

Cambridge University Press

0521545803 - Fair Ophelia: A Life of Harriet Smithson Berlioz - Peter Raby

Frontmatter/Prelims

[More information](#)

‘Fair Ophelia’:

A Life of Harriet Smithson Berlioz

Cambridge University Press

0521545803 - Fair Ophelia: A Life of Harriet Smithson Berlioz - Peter Raby

Frontmatter/Prelims

[More information](#)



Harriet Smithson as Ophelia in *Hamlet*. Lithograph by A. de Valmont, 1827.

‘Fair Ophelia’:
A Life of Harriet Smithson Berlioz

PETER RABY

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge

London New York New Rochelle

Melbourne Sydney

Cambridge University Press

0521545803 - Fair Ophelia: A Life of Harriet Smithson Berlioz - Peter Raby

Frontmatter/Prelims

[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Cambridge University Press 1982

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1982
First paperback edition 2003

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress catalogue card number: 81-21601

ISBN 0 521 24421 8 hardback
ISBN 0 521 54580 3 paperback

Cambridge University Press

0521545803 - Fair Ophelia: A Life of Harriet Smithson Berlioz - Peter Raby

Frontmatter/Prelims

[More information](#)

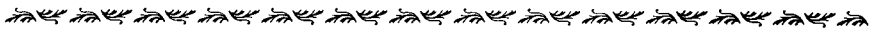
To Liz

Contents



<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>Page</i> viii
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1 Childhood in Ireland	1
2 Years of apprenticeship	13
3 The walking lady	32
4 Shakespeare in France	43
5 'Fair Ophelia'	57
6 'La Belle Irlandaise'	79
7 The <i>idée fixe</i>	106
8 Episodes in the life of an artist	127
9 Berlioz's muse	146
10 The tragic <i>dénouement</i>	162
11 Romantic image	176
<i>Notes</i>	194
<i>Bibliography</i>	204
<i>Newspapers and periodicals</i>	209
<i>Index</i>	210

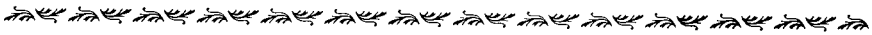
Illustrations



Harriet Smithson as Ophelia, by de Valmont, 1827	<i>frontispiece</i>
1 Montague Talbot as Monsieur Morbleau	<i>page</i> 9
2 Scene from <i>The Innkeeper's Daughter</i>	16
3 Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, 1813	19
4 Harriet Smithson, 1819	21
5 Harriet Smithson as Miss Dorrillon, 1822	30
6 Edmund Kean as Othello	38
7 Harriet Smithson as Maria, 1825	40
8 Théâtre de l'Odéon	53
9 <i>Hamlet</i> , act 3, scene 2, by Devéria and Boulanger	62
10 <i>Hamlet</i> , act 3 scene 2, by Delacroix	64
11 <i>Hamlet</i> , act 4 scene 5, by Devéria and Boulanger	65
12 <i>Hamlet</i> , act 4 scene 5, by Delacroix	67
13 <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , act 2 scene 6, by Devéria and Boulanger	70
14 <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , act 3 scene 5, by Devéria and Boulanger	71
15 Charles Kemble as Romeo, Harriet Smithson as Juliet, by Francis	73
16 Harriet Smithson, after Dubufe	74
17 Harriet Smithson, by Devéria	76
18 Sketch for the Capulets' tomb, by Devéria	78
19 Abbott as Cassio, by de Valmont	80
20 Charles Kemble as Othello, by de Valmont	81
21 Théâtre des Italiens	83
22 <i>Jane Shore</i> , act 5 scene 3, by Devéria and Boulanger	85

23	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , final scene, by Devéria and Boulanger	87
24	<i>Othello</i> , act 5 scene 2, by Devéria and Boulanger	88
25	Macready as Virginius	93
26	Alexandre Dumas, by Devéria	96
27	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , act 3 scene 5, by Devéria and Boulanger	98
28	Harriet Smithson, by Langlumé	103
29	Playbill, Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, 11 May 1829	107
30	Marie Moke, 'Camille'	113
31	Fantômes, by Boulanger	118
32	Setting for <i>La Muette de Portici</i> , by Ciceri	120
33	Berlioz, by Signol	122
34	Bocage as Antony	129
35	Programme, Berlioz's concert, 9 December 1832	131
36	Berlioz, attributed to Ingres	134
37	Liszt, by Devéria	136
38	Marie Dorval, as Adèle	148
39	Vigny, by Maurin	152
40	<i>La Mort d'Ophélie</i>	171
41	<i>Othello</i> and <i>Desdemona</i> , by Delacroix	180
42	<i>Le Bal</i> , by Fantin-Latour	183
43	<i>The Death of Ophelia</i> , by Delacroix	185

Preface



Harriet Smithson is not perhaps the most obvious personality to arouse obsessional interest, a judgment which may help to explain Berlioz's own lasting absorption in her. In fact, it was through the eyes of a less subtle Romantic, Dumas, that I first came to form an image of her: he wrote that she made a divine Ophelia, and it was then that for the first time in a theatre he saw real passions felt by men and women of real flesh and blood. The 1969 centenary exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, 'Berlioz and the Romantic imagination', provided further stimulus, and by its focus on performance encouraged speculation about the nature of the experiences which Berlioz and his contemporaries enjoyed at the Odéon and the Théâtre des Italiens. I found myself wishing to know more about the woman who could arouse such heights of enthusiasm, even ecstasy, and yet be so lightly sketched a figure both as an individual and within the history of the theatre.

Harriet herself remains, I think, a little indistinct. She was by nature modest and retiring. There are few personal documents to provide an alternative picture to the detailed and yet biased portraits provided by Berlioz himself; and most other descriptions inevitably place Harriet in a perspective dominated by Berlioz. Harriet's letters, few in number and widely scattered, are largely concerned with arrangements for her professional life until the time of her marriage; afterwards, the fact of living in a country whose language she spoke with difficulty and wrote hesitantly restricted her correspondence. Undoubtedly, there is more to be retrieved about the details of her early life, especially in Ireland, and during her long years of apprenticeship at Drury Lane.

I hope, however, that the kind of actress Harriet Smithson became emerges from the welter of detail about plays and dates and places I discuss here. Some may feel there is too much included, though there could have been far more. But it was from the stage that she made her

Preface

impact, and I believe that her dedication to her career at a troubled period for the theatre deserves attention and respect. Whatever the judgment about her qualities as an actress, there is no doubt that she embodied a powerful and yet refined series of images whose influence reached further than the most widely known and personal instance of Berlioz, and that alone might be thought a sufficient claim on our interest.

I acknowledge gratefully those who have given me permission to quote or make use of copyright or unpublished material, notably David Cairns, Victor Gollancz Ltd and W. W. Norton and Company for the extracts from *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz translated and edited by David Cairns*, Weber Commemoration and Oswald Wolff Ltd; Dr Paul Joannides; the British Library; the Chatsworth Settlement Trustees; the Garrick Club; Mr Richard Macnutt; the National Library of Ireland.

The following have kindly answered enquiries or made illustrative material available: Professor Hugh Macdonald; Mr Richard Macnutt; the Theatre Collection, the Victoria and Albert Museum; the Department of Prints and Drawings, the British Museum; Mme Geneviève Viollet-le-Duc; Harvard Theatre Collection; the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; La Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal; La Bibliothèque Nationale; La Bibliothèque de l'Opéra.

The almost unfailing helpfulness to be found in every library, sometimes in inverse ratio to its size, has been a constant encouragement. I should like to thank especially the librarians and staffs of the University Library, Cambridge; the British Library and the Newspaper Library, Colindale; the Victoria and Albert Museum; the Garrick Club; Birmingham, Carlisle, Margate, Nottingham and Plymouth Public Libraries; the Folger Shakespeare Library; the Harvard Theatre Collection; Yale University Library; the National Library of Ireland; the Royal Irish Academy; Ennis Public Library; Le Musée Berlioz, La Côte Saint-André; La Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal; La Bibliothèque de la Conservatoire; La Bibliothèque Nationale; Universiteits – Bibliotheek, Amsterdam.

During the preparation of this book I was fortunate to be granted a period of study leave, for which I am grateful to the Principal and Trustees of Homerton College. I have received encouragement, information and help from many sources, and should like to record my warm appreciation in particular to Philip Barnard, Jock Burnet, David Butler, David Cairns, Paul Joannides, Barry Jones, Chris Kelly, David

Cambridge University Press

0521545803 - Fair Ophelia: A Life of Harriet Smithson Berlioz - Peter Raby

Frontmatter/Prelims

[More information](#)*Preface*

Male, John Moore, Steve Otto, John Parmenter, Juliette Ryan, Georges and Nicole Simon, and Frank Whitford; also to Andrew Brown and Maureen Leach of the University Press. I am deeply indebted to Professor Julian Rushton and Mr Richard Macnutt, each of whom undertook the thankless business of reading an early draft and generously gave me the benefit of their wide knowledge: they saved me from error and made numerous suggestions for improvement. Lastly, I thank my wife and children, who were forced to live with my obsession for several years, have patiently suffered detours to fusty libraries, decrepit theatres and even cemeteries, and encouraged me to reach the end.

The author and publisher would like to thank the following for their permission to reproduce illustrations: the Theatre Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum (frontispiece and illustrations 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 15, 20, 21, and 28); Department of Prints and Drawings, British Museum (illustrations 4, 5, 10, 12, 16, 17, 25, 37, 42 and 43); Bibliothèque Nationale (illustrations 9, 11, 13, 14, 18, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 32, 34, 38, and 39); Harvard Theatre Collection (illustrations 1 and 19); Musée Victor Hugo (illustration 31); Académie de France, Rome (illustration 33); National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (illustration 41); Reboul-Berlioz Collection, Paris (illustration 36) and Richard Macnutt (illustrations 29, 30, 35 and 40).