Chapter 1. Introduction

This study proposes that we conceive of the theatrical prompt books created and used in Hamburg in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as written artefacts[1] that connect literary texts with theatrical processes, discourses, and practices on a material level and in a performative fashion.[2] Many of the observations that we will make in this book can be adapted to different, more general contexts;[3] however, they do have specific objects, namely those in the particularly rich Theater-Bibliothek [Theatre-Library] collection, located in Hamburg, and its more than 3,000 prompt books, created between around 1750 and 1880. While the rise of modern European theatre since the sixteenth century had depended on the proverbial emergence and dominance of letterpress printing, a distinct and internally diverse manuscript culture persisted within European theatre. In many historical contexts, the most prominent surviving written artefacts are prompt books that were created to ensure the technical and textual repeatability of the production in question (sometimes over decades). The term *prompt book* derives from the fact that prompters were the prime users of these volumes. During performances, prompters would whisper cues from the prompt book to help actors out with forgotten or mangled lines. The Hamburg Theater-Bibliothek collection mainly consists of written artefacts created for this purpose, but the prompt book was also the theatre troupe's master copy for the production of a play. The need to maintain prompt books and to regularly revise them according to both intra- and extra-theatrical requirements meant that the primary *fair copies* were constant-

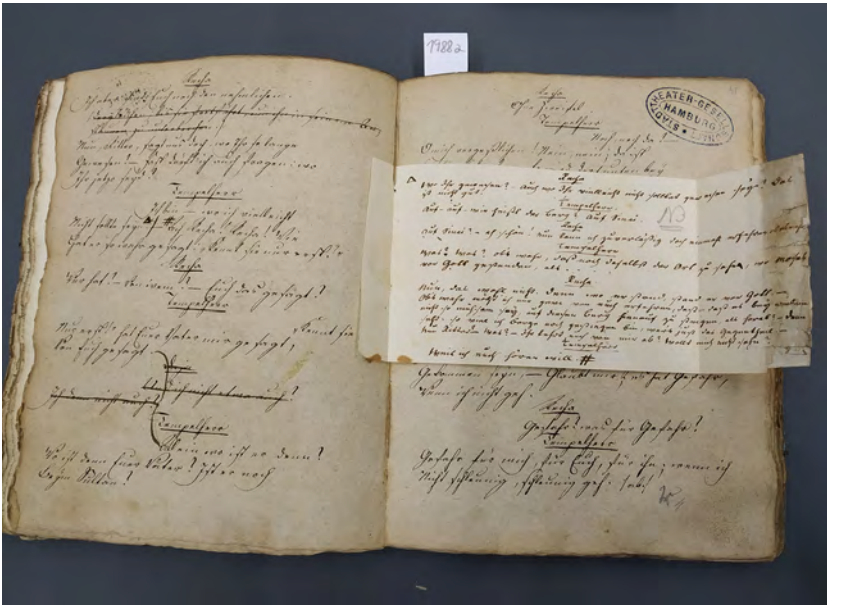
1 Throughout this study we will employ the term "written artefacts" as meaning either manuscripts in the literal sense, i.e., written by hand, or printed books that are enriched by handwriting.

2 This study builds on various shorter texts in which we have outlined our thinking and taken firsts steps in analysing our material. Cf. Schäfer 2021; cf. Weinstock 2022; cf. Schäfer/Weinstock 2023; cf. Weinstock 2024; cf. Weinstock/Schäfer 2024.

3 To some extent, our analytical framework is valid for the overall manuscript practices of modern European theatre. However, historical and local particularities apply for each and every prompt book. Nevertheless, prompt books from eighteenth and nineteenth century German spoken theatre as stored in extensive collections in Berlin, Cologne, Munich, Vienna, and Weimar largely work in a similar fashion.

ly being enriched with interacting layers produced by different writing tools, in multiple hands, and with the additional involvement of other paper practices such as gluing, cutting, and folding. These processes have resulted in a unique material biography for each prompt book – a *material performance* for all intents and purposes, deserving of attention in its own right. In this volume, we will employ thick description and close analysis coupled with broader contextualisation to examine the multi-handed creation and handwritten transformation of selected prompt books from the Hamburg Theater-Bibliothek, their complicated relationship to print, their responsiveness to the (real or perceived) demands being made by audiences and the authorities, and the complex (both aesthetic and technical) processes involved in adapting a play to the stage. (Cf. figure 1.)

Figure 1: textual and material enrichments in a prompt book for Lessing's Nathan der Weise *(Nm, 44v and 45r).*



I. Setting the Scene: A Manuscript Culture in an "Age of Print"

Discussions of European spoken-word theatre have traditionally relied on a fundamental distinction being made between drama and performance, i.e., between reading and watching, the text and its performance, where the spoken word is just one of many theatrical elements. The scholarly discussion of European theatre has largely adhered to this distinction since the dividing-up of text and perfor-

mance in Aristotle's *Poetics*.[4] It has viewed the written artefacts involved, such as the prompt books in our Hamburg context, as resources that we can use to gain knowledge about either the play as a text or the play in performance. From this perspective, prompt books and other written theatre artefacts have long been viewed as objects that provide helpful information about the textual basis or historical particularities of a theatre production. On the one hand, there is a literary text, spelt out to varying degrees depending on the theatre tradition, the time, and the circumstances, but it always contains the words to be spoken, the characters to be played, and the actions to be performed on stage. On the other hand, there are the events that take place on that very stage. What transpires on stage does not necessarily take into account the action that has been written down and prescribed. Instead, performers might be allowed to do virtually anything they want: to improvise scenes and dialogue depending on the mood of the audience, to make up parts that are sometimes only outlined in writing (or that the actors have simply not memorised that well), or to forget about language altogether and indulge in purely physical action.

Scholars of literature, theatre, and both forms of cultural expression have either privileged the text, emphasised the fleeting experience of the unique performance, or argued for some complex form of entanglement between the two.[5] However, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the various written artefacts that have been produced and used in theatres.[6] Aside from all the written documents necessary to sustain theatre operations (bank statements, contracts, playbills, tickets, etc.), the performance itself primarily relies on *scripts*[7] that set out in writing what is to be repeated the following day (or the following year, or a decade later) and what is (sometimes implicitly) left over to convention or chance: which words are to be uttered by the actors and when, where they are supposed to enter and exit the stage, when the lights are supposed to be dimmed, when the curtain is supposed to fall, etc. If circumstances change, so too must the script (which nonetheless can never completely capture what "really" transpires during

4 Cf. the notorious section 26 of Aristotle 2013.

5 Cf. Phelan 1993; cf. Halliwell 1986; cf. Malone 2021. In a vein similar to ours, Kaethler, Malone, and Roberts-Smith argue that "the term promptbook holds a complicated place in theatre history and textual studies, both of which recognise promptbooks as texts interested in stage action, but also make assumptions that lead to ongoing misunderstandings of their history and nature" (Kaethler/Malone/Roberts-Smith 2023, 4).

6 Any reference to the manuscript practices of theatre is conspicuously absent in the authoritative *Cultural History of Theatre*. Cf. Leon 2017; cf. Marx 2017. For an overview of previous research cf. Kaethler/Malone/Roberts-Smith 2023, 4–10. They primarily build their argument on the discussion of prompt books for Shakespeare-performances in the English speaking world. Cf. Shattuck 1965; cf. Werstine 2012.

7 Cf. Schechner 2003, 68; cf. Müller-Schöll 2020.

a performance). Situated between text and performance, theatre relies on written artefacts that are constantly being reshaped and that do not necessarily remain in the hands of the same people in that process.[8] Martin Schneider has recently proposed viewing prompt books as "media" that store performance history.[9] Mark Kaethler, Toby Malone, and Jennifer Roberts-Smith have recently called attention to prompt books as "polychronic actants" within the practices that make a performance possible.[10] While Schneider, Kaethler, Malone, and Roberts-Smith focus on prompt books as a means to reconstruct productions and performances, our endeavour has taken a complementary perspective on the material dimension of the written artefacts we are examining, i.e., on the ways in which their context and use have transformed them into something that not only "remains"[11] of the performance but also facilitates future ones.

In twenty-first-century, globalised, experimental performance art, scripts can consist of intricate digital spreadsheet files or, conversely, just of a bundle of scribbled notes for the stage set-up.[12] If no words are spoken, there is no need to write down any words. If they are improvised, only an outline needs to be jotted down or memorised. What needs to be written down digitally or by hand depends on the customs of the artists, the demands of the performance space, and overall conventions. This is a truism that can be applied to European theatre culture. A tradition stemming from the sixteenth century that would retroactively be seen as the "rebirth" of ancient Greek theatre shifted the dramatic text into the centre of attention.[13] It stood side by side with other traditions that relied on extemporisation, often that of the spoken word as well. There is no reliable information about whether the text excerpts we have from the Italian *commedia dell'arte* or Ger-

8 From the point of view of our study, the relationship between text and theatrical performance (or overall theatrical production) would need to be reconsidered. A performance would neither consist of the "execution" of the dramatic text in the Aristotelian or Hegelian sense nor would the text solely provide "material" to be used at will. Other metaphors such as the "transformation" of a dramatic text into a performance, the text as an "instrument" to be tailored and interpreted, or the dramatic text as interface between literature and theatre would also need to be tweaked to take the open-ended processes that take place in a prompt book into account. For these processes, cf. the following chapter. For the respective concepts, cf., for example, Weimann 2000 ("instrument"); cf. H. T. Lehmann 2006 ("material"); cf. Worthen 2010 ("interface").

9 Cf. M. Schneider 2021: Schneider uses a slightly different conceptual framework to study prompt books and related written artefacts in their historical contexts from the Middle Ages to contemporary theatre. While Schneider focuses on prompt books as a means to reconstruct the productions and performances in question, our endeavour focuses on the material dimension of the respective written artefacts.

10 Cf. Kaethler/Malone/Roberts-Smith 2023.

11 For a discussion of the non-transitory aspects of theatre performances, cf. R. Schneider 2012.

12 Cf. Müller-Schöll 2020, 77–83.

13 Cf. Brauneck 2012, 127–190; cf. Dupont 2007.

man travelling theatre (*Wanderbühne*) derive from written artefacts that were used in the theatre or taken down by audience members.[14]

It is this text-based aspect of the European theatre tradition that our study is interested in. The dramatic scripts that have survived from different contexts often include paper files with performers' parts written out in ink (often stitched together as a booklet[15] while the etymology of, for example, the German "Rolle" [part, role] is literally roll, i.e., a scroll), as well as set-up lists for the technical teams (decoration, scenery), and, most prominently, handwritten master copies of the play and any additional information. These were usually paper quires which were stitched together and bound into what were referred to as "prompt books". (For the context we are interested in, there is next to no record of any draft and trial versions of their respective content.) Once assembled into a fair copy, prompt books were then updated with whatever writing tool was available when the need for an update arose (and, in our context, sometimes decades later). Once other technologies became widely available, such as print copies of plays (when they were used as performance versions), mechanical typewriters, and different photocopying methods, the use of handwriting began intermingling with those new technologies and tended to be used for updates such as corrections and notes. The more effective the other technologies became, especially with the rise of digital tools, the more handwriting shifted to the margins. But, at least in the German context, prompt books were still being created in handwriting well into the early twentieth century.[16] Moreover, anybody who has worked backstage in any role at one of the "grand houses" in recent years can testify to the pervasive use of handwritten lists and notes in the second decade of the twenty-first century, despite the widespread availability of PCs, printers, and tablets.[17]

Depending on the historical period and context, a written artefact of this kind in Germany might have remained in the care of one of the following figures: the *principal* [*Prinzipal*], i.e., the owner, chief executive, or artistic director of one of the travelling German troupes that, during the eighteenth century, began settling down in fixed places; the *artistic director,* a figure who only emerged in European theatre in mid-nineteenth century; the *inspector,* who, in Germany, has been similar in many respects to contemporary stage managers since the late eighteenth

14 Cf. Münz 1979, 53–60; cf. Kotte 2013, 160–164.

15 Cf. Maurer-Schmoock 1982, 98.

16 Take, for example, the early twentieth century written artefacts from the two "grand houses" in Hamburg. The theatre collection at Staatsbibliothek has mostly handwritten prompt books from Schauspielhaus while from the neighbouring Thalia Theater there are interleaved print copies with handwritten notes.

17 From conversations with Anna Sophie Felser, we know that handwritten notes are at least prevalent at the contemporary Hamburg Opera.

century but who also has overall management responsibilities for the company's day-to-day operations[18]; or someone who had responsibility for the prompt books as a librarian or at least custodian. As we will elucidate below, the person in charge of the master copy in the German context at the turn of the nineteenth century was often actually the prompter themselves.[19] When the respective caretaker changed, so too did the person who would potentially update the prompt book. But, as we will see in the Hamburg context, any person who was responsible for artistic or technical aspects of the performance could, of course, pick up the quill or pencil. Well-guarded from possible rivals, prompt book creation and upkeep were usually a multi-handed endeavour spanning a long period of time. The objects held in the Hamburg Theater-Bibliothek, generally books for the prompter and sometimes the inspector, bear witness to such multi-layered effects.

While taking the Hamburg Theater-Bibliothek with its late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century materials as its point of reference, this volume will also propose that we reconsider the significance of written artefacts in the modern European theatre tradition more generally. Our study suggests that we view prompt books as the centrepiece of a specific manuscript culture which developed in European theatre from the sixteenth century onwards. A "particular manuscript culture to which a given manuscript belongs" can be understood, as Jörg Quenzer puts it, as "the milieu in which it was and is produced, used and transmitted".[20] By revealing the multi-layered traces of their regular use over weeks, years, and decades, we will show that prompt books are written artefacts of interest in their own right. We will put their material biography – i.e., the material traces of use accumulated by a prompt book over time and the modifications it has undergone in the course of its existence – on display in what we refer to as the inherent *material performance*[21] of their intersecting layers. Each prompt book performatively connects the multiple agents and technologies that make up the theatre as an overall set of cultural practices.[22] In doing so, a particular practice of handwriting comes into view which outlasted the arrival and dominance of movable type printing in Europe by several centuries.

18 There was also a *Theatermeister*, which might be more idiomatically translated as "stage manager". Cf. Schröder 1798, 36f.

19 Cf. Maurer-Schmoock 1982, 88–101.

20 Quenzer 2014, 2.

21 We re-apply and redefine scholarly approaches to the material experiments with books and print conducted by the artistic European avant-gardes of the early twentieth century. We borrow the term "Materialperformanz" from Julia Nantke (Nantke 2017, 77).

22 Our study complements the renewed interest in the materiality of printed books in the European "age of the books". Cf. Spoerhase 2018; cf. Fuchs 2020; cf. Bartelmus/Mohagheghi/Rickenbacher 2023.

The intricate relationship between the growth of the vibrant trans-European theatre culture of the early modern world and the rise of letterpress printing and the ensuing, sprawling book market has been well documented.[23] What is commonly referred to as the European "age of print"[24] or the "age of the book"[25] (which is, to some extent, ongoing) had a significant influence on the reemergence of theatre on a grand scale, whether in the growing metropolises of England, France, or Spain, or beyond, e.g., in the German-speaking countries. Convincingly, Julie Stone Peters has argued in a major study that, from the sixteenth century onwards, print was one of the most important factors in shaping "early modern" and "modern" understandings of the theatre as an institution along with the dramatic genres represented in it. Printed playbills advertised performances to great effect. Newspapers and their critics amplified feedback and attention. Dedicated journals fostered fan cultures and critical discussions alike. Not least, the new accessibility of plays in print copies created links between the reading public and the theatre-going public.[26] No matter how widespread manuscripts remained within theatre contexts until the nineteenth century, it was print that effected the "rebirth" of European theatre on a grand scale.

Adding to the scope of Stone Peters's study, our undertaking has a complementary focus: it aims to grasp the multiple ways in which handwritten prompt books were crucial in everyday theatre practice, i.e., in specific artistic and practical processes, and how they interacted with their social context. The rise of European theatre may have been externally fuelled by the printing press, but internally, everything that was not printed would, of course, be written down by hand. Long before and long after the advent of the printing press in Europe, handwriting was not an indicator of uniqueness in the theatre or anywhere else (which is how handwritten letters and manuscripts by literary authors were perceived from the eighteenth century[27]); handwriting was therefore (and often still is) pragmatic in nature.[28] On the level of day-to-day theatre operations, putting something in print may just not have been worth the effort or might even have been counterproductive. Thus, the theatre cultures of early modern and modern Europe developed specific practices for writing by hand and creating manuscripts. For many practical reasons, the format of these manuscripts often emulated the most successful format of the European "age of print", the bound book, as they were stable, move-

23 Cf., above all, Stone Peters 2000.

24 Cf. Clair 1976, for example.

25 Cf. Giesecke 1998, for example.

26 Cf. Stone Peters 2000, 93–112.

27 Cf. Benne 2015.

28 Cf. Quenzer/Bondarev/Sobisch 2014.

able, storable, and constantly updatable all at once.[29] But it is the distinct writing and paper practices of prompt books' initial handwritten creation and subsequent use that sets them apart from, firstly, the uniformity and quick reproducibility aimed at by the printing press and, secondly, other instances of pragmatic writing.

II. The Hamburg Theater-Bibliothek Collection and Its Context

Our approach is local but also serves as an example of the persistence of manuscript practices in European theatre. The Hamburg Theater-Bibliothek sports a particularly rich collection that bears witness to the activities that were taking place in one of Germany's leading theatre centres at the time. The roughly 3,050 prompt books in its collection pertain to 2,100 plays from all spoken word and musical theatre genres that were being performed at the Hamburgisches Stadt-Theater [Hamburg City Theatre] at Gänsemarkt (formerly the Comödienhaus [Playhouse] and the Deutsches Nationaltheater [German National Theatre], then the Théâtre du Gänsemarkt during the French occupation) under various principals from around 1750 until 1880. Most of these artefacts are bound paper manuscripts with cardboard covers of various sizes made from inexpensive material. About 500 of them are print copies of plays that were commercially available with new covers, extra glued-in sheets, and handwritten supplements, while the rest are entirely handwritten – whether the plays were available in print or not.[30] Prompt books for productions staged from the 1770s to the 1810s and in the early 1820s form the overwhelming majority (approximately three quarters) of the collection. Although a number of them remained in use after 1827, when the building was given up for a new one at Dammtorstraße that is now home to the city opera, our study focuses on the prompt books created during the Gänsemarkt era. (Cf. figures 2, 3, 4.)

29 Cf. Latour 1986, 19f., 25–39.

30 The manuscripts and prints have been indexed for the digital Kalliope library catalogue (https://kalliope-verbund.info/). Each index includes a short description of the material status of the artefact that contains information about its length and the types of amendments that have been made to it. A short overview of the *Theater-Bibliothek* collection and its digital representation is given in Neubacher 2016. Since a recent DFG project in Hamburg has catalogued the playbills at the Comödienhaus, which later became the Stadt-Theater, the dates of the performances and their changing participants can now be identified in many cases; cf. Jahn/Mühle/Eisenhardt/Malchow/M. Schneider (https://www.stadttheater.uni-hamburg.de).

Figure 2: a handwritten and a printed prompt book for Shakespeare's Maaß für Maaß [Measure for Measure] (Theater-Bibliothek 514, *122 and 123, and* Theater-Bibliothek 948b, *32 and 33*).

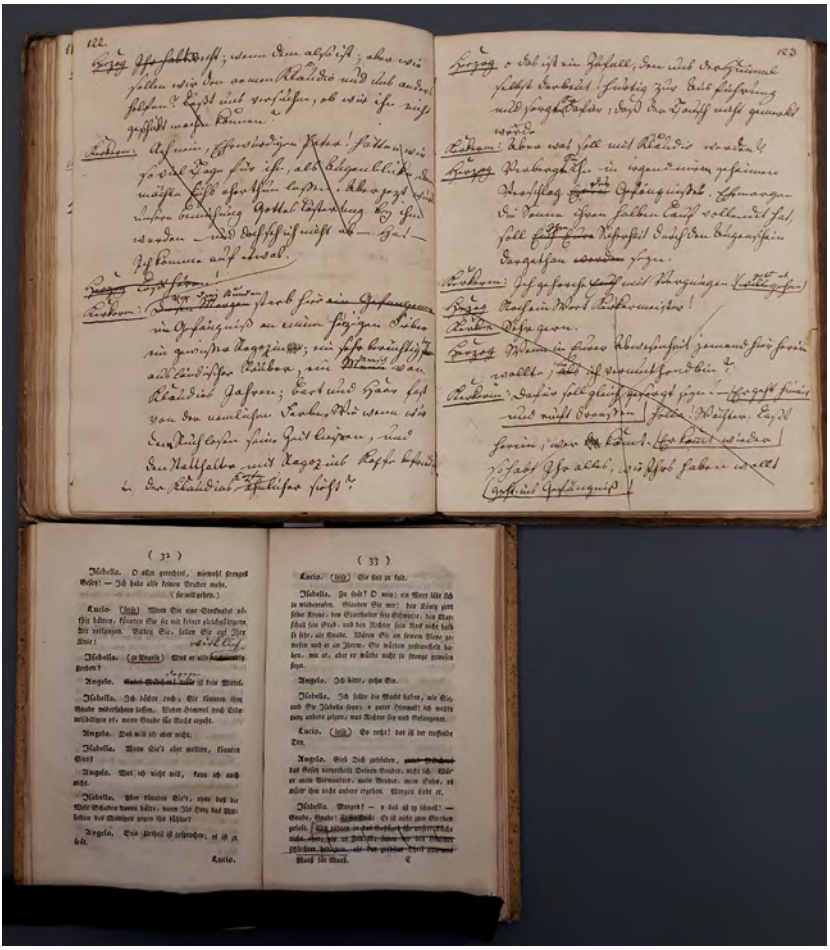


Figure 3: the front cover of an 1815 prompt book for Shakespeare's Othello *(*Theater-Bibliothek: 586a*).*

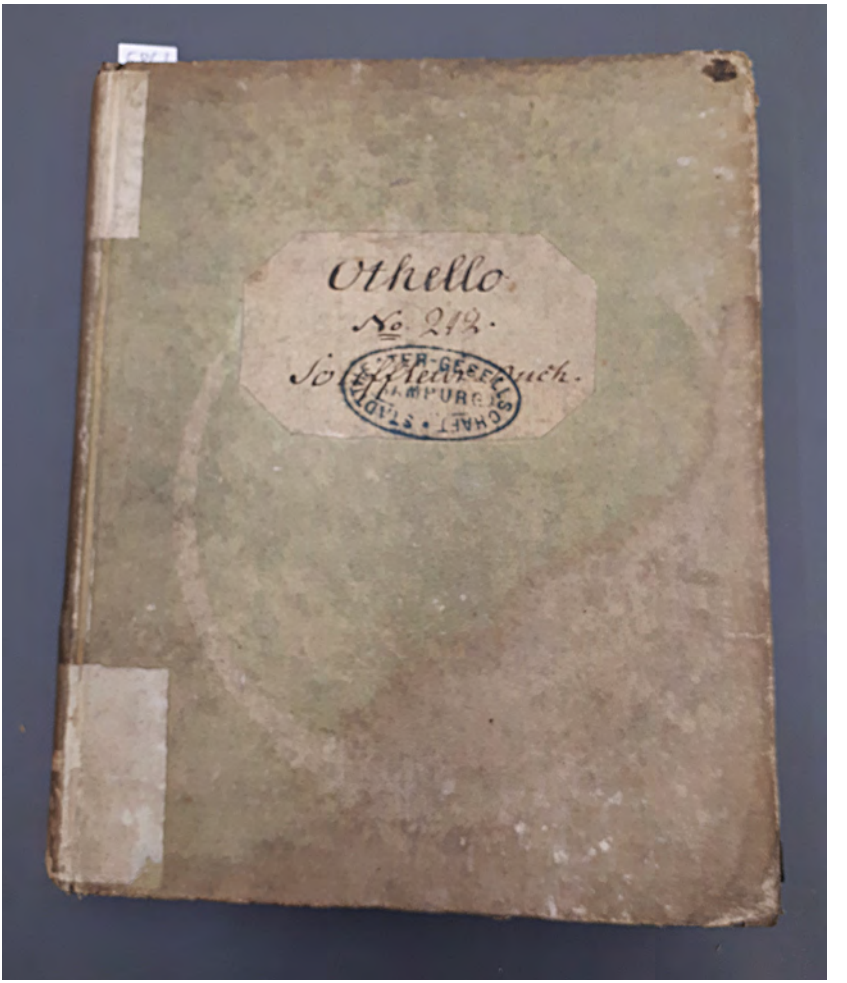


Figure 4: the complete cover of Theater-Bibliothek: 586a.

The Theater-Bibliothek is also a treasure trove for musical materials used by the orchestra, a fixture at the Stadt-Theater (and at most German theatres at the time).[31] Melodramas[32] and operas were a staple in the repertory; musical numbers and ballets were often used as preludes or epilogues.[33] At the turn of the century, more and more plays were being performed without musical elements supplementing the spoken text and without any musical preludes or epilogues either. However, the orchestra sprang into action during the interludes between acts, when stage scenery needed to be changed. The privately run theatre was bound by contract to employ the official city orchestra, at least for these interludes.[34] It may be partly for this reason that hardly any connections between the prompt books and the sheet music can be found; the latter will therefore not feature prominently in our study.

In the Anglophone world, *prompt book* has come to mean any text in book format in which a stage version and additional stage instructions are recorded. While a prompt book in the strict sense means the written artefact used by the prompter, prompt books in a more general sense can refer to the written artefacts either used by the respective equivalent of stage manager or created by an artistic director (to put forward their aesthetic vision in formats that ranged from notebook

31 Cf. Mühle 2023; cf. Neubacher 2016, 29–34.

32 Cf. Rentsch 2016.

33 Cf. Jahn 2016.

34 Cf. Malchow 2022, 162.

scribbles to fully fleshed out descriptions, especially from the twentieth century onwards) and their assistants (to obtain a record of all the technical information). In English, *prompt book* can have many meanings such as part book, memorial book, stage manager's book, or preparation copy. Prompt book might also refer to a commercially traded printed book containing the text of a stage adaptation of a certain production.[35] However, in the German context, these different written artefacts are referred to as director's books (*Regiebücher*, previously *Dirigierbücher*), inspector's books (*Inspektionsbücher*, sometimes synonymous with, sometimes distinct to *Inspizierbücher*), or published stage adaptations (sometimes referred to as *publizierte Bühnenfassungen*).[36] For the sake of convenience, this study will use *prompt book* as an overall term of reference but will draw occasional distinctions when necessary. In most cases, categorisation as a prompt book is in fact correct in the strict sense: we are examining the written artefacts used by prompters. For a short period towards the end of the eighteenth century, the texts of stage adaptations in Hamburg were sometimes printed for commercial publication, but they did not explicitly advertise their connection to the stage. The concept of the artistic director (and his "own" book) only emerged in the mid-nineteenth century.[37]

In addition to prompt books in the strict sense, the Hamburg Theater-Bibliothek collection also contains a number of *inspection books* to be used backstage. *Prompt books* and *inspection books* often come in pairs for the same production. It is relatively certain that these books were used in tandem. However, there is often no definite way of determining whether this characterisation was made upon the creation of the written artefact or at a later point in time. Some of the written artefacts referred to as prompt books include content that was presumably required by the inspector (casting, set, and prop lists, entrances and curtain calls) and vice versa. Sometimes, it seems to have depended on the circumstances whether one written artefact served both purposes or two written artefacts were created separately. In the following, we will make this distinction where required, but we will examine both types as part of the Hamburg manuscript practices that this study is interested in.

The period spanning the 1770s to 1820s on the Hamburg Stadt-Theater stage was a significant period of theatre history in the German-speaking world. It was the first time that a theatre at a fixed location that was not a court with a patron proved that it could be economically successful and was praised by critics as artistically sophisticated. The beginning of this period was shaped by Friedrich Ludwig Schröder who, as principal and lead actor but also as adapter of plays and

35 Cf. Brockett 1999, 346; cf. Beal 2008, 318–320; cf. Pavis 1998, xvi, 362. (Pavis solves the problem of wording by subsuming the different written artefacts under the term "staging book".)

36 Cf. Düringer/Barthels 1841, 177.

37 Cf. Roselt 2015, 9–15.

playwright, achieved renown for his innovative, proto-realist aesthetics and his new style of "natural" acting, with the theatre revelling in Schröder's afterglow after his retirement.[38] In the second half of the eighteenth century, Hamburg had become one of Germany's theatre hubs, despite the ongoing reservations of the local clergy.[39] The short-lived attempt in the late 1760s to establish a *Nationaltheater* [national theatre] at the recently built Comödienhaus [playhouse] at Gänsemarkt is well known. Due to Lessing's involvement and the direction he outlined in his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* [*Hamburg Dramaturgy*], the period 1767–69 has been canonised in literary and theatre history as the origin of a specific kind of "German" theatre that aimed to educate civil society.[40] Things were more complicated in practice. The repertory of the Nationaltheater still included the usual entertainment provided by the theatres of the time, such as ballet, pantomime, and light opera.[41] The high regard in which the Nationaltheater was held was in large part due to the acting prowess of the theatre company originally established by Konrad Ernst Ackermann, who had commissioned the construction of the Comödienhaus in 1763 and then leased it to the Nationaltheater. He went on to become one of its lead actors and returned as a principal after the endeavour's economic failure. As an actor, he was one of the pioneers of the new realist acting style, and as principal he introduced ensemble-based working methods that were unusual for the time (brought about by holding group rehearsals instead of relying on individual extemporisation).[42] After his death in 1769, his wife Sophie Charlotte and stepson Friedrich Ludwig Schröder (then just twenty-five) took over as co-principals and built on Ackermann's legacy. Schröder's fame as principal and actor soon stretched far beyond Hamburg's borders. Such was his popularity that, when his coffin was ceremoniously transported to the graveyard in 1816, mourning crowds are said to have lined the streets.[43] Sophie Ackermann retired in 1780. Except for a three-year stint in Vienna, Friedrich Ludwig Schröder headed up the theatre and its company until 1798 and returned for another one-year stint as co-principal during the French occupation from 1811 to 1812.[44] In the meantime, Schröder, and after his death his heirs, leased the theatre building and its repertory of plays, which was stored in the prompt books, to the principals. It was only when the theatre moved to its new building on Dammtorstraße in 1827 that a handover of the rights

38 Cf. Hoffmann 1939; cf. Litzmann 1890–1894; cf. Jahn 2016.

39 Cf. Geffcken 1851.

40 Cf. Haider-Pregler 1980.

41 Cf. Jahn 2016.

42 Cf. Malchow 2022, 226–238; cf. Kotte 2013, 266f., 293–295.

43 Cf. Meyer 1819b, 415.

44 Cf. Meyer 1819b, 317–322.

to the archive, i.e., the prompt books, was negotiated.[45] It is these objects that form the backbone of the Theater-Bibliothek collection. Many of them have speckled brown cardboard covers, indicating that they had been part of Schröder's own collection at some point.[46] While Schröder's handwriting is all over these specific prompt books, and often accompanied by an authoritative final stroke of his pen, his is but one of many hands. (It is well known that Schröder often worked with collaborators for his stage adaptations.[47]) Over time, the handwriting of the respective decision-makers dissolved into the web of different layers that enrich a given prompt book.

The prompt books that are now assembled in the Theater-Bibliothek collection were of vital importance to the new aesthetics developed by Ackermann and then Schröder in line with the views of eighteenth-century German-speaking intellectuals and critics who, influenced by the French theatre tradition of the seventeenth century (*le théâtre classique*), were demanding a major overhaul of the theatre. As part of the wider cultural transformation of the theatre's social reputation, adherence to the literary text was posited as a central element of this new aesthetics. Proponents called for new modes of interacting, moving, and speaking on stage to represent complex new dramatic characters and conflicts. Instead of relying on extemporisation, these characters and their conflicts were written down beforehand as literary texts. Thus, acting was to be based on the dramatic script being staged. In other words, the performance became increasingly subject to the text – at least as a theoretical goal that, in the late eighteenth century, frequently did not correspond to practice.[48] However, Ackermann's and then Schröder's troupe were renowned for spearheading developments. In order to become such a stable point of reference, the text had to be written down. The new theatre aesthetics was accompanied by its own manuscript practices, relying on the prompt books that also served as master copies and templates for the actors' roles.

Many of the practices pioneered or consolidated by Schröder are documented in his *Gesetze des Hamburgischen Theaters* [*Laws of the Hamburg Theatre*], a list of regulations. Schröder published an early version in 1792, and an extended version circulated within his theatre until his first retirement in 1798.[49] Schröder insisted on

45 Cf. Uhde 1879, 6f.

46 Cf. Uhde 1879, 14.

47 Cf. Hoffmann 1939, 18–21; cf. Malchow 2022, 99; cf. Chapter 5.

48 Cf. Münz 1979; cf. Krebs 1985; cf. Graf 1992; cf. Fischer-Lichte/Schönert 1999; cf. Meyer 2012.

49 We are referring to the internal 1798 version as stored in Hamburg Staatsbibliothek. An initial, slimmer version of the Gesetze des *Hamburgischen Theaters* [*Laws of the Hamburg Theatre*] was published in 1792 in a periodical named *Annalen des Theaters* [*Annals of the Theatre*]; cf. Schröder 1792, 3–22. An English translation, titled *Hamburg Theatre Regulations*, is included in Brandt 1992, 108–114. Schröder's first draft of *Laws* which was published in 1781 was similar to rules and regulations of other theatres of the time. Cf. M. Schneider 2018, 104.

collective rehearsals to enhance the understanding of a text and its corresponding enactment on stage.[50] Schröder insisted (or at least tried to insist) that actors and actresses would know and understand their parts precisely rather than improvising them. Schröder also worked on abandoning the habit prevalent among actors of simply standing still whenever they did not have anything to say.[51] Now, everybody had to continue playing their parts, albeit silently, with the purpose of keeping up the illusion of the fictitious world.[52]

The actors' lines and cues were delivered to them on loosely bound handwritten sheets, most of which have been lost in the Hamburg context and are not contained in the Theater-Bibliothek.[53] However, the stage adaptation of the play itself was key: a handwritten copy containing the complete text and frequently additional relevant information about, e.g., actors, props, technical effects, and entrance cues (stage left, stage right), as well as lighting, music, sound effects, etc. Anyone with good enough handwriting, whether aspiring actor or professional scribe, could be employed (and compensated) to copy actors' parts or the fair copy of a whole prompt book.[54] Only a few prompt books from the Theater-Bibliothek can be attributed to a distinct hand with certainty. All copyists were overseen by the prompter, who sometimes went to work copying themselves.[55] There was generally one prompter per German theatre company at the turn of the century – usually a man, in Hamburg a woman until 1776.[56] As stated above, and as we will elaborate upon in the next chapter, the Hamburg prompter was also the librarian and archivist responsible for a company's prompt book collection as a whole and all

50 Cf. Malchow 2022, 250–261.

51 Cf. Malchow 2022, 261–264.

52 For an overview of the new modes of rehearsing and staging that emerged in the late eighteenth century as well as Schröder's contributions to the transformation of the respective practices, cf. Maurer-Schmoock 1982, 168–202; cf. Hoffmeier 1964, 97–104.

53 The notable exception are all five part books for August Klingemann's one-act play *Die Matrone von Ephesus*, which he published as *Die Witwe von Ephesus* [*The Widow of Ephesus*] in 1818. The catalogue of Theater-Bibliothek lists a prompt book, an inspection book, as well as booklets for all five parts: *Theater-Bibliothek: 492a*, *Theater-Bibliothek*: *492b* and *Theater-Bibliothek: 492c1–5*. The written artefacts are dated ca. 1811. Since they include a censor's note they are firmly to be placed within the French period. However, apart from the censor's approval, there are no traces of use whatsoever. There is also no testimony of the play ever having been performed (for example, in Jahn/Mühle/Eisenhardt/Malchow/M. Schneider (https://www.stadttheater.uni-hamburg.de)). Perhaps the reason that these written artefacts have been preserved is precisely that they were not given out to actors.

54 Cf. Maurer-Schmoock 1982, 98.

55 Cf. Chapter 2.

56 Cf. Malchow 2022, 253.

the other written artefacts created at Schröder's company.[57] They were expected to make sure that as few members of the company as possible had access to the full texts.[58] Schröder's *Gesetze* clearly state in the second law "den Souffleur betreffend" [concerning the prompter]: "Er soll daher die Rollen eines Manuscripts von zwey und mehreren Personen schreiben lassen" [Therefore, he should have the roles in a manuscript copied by two or more people].[59] If several scribes were copying separate sections of the play, e.g., specific actors' lines and their cues, it reduced the risk that any one of them would take off with a copy of the whole play.

Such secrecy was long deemed necessary because the repertoire, i.e., the manuscripts of the plays in the company director's possession, contributed to the company's economic success and standing. It allowed theatres to stage plays that had not been published in print and that other companies did not own. Standing out like this could be crucial in the competitive field of professional theatre, where directors ran their companies as independent entrepreneurs, touring from town to town and fair to fair. In the limited time they spent in one fixed place, they tried to attract as many paying spectators as possible.[60]

However, towards the end of the eighteenth century, an increasing number of companies stopped touring constantly as it was now possible to work at a permanent location, like Schröder's company did in Hamburg. Due to restrictions on the number of days they were allowed to perform there, Schröder's company continued to do a lot of travelling, but they earned more and obtained more local Hamburg permits over time.[61] An increase in professional stability was accompanied by the growing need to vary their programme in order to keep the local audience interested.[62] The periods between productions grew longer, and their reliance on the written records of stage adaptations and technical arrangements increased. In order to diversify their repertories, company directors also asked authors or the directors of other companies for copies of certain plays, which, if they received a favourable assessment, were copied by the prompter and then included in the company's own repertory. Another option was to put on contests between playwrights – in the anticipation that they would enter usable material. Sometimes,

57 Cf. Schröder 1798, 28.

58 An overview of the tasks and the requirements can also be found in Schröder 1798, 28–30.

59 Schröder 1798, 28; Brandt 1992, 112.

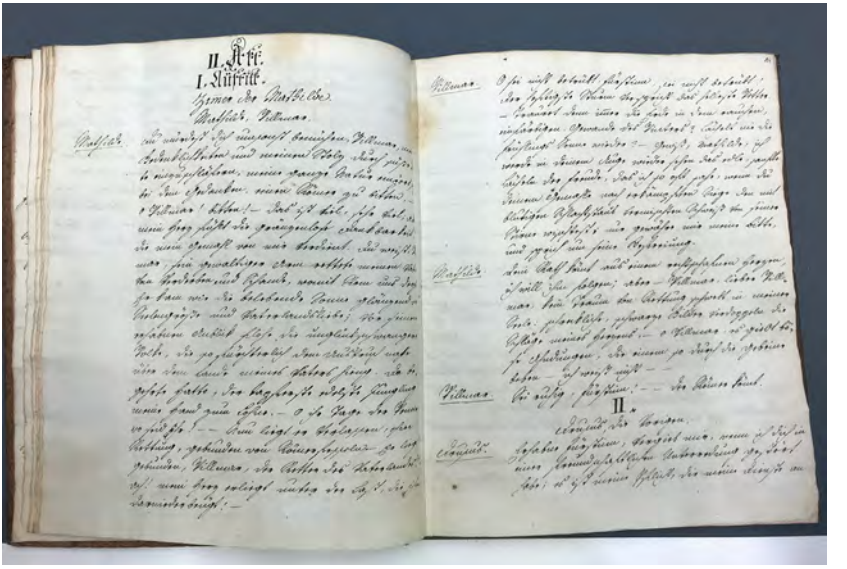
60 For the performance conditions and structure of a theatre company in Germany in the eighteenth century, cf. Maurer-Schmoock 1982. For the specific Hamburg circumstances, cf. Malchow 2022.

61 Cf. Malchow 2022, 238–246.

62 From 1750 to 1800, the population of Hamburg increased from 75,000 to 130,000. The opera that was located on the site of the Stadt-Theater held 2,000 spectators. It can be assumed that the Stadt-Theater had a similar capacity. Cf. Malchow 2022, 138–152.

authors also sent in plays on their own initiative in the hope that they would be staged.[63] Either way, manuscripts remained guarded secrets but were circulated more and more frequently among theatres thanks to the relaxing of policy regarding the exclusiveness of company repertories. However, this only increased the number of possible hands and layers revising, updating, and thus enriching prompt books. (Cf. figure 5.)

Figure 5: Theater-Bibliothek: 641, *13v and 14r. Joseph Marius von Babo's heroic tragedy* Die Römer in Teutschland *(created presumably shortly before 1780) was a contribution to a writing contest.*



As previously mentioned, from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, playwrights were having their plays published in print more often and were thus positioning themselves within a growing literary market. While many plays had become easily available as print copies, the specific adaptations used for the stage were still valuable.[64] A print copy could only be aligned by hand with the stage adaptation if the changes were not too drastic and the text remained legible. In most cases, a handwritten version, the fair copy, would be created from the template at hand: The principal might have made some adjustments to a printed book

63 Cf. Neubacher 2016, 24–27.

64 Up until the nineteenth century, company directors in European theatre capitals kept up the habit of sending scribes to copy another company's adaptation of a play live over the course of a few nights of its performance. Cf. Stone Peters 2000, 219–225.

or a manuscript sent in by an author – or, as sometimes in Schröder's case in the 1770s, he might have developed his own adaptation of one of Shakespeare's plays. The fair copy was then enriched with any updates that were made after the quires had been stitched and bound together as a book, whether in short-term fixes such as corrections of obvious errors or in long-term transformations, e.g., when a play had been on hiatus for few years and technical conditions had changed, or lines needed to be adapted to reflect the assumed new popular taste. Principals, actors, inspectors, and prompters would come and go; prompt books often remained in use for decades. They developed their own material biographies, which were written by multiple hands (often the principal, the prompter, and any other person in charge) and enriched over long periods of time.

It is these internal dynamics of creating and updating prompt books that our study is interested in and aims to situate within their respective contexts. German (and other European) prompt books at the turn of the nineteenth century and beyond are generic in nature; they follow predictable and repeatable patterns. A prompt book used in Weimar or Vienna during the same period does not look much different from one in the Hamburg collection. Even though "[t]here is no standard operating process for marking prompt-books: Annotations are determined by the individual prompter, stage-manager, or recorder"[65], the conventions of prompt book notation and the symbols used in them are often vaguely similar on both national and international levels; some of them have remained stable over time.[66] However, due to their long-term use, each prompt book has also become a unique written artefact – each a beast of its own. While general patterns are quite easy to observe, each and every prompt book is also an individual rabbit warren of multiple layers of writing and diverse paper practices. The following chapters aim to work through the *they're all the same but they're all unique* conundrum by continuously negotiating the relationship between the overall context and the individual prompt books.

65 Malone 2021, 20.

66 It is instructive to compare the abbreviations Düringer and Barthels named in the respective article of their 1841 insiders' German theatre lexicon to the notation practices Arne Langer has compiled for the prompt books of 19th century European opera. The similarities point to widespread overarching practices, the differences probably to a large scope of variation (rather than a difference in genre). Cf. Düringer/Barthels 1841, 9–12; cf. Langer 1997, 155–170.

III. Framework and Outline

Our study originated at the inter- and transdisciplinary Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) at Universität Hamburg, more specifically within the research cluster "Understanding Written Artefacts". We have made full use of this stimulating and collegial environment and have tried out points of view that were new to us. Not least, the CSMC lab performed a scientific ink analysis on a prompt book to allow us to better distinguish between certain layers of writing, which is part of Chapter 5. Wherever productive, we have introduced, adapted, and applied manuscript studies methods and terminology, which have generally been developed for objects produced before the European "age of print" and "age of the book". Their foundations lie in the *material philology* approach put forward by Stephen Nichols, who perceives a text as something "fundamentally unfixed, always open to new inflection" and therefore as something without a "definitive expression".[67] We have found this to be a very apt description of the business of a dramatic text, which was always unfinished, as it was written down and then revised in a prompt book, which itself was regularly changed on a material basis.[68]

Moreover, our open concept of the written text allows us to draw on the 1970s *critique génétique* approach regarding the development of literary manuscripts. Having said that, we do not follow the in part inherent glorification of the individual artistic process and do not attribute any teleology to it. *Critique génétique* conceives of the dynamics of writing processes as, in the words of Almuth Grésillon, a "performative act of becoming text"[69] which takes place in the written artefacts that form the "avant-texte"[70] of an oeuvre. If we take a *critique génétique* perspective on an "open set of writing processes",[71] then theatre texts are a particularly interesting case. Since they are connected to the "stage world", texts written for the theatre are subject to its dynamics and are constantly being adapted to meet the requirements of the stage: "In principle, there is no such thing as a *ne varietur* 'version' of a theatrical work, since each new production can lead not only to new

67 Nichols 1997, 17.

68 As Mark Kaethler, Toby Malone, and Jennifer Roberts-Smith put it, a prompt book is a "process" (Kaethler/Malone/Roberts-Smith 2023, 10) rather than a stable entity. In Shakespeare scholarship, this is already state of the art: "What the promptbook remembers is not an event but the movement towards and across events, always marking process." (Holland 2010, 13) The dramatic text "is not an object at all, but rather a dynamic process that evolves over time in response to the needs and sensibilities of its users" (Kidnie 2009, 2).

69 "text before the text", Grésillon 2010, 304.

70 "Performance-Akt der Textwerdung", Grésillon 2010, 304, 291.

71 "ensemble ouvert des processus d'écriture", Grésillon 2016, 12.

versions, but also to new textual twists."[72] Grésillon also points out that theatre texts "are often 'two-handed' writing, i.e., the product of several writers", which is due to the "encounter between a written text and data belonging to the world of the stage (actors, voices, gestures, set, space, lighting)".[73] This applies to prompt books in particular because in most cases they are created, used, and updated by people who belong to the "stage world".

Nevertheless, our aim is to describe and analyse the performative dimensions Grésillon identifies not only with respect to the content of prompt books but also to the extent that they are constitutive for the materiality of a single, multi-layered written artefact. We are interested in the *material performance* and processual dynamics of the prompt books used in the theatre. Although prompt books are sometimes fascinating to behold as objects, ours is not an aesthetic interest but a practical one. Our endeavour clearly reflects a renewed interest in praxeological aspects of literature and theatre.[74] Our interest is related to the interest in writing as a cultural technique,[75] especially in the vein of what has been called research into the "writing scene",[76] i.e., the ways in which writing, its instruments, and its bodily and cultural conditions interact.[77] We examine the writing and paper practices that went into creating and using prompt books, as well as the feedback loops that prompt books formed with their contexts: their material biographies created by various hands over long periods of time; their relationship to a culture increasingly dominated by print, a commercial book market, and notions of individual authorship[78]; the connections between prompt books and the external demands being made by audiences and the authorities; and the internal aesthetic, technical,

72 "univers scénique", "L'œuvre théâtrale ne connaît en principe pas de version *ne varietur*; puisque chaque nouvelle mise en scène peut entraîner non seulement de nouvelles visions, mais aussi des rebondissements textuels", Grésillon 2008, 266.

73 "sont souvent de l'écriture 'à deux mains', c'est-à-dire le produit de plusieurs scripteurs", "rencontre entre un texte écrit et des données appurtenant en propre à l'univers scénique (acteurs, voix, gestes, décor, espace, lumière)", Grésillon 2008, 249.

74 Cf. Martus/Spoerhase 2022 for the practices of the humanities themselves; cf. Kershaw 2011 for the 'practice turn' of theatre and performance studies.

75 Cf. Zanetti 2012.

76 Cf. Campe 2021; cf. Stingelin/Giuriato/Zanetti 2004.

77 However, while writing scene research tends to focus on resistances thematized or staged in literature in the structure of writing processes, we are interested in their execution, their causes and effects, and their dynamics in the prompt book itself.

78 Tobias Fuchs argues that the status of authorship in the mid- and late eighteenth century is linked to a publication in print, cf. Fuchs 2021. In emerging copyright laws, authors became the individual creators of individual works – their own works. The authors' name vouched for the quality of the works, through which authors position themselves within a growing literary market. Authors' authority over their works thus combined an aesthetic dimension with economic and ultimately also legal aspects, cf. Plumpe 1979; cf. Bosse 2014.

and practical considerations of adapting plays to the stage. All the prompt books we will examine in the following chapters were subject to the pushing and pulling that took place within this multipolar forcefield. However, each chapter will place special emphasis on only one or two aspects of the prompt book in question. We have also supplemented our discussions digitally with links to scans of the prompt books that we will examine and manuals laying out how we think it best to decipher them, as well as several overviews of layers that we have identified and transcriptions that we have made during the course of our work.[79]

After two more general chapters, three case studies will examine individual prompt books or pairs of prompt books within the milieu that constituted their specific manuscript culture. After this introduction, Chapter 2 will outline the practice of prompting in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The fact that prompting depended on someone reading in a hushed voice from a prompt book is often taken for granted. In contrast, our account draws out the intricate relationship between prompter, prompting, and prompt book, while paying particular attention to Schröder's Hamburg troupe. Chapter 3 will then take a manuscript studies approach to present the most common writing and paper practices employed in the prompt books of the Hamburg Theater-Bibliothek. In Chapter 4, close analyses of two prompt books for August von Kotzebue's *Die Sonnen-Jungfrau* [*The Virgin of the Sun*] will take a look behind the scenes of creating and updating multi-handed and multi-layered prompt books. This is the only example of a preserved trial copy in which the Kotzebue's play was first written down and then revised for what became the actual prompt book for the 1790 production. Both fair copies were distributed between several scribes to prevent bootlegging. The chapter will go on to analyse two revision periods in 1813 and 1823, during which the prompt book, which was used until 1826, was revised by several hands and writing tools. Chapter 5 will then assume a broader perspective by situating Schröder's 1770s Hamburg adaptations of Shakespeare at the intersection between plays published in print and their stage adaptations. In a second step, the chapter will retrace these interconnections with regard to the hasty revisions Schröder made to the prompt book for *Othello* (to better tailor the failing 1776 production to public tastes) and the longevity of his 1778 production of *König Lear* [*King Lear*] in Hamburg (a print copy of which was revised to meet censorship requirements in 1812). After that, Chapter 6 will zoom in on the practical and technical implications of revising a play for the stage. An adaptation by Friedrich Schiller of G. E. Lessing's 1779 dramatic parable *Nathan der Weise* [*Nathan the Wise*] was copied by hand into an inspector's book, while a print copy of Lessing's original version was reworked by hand into a prompt book by employing various paper

79 Cf. http://doi.org/10.25592/uhhfdm.13916 (Felser/Funke/Göing/Hussain/Schäfer/Weinstock/Bosch 2024).

practices. Both written artefacts then took on lives of their own as the play was intermittently staged over a period of forty years between the 1800s and 1840s. Finally, Chapter 7 will run through the ways in which we hope our study can be productive for the disciplines we have drawn on, i.e., theatre, literary, and manuscript studies.

We do not intend to give a (quantitative) overview of scribes, users, revisers, or, for that matter, of genres, periods, or any other patterns that can be observed in the prompt books of the Hamburg Theater-Bibliothek collection. Here, a lot of valuable research has been and remains to be done. Our research is deeply indebted to the work carried out by Bernhard Jahn, Jacqueline Malchow, and Martin Schneider[80], especially to their effort to reconstruct the Stadt-Theater programme for the period 1770–1850 from playbill leaflets and other sources.[81]

We will not be able to do justice to every aspect of the Hamburg repertory with its focus on comedies[82], and operas[83] as well as its inclusion of prologues[84], one-act plays, and interspersed musical numbers. Although there are three prompt books for the same production in a few cases (a separate prompt book for arias alongside a libretto prompt book, and one for the inspector[85]), there is next to no interaction between the prompt and inspection books on the one hand and the musical material on the other. Similarly, prologues and one-act plays seem to have been reused only when they still suited requirements; the respective written artefacts were rarely enriched or reshaped, and also warrant a quantitative approach.

The prompt books examined in this study were chosen on the basis of how representative they are of prompt book practices from that time. We will describe their content and material form in relation to those practices. The plays that make up their content might not proportionally represent the entire repertory, but they do reveal perspectives that we find paradigmatic in one way or another. Kotzebue's *Die Sonnen-Jungfrau* stands for the crowd-pleasing, entertaining plays that dominated the repertory. Moreover, the Stadt-Theater not only emphasised its productions of Shakespeare, Lessing, and Schiller in order to underline its own artistic quality – those authors and their plays were also very popular. However, by no means had they already achieved the canonical status that they would come to enjoy over the next two centuries. Instead of demonstrating the diversity of what then comprised the "canon" (which, again, would require a more quantitative approach), we aim to

80 Cf. Jahn 2016; cf. Malchow 2022; cf. M. Schneider 2023; cf. M. Schneider 2024.

81 Cf. Jahn/Mühle/Eisenhardt/Malchow/M. Schneider (https://www.stadttheater.uni-hamburg.de).

82 Cf. Dennerlein 2021.

83 Cf. Neubacher 2016, 29–34.

84 Cf. Özelt/Schneider 2024.

85 Cf. the written artefacts for Salieri's opera *Axur: Theater-Bibliothek: 1403a* (for the inspector), *Theater-Bibliothek: 1403b* (for the libretto without the arias), *Theater-Bibliothek: 1403c* (for the arias).

demonstrate how entirely uncanonical later canonised plays were when analysed as part of prompt book practices at the turn of the century – as texts that were in flux, inconsistent, and always up for a potential revision.[86]

A well-established (and largely justified) historical narrative generally associates the period spanning the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries with the emergence of new cultural norms and concepts, including notions of individual authorship (which expressed themselves in copyright laws) and works of art (such as dramatic texts) that were no longer beholden to outside authorities. The theatre of that period both relied and did not rely on those notions, and the material biography of a prompt book exposes their multi-layered underbelly. On some heavily revised or glued-over prompt book manuscript pages, the truism that every text consists of a web of intertextual quotations has become a material reality. The same applies for the truism that every theatre production is a collective endeavour.[87] While none of the multiple hands and tools that co-created and continuously updated a prompt book could have laid claim to authorship as it appeared on the playbill leaflet, these prompt book practices nevertheless provided the critical infrastructure[88] that made the staging of "plays" by "authors" possible in the first place.

86 If there is a common thread running through the plays in these prompt books, it is how, in the distinctly local world of prompt book creation and use, the content of the plays depicted the greater world outside of Hamburg. In line with the changing fashions of the time, *otherness* stepped onto the Hamburg stage as the "Moor" Othello whose agency runs counter to the staple exotic moor characters in other 1770s dramatic texts. In the 1790s, the fashionable Incas in Kotzebue's *Sonnen-Jungfrau* [*Virgin of the Sun*] served as exotic elements while at the same time delivering a thinly veiled mockery of the German present. In the 1800s, it was the backdrop of Orientalism that led to the discovery of Lessing's much earlier play, set in Jerusalem during the Crusades, for the stage. The practices that reworked the plays and thus reshaped the prompt books often made reference to this *otherness*: Othello's unsettling agency, the Incas' too-close-to-home monotheism, the changing negotiation of religion in *Nathan der Weise*. Such changes cannot be separated from their manifestations in the material biography of the respective prompt book.

87 Cf. Weigel 1952.

88 Cf. Etzold 2023.