

## Americanization of Shakespeare: A Cultural History through Three Posters

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### INTRODUCTION

Stratford-upon-Avon became well known to the Americans as a town with literary historical roots after Washington Irving introduced the place in his *Sketchbook* in 1817. The records show that such U.S. presidents as John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Ulysses Grant, and the Confederate president Jefferson Davis, as well as writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne and Harriet Beecher Stowe all visited there.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless by the mid-nineteenth century, Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford had fallen into disrepair due to financial problems, since public interest in the birthplace remained low as people were more interested in where the Bard was buried in the same town than in where he was born. With the death of Ann Court, the last owner of the house, deputy George Robins decided to put the birthplace on the market. According to the announcement, the auction of "THE TRULY HEART-STIRRING RELIC OF A MOST GLORIOUS PERIOD, AND OF ENGLAND'S IMMORTAL BARD . . . THE MOST HONOURED MONUMENT OF THE GREATEST GENIUS THAT EVER LIVED" was scheduled for September 16, 1847 (See Illustration 1).

Already during the 1840s, there was a persistent rumor that Shakespeare's birthplace might fall into American hands. The British public was horrified by the idea:

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. . . [O]ne or two enthusiastic Jonathans have already arrived from America to see what dollars can do in taking it away. The timbers, it is said, are all sound, and it would be no very difficult matter to set it on wheels and make an exhibition of it. We hope and trust that no such desecration awaits it.<sup>2</sup>

One of these “Jonathans” was the legendary impresario Phineas Taylor Barnum (1810–91). Upon hearing the news during his 1844–47 Tom Thumb tour in Europe, Barnum plotted to purchase the birthplace, dismantle it, and ship it across the Atlantic for final display in his American Museum in New York. However, backed by the British public and media who protested the loss of this cultural relic, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust was founded to purchase the birthplace at the auction. Consequently, Barnum’s attempt to acquire the home failed.<sup>3</sup>

Later, the tale of Barnum’s pursuit of the birthplace was featured as a minor episode in Mark Twain’s *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World* (1897),<sup>4</sup> a literary travel book chronicling Twain’s lecture tour through Oceania, India and South Africa between 1895 and 1896. In Chapter 64, there appears a reference to the Second Class Passenger who claimed to have previously worked with Barnum. According to the Passenger, Barnum had initially wanted to buy the huge elephant, Jumbo, which was then “as popular as the Prince of Wales,” “an English institution” and “part of the national glory” (639). When that turned out to be an impossible feat, he shifted the focus of his attention to the Bard’s birthplace. Barnum explained his intentions:

“I’ll buy Shakespeare’s house. I’ll set it up in my museum in New York and put a glass case around it and make a sacred thing of it; and you’ll see all America flock there to worship; yes, and pilgrims from the whole earth; and I’ll make them take their hats off, too. In America we know how to value anything that Shakespeare’s truth has made holy.” (641)

According to the Passenger’s account, Barnum did successfully purchase the birthplace. However, the British were so opposed to the idea that a “priceless possession of Britain” might be converted into a “sixpenny desecration in a Yankee show-shop” (641), that Barnum was able to acquire Jumbo in exchange for the birthplace.

Barnum’s story, as related in *Following the Equator*, is more likely rooted in fiction than fact. In reality, Barnum purchased Jumbo from the London Zoological Society for \$10,000 in early 1882. The elephant was brought back to America, and Barnum made a fortune by exhibiting it in his circus.<sup>5</sup> Considering the length of time separating the two sales, it

would be difficult to conclude that Jumbo served as a substitute for Shakespeare's birthplace, as indicated by Twain. Neither of Barnum's autobiographies, furthermore, relates such an account.

The accuracy of the facts concerning Barnum's ownership of Jumbo, or of how Shakespeare's birthplace remained in England, is not the main issue<sup>6</sup>; reconciling the contradictory accounts is less important than considering what these accounts mean within the context of the history of Shakespeare in America. From early colonial days through the revolutionary period and the remainder of the nineteenth century, Shakespearean tradition was central to the American theater. Much as *The Tempest's* Prospero and Miranda taught Caliban their language, Shakespeare was England's "cultural gift" to America.

America, as colonized Caliban, has given rise to a culture that bears the imprint of its colonial legacy. American literature has many characteristics in common with the literary traditions that have emerged in other former English-speaking colonies. These traditions are often referred to as "english literature," beginning with a small "e."<sup>7</sup> In this context, it is reasonable to conclude that the Shakespearean tradition, which America imported from England, has metamorphosed from "English literature" into "english literature."

According to Homi K. Bhabha's theory of mimicry, the colonized learns the culture of the colonizer with "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite." By absorbing the culture of the colonizer with "its slippage, its excess, its difference," the colonized invents a new post-colonial culture.<sup>8</sup> Thus, "english literature" is a new literary form forged from English literature. In the same manner, Shakespeare was destined to undergo hybridization in the creation of a new American form of art. In a sense, Shakespeare has been transformed into "shakespeare" beginning with a small "s."

An overview of the history of Shakespeare in the New World will clarify the postcolonial process of appropriation and naturalization of Shakespeare into the American theatrical culture according to political, economical and social conditions of the time. Such clarification will lead us to assume that the Bard had long been received not as a symbol of elite culture as we think of him today, but as part of Americanized popular culture.<sup>9</sup>

## I SHAKESPEARE AS A CULTURAL GIFT

The earliest written record of Shakespeare's name in America dates from the end of the seventeenth century. In the will of Virginian lawyer and merchant Arthur Spicer, dated September 18, 1688 and probated on April 3, 1700, *Macbeth* is listed in an inventory of his book collection.<sup>10</sup> This single reference to the playwright suggests that Shakespearean books were both owned and read in the colony.

Theater culture developed very slowly in the New World, due in part to Puritan beliefs that regarded theater as a symbol of depravity.<sup>11</sup> It was not until urban centers experienced rapid growth in the 1710s that theater culture truly began to thrive. The first permanent playhouse was built in Williamsburg, Virginia in 1716. The earliest performance of Shakespeare was staged on March 23, 1730 when an amateur group performed *Romeo and Juliet*; the first professional performance is recorded as March 5, 1750 when the Murray and Kean company performed *Richard III*. The more established Louis Harram company staged *The Merchant of Venice* in Williamsburg in 1752. These early performances of Shakespeare in America pre-date those by native playwrights. The first professional performance of a play written by an American playwright was in 1767, a production of *The Prince of Partia* by Thomas Godfrey, and it was not until 1787 that the first American play was staged which addressed a particularly American topic, *The Contrast* by Royall Tyler. We may say that theater culture in America developed from Shakespeare.

Exposure to Shakespeare was not limited to theater. The library catalogue of Harvard College, published in 1723 and entitled *Catalogus Librorum Bibliothecae Collegij Harvardini Quod est Cantabrigiae in Nova Anglia*, indicates that the library had in its possession "Shakespear' Plays Vol. 1-6 (London, 1709)."<sup>12</sup> As there is no play listed in the 1682 edition of the Harvard library catalogue compiled by Boston minister Cotton Mather, we can conclude that theater culture expanded rapidly between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Eighteenth-century Philadelphia, then the third biggest city in the British Empire, was a large importer of English texts.<sup>13</sup> Shakespeare commonly appeared on sales records; Benjamin Franklin had a set of Shakespeare on his list in 1744. The ease with which English texts could be imported seems to have initially detracted from the need to print American editions. By 1794, however, *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night*

appeared in print as the first American printings of Shakespeare's original works. The first American edition of the complete plays was published by Bioren & Madan in Philadelphia in 1795–96, and quickly became a best seller.<sup>14</sup>

Although theater culture gradually spread, a strong aversion to theater remained. With the exception of Maryland and Virginia, all colonies established some sort of prohibition against theatrical performance and other kinds of entertainment that were deemed as threats to public morality.<sup>15</sup>

At the root of hostility towards the theater was an ideology of what might be called “productionism,” itself a product of a mixture of elements central to Puritanism and republicanism. The productionist aesthetics attacked creative fiction as a source of degeneracy,<sup>16</sup> and was much more intolerant of representational and creative drama. At the first Continental Congress, held on October 20, 1774, all types of amusement were prohibited by the wartime government:

We will in our several stations *encourage frugality, economy, and industry* and will discountenance and discourage, every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse-racing, and all kinds of gaming, cock fighting, *exhibitions of shews [sic.], plays,* and other expensive diversions and entertainments. . . . (Emphases added.)<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the precedence of production over consumption was further confirmed.

The American aversion towards the theater has long been described as having origins in the Puritan ethic; however, the campaign had secular roots as well.<sup>18</sup> From an American viewpoint, the heavy taxes levied upon the colonies were a direct result of the establishment of a consumer culture in England during the 1760s and 70s. In this sense, it is altogether natural that the American theater culture, then overwhelmed by British plays and actors, was seen as an imported product from England, and thus became a target of buyer's strike.

Members of the theatrical world attempted to avoid criticism by stressing their own morality, patriotism and didacticism within their performances. For example, Tyler's *The Contrast* (1787) compared a diligent republican Manly with wasteful anglophilic Dimple, intelligent Maria and frivolous Charlotte, and Yankee Jonathan and mincing Jessamy. The relationship that was constructed between these pairs was intended to reflect the sharp “contrast” between America and England, or production and consumption.

In an effort to circumvent restrictions placed upon theater, performances were carefully advertised as “dialogues” or “lectures.” In 1760 David Douglass, a successor to Louis Hallam, called his new theater in Providence “a school house.” When Hallam’s company performed *Othello* in Newport the following year, it was advertised as: “MORAL DIALOGUES, IN FIVE PARTS, Depicting the evil effects of jealousy, and other bad passions, and proving that happiness can only spring from the pursuit of virtue.”<sup>19</sup> Thomas Jefferson, in a 1771 letter, discovered in *King Lear* the virtues of “a lively and lasting sense of filial duty.”<sup>20</sup> Many theatrical performances did, in fact, weave moral lessons into the plot of the story in an effort to fulfill promises made in advertisements.

Although anti-British sentiment spread to theater culture during the revolutionary period, Shakespeare remained as popular as before. Quotations from and allusions to Shakespeare’s works were often used in revolutionary propaganda. In 1770 a parody of Hamlet was used to criticize heavy taxes:

Be taxt or not be taxt . . . that is the question,  
Whether’t is nobler in our minds to suffer  
The sleights and cunning of deceitful statemen  
or to petition ’gainst illegal taxes  
And by opposing, end them?<sup>21</sup>

In turn, in 1776 one Loyalist wondered whether he should sign up for the anti-British “association” in disguise:

To sign, or not to sign!—That is the question:  
Whether’t were better for an honest man  
To sign—and so be safe; or to resolve,  
Beside what will, against ‘associations,’  
And, by retreating, shun them.<sup>22</sup>

Since parody is most effective only when the audience is fully familiar with the original text, these examples teach us that Shakespeare had been normalized as American, whether by the Tories or the Whigs, by the time of the War of Independence. One might say that Shakespeare had become so deeply ingrained in American culture that people were capable of overlooking his nationality altogether.

## II THEATER FOR NATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT

After the War of Independence and the War of 1812 (1812–14), a the-

ater culture heavily influenced by Shakespeare spread through America. Conditions of urban growth in the 1820s resulted in the construction of many theaters. In New York, the Park Theater was built in 1820 and was succeeded by the Chattam (1824), the Bowery (1826), Niblo's Garden (1827), the National (1838), the Broadway (1847), Astor Place Opera House (1847), and the Burton (1848). The development of transportation and postal services helped to promote provincial tours, thereby widening public access to the theater. Showboats emerged in the 1830s and brought the theater to riverside towns. According to Helene Koon, even gold miners in California were able to enjoy Shakespeare.<sup>23</sup>

Theatrical space in the Republican period was a microcosm of society. Although seats—box, pit and gallery—were distinguished according to class and race, people were in fact united. All gathered together in one place to share common productionist values and patriotic sentiments. The audience's reaction, positive or negative, towards a given performance was strong and swift. Commenting on the 1800 season in the *Morning Chronicle* under the pen name of Jonathan Oldstyle, Washington Irving described the conditions inside the hall as similar to "Noah's ark" with "an imitation of the whistles and yells of every kind of animal."<sup>24</sup> In *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), Frances Trollope noted that he was troubled by "the spitting," "the mixed smell of onions and whisky," and "the noises . . . of the most unpleasant kind."<sup>25</sup> The atmosphere seemed truly interactive as the audience sang songs together with vocalists while actors recited soliloquies as though they were having a more direct, intimate conversation with the audience.

As theater became increasingly accessible, Shakespeare remained a favorite among audiences. Judging from playbills of the time, it was rare that only the play itself was performed; sideshows such as farces, comic operas, dances, and a chorus were also featured as part of that same night's entertainment. Usually one performance was divided into two parts—a play and a series of short performances which followed. This did not imply that a performance consisted of a more serious and professional first half followed by amusements designed purely for light entertainment; Shakespeare was an "entertainment" as well for the public in the age of productionism.

An advertisement for a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* at the United States' Theatre in Washington scheduled for September 5, 1800 is suggestive (See Illustration 2). Featured were the "Masquerade" scene in Act 1, and a "Funeral Procession" and "Solemn Dirge" in Act 5, which

probably added spectacular effects to the show. As there was a reference to “The Vocal Parts” in the poster, we can also assume that the performance included songs and accompaniment. After the play itself, a farce entitled *The Village Lawyer* was to be staged as well. On the list of cast members to appear in the farce, we can find the names of the same “serious” actors who played Tibalt or Friar Lawrence in *Romeo and Juliet*. Obviously the audience at the United States’ Theatre was not expecting high art, but a production of Shakespeare that incorporated melodrama, sensationalism, and comedy.

Entertainment of this period, including Shakespearean plays, was expected to incorporate productionist moral lessons and didactic messages. However, it seems that the meaning of morality had become more secularized. In 1837, the *New York Mirror* insisted that theater would be a useful “School of Reform” especially when it reflects the American conditions:

The stage can never be to us a School of Reform, until the mirror be held up to ourselves, until we see our own follies reflected. . . . there are as many virtues, peculiarly American, which, if literature would make them fashionable, might be more frequently practiced [sic].<sup>26</sup>

Shakespeare was transformed and staged in accordance to these new standards.

To make the content more palatable to the morally conscious, details were often changed as well as wording. Obscene references to “whores,” “wenches” and “maidenheads” were omitted from the text and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was rarely staged due to its ribald humor.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, in actress-writer Anna Cora Mowatt’s sentimental novella about the theatrical world, *Stella* (1855), the actress Stella refuses to recite an “objectionable phrase” from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Morality took precedence over originality: “In the stage versions of Shakespeare’s plays a large portion of the original text is omitted. Numerous passages, which were tolerated in the lax days of the Virgin Queen, are suppressed, as a matter of course.”<sup>28</sup> The age of Juliet or Miranda was often raised to a marriageable one. In the *New England Magazine* in 1835, John Quincy Adams lamented the thoughtless change of Juliet’s age from fourteen to nineteen, since he considered her child-like nature as a root cause of the tragedy.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, references to classic literature became less frequent in an effort to lower plays to a level suited to the audience’s knowledge. Subplots were often omitted entirely in order to spotlight star-actors.



Departures from and misrepresentations of original texts became the focus of criticism. *The Albion* in 1846 asked, "Why, there is not a single play of Shakespeare's that would be tolerated by modern audiences as written by the author."<sup>30</sup> In a review of a performance of *Richard III* at the Park Theatre in the same year, *The Anglo American* attacked the altered script:

More than half the acted text is not Shakespeare's *at all*, yet a contemporary congratulates the public on its fidelity to 'the original!' Can he have been in the theatre during the performance, . . . and, if so, does he *know* the original?<sup>31</sup>

If the performance staged at a theater as established as the Park was subject to intense criticism, it can easily be imagined how much Shakespeare was transformed in the countryside. According to Koon in her study on theater in the West, when companies tried to stage Shakespeare with a minimum number of actors, the original text was cut and botched, one actor played two or three roles, and amateur actors were employed temporarily.<sup>32</sup>

Despite such criticism, we must remember that Americans altered Shakespeare to conform to their own taste and derived great pleasure from the new forms that emerged. The Shakespearean play, as one form of entertainment, helped to bridge the gap between people of different social backgrounds to create a sense of spiritual unity. As James Fenimore Cooper stated in 1828, Shakespeare had become "the great author of America."<sup>33</sup>

### III THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF SHAKESPEARE

As a market economy emerged by the time of the Civil War due to the Industrial Revolution, America's mode of consumption shifted from "productionism" which maintained life at the subsistence level to "consumerism" with emphases on the acquisition of material goods and the pursuit of leisure. Note that this paradigm shift was a gradual one. New notions appeared with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the 1820s, and consumerist capitalism gradually gained momentum between the 1880s and the 1920s.<sup>34</sup>

Barnum personified the age of consumerism. He attained both wealth and fame by exhibiting curiosities, staging oddities, and manipulating publicity. His American Museum, built in Manhattan in 1842, was open to all classes and age groups. There, people enjoyed displays of artifacts

from cultures around the world, rare live animals and plants, and human oddities including giants, dwarfs, albinos, a bearded woman and Siamese twins. The museum was popular beyond imagination.

Barnum's success seems to owe to his ability to forecast the needs of the new consumer society. On one hand, people with the time and money for leisure thirsted for entertainment. On the other, a strong sense of Puritan morality was still prevalent. Barnum was able to simultaneously appeal to these two contradictory social trends. At the Museum, people were encouraged to broaden their knowledge of God's great undertakings through watching various exhibitions; under such a mask of education, Barnum allowed the public to spend on amusement without developing a guilty conscience.

The theater constructed inside the American Museum maintained this illusionary coexistence of education and entertainment. Rather than calling his theater a "theater," Barnum instead named it "The Lecture Room." Along with farces, pantomimes, minstrel dances, spectacles and comic operas, Shakespearean masterpieces and didactic plays like *The Drunkard* (1844) and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) were frequently performed. In *Nation* in 1865, he wrote, "No vulgar word or gesture, and not a profane expression was *ever* allowed on my stage! Even in Shakespeare's plays, I unflinchingly and invariably cut out vulgarity and profanity."<sup>35</sup> The closing of lobby bars and the introduction of the matinee system attracted woman and children who had not, until that time, been avid theater-goers. Barnum was able to successfully stress the moral aspects of the most immoral forms of all entertainment. This paradox was his business strategy.

Returning to the tale of Barnum's purchase of Shakespeare's birthplace at Stratford-upon-Avon, according to the Second Class Passenger in Twain's *Following the Equator*, Barnum planned to buy the birthplace for the purpose of preserving this great legacy:

He [Barnum] said that it had been his purpose to set up the house in the museum, keep it in repair, protect it from name-scribblers and other desecrators, and leave it by bequest to the safe and perpetual guardianship of the Smithsonian Institute at Washington. (642)

Upon returning the birthplace to England, he supposedly even imposed the condition "that an endowment sufficient for the future safeguarding and maintenance of the sacred relic should be raised" (644).

Barnum's motivation to purchase Shakespeare's birthplace must have

extended beyond a simple desire to conserve a world treasure. In Twain's episode after listening to the Passenger's tale, Twain, the narrator, tells what he claims to have heard from Barnum himself. Barnum did not really want either an elephant or birthplace; he just wanted "a few hundred pages of gratuitous advertising": "It produced many columns of newspaper talk, free of cost, and he was satisfied. He said that if he had failed to get Jumbo he would have caused his notion of buying the Nelson Monument to be treacherously smuggled into print. . . ." After an active media dispute, Barnum would write "a blundering, obtuse, but warm-hearted letter of apology" proposing to give up the Monument and buy the Stonehenge this time. Barnum knew that such a stupid letter would be "worth six fortune to him, and not purchasable for twice the money" (642)

Concerning the attempted purchase in 1847, in his first autobiography entitled *The Life of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself* (1855), Barnum commented that had he made a purchase before the Englishmen, "I should have made a rare speculation, for I was subsequently assured that the British people, rather than suffer that house to be removed to America, would have bought me off with twenty thousand pounds."<sup>36</sup> He was all too well aware of the profitability of the birthplace.

As mentioned before, it is historically true that Barnum attempted to get Shakespeare's house in 1847, and that he bought Jumbo from England in 1881. Yet the episode that combines these two events, as told in *Following the Equator*, is probably Twain's fiction, from which we can know how Twain, and contemporary readers and audiences, saw Barnum. Barnum was a symbol of the age of consumerism, entertainment and advertisement. In Twain's "The Stolen White Elephant" (1882), Barnum also appears as a cunning impresario. In this short story, the precious elephant, a gift from the king of Siam to Queen Victoria, is stolen in New York, and all detectives make every effort to find it. Knowing the case, Barnum sends a telegram to the police saying, "Barnum offers rate of \$4,000 a year for exclusive privilege of using elephant as traveling advertising medium from now till detectives find him. Wants to paste circus-posters on him". The animal is found "plastered over with circus-bills."<sup>37</sup>

In this regard, Shakespeare became a commodity with a high market value. While Barnum sought to profit from the exhibition of the Bard's house, Americans consumed Shakespeare's plays changing the form and

contents to suit their own tastes. Shakespeare was thus commercialized as a cultural Jumbo.

#### IV DIVERSIFICATION

The Industrial Revolution, which led the changing economy, brought about a change in the social structure at the same time. As the workplace and home were separated, there emerged a middle class ideology that assigned men to the public sphere and women to the private sphere. Since working class and immigrant women had no other choice than to work outside the home, distinctions among women became obvious. The race issue sparked heated debate and the increasing flow of European immigrants received intense scrutiny. By the mid-nineteenth century, the American social structure was clearly segmented.

In the period of productionist-inspired theater, a diverse group gathered to enjoy the shows, contributing to a sense of community. With the rise of consumerism, however, an individual's preferred choice of theater became more closely tied to class, race, and gender.<sup>38</sup>

In the 1830s, theater managers began to arrange programs targeting only one group of audiences; each class of people flocked to their respective theaters. In New York, the upper class and intellectuals headed to the Park and the Astor Place, the middle class to the Bowery, and the working class to the Chattum. Immigrants clamored for vernacular programs, and the Stadtheater was established in 1854 as a German-speaking theater.

The theater experience also changed in accordance to changing gender roles. A distinction emerged between those theaters that were legitimate and those that targeted only unmarried men featuring programs that commercialized feminine sexuality.<sup>39</sup> In rural areas, the size of audience was so small that it was not economical to build different theaters for different classes; in the 1860s, the stock companies began to sponsor different programs on a daily or weekly basis so that each class could enjoy what it preferred.<sup>40</sup>

During this period of rapid economic growth and the crystallization of a three-tiered social structure, the overall theater programs changed considerably. The upper class attended Italian operas, ballets, and classical music concerts, while different programs were developed to target the middle and working classes. In an essay "Some Observations on the Theater among Democratic People" compiled in *Democracy in America*

(1835–38), Alexis de Tocqueville observed that in democratic theater, ordinary theatergoers demanded the dramatization of daily events and the lives of people like themselves: “Democratic peoples have but little reverence for learning and scarcely bother at all about what happened in Rome or Athens. They want the talk to be about themselves and to see the present world mirrored.” The public also preferred performances that captured and held their attention while requiring little effort to understand, as “most of the spectators are not looking for pleasures of the mind, but for lively emotions of the heart.”<sup>41</sup> Thus spectacular melodramas based upon daily topics were frequently produced to entertain the new rising classes. In this context, Shakespeare naturally ceased being a central diversion for all and became synonymous with high culture.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, Shakespeare began to be staged independently without sideshows, afterpieces or songs. Although it was initially necessary to advertise that there would be no side shows, such notes soon disappeared.<sup>42</sup> The publicity poster of a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* scheduled for February 3, 1869 at the Booth Theatre shows that the tragedy was staged alone (See Illustration 3). This is in contrast to the aforementioned performance of the same play at the United States’ Theatre on September 5, 1800 (See Illustration 2). At the bottom of the bill, it was stated, “The Tragedy will be produced in strict accordance with historical property, in every respect; following closely the text of SHAKESPEARE.” This note indicates that the performance no longer placed an emphasis upon effects added specifically to increase entertainment value. Moreover, the literary and intellectual value of Shakespeare is emphasized by his portrait, situated at the top of the poster between those of Goethe on the right side and Schiller on left. The poster is bordered by columns in the Ancient Greek or Roman style, and the masks of Tragedy and Comedy are also drawn in the lower left. All helped to create an authentic atmosphere that was lacking in earlier productions.

Shakespeare moved from the theater into the academic field in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> With the desire to establish America’s own heritage, vernacular language and literature came to be regarded as having academic value in the 1860s in place of classics;<sup>44</sup> as a result, Shakespeare’s popularity as a subject of literary study rose. School curricula were broadened and more emphasis was placed on English language and literature. Harvard’s Francis James Child gave a course on *Hamlet* in the 1872–73 academic year, marking the first time that Shakespeare was taught as literature. Cornell, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia

soon introduced Shakespeare to their curricula. Shakespeare was utilized in secondary and college preparatory schools when colleges began to require the reading of plays for entrance examinations. The 1869–70 catalogue of Harvard advised freshmen to prepare to be tested on the “derivation and critical analysis of Julius Caesar” as soon as they entered the college.<sup>45</sup>

The study of Shakespeare was further promoted after valuable primary and secondary sources were opened to general scholars and students. In 1873, the Boston Public Library released the collection of Thomas Pennant Barton, allegedly the first American Shakespearean collector. Shakespearean studies in America finally became comparable to those in England after the opening of the Henry Huntington Collection in 1925 and the Folger Shakespeare Library in 1932.

Shakespeare’s shift from popular culture to elite culture does not mean that Americans rejected the Bard. Rather, he came to be viewed from an alternative perspective. In the nineteenth century, Shakespeare was central to public entertainment. By the twentieth century, he became recognized as one of the greatest artists to ever grace mankind. As such, Shakespeare has continuously held an important position in American society and culture. In 1927, Ashley Thorndike stated:

He [Shakespeare] is indeed the god of idolatry. Washington, Lincoln, Shakespeare, they are the three whom Americans universally worship, and you will not find a fourth of ours or any other nation to add to this trinity.<sup>46</sup>

Americans have consumed and reshaped Shakespeare since the early colonial era. In the end, he has been naturalized into the American mind and culture.

## CONCLUSION

The episode featuring the king and the duke in Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) is perhaps the most well-known and oft-cited example of the adaptation of Shakespeare to American tastes. The king and the duke, both con men, re-enact the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* and the sword-fight from *Richard III* pretending to be the famous English actors David Garrick and Edmund Kean. When the king worries about his “peeled head” and “white whiskers” while in the role of Juliet, the duke responds, “No, don’t you worry . . . these country jakes won’t ever think of that.”<sup>47</sup> The duke also suggests that they incorporate

Hamlet's soliloquy, actually a poor combination of a bit of Hamlet with a sprinkling of Macbeth. When the two give a performance before an audience, all twelve audience members laugh hysterically and leave the hall before the curtain falls.

This episode is illustrative of theatrical conditions in the latter half of the nineteenth century. On the level of the narrative, Shakespeare was performed in a highly dramatized fashion by touring companies that traveled even to small riverside towns. With regard to Twain's readers, the reading public of the 1870s and the 1880s obviously had enough knowledge of Shakespeare to understand the farcical nature of the duke's plays. Bearing in mind that parody presupposes wide recognition of the original work, Twain's story suggests that Shakespeare had deeply penetrated American society.

*Following the Equator*, published some twelve years after *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, offers further clues for understanding the relationship between America and Shakespeare. Barnum symbolized the nineteenth century American consumer society. The fact that this cunning entrepreneur planned to purchase Shakespeare's birthplace in 1847 reveals that Shakespeare was so popular in America that the public would have re-paid Barnum in admission fees even if he had spent a huge amount of money to dismantle and ship the house across the Atlantic Ocean. Moreover, Twain's episode of Barnum's exchanging the birthplace with Jumbo indicates that Shakespeare was popular not as a literary artist but rather as a spectacular display like the huge elephant.

The sale of the birthplace, a historical fact that is scarcely remembered today, or a brief literary episode in Twain's travel book, gives us an important clue to understanding the position of Shakespeare in American culture. It was only in the past hundred and fifty years or so that the Bard came to be worshiped as high art; before that, from colonial days to the nineteenth century, he was a popular entertainer enjoyed by all Americans regardless of sex, class or location. And his immense popularity until the mid-nineteenth century originated in the fact that Shakespeare was transformed according to the demands of American society and people. In a word, Shakespeare has been Americanized.

Recent efforts to develop a revised history of American theater have largely failed to address the influence of Shakespeare.<sup>48</sup> Prominent histories have furthermore addressed the Bard from the perspective that his widespread popularity slowed the development of America's own theater and drama. Claudia Johnson laments:

. . . the American stage in the nineteenth century was *decidedly colonial*, attested to by the overwhelming number of Shakespearean productions supported by upper- and lower-class audiences alike, largely rendered by English actors. . . . (Emphasis added)<sup>49</sup>

However, it was precisely because the early theater was “decidedly colonial” that America was eventually able to co-opt and transform the culture of the colonizer. Americans not only staged Shakespeare, but also remolded his works to suit their needs and preferences. In a metaphorical sense, Shakespeare was himself transfigured by American people and theater, and in this context should be considered an “American” playwright, as well as a central figure in a new American theater history.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For the history of Stratford as a literary shrine, see Robert Bearman, *The History of an English Borough: Stratford-upon-Avon 1196–1996* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton, 1997), chapter 11. Americans have been visiting there since the late eighteenth century; see Bearman, “Americans in Stratford,” *Focus* (Winter 1984), 25–26, and “More on the American Connection,” *Focus* (Spring 1985), 15–17. I would like to thank Dr. Robert Bearman, Head of Archives and Local Studies at Records Office, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, for offering me valuable information by e-mail.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, June 15, 1847.

<sup>3</sup> Barnum’s attempted purchase is briefly mentioned in Bearman, *History*, 171 and A. H. Saxon, *P. T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989), 137.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Twain, *Following the Equator & Anti-Imperialist Essays* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996). All subsequent references will be cited from this version with page numbers in parentheses.

<sup>5</sup> Saxon, 291–98.

<sup>6</sup> Both Barnum and Twain were fans of Shakespeare. Barnum produced many Shakespearean plays at The Lecture Hall, a theater built inside The American Museum. See Saxon, 105. The references to Shakespeare’s works not only appeared in Twain’s sketches and stories but were also evident in his techniques of language, characterization, plot building, and bawdy humor that Twain obviously borrowed from the Bard. Twain’s deep regard for Shakespeare is further evidenced by the fact that he based his last book, *Is Shakespeare Dead?* (1909), upon his studies of the life of Shakespeare and the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy. Anthony J. Berret, *Mark Twain and Shakespeare: A Cultural Legacy* (New York & London: Lanham, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Bill Ashcroft, et al. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 2, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse.” *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 85–92. 86.

<sup>9</sup> The extensive relationship between America and Shakespeare has attracted a considerable degree of attention from historians and literary critics. Many are historical analyses of productions, the most prominent of which is Charles Shattuck’s two-volumed *Shakespeare on the American Stage* (Washington, D.C.: Folger Shakespeare



Library, 1976, 1987). Recently Michael D. Bristol treats development of a so-called Shakespearean industry in America in *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 1990). The position of Shakespeare in American culture is a topic of two studies: Lawrence W. Levine, *High Brow/Low Brow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) and Harriett Hawkins, *Classics and Trash: Tradition and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> "Arthur Spicer's Inventory," *Tyler's Quarterly* 10(1929): 163–67.

<sup>11</sup> Jonas Barish, *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> W. H. Bond and Hugh Amory eds., *The Printed Catalogues of the Harvard College Library 1723–1790* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1996), A95.

<sup>13</sup> Edwin Wolfe II, *The Book Culture of a Colonial American City: Philadelphia Books, Bookmen, and Booksellers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 164–202.

<sup>14</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 305; Edwin Elliott Willoughby, "The Reading of Shakespeare in Colonial America," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 31 (1937): 45–56, 54.

<sup>15</sup> George B. Bryan, *American Theatrical Regulation 1607–1900, Conspectus and Texts* (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> As Romantic imagination was taken as a source of immorality, literature of the time had to stress its productionist nature. The moral, didactic and nationalistic ideas became the main theme of stories. For example, the first American novel, William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1787) and the first best seller by a female author, Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791), both encouraged the feminine virtue of chastity. In order to deny creative elements, both authors insisted that the stories were based on actual events.

<sup>17</sup> Bryan, 31.

<sup>18</sup> Michael T. Gilmore suggests that the Revolution can more aptly be described as a conflict between English consumerism and American productionism. Gilmore, "Modes of Consumption in the Age of Production" in *Literary Perspectives*, ed. Hokkaido Association for American Studies (Sapporo, Japan: Hokkaido UP, 1995), 223–50.

<sup>19</sup> Alfred Van Rensselaer Westfall, *American Shakespearean Criticism: 1607–1865* (New York & London: Benjamin Blom, 1968), 56.

<sup>20</sup> David Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture 1800–1850* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1968), 114.

<sup>21</sup> *The Massachusetts Spy*, August 11, 1770.

<sup>22</sup> "The Pausing American Loyalist" in *Americans on Shakespeare 1776–1914*, ed. Peter Rawlings (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 29–31, 30.

<sup>23</sup> Helene Wickham Koon, *How Shakespeare Won the West: Players and Performances in America's Gold Rush 1849–1865* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1989).

<sup>24</sup> Washington Irving, "Jonathan Oldstyle Goes to the Play" (1800–1801) in *The American Theatre as Seen by its Critics 1752–1934*, ed. Moses J. Montrose and John Brown (New York: Cooper Square, 1967), 36–47, 40.

<sup>25</sup> Frances Trollope, "Frances Trollope on Cincinnati Audiences, 1829" in *Theatre in the Colonies and United States: A Documentary History 1750–1915*, ed. Barry Witham (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 139.

<sup>26</sup> "Call for a National Drama." *New York Mirror*, 1937, in *The Dawning of American Drama: American Dramatic Criticism 1746–1915*, ed. Jurgen C. Wolter. (Westport: Greenwood, 1993), 101.

<sup>27</sup> Grimsted, 112–13, 116; Peter James Ventmiglia, "Shakespeare's Comedies on the

19th Century New York Stage: A Promptbook Analysis," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 71 (1977): 415–41. 434.

<sup>28</sup> Anna Cora Mowatt [Ritchie], "Stella" in *Mimic Life; or, A Series of Narratives* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1855), 155.

<sup>29</sup> John Quincy Adams, "Misconception of Shakespeare upon the Stage," in Rawlings, 61–66, 61–64.

<sup>30</sup> *The Albion*, 1846. Wolter, 123.

<sup>31</sup> *The Anglo American*, 1846. Wolter, 122–123, 123.

<sup>32</sup> Koon, 10–11.

<sup>33</sup> James Fenimore Cooper, "Notions of the Americans," in Rawlings, 58–60, 59.

<sup>34</sup> A distinction between productionism and consumerism is also ambiguous in the field of literature. Reynolds points out the close relationship between reform literature in the early nineteenth century and creative literature of the American Renaissance (55–56). The former explored the dark side of human psychology under the guise of didacticism, and the latter exploited that characteristic as its own literary convention. These two forms of literature continued to coexist throughout the nineteenth century. See David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* (New York: Knopf, 1988).

<sup>35</sup> *Nation*, 1865, quoted in Saxon, 107.

<sup>36</sup> P [hineas] T [aylor] Barnum, *The Life of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself* (New York: Redfield, 1855), 344.

<sup>37</sup> Twain, *The Stolen White Elephant and Other Detective Stories* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996). 25, 26.

<sup>38</sup> The changes in theater experience are explained in Peter G. Buckley, *To the Opera House: Culture and Society in New York City, 1820–1860* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1984); Faye E. Dudden, *Women in the American Theatre: Actresses and Audiences 1790–1870* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994), 104–22; Grimsted 110; and Levine.

<sup>39</sup> Dudden, 107, 116–18, 149–8.

<sup>40</sup> Dudden, 119.

<sup>41</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1840), ed. J.P. Mayer and Max Lerner (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 263, 264.

<sup>42</sup> Levine, 171.

<sup>43</sup> Brown illuminates WASP political manipulation in the transformation of Shakespeare into elite culture. As postbellum America was culturally confused, WASPs situated Shakespeare at the center of school education in an attempt to construct a canonical culture based on the English language. Shakespeare became an effective means of enforcing WASP social and cultural domination. See Stephen J. Brown, "The Uses of Shakespeare in America: A Study in Class Domination," in *Shakespeare: Pattern of Excelling Nature*, ed. David Bevington et al. (London: Associated UP, 1976), 230–38.

<sup>44</sup> James McManaway, "Shakespeare in the United States," *PMLA* 79 (1964): 513–18. 516.

<sup>45</sup> Henry W. Simon, *The Readings of Shakespeare in American Schools and Colleges: An Historical Survey* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1932), 119–31. See also John Hampton Lauck, *The Reception and Teaching of Shakespeare in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century America* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Ashley Thorndike, "Shakespeare in America" (1927), in Rawlings, 512–26, 525.

<sup>47</sup> Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), 169. The episode of the king and the duke appears in chapters 19 and 20.

<sup>48</sup> Following the rise of new historicism and cultural studies, a critique of the established history of American literature along class, race and gender lines has emerged, such as Emory Elliott, ed., *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (New York:

Columbia UP, 1988) and Sacvan Bercovitch, ed., *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge UP, 1994 +). Almost ten years behind such movement, there appeared 'new' history of American theater, which culminates in Felicia Hardison Londre and Daniel J. Watermeier, eds., *The History of North American Theater* (New York: Continuum, 1998) and Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby, eds., *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*, 3 vols. (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge UP, 1998 +).

<sup>49</sup> Johnson, "A New Nation's Drama," in Elliot, 324–41, 329.

**SHAKSPEARES  
HOUSE,  
AT  
Stratford-on-Avon**

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**MR. ROBINS**

---

Feels highly flattered at having been selected by the Representatives of the late Mr. THOMAS COURT, to submit to Public Competition,  
**AT THE AUCTION MART, LONDON,**  
**On Thursday, 16th of September, 1847.**  
 AT TWELVE O'CLOCK,

**THE TRULY  
HEART-STIRRING RELIC  
OF A MOST GLORIOUS PERIOD, AND OF  
ENGLAND'S  
IMMORTAL BARD**

Which, by the course of events, and directions contained in the Will of the late Owner, must be offered to Public Sale; yet with every fervent hope that its appreciation by the Public will secure for it a safeguard and continuance at the Birth and Burial-place of the Poet,

**THE MOST HONOURED MONUMENT OF THE GREATEST GENIUS  
THAT EVER LIVED.**

To attempt to paraphrase this interesting and singular Property would be in vain, for (to quote the Poet's beautiful lines)...  
 To gold would gain, to gain the life;  
 To share a fortune on the wide  
 To reach the top, or add another line  
 To the rainbow, or with long hair  
 To seek the bosom of Heaven to perch  
 In world and creature's care.

Mr. ROBINS, therefore, simply invites all those who take an interest in this Monumental Relic (and who in these amongst us does not) to pay a visit to Stratford-on-Avon, in the full assurance that what they will see and feel, now that this remarkable Property may be possessed, will raise a spirit of Competition hitherto unknown. **THE**

**Swan & Maidenhead, a thriving Public House,**  
 Which adjoins, with its Out-let shops, forms part of the Property, extending from Beale Street to the Guildgate; the whole of which, be it remembered, is

**FREEHOLD.**

**THE BOOKS OF AUTOGRAPHS, with numerous Poetic Inspirations, CURIOUS ANTIQUE FURNITURE, and several INTERESTING RELICS, will be Sold at the same time.**

For particulars, as usual, consult this simple directory, and Printed Particulars, containing a Copy of the Family Pedigree, and much that will interest the reader, with Virginia Tones, a Plan of the Property, and a Description of the character with the ground, may be had (as to 6d.) of W. Walker, at the Swan and Maidenhead, Stratford-on-Avon; also of Mr. Roper's Library, Leamington, near Royal Bank, and of Messrs. B. & C. at Warwick, or the Author's Agent, and of Mr. F. B. at Stratford-on-Avon.

Illustration 1

Announcement for the Sale  
of Shakespeare's Birthplace in 1847?  
© The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Record Office

The Public are respectfully informed, that for the remainder of the season the Doors of the Theatre will be open at half past 5 and the curtain will rise at half past 6 o'clock precisely.

United States' Theatre,  
*CITY OF WASHINGTON.*

On Friday Evening, Sept. 5th 1800,

Will be presented a TRAGEDY called

**Romeo and Juliet.**

Romeo,	-	-	Mr. Cooper.
Paris,	-	-	Mr. Wood.
Montague,	-	-	Mr. L'Estrange.
Capulet,	-	-	Mr. Morris.
Mercutio,	-	-	Mr. Bernard.
Benvolio,	-	-	Mr. Wignell.
Tibalt,	-	-	Mr. Francis.
Friar Lawrence,	-	-	Mr. Warren.
Balthazer,	-	-	Miss Solomon.
Apothecary,	-	-	Mr. Milbourne.
Peter,	-	-	Mr. Bliffet.
Page,	-	-	Master Harris.
Juliet,	-	-	Mrs. Merry.
Lady Capulet,	-	-	Mrs. Salmon.
Nurse,	-	-	Mrs. Francis.

In *Act I.* A MASQUERADE, in which will be introduced the *Minuet de la Cour* and a *New Gavot* by Master Harris and Miss Arnold.

In *Act V.* A FUNERAL PROCESSION and SOLEMN DIRGE.

The *Vocal Parts* by Messrs. Darley, Francis, Bliffet, Robins, Miss Arnold, Miss Solomon, Mrs. Warren, Mrs. Stuart, &c.

To which will be added, a FARCE (in two acts) called

**The Village Lawyer.**

Scout,	-	-	Mr. Warren.
Snarl,	-	-	Mr. Francis.
Charles,	-	-	Mr. Hopkins.
Justice Mitimus,	-	-	Mr. Milbourne.
Sheep-Face,	-	-	Mr. Bliffet.
Kate,	-	-	Mrs. Stuart.
Mrs. Scout	-	-	Mrs. Francis.

**ADMITTANCE,** One Dollar.

Places in the boxes to be taken at the Theatre from 10 to 2 o'clock on the days of Performance. Tickets to be had at the office in the Theatre, at Way & Groff's Printing-Office, and at McLaughlin's tavern, George-town.

Days of Performance, Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

On Saturday next, the *COMEDY* of the *ROAD TO RUIN*, with Harlequin Hurry Scurry: or, the Rural Rumpus.

City of Washington: Printed by WAY & GROFF, North E Street, near the General Post-Office.

Illustration 2

"Romeo and Juliet Playbill" 1800?

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SHAKESPEARE

Business Manager, J. HENRY MAGONIGLE.

Treasurer, J. A. BOOTH.....Stage Manager, MARK SMITH.  
Leader of Orchestra, E. MOLLENHAUER.

**Mr. EDWIN BOOTH**  
RESPECTFULLY ANNOUNCES  
WEDNESDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 3, 1869,  
AS THE  
**OPENING NIGHT**  
OF HIS THEATRE, WITH THE PERFORMANCE OF SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDY OF  
**ROMEO AND JULIET:**

INTRODUCING  
Miss MARY McVICKER, as Juliet.  
Miss FANNY MORANT, as the Nurse.  
Mr. EDWIN ADAMS, as Mercutio.  
Mr. MARK SMITH, as Friar Lawrence.  
Mr. EDWIN BOOTH, as Romeo.

WITH A FULL AND EFFICIENT COMPANY.

C A S T:

ESCALUS, Prince of Verona, ..... Mr. A. PITOU.  
PARIS, a Young Nobleman, Kinsman to the Prince, ..... Mr. FRED. MONROE.  
MONTAGUE, } ..... Heads of two houses, at variance with... Mr. THOMAS J. HIND.  
CAPULET, } ..... each other, ..... Mr. A. W. FENNO.  
AN OLD MAN OF THE CAPULET FAMILY, ..... Mr. W. C. DRUMMOND.  
ROMEO, Son to Montague, ..... Mr. EDWIN BOOTH.  
MERCUTIO, Kinsman to the Prince, and friend to Romeo, ..... Mr. EDWIN ADAMS.  
BENVOLIO, Nephew of Montague, and friend to Romeo, ..... Mr. CHARLES NORRIS.  
TYBALT, Nephew to Lady Capulet, ..... Mr. HARRY LANGDON.  
FRIAR LAWRENCE, a Franciscan, ..... Mr. MARK SMITH.  
FRIAR JOHN, of the same order, ..... Mr. J. P. DEUEL.  
BALTHAZAR, Servant to Romeo, ..... Mr. G. A. VINTON.  
PETER, ..... Mr. CHARLES PETERS.  
SAMPSON, } Servants to Capulet, ..... Mr. JOHN CHATTER-ON.  
GREGORY, } ..... Mr. NELSON DECKER.  
ABRAHAM, Servant to Montague, ..... Mr. HENRY HOGAN.  
AN APOTHECARY, ..... Mr. HECTOR MACKEY.  
FIRST MUSKIAN, ..... Mr. AUGUSTUS WATERS.  
SECOND MUSKIAN, ..... Mr. W. H. V. WINTLE.  
THIRD MUSKIAN, ..... Mr. C. J. DADE.

LADY CAPULET, Wife to Capulet, ..... Miss E. V. PROUDFOOT.  
JULIET, Daughter to Capulet, ..... Miss MARY McVICKER.  
NURSE TO JULIET, ..... Miss FANNY MORANT.  
Kinsfolk of both Houses; Maskers, Guards, Watchmen and Attendants.

*SCENE, — Verona, Mantua.*

The Tragedy will be produced in strict accordance with  
historical propriety, in every respect; following  
closely the text of SHAKESPEARE. (OVER.)

Illustration 3  
"Romeo and Juliet Program" 1869?  
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