

**Shakespeare's Heroines and the Construction of an
Ideal Victorian Femaleness**

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Abstract

Denne oppgaven omhandler et fenomen i Viktoriatiden da man på tross av modernisering og fremskritt lengtet tilbake til fortiden. Industrialiseringen hadde gjort samfunnet kaldt og konkurransepreget, og forandringene hadde kommet på bekostning av de dypere verdier. Man mente at menneskenes moraler hadde blitt ofret til fordel for deres ambisjoner og ønske om å skaffe seg høyere posisjoner i samfunnet. Dette var da særlig et tema i middelklassen da industrialiseringen åpnet for at de kunne klatre oppover i hierarkiet. Det ble da kvinnenens ansvar å representere det moralske aspektet, og den perfekte Viktorianske kvinnen var hun som representerte de rene moraler og verdier. Idealiseringen av kvinnen og av fortiden skjedde på samme tid som Shakespeare ble ansett for å være selve symbolet på det engelske. Dermed ble hans kvinnelige figurer opphøyet, og brukt som rollemodeller for de Viktorianske kvinnene. Man mente at enkelte av Shakespeares kvinnelige figurer var symbolet på den ideelle kvinnen, og kvinner ble oppfordret til å følge deres eksempel. Denne oppgaven fokuserer hovedsakelig på fire bøker som brukte Shakespeares kvinnelige figurer som rollemodeller for de Viktorianske kvinnene. Mary Cowden Clarkes *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*, Anna Jamesons *Shakespeare's Heroines*, Helena Faucit's *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* og Ellen Terrys *The Story of My Life* er eksempler på hvordan Shakespeares kvinnelige figurer ble brukt som forbilder i konstruksjonen av den ideelle Viktorianske kvinnen.

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[A]ll that I had assimilated from the study of the best literature and of the best art within my reach, all that I had tried in a humble and devout spirit to learn and to practise of what was pure and unselfish, honourable and worthy in thought and in act, together with all that my own heart and experience of life had taught me, was turned to account in the endeavour to present a living picture of womanhood as divined by Shakespeare, and held up by him as an ideal for woman to aspire to, and for men to revere.

Helena Faucit, *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* (1885)

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Introduction:

Shakespeare, Femaleness, Society, History and Idealism

The Victorian Era stood for development and modernisation, and progress led to an overarching wave of change that affected everyone touched by it. The big cities grew as more people left the rural areas in hope of finding employment, where the opportunity for wealth and happiness was no longer reserved just for the nobility. One could work one's way up the social hierarchy. The society changed, the economy changed, the living conditions changed, and the people changed. The new society and the new social settings that came with it required that the people had to reinvent themselves and adopt different modes of behaviour. The industrialised society opened the doors to the higher circles in society and the possibility to improve one's social status, but that required a reinvention of the self. The changes that led to this happened so fast that it was hard to know how to react, and the need for role models arose. The old heroes and heroines were dusted off and re-represented to the Victorians as something they could grasp on to while the chaos grew around them. But this time it was more in the sense of models than as distant, fictional heroes who were only fit for admiration, and too good to be representative of a realistic and attainable goal that almost everyone could reach. The models, fictional and real, were reinvented, often with a look at their more human sides. While their excellence in being and achievements were emphasised, one made room for their flaws and errors to show that while the best of us may fail occasionally, like the heroes of fiction did, there was an innate grandeur that needed to be encouraged and developed, with the heroes as examples.

The time the heroes came from seemed so perfect and simple compared to the present. Modernised society had come at a cost, and it was the morality, the values and the ideals that

had suffered the most. Society had become machinery where ambition and hard work were survival techniques. Industrialisation did lead to many positive changes, for example improved living conditions, but a strong feeling of inadequacy started to affect the Victorians and their sense of self. Everything seemed to be better in the past, and the change that was needed to regain the grandeur of old times had to start with the people. They had to become what their forefathers and foremothers had been to create a society like theirs. But the men could not free themselves from the mercantile machinery because they had to support the family, which, due to the improved living conditions and reduced infant mortality, became bigger. That meant that it was up to the women to attend to issues regarding morality and values.

The focus of this thesis is the time when the idealisation of the past, which will be exemplified through among others Thomas Carlyle and A.W.N Pugin, met with the idealisation of Shakespeare and his characters, and created the foundation of the search for a new ideal in the new era. The focus will be on the creation of an ideal femaleness with Shakespeare's heroines as models, which will inevitably lead us into a discussion of women's education, both in school and in terms of upbringing and the inculcation of values. It also requires an investigation into the ideal represented by Shakespeare's female characters and how this ideal was utilised and conveyed by the primary books this thesis is based on. What made these characters so suitable for the formation of an ideal Victorian femaleness? And was there an active attempt on the part of the writers I use in this thesis to inculcate their readers with these ideals to the extent that it can be called an educational intention?

Among the heroes and heroines that the Victorians adopted as their ideals were kings and queens who had reigned a long time ago, great warriors responsible for England's success and prosperity, and beloved figures of literature. They were all placed on pedestals and revered as symbols of greatness that were now lost. Shakespeare's works had a unique

position as his characters were considered by many as the ultimate representatives of the grandeur represented by the past and the very finest examples of humankind that history had to offer. So when many Victorians started to look for an ideal and for a model to imitate, Shakespeare became a natural choice. This tendency coincided with an increased number of women writers who were now not only reading Shakespeare, but also interpreting his works. On one side they were actively interpreting him for their contemporaries as scholarly dissertations, meant to be read for entertainment and for the sake of educating one's self. Most importantly, they were interpreting his female characters from a female point of view and released to a female readership that was now treated to thoughts on their favourite heroines that were not filtered through male perception first. That is, aside from Shakespeare. But that was not such a big issue as they felt that Shakespeare had a special insight into the female character, and described women better than any man, and perhaps woman, ever could. They believed that his heroines were the truest examples of the feminine ideal, and they were accordingly admired and imitated by Victorian women. Shakespeare's heroines represented the values from the idealised past, and the hope was that Victorian women should adopt these values and bring them into their own time to counteract the greed, selfishness and heartless ambition that dominated industrialised society. This idea was largely aimed at middle class women. The women from the lower classes were, out of necessity, often a part of the workforce and thereby a part of the very tendencies that women were supposed to counteract. Women were supposed to be the remedy against competition, ambition and commercialism by virtue of their position as homemakers. There will, therefore, be focus on the middle class, but also on the people who were trying to get into the middle class. The following theories on womanhood, ideals and morality will be applied to a middle class environment because it allows us to look at the effects of the industrialisation in a social class where the consequences of this were most clearly seen. It enables us to view it in light of the self-

advancement made possible by the industrialisation and the focus on the home and the family that dominated the middle class. The middle class women were given a new and pivotal role as representatives of purity and high morals, and Shakespeare's heroines were often used as role models.

We must consider the words that will be used in this text. As formerly mentioned, the term "Shakespeare's heroines" is more like the imitation of models than the worship of heroes and heroines. A model is, when applied to humans, "a person ... that is proposed or adopted for imitation" (*OED*), and it resembles what we today call role model. While the term role model will be applied it must be mentioned that this term did not appear until 1957 when it was used in Robert K. Merton's research on medical students, but it was later integrated into the English language with the meaning of "someone who, in the performance of a role, is taken as a model by others" (*OED*). This term will be used because it removes the necessity of having to define, ad nauseam, what these heroines actually were presented as to the Victorian readers. It also expressed what these characters in essence meant to the people who admired them, and that they did assume a role of perfection when they imitated their favourite heroines.

The main objective of this study is to look at how Shakespeare's heroines were pulled out of the plays and put into a Victorian context, and promoted as role models to young Victorian women. This will be done by looking for descriptions of the ideal and the woman's role, and references to the education of women, in a selection of books where, I argue, the characters have been extracted from the plays and presented as individuals with individual traits, personalities and values. I believe that the authors behind the chosen works perceived the heroines to be perfect examples of ideal femaleness, and that they were used in educating young women hoping that they too would come to represent the same values. This was done in several ways, but the focus will primarily be on four books, which will shortly be duly

presented, which I find to represent this tendency to the fullest, but in different ways. Not much consideration will be made of the fact that the books come from different times, and one of them is actually released a few years after the Victorian era ended. This is because the idea is to look at it as a tendency, or a phenomenon, specific to this era, and in that respect it is more interesting to look at the overarching ideas and interests that can be found throughout than separating it into early, middle and late Victorian era trying to single out the differences. While this is not without relevance, it will be sacrificed, placing the primary focus on the differences found in the books over an analysis based on chronology.

The terms “femaleness” and “womanhood” will be applied when speaking of the ideal instead of, for example, “femininity”, because the latter comes with its own set of characteristics while the two former allows us to define those characteristics for ourselves. They may appear as synonyms, but I believe that there is a subtle difference which makes it important to divide the terms right from the start. “Femaleness” and “womanhood” can be seen as denotations of sex, and from a natural point of view be the opposite of “maleness” and “manhood”. “Womanhood” can also be used when speaking of ages, for example as opposed to girlhood. “Femininity”, however, denotes characteristics attributed to the notion of femaleness, and can be seen as its outward expression. It brings with it associations in terms of manners, actions and appearance, whereas I see “femaleness” as the foundation unto which these characteristics are added. “Femininity” may also be seen as a male construction where differences have been designated by men to women for the sake of separating them. By using “femaleness” I aim to start working with a blank sheet onto which I can assign characteristics as I go along. The construction of an ideal femaleness leads to a specific type of femininity valued as desirable in the Victorian era. “Feminism” is also a tricky term to use because that too comes with its own set of definitions and prerequisites instead of existing independently as a natural denomination like “femaleness” does.

The first chapter is dedicated to *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* from 1850, written by Mary Cowden Clarke, and Anna Jameson's *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical, and Historical* from 1832. The title of Jameson's book was later changed to *Shakespeare's Heroines*, and that is the title I will use from this point forward. The change is significant to the topics I discuss, and will be explained in greater detail in chapter one. The books will be used as examples of the tendency to extract the characters from the plays, and viewed in light of the idealisation of Shakespeare's heroines and the idealisation of the past. An investigation will be made into whether or not *The Girlhood* and *Shakespeare's Heroines* represent a clear educational intention to the extent that they resemble conduct literature, and even fit into the same educational tradition based on the same ideals, view of women and women's roles. Since the suggestion is that the ideals were taken from the past, primarily the Middle Ages, Carlyle and Pugin will be used as examples of how there was a belief that everything was better in the past and that adopting the old values was the only way to redeem what they saw as the degraded present.

In chapter two I will follow up on the claim that there is an educational purpose behind the books about Shakespeare's heroines. By looking at some conduct books, with a special focus on Sarah Ellis' *The Women of England*, I will try to find similar values and a similar approach to women's education. I believe that Shakespeare's heroines were actively used in the education of women, and that some of the books about them are, among many other things, creative contributions to conduct literature. It will be of significance, therefore, to explore the ideals depicted in traditional conduct literature.

The fact that the characters were removed from the play does not mean that we should exclude the theatre altogether, because there were important writings on Shakespeare's heroines and idealism which had its origin in the theatre. Chapter three is devoted to the writings of the actresses Ellen Terry and Helena Faucit who used their experience from the

theatre to formulate their ideas of Shakespeare's heroines. Terry's autobiography from 1907, *The Story of My Life*, and Faucit's letters, collected in the book *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* in 1885, are filled with ideas on idealism and gender roles, and give a unique insight in the meeting between the Elizabethan heroine and the Victorian actress, and the attempt to make this encounter into the Victorian heroine. While both women link their experiences to the stage, they have the same inclination towards personalising the characters, to separate them from the text from which they came, and deal with them as though they were real. Even when speaking of the characters as characters, it is combined with ideas on what women should be and thoughts on how the characters either represent or oppose their ideas on the ideal femaleness.

While their approaches are different, they use a method where the characters are pulled from the plays and put into other context. The effect of this is that it becomes not so much about Shakespeare any more, but the characters become expressions of a different cause. An exploration of these books will lead, I believe, to evidence suggesting that the four authors utilise the characters to support their ideas on womanhood. And while their allegations are tied to abilities they believe that the characters have, we must not forget that this is based on interpretations and personal readings.

Mary Cowden Clarke, Anna Jameson, Helena Faucit and Ellen Terry wrote with such an enthusiasm for these characters that it led to a way of writing about them where it seemed like the characters came alive and developed their own personalities, ambitions, hopes and intentions. This peculiar tendency made it natural to ask what had happened before and after the events in the play. What led the characters to behave like that and what happened once the curtains closed? In "The Ladies' Shakespeare" Juliet Fleming calls this approach character criticism:

Character criticism concentrates its energies on the dramatic personae of the play, and works, according to a logic of realism derived from the novel, to supply their actions with psychological motivation, and consequently to explain them as resulting from a combination of in-born traits, early life experience, and current circumstances (Fleming 2001, 13).

The result is a very special way of dealing with fictional characters where they are referred to as living human beings who are fully responsible for their fates and who have independent feelings and thoughts that stretch far outside the plot of the play. Cowden Clarke's entire book is dedicated to the task of describing the childhood of Shakespeare's heroines, creating events that lead up to the play as if they were the natural forerunners of the events in the actual plays. Terry, in her work as an actress, uses the same method. Faucit looks into the future, imagining what really happened once the play had ended, dissatisfied with where the ending had left her heroine. Jameson goes outside the perimeters of the play by asking herself how certain events could have led to different results, but she does not imagine the pasts and the presents the same way that

These are four very different books that, I argue, use four different approaches to convey the same message, namely that some of Shakespeare's heroines have qualities that make them suitable representatives for the ideal womanhood, and that through exploration of their lives, their triumphs and their errors, normal women will be provided with role models to imitate and, hopefully, become as virtuous, pure and good as them. These books represent the moment when the past meets the present and is fused together to create a future. Also, there is what can be called an educational intention behind this. I believe they are all, albeit in different ways, trying to educate the Victorian women, describing these heroines to them hoping that they will imitate what is good in them and learn from what is bad in them. Jameson claims that she hopes her efforts "might lead to good" (Jameson 1837, vi), while Faucit explains that she gave in to her friends' request that she would write her thoughts on the characters hoping that "I might do good" (Faucit 1904, viii), which leads me to believe

that these are not works written with no firm intention and no other drive than to entertain one's own curiosities, but with a desire to do good, which in this context means to inspire the Victorian women to become the best women they can be by imitating Shakespeare's heroines.

Since what we are dealing with here is the construction of an ideal, we need to take a look at exactly what this ideal is and in what ways it has been promoted. When it has been clarified exactly what the ideal is one must, inevitably, look at the ways it was conveyed. We have already established that the way in which these four women convey their idea of the ideal is through Shakespeare's heroines, but are there traces in their writing of an explicit intent to inspire others to follow in the steps of these heroines? Are they educational? A part of the exploration of the educational ideas in these four works is based on the assumption that they reflect the ideas found in conduct books that were very popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Similar ideas of womanhood can be found in both types. In Cowden Clarke and Jameson these similarities stand out more clearly, but the same ideas can be found in Terry and Faucit's books as well. But is it enough to claim that what we in truth are looking at are reinventions of conduct books? The popularity of that form declined from the 1820s, a matter which will be investigated further in chapter two, but did books like the ones on Shakespeare's heroines adopt a similar approach to education which they then brought further into the nineteenth century? Is *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* simply a creative conduct book with Shakespeare being merely the tool and nothing more? Can the same ideas on women's roles, education and nature be found in all books, and is there an attempt to convey these messages for the sake of inspiring the readers to adopt the ideals they emphasise? Sarah Stickney Ellis' *The Women of England* from 1838 will be used as a primary source when looking at conduct books, while making references to other relevant works, such as *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management* from 1861 and John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* from 1864.

None of these books belongs to a pure category or genre. The authors use different approaches to the material and different ways to convey their messages. I believe that the points they are trying to make are similar, but none of them follow the same road to reach the same destination. It is tempting for the reader to deem them exclusively one thing or the other as a way of labelling them to make it easier to comprehend what they are about. The difficulty with genre is caused both by the fact that the forms of the books themselves are new, and that they are too diverse to be placed into a category. The autobiography, for example, originated in antiquity, but did not become the life story based on accounts of childhood, memories and adventures before the eighteenth and nineteenth century. That means that the form itself is quite new, and it was not as fixed in form and outlook as it would become later. Cowden Clarke's tales are based on an old form, but, I argue, alter the premise of the form by putting it to another use, namely the exploration of positive attitudes towards women in Shakespeare, the education of women and descriptions of the ideal. I believe their work represents something new, and it is hard to place them into a category simply because there is no label that fits them all perfectly. Jameson and Cowden Clarke's books may participate in the conduct literature genre, but they are not inherently the same. Likewise, Terry's autobiography is much more than just a succession of anecdotes from a long life. Whether or not it was the intention of the writer, it is a scholarly dissertation of Shakespeare's characters, it contains material on political matters and it is a discussion of the woman's role in society, as a housewife and as a member of the workforce. Helena Faucit's letters which turned into a book change between a variety of modes without really ever settling in one of them. No attempts will be made to try to put them in a pure category or a specific genre. Jacques Derrida, among others, will tell us that there is no such thing as a pure genre. Texts participate in different genres without firmly belonging to any of them (Derrida 1992, 227), and these

four books are strong examples of just that. One must, therefore, put focus on the fact that in terms of genre, these books represent something quite unique and different.

Women writing about women will inevitably lead to the necessity of bringing up feminist criticism. But what is that exactly, and can it be applied to these books? Feminist criticism is not one clear theory with a few clear rules, and there are many different kinds. So which theory should be applied here, if any? The word feminism carries with it several implications which may not all be right for what we are looking at here. Trying to fit Cowden Clarke, Jameson, Faucit and Terry's praise of the family life and housewifery into radical activist feminism would be unfair to both the theory and the books. But by writing and publishing their ideas on Shakespeare they are challenging male authority and the male perception of both Shakespeare's heroines and women in general. Cowden Clarke, Jameson, Faucit and Terry did their work in a time when it was becoming more common for women to write, but it was still a discipline dominated by men. They are given the opportunity to speak of social and literary matters in their own voices thus challenging the dominant and reigning views of the time. They are women reading and interpreting Shakespeare, and then publishing their theories. In this respect, it is fascinating to see the relationship between the ideals they speak of, as different as they may be, and what they represent themselves as writers, editors, actors and scholars. They do not only depict ideology, but they are a part of the ideology they write about. They do not solely describe the tendencies from an objective distance, they partake in them.

Their efforts belong to what Juliet Fleming calls "women's promotion of Shakespeare...as a man who loved women" (Fleming in Callaghan 2001, 4). The revisions, adaptations and rewritings made in the four books I focus on resemble the work of a group called The Ladies Shakespeare Club which consisted of women who wanted Shakespeare's plays to be performed more often. Their persistent campaigns were very successful, and in

Emmet L. Avery's article on the Shakespeare's Ladies Club there are numbers that show that in the 1736-1737 season seventeen percent of the performances were Shakespearean against fourteen percent in the season before. They worked to incorporate Shakespeare in fashion in order to attract audiences to the "good drama" (Avery 1956, 153). Their efforts to promote Shakespeare's plays over any other may stem from many reasons, but a testimony to the Ladies suggests that their efforts were fuelled by the same belief that is held by the four authors, that the plays were a good source to morality and virtue, and bringing the plays to the public would improve the values of society. Avery quotes an unnamed writer in the periodical *Common Sense* (1738) as saying:

The great Encouragement which has been given, in these two Winters pass'd, to the acting of Shakespear's Plays, makes me hope Fashion is at last going to side with Virtue, and if ever Publick Diversions are made Auxiliaries to Common Sense, Morality may once more have a Chance of becoming Fashionable (157).

Even Shakespeare himself decided to rise from the grave and pronounce his appreciation for their work. In a letter signed WILLIAM SHAKESPEAR the Ladies are thanked for their efforts, in words that I believe could easily have been addressed to Cowden Clarke, Jameson, Faucit and Terry. While men have claimed monopoly of the "Connoissance of all Arts and Sciences, yet late glorious Stand the Ladies have made in defence of Wit, when it was almost ready to give up the Ghost, will prove that your Relish of what is truly good and poetical, is at least equal, if not superior to theirs" (155).

All four women continue in the same path laid by the Shakespeare Ladies Club as they focus on positive portraits of women that they claim to have found in Shakespeare's work. This does not apply to everyone, obviously, but the focus will be primarily on the characters where this may be the case. This is an issue which has been contested for as long as feminist criticism has been applied to Shakespeare, and evidence can be found in support both for and against. Whereas "some feminist critics have contested the apparent misogyny of the plays",

others, like Linda Bamber, “reminded her readers of the evident misogyny of Shakespeare’s treatment of his tragic heroines and placed her work ‘in reaction against the tendency for feminist critics to interpret Shakespeare as his work directly supports and develops feminist ideas’ ” (McLuskie in Dollimore & Sinfield 1985, 88-89). But this study is not primarily about whether or not there were positive attitudes towards women in Shakespeare, but whether or not Cowden Clarke, Jameson, Terry and Faucit believed there were. A textual analysis of Shakespeare’s work is not the focus of attention, but rather a study of the textual analysis I believe is made by these writers in order to find, and then present to their readers, perfect examples of womanhood to be revered and imitated. It relies on their studies, interpretations and adaptations. The plays have been reconstructed to act as a frame of reference to texts written about it with adjustments made to make it fit into the theories of the writers. If one focuses on morality, surely the plays will be all about that. Or if one is interested in gender issues, the text must be reconstructed around that claim to support it.

Dympna Callaghan claims that “we can only tell what Shakespeare means about gender, sexuality, race, or social relations by reading his texts in the context of the culture in which he wrote them” (Callaghan 2001, xiii). This devaluates the importance of the primary texts of this thesis where the characters are placed within a Victorian context, and with a continual focus on what Shakespeare really meant and how this is relevant for their present. The events in the plays were presented as evidence for their claims. That means that the books are dealing with notions of femininity in Shakespeare created and formulated two hundred years after his death in a time that was very different from the original context. Their focus on the intention is, if one is to adhere to Callaghan’s opinions, inextricably linked to the time the plays were written, and the idealisation of his characters is simply the idealisation of the past. I argue, however, that while the past is idealised and adopted, the authors have found values and ideals that should not be adopted simply because they come from the good old days, but

because they represent something universal that belongs just as much to the present and the future as to the past. Still, the use of the term “intention” is in itself is quite a slippery term, and requires further investigation. When the issue is brought to the theatre, matters are even more complicated as performance is about change, reinvention, reinterpretation and adaptation. But is it not that every age develops a new reading? And why should those readings be regarded as considered less valuable? In *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* from 1841, Thomas Carlyle makes a valid point which renders Callaghan’s claim rather restrictive. In the lecture “Hero as Poet: Dante and Shakespeare” Carlyle claims that “[t]he Hero as Divinity, the Hero as Prophet, are productions of old ages; not to be repeated in the new”, but the Poet, on the other hand, “is a heroic figure belonging to all ages; whom all ages possess, when once he is produced, whom the newest age as the oldest may produce; – and will produce, always when Nature pleases” (Carlyle 1901, 89). New readings are the natural future of literature, and the poet knows it. And it is important to remember that it is not Shakespeare as such that we speak of, it is editions of Shakespeare, appropriations, adaptations and revisions. We should not limit our scope to speak of one Shakespeare from which all ideas originates. Also, this thesis is founded on the possibility of pulling the characters out of the plays to make them relevant for the present time. In the preface to *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Heroines*, Mary Cowden Clarke writes:

Although little or no attempt will be found in these tales to give pictures of the times in which their chief actors may be supposed to have lived, yet it is hoped that no gross violation of probability in period, scene, or custom, has been committed. The development of character, not of history, has been the intention (Cowden Clarke 1878a, 1).

And so it is with this thesis. It is the development of character that is the focus, while using history and origin only to explain and give evidence of the claims that will be made.

While Shakespeare is the source of what will be explored in the following pages, this thesis is not directly about his plays. It is an exploration of what people have written about his

plays, and their interpretations of them. This is not a study of original intentions and meanings in Shakespeare's work, but an exploration of opinions of what the intentions and meanings were. When the writers speak of what Shakespeare must have meant and what he was trying to convey, it becomes a matter of finding the true opinions of the author. Their focus is on finding Shakespeare's voice in his works. In his book *Image, Music, Text*, translated into English in 1977, Roland Barthes addressed this issue under the title "The Death of the Author".

The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions...The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us (Barthes 1977, 142, italics in the original).

The study is not about the text itself, but always inextricably linked with what one believes are the political views and religious beliefs of the author, as well as the time in which he or she lived and worked. The opinions that are expressed in literature are read as the opinions of the author, and the characters become the vessels through which the message is conveyed. Barthes believes that this way of reading focuses on only one interpretation and leads to an obsessive search for the author's voice. "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text" (147). The implications are quite biblical as the "Author-God" (146), as Barthes puts it, speaks to his readers through his characters, which then gives them the same claim to reality, the same treatment as living humans, as the author has been given. The result is a way of writing about literary works as if they are testaments to the opinions of the author, ignoring all the other layers of meaning, including the meaning attributed to it by the readers.

I believe that the books I focus on are involved in the same search for the author's voice, but it becomes intermingled with their own opinions through the readers' experience. And since the characters are extracted from the plays, I argue, and placed into a Victorian

context, it is not singularly about the context in which they were written. But due to the idealisation of the past, this is an issue that should not be entirely excluded either. The point is that both the Victorian readings of the plays add more layer than the obsessive focus on the Author and their context. Jameson's essays, Faucit's letters and Terry's autobiography are based on the voice and opinions of the author, but I also believe that so are Cowden Clarke's tales. "[A] text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (148), Barthes claims, the destination being the reader. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the frequent use of the word intention is not in the sense of Shakespeare's intention, but on what I believe are the intentions and expression of opinions found in the main books. That is not to say that I exclude the possibility that there was, on the part of Shakespeare, a clear agenda to promote positive attitudes towards women, but rather a clarification that that is not the issue here. When, for example, Cowden Clarke claims to have found these attitudes in Shakespeare, the goal is to explore that claim in its own right, link it to the culture from which it originated and try to fit it into the search for and definition of the ideal. Some thoughts will be presented on the validity of the claims which requires an analysis of Shakespeare's plays to create a context. The overall goal is not to prove or disprove the theories and ideas made by these women, but rather to explore them and the implications they might have had.

Just as Cowden Clarke, Jameson, Terry and Faucit have chosen the characters best fitted to convey their message, so have I done the same. Any omission is not out of neglect, but fuelled by the desire to do justice to the chosen few. With regards to the characters this thesis and the work done by the four chosen authors, some characters stand out as particularly important. With a few minor references to other plays, this thesis primarily revolves around Isabella from *Measure for Measure*, Helena from *All's Well That Ends Well*, Ophelia from *Hamlet*, Lady Macbeth from *Macbeth*, Katherina and Bianca from *The Taming of the Shrew*, Mistress Ford and Mistress Page from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Portia from *The*

Merchant of Venice and Desdemona from *Othello*. The characters offer the opportunity to look at heroines of tragedy and comedy, and include characters who represent the ideal and characters who do not, as well as some problematic cases which alternate between the two.

Since the main issue of this thesis is to look at the phenomenon of using Shakespeare's heroines as role models for Victorian women, the primary literary works will be used as lenses into Victorian society trying to find some defining characteristics. The texts are placed in an historical context with a focus on politics and the economic situation, and with continual attention to the effects this would have on the creation of the ideal, and therefore on the books. The exploration of these aspects also involves the readers in this creation as it implies that the meaning of the books cannot fully be discovered before it has been filtered through the eyes of the readers. It mimics Barthes' claim that the origin, in other words the text as representation of the authorial intention, is not the most important thing. It is the destination, the readers.

A related notion can be found in Jacky Bratton's term "Intertheatricality". It is an extension of Julia Kristeva's "Intertextuality", and it explores "the mesh of connections between all kinds of theatre texts, and between texts and their users" (Bratton 2003, 37). The theatre must be seen in relation to society because "no writing or reading is isolated from the other writing and reading within its culture" (37). Text and culture should not be separated, and it is, therefore, important to include Victorian society into the discussion of books which circles around what we now have come to think of as typically Victorian traits. By assuming that the authors had an agenda when writing these books, other than entertaining and creating an outlet for creative energies, one has to consider the time and the culture in which they lived. Opinions, traditions and values in Victorian society must be taken into consideration without assuming that one will find an unchanging and absolute essence. The idea is to view these books as a phenomenon of the time with regards to the diversity between them. And

with Victorian culture in mind, one can investigate how, and if, these books are products of their time.

This thesis is an exploration in the ways in which Shakespeare's heroines were used in the construction of a female ideal in the Victorian era. It is not an exploration in terms of a specific theoretical basis, but rather on a cultural basis. What was the ideal femaleness in the Victorian Era? And why were Shakespeare's heroines used as role models? What qualities did they have that the Victorians viewed as so exemplary? How were the heroines portrayed in books and on stage, and what does that have to say for the Victorian opinion of the ideal femaleness? Is there a strain of educational thought behind it to the extent that one can claim that the heroines were incorporated into women's education? These are some of that will be discussed on the following pages.

Chapter One

The Construction of an Ideal Femaleness in the Works of

Anna Jameson and Mary Cowden Clarke

When discussing the Victorian Era, in terms of society, art or politics, it is important to keep in mind that above all this is a period of change, growth, modernisation and progress. Massive changes took place from the beginning to end of the period which is, paradoxically, commonly known for its stereotypes. These changes render it futile to speak of a uniform period of time, assuming that it stayed mostly the same. There are some things, however, that can be found throughout. In this study the most interesting among them are the fascination with Shakespeare and the idealisation of the past. The origin of this idea can be found largely in Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present* from 1843. While England was in a time of progress, wealth and modernisation, the poor were being exploited, ignored or simply left behind. There was a concern for the morality of the nation as some believed that the industrialised society promoted selfishness, business and earnings. Carlyle (1858, viii-ix) claimed that "while the wealth and the population of the country increased rapidly through the natural opportunities of its trade, the masses of the people were miserable and poor". He made the important point that progress does not bring happiness and success to everyone. It is not the pathway to perfection. Carlyle's concern for the miserable and poor who were left behind resembles what Walter Benjamin, one century later, called "historicity".

[O]ne asks with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathize. The answer is inevitable: with the victor. And all the rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence, empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers...Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate (Benjamin 1999, 248).

The logic behind the term “historicity” is that nearly everything can be justified because we are moving towards something better, but both Carlyle and Benjamin criticise the idea that progress always is taken to mean something positive. Carlyle’s reference to the miserable and poor, and Benjamin’s words on “those who are lying prostrate” (ibid.) reject the notion of progress as heading towards perfection. Something had to be sacrificed in the capitalistic march forward, and nothing was more expendable than humans. For Carlyle the past represented simpler times where the grass seemed greener, life was easier and the people happier. The heroes were braver and more gallant, and the heroines wiser and more beautiful. Surely the key was in these past and better times instead of the corrupted and materialistic times that their present consisted of. But industrialisation had brought them improved living conditions, increased social rights and general benefits of modernisation, and one may ask what exactly was so appealing with the past. It was claimed that modernisation had led the people in the wrong direction, and that the improvements of everyday life had come at a cost of the moral and spiritual well-being of the people.

[I]n reducing every pleasure to one kind, and making it the one motive, they pitched the moral standard far too low for their practice, and came to centre their view on the commoner desires of men, and to overlook the higher, as if those were the natural and these were not (Carlyle 1858, xlvi).

The Middle Ages stood out as particularly important in the idealisation and the recreation of the past as it was, Schoch (1998, 13) claims, “the age when English language, law and literature was born”. It is the dream of the “lost idyllic age” (ibid.) that possessed them to look back at times past with such a profound longing and nostalgia. When the English architect August Welby Pugin spoke for the superiority of the architecture of the Middle Ages it was not simply a discussion of taste. It was not even a discussion singularly about architecture. The changes in English architecture that took place from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century were symbols of how the move towards a secularised society threatened to destroy

everything that was good and pure and replace it with the cold, selfish pursuit of wealth and success. The overall message in his book *Contrasts* from 1836 is that everything had changed for the worse. In the big picture, the changes in architecture were just another expression of the dissatisfaction with the present times and the longing for the past. The greatness of the architecture in the Middle Ages was attributed to their high morals and values, and Pugin lamented the fact that the successors lacked the purity of heart and greatness of mind to make anything remotely equal in excellence. The modern times in which Pugin lived did not live up to the medieval ideal, and he felt that by adopting this ideal and bringing it into the present times, the corruption and immorality could be redeemed and order restored. Pugin (1973, 19) claimed that this could be done by “setting forth the self-denying, charitable, devout, and faithful habits of the ages of faith, as more admirable and exemplary than the luxurious, corrupt, irreverent, and infidel system of the present time”. The Reformation and the destruction and reconstruction of Catholic churches deprived the people of the proper role models they needed and a just and strong church to guide them. The decayed state of the ecclesiastical buildings is attributed to the degraded and immoral society around him. Religion was reduced to money, and it was profits over prophets as the businessmen took over the control.

[W]hen luxury is everywhere on the increase, and means and money more plentiful than ever, to see paltry buildings erected everywhere for religious worship, and the neglected state of the ancient churches, it argues a total want of religious zeal, and a tepidity towards the glory of Divine worship, as disgraceful to the nation, as it must be offensive to the Almighty” (50).

While Pugin represents a worldview which is, at times, severely lacking in nuances and presented in bitter terms, it says something important about the Victorian perception that everything was better before, and that it has slowly changed for the worse. The churches that are described in Pugin’s book are in many ways symbolic of the Victorian view of the ideal past and the degraded present. Pugin’s claim that “everything glorious about the English

churches is Catholic, everything debased and hideous, Protestant” (51) translates to the Victorian perception that everything was better before, but has turned for the worse. The architecture has not worsened because the taste is worse, but because the modern builders and architects do not have the purity of heart and firmness of morals to be able to construct buildings as glorious and divine as before, and recognise “the excellence of the despised middle ages” (18). But the increased fascination with the past shows that Pugin’s views were eventually shared by the masses, and the people began to reject the environment that had grown up around them, and the progress that threatened to leave them behind in a dust cloud of immorality and cold, heartless competition.

As a counter-reaction to this progress the Victorians became increasingly occupied with the home and the family, and the values they represented. But it could not escape the competitiveness and the ambitions that the culture encouraged. It was not only a moral foundation; it was also a vehicle for social advancement. The industrial revolution gave the members of the middle class an opportunity to climb in the social hierarchy. Along with career and commercialism, the increased status of the home and the family meant a great deal in this process. In *The Victorian Frame of Mind* Walter E. Houghton (1957, 342) explains what position the home had in the self-advancement of the middle class:

Now that work had become the means not simply of maintaining a family but of raising it on the social ladder, fathers were preoccupied with getting their sons into the “best” colleges at Oxford and Cambridge or setting them up in a good profession, and marrying their daughters to gentlemen of birth.

When the daughters had been married away to gentlemen of birth, they assumed the roles of homemakers, mothers, educators of the next generations and, most importantly, preservers of morality, purity and the good old values. Most of their contribution can be labelled as passive since it was most important who they were, and not what they did. This sort of passivity was largely found in the middle class home as the working class women were, out of necessity,

already a part of the working force and consequently more active and involved in society than the middle class women could ever hope to be. The job of the middle class women was to lead Britain into a period of morality and virtue. But first, some things had to change. Many voices made the claim that the ideal the women should model themselves after existed in the past. Among the most popular models that were made available to the Victorian women were Shakespeare's heroines.

When the theatre came to be seen as an acceptable leisure activity to the morally conscious Victorians the plays of Shakespeare had a renaissance. The Theatres Regulation Act of 1843 ended the monopoly of the patent theatres, and Shakespeare's plays were available to all the theatres (Schoch 1998, 27). Naturally, this made Shakespeare more available to the people, and the popularity and interest grew in accordance with the frequency with which the plays were performed. They were performed at several theatres in both grand and small scale productions, and night after night the audience could enjoy the adventures of the real English men and women as created by the truest English of them all, Shakespeare. His plays were read with renewed interest and his characters seen in a new light. Consequently, the scholarly interest in his works was assumed with a renewed enthusiasm. Dissertations, discussions and interpretations abounded as well as new editions and adaptations. Interestingly, a part of this renewed interest coincided with the search for the ideal, which led to a tendency to extract the characters from their context, i.e. the play, and place them in an entirely new one. The characters were viewed in light of social tendencies and political matters, and books and papers were written on them discussing their value in the fervent search for the ideal. The female characters, the heroines if you will, were thought to represent the ideal femaleness as well as the ideal Englishness. As a result these women were chosen to stand as role models for the average English woman.

The *OED* says that originally, *heroine* means “a female hero” with different meanings from the demi-goddess of the ancient mythology, “an intermediate between a woman and a goddess”. The term can also be used to describe “[a] woman distinguished by exalted courage, fortitude, or noble achievements”. Lastly it is also used when speaking of “[t]he principal female character in a poem, story, or play” (www.oed.com). The demi-goddess from the ancient mythology leads us closer to what really lies at heart of the female Victorian ideal, namely that it is largely unattainable and in a realm of perfection that ordinary people will never be able to reach. Shakespeare’s heroines are not bound by these limitations, and several of them easily fulfil the requirements of perfection, as it is a privilege creations of fiction usually have. Therefore, the books that were written about the imagined future and past as well as virtues and deeds of these heroines, described to the young female readership what they should aspire to be.

Mary Cowden Clarke’s book *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Heroines* from 1850 and the 1832 publication *Shakespeare’s Heroines. Characteristics of Women: Moral, poetical, and historical* by Anna Jameson stand out as examples of how Shakespeare’s characters were used in the nineteenth century. Cowden Clarke’s tales and Jameson’s essays are both signalled by their admiration for the characters, and they are valued as evidence of Shakespeare’s genius. But when the characters appear in their books it grows to become something so much more, and it challenges our perception of how a book about Shakespeare’s heroines would be. In terms of genre, both books represent something entirely new.

Mary Cowden Clarke holds a special position among past and present Shakespeare scholars as she was, “the first (and as yet, only) woman editor of our great poet” (Cowden Clarke 1896, 145). This was at a time when a domestic career was the ideal for every woman, but at the same time the amount of female writers increased. Cowden Clarke, and several other female writers, presented themselves as happy housewives while having productive

careers as freelance writers. Granted, most male Shakespeare editors were also freelance writers, but it is her position as the only female editor in this boy's club that makes her work the more remarkable. And one should not forget her enormous achievement in the shape of the first *Complete Concordance to Shakespeare*, which, according to Stanley Wells (2002, 313), took sixteen years to make by hand. But it is *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* that she is "best but not always fairly remembered" for (ibid.). The book is, as the title suggests, tales describing the childhood of some of Shakespeare's female characters. Most of the characters are found in the plays as well, and hints are made towards what will eventually lead up to the events of the play. Interestingly, the tales end right where the plays start which creates continuity, and strengthens the claim that the events described by Cowden Clarke are the natural forerunners of Shakespeare's plays. The concept itself seems quite strange, and one may ask exactly what the point with this is. In her essay "The Ladies' Shakespeare" Juliet Fleming (2001, 9) claimed that "Mary Cowden Clarke understood her notorious book ... as few have understood it since – as a work of fiction". It is a work of fiction, but at the same time it is so much more. It is also scholarly examination of the plays and their messages, a dissertation on positive portrayals of women in Shakespeare, a point which Cowden Clarke makes explicit in her article "Shakespeare as the girl's friend" in *The Girl's Own Paper*, which will be looked at in greater detail later, and an imaginative presentation of educational principles with thoughts on idealism interspersed. Evidence will be given in support of its various functions and as an argument against Fleming's narrow reading.

In *The Girlhood* Mary Cowden Clarke uses familiar places, characters and foreshadowing events to connect the tales to the plays they are based on, creating a continuity, which also, I believe, function as a way of justifying the work and lending the undisputable authority of Shakespeare to convey the message of Mary Cowden Clarke. The tales are at times firmly placed within the genre of storytelling, applying terms like "once upon a time"

(Cowden Clarke 1878a, 5). But the form is not the most important thing, it is what the author is trying to say. Additionally, the focus is set so firmly on feminine virtue, the importance of morals and the connection between women and the home that it becomes obvious to the reader that these are not just random tales based on Shakespeare's works. This is a presentation of the best, and worse, of womanhood, intended to serve as models and as warnings to the readers.

Viewed as a part of the "naive Victorian novelistic approach to the plays" (Thompson & Roberts 2003, 170), the book has been fairly unnoticed by scholars, but very popular among the readers. According to the Copac National, Academic, and Specialist Library Catalogue (accessed February 22 2010) the book was frequently reprinted, which is a testament to the popularity of the book in the Victorian era. But the interest for the book decreased rapidly as the era ends. Today one can only find old editions. But if one takes a closer look at this peculiar book, one will find that it has much more to offer than the sentimentality and drama found in the novels popular among the female readership of the nineteenth century. At first sight it does contain these elements as well, but it also exceeds these barriers. *The Girlhood* is a result of Cowden Clarke's position as a Shakespeare scholar and as a woman with strong opinions on what femininity is and a desire to convey her opinions to her readers. One could look at the book as simply her own personal desire to work with the characters further when the editing of the plays were completed, but one cannot ignore the educational tone that is like a red line throughout the book. The tales are interspersed with advice on how to become an ideal woman as well as admonitions on what fate evil and evil-doing will entail. In the tale of "The Merry Maids of Windsor" the future wives learn what one must do to become a good woman, and their sense of self-worth is placed firmly within the domestic sphere through schooling in housewifely duties. The intrigues and plots mimic those of the play from which the characters are taken, and it follows

the comedy recipe to the point. All the loose ends are tied and the conflicts resolved, and it ends the way “the comedy should end with what is its right conclusion – a happy marriage” (Cowden Clarke 1878a, 453).

There are segments in the tale which may cause the readers to wonder what part they have in the plot. These are the places in the text where the action seems to come to a full stop and a segment of admonitions is placed into the text at an appropriate place after a fitting example. The following quotation comes from “The Physician’s Orphan”, based on *All’s Well that Ends Well*.

True strength of mind is less inconsistent with softness of heart than is generally or willingly allowed, by those who injudiciously or interestedly persuade the sex that weakness – moral, mental, and physical, is their most winning characteristics. Feeble-mindedness, indecision, vacillation, cowardice, want of solid principle, lack of energy, infirmity of purpose, supineness of limb, debility of muscle, enervation of frame, and the thousand foibles of soul and body that are supposed amiable, will often lead to a selfish hardness, and an inflexibility of egoism any thing but womanly; while a loving nature will not unfrequently inspire the most heroic acts of fortitude, dictate the highest deeds of bravery – bravery in achievement – no less than in endurance, and yet detract no particle from the sweet grace of feminine reserve, nor abate one blush of sensitive modesty (Cowden Clarke 1878a, 271).

At first sight it looks like words in defence of the character, but if one takes a closer look it is as though a testimony to the equality of men and women has appeared in the text. Segments such as this appear frequently throughout Cowden Clarke’s tales, and they are often arguments speaking for the ideal she feels women should strive against. She tries to unify the claim for equality with the traditional image of the ideal woman, trying to create a new ideal for the new era. In the quotation above she argues against the traditional image of woman as weak of body and mind, and that strength in a woman somehow makes her less womanly. She unites the image of the loving and caring woman with the strong and independent woman,

claiming that strength is a necessity if she is to perform the duties she is assign to do, as a daughter, a housewife and a mother. A woman can be of no use to her surroundings if she is not taught to do anything for herself. Cowden Clarke criticises the ideal attached to the woman who says nothing, thinks nothing, and has no opinions or any qualities beyond being beautiful and amiable. In her opinion Shakespeare's heroines combines the qualities as amiable, gentle and caring women with strength, courage and the ability to speak up and take action when injustice and other dangers threatens their surroundings and their beliefs, for example Portia's actions in the trial and the merry wives of Windsor's plotting against Falstaff. They way Helena takes matters into her own hands, has it her way and secures her future is not the acts of a shrew, but merely of a strong woman who probably will turn out to be the perfect housewife if given the chance.

The tales are filled with events that are seemingly designed by Cowden Clarke singularly for the sake of leading it up to a warning, or even a practical advice, on how to avoid a perilous situation. There is advice on how to be the best woman one can be and what to do in a wide variety of situations with the goal of preserving one's morality, femininity and virtue without at any point let oneself be rendered weak, powerless and voiceless. In the tale of the Shrew and the Demure, inspired by *The Taming of the Shrew*, Bianca and Katharina are examples of the fact that there is a difference between feminine mildness, desirable in young women and completely lacking in Katharina, and the downright weakness of Bianca. In *The Girlhood* Bianca is a parody of the Victorian heroine, likely to faint at any trifle and slight. "I own I feel a little faint; – perhaps with the loss of blood", Bianca whines after receiving a barely visible scratch to her arm (Cowden Clarke 1878b, 170).

One may ask if this is enough to claim that there is a specific intention behind the tales to construct and promote an ideal. Do they counter the criticism of the book insisting that this is nothing but a series of meaningless stories for girls without any further importance on the

education of them, and definitely no importance in the field of Shakespearian writings? These allegations cannot be dismissed in a better way than in the words of George C. Cross in his 1972 article “The girlhood of Shakespeare’s Heroines and the Sex Education of Victorian Women”. He claims that “the didactic purposes of the tales go beyond mere teaching about the motivations and characterizations of Shakespeare’s women: they clearly intend the inculcation of various moral lessons through exhortation, precept, and example” (Cross 1972, 39). But even though he recognises these efforts, he does not seem to take them seriously or acknowledge that there is a value in approaching serious issues such as women’s roles and education from this angle. “In Mrs. Clarke’s fictionalized reconstructions of the early lives of Shakespeare’s heroines, bad women meet bitter ends, good women triumph, and enough of both are spun out of the author’s moralistic imagination to teach her lessons thoroughly” (ibid.). Hence, Cross articulates what seems to be the most common opinion of critics, but the readers embraced the books nonetheless.

Approximately twenty years before the release of *The Girlhood*, Anna Jameson published her book *Shakespeare’s Heroines. Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical, and Historical*. According to Copac it was published for the first time in 1832 under the title *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical and Historical*. But when it is rereleased in 1886 that title has become the subtitle under the heading *Shakespeare’s Heroines*. The book had placed itself within the varied collection of literary works that tied themselves to Shakespeare’s name and reputation, and the interest and respect that Shakespeare’s works were associated with. Shakespeare’s heroines belonged to the much cherished past, the time before morality was lost and selfish ambition had taken its place. They represented the morals that Jameson nostalgically longed for, found in the heroines from the past and presented so vividly for her contemporaries in the finest of literary works, representing the greatness of the past for new audiences. Hence, the adding of *moral, poetical and historical*. Jameson opened

the door to the past and attempted to revive the morality that was lost in the present. The women there, it was believed, would be purer examples of the ideals every woman should seek to attain.

Shakespeare's Heroines consists of a collection of essays written on some of Shakespeare's female characters, and the book is described by Jameson (1837, vi) in the preface to the second edition as "some observations on the natural workings of mind and feeling in my own sex, which might lead to good". Characters of intellect, of passion and imagination, of the affection and historical characters are used as examples of the nature of women with the intent, I argue, to influence women to imitate Shakespeare's heroines. Excerpts from the plays are inserted into the text as evidence of Jameson's claims. That way she borrows the authority of Shakespeare to support her own allegations. This approach was indeed a successful one, and according to Copac, Jameson's book was frequently reprinted for the next hundred years. After that it is not re-released until the 1970s, but a new interest arises and the latest edition is from 2005, an astounding 173 years after its first release. When that edition was released it was described as "a unique hybrid of Shakespeare criticism, women's rights activism, and conduct literature" (Hoeckley, C.L.L. 2005). This description embodies several of the issues surrounding this book. We are not quite sure what to make of it in terms of genre, and we do not know what specifically it was used as. The conclusion must be that it represents a new way of writing, and perhaps a more feminine approach to old subjects. Jameson has obviously done some close textual reading of Shakespeare's work, and she represents her findings in scholarly terms. But the personal tone with which this is done complicates the matter as it is frowned upon to mix the personal with the academic. Writing from a female point of view may allow for this approach as women are more connected to the personal. Hoeckley's use of the word "hybrid" can be seen as a denotation of a variety of forms adopted by women in order to create a new way of writing that is not limited by rules

and regulations made by men. By using this hybrid they stand free to speak of issues such as women's rights without being restrained by male understandings, or lack of understanding. The result is an early form of feminist criticism, which Cowden Clarke's efforts may be seen as a descendant of, as well as modern feminist criticism ranging from the 1970s and onwards.

The book starts with an introductory dialogue between the characters Medon and Alda. Medon expresses disbelief of women's abilities as writers with "mock airs of gallantry" (Jameson 1937, 2). He claims that her efforts are for one cause only. "I presume you have written a book to maintain the superiority of your sex over ours" (ibid.), he claims. Jameson proves that she has a much more progressed reasoning than most men of her time, not to say ours, when Alda's answer is as follows: "Why should you suspect me of such folly?—it is quite out of date. Why should there be competition or comparison?" (ibid.) She continues, still in the voice of Alda, to criticise the status of women in society.

It appears to me that the condition of women in society, as at present constituted, is false in itself, and injurious to them,—that the education of women, as at present conducted, is founded in mistaken principles, and tends to increase fearfully the sum of misery and error in both sexes; but I do not choose presumptuously to fling these opinions in the face of the world, in the form of essays on morality, and treatises on education. I have rather chosen to illustrate certain positions by examples, and leave my readers to deduce the moral themselves, and draw their own inferences (4).

Women's education, designed by men, is not suitable to improve women's condition or to prepare them for a role which would be beneficial for society. Her comment that it would increase "the sum of misery" in both women and men can be read as an acknowledgment of women's position as representations of morality and values. She suggests that the "mistaken principles" of the current education, constructed by and for males, is not the proper approach. Through her personalised essays on Shakespeare's characters she provided the readers with an alternative source of knowledge where she allows the readers to "deduce the morals

themselves” by observation, then create their own opinions and, eventually, personify the examples which they have observed. Through her descriptions of the characters she provides the readers with examples on how to behave and what to aspire to without explicitly educating them. She claims to oppose the “*forcing* system of education, the most pernicious, the most mistaken, the most far-reaching in its miserable and mischievous effects, that ever prevailed in this world” (Jameson 1937, 27, italics in the original). It is a rejection of both the constraints of modern education as not fitted for women, and as a tool of modernity, which will eventually lead women further away from the ideals they should represent. Jameson’s accounts remind us of Carlyle and Pugin’s mistrust of modernity and their heartfelt and nostalgic idealisation of the past. We also find evidence of Barthes’ focus on the importance of the reader, the destination, rather than the text itself, the origin. Without inculcating principles, drawing up boundaries and setting the rules, Jameson encourages the readers to observe, comprehend and practice. She teaches by example. The same can be said for Cowden Clarke, but there is a difference. Cowden Clarke pauses in her tales to warn her readers of the consequences of wrongful acts, or to encourage them to follow the example of the heroines. Jameson suggests, and instructs the readers so subtly that it is almost subliminal, by placing the characters on pedestals as images of perfection.

Anna Jameson’s rejection in the introductory dialogue of competition and comparison between men and women may be seen as a predecessor to the equal, but different slogans that appeared in the feminist campaigns in the twentieth century. It resembles Cowden Clarke’s attempt to reconcile traditional women’s roles with increased equality between the sexes by emphasising that men and women are equal, but their positions and responsibilities are different. The result is a type of womanhood where intellect and emotions make up a desire to use one’s cognitive abilities for altruistic purposes. Jameson (1937, 39) claims that “[t]he intellect of women bears the same relation to that of man as her physical organization – it is

inferior in power, and different in kind". What is the point, then, to compare and compete? Like Cowden Clarke, Jameson too focuses on the morals and virtues found in the domestic realm as the main goal in a woman's life.

Modern education fails to promote it. The society needs it. But what exactly is the ideal Victorian womanhood, and how can it be found in Cowden Clarke and Jameson? We should not be so narrow-minded as to believe that there is one right answer to this question, but it is, however, of interest to find some points of similarity in order to come closer to an answer. In *The Victorian Frame of Mind* Walter E. Houghton describes three types of womanhood using Tennyson's poem *The Princess* from 1847 as examples for his claims. The first type of womanhood is "the submissive wife whose whole excuse for being was to love, honor, obey – and amuse – her lord and master, and to manage his household and bring up his children" (Houghton 1957, 348). This resembles Jameson's description of a group of Victorian heroines, among them Desdemona, in which she praises them for being "gentle, beautiful, and innocent; all are models of conjugal submission, truth and tenderness" (Jameson 1837, 178). Cowden Clarke seems reluctant to use the word submissive as a suitable word for appropriate wifely behaviour, and according to her, submission is the result of tyranny and brutality, while "judicious restraint" (Cowden Clarke 1878, 172) and love will lead to "genuine compliance" (128). Yet, neither Jameson nor Cowden Clarke adhere fully to this limited, and limiting, conception, and neither does Houghton whose choice of words, as seen in the quotation above, reveals his criticism of this type of womanhood.

The next type is "the new woman" (Houghton 1957, 348), represented by Princess Ida who is "in revolt against her legal and social bondage...and demanding equal rights with men: the same education, the same suffrage, the same opportunity for professional and political careers". Despite being written about the same time as Cowden Clarke and Jameson's published their works, Tennyson's new woman seems too progressed for them. The Princess

renounced men and started an all-women's school. Cowden Clarke (1878b, 145) criticises women's education, accusing it of focusing on "knick-knack making" rather than meaningful subjects, but she emphasises that it is the wife and mother who would make use of the knowledge acquired at school. Jameson (1837, 27-28) would be an unlikely student at the princess' university, and speaks of modern education in harsh terms:

The custom which shut up women in convents till they were married, and then launched them innocent and ignorant on society, was bad enough ; but not worse than a system of education which inundates us with hard, clever, sophisticated girls, trained by knowing mothers and all-accomplished governesses, with whom vanity and expediency take place of conscience and affection... with feelings and passions suppressed or contracted not governed by higher faculties and purer principles ; with whom opinion... stands instead of the strength and the light of virtue within their own souls.

Shakespeare's heroines, as they are portrayed by Cowden Clarke and Jameson, are closer in nature to the third type of womanhood, described by Houghton (1957, 349) as the "middle position".

By all means let us remove the legal disabilities and give 'more breadth of culture'; but higher education is unwise, the vote is dubious, and professional careers are dangerous. For after all, woman is *not* man; she has her own nature and function in life, not inferior to his but entirely different.

Houghton continues his explanation of the middle position by looking at the writings of John Ruskin, but that is a segment reserved for the next chapter. What needs to be emphasised, however, is that the womanhood that sits under this description is the womanhood that can be found in Cowden Clarke and Jameson. I believe that they attempt to unify these views and so create the ideal Victorian woman supported by their accounts of Shakespeare's heroines.

There is hardly anything radical in Cowden Clarke's descriptions of Desdemona in the tale "The Magnifico's Child", and she includes "elegant needlework" and "music" in "the

thousand and one feminine avocations, that a mother devises for the employment, the instruction, the pastime of a beloved daughter” (Cowden Clarke 1878a, 342). According to Cowden Clarke it is her “complete knowledge of housewifely duties, and that variety of graceful attainment, which caused her to be afterwards noted as one of the most accomplished women of her time” (ibid.). There is not much trace of the new woman in Jameson’s descriptions of the same character as she promotes her gentleness, both as a character trait and as a possible explanation to her tragic fate.

Desdemona displays at times a transient energy, arising from the power of affection, but gentleness gives the prevailing tone to the character – gentleness in its excess – gentleness verging on passiveness – gentleness which not only cannot resent, but cannot resist” (Jameson 1937, 196).

There is a double standard here as we explore the traditional ideas of two women who lived untraditional lives as successful and respected writers. Attention must be paid to the disparity between what they preach and what the practice. Cowden Clarke had an important role outside the home as a writer, an editor and a scholar, but at the same time she prided herself on being a proper Victorian wife, belonging to the cult of domesticity that burgeoned in the nineteenth century. Thompson and Roberts (2003, 183) note that “Mary was not an outspoken feminist or suffragist, and in many respects her work attempts to reconcile rather than contest conflicting notions of Victorian womanhood”. It was important to her to emphasise that despite the fact that she was a writer she was also a housewife who found great pleasure in cooking, sewing and other housewifely duties. In *My Long Life* she states that “a woman who adopts literary work as her profession need not either neglect or be deficient in the more usually feminine accomplishments of cookery and needlework” (Cowden Clarke 1896, 107). The question is how much needlework one has time for when putting together the concordance to Shakespeare.

In terms of feminism Patricia Thompson makes an important point in her book *The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Idea*. “It was not so easy, then, as it was for authors, later, to decide on which side of the fence they would sit, for the fence was only in the process of construction” (Thompson 1956, 7). The Victorian Era is a time when the domestic ideal held a strong place, but at the same time women were writing more and having productive and successful careers. So on one side Mary Cowden Clarke advocates the traditional gender roles; on the other side she bends them, even breaks them, through her profession. George C. Cross (1972, 57) notes that “[i]f she did not become active in the feminist movements of her time, her life itself proved the validity of much of the feminist argument”. In many ways this is a forerunner of what women today know as the desire to have it all. The desire to have a career and a family, and be equally successful in both, is a common predicament today. But for Cowden Clarke and Jameson, pursuing only a domestic career would not only have been acceptable, but also expected. That is, unless financial matters made it necessary for the woman to get a job as well. In Cowden Clarke’s autobiography she states that she felt obligated to contribute to the household income through her work, and also that their financial situation made it necessary. In the end it was Mary who earned the most money, not her husband Charles. Outspoken or not, the lives, careers and accomplishments of both Mary Cowden Clarke and Anna Jameson, make them interesting figures within feminist issues exactly because they can be found on both sides of the fence.

There are traces of a kind of feminist criticism in their work on Shakespeare, and she finds in his works ample evidence for her claims for equality and rights, while simultaneously promoting a more traditional ideal of femininity. “The Merry Maids of Windsor”, derived, obviously, from Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, are schooled in housewifely duties, but Portia from *The Merchant of Venice* takes lessons in law and argues for female lawyers: “Might not we women make good advocates, then, cugino mio?” Portia would

playfully ask; "you know we are apt to speak eloquently when our hearts are in a cause, and when we desire to win favor in its decision" (Cowden Clarke 1878a, 52). However, the last word of the discussion Cowden Clarke gives to Bellario, indicating that they may reflect her own opinion on the matter. Bellario promotes education, but emphasises that the home is a woman's priority. Any knowledge of law should be for the best of the home and family, not as an ambition to have a career within law.

My Portia will become quite as proficient as I could wish her, if she know enough of law to manage worthily and justly her own estate by and by," answered he; "and it is with the thought that she will hereafter be called upon as lady of Belmont, to rule her tenantry, to adjust their rights, to settle their differences, to decide their claims, and to secure their welfare, that I allow her to cross-question me upon the mysteries of law as she has done" (ibid.).

In *The Merchant of Venice* Portia's knowledge of law is not used with the hopes of a further career, but to help a friend of her husband and secure marital bliss. Home and family is the focus. The women described by Cowden Clarke do not differ too much from Ruskin's thoughts on women and their place in society. For Ruskin, as for Cowden Clarke, proper education is the key. "All such knowledge should be given her as may enable her to understand, and even to aid, the work of men: and yet it should be given, not as knowledge, – not as if it were, or could be, for her an object to know; but only to feel, and to judge" (Ruskin 1890, 124). His goal is for the education of boys and girls to be the same in material, but should lead in different directions. "[A] man ought to know any language or science he learns, thoroughly – while a woman ought to know the same language, or science, only so far as may enable her to sympathise in her husband's pleasures" (129). In other words, to assist him. Bellario studies law to be able to practice it as a lawyer while Portia is given access to the same books in order to manage her estate. That is, until she has gotten married when her knowledge will be used to assist her husband when he manages her estate, when "[t]his house,

these servants, and this same myself/ Are yours, my lord's" (*The Merchant of Venice*, 3.1, line 170-171).

This leads us back to Houghton's words that higher education for women was unwise, and Ruskin's promotion of home as woman's natural realm, versus Jameson and Cowden Clarke's careers. The idea of women pursuing independent careers was considered a problem by Ruskin, Cowden Clarke and Jameson for many reasons. First of all, they assumed that women from nature's side were incapable of the same intellectual achievements as men and thus not capable of following a higher education. They assumed that their cognitive abilities were specifically designed for them to be able to assist, not create independently. Another issue, not noted by these writers, is that denying women access to higher education spared the men the embarrassment of being proved wrong. But most importantly, education is a means of liberation, and when the entire society has decided that it is for the best for the nation if women stay in their subordinate position, it is vital to not give women the opportunity to educate themselves, gain independence and pursue the same selfish and ambitious lifestyle as the one reserved for men. John Stuart Mill's essay "The Subjection of Women" from 1861 defended the emancipation of women and presented an ideal femaleness that counters Ruskin's idealisation of woman as man's support and assistant. He claims that the goal of women's education should not be aimed at making assistants and passive goals of men's admiration and ideas of idealism, and "enable her to sympathise in her husband's pleasures" (Ruskin 1890, 129), as Ruskin described it. Mill thinks that the goal should be to make her an independent individual in her own right with the same human rights as men have, and the ability to fight for these rights. But society and the educational system continue to educate amiable, submissive housewives:

All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men, not self-will and government by self-control, but submission and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty

of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others, to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections. And by their affections are meant the only ones they are allowed to have – those to the men with whom they are connected, or to the children who constitute an additional and indefeasible tie between them and man (Mill 1911, 32).

At first sight this reminds us of the new woman mentioned by Houghton, and not like the middle position which we have already concluded that Cowden Clarke and Jameson's heroines belong to. In *All's Well That Ends Well* Helena inverts the traditional tale of the hero who slays the dragon and gets a princess as a reward. In the play Helena is the hero who gets Bertram as her reward the dragon in the shape of a disease, but in Cowden Clarke's tale she is described as "quiet, retiring and undemonstrative in speech" (Cowden Clarke 1878a, 264), and quite happy to be Bertram's servant, "lingering by his side, helping him to fix his flies, to watch the bites, to land the fish, to carry home the basket, and in a thousand ways rendering herself an acceptable companion" (260). The Victorian version of Helena does make "complete abnegation" of herself, while Shakespeare's Helena is far more prone to wilfulness and active effort to get what she wants. But then there is the character one will most often look to when arguing for strong women in Shakespeare, namely Portia, who gives her estate and herself to Bassanio in an act of submission. It becomes clear that the middle position is in fact a construction of the self and attainment of self-worth that is inextricably linked to what they do for other people in selfless self-sacrifice.

A question arises when reading *The Girlhood and Shakespeare's Heroines*, particularly if one reads it with the educational purpose in mind. Why Shakespeare? Why are his plays so well equipped to teach young women the dos and don'ts of womanhood? In *Sesame and Lilies* from 1865, John Ruskin (100) claimed that "Shakespeare has no heroes; – he has only heroines...In his laboured and perfect plays you have no hero". According to him the male characters caused trouble while the women were there to redeem them and guide

them. In Shakespeare he saw women who were “infallibly faithful and wise counsellors, – incorruptibly just and pure examples – strong always to sanctify, even when they cannot save” (Ruskin 1890, 104). In an article by Cowden Clarke called “Shakespeare as the girl’s friend”, published in *The Girl’s Own Paper* in 1887, one can find a similar argument. “Compare many of his lovers with the women they love, and it will be found that the latter are nobler and firmer in affection than the former”. Further she argues that “the men are more readily credulous, and more easily shaken in their trust and confidence, than women are” (Cowden Clarke 1887, 562). Their view of the characters seems coloured by the events taking place in the society with the men being completely absorbed by the mercantile world, both by choice and by the economic forces that necessitated their involvement in business, and the threat it poses to their sense of values and morality, and the women assigned to assume the form of the ideals of the past and be the moral saviours. In other words, the turmoil overcome by Shakespeare’s heroines, like the evil intentions of a corrupt judge and the jealousy of a husband, became symbolic of women’s moral duties and the relationship between men and women as, respectively, the ambitious man working his way up the social ladder and his assistant, his wife. In the article she insists that she finds support in Shakespeare’s work for her beliefs of women in terms of roles, accomplishments and responsibilities, even to the extent that she argues that he had “something essentially feminine in his nature, which enabled him to discern and sympathise with the innermost core of woman’s heart” (562). She states explicitly that there is a clear link between Shakespeare and the education of young women through the study of his characters claiming that “[t]o the young girl, emerging from childhood and taking her first step into the more active and self-dependent career of woman-life, Shakespeare’s vital precepts and models render him essentially a helping friend” (ibid.). In Cowden Clarke’s opinion this is not simply the matter of extracting the characters from any old book and finding exemplary qualities in them which then can be presented as the ideal to

the readership. She speaks of it as if the admirable qualities of Shakespeare's heroines are intentionally designed with the hope of providing the readership with role models.

Shakespeare has interpreted his past and presented it for his present and the future in order to guide them in becoming the best English and the best humans they possibly can be. She interprets it as advice from "a helping friend", indicating the strong and personal relationship the English has with their Bard. "To her he comes instructively and abidingly; in his page she may find warning, guidance, kindest monition, and wisest counsel" (ibid.). With these words she ascribes to Shakespeare an intention it is hard to tell whether he had or not, and it equates his works with her own book, a work of fiction designed around an educational purpose. If one chooses to see it that way Cowden Clarke was merely adding to a project already in the process of educating its readership.

Through his feminine portraits she may see, as in a faithful glass, vivid pictures of what she has to evitate, or what she has to imitate, in order to become a worthy and admirable woman...She can take her own disposition in hand, as it were, and endeavour to mould and form it into the best perfection of which it is capable, by carefully observing the women drawn by Shakespeare (ibid.).

In the introductory dialogue in Jameson's *Shakespeare's Heroines*, Medon asks Alda "why have you not chosen your examples from real life? you might easily have done so...you might have given us an epitome of your experience, instead of dreaming over Shakspeare" (Jameson 1837, 6). Alda's answer sums perfectly sums up content of this chapter with focus on the idealisation of the past and the scepticism towards modernity, the focus on morals and values, the discussion of women's roles in society and the creation of ideal types of womanhood.

Long experience of what is called "the world," of the folly, duplicity, shallowness, selfishness, which meet us at every turn, too soon unsettles our youthful creed. If it only led to the knowledge of good and evil, it were well; if it only taught us to despise the illusions and retire from the pleasures of the world, it would be better. But it destroys our belief—it dims our

perception of all abstract truth, virtue, and happiness; it turns life into a jest, and a very dull one too. It makes us indifferent to beauty, and incredulous of goodness; it teaches us to consider *self* as the centre on which all actions turn, and to which all motives are to be referred (ibid, italics in the original).

The argument resembles the one found in Pugin. The present time is too degraded to produce the ideals the Victorians need, and therefore they need to go into history and literature to find pure specimens of human excellence. Modernised society promoted selfishness, while Shakespeare's heroines represent selflessness. The benefits of modernity has led people to take pleasure in earthly pleasures, and promoted indulgence at the expense of morals and values. Shakespeare's heroines are portrayed by Jameson and Cowden Clarke as not only women who follow moral principles, but who embody them. Cowden Clarke portrays Desdemona as a gentle and caring philanthropist who spends her time on "benevolent visitations to the sick, the poor, and the afflicted" (Cowden Clarke 1878a, 347), with little interest in wealth and luxury. Jameson speaks of Isabella and Portia as "equally wise, gracious, virtuous, fair and young; we perceive in both the same exalted principle and firmness of character; the same depth of reflection and persuasive eloquence; the same self-denying generosity and capability of strong affections" (Jameson 1837, 63).

It is also important to note that in the nineteenth century Shakespeare was a voice of authority, closely read, widely discussed and highly respected. In *Shakespeare for the People*, Andrew Murphy (2008, 50) claims that his works became almost a compulsory part of every household from the lower to the upper classes, and from 1882 Shakespeare was a part of the school requirements, but mostly in advanced learners' books. One might argue that Cowden Clarke and Jameson's use of Shakespeare at that time gave them a way into people's libraries as well. Using Shakespeare was a way of being taken seriously by borrowing his authority and be respected by association. Juliet Fleming makes an interesting claim in "The Ladies' Shakespeare".

[W]omen have regularly taken pleasure in, and understood the contemporary material benefits of, the enterprise of arguing the case for women's special relation to England's national poet. While women's labor has contributed to the development of Shakespeare studies, the study and performance of Shakespeare may have helped to articulate the interests of (and hence offer benefits to) women as a group (Fleming 2001, 4).

By applying Shakespeare's name to their studies they could be taken more seriously than if they had just published their ideas without a famous name to lean on. One should not go so far as to claim that Shakespeare is a mere tool, but Fleming's claim makes one wonder why Cowden Clarke's tales are so dominated by her thoughts on idealism, why she at times seems to be preaching to her readers and why there are segments in the text which seem to stand on their own as a separate entity where the opinions of the author is expressed at the expense of the action in the tale. Fleming's claim may also explain why the title of Jameson's book changed from *Characteristics of Women* to *Shakespeare's Heroines*. The essays were no longer the ideas of a random woman writer, they were now dissertations on Shakespeare's characters where representations of womanhood was supported by evidence, subjectively chosen by the author, found in Shakespeare's plays. That was enough to claim that they were constructing their ideals based on Shakespeare's own opinions of women. It made it easier for the public to accept the ideal types and the attempt to educate them in accordance with these principles. And when "certain passages" from Shakespeare became "absolute staples of the schoolbook repertoire" (Murphy 2008, 50), it was easier to use his works for educational purposes, even outside the school. We should be careful, however, with the word intention, because to claim that one knows what may or may not have been Shakespeare's intention is based on theories and interpretations more than actually fact. The plays are the only evidence. We simply do not know what he originally meant and if this is intentionally conveyed in the plays, but we can, based on close textual reading, suppose that there are positive attitudes towards women in Shakespeare's plays. What is the most interesting, either way, is how

Cowden Clarke and Jameson choose to use the characters and the way they justify their choice, as seen in the quotations above.

As a contrast to all these symbols of idealism stands Lady Macbeth. While she seems to represent everything that is wrong in society, like greed, pride and heartless ambition, both Jameson and Cowden Clarke have placed her among the heroines. She belongs to what can be seen as somewhat of a redemption project, present in both Jameson and Cowden Clarke's books, and reserved for the characters that they feel have been misunderstood. It is as if everything that did not fit in with the Victorian values were simply the errors made by fallible humans. In Cowden Clarke's tale "The Thane's Daughter", Lady Macbeth's fall is presented as quite unavoidable given the cold heart of her mother and her spoiled childhood. No fault of her own, naturally. It seems that the point Cowden Clarke is trying to make is that no one is inherently wicked, and that everyone could possibly have been saved with the right support, and above all, the right education. But instead of a happy ending, misery ensues, making Lady Macbeth a very suitable subject to use as a warning, encouraging young women not to make the same mistakes: "[T]hat night a child was born into the world, destined to read a world-wide lesson, how unhallowed desires and towering ambition can deface the image of virtue in a human heart, and teach it to spurn and outrage the dictates of nature herself" (Cowden Clarke 1878a, 94). In *Shakespeare's Heroines* Jameson criticises "the common-place idea of Lady Macbeth, though endowed with the rarest powers, the loftiest energies, and the profoundest affections" as "nothing but a fierce, cruel woman, brandishing a couple of daggers, and exciting her husband to butcher a poor old king" (Jameson 1837, 360). She rejects the reductive readings that eagerly place her as a one-dimensional villain without further investigation into her character. She thinks that "the grand moral lesson" represented by Lady Macbeth has been lost, and warns her readers not to be as narrow-minded:

[T]hey forget that the crime of Lady Macbeth terrifies us in proportion as we sympathise with her; and that this sympathy is in proportion to the degree of pride, passion, and intellect we may ourselves possess. It is good to behold and to tremble at the possible result of the noblest faculties uncontrolled or perverted. True it is, that the ambitious women of these civilized times do not murder sleeping kings; but are there therefore no Lady Macbeths in the world? no woman, who, under the influence of a diseased or excited appetite for power or distinction, would sacrifice the happiness of a daughter, the fortunes of a husband; the principles of a son and peril their own souls? (ibid.)

According to Jameson, Lady Macbeth is not the “ogress” (362) that her critics have called her, but “a terrible impersonation of evil passions and mighty powers, never so far removed from our own nature, as to be cast beyond the pale of our sympathies” (363). She deserves a place among the heroines for her position as the embodiment of the warnings both Jameson and Cowden Clarke makes. She is the example of, or rather result of, wrongful education and misguided ambition, but she deserves sympathy “for the woman herself remains a woman to the last,—still linked with her sex and with humanity” (ibid.).

Both Cowden Clarke and Jameson’s books were reprinted throughout the entire Victorian Era, according to Copac, but only Jameson’s characteristics are read with renewed interest far into the 20th century, even making it to the 21st. But even though *The Girlhood* seems to be resigned to a fate of being a relic of the Victorian Era, the frequent reprinting of both books in the Victorian Era tells us that the books have had an influence and enjoyed much popularity among the Victorians. The fact that critics have struggled to accept the works as serious contributions to Shakespearean studies must be attributed to the fact that it is difficult to decide where to place them in terms of genre. Thompson and Roberts (2003) offers an insight into why Cowden Clarke was not as respected as she should have been. They point to the collaboration between Cowden Clarke and her husband, and claims that it led their works, and her individual efforts, to be “regarded in terms of *domestic*, rather than

literary production” using the domestic terms as “a means of denigrating their literary achievements” (Thompson & Roberts 2003, 171, italics in the original). One can imagine that Jameson too would fall victim to these prejudices, and be perceived as a woman who wasted her time on writing when she should have attended to more important and more womanly affairs, such as housekeeping. The criticism can be summed up by Altick’s (1948) words, quoted by Thompson and Roberts (2003, 171) when he declared that in terms of serious studies the Cowden Clarkes’ efforts were “not intrinsically important”.

The seal of domesticity placed upon the works by Mary and Charles Cowden Clarke may explain why the comedies have received such a subordinate position to Shakespeare’s tragedies and histories. While the histories have been largely reserved for the triumphs and failures of great men, women have been given more important roles to play in comedies and tragedies, but specifically in the comedies, where the household is very prominent. It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that the comedies were given attention in what was regarded as the serious Shakespeare criticism. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare’s Comedies*, Penny Gay (2008, 12) claims that the reason for this is that “[t]he dramatic genres of tragedy and, to a lesser extent, history deal with issues that are important to a culture that is basically patriarchal and nationalistic”. What importance did the comedies have in this respect? Through Jameson and Cowden Clarke’s writings on Shakespeare’s heroines we have been introduced to the importance the home and the household has in creating a better society. Marriage, family and interpersonal relationships belong to the personal realm, but they affect the rest of society as this is also the place for the instruction in morals and inculcation of values. Heroines of tragedy and comedy are presented in a new light to new readers, but based on old values and beliefs. The result is two books which use the old traditions to present new ideals by leaning on Shakespeare’s name and creations. By presenting positive examples and intimidating warnings they hope to inspire their readers to

become the ideal they read about. But are their promotion of ideals and their appeals to their readers, evidence of a specific strain of educational thought? Are they trying to educate their readers to the extent that what we are dealing with are creative conduct books? A closer look into women's education is required, which is what the next chapter will be concerned with.

Chapter Two

A Common Ideal?

The education of Victorian Women through conduct books and Shakespeare

Mary Cowden Clarke and Anna Jameson's portrayures of Shakespeare's heroines are filled with idealism and admiration, and some of the characters are held so highly that they are equated with perfection. Characters like Portia, Isabella, Helena and Desdemona are claimed to represent the best from the period from which they originated, but at the same time they have a timeless quality that make them relevant for all times. The ideal femaleness they represent is constituted by such morals and values that only the idealised past can create and only fiction can convey. Cowden Clarke and Jameson unify the real with the ideal by removing the characters from the dramatic structure and putting them into the nineteenth century society as representations of an ideal that all English women should aspire to reach. This is the foundation from which both Jameson and Cowden Clarke work. Even though they have chosen different approaches (*Shakespeare's Heroines* is based on semi-biographical portraits and *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* are a collection of tales) the message remains the same. It is the belief that Shakespeare's heroines represented the best of womanhood and should stand as role models to the average Victorian woman, or in any case the women who had access to and interest in Shakespeare's work.

Presenting Shakespeare's heroines as role models to Victorian women indicates that there must have been some sort of educational idea behind it, which explorations of Mary Cowden Clarke and Anna Jameson's books suggest. But on further investigation similarities with conduct books started to appear. In the article "Conduct Books in Nineteenth-Century Literature" Cengage (2005, par. 1) defines them as "a means by which an individual may learn and then demonstrate socially-prescribed appropriate behaviors" focusing on "the improvement of character through development of honesty, fidelity, modesty, and other

virtues, and on demonstrating character in one's dress, manners, intellectual development, and household training." The intelligence, grace, fortitude, modesty and kindness of Shakespeare's heroines seem like the perfect examples of everything that conduct books are trying to convey, indicating that we are in fact dealing with two different approaches based on the same intention and goal. The question is, then, whether the presentation of Shakespeare's heroines as role models can be unified with the ideals found in conduct books from the nineteenth century. In the previous chapter references were made to other works where the role and status of women have been discussed, like Mill, and also with specific reference to the importance in Shakespeare's heroines in the construction of a Victorian ideal, like Ruskin. But this chapter will focus on books that can be specifically labelled as conduct books, exemplified through special attention to Sarah Stickney Ellis' *The Women of England* from 1839. Will the investigation into the area of conduct literature prove that conduct books and the books on Shakespeare's heroines represent the same ideal and teach the same lessons? Will investigations into conduct books prove or disprove that the books on Shakespeare's heroines were consciously trying to educate?

Given that Shakespeare's characters are not mentioned in Ellis' books on conduct, it would be an impossible, and wrongful, assertion that her works and Jameson and Cowden Clarke's books are essentially the same. It is obvious that they use different methods, but the question is whether the models they represent are the same, or at least, conspicuously similar. The argument, then, is that the same ideas on women's education and the female ideal can be found in both conduct books, like Ellis' *The Women of England*, and the books on Shakespeare's heroines. If one can find evidence for this, it strongly supports the claim that both Cowden Clarke and Jameson's books have an educational intent. Does it prove that the promotion of the ideals represented by Shakespeare's heroines was made with the intent of inspiring women to adopt these ideals? It brings us back to Juliet Fleming's claim, cited in

chapter one, that Shakespeare's name could make other authors respected by association, and that to some extent he became a vehicle for the expression of the author's own ideas. Are we looking at a specific strain of educational thought and purpose which uses Shakespeare's name as a means of getting attention and respect? If one explores the moral nature of Jameson and Cowden Clarke's books and the ideals of which they speak, a resemblance to conduct books will assuredly appear. Without reducing Jameson and Cowden Clarke's work and trying to add to the conduct books something that is not there, the goal is to find points of similarities to prove that they aim at the same goal, namely the creation of a Victorian ideal femaleness. If this is right it will go a long way to prove that there was an educational intention behind Cowden Clarke and Jameson's books. An exploration of what was emphasised in women's education, for example as shown through conduct books, it will bring us closer to an image of the ideal Victorian femaleness.

The initial idea behind comparing conduct books and the books about Shakespeare's heroines was based on the conception that they would go like parallel lines throughout the era so that comparisons could be made in terms of popularity, reception and relevance, as well as making it easier to draw some general lines of comparison. The problems started right away as it became evident that conduct books had been very popular from the mid-eighteenth century, but the popularity decreased dramatically in the early nineteenth century. According to Langeland (1992, 292) the conduct books started to disappear from the 1820s, and etiquette books and manuals took over the market. But even though this complicates the intention to compare Cowden Clarke and Jameson's books with conduct books and deeming them both relevant to the education of women, it does not exclude the possibility that they represent the same ideals. Conduct books were the basis of the type of educational literature that succeeded them. It is therefore important to investigate them and their relevance to Cowden Clarke and Jameson's books, manuals and etiquette books, and the general changes in society that led to

their decline in popularity. A look into the shift that caused conduct books to lose their popularity is required.

The industrialised society created entirely new social situations with new participants in these social settings. It was now possible for someone from the working class to work their way up the ladder and partake in social events with members of the upper classes. This created a need for direct advice on how to behave in these situations, a desire that went outside of the character building aspect of the conduct books. According to Cengage (2005, par. 1) the etiquette books were focused on “proper behaviour in specific and often superficial social situations”. These books, aimed at social interactions, may seem a strange contrast to the emphasis on women and the home. But the idea is that women would contribute by bringing the values that were rooted in the home, and consequently not ruined by the mercantile world, out in the world and counter the destructive economic forces. The manuals gave “practical information on such subjects as child rearing, cooking, cleaning, and gardening”, and everything that concerned everyday life. But most importantly, they were “typically offering advice designed to foster the creation of a home that exemplifies proper character”. A properly run household was, according to Houghton (1957, 345) “both a shelter *from* the anxieties of modern life...and a shelter *for* those moral and spiritual values which the commercial spirit and the capital spirit were threatening to destroy” (italics in the original). The most famous book of this kind is *Mrs. Beeton’s Book of Household Management*, first published in 1861. Throughout its 1200 pages the readers were given advice on anything that had to do with household issues, from recipes to health issues. With these books at hand the Victorians were prepared for every situation at home, as described in the manuals, and outside of the home, through the behavioural advice in the etiquette books. They are examples of woman’s dual role both as a keeper of the home and the values within it, and her role as a vital part of the social climbing as the management of the household, the appearance of the

family and the rules of etiquette they adhered to, said a lot about what position they had, or rather, should have, in society. How to behave, what to wear, how to address the staff, how long a visit should last and what was appropriate to discuss, were described in detail in these books.

The advent of manuals and etiquette books is a testament to the fact that many Victorians searched for help and advice on what to do and how to act as everything changed around them. On one side you had the heroes and heroines of fiction and history, and on the other side you had the manuals with specific instructions and direct advice. But even though the popularity of conduct books decreased dramatically, the fact that many people still felt the need to cling to their role models implies that manuals were not enough. The conduct books' decline in popularity indicates that they had been deemed outdated and irrelevant for the modern Victorians, but people eagerly read Cowden Clarke and Jameson's books. Why were *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* and *Shakespeare's Heroines* still read while conduct books were deemed outdated? In the previous chapter evidence has been presented in defence of a moral nature in Cowden Clarke and Jameson's books, meaning that there still was an interest in improvement of character that these books heroines catered to. Are they the modern version of the outdated conduct books? Do they become some sort of self-help books for women who are trying to adjust to the new era? And what place do Shakespeare's heroines have in the creation of a new ideal womanhood in the encounter with the industrialised society? The role of women needs to be investigated further to explore that notion.

The Victorians held on to the myth of the Victorian housewife as the angel in the house, the woman who is a supremely pure and good being whose only desire is to procure comfort for her master. Or, as Coventry Patmore claimed, "Man must be pleased; but him to please is woman's pleasure" (Patmore 1866, 48). But while this was the ideological picture

the Victorians tried to convey, women's roles went outside those boundaries that the title of the angel in the house imposed on them. While men had the main responsibility in bringing the family up in the social hierarchy, women were given a more pivotal role than they had ever had before. In the article "Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel" (1992) Elizabeth Langland describes some of the important functions women had in Victorian society:

[T]he wife, the presiding hearth angel of Victorian social myth, actually performed a more significant and extensive economic and political function than is usually perceived. The prevailing ideology regarded the house as a haven, a private domain opposed to the public sphere of commerce, but the house and its mistress in fact served as a significant adjunct to a man's business endeavors. Whereas husbands earned the money, wives had the important task of administering the funds to acquire or maintain social and political status (291).

This shows that women had an important part to play in the improvement of the family that went outside of the morals, virtues and values they were perceived to have. This is not to say that those aspects were without importance, but they were incorporated in the increasingly outward expression of the female role. But this was not the only way a woman could contribute to social advancement. In Cowden Clarke's tale "The Physician's Orphan" based on Shakespeare's *All's well that ends well*, the following words are spoken to Gerard, Helena's father, on the business of self-advancement:

You have had your profession chosen for you with a view to helping the family honor a step up in the world – from the rotourier wealth of the banker, to the hoped-for renown of the physician; and next, you will have your wife chosen for you, as means of obtaining another grade in society (Cowden Clarke 1878a, 178).

What the word "rotourier" stands for remains a mystery, but the important thing is that it is a direct mention from Cowden Clarke in a tale about a heroine of women's roles in social advancement. But she uses it as an example of the heartlessness of a cold father who wants

his son to choose money and status over love. Langeland's description of woman's function in society and Cowden Clarke's account of marriage as a means to social advancement indicates a divergence from the myth of the angel in the house as the selfless mother and submissive wife with no real influence outside the four walls of the home.

Social advancement is not the only outward expression of Victorian womanhood. The increased chances of upward mobility and better living conditions that came with the industrialisation came at a cost. The society grew colder, harder and more competitive. Many Victorians reacted to this by increasing their focus on home and family. The home had to be a safe place and a shelter from the cold and cruel world of business and industry. Women and the home were seen as inextricably linked, which meant that it was the duty of women to preserve morality and purity, and to lead by example. With this in mind one can see how Ruskin's thoughts on Shakespeare's heroines apply to the Victorian view of women and their role, as eminently pure figures of high morals, described in more detail in chapter one. Business required callousness and selfishness, meaning that those were the values adopted by men, voluntarily or not. The home, and the woman, had to be the opposite, and stand for altruism, high morals and perfect values. In a sermon of Baldwin Brown, cited in Houghton's *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, women must "pray, think, strive to make a home something like a bright, serene, restful, joyful nook of heaven in an unheavenly world" (1957, 345). The heroines in Cowden Clarke and Jameson are, I believe, evidence of how acutely aware the authors were of women's roles both in terms of the home and the society in general. Is not Lady Macbeth the perfect example of the disastrous effects of bringing ambition and greed into the household instead of, in Houghton's words, keep it "a source of virtue and emotions which were nowhere else to be found, least of all in business and society" (1957, 342). Cowden Clarke blames her parents. Her cold and unfeeling mother, called the Dark Lady, and

her father who never instilled in his daughter the respect for authority, least of all male authority, that Cowden Clarke thinks she should have:

There was a perverse interchange in their respective positions, as it were. The father, from his submissive, easy disposition, shrinking from authority, which he neither exercised himself, nor resisted from others; the daughter, wilful, imperious, accustomed to dictate, – they seemed unfitly associated as parent and child. Their relations seemed reversed, and produced an untoward assimilation (1878a, 120).

There is no balance, the gender roles are not properly defined, and the result is that the unharnessed girl and future Lady never learns what her role proper role is. The result is vividly portrayed in the famous play from which the character is taken. According to Jameson *Lady Macbeth* it is even more disappointing to read of her acts because she is a woman and because she represents what she is supposed to counter. But most horrible of all is the fact that “we cannot claim for ourselves an exemption from the same nature, before which, in its corrupted state, we tremble with horror, or shrink with disgust” (Jameson 1837, 18). The feminine ideal is not something that happens all by itself without any external influence. To adopt the ideals means to be educated in them, and as society changes the ideals must change with it. In that respect, it seems as though Jameson and Cowden Clarke gently push their readers in what they see as the right direction by presenting them with role models. An investigation of books on conduct, manuals and etiquette is therefore relevant because it will lead us closer to an understanding of what the ideal they searched for was. Because if we look at Cowden Clarke’s account of the attempt to push Helena’s father into a marriage for the sake of social advancement, and Jameson and Cowden Clarke’s explanation of the acts of *Lady Macbeth*, the moral seems to be that nothing good will come out of women’s social ambition. Their social roles consist of their responsibility as the opposition to the mercantile world. And that may explain why their books are more similar to what we can call the outdated conduct book as opposed to the more modern etiquette books which campaigned for

women's responsibilities in society rather than their roles as homemakers. And even though the manuals were concerned with the household, they dealt with the outward appearance of a proper household rather than focusing on morals and values. The details of everyday life are not awarded any attention by Jameson and Cowden Clarke. It seems as though they may convey the opinion that when morality and proper virtue is the foundation of every woman, how they manage their household is not as important. The values they bring out in society are more important than their sense of etiquette as the combination of their nature and proper education will naturally lead to an agreeable outward expression.

An exploration of Sarah Ellis's *The Women of England* in search for an ideal Victorian leads to a variety of discoveries. Firstly, it may include a further explanation to the disappearance of the conduct book in the early nineteenth century. It builds on the same ideas as found in Langeland that the conduct books' focus on improvement of character became inextricably linked with both the management of the household and one's appearance in social settings. It is the outward expression of self-improvement, channelled into self-advancement. In *The Women of England* she claims that while the focus on identity, virtues and self-improvement was helpful to some extent, she saw a need for detailed descriptions of the dos and don'ts of social interaction and guidance on how to manage the ideal Victorian household: "while our libraries are stored with books of excellent advice on general conduct, we have no single work containing the particular minutiae of practical duty, to which I have felt myself called upon to invite the consideration of the young women of the present day" (Ellis 1839, 5). The books on "general conduct" applied to the character building, morals and values. The fragile ideology one found in the conduct books contributed to the view of women, but their specific responsibilities are better defined in the etiquette books. The third type of behavioural literature, the manual, provided the housewife with instruction in the details of everyday life, like cooking and cleaning. This is what Ellis calls for in her preface:

“We have many valuable dissertations upon female character, as exhibited on the broad scale of virtue; but no direct definition of those minor parts of domestic and social intercourse, which strengthen into habit, and consequently form the basis of moral character” (5-6). Ellis asks for direct instructions on how to go about one’s life in the best possible manner and how to keep an exemplary household. Ellis claims that much of the character building aspects depend on the practice of everyday life. Women have a job to do to ensure the upwards mobility of the family. To be virtuous, kind and caring are still requirements to call oneself a proper woman. But according to Ellis it is also what one does that forms the basis of the moral character, not singularly who you are. In terms of the ideal English woman, as well as the true Englishness, Ellis (1839, 35) seems to land on the same conclusion as Jameson and Cowden Clarke, namely that women of England and the moral character of England are inextricably linked. There is a “connection which exists between the *women* of England, and the *moral* character maintained by their country.”

Ellis (46-47) claims that the women of England have a strong influence on society even though they rarely act upon it directly. The home that is under their management has a noticeable impact on the men who do go out into the world and act according to the morals and values that dominates in his home. In the industrialised world it is the day of the machine, but Ellis worries that the machines are about to swallow the men that made them. She notices how competition, stress and the demands of society have made men weary, disillusioned and disconnected from their homes and families. The home and the woman who manages it need to act as a counterbalance to this to restore morality and goodness in society. And that is the true core of female influence. The home is ideally meant to be a sanctuary that is kept safe from the depravity of the cold, merciless world. Women are given the opportunity to develop this microcosmos into a place where pure morals and values are allowed to grow, free from the outside pressure. The idea is that the men will bring these values with them out into the

society, thus allowing the influence of women to go further than the walls of the home inside which they are usually constrained. In *Sesame and Lilies* John Ruskin (1890, 118-119) describes the home as “the place of Peace”.

This is the true nature of home – it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently – minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home; it is then only a part of the outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted fire in. But so far as it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods, before whose faces none may come but those whom they can receive with love, – so far as it is this, and roof and fire are types only of a nobler shade and light, – shade as of the rock in a weary land, and light as of the Pharos in the stormy sea; – so far it vindicates the name, and fulfils the praise, of home.

If women abandon their positions as housekeepers and go out into society to fulfil other ambitions, there will be no moral foundation left in society. Therefore, with the hope of convincing young women to assume the role in society Ellis feels nature has given them, she describes the importance and impact of female influence and how it starts in the home and then stretches out into society. Then she asks what role education is supposed to play in this.

Will an increase of intellectual attainments or a higher style of accomplishments, effect this purpose? Will the common-place frivolities of morning calls, or an interminable range of superficial reading, enable them to assist their brothers, their husbands, or their sons in becoming happier and better men? (Ellis 1839, 50).

This statement is conspicuously similar to Bellario’s words to Portia in Cowden Clarke’s tale “The Heiress of Belmont”. As quoted in chapter one, Bellario supports her eagerness in matters of the law, but specifies that she should use it to manage her household, not to strive against an independent career. In *The Merchant of Venice* we see how Portia’s knowledge is used to help the friend of her husband before she reassumed her role as a wife. According to

Jameson one should not equate women's intellect with that of men, and says of the heroines that "In Portia is intellect, kindled into romance by a poetical imagination; in Isabella, it is intellect elevated by religious principle" (Jameson 1837, 41). That is not to say that men's intellect was not connected to either romance or religion, but the point is to show that women's intellect is directed differently. It is aimed at the family and the household, and the primary goal is to use it to preserve and grow moral principles rather than to learn hard knowledge.

Ellis' argument also resembles Ruskin's (1890, 129) claim that education should only stretch so far "as may enable her to sympathise in her husband's pleasures". The same sentiment can also be found in *Shakespeare's Heroines*. In the introductory dialogue Jameson (1837, 31) states the following:

A time is coming perhaps when the education of women will be considered with a view to their future destination as the mothers and nurses of legislators and statesmen; and the cultivation of their power of reflection and moral feelings supersede the exciting drudgery by which they are now crammed with knowledge and accomplishments.

Jameson accuses modern education of producing selfish women with hard knowledge instead of focusing on "purer principles" and "the light of virtue" (1837, 27-28). Jameson's arguments, as well as those put forward by Cowden Clarke, Ellis and Ruskin, constitute a collective criticism against modern education, and modernity in general, which brings us back to the idealisation of the past.

Ellis claims that the modern women of England have lost focus of their role and that they neglect their responsibilities. When describing the virtues of woman, their high spiritual values and pronounced moral character, it is always as examples of what they were. Ellis wants the women to go back to their domestic duty and return to the ideal of the English woman that once dominated. Women used to be content with their domestic duties, she complains, but the women in the 1830s are forsaking their responsibilities in exchange for

activities outside the home for which they will receive more acclaim and praise. They are no longer satisfied with tending the household, patiently and obediently, at the expense of the well-being of the general population and the moral character of the nation (Ellis 1839, 37). Women are supposed to be selfless, self-sacrificing and willing to put everyone's needs in front of their own. In Ellis' eyes this is positive virtues that have to be idealised and encouraged. There is, however, a remarkable similarity to John Stuart Mill's words in "The Subjection of Women", but a radical difference in terms of use.

Mill (1911, 32) claims that it is the core of the problem that women are taught "to live for others, to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections". For Ellis this is the very essence of womanhood, their greatest virtue and the best they have to offer to the society in which they live. So for Mill the new woman is a great step ahead, while for Ellis it is a sign of degradation and reason to idealise the past and better times. Ellis thinks that the new woman is selfish, has ambitions on her own, and cares more for idleness, foolish hobbies and intellectual endeavours than managing a household. She tries to urge them back to the home reminding them of the greatness of the domestic English woman, the ways she used to be. Ellis warns them that if they continue in the same direction they will never really be happy because "[t]he sphere of woman's happiest and most beneficial influence is a domestic one" (Ellis 1839, 36). She wants the women to realise that their happiness does not lie in the future, or in the modern promises of bliss. Happiness can be secured only when the ideals of the past regain their influence on modern man and woman. Ellis' ideal woman adopts old ideals, reconstructs them, embodies, brings them into the modern society and influences the people around her. It brings us back to women's moral responsibility in the increasingly industrialised and competitive society. The dream of the simpler times from which the ideals originates are found in Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present* (1858, lii):

In many men the devouter and deeper instincts, chilled in the mercantile present, were twining with the memory of whatever was great, beautiful, morally sane, and humanly satisfying in the past. Many, in the face of the appalling state of the new towns, were wishing that the wheels of Time would run back to some simpler and wholesomer age, and there stay.

Progress was irreversible, and it was too late to rebuild the simpler times they dreamed of, but much could be improved by restoring the moral nature of the nation. The image of the ideal femaleness becomes clearer through Carlyle's outline of what the idealised past was and Ellis' promotion of domesticity and virtue as a way to restore some of the former grandeur that was now lost. Modernity creates between the present and concepts founded in nature, and it is exactly in nature where the true female ideal lies.

Are Cowden Clarke and Jameson's interpretation and use of Shakespeare's heroines an expression of the dissatisfaction with modern education describes on these pages? Is it that they rely on literature to provide the ideals and values that modern society and education seem to neglect? Ellis (1839, 54) provides us with a valid link:

Look at all the heroines, whether of romance or reality — at all the female characters that are held up to universal admiration— at all who have gone down to honoured graves, amongst the tears and the lamentations of their survivors. Have these been the learned, the accomplished women; the women who could speak many languages, who could solve problems, and elucidate systems of philosophy? No : or if they have, they have also been women who were dignified with the majesty of moral greatness— women who regarded not themselves, their own feebleness, or their own susceptibility of pain, but who, endued with an almost superhuman energy, could trample under foot every impediment that intervened between them and the accomplishment of some great object upon which their hopes were fixed, while that object was wholly unconnected with their own personal exaltation or enjoyment, and related only to some beloved object, whose suffering was their sorrow, whose good their gain.

From Shakespeare's fantastic tales of kings and queens, war and conflicts, heroism and deceit, Jameson and Cowden Clarke extract women from their dramatic structure and deem them

heroines in the sense of everyday heroines who quietly and dutifully perform their duties for the collective good. Fictional women who walk the endless halls of glorious castles are supposed to mean something to the women within an average English home and inspire them to give up their ambitions of a position in the public sphere and return to the home to find happiness and the true realisation of their potential. Ellis' words on the heroines of fiction resembles closely Cowden Clarke and Jameson's work on Shakespeare's heroines, so much that it is possible to claim that we are now beginning to see the outlines of the ideal Victorian femaleness.

What it all seems to come down to, and what Ellis says explicitly, is that woman can never be great in herself. Her worth will always be linked to the role of the support, or the assistant and counsellor that Ruskin speaks of. If this concept is applied to the tales of the heroines we see how, for example, the actions of Portia were the result of a desire to assist her husband in his predicament with no personal ambitions. Likewise, the tale of the future Lady Macbeth shows how cold and unscrupulous ambitions will lead an entire family astray. The heroism of women, then, is their domestic accomplishments. It is the everyday heroism which they are noted for, but which largely remains within the area of what one takes for granted.

Interestingly, when Cowden Clarke and Jameson remove the heroines from the dramatic structure they also remove them from the heroes. Their accounts become the personal narratives of the characters' lives and accomplishments. But both writers make sure to introduce the male characters soon enough, and what starts out as independent stories of independent fates soon becomes descriptions of the importance of women as assistants to and educators of men. We have returned to gender roles not unlike the famous lines in Milton's poem *Paradise Lost* from 1667:

Whence true authority in men; though both
Not equal, as their sex not equal seem'd;
For contemplation he and valour form'd;

For softness she and sweet attractive grace;

He for God only, she for God in him (Milton 1850, 83).

The importance of Milton in Victorian literary, religious and moral education cannot be undervalued, and his works are part of the past the Victorians idealise. But Milton is yet another example of how the school and literature go in different directions and promote different areas of interest. In the section above we saw how Ellis praised the literary heroines who promoted moral greatness over hard knowledge, but the school in modern society continues to promote selfishness, competition and the desire for personal success, all of which are unseemly for a woman, according to Ellis (1839, 55). The school system completely neglects what she sees as the most important. Improvement of the cognitive abilities has to stand second to “the improvement of the heart...that if time and opportunity should fail for both...women should be sent home from school with fewer accomplishments, and more of the will and the power to perform the various duties necessarily devolving upon them” (57). And quickly she adds that “religion alone can improve the heart” (57).

What is the use for education then? Is it altogether a waste of time for women? The school is only for intellectual development, Ellis claims. What about morality? What about the good old English values? After instructing the pupils on how to behave towards each other and how to greet the teacher, the moral training is over. The pupils are then faced with demands to compete with each other and to work hard only for the good of oneself. Ellis (1839, 60) claims that cold, hard knowledge is of no use to a woman if she has not learned to be “disinterestedly kind”. Because “what man is there in existence who would not rather his wife would be free from selfishness, than be able to read Virgil without the use of a dictionary” (ibid.). Therefore, she concludes, school knowledge should only be regarded as the next step in the education of a girl after she has learned “self-denial, forbearance, generosity, and disinterested kindness” (ibid.).

Cowden Clarke also criticises the school system, but on quite different grounds. In the tale “The Shrew and the Demure”, inspired by *The Taming of the Shrew*, she describes a situation where ordinary subjects are substituted by arts and crafts in preparation for an exhibition of the school’s work. But it is not excellence in languages, biblical knowledge and history that is the focus. Artificial flowers, needlework, paintings and useless decorative boxes are displayed as the result of their schooling. Cowden Clarke (1878b, 143) criticises the “teaching of handiworks rather than of ideas, – insufficient mental culture”. She does not deem education for girls altogether pointless, like Ellis does. Rather, she thinks it needs to be reformed. What the girls learn at this school will do them no good later in life, as housewives or public persons. “Give a girl silly things to do and to think of, – occupy her fingers, and leave her mind unsupplied, – and the natural consequence is, inanity...” (143). Interestingly, she notes how proper schooling could have made a difference in Katharina Minola’s life:

Why was there no gentle friend at hand...to bring forth and assist these faint struggles towards good, in Katharina’s soul? Is it because girls’ schooling is mostly held to be comprised in the teaching of knick-knack-making, accomplishments, and housewifery, with but little regard to the heart and mind which may one day be a wife’s – perhaps a mother’s? (Cowden Clarke 1878b, 141)

Cowden Clarke also speaks for the improvement of the heart, but argues that the development of the mind is a part of this. Instruction in housewifery is not enough to make someone a good wife and mother. Ellis, on the other hand, says that religion alone can provide this improvement. In this case Cowden Clarke and Ruskin seem more closely allied as both argue that the education of women should consist of more than cooking and needlework. But only as much as needed to be a suitable assistants and counsellors to their husbands, sons and brothers. Anna Jameson claims that both intellect and affections must be considered when modelling oneself to be a true English woman. “The affections are to the intellect what the forge is to the metal; it is they which temper and shape it to all good purposes, and soften,

strengthen, and purify it” (Jameson 1837, 49). Since Portia is the foundation of this claim, one might rightfully assume that Jameson too sees value in education. But in all cases education and the improvement of the mind will always stand second to the focus on a woman’s heart, feelings, gentle thoughts and actions, and moral feelings. In Cowden Clarke’s tale “The-Heiress of Belmont”, the promotion of moral feelings versus intellectual studies are discussed.

What science could vie with a knowledge of those gentle thoughts? What learning outweigh the speaking earnestness of those persuasive eyes? What scholastic arguments exceed in eloquence the music of that soft voice? What erudition could exert so refining an influence as one of those appealing smiles? Or what store of acquirement be worthy of so zealous a toil and confer so glorious an empire, as the gain of that tender heart? (Cowden Clarke 1878a, 23).

While the amount and contents of the education may be a matter of argument, it is most commonly viewed as inferior to moral training and housewifely duties, whether you read Ellis, Ruskin, Jameson or Cowden Clarke. It is a reminder that the maintenance of the moral nature of England was the responsibility of the women. Scholarly knowledge was but a minor part of it.

Chapter one unveiled some of the prejudices held against Cowden Clarke’s *The Girlhood*, and accused it of being a collection of innocent stories for girls. But it seems like her critics have completely missed the mode of writing which seems to follow the plot of the stories like a red line. This mode can easily be deemed educational with its persistent focus on “wholesome teaching – moral training – right guidance!” (Cowden Clarke 1878b, 70). She offers a criticism both of the education that takes place in the school education and the education provided by the family. Both will lead to personal growth, either through the inculcation of knowledge, facts and principles, or through adopting the values, morals and beliefs of the family. In “The Shrew and the Demure” Katherine Minola is failed by both the school and her family where neither manages to provide the education she needs to grow into a respectable young woman with the ability to balance strength of will with gentleness and

kindness. Instead of the “wholesome teaching” that Cowden Clarke favours, Katherine Minola is educated through methods that seem more like the taming described in *The Taming of the Shrew*. While she is not starved, as in the play, a frequent punishment is letting her dine on dry bread if she has misbehaved. The nuns at the school are no better, and lock her up in a small room to suffer in isolation. “Here, shut up in darkness, and debarred from all society, she was left to reflect upon her errors, and learn repentance. She did neither; but she suffered intensely” (Cowden Clarke 1878b, 127). Cowden Clarke rejects the attempts to threat and force Katherine Minola into submission, and claims that love is the manner in which all lessons should be taught. Love, either as unconditional parental love or as the empathy, understanding and support offered by the school, would, according to Cowden Clarke, foster love from its target, while force most certainly always would be met with force:

Radical cure of a bad passion is not effected by such means. Subjection is not conviction. Fear may induce the show of submission; but through reasoning affection alone, is genuine compliance obtained. Tyranny but inculcates the meanness of hypocrisy – the expediency of apparent yielding. Love only can truly subjugate a haughty spirit. Through love alone and its divine teachings are evil feelings to be eradicated, and virtuous emotions implanted in their stead (128).

The case of Katherine Minola is an interesting one as she is not reckoned to be one of the idealised heroines. The tale of “The Shrew and the Demure” becomes an arena in which Cowden Clarke can voice her dissatisfaction with the education and upbringing of women. She seems to insinuate that everyone has within them what it takes to become proper young woman embodying all the ideals that the heroines represent and the ability to bring these values forth into their own present. With the right upbringing and education these traits can be fostered in anyone, she claims. One should not forget that it is with force the shrew is eventually tamed in the play, an approach Cowden Clarke frequently rejects in her tale. But she does describe an incident, an encounter between Katherine and a young man named

Giulio Vinci, where the taming is presented more as a game, with an erotic undertone, between two wilful individuals.

A perplexed feeling of shame and surprise take possession of her, at finding herself completely overcome, – *mastered*. As the strong, manly arms, hold her firmly, constrained there to abide his will, she feels her spirit as well as her body give way, and own itself vanquished. One of the most singular features of this new state of feeling, is, that the sense of defeat, for the first time in her life, is not altogether painful. As her woman's frame involuntarily yields to his masculine strength – as her feebler limbs bend beneath his will, and submit to his power, there is an inexplicable acquiescence, an absence of resentment and resistance, altogether unwonted, and surprising to herself (Cowden Clarke 1878b, 169, italics in the original).

It must be entirely up to the individual reader to search for the same in the taming that takes place in the play, but one will probably find more obvious similarities in the treatment she receives from her parents and the nuns. And Cowden Clarke keeps repeating that force will only be met by force, and that love is a necessity in every area of education. But in the passage cited above, Cowden Clarke suggests that also love in terms of Eros, not only Agape, can lead to the desired effect.

Cowden Clarke is not alone in using fiction to convey her ideas on and criticism of education as it was not an uncommon approach in the Victorian Era. One example is Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, published for the first time in 1853. He criticises an educational approach which is solely concerned with filling their heads with as much facts and numbers as they can possibly fit in, completely ignoring any other aspect, and choking any spark of creativity and inspiration that may grow within the children. The book also emphasises the importance of female virtue and pure morals as a counteraction to the commercialistic, selfish industrialised society, describing the sad fate of Louisa Gradgrind who is denied the opportunity to develop these traits by her father. This is a common belief held by many

Victorians, and Dickens exemplifies so strongly in his rendition of the hard times that the education must have room for such feminine qualities as love and compassion instead of urging everyone to become machines filled with facts and theories.

In *The English Common Reader* from 1957 Richard D. Altick claims that much of the fiction in the nineteenth century was intentionally didactic in order to fulfil the request for meaningful, educational reading material, appropriate for everyone. “The old religious and utilitarian prejudices against reading for entertainment still persisted; if the nation were to subsidize the reading habit, it should do so only for serious purposes” (Altick 1967, 23). These serious purposes were self-fashioning in accordance with the dominant ideal at the particular time, instruction in religion, and the acquisition of knowledge and instruction in moral codes and etiquette. It might seem to be quite a paradox that Shakespeare was chosen as a vehicle for moral education. Despite being the Bard, he was most commonly associated with the playhouse, and, according to Altick (256), consequently publicly denounced. But when the status of the theatre changed, for example with the Theatres Regulation Act of 1843 mentioned in chapter one, Shakespeare was included in the didactic tradition. In many ways, Cowden Clarke and Jameson used Shakespeare’s plays to give moral instruction to their readers, resembles the way Charles Kean used the theatre and Shakespeare’s plays to bring the knowledge of history to the masses. Then it is not hard to imagine how a middle class household would have *Shakespeare’s Heroines* and *The Girlhood* on the same shelf as they kept their conduct books, and even the Bible. As a young man once reminisced about his childhood: “Shakespeare and the Bible were the books I was brought up on, and I don’t want any better” (Altick 1967, 247).

The ideal femaleness has been explored in both the works by Jameson and Cowden Clarke and Ellis’ book, and it has brought us closer to an outline of the ideal Victorian femaleness. So it is a common ideal? Yes, I believe there is. Cowden Clarke, Ellis and

Jameson all bring to the front a type of ideal femaleness which promotes woman in her domestic role. Jameson and Cowden Clarke use Lady Macbeth to show how important women are to construct a proper household, and how serious it is if women neglect their responsibilities and allow themselves to be swept away by the selfish, ambitious mercantile society. While social advancement is not a singularly negative thing which should be discouraged at all cost, it is important for them to emphasise that women need to keep their focus on the household as an opposition to the negative forces in society. Their approaches are different, but the virtues Jameson and Cowden Clarke believe Shakespeare's characters to represent strongly resemble the ideal femaleness that Ellis promotes. But Jameson and Cowden Clarke's books cannot be called conduct books which use Shakespeare's heroines as the vehicle for modern education. They may convey the same ideals, but we must return to the reference to Derrida in the introduction. The books on Shakespeare's heroines do not belong to the conduct book genre, but they do participate in it, as well as several other genres. Cowden Clarke and Jameson have an interest in Shakespeare and his characters that goes beyond merely using him as an educational tool. But I believe they have found characters in his works that represents their idea of the ideal femaleness, and therefore they emphasise this in their accounts.

When the status of the theatre changed, the status of the actress consequently changed too. Shakespeare's heroines were no longer played by effeminate men and adolescent boys, but by respectable actresses. Helena Faucit and Ellen Terry became known as two of the most famous Shakespearean actresses in the Victorian Era. They are a vital part of the next where Shakespeare's heroines, the idealisation of the past and the search for the ideal Victorian womanhood are brought on to the stage. This ideal womanhood has been described through Jameson and Cowden Clarke's books, compared to Ellis, Mill, Ruskin and Milton's ideas on womanhood, and will now be compared to the characters as portrayed by Faucit and Terry.

Chapter Three

Shakespeare's Heroines on the Victorian Stage:

Ellen Terry and Helena Faucit's Accounts of Idealism, Womanhood and Shakespeare

It might seem strange that we now find ourselves on the theatre stage after initially claiming that this is a thesis about characters taken out of the plays and separated from their context. However, it is possible to make the same claims even if the characters are not entirely removed from the dramatic structure. Renowned actresses like Ellen Terry and Helena Faucit used their experience from the theatre when they wrote about Shakespeare's heroines, Terry in her autobiography *The Story of My Life*, first published in 1907, and Faucit in her book *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* from 1885. One may question the validity of the sources as Terry presents her idea on Shakespeare's characters in her autobiography. Authors of autobiographies, Terry among them, would certainly want to portray themselves in as flattering a light as possible, and would, quite inevitably, give a rather self-centred portrayal of the events. Faucit's ideas of Shakespeare's heroines have been formed through her career, and are the result of the combination of her opinions and ideas and the demands of the theatre management. But what they offer is direct evidence to Victorian female interpretations of the characters. Terry and Faucit are perfect examples of the personal relationship to the characters, the view of them as real people and the idealisation of the past because their writings are the result of these tendencies. Exploring the works of two people who have actually been on the stage and portrayed characters offers us another interesting way of interpreting Shakespeare's heroines. *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* and *The Story of My Life* provides insights into what extent these characters were role models to Victorian women, exemplified through Terry and Faucit's accounts, but also how Terry and Faucit were role models to their contemporaries. In this chapter the construction of an ideal

Victorian femaleness is exemplified through the works of Ellen Terry and Helena Faucit. What do their interpretation and portrayal of the characters, in their books and on stage, say about the ideal, the nature of women and the role Shakespeare's heroines had to play in this? Will these books constitute the last pieces in the puzzle in the search for an ideal Victorian femaleness based on Shakespeare's heroines? Given that one accepts that there is an educational intention behind Anna Jameson and Mary Cowden Clarke's books, can the same be found in the works by Terry and Faucit? Before trying to find the answers to these questions in the books, we must take a look at the place where their ideas on Shakespeare's heroines started, namely the theatre.

The theatre actor is unique in fusing the past and the present in such occasions as they are half the character from the past and half the person of the present. When Ellen Terry and Helena Faucit took the stage as Isabella, Portia, Ophelia or Lady Macbeth, depending on which place they were in their career, it was as women of the Victorian era embodying Elizabethan heroines, with the focus split between doing the part justice and being attentive to the demands and opinions of society. In addition to this come the qualities they bring to the table as individuals, actresses, Victorians and as women. The demands of society and the strong opinions connected to what Shakespeare's characters were like and how they should be portrayed were combined with the personal and professional opinion of the actresses and their interpretations of it. The audiences are also part of the creation of a meaning as they, as the receivers, interpret the performance based on their perception of society. This is reminiscent of Jacky Bratton's term "Intertheatricality", cited in the introduction. Bratton (2003, 37) claims that the theatre text is not independent of the surrounding culture, and it is as influenced by culture as the culture is affected by the text. Performances do not exist in a vacuum, but they are dependent on and linked to the audience who brings the present to the theatrical re-enactments of the past. All these aspects and their consequences must be taken

into consideration when studying the character that eventually steps out on the stage and faces the scrutiny of an audience who accept Shakespeare's authority as the Bard and as the greatest interpreter and conveyer of true Englishness.

In the Victorian era some people lived and breathed Shakespeare. In *Shakespeare and the Victorians* Adrian Poole (2004, 1) claims that "[t]he Victorians had Shakespeare in their bones and blood, so they liked to believe. He was certainly all around them, on stage and on posters, in paintings and cartoons, in the air they breathed, on the China they ate off". It was to the extent that one could imagine that one inhaled his spirit, and likewise the spirits of his characters. In the theatre the actors did not merely portray them, they became them. At this time many believed that the soul of the heroine became the soul of the actress, leaving little thought to the fact that the character could have no independent soul or inherent qualities other than what was given to them by an author or an actor. The actor breathes life into the character, and not the other way around. A character is not alive and therefore does not have any vitalising powers. The Victorian obsession with these inanimate figures and their creator became so absorbing that the figures took on a life of their own and became as real as the humans who were fascinated by them. With this in mind it is easier to understand what inspired Mary Cowden Clarke to write accounts of their childhood or for Anna Jameson to describe their emotional lives and thoughts outside of the perimeters of the play. The actors were equally obsessed and intrigued, and they delivered their lines and their soliloquies with such fervour that they forgot the fact that the moment they stopped talking the characters would disappear. All that was left behind was the meta-language created by scholars and audiences and critics who filled the void left by the characters with questions on what Ophelia really thought and what Portia's intentions were, as if they were gossiping about a person who had just left the room. But Ophelia does not think and Portia does not have any intentions as these actions are generally preserved for the living. Yet, the appearances of these characters

on the stage, night after night, made them as real, true and alive as the ideals we cherish today. They were the physical representations of the imaginings and ideas surrounding the characters. They were no longer just words on a page or series of textual instances. They had embodied the values and morals from the idealised past, and were now conveying them to the Victorians. They were role models.

The close relationship the Victorians had with Shakespeare may not be the only reason why Terry and Faucit seem to view the characters as real people. A look into a variety of acting techniques suggests that this may also be an approach to acting. Imagining the past and the future of the characters is not an uncommon acting technique, and it can be seen most clearly in the Stanislavski method acting which originated in the early twentieth century. In *Acting: A Handbook of the Stanislavski Method*, Toby Cole uses Stanislavski's own notes on his scripts. His notes on the script of *Othello* turned into the book *Production Plan of Othello*, published in 1930, providing us with evidence of how the idea of imagining the past and the future of the characters was employed in modern acting. Toby Cole (1983, 159) quotes Stanislavski's question "[w]hat is the *past* which justifies the *present* of this scene?" (italics in the original). He imagines that Roderigo's deceit comes from Desdemona rejecting him as a suitor. Stanislavski's thoughts on the past of the characters resemble the material in Terry and Faucit's books to such an extent that one may see what Terry and Faucit were doing as a forerunner to the method acting techniques that succeeded them. Stanislavski speaks of the characters in much the same manner as the actresses, and one can get the same feeling when reading his accounts, as with Terry and Faucit, that we are no longer speaking about a character, but an individual in its own right.

It should not be forgotten that Desdemona is not at all the woman she is usually portrayed as on the stage. She is always portrayed as a kind of shy, frightened Ophelia. But Desdemona is entirely different. She is determined and brave. She does not want the usual marriage of convenience. She wants a fairy prince" (Stanislavski 1930 in Cole 1983, 167).

But what is the foundation of what? Has the personal relationship led to an acting technique which includes the imaginings of the character's future and pasts, or is the tendency to view them as real people simply a part of a method of acting? Stanislavski seems to be representing the latter option, but further investigations of Terry and Faucit's works may not lead to the same conclusion. And what about the audiences? What impressions did they have when they left the theatre? Like Cowden Clarke and Jameson's readers, the audiences are the destination, to use Barthes' term, of the performance. If there is in fact an educational value to the performances, in the shape that the audiences chose to embody the values and ideals that have been presented to them, the theatre becomes just another medium that the ideals are conveyed with. And to what extent are Terry and Faucit as individuals relevant to the presentation of ideals? Are they role models too?

When Ellen Terry penned her autobiography in 1907 she was a very famous actress who had had a long and prolific career. Shakespeare's heroines assume a red line of consistency as she chronicles her life and experiences, indicating that the characters had been a great part of her life. What is the most interesting to this study are her reflections on the characters, what she perceived them to be and what she as an actress did to convey this to the audience. At first it seems like an easy task to tell what type of book this is, as it is, obviously, an autobiography. But in between the anecdotes and recollections from a long and eventful life she included descriptions of the characters founded in evidence from the text and her own personal opinions and interpretations. The result is what we may call a scholarly dissertation of some of Shakespeare's heroines, presented with the insight only an actress can provide as she has let them inhabit her skin for the duration of the performance, and, as we learn, which continue to affect her for the rest of her life. Terry has read the plays over and over again, and convinces her readers to accept her interpretations of her characters by referring to the evidence she has found in the text. The result is that this book too rejects the labels one

wishes to put on it. It may also be attributed to what was stated in the introduction, that the autobiography is a fairly recent genre. It is of no single fixed generic identity like the books by Cowden Clarke and Jameson.

While Terry's descriptions of Shakespeare's heroines are anecdotal and serve more as representatives of stages in her life and career, Helena Faucit assumes the task in a more focused manner. She wrote, upon request from her friends, several letters where she explained her view of the characters she had portrayed on stage throughout her career. The letters were published as a book in 1885, and in the preface to a later edition she stated that her descriptions became the continuation of the work she had started on the stage, namely "the endeavour to present a living picture of womanhood as divined by Shakespeare, and held up by him as an ideal for woman to aspire to, and for men to revere" (Faucit 1904, xi). The characters that she brought to life on stage were now presented equally vividly in her accounts of Shakespeare's heroines. Faucit's letters are an eclectic mix of borrowings from other genres. Her writings include references to her career as an actress and her insights into the theatre and acting. She also includes imaginings of the past and future of the characters, presented in dreamlike sequences where she describes to the reader what has stood so vividly before her. But most of the time the book consist of close textual readings of the plays citing relevant passages from the play and including her interpretations of the actions that takes place. There is a scholarly effort behind it that deserves the attention of the readers. Her opinions on the characters are based on close textual readings with several quotations from the plays where she finds the evidence to support her assertions. But her most significant contribution to the discussion of Shakespeare's female characters, whom she "believed had not been duly appreciated" (vii), was her experience as an actress and the fact that through her career she had let these women wear her skin and speak through her mouth. "I have had the great advantage of throwing my own nature into theirs, of becoming moved by their

emotions: I have, as it were, thought their thoughts and spoken their words straight from my own living heart and mind (viii)". Much of the basis of this statement is found in her reflections on how these plays were performed in the time in which they were written. She is, as opposed to the rules on the Elizabethan stage, a woman playing the female parts. Shakespeare's characters are to her outlines that are realised when the actor adds the substance, the flesh, and fills the outline he has made. Faucit (1904, 4) claims that the heroines Shakespeare has a "belief in the actor's art", and that the heroines are evidence of "his trust in the power possessed, at least by sympathetic natures, of filling up his outlines, and giving full and vivid life to the creatures of his brain." It is an explicit account of the effect the actor, and consequently the present culture, has on the plays since it is a Victorian substance that will fill his outlines. This renders it inevitable that the characters become products of the views and opinions of that particular time. Faucit (ibid.) asks if "[w]ithout this belief could he have written as he did, when boys and beardless youths were the only representatives of his women on the stage?" Is this an expression of a common Victorian belief that their adaptations of the plays resulted in versions that were the way Shakespeare had intended them to be? Who can tell if this is true or not? With what authority do they make these claims?

Faucit (ibid.) deviates, however briefly, from the popular tendency to idealise the past, and finds the answer in progress and modernity.

Yes, he must have looked beyond the 'the ignorant present' and known that a time would come when women, true and worthy, should find it a glory to throw the best part of their natures into these ideal types which he has left to testify to his faith in womanhood, and to make them living realities for thousands to whom they would else have been unknown. She speaks of "these ideal types" as if they were intended as models from the beginning, designed to serve an educational and inspirational purpose. The "faith in womanhood" is similar to Cowden Clarke's article "Shakespeare as the girl's friend" where she presents

Shakespeare as a teacher and close companion to women, and a conveyer of positive attitudes towards women. Cowden Clarke (1887, 562) claims that “[h]e has shown how women are capable of great forbearance and prompt forgiveness – high qualities under wrong and injury”. Faucit’s use of the term “living realities” refers both to the view of the characters as real people, but also the fact that the theatre gives life to the otherwise lifeless characters. In that respect, Cowden Clarke and Jameson speak of them as real people while Terry and Faucit are in a position to actually make them real. The theatre is the fruition of the ambition of the other writers as the characters are presented on stage as they have presented themselves in the writer’s head.

The ideals represented by Shakespeare’s heroines were frequently the focus of the theatre audience and the critics. They came to the theatre to be reminded of the greatness of what once was the honourable English woman. But in a time where the housewife was the supreme ideal, Terry and Faucit both had illustrious careers as actors. They have the same ambivalent position as Mary Cowden Clarke and Anna Jameson because they all describe woman’s ideal position, but move beyond it by the very act of their writing. But the question is whether they stood free to present a female ideal through Shakespeare’s heroines or if they were portraying a male version of that ideal which was imposed on them by the managers. It is relevant because it shows to what extent the female ideal we are trying to find was a male or a female construction, and whether or not women had any influence in this creation at all.

The relationship between the actresses and the actor-managers who ran the theatre is an intriguing study in the relationship between men and women in the professional sphere. As successful working women, their place was in the public sphere, further removed from the home than, for example, freelance writers Mary Cowden Clarke and Anna Jameson. Still, the combination of the famous actresses and the actor-managers they worked for has led critics to claim that the theatre was influenced by the same gender dichotomy as the rest of society, and

that Terry and Faucit assumed the supporting roles to the theatre managers, Irving and Macready. If this is the case, one may ask to what extent the roles they played were the result of their artistic integrity, or if they were entirely controlled by the theatre managers. And were they, as women, especially subjected to the power of the actor-managers or were all actors dominated in the same way? In *Shakespeare and the Victorians* Adrian Poole describes a working relationship where Terry and Faucit were undervalued and subjected to the will of the theatre managers, who had little or no interest in including the women's interpretations into the characters. It seems, however, that Poole stands for most of the undervaluing when it comes to the influence of the actresses. He does not take much notice, either, of the fact that the power of the actor-managers was so great that it affected everyone working in the theatre. Irving and Macready were the directors, they were in charge of the overall production, and they had the final word in almost everything that happened in their theatres. Why should this power be exerted only on the actresses? The assertion here is that it was not.

Poole (2004, 28) says of Terry and Faucit that "[b]oth found themselves partnered by powerful male actors who sought to choose their roles, control their appearance, manage their moves". In *The Story of my Life* it is obvious that Ellen Terry herself made some reflections on their relationship as well. "I have sometimes wondered what I should have accomplished without Henry Irving", she says when speaking of an incident where her friends claimed that she didn't have "chances enough at the Lyceum" (1908, 164). Her response to the accusation is that "I might have had 'bigger' parts, but it doesn't follow that they would have been better ones" (ibid.), emphasising her loyalty to Irving and a great trust in his abilities to bring out the best in the actors he worked with. However, she gives the impression that at times she was nothing but a supporting character in Irving's grand productions, and while that is most undoubtedly true, this was a feeling shared by all her colleagues, men and women. Irving would spend endless hours perfecting his parts and planning the productions, but between the

costumes and the lighting and the music and the setting, the other characters seemed to disappear from his busy mind. Little time was set aside for rehearsing with the other actors, and Ellen Terry probably speaks for many others when claims that her parts were neglected and devalued. Terry (1908, 153) comments on the *Hamlet* production that “[t]he only person who did not profit by Henry’s ceaseless labours was poor Ophelia”. However, the same sentiments were probably shared by poor Polonius and poor Claudius as well. It must be taken into consideration that the male actors were also subjected to the decisions and ideas of the managers who probably tried to, as Poole (2004, 28) claimed, choose the roles, control the appearances and manage the moves of the men as well.

In Helena Faucit’s book, however, there is evidence that suggests that it was harder for women to be heard and feel seen by the managers. In *One Some of Shakespeare’s Female Characters* Helena Faucit gives an example from her working relationship with actor-manager Charles Macready:

“My dear, you are entirely wrong in this conception,” was a phrase constantly in his mouth. The young girl was expected to take the same view as the ripe artist, who had had great experience, no doubt, but who had also confirmed habits, and whose strong masculine mind had in it but little of the feminine element (Faucit 1904, 51).

Judging by the words of Faucit and Terry on the matter it probably was not an equal working relationship, but the evidence given here suggests that it cannot be deemed only a gender issue, but also a case of a common professional hierarchy where a one person makes the decisions and the staff must adhere to it, men and women. But further investigations into Faucit and Terry’s books suggest that despite this hierarchy, one cannot claim that the parts were not their creation, but too influenced by the male actor-managers to be called female interpretations of the roles. As the quotation from Terry shows, the actor-managers were mostly concerned with their own parts to have time to micro-manage everyone else’s performances as well.

The relationships described by both women mark a strong contrast to Cowden Clarke's words in *The Girl's Own Paper*, cited in chapter one, that she believed that Shakespeare was able to write so sympathetically about women because he had something essentially feminine within him. She believed that it widened his perspective and allowed him to write better female characters than anyone ever could (Cowden Clarke 1887, 562). The actor-managers could make revisions, centre the attention on their characters, and put emphasis on the masculine interpretations, but one should not neglect the interest in and admiration of the heroines. The relationship between the actor-managers and the actresses who worked for them, must be seen with more nuance than how Poole has chosen to portray it. The person one meets in *The Story of My Life* is too proud and too headstrong with too much vivacity to be managed by an actor-manager, though one need not doubt that he tried. And Faucit, though weakened by self-doubt and a constant dissatisfaction with her own work, had strong opinions of who these women were and which dramatic techniques she needed to use to convey this in her performance. An example of this is when she quotes Macready's complaint that she was "so difficult to kill" in the murder scene in *Othello* (1904, 50). She explained her appearance in that scene by saying "I would not die with my honour tarnished, without the chance of disabusing my husband's mind of the vile thoughts that clouded it" (ibid.). The performance, at least in this case, belongs to Faucit based on her interpretation of the play and her opinions of how it should be conveyed despite being burdened by Macready's tendency to "take exception to everything I did that was not exactly in accordance with his own notions" (51). Evidently, neither Faucit nor Terry were entirely without any artistic integrity and control over their own characters, and as managers Macready and Irving were, in all fairness, in charge of everyone at the theatre, male and female. It cannot exclusively be categorised under gender issues, though it is undeniably tempting when dealing with the Victorian era. The result is that the heroines are interpreted and conveyed by

Terry and Faucit, as with Cowden Clarke and Jameson, meaning that we are, again, dealing with women interpreting and exploring Shakespeare's works and presenting them to their audience, be it their readers or theatregoers. The construction of the ideal Victorian femaleness is not singularly a male construction, imposed on passive receivers. Through the idealisation of Shakespeare's heroines, women are actively constructing their own ideal.

Another issue that weakens Poole's claim is that Terry and Faucit enjoyed more freedom than most women, as well as fellow actors and actresses. They were successful, admired by the masses and praised for their work. To claim that they were nothing but puppets slavishly following the whims of the actor-managers, is too much of a black and white interpretation of the nineteenth century theatre and an unfair portrayal of both the actresses and the managers. And anyone who has any knowledge of Shakespeare will make the claim that the female roles are too big, too interesting and too important to the central plot to be merely supporting roles to the male heroes. Portia, Ophelia, Isabella and Lady Macbeth were favoured characters among Victorian audiences and actresses, and far from any supporting roles, despite being coupled with strong male roles. Still, if one wants to find evidence to support the claim that the female characters became as subordinate to the male leads as the actresses were to the actors, in this case Macready and Faucit, and Irving and Terry, or as women were to men in general, one certainly will find it. Poole (2004, 28) mentions examples such as "[w]hen Ellen Terry sported a blood-red cloak in the rehearsals for *Macbeth* it caught Irving's eye, and the next thing she knew it was on his shoulders". In *The Story of My Life* Terry speaks of how she had to adjust her characters so that they would be in accordance with the male leads, no matter how big or small they were. She recalls an incident during the production of *The Merchant of Venice* where such a revision is needed, and she expresses concerns over the negative effect it has on her character:

In “The Merchant of Venice” I found that Henry Irving’s Shylock necessitated an entire revision of my conception of Portia, especially in the trial scene...I had considered, and still am of the same mind, that Portia in the trial scene ought to be very *quiet*. I saw an extraordinary effect in this quietness. But as Henry’s Shylock was quiet, I had to give it up. His heroic saint was splendid, but it wasn’t good for Portia (Terry 1908, 163, italics in the original).

Terry’s stories reveal to what extent the mentality went that Shakespeare’s heroines were the supporting roles to the male leads. In that way the plays would inevitably always be about the heroes. The Hamlets, Othellos and Macbeths would come in many different versions depending on the approach of the actors that played them. And then the actresses had to adjust their approach to complement the male characters in the best possible way. This caused great difficulty for the renowned actress who claimed she had a keener sense of what was right for the female characters than the men could ever have. When the American Edmund Booth took on the role of Othello, his interpretation of it was not as rigid as Irving’s, and perhaps not as bound by the English expectations of what Shakespeare’s characters were like and how one should portray them. Maybe his nationality allowed him to reinterpret the part and make it his own more than an English actor could. The Othello that Booth presented to the audience was also much easier for Terry to act against and afforded her with the opportunity to create what she saw as a truer portrayal of Desdemona that did not go against her sense of logic and insight into the character. “It is difficult to preserve the simple, heroic blindness of Desdemona to the fact that her lord mistrusts her, if her lord is raving and stamping under her nose!” (Terry 1908, 205). Booth’s “gentle”, “melancholy” and “dignified” Othello gave room for Terry’s honest interpretation of Desdemona, and awarded her more freedom in her part than for example Irving would have. “I wanted to make Desdemona out the fool who is the victim of love and faith; not the simpleton, whose want of tact in continually pleading Cassio’s cause is sometimes irritating to the audience” (ibid.), she said, indicating that she

stood freer to portray the character as she chose. It is not unlikely that the visiting actor was more prone to listen to the famous Ellen Terry and perhaps adjust his Othello to her Desdemona considering that he was a guest in her country and on her stage. “Booth was gentle in the scenes with Desdemona until *the* scene where Othello overwhelms her with the foul word and destroys her fool’s paradise” (ibid.).

Instances like the one cited above add a more nuanced view of how life at the theatre was, and they indicate that even though there was a strict power hierarchy, that sometimes roles had to be altered and adjusted according to the whims of an actor-manager, it is not enough to make the claim that the heroines were filtered through male perception and therefore not suitable examples of female Victorian interpretations of Shakespeare’s heroines. After all, Terry and Faucit’s characters have proven to be just as remarkable and memorable as those of Irving and Macready. Terry’s portrayal of the heiress was just as acclaimed as Irving’s Shylock, and Faucit’s Desdemona would at times take up more space in the reviews than Macready’s Othello.

The instances mentioned above are reminiscent of Ruskin’s words, quoted in chapter one, that in Shakespeare there are no heroes, only heroines. Ruskin (1890, 101) insisted that “[t]he catastrophe of every play is caused always by the folly or fault of a man; the redemption, if there be any, is by the wisdom and virtue of a woman; and, failing that, there is none”. The Victorian productions of Shakespeare’s play consequently becomes a complicated issue, because it seems as though Shakespeare’s plays provided the Victorians with what Poole (2004, 29) calls the recurring problem of “which role the male lead should take” against the female role. In Ruskin (1890, 101) the male characters are blamed for causing nothing but trouble, while the female characters are heroines in the truest meaning of the word.

There is hardly a play that has not a perfect woman in it, steadfast in grave hope, and errorless purpose. Cordelia, Desdemona, Isabella, Hermione, Imogen, Queen Katherine, Perdita, Sylvia,

Viola, Rosalind, Helena, and last, and perhaps loveliest, Virgilia, all are faultless, conceived in the highest heroic type of humanity.

How could the female parts be downplayed, then, if they were responsible for redeeming the acts of men? On a wider scale one can see, again, how the events of the plays mimic the realities of society as women were believed to redeem the acts of men by being a moral balance to the mercantile society. Female influence could not be downplayed, on stage or in real life. What was amiable in Shakespeare's heroines should be the ideal of Victorian women. With such a basis how could the plays become an unbalanced portrayal of male heroism and achievements? Further investigation into Ruskin's words on Shakespeare's heroines reveals that he praises them exactly for their role as redeemers of men. In a production of *Cymbeline* at the Lyceum Irving struggled with the fact that to the Victorians Imogen was the true star of the play. But at the Lyceum and in every play that was performed there, Henry Irving was the star. According to Poole (2004, 29-30) "Irving chose Iachimo instead of Posthumus...Irving saw Iachimo as a villain-with-a-soul, whose confession and repentance provide the real centre to the final scene." The result of this was that "[t]he core of the play became a familiar fable of doomed man redeemed by woman".

Yet again the woman was reduced to a saviour who redeems the actions of men, but is it a subordinate position and is it simply a matter of women saving men through passive virtue? Did they only inspire others to do good by being innately good, and led others to act in accordance with moral principles by being pure and by being examples and embodiments of these principles? Cowden Clarke, Jameson, Terry and Faucit all seem to represent the view woman as saviour as a positive terms, and speak for woman's role as redeemer as something positive. Our willingness to immediately assume that it is a symbol of subservience may reveal more of our prejudiced conception than it says something important of the gender roles in the Victorian era. We must keep in mind that when Ruskin described the ideal woman he exalted woman's "power to heal, to redeem, to guide, and to guard" (Ruskin 1890, 145). But

is this yet another view of the ideal imposed on women by men? The fact is that Ruskin's admiring words of Shakespeare's heroines are not so different from what we find in Cowden Clarke, Jameson, Faucit and Terry. Is this not similar to Faucit's account of how Portia went to Shylock's house after the trial to show him the true image of mercy? Faucit's description of Portia's future reveals that woman's role as saviour may not be singularly negative:

The hand and heart will ever remain open to help and comfort others. She will retain her gay, bright spirit. She will have always her gracious, attractive manners, and will spread around her in her home an atmosphere which will make Belmont an earthly paradise to those fortunate ones who are welcomed to it (Faucit 1904, 42).

While the instance mentioned above where Irving alters the play so that he would be the star, Ellen Terry of a variety of roles that gave her, as she puts it, "finer opportunities than they gave Henry" (1908, 164). Even if Irving was not very interested in assisting Terry during the productions, as the example from *Hamlet* shows, Terry managed to create characters that proved to be quite memorable, and that were awarded just as much attention as Irving's characters. What does it matter, then, that he stole her cloak in *The Merchant of Venice*? She claims that her Portia was "at least equal to his" Shylock (164).

Faucit could not claim the same equality for the subject of her first letter, Ophelia, but she tries to redeem her and explore why she has been so misunderstood: "It hurts me to hear her spoken of, as she often is, a weak creature, wanting in truthfulness, in purpose, in force of character, and only interesting when she loses the little wits she had" (1904, 3). Faucit tries to explain, like Cowden Clarke, Jameson and Terry, the failures of the inherently good with the desire to clear up any misunderstanding surrounding Shakespeare's heroines. In order to do so one would have to go to the point where it went wrong, and this is apparently often found in their childhood. Faucit describes what she imagines Ophelia's childhood to have been like, and it is in fact quite similar to Cowden Clarke's tale "The Rose of Elsinore". Both versions suggest that Ophelia was raised by simple people. Cowden Clarke imagines that her mother is

absent because she follows her husband on his official affairs, while Faucit imagines that her mother died in childbirth. Either way, the mother is not there to influence her in the fragile formative years, and she is “tended only by roughly-mannered and uncultured natures!” (Faucit 1904, 7). Cowden Clarke’s Ophelia is lonely and “thrown entirely upon her own resources” (Cowden Clarke 1878b, 196) while Faucit’s Ophelia is similarly referred to as “half-forgotten” (8) and largely ignored by those around her. Ophelia’s solitude, at times self-imposed, but usually not, draws her to Hamlet who has “a certain loneliness in his position not very unlike her own” (9). The rest of Faucit’s letter gives evidence of a remarkably personal relationship that the actress has to the character, and it is quite striking how this affects her work. Seldom are we reminded of a scholarly analysis of the character when Faucit presents her observations making statements such as “[I]n this state of mind, surely she is not to be much blamed, or judged very harshly”, and “acutely painful though it must have been to her sensitive nature” (13). It should, however, be noted that these are in fact letters, and originally meant for her friends. The epistolary form lends a sense of an open place for the free flow of thoughts and feelings that, for example, a scholarly work would have no room for. She is free to make her own assumptions and present her own ideas without the type of self-censorship that scholarly dissertations come with. It is related to the discussion of genre in the introduction where it is claimed that these books represent something new, and it is precisely their newness that allows them to write uninhibited by strict rules and regulations. But when the letters were made into a book, or when they were published for the first time in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, they lost some of the privacy as they are now addressed to a much larger readership.

In many ways, Cowden Clarke’s book may also seem like a collection of letters, addressed to her readers, giving them advice and attempting to influence them to make the right choices. Faucit’s letters also resemble the essays written by Jameson since neither are

dominated by accounts of her everyday life, but contain dissertations on some of Shakespeare's female characters with enough references to the plays where they came from to drag the category of textual analysis into the text. Cowden Clarke, Jameson and Faucit may in fact represent a feminine way of writing about Shakespeare's heroines. Since women were connected to the home and the personal, it may not be all that strange that their works are dominated by a personal approach to the subject and the readers

On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters was frequently reprinted in the nineteenth century, but it went out of print few years after the official end of the Victorian era. It seems that it was considered of no interest once that era was over, meaning, perhaps, that it was too attached to the time from which it originated and lacked the timeless qualities. It is not viable outside its own time, and one may wonder why that is, when the very similar *Shakespeare's Heroines* by Anna Jameson enjoys attention far into the present century.

While the claim for reality is put somewhat at distance in Cowden Clarke's tales, it is difficult to discern in Faucit's writings that it is in fact fictional characters she is discussing. She speaks of their pasts as if they should naturally have one, and she is just not quite sure exactly what it is. Her theories on the heroines lead one to assume two things. Either she has read Cowden Clarke's tales, or the events in the plays so naturally follow an undescribed past that both Faucit and Cowden Clarke come to the same conclusion, independent of each other. Such is the case with the previously mentioned work on Ophelia, but most prominent in Faucit's theories on Portia. Dr. Bellario is given as the source of her knowledge in the play and both Faucit and Cowden Clarke's books, but the description of how this has taken place in the past, not present in the play, is strikingly similar in both books. In *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* Faucit (1904, 27) present her idea of account of what she thinks has happened:

This cousin of hers we may suppose to have been a constant visitor at princely Belmont, and, indeed, to have been her instructor in jurisprudence – a not unfitting branch of the future heiress of Belmont’s education...Perhaps they have, even in those early days, “turned over many books together,” and so she may have in some measure unconsciously fitted herself for the great task which awaited her in the future.

In Cowden Clarke’s tale “The Heiress of Belmont” Portia develops an interest in books and learning from an early age, and is eventually schooled in law by Bellario in order to “know enough of law to manage worthily and justly her own estate” (Cowden Clarke 1878a, 52). The intention behind her education in law seems in both books to be so that she can manage her estate, presumably until marriage. But in the play itself the only reference to Portia’s education in law is the line, as quoted by Faucit, “[w]e turned o’er many books together” (4.1, line 154), found in Doctor Bellario’s letter to the Duke. Balthasar, Portia’s male alter ego, is, however, presented as a young doctor in law from Rome with no reference to any education taking place in the childhood years. They both presume, and perhaps rightfully so, that her knowledge of law is too extensive not to have taken place over years of education.

What has been is not Faucit’s only interest, as the case is with for example Cowden Clarke. Faucit (1904, 39) wrote in her letters that “I could never part with my characters when the curtain fell and the audience departed. As I had lived with them through their early lives, so I also lived into their future”. It is in particular the poignant trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice* that inspires her to write of what happened afterwards. There is a serious discrepancy between the Portia she feels she knows and the person we meet in the trial scene: “In Portia we see embodied the spirit of good, which it is to her first, her paramount desire, should prevail over the spirit of evil” (35), Faucit writes. But when the play is over she feels that this side of Portia has not been made explicit enough, so she feels that there is a need for further explanation to how a woman so good and pure could act as she did towards Shylock. The answer must lie in the future:

I do not believe that such a woman as I conceive her to have been would leave the despised, deserted Jew to his fate. When she finds that even Antonio's "mercy" is not enough of the kind to satisfy her woman's heart, she vows to herself that, out of her own great happiness, and in abounding gratitude for it, she will devote herself to the all but impossible task of converting this "inexorable Jew" (39-40).

But she is not satisfied with imagining what could have happened next. Where Cowden Clarke ends her tales with the first lines of the play securing a line from her tales to the plot of the plays, Faucit tells the story of what happens after the last act is finished and the curtain is dropped. She describes it in such detail that one might imagine that it is the rough draft of another act, the one in which all questions are resolved and Portia is firmly set as the woman Faucit perceives her to be; not so much the character who poses as a man, has amazing knowledge of the law and who uses her skills to deprive a man of his worth and his dignity, but the image of the ideal woman, the personification of mercy and empathy, model to every woman.

She goes alone to his wretched, lonely home, to which he has been accompanied only by the execrations of the mob. These still ring in his sick ears as he lies there stunned, bewildered, defeated, deserted [...] He knows her not, roughly enough forbids her entrance; but with gentle force, and with the charm of her winning manners and noble and gracious presence, she contrives to gain an entrance. It is little she can do in her first visits. Still she repeats them, bringing wine and oil and nourishment for the sick body, and sacred ointment for the bruised mind (40).

Faucit restores the image of Portia as the carer, the gentle and caring woman who devotes herself to care for the sick and abandoned. If there is not enough evidence in the play itself to suggest the contours of the ideal woman, Faucit solves the matter by continuing the fiction and turning the character into the ideal she wants her to be.

The core of the matter in these books is that where idealism is not to be found, it can

be created. And if it is present, but deviates from the ideal, it can be rewritten, as was the case with many theatre productions in the nineteenth century. This has been shown through Poole's account of the rewritings of *Cymbeline* at the Lyceum where "[t]he core of the play became a familiar fable of doomed man redeemed by woman" (2004, 29-30). To the actor-managers it was simply the matter of having the most important part, but to Faucit and Terry there is a much more serious issue at hand. They must redeem the character so that the character may be the symbol of the action in which the woman redeems the man. In Faucit's version it becomes yet another example of the woman's role and responsibility as saviour. But is it "conceived too much in the feeling of the present century" (Faucit 1904, 43), as some of her friends claimed? Is not the woman who goes to his house to nurture him back to health more like the female philanthropist so adored by the Victorians than the Portia that appears in the play? For Helena Faucit the allegation is meaningless as she feels that Shakespeare has written for all ages, and that every reader and every audience member is fully within his or her rights to interpret it in any way they want. She also feels that, based on the events in the play, what she imagines to happen next is predicted from the very beginning of the play itself.

I believe that, as he foresaw the woman who was to simulate the doctor, and put into Portia's heart that 'most excellent gift of charity,' into her mouth that divine speech of mercy, so he would not blame me if I thought her one of the exceptional beings who have lived in all ages, who have gone out of and beyond the bounded present, and acted the part which, in our own age, though always exciting admiration, would in no way create surprise (43).

Faucit concludes her writings on "the perfect wife" (42) by addressing the reader, cited as a Miss Geraldine E. Jewsbury, but also the other readers that the letters eventually became available to. "Much of what I have written you will perhaps think fanciful. But this is how Portia has pictured herself to my thoughts" (43). Fanciful indeed, particularly when she claims that Portia "unconsciously brought all this misery on his head" (44). Perhaps not unconsciously, even if it was not her primary goal. But that is the angle from which she

chooses to view it from and the idea on which she bases her performance. It becomes evident that much of the intention behind these letters is found in Faucit's work as an actress, and that imagining the past and the future of the character is a dramatic tool to make the actor better understand the characters they play. "Dear friend, does it all explain to you the secret of what you so kindly call my 'wonderful silent acting in the casket scene'?" (43).

Faucit mentions Desdemona as one of her role models, giving her the title "heroine" (47), obviously pointing to the meaning of a "[a] woman distinguished by exalted courage, fortitude, or noble achievements" (*OED*), and not the literary meaning of the principal character of the play. It is obvious that she is presenting her as an appropriate role model.

A being so bright, so pure, so unselfish, generous, courageous – so devoted in her love, so unconquerable in her allegiance to her 'kind lord', even while dying by his hand; and all this beauty of body and mind blasted by the machinations of a soulless villain, who 'out of her own goodness' made the net that enmeshed her too credulous husband and her absolutely guiltless self (47).

Faucit uses these words to hail Desdemona for her strength, but the modern reader will ascribe much of what happens to the innate weakness that women were generally perceived to have. Actually, this criticism existed even at the time when Faucit wrote her letters.

"Desdemona is usually considered a merely amiable, simple, yielding creature, and...she is generally so represented on the stage" (48), Faucit complains, and responds by pointing to her loyalty and gentleness as virtues and signals of strength claiming that "[t]he strong are naturally gentle" (48). It seems that the discussion of Desdemona, and the other heroines, often gets stuck in the problem of definitions. It is difficult to argue for the strength of Desdemona if one uses masculine parameters and masculine definitions of strength. On the other hand, if one was to create feminine interpretations and accept that male and female strength, as well as male and female perceptions of strength, differ, it would be easier to see what Faucit means when interpreting these characters. The assumption that Shakespeare's

alleged positive attitudes towards women were the basis of his female characters strengthens Faucit's demand that Desdemona is a character to be looked up to and respected. She claims that Shakespeare has taken "infinite pains to show how these his favourite heroines excelled in every accomplishment – how the grace, the purity, the dignity of their minds gave added charm to the fascination of their beauty and their manners" (56). The predicaments Desdemona must face in the play are fitting circumstances to show how a woman must act and react when faced with difficulties without losing her dignity. In that respect we see similarities to Cowden Clarke who designed such difficulties in her tales about the heroines in order to lecture her readers on how to hold oneself in a variety of situations. In *Othello* those situations are already present, and Faucit wastes no time in pointing out how honourable women would handle them. Faucit points to the difficult relationship with her father and the seemingly impossible love that arises between Othello and Desdemona, claiming that through all such difficulties Desdemona holds her own. "Who cannot see that this woman was of the true, heroic mould, fearless as she was gentle?" (60). Why, then, is she subjected to such laborious predicaments by the author? Why do the interpretations made by Faucit differ so from the interaction between the characters of the play?

Men, as we know, may possess all manly gifts and be fairly decorous and moral in their conduct, yet, through some defect of nature and training, or of both, may be quite incapable of conceiving the noblest qualities of womanhood [...] Had Othello been really the "noble Moor," as "true of mind" as Desdemona thought him, he would, at the lightest aspersion of his wife, have recoiled from Iago as from a serpent (62).

As a result the end of the play remains the same, offering the same tragic conclusion to every performance. And with Faucit as a vessel, the character does not give up until she has asserted her innocence and proclaimed her honour one last time.

The soul *cannot* away until it asserts the purity of the sweet casket in which it has been set. It lingers on in its pain until the poor lips can speak, not, as before, to deaf ears that will not

listen, but to those of a sympathising woman. Then, with bitter moans and broken breath, Desdemona stammers out with her last gasp of life – “A guiltless death I die!” (78, italics in the original).

We know very well what becomes Othello’s end, but Faucit imagines the destinies of the other characters, painting in sombre colours the void that is left by her and the effect it has on those who knew her. She imagines that Brabantio died of grief in “his desolate home” when he understood that “his daughter had been its very light and life” (80-81). Cassio, she envisions, goes back to Florence, but “[h]e will never be the same man again, though he may be a better and wiser one” (81). Faucit has given Desdemona a prominent position as a role model because she does not die in vain. Her unhappy ending will make a signal of difference to the characters that interacted with her, and the readers who are intrigued by her. The imprint of her, Faucit imagines, is left on their souls.

Shakespeare’s heroines on the Victorian stage are particularly interesting because they represent the desire to perform the idealised past, and because they were the physical representations of ideal womanhood. On stage they were idealism personified, both in terms of woman- and nationhood. Watching Shakespeare’s heroines in the theatre brought the past into the present and gave the audience a sense of immediacy and closeness to it. Because “[i]n the theatre...the past was not dead. It was not even sleeping. It was alive and well and appearing nightly” (Schoch 1998, 2). Instead of looking at history as isolated events that happened a long time ago, the past was given a place in the present, affording the Victorians linearity and the ability to identify where they came from. They could identify where the change had happened that removed them from a pure and ideal state and sent them into the deprived times of the present. Women had, according to the Victorians, once been pure and noble, and it was time to return to that with the literary heroines showing them the way. Despite being able to enjoy the early fruits of modernity, an increased wealth and longer life span, the Victorians felt that they were living in a chaos that threatened to absolve them. They

preached the ideologies of the past and they relished in the representations on the theatre stage while outside the theatre the society was proceeding rapidly forward. Still, the Victorians looked backwards in search of the values they felt had been lost. Schoch (1998, 7) claims that “performance is the event when an ideal past meets a degraded present”. People came to the theatre to relive a past they had never seen and to feel tapped in to the great national spirit whose origins were found far back in time. This is another part of the question as to why the theatre was so well suited to present history, ”because it was already a self-consciously nationalistic form of social practice and cultural production”, and “theatre-going was an informal act of mass public patriotism” (15).

Once again the same question arises. Why Shakespeare? Schoch (1998, 10) claims that the English trusted so firmly in his abilities as a conveyer of the past, even to the point that the “English chronicle plays were regarded by many Victorians as history books written in verse”. There was no doubt that the real English could be found in his works, and that bringing the plays on stage again would somehow bring back the times that were lost. That the ideal would become reality. The issue at hand here is what Schoch (15) calls

the ideological potency of a moment in the 1850s when Shakespeare, the Middle Ages, and the theatre – i.e. literary, historical, and social sites of identity – came together in an especially dynamic and popular conjunction to enact a collective model of nationhood and national identity.

The Victorians believed that Shakespeare’s plays had such stealth examples of the true and the ideal. It was pieces of their national identity that were brought back. The theatre offered substitutes for the models that were lacking. The ambiguous role of Prince Albert was no role model for the young British men, but that of Henry V was. And who better to show how education and housewifery could be combined than Portia? The characters drawn by Shakespeare were open to such a variety of interpretations that whatever one was looking for,

one would find. Ellen Terry (1908, 185) claimed that “[h]is characters can be interpreted in at least eight different ways, and of each way some one will say. ‘That’s Shakespeare!’”

It may seem that the entire responsibility of representing idealism was put on the productions of the history plays, and they certainly were very popular in the nineteenth century. The history plays were regarded as more reliable when trying to find and tell the truth, whatever that may be. The educational value of a comedy with clowns and intrigues and coarse puns was held in disbelief because comedies were associated with farces and cheap entertainment, and did not fit with the new image of the theatre as an arena of high culture and education. However, one should not neglect the potential of the comedies to display more clearly the feminine values and virtues. The history plays were a reminder of an heroic era when England still was a great super power, but the family centred comedies were practically treasure chests in the search for the morals and the values that were believed to have been lost in the ever progressing and ever modernising English society. Bringing the comedies into the respectable theatres signalled that idealism was not found only in the history plays, and Henry V was not the only spokesperson for the great English. The comedies were examples of how women had a responsibility too in the creation, or recreation, of the ideal English society the way it was perceived to have been. It implied that their efforts as mothers and housewives were unnoticed trivialities that had no real implications on the world outside the home. Comedic heroines like Helena and Isabella, were deemed worthy of the same esteem and praise as the heroes of the history plays. The focus was placed on role models more than the at times superhuman heroes and heroines. Bringing the idealism from the battlefield and into the household strengthened the feeling of an immediate connection to the past. It offered suitable role models that were more firmly based in events that one could identify with, such as love and family issues, but that at the same time was wrapped in a wonderful web of intrigues and cases of mistaken identities, as well as cheap laughs provided

by clown-like figures and coarse language. Comedic heroines are true symbols of what idealism represents. It is the unattainable and the, at times, unrealistic that we may reach for, but that we probably never will get a hold of. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's Comedies* Penny Gay (2008, 138) explains the attraction of comedies:

An *improbable* fiction is exactly what comedy is, at base. The world is not often so kind to us as to produce happy endings out of errors, coincidences, wrong choices in love, miscommunications. Social and political structures do not always guarantee the success of the good-hearted (*italics in the original*).

But for the hours that the comedies lasted, one could imagine that they did, and the Victorian women could model their lives after the good-hearted heroines telling themselves that their kindness would in the end be acknowledged.

As mentioned in chapter one, we find quite a discrepancy between the ideals of which the Victorians spoke and the realism after which they lived. The woman's sphere was the household, and her purpose to create a good home for husband and children. But at the same time more and more women joined the work force. In the lower classes it was out of necessity, but in higher classes women took to a variety of professions in order to fulfil personal goals and desires. There were more women writers, and the theatre stage was no longer bound by the Elizabethan rule that forbade women to act in the theatre. It was no longer immoral for women to appear on stage, assuming that it was in a respectable play, and professional actresses dedicated their lives to the theatre. Terry grew up on the theatre stage, but was in no way unaware of the role she was expected to assume outside the theatre stage. In *The Story of My Life* Terry speaks of the joys of domestic life with the same fervent insistence that Cowden Clarke does:

I left the stage for six years, without the slightest idea of ever going back. I left it without regret. And I was very happy, leading a quiet, domestic life in the heart of the country. When

my two children were born, I thought of the stage less than ever. They absorbed all my time, all my interest, all my love (1908, 75).

Cowden Clarke speaks of combining writing and needlework, but Terry left the stage altogether for many years following her run in a play aptly called *The Household Fairy*. But her family, the public and, at times, Terry herself questioned the decision to give up her career. “I haven’t made up my mind yet”, she admits, “whether or not it was good or bad for me, as an actress, to cease from practicing my craft for six years” (77). While she describes her years as a housewife in idyllic terms claiming that it brought her a happiness and sense of purpose that acting never could, it becomes evident that her sense of self is most closely connected to what she calls “my craft” (ibid.) and her work as an actress. Still, she presents herself as quite disconnected from the way in which for example Henry Irving would exist solely for the theatre and the plays. The ambition and the at times obsession Irving felt towards his craft is in Terry tempered with what we may term as feminine disposition, specifically the aversion towards working solely for one’s own personal gain.

I have been happiest in my work when I was working for someone else. I admire those impersonal people who care for nothing outside their own ambition, yet I detest them at the same time, and I have the simplest faith that absolute devotion to another human being means the greatest *happiness*. That happiness was now mine” (78, italics in the original).

The assumption that all women wanted a family and a home marked Terry’s mentality, and made it natural for her to retire and devote herself to her family. For six years the great actress was a devoted mother and wife who lived in the country and “studied cookery-books instead of parts – Mrs. Beeton instead of Shakespeare” (79). But in a time of financial hardship she could not refuse Charles Reade’s offer of forty pounds a week, and returned to the stage. It is unclear whether the money was her only motive, or if she in fact chose to return to her career because she wanted to. Terry, Faucit, Cowden Clarke and Jameson are all trapped between the housewife ideal and the ever increasing number of women in the workforce.

Something that is very prominent in Cowden Clarke's tales is her awareness of the lack of mother figures in Shakespeare's plays. The mothers seem to die either in birth or early in the heroine's childhood. Terry is acutely aware of this as well.

How many times Shakespeare draws fathers and daughters, and how little stock he seems to take of *mothers!*" Portia and Desdemona, Cordelia, Rosalind and Miranda, Lady Macbeth, Queen Katherine and Hermione, Ophelia, Jessica, Hero, and many more are daughters of *fathers*, but of their mothers we hear nothing [...] Of mothers and sons there are plenty of examples [...] but if there are mothers of daughters at all, they are poor examples, like Juliet's mother and Mrs. Page" (207, italics in the original).

This poses a problem to the idealism usually connected to Shakespeare's heroines. If these women, with the obvious exception of Lady Macbeth, are to stand as models of what the average Victorian woman should aspire to be, the lack of mothers is a serious problem. As previously mentioned, the woman is so closely connected to the home and the family, and much of their identity is linked to the virtue of motherhood. What does this fact have to say for the reverence held for Shakespeare's female characters? And why was this not more eagerly discussed among the family-oriented Victorians? "I wonder if in all the many hundreds of books written on Shakespeare and his plays this point has ever been taken up?" (208). Ellen Terry wonders. She finds a small amount of elusive and little known publications in the matter, unsatisfactory in content and amount. Amazed she comments that "I often wonder what the mothers of Goneril, Regan and Cordelia were like" (208), a statement which links her firmly to the tendency to view the characters as real people. If she had ever come across Mary Cowden Clarke's tales, she would at least have been given some noteworthy suggestions to settle her curiosity.

At times it was quite difficult to bring Shakespeare's heroines onto the Victorian stage as the watchful eyes of the moralists were always ready to discover any sign of indecency on the part of the actresses. An article in the *Blackwood's Magazine* where Ellen Terry was

accused of being too forward in the scenes with Bassanio would continue to haunt her performance as Portia for years. When looking at it in retrospect she finds the courage to claim that “she was not concealing her fondness like a Victorian maiden, and [...] Bassanio had most surely won her love, though not yet the right to be her husband” (184). Her choice of the term “Victorian maiden” is fascinating as it is a way of criticising the society in which she lives and the expectations it has towards her, even if she at that time was right in the middle of it. And Portia was by no means the most difficult character for the Victorians to accept, and could easily be presented as a role model and an example of the ideal English woman. However, the discussion of idealism will inevitably bring us to the problem case, Lady Macbeth. What can a pure, innocent and virtuous Victorian maiden learn from the cold ambition of the grand lady?

The case of Lady Macbeth seems mostly to serve as an example of what not to do or what not to be, and functions primarily as a warning. Cowden Clarke chalks it up to a cold and uninterested mother and the destructive effects of a spoiled childhood, as support for her claim that appropriate education and the inculcation of values start from early childhood. Ellen Terry attempts to defend her somewhat in a letter to her daughter where she answers the critics who have deemed her portrayal of Lady Macbeth as too soft and gentle. “I by no means make her a ‘gentle, lovable woman’...She was nothing of the sort, although she was *not* a fiend, and *did* love her husband” (307, italics in the original). It is an interesting comment, firstly, because it is such a strong indication of the tendency to view the characters as real people, even an at times one-dimensional villain. Secondly, it is interesting because of its quality as a redemptive statement and an attempt to humanise her. There is, also, the case of John Singer Sargent’s magnificent painting *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* from 1889 and the subsequent discussion, here exemplified through Poole (2004, 30), of whether or not she is crowning herself in cold and ruthless triumph, or if she is uncrowning herself in a moment of

conscious doubt and, perhaps, regret. The painting, now hanging in the Tate Gallery in London, is an interesting contrast to the Lady Macbeth who is portrayed in Gower's memorial monument to Shakespeare in Stratford. The monument, unveiled in 1888, is perhaps modelled on the sleepwalking scene as we are introduced to a female figure, hunched and shrouded in a black veil, seemingly trapped between sleep and the awoken state. In all fairness the Lady Macbeth in Sargent's painting is more similar to the statue of Prince Hal which depicts the moment in act four when the prince takes the crown from his father's bedside and places it on his own head. He believes that his father is dead and that he is now king. But the king awakes, and thinks that it is evidence of Hal's greed and immaturity that he has been so quick to take the crown. But Hal is found in another room, mourning the loss of his father. The king rebukes him for his insolence, but the conversation that ensues reveals that the prince is much more mature than the king had given him credit for and that the prince now understand the responsibility of being king. If it is so that the likeness between the statue of Prince Hal and the painting by Singer Sargent is not coincidental, what does that say about the character of Lady Macbeth? Terry (1908, 305-6) admitted that "Sargent suggested by this picture all that I should have liked to be able to convey in my acting as Lady Macbeth" (305-6), indicating that she sees in the picture what she tried to include in her portrayal of the character. If her reading of it is similar to mine, then, the picture depicts Lady Macbeth crowning herself, but not in triumph. If one is willing to accept the similarities between the picture and the statue it may be that it indicates that Lady Macbeth has a moment of clarity where she reflects on her acts and considers the responsibility of the crown she holds above her head. Terry stresses that although she is not gentle she is "*not* a fiend, and *did* love her husband" (307, italics in the original). Lady Macbeth has, according to Ellen Terry, some redeeming characteristics, perhaps exemplified through Singer Sargent's portrait. The pathos with which Terry speaks of this character indicates that the actress may have had a much

more personal relationship to Lady Macbeth than to the other characters where she mainly focuses on costume details, acting techniques and the interaction, or the lack of it, with the male lead. Terry describes what she sees as the lady's true nature, but also makes excuses for her actions as one would do for a friend who had acted inappropriately.

The exploration of the Victorian stage that these last pages have consisted of has not only painted a clearer image of the Shakespearean heroine and the ideal Victorian femaleness. It has also shown how these two influence each other. Ellen Terry and Helena Faucit presented in their books their opinions on what made the heroines so amiable, but at the same time they brought their own idealism into the parts creating a fusion of past and present in the characters. What remains now is to bring theatre, education, books and performance together to see what kind of femaleness that arises from the material that has been explored. Ideals have been described, advice has been given and warnings made, but have they sent us in the same direction? Have Mary Cowden Clarke, Anna Jameson, Helena Faucit and Ellen Terry presented us with a unified ideal based on Shakespeare's characters?

Conclusion

The introduction described the Victorian era as a time of change, and presented role models as one of the ways in which the people dealt with these tumultuous times.

Shakespeare's characters were chosen for a variety of reasons, but mainly because they represented the values of the idealised past and because Shakespeare was revered as the highest symbol of the true Englishness. His heroines, therefore, came to be seen as the ideal femaleness personified, equipped with all the values the Victorians deemed amiable. The popularity of Shakespeare and his characters meant that these qualities were easier to convey to the masses. This is an important point if one looks at, for example, Juliet Fleming's claim that Shakespeare's heroines were chosen not only for the values they represented, but also because it was a way for writers to become respected by association. By linking their work to that of Shakespeare the four writers I have focused on borrowed some of his authority, which inevitably would help them to launch their ideas. If they could prove that there were beneficial portraits of women in Shakespeare, surely this would have an impact on woman's position in society.

While describing Shakespeare's characters as representatives of an ideal femaleness, the writers have also argued for Shakespeare's position as, quoting Mary Cowden Clarke, "the girl's friend" (Cowden Clarke 1887, 562). I will not argue against the belief that there were positive attitudes towards women in Shakespeare's work. But I believe that the most important contributions to this construction were made by the women themselves, in this case represented by four female authors whose interpretations have led to an image of idealism that is as influenced by the time in which it originated as Shakespeare's works. Their interpretations brought the present into the studies of the past and created an ideal femaleness which in many ways deviates from the ideals of the past. Granted, their emphasis was on woman in the domestic sphere, and they all spoke for woman's role as a contrast to the

mercantile society through their positions as homemakers, in terms of morals and values. But they themselves were active in society through their professions as writers and actors. The paradox here is that Mary Cowden Clarke, Anna Jameson, Helena Faucit, Ellen Terry, as well as Sarah Ellis, have all sat by their desks and written their books and letters and dissertations while their servants took care of housekeeping so that they could focus their attention on what was obviously of much importance to them, their work. They describe the joy of keeping a household and women's duty to take care of house, husband and children, matters they will surely attend to as soon as they are done writing the last chapter, as soon as they have finished the sentence and as soon as the book has been published. The incongruity between what they practice and what they preach renders them even more interesting as the stories of their lives give clearer evidence to their positions than their idealised narratives and accounts.

Their most important contribution was as women interpreting women's roles and actively defining their own status and responsibilities. The difference between femininity and femaleness mentioned in the introduction is of much relevance here because the ideal femaleness is not singularly a male construction limited by boundaries and definitions imposed on it by men. The ideal femaleness modelled after Shakespeare's heroines that is portrayed in these four books can be claimed to be an entirely female construction. One may counter that claim by saying that the ideal femaleness they describe is nothing but different versions of the ideal imposed on women by the Victorian society, but that is not where these writers have found their ideals. They have actively interpreted the past and used their knowledge to construct an ideal femaleness that is, undoubtedly, coloured by Victorian views of women, but that is tempered through the use of what they saw as positive attitudes towards and consequently positive portrayals of women in Shakespeare's works. With this in mind it is possible to create a criticism against Pugin and Carlyle's denunciation of modernity claiming that everything was better in the past and that the present is degraded. True as it may

be that progress is not the pathway to perfection, it is progress nonetheless. And in this case progress has made an impact on women's influence in society. At the same time as heroines of the past are idealised, the women of the present are configuring their own theories, creating their own ideas and making their own interpretations. When their works are published they have made their contribution to the construction of an ideal which is as much a result of their efforts as the objects of their efforts. The male worship of the heroines meant giving them qualities they perceive as amiable and projecting their admiration onto them like passive objects. These four women writers have reclaimed the heroine, reconstructed the term by using their own terms and re-introduced them as characters that actively influenced their surroundings. They were not heroines just for what they were; they were heroines for what they did. But this clarification cannot escape the definition of woman as saviour. The most important contribution of the heroines was how they redeem the wicked acts of the heroes. If one is looking for radical feminism in these books, one will most certainly be disappointed. What they represent instead are small steps taken in the right direction, showing that not everything was better in the past. Some things have improved, and among those things is the status of women in society.

It is not one uniform ideal that all four writers promote, but by using their accounts it is possible to draw an outline of an ideal Victorian femaleness modelled after Shakespeare's heroines. All four writers emphasise the heroine's virtues, like modesty, kindness and grace, and they paint a picture of a woman who represents balance. She has enough knowledge to manage her household and be of assistance to her husband and a tutor for her children. She occupies what Houghton (1957, 349) called the middle position, which I see as the place between the old ideal found in Patmore and Ruskin, and the new woman, the forerunner of the suffragettes that came in the late nineteenth century. Mary Cowden Clarke used Meg and Alice, later Mistress Page and Mistress Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, to emphasise the

importance of schooling the young girls of the nation in housewifely duties. Portia is used to show that while the home is a woman's sphere, she needs to be educated in order to manage it properly. But she makes it clear that housewifery and subservience do not necessarily belong together, exemplified through Helena and Cowden Clarke's words of criticism towards "those who injudiciously or interestedly persuade the sex that weakness – moral, mental, and physical, is their most winning characteristics" (Cowden Clarke 1878a, 271). Jameson, on the other hand, used Desdemona to promote the benefits of "conjugal submission", but later blames the passivity it entails as leading to her ultimately tragic fate. There must be a balance between the traditional and the new. The traditional role needs to be viewed in a modern light, according to them, and women must be respected for the contributions they make. This is particularly interesting in light of the possibility for social climbing that occurred in the Victorian era. The explorations of the ideal presented in Sarah Ellis' book, *The Women of England*, shows how society came to play a part in the construction of the feminine ideal as women became the opposition to the mercantile society. But the school had failed when it came to educating young women and girls into model housewives because it either focused on hard knowledge or meaningless and mundane activities. There had to be an improvement of the heart, which she believed the heroines of fiction were the perfect examples of: "women who were dignified with the majesty of moral greatness" (Ellis 1839, 54). Ellis' books and the general descriptions of Victorian society leads to confusion as to what the feminine ideal really was. On one side there is the strong emphasis on woman as the angel in the house, the submissive wife, who was selfless and pure, the embodiment of morality, and a passive object onto which men's admiration and worship was directed. On the other side you have woman as a contributor to the family's social advancement. She has a role to play in socialising, in managing the finances and as an altruistic visitor of the poor. At home she was responsible for

shaping it into the sacred temple it was perceived to be, founded on high morals and pure principles, but it was also her responsibility to bring these values out into society.

While I will not describe these books as belonging to a specific strain of educational thought, I do believe that they represent a desire to share the discoveries they have made when investigating Shakespeare's heroines, in order to inspire others to follow in their footsteps. I believe they think they have found the perfect ideal femaleness personified in Shakespeare's heroines and that they believe that society will benefit greatly if these ideals are adopted by women. The explorations of the conduct books have revealed to what extent the present was perceived as degraded, and that women had to take responsibility for the redemption by representing certain values, virtues and morals. And these values were exactly the ones held by Shakespeare's heroines.

Access to the Victorian stage has been given by reading the accounts of Ellen Terry and Helena Faucit where their thoughts on the ideal are incorporated into their performances. They have given us an insight on what they as actresses did to convey the personalities they claimed the characters had. Faucit speaks of Ophelia's upbringing and sensitive nature as explanations of her actions and reasons why her life ended so tragically. It brings us back to the issue that women need proper education, both in school and at home, to be able to hold themselves properly when encountered with the world. Terry's stories from her days as an actress reveal that however her characters turned out, of they were weak or strong, they were always hers. And there was always a reason for the actions of the heroines that went further than what was scripted and that were not too bound by society's expectations. This is connected to the idea that the characters existed outside of the play, and that they often were spoken of as real people with their own personalities, ambitions and desires. This has been shown through, for example, Faucit's dream of Portia's future, Terry's words on Lady Macbeth's redeeming characteristics, Jameson's defence of Ophelia, and the entire *The*

Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines by Cowden Clarke. Jameson's claim that claim that "Ophelia makes us forget the poet in his own creation" (Jameson 1837, 151), may speak to a view held on all of the characters, that they represented a greatness that went beyond the plays, beyond the times they originated from and even beyond Shakespeare. Maybe it is so that Shakespeare was not used simply because his name would bring others success by association, but that there in fact are positive attitudes towards women in his plays that enable others to strengthen woman's position by using his characters as the foundation of their claims. Maybe it is true that he is "the girl's friend" (Cowden Clarke 1887, 562). But, as emphasised in the introduction, the issue at hand is not whether or not there were positive attitudes towards women in Shakespeare's work, but if these four writers believed that there were. And that they certainly believed, shown by how they have based their ideas of the female ideal on his characters.

If time had permitted I would have included all of Mary Cowden Clarke's tales, all of Anna Jameson's essays, each and every one of Helena Faucit's letters and even the most minor reference to a character by Ellen Terry. I have, however, opted against my desires to do so and limited my scope to include a mere handful. I would have liked to make my own analyses of the plays, to a much larger extent than I have done now, and write full accounts of all the heroines in the same manner as these writers have done. Too much ground remains unexplored. But in the mind the explorations continue into infinity, encouraged by imagination. I could have looked at feminist criticism in more detail, and maybe drawn it in a line from before and long after the Victorian era. I have been pestered by the same could have, should have, would have that I am sure haunted these four women, and so I am inclined to look at it with the same humility as they perceived their works. They made their assumptions of what Shakespeare meant and thought and felt, and I have made similar assumptions regarding their work.

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