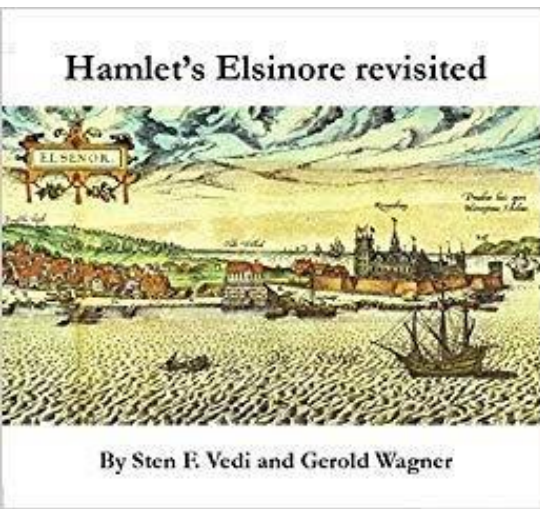


Hamlet's Elsinore Revisited

By Sten F. Vedi and Gerold Wagner

Review by Eddi Jolly



It is always a pleasure to return to considerations about *Hamlet*, and this book circles around the play and the inspirations for it with enthusiasm. The authors are familiar with the archives in Copenhagen, the British Library manuscript room, and a wide range of orthodox and other scholars' discussions of *Hamlet*, as well as with the first and second quartos and the folio version of the play, and the German *Der Bestrafte*

Brudermord (Fratricide Punished?).

The main threads uniting the different angles are the question of where the author might have received his knowledge about Denmark, and the consequent question of authorship. En route, the authors consider the libraries de Vere might have drawn upon (his own, Sr Thomas Smith's, Lord Burghley's, Lord Lumley's and possibly John Dee's), and alternative candidates to William Shakespeare (Sir Henry Neville, Lord Derby, and the most discussed, de Vere). There are also the relationship of the quartos and the historical Danish tapestries bearing pictures of the kings; many subjects crop up.

How did the author of *Hamlet* know about the Danes' inclination to drink (it is mentioned in the French source) and the cannons' roar at every rouse? Could it have been from Peregrine Willoughby, who visited the Danish King Frederick II in the 1580s? That is, the Willoughby who was de Vere's brother-in-law. Could it also have been Willoughby's reference to the 'gentleman of poliona', a gentleman from Poland, who contributed to the character of Polonius? This gentleman seems to have been a nobleman from Pomerania, Henrik Ramel, who became 'Hofmeister' to Frederick II in 1583. The name 'Corambis' and Burghley's motto 'Cor unum, via una', are seen as linking Corambis/Polonius and Burghley.

Inevitably, certain aspects of the discussion particularly appeal to me. The authors note that in the first quarto (Q1) Hamlet is younger than in the second (Q2), and it is only in the first that Hamlet says in the bedchamber scene 'but first weele make all safe'. Both features are in Q1, not Q2, further support for the authors' declaration that Q1 'cannot' be a memorial reconstruction.

Gems of information abound. Elizabeth's attempts to win Frederick II's allegiance in the late 1570s and 1580s mean that a succession of English emissaries visited Denmark: Willoughby, John Herbert, Thomas Bodley, and the 'stinking rich financier' Horatio Pallavicino. This is valuable background for anyone trying to understand the diplomatic games Elizabeth I played in England's standoff with Spain in the years up to the Armada. And there's a thoughtful appendix II about Brian Vickers' tome on co-authorship.

The book, well-illustrated, has a meandering and occasionally repetitive style, with one or two quaint phrases. It's replete with the sorts of questions about *Hamlet* that still need definitive, universally agreed answers. Perhaps they'll come, one day.

