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## "My Name is Hamlet, Revenge"

*Why two Dutchmen have the answer to the riddle of Shakespeare's early Hamlet*

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The sketch reproduced below is Aemout van Buchell's copy of an original drawing made by his friend Johannes de Witt on a visit to London. These two Dutchmen between them have thus provided posterity with the sole surviving record of any Tudor theatre interior. Time, 1596; place, the Swan in Paris Garden, Bankside. Enter an enigma. What scene is represented? Some say *Twelfth Night*, Act Three, Scene Four. But there the staging looks different; Olivia and Maria enter together, and then the latter exits and returns with Malvolio. Besides, that play was not written until the turn of the century, on internal dating evidence; for example, the "new map with the augmentation of the Indies", which Malvolio's smiling face had outwinked, was not published until 1599. The place also fails to fit; according to the Oxford *Complete Works* (Wells and Taylor 1986), the Swan was "not used by Shakespeare's company". But it was, and in 1596, too; and the drawing depicts a performance of the closet scene from the early *Hamlet*, at the entry of the Ghost. These are inferences drawn from factual sources, as follows.

Tudor Londoners lived near their place of work. For Shakespeare (though both the fact and the site seem to have been forgotten), that was first and foremost the Shoreditch Theatre in Bishopsgate. "Lived in Shoreditch", says his first biographer, John Aubrey, who adds "within six doors - Norton Folgate", as if identifying the actual house. So, Shakespeare's departure in 1596 to Bankside, some three miles away across the Thames, meant a change of theatre as well as address.

Both those areas of residence can be clearly confirmed, and the exodus definitely dated. Shakespeare was assessed for tax in October 1596, as a resident of St Helen's parish, Bishopsgate. But by November 15, 1597, he was "departed and gone out of the sayd ward". In 1796, the editor Edmond Malone wrote: "From a paper now before me, which formerly belonged to Edward Alleyn, the player, our poet appears to have lived in Southwark near the Bear-Garden - (i.e., on Bankside) in 1596". The paper is now lost, but the fact remains. Negative evidence is not without weight; and there is no record of Shakespeare's company at the Shoreditch Theatre after 1596. Further, those premises were then already twenty years old and in some disrepair; and their owner, James Burbage, who died in February 1597, was feuding with his landlord over the renewal of the lease. So there were good reasons for looking elsewhere, and the populous and prosperous Bankside was the only other theatreland.



Aemout van Buchell's copy of a drawing of the Swan, Bankside, by Johannes de Witt, 1596

But one of its two theatres, the Rose, had been occupied by Alleyn and the Admiral's Men from 1594, since when no Shakespeare play had been staged there. The newly built and spacious Swan in Paris

Garden, however, would have been as eager to attract a resident company as Shakespeare and his troupe would have been to oblige. So this, *prima facie*, was the reason for his removal to Bankside at the end of 1596. Nor is this link just likely; it is strongly evidenced in other archives. Papers unearthed by Leslie Hotson in 1930 included a writ of attachment, dated November 29, 1596, against Francis Langley, builder and owner of the Swan, William Shakespeare and others. The *casus belli* is still obscure, but it was surely to do with theatre business. The writ was issued to the Sheriff of Surrey, again with the plain inference that Shakespeare had moved to Bankside from Shoreditch by late 1596. Further, an unnamed company had indeed played then at Langley's Swan. When Pembroke's Men agreed to appear there, their contract, dated February 1597, described the Swan as "lately afore used to have playes in hit". But the 1597 season proved disastrous. It included Thomas Nashe's *Isle of Dogs*, which was condemned by the Privy Council as "very seditious and sclanderous". In July 1597, three of Pembroke's Men, including Ben Jonson, were imprisoned for three months, and all the London theatres were closed, by order, for the rest of that year. Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, soon found a different solution. In December 1598, they tore down their Shoreditch Theatre, transported the limbers to Bankside and built a new playhouse, called the Globe. By October 1599, the official records confirm both Shakespeare and his tax arrears as settled in the Bankside area. There is, in fact, every reason to suppose, and (*pace* the Oxford Shakespeare) none to doubt, that he and his company had indeed performed at the Swan in late 1596. And, of course, they would have presented a Shakespeare play; that was their, and his, *métier*. So de Witt's presence there with his sketch-pad may be no mere coincidence. He was certainly impressed by the Swan, and recorded in elegant Latin that it was built of flint-stone and could seat 3,000 spectators. He would also have enjoyed recording a famous scene from a famous play, with famous actors including the famous author himself.

One play above all others fits that bill; and it was indeed performed at the Paris Garden Swan. Thomas Dekker provides the plain answer; a character in his own play, *Satiromastix*, registered for publication in November 1601, says "My name's Hamlet, revenge; thou hast been at Paris Garden, hast not?" Thomas Nashe had seen a Hamlet as early as 1589. A *Hamlet* was performed at Newington Butts in 1594, by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the company that Shakespeare joined in that year. Soon afterwards, a *Hamlet* was played at his own Shoreditch Theatre, where Thomas Lodge had seen, by 1596, a Ghost that cried "Hamlet, revenge!" A century later, the biographer Nicholas Rowe noted that the only result of his own enquiries about Shakespeare the actor was that "the top of his Performance was the Ghost in his own *Hamlet*".

Look where he comes again, caught in the act of stalking on stage in the closet scene. De Witt's original drawing is now lost - a double misfortune because the copyist, van Buchell, excelled neither at figure-drawing nor perspective. But the description offered by Edmund Chambers (*The Elizabethan Stage*, 1923) is worth citing. He sees "the rapid approach from an outer corner of the stage of a man in an affected attitude, with a hat on his head and a long staff in his hand .... Probably he is a returning traveller, or a messenger bringing news." The Ghost was both; and it would surely glide swiftly, with an unfamiliar gait. As the shade of a soldier, it might well wear a helmet, carry (and even shake) a spear, and be bearded like the Bard. But the body looks *déshabille*, wrapped in a shroud, if clothed at all. The unfamiliar first edition of *Hamlet*, 1603, says "Enter the ghost in his night gowne". There are two other figures, "one of whom, a woman, sits on a bench" (Schoenbaum, *A Documentary Life*, 1975). The other may well represent a close-cropped male in trunk hose, namely Richard Burbage as *Hamlet* pointedly denouncing the "incestuous pleasure" of the bed on which Queen Gertrude (perhaps wearing a crown) is seated. She stares ahead, unseeing; but he looks to his left in what Chambers calls an attitude of surprise, which is also apt for the proposed scene. Hamlet gapes aghast at the Ghost and cries: "Save me, save me, you gracious powers above". He regrets "that I thus long have let revenge slippe by"; all he has done is to kill the hidden Corambis (as the Polonius character is called in the 1603 version) in mistake for Claudius. The two main pillars "could themselves be used as hiding-places" (Wells and Taylor). What Hamlet is holding in his right hand would then be the murder weapon. Three lines later he repeats "revenge". After another line, the Ghost's first word is "Hamlet". Neither word appears in the corresponding portion of the famous 1604 or 1623 texts. But the actual phrase, "Hamlet, revenge", may well have been spoken on the stage in an early version, as heard and remembered first by Lodge from the Shoreditch Theatre in Bishopsgate, and then by Dekker from the Swan Theatre in Paris Garden. and indeed for years thereafter; Samuel Rowlands in *The Night-Raven* (1620) writes. "I will not call *Hamlet Revenge* my grieves [=griefs]".

In 1596, no text of *Hamlet* had been published, and the drawing was at best a copy, so some details will remain unclear. But the general picture looks vivid and explicit. How could it have remained unrecognized ever since 1888, when it was first publicized? There has always been impressive archival evidence for an early *Hamlet* by Shakespeare; no such evidence has ever existed for the modern fantasy that the first published text (1603), by William Shake-speare (*sic*), is a "memorial reconstruction by actors" of a very different *Hamlet* unwritten until 1599. The de Witt and van Buchell drawing may well be trying to tell the world, after 400 years, that a play acted by Shakespeare and his company in 1596 was *eo facto* an authentic early Shakespeare play, and that modern editorial theories are accordingly all wrong in this respect as in so many others. And then two Dutchmen will have finally refuted decades of double Dutch.