

Krystyna Kujawińska-Courtney / Izabella Penier /
Katarzyna Kwapisz-Williams (eds.)

“No other but a woman’s reason”: Women on Shakespeare. Towards Commemorating the 450th Anniversary of Shakespeare’s Birth



PETER LANG
EDITION

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To Rev. Ryszard Gołuch with gratitude
Krystyna

Contents

Contributors	9
Introduction.....	11

PART 1

Kathryn Prince

“True Originall Copies”: Charlotte Lennox’s <i>Shakespeare Illustrated</i> , Originality, Invention, and Eighteenth-Century Shakespeare Reception	21
--	----

Catherine M.S. Alexander

Shakespeare and the Unsexed Females	33
---	----

Anna Cetera

Woman, Thy Name is Embarrassment! The Princess and the Playwright	53
---	----

Nita N. Kumar

“Shakespeare Is a Black Woman”: African American Women Writers and Shakespeare.....	65
--	----

PART 2

Giovanna Buonanno

Shakespeare and the Nineteenth-century Italian International Actress: Adelaide Ristori as Lady Macbeth.....	77
--	----

Krystyna Kujawińska Courtney

“Born outside the Magic Pale of the Anglo-Saxon Race”: Political and Personal Dimension of Helena Modjeska’s Contribution to Shakespeare Studies.....	87
---	----

Yoshiko Kawachi

Madame Sadayakko: The First Shakespearean Actress in Japan – On Her Contribution toward Modernizing the Stage	95
--	----

Rosemary Gaby

Taking Shakespeare to the Edge of the World: Leading Ladies on Tour in Colonial Australia	107
--	-----

Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay

“Women of Ill-fame” and Shakespeare Performance in Colonial Bengal.....	119
---	-----

Laurence Wright

“Most Fearful Hard Work”: Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, Marda Vanne and the “Good Companions” in South Africa	131
---	-----

PART 3*Donna Woodford-Gormley*

The Woman behind the Mask: Cuban Women and Shakespeare	149
--	-----

Anna Kamaralli

Revisionism or Fresh Vision? Silence, Speech and the Female Director	159
--	-----

Xenia Georgopoulou

Shakespeare’s Magic Mirror: The Work of Raia Mouzenidou	173
---	-----

Julie Sutherland

“Never Conquered nor Possessed”: Shakespeare in Native Canada and Québec in the Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries	181
--	-----

Margarida Gandara Rauén

On Shakespeare by Brazilian Women	193
---	-----

Works Cited	201
-------------------	-----

Index of Names	219
----------------------	-----

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Introduction

Though it is a common practice nowadays to look at various areas of academic activity from a gender-specific perspective, certain areas of Shakespearean scholarship – criticism, translations, theatrical productions produced by women in different parts of the world and in different times – have been marginalized, passed over in silence or simply overlooked. Many women: actresses, directors, designers, translators and scholars, though astonishing with their insightful critical judgments, creative staging decisions, emotional expressions on stage or successful translations, have never attracted attention as individuals. They remained marginalized in spite of the fact that their work earned a special place in Shakespearean studies and global culture. This fact advocates the need for revisions in Shakespearean studies dominated by male critics, directors and writers. Our aim is, hence, to illuminate these often neglected, forgotten and seldom appreciated women, placing them in the spotlight of attention on the international stage. Our collection of essays is devoted to women who made a significant contribution to Shakespearean studies, performance and scholarship across time, to women – individuals, who often remain unknown to the majority of international readers and even scholars.

Among the publications that touch a similar field one can mention *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance*, ed. by Marianne Novy (2000), which presents various revisions of Shakespeare but only from a distinctly feminist viewpoint. Some publications provide an account of actresses, female writers and readers of a particular period, who re-read Shakespeare according to specific social and cultural situations, e.g. *Shakespeare and Victorian Women* by Gail Marshall (2009). Readers interested in women scholars, critics, editors can reach for an anthology *Women Reading Shakespeare, 1660-1900*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts (1997). Yet, as an anthology, it belongs to a different group of reading materials. Besides, it features only British and American women writing on Shakespeare up to 1900.

There are many publications that focus on the construction of female roles in Shakespeare's works and on female characters (in literature, theatre and criticism) approached from the perspective of feminist criticism and gender studies. These include *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* by Carolyn Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Neely (1984), *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women (Feminist Readings of Shakespeare)* by Coppélia Kahn (1997) and *Shakespeare without Women* by D. Callaghan (1999) or *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* by Juliet Dusinberre (2003). Some recent publications examine the place of women in the Elizabethan world and,

consequently, in the universe of Shakespeare's plays, such as *Shakespeare and Women* by Phyllis Rackin (2005).

Among other publications, works focused on performance studies and character criticism are quite popular and numerous. They focus mainly on women's acting on the Elizabethan stage [e.g. *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* by Carol Rutter (2001)], conception of Shakespeare's female roles or tradition of cross-dressing [e.g. *Shakespeare's Women: Performance and Conception* by David Mann (2008); *Shakespeare's Heroines, or Characteristics of Women* by Anna Murphy Jameson and Cheri L. Larsen Hoeckley (2005); *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical, and Historical* by Anna Brownell Jameson (2003)] and selections of women's monologues and speeches [e.g. *Soliloquy!: The Shakespeare Monologues – Women* by Michael Earley and Philippa Keil (2000); *Shakespeare for One: Women: The Complete Monologues and Audition Pieces* by Douglas Newell (2002); *Shakespeare Monologues for Women* by Luke Dixon (2009, rep. 1990); *Alternative Shakespeare Auditions for Women* by Simon Dunmore (1998) and *More Alternative Shakespeare Auditions for Women* by Simon Dunmore (2000)].

Our collection of essays is rather unique, as it provides new perspectives on reading and appropriating Shakespeare through the work of women – actresses, directors, designers, translators and scholars from different cultural, social and political contexts. It adopts a broad perspective, as the interest in women throughout this collection is complex and diverse. It presents women from different cultural and historical contexts, which they represent but also shape, working on Shakespeare, appropriating, reinterpreting and popularising his texts in society. It also introduces women working in different media, some as translators, editors, scholars, others as actresses and directors. Additionally, the publication raises a wide variety of urgent issues approached from the perspective of feminist and gender studies, as well as colonial studies and research on ethnic difference and underprivileged social groups. The collection goes beyond the tendency to locate Shakespeare in the field of feminist and gender criticism. Consequently, the methodologies used in the collection are diversified.

The authors come from various countries and continents: from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, Great Britain, Greece, Japan, India, Italy, Poland, South Africa and the United States. Introducing facts associated with appropriating Shakespeare in different cultures and places by unknown or underappreciated female artists, critics and writers, they offer a variety of perspectives and approaches to Shakespeare, but also to the arts, gender issues and postcolonial studies. The authors refer to modern critical trends, providing, at the same time, new opportunities for gender discourse in the field of Shakespearean studies. All translations from originals are by the authors of the essays, if not stated otherwise.

The collection is divided into three Parts. The First Part is devoted to women who contributed significantly to Shakespearean studies working as writers and critics, starting already from the eighteenth century. The Second Part focuses on actresses performing in Shakespearean plays in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The third Part presents women who as directors and scholars promoted Shakespeare in the most recent times.

The essay by Kathryn Prince, “‘True Originall Copies’: Charlotte Lennox’s *Shakespear Illustrated*, Originality, Invention, and Eighteenth-Century Shakespeare Reception,” which opens the First Part of the collection, focuses on Charlotte Lennox’s *Shakespear Illukama strated* published in 1753. It is the first systematic comparison of Shakespeare’s plays and his known sources. At the same time, it is the most unjustly underrated work of eighteenth-century Shakespeare reception. Neither Lennox’s originality in presenting the first comprehensive account of Shakespeare’s use of his sources, nor her close involvement in the century’s debate about the meaning and value of Shakespeare, has been recognized adequately. The article argues that although Lennox’s sometimes-irreverent treatment of Shakespeare does depart from the effusive praise characteristic of more canonical Shakespeare criticism of the period, in her investigation of Shakespeare’s sources Lennox participates in a very timely debate about Shakespeare’s value to the eighteenth century.

The second article, by Catherine M.S. Alexander, “Shakespeare and the Unsexed Females,” analyses the relationship between Shakespeare and women in verse and focuses on the consequences of the publication of Elizabeth Montagu’s *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear* [...] in 1769, which introduced a new use of Shakespeare in verse. Until 1769 the extensive use of Shakespeare in poetry is a male device and women as authors, subjects and readers play an insignificant part in the genre. From then on, however, verse became a significant medium in gender skirmishes and Shakespeare was frequently both the subject and the ammunition in the debate. Shakespeare began to appear in verse written by women or about women that was not, initially, concerned with a gendered discussion about their emotional lives, and to feature in the debate about the quality of women writers and the propriety of women as writers. There is evidence, too, that the combination of Montagu and Shakespeare served to inspire women: their engagement expanded from reading, watching and acting Shakespeare to writing, and their work was greeted with some initial approval.

Polish Princess Izabela Czartoryska is presented by Anna Cetera in her article “Woman, Thy Name is Embarrassment! The Princess and the Playwright.” Izabela Czartoryska (1746-1835) appears to be a rather unwelcome subject of academic inquiries. Referring to the historical sources, the author claims that the approach – characterised as scholarly ostracism, needs to be rectified. The author argues that the spectrum of Izabela’s interests in Shake-

speare went well beyond her overtly sentimental cult of Shakespeare, collecting kitschy souvenirs and miming overseas fashions. To the contrary, her repeatedly reviewed and improved essays on Shakespeare testify to her efforts to read him on his own terms, irrespectively of the sentimental preferences and aesthetic habits she herself, and her age, had.

The essay by Nita N. Kumar, "Shakespeare is a Black Woman: African American Women Writers and Shakespeare," focuses on two texts, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, bringing out some of the nuances of these writers' engagement with Shakespeare and his works. It provides an informative background for the discussion, presenting Shakespeare in the context of African American life and culture. The author argues that while the identity politics of both race and gender would indicate an oppositional relationship between Shakespeare and African American women, the responses of black women writers have in fact been far more complex. Angelou for instance, in claiming Shakespeare as a black woman, is proclaiming the greatness of Shakespeare as an artist and her deep appreciation of his works, even as she refuses to obliterate herself as a black woman: Shakespeare's value as an artist lies *in* his ability to move into the identity of a black woman. This is just one instance of the multiple complex ways in which black women writers have responded to, played on, revised, and re-visioned Shakespeare and his works.

The Second Part opens with Giovanna Buonanno's work "Shakespeare and the Nineteenth-century Italian International Actress: Adelaide Ristori as Lady Macbeth," which presents an Italian actress Adelaide Ristori confronted with one Shakespearean heroine, Lady Macbeth. It examines Ristori's acting style, a particular ideal of femininity and a conception of the role and nature of the actress in the second half of the century. It also analyses Ristori's model of Lady Macbeth as heroic *grande dame* and provides a comparison with other foreign actresses in Shakespearean roles mainly through theatre critics' reception.

The essay by Krystyna Kujawińska Courtney, "'Born Outside the Magic Pale of the Anglo-Saxon Race': Political and Personal Dimension of Helena Modjeska's Contribution to Shakespeare Studies" presents Helena Modjeska (1840-1909), a Polish actress, who moved from her native country (Poland) to America as an act of resistance against Russian censorship to pursue her professional career. The work demonstrates that playing mainly Shakespearean roles, she struggled for a recognition in an English-speaking country, attempting to break not only linguistic but also cultural constraints. Interpreting selected aspects of her professional life in the USA, the essay reveals that her strife to acknowledge an almost multicultural perspective in the artistic renditions of Shakespeare's plays was inseparable from her erosion of the established male hegemony in the American nineteenth-century theatre.

Yoshiko Kawachi demonstrates a Japanese actress Sadayakko, performing at the turn of the twentieth century in Japan, America and Europe, in the article “Madam Sadayakko: The First Shakespeare Actress in Japan.” When she was sixteen, Sadayakko became a geisha named Yakko, later she became a wife of Otojiro Kawakami with whom she cooperated toward the development of Japanese drama. In America Sadayakko gained an extraordinary reputation as a dancer, and while admiring America very much, she also wanted to make efforts to raise the status of Japanese women. Returning home in 1902, she became the first actress that played a Shakespeare heroine in Japan, performing in 1903 Tomone (Desdemona) in *Othello*. Later she also performed in *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

The experiences and reception of actresses who toured Australia in the mid-nineteenth century, including Fanny Cathcart, Ellen Kean, Avonia Jones and Lady Emilia Don, are presented by Rosemary Gaby in her essay, “Taking Shakespeare to the Edge of the World: Leading Ladies on Tour in Colonial Australia.” In most theatre histories these women are overshadowed by the male players they supported, yet their feminine presence on stage was a key part of the attraction of Shakespeare for colonial audiences. Many endured extreme hardship in the pursuit of their craft.

The essay “‘Women of Ill-fame’ and Shakespeare Performance in Colonial Bengal” by Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay examines Shakespeare performances in colonial Bengal in the nineteenth and early twentieth century in relation to the performative engagements of women actresses from the lowly social strata of society and red-light areas. It considers the reception history of Shakespeare in colonial Bengal in order to create a referential frame for a critical discussion on prostitutes-actresses. With the rise of colonial elitism supported by English education, traditional popular and female cultural forms, severely criticized by the conservative elitists on grounds of obscenity, were gradually disappearing. However, as the author argues, the prostitutes turned actresses still continued to contribute to popular culture in terms of their active engagement in dramatic performances. Shakespearean plays enacted by these women may probably be looked upon as a new strategic mode to reframe an alternative cultural expression.

The final work in this part of the collection, “‘Most Fearful Hard Work’: Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, Marda Vanne and the ‘Good Companions’ in South Africa” by Lawrence Wright, presents two actresses well-established among the British artists whose lives were disrupted by the anticipated closure of theatres during World War Two. In 1941 Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, with her friend and partner Marda Vanne, was in South Africa undertaking a pioneering theatrical tour of the main centres and the platteland ‘dorps.’ They played *Twelfth Night* and Barrie’s *Quality Street* with a scratch company nick-named ‘The Good Companions’. The tour itself was a colossal adventure; a superb achievement led

by these two women, made possible in part by the patriarchal vacuum created by the war. Gwen and Marda supervised every detail, from lighting, scenery and décor to publicity and programmes. Gwen designed and even sewed some of the costumes; others came from her earlier career in Britain.

The Third Part opens with the essay “The Woman behind the Mask: Cuban Women and Shakespeare” in which Donna Woodford-Gormley presents the Cuban female writers and directors. The author claims that Shakespeare in Cuba represents the pinnacle of artistic achievement, but he is also a foreigner and the use of his plays can be a reminder of the foreign influence and oppression. For Cuban women Shakespeare’s works may seem doubly foreign: they adapt the works of a *male* foreigner. However, in the last decade, two of the most notable Cuban adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays have been written, directed, or choreographed by women. In 1997, Raquel Carrió and Flora Lauten co-wrote, produced, and directed *Otra Tempestad*, based on Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and in 2003 Alica Alonso choreographed and directed *Shakespeare y sus Máscaras, o Romeo y Julieta*, her most recent ballet adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. The two works share not only their Shakespearean heritage and the creative roles of women in bringing them to the stage, but also a common focus on the mask as a universal, archetypal symbol that unites the Shakespearean elements of the plays with something essentially Cuban.

Anna Kamaralli, in her essay “Revisionism or Fresh Vision? Silence, Speech and the Female Director,” provides a critique of the distinctive pressures experienced by female directors and performers of Shakespeare working in today’s theatre industry. It examines the ways various practitioners have responded to the particular demands made on them. It analyses several productions of *The Taming of the Shrew* that have been directed by women, who had to grapple with the competing needs of politics and comedy (under enormous pressure not to appear ‘humourless,’ but also to bring some kind of ‘relevant’ new perspective).

Xenia Georgopoulou’s “Shakespeare’s Magic Mirror: The Work of Raia Mouzenidou,” discusses the work of a Greek stage director Raia Mouzenidou. With her theatre company “Entos ton technon” Raia Mouzenidou directed several plays, which she presented at her new theatre “Dipylon,” the place that would be the home of her Shakespearean projects. Her first staged attempt based on Shakespeare, *Speaking of Shakespeare: Call Me Juliet*, written with the help of Giorgos Chassapoglou and Lefteris Papadopoulos (2003), is a backstage story of a staging of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Raia, who has spent a lifetime in the theatre, gave a fresh and lively view of a variety of possible onstage and backstage problems. She had a lot of interesting ideas on how to stage Shakespeare’s famous love story. Later she also directed Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (2003-2004) and *Troilus and Cressida: First Shot* (2005-2006).

In considering the exploratory work of several female artists and combining these with scholarship on post-colonial and Canadian Shakespeare, Julie Sutherland's "'Never conquered nor possessed': Female Theatre Professionals Present Post-colonial / Québécois Canadian Shakespeare" investigates how Shakespeare, the stalwart of British nationalism and imperialism, can be produced according to distinctly Canadian interpretations. Canada's tempestuous relationship with Shakespeare is complex with ironies. The article investigates the performance theories that inform productions of post-colonial interpretations of original Shakespearean scripts. It focuses on Alice Ronfard – one of Quebec's most prominent directors, Monique Mojica – an aboriginal actor and playwright (Kuna and Rappahannock nations) who played Ariel in a groundbreaking production of *The Tempest* (Skylight Theatre) and Charlotte Dean – an award-winning Canadian costume and scenery designer whose designs for a northern-climate, gender-blind *King Lear* (Necessary Angel) were met with great acclaim.

The final essay in this collection, "On Shakespeare by Brazilian Women" by Margarida G. Rauen, is a form of an appraisal of women who have been active in Shakespearean scholarship, translation and performance in Brazil. The author presents women who have dedicated a significant amount of their careers to Shakespeare studies, and of others who have contributed in the transmission of the canon as actresses and scholars. The account offered in this essay is informed by the Internet search tools, which provide pertinent historical data regarding women scholars, translators, actresses and directors in the Brazilian Shakespearean scenario, as well as the author's previous learning as a correspondent to the World Shakespeare Bibliography, and of her duties as a professor in the areas of Letters / Literature and Performing Arts in Brazil since 1989.

Fifteen essays gathered in this collection will not do justice to all of these often neglected and seldom appreciated women. There are more women, standing in the shadow of Shakespeare's genius and – most of all – his male commentators' fame, who need to be brought to the attention of international public. There is a significant number of publications available, dealing with Shakespearean heroines, feminist readings of his works and even women in the playwright's life. Yet, we hope that this collection will show how much individual women, coming from different parts of the world, have contributed to Shakespearean studies with their significant and fascinating work as writers, editors, scholars or actresses. We also hope that it will encourage further projects focusing on women, who in their careers dealt with various ways of appropriating Shakespeare in specific social and cultural contexts around the world.

PART 1

“True Originall Copies”: Charlotte Lennox’s *Shakespear Illustrated*, Originality, Invention, and Eighteenth-Century Shakespeare Reception

Kathryn Prince

Charlotte Lennox’s *Shakespear Illustrated*, published in 1753, may be the most unjustly underrated work of eighteenth-century Shakespeare reception. Neither Lennox’s originality in presenting the first comprehensive account of Shakespeare’s use of his sources, nor her close involvement in the century’s debate about the meaning and value of Shakespeare, has been recognized adequately. Critical opinion has generally agreed with the view, reiterated by Lennox’s twentieth-century biographer Miriam Small, that *Shakespear Illustrated* is out of step with eighteenth-century criticism, more appropriate to the age of Thomas Rymer than the age of Samuel Johnson. Fighting the rising tide of bardolatry, Lennox’s sometimes-irreverent treatment of Shakespeare does depart from the effusive praise characteristic of more canonical Shakespeare criticism of the period. However, in her investigation of Shakespeare’s sources, Lennox participates in a very timely debate about Shakespeare’s value for the eighteenth century. *Shakespear Illustrated* draws on Lewis Theobald and Gerard Langbaine’s hints about Shakespeare’s sources, forcefully rejecting Alexander Pope’s construction of Shakespeare as a natural genius and criticizing Rymer’s glibness; Lennox pays tribute to Johnson even as she subtly undermines his views on Shakespeare’s originality. As a prism in which the eighteenth century’s ideas about Shakespeare are reflected and refracted, no less than as an original contribution to scholarship, *Shakespear Illustrated* merits more attention than it has received.

Shakespear Illustrated is the first systematic comparison of Shakespeare’s plays and his known sources. In it, Lennox acknowledges the pioneering work of Gerard Langbaine, who identified many of Shakespeare’s sources in his 1691 monograph *Account of English Dramatick Poets*, and she may have relied on some of Lewis Theobald’s copious research for his 1733 edition of Shakespeare’s plays, but she exceeds these earlier projects quite significantly by moving beyond identification to critical investigation. Lennox’s three volumes are an impressive display of her thorough scholarly research and her critical skills, adhering for the most part to a structure in which she presents chapters of her own translations and synopses of the source material alternating with chapters in which she analyses how Shakespeare’s plays compare to their originals. Her treatment of *Measure for Measure*, the first play she considers, is characteristic of her approach. After summarizing Shakespeare’s source, Giraldo

Cinthio, in her first chapter, Lennox wrote a second chapter “Observations on the Use Shakespear has made of the foregoing Novel in his Comedy called *Measure for Measure*” (table of contents, unpaginated). Lennox initiates her analytical commentary only after she has made her reader familiar with Cinthio and Shakespeare in two less evaluative segments, but it is the ensuing critical remarks to which Lennox’s contemporaries responded with disapprobation and which illustrate the foundation of this hostile contemporary response. Lennox follows her translation of Cinthio and her summary of *Measure for Measure* with an evaluation of Shakespeare’s merits in comparison to Cinthio’s, arguing that “wherever *Shakespear* has invented, he is greatly below the Novelist; since the Incidents he has added, are neither necessary nor probable” (24). She complains that Shakespeare used “low Contrivance, absurd Intrigue, and improbable Incidents” to turn *Measure for Measure* into a comedy with “three or four Weddings, instead of one good Beheading” (28). This censorious attitude towards Shakespeare, whose status as the supreme author had already attained mythic and ideologically-laden proportions by Lennox’s time, was not well received by her contemporaries. Lennox’s contribution as a Shakespeare scholar has been undervalued ever since.

The eighteenth-century response to Lennox’s *Shakespear Illustrated* was a curious mixture of resounding critical silence and a concerted effort to discredit her publicly. The *Gentleman’s Magazine*, possibly at Johnson’s request, published a brief notice of *Shakespear Illustrated* in its May 1753 edition, and a longer review the following month focussing on Lennox’s treatment of *Romeo and Juliet*, one of her least censorious chapters. In contrast to this fairly innocuous reception, the *Monthly Review* suggested in its critique that Lennox’s project was “chiefly intended to prove, that Shakespear has generally spoiled every story on which [... his] plays are founded by torturing them into low contrivances, absurd intrigue, and improbable incidents” (qtd. in Small 198). Thomas Rymer had established his lasting fame by way of two books taking this oppositional approach, but, as subsequent commentators would suggest, what was appropriate for Rymer in the late seventeenth century was no longer acceptable in the mid-eighteenth. The playwright Goldsmith reportedly told Johnson that he had been urged to attend the opening night of Lennox’s play *The Sister* “to go and hiss it, because she had attacked Shakespeare in her book called *Shakespeare* [*sic*] *Illustrated*” (Boswell vol. 4, 10). Goldsmith declined to participate in Lennox’s punishment, but an account of the opening night in *Lloyd’s Evening Post* reports the success of the scheme:

part of the audience showed great marks of disapprobation, which interrupted the piece for some time; it went on, notwithstanding great opposition, until the beginning of the fifth act, when the noise was so great that the actors were unable to proceed in their parts. [...W]e are assured the Author, having heard the reception it met with has entirely withdrawn it from the stage. (qtd. in Small 37)