

Social Convention and Performance Choices^{*}**

in Three Interpretations of Lady Macbeth:

Sarah Siddons (1755-1832),

Helen Faucit (1814-1898),

and Ellen Terry (1847-1928).

By

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A thesis submitted to The University of Birmingham

For the degree of Master of Philosophy

Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's greatest female roles but she sits uneasily within the patriarchal society of late eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain. In this thesis I explore the ways in which she was made fit for audiences through the interpretations of three leading actresses of the period; Sarah Siddons, Helen Faucit and Ellen Terry.

In particular in the first chapter, but throughout the thesis I discuss the textual history of the play and the ways in which the alterations changed the balance between Lady Macbeth and her husband. I consider the place of the actress in society and the effect this might have had upon her realization of a character, in particular Lady Macbeth.

I show through debates in parliament, articles in newspapers and journals and in the literature of the period, the prevailing patriarchal nature of society but also the challenges to it. From contemporary accounts and the words of Sarah Siddons, Helen Faucit and Ellen Terry, I reconstruct their performances within that society.

Theatre is part of its society: this thesis shows the interaction between the ideas of late eighteenth and nineteenth-century society and the realization of one of Shakespeare's major characters.

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Contents.

List of Illustrations

Chapter 1: Introduction	1-8
Chapter 2: The Text and the Actress	9-27
Chapter 3: Sarah Siddons	28-55
Chapter 4 Helen Faucit	56-83
Chapter 5 Ellen Terry	84-112
Chapter 6 Conclusion	113-120
Bibliography	121-132

List of Illustrations.

1. Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse by Sir Joshua Reynolds Facing page 4
The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
2. Ellen Terry Choosing by George Frederick Watts Facing page 4
Tate Britain, London.
3. Hannah Pritchard and David Garrick in the dagger scene by Henry Fuseli Facing page 13
Zurich Kunsthaus.
4. Melpomene (Sarah Siddons) by James Gillray Facing page 22
The British Museum, London.
5. Sarah Siddons by Thomas Gainsborough Facing page 22
The National Gallery, London.
6. Two patriotic Duchesses on Their Canvass by Thomas Rowlandson Facing page 29
The British Museum, London.
7. The Tipling Duchess Returning from Canvassing by Aitken Facing page 29
The British Museum, London.
8. The Lubber's Hole, alias the Crack'd Jordan by James Gillray Facing page 33
The British Museum, London.
9. Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth in the sleepwalking scene Facing page 49
by George Henry Harlow, The Garrick Club, London.
10. Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth (letter scene) by George Henry Harlow Facing page 50
Greenville, S. C. , Bob Jones University Collection.
11. Sarah Siddons and John Philip Kemble in "Macbeth" Facing page 53
by Thomas Beach, The Garrick Club, London.
12. Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth by John Singer Sargent Facing page 101
Tate Britain, London.
13. Donna Quixote (Punch 28 April 1894). Facing page 110

Chapter 1. Introduction.

Lady Macbeth is no longer only a character in a play by Shakespeare, written five hundred years ago; she has escaped from her text and become a type, a shorthand way to express a number of characteristics which many in society see as unfeminine and dangerous. Thus, in an article in The Times, Martin Fletcher comments on the character and relationship between Hillary Clinton and her husband by referring to ‘comparisons between her and Shakespeare’s ruthlessly ambitious wife of a weaker husband’ (11 June 1993). John Bercow, a Conservative politician, discussing Cherie Blair, uses a reference to Lady Macbeth to express a number of unspoken but, he assumes, commonly held views: ‘The people in Britain will not put up with anyone who thinks they can be an unaccountable cross between The First Lady and Lady Macbeth’ (The Times 8 August 2000). Writing at the end of the twentieth century, the journalist Amanda Craig asks ‘Why don’t we admire women in the public eye who show themselves to be bloody, bold and resolute – albeit married to blithering idiots?’ (Sunday Times 29 December 1999). The answer to this may be part of the answer to the question which this thesis seeks to address, namely ‘Does the portrayal of Lady Macbeth reflect the society within which the production takes place?’.

I have had to limit the extent of the period to just over a century, from Mrs. Siddons’ first attempt at the part of Lady Macbeth in 1785 to Ellen Terry’s performance at the end of 1888. Although the length of the period is dictated by the word limit of the thesis, it is also arguably a discrete period, in which the concept of the individual within society was being discussed more vigorously than ever before and, contained within that discussion, was the question of the nature and place of women. Similarly the word limit has made it necessary to consider only three of the foremost actresses of their time: Sarah Siddons, Helen Faucit and Ellen Terry. All three played Lady Macbeth, giving interpretations which were widely discussed and controversial. Each actress became identified in the public’s mind with the character of

Lady Macbeth, a link which they did not always find comfortable as they attempted to retain their respectability at a time when an actress was often seen as little more than a prostitute.

All three actresses confront their conception of the part either directly through their own writings or indirectly through the work of those to whom they gave permission to speak for them: that view is the product not just of their reading of a seventeenth-century text but the result of their experience as women within their society. All three were connected through their portrait of Lady Macbeth. Faucit and Terry had read Siddons' comments on the part and the reports of those who had seen her play the role. Both later actresses tried to rationalise the contradiction in the conceptions of the part and both preferred Siddons' 'fair...feminine' reading of the character, one which she never realised on stage. Their preference for the more feminine Lady Macbeth is reflected in their interpretation of the part and arguably in keeping with their society. The last of the three, Terry was able to study the interpretations of both her predecessors, through their writings and through eye witness accounts of their performances. It is possible, but unlikely, that Faucit saw Terry's performance. By 1888 she was living for a great part of the time in Wales and there is no mention of it in the biography written by her husband, Sir Theodore Martin. However, as I shall discuss later, that biography was selective and it seems likely that, as an actress with a great love and interest for Shakespeare, she would have been aware of a performance that attracted so much publicity.

I will argue that in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, British society, which was strongly patriarchal, set the parameters within which the part could be successfully played and within that argument lies the answer to Craig's question. Late eighteenth and nineteenth century society did not like its women to be 'bloody, bold and resolute'. It had certain ideas of the nature of men and women and their role within society and did not approve of those who sought to challenge them.

The thesis will illustrate these views through the writings of the period. Thus in the late eighteenth century it will concentrate on the conduct books which were popular at the time and set out to give girls advice, help and directions as to what was expected of them. As the century progressed and these expectations became more pronounced, men and women began to question them and investigate the possibilities of a less restrictive society. I will draw upon the history of the feminist movement of the period, from the publication of A Vindication of the Rights of Women by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792 to the founding of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1887 and the more militant Women's Social and Political Union in 1903. Contemporary newspapers and journals, both in their reviews of the various productions of the play, but also in their assumptions regarding the roles of men and women in society, give some indication of the environment in which the play was being staged. Political discussion in the press and Parliamentary debates reported in Hansard, particularly over the Married Woman's Property Acts and the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, are other indicators of the social climate within which the actresses constructed their Lady Macbeths.

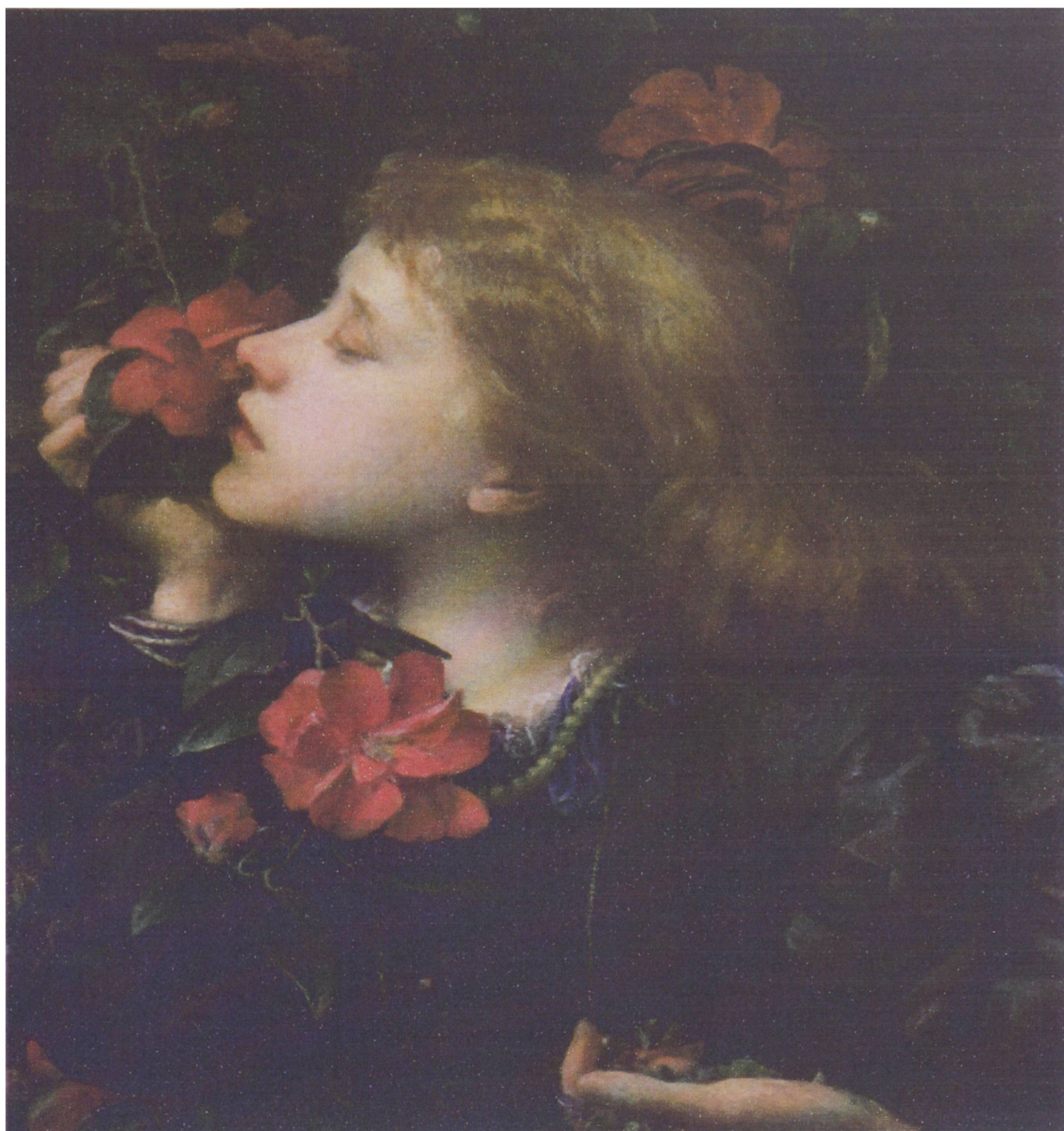
Literature, both prose and poetry, also reflects its society. By the middle of the century the novel had become a highly successful literary form and examples will be offered from both Charles Dickens and the more sensational novels of the period which reflect the role that society expected its women to play and the disquiet felt by some at this rigid positioning. Art is another medium which reflects its society and this thesis concentrates upon a period in which the cartoon was popular. As celebrities, actresses were frequently lampooned as well as appearing in more sympathetic and flattering portraits both as themselves and in their theatrical roles.

Much has already been written about the topics of this thesis, in autobiographies, biographies and in historical, social and stage histories. I have benefited from them all.



1. Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse

By Sir Joshua Reynolds 1784



2. Ellen Terry Choosing

By George Frederick Watts 1864

However I would hope they have not, so frequently, been brought together to argue the important effect of society's conventions upon the realisation of a theatrical role. Siddons, Faucit and Terry, although in their time all equally famous, have been treated differently by posterity. Of the three, Faucit has been almost forgotten, yet, as her most recent biographer, Carol Jones Carlisle remarks, 'at the height of her career, young men were enraptured by her, middle-aged scholars acknowledged her influence, and women seeing in her their own best selves, offered her affection as well as praise' (xiii). Siddons has remained famous, her name still linked with Lady Macbeth. In the recent London exhibition of Sir Joshua Reynolds entitled The Creation of Celebrity (2005) the painting of her as the Tragic Muse was prominently displayed (See picture 1). She was described in the exhibition guide as 'celebrated as the greatest tragic actress of her day... particularly known for her interpretation of Shakespearean heroines, especially Lady Macbeth'. The painting of Terry as Lady Macbeth by John Singer Sargent, has suffered a very different fate. This 'iconic portrait of Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth', which has hung in the Tate Gallery in London for many years has recently been 'retired' (Sunday Times 21 August 2005 Magazine Section p23)ⁱ. Not only has the strong image of Terry been removed, but it has been replaced by the innocent girl portrayed by her first husband G. F. Watts, (See picture 2). In 2004-5, The National Portrait Gallery in London staged a centenary exhibition of his paintings. Among them are some of Terry painted when she was seventeen. The text beside the most celebrated, entitled 'Choosing', suggested that the crushed violets in Terry's hand represented purity while the red roses she is smelling are the temptations of the public life of an actress, from which Watts wanted to save her. In 1864, the year the painting was completed, she chose marriage to Watts.

The first two biographies of Siddons were published by men who had known and seen her on stage. The first, Memorial of Mrs. Siddons, was published by James Boaden in 1827,

shortly before her death. He was a journalist, playwright and in later life the biographer of prominent actors and actresses including her brother, John Philip Kemble. In his Introduction he compares the two: ‘In the brother I found the greatest actor of his time, so in the sister I possessed, in all probability the greatest actress of any time’ (xii). He stressed that the work was free of any input from Siddons as, ‘she had never seen one line of these papers while the author was engaged upon them...’ (xviii). Presumably Siddons would have read Boaden’s biography after publication, but I could find no comment by her. Seven years later, in 1834, another of Siddons’ admirers, the poet Thomas Campbell, published his biography, The Life of Mrs. Siddons. She chose him for the task and gave him a great deal of autobiographical material including Memoranda and Recollections of her Life. Both of these biographies were criticised by her first female biographer, Mrs. A. Kennard. She dismissed Boaden’s accounts as ‘sketchy and meagre’ (v) and thought Campbell ‘wrote so bad a life it’s difficult to conceive’ (vi). Her biography, Mrs. Siddons, was published in 1893 in the Eminent Women series placing Siddons alongside George Eliot, Elizabeth Fry and Mary Wollstonecraft. Kennard, like Siddons’ two earlier biographers, was clearly a great admirer, referring to her frequently as ‘The great Actress’ and praising her respectability as much as her acting skills, perhaps indicating the precarious nature of the life of an actress. The tradition of fulsome biographies continued in 1909 with the publication of The Incomparable Siddons by Mrs. Clement Parsons who ‘attempted to construct an image approximately true of the foremost example of genius in women that this country has produced...’ (vii). During the period of the First World War and the social upheaval that followed no new biographies of Siddons were published but in 1933, perhaps reflecting the fashionable interest in psychology, The Private Life of Sarah Siddons, A Psychological Investigation by Naomi Royde-Smith appeared. Unlike the earlier biographies it did not seek to present her as a domestic goddess but instead highlighted the scandals in her life. Possibly sensing this renewed interest in Siddons, another

biography, Mrs. Siddons by Yvonne Ffrench, appeared only three years later but this and its successor, The Great Sarah written in 1968 by Kathleen Mackenzie, were a return to the hagiography tradition of the earlier biographies. The first attempt to combine an assessment of her acting with a full account of her life was by Roger Manvell, published in 1971, three years after he had written a similar account of Terry. Both of these texts have been useful and are drawn on extensively for this thesis. No more recent biography has been published, perhaps indicating that the respectability which was important to Siddons is not of interest to modern readers. The recent success of Perdita by Paula Byrne, the biography of a contemporary but scandalous actress, Mary Robinson, who was briefly the mistress of The Prince of Wales, would seem to support this.

In the most recent biography, Siddons is no longer the single subject but combined with Terry and Judi Dench. Look to the Lady by Russ Macdonald is a publication of three lectures given in 2002, linking the three actresses through their ‘domination of the English theatre’ (xv) in their respective centuries. In omitting Faucit, Macdonald underlines the obscurity into which she has fallen but Carlisle can find no answer to her own question ‘Why ... is she not better known today?’ (xiii). One reason may be that the only earlier biography was published shortly after her death by her husband, Sir Theodore Martin. His views on the nature of biography, that ‘a responsible biographer should present his subject in an ideal way’ (qtd. in Carlisle xiv) and his grief, which he sought to assuage through the writing of his wife’s life, make it an unreliable text. Her ideas about Shakespeare were collected and published as Some of Shakespeare’s Heroines, but her discomfort with Lady Macbeth was such that she felt unable to write about her, leaving the task to a friend. However her comments on other Shakespeare heroines shed light on her ideas about women, acting and Lady Macbeth.

Faucit’s early career was with William Charles Macready, including her first attempt at Lady Macbeth, but his diaries are personal and while they give a clear picture of the theatre

of the period they do not shed a great deal of light on any of the actors other than Macready himself. Unlike these three contemporary and very personal texts, Carlisle's gives a fuller and more comprehensive picture of the actress and the society in which she acted.

Terry's life and career have been well documented both by her family, her contemporaries, more recent scholars and through her own accounts of her life. Many of the last can be seen at her house at Smallhythe in Kent, where her annotations and comments in still vivid green ink make her the most vibrant of the three actresses in this thesis. During her life-time and with her approval, her friend, the drama critic Clement Scott published his reminiscences of her and of the conversations they had held. After her death both her children published their memoirs of their mother. Her son Gordon Craig, provoked by the publication of her letters to Bernard Shaw in 1929, gives a much sharper portrait, often mixed with self-justification, than his sister Edith, who, writing with her friend Christopher St. John, guards the image of the beautiful actress. Forty years after her death, Roger Manvell published a comprehensive biography which also explored her acting roles. More recently, in 1987, Nina Auerbach's Ellen Terry, A Player in her Time, seeks to explain Terry both within the context of her period and from a feminist perspective. All of these sources and others have been helpful and contributed to the picture of her life and career.

The stage history of Macbeth has been covered in great detail by Dennis Bartholomeusz in Macbeth and the Players (1969) and Marvin Rosenberg in The masks of Macbeth (1978). More recently, in 2004, Bernice Kliman updated her study of Macbeth in the Shakespeare in Performance series. These works make it possible to site the particular characterisations of Siddons, Faucit and Terry as Lady Macbeth within the changing staging and acting tradition of the play. Conversely some have concentrated on certain periods, for example Joseph Donohue in Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age which have been helpful for a particular actress, in this instance Siddons. The importance of the text used in any of the

productions is such that the first chapter includes discussion of the acting versions of Macbeth.

The story of feminism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century has been covered widely and in different ways. Historians such as Lawrence Stone in The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, have taken a chronological route. Biographers have reported the story through the lives of those who lived and influenced the events. Some of these have provided background material, others such as Amanda Foreman's Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire; Claire Tomalin's The Invisible Woman, the biography of Charles Dicken's mistress Nelly Ternan and Mrs. Jordan's Profession, her account of the life of Siddons' comic rival Dora Jordan; and Lyndall Gordon's recently published Mary Wollstonecraft, A New Genus have been crucial in providing not only facts, but also a feel for the time. Legal commentators W. R. Cornish and G. de. N. Clarke in Law and Society in England 1750-1950 have made clear the complexities of the struggles and implications of the various Acts that changed the lives of women during the period, while social historians such as Tracy C. Davis in Actresses as Working Women and Richard Foulkes in Church and Stage in Victorian England have highlighted the complexities of an actress's life.

The sources are extensive and varied, personal and subjective, contemporary or distanced, critical or complimentary: this thesis attempts to take as many different perspectives as possible and through them all to trace the effect of the social expectation for women on the interpretation of the role of Lady Macbeth.

ⁱ A copy of this painting is in Chapter 4 facing page 101.

Chapter 2. The Text and the Actress.

‘A curious thing happened to Macbeth and his Lady on their way to the twentieth century’ comments Rosenberg; their characters were ‘shaped by the cultural fashions of the eighteenth century and by the manipulation of those fashions on the stage’ (73). He calls Garrick ‘the great manipulator of the Shakespearean text’ but also lays some of the blame upon Sir William Davenant. In 1660 Charles II issued a warrant restricting all legitimate theatre to two companies giving the patent for one, the King’s Company, to Thomas Killigrew, the other, the Duke of York’s Company, to Davenant. With these patents went the performing rights to the old texts and Macbeth became the property of the Duke of York’s Company. As an amateur playwright, the Poet Laureate to Charles I and an associate of Inigo Jones, Davenant felt himself, and was seen by others, to be qualified to alter any texts as he saw fit, including Macbeth.

In the ‘Argument’ with which Davenantⁱ prefaced the play Macbeth is a much less complex character than Shakespeare created, needing no prompting to kill the king and proceeding to ‘omit no kind of libendous Cruelty for the space of 18 years’ (35). Lady Macbeth’s role is omitted; there is no mention in the Argument that Macbeth has a wife. Later, in ‘The Persons’ Names’, Lady Macbeth is listed only as ‘Macbeth’s Wife’, identified through her relationship to the male protagonist rather than by any title of her own. The roles of Macduff and his wife are greatly increased, thus lessening the sense of Lady Macbeth’s isolation and her importance within the court.

She is first encountered in the company of Lady Macduff whom she attempts to comfort, a most unlikely action for Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth. Lady Macduff expresses the conventional views of a wife left at home during battle, ‘My Lord, when Honour call’d him to the War, / Took with him half of my divided soul,’ (1.5.6-7). This conventionality is

increased by Macbeth's traditional but un-Shakespearean concern for his wife's well-being. In a new scene, inserted by Davenant towards the end of the play, Macbeth hesitates before going to meet Malcolm's army because, '... the Indisposition of my Wife / Detains me here' (4.4.3-4). In the same scene Lady Macbeth assumes the subordinate female role, blaming Macbeth for allowing her to lead them into the murder of Duncan:

You were a Man.
 And by the charter of your Sex you shou'd
 Have govern'd me, there was more crime in you
 When you obey'd my Councels, than I contracted
 By my giving it. (4.4.54-58)

It is this additional scene, rather than the truncated sleep-walking scene, which leaves the image of Lady Macbeth on the audience's mind. In Davenant's version Macbeth's continuing concern, conspicuously absent in Shakespeare's character, is highlighted by the substitution of Seyton, Macbeth's eyes and ears, for the Doctor. Seyton has been 'sent at this dead time of night to know / Her health...' (5.1.2). In Shakespeare'sⁱⁱ text the Doctor has been told of Lady Macbeth's sleep walking by one of her Gentlewomen, Macbeth is not involved. The last sounds from Davenant's Lady Macbeth are not words but cries, 'Oh, Oh, Oh' (5.1.38). She has become a wordless object 'brought... here', as Macbeth peevishly comments, 'to see my Victims, and not to Die' (5.5.13-14). In contrast, Shakespeare's Lady is still in control, reliving in her sleep, her commands to Macbeth, 'To bed,... come,... give me your hand-... To bed...' (5.1.63-66).

Despite these textual changes, seventeenth century performers of Lady Macbeth, particularly Mrs. Betterton, who briefly played the part between 1672 and 1673 with her husband as Macbeth, managed to instil fear and awe in their audience. Colley Cibber writes admiringly of her 'quick and careless strokes of terror [thrown] from the disorder of a guilty

mind ' (176). Bartholomeusz feels that this indicates: 'Mrs. Betterton interpreted the character... not in the stiff, slow, stately manner of the conventional stage sleep-walker, but more naturally, as Siddons was to do at the end of the eighteenth century' (25).

The change from Davenant's highly visual *Macbeth* described by John Downes as 'drest in all it's Finery, as new Cloath's, new Scenes, Machines, as flyings for the Witches; with all the Singing and Dancing in it'(71) to Garrick's return to a more Shakespearean text reflects a change in audience expectation and taste. Little is known about Downes but in 1706 he produced Roscius Anglicanus: An Historical Review of the Stage from 1660-1706 which lists productions and actors for that period. In the words of his modern editors Judith Milhous and Richard D. Hume, it is 'a surprisingly and impressively specific achievement' (ix). The elite group from the worldly Restoration Court who had enjoyed Davenant's version had, by the early eighteenth century, been replaced by an audience including 'People ... ,who in their original obscurity, could never attain to any higher entertainment than Tumbling and Vaulting and Ladder Dancing, and the delightful diversions of Jack Pudding' (293) complained Downes, bitter that his own adaptation of The Merry Wives Of Windsor was unsuccessful. As the eighteenth century began Shakespeare, if one believes the lines inscribed on Garrick's statue in Westminster Abbey, lay 'in night'. However as the century progressed, interest in Shakespeare grew and he became, according to Michael Dobson, 'a vernacular culture hero, an English antidote to the decadence of continental taste' (63). A Shakespeare Ladies' Club was established in the mid 1730s calling for more plays by Shakespeare to be produced and Garrick responded to that call. To quote his memorial again, 'The actor's genius bade them breathe anew. / Shakespeare and Garrick like twin stars shall shine /And earth irradiate with a beam divine'.

In 1744 Garrick declared his intention to return to Shakespeare, but as Stephen Orgel argues even more forcibly than Rosenberg 'the assertion of authenticity... was not even

approximately true' (15). However while not a total return to Shakespeare, Garrick produced a text of Macbethⁱⁱⁱ which was closer to the 1623 Folio edition while still keeping some of Davenant's additions and adding some of his own. The popularity of this change is strikingly illustrated by the historian Charles Beecher Hogan, who, from his two volume work, Shakespeare in the Theatre 1701-1800, compiled a table to illustrate the 'Order of Popularity of Shakespeare's Plays 1751-1800 and 1701-1800'. Hogan comments that 'The most remarkable fact about the theatrical history of Shakespeare in the second half of the eighteenth century is the almost complete disappearance of those drastically rewritten versions of the original texts' (716). It is arguable that only some of the rewriting disappeared and that rather more than 'brief new speeches were sometimes, though rarely introduced', but the table does give a clear picture of the popularity of the return to a more Shakespearean text. In London between 1701 and 1750 Davenant's version of Macbeth was acted 240 times and what Hogan terms the 'original' only 47. In comparison, between 1751 and 1800, the 'original' was acted 270 times and Davenant's only once (717). During this period Macbeth was second only to Hamlet in popularity.

Mrs. Giffard played Lady Macbeth in Garrick's first production of Macbeth at Drury Lane in January 1744, but it was not until Hannah Pritchard played the part in 1768 that, according to a reviewer in the Universal Museum, 'the audience felt at once the powers of the writer combined with those of the actress' (qtd. in Bartholomeusz 49). Gone were the scenes with Lady Macduff, Lady Macbeth was once more an isolated figure. Her initial strength and dominance were never consciously relinquished. In her final despair she was accepting her fate not trying to escape: 'What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed!' (5.1.53-5). But, while Garrick could allow Lady Macbeth to use Shakespeare's words for her final scene, he could not do this for Macbeth. Rosenberg argues that this 'cruelly constricted the implications of the play' (73). While Lady Macbeth could slough off the repentant tone that

Davenant had given her and become again Shakespeare's 'fiend-like Queen' Garrick could not allow Macbeth to die unrepentant. The 'bloody tyrant' must continue as 'a man of sensibility' (Rosenberg 73). In Davenant's text Macbeth dies on stage with only one line of speech, accepting defeat and recognising what has caused his downfall: 'Farewell vain World, and what's most vain in it, Ambition.' (5.8.41). Garrick, however, needed a more repentant hero, thus in his text, Macbeth admits his guilt as he dies. Ambition is still to blame but this Macbeth must suffer the anticipation of his forthcoming punishment:

Ambition's vain, delusive dreams are fled,
 And now I wake to darkness, guilt, and horror
 I cannot rise! I dare not ask for mercy.
 It is too late, hell drags me down. I sink,
 I sink- Oh!-my soul is lost for ever!
 Oh!. (5.6.74-81).

With the witches' role reduced and with Macbeth portrayed as an honourable but mistaken man lacking only a 'spur / To prick the sides of intent' (1.7.256), something or someone had to be found to be that 'spur' and carry the guilt. Garrick found his 'spur' in Lady Macbeth and, after an initial, not very successful attempt by Mrs. Giffard, he found his own strong actress to play that part. Although Siddons has become permanently associated with the role, her predecessor Pritchard was in many ways the instigator of the towering, forceful Lady Macbeth. She was born in 1711 and had made her name in comedy and critics praised her fluency and clarity but she was clearly also able to use these gifts in tragedy and became Garrick's 'partner in greatness'. In Fuseli's painting of the dagger scene Lady Macbeth, played by Pritchard, is in control of both the situation and her terrified husband (See picture 3). She retired from the stage in April 1768 after a final performance of Lady Macbeth. Garrick played Macbeth only once more with Mrs. Barry playing Lady Macbeth. Few were



3. Hannah Pritchard and David Garrick in the dagger scene.

By Henry Fuseli 1760 – 1766.

able to make a direct comparison between Pritchard and Siddons as their performances were separated by nearly twenty years, but Lord Harcourt saw both and, though a great admirer of Siddons, preferred Pritchard's performance in the sleepwalking scene reporting there was 'not the horror in the sigh, nor the sleepiness in the tone, nor the articulation in the voice' (qtd. in Bartholomeusz 73) in Siddons' performance. She was clearly interested in how her famous predecessor had played the part. She remembers that she 'begged Dr Johnson [for] his opinion of Mrs. Pritchard. . . . He answered 'Madam, she was a vulgar idiot . . . and she never read any part in a play in which she acted except her own'' (Campbell 1. 139). Siddons professed not to believe this of 'the greatest of all Lady Macbeths' yet she could not resist putting it in her Memoranda.

At the beginning of her career Siddons would have used Garrick's text, but when her brother John Philip Kemble took over at Drury Lane, he produced his own versions in 1794^{iv} 1798, 1803, and 1814. Lady Macbeth remained much as Garrick had reinstated her, Shakespeare's lines describing her as the 'fiend-like queen, / Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands / Took off her life,...' continued to be omitted and Macbeth was still the man of sensibility, led astray by an evil wife and dying with Garrick's words of guilt and dread upon his lips, '...my soul is lost for ever...' (5.6.80.)

Although this thesis concentrates on three major actresses of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who are associated with the role of Lady Macbeth, mention should be made of some other notable interpretations of Lady Macbeth in the period. Siddons' performance is remembered as so overpowering that it seems unlikely that there was any competition, but in 1787, two years after she had first played Lady Macbeth at Drury Lane, Mrs. Pope played the part at Covent Garden. She continued to do so for nine years until 1796. The critics both past and present have concentrated upon Siddons. There is no mention of Pope in either Rosenberg's or Bartholomeusz's stage history of the play, but for Covent

Garden to have continued to mount its own production at the same time would seem to indicate that Pope was an acceptable alternative.

Faucit had much less undisputed possession of the role, her chief competitor at the beginning of her career was Warner. Both actresses had been in Macready's company, where the role of Lady Macbeth had, by tradition, been played by Warner. She was, as Shirley Allen points out, 'A handsome and imposing woman... naturally well qualified to play a domineering and regal character' (86). In 1844, two years after Faucit first acted the role, Warner joined Samuel Phelps at Sadler's Wells in Islington, an area of London not usually associated with legitimate theatre at that time. Their venture opened with Macbeth, playing to a full house of over two thousand five hundred people. The play was a success with the audience, but few critics were interested enough to come to Islington and those that did were often more interested in the unusual audience than the performances. The reviewer in the Athenaeum noticed that Phelps' 'declamation thrilled the heart within many a rude bosom' (1 June 1844). The Theatrical Journal acknowledged the rivalry between Faucit and Warner and clearly preferred the more commanding nature of the latter's performance which was 'Marked with a boldness of character no other actress can approach; and her figure, face, and action combine what we consider Lady Macbeth ought to possess' (1 June 1844). For this she 'was most deservedly applauded' (qtd. in Allen 87). In 1851, Warner was again with Macready at Drury Lane where she played Lady Macbeth at his farewell performance in February. Later in the year the press were able to make much of the competition between the two as Faucit played Lady Macbeth at the Olympic theatre. The critics enjoyed comparing them and despite Martin's partisan preference for his wife's portrayal, they generally preferred the more robust and commanding Lady Macbeth of Warner.

Terry is identified with Lady Macbeth for different reasons. She did not play her frequently and her performance was not greeted with almost unanimous praise, unlike those of Siddons

or Faucit. She became famous because she and her stage partner Henry Irving, were the celebrity stage couple of the period and any production in which they appeared became an important theatrical event. For many the interest of Terry's performance lay in her perceived unsuitability for the part. Her appeal as an actress was in her charm and femininity, attributes that did not obviously apply to Lady Macbeth.

Yet if the critics and playgoers preferred a strong Lady Macbeth, society in general had unfavourable views of the actress who played her. This disapproval was of long standing and recognised by those within the profession. In 1897, Irving unveiled a memorial to Siddons at Paddington Green, London. The statue is not of Siddons the actress, nor even the woman, but as the personification of Tragedy. Irving, however, ignored this preference for deification and saw the memorial as 'striking proof . . . that public spirit has sacrificed an ancient social prejudice in homage to a great actress'^v. This 'ancient social prejudice' resulted in an ambiguous view of actresses, frequently making little difference between them and prostitutes. In 1780 when Mary Robinson, then a famous actress and mistress of The Prince of Wales, sat in a side box at the theatre, Society, in the form of the Morning Post, was scandalised. Side boxes were reserved for 'a wife, sister or daughter' and it was the manager's 'duty to refuse them to actresses, swindlers [and] wantons in high keeping' (qtd. in Byrne 135).

In her introduction to Representing Femininity, Mary Jean Corbett questions the validity of extrapolating general principles from individual examples, asking 'can we make our accounts... particular enough... so as to prevent taking a few individual examples as representative of all women's experience?' (9). Her answer to her own question is that if the 'subjects are... carefully situated', it is possible. Although the three actresses in this thesis Siddons, Faucit and Terry, were amongst the foremost and most respected actresses of their generation and, as such, are not representative of their profession, they had to live their

private and professional lives within the context of their society. All three were aware of the thin line that divided respectability from disapproval and of the need to play their off-stage parts within an implicitly agreed framework. Siddons was so conscious of this that in 1792 she felt compelled to forfeit her acquaintance with Mary Wollstonecraft when it became clear that the latter was pregnant with William Godwin's child before their marriage. It was the breaking of the moral code that forced Siddons to act, not Wollstonecraft's public and very controversial views on the nature of women. By the time she was visibly pregnant in 1797, Wollstonecraft had already published her most celebrated work A Vindication of the Rights of Women but, despite the controversy this had roused, it had not caused Siddons to end their acquaintanceship. On another occasion she chose to forgo the opportunity to meet Mary Robinson, who had sent some of her poems through a mutual friend and asked for a meeting. She declined regretfully. In a letter, Siddons acknowledges the fragility but supreme importance of society's approval, admitting: 'One's whole life is one continual sacrifice of inclinations, which to indulge, however laudable or innocent, would draw down the malice and reproach of those prudent people who never do ill' (qtd. in Byrne 311).

As a profession for women, acting was contradictory. It allowed women to work with men and to earn a more equal wage than they could have done in the very limited range of acceptable jobs, yet it carried with it an association of sin and vice. All three actresses upon whom this thesis concentrates were leading members of their profession, appearing only in reputable theatres and acting in respected plays. The name of Shakespeare, above all, gave respectability to any production, but the majority who called themselves actresses had none of these advantages. In Actresses as Working Women, Tracy C. Davis argues:

the actress could not supersede the fact that she lived a public life and consented to be "hired" for amusement by all who could command the price. For a large section of society, the similarities between the actress's life and the prostitute's or

demi-mondaine's were unforgettable and overruled all other evidence about respectability. (69)

By leaving the home space and putting herself on public view the actress contradicted the image of what defined a good woman: this seemed more acceptable to men. It is noticeable that in the social life of all three actresses their friends are frequently men, couples or other women also outside the domestic conventions. Women who had acquiesced in the social strictures of their society seemed to have difficulty accepting those who had ignored them.

This social prejudice was not confined to the actress. In The Obstacle Race Germaine Greer highlights the problems women had to be recognized as professional painters. As a pastime it received approval; as anything more it became threatening. Greer quotes the example of Frances Reynolds who, as a child, was perceived to be more talented than her brother, Joshua. Yet he grew up to become a celebrated painter and she grew up to become his housekeeper. As the nineteenth century progressed women did become painters but their work was 'inspired, led, influenced, taught and appreciated by men' (325). Their success was often short-lived and 'few believed that the practice of art was in itself superior to a life of wedded bliss' (Greer 310). But wedded life was not always bliss. Geraldine Jewsbury, the friend for whom Faucit began to write her thoughts on Some of Shakespeare's Female Heroines, wrote a very successful novel, The Half Sisters in 1848. It is the story of Alice, the legitimate daughter of a prosperous businessman, who marries an older man and her illegitimate half sister, Bianca, who becomes a successful actress. Convention would suggest that the former would live a happy life while Bianca would lead a life at least precarious if not scandalous. Yet it is Alice who falls in love with another man and who, knowing 'there is no pardon or remission of sin in this world or the next ... for wives who are faithless' (286), dies of guilt. After a successful career, Bianca is rewarded by marriage to Lord Melton, thus becoming both a lady and a Lady. The traditional happy ending in which Bianca gives up her

acting makes the book acceptable to her Victorian readership but it also questions traditional conduct in the character of her protégée Carla who, perhaps representing future generations, achieves a career, marriage and happiness. 'In Milan they saw Clara and her husband both supremely happy... and there was every reason to expect she would take the lead amongst English singers...' (396).

The history of acting as a career for women is not one of smooth progression towards respectability. Despite Irving's 1897 comment on the disappearance of an 'ancient social prejudice', it remained problematic. In 1906 a Pictorial Record of 50 Years on the Stage in the Sphere preferred to remember Terry as 'a woman with the sweet face and the tender voice, the noble soul and the loving heart, so sincere, so sympathetic and so overflowing with generous impulses' (28 April), rather than to comment on her as an actress. When she appeared at the Jubilee celebrations with her family in the Much Ado About Nothing tableaux, it was as much the vision of the family that was being celebrated as Terry's life as an actress.

From 1660, when women appeared on the professional London stage, within a system of two regulated theatrical companies, their status had been controversial. The controversy had increased after the death of Charles II, a great supporter of the theatre, in 1685 and by the failing fortunes of the King's Company. Theatre now became part of public entertainment which included a wide variety of spectacle including dance, music, farce and harlequinades, so that, according to Dobson, 'straight drama . . . became . . . only one element on a bill of a perpetual variety show' (60). In 1737 the Stage Licensing Act reasserted the two company system in London which continued until the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843. This allowed an unlimited number of licences greatly increasing the size of the acting profession. The consequences of the 1843 Act for women were threefold. Firstly, the two-company system had offered a secure and recognised framework within which the actresses could learn and

work. Secondly, the huge increase in the size of the profession ended the dominance of the theatrical families who had provided and protected many of the earlier actresses including Sarah Siddons. Thirdly, it broadened the range of theatrical events so that the term ‘actress’ covered a much wider spectrum of activity. Although successful actresses, playing Shakespearean roles, were far removed from the doubtful activities of others in their profession, the distrust and distaste felt by many in society made even their social respectability precarious. Yet the theatre had many advantages as a career for middle-class women who, for whatever reason, needed to earn their own living. In most cases their education had focussed on literature and music, and had stressed the importance of appearance and graceful movement. However it had ignored the more worldly skills, ‘namely indefatigability, worldly knowledge, self-sufficiency, mobility and the freedom to interact with men as colleagues, admirers, pursuers, and economic equals. Therein lay the hazard’ (Davis 16). Siddons, Faucit and Terry dealt with these hazards in different ways, ways that reflected their characters and the changing perceptions of women and actresses during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In his biography of Siddons, Boaden comments that she was lucky to start ‘as an actress when the profession did not disgrace a woman of virtue’ (10). Yet, despite her popularity and success, she never received the official honours given to her brother. She had no doubt that this was because of her sex rather than her theatrical talents. When her brother was given a lavish official dinner to mark his retirement, an honour not accorded to her, she commented to Samuel Rogers, ‘well perhaps in the next world women will be more valued than they are in this’ (qtd. in Richards 81). However, despite this public positioning of brother and sister, Siddons achieved for herself, for other actresses and, to a limited extent other women, an acceptance that they did not need to remain within a domestic space. This she did by combining the life of an actress with a very public commitment to her family and husband,

William. He was her manager and the father of their large family of seven children. Thus she was both a wife and mother and ‘the stateliest ornament of the public mind’ (Examiner, 15 June 1816).

Her role as a public ornament was not only on the stage but also in painting, for, as Robyn Asleson writes in an essay among a collection ‘inspired by an exhibition... of the most compelling portraits of Sarah Siddons’ (vii) held at the Getty Museum in 1999, ‘art provided Siddons with an alternative means of being visible’ (46). Reynolds elevates her from a transient character in a play to the timeless embodiment of the tragic muse. Asleson comments that he was ‘treading well-worn ground in associating Siddons with Melpomene... the historian William Russell had published in 1783 a poetic tribute to Mrs. Siddons entitled ‘The Tragic Muse. Addressed to Mrs. Siddons’’. The statuesque style and classical overtones of the painting exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1784 prefigure a movement towards sculpture as a fashionable medium. In the same collection of essays, Shearer West makes the point that ‘from the 1790s onwards, sculpture became associated with both the seriousness of the classical world and the jingoism of national feeling. Siddons was seen as a fit object for sculpture not least because of her skill with tragedy and her position as a sort of national heroine’ (West 24).

Despite her consciousness of the need for her conduct to be seen to be above reproach and the public support of her husband as manager and father of her many children, she twice found herself in the middle of scandal. The first was through the portrait painter Thomas Lawrence whose affections switched publicly between two of Siddons’ daughters, Sally and Maria. It is arguable that if Siddons had not also been fond of Lawrence she might have been able to deal with the situation more effectively. On a later occasion she encouraged a young Italian actor Galdino, whom she met in Ireland, to come to England to work. She may also have lent him money. His wife publicly questioned their relationship, but there is no mention

of this in either of the biographies written during her life time.

Her success did not protect her from the cartoonists. Siddons had a reputation for being over-concerned with money and this was used by James Gillray who drew Siddons as Melpomene reaching for a bag of gold (See picture 4). If Reynolds had raised Siddons from the human to the allegorical, Gillray brought her down again and clearly showed her human fallibility. But both Reynolds and Gillray acknowledged her popularity and she was able to use this to negotiate with managers and to refuse to recite some of the bawdy or comic epilogues that were customary. It gave her the ability to choose her parts and once her brother took over at Drury Lane, she could concentrate on her best ones. These often combined the respectability of Shakespearean authorship with patrician dignity: amongst her favourite and most played roles were Desdemona, Queen Katherine, Volumnia and, of course, Lady Macbeth. These royal connections spilled out publicly into real life. In January 1783 she 'had the honour of receiving the commands of their Majesties to go to read to them, which I frequently did both at Buckingham House and at Windsor' (qtd. in Richards 84). In 1813 she felt confident enough of this relationship to ask the Prince of Wales to become godfather to her son George. Yet there were very definite limits to this relationship; Lady Macbeth's costume could go to the ball but its famous owner could not. In a letter she wrote, 'though I am not of the rank and condition to be myself at the Prince's ball my fine clothes . . . will have the honour. Lady B has borrowed my Lady Macbeth's finest banquet dress.' (Campbell 366). Although she may not have been a lady by birth, in painting there were no restrictions. In 1785, the year she first performed Lady Macbeth, she was depicted by the society artist, Sir Thomas Gainsborough, as a Lady of Quality (See picture 5).

In 1804 Mary Pilkington published a collection of biographies of notable women. Most of the subjects were dead, royal or at least aristocratic and many were famous through their husbands. It was not a list of those who had become notable for their own talents and



4. Melpomene (Mrs Siddons).

By James Gillray 1784.



5. Sarah Siddons.

By Thomas Gainsborough 1785

Siddons' inclusion is therefore even more surprising. Her entry shows not just her fame and acceptance, but that it had been gained in a profession which society viewed with suspicion. Indeed her inclusion seems to be on account of her having kept her virtue in such a doubtful profession rather than for any excellence within it. In a recent essay Pat Rogers quotes the first lines of Siddons' entry: 'This favourite child of Melpomene has long been the ornament of the English stage, and amidst the various allurements which are naturally attached to such a situation, she has preserved the purity of an unsullied name'. Rogers adds that 'Mrs. Pilkington had the courage to mention some disagreeable stories which had been attached to Siddons... only to dismiss them' (49). Her best testament to this success in combining respectability with fame as an actress is perhaps the report of her death in the Morning Post of Thursday 9 June 1831, in which she is remembered as 'The incomparably grand actress and excellent woman . . . '.

Whereas Siddons had publicly played the role of wife and mother while pursuing her acting career, Faucit chose another route. She too came from an acting family but not a united, respectable one. Her mother left her father in 1821 to live with another actor, William Farren. Faucit, who was only seven, went with her mother, her brothers with their father. Early in her acting career she was publicly embroiled in this continuing scandal. The Sunday Times discussing her acting in scathing tones, managed at the same time to mention her parents. It described her, at the age of twenty-three as:

Miss Helen Faucit... the daughter of Mr. Faucit Saville... when that gentleman's wife eloped with Mr. W. Farren the children were protected by their mother. Miss Faucit's theatrical education has been derived from her mother and Mr. Farren... .
She is, like all persons who have been parroted into all they know, an unequal and inefficient artiste, totally devoid of mind . . . (28 January 1838).

In November 1853, soon after her father's death, her mother was finally able to marry Farren,

but although attending the marriage as a witness, Martin makes no reference to it in his biography of his wife. Her mistrust of marriage is reflected in two comments she made in her diary after a visit to a young couple's wedding: 'What a dreadful leap this into marriage always seems! 'Til death us do part!' and again on the following day she notes that 'they were both very brave' (Martin 287). This fear of marriage may also explain why she took so long to agree to marry Martin. Her mother's scandal perhaps increased press interest in the young actress and history seemed to be repeating itself in 1840 when Faucit became ill. The Satirist hinted clearly and crudely at a suspected pregnancy and the name of the father when it wrote of Faucit's 'delicate state of health, arising from arduous professional exertions while engaged under the "Eminent Tragedian"' (qtd. in Carlisle 78). There seems to be at least a hint of satisfaction that another actress has lived up to the profession's reputation. Yet, this was the last time that scandal was attached to Faucit's name which she continued to use after she married Martin in 1851. Her success in separating herself from the distrust and disapproval so frequently felt by society for her profession is illustrated by a comment from Lady St. Helier that 'Every door was closed against the dramatic profession . . . though Miss Helen Faucit . . . [was an] exception . . .' (qtd. in Carlisle 244), adding that after the 1870s 'conventional rules were swept away'. This change of attitude can not have been the result of one actress's example. It is, however likely that Faucit's very proper conduct, perhaps a result of her early exposure to public scandal; her marriage to a well-connected courtier, the biographer of Prince Albert; and perhaps the manner of her acting which the Scotsman very early in her career described as 'graceful and womanly' (26 April 1845) made her acceptable in society and this may have helped to change the attitude to her profession. Carlisle, while believing that Lady St Helier 'exaggerated' Faucit's acceptability, considers that the 'social change [which] seemed so sudden to her [had] been gradually prepared for and that Helen was among the most effective agents of that change' (244). At her funeral in London the

vicar, the Rev. Dr. Frederic Ridgeway, praised her for having made ‘the stage what it was meant to be... a pulpit streaming forth wondrous influence upon the lives and characters of men...’ (qtd. in Carlisle 268).

The idea that women might need a profession was beginning to gain credence by the middle of the nineteenth century. In A Woman’s Thoughts about Women, the ‘book of Holy Living and holy dying of the Victorian Anglican Sisterhood’ (Showalter xxiii), its author, Dinah Mulock assumes ‘the necessity of something to do’ (80). According to Showalter it was published anonymously, perhaps because of the successful publication of Mulock’s novel John Halifax, Gentleman a year earlier. This is an idealised vision of the Victorian family in which the wife and mother creates a home where the men can retreat and rest from the harsh industrial world. John Halifax is the kind of man ‘who revered all women, simply for their womanhood’ (112). It is a world where only the men work. Thus Mulock, perhaps preferred to remain anonymous when writing an article which accepted the desirability of working women. The article continued that there were ‘numerous replies . . . now current in book, pamphlet, newspaper and review’ (80) which would seem to indicate that society had begun to accept the need for women to have paid work and to question what might be suitable. Her description of the unmarried woman, growing old and devoting her energies to ‘the massacre of old Time’ (67) is chilling and must have had her readers eagerly waiting for the answer to the question ‘what is a woman to do?’ Her answer comes in four chapters, each advocating certain types of jobs. The first is ‘Female Professions’ which includes the traditional governess but also careers in art, literature and on the stage. The former she realistically admits are difficult but they are ‘of a purer and safer kind than that which falls to the lot of the female *artiste*’ (87). This word is so filled with danger that it is written in italics and in a foreign language. The dangers she lists are those that seem to be incompatible with the perceived role of women: the need to leave the domestic, private world

and 'be constantly before the public, not only mentally but physically' (87). But, having made her reader aware of the dangers, she accepts that it is a career many will take.

'Therefore, in this perilous road, double honour be unto those who walk upright, double pity unto those who fall!' (89). The other categories of work are 'Handicrafts', 'Female Servants', whom she dignifies as being 'essential to the welfare of the whole community' (102), and finally 'House-Mother'. None of these carry the dangers of the '*artiste*' and all are extensions of the domestic role that society approved for women. Yet in the middle of the century it was possible for a female writer, albeit in italics and in French, to include acting as a possible career for women. Terry experienced this prejudice against the *artiste* when she married the painter Watts. Caroline Dakers, in a recent study of Watts and his circle, notes that he had justified his marriage to a young girl thirty years his junior as an attempt to 'remove the youngster from the temptations and abominations of the stage' (68).

Public recognition of the theatre as a respectable profession for either sex came slowly, but more slowly for women than for men. Irving, who had turned down a knighthood in 1883, accepted one in 1895. It was another twenty-six years before an actress received similar public approval. The first to receive was not Terry, Irving's partner at the Lyceum, but Genevieve Ward, who was made a Dame in 1921. She was an unlikely candidate for such an honour as she had been born in America and started life as a singer only becoming an actress in 1873 after losing her singing voice. It is arguably a comment on society's or perhaps the establishment's unspoken disapproval of Terry's early history that she had to wait three more years, until 1925, to receive the honour. Her great-nephew, John Gielgud, remembers 'Ellen, of course, had had three marriages, several love affairs and two illegitimate children so that although she and Irving were very honoured guests in my grandparents' house, there was never the devotion biographers would like to suggest' (Listener 19 October 1956).

Despite this personal history, critics and audiences persisted in seeing Terry as the

epitome of all that society hoped for in women. At her Jubilee she was described in language reminiscent of the mid-nineteenth century in its vision of a child-woman, 'There never lived a woman more loveable, more simplehearted or more exquisitely human. The soul of a great woman and the sunny heart of a naïve child - an adorable combination.' (Sphere 28 April 1906). This public adoration of Terry and the financial security it gave her was no more typical of the acting profession at the end of the nineteenth century than it had been for Siddons at the end of the eighteenth; the life of most actresses was still insecure and subject to harassment which society preferred to ignore. In 1897, in an article in an evangelical Christian magazine Great Thoughts, Scott claimed that 'It is nearly impossible for a woman to remain pure who adopts the stage as a profession.' He then went on to say that 'a woman who endeavours to keep her purity is almost of necessity foredoomed to failure' (qtd. in Davis 94). This was received with cries of anger and denial from men, but almost in silence by all the women in the profession. This silence seems to indicate its truth. To agree would have confirmed all prejudices about actresses but to disagree would have 'denied all women's reality and sanctioned widespread practices' (Davis 96).

i. All references to Sir. William Davenant's Macbeth are taken from 'Macbeth' Five Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare. Ed. Christopher Spencer. Urbana; UP of Illinois, 1965. 33-107.

ii. All references to Shakespeare's Macbeth are taken from Macbeth. Ed. A. R. Braunmuller. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997

iii. All references to Garrick's Macbeth are taken from 'Macbeth' The Plays of David Garrick. Ed. Harry William Pedicord and Frederick Louis Bergman. Vol. 3. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1982. 1-74.

iv. All references to Kemble's Macbeth are taken from John Philip Kemble's Promptbooks. Ed. Charles Shattuck. Vol.5. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1974.

v. This speech is held amongst the Bram Stoker papers at the Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon.

Chapter 3. Sarah Siddons.

In the period of almost twenty years between Siddons' first appearance on the London stage as Lady Macbeth in 1785 and her final appearance in 1816, conventions and expectations within society changed considerably. Women increasingly retreated or were encouraged to retreat from the public sphere into the domestic. In the conclusion to his study of the family between 1500 and 1800, Stone writes that after 1790 'the next stage in the evolution of the family was marked by a strong revival of moral reform, paternal authority and sexual repression, which was gathering strength among the middle classes from about 1770, and continued for over a century' (422). This change affected not only society's attitude to women, but also to women on the stage and to the character they were playing. There was no alteration to the law to effect these changes but the application of existing laws and convention became more rigid. In her discussions on Women in an Industrializing Society, Jane Rendall quotes from the eighteenth-century legal commentator Sir William Blackstone, 'by marriage the husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband' (34). Despite this subordination, marriage was the chief aim for girls, certainly within the upper and middle classes. Not only were women aware of the difficulties, they would have been aware of its finality. Divorce was expensive and rare. A. H. Manchester writes: 'Total dissolution of marriage ... could be obtained by persuading Parliament to pass a private Act' but costs 'would probably reach thousands' and thus 'divorce by parliamentary means was available only to the wealthy' (374). Children too were caught in the divorce process. In any dispute over the custody of children the father's rights were paramount. This was true of all levels of society. When the Duchess of Devonshire was discovered to be pregnant by her lover Sir Charles Grey in 1792 she was banished to Europe

and did not see her three children for three years. However if divorce was difficult in the mid eighteenth century, separation had become more acceptable. According to Cornish and Clarke 'the moral perceptions of the Georgian aristocracy made separation common enough, in every variety from the passing to the irrevocable. The great world lowered its disapproval of lovers and their mistresses' (376). But this more permissive climate was short lived, 'about 1790, a sterner, less accommodating attitude began to make itself felt. . . . The new spirit found its way into common law . . . three benches sat en bloc to overrule Lord Mansfield's heresy of treating a wife who had separated voluntarily as a 'femme sole' (378).

The political activities of the Duchess of Devonshire illustrate the brief possibilities of this more open state. Her biographer, Amanda Foreman, comments that: 'The 1780s had been a decade of extraordinary freedom for women' (291). The Duchess had been able to campaign for the Whig, Charles Fox in his Westminster seat during the 1784 election. Horace Walpole describes how 'During her canvass, the Duchess made no scruple of visiting some of the humblest of electors, dazzling and enchanting them by the fascination of her manner, and the power of her beauty and the influence of her rank' (qtd. in Foreman 143). But this freedom was not popular with everyone. Although the Morning Post was very anti-Whig, its comments on the Duchess's canvassing probably reflect a wider antipathy to women taking such a prominent role. In April 1784 it declared 'Ladies who interest themselves so much in the case of elections, are perhaps too ignorant to know that they meddle with what does not concern them, but they ought to know, that it is usual, even in these days of degeneracy, to expect common decency in a married woman' (qtd. in Foreman 136). There were also many cartoons expressing the unease some parts of society felt at such a high profile role for a woman (See pictures 6 and 7). By the time of the subsequent elections in 1788 and 1796, this unease had spread throughout society resulting in a more limited and less visible role for women. Thus, while still supporting Fox as enthusiastically as before, the Duchess of



6. Two Patriotic Duchesses on Their Canvass

By Thomas Rowlandson 3 April 1784



7. The Tipling Duchess Returning from Canvassing

By Aitken 29 April 1784

Devonshire had to work behind the scene rather than be publicly active. When Fox was re-elected, she was asked to organise a victory reception for him. So uneasy did she feel at this public appearance that she wrote to her brother apologising for it: '... I could not bear that you should think that I had been coming forward in a manner unbecoming to any woman-----
-- I therefore repeat it, Dr Br, this was arranged without my knowledge. The little alone that took place was very disagreeable but had not any bad consequence' (qtd. in Foreman 298).

One of the most popular of the many conduct books available at the end of the eighteenth century was Dr. Gregory's Legacy to his Daughters, published in 1774 by the author's son who, like his father, was a Professor of Medicine at Edinburgh University. Before his death in 1773 Gregory had written his 'sentiments on the most interesting points that regard life and manners' (134) in the form of letters to his daughters. This became highly popular as a conduct book and was reprinted many times, including the 1816 edition cited here. There are three separate strands: first Gregory's idea of the intrinsic nature of woman; second how women should behave and third what men want of women. Addressing his female readers, Gregory informs them that women are particularly suited to religion because of 'superior delicacy, your modesty and the usual severity of your education' (136). There is a danger that 'The natural vanity of your sex is very apt to lead you into a dissipated state of life' (137). His advice is not written as suggestions but as a series of commands. His daughters must 'Be careful of humour [which] may sometimes gain you applause but will never procure you respect' (142). Learning must be 'a profound secret, especially from men, who, in general look with a jealous, malignant eye on a woman of great parts and cultivated understanding' (142). Everything must be done to please men, thus 'Consider every species of indelicacy in conversation as shameful in itself and highly disgusting to us' (143). Women must not 'dispel their charm', to do so 'may reduce the angel to a very ordinary girl' (145). The role men want women to assume is not so much human as angelic. This idea is expressed much more fully

in the mid nineteenth-century by Coventry Patmore in his sequence of poems The Angel in the House (1854-1863). This confinement to a domestic sphere, apparent in the Duchess of Devonshire's withdrawal from a public role in politics, is also present in Gregory's advice. His daughters, lower in the social scale than the Duchess, are encouraged to learn 'needlework and knitting' not to enjoy the skills, but to 'enable you to fill up, in a tolerably agreeable way, some of the many solitary hours you must necessarily pass at home' (148).

Frequently printed as an accompaniment to Gregory's Legacy was Hester Chapone's Letters on the Improvement of the Mind. She was one of the early Bluestockings, a friend of Elizabeth Montagu, who had first used the term in a letter in 1756. Its original use was to describe both men and women with intellectual interests but by the late 1770s the term referred only to women. Although the group were 'consistently drawn to the idea of female abilities, ... [they] feared the hostile reactions of the world' (183) according to a recent chronicler of The Blue Stocking Circle, Sylvia Myers. Thus in 1769 Montagu had published her Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare anonymously, only revealing her identity when the reaction was favourable. Joseph Donohue believes that her work is 'unjustly neglected' and that she is the 'first in Macbeth criticism to put in precise language the premise of psychological criticism: words are external signs of mental events' (199). Chapone wrote for more pecuniary reasons and dealt with more concrete matters. Widowed when young, she was faced with the need to earn her living in an age when the options were severely limited. In the mid-1760s she had written a series of letters to her niece which Montagu encouraged her to publish. This she did in 1773 with a dedication to Montagu. It became 'the most widely read work of the first generation of bluestockings' (Myers 231). Queen Charlotte was said to have modelled the Princess Royal's education on it. Like Gregory's work, it was read long after Chapone's death. The editor of her letters, Rhoda Zuk,

includes a comment by Ann Elwood, made in 1843, that it ‘still remains a standard work upon female education which has perhaps never been surpassed’ (Chapone 259).

Gregory’s Legacy and Chapone’s Letters make for interesting comparisons, the first written by a man to his daughters, the second by a woman to her niece. Both were first published in 1773, the year in which the eighteen year old Sarah Kemble married the young actor, William Siddons. At first glance Chapone’s Letters seem to echo Gregory’s. Of the ten letters, the first three deal with the importance of reading the Scriptures, ‘The sacred volume must be the rule of your life’ (266). Letters Four and Five, On the regulation of the Heart and Affections, Letter Six, On the Government of the Temper, and Letter Seven, On Economy, make few points with which Gregory would not agree. But the last letters indicate a higher expectation of women and includes the study of Shakespeare who was ‘not only incomparably the noblest genius in dramatic poetry but the greatest master of nature and the most perfect characteriser of men and manners’ (333). Over 30 years later, a new generation of girls reading Chapone’s advice, may already have become acquainted with Shakespeare through Charles and Mary Lamb’s Tales from Shakespeare, first published in 1807. In their version of Macbeth, he is a complex character, she is simply ‘a bad ambitious woman ... who cared not much by what means’ (164) they achieved the crown. The Lamb’s re-reading of Shakespeare is an early example the appropriation of his characters to validate a social construct. Chapone’s impressive expectation of women’s education, not for financial gain but for their own, and their family’s benefit, contradicts Gregory’s more condescending views on the very limited potential of women and the narrow confines within which they could be expected to contribute.

Chapone does not mention visiting the theatre but Gregory devotes twenty-five lines to the danger of comedy which ‘no lady can see, without a shock to delicacy’. Tragedy, however ‘subjects you to no such distress: its sorrows will soften and ennoble your hearts’ (150) and is

therefore permissible. This perception of the difference in respectability between comedy and tragedy is illustrated by the different public perception of Siddons, the great tragedian and Jordan, a great comic actress. Her contemporary at Drury Lane, Jordan was in many ways Siddons' equal. The Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser commented that 'It is a subject of considerable bets among the theatrical amateurs which actress brings the greatest receipts to Drury Lane theatre, Mrs Jordan or Mrs Siddons' (12 October 1788). Yet Jordan died in France in poverty and obscurity. Even the exact date of her death is uncertain. Her funeral was sparsely attended and she was buried in St. Cloud just outside Paris. By contrast, Siddons was feted in retirement and her funeral was grand and public, although some commentators, noticeably in the press, were beginning to question the social acceptability of the stage as a career for women. Jordan's popularity might have equalled that of Siddons but her respectability was always more questionable. Not only was she a comic rather than a tragic actress but she also had a very different private life. Throughout Siddons' career she was very conscious of the need to keep her private and public lives separate. Once she was on stage, Boaden commented, 'I never felt the least indication that she had a private existence' (159) but however far apart she managed to keep the two, her public life still had to be entirely blameless. As the mistress of the Duke of Clarence, the third son of King George III, the press made sure that Jordan had no private life. The Gillray cartoons of the time are particularly explicit and cruel (See picture 8). In 1811, when the Duke's brother, George became Regent for their father, the Duke of Clarence was encouraged to make a respectable marriage. The treatment of Jordan was harsh, as a mistress and as an actress, she had no status. 'The plan was that she should lose both her home and her career' (259) according to her biographer, Claire Tomalin.

It is against this social background that Siddons' interpretation of the role needs to be considered. Her *Lady Macbeth* was being watched by and judged by an audience for whom



8. The Lubber's Hole, alias The Crack'd Jordan.

By James Gillray

the expectations of women changed between her first appearance in 1785 and her retirement in 1816. Is it possible to see in Siddons' interpretation of Lady Macbeth an acknowledgement of the shift towards the more confining domestic role that was taking place during the twenty-seven years in which she played the part?

To this question the answer, from all available evidence seems to be: 'No, despite these social changes her interpretation of the role remained constant.' Siddons took possession of the role on 2 February 1785 at the age of thirty-one and made few changes over the next twenty-seven years. One of her biographers, Boaden, commented 'She was so profound, that her judgement settled once, and for ever' (159). Yet, if Siddons did not alter her performance during her acting career, her thoughts on the character, written shortly after leaving the stage, indicate that she was not unaware of the changes which were taking place in her society. Her vision of Lady Macbeth as 'fair, fragile . . . feminine' (2.10) which she suggested to her other contemporary biographer, Campbell, is one that her increasingly patriarchal society would have appreciated. It perhaps reflects the shifts in society that Siddons ignored in her acting but felt obliged to acknowledge in retirement. The gap between this vision and the reality of her performance is made clear by Campbell: 'Mrs Siddons's idea of her having been a delicate blonde beauty seems to me to be a pure caprice. The public would have ill exchanged such a representative of Lady Macbeth for the dark locks and the eagle eyes of Mrs Siddons' (2: 55). But if she did not alter her interpretation a further question arises. Why did the changing audience continue to accept a performance which would seem to be increasingly out of touch with its culture?

Before trying to answer that it is necessary to look in detail at the role of Lady Macbeth which Siddons carved out for herself so successfully. Although very much her own creation, for there were no directors in the late eighteenth century to suggest particular interpretations, other constraints did exist. The first was an expectation from the audience that the part would

be played in a certain manner. The second was the calibre and interpretation of the actor playing Macbeth. The most powerful actor of her generation was, according to Manvell, John Henderson, but he was at Covent Garden, so Siddons had first to play Lady Macbeth with the 'accomplished, gentlemanly' William Smith (Manvell 89). Many critics commented regretfully on the imbalance between the two actors and the negative effect this had on the relationship between the characters. Later her actor-manager brother, John Philip Kemble, took over the role and provided more of a foil for her interpretation. The third constraint would have been the text in use and the fourth the physical effects of the theatre in which the production took place.

When Siddons first played Lady Macbeth in London at Drury Lane the text was still David Garrick's, which had first been used in 1744. Later her brother introduced his own version for the 1794 opening of the new Theatre Royal at Drury Lane. However the difference between the two texts is slight. Both Garrick and Kemble cut Lady Macbeth from the scene in which Duncan's death is discovered. The image of the strong queen is not to be undermined by any human frailty. Both removed Davenant's additions to the Macduffs' role. Indeed they removed so much that they took out Shakespeare's text as well as Davenant's. The murder of Lady Macduff and her children no longer takes place on stage although it is still threatened by Macbeth and described by Ross. One of the effects of this is that the gap between Lady Macbeth's appearance in the banquet and sleep-walking scenes is shorter, giving the audience no time to forget her. It also isolates Lady Macbeth within a male world and removes an alternative female role model, one far more in keeping with the expectations of the audience. In the final speech of the play Kemble's text is kinder to both Macbeths. Garrick had reinstated Shakespeare's description of the couple as 'this dead butcher, and his fiend-like Queen' (5.7.99.) and had also included the line suggesting Lady Macbeth had committed suicide 'tis thought, by self and violent hands/Took off her life....' (5.7.100-1). In

Kemble's text the final image of Lady Macbeth is that of the sleep walker, still in command, still issuing orders and accepting what they have done. 'To bed, to bed - there's knocking at the gate - come, come, come, come, give me your hand - what's done, cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed' (5.1.64-7).

Siddons first played Lady Macbeth in the second Drury Lane; built in 1674 and renovated by the Adam brothers in 1775, it had a capacity of about 2000 (Mander and Mitchenson 64). It was here, for her benefit on 2 February 1785, that London critics and audiences first saw Siddons as Lady Macbeth. Next morning the words used to describe her were those that clung to her Lady Macbeth throughout her career. 'Her acting was by far the finest heroic we have ever seen. . . . Mrs Pritchard sinks into comparative futility when the sublime and terrible graces of Mrs Siddons are before us' (Morning Chronicle 3 February 1785). This comment would have been particularly welcome to Siddons for, as Sprague points out, 'there were the challenging memories of Mrs. Pritchard to meet' (Shakespearean Players 58). The reviewer in the Morning Post and Daily Advertiser, felt that she was to be commended 'for fixing upon a part to which in figure, countenance and manner she is so particularly adapted'. It continues by noting that 'the total absence of the pathetic . . . was suited to the masculine ferocity of the heroine of this drama' (3 February 1785). The Daily Universal Register, not yet known as The Times but already thundering, commented:

It would be falling into the absurd cant of vulgar criticism were we to describe the particulars of her various excellencies. We shall therefore briefly say, that the bold and horrid traits of female resolution involved in a complication of human wickedness, which the poet has so masterfully drawn, were never known to be so powerfully represented on the stage. (3 February 1785)

In all these early reviews the character of her Lady Macbeth is clear and it remains the one that critics continued to see for the next twenty-seven years.

In 1794 this relatively small theatre was replaced by a larger Drury Lane with 'a capacity of 3611' (Mander and Mitchenson 64). The opening production on 21 April 1794 was Macbeth using Kemble's text. The Times notes: 'Its numerous improvements in scenery, dress and decoration' and 'an audience which has very rarely indeed, if hardly ever graced a theatre.' Most attention was paid to 'the boldest of alterations that of laying Banquo's ghost and making the troubled spirit visible only to the mind's eye of the guilty and distracted tyrant' (22 April). This change divided critical reaction. Campbell calls it 'An innovation . . . the absurdity of which I am surprised that there should ever have been two opinions' (2: 185), but the Morning Chronicle thought 'every critical mind must agree with Mr. Kemble' (22 April). Perhaps the familiarity of Siddons as Lady Macbeth had made original comment difficult for the critics. Certainly they seemed to prefer describing the elaborate effects. 'The evil spirits had serpents writhing round them which had a striking effect, and they would be more so if they were more elastic' (Morning Chronicle 22 April 1794). Compared with this, praise of Siddons was limited, as if they had exhausted their vocabulary. The Times can only note that Kemble and Siddons 'feeling the inspiration of the evening were never more themselves'. Bartholomeusz, however, notes that 'the stage speech of both Kemble and Mrs. Siddons seemed to become slower as the years went by ... partly the result of an instinctive effort to be heard' (140-1) in such a vast space.

In 1802 Kemble, after many arguments with Sheridan, left Drury Lane and went with his sister to Covent Garden. This was a return to a smaller theatre with a capacity of 1897. If this affected Siddons' interpretation neither Boaden, Campbell, or any of the critics thought it worthy of mention. The final change of theatre came in 1808 when Covent Garden burnt down and a new one was built in its place. This was on the grand scale, a return to audiences of 3000. Its opening in September with Siddons as Lady Macbeth is famous for the O. P. riots. These organised disturbances took place throughout the season, demanding a return to

the Old Prices of tickets. Kemble blamed the rise in prices on the high cost of the new theatre but, according to Leigh Hunt: 'the public ... neither does nor will believe a syllable respecting any plea of necessity' (167). The demonstrators were well organised, noisy and frequently violent. Even Siddons in her most famous role could not control them. After sixty-one nights of disturbances, 'Kemble had to submit to public demand and make a formal apology' (Mander and Mitchenson 55). Writing to her daughter Siddons complained 'I think it very likely that I shall not appear any more this season, for nothing will induce me to place myself in so painful and degrading a situation' (qtd. in Manvell 295).

Despite these changes in the theatres, there are no indications that Siddons altered her playing of the character to accommodate them. As the theatres grew larger her only comment was that she was glad she had learnt her craft when theatres were smaller. It was within these physical and textual limitations and influenced by the interpretation of her leading man that Siddons constructed her Lady Macbeth.

There are five main contemporary sources of information as to how she did this. Two describe specific performances, one as a series of notes on a performance in Edinburgh in 1809 witnessed by Professor George Bell and the other the accounts of the play given by the newspaper and magazine critics. The other three sources are more general and reflective. The first is Siddons herself and the other her two biographers, Boaden and Campbell.

The contemporary critics did not speak with one voice. Siddons was linked to the Whig party through her association with Sheridan, a prominent Whig, and by the Duchess of Devonshire who had seen Mrs. Siddons act in Bath. Siddons told Campbell that 'My good reception in London I cannot but partly attribute to the enthusiastic account of me which the amiable Duchess of Devonshire has brought hither, and spread before my arrival' (1:89).

Thus, while such Whig papers as the Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser were well disposed to her, an anti-Whig newspaper like the Daily Herald was more likely to see the

faults. William Woodfall, the founder and editor of another Whig newspaper, the Morning Chronicle, was described by a contemporary source cited in Henry Bourne's history of the English press, English Newspapers, as being 'so passionately fond of theatrical representations as never to have missed the first performance of a new piece for at least forty years, and the public had so good an opinion of his taste that his criticisms were decisive of the fall or fortune of the piece and the performer' (219). All these newspaper accounts give a picture of one performance written either during or just after the event.

Professor G.J. Bell was, according to H. C Fleeming Jenkin who published Bell's account of Siddons' performance, 'well known by his friends to be a man of fine taste and keen sensibility' (79). He was a Professor of Scottish Law at the University of Edinburgh and wrote the notes either during or soon after seeing Siddons play Lady Macbeth in Edinburgh in 1809. This is a first-hand account of a particular performance by an expert and openly partisan witness who was clearly an admirer of Siddons: 'Of Lady Macbeth there is not a great deal in the play, but the wonderful genius of Mrs Siddons makes it the whole' (qtd. in Jenkin 79).

Siddons' two contemporary biographers, Boaden and Campbell, give a composite picture of Lady Macbeth over which they had time to reflect. Both were avowed admirers of Siddons but Campbell might have felt less inhibited in his writing as his biography was published three years after her death. The final source is Siddons herself. Her account is retrospective, written it would appear in about 1813. Campbell published his biography in 1834 and claimed that Siddons 'showed me her remarks some nineteen years ago' (I: 44). The document was therefore written a year after her retirement and included in her official biography. There is no indication from Siddons as to whom she was addressing her Recollections and Memoranda and because of the gap between her handing them to Campbell and the publication of his biography, they were never made public in her lifetime. Nor did she

include Lady Macbeth in the frequent public talks she gave in retirement. However, of all her roles it is the one she discussed most fully in her Recollections and the one with which she is inextricably linked. It is therefore likely that these notes on her performance of Lady Macbeth are at times a rewriting of a portrayal which, forged in the 1780s, was out of keeping with the social climate of the early nineteenth century. Thus it is necessary to try to separate the fact from the fiction and to find those instances where she is reflecting on her actual playing of a certain scene from those which are written for the benefit of her more patriarchal nineteenth century readers.

Although Lady Macbeth's influence on Macbeth is critical, her appearances are limited to five discrete incidents: the letter scene, the welcome to Duncan, the murder, the banquet and the sleepwalking scene. In all of these she is contained within a domestic setting, an idea audiences in the late eighteenth century and even more the early nineteenth century would have found entirely appropriate. The stage directions for both Garrick and Kemble's productions emphasise the interior world of Lady Macbeth, a world that is her husband's not her own. In Garrick's text she is first encountered in 'an apartment in Macbeth's castle' (1.5.S.D) or, according to Kemble, 'A room in Macbeth's castle' (1.5. SD). Her greeting to Duncan takes place within the limits of the castle boundaries, at 'the gate of Macbeth's castle' (1.6.SD), or, in Kemble's version, 'Before Macbeth's castle gate' (1.6.SD). The site may alter slightly, the ownership of the site does not. The public language also stresses Lady Macbeth's conventional domestic role. Both texts follow Shakespeare in this instance. Macbeth always refers to her as 'My wife' or, at the banquet, 'Our hostess'. This echoes Duncan's unwittingly ironic use of the term. In each of his three brief speeches addressed to her at the castle gate he too calls her 'hostess'. On two occasions this is prefixed by a courteous adjective 'honoured' or 'Fair and noble' (1.6.25).

In the first of Lady Macbeth's scenes her doubts of Macbeth's ability to achieve his ambition were suggested, according to Bell, by 'a slight tincture of contempt'. It was also clear that 'he had imparted to her his ambitions, thoughts and wishes' (qtd. in Jenkin 82). Bell gives a vivid picture of both the vocal and physical presence of Lady Macbeth in this, her first scene: 'Low, very slow sustained voice, her eye and her mind occupied steadfastly in the contemplation of her horrible purpose, pronunciation almost syllabic, not unvaried. Her self-collected solemn energy, her fixed posture, her determined eye and full deep voice of fixed resolve never should be forgot, cannot be conceived nor described' (qtd. in Jenkin 83). The balance of the relationship between Lady Macbeth and her husband is apparent by the end of this scene. As she says 'Leave all the rest to me' (1.5.73) Bell notes that she was 'Leading him out, cajoling him, her hand on his shoulder, clapping him' (qtd. in Jenkin 84). The critics also commented on this imbalance in the relationship although they seem to attribute it to the unequal abilities of the actors. The Morning Chronicle did not approve: 'The Lady of Macbeth was what it should not be - and what with a performer equal to the part of Macbeth it could not be - the first character in the play' (3 October 1785). The Public Advertiser's review of 5 February 1758 highlights this difference by giving thirty lines of praise to Lady Macbeth and only five lines of comment to Macbeth. Later in the same month, under the heading 'The Siddons' it questioned 'What is wanting to make Macbeth the wonder of the world but more becoming co-operation with the Lady?' (28 February 1785). These critics were judging the play on a dramatic level, but as, Rosenberg comments, both actors were 'aware of the times and they bought the familiar acceptable characterization: fierce, eagerly murderous wife; noble reluctantly murderous husband' (76). Boaden gives a very full description of this scene:

The first scene of Lady Macbeth is decisive of the whole character. She lets out in a few lines the daring steadiness of her mind, which could be disturbed by no scruple,

intimidated by no danger. The occasion does not change the nature here, as it does her husband. There is no struggle after any virtue to be resigned. She is as thoroughly prepared in one moment, as if visions of greatness had long influenced her slumbers; and she had woken to meditate upon the means, however dreadful, that could secure her object. (32-3)

Siddons' own account acknowledges the unequal balance between husband and wife although she makes no reference to the unequal balance between the two actors. She seems to want to identify from the beginning, a moral difference as well as a difference in strength of character, thus she finds 'that though ambitious, he is yet amiable, conscientious, nay pious; and yet of a temperament so irresolute and fluctuating as to require all the effort, all the excitement which her uncontrollable spirit and her unbounded influence over him can perform' (Campbell 2: 15). She also highlights the lack of affection for her husband which she sees in Lady Macbeth, 'she never betrays one symptom of affection towards him' (Campbell 2:16). I would suggest that in this, written in the early nineteenth-century, Mrs Siddons, the nineteenth-century woman rather than the eighteenth-century actress, is already excusing the man and blaming the woman for the impending crime. However, it is a judgement her contemporary male critics do not appear to have made. Writing in the more open society at the end of the eighteenth century and witnessing Siddons' performance, they were willing to accept the 'virago', almost to admire her wickedness and certainly to admire Siddons' portrayal of it.

In the second of Lady Macbeth's scenes she is at her most feminine and gracious, the epitome of domestic duty as she greets her King. 'Dignified and simple. Beautifully spoken; quite musical in her tones and in pronunciation, soothing and satisfying to the ear' (qtd. in Jenkin Bell 84). Boaden describes it as 'the beautiful reception of Duncan at Inverness' in which 'the honoured hostess received his Majesty with all the exterior of profound

obligation' (7). The hollow nature of this welcome is noted by Siddons, 'She flies to welcome the venerable gracious Duncan, with such a show of eagerness as if allegiance in her bosom sat crowned with devotion and gratitude' (Campbell 2: 16). In writing of this scene she has no need to try to alter the memory of her playing: by welcoming the king to her home Lady Macbeth was apparently behaving in a way of which even Gregory would have approved. Yet this conventional graciousness is subverted by the complicity of audience and character in the knowledge of what she is planning, which she has made plain to both Macbeth and the audience in the previous scene, 'O never/Shall sun that morrow see' (1.5.60-1). Bell's notes show that Siddons inserted a second 'never', with 'a strong dwelling emphasis on 'never' with deep downward inflection' (qtd. in Jenkin 83). The critics, however, did not linger on this scene.

The next has many names. The Public Advertiser refers to 'The Dagger Scene' (14 February 1785), the Morning Post and Daily Advertiser to 'The murder of Duncan' (3 February 1785) and the Chronicle and London Advertiser simply to 'The Murder' (4 February 1785). It is, in fact, two scenes divided by an encounter between Macbeth and Banquo. In the first, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are in private, in the second in the hall of the castle. The obvious change in place underlies the change in mood. In the privacy of the apartment Bell noted that as Lady Macbeth, Siddons:

feels her way, observes the wavering of his mind; suits her earnestness and whole manner to it. With contempt, affection, reason, the conviction of her well concerted plan, the assurance of success which her wonderful tones inspire, she turns him to her purpose with an art in which the player shares largely in the poet's praise. (qtd. in Jenkin 81)

But in the larger, formal setting of the hall this confidence wavers. Now, isolated amongst her husband's guests, she wears 'a ghastly smile... breathes with difficulty' (88). For the first

time 'her horror changes to agony and alarm at his derangement, uncertain what to do' (89). At the end of this scene Bell suggests new words 'alarm..agony... mournful' (qtd. in Jenkin 89) have taken over. The impact this scene made on its audience, even at the end of Siddons' career when she agreed to come out of retirement at the request of Princess Charlotte in 1816, is clear from an account in Chambers Journal. Writing 'half a century' later, Chambers still recalls :

What a whisper was hers. 'He is about to do it!' distinctly audible in every part of the house, it served the purpose of the loudest tones . . . Then the face . The stage was darkened but I was so near to Lady Macbeth that the countenance of her wonderful interpreter, with all its powerful workings was plainly visible, and even then with nothing to aid the fancy I beheld that terrible mixture of hope, apprehension and resolution which no other actress has since been able to effectively portray. I was spellbound. (607)

There were minor criticisms:

The taunt following from 'Was the hope drunk ?' was a little overdone . . . But barring these few defects, which like a few maculae on the surface of the sun, scarcely do not at all dim its radiance, and are not perhaps discoverable without that much magnifying power - barring these defects, the Lady of Macbeth was everything of which the art was capable. (Chronicle and London Advertiser 14 February 1785)

Boaden was less hyperbolic but no less admiring as he expressed the patriarchal view of his society: 'This really beautiful and interesting actress did not at all shrink from standing before us as the true and perfect image of all natural and moral depravations - a fiend-like woman' (137). In her comments on the scene Siddons is even more clearly taking the guilt upon her character, calling her Macbeth's 'evil genius, his grave-charm... [who] chases the gathering drops of humanity from his eyes, and drives before her impetuous and destructive career all

those kindly charities, those impressions of loyalty and pity and gratitude, which but the minute before, had taken full possession of his mind' (Campbell 2: 17).

This is Lady Macbeth at her most powerful and it is an image neither Garrick nor Kemble wanted to destroy quickly. The tricky question, therefore, of whether or not Lady Macbeth faints as Duncan's murder is discovered is solved by removing her from the scene, 'a stupid theatrical tradition' (62) according to Sprague. Boaden disagreed strongly with this tradition:

There Lady Macbeth ought most assuredly to be. She is the last of human beings to have absented herself on such an occasion as a night alarm, because her absence could not be fairly accounted for in the first place and in the second, she had fully prepared her mind to act what she thought the occasion demanded. (139)

Siddons makes no comment at all on her absence from the scene. In her account she moves directly from the murder, when still the instigator of the action she 'hurries him away to their own chamber,' (Campbell 2:21) to the short scene before the banquet when the mood has changed. She offers no insight as to how she played this moment but she certainly saw it as crucial. Using biblical language she comments 'but the peace that passeth all understanding is lost to her for ever, and the worm that never dies already gnaws her heart' (Campbell 2: 21-2). It is difficult not to see this as Siddons describing how her 'fair, feminine ... fragile' Lady Macbeth might have felt rather than how she herself acted the scene. If the critics had seen this rapid change of character they would surely have commented on it. Bell noted that 'Nought's had, all's spent' was spoken with 'great dignity and solemnity of voice; nothing of the joy of gratified ambition'. At the end of this speech on '... what's done is done' (3.2.13), Bell felt there 'should not be contemptuous reproach but deep sorrow and sympathy with his melancholy' (91). The use of 'should' indicates that Bell had definite ideas as to how this scene should be played but he gives no hint whether or not this was the way that Siddons chose. There is then the brief exchange between Macbeth and his wife:

Macbeth. Thou knowest that Banquo and his Fleance lives.

Lady Macbeth. But in them nature's copy's not eterne (3.2.41-2).

Boaden is certain that, played by Siddons, Lady Macbeth is 'ready to suggest the murder of the nobleman and his son' (140). Bell, too, sees 'a flash of former spirit and energy' (qtd. in Jenkin 92) in this line. Both were clearly sensing what Siddons was signalling for her comment on this exchange is: 'so far from offering any opposition to Macbeth's murderous designs, she even hints, I think, at the facility, if not the expediency, of destroying both Banquo and his equally unoffending son, when she observes that "in them Nature's copy is not eterne"' (Campbell 2: 30). In this instance she does not need to try change the record, the critics also clearly saw her take the responsibility for this crime. It is in accord with her earlier comments on Lady Macbeth as Macbeth's 'evil genius'.

The banquet scene gave rise to a great deal of press interest, as much as an excuse for satirical jibes at Siddons, as for genuine dramatic comment. The Public Advertiser asked 'Could the art of painting have survived the loss of Sir Joshua Reynolds had he died of indigestion in consequence of the profuse suppers she lately gave him?' (3 February 1785). But there was also praise. On the same day, the Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser wrote: 'her banquet scene was excellence itself, the anxiety; the fear lest her lord should discover himself to his guests and disclose the murder, the manner of her dismissing the company, and the reproving of Macbeth's timidity, were amongst the best acting that the stage has ever boasted.' Bell notes her 'secret uneasiness, very fine, suppressed but agitating her whole frame'. Later she 'descends in great eagerness, voice almost choked with alarm to prevent them questioning him' (qtd. in Jenkin 94). Bell clearly saw what Siddons was trying to convey. She told Campbell that Lady Macbeth only 'affects to resume her wonted domination over him'(2:26). The over-eager manner that some critics disliked is her character's way of coping while 'dying with fear...she entertains her wondering guests with

frightful smiles, with over-acted attention, and with fitful graciousness, yet incessantly labouring to divert their attention from her husband' (Campbell 2: 27). Boaden and the audience clearly loved it. 'The address displayed here drew down a thunder of applause' (142).

By omitting the murder of Lady Macduff and her children on stage, both Garrick and Kemble shortened the space between the banquet scene and Lady Macbeth's final appearance. The image of her, dressed as the Queen, publicly at her most powerful, is therefore contrasted more starkly with the sleepwalking scene which, for many, was also her finest. Boaden commented: 'every audience appeared to wonder why the tragedy proceeded further when at the final exit of Lady Macbeth its very soul was extracted' (150). Indeed on her retirement night it 'became the last scene ... for after her exhibition of a tortured conscience the company would hear no more' (Morning Chronicle 30 June 1812). The Public Advertiser endorsed Boaden's enthusiasm for 'the sleeping scene - the last and most perfect work that ever came from Mrs Siddons hand - and we think - we are not too enthusiastic in saying - the greatest act that has in our memory adorned the stage' (24 February 1785).

Neither of these admiring comments actually give an idea of how she played the scene.

From her first appearance in the part Siddons broke with tradition and put the candle down instead of carrying it throughout the scene as her predecessors had done. This was her own idea for 'she urged the impracticality of washing out that 'damned spot' with the vehemence that was certainly implied both by her own words and by those of her gentlewoman' (Campbell 2: 38) if she continued to hold the candle. Bartholomeusz also comments that 'her acting was an intellectual discipline, the product of judgement and observation as much as feeling ... and the originality of her sleep-walking scene ... arose from the fact she had observed a somnambulist in real life' (98). Sheridan did not like this new idea and just before the play began 'even at this moment of anxiety and terror ... wanted [her] to adopt another

mode of acting the sleepwalking scene' (Campbell 2: 38). This incident illustrates just how little rehearsal and direction actors had: it was assumed they would follow the tradition and Sheridan was horrified to discover, at this very late stage, that Siddons intended to break it. This new 'vehemence' was noted and approved by some critics:

By the single circumstance of putting down the candlestick on the table, she acts as consequently as Shakespeare meant her to do; and as we all of us know is done in actual slumbering agitation. Thus the two hands being at liberty, she can and does go through her accustomed action, and seen washing her hands. This improvement may also be transformed into the performance of other actresses. (The Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser 14 February. 1785).

Later this 'vehemence' became too pronounced for some. In 1789, the same paper, while hesitating 'to differ from this great artist but we must say that in her scene in the fifth act she was too alert, too active, too rigorous for the just emotion. We never before saw her so violent' (19 September). Nor did Bell like the 'vehemence'. 'I should like her to enter less suddenly. A slower and more interrupted step more natural' (qtd. in Jenkin 95). At the end of the Banquet scene he had seen her as 'Feeble now, as if preparing for her last sickness. Very sorrowful - quite exhausted' (94). This renewed vigour did not develop the impression of weakness he had perceived earlier. By the end of the scene Bell was hearing not only exhaustion but madness. His last comment is not on the string of imperatives which are Lady Macbeth's final words, but on her 'Oh, oh, oh.' 'This is', according to Bell, 'not a sigh. A convulsive shudder - very horrible. A tone of imbecility audible in the sigh '(qtd. in Jenkin 96). The white gown that Siddons adopted for this scene certainly suggested the madness that Bell was sensing but she makes no comment on this choice of dress. Boaden did not see the weakness noted by Bell, to him 'her actions had wakeful vigour'. His last image is of strength. To him Lady Macbeth 'hurried to resume the taper where she left it, that she might

with all speed drag her pallid husband to their chamber' (145). This active, commanding behaviour is what most critics and audiences wanted and saw. Donohue comments on the:

high concentration on military qualities. Mrs. Siddons' emphasis on 'the valour of my tongue' suggests a Lady Macbeth who assumes the role of general, systematically attacking Kemble's Macbeth at the weak point of his supposed unmanliness to dominate him completely. At the same time deliberately assaulting the fortress of her own femininity, Mrs Siddons conquers the natural frailty of womankind in order to gain the monarchy for her spouse... in doing so [she] precipitates their tragic end. (267-8).

But what of Siddons' retrospective idea of the scene? Could she leave Lady Macbeth to posterity, in this her final scene, still in command, still seemingly unrepentant and unpunished? Clearly, by the time she came to write her Reminiscences, introducing the 'fair fragile' Lady Macbeth, the answer must be 'No'. Thus we read from Siddons, 'Behold her now with wasted form, with wan and haggard countenance, her starry eyes glazed with the ever burning fever of remorse, and on their lids the shadow of death' (Campbell 2: 31). She calls Lady Macbeth 'the wretched creature' in 'an appalling scene'. She feels that 'her feminine nature, her delicate structure . . . are soon overwhelmed by the enormous pressure of her crimes.... Her frailer frame and keener feelings have now sunk under the struggle' (Campbell 2:32-3). It is this image that George Henry Harlow preferred to paint, catching, according to West, 'the fragile beauty in the sleepwalking scene, (See picture 9) where the gesture of washing her hands of crime appears self protective and her expression signifies bewilderment rather than purpose' (11). Campbell describes this as 'an admirable likeness' (2.349). Harlow had become a pupil of Lawrence in 1812 when he was only fifteen and, it is the influence of Lawrence's 'sentimentalizing approach to Siddons' which Asleson, in the same collection of articles, deplores, accusing Harlow of losing the 'sublimity of Lady



9. Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth in the sleepwalking scene.

By George Henry Harlow n. d.

Macbeth [in] the earnest melting gaze and moist, beestung lips'(87) However this was not a Lady Macbeth everyone saw; to many commentators she remained strong and in control. This is the Lady Macbeth which Jonathan Bate discerns in a very different painting of Siddons by Harlow of an earlier scene (See picture 10). Bate describes 'a moment of awe-inspiring authority, of control over action... caught in ... [the] representation of Siddons in the letter scene' (95). In this picture Bate sees Siddons 'confront the spectator head on' and comparing her with another actress Eliza O'Neill, he places them as the two poles of the Romantic period: 'if Siddons comes out of the Gothic, O'Neill is like the heroine of a novel of extreme sensibility' (95).

After her retirement performance on 30 June 1812 The Times had reported:

She counsels the murder, - she prepares it, - she endures solitude without hearing the cries of the murdered men - she goes where the murderer dares not go, - and she still preserves the power of mind that can employ artifice to conceal what turns her husband into a driveller and a coward. She sees no ghost, she makes no confession and when she dies she dies without lingering, or avowal of repentance.

In her more general comments on the role Siddons describes a Lady Macbeth whom The Times and her audience had never seen, a woman 'captivating in feminine loveliness', one who uses her 'charm' to 'seduce' Macbeth. She makes 'a little digression, to observe how sweetly contrasted with the conduct of this splendid fiend is that of the noble, single-minded Banquo' (13). It is ironic that it is Siddons who is most closely linked to the image of the 'fiend' and yet, due to Kemble's textual alterations, it is a term used for less than half her time in the role. From 1794, when he used his own version of the text, Lady Macbeth is no longer mentioned in Malcolm's final speech as the 'fiend-like queen'.



10. Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth (Letter scene).

By George Henry Harlow c. 1814.

Siddons not only tries to rewrite stage history in her memoirs, she also suggests that this discomfort with her most famous role was something that had been with her from her first encounter with Lady Macbeth when she was only twenty:

In the silence of the night (a night I can never forget) . . . , I came to the assassination scene, when the horrors of the scene rose to degree that made it impossible for me to go farther. I snatched up my candle and hurried out of the room in a paroxysm of terror. My dress was of silk and the rustling of it as I ascended the stairs to go to bed, seemed to my panic-struck fancy like the movement of a spectre pursuing me.

(Campbell 2:35-6)

She also ‘perceived the difficulty of assuming a personage with whom no one feeling of common general nature was congenial or assistant’ (Campbell 2: 36). Perhaps this unease had to do with what she perceived as a lack of femininity in the role, for Horace Walpole commented in a letter that ‘Mrs. Siddons was desired to play Medea and Lady Macbeth – ‘No,’ she replied, ‘She did not look on them as female characters’ ’(qtd. in Manvell 75). This was in December 1782, only three years before she undertook the role.

Lady Macbeth was not the part with which she first gained fame in London. Her first appearance there, after her brief unsuccessful season in 1775, was in 1782 when she played Isabella in The Fatal Marriage by Thomas Southerne. During the rest of that season and the next she added fourteen very successful leading roles. The plays were chiefly revivals of earlier successes in which Siddons played tragic heroines such as Isabella who ‘goes mad and kills herself’ (Manvell 348) or Jane Shore the eponymous heroine of Nicholas Rowe’s play who dies ‘destitute and starving pursued by her enemies’ (Manvell 349). These tragic heroines ‘had a devastating impact upon the female part of her audience’. Booth comments that crying audiences in ‘the late eighteenth century [which] was a sentimental age’ were well documented ‘but the sheer mass and scale of the reaction was new’. This, Booth believes, is

because ‘Mrs. Siddons touched the deepest chord of emotional truth in her audiences... who lived in a world of men who defined and circumscribed them’ (30-1). Siddons played only two Shakespearean roles, Isabella in Measure for Measure and Constance in King John. It was not until well established as an actress that she added Lady Macbeth in the middle of her third London season. This desire to distance herself from Lady Macbeth continued in retirement. When asked to do readings she never chose Lady Macbeth preferring ‘Some parts of Henry VIII... The Merchant of Venice and Hamlet’ (Campbell 2: 345). Later she gave other readings in Oxford and Cambridge but again there is never any mention of Lady Macbeth.

If Siddons felt the need both to distance herself from Lady Macbeth and to try to alter the perception of the ‘fiend-like Queen’, one returns to the question posed at the beginning, ‘why did the audience continue to accept and marvel at this performance?’ I would argue that they did not see Lady Macbeth as a woman. Siddons herself could not go quite this far. To her she was ‘a woman in whose bosom the passion of ambition has almost obliterated all the characteristics of human nature;’ (Campbell 2:10). But for her audience the obliteration was total. To them, women were the wives, sisters, daughters and mothers in the theatre and in the world outside. Lady Macbeth however, was to The Times and the majority of the audience ‘a being come from a darker world’ (30 June 1812). The language used to name her places her safely apart and removes any challenge to the prevailing view of what it was to be a woman. Hazlitt said of Siddons in the part: ‘It was as if the Muse of Tragedy had descended to awe us in wonder. Her voice was power: her form was grandeur. Her person was the mould which her lofty and gigantic spirit alone could fill. Her face lighted with awful beauty’ (79). After her retirement performance The Times described Lady Macbeth as having:

no intercourse with human sensation or human weakness. The step, the look, the voice of the Royal Murderess, force our eyes after them as if they were the step, and look and

voice of a being come from a darker world - full of evil, but full of power unconnected with life, but come to do its deed of darkness and then pass away. (30 June 1812)

Bell, too, comments on this. He writes of her 'inhuman strength of spirit' and describes her as 'Macbeth's evil genius' (36). This supernatural force is not perhaps, the perception of the part with which Siddons would have been happy, but this, much more than 'the fair, feminine... fragile' Lady Macbeth, is the one the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century audience saw and enjoyed.

The reaction of that same audience to another woman played by Siddons seems to emphasise the distinction the audience were able to make between contemporary women and Lady Macbeth. In March 1798 she played Mrs. Heller in Sheridan's adaptation of Kotzebue's The Stranger. In this play, Siddons took the part of a character who, having deserted her husband and children, is finally reunited with them and forgiven. The sin of desertion and the lack of punishment in a recognisable contemporary setting caused more controversy and agitation than Lady Macbeth's complicity in murder. In Mrs Heller, unlike Lady Macbeth, the audience saw a contemporary woman, not a spirit from some other world.

The image of a supernatural force is also the one that has endured in art. The interest roused by Siddons in her most famous role is reflected in the number of paintings completed during the period, although perhaps the most famous is that by Sir Joshua Reynolds depicting her not as Lady Macbeth but as the Tragic Muse. Heather McPherson argues that the paintings 'although not intended as literal records... attempt to transcribe through visual signs the distinctive aesthetic effects and dramatic shadings of her groundbreaking interpretation' (305). Siddons was not always happy with the way she was represented. Of a painting by Thomas Beach of Siddons and her brother in the dagger scene McPherson suggests that her dislike of the picture might have been because this 'represented the moment when she literally blooded her hands (See picture 11). This is the murderous, virago side of Lady



11. Sarah Siddons and John Philip Kemble in “Macbeth”.

By Thomas Beach 1786

Macbeth that Siddons sought to suppress or sublimate' (312). However this painting was exhibited very successfully at the Royal Academy in 1786 and to her audiences Siddons continued to play the 'virago' until she retired in 1812. It was only from retirement and only in print that she sought to distance herself from that image.

The new society, for whom Siddons wrote her reappraisal of Lady Macbeth, was also changing its view of her profession. At her death in 1831 the Morning Post was still trumpeting her praises as 'The incomparably grand actress and excellent woman' (9 June). The Times, however, had altered its opinion. A reader, preferring to remain anonymous and signing the letter only as Alpha, wrote: 'Mrs Siddons is dead! Such a genius should be buried in state. It appears to me that all great geniuses who have contributed to the intellectual delight of their country are entitled to such an honour' (9 June p 5). The paper was crushing in its answer. It was eager to 'fearlessly assert' its view. It asked 'What is the art of a stage player?' and gave its own dismissive reply, 'A contingent and dependent one. We should consider any public testimony of regard as a proof of the decline of noble feeling in the nation'. In a separate article Siddons was despatched to the outskirts of society in the caricature of an actress which she had tried so hard to avoid. 'She eloped with her lover and became Mrs Siddons, and together they joined a strolling company of no great respectability.' In a final burst of metropolitan hauteur it added, 'At Liverpool however she became a favourite' (9 June p 4). A hundred years later, on the anniversary of her death, her image had changed again. This time she had lived 'a simple, cheerful, honest, hard working life' and was 'A magnificent woman, as brave and as ready a soul as ever stepped on a stage.' The version of Lady Macbeth that was now linked to her name was the one she had tried to impose over the virago, 'a delicate blonde, ruling by her intellect, a woman quick to wickedness but equally ready for remorse...' (Sunday Times 8 June 1931). If her

contemporary audiences would not have recognised this Lady Macbeth, it is one Siddons would have endorsed and, it appears, one that subsequent societies found more acceptable.

Chapter 4. Helen Faucit.

Thirty years elapsed between Siddons' farewell performance as Lady Macbeth in 1812 and Faucit's first attempt in 1842. During that time Lady Macbeth lost her dominance within the play. Siddons set a high standard and her immediate successor Mrs. Bartley, was apparently 'very ordinary' and the critics were unimpressed. The Theatrical Inquisitor accused her of using 'a high declamatory tone, without success' (Bartholomeusz 145). Macbeth, however was played by Edmund Kean and although the critics preferred his Richard III, his portrayal of Macbeth was also discussed with much interest. Macbeth's next major interpreter was William Charles Macready and, according to Bartholomeusz, his Lady Macbeths 'dwindled in the shadow of Mrs. Siddons as they could not match her complexity, or achieve the same union of grandeur without pomp and nature without triviality' (170). Macready's favourite Lady Macbeth was Mrs. Warner. He preferred her interpretation, which was in the Siddons' mould, to Faucit's new 'affectionate, natural and civilised Lady Macbeth'. (Bartholomeusz 171). Samuel Phelps also preferred the grander style of acting, describing Warner as 'the *beau* ideal of a tragic actress... her Lady Macbeth was the best I have ever seen...' (qtd. in Mullin 499). However Macready engaged Faucit for several seasons with him at Covent Garden, Drury Lane and in Paris, although their relationship, both professional and personal, remained problematic. A young American actress, Charlotte Cushman, briefly caught the audience's imagination and in Liverpool in April 1846 she and Faucit both played Lady Macbeth. The critics preferred Faucit's more womanly interpretation, calling it 'a chaste, classical and eminently mental personation' (Albion 27 April 1846) but the audience voted with their feet. The same edition of the paper noted that 'the excitement caused by the acting of Miss Cushman was in no way diminished throughout the week and the consequences were a succession of crowded houses'. But by 1851 Cushman

had returned to America, Warner had retired and for the next twenty years Faucit had Lady Macbeth almost to herself. During that time the increasingly confining role for women which Siddons had seemed to recognise in her Memoranda in 1813 triumphed over the more equal and relaxed atmosphere of the late eighteenth-century. Satiric verses written in 1843 give some idea of the change that had taken place within a century:

1743

Man, to the Plough,
Wife, to the Cow,
Girl, to the Yarn,
Boy, to the Barn
And your rent will be netted.

1843

Man, Tally ho
Miss, Piano,
Wife, Silk and Satin,
Boy, Greek and Latin,
And you'll be Gazetted. (qtd. in Pinchbeck 36-7)

In a successful but difficult industrial world the home, created and sustained by women, had become, in Coventry Patmore's words, 'A tent pitched in a world not right' (5.129). The beliefs and passions swirling round that 'tent' were discussed and fought over in the politics of the period, never more vociferously than in the argument over the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, which was passed in 1857. Although the life Faucit led as a woman and as an actress had no direct connection with the discussions which seethed around this Bill, her representation of the role of Lady Macbeth and the audience who judged it were part of the society in which these arguments were prevalent.

Prior to 1857 divorce could only be granted by an ecclesiastical annulment or a Private Act of Parliament. The new Act created a Divorce Court in which Judges had the power to adjudicate. Despite fears that it would create a flood of cases, it was a costly process and ‘as a result the number of decrees granted annually never exceeded 583’ (Fredmann 51). However the discussion it caused in print and in Parliament indicate the anxieties and prejudices of mid-nineteenth century society. One of the most prominent and outspoken advocates of a more equitable system for men and women was Lady Caroline Norton. She had found that by separating from her husband she had lost access to her children and control over the money that she earned by her writing. In a celebrated pamphlet A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth’s Marriage and Divorce Bill she encapsulated the legal position of women in the mid nineteenth-century: ‘I exist and I suffer; but the law denies my existence’ (96). This suffering, she argues, is not unnoticed but is a price that society feels is worth paying ‘... it is better one or two women should suffer unjustly, than that the authority of the husband should be doubted’ (105).

In the long and often bitter debates over Lord Cranworth’s Bill, it was the grounds for divorce that proved most contentious. Some Members of Parliament thought that if divorce was to be made more easily available then the grounds should be the same for both sexes. Gladstone, while disapproving of divorce in principle, argued that ‘if you think adultery really constitutes in the sight of God that right to release from the marriage tie... where do you find your title to withhold from women the remedy which you give to men?’ (Hansard 3 CXLVII 1273). However most agreed with The Marquis of Lansdowne, who told the House of Lords: ‘Anyone who proposed that the relief given to husband and wife should be reciprocal could not expect to have the concurrence of the public opinion for unquestionably the public entertained the belief that there was a criminality on the part of the wife in

cases of adultery which did not attach to the husband' (Hansard 3 CXLII 1977). In the Commons, too, this was the prevalent view. It was based not only on the long-standing patriarchal belief in the innate superiority of men but in a very nineteenth-century belief in the importance of possession and inheritance. Thus in one of the last debates on the Bill, in August 1857, Mr. Puller argued that 'viewing it as a social question, as regards injury to society, [he] must affirm adultery to be a far greater injury to society when committed by women than when committed by men in consequence of being attended with uncertainty as to the parentage of the offspring' (Hansard 3 CXLVII 1270). In the final bill which received royal assent on 28 August 1857 men were to be granted a divorce on the grounds of simple adultery, but women only on the grounds of aggravated adultery. News that the Bill had finally been passed caused little press interest. The Indian Mutiny was taking place at the same time and the newspapers were more interested in that. Punch, however, encapsulates the power balance between men and women in law and, by extension, in society:

For the Men make the law an so please to observe

How it stands if you, Madam, from duty should swerve.

He may get a divorce - that's a grave solemn thing

Annuling the marriage and melting the ring

.....

But you have no right for Divorce, Joan, to stir

Save in cases so shocking they rarely occur. (5 September 1857)

In the literary as well as the political world, the images of the ideal woman were both being created and challenged. Charles Dickens drew a series of women ranging from the childlike eponymous heroine of Little Dorrit (1855-7) to the self-effacing Esther Summerson in Bleak House (1852-3). The highly successful sensational novels of authors such as Mrs. Henry Wood, while seeming to endorse Dicken's female stereotypes, can also be interpreted

as challenging that role. Showalter argues that 'These women novelists made a powerful appeal to the female audience by subverting the traditions of feminine fiction to suit their own imaginative impulses, by expressing the wide range of suppressed female emotions and by tapping and satisfying fantasies of protest and escape' (158-9). Patmore wrote his poem of domestic bliss The Angel in the House (1861): John Ruskin lectured on his, and society's, ideal woman in Sesame and Lilies (1871) and Alfred Tennyson, who succeeded William Wordsworth as Poet Laureate in 1850, celebrated spiritual beauty in women. Some of Shakespeare's female characters were used by writers, notably Mary Cowden Clarke and Anne Jameson, as examples of the ideal woman, or, in Lady Macbeth's case as an example of the dire consequences if they challenged this role.

What did the commentators, authors and their readers understand by the use of the words 'feminine' and 'womanly', words which they seemed to use as interchangeable? It is arguable that even as Gregory had hoped his late eighteenth century daughters would have been careful 'not to dispel their charm' for fear it would 'reduce the angel to a very ordinary girl' (145), the Victorians too wished for an angelic rather than human quality in their women. Although it is possible that the Angel in Patmore's poem The Angel in the House is the spirit of love rather than the wife, Virginia Woolf's unifying of the two is convincing as well as humorous:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult art of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was a chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it - in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all - I need not say it - she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty - her blushes, her great grace. (3)

In his poem Patmore stresses this purity:

The mystery of loveliness
Which made an altar of her face
Was not of flesh though that was fair,
But a most pure and lambent air. (27)

Not only were women to be pure, they were to be childlike:

... she grows
More infantine, auroral, mild;
And still the more she lives and knows
The lovelier she's express'd a child. (25)

Ruskin, who so admired Patmore that he wished 'those lovely lines ... were learned by all the youthful ladies of England' (109), also wanted women to stay childish, a condition he considered 'majestic' (115).

Dickens, too, created heroines who were small and childlike. In Martin Chuzzlewit, published in 1843, the same year that Faucit first played Lady Macbeth, 'fluttering little Ruth' receives John Westlock's proposal thus: 'She clasped her little hands before her face. The gushing tears of joy, and pride, and hope, and innocent affection, would not be restrained. Fresh from her full young heart they came to answer him' (897-8). This emphasis on the 'little', on innocence and youth are qualities stressed even more in the eponymously titled Little Dorrit whom, the hero, Arthur Clennam refers to as both child and angel, 'Dear girl! ... Good angel!' (67). These heroines are confined within a domestic setting. Little Dorrit looks after her father and then Clennam in the debtors prison, the Marshalsea, which, by 'constant pains and care [she] had made... neat and even after its kind, comfortable' (70). In Martin Chuzzlewit it is easy to see Ruth as the doll in her own doll's house, 'Pleasant little Ruth! Cheerful, tidy, bustling, quiet little Ruth! No doll's house ever yielded greater delight

to its young mistress, than little Ruth derived from her glorious domain over the triangular parlour and the two small bedrooms' (672). A very different heroine appears in Dickens' later novel, Great Expectations (1861) Estelle is not a doll, delighting in a domestic setting. Claire Tomalin argues that this may have resulted from the conflict in Dickens' relationship with Nelly Ternan, a young actress: 'he was eager for release from the conventions and hypocrisies of British middle-class society'; ironically she wanted the opposite: 'to leave behind the equivocal world of the theatre... and become respectable' (131).

In poetry, as well as fiction of the period, it becomes possible for the reader to retreat into the safety of the home which is created by an innocent female figure, a space which is untouched by the evils and temptations of the outside world. In Maud, written by Tennyson in 1855, the hero, reflecting on his meeting after many years with his childhood friend and love, finds her the embodiment of the Victorian ideal. Once again the love, both subject and object is childish, maternal, safe and pure:

Perhaps the smile and tender tone

Came out of her pitying womanhood,

For am I not, am I not, here alone

So many summer since she died,

My mother, who was so gentle and good? (V1. 63-7 162)

Though not claiming the same literary merit or establishment approval, the sensational novels of the period also endorsed this domestic, spiritual ideal of women. One of the most successful was East Lynne by Ellen Wood, better known at the time as Mrs. Henry Wood, published in serial form between January 1860 and September 1861. It was received with both acclaim and horror but its success was unquestionable. The Times printed a review by Samuel Lucas calling it 'the best novel of the season' (25 January 1861 p. 6) and an unsigned review in the Athenaeum was of the opinion that 'the book is a good book, and will, no

doubt, be a successful one' (12 October 1861 473). Its critics however feared that success. Although Wood stresses the magnitude of the sin Lady Isabel commits by leaving her husband and children, it is she, rather than the insipid second wife, who is undoubtedly the heroine of the novel, the object of the readers' interest and, even to a nineteenth-century readership, the object of sympathy. It is just this sympathy for the fallen heroine that disturbs Margaret Oliphant. Writing in Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine she accepts that East Lynne is 'a clever novel which some inscrutable breath of popular liking has blown into momentary celebrity, [but] nothing can be more wrong and fatal to represent the flames of vice as a purifying, fiery ordeal, through which the penitent is to come elevated and sublimed' (567). Wood accepts and stresses the magnitude of Lady Isabel's sin but she also paints a chilling picture of the lack of hope or escape that some women had to endure. Addressing the reader directly she writes:

Oh, reader believe me! Lady - wife - mother! should you ever be tempted to abandon your home, so you will wake! Whatever trials may be the lot of your married life, though they may magnify themselves to your crushed spirit as beyond the endurance of woman to bear, *resolve* to bear them; fall down upon your knees and pray to be enabled to bear them. pray for patience; pray for strength to resist the demons that would urge you to escape; bear unto death rather than forfeit your fair name and good conscience; for be assured that the alternative, if you rush on to it, will be found far worse than death! (289)

This seems a strong endorsement of the roles and siting of women in mid nineteenth-century society, yet, as Showalter has argued this, and other sensational novels, must have caused some readers to question such bleak alternatives and, at least briefly, stirred 'fantasies of protest and escape' (159). Thus while on a public level, the role and expectations for women were both clear and seemingly unquestioned, constant vigilance was needed to ensure that

this remained the case. In this campaign Shakespeare, the national poet and treasure, was an important weapon. His texts were made fit for a family audience by Thomas Bowdler, his female characters were used, by Anna Jameson, Mary Cowden Clarke and Helen Faucit as templates of acceptable womanhood and his characters on stage had to be interpreted within these expectations.

Bowdler first published his Family Shakespeare in 1818 and it continued to be reprinted throughout the century. In the Preface to the seventh edition of 1839, Bowdler includes Macbeth amongst ‘5 of the finest plays in the world of which there is not one that can be read aloud by a gentleman to a lady, without undergoing some correction’ (v). The corrections he made give a fascinating insight into what were considered the most heinous matters that ladies might encounter. Violence was clearly acceptable, Macbeth is still described as having ‘unseamed [Macdonald] from the navel to th’chaps/ And fixed his head upon the battlements’ (1.2.22-3). Lady Macbeth can still invoke the spirits to ‘unsex me here/ And fill me from the crown to the toe topfull / Of direst cruelty; ...’ (1.5.40-1) but when Malcolm starts to list his faults, Bowdler’s horror on behalf of female readers is stirred. Malcolm may admit that ‘there’s no bottom, none/ In my voluptuous; ...’ but the next few phrases must be omitted. Out goes ‘... your wives, your daughters,/ Your matrons, and your maids could not fill up / The cistern of my lust, ...’ (4.3.61-2). The only other scene to stir Bowdler to censorship is the Porter’s monologue.

Reading Shakespeare rather than seeing the plays was common and to many, preferable. Jonathan Bate argues that in the Romantic period Lear and Hamlet were perceived to be ‘more powerful in the individual reader’s imagination [than] on the stage when impersonated by an actor’ (93). In an age when ‘emphatic feeling with another being’ was the ideal, reading, when ‘one could be Lear’ was preferable to ‘the theatre [where] one merely saw Lear’ (93). Thus many of the readers to whom Jameson, Cowden Clarke and Faucit addressed

their texts might only have encountered Shakespeare's plays as a written work and, for many, only in a Bowdler version. Similarly the audience seeing and judging Macbeth and Faucit's portrayal of Lady Macbeth would have been part of the culture that embraced Bowdler and read Shakespeare's Heroines, The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines and On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters.

Published first in 1832 and continuously reprinted throughout the century, Shakespeare's Heroines was given the subtitle Characteristics of women, moral, poetical and historical by its author, Mrs. Jameson. According to her recent biographer, Judith Johnston, she belonged 'to a particular coterie which dominated [the world of art and letters] during the period 1830-1860' (2). When her husband, a judge, was appointed to a post in Dominica, she remained in England and later became formally separated from him, but her married state permitted her 'to move freely in a society in ways that an unmarried woman could not' (2-3). She took advantage of that respectability by using her married name as an author. In the introduction, which is presented as a dialogue between the imaginary female author and her sceptical male companion, the author explains her debt to Shakespeare: 'the riddle of history [was] found solved in the pages of Shakespeare' (13). She accepts that 'Shakespeare's women are inferior in power to his men ... for in Shakespeare the male and female characters bear precisely the same relation to each other that they do in nature and society - they are not equal in prominence or power; they are subordinate throughout' (15-6). Jameson believed it was necessary to 'judge Lady Macbeth very differently' (35) and to isolate her from the other heroines amongst the 'Historical Characters' at the end of the text. She claims that the image of Lady Macbeth as 'a fierce, cruel woman, brandishing a couple of daggers, and inciting her husband to butcher a poor old king' (369), is misplaced for, she continues, 'they forget that the crime of Lady Macbeth terrifies us in proportion as we sympathise with her' (369). Then, in a sentence which recalls East Lynne, she argues that 'It is good to behold and tremble at

the possible results of the noblest faculties uncontrolled or perverted' (369). Jameson admits that there are women, 'who under the influence of a diseased or excited appetite for power or distinction, would sacrifice the happiness of a daughter, the fortunes of a husband, the principles of a son, and peril their own souls' (369). For these women, for a Lady Isabel or a Lady Macbeth, both of whom have challenged the rules of society, there must be punishment but also pity. In the end, according to Jameson 'we rather sigh over the ruin than exult in it' (384). 'Exult' is a dangerously strong and active verb liable to produce dangerous emotions but to sigh is to be passive, to accept rather than challenge fate. In acting Lady Macbeth's final scene in a different culture, Siddons did not provoke the audience to sighs: she was still grand, leaving the audience with an image of strength. Indeed the Morning Chronicle complained she was 'too alert, too active, too vigorous' (19 September 1798) but Faucit's Lady Macbeth played to a different age. In this scene '...her voice has a dreamy pathos, as though she were carried back to days of childhood and innocence, ere ambition and crime had raised her to her present "bad eminence"' (Sunday Times 6 November 1864 p. 3).

A different approach was taken by Cowden Clarke, author of The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines. Born into a literary family in 1809 and married to another prominent Shakespeare scholar Charles Cowden Clarke, she is described by Linda Rozmovits as 'the best example of a Shakespeare woman' whose 'passage through life was structured at every stage by her developing relation to the bard' (498). Cowden Clarke stressed the benefits of reading Shakespeare: 'Happy they who in mature years have the good sense to read aright the pages of Shakespeare and gather thence the wholesome lessons and choicest delights' (qtd. in Rozmovits 449). In addition to the imagined childhood, already gendered as 'Girlhood' of Shakespeare's heroines, Cowden Clarke spent sixteen years of her life, between 1829 and 1845 producing the first Complete Concordance to Shakespeare. Her explanation for undertaking such a mammoth task illustrates her belief in the importance of Shakespeare:

‘although there was a concordance for the Bible, no complete guide existed to the ‘Bible of the intellectual world’, Shakespeare’s plays’ (qtd. in Rozmovits 449). In the Introduction to The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Heroines she makes no claims that she is writing a manual for bringing up daughters, but it is difficult not to see this as at least one of her purposes. The first publication was in 1851, the year in which Faucit returned to London to play Lady Macbeth at the Olympic. Playing the part at the Haymarket at the same time was Warner, whom Macready had preferred to Faucit in 1843. The Sunday Times compared the two performances:

If we were to define in a few words the difference between the two, we should say that Miss Faucit’s is more refined and imaginative, but that there is more grandeur in that of Mrs. Siddons and Mrs. Warner. ... Miss Faucit ... reminded us more of one of the personages in the Greek tragedy, impelled by an irresistible destiny to a deed of blood than a mere woman of masculine energy and indomitable will, casting aside every human feeling for the gratification of her ambition... . (10 August 1851 p. 3)

There is a distinct feeling here that ‘mere’ women should not presume to exhibit a quality reserved for men, namely ‘energy’. How was this character, whether in the ‘refined and imaginative’ portrayal by Faucit or in the more ‘masculine’ version of Warner to be included in a text which was in celebration of women, in particular Shakespeare’s women, and which hoped to present them as models for a daughter’s upbringing? The answer was to place her safely in the past, and to make her, as Jameson had a few years before, into an ‘historic personage’ (i) the only character to receive this treatment.

From the moment of her birth Lady Macbeth is doomed. Born on a night when ‘the wrath of nature seemed striving to find voice in the tumult of the vengeful elements’ (79), her feminine nature is already problematic. On hearing that the baby was a girl, ‘A groan burst

from the lips of the dark Lady; and the teeth were ground, with what sounded like a curse' (83). To her mother it was 'As well unborn, as born a girl' (87). Lady Macbeth's subsequent behaviour is a dire warning to Victorian mothers against poor mothering, '... thus the babe sucked bitterness, perverted feeling, unholy regret, and vain aspiration, with every milky draught imbibed' (89). Gruoch, the young Lady Macbeth, grows into a child who presents a picture of beauty which could have come straight from Tennyson or Patmore, but that beauty is undermined by

a look there was in those blue eyes, that marred their loveliness of shape and colour and seemed to contradict their attractive power. In the mouth, too, round those full and ruby lips there played certain lines that presented indications of a startling contrast of will and unfeminine inflexibility with so much charm of feature. (95).

The 'look' is not made specific but two characteristics, a 'will' or perhaps a mind of her own and 'inflexibility' which in a man might be valued, are noted in a girl with disapproval. To add to Lady Macbeth's unhappy pre-play life, she does indeed know 'How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me' (1.7.54) but the baby boy, Cormac dies. Thus she is formed as the Lady of Shakespeare's text, and becomes a chilling example of the importance of girlhood for either good or evil. Rozmovits calls the works of both Jameson and Cowden Clarke, 'typologies' which 'invited' the reader, who is assumed to be female to 'identify with a heroine of [their] choice and then be like her or... in the case of someone like Lady Macbeth, not like her'. But she argues typologies were also more complex, 'If Shakespeare was the world then typologies were the maps of that world: they were the representational form that allowed you to gain your moral orientation and thus tackle any experience the world was apt to offer' (445). Like the conduct books of an earlier era, they made clear for young women the role that society expected them to fulfil.

The third example of Shakespeare being pressed into the service of forming nineteenth-century womanhood is On some of Shakespeare's Female Characters, written by Faucit herself in retirement. Carlisle suspects that 'Today these essays are considered as sentimental descriptions of Victorian gentlewomen masquerading as Shakespearean heroines' (249), but for this thesis they indicate the expectation of women against which an actress in mid-nineteenth century society had to create her character. At the request of Queen Victoria, articles which had begun as letters to friends were published in 1888 and 'respectfully dedicated, by permission, to Her Most Gracious Majesty The Queen by Her Majesty's grateful and devoted subject and servant, Helena Faucit Martin.' It is interesting that in retirement for her literary work, Faucit reverted to her baptismal name, Helena, one that she perhaps thought sounded more in keeping with her husband's recently acquired knighthood. She also added her husband's name to her own. The Queen's public endorsement of the book gave it great influence and importance at the time, although Faucit's purpose in writing the letters was less ambitious and less instructive than that of the two earlier users of Shakespeare. In the preface she states that her:

best reward would be that my sister-women should give me, in return, the happiness of thinking that I have helped them, if ever so little, to appreciate more deeply, and to love with a love akin to my own, these sweet and noble representatives of our sex, and have led them to acknowledge with myself the infinite debt we owe to the poet who could portray, as no other poet has truly done, under the most varied forms, all that gives woman her brightest charms, her most beneficent influence. (viii. Emphasis in the original)

It is easy to see that amongst these 'sweet and noble representatives' Lady Macbeth might be out of place. She intrudes briefly in the chapter on Rosalind, taking three of the sixty-four pages dedicated to Faucit's favourite character. Her own chapter is again at the end of the

text, in this instance even more separated from the other women by being placed in the Appendix. Faucit tries to explain, not the character but her 'dread' of acting the part, which she blames on the lack of time she had to prepare for her first performance in the role in Dublin in 1842 and an 'antipathy' to Lady Macbeth which lasted 'to the last time of my performing the character' (Martin 240). Unwilling to undertake 'a task of great labour, because it would not be prompted by the love for my subject which has made writing about my favourite heroines comparatively easy' (354-6), she distances herself even more from Lady Macbeth by allowing a letter from the 'late William Carlton' (401) to write for her.

It was from within this legal and cultural expectation of women that Faucit had to portray her Lady Macbeth. It is more difficult to build up a picture of this than of Siddons' portrayal. There was no Professor Bell watching her, noting on his copy of the text the inflections, actions and expressions of the actress. There were no biographers detailing, either favourably or otherwise, her interpretation of the part. Instead there was only the very personal account, written, after her death in 1893, by her husband Sir Theodore Martin. She had clearly kept a diary, as her husband quotes frequently from it, but it has disappeared and her words from it come to us mediated by her most devoted and biased critic. Unlike Siddons she did not write her own recollections of the part and, as I have already noted, she omitted Lady Macbeth from her writings on Shakespearean characters. According to her husband, she wrote in her diary after her last performance of Lady Macbeth in Manchester on 15 November 1871, 'Oh how glad I am this part is over! What a punishment it is to undertake it!' (Martin 318). Her dislike of the part was not total, 'I had no misgivings after reaching the third act, but the first two always filled me with a shrinking horror' (Faucit 240). This seems to have been apparent in her acting, the Daily News commented on 4 November 1864 that 'Miss Faucit struggles through the strong passages at the commencement of the play with evident effort and makes a far deeper impression in the intense and delicate portions'. Faucit, a product of her century,

was, I would suggest, more comfortable with the ‘delicate portions’ than the ‘strong passages’.

In these circumstances it is necessary to rely more on newspapers and journals for accounts of Faucit’s performances. Nor can one look chiefly in the London papers for, unlike Siddons, she performed less in London than in the provinces and less frequently in England than in Scotland, Ireland and France. This was an absence that critics such as George Fletcher, whom Alan Hughes dismisses as ‘relatively obscure’ (93) regretted. Despite this obscurity, he was influential in Faucit’s and later Terry’s interpretation of the role. Fletcher admired Faucit’s reading of the part and lamented her long absences from the London stage:

We owe it to Miss Faucit, to acknowledge distinctly the originality and truth which, in courageous prosecution of her art under all theatrical disadvantages, we find her to have imparted to the personation of the heroine. Those lamentable circumstances of our metropolitan stage, ... have left our greatest Shakespearean actress without a theatre in which to appear before a London public,...’ (Fletcher 197-8) .

Yet, despite her infrequent appearances in London, her fame and reputation in her time were as great as that of Siddons. In an acrostic in the Theatrical Journal of 2 November 1864, an unknown admirer wrote:

H ail, brightest star upon our modern stage
E ’en first and fairest actress of the age
L ong hast thou reigned, of tragedy the queen
E ntrancing hearts upon thy mimic scene
N o present actress like to thee has been.

To which James Major replied in the same journal on 30 November:

M ay posterity lighten on thee where’ere thou go
A nd health remain with thee thy art to show;

R emembered for ever, too, wilt thou be,
 T hough hundreds thy power may never see.
 I mmortal wilt thy name ever remain
 N ever to be excelled in this age again.

What was she like, this Lady Macbeth that the audience so admired but that the actress herself never came to enjoy? In the same way that Siddons seemed to choose an interpretation early in her career and make little change thereafter, Faucit also seemed to decide upon a way of playing the character and then make only minor changes. Martin says that his wife told him that after her first appearance with Macready ‘she never saw cause... to deviate from the general conception of the character, as it revealed itself to her then [during her] perusal of the play’ (90). How much this was because physical characteristics suggest and limit an interpretation is difficult to judge. As has already been noted (p.35) Campbell said of Siddons ‘the idea of her having been a delicate blonde seems to me to be a caprice. The public would ill have exchanged such a representative of Lady Macbeth for the dark locks and the eagle eyes of Mrs. Siddons’ (56). Portraits of Siddons , even when not in the role of Lady Macbeth, give the impression of stature and power. Martin’s description of his wife is of a much more delicate, feminine figure and the repeated use of the word ‘woman’ in the following passage lays emphasis on the importance of that quality in her. ‘There was a charm in her personality, that spoke of a pure and lofty spirit, something so “pure womanly” that it filled men with reverence, while women were grateful for it, as showing to the world a fascinating type of what a woman could be’ (119). The Scotsman of 19 April 1845, reviewing one of Faucit’s early performances notes this ‘womanly’ quality: ‘A presence graceful, womanly yet commanding and bearing upon it the stamp of intellect and decision are the true essentials. These Miss Faucit possesses in a pre-eminent degree’. The critic in the Examiner, possibly Henry Morleyⁱ, also comments favourably on this new underlying femininity:

Miss Faucit's portraiture of Lady Macbeth softens down the more revolting aspects of the character, as it has been generally represented; and invests it with as much feminine interest and dignity as is possible to reconcile with the crime of the blackest dye. We see a woman before us, terrible in her purpose and guilt, but still within the pale of womanhood by virtue of the qualities of her sex, with which actress as well as poet invest her. (23 January 1858)

In Journal of a London Playgoer Morley finds this 'femininity' excessive: 'Miss Faucit is too essentially feminine, too exclusively gifted with the art of expressing all that is most graceful and beautiful in womanhood to succeed in inspiring anything like awe or terror' (350). None of the critics who argue so strongly Faucit is too feminine for this part explain what they mean by this. They would appear to be saying that feminine qualities can not co-exist with evil, that women can only be good and thus by being evil, Lady Macbeth and, more importantly, women in society lose their femininity if they transgress. Like Faucit herself, the critics seem perturbed by the thought of evil in women and sigh with relief when the difficult part is over. Morley continues: 'This defect in representation disappears, of course, when the second phase of the character ... has to be represented' (352).

From the opening scene there was a statuesque as well as a feminine quality in her acting.

The Examiner noted that:

In the reading of the letter... she holds the scroll in a manner that a sculptor would admire. From the record of the witches predictions she has drawn inspiration and the address to the spirits of evil might have been delivered by a Medea, conscious of her power over the preternatural world. The same conception influences her greeting to Macbeth, she is not merely a tempter, she is a prophetess. (23 January 1858)

However this statuesque quality was not apparent, or perhaps present in every performance.

The Manchester Guardian saw, with disapproval, a lack of self control:

Miss Faucit's rendering [was] too one-sided, lacking something of self restraint. There is a wildness for example in the rush of passion in her first words as she reads Macbeth's letter... throughout the part too there is a restlessness of gestures and expression, a wild waving of the arms and a pacing to and fro ... (15 November 1871).

Some however approved of the same wild quality:

her invocation ... to the spirits to unsex her is terrific; and the swelling exultation and keen sense of triumph which seems to dilate her form and take possession of all her faculties as she pours her spirits into her husband's ear and chastises him with the valour of her tongue have all the sublimity of wild impassionment and intense emotion. (Morning Post 19 November 1858)

In the banquet scene Faucit had no trouble with the traditional woman's role of hostess yet she undermined it by a clearly signalled perversion of an even more traditional role, that of motherhood. The critics, who had so praised her 'feminine acting' noted the action while clearly relishing the scene. The Times commented 'The reception of Duncan is executed with consummate skill. The courtesy is obviously overdone and tho' the king can not see through the mask the audience can detect the difficulty with which it is worn. So, in the mute caress bestowed on Fleance the affection means mischief' (7 November 1864). This action also impressed the Dublin Evening Mail which particularly approved of the fact that the 'fiend' was 'well-bred':

When Miss Faucit's Lady Macbeth caressed the little son of Banquo, she fairly looked a loveable person, above all suspicion; but when she passed silently from the stage, and no human eye was supposed to be upon her, the whole woman was transformed – all the fiend cruel and perplexed was there: yet not vulgar, but a well-bred fiend, the very sweep of her admirable drapery helping the illusion. (23 December 1864)

Faucit's reluctance to write or talk about Lady Macbeth makes it difficult to know whether she intended to play a Lady Macbeth who suggested or knew that her husband was plotting the death of Banquo and Fleance. Clearly both papers seem to suggest she knew, The Times sees the caress as meaning 'mischief' and the Dublin paper talks of her as looking loveable as she gave the caress but, when undetected, looking 'cruel'. Those who had read The Girlhood of Shakespeare Heroines might have remembered Gruoch's loss of a child and interpreted the caress in a more sympathetic way: yet, if the critics were not mistaken Faucit was signalling, in a particularly cruel way, a negation of all accepted rules of womanhood. Even Siddons, while perhaps suggesting the murder of Fleance to Macbeth, did not 'caress' the child in a manner which suggested 'mischief'.

The murder scene, which drew forth so many admiring comments for Siddons goes remarkably unreported when played by Faucit, perhaps reflecting her unease with the action, but the Edinburgh Observer gives a graphic account of one of her earliest attempts. In ringing patriarchal tones, sounding more like The Temperance Society than a theatre critic, it lays the blame for her actions on drink: 'When again she rushes in, after Macbeth has entered Duncan's chamber, the dilated eyes, the flushed cheeks, the flurried gesture, the short quick drawing of breath, seem to tell us before she speaks she has been at the wine cup'. It seems to see her as a plot device rather than a primary protagonist and so continues:

The great energies and imagination of Macbeth once raised, her feeble powers drop and dwarf before him - the very sway she held over him - and that she was a shrew is not to be doubted is gone. ... The womanliness of her nature returns, and she seeks to solace the agony of her 'dear lord' by words of comfort and endearment, which she feels, even when she speaks them, to be ineffectual. (28 November 1843)

The use of the term 'shrew' in this context seems to belittle Lady Macbeth's power and influence, as if by naming Lady Macbeth in this way her former powerful role can be erased,

for shrews can be tamed, as the audience would know. Garrick's Catherine and Petruchio, a popular adaptation of Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew was often played as an afterpiece. Garrick had reduced Shakespeare's complex play to a simple battle between a difficult woman and a powerful and physical man, complete with whip. These two were engaged in a battle, the outcome of which was never in doubt.

Given the more womanly nature of this Lady Macbeth, the omission of her collapse in Act Two, after the discovery of the murder of Duncan, seems less necessary. Throughout most of her career Faucit was following an 1814ⁱⁱ text. In this version Lady Macbeth is not present when the murder is discovered, thus making it unnecessary to decide whether to play the collapse 'not [as] a faint- but [as] a feint' (North 637). In November 1849, five years after Faucit had started to play Lady Macbeth, a long article appeared in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine by Professor John Wilson, who wrote under the name of Christopher North. This attempted, in the form of a debate, to decide what kind of a faint took place. One view was that it was only a feint executed to preserve the fiction of her innocence 'A highbred sensitive innocent Lady startled from her sleep to find her guest and King murdered and the room full of aghast nobles, cannot possibly do anything else but faint. Lady Macbeth, who "all particulars of duty knows," faints accordingly' (637). The other side of the argument was: 'What she must have suffered then, Shakespeare lets us conceive for ourselves,...The whole is too much for her - she is perplexed in the extreme and the sinner swoons' (637). North sums up: 'Calculate as nicely as you will – she distracts or diverts speculation, and makes an agreeable break in the conversation - I think the obvious meaning is the right meaning – and that she faints on purpose' (638). Yet, even with this discussion taking place in literary circles, Faucit seems to have continued with tradition and omitted the scene although she clearly felt the faint was real. She talks of Lady Macbeth's 'agony of anxiety ... lest her husband... should betray himself. ...to have the whole thing brought before her again was too

great a strain upon her nerves. No wonder she faints' (Faucit 240-1). One cannot imagine Siddons or her Lady Macbeth thinking of nerves in quite this way, although in a period which glorified sensibility and with an audience which readily gave itself up to tears, 'nerves' were part of the Siddons' phenomenon. However while Siddons may have been using her audiences' nerves rather than her own, it is possible the actions of Lady Macbeth caused Faucit as well as her character 'agony' and 'strain upon the nerves' and contributed to her unease with the role in the earlier scenes.

The presence of Lady Macbeth at the discovery of Duncan's body is first mentioned in a review of Macbeth in 1858 in which the part of Lady Macbeth was played by the Italian actress, Madame Ristori. This is a faint rather than a faint according to The Saturday Review which describes it as 'one more triumph of the pantomime' and is certain that the horror and faint are false:

Lady Macbeth's affected horror and fainting at the details, her simulated shrinking and shuddering at the thought of the blood - apparently so true to nature, and yet its insincerity displayed by a single lighting gleam of suspicion and doubt whether her irresolute husband might not betray himself. (19 June 1858 p. 693)

The first mention of Faucit's Lady Macbeth being present in this scene is in a review of a production at Drury Lane at the end of 1864 when the critic from the Examiner, was certain the faint was real and attributed it not to 'nerves' but to Duncan's likeness to her father. 'It is at Macbeth's words 'Here lay Duncan/His silver skin laced with his golden blood' that the swoon comes over her' (17 December 1864).

However, after the discovery of the murder, Faucit had reached the acts she enjoyed and it seems to have been an enjoyment the critics shared. There are more comments, from early in her career in 1845 to the last performances in 1871, on these next two scenes than on any of the earlier ones. Critics, actress and audiences were, with relief, on much safer ground, the

momentary usurping of the male role was over as ‘we see her subside into the passive wife, gentle in tone and affectionate in observance’ (Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle and Scottish Pilot 19 April 1845). In the banquet scene:

the necessity of politeness to her guests, and of explaining away her husband’s agitation, together with her apprehension, lest some indiscreet word should escape, held her in a struggle, a passion of anxiety and fear, which could scarcely be rendered more striking than in her face and gestures. (Sunday Times 6 November 1864 p. 3)

It is clear from all the accounts that Faucit was preparing the audience for Lady Macbeth’s disintegration and subsequent death. The Scotsman saw this change in an early performance, ‘When they are left alone, it is seen how great the effort has been to subdue those inner tortures that are eating away her life’ (26 April 1845). The Morning Post, compared Faucit favourably with her predecessors who, no doubt, included both Siddons and, more recently, Cushman:

After the banquet scene, ... and its terrible emotions, when the fiend of historic conventionalities would have visited Macbeth with a storm of vulgar indignation, how beautiful was the hearted sympathy with which Miss Faucit enunciated the line ‘You lack the season of all natures, sleep!’ The mingled love and pity conveyed in these words revealed the real character of Lady Macbeth and the elocution was faultlessly pure and charmingly musical. (5 August 1851)

In this last sentence the ‘real’ character of Lady Macbeth is described in words reminiscent of Patmore as full of ‘mingled love and pity’. Her speech is no longer domineering or powerful but ‘faultlessly pure and charmingly musical’. The Liverpool Post’s description of this scene gives a vivid picture of the broken Queen, bowed down by guilt and remorse:

She totters to a table, sits down at it, rests her forehead on her hand, touches the crown, takes off with a melancholy, not quite absent air, this gilded symbol of her irretrievable

wretchedness, presses her agonised brow the more freely for its absence, lets it hang listlessly in her hand as she marches faintly, yet with persistent dignity, after her husband. ... Her magnificent gown drags heavily on the ground after her as she departs. (13 December 1870)

The Times commented upon the growing gulf between husband and wife as they left the hall, separated by physical as well as mental distance: 'when... the guilty pair are left alone in their vast hall, the excitement subsides into deep mournfulness and the slow manner in which the Lady follows her husband at a distance of some paces is full of mute eloquence' (7 November 1864).

The final scene was one with which Faucit had success with from the start. She first performed the role with Macready in Dublin in 1842. In her diary after this first performance she wrote that Macready told her that her 'banquet and sleep walking scenes were the best' and asked her 'Oh my child, where did you get that sigh ? What can you know of such misery as that sigh speaks of?' (Martin 90). Throughout her career the critics praised her in this scene. In 1851, the Morning Post judged:

To our liking the great triumph of the evening was the celebrated sleepwalking scene. The conscience stricken with guilt expressed itself in every movement and intonation. The pervading idea of terror was absolutely appalling and yet a solemn and sustained dignity elevated the whole to the highest standard of art. (5 August 1851)

Seven years later the same paper saw her 'exhibit a distressing picture of a heart sick with the sense of guilt and riven with remorse' (19 February 1858). In all the comments there is approval for a sense of decorum. The Daily News was pleased to see 'nothing could be more spiritual, dreamy and impressive, without coarseness, than the great sleepwalking scene' (4 November 1864). The enthusiastic Sir Edward Russell, the editor of the Liverpool Post, draws a graphic picture of Faucit in this scene, 'Here is no impassive statue, no monumental

Nemesis. Here is instead a great lady sick to death, sick to melancholy madness, incarnadined with blood, which all her painful efforts will not rub from the paleness of her attenuated hands... What a picture of bodily and mental wreck!' (13 December 1870). The audience clearly shared the critics' approval of Lady Macbeth in this scene. After her last performance the Manchester Guardian wrote: 'Not only was the illusion of sleep perfectly maintained, but every tone and gesture too with a truth and power which for the time spread a breathless silence through the house and at the scenes close provoked a storm of enthusiastic applause' (15 November 1871).

Martin wrote that his wife 'was in the habit of writing on the blank pages of her parts' (108). At the end of her copy of Macbeth there is the following passage. It is perhaps her understanding of the very personal tragedy of the Lady Macbeth she was trying to play: a very weak, very human woman, not a 'being from another world' but one for whom the realisation that there is no 'reconciliation or repose' leads to suicide.

'-----through every strife
she looks forward to the re
conciliation----- beyond every
storm to the repose. There is no depth of the heart, according
to her, which faith and knowledge
can not illumine; no agony
of the affections which may
not be overcome by the
bravery of patience'.ⁱⁱⁱ

This is not a conception of Lady Macbeth which those who saw and marvelled at Siddons would have appreciated, but the two actresses were separated by more than the twenty-nine years between Siddons' triumphant last performance in 1813 and Faucit's first nervous

attempt in 1842. They were separated by a shift in the perception of the true nature and role of woman. To accommodate this change not only was Faucit's interpretation of the part to be praised but Siddons' much stronger portrayal needed to be reappraised. This the critics did with great enthusiasm and at great length.

Martin claims that the critic Fletcher 'had from the first maintained ... that Miss Faucit's was "the true Lady Macbeth"' (228). In 1847, five years after Faucit had first acted Lady Macbeth, one chapter in his Studies of Shakespeare was devoted to False Acting of Lady Macbeth, in which he challenges the reading of the play which had put Lady Macbeth centre stage, dominating her husband. Fletcher claims back for Macbeth both the guilt and the centrality. To him it is a 'vital injustice to the character of his Lady, in making her responsible - not merely, as is the fact, for holding him to the fulfilment of his own constant wish and purpose - but for inspiring him with the purpose itself' (186). He applauds 'Miss Helen Faucit... [who] has followed steadily the unsullied light of Shakespeare's words - and so has found for herself and shown to her audience that feeling not pride is the mainspring of the character' (196). This contrasts with 'Mrs Siddons [who] endeavoured to act the earlier scenes of this great part too much as if she had to represent a woman inherently selfish and imperious, not devoted to the wish and purpose of her husband, but remorselessly determined to work him to the fulfilment of her own' (185). This reappraisal of Lady Macbeth, which placed her more comfortably within the prevailing culture of the period, was later influential in forming Terry's perception of the role.

William Carlton, 'the much valued friend' whom Faucit chose to speak for her in On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters, also saw a new interpretation of Lady Macbeth and he too describes a character situated much more within the parameters of perceived mid-nineteenth-century womanhood. He applauds Faucit's Lady Macbeth as a fresh interpretation,

one to which new words, 'woman' and 'simple' can apply, a world where it might be necessary for a woman to commit evil but only for the greater good of her husband:

This woman ... is simply urging her husband forward through her love for him, which prompts her to wish for the gratification of his ambition to commit a murder.... She perceives he has scruples; and it is necessary that she should work on him so far as that he should commit the crime but at the same time prevent him from feeling revolted at the contemplation of it. (Faucit 402)

This reading 'unquestionably adds new elements to the character, and not only rescues it from the terrible and revolting monotony in which it has heretofore appeared, but keeps it within the category of humanity, and gives a beautiful and significant moral to the closing scenes of the queen's life' (Faucit 402). The fault for this previous misreading is not Carelton's, Faucit excuses him as he 'has only laboured with the public, under the disadvantage of being misled by the authority of Mrs. Siddons as to the true estimate of Lady Macbeth's character' (Faucit 402). The magnitude of that disadvantage is made clear in the Scotsman, which commented on a very early performance of Faucit's Lady Macbeth:

Every performer undertakes this part under the disadvantage of having to contend with the prevailing image which connected Mrs. Siddons with the character as its one unapproachable representation. For the young she lives in Lawrence's portrait as the ideal which few have ever thought of questioning, and for the old she is clothed in the transfiguring light of memory which is apt to exaggerate the merits which have charmed its youth. (26 April 1845)

Even in 1870, when Siddons had been dead for nearly forty years and had not played Lady Macbeth for over fifty, the critics were still harping on her 'massive person and sculptured genius [which] were as essentially repugnant as they were akin to the spirit of the antique.' This was contrasted with Faucit's 'essentially human, and even womanly representation of

Lady Macbeth' (Liverpool Post 13 December). It is possible to argue that the reason for this continual harping on Faucit's 'womanly' representation of Lady Macbeth while at the same time attempting to distance Siddons' Lady Macbeth not just in the previous century but in antiquity, was more than a preference for a certain theatrical interpretation and that the two characterisations of Lady Macbeth were being seen in a wider context. Thus the one who reflected the prevailing ideal of womanhood had to be celebrated while the woman who challenged this conception must be rejected.

ⁱ Henry Morley was sub-editor then editor and critic for the Examiner from 1850-1865 but the reviews, although probably written by him, were unsigned. Many were collected and published in Journal of a London Playgoer. In the text I have only attributed to Morley the citations which are taken directly from the Journal of a London Playgoer.

ⁱⁱ This text was Fanny Kemble's acting copy and was given by her father, Charles Kemble to Helen Faucit in 1838. It is now in The Shakespeare Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon (S.R./P.72.919 (4010)).

ⁱⁱⁱ This is written in quotation marks but I have been unable to find its provenance.

Chapter 5. Ellen Terry.

The audience at Terry's first performance as Lady Macbeth at the end of 1888 was very different from that watching Faucit's final interpretation in November 1871. The certainties had gone, established values were being challenged, roles within society questioned. Yet the performance which the Lyceum audience experienced was one to reassure those who felt uneasy at the changes taking place in society, one that Faucit would have recognised and appreciated. But in Terry's audience there were now women who publicly fought for and would benefit from the recent Married Women's Property Act of 1882 and who could join, if only in a supporting role, political parties; women who had joined together to seek the right to vote and women who were beginning to seek opportunities to work outside the traditional family environment. By 1888 women could find employment in The Post Office Savings Bank, The National Savings Bank, at the Post Office or in The Civil Service. Admittedly these jobs were as clerks, but the possibility of employment began to appear as an option, however slight, to marriage. Higher Education, which also carried a possibility of access to a world beyond the domestic, started to become available to women. In 1873 Girton College, Cambridge was founded. London University admitted women in 1878 and Maria Grey Teacher Training college opened in the same year. Politics too were beginning to loose their male exclusivity. The Conservatives founded the Primrose League in 1884 followed in 1886 by the creation of the Women's Liberal Foundation. In both cases their role was a supporting one with no aim of obtaining the vote. This was left to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, founded in 1887. However women's involvement in politics at whatever level was not always popular, 'their natural sphere is not in the turmoil and dust of politics but the circle of social and domestic life' according to Lord Asquith (qtd. in Fredman 58).

As with the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act in the middle of the century another Parliamentary Bill, this time the Married Women's Property Act, brought the often unspoken assumptions about women into the public arena. The argument caused during the debates over the bill and the language used both to promote and oppose it, illustrate clearly the confusion and division within society as to the nature and role of men and women. In 1857 a first attempt at a Married Women's Property Act had been overshadowed by the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act. A second attempt took place in 1868, championed this time by John Stuart Mill. The main argument against the Act, that there was a pre-ordained inequality in the relationship between man and wife, was summed up by Lord Penzance, the chief opponent of the bill in the Lords:

The relations of husband and wife were founded upon a condition of things which had existed without exception in all times and in all parts of the earth - the husband being the protector and support of the wife and the latter subordinate to and reliant upon him...and ... the law obviously ought to follow in the same track. (Hansard 3 CXCVIII 982)

The Times, which changed its opinion during the contest, agreed that the law as it stood simply 'followed nature' (15 April 1869 p. 8). Mill argued that it was impossible to know what nature had intended as society had made its own rules:

I deny that any one knows or can know, the nature of the two sexes, as long as they have only been seen in their present relation to each other. If men had ever been found in a society without women, or women without men, or if there had ever been a society of men and women in which the women were not under the control of men, something might have been positively known about the mental and moral differences which may be inherent in the nature of each. (qtd. in Sachs and Wilson, 217)

But Mill was not speaking for a majority nor, more importantly, for those who made and interpreted the law. In a highly popular pamphlet Liberty, Equality, Fraternity James Fitzjames Stephen argued that physical and mental superiority went together:

Physical differences between the two sexes affected every part of the human body the texture of the brain and the character of the nervous system. Men are stronger than women in every shape; they have greater muscular and nervous force, greater intellectual force and vigour of character. (qtd. in Sachs and Wilson 140)

Six years later Stephen became a High Court Judge.

Despite such strong opposition the bill passed the Commons but was then torn to shreds by the Lords before being returned to the Commons who passed the amended bill. Despite its defects it was, according to the Annual Register of 1870, ‘a first recognition of a new principle, another small sign of the times...that the old creeds were passing away, and, whether for good or evil, all things becoming new’ (qtd. in Holcombe 183).

The ‘old creeds’ took time to pass away and it was another twelve years before the House of Lords was willing to accept the Commons’ proposals and a second, more robust Married Women’s Property Act was passed in 1882. Yet the Married Women’s Property Committee were hinting at other battles still to be fought: ‘There are rights more sacred than even the right of property, wrongs more flagrant than even the forfeiture of a wife’s property that yet remain unaddressed, but for the redress of which they rejoice to believe that they see in the passing of the Act the sure pledge and herald’ (Final report of the Married Women’s Property Committee 1882 qtd. in Holcombe 219).

The tradition of using Shakespeare’s female characters as role models for women continued into the late nineteenth century and Lady Macbeth remained problematic. One of the most successful works of the period was Shakespeare’s Garden of Girls, which grew out of talks given by M. Leigh-Noel, later to become Mrs. Elliott, to the New Shakespeare

Society in 1885. According to Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts, ‘little is known of [her] aside from her two books on Shakespeare’ (173). Her work celebrated the ‘sisterhood of Shakespeare’s heroines’, a category into which Lady Macbeth did not fit easily. However she could not be ignored, thus in 1884, Leigh-Noel published an extended essay, entitled Lady Macbeth: A Study. The unease felt by the writer at Lady Macbeth’s behaviour is indicated by her positioning the character, as had the earlier writers, ‘far removed from our scrupulous times’ (qtd. in Thompson 174), but she clearly wanted her readers to understand rather than judge the character. They would need ‘only a little care and patience to discover in Lady Macbeth many womanly traits and even endearing qualities’ (qtd. in Thompson 174). Leigh-Noel then seeks to explain Lady Macbeth’s actions through a state which modern actors and audiences would define as post-natal depression. In 1987, Sinead Cussack used the same reasons but different language to explain her understanding of her character’s motives, ‘the image of the lost child became the most potent reference point in [the] production’ (qtd. in Rutter 56). Leigh-Noel’s Lady Macbeth is a ‘childless mother’ who ‘live[s] only on the remembrance of the bitter-sweet joys of maternity’. Without a child and ‘lacking her husband’s confidence, the salt and season of her life were gone...’ (qtd. in Thompson 174).

It was against this background of strongly held but increasingly challenged perceptions of the nature of women and their role in society that Irving decided that it was time to add Macbeth to the Lyceum repertoire and it therefore followed that Lady Macbeth would be played by his leading lady, Terry. In 1888 she had been with Irving at the Lyceum for ten years. She was just forty although she would probably have only admitted to thirty-nine. She always gave her birth date as 27 February 1848 but after her death her daughter, Edith Craig, discovered that she had been born a year earlier in 1847. During the ten years at the Lyceum Terry and Irving had been highly successful. She had played Ophelia to Irving’s Hamlet, Lady Anne to his Richard III and a highly acclaimed, but controversial Portia, to Irving’s

Shylock. Ruskin complained to Irving that ‘Though Miss Terry’s Portia has obtained so much applause, it greatly surprises me that you have not taught her a grander reading of the part’ (qtd. Manvell 131). In 1881 she had played Desdemona and Juliet the following year. She also played Beatrice, which became her favourite part: ‘her brilliant mind has a strong deep heart’ (Lectures 83). The role suited her physically and she enjoyed the cleverness of Beatrice. She perhaps also felt comfortable with the resolution in which Beatrice, despite all her independence, has to ask for Benedict’s help. Scott thought this was ‘one of the most exquisite realisations of a Shakespearean heroine that any of us have ever seen’(14-5), and that the lines ‘... there was a star danced, and under that was I born’ described not only Beatrice but Terry. In 1885 she played Viola but she never played Rosalind. There were many who felt it was a role that would have suited Terry but because Irving could see no starring role for himself in the play it was never performed. This partnership with Irving was not an equal one. Scott remembers Terry telling him that her ‘aim’ was ‘usefulness to my lovely art and to Henry Irving’. She admitted that this was ‘not a very high ambition’ but she ‘saw things as they were ... both off and on stage’ and therefore only ‘aspired to help a little’ (117-8).

In 1887 a new production was needed. In her Memoirs Terry admits ‘We ought to have done As You Like It ... or The Tempest...[or] Julius Caesar, King John, Anthony and Cleopatra, Richard II and Timon of Athens’ (302)’. There seems a note of desperation in this list that includes almost every play but the one Irving wanted to do, Macbeth. He had already played the part in 1875 with Miss Bateman as Lady Macbeth but without any great success and was eager to try again. Scott blamed the earlier failure on Irving’s ‘lack of physical strength or robust vigour necessary for the trying demands of a tragedy like Macbeth’ and damned Bateman with faint praise: ‘the greatest possible pains and loving care [had] been bestowed on the work... no one would attempt to deny’ (79).

Lady Macbeth was not an obvious choice for Terry's talents or acting style, a fact of which she and the critics were aware. Two of her sternest critics were her son, Gordon Craig and the writer, George Bernard Shaw. The former published his biography, Ellen Terry and her Secret Self in reply to Shaw's publication in 1931 of his correspondence with Terry. Craig was incensed both by the publication of the letters and particularly the Preface. Shaw however dismissed Craig as a 'squalling baby' attributing his rage to his having 'wounded that sacred thing, a boy's idolatry of the first great actor he ever saw' (212). Despite their public disagreement both men discuss Terry's acting style and her relationship with the audience in a very similar vein. Shaw wrote: 'Although she was soundly skilled in the technique of her profession she never needed to perform any remarkable feat of impersonation: the spectators would have resented it; they did not want Ellen Terry to be Olive Primrose: they wanted Olive Primrose to be Ellen Terry' (xvi). Craig also saw this relationship with the public and felt it limited his mother's performance:

Faced with the public, rather than carry the public along or fight she would side with the cow-like animal and begin to imitate its face and drop tears all over the place. ... If there was ever any body born in nineteenth century England to give a real and painful interpretation of Lady Macbeth it was Ellen Terry if only she had not been frightened of that British public.... What made Mrs. Siddons seem, ... greater than Kean... was her ascendancy over the public - she refused to be dominated by it, and made tearful by it, when she was about to scorch and burn it. (157)

Terry was well aware of the Siddons' tradition. According to Irving's grandson, Laurence:

When Irving had studied Macbeth for the first time, Helen Faucit had given him a book which had influenced him profoundly. It was an essay on the play by George Fletcher which had been published in the Westminster Review in 1843. It included a detailed exposition of Mrs. Siddons' view of the character of Lady Macbeth - namely the

devoted wife. (Laurence Irving 499)

In view of Faucit's early contribution to the production, Martin's failure to make any comment in his biography on his wife's interest or even awareness of it seems all the more strange. Irving now gave this essay to Terry¹. The seeming discrepancy between the established memory of Siddons' portrayal, her scorching and burning of the public to which Craig referred and the 'fair and feminine' creature puzzled Terry, but she thought she had found the answer. On Fletcher's essay she wrote 'I cannot understand why Mrs. Siddons shd write down one set of ideas upon the subject and carry out a totally different plan. Why?... because one way is well within her methods and physical presentation'. Terry then gives Siddons and herself three options:

1 Make up in every way....Be in fact (I'm afraid) a great actor- deceive audience into at least thinking all this.

2nd Method. Play to the best of one's own powers - one's own possibilities. Adapt the part to my own personality...

3rd Method. Don't play at all. (qtd. in Manvell 193.)

The critics seemed to feel that Terry chose the second option and she seems to think Siddons had too. Yet many of those who saw Siddons as Lady Macbeth would have argued that what they were seeing was a 'great actor' not merely someone playing 'to the best of [her] powers.'

In retirement Siddons, Faucit and Terry published or gave talks on Shakespeare's women, but only Siddons chose to write about Lady Macbeth in any detail, the other two either ignored her or isolated her in some way. It was as if they were afraid she might subvert their carefully constructed version of the true nature of women, as if her very complexity, her combination of both good and evil was too threatening a notion of what women were, or might be if released from the constraints that society imposed upon them.

Terry gave a series of lectures on Some of Shakespeare's Heroinesⁱⁱ. The Preamble is robust:

Most writers consciously or unconsciously are affected by the view that women should Always keep silent, that they should not live lives of their own, but exist for certain episodes in a man's life. Milton put this frankly [by jove] when he wrote 'He for God only - she for God and him' And many, who would not care to confess it openly agree with Milton within their hearts.

But the robust attitude did not continue, while Faucit found Lady Macbeth too difficult even to consider for any length, Terry placed Lady Macbeth amongst the Pathetic, rather than Triumphant women. She realised this was problematic: 'no sooner had I stuck on the labels 'triumphant' and 'pathetic' than I felt this division into two types was a mistake....you will find that in the 'pathetic' group there are women who have nothing more in common than a tragic fate'(80). In the introduction to the lecture on 'The Pathetic Women' she comes back to the vision of Lady Macbeth which Siddons first suggested in her retrospective view of the character, but she takes Siddons' hint of fragility to much greater extremes. 'I don't conceive of Lady Macbeth as a muscular woman, but as a delicate little creature, with hypersensitive nerves... This may be the explanation of my calling these heroines 'pathetic'. Little creatures are pathetic, I think, whether birds, kittens, or children' (125). This seems to contradict her earlier assertion that by 'pathetic' she only meant suffering 'a tragic fate'; by linking 'pathetic' to 'little creatures... birds, kittens or children' she is using pathetic in the more commonly accepted meaning that she had earlier taken pains to avoid. Later, in the lecture she seeks to explain the construction that can be applied to certain lines of the play to support this delicacy:

I have given suck, and know

How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:

.....
 ... had I so sworn as you

have done to this.

Are not these lines capable of this construction: I would do all that I couldn't do, all that would be utterly false to every natural instinct and feeling of mine rather than break such an oath as the one you have sworn.... We really ought not to take her wild words as proof of abnormal ferocity. (161)

Yet she then asserts that Lady Macbeth 'is compelled to take up the burden of action when her husband who being a dreamer finds it intolerably heavy, lays it down' (162). Terry is perhaps unconvinced by her own argument for almost immediately she adds: 'in plain prose she has a nervous break-down ... [and] dies of remorse' (162).

In comparison with other characters, Lady Macbeth receives little consideration in either Terry's lectures or autobiography. Even as Faucit preferred someone else to speak for her, Terry gives scant attention to the production of Macbeth in her Memoirs, instead referring the reader to: 'one of the best things ever written on the subject ... the essay of J.Comyns-Carr. That is as hotly discussed as the new Lady Mac - all the best people agreeing with it' (306). As the 'best people' presumably includes Terry herself it is worth looking at the article in some detail. Terry had her own copyⁱⁱⁱ bearing the proprietorial message in her distinctive handwriting, 'Ellen Terry 1888 (her book)'. It is inscribed 'To Ellen Terry from her affectionate friend J. Comyns-Carr'. Terry has then written, as was her habit, along the margins of the text. For example she underlined the word 'exhausted' and put a question mark beside it when Comyns-Carr writes of the 'soul [of Lady Macbeth] exhausted by its wickedness'(7). However, in the great majority of instances, she clearly agreed strongly with what he was saying for almost every page is scored with emphatic lines in the margin.

Comyns-Carr began his essay by describing 'the popular view of the play' in which Lady Macbeth is regarded 'as the dominating influence in this awful record of crime' (3). This Lady Macbeth is the nightmare of the opponents of The Married Women's Property Act, the threat to those who fear the suffrage movement. She is

the embodiment of all those fierce passions that are deemed to be most repugnant to the ideal of womanhood, and moved by a will that is deaf to the pleadings of humanity and inaccessible to the voice of eternal law, she is regarded as the evil genius of her husband, crushing by the weight of her stronger individuality the constant promptings of his better nature, and sweeping him with irresistible force into a bottomless abyss of crime. (6)

Comyns-Carr, like Terry, has read Fletcher's article and feels that he '... made a praiseworthy attempt to revive the finer outlines of Shakespeare's portrait' (7). He also quotes extensively from Siddons' views of Lady Macbeth's character and comments that the difference between her 'constant insistence upon the essentially feminine nature of Lady Macbeth' and 'the threatening and commanding figure which she actually presented on stage... only proves how potent a factor in the art of the stage is the unconscious and inevitable intrusion of the actor's personality' (11). His argument is that 'the two central figures are, and are deliberately intended to be the embodiment and expression of the contrasted characteristics of sex... Macbeth stands out among the works of Shakespeare as a sublime study of sexual contrast, a superb embodiment of the force and the weakness of the conjugal relation' (13). Thus Macbeth suddenly becomes a morality play about marriage, about the relationship between male and female, no longer a tragedy or about good and evil. Instead it becomes a reflection of the late nineteenth-century unease and preoccupation with the nature of the two sexes and their appropriate roles. Seen in this light, Lady Macbeth has to be domesticated and given the supporting role:

Her superlative strength in executive resource is only consistent with the assumption that she has accepted without questioning a policy that was not of her own devising: his apparent weakness, on the other hand, is the inevitable attitude of an imaginative temperament, which feels all the responsibilities, and forecasts the consequences of the crime it has conceived. (20)

Society expected, or at least hoped, that women would be selfless, that they could be relied upon to put themselves last, 'in the draught', as Virginia Woolf so memorably put it. So Comyns-Carr sees that Lady Macbeth 'labours in his service, and not for any ends of her own' (24). Alongside this sentence and those that follow, all of which deal with comparisons of male and female, Terry has written 'Admirable insight of character'. Later she underlines, with an extra underlining on the second 'woman', '... she is every inch a woman. It is the woman...' (26). He believes that 'in all tragedy there is nothing so pitiful in its pathos as the passage ('Nought's had, all's spent' 3.2 5-12) in which she strives to grant to her husband the support of which she herself stands so sorely in need' (30). The language in which Comyns-Carr writes of the final moments of the two characters reduces one and enlarges the other. Thus of Lady Macbeth he observes 'beneath the weight of her guilty knowledge her shattered nerves have snapped and broken' (31-2) while of Macbeth he writes, 'And yet despite the full revelation of the man's nature, who can fail to be moved by the splendid despair of his closing hours, when, with all the forces of heaven and earth arrayed against him, he struggles with dauntless courage to the end' (38). Terry seems to be saying, by her enthusiastic commendation of the article, that this Lady Macbeth and the relationship between the two protagonists is the one she was hoping to create.

Irving, it would appear, was not quite so eager to take such a commanding role for Macbeth. In his Introduction to the play, which was included in The Book of Words^{iv} which went on sale at the theatre to accompany the production, he questions whether Siddons

played Lady Macbeth ‘in the style of a stern and forbidding termagant’, but he accepts ‘from the descriptions left to us by those who were happy enough to see her that there were resonant notes of supernatural terror, and flashes of fire, almost infernal in their devilish splendour’ in her performance. Unlike Comyns-Carr he does not see the differences between the two sexes as the fulcrum of the play, instead ‘the real conflict, out of which the action grows, is the conflict between the worse and better natures of these two persons; the real tragedy is one of conscience’. Despite clearly having strong and contradictory views as to the nature of Lady Macbeth’s character, Irving did not try to direct Terry’s performance. Indeed in a moment of weakness she wrote to an American friend, William Winter asking for help. ‘It appears obvious that I ask Henry ...: but I’d sooner trouble you’ (qtd. in Auerbach 260).

The copious notes in the margins of the texts, kept at Smallhythe, which Terry used while preparing the play give many hints as to how she approached the part and how she perceived the characters. Against the list of ‘Dramatis Personae’ she has written a perceptive and less heroic description of Macbeth than the one she accepted from Comyns-Carr:

A man of great physical courage, frightened at a mouse a man who talks and talks
 And works himself up rather in the style of an early Victorian heroine
 Macbeth must have had a ? [clearly Terry could not think of a suitable word for this
 kind of mother] who never taught him the importance of self-control. He has none and
 he is obsessed by the thought of himself.

Lady Macbeth is: ‘A woman (all over a woman) who believes in Macbeth, with a lurking knowledge of his weakness but who never found him out.’

Even before Lady Macbeth appears, Terry stresses her ambition, which she feels is greater than Macbeth’s. Beside his speech, ‘The service and the loyalty I owe / Safe toward your love and honour’ (1.4.22-27), Terry writes ‘Yes, Lady M was ambitious. Her husband’s letters aroused intensely the desire to be Queen - true to women’s nature, even more than man’s to

crave power - and power's display.' Yet, although Terry sees the ambition in Lady Macbeth, she thinks that while 'she dreamed of future splendour she did not realise the measure of the crime'. This note is written alongside the speech 'Glamis thou art' (1.5.13-28). The guilt and the responsibility for goading Macbeth into action were, thought Terry, Lady Macbeth's. When Macbeth is hesitating, alongside the stage direction 'Enter Lady Macbeth', Terry has written the words 'The spur'. She clearly felt that Macbeth's hesitation was from cowardice not from any moral compunction. By the line, 'When you durst do it, then you were a man' (1.7.49), Terry writes 'you are a coward, that's what all this means'.

After the murder, Terry sensed a change and she was helped to show this by Irving, who, following the now accepted pattern, had reinstated Lady Macbeth in the scene. Terry had no doubt that the faint was real. As Macbeth describes his killing of the grooms, she writes, 'Safe! Safe!! She thinks' and 'She faints (which she does)'. Irving thought that while the faint was genuine 'Macbeth, by his disregard of it, seems not to think so' (358). But the safety was short lived. Before the banquet, beside 'Nought's had, all's spent...' (3.2.4) Terry writes: 'She sees clearer now!!! knows she has missed what she had hoped to gain - I think she is rather stupid!!' At the back of another of her texts, she has stuck a picture of a woman with head in her hands and the lines 'Noughts had, all's spent / When our desire is got without content'. Written beside in a more sympathetic tone is 'This suggests Lady Macbeth to me'. At the end of this scene Terry highlights the increasing signs of separation between Macbeth and his wife and the beginnings of her final collapse. 'He goes out first and she still, I think and try to find the meaning of his words- anxious and rather ill.' This distance between them is increased at the end of the banquet scene, the one eager to relinquish the weight of power, the other determined to grasp it. Terry asks herself 'How about trying to ease his head by taking off his crown which he the more firmly now plants on his head'. This contrasts with 'The first thing she does is to take off her crown'. At the end of the Act she writes 'Now-----

---she knows him. Now Lady Macbeth shall sleep no more - for she is at last - frightened!' At the back of the text Terry has pasted a picture of the sleep walking scene and written above it, 'my acting ... was all wrong somehow' a comment with which the majority of the critics would agree. Then she has added in large letters 'Remember she is weak and ill.' After Lady Macbeth's final 'Oh, Oh, Oh,' she has written 'the last one is a sigh'. In this copy Terry's final verdict on Lady Macbeth is written on the last page, 'Lady M is an example of affection - she loves her husband - ergo - she is a woman = and she knows it and is half the time afraid while urging M not to be afraid as she loves a man = women love men'.

Terry had a second copy of the play upon which she also wrote acting and general comments, usually longer and in a more humorous vein. Before the banquet, which she refers to as 'the Royal tea party' she writes beside Lady Macbeth's 'But in them nature's copy's not eterne' (3.1.38), 'Don't trouble so, for they can not live for ever that fellow Banquo may die any day - why not! the boy may have whooping cough in such a climate as this - and we keep all the whisky to ourselves - I lock the cupboard every night'. She clearly thinks that Lady Macbeth has no idea that her husband might be plotting the death of Banquo and Fleance nor makes any suggestion to him that he might, unlike Siddons or Faucit. In this second text Terry suggests Lady Macbeth has gone beyond weakness and fright to the edge of madness. On the flyleaf opposite the Banquet scene she writes 'I wonder she didn't go mad sweetly but with a ghastly mouth the mouth tells all = the pain and the effort and the madness.' However her instructions to herself in the sleep-walking scene do not continue to suggest madness only weakness: 'Enter with taper - she is seen coming down the stairs hurried excited. Trembling hands - she is very weak Rub the palm of hand. 'Here's the smell of blood' is to be said 'with great pity and soft voice'. The final 'Oh, Oh Oh' is to be accompanied with a 'convulsive shudder'.

All three actresses had to consider the question of Lady Macbeth's madness in her final scene. Siddons chose to wear white. According to the Morning Post this signalled madness and she was angrily rebuked by the paper: 'Lady Macbeth is supposed to be asleep not mad' (3 February 1785), but most of the eye-witness accounts of her performances comment on her 'vigour' (Boaden 145) rather than madness. In her later notes Siddons does not seem to indicate she felt that Lady Macbeth was mad, only in an 'ever-burning fever of remorse' (Campbell 2:31). Bartholomeusz notes her visits to see a 'somnambulist' but no visit to observe a lunatic. Only Bell heard a 'tone of imbecility' (96). Faucit's Lady Macbeth has to bear her own guilt as well as her husband's, but even this does not cause her to go mad. Most audiences saw 'a heart sick with the sense of guilt and riven with remorse' (Morning Post 19 February 1858) in a woman 'beautiful and touching' (Sunday Times 10 August 1851). However Edward Russell in the Liverpool Post sensed a hint of 'melancholy madness' (4 November 1864). Terry's notes on the text do not seem to indicate that she felt Lady Macbeth was mad but simply hopeless. On the final page she has written, as Faucit had done in her text of the play, lines of poetry that seem to sum up her view of the character:

Leave every joy to glimmer on my mind

But leave – oh leave the light of Hope behind

What though my winged hours of bliss have been

Like Angel visits, few and far between. (Campbell Pleasures of Hope)

In the reviews of her performance only the Star, which differed from most of the other critics in almost all its opinions, hears 'a wild hysterical shout' as she 'disappears' (31 December 1888).

From her Memoirs, her annotated texts and her endorsement of Comyns-Carr's ideas on the character of Lady Macbeth and these two personal comments at the end of her texts, it is possible to form a clear picture of what Terry was trying to do when she opened at the

Lyceum Theatre on 29 December 1888. It is perhaps possible to do the same for Irving from The Book of Words which contained an Introduction, the text, which was not the one used in the production, and a 'Moral'. The 'Introduction' included the 'Plot':

Lady Macbeth, at once roused to the highest pitch of ambition, subordinates the scruples of her lord and urges him to kill the king, whilst sleeping. He consents and executes his bloody purpose, which the better to conceal Lady Macbeth enters the bloody chamber, smears the faces of the two attendants sleeping in the king's bedchamber with blood and places the two daggers on their pillows.

In this explanation there is no mention of Lady Macbeth's reluctance to kill Duncan because of his resemblance to her father, nor of Macbeth's refusal to re-enter the chamber to leave the daggers himself. In the remainder of the Plot, Lady Macbeth is not weakened by any mention of her faint, although this was played in the production, nor is there any discussion of Macbeth's increasing separation from his wife or her sleepwalking. Almost as an afterthought, it notes 'Lady Macbeth kills herself in the interim and the whole concludes by Macduff and the army declaring Malcolm king.' These final words emphasise the heroic mood which Irving hoped to create for the production which omitted the play's last speech, ending instead at the point when the army echo Macduff's words to Malcolm 'Hail King of Scotland'(5.9.26). In the Book of the Words, Irving the scholar, (as opposed to Irving the actor), prints Shakespeare's complete text including Malcolm's final speech so that Macbeth is left in the reader's mind as 'this dead butcher' and Lady Macbeth as 'his fiend-like Queen' (5.9.36). This was a character Irving's audience did not see nor one Terry wished to play. There is a second discrepancy between Irving the director and Irving the Shakespearean scholar. In the play as acted, Irving continued the tradition of isolating Lady Macbeth amongst a world of men; but in the text in the programme there is another woman, one of whom the audience could approve and for whom they could feel great sympathy. Lady

Macduff is reinstated and the scene in which she and her children are murdered is included in full. In the 'Moral' at the end of the programme no mention is made of Lady Macbeth:

In this play Shakespeare has finally depicted the length to which unprincipled ambition will carry mankind, when once their imaginations are posed by it. We behold Macbeth, cherished and rewarded by his sovereign and beloved by his compeers and his country, suddenly become the murderer of the first and the scourge of the last. He succeeds, it is true, but his fall is more rapid than his exaltation.

There was a great deal of publicity surrounding the opening of Macbeth. The Illustrated London News described it as 'the talk of the town... to the exclusion of politics, social scandal and the latest low life atrocity' (5 January 1889). This was because of the fame and popularity of Irving and Terry and the success of the Lyceum productions, but there was also a perception that Terry was not in the traditional mould of Lady Macbeths. The St. James Gazette lamented that it had 'not been let into the secret... of Miss Terry's conception of the character... but we may venture to forecast it will be something rather different from that of historic tradition' (29 December 1888). Comyns-Carr's essay had already been published and was seen as indicating how Terry would try to play the part. On the morning of the opening the Pall Mall Gazette imagined Siddons' answer to Comyns-Carr's 'disquisition' which 'she said was vastly well written though the author found several things that Shakespeare never put there'. The paper also gave Shakespeare's view on Comyns-Carr's theory that the play was 'a sublime study of sexual contrast'. He did not 'believe the contrast exists, [he was] always sceptical of contrast between Man with a big M and Woman with a big W' (29 December 1888). Ten years later Charles Hiatt, who wrote one of the earliest biographies of Terry, remembered: 'As may well be imagined the effect of these prolonged discussions was to produce a state of eager expectancy in the minds of the playgoers almost without parallel in the annals of the modern stage' (202-3).

The critics all perceived the same performance, the words they used in their reviews are very similar, 'feminine', 'womanly', 'beautiful', 'graceful' and 'tender' were amongst the most frequently used. Where they differed was whether they thought these adjectives were applicable to Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. There was little dissension over the physical beauty of this Lady Macbeth. The Daily Telegraph^v is perhaps the most extreme version but all critics praised her beauty :

... what we see is no tragedy queen indeed no hard harsh featured woman with a rasping voice and a forbidding manner, ... but a woman stately, fair with a clear white face set in a glory of hair of Titian red, in the heyday of her beauty arrayed in apparel as gorgeous as some Queen of Sheba, who hurries onto the stage reading Macbeth's letter... then drawing her chair to the dying embers she soliloquises on the character of her warrior husband, fortifying her impression with a miniature which she addresses with a hesitating voice but in a tone of loving rapture. (31 December 1888)

Despite clearly falling under the spell of this beauty, the writer had to admit that there was a discrepancy between vision and words. 'Vain is it for such a woman, struggling against her nature, trying to appear what she is not, with her tender throbbing voice and her honest open countenance, with softness in her eyes and promised kisses on her lips'. The Star was more forthright: 'The great thing about Ellen Terry's Lady Macbeth is its sex. It is redolent, pungent with the odeur de femme. Look how she rushes into her husband's arms, coaxing, flattering and even her taunts, when his resolution begins to wander are sugared with a loving smile' (31 December 1888). This critic also sensed treachery in her beauty, not the honesty the Daily Telegraph saw. In her notes Terry wrote 'serpent' by the line 'leave the rest to me.' The Star sensed this, commenting '... one sees a creature of viperine charm, of deadly seduction'. Terry's costume had been designed by Alice Comyns-Carr. In her opening scene the magnificent dress, which Sargent chose for his portrait, (See picture 12) successfully



12. Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth.

By John Singer Sargent 1889.

suggested not only the treachery that Terry had hinted at and The Star had seen, but the strength that Terry was unwilling to play. Comyns-Carr later said: 'I was anxious to make this particular dress look as much like soft chain armour as I could, and yet have something that would give the appearance of the scales of a serpent' (211). Auerbach suggests:

The lesson within Ellen Terry's Lady Macbeth dress was that it did not belong to Lady Macbeth. The costume dramatized not the wife Ellen Terry tried to play, but her unspeakable alienation from that role and from the world of the Lyceum in which she moved... The Lady Macbeth dress, and Sargent's crowning vision of its meaning, were definitive embodiments of Ellen Terry's disjunction from her assigned roles. (265-6)

The Times however did not sense this, instead it felt 'something almost shocking in the cold-blooded suggestions from such lips as hers' and her encouragement to Macbeth amounted to no more than 'gentle chiding exhortation' (31 December 1888). Hughes sees her task in this opening scene as 'to make her motive clear' but feels she failed by 'substituting conventional sentiment for love' (98).

The Star continued alone in sensing the evil in Lady Macbeth. At the arrival of Duncan at Macbeth's castle, it advised its readers to:

Mark the wily obsequiousness of the woman as she leads Duncan under the broad archway in the massive set... It was very irreverent, I know, but as I watched Ellen Terry's eyes gleaming, almost gloating in the flickering torchlight over the poor old man, I could not help thinking of the spider and the fly. (31 December 1888)

Terry kept many of her reviews and this was amongst them, perhaps grateful that at least one critic could see beyond her physical charms.

The Dramatic Review gives a vivid description of the murder scene:

Lady Macbeth's face is a mask of tragedy itself, or a new study for a damned soul in torment as she stands crouching against the pillar, impervious to all sights and sounds

but those for which her eyes and ears are waiting, till the return of her husband with blood stained hands and conscience brings back to her mind the necessity for further resolute action. Then she is fiercely impatient to obliterate traces of the crime and it is only when the immediate danger is over that the normal woman asserts herself.

(5 January 1889)

This re-establishment of the 'normal woman' displaying 'the weakness of her sex' is noted by the Daily Chronicle:

Only when the deed is done and the guilty pair stand together alarmed by the knocking at the gate does Lady Macbeth resign the control of affairs. The weakness of her sex asserts itself when agitated by the knowledge of the manner in which the murder has been committed and in a measure terrified by the vehement grief and indignation of the suddenly aroused inmates of the castle, she faints and is borne away.

(31 December 1888 p. 5)

The faint, definitely not a feint, was very much in keeping with the character of Terry's Lady Macbeth. Percy Fitzgerald, in a favourable review in the Theatre, thought that her:

more feminine conception is supported in a remarkable way by the incident of Lady Macbeth fainting on the discovery of the murder. No ingenuity can get over this inconsistency and performers who have adopted the heroic masculine view have turned the difficulty by leaving the passage out. (1 February 1889)

Russell, now styling himself 'An Old hand' and still writing and editing the Liverpool Daily Post eighteen years after he had applauded Faucit's equally feminine Lady Macbeth, thought it a 'splendid idea' that Terry stood 'behind Banquo, nervously assenting by nods and gestures and inarticulate lip movements to her lord's story, until her woman's strength fails her and the cry is raised 'Look to the Lady' ' (31 December 1888).

Terry's performance in the banquet scene did not receive much attention from the critics who were more concerned with the treatment of Banquo's ghost and admiration for the scenery. This had been designed with great attention to historical accuracy by Charles Cattermole, a well known water-colour painter. Hughes comments that in this scene 'Cattermole's scholarship and Irving's love of pageantry met' ... and ended in 'a piece of melodramatic claptrap to bring down the curtain' (108-9). This 'melodramatic claptrap' was described by the Star, seemingly with approval:

The man, spent bent and broken hangs helpless vacant-eyed in his chair. The woman puts out her hand and gently touches him, then comes the whisper in Ellen Terry's sweetest tones, 'You lack the season of all nature, sleep'. Hand in hand they totter to the door, but ere they reach it Macbeth stops, stares and buries his head in his hands. His wife gives way at last and falls prone at his feet. Such a picture of despair the stage can rarely have shown. (31 December 1888)

The Daily Telegraph was equally taken with this scene, which would not have been out of place in a sensational novel. The woman is preparing for the guilt and anguish of the next scene while at the same time relinquishing the leadership role she usurped at the beginning of the play: 'What a world of sorrow there was in that agonised woman's cry as in the act of departing to their loveless chamber he dashes the torch with impotent rage and she falls swooning at her husband's feet, as the curtain descends' (31 December 1888).

'In the famous sleepwalking soliloquy Miss Terry's performance was again a little disappointing. The vocal tones and articulation of somnambulism were, it is true admirably simulated, but the utterances of the conscience stricken sleeper were rather pathetic than awe inspiring' (January 1889 Vol. 67 No. 1732 p.10-11). This was the opinion of the Saturday Review, whose reviewer was not alone in his disappointment. The Society Herald complained that Terry was being herself rather than playing Lady Macbeth: 'What a farce

that was. It was Ellen Terry who stood before us moaning and rocking backwards and forwards, Ellen Terry who spoke. Ellen Terry who gracefully walked upstairs and down, but Lady Macbeth, the guilty, the restless, the agitated slumberer - never!' (31 December 1888). The Daily Telegraph, though continuing to admire the beauty of Terry, was also unsure what part she was playing:

Pretty and picturesque it could not fail to be; mysterious and impressive it certainly was not. The question is whether in her desire to avoid conventionality, she has not wandered into the opposite extreme of tameness. What could be lovelier than the sight of Miss Terry descending the steps of the pillared passage, light in hand and advancing towards the footlights? But it was not Lady Macbeth. (31 December 1888.)

Other critics, however, admired Terry at this point. The Spectator, though generally disapproving, thought the sleepwalking scene was 'Miss Terry's best effort and impressed the audience greatly by its picturesque path....[she] remains sympathetic to the last and this final scene in her hands remains the most effective argument for Lady Macbeth's rehabilitation' (5 January 1889). The Times, which felt that 'the uphill portion of Miss Terry's task' ended after the murder, called:

the sleepwalking scene ... the most impressive feature of this performance. While Miss Terry walks in her sleep she holds the whole house in a state of absolute almost painful stillness, her face haggard and worn, her eyes have a lost faraway look and as she soliloquises her body sways to and fro in a strange awe inspiring fashion.
(31 December 1888)

The Star hailed Terry as 'The High Priestess of Intensity' describing 'the deep, unbroken silence that falls upon the house. Followed, as the white figure, lamp in hand and whispering 'To bed, to bed, to bed' disappears in the doorway, by a wild hysterical shout' (31 December 1888).

As the reviews have shown, the verdict of the critics was mixed but most admired the beauty and femininity of Terry even if they could not agree that these were qualities that Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth possessed. The Daily Chronicle perhaps summed up this view best: 'That it is convincing few will maintain. It is however divinely beautiful. ... This is not the Lady Macbeth of tradition or of Mrs Siddons we know. It is scarcely a Lady Macbeth we realise. It is perhaps, one of which we have dreamed' (31 December 1888). The Society Herald, touching a nerve of public pride in memories of the Crimean War, commented 'to distort a well known saying, ... "c'est magnifique mais ce n'est pas Lady Macbeth"' (31 December 1888). The Spectator was more forthright 'What on earth is this graceful, amiable and picturesque woman doing in these shambles?' It then answers its own question 'The requisite clue will be found in Mr. Comyns-Carr's opportune brochure' (5 January 1889). The Times compared Terry with the earlier reading by Faucit:

Miss Helen Faucit was blamed for portraying Macbeth's consort as a womanly and to some extent a sympathetic personage, but there is no precedent we believe for a Lady Macbeth of the stamp now given by Miss Ellen Terry - a gentle affectionate wife, wrapped up in her husband, ambitious not for herself but for him. (31 December 1888)

'To sum up - but why sum up? ... Miss Terry's Lady Macbeth ... is an impersonation of the very deepest interest, daringly original, rich in suggestion, a gallant appeal to the present playhouse to upset the traditional point of view' (The Spectator 5 January 1889). Or, to put it another way:

The Lady Macbeth Puzzle

Some say she was meant to be thin

Some say she was meant to be fat

Some say she was meant to be this

Some say she was meant to be that

But whatever William meant her to be

She is for the present, a Mys-Terree. (The Daily Telegraph 2 January 1889)

Despite arousing such conflicting passions, from the enthusiastic to the dismissive, the commercial success of the production was never in any doubt: it ran for one hundred and fifty-one nights to a capacity audience and was then revived for a tour of the United States in 1895. Terry admitted, at least to her diary, that ‘...it is a success, and I am a success which amazes me, for never did I think I should be let down so easily’ (306). She does not explain her amazement, but her nervousness at attempting Lady Macbeth, her stated preference for many other parts and the public’s eager anticipation may have been because of her perceived unsuitability for the part. Terry was famous for her charm, her beauty and her ability to move the audience, which was used to being in sympathy with her character. How was this to be reconciled with traditional perceptions of Lady Macbeth, a woman so unwomanly that she had to be banished from the sisterhood of Shakespeare’s heroines? Terry thought that the critics did not see what she was trying to do. In a letter to her daughter, Edy, she wrote, ‘Oh it’s fun, but its precious hard work, for I by no means make her a loveable woman as some of them say. That’s all pickles. She was nothing of the sort, although she was not a fiend and she did love husband’ (Memoirs 307).

Two days after the play opened Terry wrote to the critic Scott. He repeats a great deal of what she said in his biography but there is an urgency in her letter that is absent from the later work as she tries to explain her ideas and vent her frustration at what she perceives to be her failure. The letter, quoted in full in Auerbach’s biography, is scattered with repetitions, dashes, underlining and half finished sentences. In it she seeks to rescue Lady Macbeth from her fiendish image and reinstate her as a women: ‘I don’t even want to be a ‘fiend’ & won’t believe for a moment can’t believe for a moment that she did ‘conceive’ that murder’ (qtd. in Auerbach 256). The vision that many critics saw at the end seems to be the one she was

trying to achieve: 'I do believe at the end of the banquet, that poor wretched creature was brought, through agony and sin to repentance and was just forgiven' (qtd. in Auerbach 258).

Her frustration, according to Auerbach, is not because the critics see her as a weak woman but because she feels that 'her very dithering and devotion, her modest protestations of usefulness, represent the Lady Macbeth she sees as Shakespeare's' (259) and one that she feels was captured by Faucit rather than Siddons who played: 'Lady M. her Lady M. not Shakespear's & if I could I wd have done hers, for Shakespeare's Lady M was a fool.'

Despite this admiration for the strong Siddons' interpretation she also wishes she 'could have seen Helen Faucit in the part I do believe she was the rightest - although not to be looked at by the side of the portrait of Siddons...' (qtd. in Auerbach 259). In a second letter written to another critic, William Winter, she again stresses Lady Macbeth's normality: 'she's a woman - a mistaken woman - & weak - not a dove - of course not - but first of all a wife' (qtd. in Auerbach 259). This appeal to two eminent critics to understand Lady Macbeth as an example of a traditional woman and a wife contradicts her approval of Sargent's very different painting: 'Sargent suggested by this picture all that I should have liked to be able to convey in my acting of Lady Macbeth' (Memoirs 306).

In this portrait, in a scene that does not occur in the play, Lady Macbeth stands alone. There is no husband beside her and it is she, not her husband, who is about to receive the crown and it is she, rather than any outside agency who is placing the crown upon her head. It is as if, even as Siddons felt the need to rewrite her portrait of Lady Macbeth changing her from a strong, active protagonist into someone much weaker and less self reliant, so Terry saw in Sargent's painting the strong ambitious woman she had been unable to play. Auerbach believes that in this painting:

Ellen Terry is neither Shakespeare's queen nor Irving's, for she rises into possession of her unsanctioned, forbidden, powerful self with a boldness she dreamed of but never

realized. Watts painted her into a pathetic heroine, Sargent, discerning her lust for forbidden roles, painted her into the triumph she could not act, though it encompassed 'all that she meant to do'. (263)

This image was not one the nineteenth-century audiences or critics saw and this is the image that twenty-first century visitors can no longer see hanging on the walls of the Tate Gallery . Once again the image of Terry is Watts' young girl caught in the moment of choice. In the late nineteenth century when many were challenging the very idea of the nature of women, it was comforting to see Terry choosing a domesticated Lady Macbeth, turned from a virago to a kitten, supporting rather than leading her husband and finally disintegrating under the burden of guilt. Even if many of the critics knew this was not the part Shakespeare wrote, that it was, as the Morning Post admitted only 'a dream', it was a dream into which many in late nineteenth-century Britain wanted to escape. It is also possible that Terry helped to create this 'dream' by her inability to play the part as Sargent, and as she, at times, sought to create it. She may have grumbled to Edy that she did not 'make her a loveable woman' but even those critics, in papers such as the Star, who were not predisposed to see Lady Macbeth in this light declared that this was what they saw.

During the period in which all three actresses were on the stage, Shakespeare was not the only popular dramatist. Siddons undertook a variety of parts including an adaptation by R. B. Sheridan of Kotzebue's Pizarro in which she played Elvira, who, in a narrative reminiscent of Macbeth, persuades the honourable Rolla to murder the Spanish leader Pizarro. Filled with guilt she 'devotes herself to a religious life in a cloister' (Manvell 350). In this and other roles in the same vein, Siddons was playing women who either represented the prevailing views of what women should be, or, if they transgressed, realized their guilt, sought forgiveness and died. In the middle of the century Faucit played similar parts in which women accepted the role society put upon them. A favourite, repeated successfully by Terry, nearly forty years

later, was The Lady of Lyons by Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Auerbach comments that the domestic emphasis in Act 5 was ‘for sensitive Victorian spectators ... a reminder of the many women in everyday life whose unhappy marriages were dictated by economic necessity or family pressure’ (302). However by the end of the century a new kind of woman was emerging in society and being represented on stage. In The New Woman and her Sisters, the editor, Viv. Gardner describes this new woman as: ‘Not overlooked, immediately identifiable but somehow unknown...and best exemplified by one of the Punch cartoons from 1894’ (3-4) (See picture 13). In his introduction to Plays of Henry Arthur Jones, Russell Jackson notes that ‘Sydney Grundy had put a squadron of the harridans on stage in The New Woman’ (17) which ran very successfully at the Comedy Theatre in 1894. In Jones’ play, The Case of Rebellious Susan the caricature New Woman is present in ‘Elaine Shrimpton, a raw, self assertive modern young lady, with brusque and decided manner’ (S. D. Act 1 p. 120), but, the heroine Lady Susan is more than a caricature, she ‘feels frustration as a result of a moral code that binds [her] to an uncongenial husband or fetters [her] to consequences of a past mistake’ (Jackson 14). In Jones’ play Lady Susan returns to her husband although ‘there can never be any true happiness in such a reunion’ (The Theatre qtd. in Jackson p. 16). This traditional ending would not however have been the ending of a more controversial playwright of the period. Among the characteristics Gardner lists for the New Woman was ‘a devotion to Ibsen’ (4).

In December 1879, nine years before Terry played Lady Macbeth, Ibsen’s A Doll’s House opened in Copenhagen, and a woman ‘slammed’ the door on the Victorian ideal. So great was the shock that many companies refused to accept Ibsen’s ending and he was forced to rewrite the last act. Other playwrights bowdlerized the plays including Henry Arthur Jones who chose the telling title Breaking A Butterfly for his version which appeared in London in 1886, three years before the original was staged in The Novelty Theatre to ‘apocalyptic



13. Donna Quixote.

Punch cartoon 28 April 1894.

effect' (Templeton 113). According to Joan Templeton in Ibsen's Women: 'Ibsen was accused ... of advocating the destruction of the family, and with it morality itself,... women in refusing to be compliant were refusing to be women' (113-4). Scott complained that Nora would 'drive off the stage the loving and noble heroines who have adorned it' (qtd. in Templeton 114) a category which surely includes Terry's Lady Macbeth who has risked murder for the love and advancement of her husband. A Doll's House was received with fierce criticism, but small theatres kept Ibsen's plays in production and popular with an audience described dismissively by Scott, writing anonymously in Truth, as composed of 'unnatural looking women, long haired men, atheists, socialists, egoists and Positivists' (13 June 1889). Ibsen's plays were championed by William Archer and Shaw, who encouraged Terry to leave Irving, whose productions Shaw said were 'expensively mounted and superlatively dull' (Shakespeare 115) and play a Shaw or an Ibsen character. At this time Terry was unwilling to risk her popularity with audiences but having acted for the last time with Irving in 1903 she invested her reputation and money in an Ibsen play, The Vikings which her son, Gordon Craig was anxious to stage. In it she played 'a kind of Scandinavian Lady Macbeth' (Findlater 155) but the production was a failure. The public wanted the Terry with 'the sweet face and the tender voice' (Sphere 28 April 1906) and this was the image that was remembered at her Jubilee in 1906, celebrating her fifty years upon the stage. In the articles which appeared and in the celebration itself, Lady Macbeth has all but disappeared. It is a part which sits uneasily with the image which society and presumably Terry herself wanted to remember, yet it is too strong an image to be completely forgotten. It is Sargent's vivid painting which incongruously accompanies a Supplement to the Sphere. In the text it is Terry the 'woman with ... the noble soul and the loving heart, so sincere and sympathetic and so overflowing with generous impulses,...' (28 April 1906) who is remembered but the painting hints at another Terry, another type of woman. Similarly in the Programme for the

Commemoration held at Drury Lane on 12 June, the Biographical Sketch, omits all mention of her three marriages and her affair with Edward Godwin, ignores her two illegitimate children and instead praises her as Portia and Ophelia. Yet it too chooses to remember her pictorially in Sargent's painting. At her death in 1928 the Daily Telegraph, aware of the contradictory views of the Victorian age and the way in which Terry seemed to encapsulate them, promised 'In the future, when the late Victorian era will have its detractors and apologists, the name of Ellen Terry will be the confusion of the one and the salvation of the other' (22 July 1928).

ⁱ According to Roger Manvell 'Ellen Terry's notes on the essay on Lady Macbeth are preserved at the British Theatre Museum in a specially bound copy of the article' (345). I have been to the Theatre Museum in Covent Garden but have been unable to find the article. All quotations from it are therefore taken from Manvell.

ⁱⁱ Ellen Terry's copy of her Lectures is at her house at Smallhythe, Kent which is now a National Trust property. Terry was in the habit of underlining words and adding her own comments, where she has done so I have used her copy, but the pages are not numbered. If there are no added comments I have used the published version in which case I have given the page numbers.

ⁱⁱⁱ This copy is held at Ellen Terry's house at Smallhythe.

^{iv} This is held at the Shakespeare Centre Library in Stratford-upon-Avon in the Bram Stoker Collection Box 2/13.

^v This review and others in the Daily Telegraph were unsigned but were most likely written by Clement Scott who was the drama critic of the paper from 1871-1898.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

In the hundred years during which Siddons, Faucit and Terry were on the stage, the role and position of women in society altered and this affected their portrayal of one of Shakespeare's major female characters, Lady Macbeth. Thus Siddons, acting in a more relaxed social period at the end of the eighteenth century was able to play a strong dominant character, while Faucit, interpreting the same character in a more restrictive age, portrayed a Lady Macbeth who was willing to twist her innate goodness to evil to facilitate her husband's desires. Terry, in an age which was already beginning to question the patriarchal system, played a Lady Macbeth who seemed to accept the vanishing certainties. All three were able to portray different women using one text, admittedly with some alterations, but, by the last decade of the nineteenth century, new authors were writing plays in which the text rather than their interpretation questioned society's values. Ibsen chose tragedy and his plays had some success, but influential critics like Scott were hostile. Reviewing Ghosts in 1891, he not only criticised the play, which was 'revolting', the playwright 'a dull verbose preacher', but also its propriety for it 'cannot possibly be discussed in all its morbid details in any mixed assembly of men and women' (291). However through comedy, which was more commercially successful, Henry Arthur Jones, Oscar Wilde and Arthur Wing Pinero wrote plays which challenged the conventions of marriage and exposed the double standards of society. Wilde's most successful play, The Importance of Being Earnest, performed in 1895, can be seen as ridiculing the seriousness of finding a suitable partner. In the same year, in The Notorious Mrs. Ebsmith, Pinero created a sympathetic New Woman, Agnes Ebsmith, who was no longer a figure of ridicule. Peter Raby describes her as 'a compelling if realistically improbable character who has suffered from both an alcoholic mother and an abusive husband' (192). These plays found ways 'to puncture the hypocrisy and false

idealism of the age'(Raby 303). Some ideas were too extreme and one of Shaw's early plays Mrs. Warren's Profession, which took prostitution as its theme, was too contentious for public performance. It was staged privately by The Stage Society in 1902, but not given a public performance in Britain until 1925.

Ideas about the nature of Shakespearean productions were also changing. There was a reaction against the scenic grandeur and attention to the historical setting of the play which the theatrical community had thought so important. In 1893 William Poel published his views on 'The Function of a National Theatre' in which he argued that 'realism is exhausting and enervating in its effect' (qtd. in Bate 124). He preferred his own particular realism: that of the period in which the plays were written, and started the Elizabethan Stage Society to present the plays of Shakespeare in the way he felt they would have been originally produced. For him Lady Macbeth was 'unconscious of being criminal or sinful'; it was 'her woman's weakness which she dreads may defeat her purpose' (qtd. in Speaight 186). Robert Speaight argues that the reason Poel 'insisted on keeping in the scene with Lady Macduff' is to show the difference 'in their degree of moral sensibility' (187). Without the complexity of guilt and with the reassuring figure of Lady Macduff to uphold moral virtue, Lady Macbeth is no longer a site of conflicting feminine roles. Poel's choice of two actresses, Lillah McCarthy and Evelyn Weeden, to play Lady Macbeth in his 1909 production also blurred the definition of the character.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the number of productions of plays including Macbeth has increased, thus lessening the impact of any particular interpretation of Lady Macbeth. Some however stand out. In 1955, Glen Byam Shaw produced 'the most successful interpretation of Macbeth in [the twentieth century]' (254) according to Bartholomeusz, at Stratford-on-Avon starring, in a style reminiscent of Irving and Terry, Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh. The expectation was high and many felt, as they had with Terry, that Leigh

was about to undertake a part for which she was not suited in order that her partner might play Macbeth. According to one of Leigh's biographers, Anne Edwards, 'there were over a thousand words by The Times critic containing praise for Olivier and only two lines about Vivien' (208) and those two lines dismissed her 'as a small, baleful, gleaming Lady Macbeth' (8 June). Milton Shulman thought she looked 'much too beautiful and fragile for anyone to take seriously her cry to be unsexed' (Evening Standard p. 8 June). The Financial Times drew a link with Terry: 'Her dress echoes the peacock blue of Ellen Terry's Lady Macbeth in the Sargent portrait and perhaps the designer... was cleverly underlining the fact that here too natural charm and elegance had to be subdued' (8 June). Kenneth Tynan, in the Sunday Observer, was damning about Leigh's Lady Macbeth which he described as 'more niminy-piminy than thundery-blundery' (12 June) but full of praise for Olivier. In the mid twentieth century the balance between the two protagonists still seemed to reflect a relationship between the sexes which would have received total approval from an audience a century before.

A later production, in 1974 also at Stratford, re-introduced witchcraft into the play and human evil was now no longer the only 'spur'. Ian McKellen played Macbeth and Judi Dench Lady Macbeth, both of whom 'were simultaneously guilty agents and victims' (Braunmuller 84). J. W. Lambert described Dench as a 'small, severe, black-clad dynamo moving to her doom without ever becoming the mere personification of something or other' (Sunday Times 12 September 1976). The success of this production owed a great deal to the limited space of The Other Place. In a recent radio discussion of the playⁱ Max Stafford-Clark and John Caird agreed that Macbeth was a chamber play that needed the intimacy and claustrophobia of a small space to succeed. Stafford-Clark limited the audience of his recent touring production to 130 and Caird's 2005 production took place within the narrow confines of the Almeida Theatre. Both Caird and Stafford-Clark are directors rather than actors and in the twentieth

and twenty-first century it is often the director who has the vision of the final production. Thus it is Poel who is remembered for the 1909 version of the play, Byam Shaw who is mentioned with Olivier and Leigh in 1955 and Trevor Nunn, the director of the 1978 version, who is associated with the ideas in that production as much as McKellen and Dench.

In this thesis the images of the productions have had to be taken from eye-witness accounts so that the events on stage always come mediated through another's perspective. More recent productions, for example that of Nunn in 1978, are able to have a more direct influence, long after the production, through modern technology. The advent of film, television, video and D.V.D. has enabled an audience to continue to see a production after the event itself has ceased. These technologies have also added to the number of productions and altered the audience experience as Shakespeare's plays are no longer only watched within a group as they take place.

In recent stagings of the play, Lady Macbeth has come in all guises: as the young grieving mother suffering post-natal depression on a housing estate in Penny Woolcock's 1997 production for BBC 2; as 'the ordinary mortal... the woman who eventually cracks' (Sunday Telegraph 2 November 1999) played by Harriet Walter in Gregory Doran's 1999 production; isolated by her sex and colour in Out of Joint's 2004 production which sets the play in a revolutionary African country; or as the rather forlorn figure kept at a distance by Simon Russell Beale's very introverted Macbeth in Caird's production at the Almeida in 2005. Such is the variety of these and other portrayals of the part that it would not be possible to define a current interpretation of the character of Lady Macbeth. Nor would it be possible to define, within current British society, the role of women in the early twenty first century. However if it is not possible to do this for contemporary society, I would argue that the same is not true for the earlier period. It is possible to see, through the writings in journals, newspapers, conduct books and literature and in the arguments over changes to the law, what society

thought of itself and the role of the sexes within it. I have tried to discover whether there was a correlation between that idea of the relationship between men and women, the portrayal of one of Shakespeare's most famous female characters and the audience's reaction to that performance.

This thesis has concentrated on the role of Lady Macbeth as played principally by the three foremost actresses of a period which covers just over a hundred years from Siddons' first appearance in the role in 1785 to Terry's opening night on 29 December 1888. During that time women's role in society was almost constantly under review in print, in parliament, in church and in society. It was not a straight path from patriarchy to emancipation, nor a very clear one. Siddons performed before a more open society in 1785 than Faucit in 1845. In 1888 Terry faced an audience that, while seemingly firmly rooted in the belief that men were in control and women only 'useful', had begun to realise, as the critics' comments show, that this was being challenged and such certainties now only came in 'dreams'.

In 1792, in an unparalleled period of unrest, debate and revolution, Mary Wollstonecraft sought to ask for women what the philosophers and soldiers of the French and American revolutions and the radicals in Britain had demanded for men. In A Vindication of the Rights of Women she argued, not that women were equal with men, she was willing to accept 'a degree of physical superiority' (80), but that 'not content with this natural pre-eminence men endeavour to sink us still lower, merely to render us alluring objects for a moment' (80). Wollstonecraft was not interested in votes for women but in discovering and representing the true nature of women, arguing that women were falsely constructed by society. She saw a practical route out of this 'barren blooming' (79) through education. For these views she was praised by a narrow circle of radical friends and vilified by most of society, including many of the Bluestockings including Hannah More, who also wrote on the education of women. She was scornful of Wollstonecraft's ideas; for her, the more education a woman had, 'the

more accurate views [would] she take of the station she was born to fill' (qtd. in the Introduction to Wollstonecraft 19). Progress towards a more equal society was slow. In 1869, almost a hundred years after the publication of A Vindication of the Rights of Women John Stuart Mill was arguing that 'the silly deprecations of intellect [were] as silly as the panegyrics on the moral nature of women.' (qtd. in Okin 219). In the years since Wollstonecraft had argued for intellectual equality, society had increased the inequality by making women the keepers of the moral values of the nation, located safely within the home, away from the temptations of the world. As the century progressed society began to question this divided nature, women began to ask, demand, beg or even fight for a range of opportunities or rights. The level of vigour varied as the history of the Suffragette Movement illustrates. By 1887 various groups demanding votes for women had come together to form the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, but, in 1903, in the face of little progress, the Women's Social and Political Union, a much more active group, willing to use violence if necessary, was formed by Emmeline Pankhurst.

The interpretation of Lady Macbeth followed this trajectory. In the years that Siddons forged her idea of the character, society was willing to accept leadership and wickedness, evil and majesty in a woman, but as the century progressed this became more problematical. It was too late for Siddons to re-enact on stage her Lady Macbeth, but she could do so in print. The virago became fair, delicate and fragile, a support to her husband rather than a leader. In the middle of the century, at the height of the patriarchal society, Faucit played a Lady Macbeth who was willing to sacrifice herself for her husband and a wife who would endanger her own soul to give her husband what he so desperately wanted. By 1888 society was beginning to sense that this division, the creation of some domestic sanctuary presided over by the wife, while the man foraged in an wicked world, was no longer tenable. Thus Terry's

Lady Macbeth, a product of this vanishing illusion was recognised by many as only ‘ a dream’.

It is, however, possible to take this argument further and ask whether the three actresses could have given different interpretation in a different social climate or whether they were limited by their own stature and ability. This is a question Terry asks as she prepares for her portrayal of Lady Macbeth by reading the comments of one of her predecessors. She clearly feels that both she and Siddons could only ‘play to the best of ones powers... adapt the role to my own personality’ (qtd. Manvell 193). If this is the true answer for all three actresses, then one needs to ask whether they rose to the top of their profession, not just through talent, but because their physique and style of acting was in sympathy with the times. Would the dark, almost muscular Siddons have been as popular in the middle of the century? Cushman, who according to Charles H. Shattuck was ‘tall, big-boned, almost mannish’ (87), was often likened to Siddons. Her drama coach in America James Barton, who had known Siddons ‘recognised ... the potential of Siddonian power’ (Shattuck 87). Despite this, in an age which preferred Faucit’s fragility and femininity, Cushman found it difficult to find success with the majority of the critics, although audiences, especially outside London, flocked to see her. Terry was renowned as a ‘sweetly tender and poetical actress’ (The Graphic 1 January 1889), but, in a more questioning social climate, this conventional femininity raised questions, not just in the minds of radicals, but also in admirers such as her son or Shaw. Many of the critics, while admiring her as Ellen Terry, regretfully had to question her as Lady Macbeth. Thus, certain physical strengths and attributes which are more or less in sympathy with the time contribute to an actor’s success.

A realisation of a character on stage, especially one as complex as Lady Macbeth, is a combination of many things including the text, the actress and her audience. In this particular instance, the text is Shakespeare’s, but it is also Davenant’s, Garrick’s, Kemble’s and

Irving's. The actress takes the text, works with her Macbeth, uses and is limited by her physique, judges and is judged by her audience. All are susceptible to the mores of their time and all are so interdependent that it is difficult to discern their individual contribution to the whole. Writing of her own preparation and playing of Lady Macbeth in 1999 Harriet Walter admitted that 'until I came to play her I did not understand why Lady Macbeth is supposed to be such a great role' and that afterwards she was left 'with the feeling of having made a fist-sized dent in a battleship'(63). In this 'fist-sized dent' that an actress can make in the 'battleship' of Lady Macbeth, the impact of society's views must play a part.

ⁱ The discussion took place on BBC Radio 4 on 29. September 2005 at 11.30.-12.00.

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