THE DIARIES AND PAPERS OF ELIZABETH INCHBALD
From the Folger Shakespeare Library and the London Library

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"Self-tutored and remarkably successful, Inchbald achieved an unusual degree of recognition for a professional woman writer of her period."

Catherine S Green

Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821) was one of the most important women writers of the 18th century.

Despite a pronounced stammer, she first gained notice as an actress. Following her marriage to Joseph Inchbald she played major roles in London and the provinces and became friends with Sarah Siddons and John Philip Kemble, whom she loved.

Her career as a playwright came after the death of her husband and she wrote over a dozen plays for the London stage between 1784 (A Mogul Tale) and 1805 (To Marry, or Not to Marry). These ranged from farces such as I'll Tell You What (1785), to complex works based on Rousseau such as The Child of Nature (1788). Perhaps her most famous work was Lover's Vows (adapted from Kotzebue), which so affected Fanny Price in Jane Austen's Mansfield Park.

Inchbald's success as a dramatist led to the publication of two novels – A Simple Story (1791), about Faith and faithfulness, and Nature and Art (1796), a tale of two brothers. Finally she achieved recognition from her peers as the author of c125 biographical and critical prefaces for The British Theatre (1806-1808, 25v) and other key works on the English stage.

Sources for her life and works are rare, but the Folger Library possesses 11 of her diaries, 13 letters and 14 manuscripts, including critical thoughts on Othello and the draft of A Case of Conscience. To these, we have added a range of rare printed materials, featuring a dozen original editions of her plays, the important Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald, including her familiar correspondence with the most distinguished persons of her time edited by Boaden in 1832, and the complete introductions from The British Theatre.

Taken together, these sources will allow scholars to explore:

- Metropolitan life in London, 1770-1820
- The workings of the British Theatre and the roles played by actor-managers, playwrights, and publishers
- The challenges of being a successful businesswoman in the late 18th and early 19th century
- The lives and careers of Elizabeth Inchbald, John Philip Kemble, George Colman, R B Sheridan and others

The diaries are the remains of what was once a 50-volume sequence spanning her entire theatrical life. We have the volumes for 1776, 1780, 1781, 1782, 1783, 1788, 1793, 1807, 1808, 1814 and 1820. They are all written into small printed diaries of the period (her favourite was The Ladies Own Memorandum Book or Daily Pocket Journal), which are full of interest in themselves, as they contain essays on education, poetry by women writers, poetical enigmas, lists of remarkable occurrences in the preceding year, and detailed accounts of the latest dances being performed. The diaries are presented with a week to view and Inchbald packs the available space with a densely written account of her daily happenings. The first six volumes contain many entries regarding her appearances on stage and there are also some brief, unsystematic, but insightful expense accounts.

A warm and rounded picture of Inchbald and her social life is revealed through the steady accretion of detail, as may be gleaned from these brief extracts:

"19 Feb 1780: Was at Rehearsal - Dressed early – played Foible in Way of the World, then saw Widow or no Widow. Dr & Mrs Hudson supped with us – after I wrote to Dr Hitchcock and a copy to Mr Wilkinson.”

"5 Apr 1780: A cold snowy day – was at 11 o’clock Rehearsal – all the afternoon at Hamlet…"

"13 July 1781: Shell’d Peas and Beans. Mrs Hurst read Liberal opinions while my mother slept.”

"25 Dec 1781: A beautiful day – Walked to Mr Harris’s but he was out – then breakfasted and my cousin and Mr Chambers call’d – at rehearsal of the pantomime and told Mr Harris I had called on him – dined, drink tea and supped at Dr Babbs.”

"15 July 1783: A fine day – read – played in Friend in Need and Pantomime. Found Etty poorly when I came home. Heard Mrs Wilson was entirely gone from the Theatre. Received a note from Mr Johnson for an order.”

"19 Jan 1788: Translating all the morning… Sir Charles called while I was at tea …. We went to the last two acts of jks shows then returned again … I worked on play Robin Hood and Midnight Hour.”

"31 May 1793: At the Old Bailey hearing trials.”

"23 Apr 1807: My few lines on Opie highly praised.”

"19 Jan 1808: Shocked on reading the Death of Lord Trafalgar in my Paper…. I read the end of Paley’s Theology.”

"21 Mar 1814: Rain and fog all day … I worked then read till dark. Miss Brake dined with me about seven off roast beef. An account of the victory near Bayonne in my paper ….”

The letters also provide fascinating insights into her struggles and successes. A letter to Tate Wilkinson (1739-1803), actor and theatrical manager, reveals how tough she could be:

"You surely forget that I am articled and will stay with you just as long as I please, therefore don’t affront me …”. She continues to discuss the qualities of a rival actress.
Her passion for business is revealed in a lengthy missive to R B Sheridan:

"Mr Kemble many weeks ago purchased a farce of me in your name, at the same time assuring me it should be performed immediately – but, I hear now, reason to apprehend, from the nearer approach of the close of the Theatre, that it cannot be brought out this season. I take the liberty to acquaint you that if either Mr Kemble in delivering your message, or I in comprehending of it, have made the least mistake in respect of your meaning, and you will be so obliging as to let me know it, I shall instantly relinquish the claim which at present time I hope I have on the Theatre, and ask for nothing more than to receive back my manuscript; which (as I have not another copy, and this is the only probable time for Mr Colman to receive it) is of very material consequence to me."

Other letters concern orders for her works, criticism, a petition, proofs, personal affairs and a charming epistle to Mrs Siddons praising the performance of her son Harry in a play at Covent Garden.

The additional manuscripts feature box office receipts for four nights, 1784-86 (including The Chapter of Accidents and A Mogul’s Tale on 20 July 1784); notes about herself and about various writers and their works; a copy of her Will (29 April 1821); and remarks on Othello and the interpretations of certain actors.

These sources will be of interest to all those studying 18th and 19th century theatre, women writers, social history and Romanticism. They will provide colour and detail to any account of life in London and the world of the theatre during this vibrant period.
Technical Note

Our microform publications are prepared and produced in accordance with recommended and established guide-lines for the production of microform of superior quality. These conform to the recommendations of the standard guides to good microforming and micropublishing practice.

Attention should be drawn to the nature of the original material. As with all manuscript and rare printed sources the inking is variable. Darker and lighter inks, or a dark ink and light pencil note, can appear on the same page. Some sections are barely legible in the original. There are instances when the volume has been badly stained, discoloured, or faded with exposure to light over a period of time. Some pages are torn, crumpled or cropped. Occasionally volumes have been tightly bound and material is slightly obscured in the inner margin. The curvature towards the spine of such volumes inevitably results in some distortion of the text. Sometimes the original paper is quite thin and this results in showthrough which can make the text difficult to read. Every effort has been made to minimise these difficulties and some openings are microfilmed more than once in an attempt to bring out all the features of the original. Nevertheless these original characteristics present difficulties of image and contrast which stringent tests and variations of density cannot entirely overcome.

The most responsible care has been exercised in the filming of this unique collection and every effort has been made to ensure that this microform publication meets the standards established by the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM), the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and prevailing European standards.


**Contents of Reels**

**REEL 1**

A Case of Conscience, c.1799.
A play prepared for presentation at Drury Lane, but never acted. The cast list includes Cooke, Kemble and Mrs Siddons. D.B.36

Diaries and account books, 1776-1820, 9 volumes.
The diary entries are brief, each day crowded into a very small space in printed diary form. The first seven diaries are written in editions of The Ladies' Own Memorandum Book. The first five volumes contain many entries of appearances on the stage and each day's movements and activities are noted. The first four volumes contain brief and unsystematic expense accounts.

The diaries were originally part of a set of fifty, each measuring 12.5 x 8 cm. M.a. 149-55

Extracts include:

Volume 1, 1776: Packed entries and well reproduced but a difficult hand, with one week per page. Features an essay on education, poetry, enigmas, country dances. M.a.149

Volume 2, 1780: Remarkable occurrences in 1780s as well as poems and enigmas.
19 February 'Was at Rehearsal – Dressed early – played Foible in Way of the World, then saw Widow or no Widow. Dr & Mrs Hudson ... supped with us – after I wrote to Dr Hitchcock – and a copy to Mr Wilkinson.'
5 April 'A cold snowy day – was at 11 o’clock Rehearsal – all the afternoon at Hamlet ....' M.a.150

Volume 3, 1781:
13 July 'Shell’d Peas & Beans. Mrs Hurst read Liberal opinions while my mother slept.'
25 December 'A beautiful day – Walked to Mr Harris's but he was out – then breakfasted and my cousin & Mr Chambers call’d – at rehearsal of the pantomime and told Mr Harris I had called on him – dined, drink tea and supped at Dr Babbs ....' M.a.151

Volume 4, 1783:
15 July 'A fine day – read – played in Friend in Need and Pantomime. Found Etty poorly when I came home. Heard Mrs Wilson was entirely gone from the Theatre. Received a note from Mr Johnson for an order.' M.a.152

Volume 5, 1788:
19 January 'Translating all the morning ... Sir Charles called while I was at tea ... we went to the two acts of jks shows then returned again ... worked on play Robin Hood and Midnight Hour ....' M.a.153

Volume 6, 1807:
23 April 'My few lines on Opie highly praised,' M.a.154

Volume 7, 1808:
19 January 'Shocked on reading the Death of Lord Trafalgar in my Paper ... I read the end of Paley’s Theology.' M.a.155

Volume 8, 1814:
21 May 'Rain and fog all day .... I worked then read till dark. Miss Brake dined with me about seven off roast beef. An account of the victory near Bayonne in my paper ....' M.a.156

Volume 9, 1820: a smaller diary. M.a.157

Diaries for 1782 and 1793.

Similar in format to other diaries.
1782: The Ladies’ Own Memorandum Book; or Daily Pocket Journal includes a list of travelling expenses. W.a.239
31 May (?) ‘At the Old Bailey hearing trials.’ W.a.240

Letters to various people, [1780]-1910.

Twelve autograph letters signed and one fragment signed. Correspondents include: [Alexander?] Chalmers, [Archibald?] Hamilton, [James?] Heath, Joseph Munden, [James] Northcote, John Robinson, [R B Sheridan], [Mrs Siddons], [Tate] Wilkinson, Francis Wrangham. Y.c.1376 (1-14)

Extracts include:

Chalmers: 3 August 1893, letter of thanks. (1)
Hamilton: 13 March, returning pamphlet, plus criticism. (2)
Heath: 1805, order. (3)
Munden: 11 December 1802, petition. (4)
Robinson: 1806, orders and criticism of Mr Chalmers. (6)
Robinson: n.d., to the publisher respecting the copyright of the 'British Theatre'. (7)
[RBS]: 5 May, Purchase of forcs by Mr Kemble. (8)
[Siddons]: October 1801, epistle to Mrs Siddons praising the performance of her son, Harry, in a play at Covent Garden. (9)
Wilkinson: [1780], Inchbald announces her intention of leaving his company ‘You surely forget that I am articled and will stay with you as long as I please, therefore don’t affront me ....’ (10)
Wrangham: 8 October 1778, criticism of a sermon. (12)

Papers, 1784-1821, 1909.

Thirteen items. [Haymarket] box office receipts for four nights, 1784-1821, including The Chapters of Accidents and The
Mogul Tale (1-4). Notes about herself, and about various writers and their works, including remarks on Othello and the interpretations of certain actors, c.1801 (5-8). Will, 29 April 1821, signed and sealed only (9). Notes by ? from several of her Pocket Books, and a statement and letter from Agnes Croucher, 20 May 1909, vouching for certain of the Inchbald MSS at the Folger Library (10-13). (6) is written on the blank pages of the Part-Book for Count Abbeville in 'The Hue and Cry' by Mrs Inchbald. Y.d.592 (1-13)

Printed Works from the London Library

REEL 2

The Mogul tale, or, the descent of the ballon, a farce
Dublin, 1788

The midnight hour, a comedy in three acts, from the French of M Damaniant ...
Dublin, 1788

Animal magnetism, a farce in three acts
Dublin, 1789

I'll tell you what, a comedy in five acts
Dublin, 1787

Such things are, a play in five acts
Dublin, 1788

The married man, a comedy in three acts, from Le philosophe marié of M Nericault Destouches
Dublin, 1789

The child of nature, a dramatic piece in four acts, from the French of Madame the Marchioness of Sillery, formerly Countess of Genlis
Dublin, 1789

Every one has his fault, a comedy in five acts
Dublin, 1795

George Coleman, Ways and Means, or, A trip to Dover
Dublin, 1788

Edward Morris, False Colours
Dublin, 1793

Simple Story, a novel
London, 1840

REEL 3

Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald, including her familiar correspondence with the most distinguished persons of her time. Includes: The Massacre and A Case of Conscience.
Editor James Boaden
London, 1833, 2 volumes

The British Theatre: or, A collection of plays, which are acted at the Theatres Royal, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and Haymarket ... with biographical and critical remarks by Mrs Inchbald.

Volume 1: Comedy of Errors (Shakespeare) -- Hamlet (Shakespeare) -- King John (Shakespeare) -- King Richard III (Shakespeare) -- Romeo and Juliet (Shakespeare)
London, 1808, 25 volume collection

REEL 4

The British Theatre: or, A collection of plays, which are acted at the Theatres Royal, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and Haymarket ... with biographical and critical remarks by Mrs Inchbald.

Volume 23: Everyone has his fault (Inchbald) -- Lovers' vows (Kotzebue) tr Inchbald) -- Such things are (Inchbald) -- To marry or not to marry (Inchbald) -- Wives as they were (Inchbald)

Title page, biographical and critical notes for:
Volumes 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25.

London, 1808, 25 volume collection

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