

## DISCOVERY and PROVENANCE of *HAMLET* Q1

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The literature gives conflicting dates for the discovery of Q1. Some scholars state 1823, others claim 1825. A review of the literature indicates that those who quote the 1825 date are confusing the date of printing a copy of the rediscovered Q1 with the date of discovery.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Henry Bunbury (1778-1860) edited the papers and memoirs of his relatives, foremost of whom being Sir Thomas Hanmer (1677-1746). In the chapter devoted to Hanmer's memoir, Bunbury tells of Hanmer's prominent political career and expertise as a critic and editor of Shakespeare. At this point, in a footnote on page 80, Bunbury, writing in 1838, interrupts the memoir to explain how he [Bunbury himself] came to rediscover Q1 in Great Barton Hall, the house on the estate inherited from an uncle.

It seems evident that the critic [referring to Hanmer] had never seen the edition of 1603, the only copy of which, known to be in existence, was found by me [Bunbury] in a closet at Barton, 1823. This curiosity (for a great curiosity it is, independently of its being an unique copy) is now in the possession of the Duke of Devonshire. It probably was picked up by my grandfather, Sir William Bunbury, who was an ardent collector of old dramas. For the satisfaction of bibliographers, I take this opportunity of recording the particulars of the little volume, which contained this Hamlet of 1603. It was a small quarto, barbarously cropped, and very ill-bound; its contents were as follows: [lists titles] í Hamlet 1603 (wanting the last page)í [more titles]. I exchanged the volume with Messrs. Payne and Foss, for books to the value of £180, and they sold it for £230 to the Duke of Devonshire.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is derived from "Polonius Identified: *Scandal to Pun to Gossip to Print*," a thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, February 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Henry Bunbury, Bart., ed., *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas Hanmer, Bart....with a Memoir of His Life, to which are added Other Relicks of a Gentleman's Family* (London: Edward Moxon, 1838), 80n. Two copies of this imprint were examined. Neither has an *erratum* page.

In 1868, Sir Charles Bunbury, son of Sir Henry, wrote a biography of his father, wherein he confirms the discovery date as being 1823, and references his father's note on page 80 of the Hanmer memoir.<sup>3</sup>

A recent biography of Sir Henry, by Desmond Gregory, focuses on his military and political career. A chapter is devoted to his land holdings, and describes Great Barton Hall, where Q1 was discovered. Gregory does not mention the discovery.<sup>4</sup>

P. MacDonell has an endnote to his essay on *Hamlet* published in 1843, which note was apparently written years earlier before publication, and a parenthesized date seems to be added to clarify the statement made: "í [Q1] only came to light at the commencement of the present year (1825)."<sup>5</sup>

Two years after MacDonell published, in 1845, Joseph Hunter (1783-1861) writes "í no copy of it was known till the year 1825í " and cites as his source the Bunbury footnote (page 80n), which has the year as 1823!<sup>6</sup>

John Payne Collier (1789-1883), in his diary for 1832, published four decades later in 1871, gives the impression that Lord Devonshire acquired Q1 in 1832. Collier published his diary late in life, relying on notes taken many years earlier in shorthand (in which he was expert):

*Feb. 12 [1832]. — The Duke of Devonshire [(1790-1858)] called at my house yesterday, and left his card, stating that he wished to see me. I went to*

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<sup>3</sup> Sir Charles J. F. Bunbury, *Memoir and Literary Remains of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Edward Bunbury, Bart.* (London: Privately Printed., Spottiswoode & Co., printers, 1868), 115.

<sup>4</sup> Desmond Gregory, *No Ordinary General: Lt. General Sir Henry Bunbury (1778-1860) The Best Soldier Historian* (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> P. MacDonell, *An Essay on the Tragedy of Hamlet* (London: Cunningham and Mortimer, 1843, 56.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Hunter, *New Illustrations of the Life, Studies, and Writings of Shakespeare. Supplementary to all the Editions. In two volumes.* Volume the second (London: J. B. Nichols and Son, 1845), 202-203, 203n.

Devonshire house, and was received, as always, cordially. The Duke said he wanted to put the whole of his English Dramatic library, ancient and modern, under my care...The Duke wished [me to be his] guide in procuring plays to fill up vacancies, for he said he had made up his mind to buy every play of every age in our language, not caring much what price he gave for the rarer ones anterior to the Restoration.

*Feb. 16 [1832].*— The Duke sent me a note asking me to call upon him, "if I happened to be passing," as he wanted to show me a volume of old plays which he purchased on his own responsibility [Collier does not state date of purchase.] I went, of course, directly, and found that the volume was one of which I had already heard was on the market but which I had never seen [by this statement Collier implies purchase in 1832] there were five dramas in the volume of them of the highest value and curiosity; viz., the first edition of "Hamlet", 1603, wanting only the last leaf considered *unique*, and the "Hamlet", 1603, until recently has never been heard of [Here again, implying a date later than 1823, or even later.]<sup>7</sup>

Publishing the diary late in life, Collier may have conflated events that occurred earlier with whatever he recorded in the diary. Because, in 1843, when Collier published his edition of Shakespeare, in the introduction to *Hamlet*, he wrote "an accurate reprint was made in 1825"<sup>8</sup>

Discovered in 1856 was a *second* copy of Q1. Michael William Rooney, the proprietor of a Dublin bookstore named *The Sign of Shakspeare's Head*, purchased the *second* known version of Q1 from a customer whose family possessed it for 150 years. The Devonshire copy had the title page, but lacked the last page of text. The copy Rooney purchased in 1856 wanted the title page, but was otherwise complete. The two together represent the complete Q1, from

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<sup>7</sup> John Payne Collier, *An Old Man's Diary, Forty Years Ago, Part I, For the First Six Months of 1832* (London: Printed by Thomas Richards, 1871; reprinted New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1975), 21-22.

<sup>8</sup> John Payne Collier, "Introduction to Hamlet" in: William Shakespeare, *The Works of William Shakespeare. The Text formed from an Entirely New Collation of the Old Editions: with the various Readings, Notes, a Life of the Poet, and a History of the Early English Stage, in eight volumes*, vol. VII, *Hamlet* (London: Whittaker & Co., 1843), 190-191.

title page to *finis*. Mooney published a pamphlet describing the events of the discovery of the second Q1. In it, he also states the discovery year for the Devonshire copy to be 1825:

The rediscovery of another copy of the "first edition of Hamlet" has added to the great interest taken in the early editions of Shakspeare's plays. Ninety years since, Steevens, when editing his "twenty plays", [*sic* punctuation] regretted that, after "great research", he was unable to find any more "early quartos, than those he republished". Since that period, some earlier editions have been found, but none so replete with interest to the literary world as the "Hamlet dated 1603", discovered in 1825.<sup>9</sup>

The 1902 edition of Alibone's *Dictionary of Authors* informs that only two copies are known of the 1603 edition. Of the first copy, it advises reprints were published at two presses, both in 1825:

[Referring to the Devonshire copy] I. Wanting last leaf, in the library of the Duke of Devonshire. Reprinted by Payne & Foss, Lon., 1825, 8 vo, and at Leipzig 1825 8voí .<sup>10</sup>

The 1931 Huntington Library facsimile copy of Q1 clarifies the story. The "Introduction" quotes Bunbury, and accepts the year of discovery to be 1823. Then, it quotes a communication printed in "í *The Athenæm* (October 18, 1856, p. 1277) that indicates the sale to the Duke of Devonshire was made in 1825."<sup>11</sup>

The discovery date may actually be two years earlier. Zachary Lesser has brought to my attention that a copy of the Duke of Devonshire edition has an autograph notation by Bunbury

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<sup>9</sup> M[ichael] W[illiam] Rooney, *Hamlet, first edition (1603). The last leaf of the lately discovered copy, carefully reprinted, with a narrative of its discovery, remarks on its probable date—on the date of the first edition of Lear, and on the printed quartos* (Dublin: M. W. Rooney, 1856), 3.

<sup>10</sup> S. Austin Alibone, ed., *A Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors, Living and Deceased, from the earliest accounts to the later half of the nineteenth century, containing over Forty-six Thousand Articles (Authors), with Forty Indexes of Subjects* volume II, MAB-SZY (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1902), 2010.

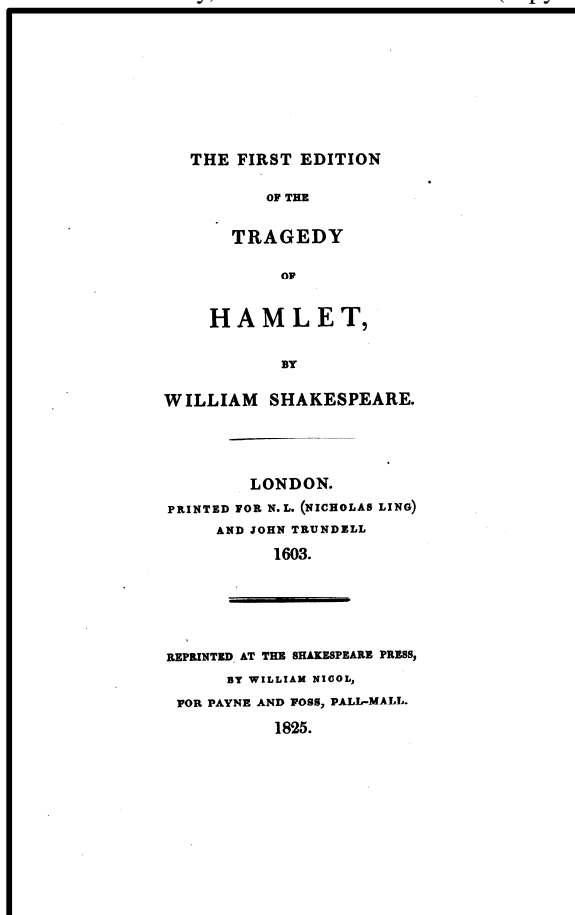
<sup>11</sup> William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Hamlet, Facsimile 1603* (San Marino CA: Huntington Library Publications, 1931), 3-4.

stating that it was discovered in 1821. This additional piece of evidence will be analyzed in Lesser's forthcoming book on Q1 *Hamlet*.<sup>12</sup>

The discovery year is either 1821 or 1823, but certainly not 1825.

The title page of the Duke of Devonshire edition from a copy at the Harvard University is reproduced as Figure 1, with the linkage to the complete edition cited in the footnote.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 1: Title Page from the Duke of Devonshire Edition  
Harvard University, call number 13484.32.15 (copy B)



<sup>12</sup> My thanks to Zachary Lesser for alerting me to this additional piece of evidence. See: Arthur and Janet Ing Freeman, "Did Halliwell Steal and Mutilate the First Quarto of *Hamlet*?" *Library* (2001) 2 (4):349-363, p. 350, n. 5.

<sup>13</sup> The *Google Book Search* online link to the Harvard University's copy is:  
<http://books.google.com/books?id=Vf8VAAAAYAAJ&ots=xjKzUI3pl-&dq=%22first%20edition%20of%20the%20tragedy%20of%20hamlet%22%201825%201603&pg=PT8#v=onepage&q&f=>