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The Backwards Making of A Heroine: Mary Cowden Clarke's
Girlhood and Its Importance In the Shakespearean Conversation

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I

In 1852, Mary Cowden Clarke published *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*, a series of fifteen tales that created back-stories for Shakespeare's female characters. Her motive, as she says in the preface to the series, is simply "the development of character." All actions are "preliminaries to catastrophes already ordained." Other authors used varying methods to expand Shakespearean creations, but Cowden Clarke is unconventional in her decision to invent prequels. She removes the heroines from their familiar surroundings and grants them childhoods. *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* takes cues from subtle details of the plays, thus imagining answers for those aspects of character absent and undeveloped within the heroines.

The design has been, to trace the probable antecedents in the history of some of Shakespeare's women; to imagine the possible circumstances and influences of scene, event, and associate, surrounding the infant life of his heroines, which might have conducted to originate and foster those germs of character recognized in their maturity, as by him developed (Cowden Clarke iii).

Shakespeare's heroines are, in a sense, born when the curtain rose on the opening scene, existing only to the extent that the playwright deems necessary. Cowden Clarke sought to wipe away obscurity and fill in gaps; she connects important textual details to imagined childhood events, in hopes of explaining and even justifying the behaviors and actions of the heroines. In doing so, she elaborates upon those aspects of character present in Shakespeare's plays as she places the women in imagined circumstances.

Mary Cowden Clarke recognized that Shakespeare's heroines are undeveloped characters. *The Girlhood* works backward to create suggested circumstances to answer questions, account for behaviors, and introduce future occurrences. For example,

Cowden Clarke addresses the question of Lady Macbeth's unexplained role as a mother. A story devoted to the childhood of Katherine works to explain her future shrewish behavior. The rift between the Montagues and Capulets and the role that both Juliet and her mother play in this familial dispute is gradually introduced. The curious importance of handkerchiefs is present as the relationship between Desdemona and Othello develops. Cowden Clarke shapes the identities of the heroines, independent of the structure of the texts of the plays, so as to develop these childhood creations in such a way that they adequately foreshadow and align the future. Though they are imagined circumstances, these "clever reconstructions of the lives of Shakespeare's heroines from birth to entrance cue" (Altick 142) hold the potential to persuade readers to consider the lives and lessons of these females in an entirely different way.

The majority of our knowledge about Mary Cowden Clarke comes from a biography written in 1984 by Richard Altick. This biography, *The Cowden Clarkes*, outlines her life and the life of her husband, Charles, as well as their contributions to literature. Mary Cowden Clarke, Mary Novello before marriage, was a privileged, educated child. Altick describes her days of youth as being full of literature, interaction with other educated friends and family, and worldly experiences. Her home was at the edge of the city, "thus a Novello childhood afforded the combined delights of the city and the country" (Altick 8). Her father was invested in his children's education: "the children would drape themselves over the counterpane to see some new book he had brought home for them, and hear his explanations of its purposes and virtues" (Altick 9). Mary Cowden Clarke knew nothing but comfort and love in her own childhood, and thus was able to create for the heroines the advantaged life that she knew. As an adult, she did

not have any children, but she came from a large extended family and was familiar with the influence of familial ties. The heroines all develop in circumstances relative to their respective futures; however, Cowden Clarke's personal childhood experiences influenced the childhoods she created for Shakespeare's heroines.

When Mary Victoria Novella was seven years old, she met a twenty seven year old man at a family picnic, and the new gentleman visitor intrigued young Mary Victoria. Though she obviously had no knowledge of how her future would evolve, Altick suggests that there was an immediate connection between the man and the child. Married on July 5, 1828, the two entered into a life enriched by literature and the arts, and they specifically shared a love for Shakespeare and his plays. Many of Shakespeare's heroines in *The Girlhood* meet their lovers early in life. Perhaps her own romantic life influenced Mary Cowden Clarke's approach to introducing the heroines to future lovers at such young ages, or situating these encounters under familial influence.

In the Victorian period, Shakespeare was respected and held in highest esteem. Says Altick of the playwright: "At one and the same time he was an unapproachable genius and a perfectly knowledgeable human being, endowed with all the traits which the everyday Victorian held most dear: earnestness, domesticity, modesty, wholesomeness, personal simplicity" (Altick 130). The Cowden Clarkes agreed with this belief, and dedicated their lives to writing about and studying Shakespeare. "Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke will have conspicuous roles, for in many amiable Victorian minds their names were indissolubly associated with that of Shakespeare himself" (Altick 128). Along with this widely known connection with the playwright, they embodied a popular image of authors in the time period. "Victorians were particularly pleased by the idea of

a loving husband and wife sitting on opposite sides of a cluttered work table, each busy with his or her new essay or poem or novel” (Altick ix). The couple wrote together, but also published on their own. Mary Cowden Clarke was able to establish herself as a Shakespeare scholar independent of her husband.

Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke wrote primarily about Shakespeare, but also wrote about other authors. Similarities can be found throughout all their writings.

Charles Cowden Clarke wrote a series of tales devoted to introducing children to the writings of Chaucer.

The Tales from Chaucer in Prose, designed Chiefly for the Use of Young Persons attempted to do for Chaucer what the Lambs had done for Shakespeare in 1807: to ‘simplify’ the works of a master-poet for childish reading, and thereby, according to the pleasant theory, to sow the seeds of a lifelong literary predilection (Altick 100).

This consistency in motivation and style illustrates how the Cowden Clarkes valued literature and believed that children should be exposed to it at a young age. Since the Cowden Clarkes were interested in children’s literature and making adult literature accessible for young minds, Mary Cowden Clarke’s decision to create *The Girlhood* is an example of the writing goals that she and her husband wished to accomplish.

A dominant factor in establishing Cowden Clarke’s important identity in the Shakespearean conversation is recognizing the passion that she felt towards her position in the literary world.¹ Coupled with this was her “ardent desire to maintain an intimate, comradely relationship with her readers” (Altick 81). In order to create this bond, Cowden Clarke provided her readers with stories that embodied popular images of the time period. Altick described the Victorian age as “one conspicuously rich in character – and characters” (Altick 78). The main focus of Cowden Clarke’s writing was to grant the

heroines innocence, and then introduce those occurrences that would create their future characters.

This developmental emphasis on the interaction between inherited characteristics of mind and social and environmental contexts particularly appealed to Victorian realists, in part because it offered an intricate model for portraying the psychological growth of characters and the social structures in which they moved (Vrettos 71).

Her style and the motivations of her writing were classically Victorian. Victorians were interested in character studies, and literature of this period was written in a distinct fashion.

In *The Girlhood*, Cowden Clarke explores Shakespeare's heroines in a style that was designed for Victorian readers. Her writing reflects the values of her culture. She uses flowery, ornate language to describe characters, occurrences, and scenes throughout *The Girlhood*. The distinct narrative voices uses enhancing adjectives and descriptive phrases to detail the heroines and surrounding characters. Her descriptions contain metaphors and hyperboles in an attempt to create sentimental expressions of character and circumstance. For example, in *The Thane's Daughter*, a young Lady Macbeth is described as "surpassingly handsome" but "a look there was in those blue eyes, that marred their loveliness of shapes and colour, and seemed sinisterly to contradict their attractive power" (Cowden Clarke 110). In another example from *The Magnifico's Child*, Desdemona's "feelings were moulded of such exquisite tenderness and sensibility, her imagination so lively, so susceptible, her heart so benign" (Cowden Clarke 330). These descriptions, with such distinct word choices, not only foreshadow the future heroines, but also are written in desired Victorian style.

The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines was a popular book in the nineteenth century. The stories achieved “great success on both sides of the Atlantic” (Altick 138). Between 1850 and 1906 there were 21 editions and they were reprinted five times in London alone. The tales were designed for the enjoyment of young ladies, and they were often handed down from mothers to daughters. Yet, the series received little attention from Shakespeare critics. Altick recognized the ambiguous nature of the popularity of the series. Speaking of Mary Cowden Clarke, he said

The books she produced during those years are never recorded in the histories of Victorian literature, nor did they receive much mention in the contemporary press. Yet each enjoyed a notice-able degree of popularity in its day. I have noticed that the copies of other of her books which stand today on the shelves of American public libraries bear evidence of having been read to death (Altick 143).

Cowden Clarke believed that Shakespeare's lessons were important. *The Girlhood* revealed the lessons within Shakespeare's plays, while exploring his heroines. Altick remarked of Cowden Clarke that she believed, “Shakespeare is meaningless unless women will take to heart the lessons he has so shrewdly set forth in the characters of his plays” (Altick 137) and that the playwright had an “incredibly accurate perception of the soul of women” (Altick 136).ⁱⁱ

Cowden Clarke was inspired to write *The Girlhood* by conversations with other Shakespearean scholars. She was especially close with Mary Lamb, who wrote the *Tales From Shakespeare*. Though Mary Lamb was older than Cowden Clarke, a friendship developed between the two authors. Lamb began as Cowden Clarke's Latin teacher, and Cowden Clarke read *the Tales From Shakespeare* when she was a child. This series rewrites the major works of Shakespeare so as to make them more appropriate and understandable for young readers. Mary Lamb and her husband Charles collaborated as

authors for the children's series. The Lambs were faced with a difficult task; the plays contain death, violence, and mature elements that would be confusing and inappropriate for young readers. *The Tales* kept the details of the plays constant, but rewrote them in such a way that children would be able to read and relate to the plots. *The Tales* were not written as adaptations or plot/character expansions, as Cowden Clarke's *Girlhood* was. The two works were both written with young readers in mind; however, they were born of entirely different motivations.

The Tales From Shakespeare were Cowden Clarke's first introduction to reading Shakespeare. Altick quotes Cowden Clarke as she reminisced about reading the *Tales* "and what a vast world of new ideas and new delights that opened to me – a world in which I have ever since much dwelt, and always with supreme pleasure and admiration" (Altick 10). Altick tells readers that after reading the *Tales*, Mary Cowden Clarke "progressed to the plays themselves" (Altick 117), and then continued reading and educating herself on Shakespeare, until she became "a confirmed Shakespearean" (Altick 117). She was not alone in this process. It was common for children to read the *Tales*, and then graduate to reading the plays when they were old enough to understand the details. Since this was a customary approach to introduction to Shakespeare, Mary Cowden Clarke was assuming that her readers were familiar with Shakespeare's plots when they read *The Girlhood*.

Lamb's *Tales* sparked an early interest in Shakespeare for Mary Cowden Clarke; however, she credited a specific comment for her decision to create *The Girlhood*. Her friend and fellow scholar William Hazlitt pointed out that Portia was unlike other Shakespearian females. "Portia is not a very great favorite with us; she has a certain

degree of affection and pedantry about her which is very unusual in Shakespeare's women." Apart from Portia, Hazlitt saw little distinction among all the heroines. Contemporary critic Marianna Novy, author of *Women's Revisions of Shakespeare*, states that he "emphasized their attachment to others and to social continuity, credited them with emotion rather than thought, and minimized the importance of their words" (Novy 7). Mary Cowden Clarke was compelled to consider these female characters both in relation to their male counterparts and on their own. She did concede that Shakespeare did not provide any answers as to how his heroines developed into the characters that became familiar in the plays. A tremendous desire to explore the minds' of Shakespeare's heroines resulted in Cowden Clarke's ambitious approach to studying Shakespearian characters. After her discussion with Hazlitt and consideration about Portia's character, Cowden Clarke was inspired to write *The Girlhood*. Altick recounted her thoughts, "and now a new and enticing train of thought began: might not the characters of the other Shakespeare heroines be explained in the light of events antecedent to the rising of the curtain?" (Altick 138).

Considerations about Victorian children and Mary Cowden Clarke's decision to use childhood in her exploration of the heroines provide a good starting point for this discussion. In *Children's Fiction*, Lewis C. Roberts stated "the romantic child became the site for the exploration of the self, the measure of morality and human perfection, and the standard for the evaluation of Victorian society" (Roberts 355). She was able to embody Victorian cultural ideals, while still pursuing her main goal of exploring Shakespeare's heroines. As she took cues from the original text and created these back-stories, she sought to encourage an expanded consideration of the character traits that

grew to define the heroines. Victorian culture encouraged innocence and feminine beauty. Cowden Clarke granted these characteristics to the heroines in their childhoods.

While the nineteenth century is commonly associated with the birth of modern concepts of childhood, these ideas were developing earlier. In the article “Growing Up: Childhood” by Claudia Nelson describes that though ideas of childhood preceded the Victorian years, these ideas became more defined during this time period.

But even while we concede that the Victorians inherited from older generations their interest in childhood, and some of their ideas about it, we may legitimately contend that Victorian conceptions of childrearing, of the state of being a child, and of the emotional importance of children to a society dominated by adults took on such weight as to represent something new in Western history (Nelson 69).

Nelson described the Victorians as being “obsessed” with childhood and with giving it adequate attention in the culture. Families were beginning to place value in providing children with opportunity to enjoy a time of innocent youth, as this period was influential in shaping the development of those children into adults.

As childhood was beginning to find its niche in culture, a transcendent vision was emerging in literature written for children. Images of childhood were moving away from those of adulthood, and the two phases were considered distinctly different. Childhood was to be cherished; innocence of youth was idealized. Connections were made between childhood experiences and influences, and the adult that developed years in the future. Parents worked to cherish and prolong their children’s days of youth, instead of rushing them into maturity. This stage gained importance, and literature written for children began to appear in Victorian homes. Increasing literacy rates, printing technologies, and provisions for transportation and production made children’s books more accessible than they had been in the past. These stories, though written for enjoyment, also served an

important purpose. “A major function of children’s literature is to explain to the young the principles, ethical as well as practical, by which the society that has produced it works or should work” (Roberts 355). Children’s literature emerged as a guide to shaping those young minds that would grow to define future society. However, as with any developing theory of thought or culture, childhood images in the Victorian Era varied. Not all children were born into circumstances that allowed for their flourishing.ⁱⁱⁱ

Although it is impossible to know completely what subliminal parental memories may influence the development of an infant, Cowden Clarke recognized that there is the potential for a child to be shaped by events beyond his or her recollection. There is no doubt that environment and experiences during youth are major factors in the evolution of a child. Parental influence, society, and specific situations during youth all play a role in shaping growth and eventual emergence into maturity. There is undeniably a strong tie between the circumstances of childhood and the eventual adult that a specific child grows to become. Much of this is shaped by family influence, but environment also plays a major role. Traditions of culture and time period affect how a child would be raised.

As the “Victorians inherited a growing concern about children” and as childhood increasingly became a more significant period of life, the child’s literature book became much more of a social norm, and so did female authors. Mary Cowden Clarke was a member of a small community of educated female writers who were fascinated with childhood, Victorian traditions, and Shakespeare, and this array of interests gave birth to numerous critical works that dealt with variations of these genres. Cowden Clarke’s choice of children’s literature would have met little resistance in the literary world due to her sex. “Since entertaining children, understanding them, and training them through

gentle moral suasion were considered well suited to women's capabilities, few people would complain that a woman who wrote children's books was improper or unfeminine" (Nelson 76). *The Girlhood* and its author were accepted in the Victorian period as her contributions served to explore Shakespeare, and provide children with moralistic reading material.

Just as ideas of childhood were developing in the Nineteenth Century, ideas of womanhood were also beginning to challenge earlier norms. Often, these ideas were proposed through literature. According to Hilary M. Schor in *Gender Politics and Women's Rights*, "It is remarkable how many of the great Victorian novels are obsessed with what now seem to us clearly feminist issues" (180).^{iv} Yet this was not to say that society moved drastically away from patriarchal influence, nor that all literature about women proposed a cultural change. "The Angel in the House," a nineteenth century poem that supposedly depicted the ideal woman of the Victorian period, illustrated that a woman was to be submissive to her husband. She was to live a life completely defined by her role as a wife and mother. Schor commented on this cultural standard, saying that

Women were expected to center their lives on home and family; they were expected to conduct themselves, indeed drape themselves, in modesty and propriety; they were expected to find the commands of duty and the delights of service sufficient, in fact ennobling, boundaries for their lives (172).

The time period was considering some ideas of social evolution; however, women were still seen primarily as those submissive "angels" who were to put family and womanly responsibilities above all else. If anything is clear in this exploration of feminist ideas, it is that the major Victorian phenomena, the novel, displayed a complex dynamic of feminist thought, even if they were not always in sync with cultural ideas. Cowden Clarke proved through her literary contributions that she felt women held a greater place

in society beyond being submissive angels to their families. Since she chose to focus on female characters and give them detailed attention in her writing, she employed the novel as she challenged the social norms of nineteenth century women.

The importance of *The Girlhood* results from Cowden Clarke's unconventional approach to developing undeveloped characters. Scholars past and present have spent a great deal of time analyzing childhood, the impact that childhood development has upon the growth of an individual, as well as how extensively a child's surroundings determine the adult that said child will become. Cowden Clarke uses this psychology to develop her own contribution to the world of Shakespearean scholars. Her backwards making of a heroine pleased the Victorian population, and reflected the respect that she had for Shakespeare and his characters. Whether audiences are sympathizing with a character's tragic mistake or marveling at the humor of a character's trickery, Shakespearean characters are spectacular examples of complexity. They are also all designed as products of their developing plots, influenced by surrounding characters. Often born immediately into the present tense of the plot, many are denied personal histories. Details of childhood are limited, especially those of female characters. Lady Macbeth never explains in soliloquy what causes her ruthless desire to aid Macbeth in a murderous plot for the throne. Readers know of the previous harsh feelings between the Capulets and the Montagues; however, the childhood of Juliet amidst this history is nonexistent. Ophelia does not lean to the audience and discuss the motivations behind her feelings for Hamlet in a heartfelt aside. By extracting these heroines from their original plots, Mary Cowden Clarke grants them the ability to exist beyond Shakespeare's specific words.

Cowden Clarke's writing contributes to the conversation about Shakespearean criticism in a different fashion than the other female Victorian authors with whom she is commonly associated. In *The Woman's Part*, one of the first and most influential anthologies of Shakespearean feminist criticism, Mary Cowden Clarke is only mentioned once. Often, Cowden Clarke is grouped together with female Victorian Shakespeare authors Mary Lamb and Anna Jameson. Mary Lamb took the direct texts of Shakespeare's plays and transformed the language as to make them attractive, accessible, and understandable for children. Anna Jameson analyzed the behaviors and actions of Shakespeare's female characters directly from the text. Jameson published her book, *Shakespeare's Heroines. Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical* in 1832, twenty years before the complete publication of the *Girlhood*. After considering these two writers, it may seem appropriate that Mary Cowden Clarke should be placed in this category. *The Girlhood* is focused on Shakespeare's women and they were written primarily for women readers. However, they are not a critical analysis of character or scene, but rather an imaginative expansion of character and scene based on the details provided in the plays. Often, when *The Girlhood* is mentioned in any critical conversations, it is amidst a feminist consideration of Shakespeare.

Marianna Novy, author of *Women's Revisions of Shakespeare*, examined the history of the feminist approach to analyzing Shakespeare.^v Instead of attempting to simply enter the conversation debating Shakespearian feminism, she devoted her research to showing how females used Shakespeare, rather than how he used them. She noted how "women have contributed to constructing a cultural image of Shakespeare they find congenial and have re-constructed previous images by analyzing and rewriting the gender

relations in his plays” (Novy 1). This debate, however, seems to present a puzzling, circular argument that never successfully reaches a conclusion. The “dilemma of feminism criticism” inspired Novy to search for opportunities to celebrate the empowerment of females, rather than allowing patriarchy to define all aspects of Shakespearean discussion (Novy 16). She recognized that Cowden Clarke fit into a category of women writers who dedicated their attention and writing to Shakespeare’s heroines.

Another Shakespearean feminist critic, Juliet Dusinberre, credited Shakespeare’s original plays as emancipating women from the confines of society; however, she acknowledged the conflicting and often ambiguous critical opinions about the playwright’s ideas of women. As a precursor to a discussion about feminism and Shakespeare’s attitude towards women, Dusinberre states, “the feminism of Shakespeare’s time is still largely unrecognized” (1). Shakespeare’s consideration of women in his plays has been a source of interest and discussion since he was writing. While discussing the role Cowden Clarke played in a time of questionable developing feminist views, Altick stated, “this persistent concentration upon Shakespeare’s view of women had, obviously, its intimate relation with the emerging Victorian conception of the female sex” (Altick 136). Cowden Clarke’s appearance in critical works places her within the discussion of Shakespearean feminism. Her works have contributed to the slowly developing feminist images within the nineteenth century.

In the introduction to her essay collection, Novy states: “these essays show a long historical record of women’s identification with a range of Shakespearean characters and, more surprisingly, with Shakespeare himself” (2). Mary Cowden Clarke was writing

almost a century before these contemporary feminist scholars. She anticipated these feminist ideas. Cowden Clarke's extensively detailed stories of childhood show that she is deeply connected with these women, and ultimately understands their characters. Her writing also demonstrates that she feels she has an understanding of Shakespeare and his motives, as she takes it upon herself to further develop his characters. "Whatever the cultural and personal causes, many women readers and writers have found or constructed something unusually convincing in most of his female characters" (Novy 6).

Modern critics often disregard *the Girlhood* because it is an imaginative work, rather than a critical one. In *Women Reading Shakespeare 1660-1900: An Anthology of Criticism*, Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts, state that

The tales provide a novelistic 'subtext' to Shakespeare's female characters, and contain striking scenes of sex, violence and death; modern critics have condemned this naturalist approach to character as naïve, but contemporary reviews of the *Girlhood* were more appreciative, and respectful of the author of the *Concordance*, stressing the value of the tales for introducing young people to Shakespeare (82).

As Altick observes, "the only Shakespearean element in them, apart from the names and characters and the locale – and an obvious stylistic indebtedness to the Lambs' Tales – is a conscious emphasis upon the particular trait of character which will bring the heroine to calamity or reward when she finally emerges in one of the plays" (Altick 137). To ignore *The Girlhood* because of these ideas limits the potential that they have to contribute to the Shakespearean conversation. Cowden Clarke initially grants Shakespeare's heroines the innocence of childhood, but as they evolve through the stories, parallels to the text emerge, thus developing the familiar heroines that are introduced in the plays. Her writing compels readers and audiences to rethink Shakespeare's female characters, and therein lies her important contribution to the ongoing conversation. Altick notes

“virtually all the questions which sentimental critics had raised concerning the genealogy and upbringing of Shakespeare’s female characters – as well as many questions which no one apparently ever thought of raising – are answered” (Altick 139).

Every time period reads Shakespeare differently. Depending on the cultural influences of that particular time period, Shakespeare takes on different meanings that run parallel to societies values. The Victorians believed that Shakespeare’s plays contained important moral lessons. *The Girlhood* was a didactic piece of Victorian literature. It was enjoyable reading for young girls; however, it served a larger purpose. As the heroines developed, the circumstances of their childhoods, along with their actions and responses to these circumstances, demonstrated the behaviors and moral lessons that the Victorians saw as so important in the plays. Since *The Girlhood* is written in this Victorian didactic style, the work may seem dated. It is a product of its time, written for a specific culture and generation of values. However, *The Girlhood* should not be disregarded because of its sentimental writing style. In a contemporary conversation, it provokes readers to think differently about the heroines.

In the preface to *The Girlhood*, Cowden Clarke says that Shakespeare gave readers his heroines “in immortal bloom.” Her contributions were to construct “the opening buds of the future.” Cowden Clarke was endowed with the ability to know what was to become of her girlhood creations, for Shakespeare had already given life to those heroines. A pattern already in place, Cowden Clarke took upon herself the task of filling in gaps in the familiar lives of the heroines. Mary Cowden Clarke articulated the end of her tales to merge neatly into the opening scenes of the plays. Parallel to the primary texts, *The Girlhood* enlightens, expands upon, and enhances the plays. Within the

cultural influences of the Victorian period, Cowden Clarke's writing raises another curtain, on another stage, where the heroines are granted the spotlight.

II

Each *Girlhood* begins with the infancy of Shakespeare's heroines, an infancy characterized by kindness and gentleness. They are born without the tendencies, be those tendencies positive or detrimental, which ultimately define them as Shakespearean characters. Each heroine is born with a virtuous soul. Any flaws that present themselves in future situations are caused later in life, and are not singularly the fault of the character. Desdemona is "sensitive and impressible to a remarkable degree" (Cowden Clarke 308). Young Gruoch's beautifully delicate features and charming character make her charming, and her fierce spirit makes her irresistible. "Many little women have been known to possess this ascendancy over mankind" (Cowden Clarke 122). Ophelia embodies kindness and gentleness of spirit. Her affections for those men in her life and her desire to please them make her a pawn of their protections. Each heroine has characteristics that are not initially problematic; however, when coupled with the trials of life, these characteristics contribute to the identity of the mature heroines. The narrator of each story speaks from a third person omniscient point of view, knowing the thoughts of each character. This serves to amplify the development of identity, as readers are allowed access to the truest intentions of all those playing a role in the evolution of the heroines. The narrator also reveals knowledge of future events. For example, in *The Thane's Daughter*, the narrator directly foreshadows the life of Lady Macbeth. "And that night a child was born into the world, destined to read a world-wide lesson, how

unhallowed desires and towering ambition can deface the image of virtue in a human heart, and teach it to spurn and outrage the dictates of nature herself” (Cowden Clarke 94).

Anna Jameson considered that “the sternly magnificent creation of the poet stands before us independent of all these aids of fancy: she is Lady Macbeth; as such she lives, she reigns, and is immortal in the world of imagination” (367). Cowden Clarke took this “magnificent creation” and drew Lady Macbeth out of her original context in hopes of explaining those aspects of her character that remained vague and provoked inquiry into her personal development. In the opening pages of *The Thane’s Daughter*, the restless chaos of Lady Macbeth’s future life is introduced with a storm that raged on the night of her birth. “The dark lady,” Cowden Clarke’s shadowy image of Lady Macbeth’s birthmother, did not want a daughter. She desired a son, and upon being told that her newborn child was a little girl, immediately cursed and resented the baby. “Mother’s regards were well-nigh scowls; mother’s smiles were all but disdain, not pitiful tenderness” (Cowden Clarke 104). This image of parental disappointment is a common theme throughout the stories. While the Victorians were developing ideas that cherished childhood, Cowden Clarke kept in mind the different views that were present in Shakespeare’s time. Mothers would have been eager to bear sons; fathers would have desired male heirs to carry on the family name.

In *the Thane’s Daughter*, the dark lady is so affected by the son she could not provide that though she physically inhabited the earth for some further time, her spirit and soul withered away. This also occurs in *The Girlhood* created for Katherine and Bianca from *the Taming of the Shrew*. Cowden Clarke’s *The Shrew, and the Demure*

introduces the birth of two daughters. When a girl was born instead of a son, the mother was unable to conceal her unhappiness, “my expected son proved to be a little girl, after all. It’s a sad disappointment” (Cowden Clarke 101). After bringing a second daughter into the world and facing the disappointment of another failed attempt at mothering a son, Madame Minola essentially removed herself from the nurturing, maternal role. “The poor lady took this reiterated disappointment so much to heart, that she sank into a weak health; and even her boasted energy in church-going could not avail to rouse her from her easy chair which she thenceforward constantly occupied” (Cowden Clarke 103). Then, the narrator suggests that Katherine’s developed dispositions were the fault of her mother’s absence; if Madame Minola had not been so preoccupied with pursuing personal desires, she could have cultivated her child into an acceptable young lady.

But there was no 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 – which might thus have been more pleasant and winning playfulness” (Cowden Clarke 104).

Madame Minola was not interested in shaping her daughters into respectful young women, since they were not sons, she reluctant to play a large role in their lives. Instead, young Katherine began showing signs of the familiar future shrew, as the narrator calls her “an object of universal dislike and avoidance” (Cowden Clarke 108).

Cowden Clarke also deals with the influence of absent mothers in another way. It was common for wealthy families to leave their children to the charge of a nurse or governess. This woman would serve as a pseudo-mother when the child was young and the parents were occupied with personal endeavors. In *The Girlhood*, many of the heroines grow up with nurses. Sometimes the nurses supplement mothers, and in other

cases when mothers are absent, they take it upon themselves to fill maternal roles. While many of Cowden Clarke's nurses were among the imagined characters who existed solely in the childhood stories, Shakespeare did provide her with inspiration in *Romeo and Juliet*. Juliet's nurse, present in the play and introduced in *The White Dove of Verona*, plays an influential role in the child's development when her mother is unable to care for the infant. With this image of a nurse direct from Shakespeare's text, Cowden Clarke is able to incorporate other imagined nurses into the lives of other heroines.

In *The Thane's Daughter*, young Gruoch's nurse, Bethoc, assumes the role of mother when the dark lady passed away; however, Bethoc could never fully negate the maternal void in the child's life. Desdemona has multiple nurses in *the Magnifico's Child*, one to accompany her in public and please her father who was absorbed in sustaining a certain image, and another who was less visually pleasing. The second nurse did not meet the standards of Desdemona's father, but the nurse is loved by both mother and daughter, and thus allowed to take charge of the child within the confines of the home. Along with these two nurses, Desdemona shares a close relationship with a third female figure, her mother. Though her mother is not present in Shakespeare's play and thus must disappear within the pages of *The Magnifico's Child*, in order to develop the gentle disposition of this heroine, Cowden Clarke develops an affectionate relationship between mother and daughter.

Baby Ophelia appears as a third example of a child left in a nurse's care. Her situation differs from the previous two heroines, as her mother leaves her to be raised in another family. A busy life dominated by social functions and constant travel causes the parents to send Ophelia and her brother to live out their youngest years in the homes of

family friends. Since she is raised away from her original parents and then returned to them when she is of appropriate age, Ophelia is exposed to an array of experiences and influenced by a multitude of people. A mother choosing to place her young child in the care of a nurse certainly did not always mean that she did not love the child; however, this too left a heroine without a mother. Regardless of the whereabouts of an absent mother, these heroines were deprived of maternal connection.

The Lady Macbeth born into *The Thane's Daughter* is still in infancy when her mother "the dark lady" dies. If the child is able to remember any images of the woman who bore her, they would be of a cold, emotionless figure, seated statue-like in a chair. Every day, the child plays around her mother, as though the woman is not even there. The infant, little Gruoch, has love and attention from her doting nurse Bethoc, and it is certainly impossible to determine if any recollections of "the dark lady" haunt the child's deepest memories; however, the narrator is certain to include numerous powerful images of the mother, suggesting that "the dark lady" has some impact on the child's development. Following her mother's death, the tiny child stares up into the now empty chair where her mother had once sat. The narrator speculated,

Who shall say what limits there are to infant memory? Who may tell what vague impressions of the pale cold figure that was wont to abide there, and which was the only shadowy semblance of maternity that had ever floated before the child's vision, might not at that moment have wandered into its brain, and inspired one natural yearning to behold even that faint shadow once again in its earthly form? (Cowden Clarke 107)

In this connection, the narrator encourages readers to consider not only important connections between childhood and adulthood, but also the obscurity of the future. There is a great deal of mystery present in these stories, and it is amplified by the fact that

readers are aware of how the adults that these women grow to become. Elements of foreshadow that are clear to readers are foreign and confusing to the heroines.

The narrator even accents one of the most intimate, motherly connections, breastfeeding, with hatred, saying “the babe sucked bitterness.” This infant, unknowingly engulfed in its mother’s disdain, shows early signs of developing into the chaotic woman who would play a vital role in future murderous plots. By allowing the childhood Lady Macbeth to retain some scattered images of a mother, Cowden Clarke enhances the explanation behind Lady Macbeth’s future attitudes towards motherhood. In *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth gives a powerful and self-revealing speech that contains her only reference to a child never mentioned or present elsewhere in the play.

I have given such, and know
How tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me;
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck’d my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash’d the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this. I.vii 54-59^{vi}

In the concluding pages of *The Thane’s Daughter*, one much debated question Shakespeare raises is addressed when readers are introduced to Lady Macbeth’s son. Cowden Clarke’s imagined Lady Macbeth gives birth to a son named Cormac, and the child “enhanced the joy of both parents” (161). Although she loves her boy, Lady Macbeth’s true loyalties overshadow her role as a mother. In a final scene of *The Thane’s Daughter*, preceding the opening scene of the original play, Lady Macbeth observes a battle from the high castle walls. She brings her young son along, and shows little concern for the child’s well-being in the potentially dangerous situation. Her obsession with achieving success in the battle is more important than keeping her child safe. The boy survives this dangerous outing; however, dies of illness shortly after, thus

explaining how Lady Macbeth could mention motherhood, yet no child appears in the text of the play. Shortly after the death of Cormac, Lady Macbeth's father dies, allowing for the events of the play to begin.

In order to introduce readers to the evils that lay buried deep within the identity of the little Gruoch, Cowden Clarke envisions a situation where the baby Gruoch's violent tendencies could be displayed. She first appeals to the curious naivety of a child. By presenting the baby with an attractive goal that could not feasibly be achieved, Cowden Clarke encourages a display of anger and violence. When attempting to grasp beams of sunlight, "the baby hands clenched angrily, and struck and buffeted at the golden rays they could not seize" (Cowden Clarke 106). Like the future adult version of herself, the young infant becomes frustrated when she was denied a desire. Suddenly, the baby's aggravation subsides. A small, fluttering moth enralls her and averts her attention away from the sunbeams. She reaches her arms out in pursuit; the moth is a much more achievable target. The little Gruoch's nurse removes the girl from the window where the moth flutters amongst the still present rays of sunlight. She attempts to protect it from the baby's pursuing fingers. In a sudden and unexpected outburst, "the dark lady" commands that her daughter be allowed to try and grasp the flying creature. "The next instant, the little fingers were unclosed; to one of them stuck the mangled insect, crushed even by so slight a touch" (Cowden Clarke 106). This act that might seem simply an accident of innocent childish curiosity, serves as important function. Cowden Clarke incorporates this example of determination and violence to foreshadow the woman that this tiny child would evolve into. Following her daughter's triumphant conquest, "the dark lady" is suddenly attracted to the "masculine spirit" (Cowden Clarke 107)^{vii}

harbored within the little girl. However, before being able to physically hold the child she had suddenly vocally accepted, “the dark lady” perishes.

Mary Cowden Clarke’s childhood Lady Macbeth grows and flourishes even with the absence of a mother. Cowden Clarke set the foundation for one of the most important scenes in Shakespeare’s play in the child’s adolescence. Prior to Macbeth’s ultimate descent into madness and the collapse of the scheme for the throne, there are very few examples where Lady Macbeth demonstrates weakness in the play. One of these few examples comes on the night when Macbeth is to kill Duncan. Ironically, Lady Macbeth displays her greatest vulnerability in a scene where she is credited for also showing the greatest strength and dominance. In the famous dagger scene, Lady Macbeth forcefully reminds her husband of the plan to place the crown on Macbeth’s head and instate him as king. While questioning Macbeth’s ability to commit the crime, Lady Macbeth considers murdering Duncan herself; however, a mysterious confession of emotion hinders her action. “Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done’t” (12-13 II.ii). No further details are provided, but the audience is made aware of an important aspect of Lady Macbeth’s character.^{viii} She is capable of compassion. She is human.

It is intriguing that Mary Cowden Clarke chose to call this story *The Thane’s Daughter*, rather than the dark lady’s daughter. Lady Macbeth’s father is directly mentioned in the original text, while any influence of a mother in Lady Macbeth’s life is strictly fictionalized and imagined. The thane is the ultimate force that prohibits Lady Macbeth from murdering Duncan, and thus plays an important role in Cowden Clarke’s childhood creation. Initially shown as a kind, caring man, the thane is affectionate

toward his newborn daughter, even when the dark lady is disappointed and resents the child.

“The thane pressed the little creature to his bosom; he looked into the sleeping face, and listened to the soft even breathings, and a world of emotions filled his heart at the thought of this new morsel of vitality, this fresh-comer into existence, this atom on the thresholds of the past and present, this strange bit of opening life, this mystery of commencement, this tender blossom” (Cowden Clarke 101).

Mirroring this affection, the child loves her father. The gentle old man is important to the child. “Sometimes she would seek out her father, and take pleasure in seeing the pleasure that always lighted up his venerable face at the sight of hers” (Cowden Clarke 109).

The young Gruoch is fond of the thane; however, she is unable to have a healthy, fulfilling relationship with her father. Within the back-story, Cowden Clarke creates situations that would help develop the opinions of men held by the adult Lady Macbeth. Even early in her youth, the young woman gravitates to men who exhibit strong, masculine characteristics. She initially displays this attraction when the young girl is determined to watch the men practice their weaponry, rather than to stay in the female quarters with her nurses. The child even expresses a desire in acquiring some personal weapons knowledge of her own. While watching the men, she becomes particularly attached to Grym, an extremely powerful, masculine weapons man. Her unusual attachment to him continues throughout the story, until his death, revealing Lady Macbeth’s gravitation towards men who exhibit masculine characteristics.^{ix}

Since the young girl has such an attraction to men who display masculine qualities, the same trait influences her relationship with her father. Her father is kind, quiet, and in the eyes of his daughter, weak.

The father, from his submissive, easy disposition, shrinking from authority, which he neither exercised himself, nor resisted from others; the daughter, willful,

imperious, accustomed to dictate, - they seemed unfitly associated as parent and child. Their relations seemed reversed, and produced an untoward assimilation (Cowden Clarke 119).

Unfortunately, the kind old thane does not embody those characteristics so respected by his daughter. The narrator says that the young woman “found the constant companionship of her parent as irksome as ever” (Cowden Clarke 122). However, in order to formulate the parallel to the original text where she is emotionally affected by Duncan’s resemblance to her father, the narrator reminds readers “she loved him (as has been said), and felt dutifully towards him” (Cowden Clarke 122). Cowden Clarke shapes the thane and the relationship he shares with his daughter to anticipate the evolution of Lady Macbeth’s opinions of Macbeth and king Duncan. However, her father and Grym are not the only male influences in her early years. There is another man who, sadly, is probably the most affected by the young girl’s tendencies.

Culen is a pageboy who works at the castle and adores the young Lady Macbeth. Just as the young girl prefers men who display masculinity, Culen is attracted to Grouch for her specific characteristics.

Not only, however, did the authoritative manner, and commanding style of beauty, that distinguished the young lady Gruoch, tend to preserve her influence over the lad’s feelings; but her superior rank, and relative position with himself, served to maintain respect and admiration on his part towards her (Cowden Clarke 122).

Gruoch is hardly warm and receptive to him; she often treats him as a pawn and takes advantage of his submissive, adoring manner. Through a specific instance with Culen, little Grouch is able to display many of her characteristics. The pageboy makes the girl a ball as a plaything in an effort to win her love and please her. While playing with the new toy, she loses it over the edge of the wall. She employs her male companion to

venture over the wall and rescue the ball from its resting place. When he finds himself in danger, the young woman keeps a hold of him, and encourages him to keep calm and display strength. “Keep a brave heart, Cullen! Hold my hand steadily! You are safe, fear not!” (Cowden Clarke 125). She will again display such attributes when encouraging Macbeth, to remain composed and focused as they are plotting and executing the plan to murder the king. “The small hand never trembled, or waived, but clutched close, like a vice. Her voice did him good; her tone of resolution inspired him; her steady grasp encouraged him; and he was able to recall his dizzied senses” (Cowden Clarke 125).

Parallels to the text are again created when the young Lady Macbeth introduces her view of king Duncan. She is not fond of the king because he is not brave enough to take the action necessary to aid the people of the kingdom. “She spoke of the endurance, fortitude, bravery, and of her admiration and emulation of such virtues. Of strength and of courage, and of how she marveled that any one could rank softness and sweetness by their side” (Cowden Clarke 128). By emphasizing the importance of masculinity and degrading images of sensitivity and vulnerability, Cowden Clarke takes cues from the original text and begins shaping Lady Macbeth’s masculine tendencies. Her beloved Grym describes a soldier that embodies everything she values in a man. “It is whispered that the valor of Macbeth partakes of somewhat more than hardihood and bravery, and that to what his partisans call courage, his enemies might give the harsher name of cruelty” (Cowden Clarke 129). In this exploration of character, Cowden Clarke diverts from common notions of feminine roles in the Victorian period. This image of a powerful woman, solely attracted to dominant men, would have been perceived as contrary to how women were supposed to think about men in the nineteenth century. A

fulfillment of a role of submission would have meant that women did not question the characteristics or motives of the men in their lives. Instead, they would have been expected to obediently accept males. As Cowden Clarke departs from these expected cultural images, she uses literature as a medium to not only set up future occurrences, but also to challenge an anticipated Victorian female image.

Since the curtain rises on Macbeth and his wife already married and well into a developed life, Cowden Clarke is faced with the challenge of creating this relationship. Serving as a foil to the incompetent men in the life of young Gruoch, Macbeth enters the plot of this girlhood as future Lady Macbeth's ideal man. Even before the two meet, she is intrigued by a description of Macbeth. "It is whispered that the valor of Macbeth partakes of somewhat more than hardihood and bravery, and that to what his partisans call courage, his enemies might give the harsher name of cruelty" (Cowden Clarke 129). After they are introduced, Gruoch becomes obsessed with the soldier. With their future together obvious, readers watch the pair develop into the familiar characters of Shakespeare's play. Cowden Clarke ensures that they clearly begin to exhibit the defining traits of their partnership.

"In his wife's dominant beauty, Macbeth's passionate admiration found fell content; whilst in her high-reaching undaunted spirit his own felt strength. His natural valour seemed to gain fresh impetus; his bravery new vigor; his deeds additional daring, with such an incentive by his side to urge him to exertion, and with so lustrous an object to gratify by his triumphs" (Cowden Clarke 160).

The intensity of their romance, coupled with the hunger for power, amplifies the harsh tendencies of Lady Macbeth.

The humanity exhibited by Lady Macbeth when she is unable to murder Duncan is crucial to plot and character development. Her desire for power and status is an

essential motivation that fuels her existence. Lady Macbeth's lack of nurturing, motherly behaviors causes readers to question their origin. Her superficial, emotionless actions are bewildering. When reading Shakespeare's plays, one is faced with many troubling questions. Some are resolved in the text; however, others are left unanswered. By fictionalizing the youth of Lady Macbeth and tying her adult behaviors to influential childhood experiences, Cowden Clarke provides potential explanations. She also allows readers to view this heroine in a more sympathetic manner. Lady Macbeth is undeniably rash and hard, yet when readers take the time to consider why she is such, and are presented with possible motives behind her actions, she becomes a misunderstood woman with a past that accounts for her behaviors.

The Thane's Daughter contains many characters that help shape the plot; however, the focus is on Lady Macbeth. Though the romanticized Victorian style stays constant throughout the tales, the design does not. Each story contains elements of literature that create parallels to Shakespeare's plays and characters. Cowden Clarke makes the heroines innocent, beautiful, and vulnerable, and then imposes upon them the realities of the world. The influence of motherhood, an important feature in all of the stories, is especially influential in *The White Dove of Verona*, the childhood story of Juliet. The focus of the plot is not on Juliet, but rather on her mother, Lady Capulet. Themes of mother/daughter relationships are recurrent throughout the tales. When mothers are absent, Cowden Clarke creates them. When mothers are present in Shakespeare's plays, she introduces them and expands their characters. In *The White Dove of Verona*, Lady Capulet is the focal point for the majority of the tale. The story traces the turbulent marriage of Capulet and his young bride. Juliet enters their lives

midway through the story, but she only appears sporadically when her presence coincides with her mother's in the plot. The story continues to pursue that life of Lady Capulet until the last few pages change focus to the future heroine. Perhaps Juliet was such a young character in the original plot that Cowden Clarke did not find it necessary to devote an entire story to her. Maybe she found Lady Capulet so intriguing and influential on her daughter that she thought it would be necessary to preface a discussion about Juliet by contextualizing her relationship with her mother.

“And now, to tell the sum of Juliet's life, - her love, her death, and the Poet's “strength shall help afford”” (Cowden Clarke 453). Cowden Clarke ends this story with a line that concedes to the fact that the majority of Juliet's existence is demonstrated in the play. Her life, so brief, yet so full of love and conflict, has little need for preface, which is potentially why Cowden Clarke devotes so much of her girlhood to her mother. Lady Capulet's life is filled with disappointment and internal angst. Her initial meeting with the Lord Capulet and the circumstances that lead to their marriage are tainted by death and sadness. Angelica, known to readers as Lady Capulet in Shakespeare's play, is but a mere child when she first is acquainted with Capulet. Angelica's dying father calls for his good friend to visit him at his deathbed. The man's dying wish is that Capulet care for and marry his daughter. Though skeptical of the situation, for the child is young and average in appearance, Capulet carries out his friend's last wish and marries the girl. She has money and status, and her beauty develops as she ages. As the narrator shifts the point of view from Capulet to his young wife, readers begin to witness the opinions and emotions of young Lady Capulet.

Lord and Lady Capulet share a tense relationship. The young wife is constantly concerned that her husband harbors wandering attractions and ulterior motives. Readers are first introduced to these suspicions when shortly after marriage, Lady Capulet comes into a large sum of money. “Capulet’s unreserved demonstration of delight on hearing this important increase to his young wife’s wealth and consequence, gave her the first uneasy sensation of doubt lest her husband’s regard for her, might be inferior to her own for him” (Cowden Clarke 359). She painfully wonders if Capulet would have accepted her as his wife had she not been of wealthy and noble birth. Such a common thread of questioning the motives behind love foreshadows the love that would come to define the plot of Shakespeare’s play. This is also evidence of another Victorian value present in Cowden Clarke’s writing. Marital values in the Nineteenth Century were often based on familial and economic standing, rather than love or the happiness of the couple.

Capulet’s superficial ideas of women continue to be demonstrated as the text pursues onward. “He took pleasure, amidst all his bustle of receiving and dispensing amenities himself, in noting the effect she produced upon others; and whilst he seemed only alive to the gaiety of the general scene, was in secret enjoying the impression produced by her beauty” (Cowden Clarke 363). Capulet’s questionable behaviors with regards to her caused Lady Capulet to feel “a mournful resignation, a deep dejection and self-mistrust” (Cowden Clarke 363). Her fears were only fueled by Capulet’s acquaintances with beautiful women. The lovely Giacinta, and later the lady Leonilda, attract the attentions of the man, and trouble the mind of his wife. Though the situations with both women ultimately lead Lady Capulet to feel guilty after the circumstances

resolve, they cause her great grief, as she does not fully understand the intentions of her husband.

With so much focus on her mother, Juliet is hardly missed throughout the text; however, though *The White Dove of Verona* is structured differently, Juliet's future tendencies are still displayed. As soon as the baby is born, Cowden Clarke wastes no time in displaying some of Juliet's most dominant characteristics. As in several tales, the child is placed in the care of a nurse, a common choice of *The Girlhoods*, as well as a cultural norm of the time period. As her nurse is watching over the child, she comments on the child's determination and fierce spirit. "When my young madam must needs have Susan's bowl of milk 'stead of her own; how the pretty fool fought and strove for it, till she got it" (Cowden Clarke 376). Though the child is denied something, she did not give up a quest until she achieves what she desires. "Jule's a dear lambkin of pretty willfulness" (Cowden Clarke 376). This spirit is obviously again demonstrated by Juliet's resilient loyalty to Romeo, despite the obstacles posed by their rival families. Just as Lady Macbeth exhibits some unfeminine attributes, Juliet too diverts from expected feminine ideals.

The Girlhood consistently introduces the most dominant aspects of character that define each heroine. Juliet's loyalty and determination, Lady Macbeth's valour and dominance, and in *the Shrew, and the Demure*, the opposing characteristics of the sisters, Katharina and Bianca, are introduced early in the text. Katharina is not concerned with the opinions of the world, while Bianca wants nothing more than to gain its approval. Bianca "had a reputation for gentleness," while the spirited Katharina was "found to be annoying, rather than amusing; rude, instead of droll and pretty" (Cowden Clarke 103-

105). As the story progresses, the narrator foreshadows the possibility of Katharina being tamed. Katharina's aunt Antonia took it upon herself to "try to win her confidence" (Cowden Clarke 109) and gain the trust of the troublesome heroine. By ignoring Katharina's problematic attitudes and curtness, Antonia was successful. Katharina "gradually dropped her insolent tone, when they spoke together" (Cowden Clarke 109). Still, Katharina vocalized distaste for both Father Bonifacio, "I don't care a fig about him. I detest him" (Cowden Clarke 110). She also spoke bitterly because she believed her mother was "cross and unkind" (Cowden Clarke 110). Antonia urges the child to not harbor such feelings, cautiously warning the girl that she would regret her emotions. Later in *The Shrew, and the Demure*, the narrator uses this warning and the guilt it provokes in Katharina to further develop her character. Madame Minola, Katharina and Bianca's mother, dies soon after this conversation, leaving Katharina overcome with guilt. Her turmoil is disregarded and deemed to contain no truth, only furthering her pain and encouraging even worse behavior. In adulthood, Katharina would again lose her shrewish tendencies at the hand of another individual who was confident enough to endure her demeanor.

Cowden Clarke gave great attention to developing the spirit of each heroine. Just as she took Juliet's spirit and traced this fortitude back to her days of youth, and as she accounted for the differences in the tendencies of sisters Bianca and Katherine, she used a similar approach as she developed Ophelia. The heroine's initial appearance in a royal court where she seems misplaced and dominated, her confusing reaction to Hamlet's treatment, and her descent into madness and eventual death all seem to go against the kind, innocent female who exists throughout the text. Yet, Ophelia manages to embody

all these aspects, making her a challenging character. Audiences feel great sorrow for the heroine, coupled with the feelings of frustration that result from not being able to understand her actions. Altick responds to Cowden Clarke's childhood story for Ophelia, simply stating that she "explains everything" (Cowden Clarke 141). A complete explanation for Ophelia is a difficult task; however, Cowden Clarke takes *The Rose of Elsinore* and accounts for her quiet demeanor, her sadness, her feelings towards men, and even goes so far as to subtly plant the ideas of suicide into a mind that would seemingly never consider such an act.

Ophelia is submissive and quiet throughout the plot preceding her madness, and this element of her character is present throughout her entire childhood tale as well. Since her parents had to travel when she was just a baby, her earliest years are spent away from home, being raised by a nurse in the countryside. The baby Ophelia is welcomed into this pseudo-family; however, she is often left to entertain herself, as all the members of her family are busy with their own tasks and cannot spend all their time with the baby. Ophelia is loved and cared for, yet the intimate bond between mother and child is delayed until she is slightly older and her mother returns to retrieve her. She also spends these years separated from her brother, as he is at another location while Polonius and Aurora are abroad. This absence of a stable family creates an inverted little girl who is kind and lovely, but keeps to herself, as no one in her foster family is near her age.

In a psychological consideration of Ophelia, Cowden Clarke suggests "willful misunderstanding sometimes betrays deepest consciousness" (Cowden Clarke 240). *The Rose of Elsinore* is interwoven with foreshadowing. In essence, all of *The Girlhoods* contain foreshadowing of important events. Since she is working backward, Cowden

Clarke introduces those details that will gain importance in the future. Perhaps Cowden Clarke knew how difficult *The Rose of Elsinore* would be, as readers were so curious as to the development of Ophelia's character. Throughout Ophelia's growth, the narrator uses foreshadowing to allude to the heroine who appears with the rising curtain. The most startling display of future events comes near the end of the story, when young Ophelia has a startling dream depicting the death of three different women. The first is her best friend from her youngest years, Jutha. Jutha dies after becoming pregnant out of wedlock and disgracing her family. Young Ophelia discovers the body of both mother and child. The innocent heroine is bewildered and shocked at Jutha's death, yet Ophelia does not fully comprehend the complexity of the situation. She is initially traumatized by the discovery of her dead friend; however, these feelings are quickly overshadowed by the arrival of her mother. Ophelia's character is sexually aroused and troubled by Hamlet's advances. This particular occurrence in her girlhood memory serves to represent the introduction of some underlying themes that will continue to appear in both the continuation of the story, and the eventual transition into play.

The next woman in the dream is her best friend of more recent years, Thrya. The two girls had been introduced by their mothers and developed an intimate bond of trust and friendship. Ophelia discovers Thrya's body. She commits suicide after losing her lover. The last woman in Ophelia's dream was not familiar to her. However, readers will recognize the familiar scene of Ophelia's future drowning, adorned with flowers and clothed all in virginal white.^x Although this is obviously foreign to the heroine, Cowden Clarke uses the dream as an element of foreshadowing to provide an answer as to how

not only the consideration of suicide, but also the evil capabilities of men, became influences in Ophelia's life.

Another important element of foreshadowing comes throughout the story and is then ultimately concluded in the dream, as Ophelia comes to realize that there is a strange parallel between her childhood friend Jutha and her elder friend Thrya. This parallel is one that not only entwines the fate of the two young women, but also sets the stage for Ophelia's further interactions with men, specifically Hamlet. When Ophelia is but a small child, she and Jutha met a "noble stranger" (Cowden Clarke 203). While playing outside, the friends stumbled upon a beautiful white horse and the sleeping figure of a handsome young man. This man captivates Jutha, and the two become romantically involved. His perfections, however, did not sustain, as he plays a key role in Jutha's downfall. They have in pre-marital sexual relations, she becomes pregnant, and when he does not return to marry her, she is forced to tell her family and ultimately this leads to her death. This man is even more deeply involved in this death than Ophelia knew. The "noble stranger" Eric, would resurface later on in Ophelia's life.

Throughout the time she spends with Thrya, Ophelia senses that her friend is romantically attached to a man called lord Eric of Kronstein. Ophelia observes that her friend greets his visit with "so much agitation, so involuntary a delight, such blushing joy" (Cowden Clarke 233). When Ophelia first sets her gaze upon this man, she does not remember his face. However, Cowden Clarke employs a subliminal childhood memory to trigger a recollection. As the man picks up a chess piece and holds it in his grasp, Ophelia suddenly is brought back to another place and another time, and places this handsome face in another context. "A slight incident will sometimes prompt a struggling

memory, while vainly striving to help itself by recalling more important clues. The form of the ivory piece caught Ophelia's eye" (Cowden Clarke 235). Forced by the impulse of viewing the white chess piece in his hand, she remembers the white horse that had wandered up to her while she was playing outside. She recalled the first meeting between herself, Eric, and Jutha. She is able to place him in another life, though she had been just a small child at the time of their first meeting. Cowden Clarke allows an older version of the character to recall a small memory from long ago and make important connections that would thus define and explain certain instances.^{xi}

The importance of Eric's character becomes clear as his relationship with Thyra evolves. Eric urges Ophelia to never speak of what she knows. "Be silent, I conjure you, young lady. Do not speak that name again – it can do no good – it may do fearful harm" (Cowden Clarke 235). She agrees, and gives him her word. His fears are calmed when he comes to realize that Ophelia does not know the truth behind her friend's death. "Her ingenuous look, her simple unconsciousness, as she spoke, plainly told the man of the world that this innocent girl had no suspicion of the share he had had in the unhappy Jutha's fate. His dark secret was safe" (Cowden Clarke 235). However, no concealment of his past could prevent harm as he stayed true to his character and caused harm to this relationship as well. As soon as Thyra told Ophelia that she was to marry Eric, he ruined both their lives. "It was reported that lord Eric of Kronstein, whose affairs were long suspected to be in an embarrassed state, was discovered to be utterly ruined" (Cowden Clarke 244). The young man made many enemies, gambled away his money, and put himself in great debt. In earnest to comfort her dear friend, Ophelia hurries to Thyra's home, only to find "the dead body of Thyra, hanging, where her own desperate hand had

stifled out life” (Cowden Clarke 247). And thus, Cowden Clarke set her own stage for Ophelia’s ideas of men and future suicide.

The most haunting part of the dream is the female shown at its conclusion. After describing Jutha and Thyra, Ophelia began speaking of a woman with whom she was not familiar.

Then I saw one approach, whose face I could not see, and whose figure I knew not. She was clothed in white, all hung about with weeds and wild flowers; and from among them stuck ends of straw, that the shadowy hands seemed to pluck and spurn at. The armed royalty waved sternly, but as if involuntarily, commanded by yet a higher power than his own will; and then the white figure moved on, impelled towards the water. I saw her glide on, floating upon its surface; I saw her dimly, among the silver-leaved branches of the drooping will, as they waved around and above her, up-buoyed by her spreading white garments” (Cowden Clarke 250).

This terrible image, though foreign to Ophelia at the time she dreamt it, is a shocking foreshadowing of her ultimate insanity and suicide. Here, Cowden Clarke again uses the foresight of a narrator to describe a future event that audiences will recognize, thus further connecting the back-story to the original text.

In this example of foreshadowing, Cowden Clarke illustrates her ability to show that emotions and tendencies could have been generated through influential circumstances, but she also introduces reasoning behind significant objects. For Ophelia, the flowers she sees adorning the mystery figure will re-surface in her future when it becomes evident that the figure is a vision of the heroine’s personal fate. Overcome by a loss of sanity following the murder of her father, Ophelia, draped in a floral arrangement of which she describes the meaning behind each specific bloom, approaches her death. By including references to the flowers not only in the text of *The Rose of Elsinore*, but

even in the title itself, Cowden Clarke's stylistic endeavor becomes convincingly tied to the text it precedes.

Cowden Clarke incorporates one of Shakespeare's most curious objects into another of her tales. In *The Magnifico's Child*, a handkerchief orchestrates the ultimate catastrophic downfall of the play. Desdemona's childhood story draws to a conclusion with her standing on her balcony, wringing Othello's handkerchief with her hands. Soon after her uncle witnesses this image, Desdemona leaves her father's home to marry Othello. The handkerchief that precedes this drastic decision to relinquish her childhood and enter adulthood as a wife of a much older gentleman, though seemingly minor and insignificant to the text of *The Magnifico's Child* alone, becomes an element of great importance when read in correspondence with the text of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Readers familiar with the play, as Cowden Clarke assumed her readers were, will immediately gravitate to this object and appreciate the foreshadowing present in this, along with the rest of the series.

As foreshadowing introduces occurrences that are yet to unfold, returning to the story of Ophelia and a much more direct warning about the implications of the future ties *The Rose of Elsinore* to the Shakespearean text. In the play, both Polonius and Laertes advise Ophelia to be cautious and reserved with her affections towards Hamlet. Her brother bases his advice on the intentions of men, while her father is much more concerned with the image that she would create for herself if she continued seeing Hamlet. Ophelia's absent mother also advises her daughter in Cowden Clarke's expansion. The author has Ophelia's mother die of illness shortly before the end of the story transitions into the play. However, before she dies and leaves her daughter alone in

a world dominated by men, she gently urges Ophelia to be cautious when dealing with men, specifically Hamlet. “Thus it came, that – from her mother’s warning, at this time as, from her father’s and her brother’s admonitions, at a subsequent period, - Ophelia had the perils which awaited her, in her future life at court, peculiarly impressed upon her mind” (Cowden Clarke 252).

In Shakespeare’s play, the relationship between Ophelia and Hamlet is developed preceding the opening scene. Shakespeare gives audiences enough information to understand the textual circumstances, yet he does not go into detail about the past. Following the death of her mother, Ophelia finds herself surrounded by Hamlet’s comforting family. From this, the relationship between the two commences. “The prince Hamlet joined his royal parents in their attempt to soften the grief of Ophelia; and in this gentle task, his own growing preference for her, gained strength and fixedness of purpose” (Cowden Clarke 253). And despite her mother’s warnings, Ophelia accepts this affection and cultivates mutual feelings. “As time went on, tokens of his increasing regard, awoke a responsive feeling in her breast towards him” (Cowden Clarke 253). However, the narrator is careful to preface the tragedy that waits these two future lovers. “But while this fair flower of love was springing up between them, - near to it lurked in unsuspected rankness of growth, the foul unwholesome weed of a forbidden plant” (Cowden Clarke 253).

Anna Jameson was intrigued by Ophelia and the innermost workings of her mind, both in its sanity and its madness. Jameson considered the possible scenarios of how Shakespeare’s other heroines might react if they had met Hamlet and were in Ophelia’s position. She concluded that based on unique personal dispositions, each woman would

treat Hamlet differently, and though some sustained the capacity to pity or care for him, Ophelia was the only one who could love him.

Shakespeare then has shown us that these elemental feminine qualities, modesty, grace, tenderness, when expanded under genial influences, suffice to constitute a perfect and happy human creature; - such as Miranda. When thrown alone amid the harsh and adverse destinies, and amid the trammels and corruptions of society, or strength to endure, the end must needs be desolation.” “Ophelia – poor Ophelia” (Jameson 154).

Jameson’s contrast between Ophelia and Miranda would provide an ideal transition into a discussion of Miranda’s girlhood story. However, there is one major obstacle prohibiting a study of this particular story: it doesn’t exist. Interestingly, Cowden Clarke did not create a back-story for the heroine of *The Tempest*.

III

Mary Cowden Clarke humanized Shakespeare’s heroines. She gave them dreams and emotions; she forced them to feel love and endure pain. The warmth of affection from family and friends accounted for the kindness of future heroines. The agony of heartbreak and abandonment created sadness and the skepticism that inhibited trust. The denial of harbored grief and the excessively violent drive for success fueled anger. Suppressed emotions in the plays were set free in *The Girlhood*. Their questionable actions in Shakespeare’s plays became more understandable when explained by antecedent events. The prequels developed deeper layers of character and enabled the Nineteenth Century readers for whom Cowden Clarke wrote to relate to these heroines. They become understandable; it is easier for readers to sympathize and relate to these women. However, there are some heroines absent from *The Girlhood*. The sisters of *King Lear* are not present in the series. They would seemingly provide Mary Cowden

Clarke with extensive detail upon which to work backward; the childhood dynamics between the three sisters would have been both interesting to create and interesting to read. Miranda is an even more intriguing exclusion from *The Girlhood*. One may think that Cowden Clarke would be eager to develop a back-story for Miranda, who was deemed to be one of Shakespeare's finest creations.

The father-daughter relationship plays an important role Shakespeare's writing. Mary Cowden Clarke recognized this, and as her child heroines grew, characteristic development was influenced by fathers, or lack there of. Thus, as the stories transitioned into the rising curtain, the stage was set for future events. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet's father prohibits her from being with her true love, since the boy is a member of a hated rival family. In *the White Dove of Verona*, Juliet quietly develops in the shadow of her mother's troubled relationship with her father. Ophelia is dominated by her father. He forbids her relationship with Hamlet, and later employs her as a pawn in a scheme to explore Hamlet's mind and true intentions. There is also extensive focus paid to the mother-daughter relationship. Many characters have absent mothers who never make an appearance in the original text, leaving audiences to wonder about the identity of these women who undoubtedly existed.

One major fact presents itself as the possible reason for Miranda's absence. Shakespeare does tell us early in the text that Miranda and her father came to the island when she was a young girl. Her entire life was spent in isolated enchantment. Apart from her father Prospero, her only companions were Caliban, who attempted to violate her, yet there are clues in the text that they did once share a friendship, and the spirits that inhabited the island. Miranda did not have further family to influence her growth. She

did not develop childhood friends. She did not have contact with the harsh realities of the world. Her father created a world for her that was both sheltered and kind. This upbringing, untouched by the brutal realities of an unknown world, was responsible for the heroine's naive innocence in the play. Shakespeare delivers no specific details, yet he does set up Miranda's character by saying that she knows nothing beyond life on the island. Because of this, Cowden Clarke may have excluded Miranda on a basis that there was not significant information or events encompassed in her childhood. A girlhood of Miranda may have only consisted of a single dominant relationship in a single, limiting location.

Certainly there was an interesting relationship between Miranda and her father. In *Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare and Shaw*, Lenker calls Miranda and Prospero the only successful father-daughter relationship in Shakespeare. "Through the power of Prospero's (and Shakespeare's) magic, father and daughter live on the enchanted but imperfect island for one-third of his life and for most of hers and enjoy a pure father-daughter relationship" (Lenker 77). He reminds readers that their miraculous survival and eventual residence in their own personal utopia shielded this relationship from a much more complex and challenging real world. Miranda, too young to remember their exile, grew and prospered in the only world she knew, with the only companion she would have until Prospero's storm brought others to the island. She never grew to resent her father, nor experienced a stressful relationship due to circumstantial surroundings, as many other heroines did. She never met another person who tainted her vision of Prospero. He loved and cherished her, and they lived together in an existence where they relied solely on one another. In this world, Prospero was able to ensure that his daughter

would mature to embody his ideals. Lenker suggests that extremities of location and circumstance were the only reasons allowing the success of this father-daughter relationship. Had Prospero tried to dominate every aspect of Miranda anywhere other than an isolated, enchanted island, his attempts would have failed, and she would have grown to resent him. Since they were so far removed from conventional society, father and daughter shared a sustainable union (Lenker 77).

With this in mind, some significant differences between Miranda and the other heroines begin to emerge. Through these differences, one may infer some reasons why Mary Cowden Clarke did not write a girlhood for the heroine of *The Tempest*. It may simply be that she did not think there was sufficient detail upon which to shape a story. Miranda's childhood would have been limited in numerous ways. *The Girlhood* contains constantly evolving human interaction. Antecedent characters and circumstances preceded the texts. Characters die; characters disappear and reappear. New friendships are introduced. The heroines meet their future husbands or lovers. The central conflict of the future is neatly arranged and set up to precede the opening acts. Perhaps Cowden Clarke did not believe that Miranda's life needed introduction. There would be no way for an author to set up an evolving relationship between Miranda and Ferdinand since the two do not meet until Prospero arranges it upon the island. Shakespeare does grant audiences a glimpse of Miranda's single memory prefacing her arrival on the island. She is able to describe a vague recollection of her female nurses when she was in infancy. Prospero questions her, wondering if she remembers anything of life before the island. She replies that she does. "'Tis far off; / And rather life a dream than an assurance / That my remembrance warrants. Had I not / Four, or five, women once that tended to me?"

(I.ii 44-47). However, Cowden Clarke may have deemed this flicker of a memory too insignificant and limited to shape an entire girlhood. This does leave her with unlimited potential for imagination, but all her other stories are so closely paralleled to the text and the images provided by Shakespeare that perhaps Cowden Clarke did not see it fit to go off such little information.

Another reason for the absence of Miranda is the possibility that Cowden Clarke saw no faults in her character, and chose not to explore a seemingly flawless heroine. While it would not have been impossible to create a childhood for a happy adult, so much of her writing is fueled by chaos. As she imagined the childhoods of the heroines, she accounted for questionable behaviors and flaws. If she did view Miranda as a perfect heroine, then she would not have found it necessary to account for any of her behaviors. If this theory had any impact on her decision, she would not have been alone in her sentiments. Anna Jameson muses that Miranda “resembles nothing upon earth” (171). She saw Miranda as the perfect female character, the ultimate Shakespearean heroine. Jameson even went so far as to say “let us imagine any other woman places beside Miranda – even one of Shakespeare’s own loveliest and sweetest creations – there is not one of them that could sustain the comparison for a moment” (170-71). It was as though Shakespeare painted such an exquisite gem that she was removed from any potential generalization with the female sex, and possibly with the other heroines. Jameson marvels at the feminine perfection that is Miranda. She says that the heroine’s character “resolves itself into the very elements of womanhood” (170). An exploration of Miranda’s character dissolves her into feminine perfection. This opinion would provide

Mary Cowden Clarke with quite the challenge. How does one expand upon a character that audiences already view as the perfect illustration of a woman?

As a reader, both of original Shakespearean texts and of critical works concerning these texts, I am not compelled to explore answers to Miranda's life preceding the rising curtain; however, my curiosity lies in her future. How would such an innocent, pure creature adapt from her sheltered mystical island to life in the real world that could not be completely dictated by her father? There would be no insurance of her safety and happiness, as Prospero could no longer control the circumstances surrounding her existence. It would seem that the cruelty of society might come as a shocking reality to the naïve Miranda. Her character stays true to its perfections throughout the play, but one may wonder how that perfection would be tested, and if it could endure. Unfortunately, Mary Cowden Clarke did not add a series of sequels to her vast collection of publications. This is probably because Miranda might be alone in a category of heroines encouraging a consideration of life beyond the final scene.

Regardless of why Miranda is absent, *The Girlhood*, as it exists, encourages a distinctive exploration of character. Mary Cowden Clarke told her readers that her intention was never to improve Shakespeare's plays; she did not believe they were in need of improvement. Rather, she sought to explore the undeveloped pasts of the heroines and imagine the development of those females Shakespeare had already created. The stories are influential because they persuade readers to consider the heroines independent from the plots that have been the sole definition of their identities. As she removed the females from their respective plays, she granted them extended lives. *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* encourages readers to consider the heroines as

characters apart from the principle circumstances of Shakespeare's plays. No longer born directly into the plays, the heroines are introduced prior to climax or catastrophe, and granted the opportunity to account for future actions, tendencies, and behaviors.

ⁱ In *Women Reading Shakespeare*, editors Thompson and Roberts state that Cowden Clarke was “one of the first women to make writing on Shakespeare her profession.” She was first introduced to Shakespeare as a young child, and devoted her life to studying and writing about him. The *Girlhoods* achieved great popularity in their time; however, she published other pieces of literature that were even more widely read. Altick also details her numerous writings throughout his biography. Her writings were mostly focused on the female characters, as she believed Shakespeare “had an incredibly accurate perception of the soul of woman” (Altick 136).

ⁱⁱ As quoted in Altick’s biography, Cowden Clarke states of Shakespeare on page 25 of *The Ladies Companion* “of all the male writers that have ever lived, he has seen most deeply into the female heart; he has most vividly depicted it in its strength, and in its weakness.”

ⁱⁱⁱ Some youth were denied this period of childhood innocence due to lifestyle or economic standing. To some it was “a stage during which desire out-stripped self control,” to others “the area within which a better society might be engineered.” Still another group viewed childhood as a “commodity to be marked” (69). The majority of these discrepancies were due to class status, but some were deeper and more psychological. Those who did not harbor such a fond recollection of childhood were plagued by personal unhappy days of upbringing.

^{iv} Novels such as the famous *Jane Eyre* placed women in positions where they stood up to males. *A Companion to the Victorian Novel* proposes that readers think deeply about *Jane Eyre*. “The novel asks more from us than that we just enjoy the energetic resistance of its heroine: it asks that we think explicitly about the fate of an intelligent woman in the middle of Victorian England, trying to make sense of her destiny” (173).

^v In *Women’s Re-Visions of Shakespeare*, Novy compiles a series of writings that deal with females in Shakespeare. “Contemporary critics argue whether Shakespeare’s plays subordinate or empower women; these essays show a history in which many women have used Shakespeare to empower themselves” (1). As Novy continued to discuss different critical approaches to reading Shakespeare’s characters, she points out that men and women analyzed his females differently. Male critics grouped them together and read his portrayal of women as a whole, while women critics tended to focus on specific traits from females and considered how they defined their roles. However, Novy did not only discuss positive views of women. She references a point made by Virginia Woolf. Woolf did not believe that there was any reality in Shakespeare’s female characters. She also noted the lack of female friendship, and observed that all of Shakespeare’s characters existed solely in their relation to men (8). All of his heroines are intertwined with their dominant male counterparts. Whether they are meeting a tragic end at the hands of a dominant man, like Desdemona, or obsessing over power and using a husband to gain power, like Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare does create female characters that are intricately defined by males. Even Miranda, who had a very successful and happy existence, is entirely at the mercy of her father. He is motivated by nothing but her best interests; however, he controlled her entire development.

^{vi} Quotations from Shakespeare's plays come from *the Riverside Shakespeare* Second Edition

^{vii} Cowden Clarke describes that young Lady Macbeth has masculine qualities and is attracted to masculinity, and this serves to parallel to the image in the original text, quoted in the body of this paper, where adult Lady Macbeth denies her femininity in favor of a violent unsexing image.

^{viii} Just as Mary Cowden Clarke worked backward from this vague element of character, and shaped the girlhood of Lady Macbeth so as to explain why she was unable to murder a man who resembled her father, she used this as a reoccurring strategy of character development throughout all *the Girlhoods*. A small element of detail from the original text often became the inspiration for a major event in one of the stories. In order to give the stories depth and structure and since we are given so little information on the females in the original texts of the plays, it was often necessary for Mary Cowden Clarke to use small details as the motivations for the situations she created.

^{ix} Cowden Clarke's introduction of an imagined character to aid in development of a heroine's tendencies is a stylistic element used frequently throughout the *Girlhoods* and a more detailed discussion will appear later in this paper.

^x In the 19th Century, there was a fascination with Ophelia's drowning. Her death is only described by Gertrude in the original text of the play; audiences do not directly witness any tragedy. Ophelia, adorned in flowers, her white dress billowing in the water, presented an enticing image for artists. Much as Cowden Clarke used her abilities of prose to construct back-stories for the heroines, artists used various mediums to create visual images to go along with the descriptions of her death as told by Shakespeare.

^{xi} Another example of this stylistic theme is present in *The Shrew, and the Demure*. Katherine openly vocalizes her dislike for father Bonifaccio, and her sister is troubled by the harsh words. When Bianca retires from the scene, Katherine is left alone to recall the guilt that she felt following her mother's death, and the promise that she made to Antonia to be kinder and more understanding. "Her thoughts flew back to the time of her mother's death, of her remorse, of her aunt's words which had foretold both, while they had opened her mind to its first perception of a higher rule of action than self-will" (Cowden Clarke 141).

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