

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00025-3 - On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters

Helena Faucit Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE LIBRARY COLLECTION

Books of enduring scholarly value

Literary studies

This series provides a high-quality selection of early printings of literary works, textual editions, anthologies and literary criticism which are of lasting scholarly interest. Ranging from Old English to Shakespeare to early twentieth-century work from around the world, these books offer a valuable resource for scholars in reception history, textual editing, and literary studies.

On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters

Helena Faucit, one of the leading stage actresses of the early nineteenth century, played several Shakespearean roles. When she began expressing her opinions on her favourite women characters in letters to her friends, they urged her to publish them. The result is a series of fascinating, candid and informed sketches of seven of Shakespeare's well-known female characters, featuring Ophelia, Juliet, Portia, Imogen, Desdemona, Rosalind and Beatrice, which was published in 1885. Faucit's writings are distinctive, in that she approaches her subjects not as a critic of drama, but as someone who has 'thought their thoughts and spoken their words'. She treats Shakespeare's characters as beings with a life outside the stage, as figures for herself and other women to look up to as guides, friends and mirrors for their own lives. Among the letters in the volume are those written to Faucit's eminent friends, Robert Browning and John Ruskin.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00025-3 - On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters

Helena Faucit Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press has long been a pioneer in the reissuing of out-of-print titles from its own backlist, producing digital reprints of books that are still sought after by scholars and students but could not be reprinted economically using traditional technology. The Cambridge Library Collection extends this activity to a wider range of books which are still of importance to researchers and professionals, either for the source material they contain, or as landmarks in the history of their academic discipline.

Drawing from the world-renowned collections in the Cambridge University Library, and guided by the advice of experts in each subject area, Cambridge University Press is using state-of-the-art scanning machines in its own Printing House to capture the content of each book selected for inclusion. The files are processed to give a consistently clear, crisp image, and the books finished to the high quality standard for which the Press is recognised around the world. The latest print-on-demand technology ensures that the books will remain available indefinitely, and that orders for single or multiple copies can quickly be supplied.

The Cambridge Library Collection will bring back to life books of enduring scholarly value across a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and in science and technology.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00025-3 - On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters

Helena Faucit Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters

HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00025-3 - On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters
Helena Faucit Martin
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge New York Melbourne Madrid Cape Town Singapore São Paulo Delhi

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108000253

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2009

This edition first published 1885
This digitally printed version 2009

ISBN 978-1-108-00025-3

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00025-3 - On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters

Helena Faucit Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

SHAKESPEARE'S
FEMALE CHARACTERS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00025-3 - On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters

Helena Faucit Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

“ O degli altri poeti onore e lume,
Vagliami il lungo studio e il grande amore,
Che m' ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume ! ”

—DANTE : *Inferno*, Canto I.

O thou of bards the glory and the light,
Be it not wholly vain, that year on year
With a great love I have explored thy book !

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00025-3 - On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters

Helena Faucit Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Lady Martin.

Engraved by Francis Kell from a drawing by Rudolf Lehmann.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00025-3 - On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters
Helena Faucit Martin
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

ON SOME OF
SHAKESPEARE'S
FEMALE CHARACTERS

OPHELIA
PORTIA
DESEMONA

JULIET
IMOGEN
ROSALIND

BEATRICE

BY

HELENA FAUCIT, LADY MARTIN



WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCCLXXXV

All Rights reserved

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00025-3 - On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters

Helena Faucit Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY PERMISSION,

TO

HER MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY

THE QUEEN

BY

HER MAJESTY'S GRATEFUL AND DEVOTED

SUBJECT AND SERVANT,

HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00025-3 - On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters

Helena Faucit Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

L'ENVOI.

THESE letters were begun at the request of a dear friend, who thought that what I had told her in our conversations of my impressions as to certain female characters in Shakespeare, which we both believed had not been duly appreciated, ought to be written down, and not allowed to fade away with the talk of the moment.

She was in her last illness, and we were parting—she to keep the bed of suffering from which, before many months, she passed into “the haven of rest where she wished to be,”—I, to seek the quiet of my country home.

I could not refuse a request thus made, and the first three of these letters were at once written. My friend lived to see only two of them; but after reading them, she wished me to promise her

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00025-3 - On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters

Helena Faucit Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

L'Envoi.

that I would have them printed, at least for circulation among my friends. I could refuse her nothing, and she had my promise. When the letters were seen within my own immediate circle, I was strongly urged to make them public, and to extend them to the other characters of Shakespeare with the impersonation of which I had been especially identified. In this way these letters grew, one by one, under my hand into the present volume.

I could find much to say of other Shakespearian heroines whom it has been my delight to personate, —such as the noble widowed suffering mother, Constance of Bretagne; that much-wronged sweetest queen, Hermione; the truthful, tenderly devoted daughter, Cordelia; the saintly Isabella; and Miranda, full of “plain and holy innocence,” a being “created of every creature’s best.” But my task is ended. I feel that my gallery of “fair warriors” is already full enough.

What I have said has been written in a loving and reverent spirit, with the wish to express in simplest language what I feel deeply about these exquisite creations of Shakespeare’s genius. That fuller justice might well be done to them I do not doubt. Still I have had the great advantage of

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00025-3 - On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters

Helena Faucit Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*L'Envoi.*

ix

throwing my own nature into theirs, of becoming moved by their emotions: I have, as it were, thought their thoughts and spoken their words straight from my own living heart and mind. I know that this has been an exceptional privilege; and to those not so fortunate I have striven to communicate something of what I have learned in the exercise of my potent art.

My 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 so fully done, under the most varied forms, all that gives to woman her brightest charm, her most beneficent influence.

H. F. M.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00025-3 - On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters

Helena Faucit Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. OPHELIA,	1
II. PORTIA,	27
III. DESDEMONA,	55
IV. JULIET,	103
V. JULIET (<i>Concluded</i>),	131
VI. IMOGEN, PRINCESS OF BRITAIN,	193
VII. ROSALIND,	281
VIII. BEATRICE,	361
APPENDIX—	
MR BROWNING'S "BLOT ON THE SCUTCHEON,"	425
ACTING OF "ANTIGONE" IN DUBLIN,	427
"THE LADY OF LYONS,"	429
LADY MACBETH,	431
NOTE TO LETTER ON ROSALIND,	435