

“Bad” Quarto Versus “Good” Quarto

“To Be or Not to Be” in the First Quarto (1603) and the Second Quarto (1604–5)

Two versions of the most famous monologue in theatrical history. The differences are substantial. But Q₂ is backed in nearly all its details by the First Folio of 1623. (The one significant exception in the text below is a22/b28, where the folio supports the reading “of us all” in Q₁.) There are similar differences that affect musical passages or sections in the plays, supporting the idea that these are, in some cases at least, interpolations that are dispensable as such. Yet the fundamental question remains, and it is illustrated by the comparison below.

Q₁

- a1 To be, or not to be, aye, there’s the point,
- a2a To die, to sleepe,
a2b is that all? Aye all.
- a3 No, to sleepe, to dreame, aye mary, there it goes,
a4a For in that dreame of death
a4b when wee awake,
a5 And borne before an euerlasting iudge,
a6a From whence
a6b no passengere euer return’d,
a7 The vndiscovered country, at whose sight
a8 The happy smile, and the accursed damn’d.
- a9 But for this, the ioyfull hope of this,
a10 Whol’d beare the scornes and flattery of the world,
a11 Scorned by the right rich, the rich curssed of the poore?
a12 The widow being oppressed, the orphan wrong’d,
a13 The taste of hunger, or a tirant’s raigne,
- a14 And thousand more calamities besides,
a15 To grunt and sweate vnder this weary life,
a16 When that he may his full quietus make,
a17 With a bare bodkin, who would this indure,
a18 But for a hope of something after death?
a19 Which pusles the braine, and doth confound the sence
a20 Which makes vs rather beare those euilles we haue,
a21 Than flie to others that we know not of.
a22 Aye that, O this conscience makes cowardes of vs all,

Q₂

- b1 To be, or not to be, that is the question,
b2 Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer
b3 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
b4 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
b5 And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep--
b6 No more--and by a sleep to say we end

Q₂

lines rearranged to match the Q₁ version

- b1 To be, or not to be, that is the question,
b2 Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer
b3 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
b4 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
b5 And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep--
b6 No more--and by a sleep to say we end
b7a The heartache,
b8 That flesh is heir to; ‘tis a consummation
b9 Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep;
b10 To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there’s the rub,
b11 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
b12 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
- b24b from whose hourn
b25a No traveler returns,
b24a The undiscovered country
- b13 Must give us pause. There’s the respect
b14 That makes calamity of so long life.
- b15 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
b16 Th’oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,
- b17 The pangs of despised love, the law’s delay,
b18 The insolence of office, and the spurns
b19 That patient merit of th’unworthy takes,
b7b the thousand natural shocks
b22 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
b20 When he himself might his quietus make
b21 With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
b23 But that the dread of something after death,
b25b puzzles the will,
b26 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
b27 Than fly to others that we know not of.
b28 Thus conscience does make cowardes,
b29 And thus the native hue of resolution
b30 Is sickled o’er with the pale cast of thought,
b31 And enterprises of great pitch and moment
b32 With this regard their currents turn awry
b33 And lose the name of action.

Q₁

lines rearranged to match the Q₁ version

- a1a To be, or not to be,
- a2a To die, to sleepe,
a2b is that all? Aye all.

b7	The heartache and the <u>thousand</u> natural shocks	a14	And <u>thousand</u> more calamities besides,
b8	That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation		
b9	Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep;		
b10a	<u>To sleep, perchance to dream.</u>	a3a	No, <u>to sleepe, to dreame,</u>
b10b	<u>Ay, there's</u> the rub,	a3b	<u>aye</u> mary, <u>there</u> it goes,
		a1b	<u>aye, there's the</u> point,
b11	<u>For in that sleep of death</u> what dreams may come	a4a	<u>For in that dreame of death</u>
b12	<u>When we</u> have shuffled off this mortal coil	a4b	<u>when wee</u> awake,
		a5	And borne before an euerlasting iudge,
		a8	The happy smile, and the accursed damn'd.
b13	Must give us pause. There's the respect		
b14	That makes calamity of so long life.		
b15	For <u>who would bear the</u> whips and <u>scorns of</u> time,	a10	<u>Who'd beare the scornes</u> and flattery of the world,
		a11	<u>Scorned</u> by the right rich, the rich cursed of the poore?
b16	Th' <u>oppressor's wrong</u> , the proud man's contumely,	a12	The widow being <u>oppressed</u> , the orphan wrong'd,
		a13	The taste of hunger, or a tirant's raigne,
b17	The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,		
b18	The insolence of office, and the spurns		
b19	That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,		
b20	<u>When he himself might his quietus make</u>	a16	<u>When that he may his full Quietus make,</u>
b21	<u>With a bare bodkin? Who would</u> fardels bear,	a17	<u>With a bare bodkin, who would</u> this indure,
b22	<u>To grunt and sweat under a weary life,</u>	a15	<u>To grunt and sweate vnder this weary life,</u>
		a9	But for this, the ioyfull hope of this,
b23	<u>But that the dread of something after death,</u>	a18	<u>But for a hope of something after death?</u>
b24a	<u>The undiscovered country</u>	a7	<u>The vndiscovered country,</u> at whose sight
b24b	<u>from</u> whose bourn	a6a	<u>From</u> whence
b25a	<u>No</u> traveler <u>returns</u> ,	a6b	<u>no</u> passengere euer <u>return'd</u> ,
b25b	<u>puzzles the will,</u>	a19	Which <u>pusles the</u> braine, and doth confound the sence
b26	And <u>makes us</u> rather bear those ills we have	a20	Which <u>makes vs rather beare</u> those euilles we haue,
b27	<u>Than fly to others that we know not of.</u>	a21	<u>Than flie to others that we know not of.</u>
b28	<u>Thus conscience does make cowards,</u>	a22	Aye that, O <u>this conscience makes cowardes</u> of vs all,
b29	And thus the native hue of resolution		
b30	Is sickled o'er with the pale cast of thought,		
b31	And enterprises of great pitch and moment		
b32	With this regard their currents turn awry		
b33	And lose the name of action.		

Does Q1 make sense on its own?

To be, or not to be, aye, there's the point,
To die, to sleepe, is that all? Aye all.
No, to sleepe, to dreame, aye mary, there it goes,
For in that dreame of death, when wee awake,
And borne before an euerlasting iudge,
From whence no passengere euer return'd,
The vndiscovered country, at whose sight
The happy smile, and the accursed damn'd.
But for this, the ioyfull hope of this,
Whol'd beare the scornes and flattery of the world,
Scorned by the right rich, the rich cursed of the poore?
The widow being oppressed, the orphan wrong'd,
The taste of hunger, or a tirant's raigne,
And thousand more calamities besides,
To grunt and sweate vnder this weary life,
When that he may his full *Quietus* make,
With a bare bodkin, who would this indure,
But for a hope of something after death?
Which pusles the braine, and doth confound the sence
Which makes vs rather beare those euilles we haue,
Than flie to others that we know not of.
Aye that, O this conscience makes cowardes of vs all.