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FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

Kathryn Prince

AUTEUR DE LA THÈSE / AUTHOR OF THESIS

Ph.D. (English)

GRADE / DEGREE

Department of English

FACULTÉ, ÉCOLE, DÉPARTEMENT / FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT

Educating an Audience : Shakespeare in the Victorian Periodicals

TITRE DE LA THÈSE / TITLE OF THESIS

Irena Makaryk

DIRECTEUR (DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS SUPERVISOR

CO-DIRECTEUR (CO-DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS CO-SUPERVISOR

EXAMINATEURS (EXAMINATRICES) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS EXAMINERS

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Educating an Audience: Shakespeare in the Victorian Periodicals

by Kathryn Prince

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfilment of requirements for
the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English

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Educating an Audience: Shakespeare in the Victorian Periodicals

Abstract

Based on extensive archival research, this thesis offers an entirely new perspective on popular Shakespeare reception by recuperating articles published in Victorian periodicals. Shakespeare had already reached the apex of British culture in the previous century, becoming the national poet of intellectuals and gentlemen, but during the Victorian era he was embraced by groups outside the corridors of power. If Shakespeare was sometimes employed as an instrument of enculturation, imposed on these groups, he was also used by them to resist this cultural hegemony. As a comprehensive record of how Shakespeare was represented to a wide variety of readers, the periodicals are invaluable.

Research has already demonstrated the varied representations of Shakespeare available to the Victorians through performance, criticism, and creative works employing Shakespeare as a point of departure, as well as his prevalence in formal education and examinations. A missing element of this Victorian picture, the periodicals, has been virtually ignored by Shakespeare studies. Articles published in periodicals intended for well-defined readerships including the working classes (chapter one), children (two), women (three), and theatregoers (four and five) are records of alternative Shakespeares reshaped for particular demographic groups. As the pressure to sell copies was renewed with each issue, the periodicals were acutely responsive to the interests of their readers, and Shakespeare's prevalence in such diverse publications is powerful evidence of both the scope and the variety of his popular appeal. In the *Girl's Own Paper*, for instance, Portia became a vehicle for discussing women's rights, while some working-class periodicals borrowed from *Coriolanus* and *Richard III* to sharpen their readers' views on class relations, and the proponents of a national theatre transformed Shakespeare into the saviour of English drama. Measured in terms of utility, a favourite word among Victorian thinkers, Shakespeare became a valuable, contested commodity for Victorian readers and spectators. In turn, the Victorians prevented Shakespeare from fading into the forgotten past by continuing to discover new ways of making him relevant.

Educating an Audience: Shakespeare in the Victorian Periodicals

Table of Contents

Introduction: Shakespeare in the Victorian Periodicals	1
Chapter One: Shakespeare in the Early Working Class Press	20
Chapter Two: Shakespeare in the Victorian Children's Periodicals	54
Chapter Three: Women as Readers and Writers	91
Chapter Four: The Theatres Regulation Act and the Great Exhibition in the <i>Theatrical Journal</i>	125
Chapter Five: Victorian Periodicals and England's National Theatre Debate	189
Appendix: Periodical Descriptions	226
Bibliography	231

Shakespeare in the Victorian Periodicals

I do not think I have had a volume of Shakespeare in my hand before, since I was fifteen. – I once saw Henry the Eighth acted, – Or I have heard of it from somebody who did – I am not certain which. But Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is a part of an Englishman's constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them every where, one is intimate with him by instinct.¹

Near the beginning of the nineteenth century, Jane Austen put an observation about Shakespeare's ubiquity into the mouth of Henry Crawford, her character in *Mansfield Park*. Crawford, coming upon Fanny Price reading Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* aloud to Lady Bertram, takes over from the demure Fanny and delivers a compelling rendition of the play even though he claims not to have read Shakespeare since he was fifteen. Having won Fanny's admiration, his chief objective in this display, Crawford downplays his erudition with the self-deprecating remark that Shakespeare is "part of an Englishman's constitution." Edmund Bertram agrees with his friend that Shakespeare is integral to English culture, adding that "we all talk Shakespeare, use his similes, and describe with his descriptions. [...] To know him in bits and scraps is common enough" (229). What Crawford and Bertram mean is precisely what Michael Dobson and Jonathan Bate have demonstrated in their important studies of eighteenth-century Shakespeare reception: by the end of the eighteenth century, Shakespeare was part of the education of young English men of the upper classes.² The nineteenth century saw the boundaries of Bardolatry pushed beyond those limits of age,

¹Austen, *Mansfield Park*. Claudia L. Johnson, ed. New York: Norton, 1998: 229.

²See Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions* and *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*; Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*.

gender, rank, and nation, until by the end of the century Shakespeare was the national poet of all English men, women, and children, a key to social mobility among Victoria's imperial subjects, and a more general symbol of English achievement to whom Continental and American performers paid homage. While Shakespeare at the beginning of the nineteenth century was "part of the constitution" of a certain class of English man, by the century's close he had become a symbol of Englishness and a source of inspiration both in his native land and abroad. Shakespeare's dissemination beyond the boundaries signalled by Crawford's term "Englishman" was achieved largely through the medium of periodicals. While the Victorians had access to a wide range of Shakespeare experiences including inexpensive editions and accessible productions, the periodicals helped to teach them how to interpret what they were reading and watching.

The periodical evidence suggests that Shakespeare was employed as an instrument of enculturation, but also that dissenting voices used the periodicals to construct alternative ways of understanding Shakespeare and, in so doing, different ways of articulating their own place within Victorian culture. Periodicals for children illustrate Shakespeare's usefulness as a model of English manliness for boys and his characters' usefulness as moral exemplars for girls, but also the nuanced and multivalent interpretations of those models. Some periodicals for women and for the working classes use Shakespeare to promote traditional gender and class roles while others use him to establish the intellectual credibility of writers from disenfranchised social groups. The theatrical periodicals, attracting readers united only in their leisure pursuits, negotiate the divides of gender, class, and age to teach their readers not only how Shakespeare might fulfil their needs for entertainment and edification, what the

Victorians called “rational amusement,” but also for cultural legitimacy and national pride. Shifting definitions of childhood, masculinity and femininity, class, and legitimate entertainment rely to a surprising extent on Shakespeare to anchor them within an English cultural context that had already crowned Shakespeare as the epitome of its achievement. Shakespeare, by turns the ideal Englishman and the typical one, the embodiment of a culture’s past achievements and the source of its aspirations for the future, was a testing ground for challenges to accepted social values and social roles. In contrast to Milton or Shelley, whose political resonances were already established for Victorian readers, Shakespeare remained a contested ideological property.

As the chapters that follow will demonstrate, the nineteenth century was an exciting period in publishing, when the gradual abolition of Britain’s “taxes on knowledge” and the rapid emergence of new technologies had begun to have an effect on the variety of periodicals being launched. With publishing becoming increasingly inexpensive as a result of these two cumulative forces, Victorian publishers began to look beyond the relatively restricted markets which had sustained the magazine trade since its eighteenth-century beginnings. While the supply side of the magazine trade benefited from reduced taxation and new technologies that together made launching a new title a less expensive risk, other factors operating on the demand side combined to create new and expanded markets. As literacy rates increased throughout the period, the demand for appropriate reading material for newly-literate groups led to the creation of new kinds of literature. The periodical form was particularly appropriate for new readers, who did not belong to the leisured class which had traditionally formed the majority of the reading public. Literate members of the middle and

working classes did not have long stretches of uninterrupted reading time, and the magazine format with its short, discrete articles was ideally suited to the way that these readers read.

These new groups of readers shaped the periodicals market in a manner unmatched by any other publishing genre. The creation of meaning is always a collaborative act, but in periodicals this collaboration takes the form of an ongoing negotiation. Authorial intention is reshaped not only by editors and publishers anticipating reader response, or by readers bringing their own experiences to bear on the interpretation of meaning, but also by the author's second thoughts as factors such as sales figures and letters to the editor make manifest readers' responses. The Victorian period is rich in anecdotes about serial fictions with hurriedly wrapped-up plots or characters rising from the dead in response to readers' pleas, a successful article launching a recurring feature in a periodical, and plaintive letters from readers urging the speedy publication of the latest instalment in a serialized story. Readers expressed themselves not only with their letters, of course, but also with their purchasing power. The author of a book might be keenly aware of his audience, but if he misjudged that audience his only recourse would be to write another book – as Dickens seems to have done after a reader's critique of *Oliver Twist's* Fagin, creating the more sympathetic Jewish character Riah in *Our Mutual Friend*.³ In contrast, magazine publishers could shape each issue to reflect readers' tastes, as expressed in letters to the magazines' correspondence columns and in sales figures. Magazine readers clearly felt that their

³See Deborah Heller, "The Outcast as Villain and Victim: Jews in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend*."

opinions mattered to publishers, a belief encouraged through the inclusion of correspondence columns, with replies from the editor, in each issue.

Periodicals, then, are remarkably detailed records of ongoing collaborations between readers and writers. Collectively, Victorian periodicals allow us to witness one branch of the nineteenth century's public discourse: that is, how non-specialists learned about and expressed their views on subjects ranging from politics and current events to literature. As such, they provide a comprehensive body of evidence about popular Shakespeare. We know from the very existence of Shakespeare-themed articles in magazines aimed at readerships not likely to include Shakespeare scholars that Shakespeare was thought to possess some attraction for juvenile, female, and working-class readers.

The periodicals were by no means the Victorians' sole opportunity to engage with Shakespeare. For instance, Shakespeare was an important component of the Victorian educational curriculum even before 1882, when he was mentioned explicitly in the Education Department's code for the first time. However, compared to the range of engagements with Shakespeare made possible in the periodicals, the curriculum asked only that students show an ability to read a passage, of Shakespeare or "some other standard author," aloud:

Standard VI: Read a passage from one of Shakespeare's historical plays or from some other standard author, or from a history of England.

Standard VII: Read a passage from Shakespeare or Milton, or from some other standard author, or from a history of England (Committee of Council on Education, *Report*, 1881-82, 132; reproduced in Ellis 177).

Long before the schools formally endorsed Shakespeare in this way, Shakespeare had been a part of Victorian education in other ways. For instance, Andrew Murphy's work on grammar school textbooks has demonstrated that passages from Shakespeare's plays were anthologized as lessons in elocution or as likely candidates for memorization (Murphy, "Shakespeare Goes to School"), and the Cambridge and Oxford examinations for secondary school students, created in the 1850s, also included Shakespeare (Roach 3). However, since the legal age for leaving school was ten until 1893, when it was raised to eleven, many Victorian children would never sit for even the Standard VI examination, let alone a secondary school one. Thus, even the basic skill of reading Shakespeare aloud might never have been acquired in this formal manner. For those who did remain to be tested, neither memorizing Shakespeare nor reading him aloud was quite akin to understanding him, and the connections between Shakespeare's plays and Victorian readers remained to be made by other, less formal engagements with his works.

Outside of the schoolroom, Shakespeare was also present in a diverse array of less formal educational programs, for instance as a popular topic for working men's club lectures and as a frequent selection for women's reading groups. Here, we can imagine, Shakespeare was not only read but also discussed by people trying to understand what he might mean to them. Among these opportunities for voluntary engagements with Shakespeare, the periodicals represent a significant archive of the ways in which Shakespeare was presented to a wide range of Victorians. In contrast to club lectures and reading groups, for which we have few records of the discussions that took place, the periodicals represent an opportunity to assess the range of ways in which Shakespeare was presented for popular consumption.

To suggest that the periodicals represent an important source of evidence about Victorian popular Shakespeare reception is not to diminish the significance of the school textbooks, editions, and performances that also made Shakespeare part of Victorian culture, or to underestimate Shakespeare's influence on Victorian visual arts, poetry, and the novel. However, existing studies of Victorian Shakespeare have tended to focus on these aspects of Shakespeare reception without considering that periodicals, too, presented their readers with ways of thinking about Shakespeare. Indeed, for many Victorians who would not have chosen to pursue Shakespeare beyond an enforced memorization or an enjoyable evening at a theatre that happened to be showing one of Shakespeare's plays, the periodicals may have represented the chief means by which additional information, for instance criticism or biography, might have been put before them in a form that made the Shakespeare connection explicit. For those without knowledge of Shakespeare's works, an allusion in a Dickens novel or a Pre-Raphaelite painting would not necessarily resound with meaning.

The argument that periodicals made Shakespeare available to a readership without the will to invest in Shakespeare books or the knowledge needed to register allusions is susceptible to the impossibility of ascertaining which articles readers actually chose to read. In each issue of a periodical, readers were presented with a variety of articles, some of more interest than others. Clearly not every boy who received the *Boy's Own Paper* turned immediately to the Shakespeare-related article, but that article was available to be read, whereas if he had no interest in Shakespeare he would definitely not make the commitment to read, say, the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespear*. Similarly, a labourer might not have chosen to invest an entire shilling in John Dicks's collected edition of Shakespeare in 1867,

although some 700,000 people did (Murphy, *Shakespeare in Print*, 177-78). If he invested in the *Penny Magazine*, however, he would have had access to a great quantity of Shakespeare-related material without making a conscious decision to do so. To believe that the periodicals were a significant source of potential engagements with Shakespeare, we need not have utter faith in the *Penny Magazine*'s perhaps self-aggrandizing claim that:

In the present year it has been shown, by the sale of the 'Penny Magazine,' that there are two hundred thousand *purchasers* of one periodical work. It may be fairly calculated that the number of readers of that single work amounts to a million (*Penny Magazine* 1, 1832, iii).

However, while the *Penny Magazine*'s ratio of five readers to one purchaser is difficult to substantiate, it does seem believable that working-class readers, especially, would share a single issue rather than each individual purchasing a personal copy. Indeed, the correspondence sections of many periodicals, and not just those for the working classes, include advertisements from subscribers wanting to set up the regular exchange of one periodical for another once its first owner had finished reading it.

Evidence of the remarkable influence of the periodicals on Victorian culture, uncovered through the foundational research of scholars working under the aegis of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals, has helped to reshape Victorian studies. We now know that, just as the internet was seen as a rival to the book in the late twentieth century, in the nineteenth century it appeared that the periodical might supplant other forms of written expression (see Kent, 1 and *passim*). It did not, but the remarkable expansion of the

periodical offerings available to nineteenth-century readers was truly astounding. Modern directories such as the *Waterloo Index* estimate that the number of periodicals published in the nineteenth century amounts to well over 100,000 titles. While some of these titles represent periodicals that failed after just a few issues, many, including many of those in this thesis, had decades-long publication histories running to hundreds or even thousands of issues, published on a quarterly, monthly, sometimes even weekly or daily basis. These hundreds or thousands of issues of more than 100,000 titles were circulated to readerships that could themselves reach the tens or hundreds of thousands. Clearly the potential influence of periodicals, judging by sheer numbers, was immense.

In contrast to earlier periodicals, the potential influence of nineteenth-century periodicals can be measured in terms of breadth of readership as well as publication numbers, because factors conspired to create, around 1819, the first truly popular press. Technological advances that made printing drastically less expensive, combined with the repeal of restrictive legislation that had further increased prices, put magazines within the reach of almost everyone for as little as a penny an issue. The first beneficiaries of this newly-feasible popular press were the working classes, who had been taught to read through successful literary programs in the previous century but who, until now, had been ill-furnished with reading material. In penny magazines designed to appeal to working class readers, Shakespeare was often presented as one of them, a working class boy who had risen by dint of his own talent and hard work. Sometimes, his biography and works were mined

for political propaganda. Chapter one focuses on the early working-class press during the decades of labour unrest marked by the Peterloo Massacre in 1819 and Parliament's rejection of the Chartist' petition in 1836, presenting both the more familiar, conservative approaches to Shakespeare published by groups such as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and the alternative view available in magazines published with a more radical political agenda.

When children's periodicals began to thrive in significant numbers in the 1860s, they, too, found Shakespeare an endless source of pertinent material. Well before Shakespeare became an explicit component of the national curriculum in 1882, children were receiving an education in Shakespeare, and through Shakespeare, in the children's periodicals discussed in chapter two. As newly-created periodicals such as *Boys of England* and *Boy's Own Paper* or *Atalanta* and *Girl's Own Paper* competed for readers, the approaches to Shakespeare available to readers were shaped by each magazine's developing sense of its audience.

For women, Victorian periodicals expanded and splintered an existing market by offering an increasingly specialized product. Whether a woman was maid, widow, or wife, a radical feminist or an arch-conservative, there was a magazine that promised to educate her, though often by reinforcing, not really challenging, her beliefs. Just as the early decades of the century brought a political element to Shakespeare reception, the decades of the 1860s and 1870s, which saw the formation of the Women's Suffrage Committee in 1865 and the

adoption of the Married Women's Property Act in 1870, brought a new vitality to women's Shakespeare reception. As chapter three illustrates, the periodicals, though circumscribed by the economic imperative not to alienate readers, presented a wide range of possible engagements beyond the character criticism familiar through the books published during the period.

The first three chapters explore the Shakespeare education that the periodicals offered to these three demographic groups. In chapters four and five, the connection between Shakespeare, education, and the periodicals is considered in more thematic terms. Chapter four explores how one periodical, the *Theatrical Journal*, helped to educate an audience for Shakespeare. Priced at just a penny and a half when it was launched in 1839, and reduced to a penny an issue in 1846, this weekly magazine was within reach of any theatregoer who wanted to know where to find the latest Shakespeare production – or equestrian spectacle, exhibit of pygmies, or anything else that might be worth viewing. This chapter is centred around two key moments in theatre history, the Theatres Regulation Act of 1843 and the Great Exhibition of 1851. By focussing on the evolving responses to these two potentially threatening events, the chapter illustrates how, like the periodicals discussed in earlier chapters, this magazine was engaged in the same process of popular education that made Shakespeare part of other kinds of magazines.

The final chapter considers how this connection between Shakespeare and popular education influenced the national theatre debate that began with the Theatres Regulation Act

in 1843 and was only finally resolved by the creation of the National Theatre more than a century later. By filling in the blanks between more familiar, book-length interventions in the national theatre debate, this chapter provides evidence of a cause and effect relationship that gives the debate a more nuanced ideological context. Why was Shakespeare central to the national theatre debate? The periodicals offer some answers.

By focussing on popular Shakespeare reception rather than high culture, this dissertation resists the notion that Shakespeare was imposed on less-powerful demographic groups by the proponents of a dominant culture. The relationship between the cultural values of a dominant group and the responses of less-powerful ones, normally some combination of resistance and enculturation, has been the object of considerable theorizing. As consumer products, periodicals fit neatly into Theodor Adorno's conception of the mass culture industry, conceived as a monolithic agent of assimilation and domination in contradistinction to uncommercial culture.⁴ As sometimes-coercive agents peddling aspirations and ideals rather than striving to capture reality, periodicals can also be understood within the models of ideology proposed by such theorists as Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, and Georg Lukács; that is, that periodicals contribute to the reification of inequality by shifting the

⁴See Adorno, *Prisms: Cultural Criticism and Society* and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

energies of society's subordinate members away from resistance and towards false visions of an imagined future.⁵

Roland Barthes's concept of intertextuality also resonates with magazines, since each issue collects articles united physically, by being bound together, but treating disparate topics approached by various authors.⁶ Intertextuality is also a concern of reader-response theory, focussing on reading practices. The question of how people actually read these Shakespeare articles is one that I have elected to defer as probably unanswerable, but these articles do provide some evidence about how their authors, at least, interpreted Shakespeare's life and works. Hans Robert Jauss's concept of a reader's "horizon of expectations" and Stanley Fish's notion of "interpretive communities" have led me to ask questions about the ways in which magazine publishers oriented themselves towards imagined readers, and the ways in which their assumptions about these readerships influenced Shakespeare reception.⁷ Work on the reading practices of subordinate groups, who can choose to read canonical texts subversively, has been foundational to my analysis of

⁵See, especially, Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, and Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness and A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*.

⁶See, especially, Barthes, in *Image-Music-Text*.

⁷See, especially, Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* and Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?*

the articles themselves, which often show evidence of resistant or revisionary readings of Shakespeare.

Another useful approach to periodicals is discourse theory, which holds that discourse shapes identities, both individual and collective, by providing the narratives that transform lived experience into meaning. Studies of magazines for women and the working classes have demonstrated the usefulness of discourse theory as a framework for understanding the function that periodicals served in articulating and popularizing alternative ways of manifesting class and gender roles – the New Woman and the political radical, for instance, were figures prevalent in periodical articles as objects of both admiration and ridicule. My work, showing how Shakespeare was employed as an instrument of discourse to create or to delimit ways of being a child, a woman, a member of the working class, or a theatregoer, seems at first glance to take on a rather minor figure in Victorian culture, certainly one less characteristic of the period than the New Woman or the political radical. However, as the following chapters will illustrate, Shakespeare was more characteristic of Victorian culture than has been realized. One objective of this project, then, is to demonstrate that Shakespeare reception was a significant means of expression for a wide range of Victorian writers, and, for periodical readers, a significant influence on the way the world and their place in it might be understood. Moreover, as a figure who appeared in periodicals for widely varied readerships, Shakespeare is a constant that permits comparison

between the modes of discourse in magazines for disparate groups whether defined by gender, class, age, or leisure pursuits.

Victorian periodicals are excellent candidates for discourse analysis because they are inherently multivocal and open-ended. Each issue of a magazine contains articles on diverse subjects, written by different authors, yet shaped by an editorial point of view and intended to be read by a group of people imagined to share a defining characteristic such as age, gender, or political orientation. Each issue relates to the ones that precede and follow it in general orientation, but, as readers' perceived interests and tastes evolve over time, the most recent issue is, ideally, an improvement on the last. It is no accident, perhaps, that the heyday of the periodical was also the context in which Darwin, putting together the clues of scientists who came before him, solved the mystery of evolution.

Despite the usefulness of discourse, mass culture, and reader-response theories for interpreting the periodical evidence, this project was conceived as primarily archival rather than ideological in orientation. The thrill of poring over old and dusty tomes of bound collections of periodicals, or the hunt for elusive single issues, brittle, fragile, yet miraculously preserved for posterity, have been its driving forces. Theory has inspired the interpretation of the material located through this archival treasure hunt, but it did not shape the hunt itself. The decision to collect archival sources without a fixed theoretical or ideological objective in view is an acknowledgement of the truth in Margaret Ezell's warning that the feminist origins of the project to recuperate women's writing has risked

limiting the kinds of texts that are brought back from obscurity to those that serve feminist ends.⁸ As useful as various theories have been to the analysis of my findings, Ezell's warning has been heeded here; analysis and interpretation have been reserved for the final stage of the research process. The serendipity of archival research, not the single-minded pursuit of evidence to prove a point, has determined the shape of this project.

The sheer abundance of Victorian periodicals renders any claim to comprehensiveness impossible, with the added complication that, with their relatively low status in the hierarchy of publishing genres, periodicals were more often discarded than archived once the latest issue replaced the last. The rise of periodical-history over the past three decades has initiated attempts to compile complete retrospective collections, but it has also drawn attention to extant collections mouldering away in inappropriate storage or disintegrating in open stacks. Limited by the frustrating combination of abundance but incompleteness, even studies of periodicals for a particular readership almost invariably rely on the case-study method to give the weight of specificity to their general arguments. The alternative, an annotated bibliography, already exists for the varieties of periodical discussed in this project, and has proven an essential first step to research by suggesting periodicals likely to contain Shakespeare-related articles.

This project is selective in one sense, then, beginning with decisions about which periodicals to seek out and defining a time period for each chapter, as short as two or three

⁸See Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History*.

decades in the first four chapters or as long as a century in the final one. On the other hand, it is also comprehensive because it analyses the material uncovered in the selected periodicals without excluding items that would trouble a smooth narrative structure. Indeed, as Adrian Poole has also found in his work on Victorian Shakespeare, the temptation to tell the story in chronological order, dividing the material into early, middle, and late Victorian periods with their own recognizable political and literary currents, leads to a narrative replete with “half-truths” (3). Poole’s observation in relation to his analysis of a broad range of examples chosen from poetry, the novel, the visual arts, and the theatre is even more apt in relation to the periodicals. Since each issue of a periodical was designed to become obsolete, replaced by the next in a week or a month’s time, there was generally little attempt to build on previous criticism or even to retain a consistent position. The impulse to identify vestigial, dominant, and emergent ways of thinking about Shakespeare is not gratified by periodicals research, which yields a more sporadic assortment of materials. Within the time boundaries identified in each chapter, consequently, the organization is thematic rather than chronological, relating the individual articles to each other within categories of general tendencies or approaches.

A thematic approach sacrifices the appeal of chronology, and also, regrettably, an organizing framework that would foreground the concerns of social historians investigating what it meant to be a Victorian child or woman or worker at any given moment. Its great advantage, for this project, is that it illuminates the term “Shakespeare,” a term otherwise

flattened in intellectual histories of the Victorian period. Shakespeare, as this thesis argues on every page, signified meanings ranging from archetypal authority figure to friend and ally or the disenfranchised. The proliferation of alternative Shakespeares in the periodicals suggests that Victorian readers had an insatiable appetite for Shakespeare beyond merely cramming for school examinations. Throughout the nineteenth century, periodical-readers continued to mean by Shakespeare, to borrow Terence Hawkes's astute phrase accounting for Shakespeare's enduring popularity. Contributors to the *Girl's Own Paper* essay-writing contest discussed in chapter one used Portia as a vehicle for discussing women's rights, just as working-class readers borrowed from *Coriolanus* and *Richard III* to sharpen their views on class relations and the proponents of a national theatre transformed Shakespeare into the saviour of English drama. Measured in terms of utility, a favourite word among Victorian thinkers, Shakespeare continued to serve his readers and spectators throughout the nineteenth century. In turn, the Victorians prevented Shakespeare from fading into the forgotten past by continuing to discover new ways of making him relevant. If we now feel compelled to question their assertions about his value in cultural, moral, and aesthetic terms, we should recollect that we, too, use Shakespeare to create our own meanings.

Retrieving this popular Shakespeare is, in one sense, a response to the current crisis in the academy. Shakespeareans have been among the most vociferous opponents of theory, on the grounds that it has sundered Shakespeare's works from any lasting value they might have had. Harold Bloom is perhaps the most controversial of these opponents, but more

moderate voices including Edward Pechter, David Scott Kastan, and Brian Vickers have questioned what remains when Shakespeare and theory part company. Retrieving popular constructions of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century accomplishes more than merely situating the current theory wars within the *longue durée* of ideological battles about Shakespeare's true significance. As Ivo Kamps explains in a description that could just as easily invoke nineteenth-century commentators in place of the contemporary ones he selects:

every time Jonathan Goldberg or Catherine Belsey goes after Levin, or Bradshaw goes after Greenblatt, or Levin goes after feminists, or Pechter goes after the Left and the Right, or Vickers goes after everybody, the Shakespearean body is circulated – is passed around freely – amongst the most fierce rival critics. Such circulation constitutes literary life.⁹

The impulse to claim Shakespeare as a case study in a particular ideological approach, or to demonstrate that he is above them all, is no new manifestation. The Victorians' attempts to define the limits of what he might mean suggest that, far from sounding a warning of imminent demise, the struggle to contain Shakespeare's meaning is itself the lifeblood of his literary immortality.

⁹Kamps, "Alas poor Shakespeare! I knew him well," 20.

Chapter One: Shakespeare in the Early Working Class Press

Shakespear has in this play shewn himself well versed in history and state-affairs. *Coriolanus* is a store-house of political commonplaces. Any one who studies it may save himself the trouble of reading Burke's *Reflections*, or Paine's *Rights of Man*, or the Debates in both Houses of Parliament since the French Revolution or our own. The arguments for and against aristocracy or democracy, on the privileges of the few and the claims of the many, on liberty and slavery, power and the abuse of it, peace and war, are here very ably handled, with the spirit of a poet and the acuteness of a philosopher. Shakespear himself seems to have had a leaning to the arbitrary side of the question, perhaps from some feeling of contempt for his own origin (William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakspear's Plays*, 1817).

Shakespeare stood and stands for Democracy, for Empire, for Humanity; his message for all mankind and for all time is Nature's own; it will ring down the ages, a challenge to prejudice, a clarion call to Patriotism (Edward Salmon, *Shakespeare and Democracy*, 1916).

A century separates William Hazlitt's tentative synthesis of Shakespeare's class consciousness and the politics of *Coriolanus* from Edward Salmon's ringing certainty that Shakespeare's political message is democratic, patriotic, and timeless. Writing at a time when the Romantics were using Shakespeare to articulate their most personal responses to the political aftermath of the French revolution, Hazlitt suspected that Shakespeare did not share his egalitarian views.¹ Salmon, writing in a period of fervid patriotism, identified Shakespeare as a potential means of reconciling democracy and imperialism, a British beacon for the world. To Salmon, Shakespeare's value was universal, not personal, less a clue to Shakespeare's character than an unmistakable rebuttal of alternative political viewpoints. His invocation of Shakespeare's timelessness in the phrases "stood and stands,"

¹See Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730-1830* and *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*.

“for all time,” and “down the ages” is in sharp contrast to Hazlitt’s focus on recent political tracts. Events between 1817 and 1916 account for some of the differences between Hazlitt’s view and Salmon’s, but it is the development of a strong tradition of working-class Shakespeare reception in the early decades of the nineteenth century that permitted the utter refutation of Hazlitt’s suspicions in Salmon’s book. The conservative tendency of Shakespeare appreciation offered by remembered figures such as the prolific Charles Knight in the Victorian period was inspired by the radical deployments of Shakespeare that continued to exist alongside more conservative ones during the politically fraught decades of the Peterloo Massacre, in 1819, and the height of Chartist activity leading to Parliament’s rejection of the Chartist petition in 1836.

The Victorian debate about Shakespeare’s relevance to the working classes was often divided along political lines, with contemporary writers seeing in his works a reflection of their own political views. Working-class publishers and writers found Shakespeare useful if he could be made to represent working-class values and reprehensible if he seemed to undermine them. Magazines published for working-class readers by charitable groups adopted a similar approach, using Shakespeare for propagandistic purposes to further their own political agenda. In the Victorians’ hands, Shakespeare was rehabilitated into a working-class hero, a Chartist *avant la lettre*, and, contradictorily, a Tory propagandist.

Shakespeare was firmly ensconced as the national poet of Britain’s upper and middle classes by the end of the eighteenth century, but his value to working-class readers remained to be established. Technological and demographic factors made the emerging working-class periodicals the medium for Shakespeare’s popularization. Beginning with the radical

political magazines in the early decades of the century and continuing with the “useful knowledge” magazines of the 1830s and onward, publishers sought to provide working-class readers with the information they needed to educate and empower themselves. While the radical and the conservative magazine publishers defined their educational enterprise differently, both were engaged in the process of teaching the working classes to use their reading for more than mere entertainment. Teaching the working classes the skill of “right reading” had been a concern of eighteenth-century religious groups who taught literacy as a way of proselytizing, but once they became literate these working-class readers were ill-served by secular reading material.² The growth of a working-class magazine trade in the early decades of the nineteenth century can thus be traced to the successful literacy efforts of these religious groups, producing a group of newly-literate working-class readers for whom

²Literacy programs inspired by emerging theories about childhood and education had existed in England since the eighteenth century, first as instruments of Evangelical proselytizing through charity schools and Sunday schools designed as outreach programs for the poor. These programs were not regulated by any central body and were often temporary or itinerant, so it is difficult to ascertain the precise numbers of new readers produced by them, but Louis James estimates that by the middle of the eighteenth century, charity schools were already reaching some 30,000 working-class children, while the Sunday schools, formed in 1780, were educating between 800,000 and 1,500,000 pupils by 1830. Early in the nineteenth century, organized educational programs such as the National Society (est.1811), Anglican in affiliation, and the British and Foreign School Society (est.1813), run by the Quakers, were founded on the lessons learned in the charity schools and Sunday schools of the previous century. Meanwhile, schools for adults who had not benefited from one of these early education programs were available in some areas of England as early as 1811, and more widely when the first Mechanics’ Institutes were formed in 1823. At the same time, magazines for the working classes provided the cultural and intellectual contexts that helped graduates of these programs to build on the rudimentary reading skills they had acquired. See Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850: A Study of the Literature Produced for the Working Classes in Early Victorian Urban England*, 1-4 and passim.

existing periodicals intended for the middle and upper classes held little appeal. Literate but lacking the basic education that provided the cultural context for the material offered in magazines for the classes above them, working-class readers were ripe for reading material that addressed their needs and interests. Initially, literacy campaigns had been launched because charitable institutions had recognized illiteracy as a significant factor in labour unrest and atheism, but the cheap and often sensationalistic magazines that first sprang up to fill this niche in the market led these institutions to revise their stance. Ignorance, not illiteracy, was determined to be the root cause of these social problems, and so groups such as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and the Religious Tract Society sought to create religious and political harmony through an education in which literacy would be merely an initial step to enculturation. Long before the Education Act of 1870 made literacy an official national priority, the combined efforts of charitable groups and profit-minded publishers had undertaken to provide what the British government quite belatedly recognized as a social good.

In the periodicals created to fill the gap that literacy programs had created among working-class readers, Shakespeare was treated as a hotly contested piece of cultural property, employed both to reinforce Victorian England's threatened class hierarchy and to empower politically disenfranchised workers. Since the French revolution, a dominant tendency in Shakespearean scholarship had been to quarantine his works from the contemporary political fray by placing them in a remote, historicized past through antiquarian and philological investigations. Working-class treatments of Shakespeare operate against this dominant mode, introducing him into debates about class relations in

nineteenth-century Britain. As an example of a working-class boy who rose in society by virtue of his innate talents and work ethic, as a playwright whose words were employed both to foment and to quell class unrest, and as the source of both inspiration and parody, Shakespeare's ideological usefulness to Victorian publishers is responsible for his popularization among working-class periodical readers.

The sometimes conflicting purposes Shakespeare was made to serve are the result of at least two competing motives for publishing, combined with differing perspectives about working-class literacy. As religious groups were beginning to realize, literacy, once acquired, could not be limited to sanctioned reading material. Sunday schools instructed their pupils in the Bible, but readers were more apt to apply their newfound skills to more appealing works. The publishing industry obliged these readers with penny dreadfuls and penny novelettes that charmed them with graphic illustrations and easy reading, along with newspapers featuring sensational reports of political turmoil and lurid descriptions of recent crimes. The response was a spate of religious-minded magazines that sought to replicate the success of these inexpensive publications without also replicating their unacceptable contents. Along with the Religious Tract Society's publications to be discussed in chapter two, the *Penny Magazine*, founded by the utilitarians of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, and *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, the private enterprise of the evangelical Chambers brothers, were both created to meet this perceived need.

Not coincidentally, like the Religious Tract Society's *Boy's Own Paper* both the *Penny Magazine* and *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* feature multiple versions of Shakespeare's biography and snippets of facts from his life. These articles served a dual

purpose for working-class readers. They provided the elements of cultural literacy that would enable working class readers to take part in the intellectual life of the nation by familiarizing them with an author who had, by this time, become identified as the epitome of English achievement. At the same time, these magazines furnished their readers with a model of behaviour by presenting Shakespeare as a working class boy who had risen through the ranks by virtue of diligence, talent, and often such characteristically Victorian attributes as good manners and kindness to his mother. Shakespeare's prevalence in this type of periodical is a reflection of the educational agenda evident in Lord Brougham's address to the House of Commons, frequently cited by his contemporaries, on the effect of educating the "lower orders":

There have been periods when the country heard with dismay that the soldier is abroad. That is not the case now. Let the soldier be ever so much abroad, in the present age he can do nothing. There is another person abroad [...]. The schoolmaster is abroad, and I trust to the schoolmaster armed with his primer more than I do the soldier in full military array for upholding and extending the liberties of their country.³

If the working classes were indeed to be schooled as a way of "upholding and extending the liberties of their country," there was some dissension about the subjects that constituted this education, as well as the individual and societal benefits that might accrue from it. Lord Brougham was a founding member of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, and closely associated with the society's *Penny Magazine*, an attempt to place the "schoolmaster" within reach of all citizens, however humble. The *Penny Magazine* is

³Cited in Murphy 1.

sometimes dismissed as a misguided or even reprehensible attempt to impose values on the working class from above, but the memoirs of its publisher and editor Charles Knight suggest that his motives, at least, were honourable. For years before he became involved with the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, Knight was already an advocate of wholesome reading material designed to provide the working classes with interesting alternatives to the incendiary, politically-motivated magazines published by radicals such as William Cobbett and T.J. Wooler, discussed later in this chapter. In an article for the *Windsor Express*, Knight warned that the proliferation of inexpensive literature for the working classes could have dangerous consequences:

We have already said, and it is perhaps necessary to repeat it, that there is a new power entrusted to the great mass of the working people, and that it is daily becoming of wider extent and greater importance. It has been most wisely and providently agreed to give that power one principal direction by interweaving it with religious knowledge and feelings, that they might thus blend with the whole current of mature thought, and sanctify the possession of the keys of learning to useful and innocent ends. We are yet disposed to think that this is not all which the creation of such a new and extraordinary power demands. Knowledge must have its worldly as well as its spiritual range; it looks towards Heaven, but it treads upon the earth. The mass of useful books are not accessible to the poor; newspapers, with their admixture of good and evil, seldom find their way into the domestic circle of the labourer or artizan; the tracts which pious persons distribute are exclusively religious, and the tone of these is often either fanatical or puerile. The “two-penny trash,” as it is called, has seen farther, with the quick perception of avarice or ambition, into the intellectual wants of the working-classes. It was just because there was no healthful food for their newly-created appetite, that sedition and infidelity have been so widely disseminated. The writers employed in this work, and their leader and prototype, Cobbett, in particular, show us pretty accurately the sort of talent which is required to provide this healthful food. [...] They state an argument with great clearness and precision; they divest knowledge of all its pedantic encumbrances; they make powerful appeals to the deepest passions of the human heart. Let a man of genius set out upon these principles, in the task of building up a more popular

literature than we possess; and let him add, what the seditious and infidel writers have thrown away, the power of directing the affections to what is reverend and beautiful in national manners and institutions [...] and then, were such a system embodied in one grand benevolent design supplementary to the Instruction of the Poor, National Education, we sincerely think, would go on diffusing its blessings over every portion of the land, and calling up a truly English spirit wherever it penetrated (I, 235-37).⁴

Early on, then, Knight had recognized that the appeal of the radical magazines lay in their tone. In contrast to religious publications that persisted in “talking to thinking beings, and for the most part to very acute thinking beings, in the language of the nursery” (I, 243), an editor like Cobbett succeeded “not only by using the plainest English, but by identifying himself with the every-day thoughts – the passions, the prejudices – of those whom he addressed” (I, 243). While the Religious Tract Society’s magazines are more appropriately discussed among other publications for juvenile readers, in chapter two, the *Penny Magazine* and *Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal* made an effort to marry the tone of a Cobbett with subjects appropriate for Christian adults. The *Penny Magazine* and *Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal* were founded within weeks of each other in 1832, and acknowledged their shared goals. Knight suggests in his memoirs that together, these magazines:

were making readers. They were raising up a new class, and a much larger class than previously existed, to be the purchasers of books. They were planting the commerce of books upon broader foundations than those upon which it had previously been built. They were relegating the hole-and-corner literature of the days of exclusiveness to the rewards which the few could furnish; preparing the way for writers and booksellers to reap the abundant harvest (II, 183).

⁴Quotations are from Knight’s autobiography, which collects and comments on many of his newspaper and periodical articles. The article originally appeared in the 11 December 1819 issue of the *Windsor Express*.

Given his keen sense of the importance of making readers, it is appropriate that Knight is, more than any other single Victorian figure, responsible for introducing Shakespeare to the masses. In addition to his pecuniary and ideological interests in publishing material for the working classes, Knight was also an amateur Shakespearean who wrote a biography of Shakespeare and published the inexpensive *Pictorial Shakspeare*, “the most congenial undertaking of my literary life” (I.viii). He became associated with the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in 1827, when he began to edit and publish projects such as the *Library of Entertaining Knowledge* (I, vi). In Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge publications as well as his own projects, Knight repeatedly presented Shakespeare as an exemplary figure ill-served by the majority of his established critics and best appreciated through direct experience. Knight was a devout Bardolator determined to convey his convictions beyond a readership of Shakespearean scholars:

After a year of preparation I issued my prospectus, in which I boldly declared that Shakspeare demanded a rational edition of his performances, that should address itself to the popular understanding in a spirit of love, and not of captious and presumptuous cavilling. In the first number of my edition, containing the “Two Gentlemen of Verona,” I made a distinct profession of faith in Shakspeare, with a perfect knowledge that I should be assailed on many sides, but that I should call up hosts of friends ready to shake off their allegiance to “the dwarfish commentators who are for ever cutting him down to their own size.” I thus wrote in my introductory notice to this play: “We believe the time is now past when it can afford any satisfaction to an Englishman to hear the greatest of our poets perpetually held up to ridicule as a sort of inspired barbarian, who worked without method, and wholly without learning. But before Shakspeare can be properly understood, the popular mind must be led in an opposite direction; and we must learn to regard him, as he really was, as the most consummate of artists [...]” (II, 286-87).

The result, Knight's *Pictorial Shakspeare*, was well received by reviewers and readers. On the heels of that success, Knight launched his *Store of Knowledge for all Readers*, a weekly periodical, in 1841. Knight wrote the first two issues himself, on the life and works of Shakespeare (II, 296-97). Then, inspired by the new facts about Shakespeare he had uncovered while editing the plays, and which he had already rehearsed to some extent in his two issues of *Store of Knowledge for all Readers*, Knight began a full-scale biography of Shakespeare in 1842.

While Knight's publishing endeavours were reflected in the treatment accorded to Shakespeare's life and works in the periodicals he published, there was little overlap in readership. The *Pictorial Shakespeare* and *William Shakspeare: A Biography* appealed to readers who already appreciated Shakespeare, albeit in a "popular" rather than pedantic fashion, but periodical articles introduced him to readers who might never have considered investing in Knight's other projects or even borrowing them from a library. The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge recognized that the periodical form was ideal for readers lacking the leisure or the inclination to read a book-length work on any particular topic, and might serve to educate these readers while diverting them from less wholesome pastimes. The society launched its working-class *Penny Magazine* with an editorial recognizing that "there are a very great number of persons who can spare half an hour for the reading of a newspaper, who are sometimes disinclined to open a book," and promising a magazine "that may be taken up and laid down without requiring any considerable effort," that would serve as an alternative to the newspapers with their "violence of party discussion, or the

stimulating details of crime and suffering.”⁵ To this end, in addition to articles promoting good health, domestic economy, and proper pronunciation, the *Penny Magazine* furnished its readers with fodder for “rational amusement” such as an ongoing series describing items in the collections of the National Gallery and the British Museum.

The publication of the first annual volume of the *Penny Magazine*, a collected edition of the previous year’s issues, afforded the editors the opportunity to reflect on what they had accomplished:

It was considered by Edmund Burke, about forty years ago, that there were eighty thousand *readers* in this country. In the present year it has been shown, by the sale of the ‘Penny Magazine,’ that there are two hundred thousand *purchasers* of one periodical work. It may be fairly calculated that the number of readers of that single work amounts to a million (iii).

Even without the impressive but unverifiable multiplication that allowed the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge to claim that it had attracted a million readers, the magazine’s success, after its first year, was undeniable. The society had succeeded in attracting hundreds of thousands of readers, at least, with its formula of brief, interesting articles on a wide variety of topics. It was also widely criticized in competing periodicals for misrepresenting the goal it had actually achieved. The editors of the *Poor Man’s Guardian*, for instance, saw the *Penny Magazine* as the society’s transparent attempt to promote party politics, not working-class education:

yes, we ‘levellers’ have brought these gentry to the lowly figure of a penny! and we promise them greater humility than this. But our present business is with this new proof, if any further were wanting, of the odious hypocrisy of

⁵*Penny Magazine* 1, 31 March 1832, 1.

‘the Whigs;’ hear this precious set tell the whole community, with unblushing effrontery [...] “We consider it the duty of every man to make himself acquainted with the events that are passing in the world, with the progress of legislation, and the administration of the laws; *for every man is deeply interested in all the great questions of government.* The false judgements which are sometimes formed by the people upon *public events*, can only be corrected by the diffusion of sound knowledge.” Now, my Lord Brougham and Vaux, and company, as above, [a reference to the SDUK committee members listed earlier in the article], what say you to the almost numberless prosecutions YOU are at this moment carrying on against the publishers and vendors of penny publications; [...] we do not stay to offer one word of comment, but close with the words of Henry Brougham, *now* Lord Chancellor, and Chairman of “*The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*,” believing there is not one REALLY honest man, who shall read this page, who will not cordially join us in saying with the *illustrious* Chancellor – “Out upon such hypocrisy!”⁶

The charge levelled at the *Penny Magazine* was not entirely unfounded. As the comments of the magazine’s editor Charles Knight reveal, the magazine was not focused on working-class education for its own sake, but as a means to a political end:

It is the half-knowledge of the people that has created the host of ephemeral writers who address themselves to the popular passions. If the firmness of the Government, and, what is better, the good sense of the upper and middle classes who have property at stake, can succeed for a few years in providing tranquillity, the ignorant disseminators of sedition and discontent will be beaten out of the field by opponents of better principles, who will direct the secret of popular writing to a useful and a righteous purpose (II, 260-61).

The “righteous purpose” that Knight envisioned is a politically conservative one, opposed to “sedition and discontent” and promoting the current government. Knight’s theory was that by educating the working classes, publications such as the *Penny Magazine* could inure them to the radical notions fostered by ignorance. In Knight’s view, shared by many of his

⁶*Poor Man’s Guardian*, 31 March 1832, 334.

political stripe, the working classes needed to be taught to resist the empty political messages purveyed to them by radical politicians if reason were to triumph over rhetoric. By using Shakespeare as an instrument of this conservative educational agenda, Knight contributed to Shakespeare's enduring reputation as a Tory propagandist.

Shakespeare's usefulness as an instrument for the propagation of conservative values was no secret to Knight's contemporaries. Launched in the same year as the *Penny Magazine*, *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* shared the *Penny Magazine's* approach as well as its fundamental beliefs about the social value of such publications. In 1872, assessing the impact of the journal that he had published with his brother Robert, William Chambers could confidently assert that "the mass of cheap and respectably conducted periodical literature" among which he included *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* "has proved one of the many engines of social improvement in the nineteenth century" (283). From the outset, *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* had been intended to furnish the broadest possible readership with nutritious mental sustenance, as the "Editor's Address" from the first issue makes explicit:

Every Saturday, when the poorest labourer in the country draws his humble earnings, he shall have it in his power to purchase, with an insignificant portion of even that humble sum, a meal of healthful, useful, and agreeable mental instruction: nay, every schoolboy shall be able to purchase with his pocket-money, something permanently useful – something calculated to influence his fate through life – instead of the trash upon which the grown children of the present day were wont to expend it.⁷

⁷*Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* 1.1, 4 February 1832, 1.

Chambers' Edinburgh Journal attempted to disseminate “healthful, useful, and agreeable” reading material to a populace that had hitherto been served only a steady diet of partisan propaganda, sectarian cant, or sensationalism. Each issue of the magazine included articles as diverse as advice on emigrating to the colonies, domestic economy, and the arts, often with a title indicating that the item would be of particular interest to a specific type of reader. As a result of this deliberate inclusiveness, *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* was both a highly successful publication and an excellent example of the way in which the magazine format served to spread Bardolatry beyond the schoolroom and the library.

To this end, *Chambers'* introduced a series called “Popular Information on Literature,” which recognized that for many of the magazine’s readers, literature was an undiscovered country that required some form of roadmap in order to become accessible:

There is a large class of inquiring minds in the humbler walks of life, and another large class composed of the young of all orders, who, in entering upon a course of general modern reading, must be greatly at a loss for a knowledge of many men and books which are familiarly alluded to, and things with which every body is understood to be acquainted, but which, in reality, are only familiar to persons of perfect education, and to those who have been living for a considerable time in intimate converse with the world.⁸

As the quoted passage suggests, to transform these newly-literate “young of all orders” and adult members of the “humbler walks of life” into readers, it would be necessary to extend their education beyond mere literacy to include the cultural context that would make their reading comprehensible to them. Much as modern editions of classic works furnish their readers with a critical commentary intended to supply the information that would have been

⁸*Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* 1.13, 28 April 1832, 99.

obvious to readers experiencing the work in its own time, so *Chambers'*, in its eleven years of existence, provided an ongoing education in cultural literacy for readers whose experience in education and "intimate converse with the world" was less than complete.

Chambers' was an untiring advocate of literacy, and, in contrast to more radical publications, this was a literacy meant to extend beyond the pages of the magazine. In an article entitled "The Cultivation of the Mind," the benefits of reading were expressed in no uncertain terms:

The man of letters, when compared with one that is illiterate, exhibits nearly the same contrast as that which exists between a blind man and one that can see; and if we consider how much literature enlarges the mind, and how much it multiplies, adjusts, rectifies, and arranges the ideas, it may well be reckoned equivalent to an additional sense. It affords pleasures which wealth cannot procure, and which poverty cannot entirely take away. A well-cultivated mind places its possessor beyond the reach of those trifling vexations and disquietudes, which continually harass and perplex those who have no resources within themselves, and, in some measure, elevates him above the smiles and frowns of fortune.⁹

As *Chambers'* noted in an article in the December 14, 1844 issue, by that time Shakespeare's biography had superseded criticism of his works as an area of investigation and discovery.¹⁰ Influenced by the working class periodicals that used Shakespeare's

⁹*Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* 2.104, 25 January 1834.

¹⁰ *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* new series 2.50, 14 December 1844, 369-73. The Victorian urge to plunder Shakespeare's plays and poems as a way of supplementing his scanty biographical details is apparent in the pages of *Chambers'*. In addition to the biographical interest discernable in articles such as "The Will of Shakspeare" (10.472, 13 February 1841, 30), "Was Shakspeare Ever in Scotland" (4.181, 18 July 1835, 199), and "Did Shakspeare Visit Scotland?" (new series 1.17, 27 April 1844, 257-60), the magazine published several articles devoted to a more comprehensive biography: "Biographic Sketch" (5.247, 22 October 1836, 309-10), "Facts and Traditions Concerning Shakspeare" (new

biography as a vehicle for propaganda, the reception of Shakespeare's plays in these periodicals and in Victorian criticism more widely was often concerned with the extent to which Shakespeare's characters reflect their author. *Chambers'* emphasis on Shakespeare's life, not his plays, is attributable to the view expressed in one article, a "Biographic Sketch," that "In none of the persons of his dramas is any thing of their author to be seen. Every one speaks and acts for himself, and as he ought to speak and act."¹¹

In the same article, *Chambers'* suggested that in contrast to the plays, which offered little biographical fodder, Shakespeare's sonnets were acutely personal, "a private means of disburthening the poet's mind of the sweet and bitter fancies which occurred to it" (309). In keeping with Knight's scholarship, *Chambers'* suggests that within the sonnets readers can find Shakespeare "unbosoming himself of the mild complainings to which his situation and circumstances gave rise," and confessing the "melancholy which secretly preyed" upon him (309). The fact that the sonnets appeared infrequently in *Chambers'* and the *Penny Magazine*, despite their biographical interest, may suggest that these moralizing magazines detected the sonnets' potentially homoerotic overtones or found them not conducive to synopsis treatment.

Shakespeare's biography was also useful, within carefully delineated parameters, for magazines preaching the very radicalism that the *Penny Magazine* and *Chambers'* *Edinburgh Journal* sought to avert. While conservative magazines viewed Shakespeare as

series 2.50, 14 December 1844, 369-73), and "Who Wrote Shakspeare" (New Series 17.449, 7 August 1852, 87-89).

¹¹*Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* 5.247, 22 October 1836, 309-10; quotation p.309.

an exemplary Englishman and an important item on the cultural literacy curriculum, magazines published from within the working class can be characterized by their willingness to question all received ideas, including ideas regarding literature. Instead of labouring to acquire the trappings of a middle-class or upper-class education, readers of these magazines were encouraged to use their own experiences as a frame of reference for their reading. Literature that failed to resonate with the realities of working-class life was simply expunged from this emerging working-class canon. Shakespeare, already occupying a lofty position in the established canon of the higher classes, was among the figures whose value to the working class was called into question. There is no consensus within these periodicals about Shakespeare's relevance, but even among periodicals not explicitly concerned with issues of literary value, Shakespeare's life and works became fodder for political and aesthetic debate.

The political working-class periodicals inherited a tradition of satire and allegory that frequently employed Shakespeare's plays for rhetorical and humorous effect. In the eighteenth century, visual appropriations of Shakespeare's plays through caricature were in theory accessible to the working classes, displayed in shop windows for the amusements of passers-by. However, by relying on the viewer's intimacy with Shakespeare's plays, these visual appropriations probably excluded most members of the working classes. In the nineteenth century, working-class periodicals combined visual and verbal parodies with caricatures accompanied by texts that explained the joke. For example, the front page of one issue of *Figaro in London* featured a caricature entitled "The Modern Lear," accompanied

by an article drawing a parallel between Shakespeare's play and contemporary politics. In this politicized retelling, Lear is compared to "a certain king of modern times" who:

had a number of ungrateful children, on whom he showered abundance of wealth, which was not sufficient to allay their most ravenous appetites. He gave them honours, titles and sinecures, curtailed his private income to enrich them, and he was after all tauntingly charged with a want of proper liberality. His domestic moments were embittered continually by the ingratitude of his offspring, who, like the children of Lear, professed much love and obedience till the unreasonableness of their demands rendered full compliance with them absolutely impossible. Then every insult was offered to the unhappy parent who had yielded too long to the ravenous disposition of his thankless and rapacious family.¹²

In contrast to eighteenth-century caricature relying on the reader's ability to recognize visual cues and supply the necessary context, *Figaro in London* contextualizes the caricature before going on to complain about contemporary instances of political patronage, using Shakespeare as a source not only of analogy but also of insult. The article refers to an Edmund-like figure, a:

mushroom nobleman whom we need not allude to in more explicit terms than by the words 'degenerate bastard,' which Shakespeare has put into the mouth of King Lear. This base born individual of a mongrel breed; this snarling *Whelp* inheriting all the assuming pride of royalty, with all the depraved attributes of the vitiated source from which he had his more immediate origin; this base born lump of illegitimacy not content with impudently accepting titles to which he possesses no other claim than his bastardy, has thought proper to make a dead set at the Exchequer of this country, which he is anxious to plunder for his private benefit. He does not seem content with merely casting a stain on the aristocracy, (if what is already so black can be affected by a blot,) but the leniency that has been shown him for his father's sake, stirs him up to acts of insolent effrontery which would not be patiently born with even in the person of the legitimate heir to the monarchy (1).

¹²*Figaro in London* 58, 12 January 1832, 1.

On the front page of another issue, *Figaro in London* depicts the monarch as a “royal puppet” in a “state theatrical” based on *Othello*, in which the puppet is manipulated by Lord Brougham, in the role of Iago, to the detriment of Desdemona, standing for Hibernia. Here, the details of Shakespeare’s plot are less relevant than the circumstances of this production, as a puppet show. *Othello* had by this time become so prevalent in amateur and popular productions that Iago was probably familiar as a manipulative villain, but even without that context the parody is comprehensible because, as the accompanying text explains, the puppet’s strings:

are held in the hands of persons, who amuse themselves by pulling first one and then the other as it may serve their temporary purposes. The funny little figure wriggles about first to one side and then the other just as it strikes the whim of those in whose hands he happens to be, and he is forced when acted on by them to play whatever antics they may deem desirable. One jerk may make the little fellow extend his hand in an attitude of friendship, while the next moment he may be made grotesquely to throw up his foot, as if he would kick down the very thing to which he had the moment before offered his hand, and this he wriggles about in every sense of the word the mere *puppet* of those who possess the power to play upon him.¹³

Figaro in London was an astute judge of Shakespeare’s potential appeal to working-class readers, providing just enough context to make these caricatures effective among readers who required something like an editor’s note to lay the groundwork for the joke. Especially after Shakespeare’s history plays began to be used as an interesting means of conveying otherwise dry lessons on Britain’s past, analogies between Shakespeare’s plots

¹³*Figaro in London* 65, 2 March 1833, 1.

and current events were popular in the radical press. However, Shakespeare's potential value to working-class readers was not limited to his usefulness in political attacks, as these examples from *Figaro in London* might suggest. In some working-class magazines, Shakespeare was treated as a contemporary, and often as a propagandist.

For the *Literary Test*, Shakespeare like other literary figures had the potential to help or hinder the working-class cause as more than just a source of satire. In the pages of this short-lived periodical, works of literature were analysed for the views they embodied, and according to this test Shakespeare was a failure. The first issue of the *Literary Test* and the advertisements that preceded its publication made clear its political and moral point of view. As the editor explains in his first address to his readers:

The conditions upon which I accepted office, were that "I belong to no sect – no party, religious or political; – that I study no private interest; – that I admit no partiality; – that, above all, I acknowledge sincerely the strict equality of all men, – and women too – in the face of justice and morality; – that I neither succumb to the powerful or the proud, nor presume over the poor and the despised, – but that I be 'the friend of all, – the rich man's adviser, the poor man's advocate;' – that I do my duty fearlessly and unscrupulously in every respect, without consulting prejudice, delicacy, despotism, fashion, patronage, or" – will you believe it – even "*popular opinion*:" – in short, that I "do unto others as I would that others should do unto me."¹⁴

The *Literary Test* ensured its independence from economic interests, and probably its early demise as well, by refusing to accept any advertising. Its lofty aims were also evident in its reviews, where the magazine took as its motto Othello's request of his posthumous reviewers that they "Nothing extenuate nor set down aught in malice" (2). The inaugural

¹⁴*Literary Test* 1, 1 January 1832, 1.

issue explained that the “aim of all writers ” should be “to instruct and to improve, by light and interesting means, the condition of their fellow creatures: – no one should take up the pen of authorship who has not such an object in view ” (2).

In the advertisements preceding the publication of its first issue, the *Literary Test* trumpeted the bravery of tackling Shakespeare as its first “test” subject. Shakespeare, already an established figure in the literary canon and sometimes an instrument of cultural hegemony, was an appropriate target. When the promised article finally appeared in the third issue, the test was less analytical than hortatory, propagandistic rather than probing. Without any attempt to present evidence or example, the article concluded that Shakespeare was a failure in *Literary Test* terms:

I at once admit that *Shakspeare* 's powers of language and delineations are stupendous, and his poetry exquisite; but I have yet to ascertain whether all these advantages have been employed for a good object; or whether, instead of applying them to the furtherance of knowledge and increase of happiness, he has not somewhat preferred the advancement of his own individual interest, and tended to the perpetuation of ignorance and wretched inequality, by truckling to the vicious and distempered opinions of those who benefited by their continuance. That the state of things, however he intended, has not been much improved by his endeavours is very clear, and surely by such extraordinary powers as he possessed, any difficulty would have been surmountable. It is true that he lived in times even more despotic than the present; still, to a genius like his, the task would have been easy to bring, without offending, the king into contact with the beggar – the rich with the poor – and to assist the latter with such powerful arguments as would compel the most violent of tyrants to own how unjust the dreadful disparity of their relative situations.

But, instead of doing this, he has drawn his scenes among kings and nobles, and taught mankind little more than that princes are but men, and prone to all the faults and weaknesses of mortality; – occasionally, however, contenting himself by saying a kind sentence or two in favor of the unfortunate – and those too so admirably and effectively that I can the less excuse his omission to say more. *Shakspeare* in fact only studied the

amusement of the aristocracy of his day, who were yet more difficult to please than the “society” of the present; – if, indeed, he was not of himself rather inclined to agree with his betters, – or else, how could a mind of his substantial superiority have delighted so much in the pageantry of kings “and the pomp and circumstance of glorious war?”¹⁵

Ironically, while eighteenth-century Shakespeare criticism had been largely occupied with defending Shakespeare from French criticism that he had breached the rules of decorum by mingling kings and clowns, the *Literary Test*’s main objection appears to be that he did not mingle them enough. While the *Literary Test* folded shortly after its attack on Shakespeare, the views it expressed resurfaced periodically, most famously in Ernest Crosby’s 1903 book *Shakespeare’s Attitude Toward the Working Classes*. The book provides examples of Shakespeare’s shortcomings but adds little to the *Literary Test*’s argument, and would have been forgotten if not for its foreword by Leo Tolstoy, which in turn gained something of an afterlife in George Orwell’s reply.¹⁶ The unwarranted longevity of Crosby’s book, unfairly used to characterize late-Victorian views on Shakespeare and the working classes, is one reason a thorough investigation of periodical sources is so important.

Another advantage to placing works such as Crosby’s in context is that in contrast to the *Literary Test*, which like Crosby saw little usefulness in Shakespeare’s works, other magazines with a similar political perspective did recognize an inherent value in them. In *The National, a Library for the People*, for instance, Shakespeare’s legacy was treated more

¹⁵*Literary Test* 3, 14 January 1832, 48.

¹⁶“Lear, Tolstoy, and the Fool,” reprinted in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, eds., *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968).

positively. Like its more successful rivals *Figaro in London* and the *Northern Star*, *The National* combined cultural and political concerns, presenting them in a manner designed to appeal to working-class readers. With objectives very similar to those expressed by the editor of the *Literary Test*, and a not much longer existence, folding after just six months (January - June 1839), *The National* came to a quite different conclusion about Shakespeare's relevance to the working classes. In its article "The Life of Shakspeare," Shakespeare is depicted as a compatriot, a man who had risen from obscure beginnings and who had never abandoned his solidarity with the people of his own class. In its analysis of Shakespeare's value, *The National* uses Shakespeare's biography to mock the gentrifying tendencies of more highbrow publications, dismissing the usual claims about the "undoubted gentility" of Shakespeare's mother with the parenthetical comment "as if it were a matter of vital importance to the fame of the great dramatist!"¹⁷ Like most articles introducing Shakespeare to the working classes, the biography in *The National* is selective in its details, mentioning the key elements contributing to Shakespeare's ready identification as one of "the people": his father's status as a working man rather than a gentleman; his ordinary education beginning and ending at a country free-school; a possible apprenticeship with his father; the legendary deer-stealing frolic which resulted in his temporary exile from Stratford-upon-Avon; his first theatrical employment minding the horses of theatregoers or assisting the prompter; his rise from this subordinate position to success as a dramatist, shareholder, and manager; and his country's final testament to his success with a monument at Westminster Abbey.

¹⁷ *The National* 1, 1839, 277.

The National, in common with other working-class periodicals, sought to promote the interests of the most numerous but least powerful class of English society. It counted Shakespeare's biography among the topics worth discussing because, as it explained in its first issue, this periodical envisaged the "pursuit of knowledge" as an inherently laudable and lofty goal. For *The National*, the "equal rights of all, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and the never-ceasing improvement of humanity," a broadly utilitarian agenda, could be achieved by levelling the educational playing field so that the "grandest and profoundest thoughts of our master intellects," the "thoughts and opinions of the noblest spirits of the world, more especially those of our own country" might be rendered financially and intellectually accessible to all.¹⁸ Information about Shakespeare was deemed essential to this enterprise not only because Shakespeare could serve as a model of the self-made man, but also because the thoughts embodied in his plays and poems could elevate readers. By moving beyond biography or outright dismissal to genuine analysis, *The National* furthered working-class Shakespeare reception.

Other magazines, less utilitarian in orientation, also helped to develop a discernable working-class tradition of Shakespeare reception. The *Political Mirror* found Shakespeare relevant to the working classes on very different grounds than *The National* had, publishing a series on his works in 1837. In the first instalment, the series suggested that Shakespeare's plays remained politically relevant:

In the pages of Shakespeare, may be traced not only the operation of those social relations which have, from the earliest periods, connected, or disjointed

¹⁸*The National* 1, 1839, 3.

human beings – but a most faithful picture of those political relations, also, which human beings have always borne and still bear, to each other. In history, there is nothing new. All is re-production. Names may change – but the political principles and passions which now agitate the world, have agitated the world since the commencement of time.

In England, we are in the habit of dividing politicians into Tories, Whigs, Radicals, and pretend Radicals. All these varieties may be found in Shakespeare – although the specimens are not so ticketed and labelled.¹⁹

To demonstrate its theory that Shakespeare was relevant to working-class readers because his plays could help them to understand contemporary politics, in several subsequent issues the *Political Mirror* used *Julius Caesar*²⁰ and *Coriolanus*²¹ to discuss contemporary political debates such as parliamentary representation and the mutual obligations of the social classes. While these politicized uses of Shakespeare did little to illuminate either play, they did succeed in disproving the *Literary Test*'s case against him. Shakespeare was indeed relevant to the working classes, as readers of the even more radical *Northern Star* well knew.

The *Northern Star*, the chief Chartist publication until it folded in 1852, regularly employed Shakespeare in the service of political ideals. Like the *Political Mirror*, the *Northern Star* frequently invoked Shakespeare's plays as analogies to contemporary events, quoting couplets from the plays to bolster its arguments and even running a five-part series, "Chartism from Shakespeare," in which lengthy quotations selected chiefly from the history and Roman plays reflect radical views on current events reported elsewhere in the

¹⁹*Political Mirror* 19 August 1837, 12.

²⁰*Political Mirror* 19 August 1837, 12-15; 26 August 1837, 23-26; 2 September 1837, 42-43.

²¹*Political Mirror* 16 September 1837, 70.

magazine.²² Initially, Shakespeare was included in “Chartism from the Poets,” alongside Milton and Thomson, but the *Northern Star* quickly realized that his plays offered a rich vein of apposite commentary and began to include a wide variety of quotations drawn exclusively from his works. Passages reflecting on the reciprocal duties of king and subject (from *Henry V*, *Henry VI*), justifying rebellion (*Henry IV*, *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*) or lamenting the dismal state of the nation (*Richard II*, *King John*) are especially prevalent in these selections. The *Northern Star*’s approach to these quotations suggests that they are being employed as rhetoric, not as references intended to remind the reader of the plays from which they are drawn. “How poor an instrument / May do a noble deed! he brings me liberty,” (mis)quoted from *Antony and Cleopatra*, is probably meant to encourage political radicalism, not to inspire readers to emulate the play’s clown by bearing asps in baskets.²³ “The better part of valour is discretion” achieves its inspirational tone only if the reader fails to identify the speaker, Falstaff, and the context, justifying his decision to “counterfeit dying” to avoid fighting and then to pretend that he has slain Hotspur in battle.

The *Northern Star* used Shakespeare for rhetorical purposes, but that it also revered his works is evident in its review of the *Pictorial Penny Shakespeare*:

The Englishman who has not read SHAKESPEARE may doubt his nationality; he is, at best, but half an Englishman, when ignorant of the works of his greatest countryman: and yet, to how many millions has SHAKESPEARE been but little, if anything, more than a mere name. It is painful to reflect that thousands, nay, millions have lived and died, and never

²²*Northern Star* 25 April 1840, 7; 2 May 1840, 7; 9 May 1840, 7; 23 May, 1840, 7; and 6 June 1840, 7.

²³*Northern Star* 2 May 1840, 7.

known him, who, 'though dead yet speaketh,' and speaketh those words which, of mightier import than the words of priests or prophets, never fail to elevate the minds and purify the hearts of those who willingly list to them.²⁴

Clearly the *Northern Star* shared the conviction evident in less-radical magazines that reading Shakespeare could improve working-class life. In the *Northern Star*'s review of the *Pictorial Penny Shakespeare*, as in its regular literary features and its reverent attitude towards literary classics and innovations alike, the magazine taught the working classes to find more in their reading than mere political propaganda. Shakespeare was not valuable just for anticipating the political developments of the nineteenth century or for furnishing writers with apt quotations; though the *Northern Star* might quibble elsewhere in its pages about just whose minds required elevating or hearts purifying, in its review the magazine clearly recognized Shakespeare's ongoing relevance to its radical readers. The *Northern Star* furthered working-class Shakespeare reception by recommending reading Shakespeare, not just citing him.

The kind of rhetoric that made Shakespeare a useful source of quotations was characteristic of most Chartist publications, and among them the *Political Register* stands out both for its frequent recourse to Shakespeare and for its unusually virulent attack against Shakespeare's relevance to the working classes. In an article not about literature but rather about the lack of nutrition in potatoes,²⁵ Cobbett likened a taste for this "worse than useless root" to the British fondness for Shakespeare. The analogy between the everyday life of his

²⁴ *Northern Star* 29 November 1845, 3.

²⁵ *Political Register* 18 November 1815, 194.

readers (potatoes) and more abstract concepts (the fashion for Shakespeare) is typical of Cobbett's technique, admired and emulated by Charles Knight however much the conservative periodicals might have objected to Cobbett's conclusions. While Knight would certainly not have agreed that Shakespeare was merely fashionable rather than positively wholesome for working-class readers, the analogy is persuasive, especially to readers more familiar with potatoes than with Shakespeare.²⁶ However, Cobbett did not succeed in turning his readers away from Shakespeare, partly because his own periodical worked at cross purposes to his argument in the article. By drawing attention to the lack of mental nutrition in Shakespeare's plays and their reliance on what he dismissed as "bombast and puns and smut," Cobbett was being less than ingenuous. His own reliance on the "bombast" of Shakespeare's history plays for rhetorical purposes is evident in nearly every issue of his magazine. Cobbett's biographer, George Spater, notes that among a rich repertory of authors from whom Cobbett regularly drew quotations and analogies, he quoted Shakespeare far more often than any other author (1:18 and 538). Nonetheless, in spite of Cobbett's implicit recognition that Shakespeare could serve working-class interests at least as a source of rhetoric, his overt rejection of Shakespeare in his influential magazine stands with the *Literary Test* as a rare instance of anti-Shakespeareanism in the early working class periodicals.

Despite Cobbett's views as expressed in that article, Shakespeare was prevalent in the radical periodicals, not excluding his own. In Thomas Jonathan Wooler's successful

²⁶E.P Thompson notes in his influential *The Making of the English Working Class* that Cobbett frequently employed "the homely, practical analogy, most commonly taken from rural life" to draw in his readers (824).

periodical *Black Dwarf*, Shakespeare was likewise employed for rhetorical purposes, most often as a source of pithy, politically-weighted quotations. The *Black Dwarf*'s prospectus vowed to "hold up a glass, in which no honest man need be ashamed to look, and every fool and knave may readily trace his resemblance."²⁷ As part of its ongoing mission to expose "political delinquency" and "spiritual imposition,"²⁸ the magazine frequently printed quotations from Shakespeare, often as the epigram to the lead article. In these cases, while the author is identified, the quotation is never attributed to a character or situated within a particular play, with the result that it serves Wooler's rhetorical purpose all the more precisely. Only in a few instances is the comparison rendered in more explicit terms, becoming an epic simile rather than an isolated quotation. For instance, Shakespeare's *Richard III* is invoked in an open letter from the *Black Dwarf* to Sir Francis Burdett calling on the baronet to rebuke the principles of his protégé, John Hobhouse. After quoting from an objectionable speech in which Mr. Hobhouse expresses anti-radical views on parliamentary reform, Wooler inserts four lines from Shakespeare's *Richard III* to imply that Hobhouse had been deliberately masquerading as a friend of the people just as Richard had smiled while he played the villain.²⁹ In the same vein, an article on the death of George III and the ascent of his son to the throne seizes the opportunity to demand justice for radicals who had been injured or killed when the government responded with violence to a political gathering, an event known to posterity as the Peterloo Massacre. The *Black Dwarf*

²⁷*Black Dwarf* 1.1, 22 January 1817, 1.

²⁸*Black Dwarf* 1.1, 22 January 1817, 1.

²⁹*Black Dwarf* 3.7, 17 February 1819, 97-102.

recommended that George IV take Shakespeare's Henry V as a model. Just as Henry "when he ascended the throne, parted with all the associates who had disgraced him," so George IV should dismiss the advisors who served him during his Regency, notably Sidmouth, Castlereagh, and Canning, blamed by the radicals for that bloody attack on the crowd assembled to hear Henry Hunt speak of parliamentary reform.³⁰ In an open letter to the Earl of Liverpool "On the sophistry and nonsense of his speech on the Embarrassment of the Country,"³¹ Wooler asks whether the earl has deliberately "imitated the jesting of Hamlet upon Polonius" in his speech (725). If the rhetorical question fails to make explicit the analogy between Hamlet's feigned madness and the madness Wooler is implying as a quality of Liverpool's speech, not to mention the Polonius-like foolishness of his auditors and the potential for a tragic outcome, the article goes on to develop the comparison:

Hamlet. – That cloud is like a camel.

Pol. – It is like a camel!

Hamlet. – Or, like a *whale*!

Pol. – Very like a whale!

It is as fortunate for your lordship, as for the Prince of Denmark, that your hearers were equally complaisant. With your permission, however, we will doff the figures of the whale and camel, and consider your speech as a mere cloud – a shadow of something; a resemblance of nothing (726).

Beginning with the January 26, 1820 issue, *Black Dwarf* included a regular selection of quotations in a column called "The Blackneb." As Wooler explained in the first

³⁰ *Black Dwarf* 4.4, 2 February 1820, 109-16.

³¹ *Black Dwarf* 4.21, 31 May 1820, 725-37.

“Blackneb,” the column was intended to convey the sense that the radical agenda was not an innovation, but rather a continuation of an age-old struggle for liberty and justice. Here, alongside quotations from political tracts, Wooler occasionally included passages from Shakespeare intended to reflect the issues addressed in the front-page article. During the complicated series of divorce proceedings designed to prevent Caroline of Brunswick from being crowned when her husband George IV took the throne in 1821, for instance, the *Black Dwarf* like other radical publications supported Caroline because the Tories opposed her. During the trial, the *Black Dwarf* quoted a passage from *King Lear* that suggested both a parallel between George IV’s behaviour and the madness of Shakespeare’s monarch, on the one hand, and a more rhetorical point about injustice, hypocrisy, and rank on the other:

Lear. – Yet see how this world goes.

Gloster. – I see it feelingly.

Lear. – What! art mad? A man may see how this world goes, with no eyes. Look with thine ears: see how yon’ justice rails upon yon’ simple thief. Hark! in thine ear: Change places; and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief? – Thou has seen a farmer’s dog bark at a beggar? –

Gloster. Ay, Sir.

Lear. And the creature run from the cur? – There thou might’st behold the great image of authority: a dog’s obeyed in office.–

Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand:

Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine back;

Thou hotly lust’st to use her in that kind

For which thou whipp’st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.

Through tatter’d clothes small vices do appear, –

Robes and furr’d gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold –

And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks; –

Arm it in rags, a pigmy’s straw doth pierce it.

*William Shakespeare. King Lear, a Tragedy. 1605.*³²

³²*Black Dwarf* 5.13, 27 September 1820, 448.

In its report on Caroline's death in August 1821, the *Black Dwarf* again invoked Shakespeare, opening the article with the quotation "Adieu, much injur'd queen" from *Richard III*. As the article goes on to remark, the quotation is eerily apt, "ominously applied to her late Majesty, by the audience on the evening she visited the theatre for the *last time*, on the 28th of July, only eight days before she became a corpse."³³ Later in the same article, four lines from *Cymbeline* recall the most memorable aspect of the queen's life, the trial which the *Black Dwarf* had always maintained to be slanderous. According to the article, the queen's death is attributable to the machinations of her enemies, who killed her not with poison or sword but rather by means of:

SLANDER – whose edge is *sharper* than *the sword*! –
Whose tongue *outvenoms* all the worms of Nile!
Whose breath rides on the posting winds, and doth
Belie all *corners of the world*! (224).

Like *Figaro in London*, *Black Dwarf* recognized the intimate connection between drama and the political pageant Wooler dubbed "state theatricals" in a recurring column. For instance, in another issue, Menenius' conversation with the citizens in *Coriolanus* is used to reinforce Wooler's contention that the struggle between patricians and populace is nothing new, with an underlying threat that continued indifference to the needs of the populace could lead to violence in England just as it had in Coriolanus's Rome.³⁴ At the same time, while politics were often seen to be inherently dramatic, the *Black Dwarf* recognized that drama itself

³³ *Black Dwarf* 8.7, 15 August 1821, 217-27.

³⁴ *Black Dwarf* 5.8, 23 August 1820, 267-68.

could serve a political purpose. In a short-lived theatrical review column, the theatre's potential was made explicit:

DRURY LANE. – *Othello* – We sometimes go to the theatre, and sit there with the utmost astonishment, in the indifference we see around us. The stage has many charms. We can see there what we might in vain hope to find in the common walks of human life. We sometimes catch the living spark of freedom, and think we breathe in ancient Greece, or god-like Rome; or sit over the better remembrance of English liberty, or glory. We see the native dignity of man, unawed by rank, or title, boldly indulging the noblest feelings of humanity. What an invaluable school would the stage be, if it were quite unfettered. What a powerful engine to correct the abuses, and lash the follies of the times. But we turn with some regret from the consideration of what it might be. We must be content to take it at present as it is.³⁵

In the 1820s, the theatre would come into its own as a radical power, discussed more fully in chapter four. The *Black Dwarf* noted the theatre's potential in its review of *Othello*, but a production of *Richard III* illustrated a fully realized intersection between drama and politics. The *Black Dwarf*'s review article, with the headline "Horrid Sedition at Covent Garden Theatre," suggests that audience members laughed during a production of *Richard III* because they recognized a parallel between Shakespeare's Lord Mayor and the current occupant of that position. According to the review, the actor:

made the Mayor of the tragedy as servile, officious, and contemptible, as Shakespear ever imagined, or modern times beheld. The real Mayor's reign approaches its close; let him not leave office without avenging his dignity, and asserting his exclusive right to be ridiculous in the robes of the annual magistracy.³⁶

³⁵*Black Dwarf* 1.5, 26 February 1817, 78.

³⁶*Black Dwarf* 3.43, 27 October 1819, 706-7.

Working-class periodicals interpreted Shakespeare for their readers, using his history and Roman plays in particular as sources of political commentary. If the *Black Dwarf* could interpret *Richard III* as seditious, the conservative publications would see Shakespeare's history plays as opportunities to glorify Britain's past. The treatment Shakespeare was accorded in both conservative and radical working-class periodicals had important repercussions in Shakespeare reception more widely, especially in the reception of the history and Roman plays. Working-class periodicals influenced Victorian Shakespeare reception by making Shakespeare the Victorians' contemporary, highlighting the political aspects of his life and works not otherwise widely noted in the criticism of the day. The image of Shakespeare as a self-made man was popularized in these periodicals because that image held an ideological appeal for working-class readers. While it is true that Shakespeare was sometimes also used as a representative of an elite culture to which working-class readers should be forced to aspire, that tells only part of the story. In the magazines published with less conservative ideals in mind, Shakespeare's life and works, stripped of their middle-class pretensions, helped working-class readers to resist that hegemony and to imagine alternatives to continued subordination. Shakespeare may be less familiar as a working class hero than as the iconic playwright of the upper classes, but, as the Victorian working-class periodicals discovered, Shakespeare need not be accepted merely according to the terms on which he is habitually offered. By finding innovative uses for Shakespeare's life and works, radical writers expanded Shakespeare's status as the national poet to include political values that challenged Britain's class hierarchy.

Chapter Two: Shakespeare in the Victorian Children's Periodicals

Shakespeareans know very little about the canon of Shakespeare adaptations and interpretations for children before the twentieth century. This gap in knowledge is nowhere more apparent than in the recent anthology of criticism *Reimagining Shakespeare for Children and Young Adults*, the only book dealing directly with this topic. Few of the thirty-one articles in the anthology reference pre-twentieth century works besides Charles and Mary Lamb's enduringly popular *Tales from Shakespear*, and nowhere, not even in Naomi Miller's introduction, is there a sense of the historical development of children's Shakespeare. *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* is slightly less presentist in its focus, mentioning several books from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in its capsule history, but this greater historical awareness is not matched by an adequate survey of the various genres of writing which presented Shakespeare to children in these periods. By naming only books in its brief history, the *Oxford Companion* implies that only book-length prose adaptations are of continued interest, and recent criticism of the type published in Miller's anthology has corroborated this rather narrow sense of the canon by using the Lambs to stand in for a rich and varied assortment of approaches to Shakespeare available to children. The result has been an unwarranted sense that the Lambs' *Tales* can serve as an adequate synecdoche for children's Shakespeare through the ages.

The comparison of a single one of the Lambs' *Tales* with even one other prose adaptation reveals the nuances that make the Lambs far from representative. For instance, while the *King Lear* in *Tales from Shakespear* does not shrink from the death of Cordelia, the version of their immediate predecessor, from Jean-Baptiste Perrin's *Contes Moraux et*

Instructifs, à l'usage de la Jeunesse, tirés des Tragédies de Shakespeare in 1783, is more in keeping with the dominant nineteenth-century preference for Nahum Tate's Restoration adaptation. Like Tate and virtually all stage productions well into the Victorian period, Perrin allows Cordelia to survive and reign as queen to her husband Edgar's king. There is no way of knowing whether Perrin made this choice deliberately or because he was using one of the many acting editions that reproduced Tate's alterations unattributed, but the result is that in this instance the explicitly moral agenda in his *Contes Moraux* is less problematic than the troubled admission in the Lambs' version that virtue does not always prevail. The inadequacy of using the Lambs in this way is all the more apparent when the canon is expanded to include the extensive variety of prose adaptations, criticism, biographies, short plays, and parodies disseminated in the Victorian children's periodicals. As one component in a generalized popularization of Shakespeare during the Victorian era, the Victorian children's periodicals constitute a significant but unappreciated mechanism contributing to the rise of a popular Shakespeare. In return, Shakespeare as he was depicted in these periodicals helped to shape a nascent sense of national identity among England's youth, embracing adventure, exploration, and conquest for boys, self-sacrificing daughterhood – and eventually motherhood – for girls. That these children's periodicals exploited Shakespeare as part of a larger project to promote a moral agenda to English youth, or, less often, to resist one, provides one explanation for the Victorians' ongoing fascination with Shakespeare for children.

The periodical evidence needs to be situated within the context of Victorian children's appetite for Shakespeare more generally, not least because the periodical publishers, in their relentless quest for popularity and profit, were acutely attuned to the

trends discernible in the books of their day. Thus, while the focus of this chapter is Victorian children's periodicals, its survey of several key periodicals also takes into account the interplay between periodicals and books to address both how Shakespeare was read by children in the Victorian period, and why adults published and purchased Shakespeare for children.

Victorian children's periodicals occupy an especially fraught position among the periodicals in this study, as they were required to appeal to two distinct audiences if they were to survive. In contrast to periodicals which sought only to please their readers, children's periodicals had to gain the approval of parents before they reached their intended readership. The cautious balance between instruction and entertainment characteristic of Victorian periodicals in general is especially pronounced in the children's periodicals, repeatedly articulated in advertisements for new ventures promising wholesome amusement for young readers. Successful Victorian periodical publishers were quick to realize that in order to cultivate a readership they must appeal not only to the reality of a particular group but also to its aspirations, resulting for example in women's magazines which offered advice to remedy acne or reduce excess *avoirdufois* alongside patterns for the latest fashions. The publishers of children's magazines had to counterbalance children's interests with those of their parents, whose aspirations for their offspring were often quite different from those of the children who would ultimately read the magazines. To this end adventure, but adventure contained within the bounds of respectability, is the hallmark of Victorian boys' magazines. For girls, conditioned to crave not adventure but attractiveness, the influence of parental aspirations is even more marked in the periodicals. Unlike boys, for whom adventure stories provided at least a possible reprieve from the push to become

respectable men, in their periodicals girls found little escape from the pressure to be perfect. The ideals of self-sacrifice and endurance that created the Victorian “angel in the house” permeated virtually every article in the girls’ magazines, whether manifested in competitions to make mittens and blankets for London’s poor, articles about professions such as teaching and nursing, or first-hand accounts by young wives and mothers. The imperative to please both parents and children exerted a powerful influence on the ways in which Shakespeare was packaged for young Victorian readers.

For many Victorian children, the first introduction to Shakespeare was Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespear*, a book that had served the same purpose for their parents and that remained popular well into the twentieth century. Any sense of how Victorian children experienced Shakespeare must take into account the legacy of *Tales from Shakespear*, which continued to dominate the market in various guises throughout the period. The Lambs’ *Tales* are a useful point of departure rather than the epitome of children’s Shakespeare, as they are often considered. Still, their sustained popularity undoubtedly contributed to periodical publishers’ confidence that Shakespeare could appeal to children. A letter in the *Girl’s Own Paper* in 1898, for instance, reminds us that the *Tales* remained popular even at the end of the century:

Will the Editor in Correspondence give a short account of Dante’s ‘Divinia Commedia’? Ordinary people never seem to know anything of Beatrice. Is there any book giving an easy interesting little tale from it in the way that Lamb’s *Tales* do of Shakespeare’s plays?¹

¹*Girl’s Own Paper*, 2 April 1898, 431.

Throughout the century, the publication of individual tales from the Lambs' book in chapbook format demonstrated that there was a market for this kind of material beyond the libraries of children whose parents could afford to purchase *Tales from Shakespear* at the rather high price of eight shillings when it was first published in 1807. The children's magazines of the Victorian period are deeply indebted to the chapbook form, and the chapbook publication of the Lambs' *Tales* is an example of the manner in which magazine publishers adopted successful approaches directly from the chapbook market. While several books published during the Victorian period emulated the Lambs' *Tales*, aimed at the same book-buying public that had bought the *Tales* in book form,² the periodicals that published this kind of Shakespeare adaptation were pursuing a wider range of readers, including those who had read the Lambs in the less expensive chapbook editions. Series of "tales" from Shakespeare were published in children's periodicals because they had proven to be popular among a wide constituency of youthful readers and the adults who purchased reading material for them.

Since the Lambs' *Tales* remained widely available to be purchased for Victorian children who did not already own a copy, periodicals were not particularly interested in replicating the Lambs' format and sought instead to produce equally-successful variations on a theme. When *Little Folks* published a series of six "stories" from Shakespeare over

²For example: Maxwell, *The Juvenile Edition of Shakespeare, Adapted to the Capacity of Youth* (1828); Graves, *Dramatic Tales Founded on Shakespeare's Plays. To Which is Added, the Life of this Eminent Poet* (1840); Seymour, *Shakespeare's Stories Simply Told* (1883); Alias, *Scenes from Shakespeare for the Young* (1885); Morris, *Tales from Shakespeare, Including Those by Charles and Mary Lamb, With a Continuation by Harrison S. Morris* (1893); Sim, *Phoebe's Shakespeare, Arranged for Children* (1894); Nesbit, *The Children's Shakespeare* (1895); Quiller-Couch, *Historical Tales from Shakespeare* (1899); Townsend, *Stories from Shakespeare* (1899).

several issues in 1877, for example, the plays selected for inclusion were those featuring children as characters: “Shakespeare’s Little Folks.”³ Rather than simply retelling Shakespeare’s plays in an accessible style, as the Lambs had done, the *Little Folks* series went farther in reshaping the plays to promote a sense of empathy among youthful readers. In Anna Buckland’s hands, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline*, *Coriolanus*, *King John*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *Richard III* were reinvented as stories in which children became the chief protagonists in plots that promoted clearly-articulated moral values in an entertaining format. Thus, for example, “The Little Princes in the Tower” are models of bravery and virtue snuffed out by Richard III’s villainy,⁴ and “The Story of Miranda” repeatedly focuses on Miranda’s role as a dutiful daughter:

If Miranda’s love and smiles had comforted and saved her father when she was but a baby-child, we may be sure her sweetness and intelligence as she grew older – her tender concern for her father, and her sympathy and interest in all he taught her – must have been the very life of his life, and have kept him from hating all mankind on account of the way he had been treated by the world, or from sinking into wretchedness and despair. Perhaps it was seeing Miranda’s unselfishness, and her pity and care for every living thing, that made Prospero feel that life is not meant to be spent only in pleasing ourselves, whether by giving up ourselves to study or to play. He may have perceived that Miranda’s little, unselfish, loving services, had in them something nobler than some of his intellectual pursuits, when these were sought only for the sake of the power they gave him, or for the indulgence of his own tastes. Prospero had now no State duties to take him from his studies, no fellow-creatures to disturb him; but he found that his life was not

³The *Little Folks* series significantly predates E. Nesbit’s 1895 *The Children’s Shakespeare*, a book often considered noteworthy because virtually all the characters are depicted as children in the illustrations.

⁴*Little Folks*, July 1877, 78-81.

complete, for our lives never can be happy and true if we ever forget that others love us, and that they need our love.⁵

The other stories in the series adopt a similar approach, focusing on appropriately gender-specific virtues: duty to family, king, and country in “The Story of Polydore and Cadwal” and “The Story of Young Marcius” (*Cymbeline* and *Coriolanus*), “love to God, and love to every man” in “The Story of Prince Arthur” (*King John*), and the feminine virtues of kindness and reserve which distinguish the noble Perdita from the rough shepherds and shepherdesses in “The Story of Perdita” (*The Winter’s Tale*).⁶

In contrast to the brief and didactic *Little Folks* tales, the version of *Pericles* published in an 1877 issue of *Aunt Judy’s Magazine* is a fairly complete story, told in six pages rather than the *Little Folks’* customary two or three.⁷ While the title suggests that the main concern of the story will be “Marina, The Princess Born at Sea,” a full two pages deal

⁵*Little Folks*, January 1877, 45-47, quotation p.46.

⁶“The Story of Polydore and Cadwal” (*Cymbeline*, February 1877, 114-16) reminds readers that “Guiderius and Arviragus [...] took active part in the struggles and government of Britain, now our own England, and ‘the fair seed-time’ of their early youth bore fruit in a life of earnest duty” (116); in “The Story of Young Marcius” (*Coriolanus*, March 1877, 146-7), Marcius is as brave as his father, Coriolanus, but “certainly never forgot to be loving and attentive to his mother and grandmother, seeking to please them, and to obey their wishes” (146); in “The Story of Prince Arthur” (*King John*, April 1877, 225-28), Arthur “stands out distinct from the world around him like a lily among thorns. Every one else is seeking his own selfish ends [...]. Little Arthur, on the other hand, lives by the principle of love - love to God, and love to every man - and thus his life is pure and true, while that of every one else is false and selfish” (225); in “The Story of Perdita” (*The Winter’s Tale*, May 1877, 269-71), though she was raised among the rough shepherds and shepherdesses Perdita’s “inward difference” was manifest in her exemplary conduct: “She was gentle and loving, and had a high sense of truth and honour [...]. She was gracious and kind in her manners to all, but a certain shyness and reserve kept her from being so familiar and outspoken as the peasants were with one another” (269).

⁷ *Aunt Judy’s Magazine* 1877, 618-24.

with the events occurring before her birth. The plot is cleansed of some of its more lurid aspects such as the incest between Antiochus and his daughter; Marina is sold into slavery, not prostitution, and her association with Lysimachus begins when he charitably finds her employment in a rich man's household, not, as in *Pericles*, when he attempts to deflower her forcibly in a brothel. Aside from these refinements, the story is conveyed in a fashion both sufficiently concise and admirably complex. Instead of using the story to convey a defined moral message, the moralizing tone evident throughout the *Little Folks* Shakespeare series is displaced in *Aunt Judy's Magazine* from the play to the biography of Shakespeare published in the same annual volume.⁸

In *Aunt Judy's* biography, Shakespeare's life becomes a case study in middle-class values. The article characterizes Shakespeare's father as a "well-to-do tradesman [...] much respected; so much so, that when William was four years old, he was made one of the aldermen of Stratford" (17). Shakespeare's mother is described as a "lady of good family," and from Shakespeare's success in life "we may reasonably suppose that either she or her husband were, if not talented, people of vigorous intellect, inasmuch as the parents of most great and wise men have been, either one or the other, highly endowed" (17). The article reinforces the impression of Shakespeare's respectability by explaining that Ben Jonson's well-known aspersion about his "small Latin and less Greek" is a "half-sneer at the fact that Shakespeare did not enjoy the advantages of a university education" and not an accurate assessment of the perfectly adequate education he actually received at the Stratford Grammar School (18). In contrast to the manly, patriotic virtues ascribed to him in the boys'

⁸ *Aunt Judy's Magazine* 1877, 17-24.

magazines, *Aunt Judy's* focuses on more domestic ones: he possessed a "genial kindness and amiability," he was a "dutiful son to his aged parents and a careful, prudent man in his affairs," "blessed with true wisdom," and "careful not only to teach others but to follow what he taught" (21). The same morality is evident in Shakespeare's plays, according to the biographer:

How well Shakspeare knew right from wrong, how thoroughly he saw the misery of vice and its fearful consequences, not only to the wrong-doer but to others, how earnestly he admired what was pure and noble, both in man and woman, his works will tell you. They are indeed stored with the highest and, I may say, holiest lessons; never does Shakespeare defend guilt or detract from the beauty of goodness, and one can but trust that he walked himself in the path the beauty of which he saw so clearly. [...T]here are indeed many wicked and hateful characters introduced into his plays, but if Shakspeare shows us guilt, he shows us also its dire consequences (21).

The article goes on to suggest that this morality is the chief virtue of Shakespeare's plays and the main reason why they should be read:

People need not be admirers of poetry to enjoy his genius, prince of poets though he undoubtedly is; all who love to study character, who admire what is great and good in man, who believe in the force of example, in the sweetness of sympathy, in the power of warning, will find inexhaustible food for their minds in Shakspeare's pages, the first of philosophers as of bards, sagest of teachers, - for his lore is drawn as well from things of heaven as of earth, - the most powerful and subtle of dramatic creators, - for never was there human character whose type is not found in his writings, - one of the sweetest of singers, William Shakspeare stands indeed above the crowd of literary men of all nations as the noblest genius that earth ever numbered among her children (24).

Like many other Victorian children's publishers, *Little Folks* and *Aunt Judy's Magazine* recognized that Shakespeare was a valuable source of morality not only as a playwright but also as an exemplary Englishman. The Victorian fascination with

Shakespeare's biography, well-described by Gary Taylor in *Reinventing Shakespeare*, serves a demonstrably ethical function in the children's periodicals. While these periodicals exhibit something of the Victorians' need to see the trajectory of Shakespeare's career in terms of progression or evolution, in them the pinnacle of Shakespeare's success is reached not as an artist but as an Englishman. Indeed, Shakespeare's literary accomplishments, the cornerstone for his Victorian biographers, are often downplayed by children's biographers who seek to depict his greatness in familiar, and imitable, moral terms. For example, H.L. Hamilton's "A Chat About Shakespeare" begins "'Our great Shakespeare!' That is what we love to call him. He is not only a great man and a great poet, but, say we - best crown of affection and pride - he is 'ours'." In this brief biography, Hamilton emphasizes "that it was not only as a poet that he was great, but that he must have been of a great noble heart, of a single mind, and of indomitable perseverance in and love for hard work; too great to think about himself at all" (104). Shakespeare's status as a valuable possession – "ours" – and his resemblance to a Victorian Captain of Industry in Hamilton's characterization supersede any interest Shakespeare might have had "only as a poet." H.P. Burke Downing takes a similar approach in one of the *Boy's Own Paper's* very few articles featuring Shakespeare, an account of "A Day in Shakespeare's Country."¹⁰ Like Hamilton, Burke Downing emphasizes Shakespeare's personal qualities, but here Hamilton's pride that he is "ours" takes on a more precise meaning:

⁹*Little Folks*, July 1881, 104.

¹⁰*Boy's Own Paper*, 10 June 1893, 584-86.

the name of Shakespeare is as dear to the heart of true Anglo-Saxons as that of the protector saint on whose feast-day the great poet was born. To English boys, Shakespeare, it seems to me, is as much the great Englishman as the great poet, an embodiment of the national characteristics, and the feeling that they have for him forms part of their patriotism. He holds a place in their respect much more akin to that of a national hero than that of, as school boys might be inclined to express it, a mere poet, and disloyalty to the Queen would be as light an offense as disrespect for Shakespeare. Greater knowledge can only intensify such a feeling, so truly national is Shakespeare, so well does he agree with our English character (584).

As this sabre-rattling biography suggests, in boys' magazines Shakespeare was depicted less often as a "mere poet" than as an exemplar of English manliness. If those qualities that make Shakespeare "an embodiment of the national characteristics" are never quite defined in Burke Downing's biography, the general tenor of the *Boy's Own Paper* makes it clear that Shakespeare's three strengths mentioned in the *Little Folks* biography, that "great noble heart," "single mind," and "indomitable perseverance," are no less crucial in the *Boy's Own Paper* for being implicit.

A final example of the purposes served by Shakespeare's biography, from *Boys of England*, is illustrative of the class interests Shakespeare's rags-to-riches story was made to serve. In contrast to the solidly middle-class values articulated in *Little Folks* and *Boy's Own Paper*, the short biography featured in *Boys of England* reinvents the Bard as a Renaissance Horatio Alger, a self-made man who rose from obscurity and the company of inappropriate youthful companions to employment in "a very subordinate situation" in a playhouse, where he "worked his way up and eventually made a good fortune."¹¹ For the imagined readers of *Boys of England*, "returning from school, from the office, the work-room, or the shop, and taking up [their] weekly number of the 'Boys' to soothe and enliven

¹¹*Boys of England*, 21 September 1867, 277.

[their] ‘care-tired thoughts’,”¹² Shakespeare was depicted as a man whose struggles were much like their own and whose successes might also be theirs.

To *Boys of England* readers toiling in these schools, offices, work-rooms, and shops, Shakespeare’s future king with the common touch, Prince Hal, was evidently an appealing figure. The lengthy serial fiction “Prince Hal and the Armourer’s Apprentice”¹³ combines two proven formulas, the Shakespeare adaptation and the revenge of the clever apprentice on his unscrupulous master. Using *I Henry IV* as a point of departure, the story depicts the adventures of Prince Hal and his Boar’s Head companions. In the first instalment, a group of conspirators discuss their plan to overthrow Hal’s father, King Henry, by using his fool, a Richard II lookalike, to make the public believe that the deposed King Richard is still alive. Their first meeting takes place in an armourer’s shop, where the conspirators’ plans are overheard by the armourer’s apprentice, Dick Grey. Dick gets into trouble while following the conspirators, and is rescued by a stranger whom he soon discovers to be Prince Hal in disguise. Many adventures ensue, with the participation of such familiar faces as Poins, Falstaff, and Bardolph, as well as the introduction of new characters including a black dwarf, a mysterious foreign doctor, and Agnes, a love interest.

As this brief summary of “Prince Hal and the Armourer’s Apprentice” suggests, *Boys of England* frequently relied on sensationalism and gimmicks to attract readers. The inclusion of stock characters from Victorian popular fiction is in keeping with the

¹²*Boys of England*, 24 November 1866, 16.

¹³*Boys of England* 5 n.s., beginning in #108.

magazine's admixture of edification and enjoyment. In the inaugural issue, the publisher Edwin Brett expressed the objectives of the magazine:

Our aim is to enthrall you by wild and wonderful, but healthy fiction; to amuse and instruct you [...]; to inform you [...]; to enter into a hearty, free, and trusty companionship with you [...]; to afford you a merry laugh [...]; to charm you [...]. In short, our aim mainly is to delight you.¹⁴

By offering an abundance of delight to leaven a modicum of instruction, *Boys of England* became a highly successful periodical that frequently verged on the luridness of the reviled 'penny dreadfuls' without ever quite tipping over into it. The magazine's irreverent, even iconoclastic treatment of *Othello*, published in instalments on the back page of five successive issues as one of its occasional "sensation dramas," is an excellent example of the fine line that *Boys of England* was always threatening to cross.¹⁵ An account of the magazine's version of the play's final act gives a clear impression of the ways in which *Othello* was reshaped to appeal to boys. After Iago has shown Othello the incriminating handkerchief, here embellished with a message from Desdemona to Cassio written in invisible ink, Othello is determined to murder his wife. After Desdemona goes to bed lamenting her husband's bad behaviour and vowing "I'll never love another blackey," Othello enters armed with a candle and a feather-bed to utter a garbled version of the speech barely recognizable as a loose adaptation of Shakespeare's original:

Othello: It is de cause, it is de cause, my soul;
Through circumstances quite beyond control,
Dis nigger's got to kill his faithless wife,

¹⁴ *Boys of England* 1, 24 November 1866, 16.

¹⁵ *Boys of England* 19: 472-76, November and December 1875.

By turning off de gas-light ob her life.
When dat's once done, no turning on de main
Will eber light dat burner up again.
It is a pity, for she looks so nice,
Yet I can't let her lib, at any price;
One kiss (performs that operation); anudder
(Ditto repeated) Good bye! Hush! She's waking.¹⁶

Othello smothers Desdemona with the feather-bed, is stricken with remorse, and attempts to commit suicide with a dagger but fails because he has forgotten to unsheathe it. Then:

the doors burst open, and all our characters rush on at once. Amid a chorus of anguish, they pulled her out, squashed so flat that it took the united exertions of everybody to bring her round again. At length, however, their restoratives were successful. Desdemona was herself again, but Othello, when he, too, was wakened up, thought she was somebody else, or her own ghost, for he was so confused he didn't know who was alive and who wasn't.

Othello: What, ain't we dead and buried after all?

Lodovico: No, though your chances of escape were small.

Be this a caution, never more to kill

Either your wife or self.

Othello (firmly): I never will.

The Doge: Othello, we've been labouring under several mistakes, but they're all over now. The villain is caught and his guilt proved (pointing to Iago, who was now observed to be standing handcuffed in the midst). Through his scheming it was that we've all been set at loggerheads; but his fictions are without the slightest foundation. All the rest of us have made it up, so you had better do the same.

Othello (embracing Desdemona): I shall be only too glad. (To Iago) Villain, what have you got to say for yourself?

Iago (coolly): Nothing; I reserve my defence.

Doge: I mean to give you twenty years, whether you like it or not. And now, friends, all's well that ends well, as our Immortal Bard puts it. Let's all be jolly good fellows!

The melodramatic nature of this *Othello* adaptation is more precisely understood when it is placed in its proper nineteenth-century context, not alongside the prose adaptations of the

¹⁶*Boys of England* 19: 476, December 1875, 80.

Lambs and their successors but rather among the hundreds of plays adapted for production in children's toy theatres earlier in the century. As George Speaight explains in his history of the juvenile drama genre, between roughly 1810 and 1880:

some 324 plays were adapted for, and published as sheets of characters and scenery for, the Juvenile Drama. These sheets were sold originally for a penny plain or twopence coloured by hand, and their intended destiny was to be stuck on card and cut up, and for the characters to be moved across the boards of toy theatres.¹⁷

Another historian of the juvenile drama, A.E. Wilson, estimates that at the height of the genre's popularity in the 1830s there were probably more than fifty publishers producing these sheets (35).¹⁸ In order to promote their toy theatre sets of characters and scenes, these publishers commissioned brief versions of the plays in dramatic form that often included "stage" directions for selecting and moving the paper cutouts: the Othello from plate 1, looking every inch the soldier, would eventually have to be replaced with the distraught and then the dead Othellos from subsequent plates, for example. These dramatic adaptations usually remained true to the main lines of the plot while transforming the characters into the

¹⁷*Union Catalogue*, 2. Among the extant toy theatre sheets housed in the collections canvassed in Speaight's *Union Catalogue* are forty sets based on fourteen of Shakespeare's plays: *Antony and Cleopatra* (published by Jameson, no date); *Coriolanus* (West, 1824); *Hamlet* (Hodgson 1824, Jameson 1818, Park n.d., West 1819); *Henry IV* (W Clarke 1821, West 1824); *Henry VIII* (Myers, n.d.); *Julius Caesar* (Hebberd n.d., Love n.d., West n.d.); *King John* (Hodgson n.d.); *Macbeth* (Hodgson 1823, Smart 1822, West 1811); *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Smart 1822, West 1815); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Jameson 1813, West 1817); *Othello* (Hodgson 1823, M. & B. Skelt n.d.); *Richard III* (Andrews n.d., Globe n.d., Green 1851, a second version by Green n.d., Hodgson 1822, Jameson 1815, Lloyd 1830, Park n.d., Park and Golding n.d., Pollock n.d., G. Skelt n.d., M. & B. Skelt, n.d., West 1814); *Romeo and Juliet* (Hodgson 1823, West 1825); *The Tempest* (Hebberd n.d., Hodgson 1823, Smart 1822).

¹⁸I am grateful to the staff in the British Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings for their assistance with the Thomas collection of toy theatre sheets, and to the staff at Pollock's Toy Museum, in London, for regaling me with tales of the juvenile drama's heyday.

textual equivalents of the cardboard cutouts provided on the illustrated sheets, reduced to the poses in which they had been depicted by the illustrators. Unlike the prose adaptations by the Lambs and their successors which virtually eliminated dialogue in favour of character development and often a moralizing element, the dramatic adaptations for use with the toy theatres were emphatically plot-driven. Skelt's *Othello: A Drama in Five Acts* is a case in point. Throughout its five brief acts, "stage" directions show how the eight plates of characters and seven of scenery combine to reproduce the visual aspects of a genuine theatrical performance while the sparse lines themselves produce an original, severely curtailed, version of the play. Othello's speech to the senators is characteristic, rendered in several short snippets of prose dialogue:

Oth. 'Tis true, I have taken away this old man's daughter and have married her, rude I'am in speech, my course of love as been with Drugs, Charms, and Magic power, with which I won his daughter.

Bra. To fall in love with what she feared to look on, it must have been some dram conjur'd, he wrought upon her.

Duke. Othello, did you poison this maids affection.

Oth. Send for the lady, and let her speak before her father, and if you find me false let your sentence fall upon my life.

Duke. Fetch Desdemona. (Exit Iago, Roderigo)

Giovanni, and Luca, R.H.

Oth. You will see how I did thrive in this lady's love, and she in mine, her father loved me, and invited me to tell the story of my life, the battles I have passed, she was anxious of my discourse, which I observing, at once the chance her sighs caused me pain, and bade me if I had a friend that lov'd her to teach him to tell my story, and that would woo her that is all the power I have used, here she comes.

Enter Iago, pl. 1, Desdemona, pl. 3, Roderigo, pl. 4, Giovanni, and Luca, pl. 2, L.H.(7,8).

Clearly this adaptation was not designed to promote an admiration of Shakespeare's language or of his insights into human nature, as many other children's adaptations claimed to do. The nearly nonsensical lines serve to propel the characters from pose to pose and little

else, a criticism frequently levelled at the Victorian melodramas which served as the models for most of the 324 juvenile drama adaptations.

The history of the development of the juvenile drama is in some ways a microcosm of the way in which Shakespeare was gradually adapted to the needs and interests of children. Illustrated sheets depicting London actors in costume were originally produced by enterprising publishers intending to furnish adult theatregoers with mementoes of performances they had seen. Eventually, perhaps when it became evident that the children of these theatregoers were making use of castoff illustrated sheets in an unexpected way, in effect as substitutes for the theatregoing experience rather than as souvenirs of one, publishers began to market their illustrations to children. As the juvenile drama became an established genre in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the illustrations moved away from carefully-rendered portraits of actors because they no longer commemorated actual performances. Instead, accompanied by short dramatic versions of the plays intended for the use of juvenile puppeteers, the toy theatre sheets became cartoon-like renditions of characters and scenes from the plays, no longer specific to particular actors or productions. Just as Shakespeare for children eventually became its own branch of Shakespeare reception, with its own conventions far removed from the halls of learning or the theatres, so the juvenile drama took on a life of its own, separate from its original purpose.

Evidently the playbooks written to accompany the toy theatre sheets were often written in haste, in the case of Shakespeare's plays by stringing together the most memorable lines of the originals and summarizing the remaining dialogue. As the already-cited passage from Skelt's *Othello* suggests, the sensation dramas in *Boys of England* draw on the characteristics of the successful juvenile dramas of Skelt and his competitors, but

exaggerate their characteristics to the point of parody. In the *Boys of England* version of *Othello*, for example, Othello's speech to the senators begins:

Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors
(*Aside*. A pack of awful duffers and old bores),
(*Aloud*). That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter,
(*Aside*. She'd ha' dropped in for it, if he had caught her).
(*Aloud*). 'Tis true, the head and front of my offending,
(*Aside*). They're getting tired, I must make an ending).
(*Aloud*). Is that we two got married on the sly,
Acos we chose, and dat's de reason why;
Whoever more than this desires to know,
This leg 'o mutton fist shall lay him low.¹⁹

In contrast to the Skelt version, which seeks the shortest distance between famous lines and fills it in with the briefest dialogue, the *Boys of England* version uses the space between these lines to comic effect. As the scene continues, the general sense of the play which is conveyed in the Skelt version through pedestrian, serviceable prose is rendered here in comical fashion. After Othello is interrupted by Brabantio, who fumes that Othello has become so cheeky he will soon be suggesting that Brabantio had encouraged Othello's romance with his daughter, Othello resumes, this time in prose:

" 'Scuse me, sar," answered Othello, "but it strikes me you did. Usen't you to invite me every time you ope a bottle of fine Jamaica, and didn't we generally empty it between us, going half and half in the friendliest way? My lords and gents, that was what began it. I went to Massa Brebberantio's house eberry night, I did, and related all the scrapes and adventures I had met with during my circumbobulations ob de uninhabited globe; how I killed sharks in de central deserts of Californy, chased de mighty rhinoceros ober de Injun Ocean, and crossed de Equinoxious line jist as the train come along at fifty miles an hour, and consequentially nearly got drowned" (32).

His speech concludes:

¹⁹*Boys of England* 19, November 1875, 473, 32.

Golly, them was happy times! All dese yer 'complishments, togedder with my rich complexion and African phizmahogany, so titivated de lily heart of de lubly Desdemona that one night when we was lemonading under de gaslight ob de moon, I axed her, in tones as tender as a tambourine - 'Will you be mine, lub?' to which she immejitly despended - 'We will,' and so we did. De power ob lub, dat, gebblemen, was de only species ob magic used by dis interesting stranger (32).

Another *Boys of England* Shakespeare "sensation drama," *Hamlet the Second*, or, *The Guilty Uncle and the Ghostly (H)Aunt, a Grand Shakesperean Revival*, appeared in the April and May 1875 issues. Where much of the sensation-*Othello*'s intended humour arises from the title character's (now objectionably racist) speech patterns, in *Hamlet the Second* Shakespeare's own words are employed to comic effect. Like the juvenile drama playbooks, the *Boys of England* adaptation incorporates only the most recognizable lines from the original, but reshapes their context so that their meaning is altered. For example, Hamlet's wry observation that Claudius has become "a little more than kin and less than kind" to him by marrying Hamlet's mother is transformed in the *Boys of England* parody into Hamlet's response to Claudius's promise to Hamlet that "you shall be king some day, if you're a good boy." "A little more than king, and less than kind," this Hamlet replies somewhat more menacingly than his original, and the anonymous author adds his assurance that here Hamlet is "using Shakespeare's precise words" (304). In the same scene, Claudius closes his public address with the remark that " 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown,' which is Shakespeare's, though not in the present play" (304). When Polonius asks him what he is reading, Hamlet replies "Words, words - 'Household Words,' vol. XI" (320), a reference to Dickens's popular periodical that billed itself as the "comrade and friend of many thousands of people, of both sexes, and of all ages and conditions."²⁰ For the Shakespeare reader

²⁰*Household Words* 1:1, 30 March 1850, 1.

attuned to the class, gender, and age issues of the original, Hamlet's selection of reading material is all the more ironic.

The most famous lines of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* are introduced when, commenting gratefully on Polonius' exit, Hamlet says "now I am alone, I can do a soliloquy" (320). The soliloquy itself is garbled into this:

To was, or not to are, that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The imperence of each officious buffer,
Or take up sticks against a lot of fellows
And by chastising, scare them; to lie, to peep,
To chaff and spy on me. I'll serve 'em out!
But p'raps I should be had up for assault.
'Tis better to endure the things we have,
Than go to prisons that we know not of.
But, hush! these thoughts are rather too pequelia,
She comes, the party that I love, Ophelia (320).

The fair Ophelia, like Shakespeare's other characters, is utterly reinvented in this parody. The *Boys of England* Ophelia does descend to madness like her original, but here her sensible-sounding impetus is that she, "having every reason to believe that Hamlet had gone mad, thought it would be a good idea to go mad to keep him company" (336). Rather than committing suicide, this Victorian Ophelia becomes the plaintiff in a breach-of-promise lawsuit, a case prosecuted by her brother Laertes Fitz-Polonius, Esq., with Hamlet's Irish friend Mr. O'Ratio representing the defendant. Among the love-letters produced as corroborating evidence at the trial is Ophelia's charming epistle to Hamlet in which she expresses her heartfelt sentiment that:

Further disguise is useless; such is my affection, that I'd rather share a palace and fifty thousand a year with you, than a cottage and a crust of bread with a man I loved less. The very thought of being Mrs. Hamlet, and going halves in

your Shakesperian immortality, and of being played with marked success, both in London and the provinces, the very thought, I say, is the seventh heaven of delight (352).

Ophelia's suicide is not the only plot detail to be revised for comic effect. In the *Boys of England* version Hamlet's father is no ghost, but the cunning survivor of Claudius's failed attempt to murder him. As he explains to Hamlet:

I changed my name,
Pretended to be dead, came here incog.,
Resolved to let your uncle have his fling,
And when the time is ripe, reveal myself,
And serve him out. [...]
I thought I was sufficient like myself
To pass for my own ghost - at least, at night.
But softly, methinks I scent the morning air;
The early bird goes "Cock-a-doodle-doo!"
I must be off - not wishing to be nabbed,
I want to vanish - what's the best way out? (320).

Hamlet then shows his father a secret exit, which, the pun being irresistible, is of course described as "one of the obscure passages in Shakespeare" (320).

The Boys of England sensation-dramas proved that there was a market for Shakespearean parodies among boys, but they also appear to have inspired their publisher to attempt a more serious rendition of the plays for a similar readership. Several years after the parodic sensation-dramas *Othello* and *Hamlet the Second* were published, Edwin J. Brett went on to create the *Boys of England Stories of Shakespeare* series, a collection of twelve sixteen-page prose adaptations sold for a penny apiece in 1881-82: *Richard III* (#1), *Hamlet* (#2), *Macbeth* (#3), *Henry IV* (#4), *Romeo and Juliet* (#5), *Othello* (#6), *King John* (#7), *King Lear* (#8), *As You Like It* (#9), *Henry V* (#10), *Henry VI* (#11), and *The Taming of the Shrew* (#12). In contrast to the sensation dramas which appeared in the pages of *Boys of*

England, these prose versions were serious and even sensitive adaptations rather than parodies. The *Stories of Shakespeare* version of *Othello*, for example, opens with a depiction of Othello and Iago as competitors for Emilia's love. Although Iago is ultimately the successful wooer, he is given ample grounds for suspicion, and thus the "motiveless malignity" that Coleridge identified as the keynote of Iago's character is transformed into a quite legitimate jealousy. In the second chapter, Iago is again given adequate reason to hate Othello, when he is not chosen to be Othello's lieutenant even though, as Iago believes, "I must even be second in command, for I am well recommended by three of the senate; and Othello's very suspicious friendship for my wife should have some weight in influencing his decision" (4). When Othello is rumoured to have chosen Cassio as his lieutenant, Iago deprecates him as "a mere theorist - a man who has never seen a battle" (4). The opening scene of Shakespeare's play, with Iago and Roderigo awakening Brabantio to tell him that his daughter has eloped with Othello, does not take place until page five, after substantial justification.

Comparing Othello's speech before the senate in the *Stories of Shakespeare* version to its counterpart in the sensation drama, it is clear that the former deals seriously with what in the latter becomes merely fodder for parody. Where the sensation drama uses the speech chiefly as an opportunity to make fun of Othello's characteristic manner of speaking, the prose version is based on Othello's speech in Shakespeare's play, simplified in terms of its language but as complex as the original in the ideas it conveys:

I have used no witchcraft, great Doge. I often visited Brabantio's house, and spoke of all my former life, my travels, battles, and strange adventures. Fair Desdemona heard me, pitied me, and said she would Heaven had made her such a man to undergo such dangers; and that he might most expect success in wooing, who such a tale as mine could tell. I told my tale again, grave

signiors, and found the gentle Desdemona loved me for the many dangers I had encountered. I loved her, and 'tis true that I have married her, but no other witchcraft have I practised. See where Desdemona comes; let her say how I won her love (6).

The contrast between the sensation drama *Hamlet the Second* and the *Stories of Shakespeare* version of *Hamlet* reveals a similar shift from parody to profundity. Whereas *Hamlet the Second* is clearly played for laughs, the *Stories of Shakespeare Hamlet* adheres closely to Shakespeare's psychologically complex tragedy throughout its sixteen pages. For example, Hamlet and Ophelia's disastrous conversation, though rendered in prose dialogue form, is recognizably Shakespearean:

He did not appear to see her at once, but pacing to and fro, went on with his thoughts, then suddenly he said: "Ah! soft, now - the fair Ophelia! Nymph! In thy orisons let all my sins be remembered."

"Ah, my good lord," said Ophelia, "how does your honour for this many a day?"

"I humbly thank you - well."

"I have something here you gave me as a keepsake, that I have long wished to redeliver. I pray you now take them back, for rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind."

"Ha! ha!" cried Hamlet; "are you honest?"

"My lord?"

"Are you fair?"

"What means your lordship?"

"This - that if you be honest and fair, I should admit no discourse to your beauty. I did love you once."

"Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so," said the blushing girl.

"You should not have believed me. I loved you not."

"I was the more deceived."

"Get thee to a nunnery! Why shouldst thou be a mother to sinners? I am myself but indifferently honest, yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am proud, revengeful, ambitious. What should fellows such as I am do crawling between heaven and earth? Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where is your father?"

"At home, my lord."

“Then,” said Hamlet, “let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in his own house. Fare thee well!”

And with these words he left her (9-10).

Ophelia’s madness, the occasion for jest in *Hamlet the Second*, is rendered with a light though compelling touch:

From the moment of her father’s death, meanwhile, Ophelia seemed utterly distraught. She was continually to be found wandering to and from in the palace, singing sad melodies about her lover, and dropping, too, such direful hints that people’s minds began to be set on the rack of wonder.

It was some days after the departure of Hamlet that she claimed an audience of the Queen.

“How now, Ophelia; what ails you?” she said.

The young girl stood still, picking at a flower, and singing a wild sad song.

“Alas!” said the Queen, turning to the King, “look upon her, her reason has fled.”

“How do you, pretty lady?” said Claudius.

“Well. God shield you,” returned Ophelia, “they say the owl was a baker’s daughter. But let’s have no more words of this. When they ask what it means, say you this:

‘Good-morrow, ’tis St. Valentine’s day,
All in the mornings betime;
And I, a maid, at your window
To be your Valentine.’

Hope all will be well; but I cannot choose but weep, to think they should lay my poor father in the cold ground. Come - my coach! Good night” (13).

Later, when news of Ophelia’s death is announced, she is described “calmly floating among the water-lilies of the palace lake, with her exquisite hair bedecked with flowers” (13).

While adhering to the main lines of Shakespeare’s plot, the *Stories from Shakespeare* version adds two closing paragraphs that tie up Shakespeare’s loose ends:

Horatio faithfully fulfilled his promise, and told to the wondering and sorrowing Danes the wrongs and troubles of their favourite Prince.

The election, as Hamlet had prophesied, fell on young Fortinbras, and Horatio was advanced high in office; but one of the things which most delighted the heart of the true friend was the news from England that the two cowardly traitors, who had tried to compass Hamlet's death - his two treacherous schoolfellows, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern - met their death instantly on their arrival on Albion's shores (16).

With these two types of Shakespeare adaptation, the *Boys of England* sensation-dramas on the one hand and the *Stories of Shakespeare* series on the other, Brett's publications neatly encapsulate two extremes of children's Shakespeare. Brett had a keen eye for marketable material, so it is not surprising that *Boys of England* furnishes an example of yet another characteristic type of Shakespeare adaptation in Vane St. John's "Wait Till I'm a Man," serialized in *Boys of England*.²¹ "Wait Till I'm a Man" is an unacknowledged adaptation of *Hamlet*, in which Reginald Fairleigh's father dies under mysterious circumstances while our young hero is away at school. Mr. Fairleigh's steward inherits the dead man's estate, marries Reginald's mother, and is soon contriving to cheat Reginald out of the military career which the terms of his father's will had set out for him. In an ingenious solution to the perennial question "Why does Hamlet delay?," St. John suggests in his story that though something is very rotten at the Fairleigh estate in England, Reginald will have to spend time away from home passing through the stages of a respectable boy's upbringing before he can take action against the usurping steward. Only after a benefactor makes it possible for Reginald to attend the Sandhurst military academy and to obtain his first military position fighting in the Crimean war is Reginald finally able to attain manhood and obtain his revenge.

²¹ *Boys of England*, 1867, #s 43-58.

“Wait Till I’m a Man” belongs among the coming-of-age stories that formed a significant proportion of the serial fiction appearing in the Victorian boys’ magazines, characterized by the hero’s education in what it means to be a man and his triumph over the perils threatening to prevent him from fulfilling his potential. Often the threat depicted in these stories is related to class, as it is in this one when Reginald’s parvenu stepfather attempts to prevent him from taking his gentlemanly place in the military. In merging contemporary concerns about masculinity and class with *Hamlet*, St. John produced a Victorian adaptation very similar in technique to the treatment Shakespeare’s heroines were receiving in the girls’ periodicals at that time, where they became the vehicles for less-than-subtle lessons about the Victorian feminine ideal.

Girls were by no means excluded from appreciating Shakespeare as a symbol of manliness and Englishness, not least because a contemporary survey demonstrated that, if most girls preferred reading *Girl’s Own Paper*, *Boy’s Own Paper* was their second choice far ahead of the other magazines for girls.²² In unisex publications for younger children such as *Little Folks*, too, girls absorbed the same kind of hagiography that encouraged their brothers to revere Shakespeare as a national icon. However, while girls sometimes experienced Shakespeare as an historical figure embodying admirable characteristics, this was only one in a range of approaches to Shakespeare in the girls’ periodicals. In order to discover the same moral usefulness that boys absorbed through reading about Shakespeare as a biographical figure, girls were required to read the plays or character sketches derived from them because Shakespeare’s heroines had been recast as moral exemplars. While

²²See the Victorian journalist Edward Salmon’s study *Juvenile Literature As It Is* and his earlier article “What Girls Read,” published in *The Nineteenth Century* 20:116, October 1886, 515-29.

Victorian boys were taught to admire Shakespeare as an embodiment of English manliness, girls, following the success of Anna Jameson's 1832 book *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical and Historical* (later renamed *Shakespeare's Heroines*), were encouraged to emulate Shakespeare's heroines. Mary Cowden Clarke articulates this approach to Shakespeare most clearly in her 1887 article for the *Girl's Own Paper*, "Shakespeare as the Girl's Friend":²³

To the young girl [...], Shakespeare's vital precepts and models render him essentially a helping friend. To her he comes instructively and aidingly; in his page she may find warning, guidance, kindest monition, and wisest counsel. Through his feminine portraits she may see, as in a faithful glass, vivid pictures of what she has to evitate, or what she has to imitate, in order to become a worthy and admirable woman. Her sex is set before her, limned with utmost fidelity, painted in genuinest colours, for her to study and copy from or vary from, in accordance with what she feels and learns to be supremest harmonious effect in self-amelioration of character. She can take her own disposition in hand, as it were, and endeavour to mold and form it into the best perfection of which it is capable, by carefully observing the women drawn by Shakespeare. [...] Happy she who at eight or nine years old has a copy of 'Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare' given to her, opening a vista of even then understandable interest and enjoyment! Happy she who at twelve or thirteen has Shakespeare's works themselves read to her by her mother, with loving selection of fittest plays and passages! Happy they who in maturer years have the good taste and good sense to read aright the pages of Shakespeare, and gather thence wholesomest lessons and choicest delights!²⁴

As the author of that model of Victorian character criticism, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1850-52), Cowden Clarke had already established herself as an authority on the moral lessons to be learned from Shakespeare's female characters. Her interest in the

²³I have taken my quotations directly from the periodical, but readers who do not have access to a periodical archive will find the article reprinted in Thompson and Roberts, 101-3. Because this article has been anthologized and is consequently more accessible than most children's Shakespeare articles, I have shortened the passage considerably.

²⁴*Girl's Own Paper*, 4 June 1887: 562-64.

development of women's personalities through the exercise of external influences such as reading is everywhere apparent in the pages of her book. In her article, the methodology she uses in her book to expand the characterization of Shakespeare's heroines is applied to real-life girls whose reading experiences will shape them in much the same way. Like Cowden Clarke, the *Girl's Own Paper* took seriously the task of teaching girls how to "read aright the pages of Shakespeare." In 1888, the *Girl's Own Paper* followed its publication of Cowden Clarke's essay with a contest on the theme "My Favourite Heroine from Shakespeare." In their overview of the entries received, the judges' fulsome praise for the entries which were clearly "a labour of love" contrasts sharply with their dismay that:

A few of the girls wandered from the subject in a curious manner, and made their essays a vehicle for expressing their ideas on some social problem. The vexed question of 'women's rights' was answerable for four of these failures.[...] How foolish girls are to become so exercised about one idea that they must fain 'drag it in,' when it has nothing to do with the subject they are writing about. It is curious that both those who approve of and those who disbelieve in what are known as 'Women's Rights,' should choose the same heroine, Portia, and draw from her character directly opposite conclusions.²⁵

Girl's Own Paper readers, then, were encouraged to appreciate Shakespeare in what Isobel Armstrong, writing about women poets of this period, has dubbed the "gush of the feminine," an ostensibly uncontrived outpouring of emotion unmediated by analysis or reflection.²⁶ As the most widely-read girls' magazine, the *Girl's Own Paper* represents the

²⁵*Girl's Own Paper*, 3 March 1888, 380-81.

²⁶In 'The Gush of the Feminine: How Can We Read Women's Poetry of the Romantic Period?,' Armstrong demonstrates that this pose of an impulsive, uncontrolled outpouring of emotion was adopted by women writers to authorize their writing for a reading public who limited women's sphere of influence to the emotional realm and was unwilling to accept serious writing by women on any other terms. The emotional gush with which *Girl's Own Paper* readers are urged to respond to Shakespeare coincides with Armstrong's view of Victorian poetics, a view which she demonstrates with reference to contemporary reviews. I would argue, then, that in the *Girl's Own Paper* Shakespeare is packaged for Victorian girls

dominant view of Shakespeare for girls, but not the only available one. In contrast to the emotional “gush” promoted in the *Girl’s Own Paper*, *Atalanta* readers were invited to engage with Shakespeare on a more intellectual level. For example, when Shakespeare was the featured author in the “*Atalanta* Scholarship and Reading Union” for the October 1890 - September 1891 year, the series of related articles included a general introduction by Lucy Toulmin-Smith²⁷ and ten brief but critically astute analyses of Shakespeare’s works divided along generic and chronological lines.²⁸ Each article concludes with a series of “scholarship competition questions” designed to test readers’ engagement with both the article and the plays it discusses. The introductory essay makes it clear that, while *Atalanta* wants to encourage an emotional engagement, this is seen as a starting point rather than an end in itself:

It is time in this, the fourth year of our ATALANTA’s course, that she should take up the brightest and most glorious fruit of all the English race, a fruit so divine and yet so human that all the world presses forward to share in it. We are proud to be akin to Shakespeare by the name of his countrymen and countrywomen. [...] He has given us a perfect gallery of portraits. Portraits? Nay, they are friends, living and breathing men and women whom we shall find at one time or another of our lives face to face, or enemies from whom, taught by this noble moralist, we shall flee. The women of

much as Victorian poetesses were packaged for their readers.

²⁷*Girl’s Own Paper*, October 1890, 50-54.

²⁸Publication details and an inventory of plays covered in each article are: early comedy (G. Saintsbury, 114-18: includes *Love’s Labours Lost*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Comedy of Errors*), early histories (G. Saintsbury, 214-17: includes *Henry VI*, *Richard III*), early tragedy (R.K. Douglas, 273-77: treats *Romeo and Juliet* alone), middle history (Prof. Church, 339-43: includes *Richard II* and *King John*), middle comedy (R.K. Douglas: 402-6: treats *The Merchant of Venice* alone), later history (Lucy Toulmin-Smith, 469-73: includes *King Henry IV* (both parts) and *King Henry V*), later comedy (Edward Garnett, 532-35: includes *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing*), middle tragedy (Prof Church, 597-601: includes *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*), later tragedy (George Saintsbury, 660-63: includes *Macbeth*, *King Lear*), historical classical tragedy (Edward Garnett, 726-29: includes *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*), Romantic comedy (Edward Garnett, 786-90: includes *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale*, *The Tempest*).

Shakespeare, who shall say how sweet, how courageous, how coy, how feminine they are? The men, how they range in infinite variety of character. [...] Be not alarmed at this formidable array; there is one qualification which the humblest student may share with the most learned scholar - *love* of the man. So, the first thing above all is to read Shakespeare himself, especially his best plays (to which the scheme laid down for ATALANTA in the coming year will lead.) Perhaps (and it is well to confess it) this may be difficult at the beginning to those who have never *seen* a play; their imagination may run easily along a narrative, but does not readily fill up the details of a story told in dialogue and stage directions. If possible, read the play also aloud, in characters, even if only two or three companions join; this is of the greatest assistance to realising not only the course of the story, but the characterisation. If opportunity offers, go to see the play acted; even the worst performance brings out many parts for the tyro better than mere reading, and to a slow imagination throws a flood of light upon the whole, which then assumes its just proportions. Then can we see how Shakespeare held 'the mirror up to nature' when we understand that his representations were pictures of life, written in the first instance to be acted and spoken (50-52).

Atalanta, in addition to the plays discussed in detail in full-length articles, featured in virtually every issue several items from Shakespeare in its "search page" of literary quotations, culled from such varied plays and poems as: *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, *Henry VIII*, *King John*, *King Lear*, *Love's Labours Lost*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Richard II*, *Romeo and Juliet*, the sonnets, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Winter's Tale*. While less 'literary,' the *Girl's Own Paper* also favoured Shakespeare as a source of topical quotations for its "Varieties" column, on subjects such as morality, music, flowers, and female beauty. Here, the results are sometimes unintentionally hilarious, for example when Iago's cunning lines "Trifles light as air / Are to the jealous confirmation strong / As proofs of holy writ" (in III.iii of *Othello*) are attributed to Shakespeare, not Iago, gaining the weight of a moral precept rather than a plan to incite murder.²⁹

²⁹*Girl's Own Paper*, 12 February 1887, 318.

The striking difference between the treatment accorded to Shakespeare in these two girls' magazines is most apparent when their essay competitions are juxtaposed. In contrast to the emotional, appreciative, highly personal mode encouraged by the *Girl's Own Paper* judges, the prizewinning essay published in the March 1892 issue of *Atalanta* is a model of objective critical acuity. Susan H. Cunliffe's "Is Shakespeare a Moralist?" situates the author in direct opposition to the approach advocated in the *Girl's Own Paper*. Although Cunliffe, too, eventually concludes that Shakespeare promotes morality in his plays, her essay relies on a careful analysis of the evidence rather than an emotional response. She considers several possible ways of answering the question, first dismissing the kind of de-contextualized quotation evident in magazines like the *Girl's Own Paper* on the grounds that "[q]uotation is not a permissible method of confirming a statement when dealing with a dramatist, as there is no infallible test by which to decide positively when he speaks *in propria persona* and when in character" (347). Moving from quotation to criticism, she argues that:

though some German critics, indeed, would assert that each play is an ethical study, maintaining, for example, that Cymbeline is meant to illustrate fidelity, The Merchant of Venice man's duty with regard to wealth, and so on, such theories are as unsatisfactory in application as they appear farfetched. In no one case can the drift of the play be summed up in an aphorism which undeniably conveys the essence of the author's intention. It rather seems as if he made a point of abstaining from inculcating simple truths (348).

Atalanta, then, offers an alternative to the more mainstream Shakespeare criticism exemplified by the *Girl's Own Paper*, as well as an antidote to the morality-tale Shakespeare typified by *Little Folks*. *Atalanta*, however, cultivated a select readership of already-literate girls, ones likely to embark with enthusiasm on the ambitious series of

readings recommended in the 1890-91 issues. If the *Girl's Own Paper* never attempted to scale the heights of Shakespeare criticism in quite the same way as *Atalanta*, it did succeed in introducing Shakespeare appreciation to a wider range of readers – for decidedly feminine ends. This ulterior motive is especially evident in an article on “Our Shakespeare Society,”³⁰ which describes how a *Girl's Own Paper* reader might form a mixed society for the purpose of reading Shakespeare aloud. The article narrates the experiences of “Perdita,” a young woman “pretty, clever, and charming, the daughter of indulgent and sensible parents, with plenty of time at her command” (507). Perdita’s whim to form a Shakespeare reading group is eventually a success, despite the inconveniences arising from the fumbings of several unpractised readers as well as her lack of foresight in selecting the too-meditative *Richard II* for the group’s inaugural reading. The real benefits of forming such a group are hinted at in the description of Perdita’s increased esteem among the men of the circle, where she is now “regarded with chivalrous allegiance by the gentlemen of the Society, who bow to her will as law” (508). The implicit advantage of an interest in Shakespeare is stated more overtly in the magazine’s description of the merits of education in general: “Education increases your interest in everything [...]. And it is *interest* in these things that is the never-failing charm in a companion. Who could bear to live life with a thoroughly uneducated woman?”³¹ Increased marriageability was certainly one potential side effect of Shakespeare study, but for girls who pursued marriage less single-mindedly other opportunities to make use of their newfound knowledge presented themselves. The importance of Shakespeare to the girls’ periodical market had a salutary effect on the range of publication opportunities available to amateur Shakespeareans, especially young women.

³⁰*Girls' Own Paper*, 9 May 1885, 507-8.

³¹*Girls' Own Paper*, 5 March 1892, 361.

The virtually incessant moralizing evident in much of the treatment Shakespeare was accorded by the Victorians is at least partially the result of the realities of the magazine publishing market. The bestselling Victorian children's periodicals, the *Boy's Own Paper* and *Girl's Own Paper*, had been founded by the Religious Tract Society in a thoroughly-articulated plan to counteract the contaminating influence of popular, inexpensive reading material on the young. As part of the society's efforts to provide children with exciting yet wholesome alternatives to the popular penny dreadfuls and penny novelettes, Shakespeare was employed to promote ideals contrived to be at once appealing to children and acceptable to the Religious Tract Society's members.³² The success of the Sunday school movement earlier in the century had resulted in a tremendous surge in the number of literate children and a concomitant boom in the children's literature market. From its founding in 1799, the Religious Tract Society had recognized that the spread of literacy represented an opportunity as well as a challenge. An article in the *Evangelical Magazine* published that same year articulates the policy which would eventually help to shape the editorial policies of the *Boy's Own Paper* and *Girl's Own Paper* that for:

thousands who would have remained grossly illiterate, having through the medium of Sunday schools been enabled to read, it is an object of growing

³²See Dunae, "Boy's Own Paper" for further details about the Religious Tract Society's struggles to balance its moral agenda with the demands of the Victorian children's periodical market. For contemporary views on the penny dreadfuls, see James Greenwood, "The Penny Awfuls," *St Paul's Magazine* 12 (1873): 161-8; Alexander Strahan, "Bad Literature for the Young," *Contemporary Review* 26 (1875): 981-91; Francis Hitchman, "The Penny Press," *Macmillan's Magazine* 43 (1881): 385-98; Edward Salmon, "What Boys Read," *Fortnightly Review* n.s. 39 (1886): 248-59; Bennett G. Johns, "Literature of the Streets," *Edinburgh Review* 165 (1887): 40-65; Edward Lyttleton, "Penny Fiction," *Quarterly Review* 171 (1890): 150-71 (source: Boyd, n.8, p.181). For the modern reader, Carpenter's catalogue of a 1983 exhibition at the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood is an excellent overview of the penny dreadful's development.

importance widely to diffuse such publications as are calculated to make that ability an unquestionable privilege.³³

Victorian children were the beneficiaries of a publishing industry in which dozens of magazines competed for their weekly pennies. In the Victorian period, as never before, children from all classes had a range of reading choices available to them. With its two highly successful and enduring magazines, the Religious Tract Society succeeded in capturing the sustained interest of generations of children while continuing to promote the moral agenda which had prompted the society to create these alternatives to other inexpensive, wildly popular, but morally questionable periodicals. As a spokesman for the Religious Tract Society warned members, the consequences of failing to attract readers away from the penny dreadfuls would be dire, since “These illustrated papers are eminently fitted to train up a race of reckless, daredevil, lying, cruel, and generally contemptible characters.”³⁴ The admirable inclusiveness of many of the children’s periodicals, sold for a penny a week to children of virtually all social classes, has its foundation not in some utopian sense of class harmony, but rather in a bid to attract a readership which had already been defined by the successful penny dreadfuls. The lurid tales circulated in the early penny dreadfuls were never aimed at an exclusively youthful audience, but, as Patrick Dunae has established, boys constituted a major portion of their readership and the term eventually came to be associated primarily with penny magazines for boys. From the outset, the undemanding writing style and copious illustrations of the penny dreadfuls, designed to appeal to a barely literate working-class constituency with little leisure time, attracted

³³*Evangelical Magazine* 1, July 1799, 2.

³⁴*Religious Tract Society Record* 10, March 1879, 2, cited in Dunae, “Penny Dreadfuls,” 139.

working-class children as well as adults. Indeed, for the working classes there was often little distinction between child and adult as children took their places alongside adults in the mines and factories at a young age. In these workplaces, where penny dreadfuls were circulated and read aloud, children were an intrinsic part of the workforce.

While other children's publishers kept the sensibilities of middle-class parents in mind, magazines for the working classes attempted to appease employers, not parents. As the Religious Tract Society spokesman's comments suggest, publishers were quick to recognize that values promoted in the penny dreadfuls had potential repercussions for capitalists as well as Christians. If the Religious Tract Society worried that hell loomed for the "generally contemptible characters" fostered by the penny dreadfuls, for Victorian Captains of Industry the problems created by "reckless" and "lying" employees were a more personal concern. Class resentment, insubordination, and thievery were among the elements that editors of a new breed of periodicals, sometimes dubbed the "penny healthfuls," attempted to eradicate from periodicals for working-class children. The Religious Tract Society's decision to counteract the penny dreadfuls by producing an equally inexpensive but more wholesome alternative can thus be seen as a move to protect not only Christian but also capitalist values, a move emulated by a spate of secular imitators including Edwin J. Brett with his *Boys of England*. In the hands of these professedly healthful penny publications, Shakespeare became a cornerstone of the glorification of an adventurous, hard-working masculinity for boys and the somewhat contradictory ideals of self-sacrifice and marriageability for girls, no matter what their social class. When we consider the popularity and longevity of the Religious Tract Society's publications, we are reminded that, for a wide range of Victorian children, the Religious Tract Society was largely

responsible for contributing to the images of Shakespeare children carried into adulthood.³⁵ Although *Atalanta's* approach is perhaps more appealing from a modern critical perspective, and *Boys of England's* more multi-faceted, the emphatically mainstream publications of the Religious Tract Society also taught children to care about Shakespeare, if only for less than literary reasons. While some of these children were no doubt satisfied with simply identifying Shakespeare as a national icon or a means of securing attention from the opposite sex, others, as the magazines' essay contests reveal, used this introduction as a springboard to more adult ways of understanding the man and his works.

Children's Shakespeare, then, must be seen within the context of Victorian working-class literature, disseminated chiefly in the periodicals, no less than in the context of the nineteenth-century theatre via the illustrations and playbooks published as children's toys or the "family reading" of the middle and upper classes promoted in books such as *Tales from Shakespear*. From the working-class periodicals and the toy theatre, children's publishers borrowed the sensationalism and sheer fun that gave Shakespeare an added appeal to young readers, while the "family reading" Shakespeare of the Lambs contributed a moral focus. It is worth noting, by way of conclusion, that the impulse to extract a moral message from Shakespeare's plays is by no means the Lambs' invention, and is in fact evident in the earliest documents of Shakespeare reception-history. When the Jacobean astrologer and physician Simon Forman recorded his impressions of *The Winter's Tale* produced at the Globe in 1611, he included a note to "Beware of trusting feigned beggars and fawning fellows." Likewise, the title of the earliest known full-length book of Shakespeare for

³⁵The *Girl's Own Paper* and *Boy's Own Paper* were consistent bestsellers, and both magazines endured until the middle of the twentieth century under various titles. The *Girl's Own Paper* finally succumbed in 1965 after being subsumed by *Heiress*, and the *Boy's Own Paper* folded, to a great public outpouring of nostalgia, in 1967.

children, Perrin's *Contes Moraux et Instructifs, à l'usage de la Jeunesse, tirés des Tragédies de Shakespeare*, indicates Perrin's explicitly moral, edificatory agenda. Tracing the trajectory of early contributions to the "Shakespeare for children" genre from Perrin to Brett within the larger context of Shakespeare reception corrects the misperception that moral Shakespeare and children's Shakespeare are synonymous. It also renders more explicit the movement from the elite readership of Perrin's book, sold by subscription as a pedagogical aid for the governesses of wealthy children, to the increasingly demotic readerships of the Lambs' successive editions, the middle-class readers of early children's periodicals, and the distinctly downmarket publications of Brett later in the century. When Perrin and the periodicals are included alongside the Lambs in a more complete history of the development of Shakespeare for children, the movement is clearly down the social scale to include, by the middle of the nineteenth century, young readers from all social classes. By the end of the Victorian period, just as Shakespeare had been disseminated among a wide constituency of adult readers through periodicals for the working classes and women, so, in the children's periodicals, children of all classes were encouraged to find their own connection to Shakespeare.

Chapter Three: Women as Readers and Writers

In the Victorian period, women's engagements with Shakespeare flourished as never before. Actresses including Helena Faucit and Fanny Kemble penned memoirs and periodical articles inspired by their performances, while the character criticism disseminated in the works of women such as Anna Jameson and Mary Cowden Clarke became a dominant mode of approaching Shakespeare's plays, and the labours of Mary Lamb and Henrietta Bowdler helped to shape editions fit for the sternest Victorian moralists. Meanwhile, Victorian women were introduced to Shakespeare in the theatre, in Shakespeare-inspired prose works, in adaptations suitable for family reading, and in the original. To focus solely on the privileged group of exceptional women who published their views on Shakespeare and his works in volumes of scholarly criticism is to ignore the many women who experienced Shakespeare in more incidental ways. Even a woman who might never have chosen to attend a Shakespeare play or to read a book about his works, let alone become the author of one, might nonetheless have learned to recognize Shakespeare as a cultural icon through his treatment in the periodicals. She might even have ventured to write for one of the many women's or "family reading" periodicals of the time, or, should she be ambitious indeed, perhaps even for one of the periodicals intended for more intellectual readers of both genders, such as the *Athenaeum*. As an important source of the information Victorian women received about Shakespeare and a venue for the publication of their reactions to his works, the periodicals, in which women responded to Shakespeare as both writers and readers, merit investigation.

In contrast to the hitherto understudied area of women's Shakespeare-reading experiences, women's writing about Shakespeare as disseminated in a variety of genres has benefited from attention in recent years. Within this emerging area of investigation, the manifestation of this writing in periodicals has not been wholly ignored. In their anthology *Women Reading Shakespeare 1660 - 1900*, Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts note the pre-eminence of the periodicals as a venue for women's writing when they observe that:

the enormous output of women's writing on Shakespeare – discovered in autobiographies, theatre criticism, books for a general readership, club records, popularisations, adaptations and, perhaps above all, in periodicals – has been overlooked in histories of Shakespeare criticism (7).

In correcting this oversight in reception-history, Thompson and Roberts have made a significant contribution to our knowledge of women's responses to Shakespeare by recuperating the writing disseminated in these under-rated genres, and by anthologizing them to reveal that they often share similar concerns and approaches. However, the anthology form also has its inherent limitations. By grouping such diverse kinds of writing together, the editors imply a cohesion between the pieces they have selected for inclusion in the anthology. For periodical readers, the context of articles about Shakespeare would not have been the other genres mentioned in the quotation above, such as women's autobiographies or club records, but rather the other articles published alongside one of them in a particular issue of a magazine. Moreover, while the anthology collects women's writing from these various contexts and historical periods, women reading all but a few explicitly women-only Victorian periodicals would have found articles written by men as well as

women. A more complete history of women's engagements with Shakespeare, as opposed to a history of women's writing about him, includes pieces by men as well as women which appeared in a range of Victorian women's and "family reading" periodicals, as well as articles in other periodicals intended for both genders. Reading these diverse articles as items within the periodical genre restores them to the context which helped to shape how they were read.

A further caveat about anthologies in general is the selectivity that risks, in the case of women's writing about Shakespeare, according a disproportionate importance to present-day feminist concerns. As Margaret J.M. Ezell has warned in her highly influential book *Writing Women's Literary History*, since this recuperative enterprise has been largely undertaken as an aspect of feminist criticism it risks favouring texts which foreground feminist issues at the expense of what might well be more truly representative works. There is a pedagogical as well as a stylistic justification for anthologizing texts that address a common set of issues, but if we are interested in seeing an accurate representation of the myriad ways in which Victorian women experienced Shakespeare, this selectivity can have a distorting effect. The present chapter surveys a limited number of Victorian periodicals and makes no attempt to provide the kind of generic or temporal range so admirably achieved in the Thompson and Roberts anthology, but it foregrounds these other contextual elements that had a significant impact on the way in which Victorian women really read Shakespeare.

If we were relying on book evidence rather than periodicals, recourse to the *Nineteenth Century Short Title Catalogue* would make it immediately apparent that the chief mode of women's writing about Shakespeare during this period was character criticism, an

approach at which women were thought to excel by virtue of their more “emotional” and “sensitive” natures. By 1832, when Anna Jameson published her *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical and Historical* (later renamed *Shakespeare’s Heroines*), women had established their own critical niche based on their acknowledged expertise in the domain of empathy. The writings of professionally-trained actresses, who had been recognized since the seventeenth century as the real experts on Shakespeare’s female characters, had helped to open this new territory for female critics, eventually allowing women to expand their range from character criticism to a more ambitious analysis of Shakespeare’s oeuvre. In their memoirs, published letters, and written accounts of past performances, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century actresses showed that their training and experience made them experts in more than Shakespeare’s female roles. While eighteenth-century critics such as Charlotte Lennox were manufacturing justification for their intrusions into the traditionally male sphere of literary criticism, actresses’ voices were articulating their own interpretations loud and clear, with unapologetic authority. In the nineteenth century, the periodicals published articles by prominent actresses such as Helena Faucit and Fanny Kemble to boost sales, harnessing the power of what Fraser, Green, and Johnston have identified as a “cult of personality” that had developed around Victorian performers. These two strands of Shakespeare appreciation, propagated chiefly in character sketches, were eminently suitable for periodical publication. A successful series like Helena Faucit’s friendly letters on her favourite rôles, published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* beginning in 1881, could be prolonged over many issues, while an unreliable or less talented writer could be dropped after a single instalment.

Despite their shared focus on Shakespeare's female characters, the discrepancy between the views of actresses and those of character critics is evident in their treatment of exemplary but dramatically unexciting heroines such as Desdemona. If writers including Elizabeth Griffith in the eighteenth century and Anna Jameson and Mary Cowden Clarke in the nineteenth approved of Desdemona as an exemplar of feminine virtue, actresses generally found fewer admirable qualities in her less-than-compelling stage presence, a small and relatively insignificant role alongside such star turns as Lady Macbeth, Juliet, and Viola. Helena Faucit is one notable exception. Faucit, later Lady Martin (1817-1898), was one of the leading actresses of her time, using her experience playing a long list of Shakespeare's heroines as the credential for her book *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters: By One Who Has Personated Them*. Originally published as a series of letters to friends serialized in *Blackwood's*, Faucit's letters were collected into book form in 1885 and released in several subsequent editions to meet the public demand for this sort of interpretation.¹ In her letter about Desdemona, addressed to the writer Geraldine Jewsbury, Faucit contrasts her early impressions of Desdemona with the critical reception Faucit had not yet imbibed. Faucit explains that her highly-praised depiction of Desdemona arose from this early, untutored sense of the character, shaped before she had learned that "Desdemona is usually considered a merely amiable, simple, yielding creature, and is also generally so represented on the stage" (48). In sharp contrast to the scholarly vein of criticism evident in the work of earlier women writers such as Charlotte Lennox and Elizabeth Montagu, among

¹The book version is now more easily accessible, so all page references are to this work for the reader's convenience.

others, Faucit suggests that her appreciation for the character depended on utter ignorance of that criticism. For Faucit, her ability to play Desdemona is predicated not on careful study of the critics, but rather on her ability to identify with the character, not least because her own delicate health helped Faucit to imagine Desdemona's suffocation with an especial vividness (47-48). Faucit reveals a similar emotional, empathic attachment to Imogen when she begins her letter to Anna Swanwick with an apology for the long-delayed fulfilment of Swanwick's request for Faucit's comments. The cause of the delay, Faucit explains, is that:

by long brooding over her character, and by living through all her emotions and trials on the stage till she seemed to become "my very life of life," I find it next to impossible to put her so far away from me that I can look at her as a being to be scanned, and measured, and written about. All words - such, at least, as are at my command - seem inadequate to express what I felt about her from my earliest years, not to speak of all that the experiences of my woman's heart and of human life have taught me since of the matchless truth and beauty with which Shakespeare has invested her. In drawing her he has made his masterpiece; and of all heroines of poetry or romance, who can be named beside her? (157-58)

The kind of critical distance necessary for Lennox's at times scathing evaluations of Shakespeare's heroines is, in Faucit's account, deliberately eschewed in favour of a more emotional response. For Faucit, understanding Imogen means learning to feel as she feels, using her own "woman's heart" to enter into the experiences of another. Repeatedly in these "letters," Faucit describes the blurring between actress and role as the beginning of her depiction of a Shakespearean character, since, like character critics such as Jameson and Cowden Clarke, she looks for attributes that she recognizes and admires. Faucit goes on to explain that she uses Shakespeare's playtext as a point of departure, filling in his character with her own gestures and expressions:

Ah, how much finer a medium than all the pen can do for bringing home to the heart what was in Shakespeare's mind when he drew his men and women, is the "well-trod stage," with that living commentary which actor and actress capable in their art can give! How much has he left to be filled up by accent, by play of feature, by bearing, by action, by subtle shades of expression, inspired by the heart and striking home to the heart - by all those movements and inflections of tone which come intuitively to the sympathetic artist, apparently trifling in themselves, but which play so large a part in producing the impression left upon us of a living interpretation of the master-poet! (158)

Elsewhere in her Shakespearean letters, Faucit comments in greater detail on her view that her insights as an actress give her a privileged perspective on Shakespeare's female characters. In her letter on Ophelia, Faucit suggests that Shakespeare's women offer strong evidence of his belief that eventually, on a less restrictive stage, actors and "sympathetic natures" would be capable of "filling up his outlines, and giving full and vivid life to the creatures of his brain" (4). But almost immediately, Faucit qualifies her position by noting that the actors for whom he wrote his women's parts were "boys and beardless youths," not women. Where Shakespeare's women are concerned, actresses are in her view uniquely positioned to interpret roles which must have existed as only pale shadows on Shakespeare's stage. In a move typical of Victorian criticism and made manifest in the elaborate productions discussed in chapter four, Faucit deduces that Shakespeare wrote not for his own time, but for an imagined future when women would perform the roles he had written for them:

Yes, he must have looked beyond 'the ignorant present,' and known that a time would come when women, true and worthy, should find it a glory to throw the best part of their natures into these ideal types which he has left to testify to his faith in womanhood, and to make them living realities for thousands to whom they would else have been unknown. Think of a boy as Juliet! As 'heavenly Rosalind!' as 'divine Imogen!' [...] How could any

youth, however gifted and specially trained, even faintly suggest these fair and noble women to an audience? Woman's words coming from a man's lips, a man's heart - it is monstrous to think of! One quite pities Shakespeare, who had to put up with seeing his brightest creations thus marred, misrepresented, spoiled (4).

For Faucit, then, a Shakespearean heroine like Imogen, Desdemona, or Ophelia is depicted through a collaborative process in which the actress supplements Shakespeare's conception with the "best parts" of her own nature. Just as female character critics often suggest that their gender affords a special insight into aspects of Shakespeare's genius unappreciated by his male critics, so Faucit here argues that without the feminine qualities which an actress brings to the roles, there is something "monstrous [...], marred, misrepresented, spoiled" about his heroines.

Faucit is not making a revolutionary argument; since Charles II decreed that women would be allowed to grace the public stage in England, actresses have been admired for the special qualities of insight or inspiration they bring to the interpretation of Shakespeare's women. But the individualism of the actress, her ability to understand a character through her own experiences and imbue it with her own qualities, was not always recognized as a component of good acting. The traditionalism of the nineteenth-century theatre is evident in the way reviewers with long memories compared current productions to past performances. Actresses' memoirs and letters are replete with laments that their own innovations and deep understanding of their roles counted for little among reviewers who wanted to see the recreation of a role as it had been played by Sarah Siddons, or, later in the century, by Helen Faucit or Ellen Terry. Faucit, for instance, comments about the reviews of her Desdemona:

how my heart ached when sometimes great names were flung at me! A Siddons, an O'Neill - what could I know of them? How they thought about my heroines - for they were mine, a part of me - I could not tell. Did they look at them with the same eyes, think the same thoughts about them, as I did? [...] Happily, however, there were not a few who did not daunt me with tales of my predecessors, but encouraged me to persevere in my own course, to trust my own conceptions, and to believe that these would work out a more adequate expression as I gained a greater mastery of my art. Among such, my Desdemona was particularly welcomed as rescuing the character, as I was told, out of the commonplace, and lifting her into her true position in the tragedy (49-50).

Like Helen Faucit, Fanny Kemble (1809-1893) ventured into print as a way of extending her Shakespeare interpretation beyond the ephemeral performances that had to be recreated anew each night; her often-precarious financial situation might have given her another, more immediate incentive. In 1867, when *Macmillan's Magazine* published her article on the characters in *Macbeth*, Kemble was already one of the most prominent Shakespearean actresses of the nineteenth century, with the credentials that made her opinions on Shakespeare's characters highly sought-after. The success of that piece led to a second article on Lady Macbeth and eventually to books including *Notes on Some of Shakespeare's Plays* (1882). In contrast to Faucit, whose format and tone deliberately imitated personal letters rather than the articles of professional writers, Kemble adopted a more intellectual approach. Her article on Lady Macbeth, for instance, cites other critics and performers only to disagree with them, and quotes passages from the text to shore up her well-developed arguments about Lady Macbeth's strong, masculine character:

Taking the view I do of Lady Macbeth's character, I cannot accept the idea (held, I believe, by her great representative, Mrs. Siddons [Kemble's aunt]) that in the banquet scene the ghost of Banquo, which appears to Macbeth, is seen at the same time by his wife, but that, in consequence of her

greater command over herself, she not only exhibits no sign of perceiving the apparition, but can, with its hideous form and gesture within a few feet of her, rail at Macbeth in that language of scathing irony [...]. The hypothesis makes Lady Macbeth a monster, and there is no such thing in all Shakespeare's plays. That she is godless, and ruthless in the pursuit of the objects of her ambition, does not make her such. Many men have been so; and she is that unusual and unamiable (but not altogether unnatural) creature, a masculine woman, in the only real significance of that much applied epithet.

Lady Macbeth was this: she possessed the qualities which generally characterise men, and not women – energy, decision, daring, unscrupulousness; a deficiency of imagination; a great preponderance of the positive and practical mental elements; a powerful and rapid appreciation of what each exigency of circumstances demanded, and the coolness and resolution necessary for its immediate execution. Lady Macbeth's character has more of the essentially manly nature in it than that of Macbeth.²

While Kemble does enlist her own credentials in support of her position, she does not, as Faucit does, imply that she possesses any unique ability to intuit the character. With this emphasis on evidence rather than empathy, and close reading rather than intuition, her criticism resembles the articles of *Victoria Magazine*'s Edward Roscoe (cited below) more than the “gush of the feminine” embodied by Faucit and her offstage sisters in empathic character criticism.

The chronology, from Kemble's evidence-based argument in 1867 and 1868 to Faucit's emotional engagement beginning in 1885, suggests that, while women were making strides on the political front, their Shakespeare criticism does not follow a similar progression from feminine to increasingly feminist positions. Faucit's articles, which appeared after the creation of the Women's Suffrage Committee in 1865 and the adoption of

²*Macmillan's* 17, February 1868, 354-61; excerpted in Thompson and Roberts 116-20; quotation pp.117-18.

the Married Women's Property Act in 1870, are if anything less feminist in tone than Kemble's.

Faucit's intuitive, idiosyncratic reading of Shakespeare is probably responding less to political developments than to currents in Shakespeare reception. During the final quarter of the nineteenth century, criticism was dominated by the approach of the New Shakspeare Society. Members of the society were encouraged to investigate the facts surrounding Shakespeare's plays, articulated in Frederick James Furnivall's focus on "the metrical and phraseological peculiarities of Shakespere" as a means of ordering the plays chronologically, and in Frederick Fleay's emphasis on the need for a quantitative approach in which the critic would "weigh, measure, [and] number" the results of his investigations (both cited in Taylor 165, 166). Although the aims and accomplishments of the New Shakspeare Society were dominated by powerful male critics such as Furnivall and Fleay, the society's published transactions reveal that women were active, if now largely forgotten, contributors to meetings. As a prolific and enthusiastic participant in the New Shakspeare Society, Grace Latham, for instance, is an interesting but shadowy figure about whom little personal information is known. Her contributions to the society's proceedings appear to be her only record for posterity.

In contrast to New Shakespeareans, Latham included, the critical approach adopted by later nineteenth-century actresses and character critics such as Faucit, focussing on the affective and intuitive elements that the New Shakespeareans attempted to exclude, was oriented towards a more general readership interested in appreciating Shakespeare from a perspective that was often the opposite of factual. The popularity of gossipy memoirs and of

articles using Shakespeare's plays as a point of departure for imaginative tales reflecting Victorian ideals suggests that many Victorian readers desired more than mere facts. For the wide variety of women who chose to read about the imagined girlhood of Shakespeare's heroines or the moral beauties inherent in his plays, Shakespeare's writings were made to reflect familiar – and most often familial – values. The identification between Shakespeare and Victorian values was so successful that, especially as these values came under increasing pressure towards the end of the nineteenth century, the image of Shakespeare that had prevailed in women's writing through a focus on his moral beauties and exemplary heroines became a damning rather than a deifying one.

Fortunately, alternatives to the Victorians' virtuous Shakespeare had existed, particularly after 1863 with the creation of the feminist *Victoria* magazine. *Victoria* was founded by Emily Faithfull as an outgrowth of her successful venture in practical feminism, the Victoria press, intended to provide work for women. As an article in the August 1864 issue of *Victoria* explains:

For several years MISS FAITHFULL has devoted her time, her means, and her energy to the conducting of a Printing Office, in which the composing (that is, setting the type), and all labour for which female strength is available, has been performed by women. Though the capital and space at MISS FAITHFULL'S disposal have not induced her to employ at one time a great body of work people, she has enabled a number of women, otherwise unprovided for, to start in life furnished with a new power of introduction to the great labour market of the world.³

³ *Victoria* 3, August 1864, 385.

Among articles on women's educational and professional opportunities, political reform, and "domestic economy," Shakespeare was a recurring figure in the pages of *Victoria*, invoked as both an embodiment of sensible morality and a source of intellectual stimulation. Despite the magazine's emphasis on women's employment as typesetters, proofreaders, and, often, authors, several of *Victoria*'s most authoritative Shakespeare-related articles were in fact attributed to men. If even an overtly feminist magazine like *Victoria* invited men to contribute articles, the notion of sequestering women's Shakespeare reception from men's criticism is clearly problematic.

Victoria's approaches to Shakespeare differ from those in the more conservative women's press by being scholarly and intellectually rigorous, like Fanny Kemble rather than Helen Faucit, but, in keeping with other women's periodicals, *Victoria* often emphasizes his relevance to its readers. For instance, the first volume of *Victoria* includes a lengthy and learned article, unattributed, entitled "The Art of Shakspeare, as Revealed by Himself."⁴ Acknowledging that great art sometimes includes "unconscious truth" unintended by the artist (482), the article contends that critics have been too apt to read Shakespeare impressionistically, seeing him as a natural genius whose truths are of the unconscious variety rather than as a great artist with a complete mastery of his material. While Shakespeare's sense of literary values is never stated explicitly and can only be deduced by close reading of his works, the article admits, passages in which he assesses other art forms hint at these values and can therefore shed light on his aesthetic. The passage from "The Rape of Lucrece" in which Lucrece finds echoes of her own misery in a "skilful painting"

⁴ *Victoria* 1, October 1863, 481-97.

depicting the siege of Troy, for instance, is itself presented as an echo of Shakespeare's own careful methods of composition as well as his sensitivity to Lucrece's state of mind: "the carefulness with which he represents the *work* of the picture" reveals, according to the author, the attention to detail in his own work (483-85). Through the accretion of examples illustrating Shakespeare's subtle use of detail in a wide range of plays over some fifteen pages, the article contradicts other "expounders of Shakspeare" (496) who credit him with only an innate sensitivity to human nature rather than a conscious mastery of his art.

This keen sense of Shakespeare's artistry and his importance to women is also evident in *Victoria*'s review of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*,⁵ which focuses on the section of this work familiar to Shakespeare reception-historians as "Of Queen's Gardens." Like the article on Shakespeare's art, this review distinguishes between the misconceptions of previous critics and the more considered views it claims to embody. Ruskin's passage contrasting Shakespeare's flawed heroes with his "faultless" heroines, "conceived in the highest heroic type of humanity," is cited at length (72) and used to introduce Ruskin's views on women's education more generally. While the review is receptive to Ruskin's arguments in the main, its concluding paragraph reminds *Victoria* readers that "woman has to work, not only in queen's gardens, but in the busy mart, and for the coarse bread of life [...] and wander forth in the rough and stony places of the world's highway (76). The second part of the review, published the following month,⁶ takes up this distinction between

⁵*Victoria* 6, November 1865, 67-76.

⁶*Victoria* 6, December 1865, 131-37.

Ruskin's ideals and real life, but concludes by urging *Victoria* readers to study *Sesame and Lilies* for its "brave and noble words" about women's education in the broadest sense (137).

Several articles on *Hamlet* published in 1873 and 1874 offer, in their juxtaposition, a sense of *Victoria*'s varied approaches to Shakespeare. "Hamlet: His Character and Critics" by Edward Roscoe⁷ seeks to rescue the melancholy Dane from German character criticism. In contrast to Goethe, who had suggested that Hamlet's inability to act arises from Shakespeare's perception that thought and action are seldom united in one breast, Roscoe argues that Hamlet begins to act at once, first in preparatory action and then in final action (502). The article is essentially an in-depth analysis of Hamlet's character as it is developed throughout the play, accompanied by occasional thrusts at the "dogmatic conclusions of the German critics and their disciples" (505). In a sequel, "Recent German Criticism on the Tragedy of Hamlet,"⁸ Roscoe looks more closely at the criticism of G.G. Gervinus (1805-71). While paying tribute to Gervinus's work in general, Roscoe takes exception to his views on *Hamlet*, in which, he contends, Gervinus becomes a mere "bigotted follower of his critical predecessors" (338). In accusing Gervinus of slavishly adopting Goethe's views on *Hamlet*, Roscoe articulates a view of criticism that resonates with *Victoria*'s approach to more timely issues of politics and education. Roscoe rebukes Gervinus for accepting Goethe's conclusions seemingly unquestioned:

I merely urge that we should not take everything on the trust of a distinguished name, and subserviently bend whenever a king's critical

⁷*Victoria* 20, April 1873, 502-10.

⁸*Victoria* 21, August 1873, 338-58.

mandate is flaunted in our faces, though we must slip into mental confusion and deny our inherent right to freedom of judgment (338).

These two articles, both relying on their male author's reading of German criticism, belie the misconception that character criticism was necessarily a feminine and impressionistic mode. On the contrary, while Roscoe's articles may have been thought to appeal to women readers because of the character criticism they undertook, his approach is, in keeping with *Victoria's* general tone, rigorous and learned. Roscoe questions received ideas about Shakespeare just as, in articles published alongside his, *Victoria* readers were asked to question received ideas about women's duties and limitations. Similarly, an article on Henry Irving's *Hamlet* which appeared in the December 1874 issue of *Victoria*,⁹ takes up the challenge of Roscoe's articles with a close analysis of Irving's departures from tradition. In her defence of Irving's innovations, Ina L. Drewry makes a strong case for independence of thought and action that reinforces Roscoe's message and, indeed, *Victoria's* entire *raison d'être*.

In a similarly thorough vein, *Victoria's* series on "The Three Great English Poets, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton,"¹⁰ situates Shakespeare's works within the context of pre-Renaissance and Renaissance drama and provides a brief biography (974-76) before turning to an analysis of the plays. In contrast to the biographies intended for the edification of children and the working classes described in the first two chapters, the biography in *Victoria* focuses, at least initially, on the perils and pitfalls of marriage. Given Emily

⁹*Victoria* 24, December 1874, 169-82.

¹⁰Parts two and three, dealing with Shakespeare, were published in *Victoria* 25, September 1875, 968-88 and October 1875, 1059-65.

Faithfull's stated objective of providing paid work for women at a time when marriage or financial dependence on a male relative was the norm, it is telling that the opening sentence depicts Shakespeare as the product of an unequal and ill-advised match: "When Mary Arden, the daughter of a well-to-do Warwickshire husbandman, married in the year 1557, John Shakespeare, a glover at Stratford-on-Avon, she united herself to a man who seems to have mismanaged his own affairs" (974). After giving examples of John Shakespeare's mismanagement and its effect on his son's education, the article makes a connection between Shakespeare's marrying Ann Hathaway "imprudently" at the age of eighteen and "the pecuniary trials which he had seen in his father's house [and which] would come more closely home to him in his own" (974). While dismissing the anecdotes of Shakespeare's deer-stealing and domestic discord as unsubstantiated rumours, the article seizes on John Shakespeare's troubles as the explanation for his son's insufficient education, unsuccessful and early marriage, and the financial situation that propelled Shakespeare to London to earn a living. In two paragraphs, the shortcomings of Shakespeare's early life are either dismissed or blamed entirely on his father, while the achievements of his adult life are prefigured in the good judgment he shows in leaving his wife and children behind in the more salubrious environment of Stratford. More tellingly still, Shakespeare's London years are virtually ignored so that the biography may leap ahead to his triumphant return to Stratford:

Shakespeare had a strong love of home, and left Stratford with the intention of a return to it when he had made money; with this prospect he worked hard, and exercised both prudence and economy, virtues which are never incompatible with true genius; he then retired from the stage to live the life of a gentleman in his own town; the simple, unobtrusive life which men with real talent so often desire to live. He felt keenly all the natural ties of life, and the cynical views about his wife which have been attributed to him are all

nonsense; he married his daughters; he regulated his own life with perfect care; he was a genial companion in society, and never sank with those with whom he was associated. There was over his own character a supremacy of hearty kindness; over others, the influence of a clear, simple, healthy mind, of a conduct above suspicion. Perhaps above all men of genius who have yet lived, Shakespeare had more of the Christ-like power of sympathy, a keener and truer sense of all that other people feel; he must have so thoroughly read his own heart that he had from thence the key to unlock those of his fellow men; and then the characters he delineates are not the men and women of his own age only, but human beings of all time (975).

Prudence, economy, and a well-regulated life, values evident throughout the pages of *Victoria*, are emphasized here just as magazines intended to edify the working classes made sure readers would recognize him as a “man who had risen” and boys would see him as an exemplary Englishman they might emulate. In contrast to the focus on Shakespeare’s achievements in biographies for children and the working classes, however *Victoria*’s biography emphasizes the family man, not the ambitious playwright. Like other women’s magazines, *Victoria* was interested in Shakespeare as a father and a husband. However, whereas *Victoria*’s biography focuses on Shakespeare’s triumph over the shortcomings of his father, with a glance at the long-term consequences of imprudent marriages, articles in other women’s magazines turn more frequently to the topic of mothers. For instance, the novelist Marie Corelli’s speculative biography of Mary Arden, in the late-Victorian periodical *Woman’s World*,¹¹ suggests that Shakespeare’s skills and sympathies are attributable to his own mother:

For it is admitted by all eminent physicians and physiologists, and those who have made *race* and the gifts of heritage their special study, that the mind or

¹¹“Shakespeare’s Mother.” *Woman’s World* 2, 1889, 435-38.

intellectual bias of a child is, to a certain degree, formed before it is born, and that its cleverness or stupidity depends in a very great measure upon its mother's disposition; and not only on her disposition, but on her general characteristics and state of mental and bodily health (437).

Besides her natural gifts of intelligence and sympathy, Mary Arden also, according to Corelli, gave her son something that modern women often failed to give their own children:

It can easily be imagined what care was taken of the babe[...] Now, had she lived in these days, she would perhaps have hired a nurse and a perambulator. She might have even yielded to the often unnecessary and unnatural laziness of providing a substitute for herself in the person of some coarse, vulgar-tongued peasant, because she felt disinclined to bring up the child herself, or for the still more pungent reason – a fear of spoiling her figure! [...] Fortunately for the world, she lived in those old-fashioned times when women did their duty because it lay plain and straight before them, and there was no way out of it by either scientific or fashionable means (437).

For women seeking inspiration from Shakespeare, Corelli proposed a novel solution to the lack of mothers in his plays. Shakespeare's heroines were acceptable moral exemplars for girls, but for mature wives and mothers Mary Arden became the epitome of maternal influence. In contrast to Shakespeare's few and undesirable mother-characters (Lady Capulet and Volumnia, for instance), Mary Arden could serve as a role model for adult women. Just as some working-class magazines emphasized Shakespeare's humble origins and the children's magazines traced his trajectory from country lad to exemplary Englishman, articles like Corelli's made the connection between Shakespeare and other topics in the women's periodicals. Articles speculating about Shakespeare's relationships with his mother, wife, and daughters linked him to the other relationship-oriented material prevalent in the magazines' romantic fictions, advice columns, and human-interest stories. By

depicting Shakespeare as a family man, these women's magazines offered an alternative to the heroine-worship that dominated women's Shakespeare reception.

These magazines provided one outlet for women's Shakespeare criticism, but in contrast to their signed articles many women who wrote about Shakespeare outside the women's press have been lost to posterity due to the policy of authorial anonymity adopted by the more mainstream or general-interest Victorian periodicals. In the Victorian period, when the boundaries delimiting the appropriate topics for women were often quite strictly patrolled, anonymous publication had the potential to disguise women's excursions beyond the bounds of propriety. Whether that potential was realized at any given time and place depended largely on the personality and predilections of a magazine's editor.

Publishers' records can, in some cases, rend the veil of authorial anonymity and indicate the extent to which women contributed to a periodical. For instance, Marysa Demoor makes excellent use of the *Athenaeum*'s marked file in her study of women's contributions to that magazine, but the careful record-keeping of the *Athenaeum*'s successive editors, who marked the names of contributors in an archival copy of virtually each issue from 1830 onward, is not typical.¹² In her analysis of this marked file, Demoor suggests that women's contributions increased after 1869 when Sir Charles Wentworth

¹²Exceptions, Demoor notes, are 1832, 1835-38, 1844, and some issues from 1917-18. The marked file for the *Spectator*, beginning in 1880, is the only other example of a relatively complete marked file. The *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals* attempts to identify anonymous authors where possible and offers a useful, if necessarily limited, point of departure for other periodicals. However, the impossibility of tracing the biographical details of all authors, particularly fictitious identities including the male pseudonyms adopted by women writers, guarantees that no study of women's writing in the periodicals will ever be entirely comprehensive.

Dilke inherited the magazine at his father's death and promptly fired William Hepworth Dixon, replacing him with interim editor John Doran and, in 1870, Norman MacColl. While a small number of women such as the sisters Maria and Geraldine Jewsbury had been frequent and prolific contributors in earlier decades, chiefly as reviewers of books relating to literature, local history, and domesticity, under MacColl women's contributions increased both in number and in variety.¹³

An analysis of women's anonymous contributions to magazines such as the *Athenaeum* provides an essential supplement to studies of women's magazines or of the signed contributions of women writers in periodicals more generally. Charlotte Carmichael Stopes (1841-1929) is illustrative of the way in which attention to anonymous reviews can shed new light on the breadth of women's engagements with Shakespeare. Stopes joined the *Athenaeum* in 1896 as its Shakespeare expert and authored some thirty anonymous reviews and several signed articles in addition to her published books, helped to found the Shakespeare Association in 1914, and received an award from the British Academy in 1916 on the strength of her Shakespeare criticism; she remains, nevertheless, a virtual stranger to modern Shakespeare reception-historians.¹⁴ Her articles in the *Athenaeum* respond to the leading critics of the day in a confident, learned, and rational tone that could not contrast more sharply with the emotive criticism normally associated with Victorian women. While

¹³According to Monica Frystedt's *Geraldine Jewsbury's 'Athenaeum' Reviews*, she contributed an incredible 2,300 reviews in the 1850s and 1860s (15). See also Demoor, 1.

¹⁴The British Library catalogue lists, under Charlotte Stopes, "Articles on matters connected with Shakespeare, reprinted from various periodicals," HMNTS 11764.r.3. Her papers are housed at University College London as MS Add.157.

other women argued about whether women could write literary criticism as well as men, Stopes, in the pages of the *Athenaeum*, simply did.

Stopes is a salutary reminder that Victorian women's writing about Shakespeare was not limited to character criticism and actresses' memoirs. As an active proponent of women's rights, the originator of a Shakespeare reading society in Upper Norwood, and a member of Furnivall's New Shakspeare Society, and especially as the *Athenaeum*'s Shakespeare reviewer, Stopes wrote forcefully on a wide range of subjects. Despite venturing into print with several books on such topics as Shakespeare and his sources, documents relating to the Renaissance theatre and culture, and the authorship controversy, Stopes published her magazine articles anonymously, including all her reviews in the *Athenaeum*, or under pseudonyms of indistinct gender.¹⁵ In his eulogy for Stopes, delivered as a Royal Society of Literature lecture and published along with a comprehensive bibliography of her writings,¹⁶ Frederick Boas summed up her accomplishments this way:

She never took anything at second hand. She went to the fountain-head, and her aim was truth. Even when some of us thought her wrong and somewhat obstinate [...], we never doubted her sincerity and singleness of mind. And she followed learning for its own sake, without thought of material reward or its honours. Some of the latter fell to her – the British Academy's Rose Crawshay Prize, the Honorary Fellowship of this Society, the Vice-Presidency of the Elizabethan Literary Society, for the first time bestowed on a woman. I think some University would have done well to recognize her work with an honorary degree (94).

¹⁵Gwendolyn Murphy's bibliography identifies the following pseudonyms: Lutea Reseda, C. Graham, Ursa Major, Audi Alteram Partem (see Boas 95).

¹⁶Boas, Frederick S. "Charlotte Carmichael Stopes: Some Aspects of her Life and Work," with a bibliographical list of her writings compiled by Gwendolyn Murphy. *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature* 10 (1931): 77-107.

Were it not for records like the *Athenaeum*'s marked file and Boas's short biography, Stopes's accomplishments would almost certainly have been lost in the morass of authorial anonymity. In contrast to her more-famous daughter, the feminist and birth-control pioneer Marie Stopes, Charlotte Carmichael Stopes has not attracted much attention, whether among Victorianists, Shakespeareans, or even historians of women's writing. As Barbara Onslow notes in *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, modern efforts to learn more about the anonymous contributors to periodicals, despite the otherwise impressive accomplishments of projects such as the *Wellesley Index of Victorian Periodicals*, leave much to be done in the area of female contributors (82).

Like the *Athenaeum*, Charles Dickens's "family reading" magazines *Household Words* (1851-59) and *All the Year Round* (1859-95) provide two related examples of the results that can be achieved through archival research when both scholarly incentives and appropriate source materials exist. Both magazines adopted a general policy of anonymity, with the exception of editorials written by Dickens himself.¹⁷ Despite an impressive range of female contributors including Elizabeth Gaskell and Geraldine Jewsbury, and an incentive to attend to the sensibilities of women readers as the chief arbiters of what might be appropriate for family reading, Anne Lohrli's list of contributors to *Household Words* and Ella Ann Oppenlander's similar list for *All the Year Round* reveal that, while Shakespeare-related articles appeared in both magazines, these articles were usually written by men.

¹⁷The anonymous contributors are identified in Ella Ann Oppenlander's *Dickens' All the Year Round: Descriptive Index and Contributor List* and Anne Lohrli's *Household Words: A Weekly Journal, 1850-1859*.

Several articles praising Shakespeare through sarcasm and irony directed at current tastes are typical of the approach Dickens and his contributors adopted in *All the Year Round*. “Much Better than Shakespeare”¹⁸ opens with the incendiary remark that:

An ignorant British public has long taken it for granted that Shakespeare wrote the play of Hamlet. It is time the confiding public should be undeceived, and forced by direct evidence to acknowledge that, although Shakespeare did indeed supply certain crude materials for a play of that name – materials incongruous, wild, and full of anachronisms – the real play, shaped, squared, and harmoniously arranged according to the Unities, was written by DUCIS, and first played at the Théâtre-Français in Paris, in seventeen hundred and sixty-nine (17).

The article goes on to deplore the “national prejudice” that has led the British public to regard Shakespeare more highly than his French improver (17), offering as a corrective a literary biography of the man and his principal works (17) as well as an overview of the theory of unities he espoused (17-18). The majority of the article contrasts Ducis’s *Hamlet* with Shakespeare’s, much to the mock-inadvertent detriment of Ducis’s adaptation (18-20). The article concludes with a quotation from Ducis’s complete works, in which his editors proclaim with enthusiasm:

Who can speak of the beautiful productions with which Ducis has enriched our stage, without the names of Sophocles and Shakespeare being brought back to his memory...

The drily witty reply, crowning the article with a final ironic flourish, reads:

¹⁸ *All the Year Round* 4, 13 October 1860, 17-20.

How strange, then, that any reference to the works of Sophocles and Shakespeare should fail to bring before the “mind’s eye” the name of Ducis! (20).

Another article, entitled “Shakespeare not a Man of Parts,”¹⁹ parodies criticism written by Shakespearean actors. In this fictitious complaint published on Shakespeare’s birthday, a disgruntled player of Shakespeare’s minor parts calls into question the cult of celebrations and pilgrimages surrounding the playwright:

Commemorate the birth of Shakespeare indeed! If you knew as much of Shakespeare as I do, or had suffered as much at his hands, you would curse the day that he ever was born. I tell you that Shakespeare has written more bad parts than any dramatic author living, or dead. I ought to know, for I have been acting in his plays all my life, at least ever since I began to act, and that was when I was young and a fool, and didn’t know better. I won’t subscribe to his monument; there. Why should I? What has Shakespeare done for me? Done? Why, made my life a misery and a torment. [...] I tell you, you can’t name a single one of Shakespeare’s plays that ain’t full of the very worst parts that ever were offered to an actor. And the worst of it is, that if you threaten to throw them up, you are told that you mustn’t; for it’s Shakespeare. And you are expected to take as much pains with them as if they were the finest things that ever were written.[...] He was not for an age, but for all time, you say. Worse luck. How his plays came down through three hundred years to this day, is a puzzle to me. And what’s more puzzling, is all this fuss that you’re making about their immortal author. You have been a long time making your minds up to give him a statue, and you set to work at last when his plays have gone out of fashion, and when people won’t go to see them even with orders [i.e. for free tickets...]. Will I go down to his birthplace? Certainly not. I know I should hate the very sight of it. What pleasure could it be to me to gaze upon the birthplace of a man who has left me nothing but an inheritance of bad parts? Why didn’t he follow his father’s trade, and be a woolstapler? If he had made stockings or blankets, and they’d been bad ones, they would only have troubled the people of his own time; they would have been worn out long before this. But his plays have lasted, confound them! Will I take a ticket for the actors’ supper in his honour, price, to suit all

¹⁹*All the Year Round* 11, 23 April 1864, 258-59.

classes of the profession, five shillings? No, I won't. Why should I? Shakespeare never gave me a five-shilling supper. [...] Go to the masked ball? [...] No, I thank you. [...] Will I drink to the bard's memory on the day? No, I won't; but I'll tell you what I'll do; if *you* are inclined to be hospitable, I'll drink to *your* health now (258-60).

Another article several weeks later contains the “confessions” of a Bardolator driven to the brink of madness by his attempts to partake of all the birthday festivities in both London and the environs of Stratford-on-Avon, collecting mementoes and anecdotes along the way.²⁰

In a similar vein, “The Sensational Williams” enlists Shakespeare in the defence of the sensational in literary production. The article suggests that while contemporary literary and theatrical criticism favours depictions of familiar domestic life and encourages writers to shun the extremes of passion and adventure, the greatest works of literary, dramatic, and musical merit inhabit those extremes to magnificent effect. After a brief mention of examples ranging from Sophocles' Oedipus to the Satan of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the extremes of suffering evident in Handel's oratorios, more than half the article dwells on *Macbeth*. As a sustained example of the kind of criticism to which the article objects, this mock-review of *Macbeth* highlights both the shortcomings of domestic drama and the subjective nature of Shakespeare appreciation. The entire “review” is worth reading, but an extract will suffice for purposes of illustration:

Mr. Shakespeare is really becoming an intolerable nuisance, which it behoves all critics who have at heart, the dignity, or even the decency, of letters, to abate by the exercise of a wholesome severity. He has no idea of tragedy apart from the merest horrors of melodrama. In his Othello, a blackamoor smothers his wife on the stage, encouraged by a gentlemanly Mephistopheles

²⁰*All the Year Round* 11, 21 May 1864, 345-51.

of his acquaintance; in King Lear, the accumulation of frightful and revolting atrocities is something almost beyond belief. [...] On account of a very natural and becoming answer made him by one of his daughters, he disowns her, and afterwards, for some insufficient reason, pronounces a curse upon another daughter [...]. We do not wish to be unfair to Mr. Shakespeare. He is not devoid of a certain ability which might be turned to account if he only understood his own powers better. He has a good deal of native humour – exaggerated, indeed, to the pitch of burlesque, but undoubtedly amusing; and he possesses some knowledge of the superficial parts of character, though, being evidently no scholar, he is often ridiculously vulgar in his would-be representations of gentlemen. He would do very well as a writer of farces and of show pieces, but his injudicious friends have flattered him into the belief that he is a great tragic poet (15).²¹

The article can employ *Macbeth* to ridicule contemporary criticism because the play is an established classic impervious to the slings and arrows of outraged reviewers, but also, as the article indicates, because the sensationalism it contains is different from the “vulgar species” which had become so prevalent on the Victorian stage as to give rise to a critical backlash. The distinction, according to the article, lies in “the difference between an artist who can look into the psychology of crime and terror, and the botcher who can do nothing

²¹*All the Year Round* 11, 13 February 1864, 14-17; quotation p.15. In *Household Words*, *Hamlet* is accorded a faux review, this time in a fantasy comparing the current state of criticism with Shakespeare’s magazineless time: “...suppose that, instead of being subject to mere play-house and pot-house comments, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, – which, for argument’s sake, we will suppose to be a first work, – has been distributed, with leaves uncut, among the critics. The poet’s housekeeper collects for him, while he is out of town, the reviews that appear during his absence; and at the end of a few weeks, when he has come home, he takes them in his lap one evening after dinner, and, nestling snugly in his easy chair, is instructed [...A review with some “friendly strictures” and general praise, and a second replete with fulsome adulation, follow]. But since by these songs of triumph the poet might be led to forget that he is human, it is well that there is here and there a critic ready to keep undue exaltation of the mind in check. I think it likely that in the next notice our bard would take up he might find himself summarily dismissed [...]. The sort of reviewing I have illustrated is the sort I like; and what I feel that Shakespeare missed no little in losing (*Household Words* 15.356, 17 January 1857, 49-52; Lohrli attributes the article to Henry Morley).

more than lay on the carmine with a liberal brush” (14). This emphasis on psychology, articulated in the preamble to the review and central to the mock-criticism of *Macbeth*, allies *All the Year Round* with the character criticism of Anna Jameson, Helen Faucit, and other women writers of this period.

Alongside these defences of Shakespeare’s cultural primacy, other articles, perhaps intended to be suitable for reading to older children, approach Shakespeare as an opportunity for imparting historical information. “Going to the Play with Shakespeare,”²² for instance, invites readers (or listeners) to compare their playgoing experiences to the conditions in Shakespeare’s time. As a brief history of theatrical production from medieval miracle-plays to the destruction of the Globe by fire in 1613, the article often relies on compelling examples from Shakespeare to add piquancy: amateur performers are compared to the mechanicals from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (380); a description of the architectural features of the Fortune and the Globe theatres concludes with a remark that neither was “a very imposing building for Hamlet to be represented in, with Shakespeare himself to speak the solemn address of the Ghost” (381); the destruction of the Globe happened during a production of *Henry VIII* (382).

Similarly, “Shakespeare Summed Up”²³ strings together a series of facts and anecdotes to correct the misconceptions that, on the one hand, there is very little accurate information about Shakespeare’s life, and, on the other, that the conjectures of the early editors Rowe, Pope, and Theobald are true. Among other things, the article asserts that

²²*All the Year Round* 6, 11 January 1862, 379-82.

²³*All the Year Round* 15, 2 June 1866, 489-95.

Shakespeare was the product of a “respectable family” (490), the son of a prosperous woolstapler who became a respected alderman and an heiress who was the descendant of one Robert Arden, a groom of the chamber to Henry VII. Shakespeare married Ann Hathaway, the daughter of a neighbouring family with whom his parents had close ties, and she was probably “his frequent companion” in London when he moved to the metropolis to further his career in the theatre (490). He is described as gentle, with “an augustness of aspect, a loftiness of forehead, a mild countenance, a sweet mouth, and a deep look,” with the “noble appearance” appropriate for a man who aspired to the coat of arms he was conceded in 1597 (492). After making his fortune on the London stage, Shakespeare, “prudent and economical” (493), saved enough money to retire to New Place in Stratford. This morality tale of Shakespeare as a good man is a familiar one in periodicals for children and the working classes, but here the emphasis on his gentleness and pleasing physical appearance is calculated to appeal to women.

If serious, scholarly Shakespeare criticism was largely absent from most women’s periodicals and those intended for family reading, one reason was simply that more literary magazines such as the *Athenaeum* or *Nineteenth Century* included women among their readers. Magazines for women and their families, intended to offer comparatively lighter reading, included Shakespeare as one item in a broad range of general-interest topics. Shakespeare’s treatment in the *Ladies’ Treasury* makes clear some of the underlying assumptions that kept Shakespeare from occupying a more prominent place. Before the tercentenary celebrations in 1864, Shakespeare’s heroines were recurring figures in the *Ladies’ Treasury*, featured in illustrations and brief character sketches. In the first volume,

for instance, an illustration based on the “Lady Macbeth” of the German artist Wilhelm von Kaulbach (1805-1874) provides the occasion for a meditation on Lady Macbeth’s character:

The position of her hands is indicative of the struggle which is going on within. She is Lady Macbeth: her guilty conscience haunts her in her dreams, and she is now uttering, in her disturbed slumbers, words, which, had she the full use of her waking reason, she would have concealed from the doctor and the gentlewoman who are watching her at a distance.²⁴

Similarly, volumes five and six (1861 and 1862) include a long series on “Shakespeare’s Maidens,” in the moralizing vein evident in other, more familiar studies of these characters. An example that will serve to make the magazine’s approach clear occurs in the treatment of *Measure for Measure*.²⁵ After explaining the plot in some detail, the article reaches the point at which the disguised Duke proposes that Isabella should agree to an illicit assignation with Angelo, then send Mariana, Angelo’s spurned fiancée, in her stead. In an effort to avoid narrating this bed-trick, so distasteful as to render the entire play anathema to the Victorians, the article makes an abrupt end:

We need scarcely pursue the plot of this drama further than to observe that, through the interference of the disguised Duke, in the end justice is very evenly administered, even to the recompense of virtue, as well as to the evil doers; for Isabella, instead of entering a cloister, becomes the wife of the Duke. Shakespeare was a great worshipper of virtue in the female character, and generally manages to testify his approbation in some way or other.

A good moral may be read here, and in all other of his plays, as well as in life, that evil is sure to meet a retributive justice, and if virtue be not always tangibly rewarded, it has the supreme satisfaction of being independent of self-reproach, and can afford to be careless of results, well

²⁴*Ladies’ Treasury* 1, 1858, 105-6; quotation p.106.

²⁵*Ladies’ Treasury* 6, 1862, 52-54 and 86-87.

knowing that these results can only end in good, though, perhaps, not immediately so. The feminine characters in “Measure for Measure” exhibit no evidences of refinement worthy to be remembered as examples. Isabella’s is the only one which shines pre-eminent. There is a coarseness, too, in the characters generally, which renders the play an unpleasant one to read, although it abounds in passages of exquisite pathos (86-87).

In 1864, tercentenary year, the *Ladies’ Treasury* changed its approach from character criticism to Bardolatry with a series of articles and a poem focussing on what Shakespeare should mean to Victorian women. The series begins with a biography which, in relying on Carlyle’s lecture on Shakespeare published in his *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), predicts Shakespeare’s eventual ascendancy over “all the nations, [...] wherever English men and women are.”²⁶ A retrospective entitled “What has the Tercentenary Commemoration Done for Shakespeare,” describing the festivities at the Crystal Palace, is less encouraging in terms of women’s appreciations:

It was evident that the feminine portion of the community knew but little of Shakespeare – knew nothing of the delightful portraiture which his inspired intellect had created for their amusement – nothing of his philosophy concealed sometimes in a jest, words of wise import uttered by clowns – knew nothing of the proverbial wisdom scattered in rich profusion over his works. The question which we heard asked and answered was perhaps repeated frequently on that day.

“But what has Shakespeare done?”

“He wrote plays, my dear. Hush! I don’t know much about them; but everybody praises him, and we must do the same.”

So instead of glorifying Shakespeare, there was a grand glorification of dresses and bonnets, of chatterings and dinners.²⁷

²⁶*Ladies’ Treasury* 8, 1864, 121-22; quotation p.121.

²⁷*Ladies’ Treasury* 8, 1864, 207-8; quotation p.208.

The article goes on to suggest that women's inadequate reading habits are to blame for their inability to understand Shakespeare except in performance:

At the close of that day an amicable dispute arose between two friends as to a passage of about ten lines in "Coriolanus." One of them offered to read it aloud, and proceeded without stops, pauses, or emphasis – one mass and jumble of words, from which, as it was read, no possible sense could be extracted. Another tried to make the passage more intelligible, and failed likewise. Then a young lady, fresh from a school of high reputation, tried, but did not succeed. At last an elderly lady, who had been listening in amazement, requested that she might be permitted to read the lines, and as the wonderful harmonies of the great poet fell from her lips the mind was entranced, the spirit held captive, and the sense was at once fully revealed. [...] I could not help but think what a mine of open and unguarded treasure, ready for the taking, was as if sealed up and buried to the mass of people, young and old, who had never been taught to read in the proper and scholarly acceptation of the term (208).

One sees, in this passage, the future of Victorian education. In 1882, when Shakespeare was introduced into the national curriculum as an explicit requirement, students were examined on their ability to read a passage from one of his plays aloud. At the tercentenary celebrations, however, this skill was sorely lacking according to the *Ladies' Treasury* account. Despite the gay show of dresses and bonnets on display among the women attending the tercentenary, the "elderly lady," with her ability to make Shakespeare come alive through her reading, is alone singled out for praise. The implication, that women's enthusiastic participation in the tercentenary celebrations might have more to do with bonnets than with true appreciation of Shakespeare's works, echoes Cobbett's complaint, cited in chapter one, that Bardolatry was merely fashionable. Magazines that featured introductions to Shakespeare or accessible criticism attempted to remedy that shortcoming by making Shakespeare as familiar, and as fashionable, as the latest dress pattern.

During this period, Shakespeare reading groups for women, or sometimes for both genders, provided an important venue for these gentle introductions mixed with the fashionableness of belonging to the right social circle. The periodicals, attuned as always to cultural trends, obliged these amateur associations with notices of meetings and special events, and provided guidance for readers who aspired to create something similar where they lived. Charlotte Carmichael Stopes's Shakespeare reading society in Upper Norwood is one instance of a prevalent institution in Victorian society that gave women who were not writers the opportunity to express their thoughts. A sense of their contributions to Shakespeare reception, now largely unrecoverable unlike the articles written for and read in the periodicals, is hinted at in the treatment Shakespeare was accorded in periodicals that identified the members of these clubs as their readers. By offering advice to help readers find Shakespeare clubs or create them, periodicals like the *Ladies' Treasury* or the *Girl's Own Paper*, discussed in chapter two, helped to promote Shakespeare appreciation. Just as Chartist periodicals linked Shakespeare to radical politics, and children's periodicals made Shakespeare or his heroines into people one might grow up to resemble, the women's periodicals introduced Shakespeare by connecting him with their readers' more familiar aspirations.

Victorian women, then, had their choice of a wide variety of modes for experiencing Shakespeare, ranging from passive, incidental reading between other more immediately pertinent articles to the authoritative stance of an anonymous reviewer for a major periodical. Recovering the evidence lingering in the periodicals helps to correct the mistaken impression that, as magazines like the *Ladies' Treasury* and "family" editions of

Shakespeare like the Bowdlers' and the Lambs' have conspired to suggest, women were incapable of reading Shakespeare aright. As early as 1863, long before women had made measurable political gains, magazines like *Victoria* and writers like Fanny Kemble were providing them with an alternative to the character criticism in magazines like the *Ladies' Treasury* or the indirect praise of *All the Year Round* and *Household Words*. The contributions of actresses including Kemble and Faucit and serious critics such as Charlotte Carmichael Stopes show that women were indeed capable of understanding Shakespeare, in ways perhaps unimagined by the *Ladies' Treasury* and its tercentenary-celebrating characters.

Chapter Four: The Theatres Regulation Act and the Great Exhibition in the *Theatrical Journal*

In the nineteenth century, the trade in Shakespeare, like British trade more widely, was utterly transformed by deregulation. After 1843, when the misnamed Theatres Regulation Act ended nearly two centuries of the patent theatres' exclusive right to Shakespeare, theatre reviewing was the medium in which views on the relationship between Britain's dramatic heritage and the political and economic contexts shaping its future could be tested. The *Theatrical Journal*, Victorian Britain's longest-lived theatrical periodical, provides an unusually comprehensive record of the theatrical world's responses to free trade. Throughout its thirty-two years of weekly publication, the *Theatrical Journal* frequently instructed its readers not just where to find the latest Shakespeare productions, but also how to appreciate them. This appreciation included, inevitably, reading the *Theatrical Journal* before venturing to the theatre. For lesser members of the Victorian audience, willing to risk an untutored evening at the theatre, the magazine reserved its derisory view that "we should not think of putting a pine-apple before a pig, therefore we should not think of putting Shakspeare before them."¹ The *Theatrical Journal's* evolving responses to two key moments of crisis in Victorian Shakespeare production, the adoption of the Theatres Regulation Act in 1843 and the opening of the Great Exhibition in 1851, are evidence of the different sense of theatre history that emerges when the periodicals are considered.

The *Theatrical Journal's* week-by-week account of theatrical events as they happened contrasts with retrospective accounts of Victorian Shakespeare productions that

¹*Theatrical Journal* 7.333, 2 May 1846, 137-38.

look to the aspirations and achievements of prominent managers or actors, influenced by the approach in foundational studies such as Odell's *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving* or Sprague's *Shakespeare and the Actors*. An analysis of theatre history according to the contemporary accounts of the *Theatrical Journal* necessarily takes an audience-centred view of the period's progress because of the magazine's own sense that a period's theatrical achievements should be measured with reference to its audience. One article suffices both to make this point clear and to introduce one significant term of the discussion, "adulteration":

It is an acknowledged fact, that Shakspeare is better understood by the great body of the people than at any former time. The reasons are obvious: education with the last twenty years has advanced with a rapidity unequalled in any former period, and that Shakspeare is more sought after and read is proved by the great number of new editions published within the last three years.

The above facts being admitted, it follows as a matter of course that the public are in the present day better judges of acting than they were, simply because they understand the poet better than they did, for no man can by any possibility be a judge of how an actor performs a Shaksperian character, if he has not, previously to seeing him, studied and thought upon the character as written by Shakspeare himself. But there is another very important fact, and one which Charles Knight (whose edition of 'Shakspeare' is generally considered one of the best we have) brings forward as abundant proof of the intellectual superiority of the present day. It is this – that now we have the plays of Shakspeare acted as written by the poet, curtailed a little, of course, to bring them within reasonable limits. In the present day we have no hesitation in saying, that the disgraceful mutilations called Shakspeare's 'Richard the Third' and 'King Lear,' as played some few years back, would not be tolerated. Let anybody compare the then *acting* copies of 'Richard the Third' and 'Lear,' as they used to be played, with the *true* text, as written by the poet, and he will blush for the age that countenanced such abortions, and for the actors that adopted them; for not only is the text altered and transposed, but some is even added; and in 'Lear,' actually new characters are invented. Verily, we are now living in better times; we now think Shakspeare

knew a little better than we do how to write a play, and we are satisfied to take him pure without adulteration.²

As a self-professed participant in the education of the theatregoing public, the *Theatrical Journal* was being more than a little self-congratulatory with its remarks on the present taste for “unadulterated” Shakespeare.³ The “better times” that the article heralded were times the *Theatrical Journal* had helped bring into being. The magazine would have occasion to call into question this optimistic view, articulated in 1846, but never its underlying assumption that popular education and theatrical appreciation were mutually dependent objectives.

Throughout its thirty-two years of publication, the *Theatrical Journal* exhibited an ongoing anxiety regarding the state of British drama. In the perceived absence of a strong, viable tradition of contemporary dramatic writing during the Victorian period, Shakespeare revivals, Italian operas, and loose translations of French plays dominated the theatrical scene and represented alternative directions for the future of drama in Britain. The magazine’s reviews and related editorials often depicted Shakespeare as Britain’s last, best hope against utter capitulation to foreign influences, a local contender worthy of legislative protection. Reviewers who saw the decline of British drama in the ephemeral spectacles and melodramas on which the metropolitan theatres had come to rely regularly invoked Shakespeare as a symbol of what had been sacrificed when the traditional homes of serious, native drama had lost their protected status with the revocation of their patent rights. In the

² *Theatrical Journal* 7.336, 23 May 1846, 161-62.

³ Adulteration had a particularly strident connotation at this time, when gruesome cases of illness and death resulting from the consumption of adulterated foodstuffs were frequently front-page news.

Theatrical Journal, this anxiety about the future of native British drama was balanced against the interests of living dramatists and managers who relied on the magazine's reviews to send audiences to new plays. Alongside its main task of reviewing productions ranging from Shakespeare to exhibitions featuring picturesque foreigners from faraway lands, the *Theatrical Journal* explicitly sought to teach its readers how to distinguish between the worthwhile and the worthless.

Central to the *Theatrical Journal*'s measure of a production's worth was the period's changing definition of authenticity, or what it meant to promise the public "pure," "unadulterated" Shakespeare. From its inception in 1839 to its last issue in 1871, the *Theatrical Journal* interpreted the significance of developments that inflected the definition of authentic Shakespeare, including the mooted end of protectionism that eventually made Shakespeare freely available to all producers in 1843, Macready's decision to retire the "adulterated" Shakespeare that had dominated the stage through the adaptations of Tate and Cibber, and the elaborate historical research evident in Kean's historically "accurate" productions. In the pages of the *Theatrical Journal*, readers were encouraged to value "Shakespeare" not as a source of inspiration through his biography or of morality through his characters, but as the local commodity most likely to thrive in a theatrical economy inundated with suspect foreign products or adulterated versions of otherwise wholesome local ones. Whether it was produced in the traditionally respectable West End or the innovative minor theatres of London's other boroughs and suburbs, this indigenous product thrived in the post-1843 marketplace. Because of Shakespeare's association with market forces, Shakespeare reviewing in this period was a debate about supply and demand,

authenticity and adulteration, and the limits of capitalism as much as it was a record of production values and aesthetic concerns.

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, theatrical production and theatre reviewing were shaped by a series of cultural and legal struggles. Until 1843, “legitimate” Shakespeare meant Shakespeare protected by the duopoly⁴ Charles II had established at the Restoration, when he granted patents to Sir Thomas Killigrew, whose King’s Company eventually became associated with the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane, and Sir William Davenant, whose Duke’s Company came to be associated with Covent Garden.⁵ As London’s population burgeoned in the aftermath of the industrial revolution, alternatives to these two patent theatres sprang up throughout the metropolis to serve an audience growing in both number and range of tastes, but these new theatres were limited by law to producing non-spoken drama in the form of musical or mime shows, the precursors of burlesque and pantomime. Londoners’ appetite for Shakespeare is manifest in the rather untraditional productions his plays were accorded at these non-patent theatres no less than in their frequent revivals at the patent playhouses. Before 1843, “legitimate” Shakespeare productions were permitted only at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, with a special summer

⁴As Tracy Davis notes in *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800-1914*, the term ‘duopoly’ is not strictly correct, but for present purposes it seems more suitable than ‘monopoly,’ the term used at the time, which must strike the modern reader as odd because it is used in this context to refer to two theatres, duo, not one, mono. ‘Duopoly’ is the term favoured throughout the present chapter, with an acknowledgement that it is employed with some latitude.

⁵Although established at the Restoration, the terms of the patent were somewhat uncertain by the eighteenth century, but were reified by the General Agreement of 1792 (see Davis 369 n.2).

license for the Haymarket. The revocation of their patent in 1843 initiated a lengthy period of crisis in which Shakespeare was virtually banished from these theatres in response to market forces. Shakespeare found a new home among the equestrian and aquatic spectacles of the non-patents alongside exhibitions of freaks and foreigners, but the implications of his changed status in the hierarchy of theatres initiated a debate that outlasted the century.

Before 1843, Covent Garden, Drury Lane, and the summer theatre at the Haymarket were the official, legal homes of authentic Shakespeare in London. At other theatres in the capital, known collectively as the “minors,” Shakespeare was presented in adulterated form as the point of departure for song-and-dance spectacles such as *Hamlet Travestie* and *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*, so numerous that Stanley Wells’s massive five-volume anthology merely samples them. By transforming Hamlet’s soliloquies into musical numbers or relocating the action of *Othello* from Venice and Cyprus to London’s Fleet Street, these adaptations reshaped Shakespeare into a cultural commodity accessible even to those without a gentleman’s education. However, as Jane Moody has demonstrated with conclusive evidence in *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840*, by the 1820s the unlicensed theatres were offering their audiences Shakespeare virtually unadorned, resorting to increasingly transparent means of presenting their patrons with a more authentic Shakespeare accompanied by a mere smattering of musical interludes in a token gesture of compliance with the law. With Covent Garden’s financial situation already precarious, its manager Charles Kemble could not afford to lose business to these illegitimate competitors. In 1830, he invited the management of Drury Lane to join Covent Garden in an effort to protect their patent rights with a series of lawsuits fuelled by evidence procured by Covent

Garden and Drury Lane spies reporting on infractions at the minors. The ensuing controversy, including a sustained debate in the newspapers and periodicals, placed Kemble at the centre of a public furore about the place of the drama in nineteenth-century society. Testimony from witnesses in Kemble's lawsuits against the perpetrators of these renegade productions suggests that in some cases the token compliance might amount to no more than occasional piano chords played in the background during a performance. As one correspondent wrote in a letter to the *Theatrical Inquisitor*, as early as 1812 productions at the Surrey were growing so close "upon the heels of the *legitamate* stage, that in spite of the *tinckling* of the piana and the *jingle* of the rhyme, I can often fancy myself sitting in one of the winter theatres."⁶ This "tinckling of the piana" remained an enduring feature of Shakespeare productions at the Surrey: as *Figaro in London's* critic noted about a production of *Othello* there in 1831, the action had been simply "interspersed with melodramatic music, in order to render it legitimately illegitimate."⁷ Long before the Theatres Regulation Act rendered such productions officially legal, the minor theatres were asserting a moral and commercial right to perform the plays of Shakespeare as unadulteratedly as they saw fit. In fact, even before a parliamentary committee was formed to investigate the problems of the patent system, ultimately releasing a report in 1832

⁶*Theatrical Inquisitor* 1, October 1812, 69, with the editor's derisory corrections of the italicised words silently omitted.

⁷ *Figaro in London*, 21 January 1831, 82.

recommending the abolition of the patent,⁸ the legitimate theatres had lost their dominion.

As Moody notes:

By the late 1820s, the Pavilion theatre in Whitechapel [...] was staging more Shakespearean plays than Covent Garden and Drury Lane Theatres put together. In 1829 alone, the Pavilion produced *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Cymbeline*, *Henry IV*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Coriolanus*.⁹

As this statistic and Kemble's lawsuits make clear, Shakespeare was being performed unadulterated or nearly so outside the patent theatres well before 1843. Testimony in the lawsuits and in the select committee's proceedings refers again and again to the complaint that, with the patent theatres failing to produce enough Shakespeare to satisfy audiences, the minor theatres were simply filling a genuine need for this scarce commodity. The argument that Shakespeare might be beneficial to the "lower orders," a public good trumping the rights of the patent holders, was a convenient *post facto* defence that took on the weight of fact through frequent repetition.

As the correspondent's letter to the *Theatrical Inquisitor* suggests in its rather eccentric spelling and grammar, the audience for Shakespeare was not limited to educated members of the middle and upper classes seeking diversion at the patent theatres. The architecture of the minor theatres, with larger sections of inexpensive seats and smaller areas

⁸Reprinted as *Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Laws Affecting Dramatic Literature. Stage and Theatre vol. 1*. British Parliamentary Papers 1832. Shannon: Irish UP, 1968.

⁹Moody, *Illegitimate Theatres in London*, 135.

for wealthier patrons compared to the more limited facilities for impecunious spectators at the patent theatres, confirms the anecdotal evidence offered in the periodicals.¹⁰ The debate about Shakespeare's relevance to the working classes and his status as the cultural heritage of all British citizens must be understood within this context of theatre design and legal wrangling so that the facts of working-class theatregoing are not distorted by the rhetoric on both sides of the debate about the appropriate manufacture and sale of Shakespeare.

Throughout the period, articles lamenting the decline of the drama frequently admonished the higher classes for abandoning Shakespeare to the denizens of the less-affluent neighbourhoods in which the minor theatres, and their Shakespeare productions, flourished. For instance, if the enthusiastic letter in the *Theatrical Inquisitor* represents one attitude to the minor theatres' encroachment on the hallowed ground of legitimate Shakespeare production, a theatre review in the same magazine offers a less sanguine interpretation of its significance. Commenting on Elliston's *The History, Murders, Life, and Death of Macbeth* at the Surrey, the reviewer rebuked Elliston for "administering to the ignorance or depravity of the multitude" instead of elevating audiences with a more authentic Shakespeare production.¹¹ For many reviewers throughout the nineteenth century, the health of the national drama, perhaps even its very survival, depended on its protection

¹⁰Moody provides specific evidence of this architecture, as well as a more general discussion of its implications, in *Illegitimate Theatres in London*. Davis and Emeljanow's *Reflecting the Audience* provides crucial information and analysis, conveniently divided into chapters on each theatre, for the Surrey, the Victoria, the Pavilion, the Britannia, Sadler's Wells, the Prince of Wales's, and Drury Lane. Booth's "East End and West End" suggests that audience composition is an important context for theatre history.

¹¹*Theatrical Inquisitor* 2, April 1813, 36.

from the lower orders no less than from the predations of the minor theatres. When the Theatres Regulation Act came into effect in 1843, the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate Shakespeare was no longer a simple matter of location, and, while legitimacy remained a central issue in the discussion of Shakespeare, the term was subject to repeated re-definition. Once Shakespeare ceased to be associated with the limited suppliers named in the letters patent, his plays required some stamp of authenticity to ensure that buyers were purchasing the genuine article.

The issue at the heart of the debate is not one of spectators' access to Shakespeare, for, as the Old Price riots of 1809 and subsequent disturbances on a smaller scale had made clear,¹² the legitimate theatres had welcomed a highly diverse audience hailing from the

¹²In 1809, John Philip Kemble's decision to raise admission prices at Covent Garden to subsidize repairs following a devastating fire the previous year proved disastrous. He had recognized the fire as an opportunity to improve Covent Garden's amenities, making it an appropriate shrine to the serious drama he saw as his theatre's *raison d'être*. When Covent Garden reopened within a year of the fire it boasted a new, richly appointed interior complete with marble and gilt surfaces, seats of mahogany and tufted silk, and an assortment of *bas-relief* figures ranging from the classical muses and Sophocles to Shakespeare and the Macbeths. The audience spaces were reconfigured to offer a larger number of lucrative private boxes at the expense of fewer of the more economical seats in the pit while admission prices for these latter seats were raised. The public outcry, known to posterity as the "Old Prices" (or OP) riots, is illustrative of the extent to which the theatre was frequented by individuals from all walks of life. Members of the working classes risked arrest in order to assert their right to patronize the theatre in the pit alongside the more aristocratic occupants of the private boxes. The public's outrage eventually resulted in Kemble's utter and repeated capitulation on playbills and in public addresses, but not before the rioters, with the help of newspapers and periodicals, had characterized the conflict as a battle over English citizens' rights to enjoy their national drama.

The strong public reaction to the raising of prices at Covent Garden was to some extent the result of John Philip Kemble's successful deployment of an idea which would come to dominate both the OP riots and the ensuing discussion of national drama throughout the entire nineteenth century. In the fundraising campaign preceding the rebuilding of the theatre, Kemble had argued that the legitimate playhouses merited public support as national theatres cultivating the national drama. Samuel Whitbread made a similar argument on

working classes no less than from the aristocracy. Rather, as the frequent laments of reviewers suggest, the real issue of contention was control over the manner in which Shakespeare was represented. Working class patrons were welcomed in the pit at Covent Garden and Drury Lane, but the Shakespeare they experienced there was not one contrived with them in mind. At the minor theatres, where the luxurious boxes were filled with patrons no less aristocratic but the economical pits and shilling galleries were proportionately larger and generated more income, the theatrical values that shaped Shakespeare revivals were more responsive to the tastes of the multitude. Just as commodities sold in the marketplace might be adulterated to increase profits, a freely-circulated Shakespeare subject to market forces was potentially suspect. Detractors of “popular” Shakespeare were misguided, however, in fearing that the minors would taint his plays for profit. In fact, the economic pressure was less of an influence on these smaller theatres than on the erstwhile patents. While the West End theatres struggled to fill their enormous houses and recorded season after season of losses, attendance at the minors continued to grow throughout the period, threatening the hegemony of the legitimate theatres and leading to the official recognition of

behalf of Drury Lane when fire destroyed that theatre that same year, although as Jonathan Bate has argued the differences between the two fundraising campaigns amount to a political rift between the Tory and Whig views of what a national theatre could do. Kemble succeeded in obtaining Tory support for his conservatively-oriented theatre, siding firmly with the powerful as evidenced in his production of *Coriolanus*. When Drury Lane burnt down Whitbread was left to garner the support of the Whigs, the Opposition at the time, with the result that Covent Garden was rebuilt within a year and Drury Lane not until 1812, after a more protracted period of fundraising. See also Baer’s *Theatre and Disorder in Georgian London*, Russell’s “Playing at Revolution,” and Troubridge’s “Theatre Riots in London.”

this fact first in the report of the select committee in 1832 and then in the Theatres Regulation Act of 1843.

Even before the Theatres Regulation Act rendered the term “legitimate drama” technically obsolete (though it continued to be used throughout the century), the phrase had lost its original associations with Charles II’s letters patent and was subject to varying interpretations. In an article entitled “The Legitimate Drama,” the *Theatrical Journal* highlighted the term’s slippage, quoting testimony from the proceedings of the 1832 select committee to illustrate the lack of consensus regarding the proper definition of the ‘legitimate’ or ‘regular’ drama among even dramatists, managers, and theatre owners:

“tragedy and comedy and every thing on the stage.”

“I do not know – that is a very difficult thing to ascertain – if they can play every thing, every thing is the regular drama.”

“I call the regular drama any drama which has good dialogue, good characters, and good morals: I make the word ‘legitimate’ as applied to the drama, depend on the nature of the plot, characters, and dialogue. I do not think legitimate drama depends upon any number of acts.”

“[Question] By the regular drama, do you mean tragedy and comedy in five acts? [Answer] Yes.”

“I could tell you what the regular drama is not, but it would be very difficult to define it positively.”

“I would say that tragedy and comedy, without any musical accompaniment, would be regular drama.”¹³

¹³*Theatrical Journal* 1.7, 1 February 1840, 65-66.

The proceedings of the 1832 select committee, old news when this article was published in 1840, were worth recollecting because the issue of legitimacy had remained vexed and was threatening to become meaningless as the legitimate theatres continued to assert their exclusive right to the “legitimate” drama while failing to produce much of it. Shakespeare had still found an occasional home at Covent Garden in the 1830s, but the rarity of his appearances there is evident in their degree of noteworthiness in the theatrical reviews. The *Theatrical Journal*’s retrospective of Macready’s tenure as manager of Covent Garden during the 1838 and 1839 seasons, for instance, recalled that the theatre had been in such a disastrous state before he took over from Osbaldiston that “the spirit of eternal Shakespeare paused and wept” while the seat of legitimate drama abandoned its birthright to become “a bear garden, – a monkey cage, – a lion pit – and a raree show for the gilt gingerbread of pageantry.”¹⁴ With the Theatres Regulation Act, Shakespeare was transformed from the property of the legitimate theatres into a token that all theatres might use to claim the stamp of legitimacy.

The Theatres Regulation Act of 1843

The summer of 1843 was a bleak period when England’s theatrical future seemed particularly tenuous, with the doors of both Drury Lane and Covent Garden closed, but there was hope on the horizon. As a lead article in the *Theatrical Journal* suggested, even though both theatres were without tenants or prospects thereof, “we can clearly discern a gleam of promise that assures brighter hope for the glorious revival of Shakspeare and the legitimate

¹⁴*Theatrical Journal* 1.52, 12 December 1840, 424-25.

drama.”¹⁵ That gleam was the prospect of legislation that could put an end to the patent system under which any London theatre producing Shakespeare, even in the current crisis when both patent theatres were closed, would be liable to a fine of fifty pounds levied on the manager and on each actor participating in the illicit performance.

Another bright spot was provided by a group of out-of-work Drury Lane actors who undertook “a most praiseworthy experiment” by renting the minor City Theatre for their own Shakespeare performances that summer. As the *Theatrical Journal* suggested, the brave move had the potential not only to keep Shakespeare available to his committed aficionados, normally patrons of the patent theatres, but also to introduce him to a new audience by taking him to a theatre more often associated with less elevated forms of dramatic entertainment. The magazine expressed its hope that :

the ruffian morals of Jack Sheppard, and the raffish sentimentality of the modern melo-dramas that have so long disgraced the stages of our minor theatres will be swept away, and food of a pure, improving, and intellectual quality be well digested, to the restoration of the sound health in this improved age of our national drama.¹⁶

As this quotation suggests, the improved age of the national drama included neither English melodrama nor the very English Jack Sheppard, the criminal-hero whose exploits had been related in the Newgate calendar, periodical series, a novel, and numerous stage versions. “Sound health” and good digestion implied a return to more nutritious fare, with the City Theatre’s Shakespeare productions leading the way. The magazine’s sense of Londoners’

¹⁵*Theatrical Journal* 4.185, 1 July 1843, 201.

¹⁶*Theatrical Journal* 4.187, 8 July 1843, 213.

appetites was reflected in box-office receipts. Reports do not specify the proportion of erstwhile Drury Lane regulars to new patrons from the neighbourhoods surrounding the City Theatre, but the City's full houses suggest at least that Shakespeare could be made profitable at the minor theatres despite the patent houses' evidence to the contrary. At the City, Shakespeare might stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Jack Sheppard as an example of theatregoers' taste for domestic products, while even a varied diet of foreign delicacies had failed to keep the patent theatres open.

In several front-page editorials that summer, in light of developments such as the City Theatre experiment, the *Theatrical Journal* repeatedly explored the class ramifications of controlling access to Shakespeare. In one editorial, the magazine argued that nothing less than free trade would serve the interests of working-class theatregoers. Anything else, according to the magazine, would merely:

protect the patent houses, subvert the managements of the minor houses, by transferring the licenses of these popular establishments from the local magistracy to the Lord Chamberlain, and thus totally exclude the representations of Shakspeare from those who cannot afford to pay the monopoly prices of Drury Lane and Covent Garden. [...] By this bill also the amusements of the people, especially of the humble class, are most cruelly attacked and unjustly interfered with, inasmuch as their cheap and rational enjoyments, as at the Grecian and Albert Saloons, will be perilled by enactment. It is unquestionably all very well for one of the aristocracy, a peer of the realm, a Lord Chamberlain, as a paid officer of state ceremonials, to exercise power over the Opera and other royal houses, where the most exalted talents can be secured by lavish and extravagant expenditure, flowing from the mines and coffers of the rich; but it is an oppression to wield the same legislative powers over the scanty resources of the middle classes of society. They require a cheap amusement, and ought to enjoy the music of Bishop or Dibdin, and the dramas of their Shakspeare, with equal facility and favour. The amusements for the rich are munificent and abundant, and ought to be rendered equally so, and profusely and liberally extended, to the people

at large. The people now require a free-trade in their public amusements, and if government bestow it on them and extend its benefits, the public will show in their improved habits and tastes, how worthy they are of its social influences.¹⁷

The *Theatrical Journal*'s objection to the bill, otherwise mysterious in light of its subsequent support, appears to hinge on a clause removed before the bill was passed. The stricken clause had stipulated that no theatre within five miles of a patent theatre could produce Shakespeare while the patent theatre was open. Had the clause survived, it could have imposed an even more strict definition of "Shakespeare production" than that of the letters patent, which predated the Shakespeare adaptations and burlesques that had been tolerated under the pre-1843 law. Under the proposed new legislation, all Shakespeare, whether authentic or adulterated, would have been strictly policed. "The people" would have found Shakespeare priced beyond their reach, available only at the patent theatres.

The proposed legislation remained a front-page topic in the magazine's subsequent issue, where the benefits of making Shakespeare more widely available were discussed in more specific terms. Again, "sound and healthful" Shakespeare was contrasted with other forms of entertainment that could ruin the public's taste and its digestion merely to fill a "sordid" manager's pockets:

If Shakspeare be, as he is, the most exalted of all our native poets, surely his pure teachings ought to be given in all our dramatic temples throughout the land for the benefit and instruction of all classes; not by confining his intellectual splendour within the limited circle of the few to the utter exclusion of the many. In a moral point of view, the attempt is atrocious; – alike injurious to the general manager, the young and aspiring actor, and the

¹⁷*Theatrical Journal* 4.191, 12 August 1843, 249-50.

public at large. The effect of the new bill will be to perpetuate the Jack Sheppard class of dramas, and inundate both town and country with mawkish, unnatural *ad captandum* pieces that tend to vitiate and destroy public taste, and prevent a sound and healthful constitution of dramatic interests. The new bill is also altogether uncalled-for and needless. It cannot aid the interests of the patent theatres, inasmuch as the works of Shakspeare cannot, in the dearth of tragic talent, without a John Kemble, a Charles Young, an Edmund Kean or a Macready, be rendered sufficiently attractive, while the ‘vested rights’ exercised in the importation of foreign operas, foreign singers, foreign fiddling or foreign beasts, may yet draw a further scandal on our national temples formally dedicated to Shakspeare, but whose pure inspirations are silenced by the meretricious offerings of a sordid and money-scraping manager.¹⁸

With the abolition of the patent, profit would be as strong a motive at Covent Garden as at the City, but the *Theatrical Journal* suggested in this editorial that Shakespeare’s “pure inspirations” should be better protected from market forces. This makes the *Theatrical Journal* one of the earliest proponents of some system by which the “national temples” would be protected from the motives of the “money-scraping manager” on the one hand and the influence of imported, “foreign,” spectacles on the other. While this stance is discussed within the context of the national theatre debate, the theme of chapter five, it is worth mentioning here as an important influence on the journal’s treatment of the Theatres Regulation Act. The *Theatrical Journal* was initially sceptical that Shakespeare would be well-served by free trade.

Other periodicals concerned with theatrical matters offered their own solutions to the perceived crisis in Shakespeare production. For the *Edinburgh Review*, a new policy of control, enforced more consistently, was the answer. The magazine began its October 1843

¹⁸*Theatrical Journal* 4.192, 19 August 1843, 257-58.

review of F.G. Tomlins's *The Past and Present State of Dramatic Art and Literature* with a promise to suggest a way out of an unsatisfactory situation:

That the present state of the Drama is matter of regret to all lovers of the art, and ruinous to all managers of theatres, are facts known to every one. Plans of reform, and remedies for the existing evils, are daily promulgated, without any effects resulting. We mean, in this paper, to endeavour to unfold the causes of these evils, and to point out what seems a promising mode of removing them.¹⁹

In concord with the *Theatrical Journal's* assessment of the problem, the *Edinburgh Review* identified the “monopoly possessed by the patent theatres” as the chief evil, but for the latter magazine the dilemma was an economic rather than a moral one. With their “enormous size and concomitant expenses,” the patents relied perforce on spectacle to fill seats and were in no position to produce other kinds of shows (382). Even with their attempts at “dazzling the vulgar eye with tinsel, and flattering the learned with accuracy of costume,” the patent theatres had clearly failed to fill their enormous spaces (383). The solution, according to the reviewer, was nothing less than a complete reform of the theatre licensing system so that each theatre would be allowed to produce only one or two “species of performance” best suited to its size and location (383). The first step to this reform would be the abrogation of the patent, since the patent theatres were evidently “positively unfitted” for the performance of the legitimate drama, rarely performed it, and were “ruined when they do so” (383). This view is an important one that, though disregarded by legislators at the time, would bear fruit later in the century and will reappear in this chapter in due course.

¹⁹*Edinburgh Review* 78, October 1843, 382.

When the Theatres Regulation Act was eventually passed into law in September 1843, it was, of course, a matter of gripping interest and speculation in the theatrical press. The *Theatrical Journal* devoted four of the eight pages in its 16 September 1843 issue to the act, which it reprinted verbatim in virtually microscopic font.²⁰ In the weeks and months that followed, the aspirations of the act's proponents appeared to have been gratified, and the *Theatrical Journal* quietly altered its position to one of cautious, and for a time enthusiastic, approbation. As hoped, Shakespeare was indeed performed in London with a frequency unmatched since his lifetime, at theatres including the Strand (*Othello* in September and a parodic *Richard III* in March), the Victoria (*Richard III*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello* in September, later *King John* and *Macbeth*), and the Pavilion (where a Shakespeare revival featured, among other plays, a well-received *Julius Caesar* paired with the nautical drama *Union Jack*).²¹ The Albert Saloon was deemed to have "wisely adopted the system of bringing forward the legitimate drama now that the new Act of Parliament admits of it in a legalised way" so that "the public can now see our immortal bard's compositions acted in a manner worthy of our notice."²² Productions there included *The Tempest* "on a scale of great splendour" that could "vie with any thing of the same description at Drury Lane"²³ and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with a woman, Miss L. Pearce, playing Oberon²⁴ "in a manner

²⁰*Theatrical Journal* 4.196, 16 September 1843, 292-95.

²¹*Theatrical Journal* 4.205, 18 November 1843, 364.

²²*Theatrical Journal* 5.212, 6 January 1844, 5.

²³*Theatrical Journal* 5.219, 24 February 1844, 60 and 5.220, 2 March 1844, 68.

²⁴*Theatrical Journal* 5.225, 6 April 1844, 107.

that would do credit to any theatre.”²⁵ The Lyceum opened its 1844 season with *I Henry IV*,²⁶ the Adelphi featured a well-received burlesque of *Richard III*,²⁷ and Sadler’s Wells produced a lukewarm *Othello* starring Mr. Mapham and Mr. Marston²⁸ followed by a more successful *Macbeth*²⁹ and another *Othello*, starring Samuel Phelps this time.³⁰ Reviewing this latter production, the *Theatrical Journal* interpreted the fullness of the house as:

a convincing proof of the intense interest the audience took in witnessing what is termed the legitimate. The play was listened to with the greatest attention, even by the audience in the sixpenny gallery, who, it is said, have no taste for the drama, and who cannot comprehend the plays of Shakespear.³¹

A well-attended *Hamlet*, in August, was also taken as “convincing proof” that the theatregoers of Islington were prepared to embrace the legitimate drama,³² and *King John* in the autumn was deemed superior to anything produced even by the better-established purveyors of legitimate drama.³³ At Kensington Theatre, Miss Arelia played the title

²⁵*Theatrical Journal* 5.227, 20 April 1844, 124.

²⁶*Theatrical Journal* 5.215, 27 January 1844, 28.

²⁷*Theatrical Journal* 5.219, 24 February 1844, 59.

²⁸*Theatrical Journal* 5.219, 24 February 1844, 59.

²⁹*Theatrical Journal* 5.233, 1 June 1844, 173.

³⁰*Theatrical Journal* 5.234, 8 June 1844, 178.

³¹*Theatrical Journal* 5.234, 8 June 1844, 178.

³²*Theatrical Journal* 5.242, 3 August 1844, 244.

³³*Theatrical Journal* 5.251, 5 October 1844, 315-16.

character in *The Taming of the Shrew* in a manner that “would render her useful and ornamental in a theatre more worthy of her abilities,”³⁴ Miss Vincent in the Victoria’s production of *Hamlet* was ranked as “one of the best Ophelias we have seen for years,”³⁵ and Hudson Kirby’s *Hamlet* and *Richard III* at the Queen’s were deemed a “great success.”³⁶ Meanwhile, Drury Lane responded with *Macbeth*,³⁷ *Hamlet*,³⁸ and a sumptuous revival of *Richard III* featuring a “Battle of Bosworth Field [...] conducted on a scale of magnificent grandeur almost without parallel” and an attention to set and costume “that vividly impresses the imagination and carries it back to the period when the wars of the red and white roses desolated our native land.”³⁹ Reading the *Theatrical Journal*’s issues from the year following the enactment of the Theatres Regulation Act, one could believe that the new legislation had managed to effect not only Shakespeare’s revival, with the cooperation of the managers and patrons of the minor theatres, but also his triumphant return to the “national” stage at Drury Lane.

Commenting on these early “legitimate” Shakespeare revivals at the minor theatres and their effect on the productions at Drury Lane, the *Theatrical Journal* was, a bare year after its initial scepticism, wholeheartedly enthusiastic that “the new Act for regulating

³⁴*Theatrical Journal* 5.227, 20 April 1844, 124.

³⁵ *Theatrical Journal* 5.248, 14 September 1844, 291.

³⁶*Theatrical Journal* 5.252, 12 October 1844, 325.

³⁷*Theatrical Journal* 5.219, 24 February 1844, 58.

³⁸*Theatrical Journal* 5.220, 2 March 1844, 64.

³⁹ *Theatrical Journal* 5.216, 3 February 1844, 34.

Theatres has already been taken advantage of.”⁴⁰ However, it was not long before the magazine had begun complaining that at theatres such as the Victoria, the early promise of these productions had degenerated to:

Shakspeare compressed, twisted, and murdered – actors discharged because they will not cut and hack the sentences to suit the acknowledged heroine of domestic tragedy – and scenes in such a state that the director of a penny gaff would grumble to take them at a gift.⁴¹

As this grumble suggests, even after the Theatres Regulation Act had made unadulterated Shakespeare productions legal at the minor theatres, adaptations, sometimes passed off as genuine Shakespeare, continued to be performed when it was thought that they might appeal to audiences. These “compressed, twisted, and murdered” versions co-existed alongside less altered productions as well as adaptations that were more frank about the liberties they took. For instance, during the campaign to raise funds for the purchase of Shakespeare’s birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon, the Adelphi produced a timely and well-received Shakespeare extravaganza, a parody by S. Coyne featuring a young heir who, spending a night at the birthplace, dreams that he is visited by the Bard and his creations. Like genuine Shakespeare extravaganzas such as the Shakespeare’s Birthplace fundraiser at Covent Garden on 7 December 1847,⁴² the Adelphi parody featured a parade of Shakespearean characters:

⁴⁰*Theatrical Journal* 4.194, 2 September 1843, 276.

⁴¹*Theatrical Journal* 5. 258, 23 November 1844, 373.

⁴²Announced in the *Theatrical Journal* 8.416, 4 December 1847, 392, and reviewed in 8.417, 11 December 1847, 399.

Shakespeare, personified by Mr. O. Smith, appears, and in a colloquy with the sleeper, details the degradation to which he feels himself reduced by his exclusion from his own houses in the metropolis. He summonses the children of his mind's creation, and *instantly* the leading characters of his dramas present themselves. Othello, (Paul Bedford), converted into an Ethiopian banjo player, declares that pursuit more successful than any legitimate efforts. Desdemona announces her determination to seek the arena on which a Cassio Widdicome presides. Shylock vows that he will, like others of his tribe, turn manager, and try the legitimate. Falstaff avows himself a devotee to Father Mathew. Lady Macbeth (in a broad Scotch accent), declares her fixed resolution to go back north and take in washing, especially as her husband has been accustomed to 'mangl,' and one and all vow their retirement from the legitimate purpose for which they had been brought to life by the poet's genius.[...] On the whole, we congratulate the management, the author, actors, and all engaged, upon the complete success with which this *jeu d'esprit* has been received.⁴³

The extravaganza is a send-up of minor theatres like the Adelphi, where actors impersonating Shakespeare's characters shared the greenroom with travelling minstrels and ingenues of dubious reputation.⁴⁴ Its more serious point is that while Shakespearean acting is less profitable than banjo-playing or taking in washing, a theatre-manager's profits are more attractive than even a money-lender's of Shylock's repute. The jab was well-placed during a period when the managers of the minor theatres were making record profits while serious actors toured the provinces, the Continent, and America to make ends meet.

While the *Theatrical Journal's* review of the Adelphi parody is generally positive, its review of *Cymbeline* at Sadler's Wells, on the same page, suggests that by this time the

⁴³*Theatrical Journal* 8.405, 18 September 1847, 300-1.

⁴⁴It is also clearly an imitation of James Robinson Planché's 1844 burlesque *The Drama at Home; or, an Evening with Puff*, written for performance at the Haymarket and subsequently published by S.G. Fairbrother and W. Strange in London that same year.

magazine was already employing a double standard in its estimation of what merited praise at the two theatres. The reviewer advises the latter theatre that “good afterpieces,” not just “trivial farces,” should follow its commendable Shakespeare revival: “An entertainment that begins well should always have a good termination; something light, genteel, and merry. Broad Adelphi farce is out of place here; the audience look for something better.”⁴⁵ While the *Theatrical Journal* had greeted the new legislation by praising the minor theatres for producing Shakespeare on a level comparable to, sometimes superior to, the patent theatres, by 1847 Sadler’s Wells was clearly being held to a higher standard than the Adelphi. The old distinction between the patents and the minors, each category implying its own expectations, had been supplanted by a more nuanced system of evaluation focused on the quality of the product, not its venue.

It is perhaps not entirely surprising that at theatres like the Adelphi and the Victoria, the right to produce authentic Shakespeare never entirely eclipsed the imperative to produce plays that would pay dividends to shareholders. Other theatres such as the Strand, the Olympic, the Standard, and the Grecian Saloon also continued to favour burlesques or rough approximations over unadulterated Shakespeare, often with titles like *Macbeth by Act of Parliament* that hearkened back to the pre-1843 state of affairs when Parliament really did control these productions.⁴⁶ Even at Sadler’s Wells, which would become the acknowledged

⁴⁵*Theatrical Journal* 8.405, 18 September 1847, 301.

⁴⁶*Macbeth by Act of Parliament* was produced at the Strand (rev. *Theatrical Journal* 14.698, 27 April 1853, 130). During the same period, another *Macbeth* burlesque played at the Olympic (rev. *Theatrical Journal* 14.699, 4 May 1853, 138), while at the Standard Mr. Anderson performed his broad interpretations of *Richard III* and *Othello* to a house “crammed nightly” (*Theatrical Journal* 14.698, 27 April 1853, 130). *Romeo and Juliet* was

home of Shakespeare in London, Shakespeare was interspersed with shows of a more evidently spectacular nature:

One week may be found some of the first-rate talent of the present day enacting the legitimate drama; at another period, some of the best nautical dramas that have been written; then a domestic drama of great interest; afterwards, an aquatic piece with real water, and ships of war and our jolly tars are to be seen in all their glory; then for variety as is now, the best troop of equestrians, with their neighing steeds, and the whimsical eccentricities of the clown; and at the conclusion of the year generally the best comic pantomime of any of the minor theatres.⁴⁷

The *Theatrical Journal's* considered response to the new theatrical state of affairs ushered in by the Theatres Regulation Act is perhaps best represented by the annual editorial with which the magazine greeted the new year by situating recent theatrical developments within the *longue durée* of Victorian theatre history. Looking back over the changes in the theatrical scene since its inaugural issue in 1839, the first editorial of 1845 remarked:

How many changes have marked the Drama's career during the short space of the last six years! When the Theatrical Journal first issued from the Press in 1839, a revived taste for dramatic science was gradually spreading [...] and the play-going public rejoiced that the classic walls of Covent Garden and Drury Lane were once again sacred to the delineation of genius and art. What are the 'National' Theatres now? Fashionable places of resort, to be sure, and spiritedly and cleverly conducted for the purposes to which they are devoted; but where is the Legitimate Drama – that drama for which those costly and elegant buildings were erected? Gone, gone, no one knows whither. [...] the present position of the English stage is a subject for sad reflections, and calls for the serious consideration of those who think as we do, that the neglect of

greeted with "immense applause" at the Queen's (*Theatrical Journal* 14.699, 4 May 1853, 139), and an approximation of *Othello* at the Grecian Saloon was performed with "great satisfaction to a house literally crammed" (*Theatrical Journal* 14.700, 11 May 1853, 147).

⁴⁷*Theatrical Journal* 4.202, 28 October 1843, 340.

the legitimate drama is a national disgrace. [...] The Theatrical Journal [...] has invariably fought under one banner – that of strenuous advocacy for the more elevated dramatic productions and the steady support it has received, enabling it to outlive more than a score of competitors who pandered to inferior tastes, is some evidence that the principles it supports yet animate the minds of thousands of the metropolitan playgoers – that the passion for ‘the play’ is not dead, though ‘it sleepeth.’ We do not despair of yet seeing a reformation.⁴⁸

That this assessment was not a transient impression is confirmed by the first editorial of 1846, which makes the point even more emphatically:

we yet cannot forget the principle we adopted when we ushered the THEATRICAL JOURNAL into existence – *the legitimate drama above every other consideration*; to these sentiments we still adhere; and we are impelled and strengthened in our course by the steady support we have uniformly received from those who advocate the same principles. Our prolonged existence is, indeed, a sort of guarantee that there is much public feeling on the same side; for, while we have, year after year, had to announce the sudden rise, and equally sudden fall, of rival publications (with much more imposing pretensions than we have ever put forth, but with a less rigid adherence to the interests of the pure drama), our readers find us again, at the outset of another year, still robust [...]. It is useless, in an article of this description, to offer suggestions to remedy the state of things we deplore, though it is right that they should not be glossed over, because by calling public attention to them, it may by degrees lead to a more wholesome taste, and eventually secure the resuscitation of the legitimate drama in all the splendour and chastity that marked the Macready era.⁴⁹

As these editorials suggest, by 1846 the *Theatrical Journal* was looking back to an earlier period, Macready’s tenure at Covent Garden (1837-39) and Drury Lane (1841-43), as the apex of Victorian theatrical achievement. Despite the initial flurry of Shakespeare

⁴⁸*Theatrical Journal* 6.264, 4 January 1845, 6-7.

⁴⁹*Theatrical Journal* 7.316, 3 January 1846, 1-2.

productions after the Theatres Regulation Act was passed, cause for some optimism even in the sceptical *Theatrical Journal*, that early promise of Shakespeare's renewed vigour had not borne fruit.

Macready and the National Drama

The *Theatrical Journal's* invocation of Macready was, as events would soon show, prophetic. The trajectory of Macready's career is symbolic of the fate of legitimate Shakespeare during this period. After his lesseeship at Covent Garden, Macready took over as manager at Drury Lane and then, in 1846, at the formerly illegitimate Surrey theatre. In 1841, the news of Macready's decision to take the helm at Drury Lane had been greeted as a promising indication of the national drama's status at a theatre still considered its legitimate home. According to the *Theatrical Journal's* report at that time, the announcement amounted to:

the harbinger of a more flourishing career for the theatrical state; a return, in fact, to that prosperous condition when the two national theatres were an ornament and honor to the first city in the world. [...T]he public may confidently look forward to another golden age for the legitimate drama.⁵⁰

Macready's remarks launching a new season at Drury Lane in December 1841 had promised, among other things, a revival of the "true spirit" of Shakespeare's plays in the capital. For Macready, this meant a return to Shakespeare's texts, not the eighteenth-century adaptations and ad-hoc alterations that continued to dominate nineteenth-century

⁵⁰*Theatrical Journal* 2.70, 17 April 1841, 121.

productions. As the *Theatrical Journal* noted, at Covent Garden Macready had already made significant progress towards recuperating Shakespeare through “the redemption of his dramas from those corruptions, interpolations, changes by which managers had complimented and promoted the debasement of the public taste” and with his “wonderful artistical combinations, extending from the exertion of the highest intellectual power of personation to the minutest scenic details of form and colour, by which each revived play was in succession put upon the stage.”⁵¹ A review of Drury Lane’s offerings a few weeks later suggested that the high hopes attached to Macready’s management were already being made manifest:

If we may judge from the thronged houses here we may conclude that the legitimate drama is gaining fast in public estimation; the house has now been open three weeks, and we have had no less than four revivals, the Merchant of Venice, Two Gentlemen of Verona, Every one has his fault, and the Gamester, all of which have been got up with the greatest care and attention.⁵²

Macready would go on to produce ten Shakespeare plays during his first year at Drury Lane,⁵³ but his failure to make these productions profitable would give his tenure there the savour of a Pyrrhic victory. However, in the glorious days of Macready’s first Drury Lane

⁵¹*Theatrical Journal* 2.104, 11 December 1841, 393-94.

⁵²*Theatrical Journal* 3.110, 22 January 1842, 26.

⁵³The *Theatrical Journal* notes that in the 1842-43 season just ending, Drury Lane under Macready produced ten Shakespeare plays amounting to a total of nearly one hundred performances: “As You Like It 22 times; Hamlet 7; Othello 10; Macbeth 10; King John 26; Cymbeline 4; Much Ado About Nothing 12; Julius Caesar 3; Henry IVth, Part 2 2; Winter’s Tale 2” (*Theatrical Journal* 4.184, 24 June 1843, 193).

season, Shakespeare seemed destined to be revived, like the six million dollar man, “better than he was before.”⁵⁴ This idea of improvement was central to Macready’s productions, and to the future of “legitimate” Shakespeare production. According to some arguments, the spectacular, improved Shakespeare being produced at Drury Lane under Macready was actually more legitimate than even performances in Shakespeare’s own theatre supervised by the playwright himself. Macready’s improvements, it was argued, represented the realization of Shakespeare’s true intentions:

It has been a question, asked by persons who can be but poor and weak judges of the matter, to what extent the resources of scenery, and the various means of scenic illusion, are properly admissible. But it is surely a very simple question. It has been perplexed by the introduction of extraneous circumstances that have nothing in the world to do with it. The principle of the matter is easily stated, and resolves itself into this: – everything should be done of which the art of the stage is capable, to realise the intention of the dramatist, to embody the idea of the drama. If this is lost sight of for an instant, – the greater the splendor, the greater the mistake. If this is steadily kept in view the more complete every artifice and resource of the scene is brought to bear upon it, the greater the justice that will be done, not only to the genius of the poet, but to the high and instructive purpose of the stage. This has been felt from the earliest times, and by Shakspeare himself, who makes the Chorus in Henry V apologize for the want of these things. [...] Poor Shakspeare had to fight a hard battle to get rid of the bears, so it was not for him to be particular about scenery, &c; so up went the blanket for a scene, and to work went those ‘imaginary forces,’ not invoked from the will, but from the poverty of the great poet and his fellows. Yet for all this, he has most carefully guarded against misrepresentation in this matter, not unimportant to a dramatist with a lofty sense of art.

⁵⁴Not all observers were so sanguine about Macready’s Shakespeare revivals. Responding to criticism of Macready in the Sunday press, the *Theatrical Journal* asserted that the opinions of critics in publications such as *John Bull*, the *Satirist*, the *Dispatch* and the *Sunday Times* were less than impartial, while “any unprejudiced person” would see that Macready stood as the “foremost champion of the legitimate drama” (*Theatrical Journal* 3.113, 12 February 1842, 52). The controversy over Macready’s interpretations of Shakespeare recurred in several subsequent issues, including the front page of the 5 March 1842 issue (*Theatrical Journal* 3.116, 5 March 1842, 73-74).

In the construction of all his plays, not seldom in the mere stage directions of the scene, we find as it were, his protest and appeal to posterity. The 'ignorant present' faded at those times from before him. He was not for an age, but for all ages; and he did not write for the scanty, poverty-stricken illusion of his day, but for the wealth, (such as is now employed) and amplitude of a theatre similar to Drury Lane.

In Covent Garden, when it was formerly under the management of Mr. Macready, as in Drury Lane now, these resources of scenic illusion have been brought, in our judgment, into nearly completeness of action; there has been nothing of tawdry tinsel in it, nothing of suffocating show. And the result has been that the idea of some of Shakspeare's greatest plays have been more clearly presented to the humblest auditor, than the wisest reader is always likely to have realised. These magnificent works were not written for solitude, but to be set forth in the midst of crowds, and light, and all garish excitements, and to be accompanied by the audible throbbings of a thousand hearts...⁵⁵

Increasingly, under Macready's patient tutelage and the *Theatrical Journal's* appreciative explanations, while spectacle continued to draw audiences, the *quality* of that spectacle in terms of its illumination of the play became a measure of a production's true legitimacy. This is an important development in the assessment of the legitimacy of Shakespeare productions, which had previously relied on the simple formula of patent theatre = legitimate, minor theatre = illegitimate. With this new emphasis on spectacle with a purpose, an era of more thoughtful Shakespeare production – and reviewing – was initiated. If the result was not quite authentic, nobody, at least nobody writing in the *Theatrical Journal*, seemed to mind.

At the same time that the relationship between production values and playtexts was being developed into a discourse of authorial intention and eventually authenticity, textual

⁵⁵*Theatrical Journal* 3.146, 1 October 1842, 313-14.

accuracy, a not unrelated issue, was brought to the forefront by Macready's decision to retire some long-used adaptations in favour of a return to texts that bore a greater resemblance to Shakespeare's originals. Macready's success in supplanting these familiar adaptations depended on his audience's ability to recognize the value of so doing, and the *Theatrical Journal* was quick to begin educating the public on his behalf. In a series of articles on Shakespeare's characters as produced by Macready at Drury Lane, the *Theatrical Journal* seized the opportunity to lament the ongoing displacement of Shakespeare's *King Lear* by Nahum Tate's "miserable parody" at other, implicitly lesser, theatres:

Nahum Tate has succeeded to an extent that defies all competition, in degrading the psalms of David, and the Lear of Shakespeare, to the condition of being tolerated and perhaps admired, by the most dull, gross, and unpoetical capacity; yet the wretched jumble called Lear has from the time of Garrick downwards, (with one exception which we shall notice directly,) been represented on the British stage; yet with this fact before their eyes, shallow and concerted men have criticised Garrick, Kemble, Young, and E. Kean, in this character, when it is evident to the veriest fool who has read *real* and *spurious* tragedy, that the Lear of Shakespeare has never from Garrick's time to the present, (except in the instances noticed,) been represented before a London audience [...]. The age which produced this miserable parody of Lear that till within a few years has banished the Lear of Shakespeare from the stage, was, as far as regards the knowledge of the highest efforts of intellects, a presumptuous, artificial, and therefore empty age. In the present day, and the above stated truths bear sure testimony to it, the immortal poet's works, and the efforts of the tragedian in those works, must be as a matter of course, and are judged and appreciated by a higher intellectual power than they ever were before. But thanks to the master mind of Macready, the Lear of Shakespeare was at last restored to the stage in its own natural grandeur; this act of justice to him "who was not for an age, but for all time," took place on the night of Thursday, January 25th 1838, at Covent-garden theatre, under the enlightened management of the tragedian in question.⁵⁶

⁵⁶*Theatrical Journal* 1.45, 24 October 1840, 370.

Despite the *Theatrical Journal*'s unwavering support, Macready's period at Drury Lane, launched so triumphantly in 1841, concluded with recriminations and regrets. In his farewell address at the end of the 1842-43 season, Macready drew explicit attention to the shortcomings of the current "oppressive" theatrical legislation. Even untenanted and therefore "themselves unable to present the glorious works of Shakspeare to an English audience," Drury Lane and Covent Garden retained their patent rights and remained:

armed by the law with power to forbid their representation elsewhere, for were I now, after all I have given and endured to maintain the drama in these theatres – were I, excluded as I am by circumstances, from them, to attempt in a theatre lately licensed by the Lord Chamberlain for performance of the brutes and brute tamers – were I to attempt there the acting a legitimate play 'the law, with all their might to urge it on,' would be put in force to prevent me or punish me! May I not ask for what public benefit such a law is framed? Or for what good purpose is it persisted in?⁵⁷

Macready's rhetorical question would soon be answered when the patent was revoked. Meanwhile, though Macready's attempt to re-establish Shakespeare at the patent theatres was ultimately unsuccessful, the Bard had gained a less tenuous foothold at Sadler's Wells, in the London suburb of Islington.

Phelps at Sadler's Wells

The reliance of Sadler's Wells on Shakespeare, and its sustained effort to associate itself with his works, was manifest in the theatre's 1841 renovation:

⁵⁷*Theatrical Journal* 4.184, 24 June 1843, 194-95.

the ceiling represents Jove conferring immortality on Shakespear, who is presented by Genius and Fame, and attended by Melpomene and Thalia. The circle of boxes, most richly ornamented with medallions, representing Shakespear's seven ages, with the addition of birth and burial.⁵⁸

By 1845, when Macready had deserted the legitimate London theatres for Paris and America, bringing Shakespeare with him, Sadler's Wells was Shakespeare's acknowledged refuge in London.⁵⁹ Under Samuel Phelps and Mrs. Warner, Sadler's Wells had succeeded in establishing itself as the *de facto* home of legitimate drama, while Covent Garden and Drury Lane relied on opera, ballet, and spectacle to fill their houses. As *The Era* would later remark retrospectively, the successful Shakespeare revivals at Sadler's Wells during this period were some consolation for his disappearance from his more accustomed home:

Of late years our ancient dramatists, with their monarch Shakspeare, have had but a precarious abiding-place in the legitimate domains of Covent-garden and Drury-lane. It is, however, some consolation to find that they are not shelterless, but that, in the neighbourhood of Islington [at Sadler's Wells], they still find a home and a haunt.⁶⁰

⁵⁸*Theatrical Journal* 2.77, 5 June 1841, 179.

⁵⁹See, for example, *Theatrical Journal* 6.264, 4 January 1845, 6-7.

⁶⁰*The Era* 15.780, 4 September 1853, 10. This view is also evident in *The Era*'s earlier note: "SADLER'S WELLS – This establishment, which may with justice be said to be the only real temple dedicated to the performance strictly of the legitimate drama, has commenced the season favourably, Saturday, the 28th ult, being the opening night. Shakspeare is here found 'at home,' and, we are happy to say for national taste, is well patronised. The amusements at the 'Wells' are truly of an intellectual character, and while associated with enjoyment the mind imbibes material for thought" (*The Era* 14.728, 5 September 1852, 11).

The *Theatrical Journal* interpreted Shakespeare's move from the West End to Islington as a direct result of the Theatres Regulation Act, and was thus persuaded to revise its generally negative view of the legislation:

Had not the late judicious alterations been made in the law, we should have seen in a few years either a total loss to the stage of Tragedy and Comedy, or a permanent closing of the two large theatres; as it is, they have found their level. Dramas which depend for their success on extraneous matters, such as pomp, splendour, music, and dancing, are the only ones that pay; and the reason is this; – the modern play-goer finds that he can much better enjoy the works of our great dramatic poets, and much more fully appreciate the beauties of acting in a house of moderate size, than in one wherein all the lighter tones are lost to the ear, and the minute changes of the countenance hid from the eye. [...] Many persons deplore the banishment of Tragedy and Comedy from those stages [Covent Garden and Drury Lane]; but I rejoice at it, as it evinces a welcome though tardy acknowledgement of the fact that they are better adapted to the production of such pieces as are now nightly there represented.

And I rejoice still more that the minor theatres are allowed by law to produce to their audiences the sublime works of the legitimate artists of the drama. The beneficial results which this alteration has produced in the case of Sadler's Wells, have become too well known to require any mention here.⁶¹

The legitimate theatres did not relinquish Shakespeare without a fight, but the *Theatrical Journal*, with its new enthusiasm for the post-1843 theatrical *status quo*, encouraged its readers to view the complaints of the former patent-holders with scepticism. For instance, the magazine printed Drury Lane's querulous annual report of the 1844-45 season verbatim, accompanied by an editorial riposte:

Our readers must be amused by this mighty piece of composition. So the Legislature are to be called to account for allowing the Poet to be played at

⁶¹*Theatrical Journal* 6.270, 15 February 1845, 49-51. See also 6.267, 25 January 1845, 29-30.

Pothouses! – Most sapient Committee! – what have you already made of old Drury? – Has it not been a vehicle for tumblers, wild beast shows, cat-gut-scrapers, and mountebanks of all kinds? [...W]hen Macready engaged the place for two seasons: what then did you all say? Why, of a sudden you became enamoured of the legitimate! You were all pleased, or pretended to be, at the prospect of its revival. But how the creature changes with circumstances. Now, Opera and Ballet mad; if that fails, you will all be deep in love with Shakspeare again, provided another dupe can be found.

Petition for a repeal of the Act. You never encouraged English drama when you monopolised it, – why try to rob those of it who use it well? Pluck it from Sadler's Wells if you can! Rob the Haymarket of it if you can! If you could you would.⁶²

As the *Theatrical Journal's* reviews during this period suggest, even before the Theatres Regulation Act had made it possible for each theatre to produce any type of play it believed might appeal to its audience, many of the erstwhile illegitimate theatres were already choosing to produce Shakespeare while the legitimate theatres resorted, increasingly, to Italian opera and French farces. Ironically, the theatres located in the less-fashionable sections of London inhabited by working-class families had become the protectors of England's much-vaunted dramatic heritage, in the form of Shakespeare, while the West End became dominated by foreign influences. While Sadler's Wells was attracting audiences from all over London with its serious Shakespeare productions, other minor theatres also experimented with Shakespeare, with varying degrees of success. For a brief period in the summer of 1841, the Victoria was a rival seat of legitimate Shakespeare in London, second only to Covent Garden according to the *Theatrical Journal's* enthusiastic review of the Victoria's *Macbeth* and *Othello*, performed on alternating nights.⁶³ Another production of

⁶²*Theatrical Journal* 6.296, 16 August 1845, 258.

⁶³*Theatrical Journal* 2.83, 17 July 1841, 227-28.

Othello, at the Pantheon Theatre, was less successful and served to confirm the dubious reputation attached to the minor theatres: the actor in the title role “was drunk, decidedly drunk, and at times almost incapable of retaining his personal equilibrium! – sweet Desdemona too had not neglected her devotion to the bottle.”⁶⁴

Faced with this unpredictable mixture of the admirable and the abysmal, often indistinguishable until the theatregoer had endured the production, advocates of the repeal of the patent must have been gratified by Macready’s engagement at the Surrey Theatre in the autumn of 1846, reports of which often made an explicit link between this new venue for genuine Shakespeare and the legislation.⁶⁵ Macready, with his indisputable *bona fides* from the patent theatres, would bring the stamp of legitimacy to this minor theatre and at least in theory ensure that the proportion of positive theatregoing experiences, along the lines of Sadler’s Wells, would outweigh the Pantheon’s drunken *Othello* variety. In a front-page article commenting on the opening night at the Surrey under Macready, the *Theatrical Journal* seized the opportunity to refine its ongoing argument about Shakespeare and class:

Ignorance is a foul demon, the fell destroyer of man. Shakspeare, Milton, Burns, Goldsmith, all that fashion would call of ‘*lower*’ order (what an asinine phrase!) *earned* knowledge, and the use of it has made their names *immortal*; whilst most of their neighbours of the same period, and of the *higher* order, are dust, their names enveloped in utter darkness in the womb of the past. These remarks lead up to the point, that a well-ordered Stage is one of the best means for the *moral* advancement of the people. Hence, the reception at the Surrey of Mr. Macready has been in the highest degree

⁶⁴ *Theatrical Journal* 2.80, 26 June 1841, 204.

⁶⁵ See, for instance, newspaper reviews of the first and last performances (7 September and 7 November 1841). See also the unidentified press clipping cited at length in Foulkes, *Performing Shakespeare in the Age of Empire* 17.

satisfactory, as proving that the *lower* orders (we use the term fashionably) have *souls* rather above than below the higher classes, for surely Shakspeare is a trifle more intellectual than the Italian Opera, where noisy operas and lascivious ballets are the much sought after amusements of the Aristocracy and the other high cliques of society.⁶⁶

While the *Theatrical Journal* treated Macready's engagement at the Surrey as corroborating evidence that the "lower orders" appreciated Shakespeare, other magazines, either disingenuous or misinformed, saw it as a unique manifestation of class mixing. Also less than accurate were reviews and retrospectives of Phelps's thirty-one Shakespeare plays performed over more than 1600 nights at Sadler's Wells, where, according to highbrow publications such the *Athenaeum*⁶⁷ and *Nineteenth Century*,⁶⁸ the audience was an unprecedentedly diverse assortment of West End Shakespeare *habitués* and local working-class folk seeking convenient amusement.⁶⁹ In fact, the working class had been an important component of Shakespeare audiences throughout the century, at Drury Lane and Covent Garden no less than at the minor theatres.⁷⁰

⁶⁶*Theatrical Journal* 7.353, 26 September 1846, 307-8.

⁶⁷*Athenaeum* 1 June 1844, cited in Foulkes 33.

⁶⁸*Nineteenth Century*, December 1877, cited in Foulkes 33.

⁶⁹See Shirley Allen's *Samuel Phelps and the Sadler's Wells Theatre* on Phelps's eighteen-year career as manager there.

⁷⁰These comments in relatively mainstream publications have become part of the discourse surrounding theatre history in this period, sometimes causing modern critics to misunderstand the actual class composition of Victorian audiences for Shakespeare, although recent investigations such as Davis and Emeljanow's *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* and Richard Foulkes's *Performing Shakespeare in the Age of Empire* are helping to clarify this aspect of Victorian theatre history.

The *Theatrical Journal*'s attitude towards Shakespeare and class is more accurate than the views articulated in magazines such as the *Athenaeum* and *Nineteenth Century*, and a sharp contrast to the parliamentary committee's 1832 report. While the *Theatrical Journal* uses the success of Shakespeare among the "lower orders" to indict the tastes of the "high cliques of society" who seem to prefer less intellectual entertainment, the 1832 report had suggested that at the then-patent theatres Shakespeare had been regarded as an elite commodity, "caviare to the general." Charles Kemble's testimony to the committee, for instance, had defended the patent system on the grounds that Shakespeare's plays could only be performed adequately at the legitimate theatres.⁷¹ Thomas Morton, reader of plays at Drury Lane, misread the prologue to *Henry V* as evidence that Shakespeare himself had wished his plays to be performed only at elite playhouses where one might actually find "princes to act" and "monarchs to behold the swelling scene."⁷² The evidence of the decades following these testimonies had demonstrated, well before Macready's engagement at the Surrey, that the minor theatres were able not only to produce serious Shakespeare, but often to do so in a way that put the patent theatres to shame.

While more highbrow magazines sometimes lamented Shakespeare's popularity at the minors as a sign of the imminent demise of the drama or even the decline of British society, the *Theatrical Journal*, after its initial scepticism, adopted a more optimistic tone, perhaps because the latter magazine was unusually inclusive in class terms. Class had been a

⁷¹British Parliamentary Papers Stage and Theatre I, 1968: 45, cited in Foulkes, *Performing Shakespeare in the Age of Empire*, 8.

⁷²Cited in Moody, *Illegitimate Theatres in London*, 129-30.

central concern of the *Theatrical Journal* since its inception, when the magazine made clear that it was intended for all members of the theatre-going public, from those occupying the most inexpensive places in the minor theatres to those attending private performances at the Queen's invitation. While the journal was often moved to lament the decline of the drama to the lowest common denominator at the expense of legitimate drama in tones of elitist outrage reminiscent of *Blackwood's* or the *Athenaeum*, it was also an unstinting advocate for the rights of the less-affluent members of its constituency. In one issue, for instance, the journal rebuked proprietors for implementing renovations that had reduced the number of inexpensive gallery seats or in some cases even eliminated them altogether. The "humble artisan may not be the most profitable customer," but "he, as one of the public, is no less entitled to consideration and respect" and, the magazine argued, he often appreciates his theatre experience more profoundly than the more affluent spectators because it is a pleasure for which he has worked extra hours or foregone some necessity to procure. Moreover, the article suggests, since theatregoing can have a salutary effect on the working classes by encouraging sobriety, intellectual stimulation, and rational amusement, the galleries with their inexpensive seats should be maintained as a public good. In a somewhat contradictory vein, the article concludes with the crowning argument that "all parties" should be convinced by the recent example of the Olympic theatre, which found that the box office receipts for its newly-opened section of inexpensive seats exceeded in one night sales of its more prestigious box-seat for an entire week, with the added advantage that the audience

composition of the other sections was rendered “more select” when less-affluent spectators were offered a more economical alternative.⁷³

From the outset, the *Theatrical Journal* had identified its target audience as “the middling and operative classes,” and evinced an intention to be “within the reach of the most economical,” an intention made all the more manifest when the magazine reduced its weekly price from one and a half pence to a penny in 1846.⁷⁴ Much like the working-class periodicals published by charitable organizations discussed in chapters one and two, the *Theatrical Journal* defined itself as a more salubrious alternative to the newspapers, with their “political feeling on the one hand, and personal predilection on the other.”⁷⁵ The *Theatrical Journal* was also reminiscent of these charity-minded publications in its advocacy of widespread education and rational entertainment, although, in sharp contrast to the more religious of the charitable groups, the *Theatrical Journal* was wont to find that the theatre fulfilled most of its readers’ educational requirements. In one front-page article, for instance, the *Theatrical Journal* considered the importance of theatrical productions to the working classes:

It is only in the theatre that any image of real grandeur of humanity – any picture of generous heroism and noble self-sacrifice – is poured on the imaginations, and sent warm to the hearts of the vast body of the people. There are eyes, familiar through months and years only with mechanical toil, suffused with natural tears. – There are the deep fountains of hearts, long

⁷³*Theatrical Journal* 1.52, 12 December 1840, 121-22.

⁷⁴Citation from *Theatrical Journal* 1.1, 21 December 1839, 1; the price reduction was announced in the 15 August 1846 number, 7.348, 257.

⁷⁵*Theatrical Journal* 1.1, 21 December 1839, 2.

encrusted by narrow cares, burst open, and a holy light is sent in on the long sunken forms of the imagination, which shown fair and goodly in boyhood by their own light, but have since been sealed and forgotten in their 'sunless treasures.' There, do the lowest and most ignorant catch their only glimpse of that poetic radiance which sheds its glory around our being. While they gaze they forget the petty concerns of their own individual lot, and recognise and rejoice in their kindred with a nature capable of high emprise, of meek suffering, and of defiance to the high powers of agony and the grave. They are elevated and softened into men. They are carried beyond the ignorant present time, feel the past and the future on the instant, and kindle as they gaze on the massive realities of human virtue, or on those fairy visions which are the gleaming foreshadows of golden years, which hereafter shall bless the world. Their horizon is suddenly extended from the narrow circle of low anxieties and selfish joys, to the farthest boundaries of our moral horizon; and they perceive, in clear vision, the rocks of defence for their nature which their fellow-men have been privileged to raise. – While they feel 'that which gives an awe of things above them,' their souls are expanded in the heartiest sympathy with the vast body of their fellows. A thousand hearts are swayed at once by the same emotion, as the high grass of the meadow yields, as a single blade, to the breeze which sweeps over it. Distinctions of fortune, rank, talent, age, all give way to the warm tide of emotion, and every class feels only as partakers in one primal sympathy, 'made of one blood,' and equal on the sanctities of their being.⁷⁶

Another characteristic instance of the *Theatrical Journal's* interest in popular entertainment is an article in its 11 April 1850 issue,⁷⁷ in which three full columns are devoted to Dickens's article "The Amusements of the People," which had recently appeared in the first number of *Household Words*, a new periodical edited by Dickens himself. While professing its admiration of Dickens generally, the *Theatrical Journal* took exception to his article, which, it claimed, amounted to a mean-spirited attack on the Victorian minor theatres. The article resulted in a flurry of letters, and in the next issue the *Theatrical Journal* responded

⁷⁶ *Theatrical Journal* 6.312, 6 December 1845, 385-86.

⁷⁷ *Theatrical Journal* 11.539, 11 April 1850.

to Dickens's "continued and ungenerous attacks upon the minor theatres – their actors and their audiences" ⁷⁸ with a renewed volley of unflattering epithets and a vow to attend to the matter. In the 2 May 1850 issue, the magazine made good that vow with a meditation on the motives behind Dickens's attack, which, the magazine surmised, included a Quixotic need to tilt at windmills far beneath his notice and envy that his forays into the theatrical world, as an actor and a playwright, had not been successful. The article concludes with a snide paragraph combining a criticism of Dickens's "strange" speech at a Theatrical Fund dinner with a dismissal of *Household Words* as a magazine of neither originality nor interest. ⁷⁹

The *Theatrical Journal* was certainly not alone in its advocacy of the "amusements of the people" against Dickens's disparagements. *The Era*, too, took exception to Dickens's position. In its equally vituperative riposte, *The Era* insulted both Dickens's profession and his magazine:

It usually happens that when mere literary gentlemen, totally unacquainted with the requirements of the stage and the difficulties surrounding theatrical management, step out of their way to write respecting the Drama they show an extraordinary amount of ignorance of the subject on which they discourse. [...] Mr. Thackeray has had a comedy in the hands of three of our best managers, who have pronounced it to be totally unactable. Mr. Dickens once produced a musical piece at the St. James's Theatre, entitled *Village Coquettes*, with no very great success. ⁸⁰

⁷⁸*Theatrical Journal* 11.540, 18 April 1850.

⁷⁹*Theatrical Journal* 8.542, 2 May 1850, 140-41.

⁸⁰*The Era* 20.1017, 21 March 1858, 9.

The message in both *The Era* and the *Theatrical Journal*, that novelists are not always the best judges of theatrical matters, is one that Shakespeare reception historians would do well to recall. While theatre historians are accustomed to working with newspaper and magazine reviews, as well as material of an even more ephemeral nature such as playbills and posters, Shakespeare reception has tended to focus on the remarks of just such figures as Dickens and Thackeray. These public thinkers certainly attracted attention, but theatre reviewers exerted a more sustained influence on theatregoers, establishing their credibility through weekly appreciations of the theatrical offerings rather than through occasional impressions or pronouncements.

Despite its stance in this controversy and its frequent pleas on behalf of its less wealthy readers and London's minor theatres, it would be wrong to assume that the *Theatrical Journal* was unfailingly generous and large-spirited in matters of theatrical taste and the working classes, although this is very nearly the case. One instance of the contrary, the front-page article "A lecture on the head of 'Massa Shakspeare,' by our own Ethiopian,"⁸¹ can be read as an extended racist joke, though its mockery extends beyond race to include mutual aid societies and outreach programs more generally. True, much of the humour in the piece derives largely from its linguistic peculiarity and the elocutionist's comic misprisions:

Ladies and genelman, de bery mighty Shakkerspere, as de assembly all know, am the great and talented autor ob de 'Waberly Nobels,' and um likewise write de renowned book called de 'Byron's Works' – very sillybrated work – very clivver work. Shakkerspere, ladies and genelman, was a genelman ob

⁸¹*Theatrical Journal* 8.394, 3 July 1847, 209-10.

colour, like de whole assembly; him bery fine nigger, and um take nigger's part in ebery ting troughout um writings.

However, as this passage illustrates, the speaker's errors extend beyond pronunciation and serve to emphasize his position as an outsider. When he describes Shakespeare's status in England, for instance, his blanket description of English theatregoers is as over-generalized as it is inaccurate:

At all de playhouses in England – at ebery theatre in the land – dey perform no ting but de works ob de great Shakkerspere; de pipples dere am so fond of um dat dey won't hear no ting but um; dey neber go to 'tallian operas; dey won't hear, dey won't see no ting but Shakkerspere, dey lub him so bery much. Dere most grashus queen, de lilly Victoria, and de Prince Albert, and de lilly piccannies, go to see Shakkerspere ebery night ob dere libes.

The intent of the article is clearly humorous, but a more serious message can be derived from the context implicit in the speaker's asides to disruptive audience members as well as the illustration accompanying the article: a gathering of auditors interested in Shakespeare, or at least in hearing an educational lecture. By depicting the episode as an exercise in mis-education, the article undermines the validity of self-help activities like this one in a critique not necessarily limited to Britain's small black community. The article suggests in its parody that when the speaker is himself a member of the disenfranchised group to whom he speaks, the information he imparts is suspect and misleading: his product is not the genuine article. The restlessness of the audience members, who eventually resort to heckling and throwing stones at the speaker, is perhaps meant to be read as an encouraging sign that they too recognize his inadequacy.

In a magazine billing itself the champion of the legitimate drama accessible to all by virtue of its recently-reduced price of a penny, such an article seems elitist and out of place, and indeed it is the only one of its kind in the *Theatrical Journal*. Perhaps its presence can be accounted for by the unstated subtext of the article, that readers of the *Theatrical Journal* would recognize the speaker's misprisions and, implicitly, receive a more impartial and strictly factual account of Shakespeare's life and works in the pages of the magazine. At a time when education through self-help societies was an inexpensive, even free, alternative to magazine reading, it would be unusual if the publishers of the *Theatrical Journal* did not feel some anxiety about protecting their share of the Shakespeare market.

If the *Theatrical Journal* was perturbed by the explosion of Shakespeare-related entertainments at the minor theatres and at public lectures like the one parodied in the "Massa Shakspeare" article, its concern was not the racial or class boundaries being breached as much as the possibility that too much Shakespeare, and of the wrong kind, could vitiate the public's appetite for the real thing:

An epidemic of an entirely new character has seized upon all the Minors, to an almost fearful extent. It is a thirst after and an affection for that very same legitimate drama which has so long been bandied about, the shuttlecock of theatrical managers, and which has received more hard blows, and encountered more mishaps, than ever did a baby produced for the support of a Clown in a pantomime. It has been a sort of 'foundling' without finding any hospital willing to give it a permanent shelter, but has been tossed from side to side, now pulled one way and now another, but no way finding a hand ready and willing to succour it. It has perchance been mangled and curtailed for some benefit night, wretchedly got up, and acted worse, by the old hacknied troupe, with no additional talent, and dropped again after that particular evening. But now, at all, or at any rate at most of the Minors, Shakspeare and the Barber Bravo – (Ye Gods! What a couple!) – are nightly drawing perspiring multitudes, and packing hundreds and thousands in as

close connection as sheep in a railway stable truck. Nor are they content to do the thing with their own companies, however strong and talented. No – they must have some *bona fide* star, some ‘legitimate drama’ hero, some ‘eminent tragedian’[...]. Well, if now people have not enough, and to spare, of Shaksperianisms and legitimacy, Heaven knows when they will. However managers of National Theatres may sneer, when producing some foreign operatic trash, about the drama gone to the ‘pot-houses,’ they will soon discover to their dismay that, after all, the people really like good acting much better than they do equivocally good singing. Yet verily we are a strange people; from one extreme we run to another. The ‘legitimate drama,’ instead of being without a house, has so many it is almost bewildered; and Heaven grant it may not, sitting on so many stools, tumble to the ground after all.⁸²

In light of this perceived over-saturation, it makes sense that, despite championing Shakespeare productions at the minor theatres generally, the *Theatrical Journal* responded with equanimity to the triumph of melodrama over Shakespeare at the Olympic:

Though we cannot but regret that the purpose for which the theatre was first opened, viz the performance of Shakspeare’s writings and the legitimate drama, has been lost sight of, still we must put up with the lessee’s excuse that ‘a man must live;’ and if melo-drama possesses more charms for the Olympic audiences than Shakspeare, why we be content to see melo-drama played.⁸³

In fact, by 1850 the *Theatrical Journal* appeared to have changed its earlier stance encouraging Shakespeare production at the minors, characterizing their non-Shakespearean offerings as a “refreshing” change:

In these days, when everything in the legitimate line rarely goes beyond the bound of mediocrity, when Hamlets and Macbeths are either very ordinary, or

⁸²*Theatrical Journal* 7.353, 19 September 1846, 302.

⁸³*Theatrical Journal* 8.377, 6 March 1847, 75.

very extraordinary, – when music is at a stand-still, and we are praying for the appearance of somebody – we don't care who, so as he creates an excitement; it is really quite refreshing to pay a visit to some of the minors who make no pretensions to high-class drama, but are doing a steady trade in the domestic and melo-dramatic line.⁸⁴

In another article, the *Theatrical Journal* went farther, suggesting that managers' reliance on old plays such as Shakespeare's was tantamount to:

'Rabbits hot, rabbits cold,
Rabbits young, rabbits old,
Rabbits tender, rabbits tough,
We thank the Lord we've had enough'

What amazing folly to suppose that Shakspeare is sufficient for all purposes, or that the old dramatists alone can supply food for the intellectual wants of to day! The fact is, the spirit of the times has changed.⁸⁵

Despite its articles urging the production of new plays instead of Shakespeare revivals, the *Theatrical Journal* also continued to express its concern regarding the decline of Shakespeare's popularity. In fact, the *Theatrical Journal* suggested that the success of legitimate drama at several suburban theatres was both an example and a warning for more centrally-located ones:

The want of a company at a centrally situated theatre, grounded on the principle adopted at Sadler's Wells, has been much felt for several seasons; but in the present, the weakness, the utter inability of all theatres for the performance of the sterling drama, is more displayed than ever. Bad, as many of Mr. Anderson's representations during his lesseeship undoubtedly were, they had not the negative advantage of provoking a powerful and injurious comparison, which unfortunately Mr. Bunn's efforts at legitimacy invariably

⁸⁴ *Theatrical Journal* 11.567, 24 October 1850, 439.

⁸⁵ *Theatrical Journal* 12.598, 29 May 1851, 174.

do. Miss Glyn's great talent, despite her evident coarseness, placed the dramatic *personne* in an unfavourable light; but the contrast forced upon the public by Miss Faucit's finished impersonation of Juliet was too terrible to be endured, and after a second attempt to build a home for Shakspeare on one of the most slippery foundations ever put together, the idea has been abandoned. The neat even representations of the poet's works we see at Sadler's Wells, (much as it is out of the way of playgoers) spoils us for a performance beneath mediocrity, in almost every respect. It is nothing better than placing Drury Lane Theatre on a par with the provinces, where, on particular occasions, refinement, sublimity, and psychology, treads the stage with fire, and fury, and murderers of the Queen's English.

To remedy this sad evil, what has been done in the suburbs must be established in the heart of the metropolis. [...] The legitimate at a large house is out of the question. Drury Lane is fit for nothing but operas and ballets, promenade concerts, teetotal meetings, and masked balls. St. James's is about the size, but much too far west, and too much among the aristocracy, who only patronize French folly. The Adelphi succeeds too well for an idea of change. The Olympic strikes us, at present, as the most suitable for legitimate purposes. In position and size the selection could scarcely be improved.⁸⁶

As the article suggests, by the 1850s "legitimate" had become a term describing a style of Shakespeare production rather than a theatre's pre-1843 status. Under the leadership of Macready and then Phelps, appropriate production values and textual authenticity, not to mention good acting, had replaced venue as the measures of a production's relative value. Despite Macready's sterling credentials, his efforts at the Surrey were not unrivalled, and in the eyes of some reviewers were even superseded by Phelps's success at Sadler's Wells.

According to some contemporary accounts, Phelps's remarkable achievement at Sadler's Wells was the quintessential Victorian tale of an orphan in the *Oliver Twist* cast, whose unwholesome companions had failed to deter his inexorable progress towards the discovery of his true, aristocratic identity. The story complies with Victorian tradition even

⁸⁶*Theatrical Journal* 13.640, 17 March 1852, 83-84.

in its author, since the myth of the utter transformation of the Sadler's Wells audience is a fiction penned by none other than Charles Dickens. Dickens's account was published in *Household Words* with the morality-tale title "Shakespeare and Newgate." According to Dickens's rather romanticized version of events, to which the term "Dickensian" most definitely applies, Phelps decided to take the helm at Sadler's Wells because he had:

conceived of the desperate idea of changing the character of the dramatic entertainments presented at this den, from the lowest to the highest, and of utterly changing with it the character of the audience.⁸⁷

The myth of Phelps descending, missionary-like, into Islington to educate the ignorant masses was a popular and longstanding one, repeated in subsequent accounts and largely still prevalent. The exaggeration inherent in Dickens's ideologically-laden fiction renders Phelps's achievement at Sadler's Wells all the more interesting, as it highlights the discrepancy between the cultural objectives of Dickens, his readers, and his imitators, on the one hand, and on the other the real theatregoers who made Phelps's venture a success. Where Dickens wanted Phelps to do what he himself had accomplished in his charitable ventures to assist the poor and the marginal, raising the downtrodden through his words as well as his work, what Phelps actually achieved was, in its own way, equally admirable.

The *Theatrical Journal*, more attuned than Dickens to the previous offerings at Sadler's Wells, portrayed Phelps's triumph in somewhat different terms. It is indeed remarkable that Phelps managed to produce virtually the entire Shakespeare canon during

⁸⁷*Household Words* 4 October 1851, 25-27.

his tenure at a theatre known for its demotic tendencies. However, as Davis and Emeljanow suggest in their analysis of the Sadler's Wells audience,⁸⁸ the very architecture of the theatre, with its unusually capacious pit and relatively small number of box seats, amounting to some ten per cent of the theatre's total capacity of twenty-four hundred, made it virtually unavoidable that Phelps's attention should be focused on his less wealthy but statistically more significant patrons. The impetus for Phelps's populist approach to Shakespeare was less missionary zeal than practicality. The *Theatrical Journal*, unlike Dickens, was apt to praise the Islingtonians for their ability to appreciate Phelps as much as it praised Phelps for his productions there.

From the outset, Phelps's Sadler's Wells, despite its location outside the West End and its status as a minor theatre, was welcomed as the heir to Macready's attempts to replace outmoded adaptations with Shakespeare's "authentic" (by the current standards) playtexts:

SADLER'S WELLS.— The production of 'The Tempest,' from the original text, freed from the interpolations and mutilations of the 'soi-disant' improvers of Shakspeare, of whom Colley Cibber was the head and chief, made a great hit at Drury Lane, during the management of Mr. Macready, and it seems likely to create as great a sensation now on its revival at Sadler's Wells Theatre during the reign of Mr. Phelps.⁸⁹

Several months later the *Theatrical Journal* suggested that Phelps, at Sadler's Wells:

deserves the lasting gratitude of all true lovers of our immortal bard for being the first to rescue this truly great work [*Macbeth*] from the fetters of

⁸⁸Chapter four of *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880*.

⁸⁹*Theatrical Journal* 8.383, 17 April 1847, 123.

interpolation and mutilation into which it had been thrown by self-styled 'improvers' of Shakspeare, and to render it in its original purity.⁹⁰

Likewise, a production of *Richard III* at Sadler's Wells, employing the original text rather than Cibber's adaptation, was the subject of extensive commentary in the *Theatrical Journal*.⁹¹ As a measure of the degree to which Phelps succeeded in making authentic Shakespeare texts the standard, when the Princess's Theatre dared to put on a less-than-authentic production of *Richard III* some nine years later, the *Theatrical Journal* complained that:

nothing which the scene-painter, the machinist, and the property-man can effect will be wanting to do honour to the genius of Shakspeare, or rather of Colley Cibber, whose wretched trash will, we understand be substituted for the historical play of England's dramatic bard.⁹²

The Victorian debate about textually and scenically accurate Shakespeare was also a debate about progress, that favourite term of the period. Drury Lane's Thomas Morton was not alone in imagining that Shakespeare would want his nineteenth-century interpreters to employ all the innovations at their disposal to realize scenic effects for which his own theatre and the intervening ages were not equipped. Much as Restoration critics had argued that Shakespeare wrote his female characters in anticipation of an era in which actresses would play the parts embodied by boy actors in his own time, so some nineteenth-century

⁹⁰*Theatrical Journal* 8.409, 16 October 1847, 332.

⁹¹See, for instance, the *Theatrical Journal* 6.271, 22 February 1845, 60-61; 6.272, 1 March 1845, 67; 6.275, 22 March 1845, 99.

⁹²*Theatrical Journal* 15.740, 20 February 1853, 51.

critics saw their century's innovations as realizations of Shakespeare's proleptic sense of stagecraft. The prologue to *Henry V*, with its lament for the shortcomings of his Renaissance stage, served as a touchstone for critics who advocated liberating Shakespeare's plays from the boundaries of a poorly-lit and under-decorated "wooden O." While Macready and Phelps had done much to establish the precedents for less-adulterated Shakespeare productions, it was Charles Kean, at the Princess's Theatre, who brought this authenticity to its apex.

Kean, the Princess's Theatre, and the Great Exhibition

London's Great Exhibition of the Works of All Nations, which opened at Hyde Park in 1851, reinforced the taste for authenticity that had been discernable in the Shakespeare productions of Macready and Phelps. Despite early fears that the exhibition would draw spectators away from the theatres, it was ultimately a boon to at least one theatre, the Princess's, where Charles Kean's historically-accurate productions succeeded in attracting the foreign tourists who had come to London looking for an experience at once entertaining and educational. Kean succeeded because he was able to market his productions as a natural extension of the national exhibits featured in the displays, both as a characteristically English entertainment, by virtue of their association with the national poet, and as accurate re-creations of Shakespeare's imagined geographical and historical settings.

In contrast to the struggles of the previous decades to enact new legislation and to adapt to the post-1843 state of affairs, the main crisis of the 1850s came in the form of competition from the Great Exhibition, which drew tourists from around the globe but, at

first, seemed also to be drawing them away from the theatres. In its initial report on the opening of the Great Exhibition,⁹³ the *Theatrical Journal* made no immediate connection between the exhibition and theatrical trade, even though the publishers of “Everybody’s Interpreter,” a trilingual publication for “all foreigners visiting England during the exhibition,” had already recognized the *Theatrical Journal* as a worthwhile advertising venue.⁹⁴ In an article two weeks after the exhibition had opened, however, in “The Exposition v. The Drama,” the magazine lamented that the metropolitan playhouses were being deserted:

Never, we believe, in the memory of living man, were our theatres so completely deserted as at the present moment; especially those establishments which are generally considered to be the most intellectual, and frequented by the higher classes, whether of cultivated intellect or wealth, or both. The proof of this is palpably before us: on Friday last the Haymarket was CLOSED, ditto the Sadler’s Wells – while the other theatres of a similar class kept open were most miserably attended. [...] The only dramatic establishments now doing tolerably well are those furthest removed from the Hyde Park promenade ‘show.’⁹⁵

In that article and a subsequent one several weeks later,⁹⁶ the *Theatrical Journal* implored its readers not to let the foreign exhibitors make them forget the local actors who depended on Londoners for their livelihood. Rendered maudlin by an ongoing depression of theatrical trade, the magazine concluded its editorial of 10 July with the remark that:

⁹³*Theatrical Journal* 12.595, 8 May 1851, 147-48.

⁹⁴*Theatrical Journal* 12.594, 1 May 1851, 146.

⁹⁵*Theatrical Journal* 12.596, 15 May 1851, 159.

⁹⁶*Theatrical Journal* 12.600, 12 June 1851, 190.

it may be a cause of congratulation to some persons to know that the foreign theatres and exhibitions are thronged. The Italian opera houses are crowded nightly; the French plays are fully attended, and the continental conjurors, jugglers, and buffoons with whom the town is now inundated, are all highly patronized and approved of. This is a species of comfort at least, for who can lament the decline of the national drama when its ruins are used to build up a temple for quick handed professors of legerdemain?⁹⁷

Within six months, the Great Exhibition had attracted some seven million visitors to London from other parts of England, the Continent, and beyond. It took an enterprising manager to recognize that, while Londoners were deserting their theatres in droves for the exhibition, the flood of foreign tourists washing over the capital presented an untapped audience that might be tempted to fill their place. At the Princess's Theatre, Charles Kean seized the opportunity to bring a new kind of Shakespeare to a new kind of audience in an outreach project of unprecedented magnitude. Rather than sending a handful of actors to France or America to serve as Shakespearean ambassadors, as Kemble and Macready had done in earlier decades, Kean sought to bring French and American spectators to the Princess's, and with them all the visitors to the Great Exhibition's geo-historical pageant.

⁹⁷*Theatrical Journal* 12.604, 10 July 1851, 233-34. *The Era*, too, saw the Great Exhibition as a detriment to theatrical trade: "It is, we fear, more than probable that London Managers are doomed to discover that the year 1851 is not to yield them a harvest, but, on the contrary, to bring them losses for which they little bargained. The Great Exhibition seems to monopolize all the patronage of the public; and in that quarter of the metropolis lies all the attraction: a fact likely to bring ruin upon many who have been calculating, and not unreasonably, upon large receipts.

Still there may come thousands and tens of thousands flocking to this vast Babel, filling its theatres, crowding its public places, eating its provisions, and occupying its lodgings. The fine weather and the fame of the Exhibition may lure them" (*The Era* 13.660, 18 May 1851, 15 – but see 13.670, 27 July 1851, 8 and 11 for the magazine's enthusiastic recognition that the Exhibition is indeed a success and London's theatres are full of welcome visitors.)

Just as the exhibition recreated distant places and times through the accretion of detail, so, audiences at the Princess's were soon to discover, Shakespeare's plays might be made to recreate medieval England or ancient Rome with a suitable attention to elements of design. At the Princess's, Shakespeare was reshaped as a commodity for tourists, complete with intelligently-written, highly detailed programs to be retained as mementoes of the experience. Inspired by his profitable 1850-51 season featuring *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Henry IV part II*, and especially by his successful revivals of the quintessentially English *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *King John* in the 1851-52 season, Kean repackaged Shakespeare for spectators who sought the same combination of instruction and delight on offer at the Great Exhibition. In the years that followed, Kean meticulously recreated settings ranging from *Macbeth*'s eleventh-century Scotland (1858-59) and *Henry VIII*'s Reformation England (1855-56) to the supernatural worlds of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1856) and *The Tempest* (1857).⁹⁸ Kean's mission, nothing less than attracting a new audience for Shakespeare with a new kind of performance in a new location, was a success.

Kean's program notes are, to some extent, an appropriation of the educative function the *Theatrical Journal* had fulfilled for Macready and Phelps. Where the magazine had taken pains to justify the value of unadulterated Shakespeare, teaching its readers to appreciate the value of Macready's and Phelps's efforts, Kean's historically-accurate

⁹⁸See Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage*, 163-69 for a discussion of Kean's stagings of the Shakespearean supernatural; as Schoch's subtitle indicates, his entire book is a sustained investigation of "performing history in the theatre of Charles Kean." See also Cole's biography of Kean and Odell's account of his productions at the Princess's (285-98), both of which contribute to Schoch's larger, less biographical argument.

settings came complete with their own justifications in the form of introductory essays.

Kean's playbill for his 1853 production of *Macbeth* was the first to include such an essay, in which he provides ample rationale for his decisions, even citing his antiquarian sources for the production's controversial costuming.⁹⁹

As an early purveyor of "infotainment," the Princess's made the most of the Great Exhibition and the tastes it created by offering spectators a recognizably similar product, but other theatres in London also benefited from the exhibition, despite their early fears. With the Great Exhibition and the Princess's serving as compelling examples of the potential inherent in cultural tourism, theatres began to focus on positioning themselves as purveyors of a desirable cultural commodity for tourists. Central to this enterprise was the branding of each theatre, so that tourists would know, for example, that the Princess's and Sadler's Wells were the places to find a serious Shakespeare production, or that the Haymarket remained the seat of comedy. The *Edinburgh Review*'s suggestion in 1843 (cited above) that each theatre should be compelled by law to limit itself to one or two types of entertainment, turned out to have been prophetic and was mistaken only in identifying the law, rather than economic incentives, as the motivator.

The Great Exhibition contributed to this branding by providing managers with clear indications about what would appeal to tourists. After some anxious weeks while the theatres were dark, the *Theatrical Journal* began reporting a renewed interest in theatregoing, with some theatres even filling to capacity.¹⁰⁰ Those that favoured

⁹⁹ The playbill is reproduced in Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage*, 38.

¹⁰⁰ *Theatrical Journal* 12.605, 17 July 1851, 230.

Shakespearean drama, such as the Olympic and Sadler's Wells, found an audience and achieved full houses.¹⁰¹ The result of the Great Exhibition and the theatres' new focus on cultural tourism was that for the first time, Shakespeare's status as England's national dramatist began to be defined not only in terms of his ability to speak to all citizens regardless of social class, but also, and increasingly, in terms of his status as a cultural icon. Like roast beef and Yorkshire pudding or Westminster Abbey, Shakespeare was marketable to and consumable by foreigners seeking a taste of Englishness.

Throughout the 1850s until his retirement from the Princess's in 1859, Charles Kean's Shakespeare productions, with their emphasis on historical accuracy in costume and scenery, competed with Phelps's offerings at Sadler's Wells, where textual authenticity was as important as scenic displays. The *Theatrical Journal* could not decide whether it preferred Phelps or Kean, as is suggested in the juxtaposition of two articles published within a few months of each other in 1857, comparing the two styles of Shakespeare production:

The Princess's has afforded good fare to the Shaksperian enthusiast, none more, none so much. The indefatigable endeavours of that excellent manager and actor, Mr. Charles Kean, has done wonders with Shaksperian lore, and placed before the nobility, the gentry, and the general public, such intellectual treats, combined with the best amusement as had not been witnessed or placed upon the stage before. As a manager, Mr. Charles Kean has proved himself peculiarly qualified, and in nothing wanting. [...] Mr. Phelps, at Sadler's Wells, with his usual care and circumspection has devoted an

¹⁰¹See, for instance, their rival *Macbeths*, as reviewed in the *Theatrical Journal* 12.609, 13 August 1851, 260.

attention to Shakspeare, and in his well-judged productions has received the best favour and support at the public hands. [...].¹⁰²

A few months later:

From the number and variety of these [Shakespeare's plays] produced at this theatre [Sadler's Wells], and their attendant success, it is clearly evident that the neighbouring inhabitants adequately appreciate the works of our great dramatic poet, and effectually support Mr. Phelps' continued exertions to afford them instructive amusement.

Excepting the Princess's and, perhaps, occasionally at the Surrey, this is the sole instance of a like kind, worthy of mention, in the metropolis, and certainly sets an example of good taste to our western population, amongst whom, farce and French comedy, 'clothed in an English dress,' reign predominant. And we would remark that at the Princess's, splendour of scenery and the most brilliant decorations form the leading attraction, being rather amusement for the eye than an address to the understanding, and comprising more shew than reality. But such is far from the case at Sadler's Wells, where – although every attention is paid to the minutest detail, both in scenery and appointments, which are executed with very refined taste – the chief object in view, indeed, the primary consideration of the managers, is to illustrate the *words* of the author – in the former case, with a faithful adherence to his explicit directions, in the latter, to his text.¹⁰³

As the latter article, especially, suggests, the *Theatrical Journal* distinguished between the emphasis on textual accuracy at Sadler's Wells and on historical accuracy at the Princess's. For the first time, these two gestures towards authenticity were in competition, and it was unclear, from the *Theatrical Journal's* waffling, which would ultimately be deemed more essential. In September of the same year the *Theatrical Journal* reiterated its preference for Phelps:

¹⁰²*Theatrical Journal* 18.892, 14 January 1858, 9-10.

¹⁰³*Theatrical Journal* 18.900, 11 March 1857, 72-73.

On Saturday last, this 'legitimate' theatre [Sadler's Wells] opened for the season. We term it legitimate, because the proprietors began, twelve years back, to revive the plays of our immortal Bard, in a true spirit, with all the original text and characters; and this has been done with a success that no other theatre has accomplished; and although we readily admit that Mr. C. Kean has done much in his revivals [at the Princess's], he has depended more upon the scene painter than the actor. [...T]he house was crammed in every part with a well-dressed audience.¹⁰⁴

However, in its report on Kean's retirement the magazine switched the managers' rankings once again:

It will be most unfortunate for the public when this crisis arrives, and Mr. Charles Kean makes his bow before a Princess's audience. Never dare we again hope for such an enunciator of the Immortal Shakspeare's plays. All that refined imagination – all that classical learning, and all that superior elaboration which we have been used to witness in a Shaksperian representation at the Princess' will vanish from our sight, leaving nought but the remnant of a happy recollection. [...] We can but say of Mr. Samuel Phelps, at Sadler's Wells, what we always said of him – that next to Mr. Charles Kean he is decidedly the staunchest upholder of the Immortal Bard we have, and that his Shaksperian revivals have done him much credit. He is an actor of the most superior school, and his glitter *is gold* – so profound are his representations of Shaksperian character.¹⁰⁵

To its enduring credit, the *Theatrical Journal* took pains to defend Kean, conveniently forgetting its partiality to Phelps, when the newspapers and rival periodicals began printing unfair, gossip-laden accounts of Kean's exclusion from the Shakespeare performances honouring the Princess Royal's marriage:

¹⁰⁴*Theatrical Journal* 18.927, 16 September 1857, 289-290.

¹⁰⁵*Theatrical Journal* 19.943, 6 January 1858, 1-4.

In these columns we have frequently advocated the supremacy of Mr. Charles Kean as the Shakspearian manager of our day, and in doing so we have never detracted from the merits of any other tragedian. Four years and upwards since we also said Mr. Charles Kean was the best representative of Hamlet on the stage, and now we confess we feel both re-assured and gratified upon this point, when the *Times*, the *Globe*, the *Illustrated London News*, the *Dispatch*, and almost every daily and weekly newspaper have endorsed our views with the most self-satisfactory and free criticism that could be written upon the management and performance of any actor. We do not refer to these delightful testimonies to our own opinion, at the present moment, for the mere sake of repeating our advocacy of Mr. Charles Kean's talent in the school of the *histrion*, but merely to show what ought to have been done at the Dramatic Festival, intended to celebrate the marriage of the Princess Royal of England with the Prince of Prussia. Mr. Charles Kean, with all the courtesy and generosity that bespeaks the true gentleman, offered the Princess's Theatre for one night to celebrate the Royal marriage. His conditions were to convert the dress circle into one entire box for the accommodation of the Royal party, and to throw open the rest of his house FREE TO THE PUBLIC. This proposition was made by Mr. Charles Kean, and *was declined!!!*¹⁰⁶

Mitchell's production of *Macbeth* at the Italian Opera House under rather less liberal circumstances – Mitchell, instead of allowing free admission, raised prices to six times the usual sixpence for the gallery and twenty times the pit's shilling fee – was second-rate, according to most reviews. The end result, besides a handsome profit for Mitchell, was that “the Drama has been recklessly ill-used, and a very bad representation of what it is in this country has been given to the Foreign potentates.”¹⁰⁷ As the *Theatrical Journal*'s focus on the opinion of these illustrious visitors suggests, by 1858 foreign tastes, as well as national ones, were an important consideration in Shakespeare production.

¹⁰⁶*Theatrical Journal* 19.947, 3 February 1858, 33-35.

¹⁰⁷*Theatrical Journal* 19.947, 3 February 1858, 33-35 and 19.949, 17 February 1858, 49-52, quotation p.52.

In its retrospective glance at 1858, traditionally the *Theatrical Journal*'s occasion to take stock and provide a more considered assessment than the pressures of weekly publication allowed, the magazine offered a final assessment of the rivals, ranking Kean first and Phelps a close second:

At the Princess's, Mr. Charles Kean during the past year has even exceeded his previous great triumphs. He has presented several elaborate Shakespearian revivals in a manner that never until the end of his management manifested itself, or even dreamt of, as a component part of managerial ability. During his management at the Princess's, Mr. Charles Kean has consummated the most omnipotent ends. He has not only increased his fame as a tragedian of the most eminent stamp, but he has succeeded in extinguishing much of the ungenerous prejudice which has clung so tenaciously to a certain and especial class, and has been so spitefully and covertly expressed towards him. But, alas! We lose spirit when we contemplate that he must leave the bright field of his most magnificent conquests, and take his farewell of us as manager in July next, which is to be the climax of his glorious managerial reign, and we look forward to the interregnum with the sincerest regret.

Next to Mr. Charles Kean, both as a tragedian and a Shakespearian manager, stands forth Mr. Phelps, who at Sadler's Wells during the past year, as in many preceding ones, has worked most zealously and most worthily in the cause of the Drama. His laurels have been well-earned, and his productions, as well as his interpretations of the principal parts, have been marked with the most versatile genius, the best judgment, and the first merit.¹⁰⁸

The *Theatrical Journal* was not alone in finding Kean the finest Shakespeare director of the age. In an article reviewing his Shakespeare revivals at the Princess's Theatre, for instance, *The Era* favourably compares his accomplishments to those of his famed predecessors. In contrast to the inaccuracies and anachronisms perpetrated by Garrick, John Kemble, and

¹⁰⁸*Theatrical Journal* 20.996, 12 January 1859, 9-12.

even Macready, the magazine contends that Kean's productions "transcend, in their magnificence, propriety, and extent, any efforts ever previously made to elevate, as well as adorn, the stage." Kean's attention to detail renders his productions educational and edifying to even the most well-informed of spectators:

At the Princess's Theatre the learned student of history may reap additional knowledge from representations which the deepest archeological research have been employed in producing, whilst the ordinary critic, finding abundant opportunity for the lavish employment of approbation and wonder, is led into so deep and novel a track of inquiry, that, except he be a buffoon, he will not fail to respect as well as admire. In short, Mr. Kean has rendered his theatre a school of education, and an exhibition of bygone scenes and manners, in a way that has never been achieved except by himself.¹⁰⁹

A few months later, in its retrospective assessment of his 1856-57 season, *The Era* associated four of Kean's productions with a deliberately educative agenda:

We could fancy that Mr. Charles Kean took each of the four pieces in his hand – *Pizarro*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard the Second* and *The Tempest* – with the fixed determination of seeing to how much general knowledge they would serve as a foundation. The three Shaksperian dramas were written, as everybody is aware, at a time when the art of stage decoration was unknown, and, therefore, much was left to the imagination of the spectators. We now live in an age when an appeal to the imagination of theatrical audience will no longer suffice. A manager could not venture to exhibit a placard inscribed "Rome," or "Milan," as a substitute for a correctly painted picture. Between the plays of Shakspeare as they appeared to an Elizabethan audience and as they are presented to the subjects of Queen Victoria there must be a wide difference, and the margin included within the difference may be filled up well or ill. It is by filling up the margin with a rich treasure of antiquarian lore that Mr. Kean has shown himself pre-eminently fitted to meet the exigencies of the time – a time distinguished alike by a thirst for knowledge, and a restless practical tendency opposed to

¹⁰⁹*The Era* 19.968, 12 April 1857, 9

the severe study by which knowledge is usually attained. [...] after sitting for three hours, to witness one of these plays, a spectator of average curiosity carries away with him more than he could gather from the most extensive museum, and in a form much more suited to the capabilities of his memory.¹¹⁰

While the *Theatrical Journal* had inaugurated 1846 with an editorial lamenting the decline of the drama after Macready, by 1857 Kean had supplanted Macready as the definitive proponent of a truly modern Shakespeare – modern, that is, by being historically accurate. With Kean's retirement, however, the epicentre of Shakespeare production shifted once again. By 1860, Sadler's Wells was considered the sole reliable venue for Shakespeare production, and, as the *Theatrical Journal* noted in a rather dispirited review:

The National Drama has retired here, as a watering place, for the benefit of its health. The loftiest, the severest tragedy is represented in all its dreary integrity by solemn veterans: Shakspeare especially – Shakspeare undefiled – textual.¹¹¹

The *Theatrical Journal* and theatre history

Reading theatrical history through the *Theatrical Journal* demonstrates that Victorian audiences received an education in Shakespeare that transformed the theatregoing experience into a moral and intellectual activity, rather than simply an entertaining one. With its emphasis on accessibility to readers of all classes, its reviews of performances from the most celebrated actors to the most rank amateurs, and its commitment to the education of

¹¹⁰*The Era* 19.968, 16 August 1857, 10.

¹¹¹*Theatrical Journal* 21.1058, 21 March 1860, 90.

the theatregoing public, the *Theatrical Journal* is a record of how a broad segment of Victorian society learned to appreciate Shakespeare, from the legal morass of the pre-1843 period through the turbulent years following the enactment of the Theatres Regulation Act and the innovations of Macready, Phelps, and Kean. The *Theatrical Journal* informed its readers of what to expect from Shakespeare productions at a wide variety of theatres, but it also taught them how to assess those performances, how to prepare themselves to make the most of them as educational experiences, and ultimately how to use their own power and knowledge to create change. As an archival resource, the *Theatrical Journal* is an unusually detailed record of how Victorian theatregoers experienced Shakespeare, from his degradation and near-disappearance to his ascendancy in “unadulterated,” textually and historically accurate form.

Chapter Five: Victorian Periodicals and England's National Theatre Debate

“People must be amuthed, Thquire, thomehow. [...] they can’t be alwayth a working, nor yet they can’t be alwayth a learning” (Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, ch.6)

“The people *will* have a theatre, then make it a good one.”
(Matthew Arnold, “The French Play in London,” 243)

From the 1840s until the eventual creation of England’s endowed national theatre more than a century later, the national theatre debate raged, abated, and resurfaced, driven by many of the same objectives that had brought Shakespeare to the attention of Victorian magazine readers. Issues of accessibility, education, and enculturation, which continued to shape the ways in which Shakespeare was presented to a popular audience, also influenced the national theatre debate. Many of the nineteenth century’s conflicting visions of what a national theatre could and should achieve arose from proponents’ differing views regarding Shakespeare’s importance to the proposed theatre as well as their differing awareness of the functions that a popular Shakespeare had come to serve for the prospective constituents of the national theatre’s audience. The connection between Shakespeare, the periodicals, and the national theatre debate is no less significant for being the product of circumstances and strategic alliances rather than an inevitability.

The national theatre debate is a consequence of the abolition of the patent that had governed London’s theatres since 1660, replaced by the Theatres Regulation Act in 1843. During a period of increasing faith in free trade and market forces, the deregulation of the theatres was a logical step, but in the periodicals some supporters of deregulation also expressed their hope that the unsatisfactory patent would be replaced by a subsidized

national theatre. Theatrical periodicals such as the *Theatrical Journal* and *The Era* took an especial interest in the legislation, publishing numerous related articles in the months leading up to Parliament's vote, and even in publications intended for less specialized readerships articles about the act and its implications were accorded pride of place. With the adoption of the Theatres Regulation Act, Parliament acknowledged that the patent no longer served its intended function, but an irreconcilable difference of opinion arose among politicians and the public alike regarding a suitable replacement. The Theatres Regulation Act did little to encourage the production of what was still called the "legitimate" drama, unless it seemed commercially viable to its producers. A national theatre was among the proposed solutions, imagined as a way of ensuring the survival of England's dramatic heritage. Among the *laissez-faire* capitalists who had advocated the abolition of the patent on ideological grounds, many, especially those with a financial stake in the theatrical world, saw the proposed national theatre as a disastrous replacement for a faulty system. From the point of view of both a disinterested capitalist and an ambitious theatre manager, competition between a state-subsidized national theatre and other theatres subject to market forces would always be unequal, preserving the past at the expense of contemporary playwrights who might otherwise have succeeded on a level playing field. Meanwhile, individuals with less capitalistic orientations, particularly advocates of working-class education, saw a subsidized national theatre as a vehicle for social improvement in keeping with other Victorian initiatives such as public museums and urban parks. The ideological divide between proponents of a national theatre for those who already appreciated the

national drama, and one that might impart such a love to the nation's disenfranchised citizens, often centred on the realities of Victorian Shakespeare production and reception.

Opponents of an endowed national theatre on grounds of economic theory might have argued that long before the Theatres Regulation Act became law, market forces had already begun to recalibrate the theatrical economy. By the 1820s, the theatrical duopoly was frequently a nominal rather than an actual one, as chapter four has illustrated. Well before their Shakespeare productions had gained the legal right to exist, London's illegitimate theatres had often disregarded the patent to stage Shakespeare adaptations that were increasingly faithful to the original texts despite the punitive fines levied on producers and performers. Reviews in the theatrical periodicals from the pre-1843 period demonstrate that illicit performances happened regularly, and certainly not in secret. On the other hand, while the patent theatres had the legal right to prevent other theatres from producing Shakespeare, there was nothing compelling them to produce Shakespeare themselves. The paucity of Shakespeare productions at the patent theatres before 1843 was a clear indication that without a subsidized theatre, commercial incentives would favour the kind of Shakespeare the illegitimate theatres had been offering. Even when the Theatres Regulation Act rendered the productions at the minor theatres technically legitimate, the differences between an ideal Shakespeare and a popular one raised troubling questions about the future of serious Shakespeare production in his native land. The periodicals had succeeded in educating a popular audience for Shakespeare, and, as the century wore on, the idea that his works should be preserved for posterity in a national theatre gained popular currency through those same periodicals.

Seen in light of the expanding definition of legitimate theatre and the increasing access to Shakespeare in the first half of the nineteenth century, the national theatre movement was in some ways a regressive attempt to reinstate a situation that had not existed for decades, except in the law books. The pressure to use the Theatres Regulation Act to protect Shakespeare is evident in one controversial clause of the act, deleted before it became law. As we have seen, had the clause been included in the final version, the act would have stipulated that no theatre within five miles of a patent theatre would be entitled to produce Shakespeare while the patent theatre was open, regardless of whether the patent theatre's season included any Shakespeare at all (Davis 18-39). In fact, the letters patent that Charles II had granted in 1660, before the rise of Shakespeare adaptations and burlesques, had allowed more latitude. The stricken clause was specific, as Charles II had not been, that these quasi-Shakespeare productions would also be prohibited under the terms of the law. Had the clause remained, it would have resulted in the reification of the pre-1843 situation, forcing the non-patent theatres to produce Shakespeare disguised as burlesque or farce even if there was a public demand unfulfilled by the patent theatres. Instead, in its final form the Theatres Regulation Act legitimated the situation that had been created by the public demand for accessible Shakespeare productions, allowing more theatres to produce more Shakespeare in whatever form they felt would be commercially viable.

After 1843, then, the state had relinquished its hold on Shakespeare both legally and practically. As a result, Shakespeare had no special legal protection, and was subject to the same laws of supply and demand that controlled the posterity of other playwrights. In 1848, in an article for *Hood's Magazine*, Effingham William Wilson sounded a warning about this

situation and initiated a debate that was to last more than a century before his proposal for a national theatre was finally approved, in a somewhat different form, by the British Parliament in 1949.¹ Taking inspiration from the recent success of the Shakespeare Birthplace Committee, which had raised the funds to purchase Shakespeare's childhood home in Stratford for preservation as a museum, Wilson suggested that a true "house for Shakespeare" would preserve his plays, not just his relics. For more than a hundred years, the debate foundered on issues of funding (public subsidy versus private subscription), audience (the cultural elite, the nation, the empire) and purpose (entertainment, edification, or example). Between 1848 and 1949, however, the connection between Shakespeare and a national theatre remained unbroken, despite the fact that it had been a fortuitous rather than an inevitable link from the outset, based on pragmatic concerns that no longer applied after the Victorian period. Accounts of the debate relying on book sources have tended to move from Wilson's pamphlet to the detailed prospectus of Harley Granville-Barker and William Archer, circulated privately in 1904 and published in 1908, and thus have failed to register the full historical and political contexts that shaped the early phases of the debate. An analysis of the discussion that took place in the Victorian periodicals, regarding Shakespeare in general and his relationship to a national theatre more specifically, offers a more detailed sense of the issues that shaped the Granville-Barker / Archer treatise and the eventual direction of the National Theatre when it finally opened in 1962.

¹The article was eventually printed in pamphlet form, and has been incorrectly attributed to the radical publisher Effingham Wilson, William Wilson's father. The author of the article / pamphlet was in fact named Effingham William Wilson after his father, but used his middle name in business and correspondence.

Neither Wilson's proposal nor the prospectus of Granville-Barker and Archer sprang *ex nihilo*. In fact, periodicals had been articulating the need for some kind of national theatre even before 1843, and, thus, before Wilson's proposal made the idea concrete. For instance, in the summer of 1842 the *Theatrical Journal* had speculated that, along with new theatrical legislation:

measures may be adopted to resuscitate and restore the drama to its healthy tone of pristine vigor and strength. [...] Nothing is needed but a hearty support on the part of the public, and that can only be secured by a management that can at once command and ensure encouragement. And this Herculean task can never be successful in the hands of an individual. The stage is a national object, and its object must be nurtured by the nation; the government is its natural parent. The present legislative restrictions on the drama are of a destructive tendency and must be repealed, and in their repeal, and by adopting the liberal system so successfully carried out on the Continent, we shall secure the best interests of the drama and give an encouragement to the first of the arts and reflect just honor both on our character as a people and as worthy of a great, an enlightened, intellectual people. [...] Let government take the risk and proprietorship of our theatres into their hands, and the stage will no longer be what it is, but – what it ought to be. [...] We look therefore with earnest hopes to the exertions of the next parliamentary session for a thorough reform of the monstrous grievances under which the drama has so long labored.²

As the *Theatrical Journal*'s analysis suggests, the *Comédie française*, that "liberal system so successfully carried out on the Continent," was an early influence on the national theatre debate and remained important as the debate resurfaced in the century that followed. The *Comédie française* had been established in 1680 through the centralizing zeal of Louis XIV, and benefited from state funding and legislation which protected it from the commercial pressures that troubled London's patent theatres. As an endowed theatre that promoted

²*Theatrical Journal* 3.139, 13 August 1842, 257-58.

France's national cultural heritage and the artistry of its theatre practitioners free of economic concerns, the *Comédie française* was an appealing example for national theatre advocates in England. Under different circumstances, had this vein of public opinion influenced Parliament in crafting the Theatres Regulation Act, the *Comédie française* might have been recreated in England more than a hundred years before a very different National Theatre was finally brought into existence.

In the event, the suggestions articulated in the periodicals came to naught, and when the Theatres Regulation Act was passed it ushered in an era of theatrical free trade that allowed London's theatres to find their own level, but it also introduced an era of unprecedented anxiety about the status of England's national drama. Without the patent, England's dramatic heritage was "homeless," and the national government was again looked to as the natural source of a "house for Shakespeare." As this extract from another article published in the *Theatrical Journal* that same summer indicates, Wilson's 1848 article would be expanding an earlier idea, not originating one:

It has long been our opinion that the laws now in existence in regard to the regulation of the drama, both as regards our patent theatres, managers, and artists, are both injurious and oppressive, and that in a future legislative session the whole machinery of dramatic law will imperatively demand total renovation and repair. There must be an end to a monopoly in theatres. There must be an unlimited free-trade system in the trade of the drama. It must be, as on the Continent, the business of the government to provide for the amusements of the people. The Premier must be the Parent of the drama, as he is the head of all other important institutions of the country. The national amusements of a great intellectual people are of the first importance to a statesman, and well does our present Premier know the value of a healthy state of public morals taking their origin in the innocent and intellectual tone of British pastime. That Sir Robert Peel is prepared to legislate and encourage the arts, music, the stage and its encircling graces, may be inferred from his

expressed desire to grant a sum from the Treasury for the cultivation of music as one of the grand features in the national education of our youth, and this is the wise initiative to an entire reform, we trust, of the whole system.³

Wilson's proposal some six years later was not entirely congruent with the *Theatrical Journal's*, despite their shared focus on the social utility of a national theatre. In contrast to the magazine, Wilson recognized that Shakespeare would be the national theatre's key to success. As the previous chapter has suggested, the *Theatrical Journal* had also been arguing elsewhere in its pages that Shakespeare served a moral purpose for the nation. However, the connection between the social utility of a national theatre and the moral utility of Shakespeare remained Wilson's to make. The intervening years between the *Theatrical Journal's* unheeded advice and Wilson's recommendations would demonstrate, conclusively, that a national theatre campaign focussed on providing a suitable shrine for Shakespeare would have a much better chance of garnering popular support than a Shakespeare-less one.

Between 1843 and 1848, when Wilson's proposal was first published, the experiment initiated by the Theatres Regulation Act appeared to have failed. Despite a promising start, the proportion of serious drama to silliness demonstrated that, left to their own devices, London's theatres would not be the willing preservers of England's dramatic heritage. The day of Charles Kean's "authentic" Shakespeare productions had not yet dawned when Wilson wrote his article, and in a period when reviewers were lamenting the burlesques and parodies that passed for Shakespeare the idea that his works should be

³*Theatrical Journal* 3.137, 30 July 1842, 241-42.

protected was a potent one. The question, in an era of free trade reforms and *laissez-faire* capitalism, was who would pay.

Much as the publishers of edificatory magazines for the working classes had urged citizens of means to purchase multiple copies for distribution to the “unmonied,” in his proposal Wilson suggested that individual subscribers would be willing to contribute financially to a project of acknowledged moral value “for the people.” However, crucially, Wilson advocated a combination of private subscription and state subsidy in order to protect this national theatre from the financial pressures of the theatrical marketplace. Taking a lesson from the condition of the erstwhile patent theatres by 1848, Wilson recognized that a state subsidy would protect the national theatre from relentless pressure to stage popular and lucrative productions, whereas depending on private donations and profits alone would simply replicate the flaws of the old patent system. Wilson’s suggestion that Shakespeare merited special attention from Parliament was well-received, and when his article was reprinted in pamphlet form its endpapers were graced with extracts from positive notices in influential periodicals and newspapers.

In contrast to the cultural legacy argument that would be propounded by Matthew Arnold, William Archer, and Harley Granville-Barker in subsequent decades, Wilson’s case for a national theatre hinges on its social utility. As Wilson explains in his pamphlet, the incentive for creating a national theatre is its potential as an instrument of moral instruction,

it being generally acknowledged that the human mind receives most quickly and retains most durably impressions made by dramatic representation, the importance and expediency are suggested of purchasing, perhaps by national subscription, on the part of and for the people, some theatre where the works

of Shakespeare, the world's greatest moral teacher, may continually be performed (2).

While Wilson's proposal refocused the national theatre debate from the *Theatrical Journal's* "intellectual class" to the working classes, his article hardly represented a definitive turning point in the discussion. The conflict between a theatre promoting an ideal to the nation's best and brightest and an edificatory theatre for the working classes was never entirely resolved. As family-reading magazines began to debate the appropriate functions of a national theatre, both groups of potential spectators came under attack. For instance, in *Household Words*, despite Dickens's explicit emphasis on the broad class base he sought to attract to his magazines, working-class theatregoers were treated with a condescension remarkable for both its frequency and its degree. A two-part article written by Dickens himself focussing on the "Amusements of the People" suggests that the working classes should be treated as overgrown children who do not know what is best for them. The article begins, auspiciously enough, by recognizing that the theatre is an important institution for the working classes:

It is probable that nothing will ever root out from among the common people an innate love they have for dramatic entertainment in some form or other. It would be a very doubtful benefit to society, we think, if it could be rooted out. The Polytechnic Institution in Regent Street, where an infinite variety of ingenious models are exhibited and explained, are where lectures comprising a quantity of useful information on many practical subjects are delivered, is a great public benefit and a wonderful place, but we think a people formed *entirely* in their hours of leisure by Polytechnic Institutions would be an uncomfortable community. We would rather not have to appeal to the generous sympathies of a man of five-and-twenty, in respect of some affliction of which he had had no personal experience, who had passed all his holidays, when a boy, among cranks and cogwheels. We should be more

disposed to trust him if he had been brought into occasional contact with a Maid and a Magpie; if he had made one or two diversions into the Forest of Bondy; or had even gone the length of a Christmas Pantomime. There is a range of imagination in most of us, which no amount of steam-engines will satisfy; and which The-great-exhibition-of-the-works-of-industry-of-all-nations, itself, will probably leave unappeased.⁴

Having established the potential significance of the theatre as an agent of improvement for the working classes, Dickens shifts his attention to the quality of theatrical experience currently available to them, and here the article takes a turn towards the patronizing. Using a technique familiar to readers of his novels, Dickens invents a fictitious theatregoer, “Joe Whelks, of the New Cut, Lambeth” (13), and uses him as the vehicle for satire and social commentary. Whelks “is not much of a reader, has no great store of books, no very commodious room to read in, no very decided inclination to read, and no power at all of presenting vividly before his mind’s eye what he reads about” (13). If he is even capable of being taught, the medium will not be books, but rather the theatre of which he, like most of his class, is an avid patron.

Despite the controversial and at times objectionable argument Dickens makes in both parts of this article, his sense of the need for a subsidised theatre for “the people” and the conditions under which it would thrive makes his an important contribution to the national theatre debate. Dickens distinguishes between an ideal, subsidized theatre, and the actual popular theatres attended by patrons like Mr. Whelks. The popular theatres, “Heavily taxed,

⁴*Household Words* 1.1, 30 March 1850, 13-15 and 1.2, 13 April 1850, 57-60; quotation 13. Lohrli attributes these articles to Dickens, in keeping with contemporary commentators who blamed him personally for the views expressed therein. See, for instance, the *Theatrical Journal*’s April and May 1850 issues cited in chapter four.

wholly unassisted by the State, deserted by the gentry, and quite unrecognised as a means of public instruction” (13) are dependent on the tastes of the Whelkses of the world to survive. If these theatres hold the mirror up to Whelks instead of up to nature, the fault, Dickens suggests, lies entirely with the government for failing to provide a viable alternative. As Dickens observes after an evening’s entertainment in a popular working-class saloon, the self-professed “People’s Theatre” of London:

one of the reasons of its great attraction was its being directly addressed to the common people, in the provision made for their seeing and hearing. Instead of being put away in a dark gap in the roof of an immense building, as in our once National Theatres, they were here in possession of eligible points of view, and thoroughly able to take in the whole performance. Instead of being at a great disadvantage in comparison with the mass of the audience, they were here *the* audience, for whose accommodation the place was made. We believe this to be one great cause of the success of these speculations. In whatever way the common people are addressed, whether in churches, chapels, schools, lecture-rooms, or theatres, to be successfully addressed they must be directly appealed to. No matter how good the feast, they will not come to it on mere sufferance (58).

After establishing the popularity and the current offerings at this “people’s theatre,” Dickens considers the negative effects of putative legislation to control popular theatres and brings his analysis to bear on their potential:

Ten thousand people, every week, all the year round, are estimated to attend this place of amusement. If it were closed to-morrow – if there were fifty such, and they were all closed to-morrow – the only result would be to cause that to be privately and evasively done, which is now publicly done; to render the harm of it much greater, and to exhibit the suppressive power of the law in an oppressive and partial light. The people who now resort here, *will be* amused somewhere. It is of no use to blink that fact, or to make pretences to the contrary. We had far better apply ourselves to improving the character of their amusement. It would not be exacting much, or exacting anything very

difficult, to require that the pieces represented in these Theatres should have, at least, a good, plain, healthy purpose in them (59).

In his follow-up article some six months later, reviving Mr. Welks for an account of Samuel Phelps's achievements at Sadler's Wells, Dickens outlines a clear, step-by-step guide to the creation of an edificatory theatre based on Sadler's Wells. The article, entitled "Shakspeare and Newgate," suggests that Phelps turned the patrons of Sadler's Wells towards the former and away from the latter by sheer force of will. In Dickens's rather selective view of Phelps's accomplishments (see chapter four for a more factual account), Sadler's Wells had been "a most unpromising soil" for serious drama, "entirely delivered over to as ruffianly an audience as London could shake together," a "bear-garden, resounding with foul language, oaths, catcalls, shrieks, yells, blasphemy, obscenity – a truly diabolical clamour."⁵ Phelps, fresh from his triumphs on the stages of the Haymarket, Covent Garden, and Drury Lane, "conceived the desperate idea of changing the character of the dramatic entertainments presented at this den, from the lowest to the highest, and of utterly changing with it the character of the audience" (25). The opening night of Phelps's *Macbeth* did not augur well: the spectators, accustomed to the old ways under the previous owner, had to be taught not to drown out the acting with their bellows. Phelps chased the "friers of fish, vendors of oysters, and other costermonger-scum" from his temple, soon followed in their retreat by beer vendors and babes-in-arms. Thanks to an old act of Parliament he distributed at the theatre instead of handbills and enforced by stopping the performance to have offenders forcibly removed from the theatre, Phelps also persuaded his

⁵*Household Words* 4.80, 4 October 1851, 25-27; quotations from 25.

spectators to abandon foul language for the duration of the show (26). These nuisances eliminated, Phelps focussed on producing serious drama, chiefly Shakespeare, in a form palatable to a working-class audience: as Dickens notes, “these plays have not been droned through, in the old jog-trot dreary matter-of-course manner, but have been presented with the utmost care, with great intelligence, and with an evidently sincere desire to understand and illustrate the beauties of the poem” (27). As a result, “the audience have desired to show their appreciation of such care, and have studied the plays from the books, and have really come to the Theatre for their intellectual profit” (27). Dickens, then, might have seen Phelps as the ideal manager of a national theatre, able to transform a degenerate audience into a model one through sheer missionary zeal. The concept of an edificatory national theatre, foisted on ignorant working-class spectators for their unwitting benefit, could not be more clearly illustrated than in Dickens’s rather overheated account of the Sadler’s Wells transformation.

In contrast to Wilson, whose proposal focussed on the working classes as an ideal audience, and Dickens, who appears to have favoured their forcible enculturation through the missionary-work of a man like Phelps, Matthew Arnold imagined a separate national theatre for the working classes. His article in the August 1879 issue of *Nineteenth Century*⁶ recognized, as Wilson did not, that a nation divided by issues of class and regionalism, as well as education and taste, would be ill-served by a national theatre that attempted to collect all its citizens under one roof. Instead, Arnold’s proposal would have created two national theatres, one housing England’s ideal cultural legacy and the other serving as the

⁶“The French Play in London.” *Nineteenth Century* 6.30, August 1879: 228-43.

site of sanctioned entertainment for the working classes: “When the institution in the West of London becomes a success, then plant another of its kind in the East. The people *will* have a theatre, then make it a good one” (243). The latter theatre in the predominantly working-class East End of London would be tantamount to a concession that since the working classes must be amused and would not frequent the more highbrow theatre, they may as well have a wholesome place to amuse themselves. In contrast, the national theatre of the middle classes would serve a loftier purpose. In keeping with his views that literature might “inspirit and rejoice” its readers to provide them with moral and spiritual sustenance,⁷ so, in his *Nineteenth Century* article, Arnold suggested that the theatre represented the “mightiest means” of satisfying the “human spirit[’s]” desire for “expansion, intellect and knowledge, for beauty” (240). The implication that these lofty desires would be experienced only by the patrons of the West End theatre, and fulfilled for them there while the working classes enjoyed the base amusements furnished by the East End theatre, would recur again in William Archer’s article for the *Monthly Review* and form the bedrock of Archer and Granville-Barker’s prospectus for a national theatre.

Arnold’s article, though among the most famous contributions to the national theatre debate, is neither the first nor the most well-developed instance of a proposal to endow two separate national theatres. In a letter to *The Era* in 1851, Adam Blount had made a similar argument, but with competition, not class, as his motive:

⁷This view permeates virtually all of Arnold’s prose, but is articulated with especial clarity in his prefaces to *Poems* (1853) and *The Study of Poetry* (1880).

Let there be, at least, two national theatres, such as shall excite the rivalry of people most likely to reach excellence (the educated and the naturally gifted). Let there be companies depending upon something more substantial than chance and individual caprice – companies governed by *responsible* people – companies whose members cannot be dismissed or mismanaged, or unfairly treated, according to the vagaries of a speculative commander. Let there be something to depend upon – something to regulate – something to *look up to*, and we shall foster a race of performers more likely to obtain admiration and respect than the majority of those whose names are now familiar as household words.⁸

Like Blount, Arnold may also have had competition in mind, though not the healthy rivalry of two London theatres. As his title “The French Play in London” suggests, Arnold’s point of view was influenced by the six-week engagement of France’s subsidized *Comédie française* at the Gaiety theatre. It was also a direct response to Francisque Sarcey’s “The Comédie Française” published in the previous month’s issue of *Nineteenth Century* in which Sarcey had argued that England could never hope to emulate the French model.⁹ Arnold’s proposal for two national theatres thus had national pride, as well as the spiritual and social well-being of his countrymen, at its heart. While miles away from Blount’s notion of artistic competition, Arnold, too, recognized that rivalry might serve as a spur to excellence. National theatre advocates would turn increasingly to national pride to bolster their arguments, while the competition inherent in Blount’s proposal was integrated into a more nuanced sense of the relationship between a national theatre and its unsubsidized competitors.

⁸*The Era* 13.653, 30 March 1851, 9.

⁹*Nineteenth Century* 6.29, July 1879: 182-200.

Despite these varied appeals to memorialize Shakespeare or to edify the working classes, and the successes of Sadler's Wells and the *Comédie française* to serve as models or rivals for a national theatre, the forces of free market seem to have prevailed and the national theatre movement did not gain enough currency to be debated by Parliament until 1913. Meanwhile, increasing ticket prices transformed playgoing into a more rarified activity, and theatregoers became very different from the ragtag band of boisterous workers depicted in Dickens's account. By the late 1870s, theatregoing was viewed, often with some dismay, as a prohibitively expensive activity that excluded potential supporters of the national drama in favour of foreign tourists who patronized the theatres as a crucial part of any tour of London. From its first volume in 1877, *The Theatre* took an active interest in the cost of theatregoing, with two series in 1878 and 1880 drawing attention to the importance of a national drama accessible to less affluent spectators. In keeping with its interest in theatrical matters generally and in the function of the theatre among the working classes as expressed in these series, *The Theatre* paid close attention to both Shakespeare's afterlife and the national theatre question. Commenting on the decision to build a theatre in Stratford-on-Avon on land that the brewery heir Charles Edward Flower had donated to be the site of a Shakespeare memorial, the magazine suggested in an unsigned editorial that:

Though by no means insensible to the public spirit and liberality which prompted Mr. Flower to suggest and contribute towards the cost of these memorial buildings, we cannot resist the impression that such a way of honouring Shakespere is ill-chosen, and opposed to English notions. It may be said of him with even more justice than it is said of Wren that he requires no better monument than his own work. If there is one thing more than another which binds together English-speaking people throughout the world it is the fact that they all share in common the inheritance of being his fellow-

countryman. It is asserted that, notwithstanding the elaborate “revivals” on the stage, and the multiplication of cheap editions of his works, he is far less read than some authors of our own time, but his influence is felt in quarters to which it is least supposed to have extended. It may be asked, then, why a memorial which must of necessity be unworthy of its subject should be erected. [...] Indeed, we are in doubt whether it is wise to erect a theatre at all. In the first place, where are the audiences to come from? Stratford is but a small town, and after the performances have lost the zest of novelty, the theatre would be almost deserted. The idea that it would be filled by tourists is too ridiculous to be entertained for a moment. [The project...] is about as hopeless as could well be conceived.¹⁰

While highly sceptical of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre’s ability to find an audience in Stratford-on-Avon, *The Theatre* was an enthusiastic proponent of a national theatre located in London. In an article that responds to opponents of a subsidized national theatre, *The Theatre* suggests that, just as citizens had welcomed state intervention to protect them from such dangers as adulterated food and unsafe buildings, so a national theatre might be considered an intervention to protect them from the intellectual poverty of an unregulated stage:

Large classes of society, hitherto drugged with deleterious drink, poisoned by adulterated food, diseased from the foul air of ill-built, undrained, or ruinous houses – classes untaught and overworked as children, untended when sick, unfed when starving – can, from recent efforts of the Legislature, extract the hope that their condition may be ameliorated in this generation and much improved in the next. Amongst other reforms still to be accomplished is one which many persons would defer until the last, but which, perhaps, does not deserve so long a postponement. When the nation is fitly housed, fed, educated, and cared for, it will yet need amusement just as it does now. And we venture to say that the effects of the newly-organised means of education may be retarded or counteracted unless measures are soon taken to make the public amusements of dwellers in towns more fit for an improving condition of society. [...] The general play-going public is, however, [...] tolerant to a

¹⁰*The Theatre* 1, 1 May 1877, 167-68.

fault, and will take with more or less appetite the coarsest fare which the playbill sets forth. The greater reason therefore exists for regulating the supply. That the amusement afforded to them should not only be fit for them to take, but also of a kind to do good when taken, seems as much the care of the State as any provision for their bodily sustenance. [...] Thousands of country people are now passing through London on their way to the Continent. Fifteen theatres are open to them here. In none can a play of Shakspeare be seen. Let them when abroad, however, visit the Stadttheater of any German town, and the chances are greatly in favour of their finding some work of Shakspeare satisfactorily rendered by foreigners, who have taught us to appreciate his genius, but have not yet taught us to insist upon the due representation of his plays. The contrast is shameful to us. The shame might, we think, be removed. [...] That a subvention to a national theatre would operate as a public benefit is a proposition which deserves to be considered. [...]. Were the desirability of the State assisting the stage established, the comparatively insignificant sum needed for a subvention would surely not be withheld when the equivalent to be purchased thereby is borne in mind. That equivalent is no less than *control*, with all its advantages.¹¹

This first foray into the national theatre debate introduced a series of articles on the issue, including a detailed account of the *Comédie française* which, the magazine agreed, should serve as a model for an English national theatre.¹² The magazine also considered the issue of state subsidy at greater length in a subsequent issue, arguing that, were a question about “the desirability of extending the knowledge of Shakspeare’s plays” put to Parliament, “no sensible member of the House of Commons would rise to deny” its merits. As this article suggested, the incentives for establishing such a theatre would be not merely artistic and philanthropic, but also political:

¹¹*The Theatre* 2, 21 August 1877, 58-60.

¹²*The Theatre* 2, 28 August 1877, 73-75; 4 September 1877, 89-91.

In no boastful national vanity do we assert the possibility of the institution becoming even superior to the Théâtre Français. There is nothing to prevent it. The English people appreciate and patronise the drama; England has produced as great actors as France, if not so many great ones. There is a force and depth of feeling in our national character, only restrained by what may almost be termed conventional *mauvais honte*, and which is the first qualification of both actor and spectator. It is a kind of national hypocrisy of itself in us to parody our “practicality,” and to suppress our inclination for sentiment and grace and the refinements of art. [...For] we have instincts which should rather be cultivated than repressed – instincts understood best by the greatest one of us that ever breathed. For, lastly, we have a dramatist whom no playwright of another nation can rival. He is so high above Corneille, Racine, and Molière, that our otherwise due respect for the French authors changes to disdain at the thought of a comparison between him and them. To perpetuate their works in freshness a National Theatre has been maintained during more than two centuries, and now flourishes exceedingly, while for the *culte* of our more universal genius a similar establishment has yet to be founded. Shall the foundation be postponed? Shall Germany, with her noble intellectual ardour, unsatisfied by the possession of Schiller and Goethe, appropriate our “Master Shakspeare,” whom we unwittingly neglect?¹³

The topic was revived the following spring with an article interpreting the “signs of the times” as indications that the national theatre question had taken hold of the public imagination and might be brought before Parliament sooner than the magazine had thought. By 1878, according to *The Theatre*, “the preliminary stage of thoughtless ridicule has been passed, and it may fairly be considered that, as the scheme has now got well into the second stage, that of argument, it promises to attain the final goal of acceptance.”¹⁴ In this article and another that followed in August, the magazine reiterated that while a subsidized national

¹³*The Theatre* 2, 18 September 1877, 122-23.

¹⁴*The Theatre* 3, 20 March 1878, 126-27; quotation p.126.

theatre “is a question which is rapidly becoming ripe for discussion,”¹⁵ a Parliamentary motion proposed by Mr. O’Donnell, an “unpopular” member of the opposition, was a false start.¹⁶ In March, *The Theatre* had warned O’Donnell that his motion was not phrased in a manner calculated to win support. On the contrary, it would be too easy to refuse O’Donnell’s proposal that “the establishment of a State theatre of Shakspearean drama would be eminently expedient in the interest of public culture, and would form the only suitable recognition, long since due from the English-speaking races, to the genius of Shakspeare” (126). While the national theatre movement had relied on Shakespeare as a cornerstone of its argument, by allying the national theatre so closely with a Shakespeare memorial O’Donnell was, the magazine predicted, courting defeat. The difference, implicit in *The Theatre*’s response to O’Donnell’s proposal, was between a national theatre erected with Shakespeare as its foundation and one established to honour Shakespeare exclusively. In August, the magazine reiterated its objections to the proposal, and the following April it lamented that combined with a new, unfavourable financial climate, the abortive attempt had made it unlikely that the issue would be raised before Parliament in the near future. *The Theatre* predicted that until the national theatre movement was supported by a committee uniting members with theatrical, political, and financial credibility, it would remain an inchoate fantasy or disappear into oblivion.¹⁷

¹⁵*The Theatre* n.s.1, August 1878, 7-11; quotation p.7.

¹⁶*The Theatre* 3, 20 March 1878, 126.

¹⁷*The Theatre* n.s.2, 1 April 1879, 147-50.

In fact, the national theatre debate does appear to have dissipated in the 1880s and 1890s, and was not a major issue in *The Theatre* again until the publication of William Poel's "The Functions of a National Theatre" in 1893. Like earlier articles published during the 1870s, Poel's relied heavily on the *Comédie française* as a model. However, it is clear from Poel's discussion that the main focus of the debate had shifted from the public benefits of an edificatory theatre to the artistic value of a theatre able to train new generations of actors, playwrights, and theatregoers in the production of timeless, inspiring art. As Poel envisioned it:

Without some such safe-guard as a National Theatre, dramatic art can reach nothing higher than a species of Philistinism – that is to say, an unvaried exhibition of what is modern, which is too often synonymous with what is vulgar and mean. [...] The first condition of a national theatre is that it shall not be on the same level as a commercial playhouse, that lives to please, and must please to live. Its position is distinctly academic, and its chief function is to keep the past in touch with the present, and to keep past models of excellence and past traditions of excellence alive. [...] Moreover, the policy of a National Theatre should be conservative more than progressive, and ever watchful that the realistic does not supersede the poetical, and that dramatic art maintains its freedom without forfeiting its dignity. The extravagance of realism, so often thought healthy and natural, is with scarcely any exception only perverse sentimentality, only the expression, inartistic at best, of an enervated and distorted feeling, an extravagant and debased sentiment in comparison with which the sentiment of Shakespeare is truly refreshing and inspiring. [...] But pre-eminently should a State-subsidized Theatre be a school for poetic education. [...] It is quite possible for a modern audience to be indifferent to the poetical drama; simply because its ear and its feeling have not been sufficiently trained. [...] Besides possessing an influence over art, a State Theatre should exert an influence over morality [...] to lead popular thought in high and ennobling directions, and to encourage the dramatist to believe that whatever tends to vitiate the nation's taste and its morals may fairly be at the mercy of the dramatist's censure. The highest aim of the artist is to create a work valid for all ages, a work which shall inspire the life of the nation with more and more glorious aspiration. And it is the privilege and duty of a State-aided Theatre to encourage prophets and poets

of the nation, to enrich the artistic treasure, not only of its own country, but of the world, with a series of finished art works which will retain enduring value, give new vigour to art, and add moral stamina to the collective life of the nation.¹⁸

Poel, who founded the Elizabethan Stage society that same year in an attempt to achieve that continuity with the past idealized in his article for *The Theatre*, was only one of several luminaries from the theatrical world whose views on a national theatre were published in the magazine around that time. Responding to Henry Irving's speech to the Walsall Literary Institute articulating his view that a subsidized theatre would legitimate the stage as an institution of liberal education on par with museums and art galleries, *The Theatre* concludes that Irving was "asking too much, at all events for the present" because public support for a subsidized theatre had not yet reached a level sufficient to propel the idea beyond the obstacles raised by its opponents:

It demands a great deal more discussion and a more widespread appreciation of the advantages of a playhouse, guided by an artistic spirit, and not entirely hampered by the inexorable laws of profit and loss. Much might be done to this end if private munificence – a system of subscription, let us say – could be applied so far as to furnish a real object-lesson in the management of a theatre on this basis.¹⁹

Among the published responses to Irving's speech, an article by Charles Dickens Jr, who had continued his late father's involvement in periodicals as an author and publisher, was

¹⁸*The Theatre* fourth series, 22, 1 September 1893, 162-66.

¹⁹*The Theatre* fourth series, 24, 1 November 1894, 211-14. Irving's speech to the Walsall Literary Institute, to which this article responds, is reproduced in the same issue of *The Theatre*, 216-20.

particularly negative. Taking it upon himself to represent “The Public’s Point of View,” as the title to his article proclaimed, Dickens argued that the majority of English men and women would not be willing to pay for a subsidized theatre out of their own pockets. Characterizing the national theatre debate as one of those questions “between managers and critics, and – even more – between critics and critics,” Dickens warned that even if some type of subsidy were approved, inviting state involvement in an artistic enterprise would risk putting that enterprise at the mercy of public and political opinion. Drawing a lesson from the recent instance of a free library that had formed a committee to determine whether the novels of such authors as Smollett and Fielding should be considered appropriate reading for its members, Dickens concludes his article with a warning that the more likely effect of a subsidized theatre would be “a blocked out *School for Scandal* and a top-shelf for Shakspeare,” with both playwrights the victims of censorship guided by an ignorant public.²⁰

Meanwhile, though the idea of an artistically exemplary national theatre had become the dominant one, the concept of a national theatre intended to educate the working classes was only dormant, not dead. Despite Dickens’s view that the “great public” did not want a national theatre, advocates continued to suggest that the public should be provided with one nonetheless, for its own good. In a 1901 article responding to an earlier piece by national theatre advocate Henry Arthur Jones,²¹ for instance, Frank Benson revived the moral and

²⁰*The Theatre* fourth series, 24, 1 November 1894: 220-26, quotations pp.220, 226. Dickens reiterated the latter point in a second article, “The London Council and the Theatres,” fourth series, 25, 1 March 1895, 140-43.

²¹“The Drama in the English Provinces,” *Nineteenth Century* 49:289, March 1901, 431-44. In 1913, Jones collected and republished his articles and speeches as *The Foundations of a National Drama* (reprinted in Freeport, NY by Books for Libraries, 1967).

social utility argument that Wilson had articulated in 1848. In the second half of the nineteenth century, social initiatives had changed the context that had made Wilson's suggestions revolutionary, formed in the first flush of free-market enthusiasm when state intervention had been less acceptable. By 1901, government intervention to regulate public health and quality of life had become an important corrective to rampant capitalism. In Benson's view, a national theatre would, like public swimming pools and green spaces, promote social harmony:

We have learned that patriotism cannot be expected from those to whom we have denied the conditions of a happy and dignified life, that the vitality of the strongest nation will sooner or later decay in the presence of unloveliness. So we have set to work to tidy up the workshop, and naturally the theatre is included in the scheme of tidiness – the chief art or recreation except the public-house for many thousands of toilers; one of the few means of bringing change and brightness to their lives, of lifting them out of themselves beyond this ignorant present. "I like *Macbeth*," I heard a Northern country artisan say – "I felt I could do a better week's work after seeing it." At the same time, as showing forth the eye and body of the time its own form and pressure, the dramatic is more liable than other arts to reflect contemporary weakness or folly.

Most people, I think, would agree with Mr. Henry Arthur Jones that the theatre should be able to fulfil its function of giving noble pleasure to the people better than it does at present. [...] The National Theatre, I take it, is of the spirit, and not only of bricks and mortar. No one theatre could possibly produce all the existing forms of drama. It will be represented at different times, in different places, by different theatres, managed on different systems, worked for by different authors and actors, supported by different publics, produce different kinds of plays, meet with different amounts of success. One theatre will be financed by the artist, another by the speculator; one may possibly be subsidised or endowed by a syndicate, the municipality, or in the dim future even by the State. All will be national if they produce good work, helpful to the best life and thought of the nation.²²

²² *Nineteenth Century* 49:291, May 1901, 772-80; quotation pp.773-74.

Benson's article begins with an argument about the social utility of a national theatre, but before it concludes he has brought the discussion around to aesthetic and artistic concerns:

It might help to elevate and keep before the public a high standard of taste. It would be a guide to theatres more directly dependent on their receipts – first, as to what the public did desire; secondly, as to what they could be led to desire. At the same time, the competition of these theatres would prevent it from becoming merely academic and formal (775).

Finally, Benson makes the connection between a national theatre and the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-on-Avon:

Possessing the most wonderful and the most national dramatist, it is somewhat a reflection on our methods that there is but one theatre in his own country – namely that at Stratford-on-Avon erected chiefly by the exertions of the late Mr. Charles Flower – that is able permanently to set itself to produce his works apart from consideration of revenue.

There is no reason, however, why such an experiment should be unremunerative, given time, prudence, and wise administration. If it were desirable, it might soon become independent of subvention; only it must not try to realise all its ideals at first, but must be content from small beginnings to grow steadily and sanely. [...] Its work will not be forced on the public as part of a hard-and-fast scheme of education, but it will seek rather to attract by its loveliness and truth (779-80).

Despite Benson's enthusiasm, the success of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, privately financed and located in Stratford-on-Avon, not London, was actually detrimental to the national theatre cause. With the existence of a self-sufficient, well-regarded theatre providing a steady stream of Shakespeare in repertory, the national theatre movement's main arguments in its own favour were largely negated. National pride, and in particular a strong

desire not to be outdone by the French, became an increasingly crucial aspect of the national theatre movement as earlier rationales disappeared.

Throughout the debate about the future of the English drama, France was repeatedly invoked as an example of state intervention as well as artistic excellence, a comparison sometimes offered with great reluctance given the historical tensions between the two countries. As Henry Arthur Jones noted in a March 1904 article for the *Nineteenth Century Review*, the simple difference between the two nations was that while in England proponents had been focussing their energies on obtaining state support for a national theatre, seeing its national drama as “the creature, and instrument, and tributary, and appurtenance of the English stage,” France had recognized that the relationship between a national theatre and a national drama should be rather the inverse, to the benefit of both.²³ When theatrical conditions are permitted to dictate the state of a nation’s drama, Jones suggests, adaptations of ready-made French plays displace new English ones for reasons of economy, the English classics are ignored except when they “provide a strong or showy leading part,” and the result is the utter waste of theatregoers’ time in “the emptiest, tawdriest tomfoolery” (104-5). As Jones laments, “In England, having no national drama, what can be the real value of our theatre?” (99).

In his article, Jones includes several lengthy quotations from the French *député* M. Massé’s remarks in support of state funding for the arts. Massé argues persuasively that the state’s function should be to support and encourage the arts rather than to regulate them, and

²³The article is reprinted in Jones 98-120; quotation p.100.

to educate all of its citizens with the aim of making the arts accessible to them.²⁴ Lest his readers miss Massé's emphasis on the state's responsibility to educate its citizens in beauty and taste as a corollary to establishing an endowed popular theatre,²⁵ Jones follows his series of French quotations with a quasi-serious attack on the English practice of forcing patrons to leave their brains in the cloakroom before entering a theatre. He warns that the practice should be regulated to prevent brains being inadvertently misplaced or damaged by cloakroom attendants (119). In contrast to Massé's depiction of a French state educating its citizens to appreciate good theatre, Jones presents the risible image of England encouraging its citizens to attend mindless entertainments and focussing its energies on regulating the system which produces this mindlessness. As a stinging indictment of England's misplaced notions of protection and intervention, Jones's article paved the way for the concrete solution offered by William Archer and Harley Granville-Barker in their *Schemes and Estimates for a National Theatre*.

The contrast between an ideal and an accessible national theatre articulated in Arnold's and Benson's articles for the *Nineteenth Century*, and the imperative to correct the situation parodied in Jones's article, clearly shaped *Schemes and Estimates*. Archer and Granville-Barker circulated their proposal privately in 1904, and published it in 1908 along

²⁴ "Il ne doit ni réglementer l'art ni le contrôler, mais l'aider et l'encourager," cited in Jones 116, "L'État doit, par l'éducation et par l'enseignement, s'efforcer de rendre le Beau accessible à la généralité des citoyens," 117.

²⁵ "Embellir et égayer la vie de tous les citoyens, même les plus humbles, en leur donnant des notions d'esthétique et en ornant d'oeuvres simples et belles tous les endroits où se rencontrent les citoyens," "Il faut encore que l'État universalise le goût pour pénétrer dans les masses, la notion et l'émotion de la beauté, aujourd'hui propriété d'une élite orgueilleuse [...avec] la création d'un théâtre populaire," 117.

with written endorsements by such national theatre proponents as Henry Irving and Henry Arthur Jones. In their preface, Archer and Granville-Barker make it clear that while earlier arguments about the moral and social functions of a national theatre have been eclipsed by loftier claims, challenges to the national theatre movement have provided them with the inspiration to imagine new solutions. For instance, they abandon the argument that a national theatre might serve as an instrument of mass enculturation or edification, a case that had been made in earlier decades to little avail. Instead, Archer and Granville-Barker suggest that the commercial theatres would continue to attract their own clientèles while the national theatre would focus on “reconciling to the drama many people who are now more or less estranged from it” due to the monotony of “society plays” staged merely for commercial reasons (42). As Archer had explained in an earlier, independent article in the *Monthly Review* that influenced the proposal he would develop in collaboration with Granville-Barker:

National Theatres would help the better order of commercial theatres by training actors for them, and by augmenting the numbers of the intelligent public; but the lower class of playhouses they would leave practically untouched, or, at any rate, would affect no more than would any other institution tending to raise the general level of intelligence. The dramatic amusements of a people, taken as a whole, will always answer to their lower as well as their higher instincts; just as the noblest efforts in poetry, philosophy, and fiction do not prevent the bookstalls from being crowded with trash. The defect of the English theatre – as distinguished from English literature and from the theatres of other great nations – is that while it ministers amply to the lower instincts of the race, it answers very imperfectly to the higher instincts. It is this quite needless inequality that the supporters of the National Theatre idea aim at correcting.²⁶

²⁶*Monthly Review* July 1902, excerpted in Archer and Granville-Barker, 172-76; quotation p.173.

In their preface to the first edition, Archer and Granville-Barker revisited the issue of complementarity that Archer had raised in his article, suggesting that while a national theatre would never replace popular metropolitan theatres or provincial and colonial ones, it could improve on their dismal record of uniting “the whole English-speaking world together in the bonds of racial vulgarity” (xvii). In place of this vulgarity, Archer and Granville-Barker offered a concrete, well-developed proposal for a theatre that would produce the best plays in the best ways.

Like earlier national theatre proponents, in their prospectus Archer and Granville-Barker situated Shakespeare at the very centre of their enterprise. In keeping with their sense of Shakespeare’s importance, they chose to open their imagined début season with a four-play cycle consisting of Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, both parts of *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*. Explaining their choice to open the putative first season with four of Shakespeare’s plays instead of one magnificently-produced one, the authors distinguished between the achievements of the commercial theatres and their aspirations for a national theatre:

[W]e felt that the importance of the occasion should be marked, not by one big production, in which the National Theatre could not hope to compete with private theatres in scenic attraction, but by a sustained artistic effort on a great scale, such as no private theatre could reasonably attempt. We felt, too, that, in opening with a single Shakespearean production, the management might not unnaturally be tempted to aim at a degree of scenic luxury – as opposed to appropriateness – inconsistent with the idea of the Theatre; whereas the very magnitude of the effort demanded in presenting a cycle of four plays, would render almost imperative from the first the observance of a just standard of dignified moderation. The cycle would, therefore, be as

characteristic in a technical sense as in a literary sense it would be appropriate (38).

For Archer and Granville-Barker, Victorian scenic splendour was neither the epitome of Shakespeare production nor the appropriate domain of a national theatre. Shakespeare, then, would serve the proposed national theatre not only as a major source of its repertory but also as an essential deterrent of any tendencies towards scenic excess. The demands of producing four Shakespeare plays from the outset would serve the salutary function of preventing any nascent magnificence from taking hold before a more sober and sensible aesthetic could begin to thrive there.

Shakespeare was such an important component of their proposal that Archer and Granville-Barker devoted considerable thought to the proportion of Shakespeare versus other playwrights in each season's repertoire and to the relative merits of all his plays. In the first season, they rounded out the initial tetralogy with five others, selected because they revealed contrasting aspects of Shakespeare's achievement:

The Tempest as a beautiful poem, much neglected of late years; *The Taming of the Shrew* as a popular farce, showing the more prosaic and commonplace side of the poet's genius; and *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *As You Like It*, simply as immortal masterpieces which no English theatre can make too great haste to establish in its repertory. The number of Shakespearean productions – nine – we believe to be approximately justified by an analysis of the roll of Shakespeare's works in relation to the circumstances of the case (38).

The rather cryptic conclusion of their justification for including nine Shakespearean plays introduces a discussion of Shakespeare's canon:

The conventional Shakespearean canon consists of thirty-seven plays. Of these, one – *Titus Andronicus* – is wholly unpresentable on the modern stage; while six – *Troilus and Cressida*, *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles*, and the three parts of *Henry VI* – can only be presented, with doubtful advantage, after heroic curtailment and manipulation. We do not say that they ought never to be attempted; but they cannot possibly take a permanent place in the repertory of any theatre. Then, again, of the remaining plays, five would probably be found fitted only for occasional revival at long intervals; *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Love's Labours Lost*, as immature productions; *All's Well That Ends Well*, as likewise immature (in spite of re-touching), and unacceptable [sic] in theme; and *Henry VIII*, as a formless pageant play, which has very little claim to rank as Shakespeare's. There remain, then, twenty-five plays, which ought never to be suffered for long to drop out of the repertory of an English National Theatre. If six, on an average, were revived in every season, the whole list (save one) would be gone through once in four years; while in each season certain plays, carried forward from the season or seasons before, would be considered, not as revivals, but as belonging to the permanent substratum of the repertory – what is called in France the *répertoire courant*. We take it, then, that in this initial season three plays may be regarded as representing the Shakespearean element in this permanent substratum, while the remaining six are about equivalent to the normal revivals of a normal season (38-39).

The Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee would soon make Shakespeare even more central to the national theatre movement than Archer and Granville-Barker had done, envisioning him not only as its “permanent substratum” but as its very *raison d'être*. When the committee was founded in 1908, the hybrid name was an implicit recognition that it represented a compromise between the longstanding aspirations of two groups that had canvassed the same potential contributors and that recognized the value in joining forces to gain the widest possible support. Whereas proponents of a populist national theatre writing after the creation of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre such as Henry Arthur Jones had seen no necessary connection to Shakespeare, and Archer and Granville-Barker had imagined Shakespeare's plays supporting the theatre's goals, the Shakespeare Memorial

National Theatre committee reversed that relationship on pragmatic grounds. A flurry of newspaper and periodical articles in March 1908 (cited in Emmet) suggests that this merger had popular support, and may even have been instigated by the public's recognition that the two movements could work together to their mutual benefit. Though this alliance ultimately proved as fruitless as O'Donnell's proposal to Parliament, it continued to influence the national theatre debate until the National Theatre was established by Parliamentary vote, independently of a Shakespeare memorial, in 1949.

Meanwhile, in contrast to the aspirations of the national theatre advocates, still struggling to define the theatre's relevance and still limited by parochial concerns of class and nation, the goals of the British Empire Shakespeare Society were more closely attuned to the state of Bardolatry at the turn of the century.²⁷ Like the periodicals and in contrast to the national theatre movement, the British Empire Shakespeare Society promoted a rather less centralizing and certainly more multi-faceted and achievable approach to bardolatry. In contrast to the repeated failures of the national theatre movement to preserve Shakespeare's legacy in a permanent London theatre, the British Empire Shakespeare Society was intentionally cosmopolitan in its outlook. The appreciation of Shakespeare through individual reading, scholarship, and clubs, all of which the society promoted, did not depend on a major fundraising initiative, government support, or public consensus. Just as the national theatre movement was beginning to see empire as an ideological replacement for Shakespeare as its driving force, the British Empire Shakespeare Society was demonstrating

²⁷The BESS prospectus, preserved in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's archives, is cited in Foulkes, *Performing*, 130-31, and discussed in Mazer, 18.

Shakespeare's significance to the imperial outlook. While Shakespeare performances throughout the empire had been enormously popular, especially as touring productions by actors from the mother country, they were also costly undertakings. The annual prizes offered by the British Empire Shakespeare Society for more modest achievements in Bardolatry were an economical way of creating and sustaining enthusiasm in the colonies.²⁸ Meanwhile, the material conditions of nineteenth-century Shakespeare production, including the existence of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, pushed the national theatre movement towards idealistic, and often imperialistic, arguments that sought to recentralize Shakespeare in the metropolis.

This connection between Shakespeare and imperial power was the key to gaining parliamentary support for a national theatre, but not, unfortunately for its proponents, quite enough support to result in action. On Shakespeare's birthday in 1913, Parliament debated a national theatre in rhetoric redolent of education and empire. A private member's bill more carefully worded than O'Donnell's abortive proposal moved that "there should be established a National Theatre, to be vested in trustees and assisted by the State, for the performance of the plays of Shakespeare and other drama of recognized merit."²⁹ In his remarks opening the debate, the House speaker H.J. MacKinder suggested that "What we want is education of the world through our Shakespeare" (col.460), a position echoed later in the debate by one parliamentarian who argued for the benefits from an "imperial point of

²⁸Item 4 of the prospectus promises "Prizes given yearly for the best reading, recitation, acting scenes from his plays, or essay on Shakespeare" (Foulkes, *Performing* 130).

²⁹Parliamentary Debates, Commons, vol.52, 23 April 1913, cols. 454-94.

view”: “Let us do things as befits this great Empire [...]. Let it be a British House, of which the United Kingdom can be proud, that will speak to Canada, South Africa, and the Antipodes” (col.470). Despite the rhetorical flourishes, the bill was defeated by a narrow margin, falling only four votes short of the two-thirds majority required.

The notion of a national theatre as a nation-building enterprise was endorsed by participants in the debate who nevertheless balked at the notion of the state subsidizing this particular form of education. Adam Smith’s invisible hand remained Parliament’s metaphor of choice where intervention in market forces was concerned, and in this Parliament was supported by theatre practitioners like Irving and Beerbohm Tree who worried that a state-subsidized national theatre could have a negative effect on both the viability and the independence of other English theatres. Just as the purveyors of working-class literacy had relied on a combination of charitable institutions and the generosity of private citizens for a century before Parliament’s belated introduction of universal education in 1870, so, according to the Parliamentary debate, the proponents of a national theatre would have to look to theatrical associations and private citizens for their patronage.

When Parliament finally did approve the creation of an endowed national theatre, in 1949, its founding principles reflected the Victorian Shakespeare debate as well as the Parliamentary debate of 1913, and brought the main conflicts of both into a twentieth-century institution. As Loren Kruger has suggested in her analysis of the national theatre movements in England, France, and America, in England’s case “the cracks in the foundations of this national monument cropped up already in the blueprints” (87). Just as the periodicals discussed in chapters one through four always reflected a tension between their

readers' lived realities and the ideals to which they might aspire through appropriate exposure to Shakespeare, so, in England's national theatre, that tension was made manifest in a conflicted sense of what that theatre might represent to the nation. An empire that by 1949 was merely a reminder of past glories and present struggles, and a nation fragmented by two world wars and a steady influx of immigrants from the erstwhile colonies, would be difficult to house within an institution that looked ever-backward with revivals of a dramatic heritage that was only putatively shared by all. The ideals that had fuelled the movement, from Bardolatry to imperialism, remained components of the debate even though the events of a century had rendered many of them obsolete.

Following Parliament's vote to endow a national theatre, struggles over artistic vision, location, and architecture delayed the realization of the dream until October 1963, when, guided by artistic director Laurence Olivier, the National Theatre Company made its official debut with *Hamlet* on the borrowed stage of the Old Vic. In the meantime, the newly-formed Royal Shakespeare Company, more successful in navigating the process of entrepreneurship-by-committee and firmly ensconced in the erstwhile Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-on-Avon, had decided by 1962 to sever its ties with the National Theatre project. By the time Peter O'Toole made his first appearance as the National Theatre's melancholy Dane, it was clear that, while a national theatre might always include Shakespeare in its repertoire, the survival of Shakespeare's plays no longer depended on the existence of a national theatre to shelter them. The national theatre movement had been born out of the struggles, a century earlier, to ensure that Shakespeare's plays would remain available to audiences in the absence of a theatrical patent or,

particularly in the 1840s and 1870s, of a stable commercial incentive to continue producing them. In the intervening century, however, the results of Shakespeare's popularization had made themselves felt. The audience for Shakespeare had grown to include men and women from all over Britain, labourers as well as lords, and visitors from across the empire and beyond. A "House for Shakespeare" was, finally, a house not in the metropolitan capital of the empire, but rather in the town where Shakespeare was born and where he had chosen to live out his last days – a town perhaps already familiar to many through its vivid description in the periodicals of their youth. The portable, infinitely reproducible medium of print had contributed to the dissemination of Shakespeare appreciation and the creation of this audience for his plays. By the time a national theatre was finally brought into existence, Shakespeare's plays were no longer homeless, and his legacy was assured.

Appendix: Periodical Descriptions

All the Year Round (1859-95) was a weekly family-reading periodical selling for 2d. It was founded by Charles Dickens, whose attempt to reach a broad readership with a similar blend of serial fiction, poetry, and articles of general interest had already borne fruit with *Household Words*. At the peak of its popularity, *All the Year Round* had a circulation of 300,000, according to the *Waterloo Index*.

The Athenaeum (1828-1921), graced for most of its publication history with the subtitle “A Weekly Review of English and Foreign Literature,” sold for 8d until 1855, when the price was reduced to 4d. It was considered among the most influential sources of reviews for a liberal, educated readership.

Aunt Judy's Magazine (1866-1885) was a 6d monthly periodical for “all ages of young people,” as its first issue proclaimed, although it appears to have reached a readership of mainly adolescent girls according to Fraser, Green, and Johnston. It was founded by Mrs. Alfred Gatty, who encouraged education and philanthropy through *Aunt Judy's* frequent competitions and associations with organizations such as the Hospital Work Society.

Black Dwarf (1817-1824), intended for a working-class readership, was published weekly and then, in 1824, monthly. Edited by Thomas Jonathan Wooler, the periodical's motto was “to expose every species of vice and folly,” which it accomplished largely through satire. According to the *Waterloo Index*, weekly circulation was 12,000.

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine (1817-1980), subtitled a “repository of whatever may be supposed to be most interesting to general readers,” was a conservative monthly selling for 2s 6d. It published poetry, fiction, and essays, along with anonymous reviews, all appealing to a Tory readership that reached 10,000 in 1860 and averaged between 6,000 and 7,000, according to the *Waterloo Index*.

Boys of England (1866-1906), a penny magazine with a weekly readership of as many as 250,000 adolescent boys during its peak in the 1870s, was founded by the remarkably successful publisher Edwin J. Brett. Known for giving boys what they really wanted (as opposed to what their parents wanted them to want), the first issue promised to “enthral” readers with “wild and wonderful, but healthy fiction,” to “amuse and instruct” them with interesting articles, and vowed that “if we have failed in any respect [...] write and let us know what you want, and your suggestions shall receive the most careful consideration; for, you being satisfied, our object is gained.”

Boy’s Own Paper (1879-1967), a penny magazine, was founded by the Religious Tract Society in a very successful attempt to provide a morally-minded alternative to magazines like Brett’s *Boys of England*. Its circulation, as high as 650,000 at one point according to the *Waterloo Index*, was due in part to its appeal among parents and educators, including Sunday school teachers.

Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal (1832-1936), a weekly founded by the brothers Robert and William Chambers for a largely working-class market, fulfilled its promise to “take advantage of the universal appetite for instruction which at present exists” by offering “healthful, useful, and agreeable mental instruction” at the affordable price of 1 ½ d during the Victorian period. Its circulation, according to the *Waterloo Index*, was as high as 80,000 or 90,000 in its best years.

The Edinburgh Review (1802-1929) was the Whig equivalent of *Blackwood’s*, with reviews providing the occasion for lively, learned excursions into the reviewers’ opinions on widely varied topics. Sometimes monthly, sometimes quarterly, *The Edinburgh Review* gained a readership measuring in the thousands, occasionally surpassing the 10,000 mark.

The Era (1838-1939), a weekly periodical with some 5,000 readers, charged 5d or 6d for its largely conservative combination of politics, theatrical and literary reviews, and sporting and military news. It was initially associated with the licensed victuallers trade, and was formed by a group of shareholders to promote that industry's interests.

Figaro in London (1831-39), a penny weekly with a circulation of some 70,000, according to the *Waterloo Index*, combined theatre reviews with political satire to attract a liberal, reform-oriented readership.

Girl's Own Paper (1880-1951), a penny weekly founded by the Religious Tract Society to give adolescent girls an equivalent to the RTS's highly successful *Boy's Own Paper*, reached an estimated 250,000 girls according to the *Waterloo Index*.

Household Words (1850-59, 1881-1905), founded by Charles Dickens, brought a variety of material suitable for family reading to "many thousands of people, of both sexes, and of all ages and conditions" for the weekly price of 2d. By the late 1850s, before *Household Words* was replaced with Dickens's *All the Year Round*, the magazine was reaching some 100,000 readers.

The Ladies' Treasury (1858-95), a 7d monthly, offered lessons in feminine accomplishments and poetry explicitly selected to elevate, rather than to "bewilder," the female mind. Its price, its subject matter, and especially its title, ensured that no mere woman would make the mistake of believing that this magazine existed for her.

The Literary Test (January and February 1832), a short-lived 2d weekly, promised to test works of literature according to radical political ideals. Shakespeare failed.

Little Folks (1871-1933), for most of its publication history a 6d monthly magazine, attracted a wide age range of both genders with riddles just for the “littlest folk,” contests and projects for older children, and lavish illustrations.

The National (January - June 1839), promoted as a “library for the people,” was a Chartist monthly intended to assist the “Unmonied in their pursuit of knowledge.” The unmonied being unable to meet the costs of publishing the periodical, it folded after six months.

The Nineteenth Century (1877-1901, renamed *The Nineteenth Century and After*, 1901-1950), was a serious monthly publication costing half a crown and reaching some 10,000 subscribers.

The Northern Star (1838-52), a Leeds-based weekly, sold up to 60,000 issues per week during its peak in 1839 and was considered the voice of the Chartist movement.

The Penny Magazine (1832-45), a weekly published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, put useful knowledge into the hands of a largely working-class readership for 1 ½d.

The Political Register (1834-35) was a 2d weekly that favoured radical politics.

The Poor Man’s Guardian (1831-35), a weekly that sold for a penny or two, took as its motto the phrase “knowledge is power.” Acting on its belief that education would lead to political change, *The Poor Man’s Guardian* put articles about politics, but also history and literature, into the hands of working-class readers.

The Theatre (1877-97), a weekly and then monthly publication, included longer articles on topics such as censorship, biographies of actors, and illustrations as well as reviews of current productions.

The Theatrical Inquisitor (1812-21) was a 2d monthly miscellany of articles related to the theatre, ranging from reviews to “chit chat” and occasionally fiction.

The Theatrical Journal (1839-73) was a weekly publication surveying a wide range of productions from Covent Garden and Drury Lane to the London’s minor theatres, the provinces, and amateur theatricals.

Victoria Magazine (1863-1880) was Emily Faithfull’s project to implement her feminist ideals both by publishing feminist-oriented articles and by hiring women to work in the magazine’s publishing offices, as an extension of her Victoria Press. Selling for 1s to a readership ranging from 10,000 to 20,000 monthly, *Victoria* addressed a range of topics from its feminist vantage.

Woman’s World (1887-90) was a 1s monthly edited mainly by Oscar Wilde, who changed the magazine’s name from the more exclusive *The Lady’s World* but, judging from its contents, continued to aim for a rather elite, or at least upper middle-class, readership.

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