

## Suggestions for Shakespeare

### Playing Out the Alterations in Nineteenth-Century Promptbooks of *Hamlet*

The original versions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* did not portray Francisco as one of the key players in the protagonist's downfall. Nor did the play end with Hamlet's dying words. The first quartos and Folio of *Hamlet* introduced a flourish of Fortinbras's army coming to take over Denmark at the end of a play in which Hamlet, in his dying breath, votes for the Norwegian interloper as the next monarch instead of revealing his own self-consciousness. Yet the nineteenth-century collaborators on various productions of *Hamlet* had more exciting ideas for the ending of the play. Adding new stage directions and completely removing Fortinbras's entrance, nineteenth-century promptbooks emphasize a celebrity actor and put Hamlet in the limelight at the end of the play. Though promptbooks contain changes throughout the text, I will focus here upon changes in the last scene in Edwin Forrest's and Edwin Booth's promptbooks.

The playbills of nineteenth-century productions of *Hamlet* also tell a fascinating story of the play's transformation through performance. In particular, they show that *Hamlet* was most often performed together with a pantomime, farce, or another play such as the very popular *Octoroon*, whose action-packed ending has a surprisingly similar structure to that of Edwin Forrest's version of *Hamlet*. When advertising the play, playbills often focus on the star actor playing Hamlet or the circumstances surrounding the specific performance rather than on Shakespeare. Yet despite this focus, Forrest and his contemporaries were surprisingly attentive to the textual tradition of the play, comparing Quarto 2 with the First Folio, for instance, even as they resituated *Hamlet* within an evening of miscellaneous performances.

## Shakespeare vs. Forrest Printed Editions

The way the Edwin Forrest 1860 promptbook is bound is telling in itself; its pages are interleaved -- that is, bound with blank leaves in between the leaves of printed text. These promptbooks are specifically prepared so that they can be written into, providing extensive space to add to or cut from the text or to add stage directions. Indeed, the Forrest promptbook is covered with directions, cuts, and commentaries that highlight both the star actor's portrayal of Hamlet and the role of the star in rewriting the parts of the other actors.

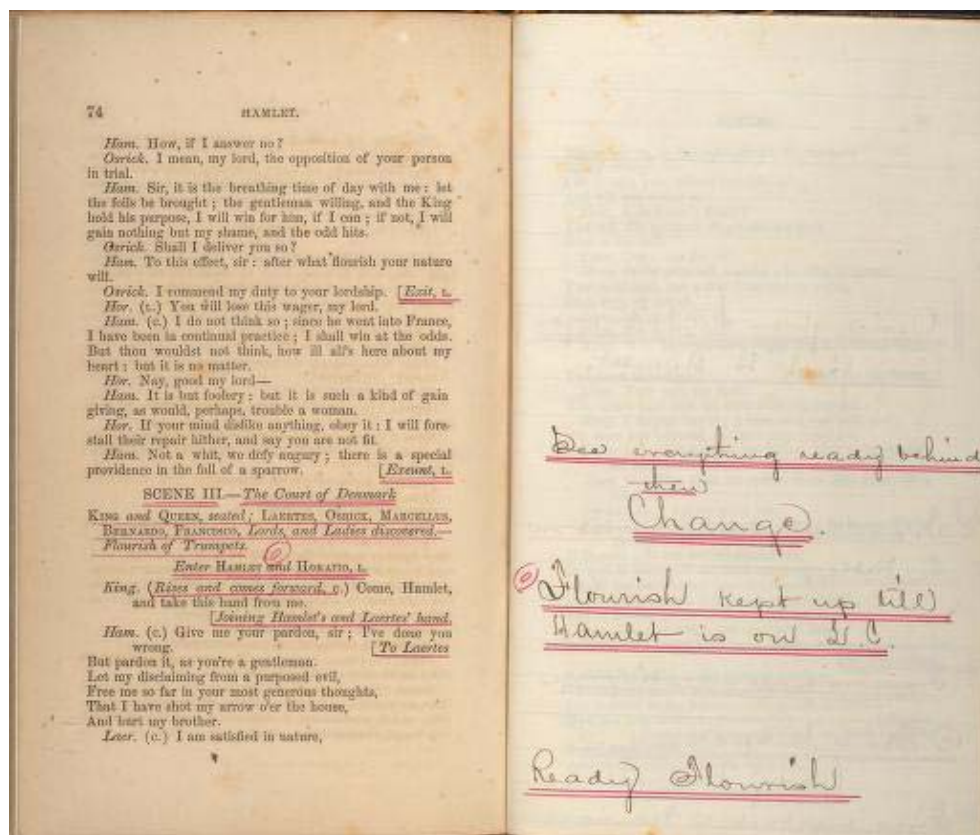


Fig. 1: Page 74 from Forrest ed. *Hamlet* Act V Scene iii. Torrey Brothers: 1860. New York. Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image.

One example of the changes in the Forrest promptbook from the Second Quarto and the First Folio is the way in which the second half of Act V Scene ii breaks off to make a third scene in Act V, beginning with the entrance of the King and Lords (Forrest 74). When the company first appears in this ‘new’ scene, they are seated. This was made possible by the fact that, unlike early seventeenth-century theatres, nineteenth-century theatres used curtains. The curtain is here used to allow the time and privacy to change the scenery and to create a new tableau. This curtain is later used to frame the tableau at the end of the play where the actor has hand-written: “slow curtain” (78). The actor also writes “warn curtain,” in the middle of the scene to prepare for this (76), emphasizing its importance in the scene.

The curtain’s significance can be seen throughout the play: it allows for various elaborate sets including a tower, the Queen’s closet and the discovery of many actors in a tableau around the thrones. As Lawrence Levine points out, “Shakespearean plays were often...spectacles in their own right” with promises of various dances, marches and complicated sets (Levine 22). With the help of musical flourishes and light cues, these scenes became both spectacular and intricate. They are drawn in great detail in the interleaved blank pages of the Forrest promptbook.



Fig. 2, 3, 4: (From L to R) Pages from Forrest ed. *Hamlet* Act I Scene ii, Act I Scene iv, Act III Scene i Torrey Brothers: 1860. New York. Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image.

The above images display sets or tableaux that are meant to be “discovered” by the raising of the curtain. The images from Act I Scene iv and Act III Scene i contain large and ornate set pieces. In addition to setting the thrones within a wooden dais, the image for Act I Scene ii requires the careful positioning of actors in order to create the tableau that is discovered.

To focus on the final scene, the Forrest promptbook’s Act V Scene iii contains cuts that align themselves to earlier editions of the text. A noteworthy difference between Quarto 2 and the First Folio is that, in the Folio, Hamlet exclaims that he never meant to hurt his “Mother” at the end of the speech, rather than his “brother.” The Forrest edition has “brother” but it truncates the speech so that it does not repeat itself, nor does it make any mention of madness. Hamlet simply begs for forgiveness and confesses that he has “done [the king and his brother] wrong” (Forrest 74).

The Forrest promptbook closely follows Q2 and F1 which elaborate on the terms of the duel into which Hamlet willingly enters. The King makes a speech that announces the terms of the battle and drinks to Hamlet in both early seventeenth-century versions. But in Q2, the speech is accompanied by “trumpets the while,” and in the same vein, the Forrest edition includes the stage direction, “Drums and trumpets sounds. C[a]nnons within.” Forrest also writes in his own additions to the stage direction by hand: “Flourish and Ordinance.” Thus, although the Forrest promptbook does not deviate from Q2 or F1 greatly at this point, it intensifies the sense of military conflict in the scene.

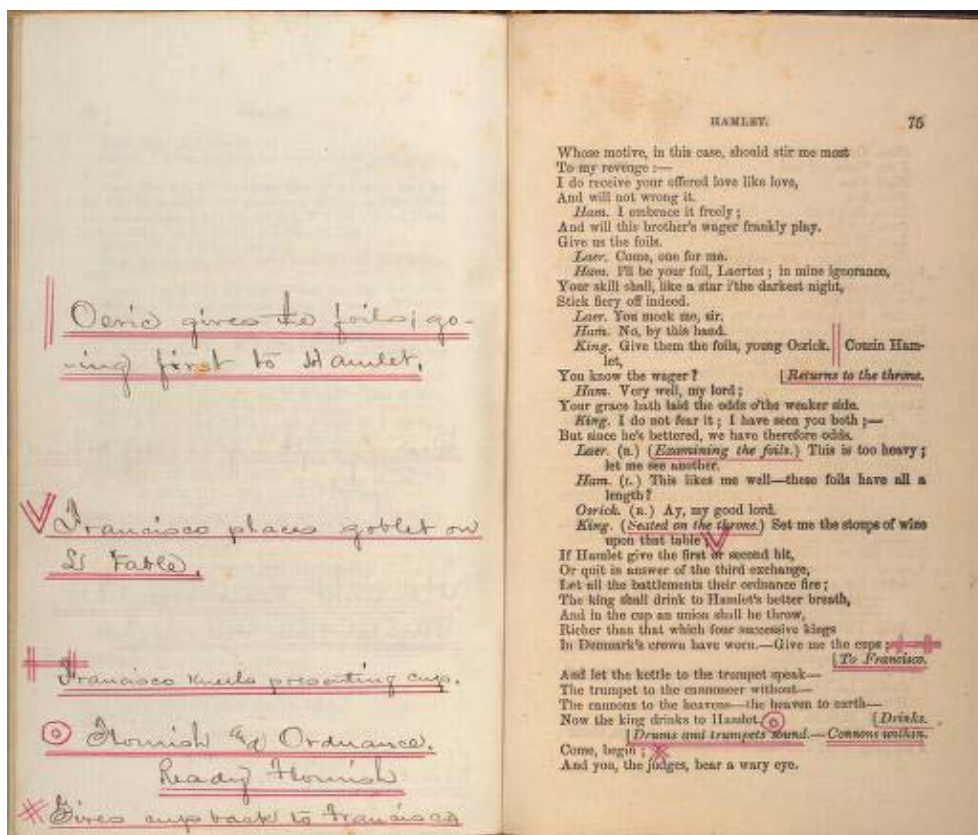


Fig. 5: Page 75 from Forrest ed. *Hamlet* Act V Scene iii. Torrey Brothers: 1860. New York. Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image.

These added sounds and images in Forrest's promptbook, like many of the textual cuts, are developed from suggestions in Q2 and F1. Q2 has shots fired later in the scene both after the first hit of the duel and again just as they begin their second round. And F1 also notes that "a shot goes off," but at the point when the King drinks to Hamlet's health. The Forrest edition follows F1 with "cannons shot off within" at the same point. Forrest also added in by hand the stage direction for a flourish and ordinance at the moment of the first hit, the same moment that Q2's text directs shots to be fired. As the duel continues, Hamlet hits Laertes and asks, "what say you?" In Q2, he only says "I doe confest" but both F1 and the Forrest edition have "a touch, a touch I do confess."



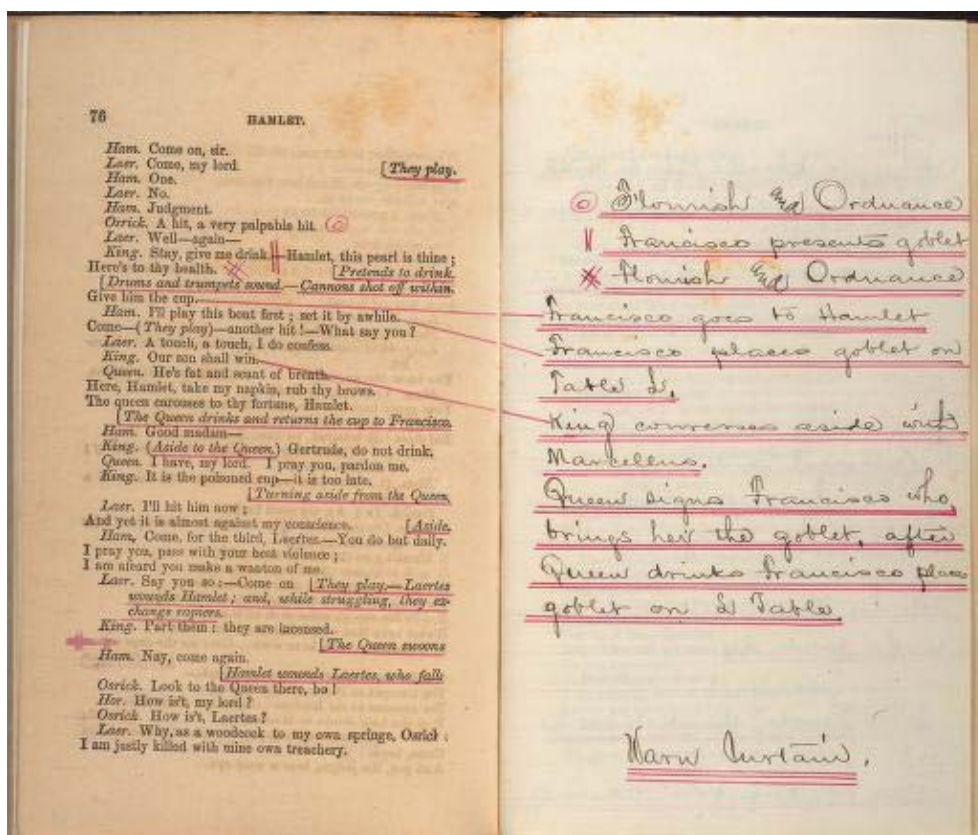


Fig. 6: Page 76 from Forrest ed. *Hamlet* Act V Scene iii. Torrey Brothers: 1860. New York. Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image.

Forrest also adds a stage direction that is not found in the quartos or Folio. The First Quarto notes that “*They catch one anothers Rapiers, and both are wounded, Leartes falles downe.....*” Q2 does not have any stage direction at this moment while F1 has “*in scuffling they change rapiers.*” In both F1 and Q2, the stage directions imply the possibility that the woundings are accidental. However, the Forrest edition reads, “*They play—Laertes wounds Hamlet; and, while struggling, they exchange rapiers.*” In fact, Forrest makes explicit that both Laertes’s wounding of Hamlet and Hamlet’s wounding of Laertes are deliberate: “*Hamlet wounds Laertes who falls.*”

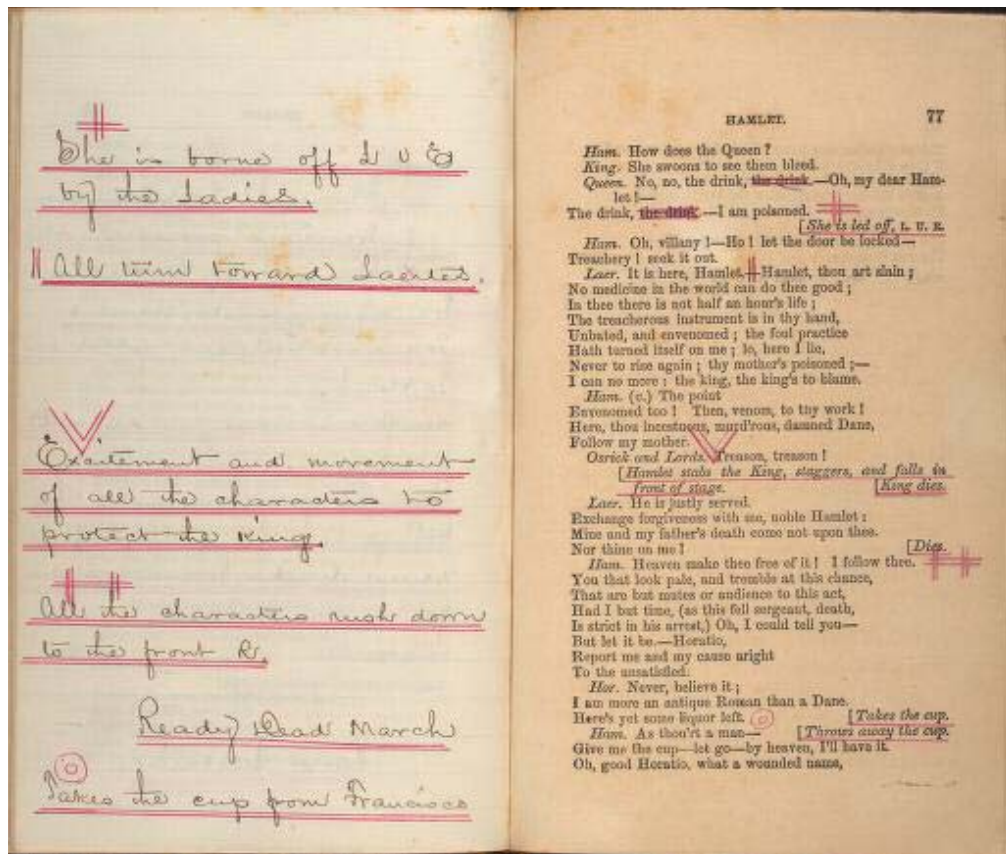


Fig. 7: Page 77 from Forrest ed. *Hamlet* Act V Scene iii. Torrey Brothers: 1860. New York. Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image.

The following speech that Laertes speaks before he dies is similar in all four versions: Q1, Q2, F1 and the Forrest. The main difference in Q1 is that Laertes does not explicitly implicate the King. But following Hamlet's accusation, the King's final words in Q2 and F1 are "O yet defend me friends, I am but hurt." Here, interestingly, Forrest follows the so-called "Bad-Quarto" (Q1) in cutting the line. But Forrest also adds a new direction that "*Hamlet stabs the King, staggers, and falls front of stage*" (77). Though Hamlet has just killed the King, the audience is meant to focus on Hamlet staggering



down to center stage. This added stage direction emphasizes the star actor at the cost of marginalizing the other characters, however central they are to the plot.

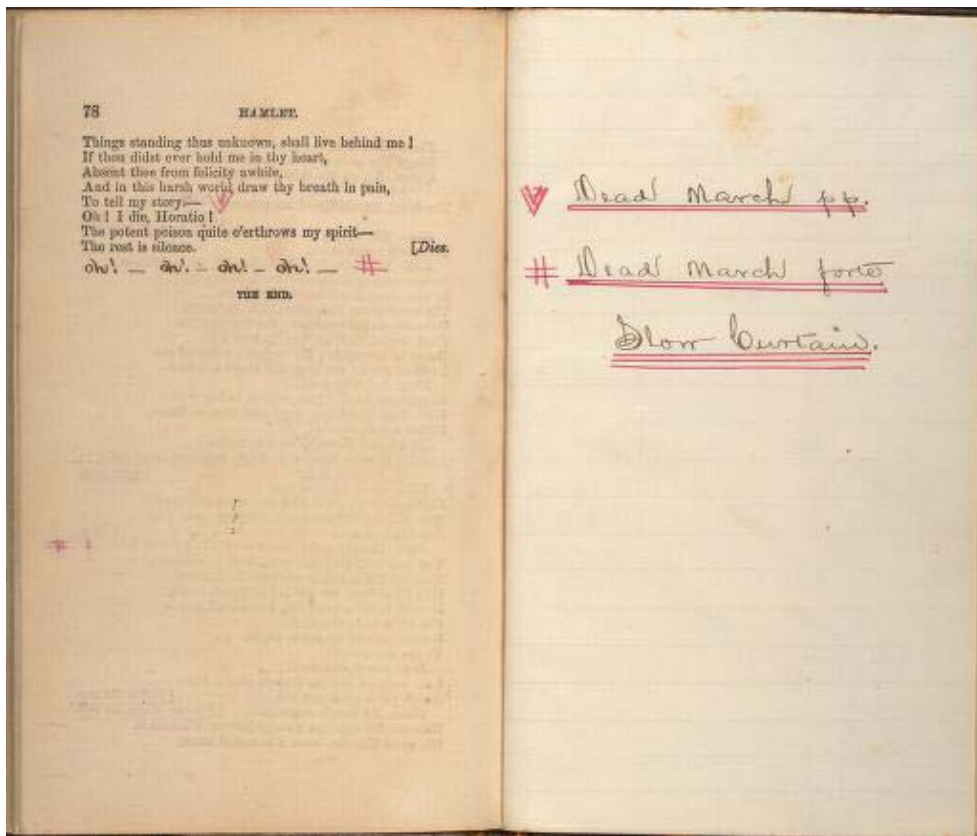


Fig. 8: Page 78 from Forrest ed. *Hamlet* Act V Scene iii. Torrey Brothers: 1860. New York. Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image.

Another difference between the Forrest edition and Q2 and F1 is that it removes the lines “I am dead *Horatio*” both times it appears, though it retains “O I die *Horatio*.” Other omitted lines include “It is a poison tempered by himself. ” The latter of these lines focuses on the King. The other two lines, “I am dead *Horatio*” and “O I die *Horatio*.” are very similar to each other and take away from the power of their counterpart, “O, I die, Horatio!” The final “O, I die” is an action, rather than an inert statement.

Nineteenth-century Hamlets make no mention of Fortinbras in their final speech, since Fortinbras's appearance has been cut from the scene entirely. Thus, Hamlet's speech is uninterrupted by the noise of distant soldiers or by Osric's announcement of Fortinbras's arrival, as in F1 and Q2. In Forrest's edition, Hamlet's final speech also closes the play, while all other editions allow Horatio to verbally react to Hamlet's death. Likewise, Forrest removes a key point from his speech which, in essence, changes the theme of the speech entirely. The Renaissance versions contain Hamlet's handing over of the throne to Fortinbras: "I cannot liue to heare the newes from *England*/But I doe prophecie th'ellection lights/On *Fortinbrasse*, he has my dying voice,/So tell him, with th'occurrants more and lesse/Which haue solicited." The omission of these lines radically changes the ending of the play. Fortinbras never enters, and Hamlet dies without ever handing the throne to him (78).

The omission of Fortinbras's entrance contrasts with the quarto endings in which Fortinbras enters "with his traine," (Q1) or "with the ambassadors," (Q2-4). These endings distract from Hamlet's death – a distraction that is emphasized by F1's "enter Fortinbras and English Ambassador, with drumme, colours, and attendants." Similarly, the sights and sounds of Fortinbras's army at the very end of F1, "exeunt marching: after the which, a peale of ordenance are shot off" are replaced by Forrest with an orchestra that responds to Hamlet alone (Spevak 150).

### The Two Edwins Up Close and Personal

In addition to printed alterations in the Forrest promptbook, there are additional changes, cuts and additions written into it by hand. Forrest has marked up his

promptbook in the last scene in a way that both alters the text and adds a range of dramatic cues. As the last scene begins, the promptbook's printed text reads: "King and Queen seated; Laertes, Osric, Marcellus, Bernardo, Francisco, Lords and Ladies discovered—*Flourish of Trumpets*" (Forrest 74). This does not greatly differ from the direction at the beginning of the quartos. Though Q1 only has "Enter King Queene, Laertes, Lordes," Q2-4 add: "A table prepared, trumpets, drums, and officers with cushions, King, Queene, and all the state, foiles, daggers, and Laertes." There is more elaborate scenery for the eye. Also, "all the state" is present. It is ambiguous just how many people and who they are. F1 says "Enter King, Queene, Laertes and Lords, with other attendants with foyles, and gauntlets, a table and flagons of wine on it" (Spevack 150).

As mentioned above, the Forrest promptbook adds that these things are "discovered" (Forrest 74) using the curtain. Since nineteenth-century theatres employed curtains, it allowed the audience to 'discover' those waiting for Hamlet simultaneously with the prince as he himself enters the tableau. Thus, the 'discovery' of the characters through the use of the curtain creates a point of view that connects Hamlet with the audience. To these directions, Forrest's hand-written note adds: "See everything ready behind them" (74). This implies that all who stand there are prepared. This may even include the Queen, if she is directed to simply drink from the non-poisoned glass, while aware that there is a poisoned glass on the scene.

The next direction is: "Flourish [is] kept up till Hamlet is on U[pstage] C[enter]" (74). By having Hamlet stop center, the director depicts him as the focus of the scene. The director is painting a picture in which Hamlet is battling his enemies alone. This is

important because of the ambiguity of Francisco's role throughout the rest of the scene. In contrast to the quartos and Folio, Francisco, Bernardo, and Marcellus are mentioned by name as part of the 'prepared' group. Though Horatio remains on Hamlet's side until the end of the play, Bernardo, Marcellus and Francisco, who are seen as friends of the two earlier in the play, stand together with his enemy, the King, in front of the prepared table. This staging accentuates the focus on the star actor playing Hamlet, who is now completely isolated.

Francisco's role in the last scene of *Hamlet* is strikingly ambiguous in the Forrest promptbook. It is almost entirely composed of hand-written notes. When the King and Laertes are passing out the foils with which to fight, Forrest writes, "Francisco places goblet on U table." Francisco performs these actions while the king makes the speech in which he says "The King shall drink to Hamlet's better breath" (Shakespeare, Folger 5.2.290). Working from a printed stage direction, "*To Francisco*," the promptbook indicates that when the King requests the cups, he does so of Francisco. This stage direction is not printed in any of the quartos or in the First Folio. However, having been added here, the director takes advantage of it. He writes that "Francisco kneels presenting cup" to Claudius (Forrest 75). It is not entirely clear whether Francisco is aware that he is acting to kill Hamlet for the King's benefit. Regardless, Claudius's plans here depend on a character who has no lines in the scene. Francisco's kneeling can be construed as a gesture to the king that he will go along with this plan. These stage directions point to the importance of action in the construction of meaning. No one could guess from the text of *Hamlet* the specific significance that is given to Francisco in this promptbook.

An argument against Francisco's knowledge of the plan is Forrest's note that the "Queen signs Francisco who brings her the goblet, after Queen drinks, Francisco places goblet on L Table." However, when the King says "Hamlet, this pearl is thine," Forrest writes that "Francisco presents the goblet." Forrest's notes continue: "Francisco goes to Hamlet" when the King says "Give him the cup." Yet Francisco seems to save Hamlet temporarily by obeying his wish to "set it by a while." These last few directions, all on the last page of the Forrest Edition promptbook, leave it to the actor to decide whether or not his Francisco is part of the plot against Hamlet. By handing the Queen the goblet which accidentally poisons her, he could be deliberately rebelling against Claudius's plot or making an ignorant mistake. Once again, in obeying Hamlet's wish to set the cup aside, he can be acting ignorantly or with the intent to save Hamlet's life by not urging him to accept the glass (Forrest 76).

Whether or not Francisco is cognizant of the plot against Hamlet, this production shows the role that the director and actor playing Francisco play in determining Francisco's intentions and actions. As Francisco has no lines in the last scene of the play, Shakespeare makes little to no indication that Francisco should have an opinion about the occurrences surrounding Hamlet's death. The actor playing Francisco can choose to think of himself as Hamlet's friend, like the character is in the beginning of the play. Alternatively, he can choose to completely disregard his early friendship with Hamlet and emphasize his switch of loyalties. Silently augmenting Francisco's role, these stage directions and notes reveal the importance of each movement, in order to portray Hamlet in a specific way and in relation to the other characters in the play.

In addition to the printed stage direction, “*Hamlet stabs the King, staggers, and falls front of stage,*” Forrest has noted by hand that after Hamlet stabs the King, there is “excitement and movement of all the characters to protect the King” (77). In the same vein, the line “Treason, Treason” is moved to directly before the stabbing. The line, following “venom to thy work!” now appears after “follow my mother!” and is immediately overshadowed by the murder. Below the stage direction on Laertes’s death, a reference to an actor’s note is marked, which indicates that immediately after his death “all the characters rush down to the front R,” to the right of Hamlet (77). As Hamlet is front and center, they should be running toward him. Thus, the activity refocuses attention upon Hamlet again. At this point, the audience is prepped for a dramatic death and a solitary moment. As with earlier speeches, Hamlet’s last speech is strategically truncated to keep the focus on the tragic hero.

In the Edwin Forrest promptbook, Hamlet’s death concludes the performance. The cuts, combined with the added stage directions, point to a Hamlet who never has to share the limelight with Osric, the English Ambassadors, or Fortinbras. Forrest’s changes reflect the empowerment of the star actor who often took it upon himself to collapse *Hamlet* into Hamlet and to create a spectacle that revolves entirely around his portrayal of the character.

In 1879, another Edwin, Edwin Booth, published the promptbook that he used to play Hamlet. Rivaling Edwin Forrest, Booth held the record for the longest run of a production of Shakespeare with his production of *Hamlet* (Archer 1). Overall, the printed texts are very similar, differing mainly in the stage directions. The Booth edition subtracts a good deal of the directions from the Forrest edition but it also adds some



directions and text as well, some of which restore parts of the early seventeenth-century editions, and some of which imply a new point of view on the play.

Like Forrest, Booth divides Act V Scene ii at the point where the majority of the company is “discovered” and creates a new Act V Scene iii. In the Booth edition, they are in a “Hall in the Castle,” instead of in the “Court of Denmark” and in contrast to Francisco’s large if silent role in the Forrest edition, Booth does not even mention Francisco as one of the characters who are “discovered.” Further, Osric is included in the Booth edition but not in Forrest’s (Booth 120).

The Booth edition removes some stage directions upon Hamlet’s entrance. When Forrest has the King ‘rising and coming forward’ and “joining Hamlet’s and Laertes’s hands,” Booth does not print a stage direction at all. In addition, Booth does not specify an addressee when Hamlet proclaims “But pardon it, as you’re a gentleman,” though in Forrest it is addressed to Laertes. When the King orders Osric to distribute the foils, Booth has no stage direction while in Forrest’s edition, the King “returns to his throne.” In addition, the stage direction which shows Laertes “examining the foils” is not printed but Booth has taken the time to write this direction in by hand instead (121).

However, Booth’s edition contains a number of dramatic stage directions neither in Forrest nor in the seventeenth-century editions. These include “Laertes, unseen by the others, poisons his weapon” and “Bernardo” handing “the poison cup to the King.” Booth has crossed out Bernardo’s name and written in “Page,” though Forrest’s edition has the King addressing “Francisco” when he says “give me the cups” (Forrest 75). Booth’s description of the duel scene in stage directions is much more elaborate than Forrest’s “Drums and trumpets sound—cannons within.” Booth prints “Flourish and

cannon. Hamlet and Laertes take position to fence. Music” (Booth 121). Both write “they play” but only Booth depicts the King “drop[ping] poison in the cup” meant for Hamlet (122). Yet, Forrest’s edition has its own flourish at this moment, as it calls for the sounding of “drums, ...trumpets [and] cannons within” (Forrest 76).

Booth and Forrest convey significantly different character dynamics during the Queen’s last moments alive. Finding a medium between Q1’s limited sideline commentary and Forrest’s edition, Booth cuts the Queen’s line that Hamlet “is fat and scant of breath.” In Forrest, the “Queen drinks and returns the cup to Francisco” while in Booth’s, she simply “takes the cup and drinks.” Forrest implies that she was served this cup while Booth implies that she grabs it unawares. The King’s warning not to drink is an “aside” in Forrest but far less intimate for Booth, where “while the Queen drinks, Osric and others approach the King” and the King, “suddenly observing [the] Queen,” belatedly warns her (Booth 122). The Forrest edition’s Queen seems more observed than Booth’s, whose Queen’s death appears almost incidental. Booth and Forrest also differ in the order of action surrounding the Queen’s death cries. For Forrest, the “Queen swoons” just before “Hamlet wounds Laertes” with the poisoned rapier. For Booth, the “Queen moans” after they have wounded each other (123). After the Queen’s death, the Forrest edition simply has her “led off” (Forrest 77). The Booth edition adds that “the King and others assist the Queen who is led out, followed by her ladies” (Forrest 124). The King returns and calls his lords around him on the throne.” Most likely because this direction is awkward and leaves the King offstage for too long, Booth emends the passage so that Laertes leads the Queen and her train out instead, while the King calls the lords around

his throne. Forrest's version has the effect of overshadowing the Queen's death with Hamlet's duel, while the opposite effect is implied in Booth's edition.

The Booth edition's exchange of rapiers may not have been used at all, as Charles Shattuck points out in The Hamlet of Edwin Booth. Though he notes what is written in the 1879 promptbook adheres to the Folio's "In scuffling they change rapiers," he adds that "apparently Booth never used that business." Charles Clarke, a nineteenth-century bookkeeper and Booth aficionado, "determined to see Booth as often as [he] could" (Bundy 99), wrote that "the exchange is omitted" and, Shattuck points out, "later promptbooks do not mention it and in the Taylor 1890 promptbook it is clear that...Hamlet has both the foils in his hand" (Shattuck 277). This moment creates a more powerful and threatening picture of Hamlet. It is noteworthy that Booth, whose body was much smaller than the "muscular" Forrest (Hewitt 156), was portrayed in this way.

After this commotion, Hamlet seeks out Laertes in Booth's version. In a crossed-out Booth stage direction, Laertes "falls into [a] chair" to confess. This direction does not appear in Forrest's edition. However, Booth moves a line from Forrest's edition, "Here, thou incestuous, murd'rous, damned Dane, Follow my mother!" to appear after calls of "Treason! Treason!" and after Hamlet has stabbed the King (Booth 124). In fact, both Forrest and Booth add in new stage directions at this moment, though both significantly different ones. As mentioned above, Hamlet's dramatic stabbing, staggering and falling overshadows the King's death with his own torment. Booth chooses to emphasize the moment's intensity before the King is stabbed, adding "Lords draw their swords to defend the King. Hamlet rushes through the crowd and stabs him" (124). The

last words Booth's King hears before he dies are Hamlet's curse, rather than cries of treason to support him.

A further point of difference between the Edwin editions comes at the beginning of Hamlet's dying conversation with Horatio. Following the seventeenth-century editions, Booth's Hamlet leaves in "Horatio, I am dead." However, he cuts a good deal of text instead. Forrest's Hamlet pronounces the speech addressing the "audience to this act," from "You that look pale" to "But let it be." In Booth's edition, Hamlet is more resigned and less explicitly theatrical.

The Forrest edition follows F1 but no other Victorian edition in ending Hamlet's last speech with "Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!," which was added by hand (Forrest 78). And Hamlet's cries end the play in Forrest which thus exemplifies a balance between respecting and transforming the seventeenth-century versions of the play.

Like Forrest, Booth ends his edition with a "slow curtain" on Hamlet's death. However, though both editions remove the arrival of Fortinbras, Booth's edition does not end with Hamlet's cries, but keeps Horatio's lines, beginning "Now cracks a noble heart..." as the conclusion of the play. And Booth even suggests Fortinbras's arrival with the added stage direction "March (of Fortinbras) is heard in distance" (Booth 125). Thus, Hamlet's death is overshadowed by both Horatio and Fortinbras in Booth's edition. In this, it strikes more of a middle ground between the early editions and the nineteenth-century *Hamlets*. The comparison of Forrest's and Booth's editions indicates that nineteenth-century promptbooks radically cut the play, while making additions for the sake of dramatic effect. But they surprisingly pay careful attention to Q@ and F1, even as they create a new, star-actor-focused version of the play.

### Critical Claims

Shakespeare was widely performed in the United States in the nineteenth century to the point where “Shakespeare’s plays dominated the theater” (Levine 17). As Lawrence Levine notes, “twenty-two of eighty-eight performances” in Philadelphia were comprised of Shakespeare’s plays in the 1810-1811 season and “from 1800-1835, Philadelphians had the opportunity to see twenty-one of Shakespeare’s thirty-seven plays” (17). Moreover, Shakespeare was not restricted to the upper classes in nineteenth-century America and “the public in general” enjoyed his plays. Yet despite his fame, “Shakespeare was by no means automatically treated with reverence” nor did he receive “universal acclaim.” Moreover, “producing Shakespeare did not necessarily result in profits” (20). There is in fact a tension in nineteenth-century performances of Shakespeare between a desire for variety and an appreciation for Hamlet and *Hamlet* in their purest, most “ideal” form.

Edwin Forrest’s “muscular body and stentorian voice” negated the traditional attributes of Hamlet (Hewitt 156). Yet Forrest was considered to have overcome his physical obstacle by having “an accurate perception of the general character of Hamlet...[with his] sweet and noble elements...whose nerves were too exquisitely strong not to be a little jangled by the harsh contact of the circumstances into which he was flung.” This description of Hamlet’s “sweetness” is no far cry from the description of Booth’s final speech in Horatio’s arms. The review of Forrest comments on “his exaggerated self-consciousness profoundly tinged with mournfulness” that causes the “fevered and hungry brain [to] devour...the juices of the body....” The reviewer concludes that Forrest’s portrayal of the character served to “neutralize the ill-

adaptedness of his stalwart person.” Thus, while Forrest’s body inspired others to write heroic action-filled roles for him in other plays, he did not use his body as an instrument to transform the mournful, intellectual Hamlet with which audiences were familiar.

While Forrest overcame his towering stature to play a meditative and ‘sweet’ dark prince, it was said Booth had a “peculiarly appropriate” body type for Hamlet (Shattuck 287). Just as the promptbooks indicate research into the early editions of *Hamlet*, reviewers tended to appreciate performances that they believed were true to the meditative nature of Hamlet. For example, Edwin Booth was lauded for his portrayal of a Hamlet with the “gently thoughtful, retrospective habit of a stately mind, abstracted from passion and toned by mournful dreaminess of temperament” (Archer 1). But, a negative review of Booth’s performance in 1870 by O.B. Bunce claimed that Booth’s speeches were “rapid and characterless...flung off at a heat,” and lacked the proper expression of the thoughts over which Hamlet “brooded,” concluding that “the psychological Hamlet is yet to arise”(Shattuck 288). Though, as Shattuck points out, this review is “at odds” with many other reviews of the time and Booth generally received favorable notices, it nevertheless suggests that even the most meditative of nineteenth-century Hamlets on the stage was too active for those who had embraced the psychological Hamlet that now dominated scholarly accounts of the play.

While one reviewer felt Booth’s Hamlet to be lacking, another reviewer, exemplifying the more widespread opinion of his performance, praises Booth for his portrayal of an “ideal Hamlet,” who in the final scene has “grace, elegance, beauty and electric swiftness...In the last speech to Horatio, his voice thrills with an unearthly sweetness as he pleads with that sure friend to vindicate his name. And when silence



falls we look as on our own dead.” This description suggests action in Hamlet’s “electric swiftness” but also an “unearthly sweetness” that supposedly captured his internal character (Hewitt 167).

An 1860 edition of “All the Year Round,” an English magazine published by Charles Dickens, contains a column called “Suggestions for Shakespeare.” The very title of the piece ironically empowers the modern viewer to speak up against ‘The Bard’ and to improve upon his work. From this satirized viewpoint, modern perspectives are considered superior to Shakespeare’s dated work.

A Western critic [who] saw George Miln as Hamlet, writes ‘there is too much chinning in the piece. The author is way behind the times, and seems to forget that what we want nowadays is hair-raising situations and detectives. ...Our advice to the author is, a little more action... and a fair share of the variety business in his next piece (All the Year Round).’

Despite Dickens’s mockery of this imaginary “Western critic,” there was indeed a substantial population who did consider action and drama the foremost elements of a successful play and an entertaining night at the theatre. Two hundred years after Shakespeare’s death, some audiences were calling on the star actor to reinvigorate his plays. Dickens assertion that he thought such ‘improvements’ preposterous marked that there were others who disagreed.

### Variety Business

While Hamlet captures all the limelight in the 1860 Forrest Promptbook through textual cuts and stage directions, hand-written notes call for a great deal of music to be inserted in the last scene. Yet in omitting the military entrance of Fortinbras and his soldiers, ‘the rest is silence’ as Hamlet says. Or rather, the words of this very wordy play finally die out and are replaced with music in Forrest’s promptbook. If the critic for “All the Year Round” suggested that Shakespeare’s play should contain more “variety business,” Forrest used music to play an important role in Hamlet’s death scene so as to dramatize what would otherwise be his silent dying moment sans the loud entrance of Fortinbras.

At the beginning of Hamlet’s final speech in the Forrest promptbook, the stage directions are already cueing “ready [the] dead march” (Forrest 77). The Dead March begins “pp [pianissimo]” at “O, I die, Horatio.” The music crescendos as Hamlet’s voice fades until at the last “Oh!” at which point the actor writes that the “dead march” is “forte [loud]” (Forrest 78). Thus, though Hamlet’s voice wanes, the music waxes, already memorializing Hamlet both during and after his death.

The 1879 Edwin Booth promptbook uses music more overtly than the Forrest edition and to a strikingly different effect. The Booth edition makes the same cuts in Hamlet’s last speech and omits Fortinbras’s entrance. However, after Hamlet dies, Horatio comments “now cracks a noble heart:--good night sweet prince; and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.” At this point, a stage direction adds “*March (of Fortinbras) is heard at distance.*” The actor has crossed out “at distance” and replaced it with “in orchestra” and added his own note “Music pp in orchestra.” Booth’s music has the effect of replacing Fortinbras’s entrance as his distant presence is reduced to a mere suggestion

in the music (Booth 125). However, Booth's music, like the Booth promptbook as a whole, does not situate Hamlet in the absolute center of the play. Whereas Forrest's Hamlet is the focus of the end of the play, Booth's music is meant to suggest Fortinbras's arrival rather than to intensify the moment of Hamlet's death.

It seems that audiences particularly enjoyed "variety business." As *Hamlet* mainly offered lengthy introspection, unlike the pantomimes, satires and melodramas with which it was usually performed, the music played with it was often given as much attention in advertisements as Shakespeare's authorship, especially in earlier playbills. In one eighteenth century playbill, below the cast list was advertised "In Act V, a DIRGE set to music by Ms. Shield." This is written in the same sized print as the cast list. Just below it, in smaller print, is "The WORDS from SHAKESPEARE." This format is similar in all the British playbills I examined.

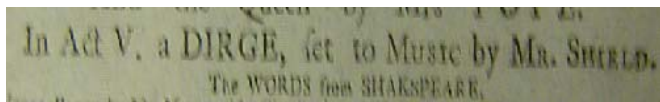


Fig. 9: Playbill from Theater-Royal in Covent Garden, London, 26 Oct. 1795. Furness Collection: University of Pennsylvania Rare Books Library.

Later playbills advertise the music last, and often the music is detached from the play as a whole. An 1860 Edwin Booth playbill advertises that "the orchestra...will perform a variety of Popular Musical Selections." Whether these are written for *Hamlet* is unclear but it is unlikely.

Dickens's allusion to "variety business" may have also referred to the other miscellaneous performances of an evening at the theatre; like the "Western critic" Dickens mocked, the playbills advertising the play placed Hamlet in the context of a long

and diverse evening that includes a variety of performances that have nothing to do with Shakespeare. These playbills show that while *Hamlet* served as “popular entertainment in nineteenth-century America,” it was not popular enough to stand on its own. Even if “it was the centerpiece, the main attraction,” an entire evening “generally consisted of a long play, an afterpiece (usually a farce), and a variety of between-act specialties” (Levine 21).



Fig. 10: Playbill from Walnut Street Theatre: 25 June 1852. Philadelphia: Walnut Street Theatre Archive.

One of many clear examples of this kind of playbill is that of the 1852 Walnut Street Theatre, which advertises Edwin Forrest's performance as Hamlet eight years before his promptbook was published. The two most prominent words on this playbill are "Forrest" and "Hamlet!" both of which are written in a large, shadowed font. However, scarcely less bold, and written in a sans-serif, 'modern' font are the circumstances of the production, namely the "last night but one" and "last appearance but one." These large letters combine with the slightly smaller fonts to refer to the penultimate staging of the season and the penultimate performance of Forrest's Hamlet "for some months." Indeed, Forrest stands out as the focus of this advertisement. Over half of the playbill is taken up by the notification of his penultimate appearance and the glorification of his performance as the title character.

This playbill is clearly divided by lines into six main sections. The first is information about Walnut Street Theatre. Below it, a second, larger section alerts the eye to Forrest's last appearance. The third section praises Forrest as the "Distinguished tragedian." The fourth section describes the specific production of *Hamlet*, its performance date and its cast list. The fifth section advertises another play, *Two Bonnycastles*, and the sixth, Forrest's upcoming performance as the title character of *The Gladiator*. Information about and praise for Forrest himself is printed on sections two, three and six, comprising half of the playbill. Since sections two and three are of the largest sections, this is, in essence, even more than half the bill.



Forrest is described as the “distinguished tragedian” and he is “highly eulogized” for playing the “arduous character of Hamlet.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines “Tragedian” both as “a dramatist who composes a tragedy or tragedies; a tragic poet or author,” and “a stage-player who performs in tragedy; a tragic actor” (OED). I would suggest that the advertisers are providing Forrest with a dual or mixed role and heightened credit for his role in the production. Indeed, with so many cuts and stage directions that alter the text, the title of “Tragedian” in its first definition may not be so far from the truth.

In this playbill, “Hamlet!” is mentioned twice, as both the character and play. Both times, an exclamation point follows it. When referring to the title of the play, the writers use the largest possible font. However, its playwright is listed in the smallest font on the poster, albeit in capital letters. As in Forrest’s corresponding promptbook, the historical element of the play is relegated to an exceedingly small type face that reads “Shakespeare’s Tragedy,” following the first Folio’s title of “Tragedy” instead of the “Tragicall Historie” of Q1 and Q2 and reinforcing the idea that the play is focused on Hamlet alone. The writer of the playbill does not disregard Shakespeare’s original title but chooses a version that best adheres to the focus of the specific production advertised.

The evening’s festivities will conclude with “the Popular Farce of the Two Bonnycastles!” The title of this farce is written in a modern, sans-serif font and most closely matches the font size of Forrest’s puffs as “highly eulogized” and a “distinguished tragedian.” The fact that both featured performances of the evening contain exclamation points implies a uniformly entertaining evening, despite the radical contrast between a Shakespearean tragedy and the farce of *Two Bonnycastles*.



Fig. 11: Playbill from Walnut Street Theatre: 1 March 1862. Philadelphia: Walnut Street Theatre Archive.

A Walnut Street Theatre playbill of Edwin Forrest's performance as Hamlet in 1862 – two years after the promptbook of his performance was published – credits him as the “Greatest Living Tregedian.” Perhaps partly building on his promptbook, Forrest's is transformed from a “distinguished” to the “greatest living” tragedian. This playbill's emphasis on Forrest is reflected by the font size and by the ink density in which his name is printed. Though Forrest's full name appears on the playbill, “Edwin” is printed in one of the smallest fonts on the playbill while “Forrest” is written in the largest. That only his last name need be written in such large letters is a testament to the actor's fame. Given that Shakespeare was so widely produced and admired in nineteenth-century America, it might be expected that his name would also be printed in large letters. Yet the playwright is again introduced using the smallest font seen on the playbill. However, his “tragedy” is described this time as “sublime,” whereas it was given no praise in 1852. *Hamlet* and the “celebrated” character, Hamlet, are both assigned laudatory adjectives and large fonts to suit. Though Forrest is described as the “greatest living tragedian,” Shakespeare himself is never praised on the playbill, nor does the presence of his name draw the eye. This focus of this advertisement is on the production, especially the actors, as the most enticing element of the play.

In the 1862 playbill, Shakespeare's name is written in such small type that it spans the width of a single letter in Forrest's name, and only the width of two letters of “Mrs. M.A. Garrettson,” the actress whom the production is to benefit. The details of the benefit are actually secondary in prominence to the star actor and the play, with “Annual Benefit” written in an ornate font. Mrs. M. A. Garrettson's full name is written out because she is not as famous as Forrest, and the length of her name would have made it

impossible to use a regular font of any size, but the problem has been resolved by using tall letters that have been radically compressed in their width. In addition to the prominence of Edwin Forrest over all else, the extra effort used to highlight Garrettson's name points to a performance evening in which *Hamlet* is a subsidiary, if important, element.

The fact that Forrest will appear in the "character of Hamlet" is announced before the play itself. The character's name is written in medium large, bold type with a hand-shaped icon pointing to it. This points to the importance of the actor playing Hamlet and to the character, as distinct from the importance of the play. *Hamlet* is printed in an ornamental font that suggests both the past and gothic drama. Beneath it, in italics, is "*Prince of Denmark!*", the exclamation point suggesting the excitement of the play, and especially of the character of the prince.



up the mood. A later version of the Imogene Polka (above) suggests what the earlier performances might have been like: fast, lively dance music, more reminiscent of a circus than a tragedy. This underscores the eclectic nature of going to the theatre to see a performance of *Hamlet*. For the play was produced and advertised as part of a miscellany, rather than as a stand-alone classic.



Fig. 13: Playbill from Walnut Street Theatre. 23 September, 1870. Philadelphia: Walnut Street Theatre Archive.

Common to the 1852, 1862 and 1870 Forrest playbills is the fact that the overwhelming elements that draw the eye are the words “Forrest” and “Hamlet.” This illustrates the prominence of the actor in the creation of the role rather than of the playwright in the creation of the play. In fact, by 1870, Forrest’s name was playing an



increasingly large role, overshadowing even the name of the play. The name now appears in a sans-serif font, making it look both bolder and more modern. And despite the fact that *Hamlet* is listed in the same, ornamental font as in 1862, *Hamlet* is reintroduced in the same manner as in 1852, as “Shakespeare’s Tragedy,” rather than his “sublime tragedy” as in 1862. It is possible that the advertisers felt it unnecessary to pay special attention to the play because this playbill advertises the last chance to see Forrest as Hamlet.

Forrest’s 1870 appearance is described as a “Brilliant Engagement” but this description is much smaller than the 1862 puff for Forrest’s excellence as the “greatest living tragedian.” Here, the description is written in the same small font as Shakespeare’s name. Perhaps Forrest’s brilliance is taken for granted in the same way that it is taken for granted that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*. It also suggests that the audience does not need to be overtly told that the actor is talented, but just to be reminded of his fame and popularity. The mere mention of his name is draw enough.

The 1870 playbill lists the music program in the same format as the cast list of *Hamlet*, virtually merging the orchestra’s performance with the play, suggesting that it is as integral to the evening’s entertainment as the performance of the actors. *Hamlet*, indeed, is only part of an evening that includes music by Conradi, Verdi and Strauss. A comparison of the 1870 and 1862 playbills demonstrates that both well-known classical music and more popular styles were thought suitable for an evening of *Hamlet* that included considerably more than Shakespeare’s play.

The 1870 playbill is split in half between that night’s performance of *Hamlet* and the entertainments of the next few days. Many significant details about the performance

share equal weight and font size with details of the performances on nights to come. The pointing hand that highlighted the importance of Hamlet in the 1862 playbill is repeated for the next-day matinee of a satire, *Lottery of Life*. The following night hosts a benefit for actor James Taylor who will act in *Money* and *Dumb Girl of Genoa*. Both play and actor are printed in a medium-sized bold font that is much larger than the font used for Shakespeare and Taylor's name is written in a larger font than the titles of the plays that he will perform. The fact that this is his first benefit in Philadelphia is also written in a larger font than the play titles, emphasizing the importance of the circumstances of the performance, and especially the actor, as the production's primary draw. The next performance, *East Lynne*, is also written in the same font and size as "Last Night" and "Hamlet" on the top half of the playbill. However, the actor starring in it, Lucille Western, is highlighted with a strikingly decorative font. This play is said to be filled with the actress's famous impersonations. The actors and circumstances surrounding the production prove the most commonly highlighted features of the playbill and variety is always important as can be seen by the number and genres of the performances that take up a substantial part of a playbill announcing the final performance of the foremost actor of his time as Hamlet.

In the case of Edwin Booth, it seems that he also is being advertised over the play. Playbills feature his theatrical "biography" alongside a plot description, praising his "genius of rare order." Accordingly, his appearance in *Hamlet* considerably overshadows Shakespeare's role in writing it.



Fig. 14: Playbill from “The Lorgnette”: Wheatley and Clarke’s Arch Street Theatre: 14 May 1860. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Rare Books Library.

A clip from the playbill which advertises his appearance highlights his name with exalted praise of his ‘perfection’ and world-wide fame. Booth’s name is only rivaled on this playbill by the ornamental, large font used to print “Hamlet.” However, in this case, this advertiser refers to Hamlet only as the role, and never once as the name of the play. He thus boasts Booth’s conquering the role of Hamlet rather than *Hamlet*. While “Shakespeare’s Sublime Tragedy” is praised as well, the formatting of the playbill makes his name pale beneath the more “important” aspects of the production, as with the Forrest playbills.

The manner in which “The Lorgnette” advertises all plays puts each play performed in any given current evening in a large primary slot with upcoming performances of the week in smaller adjacent slots. For 1860 performances, when *Hamlet* appears in the smaller slot, Shakespeare’s name is not mentioned at all and the play shares a slot with another play that will be acted together with it.



Fig. 15: Playbill from “The Lorgnette”: Wheatley and Clarke’s Arch St. Theater, Philadelphia, 8 Feb. 1860. Furness Collection: University of Pennsylvania Rare Books Library.

In the small slot allotted, they have chosen to devote space to what is imagined as integral: the name of the play with which *Hamlet* will be performed, and the name of Mr. Dolman, who is sponsoring the show and playing Hamlet.

The plays with which *Hamlet* was performed, were often strikingly different from Shakespeare’s ‘Tragedy,’ as it is called in every playbill of the time. Pantomimes and farces regularly split the bill with *Hamlet*.

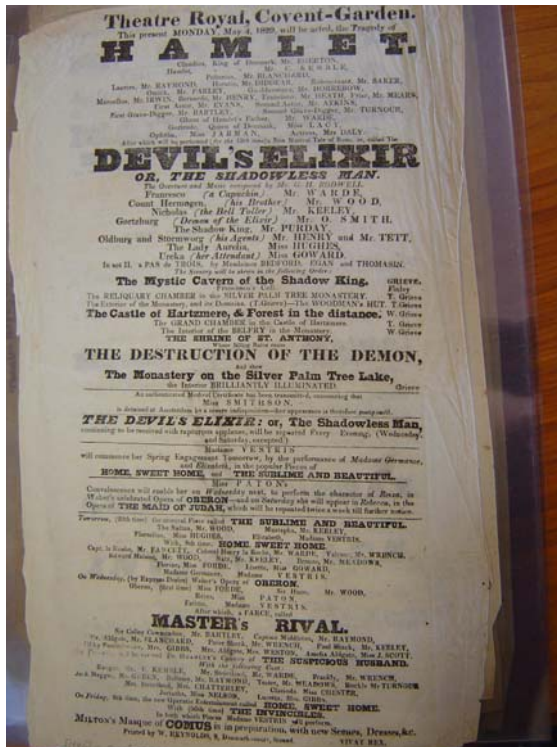


Fig. 16: Playbill from Theatre Royal, Covent-Garden: London: 4 May, 1829. Furness Collection: University of Pennsylvania Rare Books Library.

In an 1829, albeit British playbill, *Hamlet* takes up one quarter of the page while *Devil's Elixir or The Shadowless Man* and another play, *Master's Rival*, take up the majority of it.



Fig. 17: Playbill from Theatre Royal, Covent-Garden: London: 14 May, 1832. Furness Collection: University of Pennsylvania Rare Books Library.

An 1832 English playbill has the same format, with *Hamlet* having to fight for pride of place with *Chinese Tale of Enchantment in two parts called Tartar Witch and the Pedlar Boy*. This playbill announces in bold the retirement of the lead playing Hamlet after this performance while the 1829 playbill focuses on a retelling of the dramatic plot and a description of the elaborate scenery of *Devil's Elixir*, as well as a list of other performances during the course of the evening. These playbills advertise less the text of *Hamlet* than the variety of music, spectacle and other performances that will provide the variety that was imagined as the precondition for a successful theatrical evening.



The Octoroon's Appeal

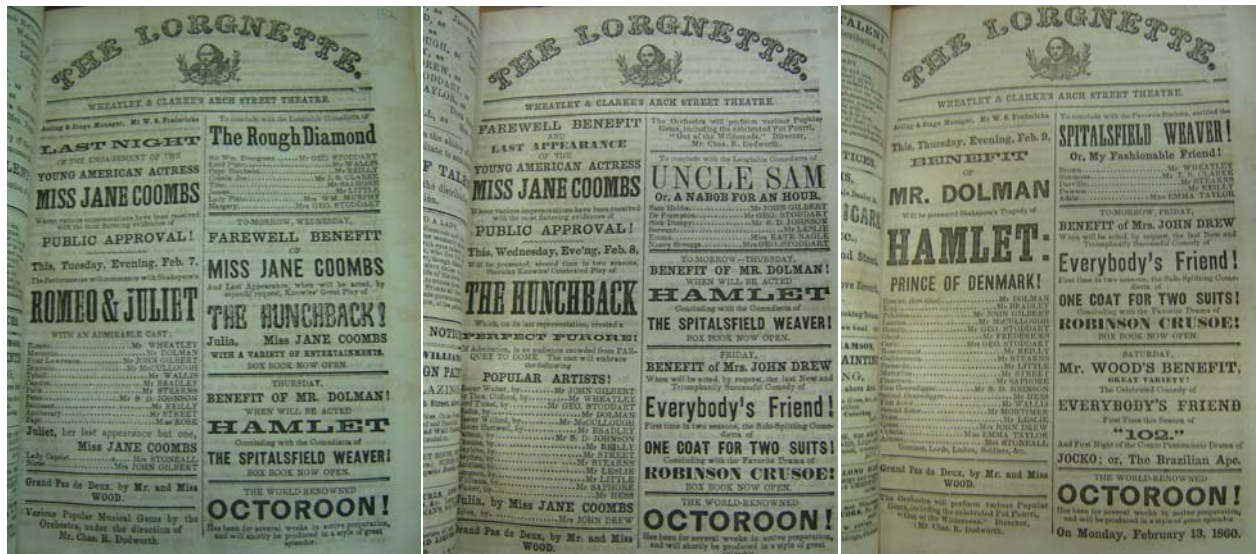


Fig. 18, 19, 20: Playbills from “The Lorgnette”: Wheatley and Clarke’s Arch St. Theater, Philadelphia, 7, 8, 9 Feb. 1860. Furness Collection: University of Pennsylvania Rare Books Library.

As mentioned above, the Lorgnette advertised for upcoming performances of the next two or three upcoming days and performances on the right-hand side of advertisements that announced that night’s performance on the left-hand side. These three playbills reveal that *The Octoroon* was the exception to the rule, since the third discloses a date for a production that “Has been for several weeks in active preparation and will be produced in a style of great splendor.”



Fig. 21: The Lorgnette: Wheatley and Clarke's Arch St. Theater, Philadelphia, 20 Feb. 1860. Furness Collection: University of Pennsylvania Rare Books Library.

Moreover, when *The Octoroon* was finally produced, eleven days after the third of the above playbills, it is given an entire page to itself and does not have to share the right hand side of the poster with other upcoming plays. The largest word on this playbill is “*Octoroon!*” complete with an exclamation point that fits the theme of this playbill which adds exclamation points to much of what is printed on it. The play is described as a “brilliantly successful great new play” with “emotion stirring drama” and an “American character!”, “American scenes!!”, and “Southern homes!!!” This description, written in a medium-sized mix of serif-and sans-serif fonts, takes up about a quarter of the playbill. The description of the “great star company!” takes up almost the entire right hand side. There are familiar names but each is given equal weight so as to



encompass the entirety of the large cast. In contrast to the Forrest playbills, there is no one star actor who overshadows the other elements of the bill. Furthermore, whether or not it was performed with farce or music, they are not advertised on the playbill. Instead, it seems that the play is the single star, since its title is dramatically larger than any other printed word and the poster's entire focus rests on *The Octoroon* itself.

*The Octoroon* was indeed an extremely popular and successful play, as the playbill suggests. Yet, despite its success, the audience was not completely satisfied with its content and its playwright, Dion Boucicault, published at least two different "acting versions:" one which ended happily, and one which ended with the death of all of its principle characters. The end of the latter version is as follows:

*M'Closky.* Ha, ha, ha! I've given them something to remember how they treated Jacob M'Closky. Made my way from one end of the vessel to the other, and now the road to escape is clear before me--and thus to secure it!  
(*He goes to R. C., and is met by Wahnotee, who silently confronts him.*)

*Wahno.* Paul.

*M'Closky.* Devils!--you here!--stand clear!

*Wahno.* Paul.

*M'Closky.* You won't!--die fool!

(*Thrusts at him--Wahnotee, with his tomahawk, strikes the knife out of his hand; M'Closky starts back; Wahnotee throws off his blanket, and strikes at M'Closky several times, who avoids him; at last he catches his arm, and struggles for the tomahawk, which falls; a violent struggle and fight takes place, ending with the triumph of Wahnotee, who drags M'Closky along*

*the ground, takes up the knife and stabs him repeatedly; GEORGE enters, bearing ZOE in his arms--all the Characters rush on--noise increasing--The steam vessel blows up--grand Tableau, and CURTAIN) (Octoroon, Marist Library).*

*The Octoroon* ends with a dramatic death and with extensive stage directions to frame it. This mass of stage directions is similar to the stage directions at the end of *Hamlet* in the Forrest Promptbook. *The Octoroon*, intended as serious drama, was highly controversial as a play about slavery, first performed in 1860. But it was adapted to satisfy a wide variety of audiences, whatever their politics, and the emphasis of the tragic version was on a violent accumulation of bodies in an action-packed ending – similar to Forrest's adaptation of *Hamlet*.

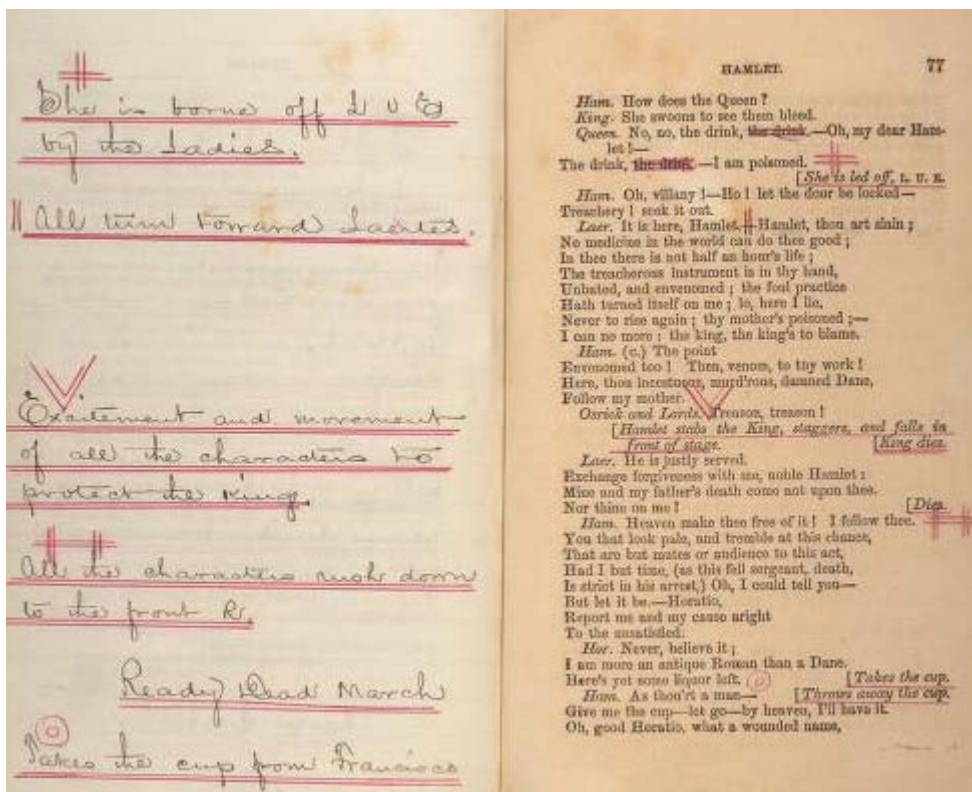


Fig. 22: Page 77 from Forrest ed. *Hamlet* Act V Scene iii. Torrey Brothers: 1860. New York. Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image.

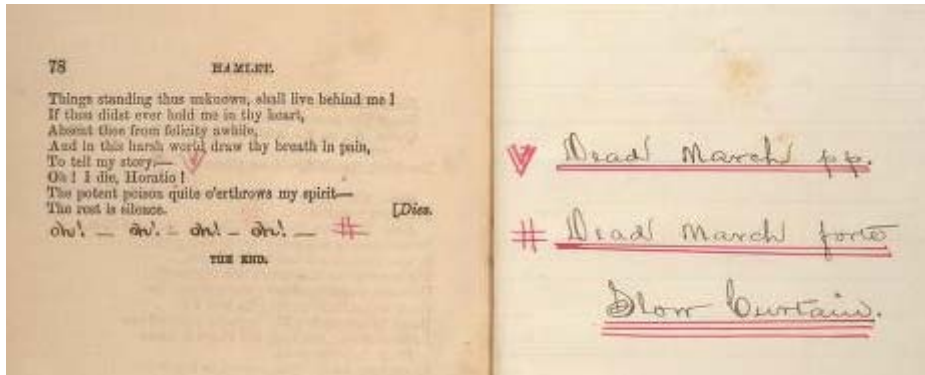


Fig. 23: Page 78 from Forrest ed. *Hamlet* Act V Scene iii. Torrey Brothers: 1860. New York. Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image.

Structurally, the Forrest promptbook mirrors the ending of *The Octoroon*, with a flurry of action that focuses on the star.

The happy ending of *The Octoroon* was, as its playwright, Dion Boucicault, put it, “composed by the Public.” After writing the play to end with the death of its lead, Zoe, Boucicault received an onslaught of letters from the public demanding that their ingénue should be “saved from an unhappy end.” Peter Thompson, editor of the 1984 edition of Boucicault’s plays, comments that the playwright is speaking ironically when he announces that “he trusts the Audience will accept [the new ending] as a very grateful tribute to their judgment and taste, which he should be the last to dispute” (Thomson 11). Ironical or not, the playwright did succumb to the wishes of the public to add a happy ending for his protagonist. This points to the influence of the audience in the creation of a theatrical experience that was to their taste. In “How to End *The Octoroon*,” John A.

Degen writes that “the original ending was hardly greeted with enthusiasm in the United States” and he quotes a *New York Herald* review that it ““was not liked.”” In addition, when produced in London, a British reviewer wrote ““that several of the audience were dissatisfied with [Zoe’s] unfortunate end”” (Degen 171). In this case, the audience proved a determining factor in rewriting the text of a famous play.

Yet, just as with *Hamlet*, there was considerable tension concerning the types of change made to the script of *The Octoroon*. Though changes were made to *Hamlet*’s ending, at least some of those changes were the product of research into early editions while others were made to complement the variety and excitement of an evening at the theatre. Just so, the change was made to *Octoroon*’s ending but with some reluctance on the part of Boucicault, who believed that “in the death of the *Octoroon* lies the moral and teaching of the whole work...I admit most fully the truth of your statement that the public was disappointed with the termination of the play, and would have been pleased with a happier issue...” (172). Boucicault letter in reply to *The Times*’ review of the play displays his own desire to adhere to the reality of the painful life of an *Octoroon* while feeling the pull of public expectations. The latter won out and in 1861 a “capitulation to public demand” was announced (172).

*The Octoroon* exemplifies the tensions that existed between playwrights and adaptors during a time wherein a play could not exist on its own merits. While tragedies were presented alongside light-hearted farces, music and pantomimes, to maintain a single tone for a whole evening was as impossible as it was generally undesired. Nineteenth-century American performances were structured by the conflict between the

production of high-minded tragedies and an eclectic miscellany of a wide range of musical and theatrical forms.

Like *The Octoroon*, *Hamlet* was truncated and modified to produce variety and action and to highlight its star. However, *Hamlet*'s cuts also show research into the early quartos and the First Folio, revealing that at least some of these changes were attempts to honor Shakespeare's original texts. At the same time, although Shakespeare dominated the theatre in Philadelphia and throughout America and England, his name was marginalized on the playbills, where the star actor playing Hamlet was most prominently advertized. Moreover, *Hamlet* could not stand on its own merits alone, and a variety of other farces and musical numbers performed alongside it took a prominent place in the playbills. The conflict between honoring Shakespeare and honoring the variety of an evening at the theatre leaves its traces in the nineteenth-century promptbooks of *Hamlet* that emphasize the star actor, music, and spectacle, even as they attempt to satisfy the scholarly demand for "authentic" Shakespeare.

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