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Mary Cowden Clarke's *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* as an amplification of the Bard's plays

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Abstract

The dissertation focuses on the collection of novellas *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* by Mary Cowden Clarke, presenting them as amplifications of the plays by Shakespeare. Specifically, the thesis aims to establish Cowden Clarke's tales as amplifications of the Shakespearean plays by delving into the new perspective her work offers on the play's female characters. The first chapter introduces Victorian society and its views on gender roles, focusing on its ideal of femininity. The chapter, then, concentrates on the development of children's literature during the Victorian period, exploring the books' contents and circulation. The second chapter summarises Shakespeare's role in the moral education of Victorian girls. It presents the first examples of Shakespearean retellings for children written by the Lambs and the Bowdlers, using these literary precedents to contextualise and introduce Cowden Clarke's life, work, and connection to the Bard, with a particular focus on her collection. The third chapter provides an overview of the common features of the novellas and then analyses "Desdemona; the Magnifico's Child," "Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore," and "Juliet; the White Dove of Verona." The fourth chapter discusses the relationships between the heroines and their parents, and it also examines the heroines' doubles that Cowden Clarke creates in her prequels.

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The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines **– titles' abbreviations**	
"Portia; the Heiress of Belmont"	HB
"The Thane's Daughter"	TTD
"Helena; the Physician's Orphan"	PO
"Desdemona; the Magnifico's Child"	MC
"Meg and Alice; the Merry Maids of Windsor"	MMW
"Isabella; the Votaress"	Vot
"Katherina and Bianca; the Shrew and the Demure"	SD
"Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore"	RE
"Rosalind and Celia; the Friends"	Fri
"Juliet; the White Dove of Verona"	WDV
"Beatrice and Hero; the Cousins"	Cou
"Olivia; the Lady of Illyria"	LI
"Hermione; the Russian Princess"	RP
"Viola; the Twin"	Twin
"Imogen; the Peerless"	Peer

Introduction

This dissertation aims to demonstrate how Cowden Clarke's collection of fifteen novellas, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*, is to be considered an amplification of a number of Shakespearean plays. In particular, the analysis focuses on three novellas: "Desdemona; the Magnifico's Child," "Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore," and "Juliet; the White Dove of Verona."

The study will open in Chapter 1 with an overview of Victorian society. We will concentrate, in detail, on the ideals regarding gender and womanhood, and the place occupied by children's literature in Victorian society. Through this outline, the reader will have the opportunity to explore the historical and cultural context which is essential for the understanding of the socio-cultural value of the novellas.

The second chapter will focus on the contextualisation of the historical period, together with elements that can guide the readers for a better understanding of the Victorian Age. Chapter 2 will focus on the role William Shakespeare served in Victorian society, which was the one of moral guide for the younger generation. The cult of Shakespeare was alive and well, and many scholars dedicated their studies to him; Mary Cowden Clarke was one of them. After delving into this, the second half of the chapter will be devoted to framing Cowden Clarke in the Shakespearean scholarly scene, giving an overview of her work regarding the Bard. Lastly, the focus will shift to *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* by explaining its structure and aims by introducing the necessary information to approach the third and fourth chapters dedicated to the analysis.

Chapter 3 will be the start of the analysis of the three aforementioned novellas. We will start with "Desdemona; the Magnifico's Child," to then proceed with "Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore," and, finally, with "Juliet; the White Dove of Verona." The study, which is the core of the dissertation, will provide a detailed examination of the novellas, one by one and will continue in Chapter 4. The analysis will be introduced with a brief overview of the elements that are common to all the tales included in the collection. Similarly, the chapter will conclude with a recap of the frequent features included in the three novellas taken into account.

Finally, Chapter 4 will conclude the study of the novellas through a further exploration of the tales by examining the relationships the heroines interweave with

other characters. The observation will concern both the plays and the novellas. In the first half, we will look at the relationships between the heroines and their fathers; while in the second half, the study will be more focused on Cowden Clarke's work since we will regard the heroines' mothers and doubles, who are characters invented by the collection's author.

Chapter 1 – Victorian girls and literature

1.1 How to be a good girl: the Victorian ideal of womanhood

Victorian society was characterised by a complex set of rules that regulated the relationship between men and women and that led to the establishment of a particularly strict gender hierarchy.

The nineteenth-century's "cult of domesticity" was a philosophy which ordained a rigid social position for women; at its core, there were domestic reclusion and submission (Gorham, 2013, p. 4). It was founded on the premise that women were physically and mentally inferior to men. According to the Victorian point of view, the female sex was naturally supposed to serve, for womanly behaviour was socially represented in terms of dependency (Dyhouse, 1981, p. 30). It was also the founding logic behind the ideology of the "separate spheres." This idea, which developed in the first decades of the 1800s, gave origin to the highly defined social and sexual roles fulfilled by men and women. According to the "theory," since males and females were biologically different beings, they were destined for different functions and had distinct behaviours, fitting to their sex (Burstyn, 2017, p. 129). By following this stance, society was thus divided into two spheres: a public sphere of professional work and politics, typically male; and a private sphere, for women, that revolved around house matters (Gorham, 2013, p. 4). Specifically, it meant that men, including fathers, as the heads of the house, had total control over the family finances and were the guarantors of discipline (Burstyn, 2017, p. 118). They were the ones making decisions regarding other family members; women, on the other hand, as wives and mothers, provided moral standards, had the responsibility to look after the household and supervise the upbringing of children (Burstyn, 2017, p. 118). The majority of Victorian citizens accepted the existence of these two separate spheres as a fact. Such clear division implemented in Victorian society had extensive repercussions on how women were perceived as they were expected to conform to an idealised role of femininity (Gorham, 2013, p. 4). This kind of teaching produced poor opinions in women about themselves which were increasingly strengthened by the impossible standards of ideal womanhood (Burstyn, 2017, p. 137) and by the patriarchal structure of society.

As Gorham (2013, p. 4) explains, the home was believed to encapsulate an idyllic conception of the family which was to be supervised by the “Angel in the House” (i.e., the ideal woman). This archetype was so rooted in society that the English poet Coventry Patmore published a poem named after this figure in 1854. In addition to the tasks concerning the house and children, the “Angel” was supposed to display qualities such as self-sacrifice, forbearance, and purity which were recognised as naturally feminine (Gorham, 2013, p. 5). They also needed to grant men a peaceful and stable home when they returned from the chaotic business world (Burstyn, 2017, p. 32). This understanding of perfect womanhood, capable of creating a harmonious household while running it with ability, remained an inspiration in Victorian England (Burstyn, 2017, p. 33).

This kind of behaviour was also demanded of daughters. The crucial importance of a girl’s relationship with her mother should be stressed, since mothers functioned as the first models of feminine demeanour (Dyhouse, 1981, p. 3) and the first meeting with womanhood. Moreover, daughters, as soon as they were capable, were initiated into gender-specific roles (Dyhouse, 1981, p. 9) that resembled the ones already occupied by their mothers. As a matter of fact, the cult of domesticity did not only describe the image of the ideal wife but also the image of the ideal daughter (Gorham, 2013, pp. 11, 12). Some of its traits are more relevant in relation to girls rather than to wives and adult women (Gorham, 2013, p. 6). For instance, a young girl was believed to embody ‘feminine dependence, childlike simplicity and sexual purity’ (Gorham, 2013, p. 7). Gorham (2013, p. 6) indeed suggests that Victorian idealisation of womanhood brought with it some inconsistencies, namely, it was desirable for women to remain childlike. Gorham also adds that ‘[t]he ideal of feminine purity is implicitly asexual’ (2013, p. 7), hence one wonders how a woman could fulfil her most relevant purpose of becoming a mother while remaining an asexual being.

Altogether, family life taught daughters about the division of the spheres. In a household where children of both sexes lived, a different treatment was immediately identifiable from the different expectations and ambitions parents had for their sons and daughters (Dyhouse, 1981, p. 4), as their positions mirrored the ones their parents occupied in the adult world. Boys were prepared to enter the public sphere as

workers, while girls were trained to be future mothers (Gorham, 2013, p. 68). If sons were able to improve the family's economic and social position through work, daughters would not have such a function (Gorham, 2013, p. 5). Girls were also expected to act with deference toward the male figures in the house, brothers included; this attitude was part of the natural social order (Dyhouse, 1981, p. 12).

The difference in treating boys and girls was concerned with clothing, diet, and exercise and such responsibility was a mother's job (Gorham, 2013, pp. 68, 79). For example, girls had to accept the physical boundaries imposed on them and the limited opportunities they had to exercise, as opposed to what their brothers were permitted to do; all for the sake of conforming to a ladylike ideal (Burstyn, 2017, p. 36). A girl engaging in games and sports would be considered "boyish;" thus, girls were encouraged to play with dolls and to be 'little housewives' (Gorham, 2013, pp. 71, 79). Over the years, views changed in this respect. According to some critics, brothers and sisters could play and learn together inside the family home until around the age of ten (Gorham, 2013, pp. 75, 79). Gorham (2013, p. 75) observes that sharing play time was believed to be beneficial since each gender might assimilate some of the traits of the opposite sex; at the same time, however, there was a possibility to strengthen and develop the differences that were assumed to be natural: in boys, their assertiveness, and in girls, their kindness and passiveness. It was also presumed that the differences between boys and girls would only fully bloom in puberty, meaning that the passage from childhood to adolescence stressed more gender-oriented behaviours and manners (Gorham, 2013, p. 85).

Puberty was also a moment for boys and girls to first approach sexual issues and the latter were once again placed side by side with their mothers who were fundamental in their daughters' sexual education (Dyhouse, 1981, p. 20). The information the young girls received was neither accurate nor thorough since there was a wide and 'astounding ignorance about […] sexuality' (Dyhouse, 1981, p. 21). In general, any kind of knowledge about sexuality was considered dangerous and girls were to be informed only as a warning (Gorham, 2013, p. 92).

This period was also crucial because it corresponded with the arrival of menstruation. Its beginning was read as 'secret pollution' (Dyhouse, 1981, p. 22) that bound mothers and daughters together. Gorham (2013, p. 86) notes how femininity

and its characteristics were supposed to manifest with the physical coming of puberty that corresponded with menstruation from the Victorian point of view. According to this perspective, there was no need to explain the reason why girls revealed feminine traits as they grew up (Gorham, 2013, p. 86) since it was a natural manifestation of a physiological process. The Victorian medical scene assumed the onset of menstruation to be the main event of female adolescence. This occurrence was linked to a girl's psychological and physical condition (Gorham, 2013, p. 85); if girls could have been considered as peers to their brothers during childhood, their maturation turned them into frail beings (Gorham, 2013, p. 87).

The majority of girls living in Victorian England did not have the opportunity to receive a school education (Dyhouse, 1981, p. 1). On the contrary, they were educated at home by their mothers, while their brothers were sent away to boarding schools (Dyhouse, 1981, p. 14). In other cases, if the family was affluent enough, it could employ a governess (Burstyn, 2017, p. 51) who had the task of educating the children up until a certain age, to then focus on the daughters' education when their brothers would start school. Education's main purpose concerned their future and adult role as the feminine ideal (Gorham, 2013, p. 85). In the early nineteenth century, the best road to take in order to attain a good marriage was training in the so-called "accomplishments," in pragmatic terms, 'they learned to dance, to play the piano, and they mastered the fine details of drawing-room etiquette' (Burstyn, 2017, p. 36). However, the defenders of the womanhood ideal sought to supplant the above-mentioned education pattern to make way for one based on skills they would need throughout their lives (Burstyn, 2017, p. 36). Indeed, many young women learned to develop their religious nature and how to run a house and rear a child (Burstyn, 2017, p. 36). They were not given teachings on any subject their male counterparts were learning.

Around the 1770s, in order to best teach their daughters, mothers resorted to books and magazines which had the task of aiding the upbringing of "young ladies" (Burstyn, 2017, p. 36). Although publishers had long been addressing different kinds of books based on the reader's gender, in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, this practice intensified with the publications of more and more periodicals which highlighted and stressed the well-founded sex differences (Gorham, 2013, p.

18). A real-life example of this separation was the publication of two periodicals, by the Religious Tract Society, called *Boy's Own Paper* (1879) and *Girl's Own Paper* (1880). The former contained sports stories and adventure tales, while the latter presented moral tales about good daughters (Gorham, 2013, p. 32, n. 17), together with 'poetry, and advice on etiquette' (Burstyn, 2017, p. 34). Through this disparity in content, Victorian society and the press were actively promoting female ignorance. It was believed that through innocence only, women could embody a female ideal; meaning that there was no interest in providing young girls with a certain type of knowledge that would expand the one concerning the strict role imposed on them (Burstyn, 2017, p. 34).

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, such gender-based texts were often reprinted in reply to the women's rights movement which was advancing requests for change (Burstyn, 2017, p. 36). The supporters of the model woman thought that the picture they fashioned was perfect and there was no need for change since a woman's life was already established and her sole purpose was to become the "Angel in the House" (Burstyn, 2017, p. 36). Women's education was discouraged because it would teach a woman to reason and that would be the loss of her very essence of femininity (Burstyn, 2017, p. 37); girls were taught the bare minimum to perform well their role while preserving the ideology of the "separate spheres" (Burstyn, 2017, p. 167). Either way, most people assumed that women were not mentally capable enough to undergo studies and that this process would drive them to discontent, away from marriage and motherhood (Burstyn, 2017, pp. 41, 42). Besides, a woman's chances of attracting a husband were unlikely to be enhanced by her going to university or becoming a "bluestocking"[1] (Burstyn, 2017, p. 51). Another claim made to hinder female education was the supposed medical evidence that studying would make women sterile with the consequence of them not meeting their life meaning as mothers (Burstyn, 2017, p. 43).

The general idea surrounding female education was that girls had different purposes in their existence, very distant from their male counterparts. Therefore, they should be educated accordingly in order to maximise and perfect their capacity to do

[1] By "bluestocking" we refer to an intellectual or scholarly woman, the term was used in a derogatory manner.

well in their assigned role (Burstyn, 2017, p. 51). Nevertheless, the low emphasis on women's education did not mean that they should not be clever, it implied that their cleverness was measured differently from men: women were not supposed to train their intellects because their value was assessed on the basis of their social success (Burstyn, 2017, p. 33).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, girls and women 'started to seek education and more independence' (Briggs & Butts, 1995, p. 159). Many sisters read the stories addressed to their brothers, but they also wanted something of their own (Briggs & Butts, 1995, p. 158). The general discontent on the part of girls' parents that arose led to a critique of the pointless education received by their daughters (Burstyn, 2017, pp. 39, 40) and the admission of girls inside the school system. As a result, the responsibility to educate them shifted from mothers to schools which, however, had poorly educated teachers (Burstyn, 2017, pp. 40, 134).

Even though girls attended girls' schools, the objective was the same as the education they received from their mothers or governesses inside the family home: learn to be a good wife and a good mother. There was no reason to make girls study "boys' subjects," since their natural inclination brought them in another direction (Burstyn, 2017, p. 73). In addition, men were worried that a system of teaching focused on French, Music, and Art would be dangerous since these studies could supersede the more feminine subjects (Burstyn, 2017, p. 38). The situation would turn even worse if women favoured studying Mathematics and Latin (Burstyn, 2017, p. 38). Literature was another risky subject since it would introduce them to sexual licentiousness which would then ruin their image of purity (Burstyn, 2017, p. 45). There was also the fear that, by shaping girls' education on the boys' one, women would start to follow men's attitudes leading them to promiscuity (Burstyn, 2017, p. 42). The general view was that educated women would prove fickle and opinionated which was something that no man wished for in a marriage; it was perceived as an act of unsexing oneself (Burstyn, 2017, p. 42).

In 1848, the Queen's College was founded in London. A year later, the Ladies' College opened too; they both provided training for future governesses, but their offer extended to public lectures on academic subjects (Burstyn, 2017, p. 125). By the 1870s, education aimed to develop 'a woman's intellect as far as her

femininity would allow' and it included basic knowledge of liberal arts which could result in becoming a better wife, mother, and housekeeper (Burstyn, 2017, p. 40). During the same period, in 1872, the Girls' Public Day School Company was founded (Burstyn, 2017, p. 134); it established 37 schools providing secondary education to more than 7,000 girls (Burstyn, 2017, p. 143, n. 46).

It should be remarked that the ideal of womanhood was reasonably impossible in daily and real life. If a woman were to live by the ideal, her life would be quite empty: in aristocratic and middle-class families, there were servants who did the work that mothers and daughters were supposed to do, as it was unladylike to spend too much time attending to the household and its duties (Burstyn, 2017, p. 132). Another traceable inconsistency was the task of developing the children's character. The task of teaching them something was, however, paired with the lack of interest society had in women's opinions on moral issues and the non-existent education to become a teacher of some sort (Burstyn, 2017, p. 133). Daughters might be even more disheartened by the situation since they did not fulfil any function inside the house and there were no issues for them to resolve: housework was a maid's work and the supervision of these servants was a job carried out by mothers (Burstyn, 2017, p. 134). By the imposition of the ideal of womanhood, society claimed that a woman's calling resided in the house. However, their houses did not need them and they could very well function without them (Burstyn, 2017, p. 136).

The perceived difference between men and women proved to be deep-rooted. Yet, the Victorian age was also a period of changes regarding gender roles: women's rights increased in various domains of daily life such as work, education, and social standards (Burstyn, 2017, p. 169). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, women were finally moving away from the private sphere and approaching the public one.

1.2 Children's literature in the Victorian Age

The majority of cultural historians locate the origin of children's literature as we know it today in the mid-eighteenth century in Britain (Grenby, 2009, p. 41). It should be noted, however, that both secular and religious books have been advertised to children for centuries (Grenby, 2009, p. 41). The arrival of texts for children in the book market should not be understood as the origin of children's literature because,

in truth, for the longest time tales and nursery rhymes had been part of a domestic and orally transmitted culture, mainly delegated to mothers (Grenby, 2009, p. 50).

The Victorian Era could be considered a meaningful period for children, as a greater interest in this stage of life arose. This kind of attention displayed a certain amount of care towards a child's intellectual and psychological development, and towards the childhood experience in general (Gorham, 2013, p. 16). This new-found awareness was manifested in the proliferation of toys and reading material specifically aimed at and designed for children (Gorham, 2013, p. 18). The most considerable indication of this preoccupation was to be found in the books and magazines produced for the young Victorian audience (Lang, 1980, p. 17). This attitude was also supported by a small number of men and women, 'higher journalists' (Lang, 1980, p. 18), who:

> pleaded for the child's right to high quality and honestly entertaining books and periodicals. They articulated fresh attitudes to children, encouraged innovative authors, prodded publishers to experiment with new *genres* of children's literature, and urged parents to appreciate their children's need for recreational reading. (Lang 1980, p. 18; original italics)

Victorian society regarded childhood as an idyllic period, long lost by adults; it was also viewed as a separate phase of one's life and the figure of the child became the centre of philosophical contemplation and commercial exploitation (Lundin, 1994, p. 49). Just around the mid-nineteenth century, a widespread level of prosperity, paired with technological advances (i.e., innovations in papermaking, printing and engraving), contributed to the growth of the book trade (Lang, 1980, p. 17). Moreover, the expansion of the publishing market was promoted thanks to reviews of children's books which followed the active interest expressed by the general public, for children's literature appealed to adults too (Lundin, 1994, p. 31). Thus, at the time, publishing houses were trying to produce cheaper works while also improving the quality of popular reading (Briggs & Butts, 1995, p. 130). Children's books, in particular, boosted their production quicker than any other literary category; for instance, in 1860, the *London Quarterly* declared its delight in finding

new titles available to the younger readership (Lang, 1980, p. 17). An essay in the *Saturday Review* (1866) investigated the growing trend of publishing fiction for the younger generation. Also, it cited some books that were considered acceptable and might have been present in the most progressive houses: *Arabian Nights*, *Don Quixote*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Tales from Shakespeare* (Lundin, 1994, p. 44).

In the first half of the century, the Evangelical movement sought to teach Christian principles to the poor children of the working classes through Sunday schools and the system of 'reward books' which were generally published by the Religious Tract Society (Briggs & Butts, 1995, p. 130). This practice promoted books as prizes which, as a result, were simply regarded as commodities (Lundin, 1994, p. 34). The content of 'reward books' originally consisted of didactic and moral teachings to display and inspire exemplary behaviours (Lundin, 1994, p. 34). The children's books that were not part of this network were scarce and expensive, meaning that the younger generations re-read the few texts available to them (Lang, 1980, p. 19). These books were often the ones owned and read by the parents who, in turn, urged their children to do the same (Lang, 1980, p. 19). The contemporary belief, therefore, was not reflected in the offer of the market. Given the large preoccupation that Victorian society displayed for morality, these books were saturated with religious talk through which moral values were imparted (Gorham, 2013, p. 19). Thus, children's literature absorbed all these concerns and produced highly didactic works. Although the tight bond with educational content had loosened up with the progression of the century (Lundin, 1994, p. 44), morals and instructive themes were still an extensive part of the books advertised to children. There had not been a real withdrawal from the didacticism that characterised literature up until that point; and the most evident instance of it was the continuous publications of the aforementioned instructive texts (Lundin, 1994, p. 45). The revival of these older books was encouraged by periodical essays that pushed forward the significance of moral lessons which should be present in every story (Lundin, 1994, p. 46). Many mid-Victorian critics were opposed to the straightforward moralising tone because they thought it would only result in producing hostility in the child (Lang, 1980, p. 27). Actually, the educational intent became so preeminent that the *Quarterly Review* (1886) advised authors against the

total exclusion of amusement (Lundin, 1994, p. 46). The best children's author was the one able to suffuse the tale with both religious and moral features while situating it in an interesting and appealing context (Lang, 1980, p. 27).

Around the 1870s, the style became less admonishing and the content more secular (Briggs & Butts, 1995, p. 130; Lundin, 1994, p. 34). It should be noted that the publication of children's books often coincided with the late autumn months and the Christmas season: the majority of publishers started launching children's books only during this time of the year (Lundin, 1994, pp. 34, 35). Their yearly appearance created an association between the juvenile book trade and illustrated holiday texts which, as gift books, were called "keepsakes," "forget-me-nots," and "friendship's offering" (Lundin, 1994, p. 34). The gift books, however, were intended to be decorative, since, according to the *Illustrated London News* of 1882, they were 'handsome editions of popular classics, illustrated with pictorial designs; […] furnished with graphic illustration' (Lundin, 1994, p. 35).

The aforementioned gift books were, in part, the starting point for the development of children's literature. As a matter of fact, the early *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744) by John Newbery was precisely a gift book: it included a ball for the boys and a pincushion for the girls (Lundin, 1994, p. 36). The success behind Newbery's book can be summarised as 'the encasement of the instructive material that adults thought their children would need within an entertaining format that children might be supposed to want' (Grenby, 2009, p. 41). Books such as 'adventure stories, school stories, nonsense, fantasy, and fairy-tales' (Briggs & Butts, 1995, p. 130) likewise became available and middle-class families were the most eager to buy cheap forms of literature (Lang, 1980, p. 17). Part of the sources of contemporary children's books were old fairy and folk tales (Lang, 1980, p. 19). The versions that reached Victorian youth were edited and purposefully cut. Even if they did not explicitly exhibit educational and religious content (yet they generally did), they still warned against 'greed and selfishness, curiosity and disobedience' which were considered emblematic among childhood shortcomings (Briggs & Butts, 1995, p. 138). The world of fairy tales granted parents a comfortable space where their children could be sheltered against contemporary society and it was also a highly cherished imaginary world by the parents themselves (Lang, 1980, p. 20). Fairy tales,

however, were a subject of dispute: the ‘mystical worlds of enchantment and mystery’ might also be suspected to tarnish children’s imagination because they blurred the lines between reality and fiction and could disturb the learning of moral lessons (Lundin, 1994, p. 47).

Given that children’s literature was, even at the time, an interesting and entertaining area for adults, parents were the ones who chose suitable readings for their sons and daughters; this practice was carried out with absolute care (Lang, 1980, p. 21). The supervision was of the utmost importance since both parents and reviewers were worried about the ‘cheap sensational papers’ (Lang, 1980, p. 21): the so-called “gutter press” that engages with sensational journalism, focuses on attracting the public, and started to make its way into the juvenile market during the 1850s (Lang, 1980, p. 21). In addition to this, the “penny dreadfuls,” as they were known in England (Lundin, 1994, p. 52), included cheeky and rebellious heroes who clashed with the idea of childlike purity and innocence (Lang, 1980, p. 22). Considering the remarkable importance that Victorian parents attributed to childhood reading, the preoccupation with low-cost sensational literature was not unforeseen (Lang, 1980, p. 27).

Nevertheless, as long as periodicals provided both edifying and entertaining content, they were considered a fundamental part of the informal education of Victorian boys and girls. They generally catered to subjects not included in the school proposal: Geography and foreign cultures are just some examples (Lang, 1980, p. 26). The most significant purpose of the stories told in juvenile magazines was to expose the young reader to society and its attitudes, ideals and relationships in a plausible yet unspoiled version (Lang, 1980, p. 27). In particular, a child learned:

> how to behave, how to define his own place in society, and how to manage social relationships from that place. […] Fictional situations and conflicts with satisfying solutions gave life to moral precepts and reinforced them in the child’s mind. (Lang 1980, p. 27)

Among the many changes undergone by children’s literature, there is also the shift in the status of the book from a commodity to an object of art (Lundin, 1994, p. 36). *The Graphic* (1881) declared that nineteenth-century children were to grow up

‘with well-cultured artistic tastes’ (Lundin, 1994, p. 37) since they were provided with illustrated books. Illustrations were so important in children’s literature that their presence would influence the audience’s expectations in connection with the reading experience, and reviewers underlined their dominance in the literature of the time (Lundin, 1994, pp. 39, 40). The majority of earlier moral tales did not feature illustrations because drawings were thought to be irreconcilable with serious works; on the contrary, the Victorian contemporary content employed the full potential of pictures (Lundin, 1994, p. 47). Images introduced an alternative way of transmitting instructive lessons (Lundin, 1994, p. 47).

As more publishers, like Macmillan and Routledge, began the production of children’s books, a diversification took place also in terms of gender (Briggs & Butts, 1995, p. 162). Even if a book, periodical, or tale was not specifically addressed to boys or girls, gender differences were somehow reiterated (Gorham, 2013, p. 18). In the decades of the 1880s and 1890s, such gender awareness expanded in the classification of children’s books: they often dealt with matters such as “test of manhood” and “true womanhood” (Lundin, 1994, p. 42). Historians, nevertheless, claim that gender division in children’s literature was already explicit in the 1860s (Lundin, 1994, p. 43). It should be remarked, however, that such partition already appeared in the aforementioned *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* by John Newbery which appeared around the mid-eighteenth century (Lundin, 1994, p. 36). It should be mentioned that, as for toys and education, the books for younger readers were more likely to be gender-inclusive and heterogeneous in their advertisement, while those for the older ones were more likely to accentuate this division: ‘adventure fiction for boys and domestic chronicles for girls’ (Lundin, 1994, pp. 42-43). An instance of reinforcing certain behaviours and attitudes was the publications of the *Boy’s Own Paper* and the *Girl’s Own Paper* which were already mentioned before (see Chapter 1.1). The content of the first put the accent on themes like adventure, science, and sport and proposed, as recreational ventures, activities such as stamp collecting and taxidermy (Simons, 2009, p. 202). The stories published in it concerned ‘mischievous schoolboys’ or ‘pirates, highwaymen, bandits and smugglers’ paired up with acts of crime and violence (Simons, 2009, p. 202). In contrast, the girl version consisted of stories which celebrated family and home, showing a higher respect for

adult authority (Simons, 2009, p. 203). Lundin (1994, p. 43) reports the thoughts of Edward Salmon, an important author and critic of children's books in the 1880s and 1890s, on the writings addressed to girls. Salmon did not question the quality of it but the topics. In his opinion, the problem was the lack of intensity and dullness compared to boys' books (Lundin, 1994, p. 43). Girls' books existed as a passage to adult reading and as a way to train young women for their future social roles (Lundin, 1994, p. 43). Towards the end of the century, reviewers discussed children's literature with a marked differentiation between boys' and girls' books: the magazines' columns became gender-labelled and there was also a clear division in the review essays that magazines, like the *Times*, published based on boys' and girls' literature (Lundin, 1994, p. 43). The daily *Times* specifically condemned literature that Victorian girls had to read: it was claimed that there were no exciting qualities and the only heart-racing moments were the sentimental ones (Lundin, 1994, p. 44).

Over the course of the nineteenth century, children's literature came to the surface as a new branch of the book market and produced a list of fundamental texts. It also established a "canon" that every historical period adapted and reformulated according to its 'aesthetic ideals, educational theories, psychological insight, and contemporary fashion' (Lundin, 1994, p. 52). Lundin (1994, p. 53) argues that the process granted children's literature the status of a literary system in its own right, so much so that the publications were second only to novels. The development of the juvenile book market was upheld by the inclusion of children's literature in advertisements, reviews, and essays that also helped the expansion of knowledge about the 'children's social, educational, and artistic development' (Lundin, 1994, p. 54). It is safe to say that the Victorian period settled the validity and authority of children's literature (Briggs & Butts, 1995, p. 165).

Chapter 2 – Shakespeare and the Victorian Age

2.1 Shakespeare as the moral guide for Victorian girlhood

> Shakespeare could be a primary gentling and civilizing influence for children. (Frey, 2009, p. 152)

Victorians felt a strong connection to Shakespeare and his legacy was felt throughout various aspects of society such as paintings, and even language. In order to best explain the role of the Bard during this historical period, it is fundamental to focus the attention on how Shakespeare and his work reached the Victorian Age. In the first half of the nineteenth century, indeed, an increase in the publication of Shakespeare's work was observed and a growing curiosity about Shakespeare's life and time was noticed too (Poole, 2004, p. 3).

In this period, one of the most common ways of reading Shakespeare's works for the young was in the form of adaptations. Sanders (2016) makes a distinction between two terms: "adaptation" and "appropriation," that are strictly connected to the practice of retelling. With the first term, she refers to a closer relationship that is established between the source text (in our case Shakespeare's) and a derivative product which indicates its link through, for example, the title or elements inherent to the source; while the second term signals 'a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product,' meaning that the relationship to the original text is not always immediately explicit (Sanders, 2016, pp. 35, 43). These processes lay their foundation in the presence of a recognizable literary canon which becomes a sort of storehouse for themes and characters that move into new imaginative pieces. The reader, to fully appreciate the mechanism, should have prior knowledge (Sanders, 2016, p. 57) of the original text; that does not mean, however, that the reworking cannot be a source of enjoyment on its own.

In the previous chapter, we described the birth and expansion of a juvenile literary market which followed the greater interest in childhood. Among the large market of moralistic books, adaptations of canonical texts—the ones of Shakespeare are an example—were also published and they occupied a meaningful position (Müller, 2013, p. 1). In this cultural imagination, Shakespeare's texts became highly

valued, and he emerged as an eminent figure in the literary field of the time (Greenhalgh, 2007, p. 131). Shakespeare's works were adapted for the children of the Victorian period and these new versions had a relevant impact on many aspects of a child's life: they were believed to carry educational qualities since they were the means to introduce children to social and cultural values, and they offered multiple scenarios in which model characters could be observed and imitated (Stephens & McCallum, 1998, pp. 3, 4).

It should be remarked that children's literature includes a larger portion of retold texts, compared to adult literature (Stephens & McCallum, 1998, p. 4). These adapted texts derive from a variety of sources: biblical literature, fairy tales and folk tales, myths, and medieval romance (Stephens & McCallum, 1998, p. 6). Shakespeare himself appropriated previous works such as *Holinshed's Chronicles*, classical texts by Ovid and Plutarch, and various myths and fairy tales (Sanders, 2016, p. 59).

Children's literature can be characterised by educational aspects and/or amusing elements. According to the "adult culture" mentioned by Hateley (2009, p. 3), both elements coexist in Shakespeare: they are not separate concepts, and they feed on each other. The entertaining element is brought in by the plot while Shakespeare's language and its virtues convey the educational value. In the Shakespearean retellings, these aspects are deeply intertwined with one another. Given the presence of both elements, Shakespeare is fitting for the aims of children's literature, namely education and amusement (Hateley, 2009, p. 3).

Because of the presence of sex, violence, and crime in many plays—issues from which young readers are normally shielded—adaptations tend to "sanitize" the original text (Müller, 2013, p. 2). These rewritings popularise the source text and make it more approachable for children (Stephens & McCallum, 1998, p. 254) and, possibly, invite the young reader to read the original text at a later moment (Müller, 2013, p. 2). When adapting for children, it is important to keep in mind some features that might interest the younger reader: a youthful character who allows identification, the element of magic and, interestingly enough, children also like gruesome and bloody scenarios; a very well-known title is helpful too (Coville, 2009, p. 60).

In the Victorian period, then, Shakespeare became popular and the term "bardolatry" started to circulate (Frey, 2009, p. 150). He became a fundamental figure in the moral education of children, especially of the girls. Generally, children used to meet Shakespeare during "family readings," largely popular among middle-class families, in which the parents or a male member of the family read aloud edifying texts (Tosi, 2014, p. 28). Usually, this kind of literature promoted patriotism and fixed gender roles (Greenhalgh, 2007, pp. 140, 142). These separated functions were mirrored in the roles occupied in the act of reading, as what the Lambs highlight in the preface to *Tales from Shakespeare*: little girls did not have direct access to Shakespeare's texts which were, instead, provided to them by their fathers or brothers who became mediators.

Marshall (2009, p. 10) uses the term 'translation' when describing the relationship that was created between Victorian women and Shakespeare; not only does she talk about it in the sense of moving from one language to another, but she also illustrates the negotiations between the two parts. Through this process, she continues, Shakespeare's work is 'edited, reshaped, spoken afresh in spaces which transform [it]' in order for them to fit their new historical and geographical setting, but also to fit the purpose envisioned by these female 'translators' (Marshall, 2009, p. 11). The evolution of this relationship, established between Shakespeare and the female sex, was based upon two elements: the expansion of formal education for girls and the increased number of adaptations of Shakespeare's texts in the literary market (some written by women) such as the *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb and the *Family Shakespeare* by Henrietta and Thomas Bowdler. Both collections were published in 1807; the first is a series of prose retellings by the Lamb siblings, while the second, by Henrietta Bowdler who had to publish her work under the name of her brother (Isaac, 2000, pp. 2, 3), is an expurgated version of the plays (Hateley, 2009, p. 33). The latter's preface acknowledges the incompleteness of the work, but it explains the authors' decision as the only safe way for young people to read Shakespeare (Marshall, 2009, p. 19). In this respect, what should be highlighted is the worry that Shakespeare's works might be morally objectionable. This is the reason why adaptations, like those just mentioned, were useful to mediate the inadequate content and to render Shakespeare beneficial for improving taste

(Marshall, 2009, p. 16). If not read in the secure space of the family, Shakespeare could be considered a dangerous influence because of themes such as sexuality and the disruption of family hierarchy (Marshall, 2009, p. 17).

The publication of the *Tales* reveals a set of gendered aims that can be gathered from a part of its preface which explicitly addresses 'young ladies' for whom 'it has been the intention chiefly to write' who are not generally permitted in their fathers' libraries and need the 'kind assistance' of their brothers to understand difficult passages (Lamb & Lamb, 1918, p. xiv). In this way, the sisters are put in a passive reading position (Hateley, 2009, p. 28), whereas the brothers are given a superior status. Sisters are dependent on their brothers and bound to read adaptations of the Bard instead of the original texts.

The moralistic intent which characterised the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be found in these two collections; as a consequence, the Shakespearean texts become child-friendly and unproblematic. Accordingly, the goal of these selections was to make the highly valued Shakespearean work acceptable for the ethical precepts of the Victorian Age which were considered more polished than the ones of Shakespeare's time (Tosi, 2014, p. 28).

Due to the popularity it acquired, the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* became a canonical text in the field of Shakespearean adaptations, and it was reprinted many times (Tosi, 2020). Their retellings—14 comedies by Mary and 6 tragedies by Charles—removed secondary plots and characters in order to focus on the main plot (Tosi, 2014, p. 33). They also tended to divide their characters into the "good" or the "bad" categories so that the narrator could guide the reader (Tosi, 2014, p. 34). For example, in *Hamlet*, the prince is excused for his actions, and the whole fault falls on Claudius; in *Othello*, the representation of the Other is not strictly linked to the racial stereotypes of the time and, once again, the blame is not put on the protagonist, but entirely on Iago (Tosi, 2014, pp. 34, 35, 40). In general, the stories contained in the *Tales* were rearranged to be less confusing and less boring for the young readers they were designed for (Miller, 2007, p. 155). If, on the one hand, the Lambs' work is vastly concentrated on the figure of the child and its pedagogical aim; on the other, the Bowdlers' collection puts the stress on its moral aspect and on the fact that the

text could be easily read aloud in the family space without any concern for the age and sex of the listeners (Miller, 2007, p. 156).

Nearing the end of the nineteenth century, Shakespeare and his work steadily became an essential part of the formal education of young girls and this was due to a number of reasons: it meant equating (in part) boys' and girls' school supply by teaching them both about the Bard, confirming Shakespeare as an important author, and using him as an instructor of moral values (Marshall, 2009, p. 22). Literature, and by extension Shakespeare, was indeed one of the subjects which were considered suitable for female education and, as a result, it widely figured in academic programs; it was also used as a remedial tool against the unsupervised reading of newspapers and sensational fiction (Marshall, 2009, p. 26). Marshall (2009, p. 27) reports a study plan by Emily Shirreff, a pioneer in promoting higher education for women, to introduce Shakespeare at different age levels: in the age range 10-12, the Lambs' *Tales* appear, while from 12 up to 18 years old, Shirreff proposes Shakespeare's plays such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *Hamlet*.

Among the various features of Shakespeare's plays, the heroines were considered idealised models for little girls to follow (Tosi, 2013, p. 9). It is exactly on the heroines that Mary Cowden Clarke, a remarkable Shakespearean scholar, focuses her collection of short stories called *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*.

What is interesting about the ongoing advertisement of heroines was the large opposition between the ideal model of femininity, that Victorian society tried to promote, and the real-life preferences of young women. This is confirmed by a competition of 1887 launched by the *Girl's Own Paper* in which the magazine asked readers to write an essay on "My Favourite Heroine from Shakespeare" (Marshall, 2009, p. 40). The responses became a way for women to voice their opinions about social problems, namely the question of women's rights, and Portia—the heroine of *The Merchant of Venice*—thanks to her 'vigorous mind,' was turned into an advocate for nineteenth-century women and many believed that she would be interested in the contemporary Victorian difficulties faced by her sex (Marshall, 2009, p. 41). On the contrary, tragic heroines, such as Ophelia and Juliet, were not favourites; these were

exactly those characters who were usually recommended as models of behaviour by Victorian society (Marshall, 2009, p. 42).

For some Shakespearean experts, the heroines possessed the trait of timelessness. Such characteristic was brought in by the supporters of the ideal of womanhood as consolidating the heroines as the perfect examples of femininity (Marshall, 2009, p. 43). The same line of thought could be found in the narrativized account of the girlhood of several of Shakespeare's female characters by Mary Cowden Clarke. In her article "Shakespeare as the Girl's Friend," published in 1887 for the *Girl's Own Paper*, she writes: 'Shakespeare may well be esteemed a valuable friend of woman-kind' (Cowden Clarke, 1887, p. 355). Cowden Clarke believes Shakespeare is a friend of women and the only one able to represent women most realistically, both in their qualities and defects. She clearly defines him as a crucial figure to a young girl who is on the threshold of adult society and is preparing herself to become a woman. In his work, Clarke continues, the young girl would be able to look into a metaphorical mirror and learn 'what she has to evitate, or what she has to imitate, in order to become a worthy and admirable woman' (Cowden Clarke, 1887, p. 355).

2.2 Mary Cowden Clarke: a life devoted to Shakespeare

2.2.1 Cowden Clarke's life and her presence in the Shakespearean scholarly scene

Mary Cowden Clarke was one of the major Shakespearean scholars in the Victorian period; a time during which she was recognized as a leading figure in the field by her contemporaries (Marshall & Thompson, 2011, p. 60). During her life, she was an 'editor, essayist, compiler of the first significant Shakespeare concordance and, briefly, an amateur actress' (Marshall & Thompson, 2011, p. 6). As well as the amount of work she produced on William Shakespeare and other topics, she also published her own biography, *My Long Life*, in 1897.

She was born a Novello—the daughter of a musician father and a writer mother—on the 22nd of June 1809. At the beginning of her autobiography, Mary

writes that she was a person ‘blessed with a greatly privileged and happy life’ (Cowden Clarke, 1897, p. 3).

In *My Long Life*, the recollection starts from her childhood which was characterised by a large presence of art and culture thanks to the books her parents provided her and her siblings with. When she mentions the books she owned and treasured, among which there were some of Maria Edgeworth’s works and Æsop’s *Fables*, she took the chance to comment and criticise late Victorian children’s books. In her opinion, they were too highly decorated with illustrations, yet were ‘scarcely read by their young recipients’ (Cowden Clarke, 1897, p. 11).

According to Hateley (2009, p. 36), Mary’s parents cared deeply about their children’s education, regardless of their gender, so they were home-schooled, by either the parents themselves or by the finest tutors, among whom there was also Mary Lamb.

In a period in which formal education was not largely available to girls, the reading of Shakespeare was often initiated by the family, and this was the case for Mary as well. In a footnote, contained in the preface of *The Complete Concordance to Shakespeare* (1845), she mentioned her mother as the person who ‘inspired [her] with a love for all is good and beautiful, and who therefore may well be said to have originated [her] devotion to Shakespeare’ (Cowden Clarke, 1845, p. ix). Her father also facilitated her familiarity with the Bard. As a matter of fact, the writer recalls an episode of her youth in which her father brought home an early copy of the *Tales from Shakespeare* by the Lambs (Cowden Clarke, 1897, p. 12). She also reminisced about this particular event in her article “Shakespeare as the Girl’s Friend” where she wrote ‘[h]appy she who at eight or nine years old has a copy of *Lamb’s Tales from Shakespeare* given to her, opening a vista of even then understandable interest and enjoyment!’ (Cowden Clarke, 1887, p. 369).

When she was 17, Mary was proposed to by Charles Cowden Clarke, a family friend who often frequented the Novellos’ house; and by the age of 19, she was a married woman (Cowden Clarke, 1897, pp. 45, 62). Cowden Clarke continues her account by recalling a conversation with her husband’s family about the lack of a concordance to Shakespeare (Cowden Clarke, 1897, p. 91), an alphabetical list of the most important words contained in Shakespeare’s work. This kind of catalogue

usually includes citations of the passages in which the words are found. Compiling this list was a project she eagerly undertook and that she finished in 1841 (Cowden Clarke, 1897, p. 131). The writing of *The Complete Concordance to Shakespeare* was also the beginning of her career as a scholar of the Bard (Barber, 2013, p. 810). After becoming officially part of the Shakespearean academic field, she accepted to work as an editor for an American edition of Shakespeare which became a source of great pride, since ‘it made [her] the first (and as yet, only) woman editor of our great poet’ (Cowden Clarke, 1897, p. 145). A few years later, in 1863, she was once again asked by a publishing company, Cassel & Co., to edit their annotated version of Shakespeare; immediately after, she started compiling, together with her husband, *The Shakespeare Key* (Cowden Clarke, 1897, p. 160), a guide to the Bard’s style and a dictionary for his language.

Cowden Clarke truly believed that her husband played a fundamental part in the promotion of Shakespeare. To highlight Charles’s role, Cowden Clarke reported Sam Timmins’s opinion, an ardent Shakespearian and a friend of her husband, on the work done by Charles. In Timmins’s view, Victorian enthusiasm was, in part, ascribable to the lectures that Charles started delivering in 1835 in which he showed himself to be a very skilled lecturer, detailed in his studies and capable of raising and maintaining the audience’s interest (Cowden Clarke, 1897, pp. 122, 123). It is also known that, in his lessons, Charles took a pro-women edge thanks to his awareness of the gender discrimination—to which Mary was also subjected—distinctive of Victorian society and, in particular, of Shakespearean studies (Thompson & Roberts, 2003, pp. 178, 179).

The name of Shakespeare and the titles of his plays appear many times in *My Long Life*, not only in connection with Mary’s work but also in her daily life. Cowden Clarke travelled a lot around Europe, and she often found Shakespeare in the places she visited. During her time in England and her trips to Germany and Italy, she often went to the theatre, and, among the several performances she watched, there were *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*. As a result, the consistent acknowledgement of the playwright’s presence throughout the memoir could be considered a signal of the considerable legacy that Shakespeare left in the Victorian period.

In the latest part of her life, she wrote the essay "Shakespeare's Self, as Revealed in his Writings" which was published in 1886 in the American magazine *Shakespeariana* and, the year after, she contributed to the *Girl's Own Paper* by submitting the article "Shakespeare as the Girl's Friend" (Cowden Clarke, 1897, pp. 239, 242). At the beginning of 1898, not even a year later after her last publication, she died.

2.2.2 *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*

During the Victorian period, Shakespeare was considered to be a moral writer and was introduced to children through a variety of rewritings based on his plays, written for young readers (Prince, 2008, p. 56). This resulted in the playwright being introduced to boys as the epitome of English manliness; while his heroines were models to emulate in terms of ideal daughterhood and motherhood (Prince, 2008, p. 77).

Cowden Clarke was among those female critics who, in the nineteenth century, began publishing and discussing Shakespeare and his female characters as models of propriety and femininity. In "Shakespeare as the Girl's Friend," she considered the relationship between young girls and the Bard to highlight the ideal age to come into contact with Shakespeare's plays. The first encounter with the playwright should be 'at eight or nine years old' through the narrative tales of the Lambs (Cowden Clarke, 1887, p. 369) whose publication, at the time, made girls the target audience of Shakespearean adaptations for children (Tosi, 2013, p. 10). After this first meeting, the young reader would enter her adolescent years and proceed in her course of knowing Shakespeare:

> Happy she who at twelve or thirteen has Shakespeare's works themselves read to her by her mother, with loving selection of fittest plays and passages! Happy they who in mature years have the good taste and good sense to read aright the pages of Shakespeare, and gather thence wholesomest lessons and choicest delights! (Cowden Clarke, 1887, p. 369)

One of her most renowned works, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1850-1852), had a very similar aim: presenting the childhood and teenage years of some of Shakespeare's female characters through the form of cautionary tales whose central theme was female education (Tosi, 2013, p. 12). The *Girlhood* is a collection of fifteen novellas first published in a serialised form.[2]

The tales, in general, are part of a nineteenth-century practice of character criticism which began with the publication of *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical and Historical* (1832) by Anna Jameson (Tosi, 2013, p. 11). Jameson grouped the heroines into four categories: "characters of intellect," "characters of passion and imagination," "characters of the affections" and "historical characters." Her goal was to consider women's virtues and display these capacities (Poole, 2004, p. 91). The popularity of this work was such that, from Jameson on, both male and female critics—Cowden Clarke included—started focusing on Shakespeare's women (Park, 1980, p. 101).

At the time of the tales' publication, Cowden Clarke was already a prominent Shakespearean scholar and, as was already noted, she wrote articles for women's periodicals, such as the *Girl's Own Paper* and *The Ladies' Companion* (Tosi, 2014, p. 58).

The novellas in the collection were extremely popular throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, both in Europe and in the United States (Poole, 2004, p. 93). Their popularity might be due to the fact that people wanted to know more about characters they were already familiar with (Poole, 2004, p. 93). Furthermore, Shakespeare's female characters, in particular, elicited an additional interest because of their relations with the males in the plays which seemed to perfectly encapsulate the social norms of Victorianism (Poole, 2004, p. 94). This is the reason why female characters seemed to belong to a greater extent to the gender ideologies of the Victorian period, instead of their original Elizabethan Age (Tosi, 2014, p. 58). Therefore, it is safe to say that these female characters had a crucial role in boosting the phenomenon of bardolatry in the nineteenth century (Barber, 2013, p. 813).

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[2] All the references to the collection are taken from the three-volume reprint of 2009 by Cambridge University Press of the original edition (1850-52). In order to avoid repetitions, the quotations from the novellas are indicated by the tale's title's abbreviation—listed at the beginning of the dissertation—and the page number.

It could be argued that Cowden Clarke's work can be classified as an appropriation. The reason behind this categorisation stands in the fact that it has an intricate and not-so-straightforward relationship with Shakespeare's text as one could, instead, identify in the works of the Lambs and the Bowdlers which are to be considered, instead, as adaptations.[3]

As we know, Cowden Clarke takes secondary characters in the Shakespearean text, the heroines, and places them in another temporal context, their childhood. This highlights the connection with Shakespeare without replicating his work, so it tells another story. In spite of being appropriations, Cowden Clarke's tales are nevertheless dependent on the original plays mainly because of the heroines who become the novellas' protagonists. Such a link is emphasised by the attention the writer shows in placing 'the heroines in such situations as should naturally lead up to, and account for, the known conclusion of their subsequent confirmed character and after-fate' (Cowden Clarke, 2009, p. iv). Moreover, a list of "illustrative notes" to Shakespearean plays was placed at the end of each volume (Poole, 2004, p. 94) which signalled a further connection. These annotations, which recall events or lines in the original plays, highlight her final aim of sparking the interest of potential feminine readers of Shakespeare (Hateley, 2009, p. 39).

The tales are characterised by an interesting feature: they end at the very moment the heroine delivers her first line in the original play. This characteristic shows that the author does not interfere with the source text in any way, as she merely provides a prequel while also granting the heroines a place outside the plays (Tosi, 2014, p. 58). The element that distinguishes Cowden Clarke's work from what the Lambs and the Bowdlers did is that she did not 'supply, whether excised or rewritten, an alternative Shakespeare,' but she rather did an 'intervention' (Barber, 2013, pp. 816, 819). Her choice reveals the unwillingness to cross a boundary, focusing instead on the unchangeable nature of the heroines' lives while also

[3] The two terms "appropriation" and "adaptations" follow the definitions given by Sanders (2016, p. 35): 'appropriation frequently effects a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain' and '[a]n adaptation most often signals a relationship with an informing source text either through its title or through more embedded references'. See also Chapter 2.1.

strengthening the moral lessons the reader should gain from the text (Poole, 2004, p. 94).

Her intention is also found in the preface in which she explains her plan 'to trace the probable antecedents […] which might have conducted to originate and foster those germs of character recognized in their maturity' (Cowden Clarke, 2009, p. iii). Her lack of interference enabled her to let her imagination loose, for the most part, with new details on the heroines and their lives. She still had, however, to use the evidence she found in the plays in order to detect the elements she had to evoke in her tales (Gross, 1972, p. 43). Everything that happens in the plays finds an explanation in the tales and vice-versa.

The heroines' upbringing in the tales is presented as a direct cause of the female characters' behaviour in Shakespeare's text (Tosi, 2013, p. 12). By doing so, Cowden Clarke clears away any chance of agency from the heroines because their lives are already predestined and because their parents—one of whom is 'usually dotingly, neglectfully benevolent, whilst the other is equally dangerously coercive and strong-willed'—fail in their role (Marshall, 2009, p. 61). The girls' education in the novellas is entrusted to mothers (who are helped or substituted by tutors and nurses) who, together with the heroines, appear to be the protagonists of many novellas. Their influence is decisive and has both good and bad repercussions on their daughters (Tosi, 2014, p. 60). Cowden Clarke creates these completely original figures in order to highlight the significance of a mother's presence/absence in a daughter's formative years. Providing the readers with information about the heroines' childhood allows for a deeper understanding of these female characters, including the reasons behind their behaviours caused by 'bereavement, parental neglect (generally male), dysfunctional families and sexual threats' (Tosi, 2013, p. 14).

In generating new or alternative versions of the heroines' parents, Cowden Clarke unfolds a—lacking—parenting example (Barber, 2013, p. 816). The parents' inadequacy reinforces her claim that young women reading Shakespeare might benefit from being mentored by his figure which becomes a guide because 'Shakespeare's vital precepts and models render him essentially a helping friend' (Cowden Clarke, 1887, p. 355). The young woman, who entrusts herself to him,

> [f]rom his youthful women she can gain lessons in artlessness, guilelessness, modesty, sweetness, ingenuousness, and the most winning candor; from his wives and matrons she can derive instruction in moral courage, meekness, magnanimity, firmness, devoted tenderness, high principle, noble conduct, loftiest speech and sentiment. (Cowden Clarke, 1887, pp. 355-356)

The novellas can hypothetically be approached by two kinds of readers: the first is a young reader who is not familiar with the original plays, for whom Cowden Clarke's work provides an entrance; and the second is an older reader who might be already acquainted with Shakespeare's works and can identify the details and the references to the plays in her rewritings (Marshall & Thompson, 2011, p. 63). To further support this claim, it should be pointed out that the preface does not specify an ideal reader in terms of age. It does not—therefore—limit the consumption of the tales to a young audience nor highlight the need for an adult mediator which was, instead, a Lambs' and Bowdlers' characteristic (Hateley, 2009, p. 39). For example, for a girl in her early adolescence, when she is largely in need of moral guidance, Shakespeare and the figure of the mother are the two presences who are able to guide the young woman to what is good and appropriate (Marshall, 2009, p. 21). Besides, mothers, as well as daughters, were ideal recipients of the novellas given their suitability for a familial space (Tosi, 2013, p. 12) and the moral teachings expressed in the tales would profit adult women too, as reminders of appropriate womanly behaviour.

Cowden Clarke envisions a 'matrilineal inheritance' (Hateley, 2009, p. 38) of Shakespeare when she writes: '[h]appy she who at twelve or thirteen has Shakespeare's works themselves read to her by her mother' (Cowden Clarke, 1887, p. 369). By doing so, she emphasises the importance of the relationship between a mother and a daughter based on their knowledge of the Bard and the enjoyment they receive from reading his plays.

The main teaching that Victorian mothers were required to give was about sexual behaviour and decorum. In order to avoid the shame and guilt of falling prey to seducers, mothers—the ones in the tales and those of the nineteenth century, together with Cowden Clarke who becomes a surrogate motherly figure (Gross,

1972, p. 55)—must save the daughters from ignorance by teaching them about men and society (Gross, 1972, p. 56).

Cowden Clarke may have decided to write these narrative amplifications because, according to Hateley (2009, p. 39), the writer identified gaps of information in the Shakespearean text that had to be filled with explanations about events and behaviours. Precisely because she imagined lives outside the plays, Cowden Clarke treated these female characters as if they were real people (Ziegler, 2009, p. 110). It was common among the Bard's scholars and authors who perceived the heroines as moral companions to young girls as much as friends or relatives can be (Ziegler, 2009, p. 110).

All the authors who were mentioned up until now proposed themselves as mediators of Shakespeare's plays in favour of young people's learning. This is because reading Shakespeare's work in its original form was believed to have disrupting effects since it includes death, violence and sexual innuendos which could upset a juvenile mind. At the same time, however, one could derive meaningful lessons from the contents of the plays, and this could be achieved through the editing, mediation and explanation of the Shakespearean text (Marshall, 2009, p. 21).

Considering Mary Cowden Clarke's *Girlhood* a (proto)feminist work or not is an interesting, yet ambiguous, task to grapple with. On one hand, there are undoubtedly aspects which can be regarded as conservative; on the other, some positions she took were more unconventional for the Victorian period.

George C. Gross is sceptical about Cowden Clarke's progressive stance. He writes that she was 'to Victorian womanhood a shining example of what a pure feminine heart, a brilliant feminine mind, and a staunch feminine will could achieve' (1972, p. 38). He also believes that Cowden Clarke deliberately invented circumstances to instruct the young girl reader about sexual traps (Gross, 1972, p. 44). According to Barber (2013, p. 812), the criticism of *The Girlhood* is limited by regarding it as a text that supports the 'conventional sexual morality' of the period, because it is likely to not consider its impact on the young women's reading of Shakespeare.

The *Girlhood* is undoubtedly a collection of cautionary tales thought for girls and women (Tosi, 2013, p. 23). Interwoven in the tales, there are instructions on

wifely and motherly duties, how to operate in situations of untrustworthy husbands and the proper level of a woman's intervention in reforms of society and politics (Gross, 1972, p. 41). As forewarnings, they possess a didactic aim which could be seen more like as an 'inculcation' than a piece of advice; this teaching is characterised by 'exhortation, precept, and example' through which immoral women are punished while virtuous women are rewarded (Gross, 1972, p. 40). The consequences of their actions are plainly presented so that the reader may learn and avoid certain behaviours (Gross, 1972, p. 41).

In Gross's opinion, Cowden Clarke's condemnation of the sexual double standard is barely a cry against injustice; yet he concedes that there are some instances of future women's liberation movements in her appeal to fairness (1972, p. 57). This is clear thanks to '[h]er refusal to countenance the behavior of the libertine any more than that of his victim, her insistence upon pity and understanding for fallen women, and her demands for social reform' (Gross, 1972, p. 57). Cowden Clarke employed her work to encourage a discussion about matters close to the women of her time such as education and the unbalanced relations between men and women in society and marriage (Marshall & Thompson, 2011, p. 64). Lastly, the attempt Cowden Clarke made to supply motivations for the heroines' actions is considerably subversive (Brown, 2005, p. 95). She does so by creating and securing a new space for Shakespeare's heroines in which they are granted a backstory, a place where their role is not subordinate to those of the male characters. It is one of the first, if not the first, Shakespearean retellings that explicitly puts the heroines at the centre.

According to Hateley, Mary Cowden Clarke could be considered a provoking writer because the author decided, through her work, that Shakespeare could be 'a topic of discussion, debate and exchange *between women*' (2009, p. 38; original italics) and she went as far as labelling him as a companion to women. Even if the main purpose of the collection is to direct female readers and favour their becoming good wives and good mothers, the simple action of reading turns it into a "feminist act" (Barber, 2013, p. 812).

Mary Cowden Clarke displayed a tension between her work to reform, even slightly, women's condition and the duties of woman and wife (Thompson &

Roberts, 2003, p. 183). That said, Cowden Clarke did not exhibit strong feminist—so to speak—opinions and her work intended to combine and harmonize the two stances, rather than to challenge the ideal of womanhood of the Victorian period (Thompson & Roberts, 2003, p. 183). The reconciliation of these positions was not easy and, so much pervaded the Victorian mentality that Cowden Clarke herself felt the need to reassure her readers 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, 1897, p. 106). However, it should be remarked that she was, in some way, an unorthodox wife because, at age 19, when she married Charles, she was resolute in being financially independent in order to contribute to house income (Cowden Clarke, 1897, p. 47).

What is certain is that the collection played a significant part in the development of a space for women to read and study Shakespeare without being dependent on their male acquaintances (Barber, 2013, p. 822). *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* can be considered a "feminist" text despite its maternal intimations and a 'Shakespeare-father' figure which, from a modern perspective, seems to restrict rather than support women (Barber, 2013, p. 822). Her work deserves to be considered revolutionary, even only for the consequences its publication had on the new possibilities available to women in the field of Shakespearean studies. Thanks to her work, and that of many others, by the last decade of the nineteenth century, women critics and editors were more common and so, one can say, that Cowden Clarke's writings 'not only coincided with but helped to shape a period of unprecedented change for women's Shakespeare criticism in the nineteenth century' (Thompson & Roberts, 2003, p. 185).

Chapter 3 – Desdemona, Ophelia, and Juliet: some examples of amplification

In this chapter, we will analyse three novellas out of *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* in order to understand how they can be categorised as "amplifications" of Shakespeare's plays. The three chosen tales are "Desdemona; the Magnifico's Child," "Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore," and "Juliet; the White Dove of Verona;" and which are, respectively, the prequels to *Othello*, performed in 1604, *Hamlet*, printed in 1603, and *Romeo and Juliet*, written around 1594.[4] The chapter will stress the common elements that characterise the novellas to, then, proceed with a specific commentary on each tale and their link with the Shakespearean plays. In the following chapter, Chapter 4, we will study more in detail the relationship between heroines and their fathers, mothers and doubles.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, Mary Cowden Clarke appropriates certain characters and features of Shakespearean plays in writing her tales. As is the case with many nineteenth-century adaptations for children, this appropriation process implies a series of changes concerning aspects such as 'plot, time-place coordinates, characters/setting presentation, and perspective' (Tosi, 2020, p. 1). Thus, our commentary will be developed through some of these critical categories, namely the narrator, the plot, the Shakespearean characters and Cowden Clarke's additional characters and events.

Cowden Clarke's novellas possess a series of attributes that are shared with other literary works of the time, the Victorian Age. All these characteristics will be explained by employing Tosi's article "The Narrator as Mediator and Explicator in Victorian and Edwardian Retellings of Shakespeare for Children" (2020) as an outline.[5]

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[4] All the texts of the Shakespearean plays are taken from the third series of *The Arden Shakespeare. Complete Works* (2001), edited by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan. The years indicated in the text are taken from the introductory insight preceding the plays. In addition, the plays will be indicated following the abbreviation's conventions.

[5] In order to avoid repetitions, the information included in Tosi's article "The Narrator as Mediator and Explicator in Victorian and Edwardian Retellings of Shakespeare for Children" (2020) is to be indicated only by the page number, and not by the complete reference.

The most evident and prominent difference between the plays and the tales is the shift of genre: from drama to narrative (p. 1). The narrativisation necessarily introduces the narrator, a figure who is not typically present in drama. In Shakespeare's work, characters usually either self-introduce by delivering their own lines or are introduced by other characters. Conversely, in Cowden Clarke's tales, there is an omniscient and extradiegetic narrator, i.e. it[6] is an all-knowing figure who fully stands outside the events yet has access to the characters' thoughts and actions, and who already knows the fate of the heroines contained in the plays. For instance, in the prequel to *Othello*, the narrator comments on the shortcomings of Erminia as a mother to Desdemona as follows: '[t]he lady Erminia, however, was not likely to communicate to her child, that of which she herself was not only unpossessed, but unconsciously devoid' (*MC*, p. 311). It does so to highlight that, if imparted correctly, her teachings might have saved her daughter from the 'diabolical malignity' (*MC*, p. 311) awaiting her in the future. The remark is clear in its reference to the play and shows that the narrator is aware of what the future (that is, Shakespeare's play) holds for Desdemona. "The Thane's Daughter," the novella dedicated to Lady Macbeth, provides another instance of the narrator's knowledge of future events. Just a little after the birth of Gruoch—Lady Macbeth's first name—the narrator preannounces that the child is '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' (*TTD*, p. 94). The anticipation of the play is apparent: the narrator foretells Lady Macbeth's avidity for power and her scheming to kill the king, plans that will have disastrous consequences.

The narration is written in the third person (Tosi, 2020, p. 4) and the focalisation the narrator adopts changes throughout the story. The focalisation is not fixed on just one character, but it tends to shift repeatedly in the novellas. This allows readers to obtain information and develop opinions about characters and events. Again, the novella dedicated to Desdemona offers a pertinent example. The focalisation is varied, but, especially in the last section of the tale, the preferred

[6] The personal pronoun "it" will be used in order to indicate the figure of the narrator since their gender is not stated, but also to avoid the confusion that may derive from the use of neutral "they" in the discussion of several texts and characters.

narratorial point of view is Gratiano's, who 'becomes the privileged observer of Othello's courtship' (Tosi, 2013, p. 65) together with the reader. In comparison, in Juliet's tale, the focalisation is less diverse because the story consistently flows through the eyes of Angelica, the future Lady Capulet, whose life—before and after Juliet's birth—covers the majority of the novella.

Tosi states the presence of an unclear relationship between a narrator and a child reader. This relationship is interpreted as ambivalent in the sense that the young reader '*is supposed* to recognise [Shakespeare's] importance […] and *is supposed* to enjoy reading his stories in a shortened or "simplified" version' (Tosi, 2020, p. 2, original italics) because the narrator provides the alternative to the primary text; yet simultaneously, the narrator 'coerces [the reader] into reading and understanding the plays *in the right way*' (p. 2, original italics). In this way, the narrator is perceived as a knowledgeable adult who imparts moral lessons to the inexperienced child reader (p. 4). To go more in-depth, Tosi lists all the actions that a narrator can perform in a Shakespearean adaptation for children.

Tosi tells us that the narrator has the task of defining characters and situations. For example, a typical feature in the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* is to introduce characters through very definitive adjectives which locate them in an antithesis of good and bad (Tosi, 2020, p. 2). Cowden Clarke does so in her novellas as well. The characters' depiction appears to be less dichotomous than that of Cowden Clarke's predecessors, nonetheless, the descriptions of the characters induce the reader to form distinctive opinions about them (p. 2). For instance, in Ophelia's tale, Thyra confesses that she 'never feel[s] at ease in [Claudius'] company' and that '[t]hough of blood-royal, he looks not noble' (*RE*, p. 229). The narrator does not harshly classify the character as evil, yet readers, young as they are, can still clearly understand that these are not favourable descriptions and, as a consequence, are likely to make up their minds about the characters in the way the narrator planned (Tosi, 2020, p. 2). By contrast, the descriptions of Juliet are perceived as positive as we can understand from the two examples that follow: 'a gentle, affectionate little creature; demonstrative in her own manner, and loving to be petted, and caressed' (*WDV*, p. 395); or also,

> [s]he loved flowers; she was fond of smelling them, playing with them, and contrasting their varied form and hue. She loved all the beauties of sky and landscape; and took more pleasure in natural objects than a child of her age usually demonstrated. She liked, too, looking at pictures. She took a fancy to all handsome and pleasant-mannered people; and hung about those who were soft-voiced, gentle, and kind. (*WDV*, p. 410)

Let us now compare two heroines in the same novella: Katharina and Bianca in "Katharina and Bianca; the Shrew, and the Demure." Katharina is described as 'a spirited, lively child, whose unchecked sallies were fast becoming flippancy: whose glibness of retort, and unbridled freedom of tongue were speedily leading into insufferable pertness' (*SD*, p. 103); while Bianca, who is portrayed as a very quiet and passive girl, is said to be 'a general favorite' and '[p]eople thought her full of sweetness, because she had none of her sister's tartness' (*SD*, p. 105). These examples show how the narratorial voice, which sometimes can adopt a character's focalisation, can lead the way in the development of the reader's opinion of the characters.

In the tales, the narrator's descriptions of a character's personality are either taken or deduced directly from the original work by Shakespeare. Therefore, the connection she creates between the plays and her tales allows the reader to retrace such elements in a future reading or theatre experience of Shakespeare. For instance, the play's Lady Capulet accuses her husband of chasing women in the fourth scene of Act 4, to which Lord Capulet answers exclaiming '[a] jealous-hood, a jealous-hood!' (*RJ*, 4.4.13). Cowden Clarke extrapolates this exchange from the play and builds her whole novella on it. Throughout the tale, Lady Capulet is shown to be a suspicious and apprehensive wife. Angelica is characterised by a 'rage of jealousy that consume[s] her' and she even becomes 'a woman made desperate' by this feeling (*WDV*, pp. 367, 381). Similarly, Cowden Clarke's narrator expands Ophelia's personality by interpreting, from a Victorian point of view, two emblematic lines in the play—'I do not know, my lord, what I should think' and 'I think nothing, my lord' (*Hamlet*, 1.3.104, 3.2.119)—as responses, respectively, to Polonius and Hamlet. The narrator of the novella then implies that the heroine's silent and quiet disposition sprang from the time she spent at the house of her wet nurse, Botilda.

During her time there, it is said that 'she became grave, strangely quiet and reserved for a little creature of her years, and so confirmed her habit of silence, that she might almost have passed for dumb' (*RE*, p. 205). Her shy and quiet mannerisms are the results of being surrounded by 'rough cottage people' who are very different from her; the narrator, therefore, suggests that '[s]he might be said to feel her uncongenial position without understanding it' (*RE*, p. 205).

In addition to the Victorian narrator's descriptions and introductions of the characters in Shakespearean retellings, Tosi's article also explores how a narrator may borrow the language of the characters to make it its own. What Cowden Clarke decides to maintain from the plays are the songs, such as *For Bonny Sweet Robin is All My Joy* and the "Willow Song." The first appears in the fifth act of *Hamlet* and is sung by Ophelia in her madness. It is reprised in "Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore" when Jutha bemoans the abandonment of her lover, Eric. The second ditty is hummed by the maid Barbara, in Desdemona's novella. In the fourth act of *Othello*, the Shakespearean heroine will be reminded of this song and of her maid Barbary who sang it before dying, just like her. In the play, Desdemona mentions the story of Barbara and Cowden Clarke, in the novella, makes it possible for the reader to learn more about her and her lover's story.

Furthermore, Tosi shows that, in Shakespearean retellings, the narrator usually removes characters or events, excises certain parts and lectures the reader (Tosi, 2020, p. 7). Cowden Clarke's narrator moralizes, but it does not cut or censor the Shakespearean text because she creates a new literary product, that is a prequel to the play, rather than working on the original text, as in the Lambs' case. Also, it is significant to remember that Cowden Clarke's prequels end exactly when the heroine delivers her very first line in the play, so she does not interfere at all with the original text.

To lecture the reader, Tosi highlights, that the narrator can intervene during the course of the narration to convey moral lessons or to comment on certain situations. For instance, in Juliet's novella, Cowden Clarke's narrator speaks about friendship and instructs on how to conduct oneself correctly: 'let us make honest, open avowal, face to face with our injured friend. Let us ask his help in our endeavour. Let us rather confide in the strength of his forgiving love, than in our own

frail, unassisted, secret resolutions' (*WDV*, p. 373). This piece of advice follows an example of Lady Capulet's jealous behaviour which, when counterbalanced by the narrator's proposition of a preferable alternative, can be recognised as misbehaviour by the reader. The narrator, therefore, is instructing the young reader through examples.

Cowden Clarke's narrator also observes and comments on the men in the tales. A primary example, a not so laudable one, is included in Virginia di Coralba's speech in Juliet's novella. The woman denounces the unfaithfulness of men. She calls them:

> demure rascals […] hypocrite knaves,—who denounce a wife, for a word, a look given to another than to him who hath bought up, with church fees, the exclusive right and title to herself and all she possesses; while they reserve to themselves the privilege of indulging in amusement wherever it offers, and rating their entertainers for lightness and falsehood, when they tire of them. (*WDV*, p. 424)

In this specific instance, it is important to remark how 'every adaptation is a bridge between a past work and a contemporary audience' (Tosi, 2020, p. 8). The narrator of the tales, precisely because of its characteristics, is to be considered a product of its time: the Victorian Era. This implies that any remark and observation are to be interpreted in the context of the Victorian Age and its concerns (p. 8). Therefore, the tales are the mirrors of their age, more than a faithful representation of Elizabethan times. Virginia's condemnation, for instance, well represents the "intrusion" of the time in which the collection was written. What is described portrays the conditions of Victorian contracts of marriage, which were highly unfavourable for women. Marriage, from the thirteenth century until 1870—the year in which the *Married Women Property Act* was enacted—meant that the majority of a woman's possessions would become legally part of her husband's property, who could manage it at will (Combs, 2005, p. 1031). The inequality concerned, as Virginia hints, divorce as well. The most common ground for divorce was adultery; on one hand, husbands could easily divorce their wives on this ground, on the other, women, in addition to demonstrating adulterous behaviour, had also to prove 'aggravating

circumstances' such as cruelty, economic abuse and deprivation (Baird, 1977, p. 402). This meant that it was almost impossible for them to be granted a divorce.

The narrator can also add new information by 'fill[ing] the gaps', and 'invent[ing]' new characters and episodes (Tosi, 2020, p. 8). In particular, Cowden Clarke's novellas are very recognisable thanks to the use of 'addition and expansion devices' (p. 9) which allow her to create a fictional "past" for the heroines, consistent with their "future" written by Shakespeare in the plays. Given that the tales in *The Girlhood* are prequels and therefore they do not, and cannot, tell the same story, the tales of the collection are amplifications of the plays because they add information to the original texts, and they become filled with new elements and episodes that can help create a believable childhood for the heroines. First of all, mothers constitute the most poignant example: while in plays like *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, Ophelia, Desdemona, and Lady Macbeth, respectively, are motherless, in Cowden Clarke's "Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore," "Desdemona; the Magnifico's Child," and "The Thane's Daughter," the heroines' mothers are added to the narrative. Through the tales, then, the readers meet Lady Aoudra, Ophelia's mother, Erminia, Desdemona's mother, and Gruoch, Lady Macbeth's mother. Differently, Juliet, both in *Romeo and Juliet* and "Juliet; the White Dove of Verona," has a mother; in the novella, a young Lady Capulet features in the narrative. Cowden Clarke decides to include these figures in her tales to demonstrate the utmost importance of a mother in the formative years of a daughter, while also highlighting the direct link between the heroines' upbringing and their behaviours.

Tosi (p. 9) underlines that their 'future choices appear to be determined primarily by the kind of family environment they were born into, from what they learned (or did not learn) from their mothers first and secondly from their masters, friends, nurses and mentors.' This means that the mothers' presence/absence and related influence are openly linked to the heroines' "fate" in the Shakespearean opus. In Ophelia's tale, for instance, the narrator comments on the relevance of a mother in a daughter's life as follows: '[t]here is a blessed influence, a sacred joy, a plenitude of satisfaction, in the very presence of a mother' (*RE*, p. 219). There is a similarly positive remark in Juliet's tale, in which the narrator notes, between brackets, '(for who can hold a child with the magic,—the instinctive consulting of its

accommodation in every limb, as a mother does?)' (*WDV*, p. 395), implying that a mother's embrace is incomparable. Cowden Clarke herself stressed the significance of mothers in the lives of their children in a note to her *Concordance*, where she pointed to her mother as the source of her love for Shakespeare, and in her article "Shakespeare as the Girl's Friend," in which she proposes a new way for young Victorian girls to enjoy the Bard, a way which saw mothers as the mediators for daughters, instead of fathers or brothers as the Lambs, before her, had suggested. As Tosi underlines (2013, p. 62) 'the change from Lamb's male mediator to Clarke's mother should not pass unnoticed.' Not coincidentally, in 1882, Lewis Carroll started thinking about an edition of Shakespeare 'which shall be absolutely fit for *girls*' and, in order to decide which plays to include, '[he] need[ed] advice, from *mothers*' (1979, p. 457; qtd. in Ziegler, 2009, p. 107, original italics). The importance Carroll puts on the opinion of mothers shows their fundamental role 'of instructing [their] female offspring in the home' (Tosi, 2013, p. 62).

The judgement of mothers, however, is not necessarily positive in all novellas. For instance, in "The Shrew and The Demure," Katharina's unruly behaviour stems from the absence of a 'judicious mother, to train the insolence into sprightliness, to subdue the malapertness into harmless mirth, and to soften the character, by teaching her to mingle gentleness and kind-meaning with her native vivacity' (*SD*, p. 104). According to Cowden Clarke's belief that the heroine's upbringing is the major cause of her story in the play, it is no surprise that Katharina becomes a true shrew. Tosi notes that 'Kate has been punished *too frequently* and no attempts have been made on the part of her ineffectual mother to understand her' (Tosi, 2020, p. 9, original italics). These maternal examples, both positive and negative, serve as lessons for parents because it is important to remember that the novellas were not written solely for girls, but their readership also included adults (p. 10).

Together with mothers, the other significant additions to the tales are new characters who figure as the heroines' doubles. Their purpose lies in anticipating the events the heroines will confront in the plays (Tosi, 2014, p. 60). Cowden Clarke's collection is to be considered a series of moral tales aimed at the teaching and guidance of proper behaviour and the episodes unfolding in these novellas become

cautionary tales employed to warn both readers and the heroines against misbehaviours, emphasising their negative consequences (Mosca Bonsignore, 2011, p. 113). For example, Ophelia does not learn anything from her doubles—Jutha and Thyra—because she falls prey to her passion and she believes the promises of man who vows his love for her is real (Tosi, 2014, p. 72). The doubles in the tales we will consider more in detail are Barbara in Desdemona's tale, Giacinta and Leonilda in Juliet's and Ophelia's two, Jutha and Thyra (see Chapter 4.2.2).

As was previously shown, the narrator supplies explanations and reasons for a character's behaviour which expands the character's personality and increases the reader's knowledge of a certain character. This action is regarded as the main task of the narrator in Shakespearean retellings aimed at the moral teaching of a child because the narrator must avoid vagueness—the comments made by the narrator on specific behaviours provide the reader with a deeper understanding of what is right and what is wrong; what to think about a character and certain episodes (Tosi, 2020, p. 11). The aim of the whole Cowden Clarke's collection is to justify the heroines' behaviour and disclose the reasons behind their demeanour; in her preface, she writes: '[t]he design has been […] to imagine the possible circumstance and influences […] which might have conduced to originate and foster those germs of character recognized in their maturity' (Cowden Clarke, 2009, p. iii). These explanations furnished to readers have the purpose of 'us[ing] Shakespeare's plots to provide moral teachings for the child' (Tosi, 2020, p. 11).

3.1 "Desdemona; the Magnifico's Child"

This analysis of the novella focuses on those aspects which connect the tale with the Shakespearean play. As a matter of fact, the novella written by Cowden Clarke seems to replicate the play *Othello* in terms of couple dynamics and events. We will delve into the similarities between the play's main couple—Othello and Desdemona—and the tale's main couple—Brabantio and Erminia. The outset of the relationship between Othello and Desdemona introduced in the novella will also be considered and we will see how it connects with the play. Part of the analysis will be

dedicated to the racist remarks[7] which are mainly included in the play, but feature in the novella as well. The aspects concerning Desdemona's relationship with her parents will be further examined in Chapter 4.

At the beginning of the novella, readers are introduced to Desdemona's parents: Brabantio and Erminia. The tale focuses, for the most part, on their story and Cowden Clarke conceives it, as we have just mentioned, in a way that the novella's couple recalls the couple of the play by Shakespeare. The young Brabantio and Erminia recently got married in secret. Only the death of Brabantio's father allows them to finally be together, since the older man disapproved of Erminia, because of her lower social status. The secrecy of their relationship establishes a link with the situation of Desdemona and Othello in the play. As we know from the play, Brabantio is awakened by Iago and Roderigo in the middle of the night and is informed of his daughter's marriage to Othello. The economic background can be a further connection between the couples. The fathers of the richer counterparts—Brabantio's father and Brabantio himself—do not accept the chosen (and poorer) partners, Erminia and Othello. On one hand, there are Brabantio, 'a Venetian magnifico' (*MC*, p. 290), who comes from a noble family, and his daughter Desdemona who naturally is part of the aristocracy; on the other, Erminia is introduced as a 'girl of humble fortunes' (*MC*, p. 289) whose father 'born a nobleman' fell into disgrace 'from a reverse of fortune' (*MC*, p. 291), and Othello who, albeit an esteemed soldier, had been a slave.

As we highlighted, both couples elope, and father and daughter marry below their class meaning that 'no material interests were involved' (Matthews, 1971, p. 128). This could be considered, in both cases, as a sign of a marriage of love. In her speech to the Senate, Desdemona explains and emphasises that there is no difference between her and her parents' marriages (Matthews, 1971, p. 128): she reminds her father that 'so much duty as my mother showed / To you, preferring you before her

[7] For a further study of Othello and the racism in the play, see Adamson, *"Othello" as tragedy: some problems of judgement and feeling* (1980); Berry, "Othello's Alienation" (1990); Hogan, "*Othello*, Racism, and Despair" (1998); Matthews, "*Othello* and the Dignity of Man" (1971) in *Shakespeare in a Changing World* (Kettle ed.); and Orkin, "Othello and the 'plain face' of Racism" (1987).

father, / So much I challenge that I may profess / Due to the Moor my lord' (*Oth*, 1.3.186-189).

Othello and Desdemona's marriage in the play is as clandestine as their courtship in the novella. The novella tells us that Othello becomes a regular guest at Brabantio's palace—a piece of information we find in the play as well—and these visits become the ground for Othello's courtship. Gratiano, Desdemona's uncle, notices that Desdemona pays a lot of attention to her father's guest and his stories because:

> [h]e knew that she was full of high romantic feeling, of enthusiasm, for all her outward serenity; he knew of what devotion, of what magnanimity she was capable; he knew how her soul aspired to nobility of deed, and how it claimed affinity with virtue and heroism, notwithstanding the feminine gentleness and maidenly reserve of her demeanour,—her quiet look, her still motion, her soft voice, and low-toned speech; and, knowing all this, it did not surprise him to see her greatly interested by the narrative of the warlike Othello.
>
> She would sit at her embroidery-frame in the window, while he conversed with her father and uncle; but the latter observed, that as the story proceeded, her needle would forget its office. (*MC*, p. 366)

In the play, the reader can find a similar passage to the one above. Othello himself becomes aware of Desdemona's attention to his stories. In the play, the soldier explains that '[t]his[8] to hear / Would Desdemona seriously incline, / But still the house affairs would draw her thence, / Which ever as she could with haste dispatch / She'd come again, and with a greedy ear / Devour up my discourse' (*Oth*, 1.3.146-150).

There is a contrast between Brabantio, who does not realise his daughter's interest in Othello, and Gratiano who, instead, grasps that Desdemona's 'ostentation of dislike' is 'assumed to veil an increasing secret preference' (*MC*, p. 369) for the

[8] "[t]his" refers to the many adventures Othello embarked on during his life and has just recounted in front of the Senate.

general. Brabantio wrongly believes that the way in which Desdemona salutes their guest and behaves around him is evidence of her ‘noble Venetian blood,’ that she ‘recoil[s] from granting a favor to a barbarian’ (*MC*, p. 368). Brabantio’s position on the matter betrays his racist and bigoted views about Othello which will fully come to light in the play. Yet he admits that because of his attributes—‘truly noble, an accomplished soldier, a skilful commander, an honorable man, high in virtue as in renown’ (*MC*, p. 352)—Othello deserves such favour from her. Similar features are emphasised in the play as well, “valiant” and “noble,” for example, are some of the adjectives used to describe Othello. However, Brabantio underlines that he would ‘rather see [her] over-proud than over-free to any one’ (*MC*, p. 368). On this issue, Gratiano learns that the Magnifico had already refused many gentlemen because they ‘lack[ed] blood worthy to mingle with his’ (*MC*, p. 354). The noble and aristocratic background Brabantio prizes so much reveals to be paradoxical considering that Desdemona ends up marrying Othello: a soldier, a former slave, and, on top of that, a black man.[9]

This bigoted attitude mainly emerges in the Shakespearean work, as we just mentioned. When, in the play, Othello is revealed to be Brabantio’s son-in-law, the older man accuses him of being ‘a heathen dealer in witchcraft and aphrodisiacs’ (Matthews, 1971, p. 131). If one looks more closely at Brabantio’s speech both in the novella—as we did—and in the play, it could be claimed that Othello’s blackness is the real reason behind Brabantio’s dislike for him. Brabantio’s displeasure for him may not be mainly rooted in the economic aspect of the union, as it was for Brabantio and Erminia; but it stems more from a racist opinion Brabantio harbours for Othello. His attitude comes fully to the surface in the play during their confrontation in front of the Senate. Brabantio charges Othello with having used magic on Desdemona because:

> BRABANTIO Whether a maid so tender, fair and happy,
> So opposite to marriage that she shunned

[9] Critics still discuss Othello’s doubtful origins because ‘whether Shakespeare intended Othello for a Moor or an Ethiopian’ is still unclear (Whitney, 1922, p. 476). For a more detailed analysis of Shakespeare’s sources and inspiration to create the character of Othello, see Whitney, “Did Shakespeare Know Leo Africanus?” (1922).

> The wealthy, curled darlings of our nation,
> Would ever have, t'incur a general mock,
> Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
> Of such a thing as thou? (*Oth*, 1.2.66-71)

The most welcome guest Othello quickly becomes a 'foul thief' (*Oth*, 1.2.62). The news '[release] in [Brabantio] violent feelings of fear, hatred, and disgust' (Berry, 1990, p. 319). When Desdemona is called to explain, she confesses that she feels 'a divided duty' (*Oth*, 1.3.181) between her father and her new husband, but, as we explained before, she points out that her mother behaved in the same way in order to marry Brabantio.

On this note, in the play, Brabantio is not the only character that could be considered racist, in the modern connotation of the term. Yet, he is also not the one with the worst racist attitude—see Iago and Roderigo, for example. Hogan believes that '[e]verywhere he turns, Othello confronts racism' and he adds that the characters' general approach to Othello appears to be 'racialist, even when it is not derogatory' (Hogan, 1998, pp. 432, 439). Orkin (similarly to Hogan) notices that other characters, 'besides Iago, Roderigo, and Brabantio,' namely the Duke and Desdemona, 'appear to refer to or draw upon racist discourse' (1987, p. 170). In Desdemona's first appearance in the play, she does not call Othello by name and 'then goes on to account for this love—for she too implicitly acknowledges that it is queer to love "such a thing" as Othello, that it requires an explanation' (Hogan, 1998, p. 441).

On the topic of addressing Othello by his name (or not), several critics noticed the little use characters make of his name in the play, preferring other epithets. This element tells of Othello's alienation (Berry, 1990, p. 322) from the Venetian society, for which he is indispensable military-wise, but this significance 'does not make him socially acceptable' as a black man (Matthews, 1971, pp. 127, 128). Berry (1990, p. 322) summarises the issue with 'the more racist the character, the less the inclination to use Othello's name' and Hogan confirms Berry's position and reports that 'when counted up, the proportion is almost two to one in favor of the generic category over the name' (Hogan, 1998, p. 439). This, Hogan explains,

demonstrates how the characters in the play 'discuss, and even address [Othello], not as a person, but as an instance of his race' (1998, p. 439). In the novella as well the name of Othello is often paired up with identifying words such as "Moor" or "Moorish."

As we have observed, Desdemona's attitude towards Othello is misjudged by her father in the novella and we detect the same misunderstanding in the play. From her father's point of view, Desdemona 'might have been thought almost to feel repugnance towards him' (*MC*, p. 367); and in the play he confirms this belief: he is incredulous at the fact that '[a] maiden never bold, / [...] in spite of nature, / Of years, of country, credit, everything, / To fall in love with what she feared to look on?' (*Oth*, 1.3.95-99). The misconceptions surrounding Desdemona's feelings and behaviour towards Othello are used by both Iago and Brabantio to poison the general's mind. The first claims that Desdemona 'did deceive her father, marrying you, / And when she seemed to shake, and fear your looks, / She loved them most' (*Oth*, 3.3.209-211). Brabantio, too, reminds the general that Desdemona 'has deceived her father, and may thee' (*Oth*, 1.3.295).

The theme of deception is a further element that joins *Othello* and "Desdemona; the Magnifico's Child." In the play, this aspect concerns the handkerchief story, how Desdemona lies about the handkerchief's whereabouts, and her intervention in Cassio's situation. Whereas in the novella, dissimulation belongs to Desdemona's mother Erminia and, at a later time, to Desdemona herself. Following Cowden Clarke's intention of making the tales prequels to the plays, the novella portrays the reason behind Desdemona's deceptive nature to her husband: she learned it from her mother during her childhood. From our understanding of Desdemona's character, we could argue that the heroine and her mother share some similarities. Thus, it could be said that Cowden Clarke draws explicit parallels in her novella and crafts Erminia as similar as possible to Desdemona's character in the play. Erminia's story in the novella seems to retrace Desdemona's story in the play. Desdemona herself, in the novella, starts behaving like her mother. The author, then, creates a loop of certain acts and behaviours which repeats for both mother and daughter and finds its end in the Shakespearean work.

Erminia '[is] by nature gentle and modest; contented with little' (*MC*, p. 303) and it is precisely this disposition that prompts her to 'do good privately […] and kindly visit among the poor' (*MC*, p. 313), without Brabantio's knowing. Contrarily to his wife, we are told that Brabantio '[has] no affinity with good deeds done in secret, with charity bestowed privately and unostentatiously' and Erminia senses that her husband '[has] no liking or interest for the poor' and even '[shrinks], and [holds] himself aloof, from any contact or association with those beneath his station' (*MC*, p. 313). Erminia often brings her daughter with her in her saintly mission to help people in need, and 'she thus trained [her] in kindly sympathy and compassion' (*MC*, p. 313). In the play, we learn of Desdemona's compassion for Othello as he recounts that Desdemona cried listening to his stories showing her empathetic nature. However, Desdemona, as we hinted earlier, is also

> accustomed to see her mother yield in silence even to things in which she did not acquiesce; to see her avoid doing what she tacitly seemed to agree to; to see her evade what she would not object to, and, although she never blamed or opposed in speech, yet quietly condemned and set aside by act—or rather by non-performance; apparently consenting and approving, but in fact frustrating and censuring by a system of silent passiveness; the little girl insensibly acquired just such a system of conduct. (*MC*, pp. 311-312)

The afore mentioned handkerchief, which in the play becomes the symbol of Desdemona's lies, appear in the novella as well. Towards the end of it, as a matter of fact, Gratiano sees Desdemona holding a handkerchief—she received it as a gift from Othello—and showing an expression 'which told of deep-seated happiness' (*MC*, p. 370). The piece of cloth has 'curious arabesques of the flowered border, and the strawberries spotted over the centre' (*MC*, p. 371). Emilia, in the play, confirms that Desdemona treasures it with the same level of care and tenderness. She has seen her lady kiss it and talk to it. It is she and her husband, in the play, that corroborate what the reader finds in the novella: Emilia says that the handkerchief 'was [Desdemona's] first remembrance of the Moor' and Iago describes it as '[s]potted with strawberries' (*Oth*, 3.3.295, 438). The handkerchief story is a key element in the

play because it holds a lot of significance for the couple. According to Othello's account in Act 3 Scene 4, the handkerchief was given to his mother by an Egyptian sorceress:

> OTHELLO She told her, while she kept it
> 'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
> Entirely to her love; but if she lost it
> Or made a gift of it, my father's eye
> Should hold her loathed and his spirits should hunt
> After new fancies. (*Oth*, 3.4.60-65)

Therefore, it is a symbol of marital loyalty. In the play, Desdemona loses it, but Emilia happens to find it and hands it to Iago who has been tormenting her to steal it. The consequences of her loss, however, do not worry Desdemona because '[her] noble Moor / Is true of mind, and made of no such baseness' (*Oth*, 3.4.26-27). The 'baseness' Desdemona mentions is jealousy: she believes that 'Othello is not an ordinary erring mortal at all' (Adamson, 1980, p. 226), so such low sentiments do not belong to him. What she does not know, however, is the fact that Iago has already instilled in Othello's mind the germ of jealousy and suspicion. After Iago puts the handkerchief in Cassio's chamber as proof of Desdemona's infidelity, the husband inquires for it but Desdemona cannot produce it. Othello, thus, defines his wife to be 'false as hell' (*Oth*, 4.2.40). Because of the origin of the handkerchief, Othello's 'understanding of marriage does not admit infidelity' (Orkin, 1987, p. 172).

As we anticipated at the beginning of the chapter, Cowden Clarke creates the Brabantio-Erminia couple to replicate and thus anticipate the Othello-Desdemona couple. After having highlighted the similarities between the two wives, the two husbands are joined by the element of jealousy. Brabantio does not recognise and mistake Gratiano, Erminia's brother, for his wife's lover and Othello believes that Desdemona's interest in Cassio hides some deeper feelings. Both Brabantio and Othello believe their wives to be unfaithful and adulterous and they do not grant them the possibility to demonstrate their innocence. Instead, they both give way to impulsive reactions and let jealousy dictate their behaviour; the only difference is the fact that Othello commits uxoricide.

There are two other tales in the collection where the subject of adultery is tackled, they are “Imogen; the Peerless” and “Rosalind and Celia; the Friends.” In the first instance, Cymbeline—Imogen’s father—is a pliable man and, more than once in the novella, he blindly believes what people tell him.[10] In Cowden Clarke’s novella, Cymbeline believes lord Mempricius’ slander of his wife Guendolen. The lord fell in love with Guendolen’s beauty but, after her rejection, decides to take revenge and plans a whole story to destroy her reputation. Cymbeline credits what Mempricius tells him, just like Othello believes Iago. Despite the accusations of ‘falsehood, treachery, dishonor’ (*Peer*, p. 427), Guendolen states her innocence, but she does not make any further attempt to escape Cymbeline’s sentence of exile. Desdemona is not so weak in her efforts, yet, in the end, she takes the blame for her death lamenting that nobody, but herself, has been the one ‘who hath done / This deed’ (*Oth*, 5.2.123). Contrarily, in the tale “Rosalind and Celia; the Friends,” we have Flora, a friend of the two protagonists, who cross-dresses as her cousin Theodore[11] and speaks ill about Flora’s loyalty to her husband Victor. She does so because she heard gossip about her husband's unfaithfulness, so, as revenge, she hints at her adultery. Victor, instead of trusting the falsehood accusing his wife, is ready to fight Theodore to defend his wife’s honour. He does not let slander undermine his love for Flora, whereas Othello’s mind is so polluted by Iago’s words and the images of Desdemona together with Cassio that he cannot escape the villain’s scheme.

3.2 “Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore”

This section will introduce Ophelia’s relations with her parents and doubles, yet—as for Desdemona—it will be analysed in more detail throughout Chapter 4. Instead, the relationship between Ophelia and Hamlet is here considered, both in the

[10] In the play *Cymbeline*, the homonymous character marries a second time after Imogen’s birth, and his new wife is a wicked woman who manoeuvres him according to her liking. Cowden Clarke takes this characteristic of Cymbeline’s personality and provides further examples of it in her tale.

[11] Flora’s cross-dressing in the novella is a clear recall to how Rosalind and Celia cross-dress in the play *As You Like It* after fleeing the court of Duke Frederik (Celia’s father). Rosalind dresses as a young man called Ganymede, while Celia becomes Aliena, a shepherdess.

novella and in the play. The songs sung by Ophelia in the play and their contents are our starting point for discussing illegitimate love affairs and their consequences.

Throughout the novella, Ophelia interacts with many different people and some relationships continue in the Shakespearean work. Her family, for instance, is introduced at the beginning of the novella. The reader meets a newborn Ophelia together with her father Polonius, her brother Laertes (both characters also appear in the play) and her mother Aoudra, who is an invention by Cowden Clarke. Laertes does not reappear throughout the novella, whereas Polonius and Aoudra disappear from the narration for a period of time due to Polonius' political affairs in Paris.

During her parents' absence, Ophelia is put in the care of the wet nurse Botilda, and moves to her house in the countryside. There, Ophelia is mainly taken care of by Jutha, the woman's adolescent daughter who becomes the full-fledged 'little creature's fond devoted girl-mother' (*RE*, p. 192). However, in this new and strange environment, Ophelia does not feel at ease and these feelings are translated into her behaviour. As a matter of fact, it is noted how 'she became grave, strangely quiet and reserved for a little creature of her years' and that 'she was rarely disposed to cheerfulness' (*RE*, pp. 204, 205). The reappearance of Ophelia's parents corresponds with Jutha's death. The motives of the girl's early passing will be later explored in the chapter. Although Aoudra's presence brings her daughter some relief, Ophelia suffers from '[v]iolent startings, abrupt twitching of the limbs, talking in her sleep, muttered ends of songs and mournful tunes' (*RE*, p. 219) following her friend's death. Ophelia's sickness is a cause of anxiety for her mother because the latter feels guilty about having been apart from her daughter. The narrator, then, takes the chance to comment on the '[h]oly mother-love!' putting the accent on the 'blessed influence, [the] sacred joy, [the] plenitude of satisfaction, in the very presence of a mother' (*RE*, p. 219).

The return to the court together with her parents allows little Ophelia to develop her relationship with Polonius, to whom the girl shows daughterly dutifulness. While at court, Ophelia is introduced to courtiers, such as Thyra, a motherless girl in charge of her father's household, performing all the tasks generally given to a wife or an older woman. Her responsibilities allow Thyra to grasp and have a deeper understanding of social relations and of the importance of knowing

about people in advance, a skill that Ophelia is unpossessed of in the play because of the imposing and shaping presence of Polonius and Laertes (Smith, 2008, p. 97).

Among the people Ophelia meets throughout the novella, there is also Eric of Kronstein. He is a lord Ophelia meets twice in the tale: the first time she sees him in the forest during one of her walks with Jutha; the second time, she encounters him at Thyra's house. In both instances, Eric causes trouble that ends in tragedy. In the first case, Jutha—too preoccupied with the man—fails to be a source of comfort for Ophelia in the uneasiness she feels in living in the countryside. The older girl prefers spending time with Eric and therefore she leaves young Ophelia to entertain herself. Sometime after the meeting with Eric, however, Jutha suddenly loses her cheerfulness, but Ophelia does not understand the reason behind it as she is just a child. Not long after, Ophelia discovers Jutha's dead body, together with the one of an infant child, and—as we noted above—the sight provokes serious implications for the young heroine:

> [t]he shock she had received was severe; and long left the effects upon her sensitive organization. Naturally gentle, she became timid. She shrank about, scared, and trembling; fearful of she hardly knew what, but feeling unassured, doubtful, full of a vague uneasiness and alarm. (*RE*, p. 215)

Victorian and Edwardian rewritings of *Hamlet* have characterised Ophelia as a spineless and 'passive' girl (Tosi, 2014, p. 71). In the play, too, such behaviour is recognised. She is different from the heroines Shakespeare included in his plays until that moment; female characters such as Juliet, Beatrice, and Portia are 'charismatic' while Ophelia personifies the ideal lady of the time: 'silent, chaste, and obedient' (Amelang, 2015, pp. 17, 18). For instance, in her first appearance in the play, in Act 1 Scene 3, 'she speaks only when asked to, and does so in a brief and humble manner' and 'most of her interventions are either corroborations of understanding what is being said to her […] or answers to questions posed to her' (Amelang, 2015, p. 19). In the scene, she is advised by Laertes and Polonius to reject Prince Hamlet for the sake of safeguarding her honour because, in their opinion, he has no serious intentions. Laertes warns his sister about the damage '[her] honour may sustain / If

with too credent ear [she] list[s] his songs, / Or lose[s] [her] heart, or [her] chaste treasure open / To his unmaster'd importunity' (*Hamlet*, 1.3.30-33); while Polonius reminds Ophelia that no matter what Hamlet told her, '[she] must not take for fire' (*Hamlet*, 1.3.120). After being conditioned by their words, she confesses that '[she] do[es] not know, […] what [she] should think' (*Hamlet*, 1.3.104). Ophelia's submissiveness is further revealed by her resolve to follow both her brother and father's insistence and the discussion ends with her saying: 'I shall obey, my lord' (*Hamlet*, 1.3.136). She does not try to defy the men's impositions, she follows what she is told to do, even if her feelings are concerned. Thompson and Roberts (1997, p. 167; cfr. Tosi, 2014, p. 71) report in *Women Reading Shakespeare* the Shakespearean critic Grace Latham's comment on Ophelia's character thus: 'for a weak woman who has been thoroughly cowed, a kind of paralysis of the will takes place, and her acts come not from her own volition, but from that of the stronger nature, under whose domination she lives.'

As we have mentioned earlier, the topic of Eric concerns Thyra, too. The girl speaks highly of this lord and the reader can immediately make the connection between Jutha's Eric and Thyra's Eric who are, obviously, the same person. When Ophelia meets him, she notices in him 'something long since seen' (*RE*, p. 233); not coincidentally, this impression is also awoken in Eric. Once they both recognise each other, Eric asks Ophelia not to mention the past and he finds himself relieved in sensing that Ophelia does not seem to understand his share in Jutha's death.

Not long after, Eric is accused of gambling and of being a seducer, so he flees the country and, for the second time, Ophelia finds her friend's dead body: Thyra hanged herself. The younger girl reacts by falling into a fit of convulsions and, because of the shock, she gets sick once again. According to Showalter, Ophelia falls ill with the so-called "brain fever," a 'staple mental illness of Victorian fiction' (1986, p. 88). The disease, however, was not a literary invention, it was indeed recognised by the Victorian medical field, but it was considered an interesting plot and character-developing device 'because of its dramatic onset and long duration' (Peterson, 1976, p. 449). Peterson reports the definition of "brain fever" given by James Copland in *A Dictionary of Practical Medicine*:

> acute pain in the head, with intolerance of light and sound; watchfulness, delirium; flushed countenance, and redness of the conjunctiva, or a heavy suffused state of the eyes; quick pulse; frequently spasmodic twitchings or convulsions, passing into somnolency, coma, and complete relaxations of the limbs. (Copland, 1858, I, p. 228; qtd. in Peterson, 1976, p. 447)

Peterson also highlights the causes of the illness quoting Alexander Tweedie's section dedicated to fever in *The Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine*: 'a severe shock to the nervous system. The various kinds of mental emotion—fear, grief, anxiety, disappointments, long-continued watching on a sick bed, intense study, want of sleep' (Tweedie, 1833, II, p. 177; qtd. in Peterson, 1976, p. 448).

As soon as Ophelia recovers, she asks her mother about the king's well-being because she is sure she has seen his ghost in her dreams. Together with the king, Ophelia saw three women. The girl is able to recognise two of them: the first is Jutha moaning 'over the little white face that lay upon her bosom' and the second is Thyra with her 'livid throat' and feet raised from the ground (*RE*, p. 249). The third figure, however, Ophelia does not identify. '[A]mong the silver-leaved branches of the drooping willow' (*RE*, pp. 249-250), the last woman stands, dressed in white and surrounded by nettles and long purples. Ophelia sees her being dragged towards the water by a seemingly higher force. Given that in her dream, Ophelia sees her dead friends, the reader can derive that the last figure must be Ophelia herself. It is as if the illness gave Ophelia visionary powers (Berg, 2014, p. 14; Showalter, 1986, p. 88), she has clear premonitions of her and the King's deaths, even though she does not know it yet. In the play *Hamlet*, Ophelia's death is reported by Gertrude and, in her retelling, she mentions all the elements that are also part of Ophelia's foreboding dream in the novella. Given that the readers of the novella will read the play or watch the performance, including these clear recallings is a way for them to recognize the scene and the elements. There is water since Ophelia dies by drowning; on this note, MacDonald discloses that, in early modern England, '[d]rowning was the favoured method of women who killed themselves' (1977, p. 567). Showalter further comments that drowning was associated with femininity (1986, p. 80). In addition, the flowers of the dream—nettles and long purples—are those used by Ophelia to make garlands in the play. Gertrude's account also features the willow tree, it is the

place where Ophelia supposedly falls from into the water because of a broken branch. In Elizabethan literature, the willow is a tree associated with unrequited love (Camden, 1964, p. 252). It is also the tree giving the title to the "Willow Song" sung by Desdemona and Barbara (see Chapters 3.1 and 4.2.2) and, in accordance with its significance, it is consistent with Barbara's love story, and Ophelia's too.

Following Ophelia's recovery and after having learned of Eric's bad reputation, Aoudra decides to explain to her daughter the nature of men and how a libertine, 'under the pretence of love for his victim, sacrifices her innocence, blasts her good name, betrays her to shame and misery, and then leaves her to ruin—to utter perdition' (*RE*, p. 246). Aoudra is worried about the dangers Ophelia would soon face as a teenage girl at court without womanly guidance—indeed, she dies not long after talking to her daughter. The reader can then derive that, according to Cowden Clarke's views that transfer a fundamental role in a daughter's life from father to mother, the lack of such a '[d]ivine protection' (*RE*, p. 219) has a remarkable yet negative impact on Ophelia. Therefore, Aoudra's early passing might have made Ophelia more vulnerable and prone to madness, among other factors (i.e. Hamlet's rejection of Ophelia's feelings and Polonius' death).

Eric is not the only libertine in the collection, there are, for example, the Marquis of Montferrat in "Portia; the Heiress of Belmont" and Chevalier Dorfaux in "Olivia; the Lady of Illyria." In the first novella, the Marquis is introduced as a suitor to Portia by her father Guido. On one hand, the father is delighted by the Marquis and his breeding, while on the other, Portia and her maid Nerissa are not very impressed. It is precisely Nerissa who notifies Bellario about the Marquis' financial interest in marrying Portia since 'the princely fortune which [he] inherited from his worthy father, is speedily dwindling' (*HB*, p. 65-66). Consequently, Bellario decides to investigate the Marquis and assures Guido that 'the Marquis is a notorious and confirmed gambler, and an unscrupulous libertine' (*HB*, p. 68). Not long after, Guido discovers the Marquis harassing and detaining Nerissa against her will, confirming his libertine inclinations. In the second novella, Chevalier Dorfaux is brought to Casa Benucci—Olivia's family mansion—by Olivia's uncle, Toby. After a horse-riding accident, Dorfaux starts his plan to seduce Astrella, the protagonist's adopted sister, who falls for it and the two get married, in spite of Astrella's family's dislike for her

future husband. The marriage is an unhappy one: Dorfaux disrespects his new wife by spending his nights out, in the company of different women, and leaving Astrella at home alone. Furthermore, scandals about his debts reach Astrella's adoptive family. Just like Ophelia, Jutha and Thyra, Astrella dies, too. There is a third example which, however, displays a reformed libertine: it is the case of Marquis Fontana from "Viola; the Twin." The two meet in a brothel and the Marquis wrongly, but justifiably, believes Viola to be a courtesan and he proceeds to come on to the girl quite forcefully. After being challenged by Sebastian, Viola's twin brother, the Marquis repents and confesses that he has fallen in love with Viola and would like to officially court her. Among these examples of libertines, only one redeems himself by taking the rightful path of courting, even if he is later rejected. The other three—Eric, the Marquis of Montferrat, and Chevalier Dorfaux—are all runaways. Cowden Clarke goes against her time's social beliefs and moral practices which fully blame the woman. She calls these men "libertines" and she warns the girls reading her collection not to fall into their traps, just like Aoudra does with Ophelia.

Aoudra's alarm, as we will see in Chapter 4.2, also concerns people like Hamlet. The relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia is left ambiguous in the play. The first information the reader can learn from the play is included in the first scene of the third act and it concerns Ophelia's wish to return the gifts the prince has given her. Hamlet, however, denies the existence of such gifts. He even repudiates her love: 'You should not have believed me. […] I loved you not' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.119). There is, therefore, an inconsistency since the two youths provide very different versions of their relationship and the audience is hesitant about whom to believe. Cowden Clarke offers a possibility to fill the gaps in their story. She writes of Hamlet showing a 'growing preference for [Ophelia]' and

> [h]is kindness and sympathy were enlisted in her behalf; his refined taste was attracted by her maiden beauty; his delicacy of feeling taught him to delight in her innocence, her modesty, her retiring diffidence; his masculine intellect found repose in the contemplation of her artless mind, her untaught simplicity, her ingenuous character; his manly soul dwelt with a kind of serene rapture on the sweet feminine softness of her nature. (*RE*, p. 253)

Another instance that could shed light on this ambiguous relationship is the lewd ditty about St. Valentine's Day, which Cowden Clarke retrieves from the play. In the tale, the song appears at the opening when Botilda, who has the habit of singing debauched songs to the little girl, sings the St. Valentine's Day song. On that occasion, the nurse is rebuked but she is convinced that Ophelia will not remember the improper nursery rhymes. The countrywoman, however, will be proven wrong. The song contains verses like: 'Let in the maid that out a maid / Never departed more' (*Hamlet*, 4.5.54-55); it implies the loss of virginity and Cowden Clarke might have chosen this song because there is a chance that Ophelia is speaking from experience, and she is retelling what happened between her and Hamlet (Hamilton, 2003, p. 89). The lyrics insinuate the 'internalization of Hamlet's accusations; his lewd treatment of her; […] the pain and humiliation caused by her love […] and her sexual feelings for Hamlet who, like the young man in her song, has abandoned her' (Smith, 2008, p. 99). Having her feelings denied by her lover might have produced unimaginable consequences on an already fragile mind like Ophelia's, leading to her death. Smith argues that Ophelia's 'suicide is not crazy. It is the outcome of a neglected, fearful psyche confronted by impossible demands and unbearable emotional trauma' (2008, p. 108).

As was previously noted, according to Gertrude's account, a branch broke under Ophelia's weight, thus the queen's report would suggest an accidental death. However, it is widely believed that Ophelia committed suicide because she 'did nothing to save herself' (Smith, 2008, p. 106), instead 'she chanted snatches of old lauds' (*Hamlet*, 4.7.177) and let her garments get heavy with water. Moreover, in the play, two gravediggers (Act 5, Scene 1) speculate on Ophelia's ambiguous death and debate her Christian burial. In the same scene, the priest claims that '[h]er death was doubtful' and that is why '[s]he should in ground unsanctified be lodg'd' (*Hamlet*, 5.1.225, 227), she cannot, then, be buried in consecrated soil. In the novella too, the unknown figure Ophelia sees in her dream—which, as we said, is Ophelia herself—is 'commanded by […] a higher power' and 'moved on, impelled towards the water' (*RE*, p. 249), so there are no broken branches in her visions of the future. Again, in the novella, there is a reference to drowning in one of Jutha's stories, which tells about the sailors dying at sea. Listening to Jutha, Ophelia would feel 'awe […] at the

thought of a watery death – of the whelming billows, of the down-sinking struggle, of the stifled breath, of the stopped sight and hearing – of the heart-despair of those poor drowning souls' (*RE*, p. 195).

There is another song that appears in the tale as another reprise from the play: it is *For Bonny Sweet Robin is All My Joy*. Morris (1958, p. 601) argues that the song has the same significance as the bawdier and more straightforward St. Valentine's Day song. The reader might be led to think that the song concerns Ophelia's recent loss of her father, a possibility which is corroborated by the repeated line 'He is dead and gone' (*Hamlet*, 4.5.30). However, Morris (1958, p. 601) proposes that the crucial reason behind Ophelia's madness is her loss of Hamlet, highlighting that love-madness was not considered a strange or an uncommon illness in the sixteenth century; Polonius, for instance, repeatedly blames Hamlet's madness on Ophelia's rejection. So, one could argue why the same would not be possible for Ophelia, after Hamlet's rejection. 'The Elizabethans […] would have been prepared to accept Ophelia as a girl suffering from the effects of love, erotic melancholy (*erotomania*)'[12] because the malady was believed to be common (Camden, 1964, p. 254; Showalter, 1986, p. 81). The obscene element characterising the song stands in the fact that the noun "Robin" was colloquially used to indicate the penis (Morris, 1958, p. 601), and the phallic association permeates the plant world as well. "Robin" was also the popular name used for long purples—one of the flowers Ophelia used for her wreaths—which are recognised with *orchis mascula* or *arum maculatum*, the latter of which is also known as *wake-robyn* and was believed to be an aphrodisiac (Morris, 1958, p. 602). What Morris tries to demonstrate is Ophelia's fixation with sex (1958, p. 603), which comes to the surface because of her insanity, and how the loss of Hamlet might have produced more serious repercussions on her psyche than her father's death.

[12] For a more detailed history on "erotomania," see the article "Erotomania: a conceptual history" by G. E. Berrios and N. Kennedy (2002). The authors explain that, until the seventeenth century, the prevalent concept of "erotomania" was interpreted as a 'general disease caused by unrequited love' (p. 381, 384). To our knowledge, there is no certain evidence of the correlation between Ophelia's characterisation and the concept of erotomania. However, we could argue that, since this specific notion was the prevailing one during Shakespeare's time, the Bard might have decided to create Ophelia and her love-induced madness based on this interpretation.

It is Jutha who sings this song to Ophelia during her childhood. It is also Jutha who teaches Ophelia about plants and flowers during their walks in the forest, during which they find willow trees; flowers such as pansies, columbines, violets and daisies; and herbs like rosemary, fennel and rue. All these plants are mentioned by Ophelia at the peak of her madness in the play. In her speech, she appears to be knowledgeable about their meanings, so much so that she explains them to the other characters in the scene:

> OPHELIA There's rosemary, that's for remembrance –
> pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that's
> for thoughts.
> LAERTES A document in madness: thoughts and
> remembrance fitted.
> OPHELIA There's fennel for you, and columbines.
> There's rue for you. And here's some for me. We may
> call it herb of grace a Sundays. You must wear your
> rue with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you
> some violets, but they withered all when my father
> died. (*Hamlet*, 4.5.173-183)

Rosemary and pansies are connected to remembrance and thoughts which are likely to be directed to Polonius, killed in the previous act. She might be talking to Laertes considering that they both lost their father and he is the character speaking next. Then, there are rue, used 'to sprinkle holy water at High Mass on Sundays,' and fennel, which is a symbol of sorrow (Dwyer, 2012, p. 6).[13] Violets 'have been associated with death, especially with the death of the young' (Grieve, 1998, p. 835; cfr. Dwyer, 2012, p. 6). Such a flower fits the situation—Polonius has just died—and has a sort of ominous significance since Ophelia will die not long after this speech. In Elizabethan England, these plants were also used and known as 'abortifacients and

[13] See Grieve, M., (1998). *A modern herbal: the medicinal, culinary, cosmetic and economic properties, cultivation and folklore of herbs, grasses, fungi, shrubs and trees with all their modern scientific uses*. London: Tiger Books International.

emmenagogues' (Newman, 1979, p. 228). Rue, in addition to its abortive properties, was also known to help suppress desire (Newman, 1979, p. 231); Ophelia keeps some for herself and gives it to someone else, possibly to Gertrude or Claudius. Delivering rue to the monarchs may allude to their sexual impropriety in marrying not long after King Hamlet's death.

In fact, Cowden Clarke provides a couple of interludes focused on Claudius and Gertrude, hinting at the possible circumstances leading to their marriage in the play. From the novella, we learn that Claudius bears a 'burning passion' (*RE*, p. 240) for Gertrude and, apparently, the king's wife is aware of the interest she inspires and enjoys it to a certain extent. Claudius' suit is persistent and '[a] veriest trifle, such as this, will suffice to sway the conduct of a weak-souled woman' (*RE*, p. 241). Not only does Cowden Clarke heavily imply Gertrude's willingness to marry Claudius after the king's death, but she also hints at the fact that the queen is of loose morals and should not be an example to follow. Even Ophelia's mother warns her daughter about Claudius as a man to be cautious of, describing him as 'a licentious unscrupulous man' (*RE*, p. 251). These two characters appear again at the end of the novella, and the finale suggests to the reader an ongoing affair between the queen and the king's brother, well before the monarch's death.

At the same time, the action of keeping some rue for herself may suggest two possibilities: a pregnancy, if we decide to consider rue for its abortive characteristics, or 'a clue to part of Ophelia's malady: sexual frustration' (Morris, 1958, p. 603). Morris (1958, p. 601) highlights that Ophelia catches Hamlet's dirty jokes and 'goes insane […] because she is frustrated in her love for Hamlet and its physical fulfillment.' The abortive attributes of these plants can possibly be linked to both Jutha and Ophelia. In the novella, Jutha gets pregnant and she dies. The dynamics of the situation are left unclear because the reader sees it all through the focalisation of Ophelia, who is still a little girl. One can wonder if Jutha might have used herbs to provoke an abortion, given that she was abandoned by the father of her child. Ophelia's case is, instead, ambiguous. The relationship between her and Hamlet is unclear and the question of whether Ophelia remained chaste or had sexual intercourse with Hamlet is left unanswered. However, there might be a chance that Ophelia got pregnant and her pregnancy 'may have been the cause of her suicide'

(Patrick, 1952, p. 9), if one decides to interpret her death as such. Such a doubt emerges because her character was often described as 'unchaste' and 'erotic' in works both before and after Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Patrick, 1952, p. 9). If Ophelia actually got pregnant, the decision to keep some rue to herself in the aforementioned scene would assume a more distinct connotation.

Among the tales examined in this dissertation, "Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore" could be considered the epitome of a cautionary tale (Tosi, 2014, p. 72). The moral teachings are delivered plainly thanks to the figure of Aoudra who, together with Cowden Clarke and the Victorian mothers, clarifies and describes the eventual dangers faced by a young girl entering society. The fact that these lessons are so explicit makes the novella more approachable in terms of understanding, and Cowden Clarke might have had the hope that the girls reading her tale learned their lessons, unlike Ophelia who seems to commit the same mistakes as her doubles (Tosi, 2014, p. 72).

3.3 "Juliet; the White Dove of Verona"

The early paragraphs of the tale describe the first moments after Juliet's birth on Lammas-eve;[14] a detail that is also disclosed in *Romeo and Juliet*. In the play, Juliet's fourteenth birthday is approaching, and the Nurse brings up the date in a conversation with Lady Capulet. The imagery at the start of the tale, however, anticipates the girl's destiny in the play: the celebratory atmosphere is accompanied by an impending storm which gives the reader a sense of nearing doom. The first drops of rain are related by the narrator as the 'Nature's tears for fate decreed'—which intensify the catastrophic aura—for an 'ill-starred pair of Italian lovers' (which recalls the more famous Shakespearean form of "star-crossed lovers") and

[14] The day before Lammas. See *Brewer's dictionary of phrase & fable* (1999, p. 672): '1 August, […] the day on which, in Anglo-Saxon times, the first fruits were offered. Formerly, bread for the Lammas Day Eucharist was made from the new corn of the harvest. The name derives from Old English *hlāfmæsse*, "loaf mass".' See also Morris (2013), "Juliet's birthday: Shakespeare and Lammas-tide". In: https://theshakespeareblog.com/2013/07/juliets-birthday-shakespeare-and-lammas-tide/: 'At Lammas-tide the earliest corn to ripen was made into specially consecrated loaves, a festival celebrating the beginning of harvest. These associations with youth, plenty and ripening grain were also appropriate for Juliet who's at "a pretty age".'

‘their early grave’ (*WDV*, p. 348). The narrator essentially encapsulates the plot of the play in this brief scene: it evokes the two protagonists, Romeo and Juliet, through the image of two white doves kissing, which soon enough are struck by a bolt of thunder. The looming fate awaiting Juliet and her lover is linked by Cowden Clarke to the heroine’s birth.

In the play’s initial conversation between the Nurse and Lady Capulet (Act 1 Scene 3), the former gives a brief recollection of Juliet’s childhood. The memories shared by the Nurse in the play become the starting point for Cowden Clarke’s amplification of Juliet’s infancy. From the Shakespearean work, the audience knows that eleven years before the events of the play, Juliet lived in a farmhouse together with the Nurse, her husband, and their daughter Susan, while Lord and Lady Capulet were in Mantua. In the novella, the narrator provides an expanded version of such events with more detailed descriptions and dialogues. The Nurse in the play, for example, does not recall the reason for the Capulets’ absence, yet the tale provides an explanation: the narrator lets the reader know that Juliet’s parents were away to assist Lord Capulet’s friend in his illness. Moreover, the Nurse remembers that, on a fateful day, Juliet is finally weaned, but an earthquake takes place and both the Nurse’s husband and daughter die in the accident. After these events, the Nurse is left alone and, in order to thank her for saving Juliet’s life, the Capulets hire her to take care of their daughter in Verona. The presence of the earthquake helps critics to locate the play in an almost exact historical moment. It could be a literary invention, yet some critics believe that Shakespeare made a specific allusion to a real event, identifying the natural disaster with the English earthquake in 1580. Therefore, considering the eleven years mentioned by the Nurse, they date the writing of the play to 1591 (Thomas, 1949, p. 417). However, another earthquake was recorded in 1585 at Mottingham in Kent, on the 4th of August—just four days after Juliet’s birthday and the eleven-year range would fit with the notion that *Romeo and Juliet* was written around 1596, the period the majority of Shakespearean scholars believe to be the right one (Weis, 2012, pp. 36, 37; Thomas, 1949, pp. 418, 419).

The novella suggests an analogy between Juliet and doves. When the Nurse weans Juliet, she happens to do it under her dove house which prompts the husband to compare little Juliet to one of those birds inhabiting it. He says that, in the young

girl, 'there's a deal o' pouting, and ruffling, […] but it's all love' (*WDV*, p. 376). The dove is a widely known symbol of peace, freedom, and love: all these characteristics can also be ascribed to Juliet. Thus, this might be the reason why Cowden Clarke chose precisely this bird and decided to use it in the title of the tale dedicated to this heroine. The other instance can be found at the beginning of the novella, as we have seen before.

In the play, as far as Juliet is concerned, her juxtaposition with birds is reinforced by the fact that women are often associated with these animals in the general imagery (Brown, 1996, p. 336). Juliet is called 'a snowy dove' (*RJ*, 1.5.48)—it is another instance of her connection to doves—and a 'ladybird' (*RJ*, 1.3.4). Her parents, too, compare Juliet to a bird; it is, however, a bird in a cage (Brown, 1996, p. 337). Lady Capulet says that Juliet is 'mew'd up to her heaviness' (*RJ*, 3.4.11) and Lord Capulet calls his daughter a 'wayward girl [who] is so reclaim'd' (*RJ*, 4.2.47).[15]

The association with birds is something related also to Romeo and his relationship with Juliet. Brown (1996, p. 334) proposes an analysis of the falconry imagery included in the play which assigns to Juliet the role of the (male) falconer and to Romeo the position of the (female) falcon, de facto swapping the traditional roles of male and female. By portraying the two protagonists in these terms, Shakespeare suggests that Juliet is not the 'naïve, immature, inexperienced' character that the early criticism of the play deemed her to be (Brown, 1996, p. 333). Juliet's link to domination is further shown when she lewdly tells her lover to '[t]ake all myself' (*RJ*, 2.2.48), yet she is not offering herself, she is actually asking Romeo to renounce his identity, to do 'what a bride customarily does during a wedding ceremony—give up her name and take her husband as her new self' (Brown, 1996, p. 340). Romeo 'is willing to give up both his first and last name' (Brown, 1996, p. 341) so he declares that he won't be 'neither, fair maid, if either thee dislike' (*RJ*, 2.2.61), meaning Romeo and a Montague. Finally, what confirms the protagonists' unbalanced relationship is Prince Escalus' last words in the play: '[f]or never was a story of more woe / Than this of Juliet and *her* Romeo' (*RJ*, 5.3.310; italics mine). Usually, in mentioning husband and wife, the man's name would come first, yet

[15] Brown (1996, pp. 336, 337) explains that the "mews" are 'the housing or confining of hawks' while the verb "to reclaim" is a 'falconry terminology for a hawk's obedient return to its master after a hunt.'

'Juliet has usurped this role, and Romeo becomes […] an extension of her and a possession, similar to the situation of a woman in marriage' (Brown, 1996, p. 353).

After the majority of the novella has been dedicated to Juliet's parents, and to her mother in particular, the end finally focuses on the Shakespearean heroine. Juliet 'has been thrown almost wholly on her resources for the development of her ideas' (*WDV*, p. 443). It is as if the whole educational and moralistic phase of the novella has been accomplished by Angelica's story (Tosi, 2014, p. 70), so much so that there is not anything else to say about Juliet and she is acknowledged only at the end of the tale. The relationship with her father and mother is said to have become colder and, as a result, little Juliet spends most of her time with the Nurse, who becomes her life companion. Accordingly, Juliet's education evolves inadequately because the traits she inherits from her parents—a 'susceptible disposition from her father' and a 'sensitive, passionate temperament' from her mother (*WDV*, p. 444)—prevent her from developing her intellect and reason (Tosi, 2014, p. 70). Angelica is a jealous and distrustful wife, she is cold and stoic, and she also displays a vengeful spirit (these characteristics will be later explored in Chapter 4.2.1). In contrast, such features do not belong to Juliet's persona, but she does possess a fiery personality in the play. Let us provide an example of her nature: '[s]he falls in love with Romeo at first sight, and she even dares to gainsay her father's orders to his face' (Draper, 1939, p. 26).

The element that, instead, joins Angelica and Juliet is an early marriage. The young Angelica is promised as a wife to an older friend of her father, Lord Capulet, like her daughter is promised to Count Paris in the play. What further links mother and daughter is the age at which they become wives: Angelica is a 'mere child' (*WDV*, p. 354) according to Lord Capulet's words, and Juliet is not even fourteen. The similar age range is again confirmed by what Lady Capulet says to Juliet in the play: 'I was your mother, much upon these years / That you are a maid' (*RJ*, 1.4.72-73). In Elizabethan performances of *Romeo and Juliet*, the female protagonist's extremely young age would have been shocking to the audience because the thirteen-year-old Juliet would still have been considered a child since, according to the time's standards of physical maturity, girls were considered fully grown at 14-15 years of age (Franson, 1996, pp. 245, 246). Youth is a recurring theme in Cowden Clarke's

work since Lord Capulet is frequently associated with much younger girls throughout the tale, and this issue touches upon Lady Capulet's jealous tendencies. Angelica herself is the first much younger female figure related to Lord Capulet; then, there are Giacinta and Leonilda (see Chapter 4.2.2).

Although it is not one of the central arguments of the tale as it is in the play, the rivalry between the Montagues and the Capulets is confronted in Cowden Clarke's tale too. At the beginning of the tale, Lord Capulet decides to get married and become a father because his decision is quickened and 'confirmed by the advent of an heir to another noble Veronese house, which had always rivalled his own' (*WDV*, p. 350). This heir is no other than Romeo of the house of the Montagues.

Cowden Clarke brings to the surface the antagonism between the two families mostly when Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, enters the narrative. The deep hatred he harbours for the Montagues is evident both in the novella and the play. In the latter, he declares he hates 'hell, all Montagues, and thee'[16] (*RJ*, 1.1.70) and calls Romeo a 'foe' and a 'villain' (*RJ*, 1.5.61, 62). Similarly, in the novella, even if he is just a little more than an adolescent, he does not lose the chance to show his disdain for 'these born-foes of ours' (*WDV*, p. 395). In contrast, the play's Juliet refers to Romeo with appellatives such as 'fair Montague' and '[s]weet Montague' (*RJ*, 2.2.98, 137) and, in the novella, it is said that she believes the Montagues to be enemies just because her family thinks so, 'but she had not one spark of genuine hatred' for them (*WDV*, 451).

The young boy Tybalt is described as 'the most rash and violent in his demonstrations of insolence and stubbornness' (*WDV*, p. 408), characteristics that are traceable in his older self in the play in the way he talks and acts. Cowden Clarke, like Shakespeare, presents Tybalt and Romeo as foils for each other. In the novella, the latter is said to have the 'judgement and grace of a finished gentleman' (*WDV*, p. 408); and a very similar description is also given by Lord Capulet in the play: '[h]e bears him like a portly gentleman; / And, to say truth, Verona brags of him, / To be a virtuous and well-govern'd youth' (*RJ*, 1.5.66-68). Coincidentally, he is singing Romeo's praises to Tybalt. However, Romeo, too, shows a 'hot disposition' (Draper,

[16] The pronoun "thee" indicate Benvolio, cousin of Romeo and part of the house of the Montagues.

1939, p. 28). From the play, we can gather that Romeo has an impetuous and impulsive personality and Rosaline's account to Juliet confirms it in the novella. What distances him from Tybalt is the fact that he is non-violent at the core, he is never driven by bloodshed, and his hate and aggression are not without reason.

Romeo appears towards the end of the novella as if to introduce him briefly before approaching the play. He is part of Rosaline's account to Juliet, the girl talks about 'a young lord who persecutes [her] with his attentions' (*WDV*, p. 450) and, surely enough, the boy is Romeo. Through Rosaline's description, we gather information about him, as Romeo is outlined as a very passionate and wistful lover. Juliet, listening to her cousin's account, wonders how she would react 'were she to discover that she had inspired such a passion' and the idea 'startled her' (*WDV*, p. 451). Cowden Clarke humours the reader with this passage because, in the play, Juliet will understand what loving someone with intense passion means and the man 'she felt a strange kind of pity and sympathy for' (*WDV*, p. 451) is indeed her future lover Romeo.

3.4 Desdemona, Ophelia, and Juliet: conclusions

In the introductory pages to Chapter 3, we highlighted the common elements which join all the novellas in Cowden Clarke's collection, for example, the role of the narrator. After focusing on these aspects, we were able to move to the analysis of "Desdemona; the Magnifico's Child," "Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore," and "Juliet; the White Dove of Verona" which are the main objects of this dissertation. This final section functions as a summary of the information contained in the previous sub-chapters, highlighting the shared features and the recurring themes that join the three heroines, while also acknowledging the differences among them and their stories.

In Desdemona's and Juliet's novellas, Cowden Clarke provides the "behind the scenes" of the heroines' parents' relationships. In doing so, she allows the reader to identify parallelisms and dissimilarities between the parents and the protagonists of the Shakespearean plays. In contrast, the author does not explore the union between Ophelia's parents and their past is never mentioned.

Love and marriage are naturally part of the two literary works, Shakespeare's plays and Cowden Clarke's tales. Interestingly so, clandestine relationships are a

recurring theme in both plays and novellas, as they appear a consistent number of times. In the plays, both Othello and Desdemona, and Romeo and Juliet have a secret marriage, while in *Hamlet*, the relationship between Ophelia and Hamlet is ambiguous, so much so that Cowden Clarke herself speculates about it. In "Desdemona; the Magnifico's Child," Cowden Clarke has the heroine's parents replicate their daughter's behaviour: Brabantio and Erminia had a secret courtship and a secret marriage. Cowden Clarke also hints at a hidden passion between Queen Gertrude and Claudius in her tale "Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore," which peaks with their marriage in *Hamlet*.

Furthermore, the novellas display instances of arranged marriages that can evolve into marriages of love or produce serious consequences. It is the case of "Juliet; the White Dove of Verona" and *Romeo and Juliet*. Mother and daughter meet the same destiny: in the novella, Egidio, Angelica's father, sets his daughter's marriage to a friend of his, Lord Capulet; and Lord Capulet himself does the same to Juliet when he decides that she is to marry Count Paris. In Angelica's case, her marriage to Lord Capulet becomes a marriage of love; her daughter, however, is not as lucky. Rather than marry Count Paris, she goes against her family and marries her true love, Romeo, but she also meets her death.

Family relations, which will be the subject of the next chapter, play important roles in Shakespeare's and Cowden Clarke's works.

The three fathers—Brabantio, Polonius, and Lord Capulet—appear all throughout the novellas and the plays, or, at least, they are part of the majority of them (in the case of Brabantio and Polonius, they die at some stage of the play). In one way or another, these fathers are against their daughters' love interests, consciously or unconsciously. For instance, in the novella, Othello is praised by his future father-in-law, whereas, in the play, Brabantio completely changes his mind about the general. Hamlet is only mentioned in the novella, but in the play, Polonius alerts Ophelia against the prince; and finally, Lord Capulet does not despise Romeo himself (if anything, he praises him) but the boy belongs to the Capulets' mortal enemy, the Montagues.

If fathers occupy a significant part of the narrative, then mothers, among the tales considered, are absent. In particular, apart from Juliet's mother who appears in the

Shakespearean work, both Desdemona and Ophelia experience the loss of theirs during the tales. The roles of Angelica, Erminia and Aoudra as mothers are varied. First, Angelica is alive and well, yet is not a supportive presence for Juliet, neither in the novella nor the play. Then, there is Erminia who, albeit a kind and generous mother, does not impart the right teachings to Desdemona. Finally, Aoudra advises and warns Ophelia against the dangers of society and, therefore, she is the only mother who leaves her daughter with an important lesson.

In all three novellas, the mothers are placed side by side with nurses. The girls are put in the care of a wet nurse for different reasons and for different periods of time. Juliet and Ophelia go to live in the countryside because of their parents' affairs. Juliet is left with the Nurse whom the reader knows from the play, while Ophelia lives with Botilda and Jutha. Lastly, Desdemona spends most of her time with Erminia, but they are accompanied by Marianna first, and then by her daughter Barbara.

Following the young heroines' childhood, the protagonists of the novellas do not survive to see the end of their plays. Indeed, the novellas taken into account are all prequels to tragedies, for their narratives end with the starting of the plays. Thus, the girls' stories carry out as intended by Shakespeare and end with their deaths: Desdemona is murdered by Othello, Juliet stabs herself, and Ophelia, as we have seen, dies in uncertain circumstances.

Chapter 4 – The heroines' relationships with their fathers, mothers, and doubles

The chapter will study in more detail the relationships existing between the heroines and other characters. In particular, in the first half, we will delve into the relationship between Shakespeare's heroines and their fathers which will be analysed considering both the tales of the collection and the plays. However, since the father/daughter relationships in the novellas are not largely explored, the analysis mainly concerns the plays with some references to the novellas. In the second half, instead, the subject will be more focused on the world of the novellas, given that the study will be centred on mothers and the heroines' doubles, both categories are, for the most part, characters invented by Cowden Clarke.

4.1 Fathers and daughters

Shakespeare explores the relationship between fathers and daughters which he includes in twenty-one of his plays (cfr. Dreher, 1986, p. 1; Boose, 1982, p. 325). Differently, Cowden Clarke puts the female characters at the centre, delving into the mother/daughter bond which, in her opinion, influences and shapes the daughter's life (see Chapter 2.2.2).

The relationships between fathers and daughters the Bard displays are similar in one characteristic: they are unbalanced and hierarchic (Chedgzoy, 2007, p. 20). The father is generally 'a middle-aged to old man, usually a widower' who 'has an adolescent daughter just emerging into young womanhood' (Hamilton, 2003, p. 6). Shakespeare portrays a challenging moment in the life of both the father and the daughter: the former is 'reluctant to release his daughter into adulthood and face his own decline,' while the latter 'stands at the threshold of adult commitment in marriage' (Dreher, 1986, p. 1). This difficult transitioning moment inevitably brings a conflict, and the daughter must choose between 'past and future, childhood and adulthood, father and husband' (Dreher, 1986, p. 13). In most of these Shakespearean plays, the father 'wants […] to retain, withhold, lock up, and possess his daughter,' knowingly or not (Boose, 1982, p. 331). One might not be surprised that the fathers

‘feel deserted’ and respond to their daughter’s growth ‘with anger and resentment, hurt and frustration’ (Dreher, 1986, p. 41).

Shakespeare’s plays and Cowden Clarke’s novellas metaphorically meet as primary works and prequels at this moment: the heroine is slowly becoming a woman and must make choices accordingly. The novellas end at the point in which ‘[t]he plays take up the stories when the women are on the verge of leaving that insulated circle’ (Hamilton, 2003, p. 6), meaning the family home. The end of the novella corresponds to the beginning of the play—this is how Cowden Clarke conceived her tales—so there is a continuum between the two works. The passage between novellas and plays coincides with the change from childhood to adulthood, and the heroines, just like the girls reading the collection, enter adolescence and ‘service or courtship might take them into a different household’ (Chedgzoy, 2007, p. 23). This movement, however, had girls moving between ‘a series of dependent, submissive positions as daughters, servants and wives, in a sequence of patriarchal households’ (Chedgzoy, 2007, p. 37). As Dreher underlines a ‘[w]oman’s life was a continuous lesson in submission’ (1986, p. 16): she is a good and obedient daughter to her father, to then become a good and obedient wife to her husband.

Dreher classifies all Shakespearean fathers into four categories which differ on the basis of their response to their daughters’ adult relationships. This separation, albeit focused on the fathers in the plays, helps us shed light on certain behaviours in the context of the novellas, since in Cowden Clarke’s work, fathers are ‘absent, neglectful, or inadequate’ (Barber, 2013, p. 820). Indeed, if we focus on the three tales considered in this dissertation, the fathers barely appear throughout the story or have minimum interactions with their daughters.

The first group Dreher proposes is that of the ‘reactionary fathers’ who deny their daughters’ growth and do not acknowledge their womanhood; the second category is the ‘mercenary fathers’ who regard their daughters as personal property; the third one is the ‘egocentric fathers’ who are against their children’s departure because they see them as part of themselves; and finally, the ‘jealous fathers’ who want their daughters’ love for themselves (Dreher, 1986, pp. 43, 44). The fathers in the works taken into consideration belong to three groups out of four: the reactionary fathers, the mercenary fathers, and the jealous fathers.

We will now delve into the characteristics of each group. The reactionary father does not accept his daughter's status as a young woman because he 'cling[s] […] to [his] old power and authority' (Dreher, 1986, p. 44). This kind of father is accustomed to his child's obedience and submissiveness; and to the fact that his daughter's affection has been devoted to him only, indirectly reinforcing his male power (Dreher, 1986, p. 44). All of a sudden, the dutiful daughter becomes, in her father's perception, a 'naughty, disobedient [child]' and this provokes anger, fear, and an injured pride (Dreher, 1986, p. 44). The mercenary fathers perceive their daughters as 'valuable possessions' and ignore their dignity as 'individuals' (Dreher, 1986, p. 48). They handle their children as if they were 'objects to be sold, traded, or manipulated' (Dreher, 1986, p. 54). The third and final group is the one of the jealous fathers. The relationship between parent and child becomes more complicated with the springing of the daughters' sexuality (Dreher, 1986, p. 56). Until puberty, the daughters have been 'sweet and docile young girls' yet '[w]ith the dawn of sexuality, […] the fathers' own incestuous feelings for their daughters' make an appearance (Dreher, 1986, p. 56).

The first father we will study is Brabantio, who Dreher includes in all the categories identified. For example, Brabantio as a mercenary father is portrayed by an epithet he uses for Desdemona and appears both in the play and the tale: he calls her 'jewel' (*Oth*, 1.3.196; *MC*, p. 362; Dreher, 1986, p. 62). Furthermore, at the beginning of the play, he laments having been robbed when Iago wakes him up, screaming for thieves (Dreher, 1986, p. 62). The status of Desdemona as a commodity is also reinforced by her husband Othello who defines her as a 'perfect chrysolite' (*Oth*, 5.2.144; Dreher, 1986, p. 62). Brabantio's objectification of Desdemona reaches its peak in the play when he charges her with licentiousness and decides to disown her 'once she plays the role of the subject who chooses and desires' (Hamamra, 2022, p. 26) because he does not need her anymore. Desdemona loses her value because she opposes her father, which brings us to Brabantio being a reactionary father.

In the play, Brabantio is incredulous at Desdemona's elopement because she has always been an obedient daughter, a 'maiden never bold' (*Oth*, 1.3.95). He has always doted on her because '[h]e was fond of his daughter for her attention and

submission to him' (*MC*, p. 336). His astonishment, then, comes from the fact that he does not know his daughter thoroughly (Dreher, 1986, p. 45). In the play, Brabantio sees Desdemona through the lenses of his expectations; his idea, however, is distorted and does not realistically represent his daughter. Similarly, the Brabantio in the novella makes the same misjudgement. The opinion he displays in both literary works differs from the views other characters have about Desdemona, both in the novella and the play. For example, in the novella, Gratiano comprehends that Brabantio's authoritarian personality is the reason behind Desdemona's behaviour: '[i]t was the origin of her silent acquiescence in whatever her father advanced' (*MC*, p. 363). However, her uncle also knows she is not entirely the obedient daughter Brabantio believes her to be. He met her on her expeditions to the poorer parts of Venice to help people, an act that could jeopardise her reputation. As in the play, Othello's consideration too diverges from Desdemona's father's account. In his speech at the beginning of the play, Othello recounts his courtship of Desdemona and, according to her new husband, Desdemona has 'a young soul yearning for adventure' and 'adult commitment' but her father is blind to all of it (Dreher, 1986, pp. 45, 46).

Desdemona knows what she wants: she secretly helps the people in need—just like her mother did—she chooses a husband for herself, one that her father would never have chosen for her, and she is brave enough to protect it in front of the Senate. In the play, when Brabantio asks his daughter where her loyalties lie, his question marks him as a reactionary father, attached to a patriarchal order; but Desdemona's answer—that she should show devotion to her husband from now on—demonstrates her defiant nature, completely unknown to her father. Brabantio feels betrayed because Desdemona now appears so unalike 'his pet, a sweet and dutiful girl who has obediently performed the household tasks' (Dreher, 1986, p. 45). The girl opposes her father and, 'feeling abandoned, he abandons her' (Hamilton, 2003, p. 58). All these factors—the elopement, this "new" version of Desdemona, and the husband she chose—naturally bring out the worst reactions of anger and violence from Brabantio.

Similarly, in the first pages of the novella, we find another instance of Brabantio's impetuous feelings. This time, however, it concerns Erminia. Brabantio

is on his way to meet his wife, but he sees her in the company of another man (Gratiano, her brother). He immediately assumes that his wife has been cheating on him and storms into Erminia's chambers '[w]ith one torrent of incoherent reproach and grief' (*MC*, p. 294). He is furious and he leaves hastily without letting Erminia explain the situation. Desdemona's elopement—which he calls a 'treason of the blood' (*Oth*, 1.1.167)—and this episode in the tale are perceived as acts of infidelity by Brabantio to which he responds with intense and fiery reactions. We notice that Brabantio's relationship with his daughter is similar to his relationship with his wife, in the sense that they arouse the same kind of feelings because his authoritativeness is questioned. In both instances, Brabantio shows his possessiveness, jealousy, and carelessness.

Another element that connects mother and daughter in their relationship with Brabantio is the fact that, in his eyes, Erminia and Desdemona share similar characteristics. After Erminia's death in the novella, Brabantio appreciates in his daughter 'all those gentle virtues that distinguished her mother' and 'he took pleasure in her beauty, her accomplishments; he was intensely conscious of her grace and loveliness' (*MC*, p. 336). This description recalls a similar passage in the novella in which, however, Brabantio is focusing on Erminia: 'Brabantio was proud of her; proud of her beauty, […] proud of her grace, her benign aspect, her air of refinement' (*MC*, p. 302-303). In both instances, Brabantio's intense personality is described not long afterwards. In the first instance, it is said that '[h]e was still the same imperious Brabantio; proud, harsh, [and] despotic' (*MC*, p. 336); in the second, the portrayal is not very different: Brabantio is 'capricious and domineering; he indulge[s] his arrogance; he allow[s] himself to use expressions of disdain, to give way to bursts of choler upon trivial occasions, and in short [forgets] to keep that strict guard upon his temper' (*MC*, p. 304).

Finally, Brabantio is considered a jealous father in Dreher's opinion. The not-so-implicit connection between mother and daughter might hint to his belonging to the category. In the play, he comes face to face with '[t]he sudden irrationality of [Desdemona's] behavior' which he finds 'bizarre, aberrant, insane' (Dreher, 1986, p. 56). Since he cannot rationally explain Desdemona's rejection of him in favour of her husband, Brabantio blames it all on witchcraft, which is the only convincing

explanation (Dreher, 1986, p. 57). Nevertheless, in the novella, the figure who best represents the incestuous implications of a jealous father is Gratiano. Even if he is Desdemona's uncle, he can nevertheless be considered a father figure. In the novella, as a matter of fact, it is Brabantio himself who asks Gratiano to 'let [Desdemona] be a child to you, no less than to me; let her find a second father in my brother Gratiano' (*MC*, p. 361). The man left Venice after Desdemona's birth and, once he is back in the city, he sees her again, yet he does not know who she is. He will later recognise her as his niece after seeing her beside Brabantio. The first time he sees her, he is left with a 'restless, inquisitive, irresistible desire to know more about her' (*MC*, p. 344). Even the people around him hint at his fascination for Desdemona. His comrades tease him for having 'the right lover's look' after seeing Desdemona (*MC*, p. 346) and an old man discloses that

> I don't wonder at your admiration; it is shared by us all; young or old, it is just the same; we can none of us resist the charm of her beauty. The young fellows, of course, are all mad for her—it is the privilege of their age to be as insane as they please on the chapter of woman's beauty.
>
> […] but, since you allow yourself to be no longer young, we may cry cousinship in regret, and condole with each other on being beyond the hope of swelling the train of the lady Desdemona's admirers. (*MC*, p. 353-354)

A similar situation occurs in "Portia; the Heiress of Belmont." After her mother's death, Portia is abandoned by her father and, once he returns to Belmont, he builds a new relationship with his daughter. This relationship, however, acquires incestuous undertones:

> His love for this new-found daughter amounted to idolatry; and in the passionate desire he felt to retain her ever in his sight […]. In his craving wish to behold her unceasingly, to enjoy her presence exclusively, he would fain have engrossed her thought as she absorbed his, and he almost jealously beheld her eyes, her words, her attention directed to any other object but himself. (*HB*, p. 58)

The second father we will consider is Lord Capulet. The theme of incest is also tackled, although indirectly, in "Juliet; the White Dove of Verona." Some critics say such a subject can be distinguished in the related play as well (Brown, 2005, p. 100). In the play, the suggestion of incest comes from 'the Capulets' anxiety to marry Juliet off at a very young age' (Brown, 2005, p. 100). In the section focused on Juliet (Chapter 3.3), we mentioned that youth is a recurring theme in Cowden Clarke's novella. Lord Capulet is often associated with much younger women: we start with Angelica (future Lady Capulet), moving to Giacinta and Leonilda. This link is part of a discourse of father/daughter incest where Lady Capulet and the girls stand in a daughterly relation to Lord Capulet, both in terms of age and social connections: they have in common a large age gap with him and the man is friends with all their fathers (Brown, 2005, p. 100). In the novella, the reader, together with Lady Capulet, suspects that Lord Capulet is a cheating husband and that he has intimate relationships with Giacinta and Leonilda. However, in this context, it is not important whether Lady Capulet's suspicions of adultery are true or not—the focus should be on the fact that Lord Capulet seems to be attracted to daughter surrogates (Brown, 2005, p. 100). Lady Capulet indeed suggests that Lord Capulet harbours a 'sick desire' to be in the company of Leonilda who, according to the wife, is 'the secret object of his passion' (*WDV*, p. 378). Above all, the narrative implies that Lord Capulet is destined to be captivated by another young woman in a few years: his daughter Juliet. Suppose we focus on Lord Capulet's persisting association with girls who could be his daughters, and how this link keeps suggesting adultery and sexual interest, Dreher's choice to put him among the jealous fathers finds its explanation.

Like Brabantio, Lord Capulet is part of the mercenary fathers in Dreher's classification (1986, p. 63), an aspect which he displays in the context of Juliet's marriage. Regarding this event, Capulet exhibits two different attitudes: the first, the more careful and hesitant, is short-lived, while the second shows his tyrant-like personality. First, he is reluctant to accept Paris' courtship because his daughter 'hath not seen the change of fourteen years' (*RJ*, 1.2.9). However, in the same conversation, Capulet allows Paris to 'woo [Juliet]' (*RJ*, 1.2.16) because, if Juliet agrees, Capulet will consent to the marriage. Capulet reveals his mercenary attitude

in Act 3 when he imposes the marriage to Juliet 'in a demonstration of his power' and '[h]is daughter becomes his livestock, to dispose of as he wills' (Dreher, 1986, p. 51). The sense of owning Juliet is reinforced by the fact that, in Lord Capulet's view, 'County Paris has all the qualifications—rank, wealth, and appearance' (Hamilton, 2003, p. 19). Marrying a Count, who is also a relative of the prince, would naturally bring the Capulets both economic and social betterment, Juliet is simply a means to a goal. Lord Capulet 'arranges [Juliet's] marriage with Count Paris without ever asking for her consent or opinion' because he believes that Juliet is 'an obedient daughter' (Hamamra, 2022, p. 27). Juliet, however, does not accept her father's decision and Lord Capulet, surely enough, does not welcome Juliet's rejection of his will. He is enraged—'[c]holer and impulsiveness' are key elements of his character (Hamilton, 2003, p. 17)—so much so that he threatens Juliet that if she does not marry Paris, she could '[b]eg! Starve! Die in the streets! / For by [his] soul [he]'ll ne'er acknowledge [her], / Nor what is [his] shall never do [her] good' (*RJ*, 3.5.192-194). This rage marks him as a reactionary father who, when defied by his progeny, goes mad with anger: '[i]n his outrage and wounded pride, he turns from doting father into petty tyrant' (Dreher, 1986, p. 51).

Among the tales, there is one which retraces this very dynamic between parent and child: Monsieur Gerard and Gerard from "Helena; the Physician's Orphan." The father discovers that his son has lately been visiting a girl whom he does not approve of because 'peasant wenches are not women to make wives of' (*PO*, p. 202) and, as a consequence, has arranged a marriage of convenience. Gerard, however, has fallen in love with the 'pretty rustic' Gabrielle (*PO*, p. 202), so his father gets to the point of intimidating him:

> You know that I am a man accustomed to declare my will and to see it accomplished. […] if you don't marry according to my will, I'll strip you of every farthing of allowance, withdraw you from college, ruin your prospects in life, and reduce you to beggary, in short. […] I give you four-and-twenty hours to decide between marriage to please me, and your father's favor; or marriage to please yourself, and beggary,—with outlawry from home for ever, for I'll have no disobedience in my house! (*PO*, p. 203)

The similarities do not only concern the children's disobedience to their fathers, seeing that they choose their own partners, but also the authoritarian and aggressive attitude of the parents. Thus, Gerard and Juliet can be considered defiant children to tyrant fathers.

Lord Capulet's discontent with Juliet appears again in similar instances in the novella and the play. In the novella, he shows displeasure at the birth of a daughter, and this adds to the negative connotations surrounding Juliet's birth (see Chapter 3.3). Lord Capulet is said to be 'a little disappointed, […] yet he consoled himself with an heiress rather than with no descendant at all' (*WDV*, p. 349). As we have seen, such dissatisfaction in his daughter returns in the play after Juliet refuses to marry Count Paris. The theme of almost undesired fatherhood returns: '[t]hat God had lent us but this only child; / But now I see this one is one too much, / And that we have a curse in having her' (*RJ*, 3.5.165-167). Thus, Lord Capulet appears to be unsatisfied with Juliet throughout the two works: in the novella, he laments the birth of a girl since he would have preferred a boy, yet he resolves that a daughter is better than no heir; while, towards the end of the play, he is frustrated anew because of his daughter's defiance going to the extent of cursing his child and wishing to be heirless.

There are other examples of disappointed parents in other novellas of the collection. In these instances, "The Thane's Daughter" and "Katharina and Bianca; the Shrew and the Demure," however, the roles between the parents are reversed: it is the heroine's mother who bemoans the birth of a daughter. In the first example, the Thane of Moray, Lady Macbeth's father, asks his wife: '[y]e would not wish the babe unborn, would ye?' and the dark lady answers: '[a]s well unborn, as born a girl' (*TTD*, p. 102). In the second novella, Claudia—the invented mother of Katharina and Bianca—defines Katharina's birth as 'a sad disappointment' (*SD*, p. 101).

In all these examples, the disappointment comes solely from the sex of the child; it does not matter if the displeasure is externalised by the father or the mother, the birth of a daughter is not necessarily a happy moment. A father's reaction to the birth of a girl may be considered "usual": a girl will not continue the bloodline because she will marry into another family. A mother's frustration is, however, interesting to

note because, on a hypothetical level, she does not have a particular interest in inheritance and bloodlines as much as a father does.[17]

Lastly, Polonius concludes the study on the father/daughter relationships. In Dreher's analysis, he is a reactionary father like the other two, but he does not give in to furious reactions. They are similar, however, in the sense that they are '[u]nwilling to lose their paternal power,' and Polonius' behaviour, in particular, drives Ophelia into docility and meekness (Dreher, 1986, p. 48). In his eyes, his daughter cannot act on her own accord; see Act 1 Scene 3 in which, together with Laertes, Polonius convinces Ophelia to reject Hamlet and Ophelia submissively accepts.

Both parents are not present in the first half of the novella because Polonius is offered an office as ambassador in Paris at the beginning of the tale. When, however, father and daughter finally reunite at court, their relationship develops and the narrator recounts that '[Polonius] would pat her cheek, or pass his hand over her fair young head, and say some fondling words of rejoicing that he now possessed so pretty a living toy at home as his little daughter' (*RE*, p. 221). Cowden Clarke's choice to define Ophelia as a 'living toy' seems deliberate. The author shows how Polonius, since Ophelia's childhood, has seen her as something to control and manipulate. This behaviour puts Polonius among the mercenary fathers.

In the play, there are other instances which highlight Polonius as a selfish and immoral father. He deems Ophelia as a possession, and he declares it to Claudius: 'I have a daughter—have while she is mine' while also bragging about Ophelia's 'duty and obedience' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.106, 107). In addition, he first prohibits Ophelia from spending time with Hamlet because a sexual affair between them 'would reduce her market value' (Dreher, 1986, p. 53). However, when Hamlet shows signs of madness, possibly caused by love melancholy (see Chapter 3.2), a marriage between Hamlet and Ophelia would resolve the problem and 'would put Polonius's grandchildren upon the throne of Denmark' (Dreher, 1986, p. 53), so he plans to spy the two to confirm that Hamlet's madness is caused by Ophelia's rejection.

Although he may appear a loving father, everything he does is driven by greed and reputation. In the play, Polonius spies, devises plans, and instructs his children

[17] See Chapter 4.2.1 for the results of a dissatisfied mother on her child. We will highlight the case of Grouch in "The Thane's Daughter," even if it is not a novella we have dealt with.

according to his will; whereas, in the novella, Polonius is introduced as 'a good-natured man, of a kindly disposition' (*RE*, p. 221), but the more the reader delves into the tale, the more the Polonius from the play is recognisable. It is said that he uses a 'pompous enunciation,' and that '[h]e would talk to his wife in manner of an oration; clearing his voice, and pausing a little, as if to bespeak full attention ere he began' (*RE*, p. 221). Polonius is then painted as having 'a habit of laying artful schemes in conversation' and as 'preferr[ing] contrivance and cunning to the commonplace means of straightforward procedure' (*RE*, p. 222). In the play, we find the passage which may have inspired Cowden Clarke in her characterisation of Polonius: in Act 2 Scene 2, Queen Gertrude reprimands Polonius with '[m]ore matter with less art' and the man swears that he uses 'no art at all' to then start a 15-line monologue (*Hamlet*, 2.2.95, 96).

As a father, Polonius does not trust his children. He sends Reynaldo to Paris to spy on Laertes and even allows him to spread rumours about his son in order to teach him the importance of stature; regarding Ophelia, he does not grant her the freedom to act, and he uses her as a puppet in his schemes. He even scorns her for being a 'green girl' (*Hamlet*, 1.3.101) and believing Hamlet's words and affection. Therefore, Polonius will tell her what to do, otherwise, '[she]'ll tender [him] a fool' (*Hamlet*, 1.3.109). This attitude is recalled in the novella when the father uses his children for social climbing: he wants Laertes to go to Wittenberg (the same university Hamlet attends) and cannot wait to introduce Ophelia to court because she has gained the queen's favour. Dreher states that he 'uses everyone, including his own offspring, to aggrandize himself and increase his power' (1986, p. 52).

In response to their fathers' behaviours, the heroines act accordingly. In Dreher's analysis, Ophelia is a subject of 'fearful domination,' Desdemona becomes a 'love's sweet victim,' but she is also a 'defiant daughter' like Juliet.

Cowden Clarke wrote and presented the novellas as introductions to the plays. The decision to write prequels prompts the reading of the novellas and the plays in succession in order to obtain the keys to understanding the Shakespearean plays. The upcoming depiction of the heroines will result in a brief compendium of the information inferred from the novellas and the plays, with the support of some critical material.

What shines through the plays and the respective novellas is that Ophelia and Desdemona are, in some respect, so imbued with submissiveness and passivity that they ‘fail to become fully adult’ (Dreher, 1986, p. 76). Their entrance into womanhood, which takes place mainly in the plays, is unsuccessful because they ‘are arrested in their emotional growth, clinging to childhood loyalties or traditional role behavior in which women remain childish and submissive’ (Dreher, 1986, p. 13).

Ophelia is widely known for not being a rebellious daughter in any way, she is a ‘docile, eager-to-please young [woman]—classic Good [Girl]’ (Hamilton, 2003, p. 69). In the novella, Polonius’ characterisation is linked to ‘dictatorialness,’ ‘didactic style,’ and ‘authoritative voice’ (*RE*, p. 221); his daughter grows into a ‘tranquil-spirited maiden, unexacting, even-tempered, affectionate’ but also ‘diffident, in her retiring gentleness and modesty’ (*RE*, p. 224), possibly because she is influenced by Polonius. Polonius is ‘her first judge and authority’ by representing social order, and Ophelia learns to be a dutiful daughter (Dreher, 1986, p. 12), a ‘living toy.’ The descriptions included in “Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore” are also valid in the context of *Hamlet*. In addition to Act 1 Scene 3 which is a good example of Ophelia’s submissiveness, there is also an instance displayed in Act 3 Scene 1. Polonius and Claudius hide behind an arras and stage an encounter between Ophelia and Hamlet. The prince asks Ophelia about her father’s whereabouts (he probably knows that he is spying on them), but Ophelia lies, telling him that Polonius is ‘at home’ (*Hamlet*, 3.1.132). With her dishonesty, Ophelia confirms her alliance and obedience to her father, rather than to her lover.

Desdemona is both defiant and submissive, and this description summarises both her role in “The Magnifico’s Child” and *Othello*. She is a defiant daughter because, in the novella, she hides part of her persona from her father both in the context of her liking for Othello and the deeds she performs in the poorer parts of Venice. In the play, Desdemona ‘is by nature unconventional, a sensuous and virtuous woman’ in a society that wants women fragile, and submissive (Dreher, 1986, p. 89). She is assertive in the choice of a husband but ‘in her concept of marriage she again succumbs to the yoke of convention, adopting the traditional role inherited from her mother, a relationship in which the wife becomes her husband’s submissive, obedient subject’ (Dreher, 1986, p. 90). In the novella, the social norm that establishes the

passiveness of the wife is traceable both in the persons of Desdemona and Erminia. Erminia is very modest, and this characteristic prevents her from communicating efficiently with her husband, but 'she continue[s] to lead the kind of existence which seem[s] one of happiness, since it [is] such to Brabantio' (*MC*, p. 304). She is a devoted wife to Brabantio, in the same way Desdemona is to Othello.

In the play, Juliet reveals herself to be a disobedient daughter; she 'choose[s] love over paternal obedience' (Dreher, 1986, p. 97). She 'actively declare[s] [her] own sexual [identity] and desires' (Garber, 1981, p. 131). Even if Juliet was trained in 'submission and obedience' in her childhood—which Cowden Clarke gives the reader a sneak peek of—she 'develops her independence and maturity' thanks to her love for Romeo (Dreher, 1986, p. 100). As a matter of fact, the first time the audience meets Juliet in the play, she is a meek child but she gradually 'grows into a sexually self-knowledgeable lover' (Garber, 1981, p. 23). It is almost as if her feelings for Romeo '[had turned] her almost overnight from a child to a woman' (Dreher, 1986, p. 99).

The relationship between Shakespearean fathers and daughters is neither easy nor smooth. Fathers like the ones we analysed want to—or try to—retain their power as a response to their daughters' growth. As we have seen, they can do so in different ways, or they can combine various behaviours. On their part, the heroines can submit to their fathers' authority or 'break the emotional strings that tie them to childhood, defying paternal authority to assert emotional independence' (Dreher, 1986, p. 5). Some of them are able to achieve adulthood, while others fail in the attempt.

4.2 New characters

This section focuses on the two groups of characters which are almost completely new in Cowden Clarke's novellas: the mothers and the heroines' doubles. The first part will concentrate on the heroines' mothers—Erminia, Aoudra, and Angelica—as individual characters while exploring their relationships with their daughters. The second half will observe the so-called "doubles" of Desdemona, Ophelia, and Juliet and how they connect with the Shakespearean heroines.

4.2.1 The heroines' mothers

Cowden Clarke designs the mothers from scratch; these characters, indeed, are not included in the Shakespearean plays. Lady Capulet, Juliet's mother, is the only exception among the novellas analysed in this dissertation. As a matter of fact, Angelica is alive and well in *Romeo and Juliet*, contrary to the mothers of Desdemona and Ophelia. For this reason, Cowden Clarke introduces Erminia and Aoudra respectively in "Desdemona; the Magnifico's Child" and "Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore," but has them die in the course of the novellas.

Desdemona's mother, Erminia, occupies the centre of the first half of the novella. She and Brabantio secretly got married and subsequently, she got pregnant. From her first scenes in the novella, it is clear that she is a devoted wife and is very much in love with her husband. Brabantio is very pleased with his wife and '[h]e rejoice[s] in displaying her as the magnifico's bride, as the lady of the Venetian nobleman, as the wife of the senator, the grandee, the man of rank, of opulence, of distinction' (*MC*, p. 303). This parade does not belong to Erminia's 'gentle and modest' nature; however, the woman does not mention it to her husband because this ostentation makes Brabantio happy (*MC*, p. 303). She is willing to conceal her feelings and thoughts in order to maintain her husband's satisfaction.

As we have previously analysed in Chapter 4.1, Brabantio has an imperious and tyrannical character which inevitably influences the people around him, Erminia and Desdemona are the prime examples. However, Erminia is not aware of her husband's impact on her character: 'she [knows] not that it [is] her husband's frown, her husband's contracted lips, her husband's harsher tone when addressing a dependant, issuing a command, or reproving an error, which ha[s] banished her girlish lightness of heart' (*MC*, p. 305). Likewise, Desdemona acts in a certain way when her father is present, notes her uncle Gratiano: '[h]e noticed that she was more shy, more distant, when Brabantio was by; that she insensibly became less frank and artless, before him; a cloud of restraint seemed to sit more or less upon her' (*MC*, p. 367) (see also Chapter 3.1).

Like other Cowden Clarke's female characters, Desdemona is put in the care of a wet nurse, Marianna. This is so because Erminia '[is] led constantly abroad by her desire to comply with her husband's love of grandeur and display' (*MC*, p. 307);

so, the girl grows up in the company of Marianna's children, Barbara and Lancetto. Barbara, in particular, will be an object of analysis in the next section (Chapter 4.2.2).

We will now focus on an episode in the novella which highlights the dynamics between husband and wife to which Desdemona is a witness, and that might or might not have influenced how she behaves with her husband in the play. Following Erminia's acquiescence, Desdemona is allowed to go on gondola excursions with Marianna and her children. However, these are put to a stop by Brabantio who meets them once and imposes new—and more proper, in his opinion—rules for his daughter's outings. According to Brabantio's luxurious preferences, Desdemona is to go out on a state gondola, accompanied by the state nurse and a train of servants. The narrator immediately intervenes to remind that '[l]ike all households where will is the mere dictator,—where despotism reigns,—where orders, rational or irrational in their results are issued, without appeal from their fiat,—obedience was professed, while subterfuges neutralized its effect' (*MC*, p. 309). With this, Cowden Clarke provides the first example of marital deception in the novella. It is said that 'Erminia, long accustomed to comply implicitly with her husband's commands, had learned, as tacitly, to evade their consequences' (*MC*, p. 309). The narrator also explains that Erminia, who is subservient and evasive, is 'apt to become a moral coward, an equivocator—well, if not a deceiver' (*MC*, p. 310). Thus, Erminia, instead of communicating with her husband, agrees for Desdemona to go out with the gondola and the nurse appointed by Brabantio by evening; but still allows her daughter to go out with Marianna, Barbara, and Lancetto by early morning since the chances to meet Brabantio are lower.

Considering the more and more sporadic requests of Brabantio for his wife's presence in his stately affairs, Erminia can finally dedicate her time to Desdemona's education. The mother 'addresse[s] herself in earnest to the task of cultivating her little daughter's heart and mind, inculcating wise and loving precepts, and teaching her all gentleness, goodness, excellence, of which her own nature yielded abundant store' (*MC*, p. 310). Despite all the good values Erminia is able to instil in Desdemona, the mother is not able to teach her 'the honesty as well as modesty of innocence,—the unflinching candour which ought to belong to goodness and

greatness,—[…] the courage of transparent truth' (*MC*, p. 311). She indirectly educates Desdemona in the 'art of marital deception' (Tosi, 2014, p. 67) which, in the end, is what marks her daughter's demise. Desdemona naturally learns this behaviour because she is the witness to her mother's deceptive nature towards her husband. As a result, 'the little girl insensibly acquired just such a system of conduct' (*MC*, p. 312) and eventually replicates it in the play. Suppose Desdemona acquired only the good qualities, she would have been provided 'with a panoply that would have proved her best protection against the diabolical malignity by which she was one day to be assailed, and borne her scathless through the treachery which wrought her fate' (*MC*, p. 311). The narrator in this previous passage hints at Desdemona's story in the play and puts the fault of her demise on her mother because of her lack of teachings. Erminia, however, cannot teach her this because 'she herself was not only unpossessed, but unconsciously devoid' of it (*MC*, p. 311). As was highlighted above, Erminia is not aware that it is Brabantio's 'violent temper' that 'had destroyed in hers that firmness and fearlessness,'

> she [knows] not that his imperious disposition [has] banished from hers openness of speech or action; that she no longer [has] unhesitant sincerity in words, or unconstrained frankness in deed; and that, in fact, although she [has] preserved her integrity of purpose, yet that she [has] forfeited her straightforwardness, her uprightness, her honesty of soul. (*MC*, p. 311)

Next, the narrator intervenes on the topic of love, saying that 'love, to be perfect love, must be free, unreserved, unfearing, equal' (*MC*, p. 312). This description refers to Erminia, but it could be applied to Desdemona in the Shakespearean work as well. The love the narrator talks about does not characterise either Erminia or Desdemona's relationships with their husbands. For what concerns Desdemona, such adjectives could have represented her marriage to Othello at the beginning of the play, but their union loses all these characteristics as the play progresses. In the play, Desdemona undergoes a series of changes in response to Othello's attitude towards her; for instance, after Othello slaps her, 'she seems to become not only less and less capable of asserting herself against Othello, but strangely less and less impelled to

try' and the blow is so unexpected that she becomes 'more and more recessive' (Adamson, 1980, p. 236); in the novella, Erminia too experiences a less violent change, yet prompted by her husband's behaviour.

During the time they spend together, mother and daughter pursue 'their studies, their elegant needlework, their music, and the thousand and one feminine avocations,' therefore, Desdemona 'acquired that 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' (*MC*, p. 333-334). In the play, Othello notes the same skills; how Desdemona is 'so delicate / with her needle, an admirable musician. O, she will / sing the savageness out of a bear! of so high and / plenteous wit and invention' (*Oth*, 4.1.184-187).

Moreover, Erminia tells stories to Desdemona and the little girl listens with delight. The descriptions provided by the narrator in the novella—'[t]he child loved to hear of […],' '[s]he listened breathlessly, eagerly' and 'she took ceaseless delight in hearing' (*MC*, pp. 314, 315)—resemble Othello's account in the play: '[s]he'd come again, and with a greedy ear / devour up my discourse' (*Oth*, 1.3.150-151). We find this characteristic again at the end of the novella, when, through Gratiano's focalisation, it is reported that 'his niece was a no less attentive hearer than either her father or himself' and that 'it did not surprise him to see her greatly interested by the narrative of the warlike Othello' (*MC*, p. 366).

Erminia dies peacefully and her death is deeply felt by her daughter. The narrator, however, reports that it did not impact Desdemona as much as Barbara's death. Let us look at other examples of the heroines' reactions to their mothers' deaths in the collection. For example, in "Katharina and Bianca; the Shrew and the Demure," the narrator highlights the grief felt by Katharina at the death of her mother, yet no references are made to Bianca's reaction to the event. In "The Thane's Daughter," the death of the "dark lady" (the appellative with which Grouch's mother is called) is said to have 'made little difference in the course of the child's daily existence' (*TTD*, p. 107). Her lack of interest, one could say, is due to the fact that Grouch is not used to her mother's presence; since birth, she was not cuddled or looked after by her mother. Generally speaking, the mothers' deaths are suffered more by their husbands, who display a range of reactions. For example, in

"Portia; the Heiress of Belmont," Guido puts his daughter Portia in the care of his friend Bellario and he disappears for many years; in "Helena; the Physician's Orphan," Helena's father, Gerard, being absorbed by his grief, forgets about his daughter; and finally, in "Rosalind and Celia; the Friends," Rosalind's presence pains her father Gaston so much that he sends her away.

One could say that what defines Desdemona's fate is not her mother's absence, but rather her mother's example while she is still alive. After her mother's passing, the girl shows obedience to her father 'devot[ing] herself to [his] will and pleasure' (*MC*, p. 335), but she also 'resume[s] those errands of charity' (*MC*, p. 335) she used to perform with her mother. She decides to keep helping the poor people of Venice, without her father's knowing, in order to feel her mother's presence with her. This, however, prompts her to act in the same deceitful way. Like her mother, Desdemona only partly shows herself to her father while she hides other sides of her persona. She appears to him as 'affectionately duteous, meekly watchful, beautiful, soft-paced, sweet-voiced' (*MC*, p. 335). His fondness is rooted in her beauty, obedience and accomplishments and in those values he esteemed in his wife: 'grace and loveliness' (*MC*, p. 336).

Aoudra is Ophelia's mother and, from the novella, we essentially do not know anything more about her. In the play, instead, Polonius refers just once to his youth, yet he does not mention his wife; '[a]nd truly in my youth I / suffered much extremity for love' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.189-190). Although she is a creation by Cowden Clarke, the writer does not examine her in depth. Aoudra, however, has a clear role.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3.2, Aoudra is apart from Ophelia for the first part of the novella because of Polonius' affairs in Paris. Consequently, she must, although unwillingly, leave Ophelia in the care of Botilda and Jutha. In the course of the narration, we find her again when she and her husband return from Paris and take Ophelia to Elsinore.

From the narrative, Aoudra appears as an affectionate mother who cares deeply about her daughter. She takes charge of Ophelia's education and '[h]er chief care was […] to surround her child with none but pleasant, healthful influences, of person, scene, and circumstance' (*RE*, p. 220). Aoudra, as a mother, has also the important task of warning her daughter against the perils of living at court as a young

girl entering womanhood. One of these risks is 'men's natures' which can do good but are also 'capable of sinful and harmful deeds' (*RE*, p. 245). In particular, the conversation is prompted by Eric's escape from creditors. Polonius is the one breaking the news and Aoudra says that Eric is also accused of being 'a libertine,—a practised seducer' (*RE*, p. 245). Rightfully so, Ophelia, who is only a child, asks her mother what a libertine is. In her explanation, Aoudra fires up. From the dutiful wife and anxious mother, she becomes a woman with ideas of her own; and she even sarcastically recalls Polonius' words: '[a]nd such deeds are called fashionable follies, and pardonable errors of youth!' (*RE*, p. 246). Husband and wife have opposite views of the event, for no other reason that the first is a man, while the second is a woman. Their opinion differs and, through Aoudra's speech, we can understand why. She is rather progressive and she condemns the double standard which pervaded the society of Cowden Clarke's time: it was very charitable and understanding toward the man accused of libertinism as it was defined as a 'pardonable error of youth,' yet it was 'severely tyrannous' regarding the victim (*RE*, p. 246). Aoudra shows a very negative judgement and she expresses it with strong beliefs: she defines libertinism as 'one of the most heinous of crimes,' and she calls for '[s]hame, double shame, on the betrayer rather than on the betrayed!' (*RE*, p. 246). An akin perspective is analysed by Smith in her article in which she investigates Ophelia's suicide in the play and explains that the double standard adopts as a rule that 'premarital or extra-marital sex is a mild offense and pardonable for men,' for women, instead, 'is ruinous' (2008, pp. 99, 100). The fact that Cowden Clarke, through Aoudra, spoke on relevant themes such as sexuality and double standard shows that she was not afraid to face subjects she thought were important. It is also thought-provoking due to the fact that there is a correspondence between Aoudra's thoughts (written by Cowden Clarke) and studies on Ophelia's suicide, they both identify the same elements. Moreover, through her collection, Cowden Clarke brought to the public's attention issues that we can find in a contemporary article such as it is the one written by Smith. At the end of Chapter 2, we already contemplated how Cowden Clarke's discussion of these topics was meaningful in the context in which she wrote and published her work.

Aoudra, however, warns Ophelia that not only should she guard herself against libertines, but also from those who seem to be ‘the good, the gentle, the refined in manner, the accomplished in speech and deportment, the cultivated in imagination and intellect’ since these qualities might ‘betray her into a premature gift of her heart, fatal to her *peace of mind*’ (*RE*, p. 251, italics mine). Cowden Clarke’s choice to mention the “peace of mind” (and she mentions it twice) is not accidental, given Ophelia’s insanity in the play. Whether the mother specifically refers to Hamlet is impossible to ascertain, yet her words fit the prince’s description. Moreover, coincidentally or not, Aoudra starts talking about Hamlet, just after the passage above-mentioned. She confirms that such admirable characteristics are recognisable in the boy; Ophelia, then, timidly asks if surrendering to one’s feelings for him is ruinous for the girl he loves. In her whispered query, she is clearly asking for herself; let us recall that Ophelia also asked Thyra about Prince Hamlet before. Her mother decisively asserts that the woman should be ‘sure—entirely sure—of his love for her’ and

> [l]et her beware that his thought is as deeply fixed upon her, as hers could be upon him, ere she allow her own to occupy itself too curiously with his merits. Let her securely know that his heart is firm-set in constancy and truth towards her, ere she weakly suffer her imagination to become enamoured of excellences only too well calculated to inspire a passion, which if hopeless, would be fatal to her peace of mind. (*RE*, p. 252)

Despite her anxiety for Ophelia, Lady Aoudra ‘consoled herself […] with the reflection that to learn the nature of vice is not to become acquainted with vice itself, or the practice of vice; that to know of evil is not to know evil; and that to perceive the perils of sin, is no allurement to sin’ (*RE*, p. 251). Yet, although Aoudra takes an anti-conformist position on the patriarchal society, her daughter will fail to follow her advice and will be hurt by Hamlet.

The reader of the novella meets Lady Capulet not long after the beginning of the tale. She is introduced in the narrative because her father Egidio decides to give her in marriage to Lord Capulet. Being aware of all the dangers awaiting ‘a helpless youth and beauty’ (*WDV*, p. 354)—these are the same concerns Aoudra has for

Ophelia—Egidio wants his friend to marry his daughter. Egidio, however, has never asked for Angelica's opinion on the matter, just like Lord Capulet with his own daughter Juliet. He accepts only after Angelica is announced to become the heiress of a large fortune. In addition, Egidio's last wish to see his daughter married together with her 'high lineage,' and the acknowledgement of Angelica's 'goodness and beauty,' (*WDV*, p. 356) convince Capulet.

In the novella, Juliet is described to boast the same features, she is said to have 'inherited her mother's strikingly beautiful features, with more softness of expression; her perfection of shape, and dignity of mien, with even yet more of winning grace, and suavity in motion' (*WDV*, p. 415). In addition to their physical similarities, what mainly joins the mother in "Juliet; the White Dove of Verona" and the daughter in *Romeo and Juliet* is the fact they both marry young. For what concerns Angelica, it is her father's imposition; Juliet, however, has two grooms: Paris who, like in her mother's instance, is the choice of her father, and Romeo who is her true love. Lady Capulet, indeed, tells Juliet 'I was your mother, much upon these years / That you are a maid' (*RJ*, 1.3.73-74). Their marriages—in the case of Juliet, the one to Paris—are urged and upheld by their fathers who are primarily interested in the economic and social natures of the union.

According to her portrayal in the novella, Lady Capulet is an anxious and doubtful wife. The tale revolves around her suspicions about Capulet's loyalty which is questioned over and over again. She is unsure of her husband's love and affection for her; for instance, she is worried Capulet accepted to marry her just because of the inheritance of the money—which, as we have seen, is part of the reason behind his assent. This possibility is only 'the first of a long train of doubts that arose to haunt her, thenceforth, with their spectral shadow' (*WDV*, p. 359).

Jealousy is another highly defining trait of Lady Capulet's personality. In the novella, she is continuously jealous of the young girls Capulet is associated with, because she fears her husband to be adulterous. In her illustrative notes, Cowden Clarke explains that 'Capulet's early gallantries may be inferred from his gossiping talk with a kinsman, at the commencement of the masquerade scene; and afterwards, from those few words between him and lady Capulet,— which also furnish hints for her jealousy, as wrought in the tale' (vol. 2, p. iv). The author is referring to Capulet

saying that he has ‘seen the day / That [he has] worn a visor and could tell / A whispering tale in a fair lady’s ear / Such as would please’ (*RJ*, 1.5.22-25) and to Lady Capulet accusing her husband of having been ‘a mouse-hunt in your time’ to which her husband answers that she is ‘[a] jealous-hood’ (4.4.11, 13).

Jealousy is also the cause of Angelica’s immoral acts guided by a vengeful spirit. She attempts to kill Leonilda with a pair of poisoned gloves. Her sinful deed is rewarded by a near-death experience: Juliet plays with a very similar pair of gloves found in her mother’s cabinet, where Lady Capulet stored the poisoned pair. Angelica reacts ‘with a pang of ill-omen’ and runs to her daughter ‘in deadly terror’ (*WDV*, p. 383, 384). The play shows another instance in which Lady Capulet displays revenge-driven behaviour. After Tybalt’s death and Romeo’s subsequent exile, she is not yet satisfied with Romeo’s sentence. She decides, then, to send an assassin to kill the boy in Mantua.

Cowden Clarke writes only a few moments shared between mother and daughter and their interactions appear ambiguous. Juliet ‘ha[s] been brought up in the style of seclusion and retirement usual for a young Italian lady’ (*WDV*, p. 443) and her relationship with Angelica is described as having ‘little of the sympathy and intimated communion usually subsisting between a mother and daughter’ (*WDV*, p. 443). Despite all of this, Juliet is a sort of moral compass for her mother, the girl is able to take her mother back on the right path. Juliet is what convinces Lady Capulet to abandon the attempt to poison Leonilda and her presence also prevents her mother from cheating on Lord Capulet with a Florentine prince who courts the older woman. The infant Juliet is described as ‘a gentle, affectionate little creature; demonstrative in her own manner, and loving to be petted, and caressed, and made much of, in return’ (*WDV*, p. 395). On the occasion, the narrator comments on the positive power surrounding a mother’s embrace when Lady Capulet cuddles her daughter, this action makes her appear as an affectionate mother. She is fundamentally an absent mother, too preoccupied with her own paranoias to care for her daughter. In the play, she never shows her loving side—she is ‘cold and distant’ (Dreher, 1986, p. 50). Generally speaking, Juliet has almost no significant contact with her parents. As a matter of fact, she spends most of her time with the Nurse, which was very common

and 'while growing up, children didn't really come in contact with their parents' (Garber, 1981, p. 122).

If we were to observe the mothers on a more general note, we could say that Erminia and Aoudra try their best to educate their daughters. This effort is apparent in their teachings of important notions and lessons and in the way they lovingly care for Desdemona and Ophelia. Angelica, instead, builds a more aloof relationship with Juliet; she surely cares for her and there are examples of affectionate moments, but Lady Capulet is mainly focused on her problems.

4.2.2 The heroines and their doubles

The doubles' role is to anticipate the events of the plays to the reader of the novellas (Tosi, 2014, p. 60). The doubles we identified are Barbara in "Desdemona; the Magnifico's Child," Jutha and Thyra in "Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore," and Giacinta and Leonilda in "Juliet; the White Dove of Verona."

We know Barbara from the play, and she is the only character in this section whose existence is ascertained. Desdemona mentions her mother's maid, Barbary, in Act 4 Scene 3. In the novella, she is introduced as the daughter of Desdemona's nurse, Marianna. Barbara has a brother, Lancetto, and the three children grow up together. Once Marianna dies, Barbara becomes Erminia's maid and also a sort of daughter to the lady.

Barbara is remembered for and linked to the "Willow Song." In the play, Desdemona recounts to Emilia that '[Barbara] was in love, and he she loved proved mad / And did forsake her. She had a song of "willow", / An old thing 'twas, but it expressed her fortune / And she died singing it' (*Oth*, 4.3.25-28). Cowden Clarke takes this passage in the play and amplifies it: she provides a background on Desdemona's connection with Barbara, and she also retells the story of Barbara and her lover Paolo. For instance, after an accident, Paolo becomes delirious and has a 'propensity to wander alone, muttering to himself, and scowling gloomily' (*MC*, p. 326). Barbara cannot bring him back and, from the heartache, she dies, humming the willow song.

The origin of the ballad, which retells the story of a lost love, dates back to the reign of Henry VIII, meaning that it was widely known in Elizabethan and

Jacobean times (Brennecke, 1953, p. 35) and that Shakespeare's audience was probably familiar with it. In *Othello*, Shakespeare makes some changes: he changes the singer's gender, as the song was originally sung by a male; he invents the story of Barbara and formulates the last couplet which does not mirror the original (Brennecke, 1953, p. 37). In the play, Desdemona, believing her death is near, '[twists] the words […] so as to apply them to her own tragic situation' (Brennecke, 1953, p. 36).

In the novella, after the maid's death, the willow song appears a couple of times more in connection to Desdemona. The first instance takes place when Erminia hears her daughter 'murmur the words of poor Barbara's dying song' (*MC*, p. 331). After that, Desdemona happens to meet Lancetto, and memories resurface making the man 'distinguish those murmured words' (*MC*, p. 340) of his sister's song, intoned by the lady. The last appearance of the "Willow Song" is at the play's culmination, just before Desdemona is murdered by Othello.

The similarities between Barbara and Desdemona mainly concern their deaths. Both die, directly or indirectly, because of their lover: Barbara is too heartbroken from Paolo's lasting madness and Desdemona is killed because of Othello's momentary insanity. Cowden Clarke has Barbara share Desdemona's last words: no one should blame Paolo (Othello, in the case of Desdemona) because she has already forgiven him. The sentences '[sings] all a green willow must be my garland' and '[l]et nobody blame him, his scorn I approve' (*Oth*, 4.3.50, 51; *MC*, p. 329, 330) appear spoken by Barbara in the novella and sung by Desdemona in the play.

On top of being linked to Ophelia as her doubles, Jutha and Thyra are also connected through Eric's figure. He indeed seduces and abandons them both. Jutha is part of Ophelia's early childhood as she takes care of the heroine while in the countryside; while Thyra belongs to the court and Ophelia meets her after returning to Elsinore.

The main common element among these girls is their tragic fate. All three, indeed, die prematurely. All three episodes might open a discussion on suicide. It is not clear if they were all suicides, yet the possibility is not excluded completely. In Chapter 3.2, we discussed the likelihood of Ophelia committing suicide, which is a

widely accepted possibility. For what concerns her doubles, we can be sure that Thyra is a suicide victim because she hangs herself and leaves a suicide note addressed to her father. Jutha's case is more equivocal: Ophelia finds her dead body, together with a newborn's corpse but nothing indicates the dynamics of her passing. The alternatives are multiple: she might have died during labour, or she might have tried to abort the baby and died, too.

There is also an aspect that only connects Jutha and Ophelia. As we know, Jutha got pregnant outside of marriage and was discarded by Eric. The baby is born, but they are both dead once Ophelia finds them. The possibility of Jutha inducing an abortion is strengthened by a passage of the novella in which Jutha and Ophelia are exploring the forest and the older girl teaches Ophelia about many different plants, several of these are well-known abortifacients (Newman, 1979, p. 228) (see Chapter 3.2).

With her prequel, Cowden Clarke suggests that Ophelia must have gone through some difficult times for her to turn the way she did in the play. Indeed, she writes a tale in which Ophelia is a traumatised child who gets separated from her mother at a crucial moment of her childhood and she is further distressed by the discovery of her friends' corpses.

Juliet's doubles are Giacinta and Leonilda. All three girls die prematurely, and this element constitutes their main similarity.

Giacinta's story, in particular, is the most similar to the Shakespearean heroine's. What further puts Giacinta and Juliet in connection, compared to Leonilda, is the presence of a secret lover. At Giacinta's funeral, a mysterious young man—her secret fiancé—barges into the church and lays on top of Giacinta's corpse. It is only after the boy stabs himself that a maid at Giacinta's service reveals his true identity. The whole episode recalls the last scene of the play's final act: Juliet is in the crypt and Romeo has already drunk the poison. In the play's "version" of the scene, it is Juliet who stabs herself with Romeo's dagger. Friar Laurence takes the part of the maid since he has the task of recounting the previous days' events. In the end, Giacinta and his young lover are buried together, just like Juliet and Romeo.

Thanks to Giacinta's narrative, the reader can observe Lady Capulet's opposite reactions to almost identical stories. The narrator of the novella tells us that,

following Giacinta's departure, '[a] sense of security, of triumph, took possession of [Lady Capulet], as she looked again upon the marble stillness of those features' (*WDV*, p. 371). She repents herself only after discovering the truth, and she even feels a sense of guilt for her useless jealousy. When, instead, '[l]ife and [Juliet's] lips have long been separated' (*RJ*, 4.5.27) and she discovers the death of her own daughter, she falls into deep despair and she curses that 'unhappy, wretched, hateful day' (*RJ*, 4.5.43) wishing to die with her. Recognising the parallels between the two young girls' situations and viewing Cowden Clarke's tales as the "true past" to Shakespeare's work, Juliet's death could be interpreted as a sort of punishment for the lack of sympathy Lady Capulet showed to a young girl such as Giacinta.

Leonilda's death also offers interesting parallelisms. In this case, however, the two responses we look at are Lord Capulet's. Conversely to Lady Capulet, Lord Capulet shows Juliet and her double's deaths the same reaction, which is more consistent with the passing of two young girls: he is mournful and heartbroken. The likeness, if not even the almost complete equivalence, is what should be striking. Let us compare the two responses: in Leonilda's case, he cries: '[t]o be snatched in the very flower of her age! A flower! A very blossom!' (*WDV*, p. 400); his exclamations wholly recall the lines at the discovery of Juliet's death: '[d]eath lies […] / Upon the sweetest flower of all the field' and '[t]here she lies, / Flower as she was' (*RJ*, 4.5.28-29, 36-37). The similarity of the sorrowful exclamations corroborates the equivalence Juliet and Leonilda have in the eyes of Lord Capulet, which—according to different opinions—can confirm the attraction of Capulet to daughter-surrogates (Brown, 2005, p. 100) or the fact that the young girls in the novella are like daughters to the old man and loves them equally.

There is a third girl in "Juliet; the White Dove of Verona" who is interpolated in the story, Virginia di Coralba. She is the only girl Lady Capulet is not jealous of, but at the same time, she is also the object of her misplaced trust. Lady Capulet helps her because she is introduced into Veronan society as an orphan, living with a supposedly 'crooked and deformed' brother (*WDV*, p. 418). However, the figure—or better, the figures—under the cloak are the gentlemen of the city, and among them, there is also Lord Capulet. Fortuitously, Angelica does not discover her husband. In addition to her role in the Capulets' affairs, Virginia also connects to Juliet, albeit

indirectly. The last time we read of her in the novella, she is talking with one of her clients. This time it is Mercutio, Romeo's friend. The link with Juliet is provided by something Virginia says to Mercutio: 'I will no longer be known as Virginia di Coralba; you shall adopt some other name than Mercutio' (*WDV*, 428). This statement is a reference to Juliet's own secret confession: 'Deny thy father and refuse thy name. / Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love / And I'll no longer be a Capulet' (*RJ*, 2.2.34-36).

In the case of Desdemona and Juliet, their mothers—Erminia and Angelica—can be interpreted as possible doubles. Throughout the first part of the chapter, we highlighted and analysed their similarities and life experiences. We observed that these two pairs of mothers and daughters resemble each other and, by looking at how Cowden Clarke arranged the novellas, we notice an intentional connection between the two sets of figures.

As was previously mentioned at the beginning of the section, the doubles are included in the novellas to anticipate the heroines' developments in the plays. These additions work as pre-emptive examples for the readers of the collection who read very similar stories to those of the heroines in the work by Shakespeare. The heroines might meet their doubles like in the case of Desdemona and Ophelia, or just repeat what happened to them as in Juliet's novella. Whatever the case, the connection between the three Shakespearean characters with these figures invented by Cowden Clarke is immediate.

Conclusion

This dissertation showed how Mary Cowden Clarke's collection of novellas *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* can be deemed as an amplification of a number of Shakespearean plays.

In Chapter 1, we contextualised the historical period of Victorianism, specifically in the framework of sex policies and the relevance of gender in an apparently separate domain like children's literature. It was important to define the background in which the collection was published because the novellas were primarily aimed at young girls. From this, we gathered that, although gender ideals were ingrained in the public's mind, the Victorian period and its society also saw some changes. These changes not only concerned women's status and rights but also children's. In particular, at that time, children's literature established itself as a major literary genre.

In Chapter 2, we delved further into Victorian society in order to study Shakespeare's presence in it. We observed that the Bard was introduced to Victorian youth as a moral guide and, in particular, his female characters were proposed as models of propriety to young girls. His plays were adapted by several scholars to be more approachable for the younger generations and, by the end of the century, Shakespeare became part and parcel of Victorian education. Mary Cowden Clarke was among those Shakespearean scholars and so she wrote the collection of *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*. With her work, she revised what the Shakespearean experience had been like up until that moment: her tales were moralistic as the Victorian market requested, but unlike her predecessors—the Lambs and the Bowdlers—she decided to write prequels to some of his plays instead of alternative versions. What further differentiated and characterised her work was the aim to have a reading experience that would be shared by mothers and daughters; which, up until that point was unheard of since Shakespeare was to be mediated by fathers or brothers.

With this historical and cultural background in mind, we moved to the analysis of three novellas—"Desdemona; the Magnifico's Child," "Ophelia; the Rose of Elsinore," and "Juliet; the White Dove of Verona"—to show how they can be considered amplifications of *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

In the first part of the study—Chapter 3—we introduced the collection by highlighting the elements common to all the novellas included in *The Girlhood*, and that make Cowden Clarke's tales amplifications of the plays by Shakespeare. The chapter proceeded with a more specific study of the three novellas. We focused on displaying the links between the plays and the novellas through examples and comparisons of similar events, dynamics and themes. The breakdown of the three novellas emphasised shared features and motives, and parallelisms among the characters.

These results were validated further by the last chapter, Chapter 4. It centred on the relationships between the heroines and their fathers, mothers and doubles, and the study incorporated elements from both the plays and the novellas. According to the analysis of these relationships, we noticed that all the heroines are daughters of tyrannical fathers who try to impose their will, giving way to different reactions from their daughters. The second group is the mothers who, unlike the fathers, display various behaviours and build different kinds of connections with their daughters, some more positive than others. Finally, the doubles conclude the analysis. They have the task of anticipating the heroines' future in the plays and their stories in the novellas are confirmed to retrace the same steps the heroines will take in the Shakespearean work.

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