

From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: British Journal for the History of Philosophy - Decision on Manuscript ID BJHP-2015-0253  
Date: December 14, 2015 at 5:34 AM  
To: [REDACTED]



14-Dec-2015

Dear Dr Wilson,

Two referees have now considered your paper but I am sorry to say that in the light of them, we have decided not to pursue it further for publication in the British Journal for the History of Philosophy. The referee comments are included at the bottom of this letter, along with those of the editor who coordinated the review of your paper. I hope you will find them to be constructive and helpful. You are of course now free to submit the paper elsewhere should you choose to do so.

Thank you for considering the British Journal for the History of Philosophy.

With best wishes,

[REDACTED]  
Editor, British Journal for the History of Philosophy

Referees' Comments to Author:

Referee: 1

This essay attempts to persuade its readers that Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech is, despite the seriousness with which it is usually acted and read, in truth, a satire of philosophy. To look for profundities within its words is thus empty, and misses the point: Hamlet's mockery of philosophy, philosophy as theatricality – a pose.

While the argument being advanced is a provocative and iconoclastic one, I do not recommend publishing this essay. It simply failed to persuade this reader that a viable interpretative possibility worthy of contemplation is being offered. The reading is forced as a literary interpretation. As a reading of a dramatic text, that is, a text designed to be performed, it fares even worse. I have not seen a performance of the speech which gravitates towards the option advocated by the author, nor does the author help me visualize what such a performance would look like. A Hamlet who turns these words into part of pretended madness weakens them for the audience. When elsewhere in the play Hamlet feigns madness, he is over the top and trying to get the audience to laugh. Surely not the intended effect here.

What I think the author is genuinely picking out, is that Hamlet's philosophizing (and not just here) is more of an evasion of the personal than a full-blooded philosophical streak. There is an inauthentic aura radiating from Hamlet's philosophical flights. They are never cerebral, but the energy is unrelated to feeling for this or that asserted philosophical abstraction, but to recoiling – sometimes in anger, sometimes in disgust – from something. Yet moving from this to perceiving Hamlet's philosophizing as a parody is too much of a leap, and the author has not convinced me that this leap can be plausibly taken.

More specific points:

- The analysis of the soliloquy begins with what is presented as a puzzle. Why does Hamlet describe death as the undiscovered country from which no traveler returns after he had just encountered his father's ghost? That encounter should have blocked describing death in such terms – that's the puzzle. The author assumes that because we cannot attribute to Shakespeare or to Hamlet mere forgetfulness of the ghost, the hint is that Hamlet's words are not to be taken at face value. Hamlet is mocking or critiquing something/someone.

The problem with this argument relates to theological context: if the line is read against a Catholic (purgatory/hell) framing, Hamlet's line isn't puzzling at all: a ghost can return from purgatory but not from hell; we can hear what purgatory is like, but can know nothing about hell/death. If, alternatively, a Protestant framing is imposed on the line, Hamlet's line is also not puzzling but for a different reason: the ghost is a demon in disguise or a figment of the imagination (not something coming back from purgatory), and death really is the place from which none return. In both frameworks it is thus consistent to believe that one is encountering a ghost, and that no one returns from the dead.

- "She has Ophelia to his left, who must be wondering what on earth Hamlet is talking about," (p. 5) - she is not just standing there gazing at him in disbelief. She is staged as praying (Hamlet greets her by asking that she remembers his sins in her prayers, and Polonius has asked her to read a book). It is also curious to imagine how Hamlet can deliver the speech if she is looking at him.

- "While it seems to be a suffering man's account of the battle between action and contemplation," - I don't see how the speech can seem to mean this. The speech is about the choice between living (thereby suffering all that life can dish out) and actively ending life. Not between acting and contemplating (in pages 15-16, there is a clarification that such is what the author has in mind, but the initial phrasing here is confusing). The paragraph directly above this one contains errors of spelling (Branagh), Greek, and philosophical classification (for most philosophers, questions of truth are epistemological, not ontological)

- "Hamlet's suggestion that he can put on madness, like a coat, signals a shift in his concerns from the internal to the external, from being to seeming. In this moment, therefore, he changes from an ontologist concerned with reality to an actor concerned with appearances." - I don't see this: when Hamlet begins pretending, this does not mean that he is no longer "concerned with reality". On the contrary, his mask is a means for him to access truth. He remains a realist, convinced that there is a truth to be known. (8) See, too, his final words to Horatio, a wish for his true story to be told.

- "Hamlet is acting here. He is not mad; he is acting mad." - while Hamlet presents his madness as an act, the extent to which the act is controlled by him and does not morph into actual madness has been debated. Good to indicate awareness of the issue.

- "When Hamlet delivers his famous speech, Claudius is watching him. And Hamlet knows that Claudius is watching him. Since

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have told Claudius that Hamlet knows that he is being watched, Claudius knows that Hamlet knows that Claudius is watching him." (p. 13) - Seems strained and extremely awkward to stage the scene in such a way. Branagh's film hints that Hamlet knows he is overheard, but even there this remains a possibility, the viewers unsure about who knows what.

- "The fact that Hamlet uses these two approaches, philosophy and misogyny, to indicate his madness allows us to consider the possibility that philosophy, so often seen as the height of brilliance and goodness, is just as repugnant as misogyny, and that both are madness, or, if someone sets out to pretend to be mad and chooses to say X, and if X is an instance of a position/discipline Y, it is implied that Y is part of madness. Both are fallacious.

- "To be, or not to be" recycles Hamlet's earlier soliloquies, " (p. 17) - it does not recycle these: the previous suicide speech mentioned suicide, but seemed to take seriously its religious prohibition. In the "to be/not to be speech", suicide is avoided due to fear. The reasons leading to the suicidal wish have also transformed: in the first case, it was his mother's trivialization of his father's death by her swift marriage; in the later speech, it is the endless suffering of the evil done by others. (the author later asserts that the discovery of Hamlet's father's murder cannot lead to suicidal thoughts but to action - revenge - but Hamlet's entire originality for many readers is its questioning of revenge and underscoring its futility, hence suicide surfaces as an option at this point).

- I don't see the point of the section in page 17, in which the author suggests moving round bits and pieces of the play. Sounds suspiciously like changing the aesthetic facts to suit the theory. The author should, rather, use the present order as a counter example to his/her reading, and ask what point is achieved by Shakespeare's chosen order.

- Throughout much of the discussion, I miss a distinction between performing and pretending. Hamlet, the author says, is doing the latter; but only under a very crude understanding of theatrical performance does the latter simply equal the former: performing is not the same as pretending.

Referee: 2

Please see attached.

Editor's Comments to Author:

Associate Editor

I hope the comments, including the more critical ones, will be of use to you, but perhaps the paper, as the second reviewer suggests,



is better suited to another journal. Shakespeare Agains...ers.pdf

### Shakespeare Against the Philosophers

Although I am not in the end persuaded by its overall thesis, I did enjoy this essay, finding it spirited and lively, provoking the reader - or this reader at least - to profitable reflection. With at least some minor revision I think it publishable. However, whether it is best suited to a philosophical journal rather than a Shakespeare or Eng. Lit. one is another matter, and obviously an editorial matter. It doesn't contribute anything of real substance either to elucidating the possible intersections between the plays and Renaissance philosophical enquiry, or to the issue - quite a live one at the moment - as to whether what Shakespeare does in some of his plays can usefully be seen as in some sense 'doing philosophy'. The author's main argument is that that 'To be or not to be' is best read not as a soliloquy on a philosophical theme but as a performance for unseen listeners and part of Hamlet's strategy of playing the madman; as a result it becomes Shakespeare's parody/rejection of ontology. I am unpersuaded. The speech is odd in many ways, and has been a locus for innumerable interpretative debates since the 18th century (Smollett thought it, despite the admiration accorded it, 'a heap of absurdities, whether we consider the situation, the sentiment, the argumentation, or the poetry'), but its poetic texture is a very different thing from where Hamlet is demonstrably acting the part of a lunatic (or perhaps even evincing some genuine signs of madness). Nonetheless I think the argument deserves a run, and, to quote Walter Pater, many suggestive and penetrating things are said by the way about the character of Shakespeare's art.

A few points of detail for consideration in any revision:

- p. 1 line 1 (and again top of p. 3) 'the most famous passage in western literature'; both journalistic and unduly Anglocentric.
- line 7: 'actually' is a favourite word of the author (again pp. 6, 8 and cf 'in its proper context' on p. 25), but the tone is unduly positivistic in so disputed a literary context.
- p. 2 line 1 'has made a remarkable splash', one of several signs of a slight insecurity in setting the tone. So too 'his acting chops' final line p. 9. The whole essay would benefit from a stylistic dusting.
- Notes 1 and 2: *Thinking with Shakespeare: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Essays for A. D. Nuttall*, ed. William Poole and Richard Scholar, Legenda 2007 should certainly be cited; inter alia it contains a longer and much superior version of Martindale's essay cited in note 1. Correct 'Shakespear' in note 2 line 2.

p. 3 bottom: pace Theobald the contradiction may be more apparent than real: what H means is that once we are dead we are dead.

p. 4, 4 lines from end: 'his lover Ophelia' - hardly the mot juste.

p. 5. 5 lines from end: insert 'to' before 'think'.

p. 6 line 5: 'from the Greek *ontos*' - not quite correct, change to 'derived from the Greek verb for "to be."'.

p. 7 'This is a Hamlet who cannot act...H is not acting sad, he *is* sad'. Matters are rather more complex. In one sense Hamlet's behaviour is ostentatiously 'passive aggressive', and thus a mode of performance; it would border on the offensive if Claudius were not a murderer. At this stage some-one not familiar with the play might think, not this is a man who is really sincere, but what a pain!

p. 8 'Your philosophy' (incidentally this becomes 'our' on p. 9 line 13): presumably Stoicism, as becomes clear later; H admires, but cannot inhabit, the particular philosophical stance of Horatio, 'the man who is not passion's slave'.

p. 12, line 8: correct 'interrogations'.

p. 19. I agree that Shakespeare was sceptical about philosophy, noting the way that there is often a dissonance between some-one's philosophical position and his/her personality and circumstance; it's a scepticism he shares with the philosophic Montaigne - I wouldn't call it satire.

'Shakespeare's England was a historical wasteland'. Too throwaway. Either cut, or better develop and make an argument.

p. 20, final line 'He treats ontological philosophy as a social rather than an intellectual phenomenon'. Again not a necessary antithesis; S is certainly interested in social interactions, but he is also interested in ideas, often of a pretty complex kind, and of a kind one seldom finds in the plays of his contemporaries.

p. 22, line 6: 'Wittgenstein': Wittgensteinian.

Line 8: after 'statement' semi-colon, not comma.

Line 9: 'two possible readings'. This suggests the frame of mind of an analytic philosopher! There are myriad possibilities, and, throughout a play much concerned with the difficulty of interpretation and certain proof, much potential for ambiguity.

Bottom: I am sympathetic to this argument, but the form is not really the point: philosophy can be, and has been, done in an epic poem, or a dialogue, or whatever.

p. 24. I would like to be told more about this book by Stanley.

Line 5: 'millions of readers' - not just the groundlings but highly sophisticated and learned scholars and critics!

Line 7 ff. The university-educated Hamlet is an elitist in his dramatic tastes; but the rather old-fashioned and bombastic style of the Player's Speech is given perspective by the more flexible and accomplished and more modern verse of the main play.  
Last line: correct 'understanded'

From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Your Submission to Renaissance Drama  
Date: November 27, 2016 at 10:51 AM  
To: Jeffrey R. Wilson [REDACTED]



# RENAISSANCE DRAMA

Department of English University Hall 215  
1897 Sheridan Road Evanston, IL 60208  
T (847)491-3341



Ref.: Ms. No. 2016048  
"To be, or not to be": Shakespeare Against Philosophy  
Renaissance Drama

Dear Jeffrey Wilson,

We have had the opportunity to review your submission to *Renaissance Drama*, "To be, or not to be": Shakespeare Against Philosophy." I regret to say that the reader's report recommends that *Renaissance Drama* decline to publish your paper.

I am including some comments from the report, reproduced below this message. I hope they will be helpful. I second the report's enthusiasm for the ambitious reach of the article. I would like to see more publications address ways in which Shakespeare may help moderns think seriously about many different aspects of the world. But I also concur with the reader that the piece seems to have many different allegiances, and to push in many different directions, and that this makes it hard to follow even as an essay in the tradition of Montaigne or Barthes. It may be that *Hamlet* is already beyond the point at which we can be introduced to philosophy in it. It is not that it is too familiar, but after literally centuries of philosophizing with this play the gesture is perhaps too diffuse to be grasped at this level.

Many thanks for submitting your work to *Renaissance Drama*. We appreciate your generosity in sending it to us and valued the opportunity to read it.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]  
Editor  
*Renaissance Drama*

Reviewers' comments:

Reviewer #1: Reader's report on "To be, or not to be": Shakespeare Against Philosophy

I admire the ambition and the capacious quality of this essay. The research seems to be thorough (though most of it is buried in the footnotes) and the author has a good command of the text.

Yet I found it problematic on many accounts. The title promises that it will be an exploration on "Shakespeare Against Philosophy." Yet by the time we reach to pg 41, the author says "To me (despite the title of my own essay), it misses the point to act as though our mission is to determine whether Shakespeare was for or against philosophy." Similarly, page 18: "This Hamlet is not necessarily against philosophy. Instead, he is an actor and, more generally, a rhetorician who uses philosophy to get what he wants." Perhaps change the title to avoid false advertising?

At various points in the essay the author contradicts him/herself:

- Hamlet in the beginning "is, in a word, an ontologist" (thus philosophical, right?) but then "Shakespeare created a pattern in which the failure of philosophy is followed by an embrace of theatricality."
- Shakespeare (or Hamlet himself, one is never quite sure), moves from metaphysics to ethics.
- On the one hand, Shakespeare is satirizing philosophy, but then "he was a philosopher of philosophy, a meta-philosopher."
- On the one hand, "Elizabethan England was a metaphysical wasteland" but then "Like many great philosophers in the line that runs from Hegel to Derrida, Shakespeare was interested in the phenomenology of metaphysics."
- philosophy is more than the study of "being" and theatre "doing." Ethics is also about doing.

All these claims are interesting and bold ones and any one of them would make an arguable thesis, but the author moves too much and too quickly through a multitude of ideas that in the end it becomes a confusing jumble. At 42 pages it is just too long and the reader has the labor hard to entangle all the different claims.

Perhaps the main problem is how philosophy is too simplistically and vaguely defined. The author explicitly states that "To be clear, I am

...cringe the main problem is their philosophy is too empiricist and regurgitated. The author rightly states that "to be dead, but not searching here for the philosophy "behind" Shakespeare's plays. Nor am I looking for Shakespeare's place in modern philosophy. Nor am I trying to use modern philosophy to read Shakespeare." But then at the end this is precisely what he does by summoning a whole host of philosophers and intellectuals: Shakespeare sounds like the sociologist Erving Goffman. "Use almost can change the stamp of nature," as Shakespeare wrote in Hamlet (3.4.168) several centuries before the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein worked out his argument that the meaning of a word is its use. Indeed, the Hamlet depicted in this essay is one interested, along with J.L. Austin, in "how to do things with words." "Like many great philosophers in the line that runs from Hegel to Derrida, Shakespeare was interested in the phenomenology of metaphysics." So this sounds like the author is trying to "look for Shakespeare's place in modern philosophy." All this is to say that Shakespeare wasn't really against philosophy after all.

The characterization of the strict binaries of philosophy is a over-generalization. Page 8: "Either God exists, or he doesn't. Either there is a great chain of being, or there isn't. Either something is true for all people in all places in all times, or it isn't." This seems like the Philosophy 101 that the author doesn't like (pg 23). Besides, aren't these precisely the questions that are debated in medieval disputation (e.g. Abelard's Sic et Non) that Hamlet and Horatio would have been exposed to in Wittenberg?

If on page 7 the author truly wants to explore "what was Shakespeare saying about philosophy" then to this reviewer's mind there seems to be different ways to tackle this question. There is really needs to be a richer, fuller historical account of philosophy in Shakespeare's day. The author alludes to them fleetingly. 1.) I found his thoughts on Jacob Lorhard's invention of ontologia interesting and wished the author had reconstructed the intellectual scene in 17th c. Germany better and related directly to Shakespeare. 2.) Erasmus praise of folly tradition is another alternative, as pg 25 suggests. But it seems that Jonathan Bate already has done that. 3.) Or an intriguing study might be done on the different persona of the philosopher in the other plays, which is what the author does briefly in a couple of sentences on 25-6 with Lear, Othello, Macbeth, etc.

Here are some other ad hoc observations:

- 1.) The author has to show why he thinks authorial/ive editors like Jenkins, Raffel, Thompson and Taylor are indeed "comically bad absurdities" rather than rely on the judgment of Hirsh.
- 2.) At one point the author faults Bruster for his "impressionistic aesthetic judgement" yet the author seems to fall into this trap (e.g. 23 While I find the poetry of the passage quite nice - the beauty of the language is, I think, largely what sustains the reading of the speech . . .).
3. For the relationship between philosophy and drama, see the work of Martin Puchner.
4. The close-readings from pg 10 to pg. 18 for most part are sensible and very good, but nothing that original.
5. pg. 23:

"I tend to agree with Bente Videbaek that "To be, or not to be" is "Hamlet's Philosophy 101 A+ essay." To me, the expression of suicidal thoughts in metaphysical terms is a marker of confusion and immaturity. I can remember doing precisely that when I was a depressed teenager. I now cringe to think about the obnoxious pseudophilosophizing I subjected my friends and family to: quite embarrassing stuff. To me now, and I imagine to most healthy adults, the answer to Hamlet's question about whether it is "nobler" to face life's hardships or to have the courage to kill yourself is painfully obvious. This is not profound philosophy."

These sentences are problematic on many levels. "Hamlet's Philosophy 101 A+ essay" is a nice quip but I don't really know what it means. Whether to live or not is indeed a very serious philosophical problem: see Socrates in the Phaedo: the goal of philosophy is learning how to die; the debates of suicide in Roman Stoicism and its reception ("I'm more an antique Roman than a Dane" Horatio says); all the way to Camus: "there is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide." The author's autobiographic bit is charming in a self-deprecating way, but I wonder if it really belongs in a scholarly article. And perhaps someone more FC might read it as dismissing important "wellness" issues in teenagers? The perspective that "to me now, and I imagine to most healthy adults" to kill oneself is not profound philosophy is painfully presentist. This was a major question for ancient, medieval and Renaissance philosophy. See Alexander Murray, Suicide in the Middle Ages (2 vols); and the many other instances of suicide in Shakespeare's plays.

6. Page 23 again: "In other words, the best way to render Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" speech as a philosophically meaningful soliloquy is to historicize it as the best philosophy he could come up with given his constraints as a troubled young boy in a devoutly Christian culture."

So is he truly a troubled young boy or a clever young man trying to deceive others to think that he is troubled or mad as the author repeatedly insists?

7. pages 28-34 the narrative of his film production - interesting but not really convincing argument to proof the point in a scholarly article, at least for Renaissance Drama which tends to be more historical than performative.

8. To satirize philosophy is different than pretending to be mad.

9. "But any answer would have to include the notion that Elizabethan England was a metaphysical wasteland suspended between two great ages of metaphysics with the medieval scholastics - Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham - on one side and the early-modern system-builders - Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz, Spinoza - on the other." Pg. 36 Bold claim, but unsupported. This is contradicted later when the author says "Like many great philosophers in the line that runs from Hegel to Derrida, Shakespeare was interested in the phenomenology of metaphysics." Pg 41.

From: Shakespeare [redacted]  
Subject: Shakespeare - Decision on Manuscript ID HSRK-2016-0082  
Date: April 8, 2017 at 1:09 AM  
To: [redacted]

08-Apr-2017

Dear Dr Wilson

Your manuscript entitled "To be, or not to be": Shakespeare Against Philosophy", which you submitted to Shakespeare, has been reviewed. The referee comments are included at the bottom of this letter. I'm sorry this has taken so long, but as you will see, the first referee recognised your work, so I was obliged to seek a third.

The referees feel that your manuscript is not publishable at the moment, but might be made so if you were willing to undertake some revisions. If you would be willing to do this, I would then resend it to the referees to see if they were now satisfied.

It is important that your manuscript uses MLA-style references and that foot/endnotes are used only for discursive commentary not for referencing. If you're not familiar with the MLA style, please see the guidelines on our "Instructions for Authors" page at <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=1745-0918&linktype=44>. Please note that unless you're referring to the editorial work in an edition, all quotations of Shakespeare must come from the second edition of Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (editors) William Shakespeare: The Complete Works (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005) and must use its lineation. The Norton Shakespeare derived from this edition uses different lineation and is not an acceptable substitute.

To submit the revision, log into <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rshk> and enter your Author Centre, where you will find your manuscript title listed under "Manuscripts with Decisions." Under "Actions," click on "Create a Revision." Your manuscript number has been appended to denote a revision. Please enter your responses to the comments made by the referee(s) in the space provided. You can use this space to document any changes you made to the original manuscript. Please be as specific as possible in your response to the referee(s).

IMPORTANT: Your original files are available to you when you upload your revised manuscript. Please delete any redundant files before completing the submission.

Because we are trying to facilitate timely publication of manuscripts submitted to Shakespeare, your revised manuscript should be uploaded as soon as possible. If it is not possible for you to submit your revision in a reasonable amount of time, we may have to consider your paper as a new submission.

Once again, thank you for submitting your manuscript to Shakespeare and I look forward to receiving your revision.

Sincerely (but please note this is an automated email),

[redacted]  
Editor, Shakespeare

Referee(s) Comments to Author:

Referee: 1

Comments to the Author

I heard this paper presented at a conference, where it provoked profound skepticism on the part of the audience, and convinced no one (including myself). I hasten to add that the argument -- that the 'to be or not to be' speech parodies philosophical profundity, rather than offering any of Shakespeare's (or Hamlet's) own ["understated in its representation of overblownness"] -- was not itself persuasive. The complaints were that the argument was, so to speak, irrelevant or beside the point. Whatever Shakespeare's intentions, the significance of 'to be or not to be' cannot, at this late date, be separated from the history of its interpretive reception. The author tries to do a kind of 'end run' around that reception, by retrieving the intent hidden (or so the author supposes) in the dramatic context in which Hamlet says those words. But that is just cheating.

That the author has changed so little of his argument after receiving so much explicit criticism, so many direct questions about his methodology and conclusions, gives me pause. At this point, I cannot recommend publication.

That said, and on the other hand, the fact that everyone in the audience felt compelled to answer the author's provocation meant that it was, at least, a provocation. And that is better than nothing these days. So, my suggestion is that the author revise and resubmit. Similarly, I suggest that "Shakespeare" not publish the piece, until AT LEAST the following revisions are undertaken:

1. First and foremost: The author needs to take more seriously than he does just why his 'interpretation' has been missing from the tradition, by and large. Insisting that philosophy deals with 'being' while the drama deals with 'action' won't cut it. There is such a thing as practical philosophy or moral philosophy, and there was in Shakespeare's day, too (since Aristotle, in fact.) Not all philosophy is metaphysics, and Shakespeare knew it. [By the way: to insist on the difference between seeming and being is not necessarily to do metaphysics; human beings do it all the time, in logic, in science, in sense-perception, in figuring out whether to trust a car salesman...]. At any rate, the distinction between philosophy and drama ('being' and 'acting') won't do nearly the work that the author wants it to. Rather, to tackle a few representative, well-known and well-chosen interpretations of the entire text, and show what

1. Better to negate a non-representative, non-main and non-essential interpretation of the soliloquy rather than to show that they miss about the dramatic context. Start with that.

2. Shorten this essay by a lot. The first 6-7 pages, for instance, can be reduced to a paragraph in which the disagreement between Bruster and Hirsch sets the stage for the author's thesis: namely, that "'To be, or not to be'" may not be the profoundly philosophical moment it has been taken to be by centuries of readers. It could be, instead, what someone says when he wants others to think he is crazy" (6).

3. Notice that this thesis, as written, requires the author to negate or deny "centuries" of criticism – and that he wildly overstates the 'originality' of the deflationary, dramaturgical claim being advanced here. Better, again, to depart from Hirsch and give a sustained dramaturgical account of the speech as a soliloquy and show how such a reading might 'answer' well-known aspects of other philosophical interpretations of the speech. The scope of this essay should be more contained, if it is to be at all helpful and persuasive.

4. The question "What was Shakespeare's attitude toward philosophy? (7) is an interesting one, but it's not necessary – not argumentatively germane – here. And answering that question requires a more sophisticated account of 'philosophy' in the period than, I think, the author is prepared to give. Better to excise that thread of the paper.

5. Stick to the basic claim: That there are dramaturgical stakes in the speech which allow us to hear 'to be or not to be' as a kind of 'staging' of philosophy, and not as philosophy proper. This is a deflationary claim, and not really an earth-shattering one; but it could be advanced productively, with attention to detail (in the play, and in the exegetical reception of that speech) and with much more humility, in ways that would shed light on how else those lines might still be read or performed. If the author can pull that off, it would merit publication in "Shakespeare."

Referee: 2

Comments to the Author

Though I have ticked 'major', that is more a reflection of the amount that could go, rather than the number of problems with the article. Actually, I found the article very enjoyable and stimulating - saying something novel about Hamlet takes some doing. Give or take the odd typo and infelicity (highlighted in yellow), it was admirably clear despite (or perhaps because of) dealing with some complex ideas. The style was, generally, very lively and engaging, and posed significant questions in arresting ways - I was less keen on the aesthetic platitudes or subjective interludes. The close readings in particular were smart and analytical. It seems somewhat overlong, mind you, and I've suggested a big chunk that could be cut with no detrimental effects (just as I've also signalled a couple of places where more elaboration would be good). With these done, I recommend publication.

Referee: 3

Comments to the Author

My recommendation for major revisions comes from a mixture of admiration and concern.

The author writes well (there is some fine phrase-making) and is knowledgeable about the issues and scenes under discussion. There are acute observations about Hamlet's repetition of words. While the final section (on Shakespeare's and Hamlet's place in the tradition of Western thought / philosophy) often risks over-generalization, it is also often provoking and suggestive in a productive way.

However, I find myself in disagreement with what is fundamental to the author's argument: the distinction between ontology and drama. I don't find this distinction, as it is drawn, logically persuasive or critically productive. This distinction is key to the argument of the first 25 pages (which is substantially the argument of the article as a whole). Moreover, the article's novelty rests largely on the perspective its argument attempts to establish (as opposed to the novelty of the matters under discussion).

Problematic also for me is the way the article does not treat other examples of philosophizing within the play – given the article's aim to draw broad conclusions about Shakespeare's (and his age's) attitudes towards (metaphysical) philosophy.

The relevance of the (quite extended) description of the author's and his students' film production of 'To be and not to be' is another concern.

Given the fundamental nature of my disagreement and my other concerns, I wonder whether the author will wish to revise.

If s/he did, my large suggestions would be:

1. The hard distinction between ontology and drama (the sense that they are adversarial) be dropped. I found far more helpful the concluding section's sense of Shakespeare as an opportunistic exploiter of philosophic discourse, and wondered if something closer to, say, Schalkwyk's position might have provided the framework to the article.

2. The article limits its claims on the play to our understanding of the soliloquy (and perhaps 'What a piece of work is man'). It might be that this could be combined with the description of the filmed production taking a more central place in the article.

Other concerns (more local / more personal).

There seemed to be an implicit assumption that a public statement would be an insincere statement; I did not find this persuasive.

I did not see why 'To be or not to be', because it was a repetition of parts of past soliloquies (19), needed to be insincere example of philosophizing. Indeed, if the previous examples were not dramatized or overheard, were they than sincere? And if they were, might

that cut against the generalized conclusions as to Shakespeare's satirizing of philosophy? Why might not repetition confirm, as opposed to undercut?

Relatedly, the essay seemed quite wedded to a Coleridgean notion of character (especially as regards unity and consistency). I'm not convinced that the demand for a reasonable basis for action is critically productive (especially as concerns dramatic persons under forms of emotional duress).

A clearer statement was needed of what was thought to be the status and relationship of Q1, Q2, and Folio. At present, the various texts were quoted from in a manner which can seem rather self-serving.

Re Sokal – is it a stretch to say he used philosophy? Wasn't it that he used gibberish which sounded vaguely philosophical to demonstrate the journal did not understand what it was publishing? This is not particularly analogous to what Shakespeare is doing with 'To be'?

Questions of tone, expression

At times a more tentative, exploratory tone, as opposed to a series of revelatory or polemic statements?

5. 'willful ignorance' – a bit strong?

7. 'this essay' – may be ambiguous; 'that essay' clearer?

20. Personal testimony of teenage years etc might be shortened or made more impersonal?

Typos spotted (the typescript is remarkably clean).

10. spelling of 'verses'

15. spelling of 'exhaustion'

20. missing fullstop after 'poetry'

34. spelling of 'precident'

Other thoughts

Mary Shelley[?], 'Byron and Shelley on the Character of Hamlet' might fit nicely into the discussion around Smollett.

I wonder whether an engagement with Calderwood's 'To Be And Not To Be' might be productive.

From: Shakespeare [REDACTED]  
Subject: Shakespeare - Decision on Manuscript to RSHK-2016-0062.R1  
Date: June 1, 2017 at 6:16 AM  
To: [REDACTED]



01-Jun-2017

Dear Dr Wilson

Thank you for submitting the revised version of your manuscript. I am now basically happy to accept it, but before I do that I'm going to ask you to fix some small glitches, which I'll list below. It may seem ridiculous that the author should need to do this at this stage, but I can't because by the time the document reaches me it is a read-only PDF, and bitter experience has taught me not to trust the copy-editors to whom such work is now outsourced. This is, therefore, the only way to get it right. If you will attend to this I'll then press 'accept', but please note I am away at a conference next week so there may be a delay.

1) You've said that your references to quartos have been marked with place-holders pending the publication of the New Oxford Critical Reference edition. My omniscient colleague Gabriel Egan assures me that it actually came out two weeks ago. If it's not yet appeared in the US, and doesn't look likely to materialise in the near future, please quote quartos from some other source.

2) p. 1, 4 lines up, 'retain the offense' needs to be 'retain the offence' - that's what the Oxford says.

3) p. 2, Section 3, line 6, 'channelling' has two Is in UK spelling. Same page, penultimate line, why the upper case for Father's ghost? It's father's in the line below.

4) p. 5, last paragraph, 'Willful' and 'forgetfulness' need to be 'wilful' and 'forgetfulness' in UK spelling.

5) p. 7, main paragraph, I'm a bit worried about the quotation at the end, which has "endeavor" and "theatre". Does the author you're quoting really mix UK and US spellings in this way? If so, I think a 'sic' is called for. If not, which is he using?

6) p. 10, line 4 and also the first line of section V, 'behavior' needs to be 'behaviour'. Also in line 5, you can't be 'different than' in UK English; you can only be 'different from'.

7) p. 11, line 5, 'pratical' > 'practical'.

8) p. 12, bottom line, 'his acting chops' - I genuinely don't know what this means. It looks as if it ought to be something like credentials, but to me 'chops' can only be cuts of meat or an old-fashioned word for cheeks.

9) p. 14, around halfway, 'color' needs to be 'colour'. Next paragraph, line 3, 'signaling' needs to be 'signalling'.

10) p. 15, two lines from end of first paragraph, behavioUr

11) p. 20, top line, 'compatible' not 'comptatable'

12) p. 21, first line of main paragraph, 'I actually find the poetry of this passage quite nice' - is that really what you want to say? I wonder if 'nice' has a different tonality in US English? For me Henry Tilney's reproof to Catherine Morland is a just one: 'nice' doesn't really mean much. Also three lines below that, needs to be 'pre-empt' in UK English.

13) p. 22, line 6, please lose the hyphen in 'inner-monologue'

14) p. 24, seven lines from bottom, needs to be 'dialogue'

15) p. 25, 3 lines up, behavioUr

16) p. 26, second para, line 3, 'manoeuvre' in UK English. Four lines below that, 'employed such that': in such a way that?

17) p. 28, second reference, line 2, manoeuvring. Three lines below that, could we have an act, line, scene ref for Faustus?

18) p. 29, top line, 'designed to elicit' not 'to illicit'.

19) p. 31, Beginning of section XI, I'd recommend losing 'As such' and starting with 'I am'.

20) p. 32, 5 lines from bottom, 'groundlings' > 'groundlings'. Three lines below, unskillful not unskillful.

21) p. 35, Derrida item in bib, Johns Hopkins not John Hopkins

22) p. 37, Marlowe item in bib, I don't see the need for 'Edited anonymously', nor for 'Ca. 1588-92' (and in any case there's no period in UK abbreviations when the last letter of the abbreviation is the same as the last letter of the word). I've spent thirty years working on Marlowe, and all I care about is whether you're quoting the A text (which I can see you are) or the B text. Any other information the informed reader can supply for themselves, and the uninformed one will be happier staying that way. Also on that page, Martindale item, period needed after Goneratne.

23) p. 38, Norris item in bib, you've got two Is in Deconstructive.

24) p. 39, The Sokal Hoax, 'Edited by the editors of Lingua Franca' - what does it mean?? How am I going to find this item if I am an interested PhD student? Is there really no author?

25) p. 40, note 2, elsewhere you've got 'To be, or not to be' but here it is 'To be or not to be'.

It is important that your manuscript uses MLA-style references and that foot/endnotes are used only for discursive commentary not for referencing. If you're not familiar with the MLA style, please see the guidelines on our "Instructions for Authors" page at <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=1745-0918&linktype=44>. Please note that unless you're referring to the editorial work in an edition, all quotations of Shakespeare must come from the second edition of Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (editors) William Shakespeare: The Complete Works (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005) and must use its lineation. The Norton Shakespeare derived from this edition uses different lineation and is not an acceptable substitute.

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Once again, thank you for submitting your manuscript to Shakespeare and I look forward to receiving your revision.

Sincerely (but please note this is an automated email),

[REDACTED]  
Editor, Shakespeare

Referee(s) Comments to Author: