Shakespeare and the London Publishing Environment: The Publisher and Printers of Q1 and Q2

Hamlet

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The Worshipful Company of Stationers was the sole provider of books printed in England from its royal charter granted by Mary I on 4 May 1557 until the copyright acts of Anne in 1708-09. It controlled copyright through the entry of approved manuscripts; it printed the books; it vended the books; and it regulated its members’ conduct of business. Since the Stationers’ Company was also a craft/trade guild, much like the Butchers, Goldsmiths, Merchant Taylors, Cordwainers, and the like, it not only had commercial interests but fraternal ones as well. Odd as it may seem today, these companies were concerned with both the advancement of profit of entrepreneurs and the working conditions of employees, all of whom were freemen of the company. The Company of Stationers held feasts, as did almost all guilds, such as cakes and ale on Ash Wednesday, feasts at the election of Company officers, feasts for the annual replacement of the paper windows of printshops, and the like.¹ The social aspect of Company life was no doubt enhanced by the fact that the Company’s charter confined printing, though not bookselling, to the City of London with the exception of the university cities of Oxford and Cambridge, and thus nearly the whole book trade was crammed in and around St. Paul’s Cathedral and its environs (indeed, this largely remained the case until the area was destroyed by the Blitz in the 1940s). Thus, we must not think of the book trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in modern terms of large publishing houses, but must think of it more in terms of cottage industries. Very few printers had more than two presses, and even a large operation like the Jaggards in the 1620s seem to have employed under fifteen people, probably including apprentices.²

Into this fraternal business world came the texts of Hamlet. It was a work of only marginal commercial value to the Stationers involved in its birth as a printed text, and they would, as
no doubt its author would, have been amazed, and perhaps amused, that in four hundred years it would become one of the iconic texts of the literate world.

The 1603 title-page for what has become known as Q1, or “the bad quarto,” Hamlet states that the edition was printed for N. L. and John Trundell. We know from the publisher’s device and the transfer of the copy on 19 November 1607 that N. L. was Nicholas Ling. In 1604-05 the title-page for what has become known as Q2, or “the good quarto,” Hamlet states that it too was printed for N. L., again Nicholas Ling. The New Bibliographers’ tarring of Q1 with the multiple brushes of memorial reconstruction, piracy, and other stolen surreptitiousness during the first half of the twentieth century, and indeed, subsequent scholars more or less following their argument, have never properly dealt with this question: “if Q1 was a piracy and Q2 was an authorized edition, why was Nicholas Ling the publisher of both?”

This question can only be answered by examining the publishing practices and standards of Ling, including his relationships with the London printers, James Roberts and Valentine Simmes. Besides the intriguing business and probable personal relationships between the stationers themselves, there are the equally intriguing connections between these stationers and the London playing companies, particularly in Roberts’s case, the Lord Chamberlain’s/ King’s Men. This company, including its primary playwright, William Shakespeare, had at the very least business dealings with James Roberts and Nicholas Ling. A closer look at the interconnectedness of these communities may help to explain how the 1603 text came to be published, and subsequently lost, and why Q2 was published so soon after the first version. Such an examination will focus of necessity on the publisher of Q1 and Q2.

Nicholas Ling was born in 1553 in Norwich. His father, John Ling, was a successful parchment maker who owned several income properties which he later bequeathed to his third son, Nicholas. On 29 September 1570, when Nicholas was seventeen, he began to learn the book trade as an apprentice in the London print shop of a prominent stationer, Henry Bynneman. While Ling was still an apprentice, he was joined in Bynneman’s
shop by a young man named Valentine Simmes. It seems likely that the two apprentices became friends during this time: it is possible that this relationship had a significant impact on the publication of Q1 Hamlet. But that would come many years later.

Three years after becoming a freeman of the Stationers’ Company in 1579, Ling set up a shop at the “signe of the Maremaide” in St. Paul’s Churchyard in 1582, a shop leased to Ling by his former master, Henry Bynneman. For three years Ling remained in London, but he maintained his connections to Norwich, returning there in 1585 and remaining there until 1590, the year of his father’s death. Ling then returned to London where he would remain until his own death in 1607. We can infer that he probably used an inheritance to help establish and then expand his London publishing business, since businesses such as Ling’s initially required significant capital.6 Like the majority of London’s Stationers, Ling’s shops were located in or near St. Paul’s throughout the twenty-eight years of his career. His financial resources and his family connections, combined with his association with Bynneman, would have assured Ling a secure place in the community of printers and publishers in London. He eventually owned English Stock, held office in the Stationers’ Company, and in 1603 served an abbreviated term as Renter Warden.7 It is not likely that a stationer enjoying this kind of success would have had any need to make money publishing illegitimate texts or dealing with bit players in search of a hasty pound.

Early in his career, Ling’s publications were largely religious works, but by the time he had established himself securely in the London publishing community, his publications became noticeably more literary; these included works by Thomas Nashe, Christopher Middleton, Nicholas Breton, Edward Guilpin, Thomas Dekker, and William Shakespeare.8 From the evidence supplied by advertisements on title pages, Ling’s shop was the customary place for the sale and distribution of books that carried his imprint, even when that imprint was shared. From his dealings with the Stationers’ Company and with other businesses in London, it can be safely assumed that Ling’s name was known: surely his was a familiar face in the community.
Nicholas Ling’s connections with the printer James Roberts may have begun through Ling’s association with John Charlewood, under whom Roberts apprenticed. Charlewood and Ling shared at least one entry in the Stationers’ Register, Anthony Munday’s *The English Romayne Lyfe* (STC 18272), demonstrating that Ling knew and worked with Charlewood in the early days of Ling’s career. The entry was made on 21 June 1582, only three years after Ling completed his apprenticeship and three years before he returned to Norwich. It may have been during this time that Ling met Roberts; the records of the Stationers’ Company and the imprints recorded in the STC show that the two stationers frequently conducted business with each other.

James Roberts held the monopoly for playbills, advertisements for plays printed on broadsides and posted all over London when the playhouses were open and the companies were vying for audiences. He acquired this monopoly by marrying Alice Baylic Charlewood, the widow of John Charlewood, at Saint Giles Cripplegate on 9 September 1593. Alice Charlewood had inherited the monopoly as part of her husband’s property, and when Roberts married her he became, by law, the new proprietor of the monopoly. Although this may seem opportunistic on Roberts’s part, the familial dynamics of the Stationers’ Company suggest that these events likely than not. Marriage within the company was at least as usual as marriage without.

James Roberts served his apprenticeship in John Charlewood’s London print shop at the Half Eagle and Key in the Barbican, earning his freedom on 27 June 1564; during his time there he would have become part of the Charlewood printing family. In addition to training apprentices in the printing business, Charlewood would have almost certainly discussed the legal and financial aspects of the business with his key employees, or at least the promising ones, which Roberts clearly was, including the benefits of monopolies or patents. John Charlewood, and many other master printers, felt that the profits a shop made off patent work made them well worth the required paperwork and fees. For example, patents excluded the necessity for the otherwise required payment of entrance fees to the Stationers’ Company, thereby reducing at least part of the initial
investment. There was also the benefit of guaranteed work. If contract work slowed, printing patented material could help make up for reduced income. During normal and/or busy times, patent work provided increased income.

Because the professional theatre quickly became the entertainment of choice for gentry and commoner alike once the fixed structures of theaters were built (after 1576), and the majority of the population of London, Puritans notwithstanding, went to the theatre on a regular basis, playbills that announced the repertoire of a given company and/or theatre were almost certainly an indispensable part of the marketing of plays. The playbill monopoly provided assured profits to the printer who received the patent. The stationers who printed playbills and/or playtexts had to have, at the very least, business and legal connections to the new but already burgeoning London theatre. After John Charlewood was assigned the playbill monopoly on 30 October 1587, he would necessarily have dealt with those people who built and managed the theaters as well as the players and sharers on London’s theatrical scene. Given the close geographical proximity of London printers and the relationships that former apprentices maintained with their masters and their masters’ printing houses, it is difficult to imagine that James Roberts could have remained ignorant of the patents assigned to Charlewood.

To take this a step further, Roberts’s apprenticeship to Charlewood, his probable knowledge of the playbill monopoly, his later marriage to Alice Charlewood, and his eventual documented relationship with the Lord Chamberlain’s Men makes it rather unlikely that Roberts did not only know the men and boys of the company, but he also certainly knew the company’s primary playwright, William Shakespeare.

Roberts earned his freedom in the spring of 1564. That same year he set up his own printing business and began his career as a printer and bookseller at the sign of Love and Death in Fleet Street. Roberts later moved to a shop that he shared with Richard Watkins near St. Paul’s Gate at the Little Conduit in Cheapside. It should be noted that Ling’s shop at the Sign of the Mermaid, was built against the back of the printing house of Roberts and his partner Richard Watkins’s from 1580 to 1583.
By the mid-1580s, Roberts had built a reputation as a printer and publisher of ballads, but little else. In partnership with Richard Watkins, Roberts was granted a patent on 3 December 1588 giving the two men the patent for printing almanacs and prognostications. Given what we know about the dynamics between stationers, we can infer that Roberts remained in contact with the Charlewood shop in the Barbican. The stationers’ shops were all located in or near St. Paul’s, with a few close-by in St. Dunstan’s, or further away but still within an easy walking distance in the Barbican. Publishers employed printers from many different shops. As one might expect, printers who apprenticed or worked together often remained in contact throughout their business and personal lives.

When John Charlewood died in 1593, Roberts had been a freeman for twenty-nine years. Since the average age of freedom was twenty-four, he would have been approximately fifty-two when he and Alice Charlewood decided to marry. The couple had several good reasons, other than the obvious, to make this match. Under the rules of the Stationers’ Company, the widow of a Stationer inherited all of her husband’s property upon his death, including the rights and responsibilities pertaining to that property. A widow could, without having been apprenticed or freed, become a printer or publisher herself. If she were to remarry a man who was not a Stationer, she would lose those rights. If she married a Stationer, her new husband would inherit those rights. Perhaps Alice Charlewood had no desire to take over the business, as a few other widows had done successfully. Perhaps there were other printers, like William Jaggard, interested in the Charlewood monopolies and who could have been challenging Alice to give them up. Roberts was someone she knew and probably trusted; marriage to him may have seemed the perfect solution. In any case, existing records demonstrate that Alice Charlewood did marry James Roberts within a year of her previous husband’s death. In doing so she handed Roberts Charlewood’s many copyrights, the playbill monopoly, and the prosperous print shop, including such equipment as type and devices.

Although this was a practical move for both parties, it turned out to be especially fortuitous for Roberts. His printing
production tripled after 1593, and he went from printing ballads, almanacs, and prognostications almost exclusively to printing plays, histories, religious books in both verse and sermons, translations, and, of course, playbills.\(^{20}\)

James Roberts's new location was north of the old city wall on Aldersgate, a fairly easy walk from London Bridge. Across London Bridge, to the southwest, on Bankside, on either side of what was then Maiden Lane, were the Rose (after 1587), purpose built for Philip Henslowe, and the Globe (after 1599), built from the large oak timbers of James Burbage's by-then dismantled Theatre. This was where James Roberts would have gone to gather information for playbills. Since Roberts' known business activities can provide an idea of what connections were established between the stationers and players, it is safe to speculate that Roberts maintained a favorable relationship with the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one that was beneficial for printer and players alike. As Harold Jenkins puts it:

> The books which he [Roberts] entered on the Stationers' Register include just five plays: five were entered within the period 1598-1603, [and] all belonged to the Lord Chamberlain's Company.\(^{21}\)

By the summer of 1602, Roberts had come into possession of a manuscript of *Hamlet*, a play with which most Londoners must have been very familiar. The play had frequently been and was still being performed. If so, the manuscript bore the approving signature of Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels. The *Hamlet* was a theatrical document for a play that may have run its course as it stood.

*Hamlet* had been in the repertoire of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men at least since 1594;\(^{22}\) it was, along with William Shakespeare (who also emerged as a player with the Lord Chamberlain’s Men in 1594) probably part of the short-lived company, the Earl of Pembroke’s Men’s repertoire, and prior to that, Lord Strange’s Men, possibly Shakespeare’s earliest theatrical connection. If this is correct, then Shakespeare may have brought the play to Lord Strange’s Men as early as 1587.\(^{23}\)

There are currently several theories as to why the playing companies would sell manuscripts of their plays for publica-
tion, but none has been proven conclusively. *Hamlet* is such a play. It is possible that by 1602, *Hamlet* simply seemed dated, or perhaps theatrical revisions had rendered the earlier manuscript useless in the playhouse. The company, together with the playwright, might have revised the play so that a more contemporary version could be staged. Perhaps publishing the play at this point was a good economic move, as Peter Blayney has argued. What we know is that there were two (or maybe more) manuscripts of *Hamlet*, that resulted in two very different printed texts.

Examining the relationships between the playing companies and the Stationers may provide enough evidence to support one possible scenario for how this came to be the case. It is more than probable that at some point during *Hamlet*’s time in repertoire, the company decided that it was time to sell the manuscript to a publisher. Consider the following: perhaps some likely individual in the Lord Chamberlain’s Men approached a stationer who had done business with the company before. In the case of Shakespeare’s company, this man would probably have been James Roberts. Roberts held the playbill monopoly, Roberts entered several of Shakespeare’s plays, and Roberts did frequent business with Nicholas Ling. The Stationers’ records show that Roberts had the play approved for print by the Bishop of London’s chaplain, Zachariah Pasfield, and entered it for publication. By purchasing the manuscript and having it properly entered, Roberts owned the copyright, but he certainly needed financial backing. Nicholas Ling employed Roberts for the majority of his publications, and Roberts seems to have been good at acquiring and entering texts that would sell. It was a successful, though unofficial, partnership. In any case, again, the evidence of the title-page demonstrates conclusively that Ling financed this publication of *Hamlet*. What then prevented Roberts from printing the text right away? Looking at Roberts’s output that year may provide an explanation.

From January 1602 until January 1604, Roberts’s shop printed no fewer than twenty-eight texts, including at least two bills of mortality recording deaths and burials from April through 20 October 1603. Mortality bills were posted all year, but during plague years they were posted weekly and may have increased
in number, requiring the hiring of additional printers. Roberts printed them for part of the plague year 1603. One such surviving bill is, “A true bill of the whole number that hath died since this last sicknes began to October the Sixt day, 1603.” This bill was signed by Henry Chettle and entered to James Roberts for John Trundle (STC 16743.2 [Trundle appears to have been a minor player to Ling’s major role in the publication of Q1 Hamlet]). This was followed by a second bill which ran through 20 October (STC 16743.3). In addition, Roberts was still printing playbills, as well as almanacs and prognostications. Even though the theaters were closed for most of 1603, during 1602 they were operating on a regular schedule, requiring playbills as part of their advertisements.

It was also in 1602 that Roberts found himself in a dispute with William Jaggard over the playbill monopoly. Jaggard had business interests in at least two playing companies, the Earl of Worcester’s Men and the Queen’s Men. Apparently he wanted to print playbills, so much so that he brought his case to the Court of the Stationers’ Company. But on 13 December 1602, the Court recorded a ruling in favor of James Roberts. The ruling, while allowing Jaggard to print playbills for the Earl of Worcester’s Men, also required that Jaggard pay Roberts 4 shillings a month for the privilege. On 2 April 1603, while the country was making the difficult adjustment to the death of the old queen and the imminent arrival of an unfamiliar new king, the Stationers’ Court records another order regarding the two printers. This time, the Court notes that the Earl of Worcester’s Men had disbanded, and so Jaggard was given permission to print playbills for the Queen’s Men as long as he paid the appropriate fee to Roberts for the privilege. Apparently, Jaggard had not been paying the fee previously ordered by the court, since the records show that Jaggard was also ordered to pay “unto the seid James Roberto xls which he oweth him in arrearage for the bille of the seid Erles seid late company.” The debt was 40 shillings, half to be paid by the middle of the summer, and the other half due at Michaelmas.

At about this same time, Nicholas Ling may have heard that Valentine Simmes, was in legal and financial difficulty, and not for the first time. Simmes appears to have had little regard
for the law, whether it was Canon Law, Civil Law, or the rules and regulations of the Stationers’ Company. At different times through his working years, he was imprisoned, was tortured on the rack, was fined, had his equipment melted down and returned to him in that abused condition, and lost his apprentices, all for various violations of the Stationers’ regulations.\(^{30}\) In 1607, the year of Ling’s death, Simmes was removed as a Master printer. He appealed to the Archbishop of Canterbury asking to be reinstated, but he was summarily denied.\(^{31}\) The Company agreed to increase Simmes’s pension from four to six pounds a year. His name appears off and on in the Stationers’ Company Poor Book beginning in 1607, and continuing until 1623, the year of Simmes’s death and the publication of the First Folio.\(^{32}\)

As has been already noted, Ling became acquainted with Simmes during the years when they had apprenticed together at Henry Bynneman’s shop in the 1580s. Whereas Ling engaged James Roberts for most of his publications, Ling was Simmes’s most regular employer. He brought twenty-one books to Simmes alone; six more Simmes shared with other printers. Although 230 titles or editions have been assigned to Simmes, and although he printed for sixty-three different publishers, half of Simmes’s customers never returned a second time. Legal records clearly show that Simmes had outspoken ideas about the Church and the Crown. Perhaps he was openly opinionated; we can only speculate. Perhaps his legal difficulties, during a very dangerous time for critics of the government, discouraged other businessmen from being involved with him. Whatever the reason or reasons, it was not the quality of his work. It is apparent that Simmes was a skilled and careful craftsman.

With a good eye for detail and layout, he generally used good paper and careful inking to avoid the show-through that makes many books of the period unreadable. He was thus a printer whose work was certainly at or above the standard of the day.\(^{33}\)

Ling was evidently not one of those publishers who allowed Simmes’s politics or religious beliefs to interfere with business, or more importantly, with friendship. Perhaps Ling was a loyal friend; more likely, he recognized and appreciated Simmes’s qualities as a printer. In any case, it is compelling to argue that
Ling asked Roberts, who appears to not have had the time to print *Hamlet*, if he would release the job to Simmes, who appears to have needed the work.\textsuperscript{34} Simmes had experience printing plays, including five by Shakespeare. Between the years 1597 and 1611, Simmes printed no fewer that twenty-seven quarto editions of plays.\textsuperscript{35} For whatever reason, it was Valentine Simmes, and not James Roberts, who printed the first quarto of *Hamlet*.

Although at one time Simmes could afford at least two compositors, by late 1602 his legal and professional difficulties had reduced this staff to one.\textsuperscript{36} Because he was not overwhelmed with work, as Roberts was, Simmes and his compositor could have begun work on the text immediately. In that scenario, the print run would have been nearly complete by April, when the new king arrived in England and the plague began to manifest itself in outlying villages. Some brief time after the licensing of the King’s Men on 19 May,\textsuperscript{37} the text was completed and the title page added. By late May or early June, 1603, the quarto was ready for the booksellers. Quires hung in the storehouse, and stitched quartos were distributed to bookshops. Q1 *Hamlet* had begun its unconventional textual life.

It seems reasonable to speculate that sales of this book would have been below average, since Q1’s release date coincided with the outbreak of the great plague of 1603. Ling would have been able to estimate that he would probably not make money on this text and that a second edition would not be printed. As a seasoned stationer, Ling had most likely experienced unforeseeable downturns before and would surely have made a real effort to advertise the text. He may have had Simmes print several extra title pages to paste up in any bookshops where the playtext was being sold.\textsuperscript{38}

Fate seemed to conspire against the financial success and physical survival of the Simmes quarto. On Ash Wednesday, 9 March 1603, the theaters were officially closed for Lent. The Privy Council passed an order to London’s Lord Mayor and the Justices of the Peace for Middlesex and Surrey stating that the theatre closing might be extended past Easter because Queen Elizabeth was gravely ill and the Council suspected she might not recover. The order was for “the restraint of stage-plays till other direction be given.”\textsuperscript{39} The Council feared that civil unrest
or even riots would occur if or when the Queen died. The restraint of stage-plays, along with other similar orders, were attempts by the Council to control the population.

The Queen did not recover from her illness, and when she died on 24 March 1603, the theater closings were extended indefinitely, although they reopened briefly during Easter. By that time there were sporadic reports of plague deaths, becoming more frequent as April moved into May. By mid-May, the plague was severe enough to have been mentioned in the Royal License issued to the Lord Chamberlain’s Men which officially changed their status to that of the King’s Men.  

The theaters usually closed when plague deaths reached thirty a week, but in May of 1603 the theaters remained closed even though plague deaths were approaching only twenty a week. The King ordered nobles and gentry out of London and into the country for their own safety, yet the 14 July coronation date remained unchanged. By mid-July, the weekly death rate from bubonic plague had reached 914. The coronation took place on the scheduled date at Westminster Abbey with no procession through the city streets and with only invited guests in attendance. The populace of London was kept away. The theaters remained closed throughout the summer, and even Bartholomew Fair, the annual August festival of cloth producers and merchants (and a good place for setting up a stage), was canceled. There were no profits for the playing companies, no source of income for the men and boys whose profession was that of playing and entertainment. Shakespeare’s company, now the King’s Men, followed the nobles and went on tour in the provinces, the *modus operandi* of playing companies during theater-closings. Even as late as December, a significant number of plague deaths were being reported, and the theaters remained closed into the New Year of 1604.

During the years between 1589 and 1603, Shakespeare may have been revising his early revenge tragedy, *Hamlet*, even as he continued to write and stage other plays. As *Faust* matured with Goethe, could not *Hamlet* have matured and changed along with its author? If so, Shakespeare apparently expanded the text so much that it would not likely be used as a playtext. It had become nonproduceable, as this much longer version would take
far more than the two and a half hours *usually* allotted to performances.\(^{42}\) A play of that length would seriously overextend the company's resources, especially after so lean a time as 1603-04 had been. The revised play was a readable dramatic narrative, but it was a play that would probably not be acted under standard Elizabethan conditions, as Andrew Gurr and others have demonstrated.\(^{43}\)

By the end of 1603, the players must have been in financial straits. With the company in this condition, Shakespeare may have decided to offer them his revised (and until then perhaps private) manuscript for sale to a stationer. Again, the stationer would probably have been James Roberts, and again, Roberts approached Ling. Both stationers may have been skeptical about this second manuscript, since the year could not have been very profitable for them either; at this point they would want only highly marketable texts.

Whoever usually represented the company in these kind of negotiations, possibly Richard Burbage, may have convinced Roberts to read the text. This manuscript was more along the lines of *Venus and Adonis* (very much a literary text) than it was like *The Taming of the Shrew* (undeniably a play). A good marketer of books, such as James Roberts must have been, would have recognized the revised *Hamlet*'s potential for sale to a reading public eager for pleasurable distractions.\(^{44}\) In addition, by 1604 Shakespeare's name was certainly recognizable and popular, another selling point. Any hesitations Roberts and Ling may have had would have concerned the existence of the other *Hamlet*, printed by Simmes and still on the market.

It was a risky venture for a publisher in a highly unstable market, but the early seventeenth century was risky under the best of circumstances. In the end Ling decided to publish this second Shakespearean *Hamlet*. Ling's primary business was the making and selling of books; this was something he understood well. The potential that Ling would have recognized in this text may have appealed to his marketing sensibilities. The theaters were still closed more often than they were open and there was little in the way of entertainment.\(^{45}\) A readable playtext by an author as popular as Shakespeare might have proven salable. Publisher and printer agreed that the venture was worth a try.
Roberts did not need to have this second text approved or entered because he had already received the necessary signatures from Church/State authorities, and he had paid the fee and entered the play in the Stationers' Register when he had received the original text from the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Whereas both texts had the same title, the same author, and came from the same company, there would be no question of copyright. It appears likely that Roberts put his compositors to work on the revised *Hamlet* right away.

Even if James Roberts did not remind him, Nicholas Ling would have quickly realized that the playtext *Hamlet* (Q1) was still being sold in bookshops and would create unnecessary competition for the newer *Hamlet* being printed in Roberts's shop. The 1603 Simmes text was shorter and better known. It probably was less expensive as well. The longer text would necessarily have to cost more to cover the increase in paper, ink, type, and time in production. If the new text were to have any chance in the marketplace, all the copies of the Simmes printing would have to be recalled, or suppressed. The copies in Ling's (and any other) shops would have been rather easily recovered and destroyed. The only surviving first quartos were those that had been sold and were in private hands. Ling's suppression of Q1 could explain the scarcity of extant copies of Q1, in comparison to the number of other extant first quartos.

Roberts and Ling would have wanted to get the second text printed quickly, and they surely began the print run in the late autumn of 1604. Roberts had his two most experienced compositors set the type, possibly supervising the job himself. After Ling had suppressed the playtext that Simmes had printed, he would have informed Roberts that he needed to get the new text to the booksellers as quickly as possible, along with extra title pages for advertisement purposes, just as he might have done with the first quarto. Ling may have anticipated good sales and probably told Roberts to keep producing more texts. In spite of the added expense, it appears that the print run extended into the new year, 1605, explaining the two different dates on the title pages of the extant texts.

Roberts appears to have provided his compositors with the manuscript Ling and he had purchased from the King's Men,
along with a copy of Simmes’s first quarto in case there were places in the fair copy of Shakespeare’s later and more literary manuscript that the composers either could not read, or found confusing. As Jenkins has noted, outside of the obvious differences, there are significant correspondences between the two texts, including unusual spellings, unusual punctuation, omissions of words and/or phrases, and even whole lines.

In both quartos the speech-prefixes on the first page, instead of being indented in the usual fashion, are set flush with the margin; and in both the speech-prefixes begin to be indented at the same point in the text (I.i.33). But whereas in Q1 the change connects with the beginning of the second page, in Q2’s longer text there is no such connection and we are a third of the way down the second page when the point of change is reached. The inference is inescapable that Q2 sets the speech-prefixes as it does because it is copying Q1.41

The significant number of compositorial errors in Q2 has generally been attributed to inexperienced composers and/or unreadable copy, and yet these same composers have been judged extremely competent in setting type for several other dramatic quartos including, The Merchant of Venice and Q2 Titus Andronicus. Rather than blame the composers’ ineptitude, it is far more probable that they had a tight deadline. With the first quarto suppressed and the decrease in income for Ling’s business during the lean times caused by the plague, it would make sense to print this edition without delay. Q1 Hamlet provided a valuable service.

Why would Roberts have had his composers use the Simmes quarto as copy unless it had some authority? For example, the same author? It is highly unlikely that Roberts would have approved using a pirated or corrupt text as reference for the new text. It also seems unlikely from what we know of their other work, that Roberts and Ling would have considered using Q1 if they thought it was anything less than authentic.

The new quarto, unencumbered by performance expectations or the competition that Q1 would have created, was published in two runs, one in 1604 and one following early in 1605. Its 4,056 lines (compared to Q1’s 2,221) carries this boast on its title page: “Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much
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Why would Roberts have had his compositors use the Simmes quarto as copy unless it had some authority? For example, the same author? It is highly unlikely that Roberts would have approved using a pirated or corrupt text as reference for the new text. It also seems unlikely from what we know of their other work, that Roberts and Ling would have considered using Q1 if they thought it was anything less than authentic.

The new quarto, unencumbered by performance expectations or the competition that Q1 would have created, was published in two runs, one in 1604 and one following early in 1605. Its 4,056 lines (compared to Q1’s 2,221) carries this boast on its title page: “Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie.”\(^{50}\) Note the following: the title page claim asserts that the text is “enlarged” (i.e. expanded), implying a definite link between it and Q1. In addition, unlike the first quarto’s title page, this second quarto is not advertised as having been acted. The two early printed versions reflect different points in the theatrical and textual life of the play.

The documented business reputations of Nicholas Ling and James Roberts in the London publishing community preclude the idea that these men were in any way unscrupulous or dishonest. Ling does not appear to have been the kind of publisher who would be part of a fraudulent scheme to print a text under William Shakespeare’s name on behalf of a contact who would have appeared highly suspicious to a stationer who understood the operations of the playing companies and the procedures normally followed for the sale and printing of playscripts.

James Roberts, also well-known and reputable, dealt with the playing companies regularly. He undoubtedly had knowledge of what the playing companies had in their repertoire and which of their plays might be offered for print. Ling must have relied on Roberts and necessarily had to have trusted him to supply only legitimate texts sold openly by the companies and with the knowledge, if not the direct supervision, of the playwrights.

Valentine Simmes, although frequently in trouble with the authorities, was a printer with undeniable standards. He produced texts of high quality that, in some cases, were questionable only in their religious and political content, not in how or where they were obtained. Nicholas Ling’s apparent loyalty to Valentine Simmes during extremely troublesome times, stands as testament to his basic decency and fairness. The *Records of the Court of the Stationers’ Company* as well as the STC provide definitive evidence of the link between the two.

Understanding who these London stationers were, how they lived and worked together, and how they interacted with the playing companies reveals much about a rich field of investigation that has only just begun to be tilled. By uncovering what we can about the publishers and printers of Shakespeare’s texts, we may be able to evaluate more fairly, not just the texts but the
people who preserved the plays in print. The two early quartos of *Hamlet* are just that, two early texts from the same ultimate source. They are neither good nor bad, just different.

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**Notes**


5 Ibid, 207.

6 Ibid, 205-206.

7 Ibid, 206.


12 It is acknowledged that books covered by royal patents were exempt [from entrance in the register]. Cyprian Blagdon, *The Stationers’ Company: A History, 1403-1959* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960) 44. “It was generally understood that books issued under a special privilege did not need to be entered in the register. That did not mean that they did not need licensing.”

13 Arber II, 477.

14 Peter W. M. Blayney’s detailed mapping of the locations of most of the printing houses and shops provides a graphic demonstration of the close proximity of London’s stationers. See The Bookshops in St. Paul’s Cross Churchyard (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1990).


18 Peter Blayney’s research demonstrates that John Trundle’s shop was close to Roberts’s at the Barbican.

19 As noted in Arber II, 651: “James Roberts: Entred for his copies by order of Court Certens Copies whiche were John Charlewoodes/ Saluo Jure Cuiuscunque . . . xijij iiij d” This entrance is followed by a list of books and patents that were transferred from Charlewood to Roberts and includes “The bille for playes.”

20 STC, 3, 145.

21 Jenkins, Hamlet, 16.


26 STC, III, 212. Greg, *London Publishing*, 53. Pollard identified this move by Roberts as “a ‘blocking entry’ organized by the acting company to prevent unauthorized publication.” Philip Edwards, *Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 9. Roberts as a “friend and a sort of champion of the rights of acting companies, in particular the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, entered the plays in order to keep them from being illicitly published. But if this were the case, certainly Ling and Trundle would have encountered some legal difficulty by proceeding with the publication of *The Tragical Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke.*” But they did not. “There is no record of a fine. There is no record that Roberts brought the matter to the attention of the Court of Assistants. Since normally the violation of copyright was a very culpable offence, it is possible that the Stationers’ Company condoned Ling and Trundle’s act. At any rate, there is no doubt that they held the advantage, that their Q1 of *Hamlet* had established a copyright in the play.” Leo Kirschbaum, *Shakespeare and the Stationers* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1955) 218.

27 STC lists thirty-three books (with several variants) printed by James Roberts for Nicholas Ling from 1594-1605.

28 STC, 2, 86.


30 These were standard punishments for recalcitrant stationers.

31 *Records of the Court*, 152.


34 His shop produced only ten texts in all of 1602. It may have been at this time that Roberts relinquished or sold the copy-
right to Ling. There are no records documenting the transfer, but *Hamlet* was listed as one of Ling’s copyrights when he died in 1607 and his business was transferred to John Smethwick. *Hamlet*, Jenkins, 15.


36 “His [Simmes’s] linear total for the year [1602] was about 2500 meters, which is comparable to one large folio.” W. Craig Ferguson, *Valentine Simmes* (Charlottesville: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1968) 20.


43 “The standard time allowed for a performance was, in Shakespeare’s words, ‘the two hours’ traffic of the stage.” Gurr, “The Theatre in Shakespeare’s Time,” *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* 62, 395. Also, “Q2 . . . a play that, performed without intervals, would take over five hours. Shakespeare . . . could realistically never hope to see [the play] performed on the

44 Gurr, Henry V, 7-8.

45 See Barroll, Politics, 173, for a complete list of theater closings during 1603 and 1604.

46 Such as was the situation with Henry V (STC 22289) and 2 Henry IV (STC 26099).

47 See Blayney’s calculations on “the stationer’s overall direct costs” in “Publication,” 405-410.

48 According to the STC, “Q1” Henry IV survives in 10+ copies, Q1 Henry V survives in 6 (one a fragment), Q1 Lear in 9 copies, Q1 Love’s Labour’s Lost in 10+ copies, Q1 Merchant of Venice in 10+, and Q1 Richard III in 5 copies. Only Q1 Titus Andronicus and Q1 3 Henry VI (The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York) survive in unique copies.

49 Hamlet, Jenkins, 39.

50 Hamlet: The Quarto of 1604-05, facsimile title page.

Works Cited


