven Urkowitz has argued that, in attempting to create a standard, 2,400 line play, Alfred Hart “misrepresents and massages his data to support conclusions directly contradicted by many documents that he either did not know of, misrepresented, or suppressed.”²² Michael C. Hirrel (2010) draws attention to the unreliability of early modern time keeping, suggesting that the two-hour play may have been a commonly used phrase that had more to do with a play’s duration as a completed experience than it did a standard 120-minute increment of time. He points out that early modern timekeeping was hardly exact: our extant examples of two-hour plays would have varied from each other by as much as an hour and a half in performance. Many of play texts self-identifying as two-hour plays would have been as long as or longer than that of *F Henry the Fifth*.²³

In addition to questioning the historical category of the two-hour play, Hirrel proposes a typical theatrical event that included a variety of entertainments, lasted most of the afternoon,

²¹Roslyn L. Knutson, “Henslowe’s Diary and the Economics of Play Revision for Revival,” *Theatre Research International* 10 (1985):1-18, 15. I should acknowledge that the converse of this argument is true as well: early modern business practices also render unlikely the expenditure of resources required to expand one playable text into another. The final section of this chapter will present evidence that there were exceptional cases wherein significant and expensive enlargement was worth paying for.

²² Steven Urkowitz, “Back to Basics: thinking about the *Hamlet* First Quarto,” in Thomas Clayton, ed., *The Hamlet First Published*, (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1992), 257-91, here on 66-7.

²³ Michael C. Hirrel, “Durations of Performance and Lengths of Plays: ‘How Shall We Beguile the Lazy Time?’ ” *SQ* 61 (2, 2010): 159-182

and created much more flexibility for lengthier performances than previously thought possible. This extended theatrical event corroborates the dramatic records of Sir Henry Herbert who, in 1619, complained that theatre traffic routinely lasted “from one or two of the clock till six at night.”²⁴ In the context of a theatrical event that included other entertainments which could be shortened or cut entirely, the play texts of Q2 *Romeo and Juliet*, F *Henry V*, and even Q2 *Hamlet* appear to have, at least potentially, fit quite comfortably into a typical afternoon of theatrical entertainment lasting four to five hours.

The possibility that a few plays may have been performed in excess of two hours certainly doesn't mean that all long plays were performed, or that the lengthiest versions of Shakespeare's variant texts were performed as printed. However, the dominant theories governing how Shakespeare's longest play texts were used in performance have arisen from an attempt to explain why his plays were printed in forms that were thought to be obviously too long for performance. The distinction between minimal/performance and maximal/authorial texts offers a broad explanation for the relationship between Shakespeare's variant texts *only* if the maximal texts were uniformly and inherently unfit for performance.

Conversely, theories governing a culture of theatrical abridgement are only necessary because of the existence the shorter Quartos. After all, relatively few early modern plays exceed 2,500 lines; the critical tradition may have very well understood these longer texts as outliers had it not been for the fact that many of these lengthier plays were printed in shorter forms. In other words, it is the existence of the shorter variant texts that created the incentive for Hart's normative 2,400 line play as a limit to performance. Surveying the arguments regarding which variant text most closely resembles a particular play in performance, one cannot escape a

²⁴J.Q. Adams, Ed, *The Dramatic Records of Sir Henry Herbert* (New Haven: 1917), 65.

tautology in which a text's relative brevity is understood to be the product of performance practices that have been, at least in part, defined and necessitated by the existence of shorter texts themselves: their shortness becomes evidence *both* of a proximity to performance *and* of the practices of radical abridgment which supposedly indicate that a play text's shortness is evidence of performance.

In addition to problems of circular logic, the existence of the short quartos points to a culture of radical theatrical abridgement only if one has reason to disregard the chronology attested to by the printed play texts themselves. The shorter play texts are capable of being self-evident products of theatrical practices regarding unplayable scripts only if one believes the longer texts to have been written prior to the printing of the shorter versions. As James Marino (2011) points out, there is zero evidence demonstrating that the manuscripts behind Shakespeare's longer play texts, many of which were published twenty or more years after their shorter quartos, existed at the time that their respective quartos were printed. Marino asserts that theories explaining the shorter quartos as the products of theatrical abridgement rely upon "a general narrative in which the version of a play first published was almost presumptively treated as a preposterous derivative of a version printed much later." He argues that an adherence to this general narrative has less to do with the relative authority of the respective play texts than it does a critical predisposition toward a narrative in which Shakespeare was the sole author of the plays in their "finished" forms.²⁵

Because our understanding of the relationship between brevity and performance is inconclusive, circular, and over-determined according to the needs of related narratives of textual authority, length alone is not a trustworthy measurement of a play text's relationship to the early modern

²⁵ Marino, *Owning*, 41.

stage. In order to address the questions most important to critics of Shakespeare's variant texts, we need to be able to truly compare how individual versions of the plays would have functioned independently of one another according to early modern staging practices. Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the speech signifies the textual element most directly responsible for how a play text would have been sundered into parts, privately studied, and reassembled in performance. By shifting our attention from questions of length to questions of speech distribution and patterning, we can see Shakespeare's variant play texts as a corpus in which, long and short alike, the play texts appear equally suited for the rigorous and unprecedented processes by which plays were mounted and performed in English playhouses.