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## HISTORY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# A discriminating audience: Touring Shakespeare and mid-nineteenth-century Tasmania

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**Abstract:** The 1850s were a defining decade for colonial Tasmania, encompassing the cessation of convict transportation, the establishment of a House of Assembly and the jettisoning of the island's old identity as *Van Diemen's Land*. Many Tasmanian settlers were dedicated to the task of raising the cultural standing of the colony and Shakespeare became an integral part of this process. A steady stream of visiting players from America and England brought Shakespeare to Tasmania in the 1850s, including Sarah and James Stark, Eleanor Goddard and John Caple, McKean Buchanan and G.V. Brooke. Newspapers of the period reflect a lively and varied local interaction with their productions. Focusing on the evidence of contemporary reviews, this paper considers the political resonance of Shakespeare in mid-nineteenth-century Tasmania. It suggests that touring Shakespeare productions opened up key opportunities for this geographically and socially marginalised community to assert a new sense of itself as a discriminating audience, ready to engage with complex and profound modes of thinking and expression.

**Subjects:** Shakespeare; Colonialism; Cultural Studies; Social and Cultural History; Media History

**Keywords:** Shakespeare; nineteenth century; Tasmania; reviews; convicts; touring tragedians; *Othello*; *Hamlet*; *Macbeth*

Shakespeare productions were few and far between in Tasmania in the early 1850s. The first month of the decade provided an entertainment at the Royal Amphitheatre, Launceston, that included

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Rosemary Gaby is a senior lecturer in English at the University of Tasmania. Much of her research work has focused on performance history, with a particular focus on Australian Shakespeares. She has published several papers on early modern drama and Shakespeare in performance, including articles in *SEL*, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, *Shakespeare*, *Multicultural Shakespeare*, *Shakespearean International Yearbook* and *Theatre Notebook*. Her 2014 book, *Open-air Shakespeare: Under Australian Skies*, was the first title published in Palgrave Macmillan's "Global Shakespeares' series" (General Editor, Alexa Huang). She is currently working on an edition of *Henry IV, Part Two* for the Internet Shakespeare Editions and has completed an edition of *Henry IV, Part One* for the ISE and Broadview Press (2013).

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Digitised nineteenth-century Australian newspapers offer a wealth of accessible information about theatre and politics in the colonial period. This paper takes advantage of this resource to investigate ways in which the local press responded to touring Shakespeare productions in Tasmania in the 1850s. It argues that the changes that took place in the theatrical and political landscapes of the colony at this time were interconnected and suggests that Shakespeare was integral to the community's development of a new cultural identity.

“Various acts of Horsemanship, Dancing, &c; also a selection from OTHELLO! by Mr. Kirk”.<sup>1</sup> Later in the year, Mr Morton King presented “the whole of the beautiful Tragedy of HAMLET” for his benefit night at the Royal Victoria Theatre, Hobart (followed by a “Bohemian Stage Polka”, “the laughable interlude of *Sylvester Daggerwood*” and Mr C. Young as the “Congo Minstrel”) (Royal Victoria Theatre, 1850). For most of this and the following two years, however, entertainments at these theatres consisted of amateur dramatic nights, melodrama, farce, burlettas and popular touring shows such as the “Grand Panoramic Exhibition” (*Courier*, 1850) and the “Ethiopian Serenaders” (*Hobartian Guardian*, 1850). Ambitious full productions of Shakespeare or indeed of other plays that the papers would describe as “legitimate drama”<sup>2</sup> were not viable. In Hobart, the Royal Victoria’s resident companies of the previous decade had decamped and since mid 1847 a series of lessees had struggled to draw audiences. As Gillian Winter explains, “at this period there was a proliferation of theatres in other colonies. The small audiences and rather shabby theatre in Hobart could not compete for companies” (Winter, 1985, p. 124).

The theatrical landscape changed significantly in 1853 when the Royal Victoria theatre (known as the Theatre Royal after 1856) was sold to local merchant, Richard Lewis, and John Davies and J. B. Watson became the theatre’s lessees. On 19 February, Davies and Watson closed the theatre for remodelling and refurbishment and advertised for members of the theatrical profession to apply to them for engagement. Davies, an ex-convict, amateur actor, hotelier and journalist, became a well-known founding figure in Tasmania, launching the *Hobartian Mercury* in 1854. He is often given the credit for the theatre’s revival and was certainly an energetic force in the first months of his involvement, even appearing in the new management’s first Shakespeare production—the 3-act Garrick version of *The Taming of the Shrew*—in June 1853. Publicity for Davies’s benefit night in September 1853, however, notes that he will “no longer be wedded to the stage” but will be “shortly buried in other pursuits” (Public Amusements, 1853a). J.B. Watson was perhaps a steadier figure behind the theatre’s renaissance. He was lauded by the *Courier* for his civilising influence:

This gentleman deserves, what we trust he will meet with, the plentiful support of the play-going public. To him belongs the credit of having brought the Victoria Theatre to a degree of comfort and respectability seldom, if ever, before witnessed. Order and regularity have, under his auspices, taken the place of disorder, riot and confusion. (Public Amusements, 1853b)

Shakespeare presided over this new era of theatrical order and regularity. His “seven ages” decorated the rear wall of the upper circle after this first renovation and later his portrait occupied one of the eight compartments of the dome, with the “seven ages” gracing the others (Theatricals, 1853; Victoria Theatre, 1856). For the 1853 opening, the “Literati of Tasmania” were invited to compose an address in blank verse, poetry or prose, and the winning entry duely celebrated a brighter era for “Tasman’s isle” in which actors would proclaim “immortal Shakespeare’s name” for the benefit of “Tasman’s youth” (Public Amusements, 1853c). After no major Shakespeare productions in Tasmania during 1851–1852, the refurbished Royal Victoria hosted at least 6 in 1853, 10 in 1854 and 13 in 1855. Thereafter, the viability of Shakespeare extended to Launceston, and productions for the state as a whole peaked in 1858 when G.V. Brooke performed in both towns. Although audiences were not always as appreciative of the repertoire as the local press (Theatrical Patronage, 1855), the theatres were kept afloat financially by the new phenomenon of the visiting star. During the 1850s and 1860s, several touring tragedians were persuaded to include Tasmania in their colonial itineraries, sometimes for return visits. Besides Brooke, visitors to Hobart included James and Emma Stark, Charles Kemble Mason, Daniel and Emma Waller, Henry Neil Warner, Amelia Poole, McKean Buchanan and Eleanor Goddard. They provided regular doses of Shakespeare alongside contemporary dramas by writers such as Bulwer Lytton and Sheridan Knowles: plays which, as David Francis Taylor has noted, harnessed Shakespeare’s cultural capital by dramatising complementary material (Taylor, 2012, p. 135).

Tasmania's political and social landscape also changed significantly in 1853. On 3 May, the *Hobart Town Gazette* printed a formal proclamation announcing the end of transportation, and on 26 May the last convict vessel arrived in Hobart Town. This event resolved several divisive years of agitation and was an important step towards political autonomy. Elections for the Legislative Council had been in place since 1851. In August 1853, a select committee began drafting a new constitution for the colony and by 1855 the constitution act established a House of Assembly. Concurrently the colony's old name, Van Diemen's Land, was changed to "Tasmania", an alternative that had been in use for several decades (Newman, 2005, pp. 34–39). The name change reflected a general determination to shake off the demonic associations of the island's convict past and establish a new identity.

The Shakespeare-oriented repertoire of Hobart's Royal Victoria Theatre after its 1853 renovations was generated by many factors outside Tasmania and its local politics. On mainland Australia in the 1850s, the discovery of gold and the extraordinary efforts of theatre entrepreneur George Coppin helped establish the country's economic appeal for the touring tragedian. At the same time, groups such as Melbourne's Garrick Club, founded in 1855, reflected wider attempts to enlist Shakespeare in the cause of colonial social progress (Washington, 1993, pp. 144–145). Furthermore, as Richard Foulkes claims, this was an era when "throughout the English-speaking world Shakespeare was the playwright whose plays audiences wanted to see, no doubt in some cases because of patriotic and sentimental attachments, but above all because of their sheer entertainment value" (Foulkes, 2002, p. 3). I think it is worth noting, nevertheless, just how closely Shakespeare was intertwined with Tasmania's specific changing political and social makeup in the 1850s. The many Shakespeare reviews and references that appeared in the local press of the period indicate that Shakespeare played a significant role in the formation of Tasmania's new identity.

The colony's recent history as an island prison—the visibility of its convict and ex-convict population and its frontier rambunctiousness—heightened the urgency with which local commentators looked to the civilising influence of the theatre, and by association Shakespeare. Welcoming Watson's changes to the Royal Victoria in 1853, the *Courier's* reviewer argued:

It seems to us peculiarly desirable that a well-regulated drama should be encouraged in this island. The powerful effect of such an engine for good or for evil cannot be over-estimated. If the mimetic art is directed to noble and proper ends—if it is made to subserve the cause of sound morals, it may become an instrument of good in quarters into which other mentally sanitary influences cannot be brought to penetrate. (Public Amusements, 1853b)

The reviewer's faith in the colony's more formal institutions to inculcate sound morals had obviously been challenged; perhaps the theatre could do a better job. In the early 1850s, ensuring "well-regulated" drama included rounding up and punishing ticket-of-leave men who defied the law by appearing on stage (Police Summary, 1850). It also involved an effort to align theatrical entertainment more closely with the edifying offerings of the Mechanics' Institute. In Hobart, the Institute often included dramatic readings from Shakespeare in its programme, with accompanying commentary on Shakespeare and the drama in general. These events were particularly frequent prior to the Royal Victoria's renovations and they were surprisingly popular: for one of William Gore Elliston's lectures in 1850 (on *Henry IV*), the *Hobarton Guardian* reported that "long before the time appointed the entrance to the institute was regularly besieged by hundreds of persons anxious to secure seats"—apparently more than 200 were turned away.<sup>3</sup> The readings were especially valued by those members of the public who felt intimidated by the theatre's more robust atmosphere. Even after Watson's improvements, visiting actors were petitioned to fill this niche: Mr Charles Kemble Mason's readings from *Hamlet* in 1854 were done "at the suggestion of several literary gentlemen, with the view to meet the wishes of many families whose conscientious scruples prevent their attendance on theatrical representations" (Mr C. Kemble Mason's Shaksperian [sic] Lecture, 1854).

As well as providing considered analysis of Shakespearean characters, the Institute lectures promoted the moral benefits of the drama. The *Hobart Mercury* (presumably without irony) described Kemble Mason's second lecture on "Shaksperian Reading" as a discourse which "improved the Christian—imparted instruction to the wise—afforded an irrefutable apology for the drama—and gave evidence that Mr. Mason—though an actor—is a good Christian and a finished scholar" (Mechanics' Institute, 1854). The actor had recently appeared in productions of *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *The Merchant of Venice* at the Royal Victoria. By establishing his authority as a Christian and a scholar, the newspaper was by default re-positioning the Royal Victoria and its entertainments as acceptable for those citizens with "conscientious scruples".

Similar terms were applied to the American tragedians, Sarah and James Stark, who were the first of the touring celebrities to visit the colony. They presented *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Macbeth* in November 1853, amongst a programme of more contemporary staples such as *The Lady of Lyons*, and were noted for "the chasteness of their conceptions, their lofty and studied elocution, and dignity of action and deportment" (Music & the Drama, 1853). The visit was extensively promoted in the local press, with puff pieces that quoted reviews from papers elsewhere, including the *New York Herald*, and the *Sunday Times*, as evidence of the actors' international standing. Once the Starks arrived, the press produced some impassioned and personalised accounts of their performances. A lengthy review of *Othello*, for example, describes the "masterly precision" with which James Stark presented *Othello* and tries to capture its emotive effect:

[...] so, as it progresses, throughout the various stages of love, distrust, jealousy, and revenge, to the final and fatal consummation, does the gathering impetus of the scene press upon the spectator's mind, until "upon horror's head horrors accumulate;" and the falling of the curtain, that separates the real from the fictitious, is felt as an actual relief. Such, in effect, was our experience; and it would be doing injustice to the taste and discrimination of our fellow-citizens to suppose that it was not participated by them. (Royal Victoria Theatre, 1853)

Mrs Stark's Emilia was likewise lauded for a performance in which she upbraided the Moor with "mingled scorn, anguish and contempt". In contrast, the local Desdemona was a disappointment: "whatever may be the other deficiencies of an actor or actress, it is at all times in the power of both to learn at least the words of the part" (Royal Victoria Theatre, 1853).

This Shakespeare review was the first of many from the period that found the deficiencies of the local stock company somewhat exposed by the skills and charisma of visiting stars. Most reviews provide generous praise for the visitors, often confirmed by descriptions of a rapturous audience response. Miss Goddard's Queen Catherine in December 1854 "ascended into genius" according to the *Mercury*, and the audience recognised this too: "the splendid burst 'Lord Cardinal to you I speak' electrified the house and drew repeated rounds of applause" (Victoria Theatre, 1855). Even when the audience did not fully appreciate the performance, as was the case with the noisy "Pittites" for Kemble Mason's *Richard III*, reviewers would take on the task of educating their readers to more fully appreciate the actor's interpretation. In the latter case, the *Guardian* explained that in keeping *Richard's* consummate villainy constantly before the audience Mr Mason "embodies the poet's idea" and in doing so "necessarily deprives himself of a large amount of sympathy on the part of the audience" (Theatrical, 1854a).

Reviews of this period clearly reflect a vested interest in keeping Shakespearean performances viable and building audiences for the touring shows. Some reviewers were probably directly affected by the financial success or otherwise of the Royal Victoria theatre—especially given John Davies's dual role as theatre lessee and newspaper man—but the reviews also reveal the existence of a fervent group of local Shakespeare enthusiasts. William Greenslade argues that in nineteenth-century Britain, "a thorough acquaintance with Shakespeare had become a necessary accomplishment for young men wishing to present themselves to society as persons of learning, civility and good taste"

and that the study of Shakespeare was considered “appropriate training for anyone wanting to enter public life” (Greenslade, 2012, p. 135). Many Tasmanian settlers were products of this world, or at least aspired to convey that impression.

Unfortunately all reviews of the period were published anonymously and it is difficult to work out who wrote what, even though, in such a small community, the authorship of most items must have been widely known. What is clear from the biographies of men such as John Davies and William Elliston is just how multi-faceted the lives of professional men were in the colony: in many cases a passionate involvement in theatre, journalism and politics coincide. John Davies was an 18-year-old Jewish clerk in London when he was convicted of fraud and transported to New South Wales in 1830. By 1854, Davies had taken over the *Hobart Guardian*, changed its name to the *Hobart Mercury* and by 1860 his business absorbed rival papers the *Colonial Times*, *Tasmanian Daily News*, *Daily Courier* and *Hobart Town Courier*. He entered parliament in 1861, resigned because of protests about his newspaper monopoly and promptly got himself re-elected in another electorate. He must have drawn on his acting experience throughout his public life, despite on one occasion being denounced as “not up on his Shakespeare” (House of Assembly, 1864), after misapplying a Shakespearean reference in parliament. His lengthy obituary in the *Mercury* concludes that few will read of his death “without an involuntary application of the deceased’s favourite poet’s language—“He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again” (Death of Mr. John Davies, M.H.A., 1872). The obituary carefully glossed over Davies’s notorious physical altercations with rival newspaper men and his conviction for assault in 1860.

When Davies arrived in Van Diemen’s Land in 1850, ex-prisoners made up a large proportion of the island’s population. The census of 1847 established that just over 50 per cent of the population were convicts or emancipists, 26 per cent were native born and fewer than 20 per cent were free settlers (Reynolds, 2011, p. 138). A sharp political and ideological divide was apparent between those who saw some benefit in the current system of convict transportation and the native born and free settlers who wanted to end it. The rhetoric of the Anti-Transportation League focused on the degradations of the convict system and inevitably offended many of its former victims. When the situation was inflamed by an Act passed in Victoria designed to limit entry for ex-convicts, a group called the Tasmanian Union was formed in opposition to the League to protect emancipists’ interests. Heated meetings were held in the Royal Victoria theatre and debates raged between pro-Union paper, the *Hobart Guardian* (edited by emancipist William Bailey in 1850) and publications including the *Courier*, which spoke for the League.

A key figure associated with the *Courier* was William Gore Elliston. Like Davies he was a keen amateur actor. He was also one of the most regular Shakespeare readers at the Mechanics’ Institute in Hobart. Elliston’s father was an actor and manager of the Royal Theatre, Drury Lane and for a while before emigrating Elliston had managed the theatre himself. After working as an auctioneer and schoolmaster, Elliston bought the *Hobart Town Courier* in 1837. By 1850 he had sold it to Henry and Charles Best. Letters to the editors suggest, however, that Elliston was still writing for the paper and had a strong influence on its anti-transportation stance. Elliston occupied a range of public roles including that of Hobart’s second mayor in 1855.

It is possible that both Davies and Elliston supplied some of the Shakespeare reviews that appeared in their papers. Another possible critic for the *Courier* in the 1850s and later for the *Mercury* was Thomas Richards, a surgeon and writer, responsible for many signed essays, poems and literary sketches published in Hobart in the 1830s and 1840s. E. Morris Miller claims that Richards came to be on friendly terms with William Hazlitt and Edmund Kean while training for the medical profession in London (Morris Miller, 1952, p. 94) and was probably responsible for the dramatic criticism published in the *Colonial Times* in the 1840s that compared Hobart Shakespeares with those of Covent Garden, Drury Lane and other London theatres (Morris Miller, 1952, pp. 99–100). Richards’s journalistic activities are supposed to have been suspended in the 1850s after he returned to medicine in 1852, although he resumed work as a reporter and reader for the *Hobart Mercury* in the 1860s

(Morris Miller, 1952, p. 102). There are clear similarities between Shakespeare reviews published in the *Colonial Times* in the 1840s and in the *Courier* in the 1850s nevertheless, so Richards might have been responsible for both. An 1844 review of *Macbeth*, for example, notes that Lady Macbeth “is unquestionably the most arduous” of female roles, “rendered still more so of late years, by the unrivalled performance of Mrs. Siddons” (Theatre, 1844). Ten years later, the *Courier* says of Mrs Brougham’s Lady Macbeth, “it was an ill advised step to stake her histrionic reputation upon the second night of performance in the arduous character of Lady Macbeth. [...] how many equally gifted have failed to achieve greatness in the paths trodden by Miss O’Neill and Mrs. Siddons?” (Royal Victoria Theatre, 1854a). The latter critique prompted a rejoinder in the *Guardian*, accusing a rival journalist of allowing “private pique” to bias his judgement, and of referring to the “Walks which Siddons trod” so frequently that the idea had lost all meaning (Theatrical, 1854b). Richards was a supporter of the Tasmanian Union in 1850 (Robson, 1993, p. 511), hence not necessarily at odds with the *Guardian* on political grounds.

The lives of John Davies, William Gore Elliston and Thomas Richards intersected in many spheres of Tasmanian public life. They would have crossed paths at the Mechanics’ Institute, at political meetings and in the theatre. For them and their associates, Shakespeare was a common language: a ready source of quotations when engaging in debate, but also a meeting point for intellectuals from varied social backgrounds. Shakespeare’s cultural capital was of considerable value to free-settler and emancipist, leaguer and unionist. I find it striking that while the local press was remarkably combative when it came to reporting on meetings held by the Tasmanian Union and the Anti-Transportation League, accounts of Shakespeare activities seem to be detached from these issues. Apart from a few negative comments on the over-use of blue paint in the renovation of the Royal Victoria, responses to the reopening of the theatre in 1853 are consistently supportive. Moreover, regardless of their political affiliation, all the papers provide positive comment on Shakespearean readings by prominent leaguers, Elliston and C.B. Brewer, at the Mechanics’ Institute. It appears that all political sides were in agreement when it came to the value of Shakespeare and “legitimate drama” for the colony.

Tasmania’s press attempted to construct a warm welcome for the touring tragedians who brought Shakespeare to their local theatre. Their responses were not obsequious or wholly uncritical however. Most Shakespeare reviews are thoughtful critiques, reflecting the writers’ engagement with the production as a whole and careful evaluation of new points of characterisation that the visiting stars might suggest. The reviewers are also fiercely independent in their judgements. When Daniel and Emma Waller opened with *Hamlet* in September, 1854, the *Courier*, having cited lengthy glowing reviews from the Sydney papers the previous week, said:

We regret to say, however, that the acting of Mr. Waller did not bear out the anticipation we had been led to form in reference to his *Hamlet* from the friendly notices of our contemporaries in the other colonies, whose standard of taste, [...] we have no desire to follow. (Royal Victoria Theatre, 1854b)

The *Mercury* was more charitable, noting that Mr Waller had a cold, which gave his voice a “curious harshness” but at least “he did not roar and rant” (Victoria Theatre, 1854).

Waller revived *Hamlet* at the Royal Victoria in November, and on this occasion the *Courier*’s critic revised his opinion. After acknowledging that for his previous review he was unaware of the actor’s illness, he praises Waller’s comprehension of “the author’s genius”. In an extended description of the performance the review focuses on several key moments, quoting liberally along the way:

His solemn appeal—“Angels and ministers of grace defend us!”—accompanied, as it was, by action totally free from exaggeration, and yet fully conveying the impression of horror that fills his soul, was chastely rendered, together with the solemn speech, in which he adjures the spirit to release him from the doubts that torture his mind. Nothing could be more beautiful than his delivery of the lines,—

“I’ll call thee Hamlet,  
King, father, Royal Dane.”

The intonation of voice on the word “father” was most pathetic, and had a touching effect. (Royal Victoria Theatre, 1854c)

The *Daily News* was less enamoured of Waller’s Hamlet the following year, noting that in one or two scenes “he forgot himself into success”. For this critic, the subtlety of Mrs Waller’s Ophelia was the highlight:

She is one of the most perfect actresses in the art of suppression we ever saw. A look, a motion of the hand or lip, a drooping of the voice, with her will tell more than whole volumes with some others. In speaking of her voice, we could not but observe the intense pathos and tenderness which she contrives to throw into her tones. She has learnt, as the Italians say, “to make her voice weep” [...] She did not make so much “feint” as some other actresses whom we have seen, and we think she was quite right: Ophelia is not intended to be demonstrative, and had she been too distinct, she would have missed what, we believe, was Shakespeare’s idea. (Royal Victoria Theatre, 1855b)

Tasmanian theatre critics had great confidence in their understanding of “Shakespeare’s idea” with regard to characters, tone and setting. They also demonstrate an awareness of the productions as adaptations. In 1853, the *Courier’s* critic comments that “the present system of placing the works of Shakespeare upon the stage” meant he had never seen a play its original form (Royal Victoria Theatre, 1853). A later review of *Macbeth* notes that it was Phelps’s adaptation they had seen, in which Macbeth’s exit to murder Duncan was “much heightened by the appearance, according to the idea of the adapter, of the weird sisters in a corridor of the castle”. The same piece speaks approvingly of “the rich music of Locke [...] the flight of Hecate, and the satanic orgies in the cave of Acheron” (Royal Victoria Theatre, 1856). Above all, though, these writers had an endless fascination with Shakespeare’s characterisation, devoting many columns to discussions of Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet and Richard III and their varied representation. It would be interesting to know how many readers tackled these essays and how they were received by the large proportion of the community with convict connections.

Studies of nineteenth-century Shakespeares commonly stress the pervasiveness of his work in Britain and its empire. Adrian Poole writes that “Shakespeare sometimes seemed the Victorian’s utterance, a language for expressing and explaining themselves and their world, for talking to each other” (Poole, 2004, p. 2) and Gail Marshall introduces *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century* by noting that Shakespeare was “acted, spoken by theatre professionals and ordinary citizens, quoted, painted and endlessly referred to” (Marshall, 2012, p. 1). In the mid-nineteenth century, Shakespeare’s reach extended right across the world to the penal colony in Tasmania. As the island moved towards self-government and ex-convicts and settlers struggled to find ways to get along together, Shakespeare’s arrival in the form of visiting tragedians from Britain and America provided welcome relief. Touring Shakespeares afforded local writers an opportunity to fill newspaper columns with ideas about acting, character interpretation and scenic effects, in a contrasting register to the adjacent accounts of local politics, litigation, murders, thefts and accidental drownings. They also provided occasion for the construction of a new sense of community identity. A review of *Macbeth* from 1855 addresses a readership familiar with both Dickens and Shakespeare:

“Time, with his innumerable horse-power,” fails to efface the interest which the admirers of Shakespeare attach to the tragedy of *Macbeth*, and it was with considerable pleasure we noticed the attendance of a discriminating audience at the theatre last night. (Royal Victoria Theatre, 1855a)

The reviewer's gratification at the existence of a "discriminating audience" in a township whose recent history was one of exploitation, injustice and bloodshed, might appear self-satisfied, elitist or even delusional. But it also speaks of this socially and geographically marginalised settlement's readiness to think of itself as a distinct cultural entity, capable of discerning engagement with Shakespeare's work.

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#### Notes

1. Royal Amphitheatre (1850). All cited nineteenth-century newspaper articles were accessed through the National Library of Australia's (n.d.) database of digitised newspapers.
2. "The Legitimate Drama" was the headline for the *Courier's* announcement of the forthcoming tour by American tragedians, the Starks, in 1853 (8 November 1853, p. 3).
3. Mechanics' Institute (1850). For detailed discussion of Hobart's Shakespeare readings see Anae (2012).

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