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The Serpent that Wears a Crown: Nineteenth-Century Illustrations of the Off-scene in *Hamlet*

Laura Tosi

Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia

An off-scene is a scene not directly shown on stage, but described by one or more characters: spectators and other characters are left to imagine it, often filling the visual gap themselves. Bridging this gap with imagery is a fascinating creative challenge – it is the case, most notably, of Ophelia's death, described by Gertrude in poetical terms in *Hamlet*, Act IV Scene vii. In some cases, theatrical productions address this by including silent scenes to represent the off-scene events—such as Macbeth's coronation, Petruchio and Katherina's wedding, or Shylock's conversion. Certain narrated scenes would pose technical challenges if directors chose to bring them back on stage – performing Ophelia's drowning on stage seems a rather complicated business, for example. These imagined scenes often depict events that occur before or after the play's narrative; interestingly enough, providing imaginary sequels and prequels is one of the ways the plays can be adapted into narratives that inserts new scenes and rearrange the plot in a chronological order. Filling the gaps and providing additions not only deepen the narrative but also serve as fertile ground for fan fiction, which thrives on expanding these untold stories.

In this article I focus on the way one of the most important off-scenes in *Hamlet* has been illustrated in nineteenth-century editions of Shakespeare's plays. The scene is that of Old King Hamlet's poisoning by his brother Claudius, related by the ghost in Act I Scene v. The ghost's speech expands on realistic, almost gory details, from the description of the effect that his tale would have on Hamlet (freeze his young blood, and

make his two eyes like stars start from their spheres, make his hair stand on end) to the effect that poison would have on his body (changing it from smooth to a body covered by “*vile and loathsome crust*” (I.v.72). At the same time, the event is also narrated in metaphorical terms which identify Claudius as the poisoning snake:

‘Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark
Is, by a forgèd process of my death,
Rankly abused. But know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father’s life
Now wears his crown. (I.v.35-39)

As is well-known, *Hamlet* is built on embedded narratives: that of the ghost, “in many ways the most powerful of all the play’s storytellers” (Neill 223), is only one of many – one only needs to think of Hamlet’s account of how he escaped from the pirates or, again, the description of Ophelia’s death. The poisoning scene, also a prequel to the play, would be complicated to show in the theatre – normally, spectators are concentrated on the spectacular appearance of the ghost and his words. In contrast, in some cinematic adaptations of *Hamlet*, such as the Kenneth Branagh’s movie (1999), the ghost’s words serve as a voiceover while the viewer witnesses old Hamlet sleeping in a winter garden, falling from his chair, and, in an earlier sequence, a close-up of his ear with blood trickling from it, symbolizing the poisoning. In this case, cinema provides the unique opportunity to present a flashback of past events as the character narrates them. Similarly, illustrators of a Shakespeare edition enjoy considerable creative freedom—they can depict virtually anything. Of course, the experience of reading a play in an illustrated edition will never be the same as seeing a play at the theatre – as Bate has argued: “The illustration of a dramatic text [...] makes meaning by freezing a single moment, whereas the unstoppable motion of time, the piling of action upon reaction, is the very essence of drama” (33). And yet, when we think of transmediating the theatrical medium into the more static form of an image, we find that, like the cinema and unlike the theatre, illustrations, despite their static quality, can give us “additional information” of the characters and the action. In Hodnett’s pithy words, “they (a) represent, (b) interpret, and (c) decorate” (13). I would add, they also integrate the text with new, unexpected, details.

Nowadays, except for certain limited artistic editions, the only illustrated editions of the plays that are available are gift books for children, or adaptations for children. In Shakespeare editions for adults (Arden editions, Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press and so on) we generally have photos of performances, drawings of theatres, reproductions of Folios or quartos, portraits of famous Elizabethans or Jacobeans, but no illustrations of the plays as such. On the contrary, in the Victorian period, “for a large proportion of the public, Shakespeare’s plays were experienced in print, and with illustrations” (Sillars, *Seen* 6). Some editions even outsold the scholarly unillustrated ones. As Sillars has noted, “the material diversity of Victorian Shakespeare editions was largely driven by a wish to attract every level of a rapidly stratifying readership that reflects the Victorian ethos of social mobility through self-improvement” (Sillars, *Illustrated* 254). Obviously, the upper classes could access Shakespeare almost “naturally,” as Henry Crawford claims in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814): “Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is part of an Englishman’s constitution [...] one is intimate with him by instinct” (335). However, Shakespeare also needed to be accessible as an educational opportunity to a broader audience—more likely the emerging middle classes than the working class, as few editions were truly affordable to all. This broader accessibility was facilitated by improved printing technologies, which made producing illustrations cheaper.

Unlike most Victorian illustrated editions, eighteenth-century versions—typically featuring fewer illustrations—appeared more closely tied to theatre and performance. Many engravings depict actors in their roles, though these were often reconstructions rather than accurate representations. This raises an important question: to what extent can pictorial representations serve as evidence of staging? Given the technical limitations of the time, which made capturing live performances impossible, such illustrations often reflect echoes or imaginative recreations of the stage. For instance, Nicholas Rowe’s 1709 critical edition of Shakespeare, with illustrations by François Boitard, includes the well-known image of Hamlet overturning a chair—a moment famously associated with actor Thomas Betterton’s portrayal of the character. Similarly, John Bell’s so called *Acting Edition* from the late eighteenth century emphasized its theatrical connections, incorporating scenes from plays, portraits of actors in costume, and a text “regulated” by the promptbooks of Drury Lane and Covent Garden (Sillars, *Seen* 254). By contrast, nineteenth-

century illustrations increasingly relied on an artist's personal vision of performance rather than theatrical inspiration (see Ashton). Quite simply, not all artists regularly attended performances, and their depictions reflect imaginative interpretations rather than firsthand observations.

Of course, illustrations can also be approached as a form of translation of a text: "They are different in terms of the sign system but constitute another construct of the (same) text in the universe of the illustrated book" (Pereira 106). Like translations, illustrations reflect the aesthetic trends and cultural values of their time; both introduce elements that are not present in the source material or, conversely, select or omit others that are in the source (Reynolds 6). Just as translators cannot wholly reproduce the linguistically and culturally loaded source texts and are forced to make choices, illustrators are similarly required to select.

Typically, in an illustration, the artist must decide not only which scene to depict but also which precise moment within that scene to freeze. The action is paused, yet the play's narrative must remain in motion. This selection significantly influences how the play is interpreted by readers or viewers. By highlighting specific key moments, an illustrated edition creates a trajectory for the reader or implied viewer to follow. But who is this viewer? Are they already familiar with the play, using the images to reinforce or challenge their understanding of it? Or are they encountering the play for the first time, relying on the illustrations to guide their reading? For some nineteenth-century readers, Shakespeare's plays were entirely new, and the illustrations served to orient them. The frontispiece, in particular, plays a crucial role in shaping the reader's approach. Borrowing its name from architecture, where it refers to the principal face of a building, the frontispiece serves as the visual gateway into the mood and themes of the play. An illustrated frontispiece can act as a synopsis, offering a preview of the play's structure and central ideas, thereby influencing the reader's perception before the play even begins. Sometimes, it achieves this by repositioning a later scene at the very beginning—highlighting the "key moment of key moments". For instance, in the 1744 frontispiece to the works of Shakespeare edited by Thomas Hanmer, engraved by Hubert Gravelot after a drawing by Francis Hayman, the chosen moment is the play-within-a-play from *Hamlet*. The poisoner stands while the poisoned king sits in a theatrical arrangement reminiscent of a stage production, immediately setting the tone and suggesting the layered nature of the drama to follow.

Nineteenth-century illustrations of the ghost's narrated scene oscillate between two extremes: a realistic depiction of the murder (a man pouring poison into his brother's ear as he sleeps in an orchard) and a symbolic interpretation of its imagery (a snake wearing a crown). In many cases, these illustrations manage to blend both approaches, uniting the realistic and the metaphorical. In the nineteenth-century illustrated editions I discuss in this article, the ghost's storytelling is transformed into visual form, often as an engraving. These editions balance the temptation to visually reorder the play along chronological lines with the desire to literalize the serpent metaphor. The snake becomes an emblem of the play, with Claudius cast as the archetypal biblical serpent administering poison in the garden.

Illustrators must account for the interplay between illustrations and the text on the page, as well as potential restrictions on the number of images allowed in the edition. For instance, if only a limited number of illustrations can be included for *Hamlet*, depicting the ghost might be more impactful than illustrating the king's poisoning in the orchard. In this way, the illustrator's work aligns more closely with the theatrical experience. The poisoning scene, in a sense, reappears during the performance of the mousetrap, allowing for the possibility of illustrating it later in the play. In a way, the staging of the play-within-the-play, *The Murder of Gonzago*, serves as an illustration itself. Through the inset play, Hamlet seeks to confront his uncle with a dramatized representation of his crime—twice—first in the dumb show and then in the mini-play. Hamlet even provides a verbal “caption”, explaining, “A poisons him i'th' garden for his estate.” (III.ii.254). By staging this scene, Hamlet brings his father's words to life, effectively transforming them into a moving image.

The issue of choice is particularly striking in the first edition I examine: a series of wood engravings by John Thompson based on designs by John Thurston. This 1825 edition, titled *Illustrations of Shakespeare*, was published simultaneously in England and Germany, reusing images from an unsuccessful publication venture eleven years earlier. Unlike later illustrated editions, this slim volume does not include the text of the plays or even excerpts. Instead, as stated in its opening pages, the engravings are designed to “be adapted to all editions”, inviting readers to integrate them into their own unillustrated copies. In this more affordable and ultimately successful publication, each play is represented by a mini-narrative of six images on a single page. The first image serves as a kind of title page or frontispiece, while the remaining five depict a scene from each act of the

play. Each engraving is accompanied by a caption containing one or more lines from the relevant scene.

The first engraving for *Hamlet*—its frontispiece—depicts the scene of King Hamlet’s poisoning but presents it in emblematic and metaphorical terms [FIGURE 1]. The image shows a crown resting on a cushion among foliage, evoking the orchard where the king was poisoned. Beside it are a sword, possibly belonging to the king, and a serpent poised to strike the crown. The metaphor is clear: Claudius is the serpent. This interpretation requires little sophistication, as Thurston uses the snake as a recurring motif to symbolize deceit and treachery even when no literal poison is involved. For instance, in the opening vignette for *Titus Andronicus*, a dark snake intertwines with a fair one, while *King Lear* features two snakes alongside a crown and a map. In *Macbeth*, a snake emerges from a cauldron, possibly referencing the “fillet of a fenny snake” in the witches’ potion from Act IV. Interestingly, Thurston does not include a snake in the headpiece for *Antony and Cleopatra*. His use of the motif is often more metaphorical than literal, and in *Hamlet*, the snake coiled around the crown encapsulates the essence of the tragedy. This emblematic approach anticipated the work of later illustrators, such as Kenny Meadows in the 1860s, who also used the serpent motif to distill the play’s central theme (see Pietrini).

Only a few years later, Frank Howard published *The Spirit of the Plays of Shakespeare* (1827–1833), first issued in parts and later compiled into volumes, as was customary at the time. Like Thurston, Howard offered a distillation of *Hamlet* through 12 plates in the relatively new style of outline engravings. Each plate was accompanied by a relevant quotation of approximately half a page, although these quotations were not placed directly under or beside the illustrations. Instead, the plates rearranged the play’s events into a chronological order. This arrangement creates an impression of visual progression, where the illustrations claim to capture the play’s essence—its “spirit”—in a way that seems largely independent of the text. The first selected scene from *Hamlet* depicts Claudius poisoning Old Hamlet [FIGURE 2] The illustration shows the King asleep in an orchard, wearing a crown and a sword. Claudius emerges from behind a tree, caught in the act of pouring poison into his brother’s ear. In the background, Gertrude watches the scene, wringing her hands. Notably, there is no serpent present. The ambiguity of Gertrude’s role—whether she is a passive witness or an accomplice—is left unresolved. Howard’s depiction of the Murder of Gonzago [FIGURE 3] mirrors this scene closely, creating

an interesting visual adaptation of the play within the play. The Italian Gertrude wears the same attire as Denmark's queen but appears distracted by Claudius's unmistakable fit of rage. This repetition highlights Howard's deliberate choice to emphasize parallels between the real poisoning and its staged reenactment. The addition of Gertrude to these scenes may have been inspired by an unsigned engraving by Johann Heinrich Füssli, based on a 1771 drawing. In this earlier version, a figure resembling Gertrude weeps as a crown is removed while poison is administered. Alternatively, Howard may have drawn inspiration from August Moritz Retzsch's *Hamlet* illustrations, published in Germany and Britain in 1828 under the title *Outlines to Shakespeare*. However, it is equally plausible that Howard and Retzsch included Gertrude independently, given the long-standing critical speculation surrounding her involvement in the murder.

Retzsch's *Outlines to Shakespeare* consists of 17 engravings that accompany selected passages from the plays, with text presented in three languages and a German commentary (later translated into English). "Outline" describes both the engraving technique and the fact that the edition provides a synopsis of the play (passages from the plays are selected to accompany the illustrations). The first engraving, titled "Introduction", provides a re-creation of the ghost's narrative [FIGURE 4]. Combining realism with symbolic elements, it portrays the King asleep on a bench in what appears to be a summer house. Foliage visible through a window suggests a garden or orchard. Beside him, the crown rests on a stool with lion's claw-shaped feet. Claudius pours poison into the King's ear while simultaneously seizing the crown (the sleeping king and the theft of the crown recalls Shakespeare's *Henry IV* part 2 when Henry tries on the crown while his father is asleep). In the background, the serpent has been displaced onto the statue of Justice, as an emblem of retribution, which seems to be symbolically overseeing the crime. Its presence conveys a sense that the act has been recorded, and retributive justice is inevitable—though, as is typical in revenge plots, the path to justice is fraught with casualties. Equipped with scales and a sword, she steps on a serpent in a pose reminiscent of the Virgin Mary. A mysterious column in the shape of an old man, whose body resembles the coils of a serpent, adds an additional layer of symbolism. In Retzsch's version of the Mousetrap scene in another illustration [FIGURE 5], the poisoning and crown-grabbing motif is repeated, synchronized much like in the earlier engraving. Once again,

the serpent is displaced, this time appearing faintly on an arras or tapestry sketched at the top left of the stage [FIGURE 6]

The first generation of nineteenth-century illustrators that have been discussed, constrained by technological limitations, often used a limited number of images to accompany smaller portions of the text. These illustrations typically provide careful, symbolic visual interpretations of key moments in the plays. Claudius, for example, is almost invariably depicted as or alluded to as the serpent and there is often a distinct separation between the texts and the illustrations. As we move towards the next generation of illustrators, advances in image reproduction made it easier to print larger runs and incorporate illustrations directly within the text. Charles Knight's *Pictorial Edition of Shakespeare* (1838–43) and its subsequent editions was a massive and extremely successful enterprise. This included an eighth volume on the life of Shakespeare, which Knight had meticulously researched in Stratford and the Bodleian Library. Knight was not just a printer and bookseller but also a scholar and educator who believed that all social classes should have access to Shakespeare through attractive, high-quality, and reasonably priced materials (Young, *Knight* 20). The techniques of serial publication, familiar to readers of authors such as Dickens, were applied to Shakespeare. His plays were first published in serialized parts, making them more affordable, and were later compiled into casebound volumes

In his autobiography, *Passages of a Working Life During Half a Century: With a Prelude of Early Reminiscences* (1864), Knight writes that he “began to look carefully at the plays, to see whether the aid of art might not be called in to add both to the information and enjoyment of the reader of Shakspere (sic), by representing the Realities upon which the imagination of the poet must have rested” (qtd. in Young, *Knight* 24). Each play was structured around a frontispiece, a headpiece and tailpiece for each act, an introductory notice, footnotes, and a section of 3–5 pages of “Illustrations” in the original sense of the term: clarification or illustrative commentary. Knight combined the two meanings of the word, producing both verbal and visual glosses to the plays. The “realities upon which the imagination of the poet must have rested” often referred to the original historical and topographical locations of the plays, such as architectural features, city views, landscapes devoid of human presence, portraits of the real-life counterparts of characters, and artifacts like weapons or clothing—what we might now call material culture. This concern with authenticity was

shared by contemporary performances, which were also characterized by the historical accuracy of costumes (Knight's interest in antiquarianism led him to seek the assistance of costume historian James Robinson Planché, who provided detailed notes on dress for each play, Sillars, *Victorians* 31) and set designs. Knight employed a team of engravers who also contributed to his other publishing ventures, such as *The Penny Magazine* and *The History of London* (Sillars, *Time* 43). Most of the illustrations serve as visual annotations, which Sillars describes as "visual archaeology working as textual elucidation" (*Seen* 2). However, a few go further, offering an interpretation of the text. For example, the headpiece (designed by William Harvey) highlights a moment that defines the play: the performance of the play within the play, where young Hamlet points to the "primal scene"—the poisoning [FIGURE 7]. This scene operates on three levels: the audience, split into two groups with Hamlet roughly in the middle; the play being performed on stage; and two women, one holding a poniard, representing the tragical muses, who present the scene to both the audience within the play and the viewer of the illustration. The curtains, a staple feature of a few of these illustrations to emphasize theatricality or metatheatricality, are prominent here. Other illustrations depict settings, such as the real-life Elsinore [FIGURE 8] or Danish ships [FIGURE 9], while some focus on details unfamiliar to the Victorian reader, such as distinctive sword belts or a pair of chopines [FIGURE 10]—the high clogs Hamlet mentions when speaking to the actors. Knight's editions of Shakespeare were constantly reprinted, providing clear evidence of Shakespeare's popularity among the Victorians, for whom owning a high-quality edition of his works was highly desirable.

Knight's edition is often compared to the *Works* edited by Barry Cornwall (1840–1843) and illustrated entirely by Kenny Meadows. The distinction lies not only in Knight's focus on the setting versus Meadows' emphasis on character but also in how the illustrations are presented: while Knight limited the number of illustrations accompanying his texts, instead making free use of images in the commentary section, Meadows' illustrations are integrated directly with the text, sharing the page. One could argue that Meadows achieves a more striking level of integration, or "mise en page" that harmonizes text and image in a remarkable way. In Peter Holland's words, Meadows "peoples the play with characters whose life and dynamic vitality move from simply supporting or surrounding the page of dry text into a theatrical engagement with the text's energies"

(65). *Hamlet* opens with “Introductory Remarks”, and the accompanying illustration immediately sets the tone for the play [FIGURE 11]. The chosen image depicts a hooded Claudius pouring poison into the ear of the sleeping king. Death holds a crown for Claudius, symbolizing his usurpation, while his other hand appears to grasp the text of the “Introductory Remarks,” as though vying for control of the page itself. This visual not only engages with the text’s themes of power and betrayal but also creates a sense of tension between the written word and the dynamic image; the same tension that is perceived in the pages portraying the ghost, where the illustration is positioned above the words, creating a striking hierarchy where the reader’s gaze moves from text to image and back again. This interplay underscores the ghost’s spectral dominance over the narrative. Notably, the poisoning scene in the mousetrap is not illustrated directly; instead, a small image of a mouse in a trap acts as a subtle emblem, leaving readers to imagine the court performance – all we see is the royal couple looking at the play-within-the play, a position that is taken by the readers [FIGURE 12]. The play’s final image, or endpiece, depicts a mysterious, monstrous bird—possibly a harpy—offering a cup, likely full of poison [FIGURE 13]. This harpy’s bat-like wings recall the headpieces Meadows created in other plays, such as *Othello*, where the serpent is a symbol of deceit and brutality. In *Othello*, the black serpent is racialized, while *Macbeth*, similarly to Thurston’s earlier depictions, show two intertwining serpents ending in small human heads, a chilling representation of ambition and destruction. Meadows’ visual choices thus deepen the symbolic resonance of *Hamlet*, using imagery to amplify its themes of power, betrayal, and death.

Howard Staunton’s 1856 edition of the *Plays of Shakespeare*, illustrated by John Gilbert, includes 831 images, which, in Sillars’s words, “resemble more closely the idiom of the new pictorial journalism” (*Illustrated* 290). These images are integrated into the two-column text, with an average of 22 images per play (Hodnett 77), including a full-page frontispiece. For *Hamlet*, the frontispiece focuses on the play’s final scene, [FIGURE 14] depicting the aftermath of the carnage: the dead bodies, with Fortinbras and his army entering the room and surveying the destruction. The entry into the play, therefore, is framed through the *end* by death, poisoning, and general catastrophe. The poisoning scene is depicted only in the *Mousetrap* sequence, which is represented as a double-spread page with deliberately paired illustrations [FIGURE 15]. On the left, a group including Ophelia and Hamlet—almost reclining on the floor and stretching his left foot

toward the right page—watches the action unfold. All the figures on this side are focused on the scene to the right, where Claudius, enraged, raises his right hand in a gesture of fury, seemingly pointing at the play. The queen tries to placate him, while soldiers in the background stare. Notably, no one in either illustration watches the performance in the background. The juxtaposition of the engravings across the spread creates what Young describes as “an effect that anticipates something like the crosscut in film” (*Hamlet* 87), and yet Gilbert managed to recreate a theatrical moment in a vivid historical present. As Peter Holland has observed, perhaps a little uncharitably toward Knight, “There is nothing here of the smell of the British Museum that pervades Charles Knight’s historical materials” (70). In this edition, nearly every act concludes with a small engraving, the size determined by the remaining space. For example, Act II ends with an emblematic illustration of a snake passing through a crown [FIGURE 16]. In the tradition of emblematic renderings inaugurated by Thurston’s illustrations, this image relies on the reader’s memory of the ghost’s words to identify Claudius as the snake-like villain, poisoning for a crown.

Cassell’s *Illustrated Shakespeare*, published in serial parts between 1864 and 1868 and later in bound volumes, also aimed to make a scholarly edition of an illustrated Shakespeare accessible to a wider audience, following the precedent set by earlier editions. It was based on the critical apparatus of Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke—the latter known for her narrative prequels to the plays, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Heroines* (1849–50)—and featured engravings based on designs by Henry Courtney Selous and others, totalling approximately 600 images. Each play is accompanied by 9 to 12 illustrations, each paired with 2–3 lines from the text, which are not always closely related to the portion of the play they illustrate. The frontispiece for *Hamlet* once again depicts the poisoning scene, with a hooded figure vaguely reminiscent of Meadows’ dark poisoner and a snake coiling near the king [FIGURE 17]. This image evokes both a realistic depiction of the act and a symbolic allusion to Claudius’s evil, tying him to the serpent in the Garden of Eden. As in earlier illustrations, the king reclines on a cushion on what appears to be a sofa or bench—this posture having become somewhat a conventional representation of King Hamlet. He wears a coronet, and refreshments at his feet may allude that he died “full of bread” (III, iii, 80). The image offers a dual allusion: Claudius is both the snake who metaphorically “stung” King Hamlet to claim his crown and the literal poisoner. The *Mousetrap* scene is also illustrated,

though the action is frozen at a moment of tension [FIGURE 18]. The actors portraying the poisoning appear bewildered as their performance is mirrored by the reactions of the characters in the foreground. These figures are grouped similarly to those in Gilbert's illustration but positioned closer. Hamlet and Ophelia form one group, while the Queen and Claudius are on the opposite side, the latter turning away from the play in anger. This arrangement emphasizes the dramatic interplay of suspicion, guilt, and revelation.

Most Victorian editions, notably Knight's editions, the Staunton/Gilbert *Shakespeare*, and Cassell's *Illustrated Shakespeare*, were reprinted numerous times in various formats, often altering the choice and placement of illustrations. For a couple of generations, under unique circumstances, readers were able to access *Hamlet* (and other Shakespeare plays) in this hybrid form, where illustrations offered a visual experience distinct from the theatre, blending the narrative with the performative. The abundance of illustrations enabled readers to explore the plays from multiple perspectives, including scenes that Shakespeare's text only narrates. Nineteenth-century editors and illustrators did not merely replicate the theatrical experience or imitate paintings of Shakespeare; instead, they experimented with innovative combinations of text and image: these illustrations served both as visualizations of key scenes and as clarifications, explanations, or even inventive reinterpretations. The verbal text and visual recreations coexisted on the page, encouraging readers to engage with Shakespeare's plays in a more direct and entertaining way. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the market for Shakespeare editions shifted. The audience transitioned from general readers seeking pleasure to mainly students and scholars focused on study material. New scholarly editions, emphasizing textual analysis, left little room for the richly illustrated experience. The Cambridge edition (1863–66), for example, exemplified what Gary Taylor called "the professorial appropriation of Shakespeare" (187): for the first time, the text was accompanied by a critical apparatus, including notes, accounts of previous readings, and numbered lines to facilitate reference. With the increasing emphasis on textual accuracy, scenes such as the Old King's poisoning or Claudius depicted as a snake were no longer visualized, marking the end of a unique phase in Shakespearean publishing history.

However, illustrated editions of single plays and collections of adaptations for children have continued the tradition—off-scene poisoning remains a favourite motif, appearing in several illustrated reprints of

the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807) to this day, as well as in contemporary narrative adaptations, mangas, and comics. Once again, at least in pictorial terms and for young readers, *Hamlet* remains very much a play about a serpent that wears a crown.



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Illustrazioni,
Abbildungen, Illustrations



FIGURE 1
From *Illustrations of Shakspeare, comprised in Two Hundred and Thirty Vignette Engravings by Thompson, from Designs by Thurston, adapted to all editions.* Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, Fleisher, 1825.



FIGURES 2, 3
 From Howard, Frank. *The Spirit of the Plays of Shakespeare: exhibited in a series of outline plates illustrative of the story of each play drawn and engraved by Frank Howard; with quotations and descriptions.* 5 vols, Cadell, 1833.



FIGURES 4, 5
 From *Galerie zu Shakspeare's Dramatischen Werken. In Umrissen, erfunden und gestochen von Moritz Retzsch, erste Lieferung, Hamlet, XVII, Blätter, 1838.*



FIGURE 6 (detail figure 5)
From *Galerie zu Shakspeare's Dramatischen Werken. In Umrissen, erfunden und gestochen von Moritz Retzsch, erste Lieferung, Hamlet, XVII, Blaetter, 1838.*





FIGURES 11, 12, 13

From *The Works of Shakspeare: Revised from the Best Authorities; with a Memoir and Essay on His Genius by Barry Cornwall, and Annotations and Introductory Remarks on the Plays by Distinguished Writers; Illustrated with Engravings on Wood from Designs by Kenny Meadows*. William Orr and Co., 1846.





FIGURES 14, 15, 16

From Staunton, Howard, editor. *The Plays of Shakespeare*. Illustrated by John Gilbert, engraved by the Brothers Dalziel, Routledge and Co., 1856–1860.



FUGURES 17, 18
From Cowden Clarke, Charles
and Mary, editors. *Cassell's
Illustrated Shakespeare: The
Plays of Shakespeare*. Illustrated
by H. C. Selous, Cassell, Petter
and Galpin, 1868.