AN ADORNMENT OF WORDS: PRECIOUS GEMSTONES AND JEWELRY AS PART OF RELATIONSHIPS IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S COMEDIES

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ABSTRACT

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William Shakespeare’s works have been studied in multiple ways, but the focus of his use of gemstones and jewelry during the course of his comedies has been almost untouched by critical review. He uses these items to connect to his audience in many ways, often for the purpose of showing how they are used as part of relationships during the course of courtship and marriage. Shakespeare introduces gemstones and jewelry in his plays in three ways: gemstones and jewelry that would be seen onstage by the audience and the characters; directly mentioned gemstones and jewelry that are referred to by the characters, yet never appear onstage; and gemstones and jewelry that are used for comparison in similes and metaphors to confer specific characteristics or value on the items or persons that they refer to. This focus reveals a new perspective with which to view Shakespeare’s comedies, both in the stories they present and the associations gemstones and jewelry carried with them in the eyes of members of Elizabethan culture.
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INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare’s descriptions of beauty and romance often use precious gems, jewelry, and metals. The only scholarly attention that has been paid to Shakespeare’s use of gemstones or jewelry in his work is the 1999 article by Nancy Owens and Alan Harris “This precious stone set in the silver sea…’: Literal and Figurative References to Jewelry in the Plays of William Shakespeare.” Owens and Harris present a “semio-discursive” analysis of seven types of jewelry: bracelet, necklace, earring, chain, ring, brooch, and watch; and then follow with four types of gemstone examples: jewel, stone, agate, and pearl. The two authors give a direct and indirect example of each type of jewelry and gemstone in Shakespeare’s plays except for the jewelry types of necklace and earring, which are restricted to a direct example of a necklace and an indirect example of an earring. They analyze jewelry as “a means of symbolically representing aspects of the culture and society” and argue that “the function of decoration or adornment arises only out of the meaning assigned by members of the culture and society to a form and is, therefore, as semiotic” (77). Their findings indicate that the terms referring to jewelry represent subtle aspects of Shakespeare’s viewpoints and writing decisions.
I intend to use a very different analytic approach and examine Shakespeare’s use of gemstones and jewelry, and I limit my analysis to their appearances in his comedies to restrict the study to a manageable size and because comedies, which routinely celebrate marriage, seemed the most likely of the genres to give me specific gemstone and jewelry references with which to work. My examination of gemstones and jewelry includes loose gemstones, jewelry, gems and precious metals used in trimming clothing and goods, and gold or silver cloth and thread. I have separated Shakespeare’s use of these items into three sections: those mentioned directly in the script with an indication that they would be seen onstage; those mentioned explicitly and literally in the script, but not to be seen by the audience; and those used in simile or metaphor. This study will furnish a new viewpoint to consider in examining Shakespeare’s work and his interactions with the audience, as well as his use of their shared culture and experiences in his plays.

When Shakespeare mentions gemstones and jewelry alongside items of clothing, the association almost automatically conveys wealth and status. The upper classes of Renaissance society discovered how to decorate almost every article of clothing with precious stones, gold, and silver in some form, and the more elaborate and costly each piece could be, the better. Shakespeare’s own beloved Queen Elizabeth “had more than 3,000 dresses. All were decorated with the finest lace and spangled with jewels. Walpole said of one of her portraits: ‘It is as if one is seeing an idol of crowns and diamonds and a huge quantity of pearls’” (Racinet 162).
Other lords and ladies commonly sat for portraits, so the likelihood that the vast number of people required to run the estates of the wealthy had gained exposure to this in some form was high:

A striking characteristic of all Renaissance portraits of women is the exceedingly profuse quantity of jewelry. As the women, like everyone else, were anxious to demonstrate how wealthy they were, they put on all their chains, bracelets and rings….Rings for which there was no more room on the hands were worn tied to the necklace. (Sachs 35)

There was not a desire to have a quiet elegance or grace of style. During the Renaissance, to be wealthy was to appear to be wealthy, whether or not this was the case for the person in question.
Sumptuary laws limited the quality, and sometimes, the quantity of jewelry and clothing that women were allowed to wear based on their status in society. According to *The Elizabethan Woman*, an example is as follows:

By these laws those persons who do not have land or fees over £200 on the subsidy books are restrained from wearing leopard skin, velvet, silk nether-stockings, or gold, silver, or silk pricking. No one under a countess can wear cloth of gold, cloth of silver tissue, or sables; no one under a baroness can wear any cloth mixed with gold or silver. (Camden 236)

Note that the restrictions include specifically gold and silver in all three instances of clothing and rank or wealth. These types of laws were common throughout Europe, especially Italy, a location for several of Shakespeare’s plays. Therefore, both Shakespeare and his audience were well aware of gemstones, jewelry, and precious metals as signifiers of wealth and social prestige. Thus it is no surprise that he tapped into his audience’s expectation of gemstones and precious metals in any description of elaborate wealth and luxury.

Surprisingly enough, the significations relegated to specific gemstones and jewelry were not recognized to the degree that they were up to and throughout the medieval period. A few of the old associations lingered, such as white gemstones like the pearl denoting purity and modesty, yet the use of amulets to ensure personal safety or repel evil declined:

During the Middle Ages, jewelry was appreciated because of its symbolic value, expressed in color and composition. Precious stones and metals were supposed to possess particular qualities and properties, reinforcing or protecting their wearer…From the Renaissance onward, symbolic meanings became relatively less important than pure ornament and financial value. Therefore, this period marks a turning point in the long history of jewelry, after which jewelry is looked on as an item of luxurious consumption and financial value. (“Jewelry” 408)
Instead, these precious stones and metals were looked upon as indicators of value and utilized in fashion: “Gorgeous jewelry encrusted with enamel and precious stones—necklaces with pendants, jewelled collars, brooches, heavy gold link chains—was worn by both men and women” (Hart 10). Almost all forms of jewelry received a heightened popularity and resurgence in the Renaissance period in comparison to all previous ages: “The Renaissance…brought a renewal of interest in bracelets, as well as in other types of jewelry” (Hart 22). The use of jewelry items as favors and gifts in courtship increased also, as is evidenced by several of Shakespeare’s plays.
Instances of gemstones and jewelry seen onstage are listed chronologically according to the plays they appear in. In *The Comedy of Errors*, Adriana equates the relationship that she has with her husband to his presence and keeping his promise of giving her a gift of jewelry. When he does not show himself in time for dinner with the gift in hand, she proclaims to her sister:

> Unfeeling fools can with such wrongs dispense.  
> I know his eye doth homage otherwhere,  
> Or else what lets it but he would be here?  
> Sister, you know he promised me a chain;  
> Would that alone, o’ love he would detain,  
> So he would keep fair quarter with his bed! (2:1:102-107)

In the statement “his eye doth homage otherwhere,” a masculine eye “doth homage,” pays tribute to or looks in awe upon an object “otherwhere,” in a place other than the expected space. Adriana intimates that her husband must have found another woman more beautiful than she is to admire and look upon in her place. She laments that he has failed her faith in him, the belief that “o’ love he would detain,” or reserve the chain for her. Her pride has been wounded because she places value on the promised present of the gold chain, an expensive item which could be worn in public as a token of affection, a display of her husband’s love. “The material adornments of a woman’s body were, then,
expressions of the status of a related male: clothing, and even more jewelry, were signs of social standing” (King 53). Shakespeare’s audience would identify with the link between adornment given by husbands to their wives or lovers, a common occurrence in social display, and the meaning attributed to it.

Another example of visible jewelry is evident in *The Comedy of Errors*, when the courtesan wishes to have back the diamond ring that she gave Antipholus of Ephesus in trade for the gold chain, but mistakes Antipholus of Syracuse for his twin and charges him: “Give me the ring of mine you had at dinner,/ Or, for my diamond, the chain you promised,/ And I’ll be gone, sir, and not trouble you” (4:3:66-68). This is an instance of exchange, when Antipholus of Ephesus took the ring in exchange for the chain he has ordered from the goldsmith. His intention is to spite his wife, Adriana, for locking him out of his house for dinner. When all is resolved at the end of the play, Antipholus of Ephesus happily returns her diamond ring, as he has been assured of his wife’s fidelity and he has recovered the chain from Antipholus of Syracuse. The diamond ring is the only instance of a piece of jewelry being given in exchange for another during the course of one of Shakespeare’s comedies as part of jealous revenge against a spouse, and it is returned to the original owner as soon as the jealousy is proven unmerited.

In *Love’s Labor’s Lost* when the visiting princess shows her ladies the spoils of the king’s love, an item decorated with diamonds, she demonstrates an unusual decision to rejoice in the material advantage of the relationship instead of the romantic tendencies of the king’s advances:

> Sweethearts, we shall be rich ere we depart,  
> If fairings come thus plentifully in.  
> A lady walled about with diamonds!  
> Look you what I have from the loving King.
The princess revels in the value of the favors that she receives from her suitor, the king. She focuses more on the monetary value of the courtship item that he gives to her, mentioning how she and her ladies will become “rich” from these “fairings,” or gifts of favor. When the princess names “A lady walled about with diamonds,” the Bevington footnotes explain, “The Princess has evidently received a brooch with a diamond-studded frame enclosing a portrait of a lady” (60). The princess does not treasure the gift for sentimental reasons, but eagerly inventories the item and the diamonds that contribute to its assumed value. This is a rare instance in Shakespeare’s comedies of a courted lady who, in this instance at least, appraises a relationship by the worth of its favors, not the sentiments of the suitor. She is only met in this practice by the ladies who wait on her.

Maria follows this train of thought with mention of a gift of her own she has received:

[Maria] [showing a letter and a pearl necklace] 
This, and these pearls, to me sent Longaville. 
The letter is too long by half a mile. 
[Princess] I think no less. Dost thou not wish in heart 
The chain were longer and the letter short? 
[Maria] Ay, or I would these hands never part. (5:2:53-57)

Maria produces “these pearls,” most likely a strand of pearls, a favorable item in great demand during the time period, and less enthusiastically, the letter, “too long by half a mile,” overrun with foolish, contrived phrases of love and admiration. The princess plays off of the expected reaction of romantic notion by asking Maria if she does not “wish in heart/ The chain were longer and the letter short?” While most lovers would desire “in heart” the admiration and praise of their lover, the princess foresees Maria’s longing for a “longer” and hence, more valuable, strand of pearls accompanied by a “short,” less
profuse, written emissary containing the amorous confessions of the giver. Maria’s affirmative “Ay” ensures her inclusion in the witty group of women determined to measure the pecuniary offerings of proposed relationships and examine the sentiments of the givers with distance and perspective.

Thus, the ladies’ emotional distance allows them to ensnare the king and his fellow suitors with the very gemstones and jewelry pieces that they were given. The king declares, “My faith and this the Princess I did give./ I knew her by this jewel on her sleeve” (5:2:454-455). Ideally, the princess and each of her attendants would be wearing the favor, or “jewel,” that her lover had bestowed on her in wooing. The princess, however, reveals the ladies’ counterplot to the king and his companions’ game of deceit in courtship. They purposely switched favors so that the king and the other lovers would forswear themselves by courting a lady other than their declared love interest. Therefore, the princess does not pause in saying:

Pardon me, sir, this jewel did she wear,
And Lord Berown, I thank him, is my dear.
[To Berown.] What, will you have me, or your pearl
Again? [She offers Rosaline’s favor.] (5:2:456-459)

For all of the pages and pages of fawning sentiments that the suitors expressed, they did not know their objects of affection when disguised; the men relied on the appearance of their favors, the dearly purchased “jewel” and “pearl,” to distinguish their beloved from the rest of the party. Each man’s inability to discern the true identity of the lady he courts only confirms the shallow nature of his love for his lady, as he does not truly know her. This confirms that both sides recognize the value of the gemstones before they acknowledge the importance of romantic love. This appraisal leaves no surprise that the play ends with a separation of the ladies and their suitors for a year, not the engagement
or the marriage of its principal characters, which is an unusual conclusion for one of Shakespeare’s comedies.

In *Two Gentleman of Verona*, Julia originally gives a ring to Proteus upon his departure from her so that he would remember her affections and loyalty; this ring betrays his decision to forsake her and court another to both Julia and his new object of affection, Sylvia. He chooses to send it to a lady whom he has turned his affections to, Sylvia, the love of his best friend, Valentine. However, Sylvia is aware of the original giver of the ring and is disgusted by the attempt to give away an item that symbolizes the love of his original sweetheart:

> The more shame for him that he sends it me;  
> For I have heard him say a thousand times  
> His Julia gave it him at his departure.  
> Though his false finger have profaned the ring,  
> Mine shall not do his Julia so much wrong. (4:4:132-136)

Sylvia declares “the more shame for him,” because Proteus has well-established the history of the ring he is trying to re-gift to her. In his early devotion to Julia, he “a thousand times” possessively named “His Julia” as the first giver of the ring. Julia originally gave the ring with the intention of reminding him of her affection and faith in him while he is away on his trip to Milan. The gift of a ring carries with it an important tie to the giver in Renaissance interactions, even to the point of denoting male friendship in remembrance as well. According to *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, “The actor, Thomas Bass, left money in his will in 1634 to nine friends to buy ‘each of them a Ring of the value of tenn shillings a peece to weare in remembrance of him’” (Jones 204). Thus a ring serves as an agent of memory and bond easily recognized by members of classes high and low who might attend Shakespeare’s plays.
Shakespeare’s repetitive “f” sound emphasizes Sylvia’s anger at how Proteus’s “false finger have profaned the ring.” Sylvia claims that she “shall not do his Julia so much wrong” by accepting the ring and placing it on her own finger. She acknowledges the promise of the ring and maintains its integrity by refusing to accept it as a love token intended for her. Shakespeare builds upon his audience’s common expectations associated with rings to build dislike for Proteus for dishonoring the ring, and, in turn, establish respect for the resolute Sylvia.

During the course of *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Fenton pursues the much admired Anne Page and desires that a ring he proffers be sent to her as a token of his unstinting affection. He sends the ring as a reminder that he has not relinquished his attachment to her, despite the open rejection by her father and the amiable disregard by her mother. Following this treatment by her parents, Fenton says to Mistress Quickly, “I thank thee; and I pray thee, once to-night/ Give my sweet Nan this ring: there’s for thy pains” (3:4:98-99). Unshaken by this rebuff, Fenton still demonstrates possession with the use of “my,” as well as continued admiration in naming her his “sweet” Anne. Fenton’s statement, “there’s for thy pains,” indicates that Fenton pays Mistress Quickly for delivering the gift because he cannot gain admittance to Anne’s house. Because Mistress Quickly states after his departure that she will try to help him to marry Anne Page more than the other two suitors, we can only assume that she carries the ring to Anne; there is no mention of the ring during the remainder of the play, so there is a slight possibility that it did not reach its intended recipient. In its intention, however, the ring serves as a symbol of steadfast determination in the pursuit of love and marriage.
In *The Merchant of Venice*, Bassanio’s correct choice in the challenge Portia’s deceased father left behind rewards Bassanio with the opportunity to marry the wealthy and beauteous Portia. This leads to the rings given by Portia to Bassanio and by Nerissa to Gratiano as a sign of betrothal for engagement. Portia declares:

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This house, these servants and this same myself
Are yours, my lord: I give them with this ring;
Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
Let it presage the ruin of your love
And be my vantage to exclaim on you.
[She puts a ring on his finger.] (3:2:170-174)
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Portia lists all that is included in her dowry: “this house, these servants, and …myself.” In accepting all of this, Bassanio’s station also rises in wealth and social status, as Portia indicates in calling him “my lord.” When Portia announces “I give them with this ring,” there can be no more explicit declaration, as the ring serves as the physical embodiment of Bassanio’s acceptance of all that has been named by Portia. As shown in this specific example, “the ring symbolizes relationship and contract” in Elizabethan England as it does today (“Jewelry” 407). In accepting the ring from Portia, Bassanio accepts the “contract” to be lord over all of the properties and maintain a “relationship,” or faithful marriage, with Portia. As an expected part of this situation “The giving of betrothal rings, an old Roman custom, evolved into an important part of the marriage ritual, and the practice of exchanging marriage rings arose as well” (Hart 128). Shakespeare’s audience would be familiar with the significance invested in the rings as symbols of commitment and the vows taken in solemnity.

Portia and Nerissa test the steadfastness of their new betrothed’s resolve, and both are disappointed by their success in extracting the rings from both men while in disguise at the trial in Venice. The subject is broached upon their return with an argument
between Nerissa and Gratiano, when Gratiano explains to Portia and Bassanio the matter being discussed:

About a hoop of gold, a paltry ring  
That she did give me, whose posy was  
For all the world like cutler’s poetry  
Upon a knife, “Love me, and leave me not.” (5:1:147-150)

Gratiano attempts to play down the monetary value and note the plainness of the ring Nerissa gave him by calling it merely a “hoop of gold,” “paltry,” and an item inscribed with a common saying, “like cutler’s poetry/ Upon a knife,” something that would be easily procured and purchased again in the marketplace. During Elizabeth’s reign “Among the more common betrothal rings were the gemmel or gimmal ring—constructed of two hoops fitted together—and the posy ring, so named from the ‘poesy’ or rhyme inscribed upon it” (Hart 128). The ring Nerissa gave Gratiano would have been one of the “posy” rings, with the simple inscription “‘Love me, and leave me not.’” Despite Gratiano’s protests, he and all present are aware that it is not the value or rarity of the ring itself that constitutes its importance, but the oaths made in accepting and wearing the ring.

Portia is also justly wroth with Bassanio when he admits that he has come back without the ring that she gave him as well:

If you had known the virtue of the ring,  
Or half her worthiness that gave the ring  
Or your own honour to contain the ring  
You would not then have parted with the ring. (5:1:199-202)

As she describes it, the “virtue of the ring” is the meaning ascribed to the ring. It stands for the vows of their marriage and his devotion to his new wife-to-be. He has insulted Portia by discounting the importance of his vow to her, as she puts it, failing to consider
“half her worthiness” or maintain his “own honour.” In short, Portia claims that Bassanio has violated the contract of the ring; ignored the claims of his new relationship and the worth of his new love who bestowed the ring on him; and dishonored himself by breaking his word and giving the ring away. Shakespeare counts upon the relatively new importance attributed to rings to create a noticeable plot device in the presence or absence of the rings in *The Merchant of Venice*.

In the beginning of *As You Like It*, Rosalind gives a chain she wears to Orlando as a token, which serves as a sign of her favor as well as a reward for winning the wrestling match he entered. As she gives him the chain, she says “Gentleman, [giving him a chain from her neck]/ Wear this for me; one out of suits with fortune,/ That could give more, but that her hand lacks the means” (1:2:235-237). The chain remains a link between the two of them throughout the rest of the play despite the space and political conditions that conspire to separate them. As listed in the *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, “the chain stands for connecting,” and depending on this prevalent feeling during his time period, Shakespeare uses the chain as a device to connect two of his characters to each other (“Jewelry” 407).

Later in the play, Celia taunts Rosalind about sighting a man who wears what appears to be her gift of the chain, writing poorly composed poetry praising Rosalind on the bark of several trees: “And a chain, that you once wore, about his neck/ Change you color?” (3:2:178-179). Celia teases Rosalind about her reaction to the news: “Change you color?” indicating that Rosalind is visibly blushing at the thought of her favored love appearing somewhere in the vicinity after their separation earlier in the play. Rosalind begs for news to confirm the identity of her mysterious admirer and soon finds out that he
is the same Orlando she favored soon after their acquaintance. The chain proves to be a
sign of their inevitable bond, as Rosalind manages to enter his companionship disguised
as a young man, and contrives a way to reveal herself to him after she has confirmed the
truthful nature of his love for her.

In *Twelfth Night: Or, What You Will*, Shakespeare has one of his most withdrawn
characters, Olivia, fall so madly in love with Viola/Cesario that she takes the role of
suitor and uses gifts of valuable jewels and jewelry to entice the reluctant messenger to
marry her. This begins when Olivia sends a ring after Viola/Cesario following their first
meeting in an attempt to make him return to see her again:

> Run after that same peevish messenger,
> The county’s man: he left this ring behind him,
> Would I or not: tell him I’ll none of it.
> Desire him not to flatter with his lord,
> Nor hold him up with hopes; I am not for him:
> If that the youth will come this way to-morrow,
> I’ll give him reasons for’t: hie thee, Malvolio. (1:5:295-302)

The choice of phrase “left…behind” indicates that a conscious effort was made to leave
the object behind. Olivia falsely implies that the ring belonged to Duke Orsino and was
consciously left by Viola/Cesario as a gift. The recitation of the words “Would I or not”
shows that the action was done without concern for the subject’s inclinations. Olivia
claims that Viola/Cesario left the gift despite any of her objections or preferences. The
bold rejection, “tell him I’ll none of it,” or I will have none of it, displays Olivia’s
determination not to have or keep the ring and the rejection of any romantic invitations
implied by the gift. Olivia makes it clear that she does not accept any of the duke’s
courtship through messages or gifts. Thus Olivia manages to send an encouraging
message to Viola/Cesario accompanied by the ring as a gift from herself; she artfully
does so by means of a servant who has no idea of the true message he carries. She manages to safeguard against openly acknowledging her feelings in case her invitation is rejected.

As her desperation and longing for the messenger grows, Olivia grows bolder and openly declares her affections, which she accompanies with another piece of jewelry. She gives Viola/Cesario a miniature of herself to wear as a favor:

Here, wear this jewel for me, ‘tis my picture;
Refuse it not; it hath no tongue to vex you;
And I beseech you come again to-morrow.
What shall you ask of me that I’ll deny,
That honour saved may upon asking give?” (3:4:210-214)

In the Bevington edition of *Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will*, the footnotes indicate that a “jewel” is “any piece of jewelry; here, seemingly, a locket” (351). Olivia hopes to force herself on her unwilling lover, giving him an image of herself encased within a valuable casing of gold or silver to entice him. She imagines that Viola/Cesario may relent in constantly viewing Olivia’s beauty in the “picture” because “it hath no tongue to vex you,” or distract from the advantage of her beauty in absence.

As the last large gift in her pursuit of love, Olivia gives a large pearl to Sebastian, believing that he is Viola/Cesario, as part of the hope that he will eventually marry her for her wealth and dowry, if not for her beauty alone. Sebastian proclaims “This is the air; that is the glorious sun;/ This pearl she gave me, I do feel’t and see’t;/ And though ‘tis wonder that enwraps me thus,/ Yet ‘tis not madness” (4:3:1-4). He is confused by the sudden present from a woman he has not met before; therefore he names items he knows exist, such as “the air” and “the glorious sun” before ending with “This pearl she gave me,” protesting that through his senses he does “feel’t and see’t.” The pearl, birthstone
for the month of June, hints at the month most common for marriages. Olivia is at once offering a proof of her wealth and the dowry that she brings with her in the event of marriage, but she also offers the undrilled, valuable pearl as a symbol of her purity and beauty. This last gift succeeds in its aim, because she actually gives it to a man, Sebastian, who is overwhelmed by her beauty, her attentions, and the wealth represented by her gift. The couple is soon after secretly married, much to the chagrin of Duke Orsino and the surprise of Olivia when she discovers that she has married a man with whom she has barely become acquainted. It is for the best, however, as it necessitates the end of Olivia’s pursuit of Viola/Cesario and leads Orsino to propose to the newly revealed Viola as a woman.

Another unrelated instance of giving a jewelry or gemstone item as a gift in *Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will* is when Duke Orsino directs Viola/Cesario to deliver a “jewel” to Olivia in another attempt to win her affections. Orsino orders, “To her in haste; give her this jewel; say,/ My love can give no place, bide no denay[i.e., denial]” (2:4:123-124). His urging to go “in haste” seconds a feeling of great impatience. Orsino cannot wait to win over the fair Olivia, despite her past rejections of his pursuit of romantic love. He mandates that Viola/Cesario “give her this jewel,” persuade Olivia to accept this token of courtship, and with it, his affections for her. In this instance, however, the jewel is not mentioned again through the rest of the play, a second rare example in Shakespeare’s comedies of a gift not making it to the recipient. It is unknown, therefore, if Shakespeare originally intended any further role for this “jewel,” or intended its loss to illustrate the lost cause of Duke Orsino’s affections for Olivia.
When Valentine advises the Duke how to woo in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Valentine says “Win her with gifts, if she respect not words:/ Dumb jewels often in their silent kind/ More than quick words do move a woman’s mind” (3:1:89-91). Valentine admits that “dumb jewels,” which are of the “silent kind,” can be more effective than “quick words” in gaining the favor of a lady. The beauty and value of the jewels entice because they are not as easy to come by as flattering words of admiration. Valentine’s advice is undoubtedly effective, because he relates it as part of his own successful wooing of the lovely Sylvia. Thus, Shakespeare again establishes gifts of jewels as integral to the process of courtship, a piece of advice that few members of his audience would not acknowledge as truthful.

At the beginning of the play *Taming of the Shrew*, several serving men and a lord play a mischievous prank on a drunk man, Sly, and use the gold, gems, and rings usually reserved for the attire of lords and their households to make him believe that he is not a beggar, but a gentleman. As he begins to formulate the plan, the lord says:

What think you, if he were conveyed to bed,  
Wrapped in sweet clothes, rings put upon his fingers,
A most delicious banquet by his bed,  
And brave attendants near him when he wakes,  
Would not the beggar then forget himself? (Induction:1:36-40)

The first thing that occurs to the lord after placing the unconscious man in a bed is to change Sly’s attire. This displays the importance of clothing and jewelry in identifying a man or woman of means and elevated class status. That is why Sly should be “wrapped in sweet clothes,” as a lord would no doubt have well maintained, sweet-smelling clothes to wear. Sly previously had no rings, which is a noted difference, as the lord instructed the servants to have not one, but several “rings put upon his fingers.” An extension of this joke is continued with the suggestion of excessive decorations of gold and pearl used as part of the gear used to prepare his animals for his amusement: “Say thou wilt walk; we will bestrew the ground./ Or wilt thou ride? Thy horses shall be trapp’d,/ Their harness studded all with gold and pearl” (Induction:2:40-42). With only the addition of fine treatment by the serving men and the lord, the food, shelter, and, ultimately, the finery convince the puzzled Sly that he is a lord who has just recovered from lunacy. Shakespeare uses this as a demonstration of how much attire, jewelry, and other finery dictate the station of the person who wears them.

After the actual play of The Taming of the Shrew commences, Gremio courts Baptista’s favor, relating the lavish lifestyle that awaits his daughter Bianca if she marries him rather than his rival, Lucentio:

First, as you know, my house within the city  
Is richly furnished with plate and gold,  
Basins and ewers to lave her dainty hands:  
My hangings all of Tyrian tapestry;  
In ivory coffers I have stuff’d my crowns;  
In cypress chests my arras counterpoints,  
Costly apparel, tents, and canopies,  
Fine linen, Turkey cushions boss’d with pearl,
Valance of Venice gold in needle-work;
Pewter and brass, and all things that belongs
To house or housekeeping. (2:1:344-354)

The claim, “in ivory coffers I have stuff’d my crowns” shows that the “coffers” or actual containers for the gold “crowns,” or currency, are constructed of precious “ivory,” an item often carved and worn as jewelry. The choice of the term “stuff’d” indicates that Gremio has so much currency that he has to pack it down to make it fit into the multiple containers he has to store it in. The mention of “Turkey cushions boss’d with pearl,” expensive imported cushions that have been embossed, or decorated, with pearls, indicates a high degree of intricacy and luxury. The example of “Valance of Venice gold in needle-work,” or drapery with gold thread and trimming, displays an exceeding amount of indulgence that surrounds those in Gremio’s house. Gremio attempts to use the amount of money he has accumulated in his old age to purchase the right to marry the young Bianca and keep her as his wife. Unfortunately, all he has cannot compete with the amount of wealth that Tranio promises Baptista in the guise of Lucentio, or the intelligence Lucentio uses in disguising himself as a tutor to gain Bianca’s affection. Shakespeare uses this scene to emphasize that wealth is not the only means of securing the right to court and marry as one chooses.

 Petruchio uses the idea of giving expensive new apparel and jewelry to Katharina in order to continue breaking down her resistance to obeying him, holding her tongue, and acting meekly:

Will we return unto thy father’s house
And revel it as bravely as the best,
With silken coats and caps and golden rings,
With ruffs, and cuffs, and farthingales, and things,
With scarves, and fans, and double change of bravery,
With amber bracelets, beads, and all this knavery.
Petruchio lists many fashionable accoutrements of Renaissance dress, indicating that he intends to spare no expense in outfitting Kate in the finest of apparel. He includes “golden rings” in the first line of his description of finery with silk items to emphasize the expense of his gifts. Petruchio ends his list with “amber bracelets, beads, and all this knavery,” in order to denote the finishing touches of elegance and “all this knavery [i.e. finery],” or abundance of choice. Both the bracelets and beads are likely to be of amber: “Because of its beautiful color and the ease with which it could be fashioned, amber quickly became a favorite object of trade and barter and personal adornment” (Matlins 158). Petruchio puts on all of this show under the guise of largess, but in fact his purpose is to offer these items, only to take them away if Kate does not submit to his expectations of her behavior. Shakespeare shows how great the temptation of fine attire and jewelry is when used as an inducement, because both he and his audience know that a respectable gentleman or lady dare not appear in public in less than their best adornments.

Gemstones and jewelry are also used in *The Taming of the Shrew* in order to maintain a plausible disguise. Tranio says to Vincentio, “Why, sir, what ‘cerns it you if I wear pearl and gold?/ I thank my good father, I am able to maintain it” (5:1:70-71). The ability to “wear pearl and gold” refers to the wealth and status that is displayed by wearing pearl and gold on various articles of clothing. According to *Shakespearean Costume*, “the more ostentatious courtiers actually wore gems, pearls and goldsmith’s work as trimmings to their clothes” (Kelly 46). Tranio makes the statement “I thank my good father,” because his father supplies him with money, and “I am able to maintain it,” implying that he can afford to purchase clothing of this caliber because of his social
status and wealth. Tranio’s purpose is to maintain that he is Vincentio’s son, Lucentio, so that the true Lucentio is free to secretly marry Baptista’s daughter, Bianca. Tranio uses the borrowed finery of his master’s social class so that he may plausibly carry his role as the son of a wealthy gentleman. If no one knows the actual history of a man or woman, jewelry or gemstones affixed to expensive attire leave little doubt in any observer’s mind that the wearer is of noble birth, both because of the wealth required to put them there and the sumptuary laws that restrict their use to gentlefolk.

In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Lysander gives items of jewelry to Hermia as tokens of his love and affection during the course of his attempts to court her. He is successful in winning the heart of fair Hermia, and in doing so, earns the wrath of her father, Egeus:

```
Thou, thou Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes
And interchanged love tokens with my child.
Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung
With feigning voice verses of feigning love,
And stol’n the impression of her fantasy
With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gauds, conceits,
Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats—messengers
Of strong prevailment in unhardened youth. (1:1:28-35)
```

Egeus is outraged because he intended Hermia for his personal favorite, Demetrius, but Hermia refuses to marry him because she is in love with Lysander. Egeus believes that the frequency and sentiment of Lysander’s unsanctioned “love tokens” and time spent “by moonlight at her window” with Hermia are to blame for her affection. Egeus does not believe that Lysander’s intentions are only of love for Hermia; perhaps he believes that Lysander aims to gain the dowry and money that she will gain from her family upon marrying. He claims that both Lysander’s voice and love are “feigning,” indicating an
act of deceit or pretended attention. Egeus attributes Lysander’s ability to have “stol’n…her fantasy” to his gifts, “with bracelets of thy hair, rings” and other thoughtful, sentimental gifts, which he calls “messengers/ Of strong prevailment in unhardened youth.” Hermia’s father obviously did not give Lysander permission to court Hermia, let alone give her gifts of jewelry and keepsakes to cherish and encourage her affection for him.

Another mention of gemstones and jewelry used in courtship presents itself in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* when, under the spell of love juice, Titania lavishes favors and attention on the transformed man, Bottom the Weaver. She says she will have her attending fairies fetch Bottom “jewels from the deep,” treasures from secret places on the bottom of the ocean floor that mortals cannot reach (3:1:144). Titania hopes to secure his affections with the opportunity of untold treasures not available outside of the world of fairies and their magical abilities. Shakespeare continues the use of “jewels” in courtship, modifying it to an added degree of magical and mystical importance so that it will be suitable for immortal beings.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock allows gemstones and jewelry to define his romantic relationship with his former wife as well as his hatred for his daughter after her betrayal of him. He laments the loss of his property when he cries:

…A diamond
Gone, cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfurt!
…Two thousand ducats in that, and other
Precious, precious jewels. I would my daughter were
Dead at my feet and the jewels in her ear!
…Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal: it was my
turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor:
I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys. (3.1.79-116)
When Shylock is angry for the loss of “a diamond” and other “jewels,” he focuses on their loss in monetary value, enumerating the value of “two thousand ducats” in the diamond and describing the other with the emphasis of repetition in being “Precious, precious jewels.” Shylock would willingly trade the life of his disloyal daughter to regain the wealth in gemstones and currency with which she absconded: “I would my daughter were/ Dead at my feet with the jewels in her ear!”

However, when it comes to the loss of the turquoise ring his now deceased wife gave him during their courtship, his reaction is based on sentimental value. After Shylock’s friend Tubal tells him about how Jessica disposed of a certain ring, Shylock cries, “Out upon her!” This explosive phrase shows the culmination of his disgust and hatred for his daughter. When he continues, “Thou torturest me, Tubal,” it expresses the anguish he is feeling because Tubal has reached an item to which Shylock had a sentimental attachment. Shylock laments, “It was my turquoise,” a light blue gemstone which “is considered a symbol of courage, success, and love” (Matlins 186). Shylock establishes the ring’s importance and value to him when he admits, “I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor.” His deceased wife, “Leah,” gave the piece of jewelry to him as “a bachelor,” which places the gift during the course of their courtship. Shylock bewails its loss: “I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys,” whereas Jessica parted with it easily for a single pet monkey. He is angry with Jessica for so cavalierly disposing of the ring that held memory and meaning for him as a gift from his lost love. Thus, in discussing gemstones and a turquoise ring, Shakespeare defines the value of a man’s relationship with his daughter and the sentimental affection he holds for the memories of his courtship with a deceased wife.
Shakespeare brings attention to how gemstones, silver, and gold are part of the
elegance required for dress, especially in wedding clothes for a bride of distinguished
social status in *Much Ado About Nothing*. The servant woman Margaret admits as much
when she describes the details of the Duchess of Milan’s wedding dress, which she had
seen previously, to Hero:

> By my troth, ‘s but a nightgown in respect
> Of yours: cloth o’ gold, and cuts, and laced with silver,
> Set with pearls, down sleeves, side sleeves, and skirts,
> Round underborne with a bluish tinsel. But for a fine,
> Quaint, graceful and excellent fashion, yours is worth
> Ten on ’t. (3:4:17-22)

The comparison between the Duchess’s wedding dress and Hero’s shows the finery
expected of ladies of station in everyday clothing, but even more so in wedding apparel.
The Duchess’s dress has elaborate details of great expense: “cloth o’ gold,” it is “laced
with silver [thread],” and “set with pearls.” Each of these elements of the dress is
luxurious in and of itself and a sign of high social rank, but the combination indicates an
overwhelming amount of finery. The footnotes of the Bevington edition indicate that
“tinsel” is “cloth, usually silk, interwoven with threads of silver or gold” (237). Margaret
insists that Hero’s simpler gown of “fine, quaint, graceful, and excellent fashion” is much
better than the duchess’s overly complicated show of wealth. Shakespeare draws
attention to the excess of finery the nobles use in the form of gemstones, gold cloth, and
thread made of precious metals as part of their wedding attire, as a wedding is of great
importance both in marrying a couple and possible use for business and political mergers
of ruling families.
During one scene in *Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will*, Malvolio imagines gemstones and jewelry as part of the distinguished attire he would wear and be accustomed to if he were ever allowed to marry his lady Olivia:

Seven of my people, with an obedient start,  
Make out for him: I frown the while; and perchance  
Wind up my watch, or play with my—some rich  
Jewel. Toby approaches; curtsies there to me—. (2:5:57-60)

Immediately after Malvolio pictures himself in a high position of society, he adds the accoutrements of wealth and status, such as a “watch” and a bauble or “jewel.” He takes the scene one step further in conveying an atmosphere of self-indulgent amusement. At his leisure, he may “perchance” decide to “wind up” or “play with,” use as a toy, an expensive item of note. According to the footnotes in the Bevington edition, Malvolio’s first pause indicates that “Malvolio perhaps means his steward’s chain but checks himself in time; as ‘Count Malvolio,’ he would not be wearing it. A bawdy meaning of playing with himself is also suggested” (343). Malvolio’s habits acquired as a member of the serving class are revealed when he has to hurriedly choose the generic phrase “some rich jewel” to avoid either identifying himself with an instrument of his current status or admitting that he engages in the embarrassing act of masturbation. Shakespeare provides an example of how the addition of jewelry and a gemstone would be indicative of the change to proper gentlemen’s attire required in marriage to a noble, and serve as a cure for boredom as well, in more than one sense.
CHAPTER III

METAPHORICAL GEMSTONES AND JEWELRY

Due to repetition of examples in kind, the instances of Shakespeare’s use of gemstones and jewelry as items for comparison and contrast are more easily organized in categories of gemstone or jewelry type.

Shakespeare frequently has his male suitors compare the women they court and admire to a “jewel,” which can indicate a gemstone or an item of jewelry, to convey the value of their beauty and admirable qualities. During the course of Two Gentlemen of Verona, Valentine declares of Sylvia:

Not for the world: why, man, she is mine own,
And I as rich in having such a jewel
As twenty seas, if all their sand were pearl,
The water nectar and the rocks pure gold
Forgive me that I do not dream on thee,
Because thou see’st me dote upon my love. (2:4:165-170)

Valentine proclaims that Sylvia is a “jewel,” worth vast amounts of treasure. In his love for Silvia, he claims her value cannot be equaled by “seas” of “nectar,” a food reserved for the gods; beaches of “pearl,” an item of great value even in small quantities; and large “rocks” composed of “pure gold,” a material of recognized worth used as currency in minute amounts as French crowns and other coins. In placing her worth above so many other items of recognized finery, Valentine establishes great worth in his beloved because
she has great virtues and beauty he considers worthy of his love. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Hortensio follows suit in calling Bianca his “jewel” (1:2:117-119), and Falstaff pays Mrs. Ford the same compliment in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (3:3:37) before going on to specify that her eye is like a “diamond” (3:3:48). Orlando of *As You Like It* goes a step further in writing, “No jewel is like Rosalind,” indicating that his love, Rosalind, surpasses even this standard of value and beauty (3:2:87).

Shakespeare also succeeds in using “jewel” to convey meaning on multiple levels to his audience. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Claudio compares his beloved Hero’s value to that of a jewel, precious and beautiful, while Benedick caters to the bawdy double meaning implied in providing a place to put the “jewel”:

[Benedick] Would you buy her, that you inquire after her?
[Claudio] Can the world buy such a jewel?
[Benedick] Aye, and a case to put it into. (1:1:172-175)

According to the footnotes in Bevington’s *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, the case mentioned can be either a “jewel case” or “clothing, outer garments,” noting that “there is also a bawdy play on the meaning ‘female pudenda’” (221). Shakespeare has Claudio garnering positive attention from romantics in the audience by declaring his love, while Benedick entertains those inclined toward the gratification of their more crude sensibilities with sexual humor.

An exception to Shakespeare’s tendency to reserve this use of “jewel” for lovers describing their objects of affection is presented in *All’s Well That Ends Well*. The King of France tells the Countess, Count Bertram’s mother, his sadness at the loss of Helena to death:
We lost a jewel of her, and our esteem
Was made much poorer by it; but your son,
As mad in folly, lack’d the sense to know
Her estimation home. (5:3:1-4)

The king uses the royal “we” to demonstrate personal involvement. He feels the effects of the action that has taken place. To have “lost” indicates a negative connotation in parting with a person or object. In this case, the king is referring to a loss from the world of the living, yielded to death. In naming Helena as “a jewel,” the king refers to Helena as the precious item that has been “lost,” as she was the beautiful woman of intelligence who cured him of his previous ailment. He claims this loss has rendered them “poorer” by depriving them of the value of her person and company. The king accuses the countess’s son, Helena’s husband, of being unable to recognize “Her estimation,” or qualities of value. Shakespeare uses this opportunity for a man’s superior, his monarch, to remark upon his inability to appreciate the worth of his own wife.

Shakespeare also uses “jewel” and “gold” in *The Comedy of Errors*, when Adriana compares a woman to an enameled jewel and a man to gold:

    I see the jewel best enamelled
    Will lose his beauty; yet the gold bides still,
    That others touch, and often touching will
    Wear gold: and no man that hath a name,
    By falsehood and corruption doth it shame. (2:1:108-112)

In choosing the phrase “the jewel best enamelled will lose his beauty,” it is understood that the enameling commonly used to make a jewel or gemstone look more bright will eventually wear off with use. The wife is comparing a woman to a “jewel,” because she is originally brightened by the beauty of her youth, but age takes its toll on her, wearing away the attractions that make her beautiful to her husband. The comparison then
changes to compare a married man to the gold that a jewel is set in by marriage. Adriana continues, “yet the gold bides still,/ That others touch, and often touching will/ Wear gold,” she lists a known attribute of gold, a material which “bides still,” and does not lose its quality or beauty over time. A man may retain his reputation even if “others touch” him lustfully. Adriana implies that “often,” or many times, “touching,” or having an affair, has the ability to “wear gold,” or take away from the integrity of its proper setting with the “jewel,” indicating a separation between the husband and the wife. Adriana suspects that her husband Antipholus has given the gift of a gold chain he promised her to another woman he with whom he is having an affair. Shakespeare uses the characteristics of two parts of a piece of jewelry to provide a ruthless, but true, illustration of the possible relationship between married men and women as they age.

In a rare instance, Shakespeare allows a female character to compare her male lover to a “jewel.” Near the end of _A Midsummer Night’s Dream_, Helena says happily, “And I have found my Demetrius like a jewel,/ Mine own, and not mine own” (4:1:190-191). Helena treasures Demetrius because she thought she had lost his affections, and she rejoices in the turn of events that led her to reclaim him as “found.” In Elizabethan England, unfortunately, jewelry and gemstones did not belong to women once they married; all items of apparel and accessory reverted to the possession of the husbands. According to _Women of the Renaissance_, “Jewelry also was ‘given’ to women by their wealthy husbands: it never ceased to be the property of the men, but worn by wives, illustrated the subordinate condition of those women” (King 53). This is how Helena can claim that Demetrius is “mine own, and not mine own.” As her “jewel,” he can never
completely belong to her; he can choose to reward her with his presence when she
pleases him or to remove the same when she does not.

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Ford considers experience to be a “jewel” which
has proved to be very expensive for him. Because he is in doubt of his wife’s fidelity,
Ford assumes a false identity and bribes Falstaff to attempt to prove his wife unfaithful:

…but whatsoever I have merited—either in
My mind or in my means—meed I am sure I have
Received none, unless experience be a jewel. That I
Have purchased at an infinite rate, and that hath
Taught me to say this:
“Love like a shadow flies when substance love pursues,
Pursuing that that flies, and flying what pursues.” (2:2:194-200)

Ford claims that he has not received any “meed,” or reward for courting his wife unless
“experience” proves to “be a jewel.” He declares that if this is true, this “jewel” is an
item he has “purchased at an infinite rate,” because he has received no attention from his
love interest. Ford leads Falstaff astray in not acknowledging Mrs. Ford as his wife, but
his suspicions of her infidelity show that he believes the time and money he has spent
while married to Mrs. Ford have been fruitless in maintaining her affection. Therefore,
Shakespeare plays upon the idea of Ford’s claiming that he has been given the “jewel” of
“experience,” when he chooses not to believe that the wife who has been faithful to him
during the previous years of their marriage can remain that way.

An instance of Shakespeare equating a “jewel” with chastity presents itself in
*All’s Well That Ends Well*. Helena manages to gain the help of the virtuous Diana, the
woman whom Count Bertram is trying to woo in his pursuit of lustful possession, in
acquiring an important ring. In order to strengthen her ability to bargain for the ring that
Helena needs, Diana relates the value of her virginity to the qualities the count attributes to his ring:

…Mine honour’s such a ring:  
My chastity’s the jewel of our house  
Bequeathed down from many ancestors,  
Which were the greatest obloquy i’ the world  
In me to lose… (4:2:45-49)

In this case, “jewel” is used as another name for a ring instead of a gemstone, so Diana compares both to her “honour” and “chastity.” Diana is aware of the conquering nature of the count’s lust, and so when he balks at trading the ring for her virginity, she restates the argument he uses with her “chastity” in place of the “ring.” The idea that she may remove the offer of sexual consummation as he attempts to remove the ring succeeds in breaking the last of the count’s resolve. Shakespeare implies that value to be had in acquiring the “jewel” of a woman’s virginity equals or surpasses the value of any family “jewel” or item of jewelry that a man possesses.

As a way to demonstrate the different values and perspectives that separate the fairy world and the mortal world in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Shakespeare has the fairies identify “spots” on the flowers as “rubies,” and describe “dewdrops” as “pearls,” using them as accessories and favors. In a description by a wandering fairy, we learn that the fairies treat the flowers as lordly members of court. This fairy’s designated duty is to bestow the latest addition to the flowers’ proud show of favors:

The cowslips tall her pensioners be:  
In their gold coats spots you see;  
Those be rubies, fairy favours,  
In those freckles live their savours:  
I must go seek some dewdrops here  
And hang a pearl in every cowslip’s ear. (2:1:10-15)
The fairy talks of the cowslips as though they are animate servants to the fairy queen, with “gold coats” reminiscent of cloth o’ gold and “rubies,” which are identified as “fairy favours.” When the fairy confides that she must go find “some dewdrops here/ And hang a pearl in every cowslip’s ear,” the personification of the cowslips indicates that they each have an “ear.” The “dewdrops” are separated into each individual “pearl” to be used as an earring for further adornment of the cowslip courtiers. According to *English Dress in the Middle Ages*, “Men were as lavish as women in the wearing of jewelry, even to the wearing of earrings, though men usually wore a ring in only one ear at a time” (LaMar 13). The dewdrops continue to be described and used as pearls throughout the play, both before mention of the cowslips, as “liquid pearl” on “the bladed grass” (1:1:211), and after, as “rich and orient pearls” on a crown of flowers (4:1:53). Either Shakespeare is attributing value to the dewdrops because they are seen as such by the fairies, or he is indicating the different world of naturalistic fantasy that the fairies are part of, and therefore, so are their favors.

Shakespeare has Proteus compare tears to pearls in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* in order to convey the value of the suffering that Sylvia goes through before her father because of her sincere love for Valentine:

> A sea of melting pearl, which some call tears:  
> Those at her father’s churlish feet she tendered;  
> With them, upon her knees, her humble self;…  
> But neither bended knees, pure hands held up,  
> Sad sighs, deep groans, nor silver-shedding tears,  
> Could penetrate her uncompassionate sire.  

(3:1:225-232)

Sylvia’s tears are described as “a sea,” or large liquid quantity, of “melting pearl,” an imaginary liquid form of a valuable gemstone. Proteus discounts the ordinary phrase, “which some call tears,” as unfit to be used to describe the precious nature of the action
taken by the lovely Sylvia. The verb “tendered,” often associated with payment or use in trade, is used to emphasize the value of the “tears” that Sylvia cried on behalf of her love, Valentine. The worth of the “tears” is again established in Proteus’s use of the descriptive phrase “silver-shedding,” indicating both the color and the value of the “tears” by associating it with the precious metal silver. Shakespeare uses this scene and the comparison of tears to pearls and silver to establish the value of Sylvia’s affections and emotions both to the speaker of this scene and the man to whom he relates it.

Near the end of *As You Like It*, the fool Touchstone relates the reason for his choice of Audrey as his bride by comparing her chastity to the dear value of a pearl. He notes of his new wife that she is:

…A poor virgin, sir,  
An ill-favored thing, sir, but mine own; a poor humor  
Of mine, sir, to take that that no man else will. Rich  
Honesty dwells like a miser, sir, in a poor house, as  
Your pearl in your foul oyster. (5:4:57-61)

Touchstone indicates value in virginity by calling it “Rich Honesty” and comparing it to a “pearl.” The “pearl” is protected by its less desirable outer housing, the “foul oyster,” as Audrey’s precious virginity is protected by her “ill-favored” appearance and her poverty. This purity is what Touchstone treasures most about Audrey and drives his desire to marry her. Shakespeare uses this scene to touch upon the continued value of a woman’s virtue, like the precious, undiscovered pearl, even without the outward attractions of beauty or a large dowry, which were much valued in marriage considerations in Elizabethan England.
As part of *Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will*, Shakespeare has Duke Orsino direct Viola/Cesario to continue to woo Olivia in his romanticized terms, praising her worth in her outward appearance of beauty:

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Once more, Cesario,
Get thee to yond same sovereign cruelty:
Tell her, my love, more noble than the world,
Prizes not quantity of dirty lands;
The parts that fortune hath bestowed upon her,
Tell her, I hold as giddily as fortune;
But 'tis that miracle and queen of gems
That nature pranks her in attracts my soul. (2:4:80-86)
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Although Orsino refers to Olivia’s beauty as “that miracle and queen of gems,” the pearl has often been referred to as the queen of gems, as noted by George Frederick Kunz in *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*: “The diamond is to the pearl as the sun is to the moon, and we might well call one the ‘king-gem’ and the other the ‘queen-gem’…the pearl, like a lady of old, —pure and fair to look upon, is the emblem of modesty and purity” (57). The qualities of “purity” and a “fair” visage are both qualities that can be attributed to the much-admired Olivia, and this comparison to a pearl allows identification with the pearl that Olivia gives to Sebastian as a symbol of her pursuit of him for marriage.

Shakespeare adds humor to a scene between Proteus and Thurio in *As You Like It* by making the unlikely comparison between unfavorable dark complexions and desired, valuable pearls. The scheming Proteus states:

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But pearls are fair; and the old saying is,
Black men are pearls in beauteous ladies’ eyes.
[Julia] [Aside] ‘Tis true; such pearls as put out ladies’ eyes;
For I had rather wink than look on them. (5:2:11-14)
```
Proteus deliberately misleads the ignorant Thurio by implying that Sylvia would admire him for the openly scorned attribute of a dark-skinned face. Because “pearls are fair,” both in hue and value, and “Black men are pearls,” reason implies that swarthy-complexioned men are favorable to “beauteous ladies’ eyes.” Therefore, Sylvia, being a beautiful lady, would find Thurio attractive because he has dark skin. Julia’s comment, however, invokes another meaning of “pearls;” Bevington’s footnotes indicate that “pearls” can be used to describe “cataracts,” an undesirable condition that can ultimately lead to loss of sight (104). This definition would play upon the pearls’ ability to “put out ladies’ eyes.” As Julia is described as a beautiful lady early in the play, her personal opinion and other meaning for “pearls” confirms that technically the “old saying” about “black men” being “pearls” is true; yet, Thurio is most likely unaware of the negative definition of pearls that the statement requires.

Shakespeare emphasizes how valuable congratulations are by calling them pearls, gemstones of great popularity and beauty. Following Bassanio’s triumphant decision of the correct casket in *The Merchant of Venice*, he turns to Portia and says:

…Fair lady, by your leave;
I come by note, to give and to receive.
Like one of two contending in a prize,
That thinks he hath done well in people’s eyes,
Hearing applause and universal shout,
Giddy in spirit, still gazing in a doubt
Whether these pearls of praise be his or no. (3:2:139-145)

Bassanio admits that he has difficulty believing that he has chosen correctly in the challenge to win fair Portia’s hand in marriage, claiming that he is “still gazing in doubt,” that he might be mistaken in his success. The congratulations that he receives in reading the scroll left by Portia’s father prompts him to claim that they are “pearls of praise,”
both valuable and longed for as items of desire. He gains both the woman he admires and an end to the financial inadequacy he previously experienced. Shakespeare shows how the messages conveying success are indeed worthy of the comparison to pearls in the riches they can precede.

Shakespeare compares the ability of a woman’s beauty to transfix a man’s attention and gaze to the state of items stored in crystal casing. When the king first views the princess in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, Boyet relays his observation of the king’s affected state:

All senses to that sense did make their repair,  
To feel only looking on fairest of fair:  
Methought all his senses were lock’d in his eye,  
As jewels in crystal for some prince to buy;  
Who, tendering their own worth from where they were glass’d,  
Did point you to buy them, along as you pass’d. (2:1:240-245)

The king’s “senses were lock’d in his eye,” indicating that all he could do was to gaze in awe at the princess’s beauty, to the detriment of all other actions. They were “As jewels in crystal,” captured in space until released from that which holds them captive. The same paralyzed state is described in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, when Valentine relates to his lady love, Sylvia, what kept Proteus from joining him when he first came to Milan: “his mistress/ Did hold his eyes lock’d in her crystal looks” (2:4:86-87). Neither man wishes to be released from the pleasant captivity of his state. Shakespeare uses the comparison of the admiring gaze to a crystal case so that he can relate the feelings of his characters to those experienced by his audience, either in noting a wished for item in similar protective casing or being transfixed by another’s beauty.

Shakespeare compares a woman’s eyes to crystal to demonstrate a sense of their being clear and bright, an attractive feature that indicates youth and health. In *A*
*Missummer Night’s Dream*, the instant when Demetrius awakens from sleep with the love potion on his eyes to look upon Helena, he declares:

O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!
To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne?
Crystal is muddy.  O, how ripe in show
Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow! (3:2:137-140)

Helena exceeds the mortal possibilities for beauty in Demetrius’s love-besotted vision, as he must resort to immortal beings to admire her, addressing her as “goddess” and “nymph.” Helena’s eyes are clearer than the transparent crystal to him, rendering “crystal…muddy” in comparison in his ardor. Another mention of the temptation of a woman’s eyes being crystal, and therefore beautifully clear, is made by the king in *Love’s Labor’s Lost* when he scolds his court for their weakness in pursuing this feature (4:3:138).

Shakespeare compares a fair woman’s hair to the precious metal of gold to highlight the beauty and rarity of its appearance. When Bassanio chooses the lead casket to solve the riddle and win the hand of his fair love in *The Merchant of Venice*, he is happily confronted by her likeness, indicating his triumph:

…Here in her hairs
The painter plays the spider and hath woven
A gold mesh to entrap the hearts of men,
Faster than gnats in cobwebs. (3:2:120-123)

Bassanio compares Portia’s hair to “a gold mesh” with the ability to “entrap the hearts of men.” As Bassanio has difficulty turning away from the golden hair of the likeness to face the actual person of Portia, the effect of the hair proves the effect of capturing his attention and his fancy. The king of *Love’s Labor’s Lost* makes a similar comparison of a lady’s hairs to gold as a temptation to be avoided (4:3:138).
In Measure for Measure, Shakespeare uses the comparison of dangerous injuries to rubies to denote their value in reserving the honor of chaste woman. When the devout Isabella is propositioned by Angelo, the deputy of the prison, in exchange for her brother’s pardon from a death sentence, she exclaims:

That is, were I under the terms of death,
The impression of keen whips I’d wear as rubies
And strip myself to death, as to a bed
That longing have been sick for, ere I’d yield
My body up to shame.  (2:4:100-104)

When she welcomes “the impression,” or mark left behind after pressure has been applied, left by “keen whips,” sharp instruments commonly used in torture or beatings, she indicates that she is willing to be beaten to the point of near-death. She would wear the bloody welts left behind from the cruel treatment “as rubies,” rare and expensive gems treasured for their fire and worn as a status symbol, if it would save her from the decision to “yield/ My body up to shame.” Her virtuous thoughts will not allow her to give up her virginity outside of marriage, no matter how noble the cause. Shakespeare shows that the virtuous consider the trials they undergo to avoid besmirching their honor as precious, comparing the bloody wounds they receive in the process to costly rubies.

As part of The Comedy of Errors, Shakespeare uses the different definitions of gemstones, such as rubies, carbuncles, and sapphires, to both note the value of the discovery of the Americas and Indies and to associate them with the grotesque body of a enormous, unattractive woman. Dromio of Syracuse discovers Dromio of Ephesus’s large wife and compares her body to the expanse of the world. He caters to his master’s whim of identifying the different countries:

[Antipholus] Where America, the Indies?
[Dromio] O, sir, upon her nose, all o’er embellished
With rubies, carbuncles, sapphires, declining their rich
Aspect to the hot breath of Spain, who sent whole armadas
Of carracks to be ballast at her nose. (3:2:132-136)

Notably, Shakespeare chooses to have Dromio describe the new discoveries of the world, the Americas and Indies, on “her nose,” one of the areas of the body that garners the most attention. The immediate availability of “rubies, carbuncles, and sapphires” and their “rich aspect” laud the new countries as a prosperous land of riches. Unfortunately, according to the footnotes in Bevington’s Complete Works of Shakespeare, “carbuncles” are defined both as “precious stones” and “inflammations of the skin resembling large boils” (17). Dromio of Syracuse compares the inflammations and skin abnormalities of the woman’s face to the varied gemstones that have been discovered in the new world of the Americas and Indies. Thus Shakespeare uses Dromio both to acknowledge the wealth of gemstones found in the new world to his audience and to discount it by playing off the negative connotation of the crude meaning of “carbuncles” on a large woman’s face.

Shakespeare attributes honor to the just spirit of the Order of the Garter by comparing the flowers used to spell out its motto to the valuable gemstones of sapphire and pearl. Mistress Quickly instructs the children/fairies:

And “Honi soit qui mal y pense” write
In em’rald tufts, flow’rs purple, blue, and white;
Like sapphire, pearl and rich embroidery,
Buckled below fair knighthood’s bending knee;
Fairies use flowers for their charactery. (5:5:68-72)

According to the Bevington footnotes, the French translation of the written message is “Evil to him who evil thinks. (The motto of the Order of the Garter.)” (285). The comparison of flowers to rich gemstones like “sapphire” and “pearl” indicates the value of nature in the world of fairies. The so-called Fairy Queen recites the message of the
flower-decoration to the child-fairies because they are aware that Falstaff is listening, and will overhear the judgment on his culpable attempts at courting Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page. The reference to “fair knighthood” invokes the judgment of the knight in capturing and punishing those who act in “evil,” indicating Falstaff. Shakespeare uses the valuable “sapphire” and “pearl” gemstones in signifying the honor meant toward the Order of the Garter in addition to people posing as fairies invoking the protection of “knighthood.”

During one of the scenes in The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare uses the distinct appearances of two very different gemstones, jet and ivory, to make a striking contrast between two of his characters. Shylock maintains that he and his daughter Jessica are made of the same biological and cultural materials:

[Shylock] I say my daughter is my flesh and my blood.
[Salerio] There is more difference between thy flesh and Hers than between jet and ivory, more between your Bloods than there is between red wine and Rhenish. (3:1:35-38)

Salerio uses the different appearances of “jet,” a semi-precious stone of blackest hue, and “ivory,” a material of light aspect and saturation, to point out a noticeable dissimilarity between Shylock and Jessica. He indicates that Shylock has a dark complexion, whereas Jessica is fair-skinned, but the differences do not end in the superficial. Salerio claims that that their “bloods,” or material associated with their source of life and inner temperament, are more different than “red wine and Rhenish.” The Bevington footnotes indicate that “Rhenish” is “a German white wine from the Rhine valley,” therefore Shylock is also made of darker moral fiber than Jessica, as his blood is compared to “red wine” and hers is to white. Hence Shakespeare uses apparent gemstone characteristics to illustrate his comparison of two extremely disparate family members to his audience.
In *Twelfth Night, Or What You Will*, the characteristics of the gemstone opal are used to address the temperament of one of the main characters, Duke Orsino. The fool Feste addresses Duke Orsino after Feste has entertained the group with a sad song of love:

> Now, the melancholy god protect thee; and the
> Tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for
> Thy mind is a very opal. I would have men of such
> Constancy put to sea, that their business might be
> Every thing and their intent every where; for that’s
> It that always makes a good voyage of nothing. (2:4:73-78)

Feste compares Orsino’s mind to an “opal,” a gemstone which shows different play of color depending on how it is shifted or turned in the light. Thus he implies that Orsino is a man of changeable mood and temper, requiring little shift in circumstances or time to bring about a noticeable difference in his manner. That is why Feste wishes to have Orsino adorned in a visible garment of “changeable taffeta,” which is described in the Bevington footnotes as “a silk so woven of various colored threads that its color shifts with changing perspective” (341). By wearing this outward sign of change that mimics the changing visual aspects of “opal,” Feste implies that others would be able to detect that a man has a moody disposition.

In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare uses precious metal and unspecified gemstones as items of worldly value that cannot rival the spiritual blessings and currency of prayers used by some of his more devout characters. Isabella tells a deputy how she will bribe him to release her brother:

> Not with fond siccles[i.e. shekels] of the tested gold,
> Or stones whose rate are either rich or poor
> As fancy values them; but with true prayers
> That shall be up at heaven and enter there
> Ere sun-rise—prayers from preserved souls,
Isabella degrades the “sicles of the tested gold,” money of proven precious metal, and “stones,” or gemstones. She claims that their “rate,” or market value, is “either rich or poor,” fluctuating between valuable or worthless, with only the driving factor of “fancy.” Against the temporary worth of these earthly items, she intensifies the spiritual emphasis on the immortal worth of “prayers” by describing them as “true,” loyal and selfless. She places the value of selfless supplications to God higher than any items of recognized value on earth. It is through the value of these requests that she believes that she can have her brother released from prison. Shakespeare presents this comparison between gold and gemstones, valued by the majority of his society, and spiritual intercessions, the currency of the devout, to establish the unusual viewpoint of his virtuous character to the audience.
IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Shakespeare draws from the cultural associations and common uses of gemstones, jewelry, and precious metals he shares with his audience in order to provide levels of nuance and depth in his comedies. He uses these valuable items not only to serve as displays of wealth, beauty, and power, but as a way to define relationships between characters during the processes of courtship, marriage, and everyday life. Shakespeare can use the mention of a jewel to demonstrate its value, use it as a token of affection, and make it the center of a bawdy joke almost simultaneously to play to the different types of audience members who enjoy his plays. This focus adds a fresh perspective in the study of Shakespearean comedies, and the lens it provides will prove useful in the study of his other works as well. The pomp and grandeur of the kings and queen in the tragedies should prove ample material for future study of how Shakespeare uses gemstones, jewelry, and precious metals to show the shift of power between monarchs and members of their families, especially in the example of the royal crown.
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