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A REAPPRAISAL OF SHAKESPEARE'S VIEW OF WOMEN

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Kezia Bradford Vanmeter Sproat, A. B., M. A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University

1975

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In Memoriam

Cornelia Sisson Vanmeter Metzger
This study began on a much more modest scale, as an investigation of Love's Labour's Lost and The Winter's Tale to determine if, as I had suspected, these plays supported my hypothesis that Shakespeare possessed what today we would call a feminist consciousness. I had planned to spend about twenty years dealing with the other plays, when it was suggested that I consider all the plays at once. It was suspected that I was rather daft on women's liberation and perhaps too desirous of finding my own predilections in Shakespeare's works, where, as we all know, we can find whatever we truly seek. Although I once read Karl Mannheim's doctoral dissertation, a structural analysis of epistemology, I do not pretend to be an epistemologist: whether what I see in the world and in Shakespeare's plays is truly and objectively there is a question I cannot answer. The following study is only my effort to share my excitement at finding some new jewels in the Shakespeare mine, and it will please or displease, convince or repel, according to its merits.

I wish to thank the following persons for helping me avoid getting black lung, as it were, in this process: Greer Allen, Ansie Baird, Frances Clements, Inez Cardozo-Freeman, John Gabel, Mary Vanmeter Gordon, Coppélia Kahn, Mildred Munday, Edwin Robbins, Joan
Straumanis, Cyoe Titchener, Emma Vanmeter, John Vanmeter, Jewell Vroonland, Joan Webber, and Andrew Wright.

Special thanks are due my children, Cornelia and Eliza Sproat, who have graciously shared their entire lives with this study and brightened all darkness. Last and most important is my mother, Helen Janes Vanmeter, who provided financial support for the last year's study and immeasurably more.

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"The Spontaneous School" (poem), OCEAN Newsletter, 3, no. 3 (October 1974), 6.

"On Reaching Age 37 in the American Middle Class, 1974", "A Child of the Fifties Sings for Her Breakfast", "A Cold in January" (poems); "The Pitiful Case" (song), The Ohio State University Women's Week Journal, 1, no. 1 (April, 1975), 10, 11, 26, 27, 32, 33.

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CHAPTER I

THE INDEPENDENT WOMEN OF LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST

1. Introduction

There is a whole class of Shakespeare scholars who delight in finding new reasons for appreciating one or another of his less popular works. This chapter is for them. In Love's Labour's Lost Shakespeare holds up to scrutiny several of the most conventional responses to women, and he gives the Princess of France control of the main plot. Our first evidence that the Princess is meant to have more importance than most critics give her is in the title, which refers to the main action of the play. An editorial controversy over the apostrophe in "Labour's," which is merely "Labours" in Q₁, F₁ and F₂, is resolved by most editors in favor of the F₃ reading, "Labour's"; but whether we read it as a sentence or as a noun phrase the basic meaning is clear enough. ¹ What we see happening in the play is a process of Love's labour or labours being lost, where "Love" refers to Cupid and the forces he represents in a comprehensive sense, and "labour" seems to denote a wide variety of what might be classed as Cupid's productions—sonnets, prettiness in general, including pretty girls; games of wit; masques; hunting parties: all the arenas and devices wherewith sexual attraction works its power. The play dis-
establishes Cupid and his works as hegemonic in the world, and it forces its audience as well as most of its characters to a new recognition of the nature of love and human personality, especially female human personality. At the outset, Navarre's strictures implicitly deny the existence of female human personality, and it is in this area that Navarre learns most during the play; but woman's nature is a more important theme in the play than Navarre's mind. To assume or insist, as so many critics have, that the success or failure of Navarre's Academy or Navarre's intellectual growth and general awareness is the main interest of the play is as uncircumspect as to assert that Edmund's character is the main interest of King Lear or that the witches are the cause of the tragedy of Macbeth because these matters are treated in opening scenes. The main plot is indicated in the title, and the loss of Love's efforts comes about through the agency of the women characters who refuse to be ensnared by them.

We must not forget that this play was written when a decidedly single woman held command. Perhaps because women's "self-sovereignty," an accepted fact of national life when the play was written, has been out of fashion for many generations, readers of the play have assumed its focus to be not on the loss of Love's labour as it is caused in the play by the women's rejections, but on a variety of other themes. Most of the themes traditionally assigned to the play are, happily, not incongruent with those I suggest. T. W. Baldwin sees as its final point that love proceeds like salvation, from grace not merit; i.e., one does not earn it, one is given it because
of the fullness of the giver's spirit and the nature of the universe, not because one writes sonnets for the purpose. Most of Baldwin's other observations support mine as well; he writes, "This is to be a regular school morality play in reverse. These always praised study, forbade women as the most pestiferous thing on earth, but allowed honest recreation. ... Shakespeare is representing accurately the actual contemporary view of pedagogues in dismantling court and forbidding women." Later Baldwin observes, "The ladies have such huge store of wit that by comparison the lords have little or none."  

Ralph Berry sums up more recent critical consensus: "Love's Labour's Lost is a sustained inquiry into the nature and status of words," and he groups the characters according to their semantic styles. Three years later he writes that "The movement toward reality is a perfectly valid way of describing what happens in Love's Labour's Lost." Berry's two views are congruent with each other and ultimately with the view I propose here: he sees the Princess as "beyond question the internal arbiter of the values of Love's Labour's Lost." Other recent studies of the play, like James L. Calderwood's in Shakespearean Metadrama, share the essentials of Berry's view: "Love's Labour's Lost, notoriously preoccupied with the uses and abuses of the poet's medium, is written not only in but about words." Other critics have found the play's word-consciousness less redeeming than Calderwood does: Granville-Barker dismissed it as a play "five-sixths of it more decorative exercise than drama," whose interest lies primarily in the parallel between Shakespeare's own drama-
tic progress and Berowne's renunciation of "taffeta phrases." Still others have gone far afield to justify the play's action. Rolf Soellner views the play as a pattern of the Christian knight's journey (albeit Christian knights aren't mentioned in the text) toward self-knowledge, with Navarre and his fellows as Christian knights and "the French maidens" as embodiments of Flesh's challenge to their attainment of holiness. Although Soellner, like most critics, dismisses the women characters from playing any active role in the drama in their own right, he does give them some credit: "The second act confronts the knights with their temptations, the French maidens, and thus begins the action proper. The girls immediately show themselves as formidable adversaries by their intellects as well as their charm. They have much more self-knowledge than the men: the princess' first words in dispraise of beauty contrast favorably with the king's initial glorification of fame. Since the no-woman rule forbids their entrance into court, they must pitch their tents outside. The scene becomes quasi-emblematic, contrasting the army of the world's desires with the beleaguered souls of the courtiers." Contrasts between traditional diplomatic protocol and Navarre's assignment of the Princess to those draughty tents suggest that the women are also slightly beleaguered in this scene, which is real before it is emblematic.

J. J. Anderson gives the female characters a somewhat more honorable role than Soellner would allow, but like every other study of the play which I have seen, Anderson's focuses basically on the growth of the male characters, whether in their use of language or
their morality: "The women expose faults and correct them. They are presented not as perfect, but as embodying norms of human conduct against which the aberrations of the noblemen are to be measured. Thus love's labour is lost, because the lovers' affectations have made them unfit for love and life." Anderson comes just short of giving the women truly dramatic characters which interact and cause action: still implicit here, unfortunately, is the view that the women are not characters but "embodiments," as in Soellner, of this or that. Joseph Hunter's explanation of the title shows that the assumption that women do not really participate in action or choose or refuse is an old one. Hunter gives Marcade's announcement all credit for the loss of Love's labour: "The efforts which the King and the three gay bachelors had made to entertain the Princess and her ladies, were all frustrated, lost, by the unexpected intelligence of the death of the Princess' father." Hunter and many other critics blithely assume that the women would otherwise be quite pleased to find the nearest altar, despite the fact that the text of the play indicates their clear dissatisfaction with Navarre and their indifference to matrimony. So old and engrained is the idea that women are all alike and wickedly devious in their plots to entrap husbands, that generations of predominantly male critics have dismissed what is clearly written in Love's Labour's Lost.

The general failure to recognize the women characters as characters, that is, as imitations of individual persons, each with particular characteristics, responding to other such characters and events and operating with the play's dynamic, can best be accounted for by reference not to perceptual errors on the parts of any partic-
ular critics but to widespread cultural patterns of thinking about
women. Specifically, critics have for generations been blind to
Shakespeare's self-directed women in Love's Labour's Lost, and they
have refused to see them as active and influential in their dramatic
context, because of the cultural habit of seeing women, especially
"proper" women, as passive and decorative objects rather than as
active subjects. That Shakespeare did not share this cultural pre-
disposition is one of the main points of this entire study.

2. Final control: the last scene,
extension of the action into the
future, and the problem play

The best way of demonstrating that the women characters do
indeed act and react in the plot and ultimately control its outcome
is to examine the scene in Act V where they refuse the proposals of
Navarre and his fellows. Hunter's view that Marcade's entrance with
the intelligence of the Princess' father's death is the reason for the
loss of Love's labour is especially ill-conceived, because it is not
until after Marcade has made his announcement that Navarre proposes.
Insensitive to the need of the Princess to absorb the news of her
father's death, Navarre proposes in gross haste:

Now, at the latest minute of the hour
Grant us your loves, (V.ii. 777-778)
says he, in an indecorous mass request. The Princess has just heard
of her father's death. Ordinarily she would refer marriage proposals
to him for approval, but clearly that is unnecessary now, and she is free for the first time in her life to reply "Yes" to a suitor without consulting her father. If she wanted to marry, she could. Her instant decision is negative, and she graciously replies with an impersonal and unassailable

A time, methinks, too short
To make a world-without-end bargain in. 9

She then gives the King her conditions, which apparently have seemed so easy to some commentators that they have assumed the marriages are accomplished:

If for my love, as there is no such cause,
You will do aught, this shall you do for me:
Your oath I will not trust; but go with speed
To some forlorn and naked hermitage,
Remote from all the pleasures of the world;
There stay, until the twelve celestial signs
Have brought about the annual reckoning.

There is no certainty that the King will be able to forego all the pleasures of the world. At the outset he was only swearing to give up sleep, food, and women. Probably the comic expectation for final happiness overpowered the critics who missed this point. The Princess continues:

If this austere insociable life
Change not your offer made in heat of blood;
If frost and fasts, hard lodging and thin weeds,
Nip not the gaudy blossoms of your love,
But that it bear this trial and last love;
Then at the expiration of the year,
Come and challenge me, challenge me by these deserts,
And, by this virgin palm now kissing thine,
I will be thine;

(V.ii. 782-797)
The King promises to try this, but as he also swore at the outset of the play to an oath of waking and fasting which was quickly forgotten, we should not absolutely count on his success.

Not only have scholars presumed to see in the play the accomplishment of Love's labours, albeit the title belies them, they have also generally dealt with the Princess' retinue in a lump, describing all the courtships together (having perhaps been unduly influenced by Navarre). The fact that Maria makes an equivocal answer to Longaville and jibes him about his height is usually overlooked:

Long. What says Maria?
Mar. At the twelvemonth's end
I'll change my black gown for a faithful friend.
Long. I'll stay with patience, but the time is long.
Mar. The liker you; few taller are so young.

(V.ii. 823-826)

Just as Maria's intention may shift with the meaning of the word "friend," so Katherine's answer leaves open the possibility that she will spend the year receiving bearded lovers. Katherine is unmistakably flippant:

Dum. But what to me, my love? but what to me?
A wife?
Kath. A beard, fair health, and honesty;
With three-fold love I wish thee all these three.
Dum. O, shall I say, I thank you, gentle wife?
Kath. Not so, my lord; a twelvemonth and a day
I'll mark no words that smooth-faced wooers say:
Come when the king doth to my lady come;
Then, if I have much love, I'll give you some.

(V.ii. 813-820)

Rosaline is usually the only one who is singled out for individual mention, probably because Berowne, who courts her, has more lines than
anyone else in the play and is generally conceived as its main char-
acter. She gives Berowne a very difficult condition. When he requests
her to "Impose some service on me for thy love," Rosaline replies:

Oft have I heard of you, my Lord Berowne,
Before I saw you; and the world's large tongue
Proclaims you for a man replete with mocks,
Full of comparisons and wounding flouts,
Which you on all estates will execute
That lie within the mercy of your wit.
To weed this wormwood from your fruitful brain,
And therewithal to win me, if you please,
Without the which I am not to be won,
You shall this twelvemonth term from day to day
Visit the speechless sick and still converse
With groaning wretches; and your task shall be,
With all the fierce endeavour of your wit
To enforce the pained impotent to smile.

Berowne is stunned:

To move wild laughter in the throat of death?
It cannot be; it is impossible:
Mirth cannot move a soul in agony.

Rosaline, however, insists, and gives an analysis of her reasons for
it:

Why, that's the way to choke a gibing spirit,
Whose influence is begot of that loose grace
Which shallow laughing hearers give to fools:
A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
Of him that makes it: then, if sickly ears,
Deaf'd with the clamours of their own dear groans,
Will hear your idle scorns, continue them,
And I will have you and that fault withal;
But if they will not, throw away that spirit,
And I shall find you empty of that fault,
Right joyful of your reformation.

Berowne is amazed but he agrees to submit to the condition:

A twelvemonth! Well; befall what will befall,
I'll jest a twelvemonth in an hospital.

(V.ii. 860-861)
We never learn if Berowne's gibing spirit is accepted and refined in the hospital or discarded for a more sober one (although we may add to the long list of fantasies about Shakespeare's lost years the notion that at least one was spent comforting the sick with his wit and refining it thereby), for as he clearly points out:

Ber.  Our wooing doth not end like an old play;
     Jack hath not Jill: these ladies' courtesy
     Might well have made our sport a comedy.
King.  Come, sir, it wants a twelvemonth and a day
     And then 'twill end.
Ber.  That's too long for a play.
(V.ii. 866-868)

Love's Labour's Lost has so often been dismissed as a precious early comedy, a decorative exercise, that its experimental quality, which is clearly indicated in this unresolved ending, has been overlooked. Berowne's lines here suggest that Shakespeare was experimenting even this early, perhaps very consciously, not only with expanding roles for female characters but also with dramatic form. It is at any rate very interesting to see that the main earmarks of the Elizabethan problem play are found here. Speaking at the Second Annual Meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, Alan Dessen offered a consensus definition of this thorny term:

Thus, in general most critics would agree that a problem play makes us unsure of our moral bearings by offering a problem for the audience as well as for the characters; the problem may continue when the play is over. The goal of problem play technique is then to sidestep the complacent assumptions and automatic reflexes of an audience and force upon them some fresh understanding of an ethical or social or political problem....More recognizable in such plays is the use of unusual endings or denouements. Thus there is the ending-which-is-not-an-ending, in which the action or implications of the
Despite the clear resemblances, Dessen, so far as I can tell, does not include Love's Labour's Lost among his examples. Whether it is a problem play and what the ramifications of this special genre may be are questions we must forgo investigating here. The fact remains that the end of the play has left many readers with questions, and the play as a whole tantalizes its students. Richard David asserts the relevance of its puzzles to studies of Shakespeare's other works: "Of all Shakespeare's works this is the most personal; a solution of the puzzle he has set here (and I had better say at once that I cannot provide it), would not only satisfy the most rabid detective ardor but illuminate Shakespeare's own early life and the conditions that shaped his career and his first plays." David was of course referring primarily to the topical allusion puzzles in the play, which have been the main interest of scholars for some time.

Perhaps because its topical allusions have held out before scholars the hope of gaining new knowledge of Shakespeare's early associations in London, the play's clear concern with the position of women has, amazingly, been overlooked by almost everyone. Frances Yates, to whom David gives credit for doing "the most complete summary of the researches and speculations that have been devoted to this play" in A Study of Love's Labour's Lost, believes that the play was written in the context of the Harvey-Nashe dispute and the Ralegh-Essex rivalry, with Shakespeare writing under Southampton's patronage on the side of Nashe and Essex. The academic pretensions of Ralegh and
Chapman, Harvey, and their circle are thus apparently satirized in the King's near-sighted plan "to see no women, study, fast, not sleep" for three years. The comeuppance visited upon Navarre and his courtiers at the end of the play is in Miss Yates' view Shakespeare's contribution to a controversy raging between Essex and Ralegh, during which Northumberland, husband of "Stella's" sister, Dorothy Devereux, insulted his wife, thus adding to the sting the Devereux sisters felt when Giordano Bruno condemned romantic love and sonnet writing in *De gli eroici furori* (1585). We shall see that *Love's Labour's Lost* implies a condemnation of sonnet writing as well (although it proceeds from different grounds), and if Shakespeare is writing in defense of the Devereux sisters, he also agrees on this point with Bruno. Thus we have a typically Shakespearean balance, growing perhaps not from a desire to join the battle but to stop it. Miss Yates discovered an anti-feminist essay written by Northumberland in the Public Record Office; although she sees the theme of women in the play, she attributes it not to any personal vision on Shakespeare's part but to a real war of wit and honor going on in the upper echelons of Shakespeare's world. For Miss Yates, as for most commentators, the play is basically about the intellectual development of the male heroes. Although their enlightenment is certainly a main interest, that enlightenment comes about because of their confrontation with particular female characters who educate them. These fully-drawn female characters provide at least as much interest as the men; they provide the essential trigger for the action, they determine its tone, and they control its outcome.
3. The main plot

We must now return to the beginning of the play and a consideration of the main plot. Love's Labour's Lost opens with the King of Navarre's naively enthusiastic exhortation to his courtiers to sign an oath which will somehow make his court "the wonder of the world." The specific contents of this oath are too distasteful: they will be revealed gradually. Navarre's purpose is to achieve fame, to "buy honor" which will conquer time, "and make us heirs of all eternity." Navarre seems to believe that such great fame will be gained if his "edict" is enforced, and he insists his followers sign an oath of obedience to it. As if to emphasize in the very first scene that the play is a comedy rather than a history or tragedy, Shakespeare gives us in the King's first speech many exaggerations which make the King an obvious comic butt. To treat these opening lines seriously is to misunderstand them and the play. As with Goneril's and Regan's opening protestations of love, the King exaggerates and thereby prompts the audience's distrust; should some not recognize his silliness (or Goneril's and Regan's falseness), however, it will be shown repeatedly throughout the play. Again as in the opening of Lear, we see two subjects, Dumain and Longaville, catering to the expectations of the monarch, but we are arrested by a third who brings us all up short with his clear cold non-compliance. Only when Berowne questions the oath do we learn specifically about its contents, and when we do, we are treated not only to its exaggerated strictures but also to Berowne's
Falstaffian anti-authoritarian iconoclastic running comment on them:

I can but say their protestation over;
So much, dear liege, I have already sworn,  
That is, to live and study here three years.  
But there are other strict observances;  
As, not to see a woman in that term,  
Which I hope is not enrolled there;  
And one day in a week to touch no food  
And but one meal on every day beside,  
The which I hope is not enrolled there;  
And then, to sleep but three hours in the night,  
And not be seen to wink of all the day--  
When I was wont to think no harm all night  
And make a dark night too of half the day--  
Which I hope well is not enrolled there:  
O these are barren tasks, too hard to keep,  
Not to see ladies, study, fast, not sleep!

(I.i. 33-48)

Although Berowne does not yet quote verbatim from the oath,  
notice that it apparently refers to "a woman" meaning "any woman," and  
that they are forbidden along with food and sleep. Women and meals  
are thus put in the same class in the oath mentality: women are  
another creature comfort, no more. We note that when Berowne speaks  
in his own voice, however, he immediately elevates "a woman" to "ladies,"  
giving them, if not specificity, at least one characteristic besides  
female bodies, for the word "ladies" immediately evokes a consciousness  
of some rank. Berowne is thus shown to be naturally less short-sighted  
and more humane than the King, Dumain, and Longaville are. We admire  
him, not necessarily because the audience are all aware of his senti-  
tivity to the humanity of women, but certainly because he has the  
courage to disagree with the King. Those who rightfully disagree with  
authority figures in Shakespeare's plays, like Kent, always move a  
little more audience empathy than ordinary good people. This identi-
fication and our awareness that Berowne’s is the most reliable voice on the stage, combined with the fact that he is quickly made the underdog when he refuses to sign the oath, elicit a generally sympathetic audience response.

Berowne next questions the assumptions the King has made about the purpose of study, and when the King says its end is "that to know which else we should not know," Berowne reverses the spirit of the oath, asserting that he can therefore study where to dine or "where to meet some mistress fine." Again Berowne shows in his word choice "mistress fine" a relatively specific view of women. But the King in his turn insists that "these be the stops that hinder study quite," again betraying his propensity for thinking of women as mere creature comforts and putting them all in the same class. Berowne capitulates to the oath-signing demand rather than be disgraced away from court, and he apparently signs—there is no stage direction, but the action seems to be indicated in the dialogue. Only after Berowne (apparently) signs it, do we hear the oath directly quoted, and the first "Item" is still more harsh and derogatory toward women than anything we have heard so far; we have been prepared for its anti-feminism, but its crudity and cruelty are unexpected and shocking. A taste of the heavier moving of Measure for Measure is provided by the juxtaposition of the King’s warm approval of Berowne for signing to avoid "shame" and his obliviousness to the shamefulness of the oath itself:

King. How well this yielding rescues thee from shame!
Ber. (reads) "Item: that no woman shall come within a mile
"of my court," —Hath this been proclaimed?

Long. Four days ago.

Ber. Let's see the penalty— on pain of losing her tongue.

(I.i. 119-123)

Even if we consider the harsher penalties commonly assessed in Shakespeare's day, when hands and tongues and ears were cut off for petty offenses, we are slightly taken aback and we can fairly guess that Shakespeare intended his contemporary audience to be taken aback as well. In fact, this may have frightened Shakespeare's audience more than it shocks us, as in the streets they could see evidence that people really were mutilated. Those in the audience—and they still exist today—who would instead laugh at this item will learn with the King as the play moves on. Berowne himself, the character who, like Kent in King Lear or Enobarbus in Antony and Cleopatra, has the choral function of stating the sane majority's response to the action, questions the penalty, and comments derisively on it:

Ber. Who devised this penalty?

Long. Marry, that did I.

Ber. Sweet lord, and why?

Long. To fright them hence with that dread penalty.

Ber. A dangerous law against gentility!

(I.i. 123-127)

If anyone but the comedian Berowne were reading this edict, we might forget it is a comedy; but just as the crude and cruel items are in danger of dispiriting the whole enterprise, the tables turn, creating one of Shakespeare's most delightful comic reversals:

Ber. "Item: If any man be seen to talk with a woman within the term of three years, he shall endure such public shame as the rest of the court can possibly devise." This article, my liege, yourself must break;
For well you know here comes in embassy
The French king's daughter with yourself to speak—
A maid of grace and complete majesty—
About surrender up of Aquitaine
To her decrepit, sick, and bed-rid father:
Therefore this article is made in vain,
Or vainly comes th' admired princess hither.

King. What say you, lords? why, this was quite forgot.

(I.i. 128-140)

From here on, the Princess of France, who has not even arrived yet, controls the main plot of the play. Berowne's reminder leaves the King and his court, like their decidedly more comfortable audience, wondering what can happen when the Princess arrives. We have heard quoted from the King's edict only two items, both concerned with the treatment of women; but because of the impending arrival of a woman with political power, the rest of the edict is forgotten and what is out becomes in the course of the play an embarrassment and a joke. The main plot is now concerned with the working out of the remedy for Navarre's arrogance and naivete in having made the edict in the first place. From this point on, no one mentions the rules of waking and fasting, and the rule of studying is briefly noted only once.

When the Princess arrives, Navarre does indeed enforce that part of his decree that excludes women from his court, but he does not offer to cut out her tongue, having set a precedent for mercy in dealing with Jaquenetta. The Princess is of course offended at having to camp out, but nonetheless she carries out her diplomatic mission effectively. Because of a delay in the arrival of some papers crucial to her mission, however, she cannot depart immediately. Meanwhile Navarre and his men have fallen Cupid's victims during the preliminary
discussion over Aquitaine. They each suffer separate agonies about oath-breaking and love until by chance they overhear each other's ludicrous love poems. These votaries then forgive each other for vow-breaking and rationalize that these particular women are not really women at all, but heavenly creatures, so they may retain all their old ideas and still love them. (So goes the time-honored quibble, "All women are bitches but my saintly mother," a mainstay of anti-feminist thought and one reason for feminist distrust of claims to the exceptionality of particular women. Thus unconsciously anti-feminist historians would have Elizabeth I and Eve Curie the smartest women who ever lived, or the only two worthwhile women who ever lived; whereas, manifestly, no one has any way of knowing how many thousands or millions were their peers.) This quibble keeps the votaries from being so badly forsworn as might at first appear. Berowne's speech on women's eyes, which we will discuss at length below, serves to exonerate Navarre and his friends in their own eyes from oath-breaking.

Thus freed from care, the men of Navarre next devote themselves not only to gazing in the newly-justified eyes of the women of France; they also commit themselves to "winning" the women in whose heads the eyes occur. This is not so easy as it first appears. They dress up as Russians, they commission a pageant of Worthies and they bestow favors, but all these beguiling efforts are turned back upon them in ridicule. The courtiers of Navarre, like many of their readers, have missed the well-justified anger of the Princess and her train at having to camp in the fields throughout the play. When the King finally does invite them inside his walls, he does so in character,
i.e., oblivious to his effect on the women. Contrary to his published edict but supremely confident of his own power and attractiveness, Navarre almost orders the visiting Princess to comply with his changed purpose:

We came to visit you, and purpose now
To lead you to our court: vouchsafe it then.

What follows is the funniest moment in the play ("A mess of Russians left us but of late"), which hilarity would have been even greater for Shakespeare's audience who knew of the embassy from Ivan the Terrible to Lady Mary Hastings in 1583 and of the Gray's Inn Revel of Christmas 1594-5 and other products of what might be called "the matter of Russia" in Shakespeare's highly volatile, sophisticated world. The Princess refuses to enter Navarre's court; instead she demolishes Navarre with her wit and disarms him simultaneously with her gracious wisdom. She chooses to defer her decision on accepting the King's final offer, as we have seen; she does not really accept the King's invitation, and one might make a case—if one wanted to push a little further than this study does—for the Princess' having promised to marry the King in a year for diplomatic reasons only.

4. The Princess and her train

Since it is the Princess who controls the action, we must look closely at the character Shakespeare gives her. She is neither the bundle of fleshly temptations, the mere creature comfort, which the edict mentality supposes to be the essential feature of all women; nor
is she the heavenly ideal, "the queen of queens," which the King's sonnet with its strained metaphysical imagery asserts her to be. In light of our knowledge of Shakespeare's later works she carries great importance, for her character and that of her waiting-woman Rosaline reappear in As You Like It, The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing, and less obviously in The Merry Wives of Windsor and Twelfth Night. The self-directed brave heroines of these comedies can be seen as elaborations and variations upon the Princess of Navarre. In Juliet and in Desdemona we hear echoes of her courageous refusal to accept her life-plan from the nearest powerful male, and her sarcastic wit lives on in Cleopatra. Neither devils nor angels, neither "good women" or "bad women," all these characters are finally persons, if you will, individual human beings. It is important to recognize that in this early play Shakespeare already commanded a consciousness of the personhood of women and an appreciation of individual women's differences. This awareness contributes enormously to the vitality of his later plays.

Perhaps the greatest commonplace of Shakespeare criticism is to appreciate the reality and humanity, the verisimilitude of his characters. A commonplace of Love's Labour's Lost criticism is that Rosaline and Berowne reappear as Beatrice and Benedict. Both these commonplaces are of course true, in fact truer than usually supposed; for as we discover new truths about human psychology and sociology—in this case that women are oppressed—we turn back to find that Shakespeare knew that and dealt very clearly with it. Love's Labour's
Lost is thus a Shakespearean contribution to feminist literature, a contribution he could make because he drew from life.

The Princess of France enters the context of Navarre, legally and thoroughly a man's world, where derision of women is tempered only by intellectual and ethical confusion and by the fact that both derision and confusion are presented in comic terms. She changes the whole atmosphere of this world remarkably.

The Princess is allowed within a mile of the court only because she is the King of France's daughter, and she knows it (II.i. 20-35). It is clearly a difficult situation fraught with possibilities for open hostility. The Princess is Shakespeare's original no-nonsense noblewoman, however—diplomatic, more intelligent than the men who surround her, impatient with their responses, but polite. Her characteristic pattern of short speeches which go to the point, often through forests of extranea, is set up in her opening interchange with her "counselor," Boyet. It is almost as if Boyet, and later the King, were playing the role of "straight man," and she comes in to deflate their naivete and pretensions with one-liners. Professor Harold Walley used to say in seminars that what makes Shakespeare's comic heroines so funny is the very fact that they are intelligent, when intelligent women are not found in nature. Granville-Barker attributed the wit of Shakespeare's women to the fact they are acted by boys. If Shakespeare himself thought intelligent women unnatural he did an excellent job of concealing his opinion, since his intelligent comic heroines are invariably redeemed by the action of the plays in which they appear. Rosaline, Portia, the Princess, Beatrice, Mistresses Ford and Page,
Isabella, Helena, Marina, Imogen are all intelligent and successful. The condescension of Granville-Barker toward women is best answered by reference to Shakespeare's exploitative control of dramatic conventions rather than submission to them. The Princess is funny not because she is a freak but because she wins the games Navarre devises and thereby defies any of the audience's negative expectations.

When we first see her, she is defying her own counselor's expectations and giving him good counsel. In II.i, Boyet, who recognizes the Princess' difficult position, attempts to bolster her self-confidence in a valid way by telling her to keep in mind who she is, whence she comes, and why she's in Navarre; but he also asks her to think of her own "graces," and when he begins to betray the sonneteering syndrome,

Nature was making graces dear
When she did starve the general world beside,
And prodigally gave them all to you

(II.i. 10-12)

she stops him abruptly:

Good Lord Boyet, my beauty, though but mean
Needs not the painted flourish of your praise;
Beauty is bought by judgment of the eye,
Not utter'd by base sale of chapmen's tongues.
I am less proud to hear you tell my worth
Than you much willing to be counted wise
In spending your wit in the praise of mine.

(II.i. 13-19)

These lines, the Princess' first in the play, set up her skeptical, critical character; they also prepare us for a critical appraisal of the sonnets and Berowne's lengthy speech in praise of women's eyes.
in IV.iii.

Getting back to business after cutting off Boyet's flattery, the Princess reminds him of Navarre's edict and assigns him as courier to the secluded King:

Tell him the daughter of the King of France,
On serious business craving quick dispatch,
Importunes personal conference with his grace.
Haste, signify so much;

(II.i. 30-33)

Then she appends a line which should be delivered in that slightly sarcastic tone taken by those who are forced by circumstances to address their peers with deference:

while we attend
Like humble-visag'd suitors, his high will.

(II.i. 33-34)

The Princess' kindly skepticism is maintained throughout the play: it is the keynote of her character. When Maria praises Longaville's "sharp wit match'd with too blunt a will," the Princess' response, "Such short-liv'd wits do wither as they grow," opens directly on the main theme of the play as it is defined by many of its most recent commentators. Bobbyann Roesen (1953), C. L. Barber (1959), Ralph Berry (1969, 1972), and J. J. Anderson (1971) generally agree that the correction of ill-placed wittiness is the main object of the satire, and this view is also largely congruent with the several critics who insist that Love's Labour's Lost is "a play about words." The Princess, as Berry and others have shown, is "the moral arbiter of word meanings in the play." But what many commentators miss is her individuality and humanity. She is constantly a polite sceptic,
the ultimate diplomat who makes both her disagreement and her desire to cooperate clear. In her first words to the King, she iterates what one is tempted to take in symbolic terms as the theme of women in Shakespeare:

King. Fair princess, welcome to the court of Navarre.
Prin. Fair I give you back again; and welcome I have not yet: the roof of this court is too high to be yours, and welcome to the wide fields too base to be mine.

(II.i. 90-94)

In this case, at least, Shakespeare gives his female character an awareness that she is on "too base" a level and her male counterpart has taken one "too high," but the possible symbolic overtones are strong, even in a comedy, because they are standing outdoors in the sixteenth century and referring to the sky and the earth. The Princess' hostile response to this state of affairs is only thinly veiled in light sarcasm:

I will be welcome then: conduct me thither.
. . . . . . .
Our Lady help my lord! he'll be forsworn.
. . . . . . .
Why, will shall break it will, and nothing else.

(II.i. 96, 98, 100)

Her anger continues as she changes to an indignant tone and preaches at him in an authoritarian voice:

Were my lord so [ignorant as I am], his ignorance were wise,
Where now his knowledge must prove ignorance.
I hear your grace hath sworn out housekeeping;
'Tis deadly sin to keep that oath, my lord,
And sin to break it.

(II.i. 102-106)
But as if she suddenly remembers the requisites of survival, she apparently shrinks immediately back into the humble role the King and the world expect:

But pardon me, I am too sudden-bold:
To teach a teacher ill beseemeth me.

(II.i. 107-108)

These lines might be delivered with a slight sarcastic edge, or at least in such a way as to indicate the Princess' subdued anger. Bravely she insists, finally, on her purpose:

Vouchsafe to read the purpose of my coming,
And suddenly resolve me in my suit.

(II.i. 109-110)

The mercurial temperament illustrated in this sequence may foreshadow Shakespeare's characterization of Cleopatra, but the inability of critics to respect the theme of women, or in some cases even to see it, has led directors and actresses to do these lines in a rather flat way. Of course, Love's Labour's Lost would not be considered very entertaining if this part were played under the auspices of the traditional attitudes toward women's proper behavior; all the Princess' self-confidence, hauteur, and anger would be smothered. This may explain the play's relative unpopularity.

The Princess is a fully-drawn and surprisingly modern figure. When she is hunting in the forest for deer, she directs her questioning spirit toward her own motives, and conveys a certain boredom with the game.

Well, Lords, today we shall have our despatch.
On Saturday we will return to France.
Then, forester, my friend, where is the bush
That we must stand and play the murderer in?

(IV.i. 6-8)

For her, there is no such thing as a "fair shoot," and she is con-
tinuing to express her polite disapproval of the hunt when she sets
up the forester to participate in another mock at flatterers:

For.  Hereby, upon the edge of yonder coppice;
A stand where you may make the fairest shoot.

Prin.  I thank my beauty, I am fair that shoot,
And thereupon thou speak'st the fairest shoot.

For.  Pardon me, madam, for I meant not so.

Prin.  What, what? first praise me, and again say no?
O short-liv'd pride! Not fair? alack for woe!

For.  Yes, madam, fair.

Prin.  Nay, never paint me now:
Where fair is not, praise cannot mend the brow.
Here, good my glass, take this for telling true:
Fair payment for foul words is more than due.

(IV.i. 9-19)

Notice that here again, she ridicules the tendency to praise
beauty; the disestablishment of Cupid's works is going on, and Love's
labours, including this particular species of praising or "painting,"
are moving out of fashion already. Soon all Love's labours will be
lost, and good riddance.

When she continues to scrutinize the hunt and the reasons
she's participating in it, Boyet tries to turn her back to consider
the proper place of woman, probably because she's disapproving of an
activity that the King invited her to join and Boyet is worried that
she is becoming too rebellious to her host; at least an oblique
warning seems the only likely reason for his sudden reference to our
friends the shrews:
Do not curst wives hold that self-sovereignty
Only for praise' sake, when they strive to be
Lords o'er their lords?

(IV.i. 36-38)

Women's "self-sovereignty" has been mostly out of fashion since Shakespeare's time: but like Elizabeth I, this Princess, as we will see, has many reasons for not marrying. Boyet's question, which implies no woman could be happy controlling herself and a husband, is based on the widely-held belief that no truly happy woman could be "lord o'er her lord," that (despite the evidence of the Wyfe of Bath, who seems rather jolly about it) all women secretly or openly desire to be mastered. Suffering under this delusion, many of Shakespeare's contemporaries couldn't understand why the most sovereign woman of all, Elizabeth I, wouldn't marry; but other women also chose not to marry from time to time: the case of Lady Mary Hastings comes to mind: her amused rejection of Ivan the Terrible (through his Minister) is in fact suggested as one analogue for Love's Labour's Lost. Whether or not Shakespeare intended women's self-sovereignty to be a major theme of Love's Labour's Lost is an open question, but it is clearly a concern in the play. Maybe Shakespeare did this to appeal to Elizabeth. Lyly, whose influence on Love's Labour's Lost is often noted, wrote everything and spun about for her notice, and Spenser starved in that hope; a desire for her attention on Shakespeare's part is a possible explanation of such lines as these and of the theme of women in the play as a whole. Rather than attributing to him a mercenary motive, however, I would of course prefer to think that Shakespeare was such an apologist in childhood, and to the manner born.
In any case, the Princess' answer to Boyet's gratuitous question about shrewish wives contains three words of complaisance and a dozen of satiric gallop in the opposite direction:

Only for praise; and praise we may afford
To any lady that subdues a lord.

(IV.i. 39-40)

The Princess probably is meant to deliver this in a jesting tone, but her jest reflects a point of view which she holds consistently in Love's Labour's Lost, and she is nowhere disparaged in the play. In short, Shakespeare appears to let the Princess get by with this idea: the action of Love's Labour's Lost affords praise to ladies who subdue lords.

Many other examples of the Princess' businesslike, unromantic approach appear in her parley with the King over Aquitaine. The King is unaware that France has already repaid him 100,000 crowns; the Princess, thinking he is only pretending not to have received payment, is quick to tell him so very plainly:

You do the king my father too much wrong,
And wrong the reputation of your name,
In so unseeming to confess receipt
Of that which hath so faithfully been paid.

(II.i. 154-157)

When he "protests" he "never heard of it" and offers upon seeing proof to give it back or give up claim to Aquitaine, she uses an expression coined in very different circumstances in Sidney's Arcadia, "We arrest your word." When Boyet cannot produce proof until a certain packet arrives, there is some excuse for a delay in the Princess' departure. Without the excuse, the Princess would surely leave, since the King
still refuses to break his edict, although he is capable of trying to play courtly games with her:

You may not come fair princess, within my gates;  
But here without you shall be so receiv'd  
As you shall deem your self lodg'd in my heart,  
Though so denied fair harbour in my house.  
Your own good thoughts excuse me, and farewell:  
To-morrow shall we visit you again.

(II.i. 172-177)

When she replies

Sweet health and fair desires consort your grace!

(II.i. 178)

it must be with a well-controlled edge of anger in her voice, as this King is clearly putting his edict before all codes of statecraft, and in denying her entry, treating her as a female body rather than as a visiting sovereign or a human being.

The Princess is at least mistress of her own court; Rosaline, Katherine, and Maria not only obey her but respond with her. The insult of Navarre's rejection of the Princess colors the side-parley between Rosaline and Berowne, in which Rosaline, who did not seem so averse to Berowne in her description of him (II.i. 64-76) grows increasingly sarcastic as the scene progresses. A motive of sophisticated coquettishness has most often been attributed to the witty, sarcastic responses of Rosaline and the other women in what Abel LeFranc called, after Marguerite de Valois' historical ladies-in-waiting, l'escadron volant.¹⁷ That the women are interested in Navarre's courtiers is apparent from their opening descriptions, to which the Princess responds, "God bless my ladies! are they all in love?" (II.i. 77), but
they are not so very interested as they might be by the end of the play, as we have seen. It is not hard to see their reasons for losing interest: the King's initial insistence on his edict is a grave insult.

It seems likely that Rosaline is responding more to the insult that her mistress the Princess has just received than to her own interest in Berowne when, immediately after the King's insistence on his oath soon after the initial meeting, she echoes the Princess' sarcasm in her parley with Berowne:

Ber. Did not I dance with you in Brabant once?
Ros. Did not I dance with you in Brabant once?
Ber. I know you did.
Ros. How needless was it then to ask the question!
Ber. You must not be so quick.
Ros. 'Tis long of you that spur me with such questions.
Ber. Your wit's too hot, it speeds too fast, 'twill tire.
Ros. Not till it leave the rider in the mire.
Ber. What time o'day?
Ros. The hour that fools should ask.
Ber. Now fair befall your mask!
Ros. Fair fall the face it covers!
Ber. And send you many lovers!
Ros. Amen, so you be none.
Ber. Nay, then will I be gone.

(II.i. 114-128)

And, after the King delivers his insult directly, along with some useless flattery and condescension (II.i. 172-177; see above, p. 29), Rosaline continues in the same vein if not a more threatening one.

Ber. Lady, I will commend you to mine heart.
Ros. Pray you do my commendations; I would be glad to see it.
Ber. I would you heard it groan.
Ros. Is the fool sick?
Ber. Sick at the heart.
Ros. Alack! Let it blood.
Ber. Would that do it good?
Ros. My physic says, ay.
Ber. Will you prick't with your eye?
Ros. No point, with my knife.
Ber. Now God save thy life!
Ros. And yours, from long living!

(II.i. 180-193)

Those of us who delight in the persiflage between Beatrice and Benedick may let our knowledge of that play color our reading of this in a way that is not fully justified by the text of Love's Labour's Lost. I think Rosaline is really angry, perhaps angry in a way she could not be had she not had a previous positive emotional response to Berowne. She may have enjoyed dancing with him in Brabant once, but here she is in his territory and forced to sleep in a tent in a field and she and her mistress are being insulted; her response is to return the favor with "polite" barbs of her own.

If we miss the truly hostile, sarcastic nature of the women's responses when they are denied entry to Navarre's court, we are in grave danger of missing the major theme of the play. Theobald, for example, was "a little staggered about the title not answering, as I conceive, the catastrophe. The four gallants set out with protestations versus giving way to love; they all happen to be caught in the snare; and their respective mistresses, upon preliminaries settled, agree to make them happy in their suits at a year's end." Theobald was perhaps blind to Berowne's words "Jack hath not Jill" because of his own unquestioned assumptions regarding "gallants" and "their mistresses." He may have shared the belief, so beautifully chastened in The Merry Wives of Windsor, that a laughing woman must have carnal intentions. But joking does not in the world of Shakespeare's comedies indicate
acceptance of a state of being possessed by another. Theobald would seem to see the motive of coquettishness behind the witty gentle derision of "l'escadron" for the courtiers, whom he sees as caught in "the snare," a snare presumably contrived by the visiting ladies. He is only the first of many commentators to ignore the humanity and individuation of the women characters, so of course he could not guess that instead of merely playing word games in order to interest and en-trap the men, the women are possibly feeling and expressing some real hostility in II.i.

Even Boyet, who is clearly not a coquette, also takes up the mocking in his responses to Navarre's men (II.i. 194-217), and the Princess commends him for it. The jests Katherine delivers to Boyet immediately following the Princess' commendation have a different tone: they reflect a friendly intimacy and trust wherein Katherine can fearlessly make remarks with sexual overtones (II.i. 218-224). This bawdy pattern of jest reappears in IV.i. 107-138 between Rosalind, Boyet, and Maria.

The Princess, as chief executive of this group, counsels them to desist:

Good wits will be jangling; but, gentles, agree:
This civil war of wits were much better us'd
On Navarre and his book-men, for here 'tis abus'd.

(II.i. 225-227)

Boyet, ever the voice of convention, replies to the Princess' hostility toward the King with a bait he assumes she will take happily: he devotes nineteen lines to a description of Navarre's interest in her; in this he is motivated by his own greed to some extent, as he
admits. He hopes that the ancient exchange of sex for wealth will obtain in her case:

I'll give you Aquitaine, and all that is his,  
And you give him for my sake but one loving kiss.

(II.i. 248-249)

The Princess' reply to this suggestion, which lies only one cut above Pandar's, is typical of her laconic style. She does not express her disgust openly; she is never rude, but she is clearly displeased. When Boyet blindly continues his pandering, the women in the Princess' train do not shrink from expressing for her the reasons for her displeasure, which they share. Here is the entire remaining exchange:

Prin. Come to our pavilion: Boyet is dispos'd.
Boyet. But to speak that in words which his eye hath disclos'd.
I only have made a mouth of his eye,  
By adding a tongue which I know will not lie.
Mar. Thou art an old love-monger, and speak'st skilfully.
Kath. He is Cupid's grandfather and learns news of him.
Ros. Then was Venus like her mother, for her father is but grim.
Boyet. Do you hear, my mad wenches?
Mar. No.
Boyet. What then, do you see?
Mar. Ay, our way to be gone.
Boyet. You are too hard for me.

(II.i. 250-259)

The Variorum has glosses on only one word in this passage—"disposed"—where Dyce suggests "disposed" means not only "merry" as Webber would have it, "but it means something more, viz., wantonly merry, inclined to wanton mirth." Halliwell is quoted by Furnivall as observing two senses for "disposed" when followed by a pause—"one of which was of a licentious kind, and implied—inclined—inclined to wanton mirth, and indeed, frequently to something beyond that." Richard David in the
Arden edition drops Halliwell's first meaning for "disposed" and glosses it "inclined to be playful or merry," mistakenly, I believe, for the context, especially the Princess' response, clearly shows that Boyet is out of line, and beyond the bounds of good taste. As, of course, he is: to suggest the Princess kiss in return for Aquitaine is not essentially different from suggesting that she prostitute herself. Boyet has appeared to most readers of this play an inoffensive character, merely a convenient courier for the Princess; however, if one is not offended by him earlier, one is unhappily surprised at Berowne's apparent pettiness in V.ii. 315-334 when he spends twenty lines in bitter disparagement of Boyet, charging him, among many other affectations, with being one who "can carve too, and lisp." Richard David glosses "carve": "a fashionable word of the day, difficult of explanation, with some such sense as 'show great courtesy and affability,' ...but especially applying to courtship." (Arden, p. 155 n.) Boyet's "carving" in the service of the Princess is not appreciated, either by the Princess or by Berowne. Berowne's choral voice cannot be dismissed; we must read Boyet as an early and very mild example of that type who appears in Hamlet as Osric and in Lear as Oswald--servile minions of evil. Costard admires him enormously, which is also a bad sign, considering Costard's tastes (IV.i. 139-148). The "Cupid's grandfather" remark Katherine makes in the disparaging interchange quoted above is clarified in Rosalind's which follows: if Boyet is Cupid's grandfather, and Venus' father, Venus resembles her mother, "for her father is but grim." Boyet has been read as a relatively harmless soul by generations who share the assumptions about sex-wealth exchange which Shakespeare
clearly ridicules in these lines. But in one sense Boyet is "grim," and grim indeed, as we will see, are the scenes Shakespeare will later paint where sex and money and power are changed under that dark and very threadbare cloak of what passes in the world of men for "love." For example, when Octavia and Juliet are forced as currency into this process, the result is tragedy; Shakespeare would seem to stand against such denials of humanity. Love's Labour's Lost provenience for the great comic characters is often noted, but here we have a very faint glimmer, in the distaste one has for Boyet, of Troilus and Cressida's Pandar as well.

Poor Boyet is confused here; as he says of the women, "You are too hard for me." He does not understand why his labor is lost, why Cupid's deal doesn't come off. Boyet hasn't caught up with the times, and doesn't know yet that Elizabeth Throckmorton and Walter Ralegh are in the tower, or that Lady Ralegh will never return to court. Of course we can only speculate as to whether or not Shakespeare was fitting the plot of his play to Queen Elizabeth's predilections. But unmistakably Cupid's works are disparaged in it, along with Cupid's go-between servant Boyet. Boyet is not alone. The impulse to sonnets, another of Cupid's works, is also soon to be mocked. Boyet's purposes are thwarted—at the end of the play, the Princess only shakes hands with the King; she regains Aquitaine through other means, and the conditions she gives the King make it clear that if she marries it will not be for jewels.

Boyet then is speaking from his own experience as well as
from second-hand observation when he gives his often-quoted lines
during the Muscovites' visit. His tone is perhaps wondering, almost
wistful; wholly the product of a culture based on the idea of the
inherent intellectual supremacy of the male, he is amazed at the
Princess and her retinue, who, having journeyed outside the sheltering
and oppressive walls of the court of France, are—mirabile dictu!—able
to enjoy their freedom and hold their own without requiring his advice
before making all their responses. His ability to accept this new
consciousness and to observe and admire the Princess' wit redeems him
in the ethic of the play:

The tongues of mocking wenches are as keen
As is the razor's edge invisible,
Cutting a smaller hair than may be seen;
Above the sense of sense; so sensible
Seemeth their conference; their conceits have wings
Fleeter than arrows, bullets, wind, thought, swifter things.

(V.ii. 256-261)

The Princess does not act out her hostility; instead she
sublimes her hostility toward Boyet and the King in laughter, making
jokes which audiences enjoy so much that many of them have read her as
a happy and complaisant character and they have been surprised in the
end to hear Marcade's dark note of death. What has generally been
regarded as a surprisingly serious ending to a very lightweight comedy
may be seen as the logical outcome of a comedy which deals with real
human feelings as well as with words. Those who see Love's Labour's
Lost as Shakespeare's worst play—Hazlitt is usually quoted in this
regard, presumably as the most auguest of a whole legion of disappointed
readers—generally do so because they take it as "a play about words," a satire on language conventions which are no longer current. Many readers seem really offended by the ending, even to the extent that more than one modern and respectable critic has misread it. The end of Love's Labour's Lost, however, grows logically out of its beginning, because the women of France have a human dignity which precludes their accepting a place in a world they were so recently not even allowed to enter.

5. The King and his men

Shakespeare has made the male characters in this play weak in comparison to the women. He does the same in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Romeo and Juliet, and in Macbeth to some extent; relatively strong women may be found in several other plays as well, for example, Antony and Cleopatra and Coriolanus. But before drawing a conclusion from this apparently Shakespearean tendency to create strong women, we should examine each case in detail and compare it with its sources. In the case at hand in Love's Labour's Lost, the men provide a useful contrast to the women.

The King and his friends do indeed need to go off awhile and learn what humanity is. Shortly put, they are all fools as well as foils. Nowhere is this better or more thoroughly illustrated, nor is their reknowned creator's mockery of them clearer, than in Act IV where they put forth their best efforts.
For example, Berowne's sonnet, published by Jaggard in 1599 in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, is meant to be a joke, as Holofernes' comment on the cadence suggests. The clearest fault of Berowne's sonnet, which Holofernes notices admiringly, is its lumbering Alexandrine line. Pentameter had been widely considered superior from the time of Tottel's *Miscellany*. Katherine M. Wilson asserts that "whenever Shakespeare mentions sonnets in his plays he does it as a joke—this without exception. In his early days he seems to have given much thought to the attitudes they presume, and to have considered them puerile." Perhaps Shakespeare shared Courthope's view of the vogue of his day: "No variety of versifier whose work the historian is compelled to examine moves in him more bitter indignation than the uninspired Elizabethan sonneteer." Vere Laura Rubel's *Poetic Diction in the English Renaissance* throughout bears witness to the public nature of the debate about what makes good poetry, and we can be fairly safe in asserting that the resulting public consciousness and discrimination about poetry was considerably greater than we might expect today in a theatre audience.20

Thus we are mistaken if we take all poems in Shakespeare's plays seriously—few people would admire the poetic quality of Orlando's Rosalind poems, for example. And we are mistaken if we treat Berowne's sonnet seriously: its long line is I think a clear signal that it is meant to be funny. Similarly, editors who treat Berowne's long speech seriously, deleting its repetitions, also miss Shakespeare's point: Berowne is a wordy, long-winded elaborator, who
by nature repeats. His enjoyment of his own facility with language
to the point of making his listeners irritated, like that same trait
in Mercutio and several other Mercutio-like characters, is his hallmark.
Here is his sonnet, at which the audience should laugh after about
the second Alexandrine:

If love make me forsworn, how shall I swear to love?
Ah! never faith could hold, if not to beauty vow'd;
Though to myself forsworn, to thee I'll faithful prove:
Those thoughts to me were oaks, to thee like osiers bow'd.
Study his bias leaves and makes his book thine eyes,
Where all those pleasures live that art would comprehend.
If knowledge be the mark, to know thee shall suffice;
Well learned is that tongue that well can thee commend;
All ignorant that soul that sees thee without wonder;
Which is to me some praise that I thy parts admire.
Thy eye Jove's lightning bears, thy voice his dreadful thunder,
Which, not to anger bent, is music and sweet fire.
Celestial as thou art, O! pardon love this wrong,
That sings heaven's praise with such an earthly tongue.

(IV.ii. 104-117)

Of course any woman with a grain of sense to whom this was addressed
would dismiss it as the merest drivel for its content, sonnet vogue or
no sonnet vogue. Shakespeare's audience, accustomed as it was to
having quite an intelligent woman in control of the state, would
probably have realized that the Princess in this play would not be
likely to take this seriously. I think it may have brought down the
house.

Katherine Wilson believes that the satire directed at sonnet-
eers is the main theme of Love's Labour's Lost. Although in my
view of the play this is not the main theme, it is a major supporting
theme. We are supposed to laugh not only at Berowne's sonnet but also
at the King's. Its strained image of teardrops as coaches driving
down the lover's cheeks, and its use of horribly outworn Petrarchan
comparisons puts it in the class that inspired Courthope to rage,
except that Shakespeare was doing it on purpose, in a sort of reverse
inspiration:

So sweet a kiss the golden sun gives not
To those fresh morning drops upon the rose,
As thy eye-beams when their fresh rays have smote
The night of dew that on my cheeks down flows:
Nor shines the silver moon one half so bright
Through the transparent bosom of the deep,
As doth thy face through tears of mine give light
Thou shin'st in every tear that I do weep:
No drop but as a coach doth carry thee;
So ridest thou triumphing in my woe.
Do but behold the tears that swell in me,
And they thy glory through my grief will show:
But do not love thyself; then thou will keep
My tears for glasses, and still make me weep.
O queen of queens! how far dost thou excel,
No thought can think, nor tongue of mortal tell.

(IV.iii. 25-40)

Now if this sort of thing is taken seriously the play will seem a
little precious, and maybe horrible, as Hazlitt judged. But the King's
mildly asinine quality is hard to play, and it has been missed by at
least one director, just as his ignorant cruelty and presumption have
been missed. The king shows his mettle after reading this poem by
deciding how to deliver his love-message: "How shall she know my
griefs? I'll drop the paper." He then hides and overhears Longa-
ville's poetic effort, which turns out to be a justification for vow-
breaking:

Did not the heavenly rhetoric of thine eye,
'Gainst whom the world cannot hold argument,
Persuade my heart to this false perjury?
Vows for thee broke deserve not punishment.
A woman I forswore; but I will prove,
Thou being a goddess, I forswore not thee:
My vow was earthly, thou a heavenly love;
Thy grace being gain'd cures all disgrace in me.
Vows are but breath, and breath a vapor is:
Then thou, fair sun, which on my earth doth shine,
Exhal'st this vapour-vow, in thee it is:
If broken then, it is no fault of mine:
If by me broke, what fool is not so wise
To lose an oath to win a paradise?

(IV.iii. 58-71)

Shakespeare often has some help for those in the audience who don't
get his points: he points again, for example, to Regan's and Goneril's
malice at the end of the scene when they coldly evaluate their father's
behavior; this is an aid to understanding in case anyone in the audi­
ence missed the hideous exaggeration of their protestations of love.
Here Shakespeare helps those who take these poems as beautiful express­
ions of true love, when he has Berowne, our chorus, remark from his
hiding place in the bushes:

This is the liver vein, which makes flesh a deity;
A green goose a goddess; pure, pure idolatry.
God amend us, God amend! we are much out o' th' way.

(IV.iii. 72-74)

The last of the courtiers, Dumain, is of course overheard by all the
precedent poets. He is not the wittiest of the courtiers, and his
creator tells us something about his style in case we missed it, just
as he told us through Berowne that these sonnets are productions of
"the liver vein." After Dumain reads his simple poem, he says, "This
will I send, and something else more plain." The fact that the poem
we have just heard is already the plainest of all makes his statement
of intention not only very funny but also naive and childlike, so that he appears rather more lovable than the others. His poem is so simple that it carries an appeal the others lack; as Costard says of Nathaniel when he runs off unable to say his lines during the Pageant of the Nine Worthies, Dumain is "a foolish mild man; an honest man, look you, and soon dashed!" (V.ii. 575). Shakespeare tends to redeem such characters easily. Here is Dumain's poem:

On a day, alack the day!
Love, whose month is ever May,
Spied a blossom passing fair
Playing in the wanton air:
Through the velvet leaves the wind,
All unseen can passage find;
That the lover, sick to death,
Wish'd himself the heaven's breath.
Air, quoth he, thy cheeks may blow;
Air, would I might triumph so!
But alack! my hand is sworn
Ne'er to pluck thee from thy thorn:
Vow, alack! for youth unmeet,
Youth so apt to pluck a sweet.
Do not call it sin in me,
That I am forsworn for thee;
Thou for whom Jove would swear
Juno but an Ethiop were;
And deny himself for Jove,
Turning mortal for thy love.

(IV.iii. 99-118)

What redeems all the courtiers from pretentiousness and perjury, strained metaphors and broken-backed meters is their ability to laugh at themselves. They discover their general perjuries, mock each other for awhile, and forgive themselves after they have heard Berowne's "salve for perjury," the paean to women's eyes. During the rest of the play they are antic, still carried away, still unrealistic and presumptuous; but they are not taking themselves so seriously as
they were before and so we find them more attractive. It is very important to appreciate their antic spirit. Boyet describes their preparation for the masque of the Muscovites:

The third he caper'd, and cried, "All goes well";
The fourth turn'd on the toe, and down he fell.
With that, they all did tumble on the ground,
With such a zealous laughter, so profound,
That in this spleen ridiculous appears,
To check their folly, passion's solemn tears.

(V.ii. 113-118)

They are at last enjoying themselves, and it is probably Boyet's perception which changes the tears that come from excessive laughter into "passion's solemn tears," rather than any real seriousness invading the antic mood. Navarre and his men are too confident of success to be unhappy or even philosophical about their courtship after they discover that they are all forsworn. They charge on happily:

King. Saint Cupid, then! and, soldiers, to the field!
Ber. Advance your standards, and upon them, lords!
Pell-mell, down with them! but be first advis'd,
In conflict that you get the sun of them.
Long. Now to plain-dealing; lay these glozes by:
Shall we resolve to woo these girls of France?
King. And win them too; therefore let us devise
Some entertainment for them in their tents.

(IV.iii. 363-370)

Capell, Dyce, and many more recent editors mutilated the major speech of the play because they did not share Shakespeare's highly sophisticated awareness of women which works with the courtiers' spirit of antic self-satire and with the characterization of Berowne to produce a wild rather than a serious statement. It is almost as if the courtiers now begin to realize that they are ridiculous and they are able to accept this fact about themselves and enjoy being
ridiculous. Camus might have called it a sense of the absurd. In such a mood they call for a speech from Berowne, whose forte is making speeches, and he produces the beautiful but humorous, semi-true and repetitive paean which has sent generations of commentators (who were doubtless a little worried about its content) rushing to their cupboards for some explanation for this Shakespearean "mistake."

Whole theories of revised versions of the play have grown up largely because of repetitions in this speech; however, the burden of proof in questions of Shakespeare cruxes or "errors" is upon those who would make them unintentional. In both Berry's and my readings of the play, it appears quite likely that Berowne, who has more words than anyone else in the play even without this speech, would in his zeal to create an effective "salve for perjury" elaborate and descant considerably, while his admiring companions show their ambivalent response to his talent by becoming poco a poco impatient. This could make for some good stage business.

On the other hand, this speech could kill the play's effect of comedy if it were performed in a serious manner: it is the exaggeration of the mercurial Berowne, a character complex enough to recognize and enjoy his own foolishness both here and elsewhere. We remember he had a certain "stoic" resignation to the edict he did not approve when he apparently signed it anyway; so he can shrug his shoulders, so to speak, and accept his own absurdity. The editors since Capell have created ingenious theories in their search for an explanation for this "vexed" passage, taking it as a serious set-speech, perhaps a moral turning point of the play, where the derogatory vision of
women given at the outset is corrected, not because it was wrong but so that everyone can at least talk about getting married and the play can end happily. Such a reading, however, gives both the speech and Berowne just a bit too much credit: he is a choral voice but he is not the hero of the play.

This speech is evidence that Berowne and the others are embracing another extremist position, one that will also prove ineffective, as it is the author's clear intention to have Love's labour lost. Like Kate's beautifully-edged satiric use of conventional wisdom exaggerated at the end of The Taming of the Shrew, Berowne's long speech should be done in that delightful style one might label "serio-comic" and a direction might read "not totally serious." Berowne might very well begin straightforwardly, but the repetitions in the text indicate that he gets carried away with the theme and with being at center stage. Otherwise Berowne here will recall Puritan over-righteousness and the pedantic Holofernian lecturer who confidently pronounces what is correct and what is not; but he's a comedian, this is a comedy, and Holofernes the resident pedant. As C. L. Barber points out:

The set speech [Berowne] delivers is Praise of Folly such as we have seen in Nashe. It is often quoted as "the young Shakespeare's philosophy," despite the fact that it is deliberately introduced as equivocation, "flattery for this evil...quiller, how to cheat the devil" (IV.iii 288). In proving that it is women's eyes which "sparkle still the right Promethean fire" (IV.iii. 351), Berowne adopts the same mock-academic manner and uses many of the same genial arguments as Nashe's Bacchus, the same used later by Falstaff in proving sack "the first humane principle."...He has turned the word "Fool" around, in the classic manner of Erasmus in his Praise of Folly; it becomes folly not to be a fool.24
Thus Berowne argues:

For when would you, my lord, or you, or you,
Have found the ground of study's excellence
Without the beauty of a woman's face?

(IV.iii. 317-319)

He soon repeats and elaborates on this theme:

For when would you, my liege, or you, or you,
In leaden contemplation have found out
Such fiery numbers as the prompting eyes
Of beauty's tutors have enrich'd you with?

(IV.iii. 338-341)

Similarly, the idea of women's eyes as academes is stated:

From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:
They are the ground, the books, the academes,
From whence doth spring the true Promethean fire.

(IV.iii. 320-323)

This is analyzed and expanded only ten lines later:

For where is any author in the world
Teaches such beauty as a woman's eye?
Learning is but an adjunct to ourself,
And where we are our learning likewise is:
Then when ourselves we see in ladies' eyes,
Do we not likewise see our learning there?

(IV.iii. 330-335)

The thirteenth line of this long speech is repeated verbatim sixteen lines from its end, and the lines following it have a very slight variation:

From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:
They sparkle still the right Promethean fire;
They are the books, the arts, the academes,
That show, contain, and nourish all the world;
Else none at all in aught proves excellent.

(IV.iii. 368-371)
All this repetition was intended. The plot of the play reinforces the message of this repeated line, since indeed Berowne has learned and will continue to—as we have seen, he will learn even beyond the end of the play if he jests in the hospital—because of his response to Rosalind. The King also learns in this play, as a result of communicating with a woman. Insofar as it describes what happens in the play the speech is "serious," but it is serious, as C. L. Barber points out, in a mock-academic manner. The play is a comedy, and far from being signs of error or revision, the repetitions and extended elaborations here are meant to be funny.

It may be that the repetitions have been viewed skeptically because of their content: to fit the idea that women's effect on men is liberalizing and educative into antifeminist traditions generally and into most views of Shakespeare (that unhappily married playwright we're heard so much about) particularly is not an easy task, even for Shakespeare. Capell, who first attributed these lines to "Shakespeare's negligence," may have been himself predisposed to dismiss what they contain. Furness quotes him as saying this speech was "pen'd in haste, found weak in some places, and its reasoning disjointed, it had instant correction; but wanting the proper mark of correction by erasure or otherwise, printers took what they found." Capell was so confident of his knowledge of Shakespeare's mind that he deleted lines 317-322 and 330-338, and Dyce and Hodson did the same; Dyce "freed" the speech from its "ridiculous repetitions." The Cambridge Editors and Halliwell use these repetitions as certain evidence of a revision of the play.25
Capell is certainly assuming too much when he refers to the "disjointed reasoning" in a speech in a comedy as sufficient grounds for deleting. The last few lines clinch the comic nature of the speech for those who did not realize it was funny up to then:

For wisdom's sake, a word that all men love,
Or for love's sake, a word that loves all men,
Or for men's sake, the authors of these women,
Or women's sake, by whom we men are men,
Let us once lose our oaths to find ourselves,
Or else we lose ourselves to keep our oaths.
It is religion to be thus forsworn;
For charity itself fulfills the law;
And who can sever love from charity?26

(IV.iii. 375-383)

Can words love men? Instead of hacking away at this, deleting here and there, over the centuries, editors and scholars who insisted on taking it seriously would have been kinder had they promoted it as Shakespeare's view of women instead of the much-celebrated "I am ashamed that women are so simple" from The Taming of the Shrew. But neither one is fully serious. Insofar as Berowne is being serious here (which I judge to be somewhat over 50%, hence so many misunderstandings), he is expressing a heavily romantic, unrealistic view of love. Shakespeare is through him no doubt satirizing the vast traditions of Cupid lore that were everywhere available in the literature and graphic art of his time—available ad nauseam, hence the satire. Berowne, like the adolescent spirits among his audience, glorifies and idealizes love instead of living with it and experiencing it. Before Love's Labour's Lost ends he will be brought down to earth through his embarrassments during the masque of the Muscovites and the Pageant of the Nine Worthies, and finally by Rosaline's rejection of him. After
the play we are asked to envision him trying to cheer the dying: this will sober him and us. In case anyone in the audience is left floating up in the clouds or off with "Hercules, still climbing trees in the Hesperides" (IV.iii. 359) at the end of the play, Shakespeare again underlines his point by giving us a strong dose of realism in the final songs of Winter and Spring.

I have implied that, after the reign of Elizabeth was out of memory, many attitudes toward Shakespeare's women on the part of commentators took on the shape of the commentators' cultures, where by and large to consider women a subordinate class was the order of the times, rather than the shape of Shakespeare's culture, where it was politically unsound and perhaps even dangerous for men of note to derogate openly all the opposite sex. Berowne's speech and this whole play have been misread by many who weren't as much appalled by Navarre's edict as Shakespeare's original audience would have been. This misinterpretation is understandable and forgivable in light of the fact that, both before and after Elizabeth, derogation of women was taken for granted as congruent with the facts of life based on Scripture, the Church Fathers, Aristotle, and Freud (not to mention Leslie Fiedler). Insensitive then, to the general derogation of women because it was assumed naturally justifiable, the majority of critics also let the exaggerated comic touches of the sonneteers and of Berowne pass unnoticed in Love's Labour's Lost. This illustrates that the inability to see and respect women as persons and the habit of stereotyping can make commentators blind to some very important areas of Shakespeare's art.
The correction of Berowne's overly-honorific view of women also lies partly in the clear fact of Rosaline's bawdiness, a facet of her personality unnoticed by nearly all commentators except Katherine Wilson, and in the Princess' sarcasm. For example, when Armado's letter to Jaquenetta is delivered to Rosaline by mistake, the Princess indicates her good-humored derision of Navarre with a derogatory jest, "Boyet, you can carve; Break up this capon." This sends almost all editors gallantly running to explain away the women's immodesties, and they comment that of course she means "poulet," in French used to denote a love letter. Actually what she says is "capon" which denotes a castrated male chicken, and she goes on to say:

\begin{quote}
We will read it, I swear.  
Break the neck of the wax, and every one give ear.
\end{quote}

(IV. i. 60-61)

Since there is no evidence to the contrary, we must assume Shakespeare intended the Princess to speak this word and that he conceived her speech as having an overtone of sexuality and an effect of derision. Many other examples of this bawdy language may be found in Herbert A. Ellis' *Shakespeare's Lusty Punning in Love's Labour's Lost.*

Most editors and commentators are much more impressed with Navarre and his men than the Princess is. She is much less in awe of them than she is willing to be amused by them, and the audience is likewise meant to be more amused by their antics than impressed by their wit. They choose Armado for amusement and they almost see themselves in his mirror. Unless one recognizes the theme of male pre-
tension corrected, the play will seem fluffy, plotless, and dis-jointed.

6. Unity of theme in main and subplot shown in Act V and in the character Armado

Oscar James Campbell saw it as a plotless play, for example, and went so far as to explain "the unconnected nature of the incidents, especially those in Act V, and the meager plot" by asserting that *Love's Labour's Lost* was constructed according to the pattern of a progress. Conveniently, progresses had no structure beyond the fact that, like this play, they usually happened outdoors. If a thematic interpretation of the play fits these "unconnected incidents and the meager plot" together into a coherent dramatic action, it is more likely to be what the author intended. The unity of Act V, like that of the rest of the play, cannot be appreciated if we share the assumptions Navarre and his men begin with. Indeed, it is possible that the play has been so often discounted and misread precisely because so many scholars have shared these assumptions and identified with Navarre and his men. They would be less likely to recognize the theme of correction of antifeminism.

Navarre not only envisions an academy cut off from all the world as a source of fame and then breaks his solemn vows regarding it, but he also engaged himself in courtship games which have nothing to do with the mutual knowledge and respect, understanding and open communication which obtain between lovers. He is excessively a creature of
his culture: he swears undying love to the wrong woman just because she is wearing a particular favor; he and his friends plan to "win" the Princess and her retinue by disguising themselves and by presenting their servants in a pageant. The fact that masques came to pass in Shakespeare's time does not prove that they were always taken seriously; these elaborate social rituals, like debutante balls today, were as likely to be derided as admired by those who frequently experienced them. Like the sonnets, the masque of the Muscovites and the favor-giving were probably much funnier in and of themselves to a contemporary court audience than they are to us, who are so distant that we tend to treat them with a too studious and explanatory respect. We thus miss what I call the antic level in the main plot, wherein the actors playing the King and his votaries are aware to a certain extent that their parts are comic. They might well communicate an inherently self-mocking high seriousness, unlike Armado more in degree than kind.

Since one of the main themes of the play is the correction of male pretensions, the male actors must be pretentious from Navarre's opening speech almost to the very end. All the action of Act V works to correct these pretensions. Although the characters in the subplot help, it is fitting that the primary agents in satirizing Navarre and his friends should be the women, because his edict denied their humanity.

When Navarre finally decides to break his oath and invite the women into his court, the Princess refuses with some devout oaths of her own:
Now, by my maiden honour, yet as pure
As the unsullied lily, I protest,
A world of torments though I should endure,
I would not yield to be your house's guest;
So much I hate a breaking cause to be
Of heavenly oaths, vow'd with integrity.

(V. ii. 363-368)

This could be played for laughs, and the swearing on maiden honor
to be played for laughs, and the swearing on maiden honor
pointed up as a joke by playing the earlier scene with the Forester
pointed up as a joke by playing the earlier scene with the Forester
provocatively: the possibility for this is in the lines, but it is
provocatively: the possibility for this is in the lines, but it is
of course not necessary. Whether or not the Princess is virgin is
of course not necessary. Whether or not the Princess is virgin is
really irrelevant, however. What is important in these lines is that
really irrelevant, however. What is important in these lines is that
here Navarre's education begins in good earnest. He is still pre-
here Navarre's education begins in good earnest. He is still pre-
tending ignorance about the singularly unsuccessful Muscovite adventure.
tending ignorance about the singularly unsuccessful Muscovite adventure.
He responds to the Princess' refusal to enter his court with a most
He responds to the Princess' refusal to enter his court with a most
solicitous concern for her happiness, only to be further reduced:
solicitous concern for her happiness, only to be further reduced:

King. O! you have lived in desolation here,
Unseen, unvisited, much to our shame.
Prin. Not so, my lord; it is not so, I swear:
We have had pastimes here and pleasant game.
A mess of Russians left us but of late.

(V. ii. 369-373)

I think this is the funniest line in the play and its high point. With
this the King at long last realizes he's holding the short end of the
this the King at long last realizes he's holding the short end of the
stick and such a realization almost knocks him unconscious:
stick and such a realization almost knocks him unconscious:

Ros. Which of the visors was it that you wore?
Ber. Where? when? what visor? why demand you this?
Ros. These, then, that visor; that superfluous case
That hid the worse and show'd the better face.
King. We were descried; they'll mock us now downright.
Dum. Let us confess, and turn it to a jest.
Prin. Amaz'd, my lord? Why looks your highness sad?
Ros. Help! hold his brows! he'll swoon. Why look you pale?
     Sea-sick, I think, coming from Muscovy.

(V. ii. 385-393)

Here at last the hostility of the Princess is out in the open and the courtiers of Navarre recognize it. With this, the tension in the air begins to clear. Open communication on taboo subjects is always good drama, as Edward Albee and Harold Pinter have shown us in the twentieth century. From here on the men of Navarre and the women of France begin to build their relationships through human interactions. They are no longer apes of form, but mutually-recognizable persons.

Concerned as they are only with appearances (sex-based discrimination is always ultimately a concern with appearance), Navarre and his friends surely deserve the embarrassment inflicted on them. In the rest of the play they show that their purgation is not yet complete, however, and they remain until the end of the play essentially "in character." Their self-consciousness is further illustrated in their nasty responses to the rustics' pageant, which Navarre has tried in vain to stop because he fears its mistakes will reflect adversely on him. When Costard says, "I Pompey am," Berowne replies, "You lie, you are not he," which is the kind of pseudo-sophisticated retort that was probably common in Shakespeare's theatre. (Compare the incorporation into the play of such naive audience response in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle.* ) In this scene the courtiers' rude and self-conscious responses are further evidence of their puerility, and they contrast sharply with those of the Princess: "Great thanks, Great Pompey"; "Proceed, good Alexander" (V. ii. 540-562 passim). She is
throughout gracious and encouraging to the awkward presenters of the Nine Worthies, and Shakespeare's sympathies were almost certainly with those who could be kind to poor players.

The subplot of Love's Labour's Lost may be seen to correspond much more closely with the main plot if we accept the theme of correction of male presumptions about women as primary. Within the subplot, no one is more antifeminist than Armado, and he is roundly punished. Although he eventually goes so far as to "turn sonnet" like the courtiers in his pursuit of Jaquenetta, his labors must wait three years for their reward.

Just after the strict antifeminist terms of the edict have been read in Act I, we are prepared to meet Armado,

A man of complements, whom right and wrong
Have chose as umpire of their mutiny,

(I.i. 67-68)

and "Costard the swain," whom the King offers as butts for comedy to the court and whom Shakespeare gives the audience as alternate butts to the King. Costard appears onstage in the custody of the petty constable Dull, who carries a letter from Armado. Berowne's hopes for comic relief are fulfilled: he says, "How low soever the matter, I hope in God for high words" (I.i. 190). Armado writes because Costard has been taken with Jaquenetta, and his response to her has clearly been of the sort that the King assumed in his edict to be the only significant response of a man to a woman: "Such is the simplicity of men to hearken after the flesh" (I.i.214). Costard's own testimony in this scene is filled with sexual puns, and Jaquenetta plays the stereotype
Armado assigns her: "A child of our grandmother Eve, a female"
(I.i. 253). The King's reading of Armado's letter is extended and punctuated, we presume, with a great many visual jokes, and with frequent comic comments from Costard. The letter also extends itself with many high phrases and descriptive flourishes; but it builds to its comic height when Armado finally comes to his main idea:

King. [reading] But to the place where: it standeth north-north-east and by east from the west corner of the curious-knotted garden; there did I see that low-spirited swain, that base minnow of thy mirth. . . . that unlettered small-knowing soul. . . . that shallow vassal. . . . which, as I remember, hight Costard. . . . sorted and consorted, contrary to thy established proclaimed edict and continent canon, which with—O! with—but with this I passion to say wherewith—. . . . with a child of our grandmother Eve, a female; or, for thy more sweet understanding, a woman.

(I.i. 238-54)

Emphasis on the theme of women is gained here by a piling up of synonyms at such a dramatically important moment, and it continues in the reading of the end of the letter:

King. [reads] For Jaquenetta—so is the weaker vessel called—which I apprehended with the aforesaid swain, I keep her as a vessel of thy law's fury; and shall, at the least of thy sweet notice, bring her to trial. Thine in all compliments of devoted and heart-burning duty, DON ADRIANO DE ARMADO.

(I.i. 259-64)

Richard David cites two instances in Greene's Mamillia and two in Lyly where these authors present characters who use the term "weaker vessels" in such a way as to doubt its accuracy. Rosalind's use of the term in As You Like It (IV.iv. 7) similarly confronts the question of woman's "weakness." Shakespeare appears to be following a similar questioning bent here when he continues to joke about terms for women
through the vehicle of the witty simpleton Costard:

Cost. Sir, I confess the wench...
King. It was proclaimed a year's imprisonment to be taken with a wench.
Cost. I was taken with none, sir: I was taken with a demsel.
King. Well, it was proclaimed damsel.
Cost. This was no damsel either, sir; she was a virgin.
King. It is so varied, too, for it was proclaimed virgin.
Cost. If it were, I deny her virginity: I was taken with a maid.
King. This maid will not serve your turn, sir.
Cost. This maid will serve my turn, sir.

(I.i. 269-270, 273-282)

The King in this sequence might be played as truly angry or as amused, but we imagine that the courtiers are richly amused by Costard. The audience will now of course laugh with the courtiers. Shakespeare seems to be setting up his male characters by having them suggest several common jokes and make their derogatory views of women perfectly clear, the better to provide a foil for the Princess and an atmosphere of conflict.

We see that Shakespeare deals head-on with the fleshly temptress view of women via the Costard-Jaquinetta-Armado triangle, then moves far beyond it. Even Jaquinetta turns out to have habits and characteristics beyond the physical: in I.ii when we learn that Armado is smitten with her, their interchange foreshadows the diffident response of the Princess of France to the King, and shows Jaquinetta's own derisiveness:

Arm. I do betray myself with blushing. Maid.
Jaq. Man.
Arm. I will visit thee at the lodge.
Jaq. That's hereby.
Arm. I know where it is situate.
Jaq. Lord, how wise you are!
Arm. I will tell thee wonders.
Jag. With that face?
Arm. I love thee.
Jag. So I heard you say.
Arm. And so farewell.
Jag. Fair weather after you!

(I.ii. 124-135)

The humor of this situation is much increased when Armado heroically accepts his ignominious passion, as he will later heroically accept his unwillingness to duel with Costard (V.ii. 713-715). His derision is tempered and made comic by his strangely-placed affection, so that the audience laughs at but cannot share any longer the attitude he expresses here:

> I do affect the very ground, which is base, where her shoe, which is baser, guided by her foot, which is basest, doth tread.

(I.ii. 157-159)

To put such a statement in the mouth of a comic butt and to exaggerate it as is done here is to aid in the idea's disestablishment. So anti-feminism rather swallows its own tail.

Armado proceeds to anatomize Cupid:

> Love is a familiar; Love is a devil: there is no evil angel but Love. Yet there was Samson so tempted, and he had an excellent strength; yet was Solomon so seduced, and he had a very good wit. Cupid's butt-shaft is too hard for Hercules' club, and therefore too much odds for a Spaniard's rapier.

(I.ii. 162-167)

Armado arrives quickly at the other extreme view of women, the sonne-teer's view, wherein woman is glorified out of her humanity as in the edict she had been deprived of it to be classed with food and sleep.

Armado exclaims:
Assist me, some extemporal god of rhyme,
For I am sure I shall turn sonnet.

(I.ii. 173-174)

The literati and semi-literati among an Elizabethan audience probably would have instantly recognized that in "turning sonnet" Armado was going to another extreme, and in terms of the play's world, he is here preparing us to laugh at the courtlier sonneteers in Act IV.

Although it is usually assumed that Armado will marry Jaquenetta at the end of the play when he says he will "hold the plough" for her (V.ii. 873), the ambiguity of that phrase and the general reversals in the courtships in the play might lead to a different conclusion. Despite the fact that Jaquenetta is apparently pregnant (V.ii. 662) it may be that when Armado says "I am a votary; I have vowed to Jaquenetta to hold the plough for her sweet love three year," he means exactly what he says— that he has sworn to serve her for a three-year test period. Hard punishment indeed, even for Armado. He has merited some comeuppance, certainly. Earlier we have heard his letter to Jaquenetta, which includes every conventional idea available to a man courting a woman he considers his inferior; here is its envoy, the height of male presumption:

Thus dost thou hear the Nemean lion roar
'Gainst thee, thou lamb, that standest as his prey;
Submissive fall his princely feet before,
And he from forage will incline to play.
But if thou strive, poor soul, what art thou then?
Food for his rage, repasture for his den.

(IV.i. 86-92)

This letter is read aloud by Boyet to the Princess, thus producing another scene wherein overbearing male attitudes provide a foil for her.
The envoy well summarizes its sense of male confidence at domination. The Nemean lion may be successful against the lamb, but in this play the "lambs" win. Here again an exaggerated view of the relation between the sexes is articulated and rebuked through laughter. Those males in the audience who see themselves as lions and their women as lambs, looking in the mirror and seeing the ridiculous figure of Armado, might incline toward changing their patterns. If, however, the play is directed as a series of linguistic extravagances, ignoring its many pointed jibes at traditional ideas of women, no such effect would be possible. These jibes provide the play's essential dynamic. We may safely assert that when it was produced by Shakespeare's company all its comic reforming force was intact. When the Princess responds to Armado's verbal attacks the audience fully understood and shared her pleasure at seeing the enemy, who has the added qualification of being a Spaniard, make an ass of himself:

What plume of feathers is he that indited this letter? What vane? What weathercock? Did you ever hear better?

(IV.i. 93-94)

Like nearly every other Shakespearean character, Armado will be redeemed, after possibly three years' penance.

7. Appearance versus reality and the mockery of antifeminist views; a therapeutic purpose of the play

Amazingly, Shakespeare's mockery of antifeminist ideas in
Love's Labour's Lost has not been noticed before. Many scholars have seen that he holds pretentious learning up to scrutiny, and most recent studies have appreciated the theme of appearance versus reality. These themes are all perfectly congruent with the one I propose here. Indeed, what might be called the feminist theme of the play allows us to see more of the great efficiency Shakespeare commanded in fitting the appearance/reality theme to the basic structure of the play and to its plots and characterization on every level. The most common recurring pattern of the play is exemplified not only in Marcade's entrance in Act V, but also in the Princess' refusal of Navarre's hand, in Nathaniel's portrayal of Alexander, in the masque of the Muscovites, and, significantly, at the outset of the play in Navarre's exclusion of women from his academe. In all these situations, despite appearances, reality peeps through and eventually controls, as the Princess of France, despite her appearance in the body (at least the dress) of a woman, first cracks open and then controls the ill-conceived world of Navarre with her superior intelligence and humanity. At the end of the play the Princess will have broken out, just as the truly shy Nathaniel breaks out and spills over to "overthrow Alisander the conqueror" and as the shallowness of Navarre and his friends breaks through their Russian costumes and their stylized poetry. The Princess, who clearly is the wisest person on the stage in the play, moves from being considered merely a dangerous female body to a person whose admonishments, along with those of Rosaline, will be respected and acted upon by the King and Berowne. Thus we see that the theme of reality's ultimate victory over
appearance unifies the entire play; those who trust appearance—and what is sexism but a trust in appearance?—find ridicule. Truth will out.

Catherine M. McLay's essay "The Dialogues of Spring and Winter: A Key to the Unity of Love's Labour's Lost" gives a history of the criticism of the songs at the end of the play, and Ms. McLay proves the relevance of the songs in terms of the usual interpretation of the play, which is not very incongruent with her own view that men of Navarre "represent" Art and "the practical young ladies" represent Nature. In terms of my interpretation of the play these songs may be seen to be even more integral. One might assert, for example, that Shakespeare put them there because he wanted to show what true poetry can be, having shown false inventions in the sonnets in IV.iii. If that was the case, he dreams happily into eternity, recognizing via the spiritual message system pervading the universe which he seems to trust that those two poems are the most widely admired lines from this play. In any case the songs' clarity of image and musical line do contrast sharply with the productions of Navarre's courtiers. Did Shakespeare the country boy, consciously enjoying his own poetic talent, wish to show up the whole class of pompous courtiers? Was he getting at them or at some sub-class disliked by his patron? The tendency in Love's Labour's Lost criticism until very recently has been to assume that the historical allusions—few though they are—in this play are evidence that Shakespeare was taking part in some kind of battle; scholars battle over which battle it was, the Harvey-Nashe dispute or the Essex-Raleigh rivalry, or—wonderful!—both. Somehow this doesn't fit with the
character of Shakespeare as described by Dekker, Heminges, Condell, Jonson. If he tried to cool the fires of these battles, perhaps by making everyone who participated look both ridiculous and somehow lovable, that effort would be more in line with what we are told of his character by contemporaries.

A therapeutic purpose just happens to fit the play better, too. My view is that Love's Labour's Lost's ultimate purpose was therapeutic, just as Milton's purpose was, and as Homer's probably was when he wrote a war poem the details of which must dissuade its hearers from war and anger. One might observe and debate this question at length in broad terms, if one were prepared to take the time and the trouble to answer charges like "neo-Puritan," "didacticist," and possibly even "philistine." Here we do not have space to trace the therapeutic purpose through all the possible historical avenues. Instead to suggest how it works we need only notice the theme of cuckoldry in the play; for to see how it is handled is to appreciate with his contemporaries Shakespeare's benevolence of spirit. Tracing other themes of the play would bring us to the same awareness, but since the songs deal with cuckoos and married men's fears and since this theme has a clear connection with the theme of women, we will concentrate on it.

Love's Labour's Lost seems on one level to tell us that cuckoldry isn't very important: this was an unusual message for Shakespeare's age. Armado is the first character who clearly ignores the sex life of his mistress; it seems immaterial to him that Jaquenetta has been with Costard. It will be remarked that Armado is a comic butt; Berowne, however, who is of nobility, is not entirely different
from Armado in this respect. Act III's only scene compares these
two suffering lovers, and although Berowne chafes under Cupid's yoke,
he ends by accepting the fact that his heart is captured by

One that will do the deed
Though Argus were her eunuch and her guard.

(III.i. 198-199)

We noticed above Katherine's answer to Dumain, who also seems to
accept it. Those in the audience who noticed these male characters
accept unchaste women matter-of-factly—and jealous persons, seeking
the company misery loves, might be more likely to notice than those who
remain uninfected—might see therein at least a precedent for steering
away from the more traditional course of Othello and Leontes.

The songs reinforce an accepting and dispassionate view of
cuckoldry, by implying that its potential is everywhere, that men suffer
it and live. Later Shakespeare wrote two plays on sexual jealousy, and
here he already had this painful subject in mind. Perhaps this early
he also tried to "keel the pot" of passion in his audience artistically,
having recognized that sexual jealousy, like the derogatory and life-
denying ideas of women which are frequently among its components, really
can oppress and kill. Witness Henry VIII, known to our author, who in
his turn pledged fealty to the daughter of Anne Boleyn.
CHAPTER I

NOTES


6 Rolf Soellner, Shakespeare's Patterns of Self-Knowledge (Columbus, 1972), pp. 89-90.


8 Variorum III, p. 10.


Granville-Barker's remarks are interesting: "In yet one more respect the play may suffer by its transference from the Elizabethan stage. The acting of women by boys was in itself a contribution to these absolute values. Further, if we do not allow for the effect of this stringency upon Shakespeare's stagecraft even at its most mature, we shall be constantly at fault. Not that he seems to have felt it a drawback; among all his side-glances at actors and acting we find, I think, no hint that it irks him. It did not impoverish his imagination nor lead, on the whole, to any undue suppression of the womanly side in his plays. ([footnote] Except in the actual fewness of women's parts, for which the fewness of the boy apprentices allowed may be accountable.) It may influence his choice of subject; he does not trouble with domestic drama. Without doubt it determines what he will and will not ask woman characters and boy actors to do. Their love scenes are never embarrassing. They do not nurse babies. They seldom weep. He puts them, in fact, whenever he can, upon terms of equality with men; and women have been critically quick ever since to appreciate the compliment, not well aware, perhaps, how it comes to be paid them. For those conflicts of character which are the very life of drama he appoints weapons that each sex can wield with equal address; insight and humor, a quick wit and a shrewd tongue—the woman's the shrewder, indeed; in compensation, is it, for the softer advantages, the appealing charm, that his celibate theater denied them? Out of a loss he plucks a gain. Release from such reality drew him to set the relation of his men and women upon the plane of the imagination. It asked from the boy actors a skill, and a quite impersonal beauty of speech and conduct; those absolute qualities, in fact, of which we speak. The Elizabethan theater lacked many refinements, but at least its work was not clogged nor its artistry obscured by the crude appeal of sex, from which the theater today is perhaps not wholly free. No one wants to banish women from the stage; and it might not be an easy thing to do. But the actresses may well be asked to remember what their predecessors achieved, and by what means."

"In Love's Labour's Lost, however, the Princess and the ladies are not, and cannot be made, much more than mouthpieces for wit and good sense. As to love-making, the Princess gives us the cue with

We have received your letters, full of love;

And in our maiden council rated them
At courtship, pleasant jest, and courtesy,
As bombast, and as lining to the time . . .

It is gallant, open and aboveboard.
Saint Cupid, then, and soldiers, to the field.
They are to be leagued encounters; and no two of the lovers are ever alone. But how few of Shakespeare's love scenes now or later need it embarrass anyone to overhear!" (Prefaces to Shakespeare, First Series, London, 1927, pp. 30-31).

The underlining in the above passage is mine. It marks the most noteworthy of many remarks here by Granville-Barker which betray unconscious assumptions about the nature of women, most of which are derogatory.

A more recent and more sophisticated study, which is nevertheless severely limited by a Freudian conviction regarding the hegemony of sex, is Hugh Richmond's Shakespeare's Sexual Comedy (Indianapolis, 1971), where on pp. 140ff. he echoes Granville-Barker's attitude. Somehow the character of Rosalind is a function of the actor's sex and her product of a capacity to "analyze her relationship to her various sex roles." Whether this capacity is held by the boy actor or the character Rosalind is not entirely clear.

Both these approaches are based on the assumption that Shakespeare was not master of the stage conventions at hand, but the servant of such conventions. One is reminded of Dr. Johnson's reply to those who would quibble about the violation of the unity of place in Antony and Cleopatra: once the imagination has made its leap, it can travel not only from Alexandria to Rome and back in time for a scene change, but also from body to body, regardless of type.

14 Bobbyann Roesen, "Love's Labour's Lost," Shakespeare Quarterly, 4 (1953), 411ff. conceives the world of Navarre where the play occurs as one of illusion, which is invaded by the real world outside. C. L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Princeton, 1959), has a chapter on "The Folly of Wit and Masquerade in Love's Labour's Lost," wherein he says that the fooling of the King and his men is subject finally to the clarification provided by the Princess' and Rosaline's commands (pp. 106ff.).

15 Geoffrey Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare's Plays (London, 1951), I, 442, 438-9 (hereinafter cited as Bullough), gives an account from The Travels of Sir Jerome Horsey which tells of the Russian ambassador's outlandish behavior in presenting the suit of Ivan. Bullough gives this as an historical parallel; he also prints an amusing analogue account from Gesta Grayorum for 1594 which may have been partly inspired by the 1582 Russian ambassador.

16 In Sidney's story Artesia is a "beauty," i.e., one of those women whose superior looks were proved by armed combat between their suitors and the suitors of the next "beauty." Sidney sees the artificiality of this process and expresses it to his readers by having Artesia's case quite exaggerated. PhalANTus, who doesn't especially like Artesia but who is willing to play this game in order to reap
some concomitant enefit, one day makes quite a rash promise to her, to the effect that he will prove her beauty in all the courts of Europe. Recognizing the publicity value in this, Artesia replies, "We arrest your word," meaning, "You said it—I want to see you do it." They both go through a lot of trouble, incredible trouble in fact, to keep face and continue playing the "beauty" game. One can see from Sidney's story, from the uproarious treatment of Surrey and Geraldine in Nashe's Unfortunate Traveller, and doubtless from many other sources, that by the time Love's Labour's Lost was written nobody was praising beauties seriously. The fact that (according to Richard David at least) nowhere else is the idiom "We arrest your word" used except in Sidney's story, here where the Princess is catching Navarre from wriggling out of the Aquitaine agreement, and in Measure for Measure II.iv. 133, when Angelo seizes upon Isabella's remark about the weakness of women, suggests the possibility that Shakespeare read the Arcadia and had in mind this truly disgusting Artesia-Phalantus relationship when he wrote a play satirizing love games. The story appears in Book I, Volume I, p. 99 in the Feuillerat edition.

17 Abel Le Franc is an anti-Stratfordian who believes the Earl of Derby wrote the plays, but his historical study provides rich details of parallels from French court life. Although I have seen Volume I of his study Sous le masque de "William Shakespeare" (Paris, 1918), I am following David's Arden introduction here, p. xxxiii.

18 Variorum LLL, p. 9.

19 Arden LLL, p. 155 n.


21 Wilson, Sugared Sonnets, pp. 26-47.

22 At Stratford, Ontario in 1974 the King was played straight, i.e., uncritically, as if his lines were not pretentious or exaggerated. Notice that Jaques and Polonius can be played straight too.

23 See Variorum LLL, p. 193.


26 The line numbers quoted in the discussion of Berowne's speech on women's eyes are those given in the Variorum rather than the Arden.


29 Arden LLL, p. 15.

CHAPTER II

SISTERHOOD IN SHAKESPEARE

1. Introduction: definitions, examples, negative examples

The fairy land buys not the child of me.
His mother was a votaress of my order:
And, in the spiced Indian air, by night,
Full often hath she gossip'd by my side,
And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
Marking the embarked traders on the flood,
When we have laugh'd to see the sails conceive
And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind;
Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait
Following, --her womb then rich with my young squire,—
Would imitate, and sail upon the land,
And fetch me trifles, and return again,
As from a voyage, rich with merchandise.
But she, being mortal, of that boy did die;
And for her sake do I rear up her boy,
And for her sake I will not part with him.

A Midsummer Night's Dream
(II.i.121-37)

Coleridge's observation that in Shakespeare "the plot always interests us on account of the characters, not vice-versa," is still true enough to justify considering characters in some cases without complete plot analyses. Shakespeare treated particular kinds of relationships between characters repeatedly: for example, variations on the master-servant relationship appear in Lear/Kent, Antony/Enobarbus, etc.; conflicts and reconciliations between brothers appear in As You Like It and The Tempest; and variations on father-daughter relationships recur in the last plays, as Harbage has pointed out.
Comparative studies of recurring relationships like these may shed light on Shakespeare's mind. One such series which has not been recognized are loyal friendships between women. As is the case in so many other areas, Shakespeare has made several studies of friendships between women which are still unsurpassed as telling pictures of human realities.

A cameo example is in the passage quoted above, where Shakespeare uses Titania's loyalty to her deceased votaress as the trigger for the conflict between the fairy king and queen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Titania's reason for disobeying Oberon may be missed altogether or dismissed as whimsical, but it is clearly based on her commitment to what she judges to be the best interests of her dead votaress who "gossip'd by [her] side" before dying in childbirth. Although Titania is a fairy and her friend was mortal, the image of them both is totally human. Titania puts herself in trouble in returning her votaress' devotion; her commitment is totally spiritual and disinterested—if you will, noble. Her friend, being dead, can neither know of nor repay her kindness.

In many of Shakespeare's plays, friendships among women give them mutual strength; they are sources of spiritual, intellectual, and psychological growth, making it easier for the individual friends to endure trials and feel joy. Using the term made current by the feminist movement of the late twentieth century, I refer to these mutually-beneficial relationships between women as "sisterly," and to the impulse which underlies them as "sisterhood." Sisterhood is manifested
in the intercession of one woman in the trials of another, in interpersonal commitments among women, in willingness to share, in sympathy and in freedom from competitiveness.

Sisterhood is very much like brotherhood. An example of the sexism inherent in the English language is the fact that traditionally such relationships have been seen as evidence of "brotherly love" or "brotherhood," terms which, like the "father" which is in heaven, do not conveniently allow for female participation in these noble areas. Sisterhood differs from brotherhood, however, insofar as it carries connotations of defensiveness; because women have traditionally been an oppressed class, their banding together is not usually just for pleasure but for survival. Mary Daly's contemporary analysis of the term will help shed light on the process in Shakespeare: "The sisterhood of women . . . is necessary to overcome paralysis, self-hatred extended to women as a caste, self-depreciation, and emotional dependence upon men for a feeling of self-esteem. It would be a mistake to think that this is merely the feminine counterpart to 'brotherhood,' basically the same in meaning, but applied to females. Sisterhood is the bonding of those who are oppressed by definition . . . [it is] the bonding of those who have been conditioned to be divided against each other." 4

The nature of these sisterly relationships may be better understood if we consider one or two negative examples. Had Juliet enjoyed the confidence and intercession even of one other person besides the tardy and bungling Friar Lawrence, her tragedy might have been averted.
When her nurse, who is her only support within the Capulet house (her mother being no mother, but the wife of Capulet) falls away from her by suggesting she also marry the County Paris, Juliet's stature as a tragic figure expands enormously, as she is now utterly alone confronting the powerful destructive forces of her father's hate and Verona's laws which have sealed Romeo's banishment. Audiences who can identify with Juliet thrill with horror in III.v. as the last vestige of present moral support is stripped from her. In sharp contrast to this are the many scenes in Shakespeare where women, sharing common ethics, willingly take on the problems of other women and commit themselves to their solution. Most often this is done with no expectation of reward beyond the continuing enjoyment of the troubled heroine's friendship and confidence. Sometimes, as in the case of Titania's commitment to see personally to the welfare of her dead votaress' child, it is done because one woman totally puts herself in the place of another. Iras, who according to the extant stage directions has not touched an asp, dies just before her mistress does (as Eros dies before Antony), when she kisses Cleopatra goodbye: she has put herself totally in Cleopatra's place.

The effect on the audience of such sisterly interventions is to give hope that the heroine's confrontation with disorder, shared as it is by another woman, may be successful. Even in tragedy such an effect of hopefulness can obtain, as the case of Cleopatra's victory over Caesar, won with the help of Charmian and Iras, illustrates. On the other hand a failure, even a slight failure of honesty and sisterliness
among women, paves the way for disaster in the case of Emilia's lie to Desdemona about the whereabouts of her handkerchief; although Desdemona makes her need for information very clear, Emilia is still too much the obedient wife of Iago to be honest with her mistress:

Des. Where should I lose that handkerchief, Emilia?
Emil. I know not, madam.
Des. Believe me, I had rather have lost my purse
Full of crusadoes: and, but my noble Moor
Is true of mind and made of no such baseness
As jealous creatures are, it were enough
To put him to ill thinking.
Emil. Is he not jealous?

(III.iv.23-29)

Emilia repents, of course, and dies defending Desdemona, too late.

Ophelia's case is, like Juliet's, hopeless; Gertrude refuses—because of her general spinelessness, passivity, and inability to confront unpleasant reality, no doubt—a conference when Ophelia requests one just after Polonius' death. Ophelia is then entirely alone, a girl-child whose culture has made her entirely dependent for self-definition on men. Thus abandoned or cut off from all of them, she must inevitably lose her mind and perish. Her last scene concentrates, we notice, on the flowers of the earth, her very last resource for self-definition, and an inadequate one. She is preparing us for her death, then, in I.iii. where she promises to obey Polonius; her personal disaster is all the more painful because we have been given a flash of her natural intelligence and independence as she responded to Laertes:

I shall the effect of this good lesson keep
As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,
Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
While, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede.

(I.iii. 45-51)

A woman better than ourselves whose disaster is unmerited, Ophelia is truly a tragic heroine whose commitment to men is not entirely different from Oedipus' commitment to truth.

2. Analysis of an early example in The Two Gentlemen of Verona

Having considered these cases where there is a failure or absence of sisterhood, let us now move to a more detailed analysis of positive examples of sisterhood, beginning with the early comedies.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona illustrates well the pattern of sisterhood which reappears in later plays. Julia, the heroine who has disguised herself as a page in her journey to Milan in order to "prevent the loose encounters of lascivious men" (II.vii.40-41), arrives only to find Proteus, her betrothed, singing love songs at Silvia's window. Julia, who now calls herself "Sebastian," quickly becomes enlisted as Proteus' courier in delivering to Silvia as a love-token a ring she herself gave him at their betrothal back in Verona. Julia is understandably upset in this role; she nonetheless
dutifully arrives at Silvia's and proffers Proteus' tokens. Silvia, however, knows Proteus is engaged to one Julia in Verona, and will have nothing to do with him or his offerings. She has, however, promised to give him a picture of herself which he begged for: had she not so promised, there would be no reason for "Sebastian," who is to deliver the picture, to meet Silvia, and the scene between the two women, pathetic, delightful, and ironic as it is, would not have been justified. When the disguised Julia asks Silvia for the picture she promised to Proteus, Silvia gives it to her with this angry message:

Go give your master this: tell him from me,
One Julia, that his changing thoughts forget,
Would better fit his chamber than this shadow.

(IV.iv.122-24)

Julia tries to remain unrattled, but as she asks Silvia to read a letter from Proteus, she pulls out the wrong paper, which, albeit it is never identified, leads the audience to think it is a letter to Proteus, and if Silvia reads it, Julia's disguise will be broken. This brief interchange heightens the dramatic irony of an already-charged situation, but Silvia unwittingly replies to Julia's request for reading in such a way as to relieve, temporarily, the dramatic tension:

I will not look upon your master's lines:
I know they are stuff'd with protestations
And full of new-found oaths; which he will break
As easily as I do tear his paper.

(IV.iv.132-5)

Next the heavy-hearted Julia dutifully offers Silvia a ring from Proteus; again Silvia (whose similarity to the Princess of France should by now be apparent) rejects it indignantly:
The more shame for him that he sends [the ring] to 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.

(IV.iv.137-41)

With this, the disguise comes close to breaking again, for poor Julia is so grateful to Silvia that she thanks her openly; in a quick-witted effort to cover her identity again, Julia, now decidedly relieved and relatively light-hearted, makes up a story about having worn "Madam Julia's gown" once in a play. She says she played the role of "Ariadne passioning for Theseus' perjury and unjust flight" in a Pentecost play. Silvia presses her to learn more about the forsaken girl, and in answering her questions Julia has some wonderful occasions for emphasizing still further dramatic ironies:

And at that time I made her weep agood,  
For I did play a lamentable part . . . .  
I so lively acted with my tears  
That my poor mistress, moved therewithal,  
Wept bitterly; and would I might be dead  
If I in thought felt not her very sorrow!

(IV.iv.170ff.)

One is tempted to speculate that Shakespeare himself as a child may have acted a woman's part and did such a good job of it that it made him a lifelong feminist. Whatever the cause, he gives us here in Silvia and Julia an interaction among women which is too often ignored or discounted.

In her response to the account of "Sebastian," Silvia is concerned about something much more serious than her own annoyance at Proteus' courtship; although (she thinks) she has never met Julia and so has no
possible personal reason for being particularly concerned about Julia's unhappiness, she is in fact greatly sympathetic to the forsaken stranger. Since she has never even seen Julia, her generosity is one of the purest examples of sisterhood in Shakespeare. It may be that she allows Proteus to have her picture only in order to have a chance to berate him for disloyalty, as she does in this scene. Like the page "Sebastian," she too can imagine how painful it must be for Julia, and she offers her purse to him as a reinforcement of his love for his mistress:

Alas, poor lady, desolate and left!
I weep myself to think upon thy words.
Here, youth, there is my purse; I give thee this
For thy sweet mistress' sake, because thou lovest her.

(IV.iv.179-82)

Silvia's kindness, of course, is immediately felt by its intended recipient, Julia, and it gives her hope for eventual success and a chance to compliment "the other woman":

And she shall thank you for 't, if e'er you know her.
A virtuous gentlewoman, mild and beautiful!

(IV.iv.183-84)

This makes quite an astereotypic situation, but in Shakespeare's hands it is quite credible.

Hardin Craig emphasizes the importance of Shakespeare's characterization of these two women:

The most original thing Shakespeare did in this play was to center the interest of his story in the disguised woman, a thing which had never been so definitely done before in England or in Italy. There is a new consistency in Julia's character. Shakespeare has indicated to us how she felt as a woman in man's clothes and how she took her helplessness. It is often said
that Julia is an early sketch of Viola and Imogen, and it is true that the psychology of a woman in Julia's situation is presented more excellently in these later characters; but the dramatic discovery had already been made in Julia. Similarly, the presentation of Silvia may have suggested to Shakespeare the self-contained, humorous, and efficient women he was later to give us in Portia and Rosalind. The two women in The Two Gentlemen of Verona are at least conceived of in the Shakespearian way. 5

The courage, nobility and true empathy between Julia and Silvia, who do not meet at all until IV.iv. and do not recognize each other until V.iv., contrasts sharply with the competitive meanness and false nobility of the two gentlemen from Verona. One of these "gentlemen," Proteus, is not only forsworn but also a would-be rapist, and the other, Valentine, having nothing better to do, becomes an outlaw before being rehabilitated, a rehabilitation brought about largely because Silvia, who loves him, dares to follow him to "the frontiers of Mantua," where her powerful father, seeking her, also finds and forgives and elevates her lover. It is possible that the title of this play, like those of Measure for Measure and All's Well That Ends Well, is ironic in its use of the term gentlemen, and that Shakespeare was perfectly conscious of creating greater kindness between the maids of Milan and Verona than between the two gentlemen. The opinion of the Cambridge editors on Valentine's gift of Silvia to Proteus—"One's impulse, upon this declaration ['All that was mine in Silvia I give thee'], is to remark that there are, by this time, no gentlemen in Verona"—has been shared by many who would like to absolve Shakespeare of the embarrassing moment via errors in transmission of the text. 6 Another possible explanation for this troubling scene is that Valentine may have recog-
nized that he "owned" nothing of Silvia, that nothing in her was "his." He may have seen that Silvia was a free agent, and wanted to re-establish her independence from any previous vows so that she could choose freely. Valentine may be allowing for the possibility that Silvia may have changed her mind; while apparently he is treating her as a piece of property, he may instead be pointing up his own awareness that even her betrothed does not own her or any part of her, contrary to popular belief. Whether or not the difficult line admits of any explanation, it is important here to notice what the Cambridge editors say regarding characterization of the women in The Two Gentlemen of Verona: "Yet while individualizing these people, he is learning to give them—the women especially—that catholic kinship which communicates to us, as we wander in Shakespeare's great portrait gallery, a delightful sense of intimacy, of recognition. They belong to a family—our family—the human family." 7

3. The Comedy of Errors and the stereotypes of shrew and obedient wife

The provenience of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, like that of Love's Labour's Lost, is widely recognized, 8 but the fact that the kinds of relationships among women which I here call sisterhood are
present in these plays and many later ones has not to my knowledge
been noticed or appreciated before. We have seen how Rosaline,
Katherine, and Maria respond to the insult visited upon the Princess
of Navarre, and how these women maintain their solidarity: in the face
of marriage proposals they subordinate their various responses to their
suitors to a commitment to stay together. We have also seen Silvia
respond to Julia sympathetically. In later plays these relationships
will be more crucial to the action, and more complicated: in As You
Like It Rosalind and Celia manifest a full development of sympathetic
interaction; in Much Ado About Nothing Beatrice puts her own and her
newly-professed lover's happiness on the line in defense of Hero's
reputation in two of the most stunning words in Shakespeare, "Kill
Claudio"; in Measure for Measure, Mariana risks even greater humilia-
tion than she has already suffered in the service of Isabella; and in
All's Well That Ends Well Diana and the widow help Helena attain her
goal. Charmian takes the asp with her mistress when her fellow Iras
has died, perhaps only of grief at Cleopatra's death; Emilia, whose
sisterhood is incomplete—as it must be, if Othello is to remain
tragedy—finally dies defending Desdemona's reputation. Paulina in
The Winter's Tale risks her life in vituperative condemnation of
Leontes, who has savagely wronged Hermione. In comedies Mistress Page
and Mistress Ford, like Portia and Nerissa and the "ladies of France"
in Love's Labour's Lost before them, join in delightful antic conspir-
acies, conspiracies which have a satirico-didactic edge for the men
who are their targets.
Before looking in more detail at these later sisterly relationships, however, it will be useful to examine one more early play, *The Comedy of Errors*, where two biological sisters, Adriana and Luciana, are represented. Adriana has been treated by many commentators as a shrew figure, and her sister Luciana as her patient foil who recognizes and accepts her place in the traditional sense of "place" for women, and who counsels her married sister to do the same. Two or three important facts about the characters, themes, and action of *The Comedy of Errors* have been overlooked in this view, however. First, Adriana has good reason to be anxious about her husband's extra-marital affairs, if only because, as she says "I do digest the poison of thy flesh" (II.ii.142), in yet another Shakespearean reference to venereal disease. Second, Luciana is not married when she counsels Adriana to patience, and she herself very soon after giving this counsel loses her own patience:

    Fie, brother! how the world is changed with you!
    When were you wont to use my sister thus?
    She sent for you by Dromio home to dinner!

(II.ii.154-6)

Soon after Luciana loses her patience with Dromio when she calls him "thou drole, thou snail, thou slug, thou sot!" (II.ii.196). Third, the theme of counseling to patience is not only articulated in the play, it is also repeatedly satirized, thus turning the laughter back at the one who so counsels, not at the impatient sufferer:

    Patience unmoved! no marvel though she pause;
    They can be meek that have no other cause.
    A wretched soul, bruised with adversity,
    We bid be quiet when we hear it cry;
But were we burden'd with like weight of pain,  
As much or more we should ourselves complain:  
So thou, that hast no unkind mate to grieve thee,  
With urging helpless patience wouldst relieve me;  
But, if thou live to see like right bereft,  
This fool-begg'd patience in thee will be left.

(II.i.32-41)

Compare this "outburst" of Adriana's with Dromio of Ephesus' response to yet another beating: "Nay, 'tis for me to be patient, I am in adversity" (IV.iv.20-21) and the servant's account of Antipholus of Ephesus' revenge upon the conjurer who was hired to cure him of madness:

O mistress, mistress, shift and save yourself!  
My master and his man are both broke loose,  
Beaten the maids a-row and bound the doctor,  
Whose beard they have singed off with brands of fire;  
And ever, as it blazed, they threw on him  
Great pails of puddled mire to quench the hair:  
My master preaches patience to him and the while  
His man with scissors nicks him like a fool,  
And sure, unless you send some present help,  
Between them they will kill the conjurer.

(V.i.168-177)

The ironies inherent in "preaching patience" thus disestablish Luciana as a true voice when she does so; indeed, Luciana herself defends Adriana from the Abbess, who in one moments says "You should have reprehended him" and in the next launches into a set-speech about the evils of "the venom clamours of a jealous woman." Even Luciana gets indignant at this:

She never reprehended him but mildly,  
When he demean'd himself rough, rude, and wildly.  
Why bear you these rebukes and answer not?

In these lines Luciana proves herself no foil for a "shrew," but her
injured sister's defender. Adriana's reply shows she was already aware of the limits of wifely remonstrance: she says the reason she did not chafe at the Abbess' lecture is that "She did betray me to my own reproof" (V.i.56-90).

The effect of the Abbess' contradictory speeches is to produce a tone of acceptance of human frailty, a tone similar to that which in dealing with the theme of cuckoldry at the end of Love's Labour's Lost I suggested may arise from a gently therapeutic purpose on Shakespeare's part: even the Abbess is not perfect, we notice, and shrews, nags, as well as those of us who approach perfection (including me and all my readers of course) may all go home corrected but retaining feelings of self-worth. Even the adulterer will be cleansed of sin. Notice that throughout the play Adriana's errant spouse is embarrassed, insulted, even beaten, and justly so. Shakespeare points up the justice in his suffering at its very height by having the courtesan on-stage demanding her ring while his wife pays his debts and he is bound and sent off to be "laid in some dark room" (IV.iv.104ff.). Like Malvolio, he brought it on himself, and the whole scene is crashingly funny. Adriana's "own reproof," i.e., her recognition that she may have been to blame as well, shows her to be something more than a shrew, if something less than a perfect wife (which, like the perfect husband, is probably not a creature found in nature); but she is a very good wife whose capabilities includes praying for her "husband" when "he" (really his twin brother) tries to seduce her sister:

Far from the nest the lapwing cries away:
My heart prays for him, though my tongue do curse.

(IV.ii.27-28)

She is a troubled woman, and throughout—at least after Luciana also loses patience early in the errors—she is given as much moral support as her sister, who shares her exasperation, can muster. The comedy requires laughter, however, so that when Luciana, in her desperation to bring her "brother-in-law" (really his twin) back into the family, counsels him that if he can't love Adriana, at least he treat her better for the sake of her money,

Or if you like elsewhere, do it by stealth
Muffle your false love with some show of blindness

(III.ii.6-8)

the tables turn and he tries to make love to her. Luciana is then a figure of fun, as she runs off saying

O soft, sir! hold you still:
I'll fetch my sister, to get her good will!

(III.ii.69-70)

Luciana's contribution to Adriana in her trials and Adriana's patience in the face of open adultery by her husband have largely been neglected, probably because it has been so easy for scholars finding a woman cursing her husband in Shakespeare to say "Egad, another shrew!" and read blithely on. It has only recently become fashionable to recognize that indeed in Shakespeare's plays as in the world, alas, some men deserve the cursing; this recognition comes hand-in-hand with a rejection of the opposite stereotype to the shrew, the long-suffering but smiling wife. When we remove from our mind's eyes the filters of
the prevalent stereotypes for women in our culture, which filters have oversimplified our perceptions and responses, we see that even in these early, relatively neglected comedies Shakespeare gives us real characters, more "rounded," better motivated, than we used to think. Neither Adriana nor Luciana really fits anyone's molds; as with the more commonly appreciated "complex" Shakespearean characters, the audience is allowed the involving, thrilling shock of recognition of kinship.

4. As You Like It rectified in the climate of Renaissance England

Rosalind in As You Like It is the one Shakespearean woman whose words and action produce that involving shock in the great majority of readers, if not all readers. Her cousin Celia is relatively pale and uninteresting. Consider, however, what Rosalind would be in the play without such a cousin and confidante. She could soliloquize her passion for Orlando, rather than tell it to Celia, but then no one onstage would share in the delightful irony of Orlando's mock courtship. The effect of soliloquies might also give a pathetic and serious tone and a reduction of dramatic ironies would certainly flatten the effect. There would be no reason for Rosalind to mock traditional sex roles:
I could find it in my heart to disgrace my
man's apparel and cry like a woman; but I must
comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose
ought to show itself courageous to petticoat:
therefore courage, good Aliena.

(II.iv.3-8)

A true foil, Celia here plays (maybe seriously and maybe not—it could
be funnier if done with at least an edge of "acting") the role of
weaker vessel, faint and weary—"I cannot go no further" and "I faint
almost to death"—while Rosalind maintains the role of provider and
protector, in spite of the fact that, as Silvius suffers for Phoebe,
she herself really is suffering in this scene because of her passion
for Orlando. Touchstone is no help. Rosalind's capability and strength
here, where she is acting in ways traditionally reserved for men,
coupled with the fact that she and Celia are from the beginning known
to be devoted to each other, have led some directors and at least one
scholar to assert that Rosalind and Celia have a lesbian relationship.

In a section of Shakespeare's Sexual Comedy entitled "Rosalind, Helena,
and Isabella: The Descent to Sexual Realities," Hugh Richmond makes
the following comments about Rosalind:

Rosalind experiments most successfully with the range of amatory
experiences open to both sexes. Her capacity for bisexuality
seems to impress Shakespeare greatly, for he never shows her less
than creatively alert and responsive to all the nuances of amatory
feeling and action that surround her . . . . Rosalind is thus all
a woman can ever hope to be. Emotionally committed to femininity
yet sexually experienced in both male and female attitudes, she
remains witty and skeptical enough never to be trapped in an
inexpedient role. She thus deserves our closest attention as
the most successful model for women in Shakespeare. 11

This sounds to me as if Dear Abby had been reading Freud and Machia-
velli. Richmond seems not to appreciate the comic ironies in As You
Like _It_ but rather to take them quite seriously. If Rosalind is indeed meant by Shakespeare to be seen as truly bisexual and if Celia is to be seen as having any kind of sexual dependence on Rosalind, however, she must feel extremely upset when Rosalind "falls in love" with Orlando: in this case poor Celia would be staged as a sufferer, like Silvius, bereft. Neither does the text require such an interaction between Rosalind and Celia, nor does the comic concept of the play seem to permit it. Richmond's book is aimed, I suspect, both from and toward an audience convinced by Freudianism that there are no operations in nature which are not sexual (in fact, one can go through his essay substituting "human" for "sexual" and it makes better sense), and if there should happen to be some discovered, they wouldn't be very interesting, let alone dramatic. Like the many scholars who have avoided consideration of the sisterhood relationships in Shakespeare while writing about everything else under the sun that is mentioned once in his works, Richmond may not recognize that women can feel camaraderie, that it's not only for "white folks" (if you can pardon the expression), or football players or army buddies or gentlemen from Verona to feel so noble and disinterested a passion as true friendship. Given an attitude which requires concentration on sex and dehumanizing women, Rosalind's and Celia's devotion to each other must be either sexual or incredible, unreal and unconvincing, perhaps convenient in the plot of the play, but not persuasive.

It would not have been so difficult for Shakespeare's contemporary audience. Precedent for Rosalind's care for Celia may be found
in *The Faerie Queene*, Books III and IV, where Britomart rescues Amoret from many perils. Britomart herself is of course a totally "new" woman character insofar as she does not reflect any of the traditional stereotypes. A literary grand-daughter of Ariosto's Bradamante, she is faithful and intelligent and she speaks only to the point; she is a warrior, and the peer of males in battle. She is far beyond all the derogatory expectations for women. Spenser saw her as a fit ancestor for Elizabeth; it is very likely that Shakespeare read *The Faerie Queene*, and Britomart very likely accounts for some of Shakespeare's freedom and independence in creating women. Spenser says at the beginning of Book III, Canto II, that he found many precedents for warrior women like Britomart in "record of antique times," but that "envious men, fearing their rules decay" instituted strict laws to "curb [women's] liberty." Although Spenser created Britomart as a vehicle for flattering Elizabeth, she grows in his hands and achieves a strong verisimilitude. She is a living example of many virtues, among them sisterhood; when she has saved Amoret from torture and Amoret swear to be her vassal, Britomart replies:

Gentle dame, reward enough I weene,
For many labours more than I have found,
This, that in safetie now I have you seene,
And meane of your deliverance have beene:
Henceforth, faire lady, comfort to you take,
And put away remembrance of late teene.

(*FQ* III.XII.xl)

Britomart is devoid of self-interest in the usual sense of the word; she seeks no reward. Rosalind may or may not have been originally conceived with Britomart in mind. Celia's devotion to Rosalind,
Rosalind's idea to dress as a man, and most other elements of their relationship appear also in Lodge's *Rosalynde*, and we do not have to decide that question. Britomart's commitment to helping Amoret solve her problems, without thought of reward, however, is evidence that in the English Renaissance, not only in Shakespeare's source but also in Spenser, for example, it was possible to have a woman in male disguise helping a weaker one without sexual involvement and without any underlying selfish purpose or hedonistic motive. Both Britomart and Rosalind are in love with men whom they have seen briefly and whom they seek despite peril, but the fact that they love others diminishes not at all their capacity for sisterhood.

We first learn of Celia's and Rosalind's relationship from Charles the wrestler:

Oliver. Can you tell if Rosalind, the duke's daughter, be banished with her father?
Charles. O, no; for the duke's daughter, her cousin, so loves her, being ever from their cradles bred together, that she would have followed her exile, or have died to stay behind her. She is at the court, and no less beloved of her uncle than his own daughter; and never two ladies loved as they do.

(I.i.110-18)

In the next scene, when we first see them, Celia is trying to cheer Rosalind:

Celia. I pray thee, Rosalind, sweet my ooz, be merry.
Rosalind. Dear Celia, I shew more mirth than I am mistress of; and would you yet I were merrier? Unless you could teach me to forget a banished father, you must not learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure.
Cel. Herein I see thou lovest me not with the full weight that I love thee. If my uncle, thy banished father, had banished thy uncle, the duke my father, so thou hadst been still with me, I could have taught my love to take thy father for mine: so
wouldst thou, if the truth of thy love to me were so
righteously tempered as mine is to thee.
R. Well, I will forget the condition of my estate, to
rejoice in yours.

(I.ii.1-16)

Within a few lines Rosalind's temper is more sanguine and she
and Celia, soon joined by Touchstone, are engaging in a wit-combat
reminiscent of Love's Labour's Lost, not only because it is a game of
wit but also because it hits directly upon the theme of women:

Celia. Let us sit and mock the good housewife Fortune from
her wheel, that he gifts may henceforth be bestowed equally.
R. I would we could do so, for her benefits are mightily
misplac’d, and the bountiful blind woman doth most mistake
in her gifts to women.
C. 'Tis true; for those that she makes fair she scarce
makes honest, and those that she makes honest she makes very
ill-favouredly.
R. Nay, now thou goest from Fortune's office to Nature's:
Fortune reigns in gifts of the world, not in the lineaments
of Nature.

(I.ii.26-44)

Rosalind here is referring to the fact that honesty, or chastity, a
quality of spirit, comes from Nature, whereas physical beauty, a
quality of matter, comes from Fortune. Soon after, when Orlando has
captured Rosalind's affection (probably as much with his assertion of
un-'Fortunate' friendlessness and willingness to die as with his
wrestling prowess), Rosalind is abetted in her desire—as yet
unexpressed—by Celia, who suggests they "go thank him and encourage
him." Rosalind, open-hearted as she is, is on the verge of totally
overwhelming the speechless Orlando with praise when Celia rescues
them both: "Will you go, ooze?" (I.ii.267). I suppose this could be
read as evidence of Celia's jealousy, if we overlooked her later
responses. Back at the palace in the next scene, Celia is at first incredulous at Rosalind's love at first sight, but their interview is interrupted by Duke Frederick, who banishes Rosalind. In this scene Celia proves the strength of her affection for her cousin by defying her father:

Celia. Dear sovereign, hear me speak.
Duke Fred. Ay, Celia; we stay'd her for your sake,
Else had she with her father ranged along.
Cel. I did not then entreat to have her stay;
It was your pleasure and your own remorse:
I was too young that time to value her;
But now I know her: if she be a traitor,
Why so am I; we still have slept together,
Rose at an instant, learn'd, play'd, eat together,
And wheresoe'er we went, like Juno's swans,
Still we went coupled and inseparable.

(I.iii.68-78)

Celia resolves to go with Rosalind, and suggests they both smear umber on their faces "so shall we pass along and never stir assailants." At this point Rosalind gets the idea of a disguise reminiscent of Britomart:

Were it not better
Because that I am more than common tall,
That I did suit me all points like a man?
A gallant curtle-axe upon my thigh,
A boar-spear in my hand; and—in my heart
Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will—
We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
As many other mannish cowards have
That do outface it with their semblances.

(I.ii.116-24)

Rosalind doesn't miss any chances to mock traditional sex-roles. What happens after their escape in the Forest of Arden is so well known that we will not detail it here, except to assert that, as Rosalind's excitement at being courted by Orlando grows and her fear that he will be easily dissuaded is confirmed (when he misses an appointment, having
been attacked by a lion), Celia is always by, adding to the audience's enjoyment of the dramatic irony as she shares their knowledge, supporting and encouraging and comforting poor Rosalind in her efforts to bring off the complicated trick. She is not above teasing, however, when she first identifies the "Rosalind" poet:

Celia. O wonderful, wonderful, and most wonderful! And yet again wonderful, and after that, out of all hooping!
Ros. Good my complexion! dost thou think, though I am caparisoned like a man, I have a doublet and hose in my disposition? One inch of delay more is a South-sea of discovery; I prithee, tell me who is it quickly, and speak apace. I would thou couldst stammer, that thou might'st pour this concealed man out of thy mouth, as wine comes out of a narrow-mouthed bottle, either too much at once, or none at all. I prithee, take the cork out of thy mouth that I may drink thy tidings.
Cel. So you may put a man in your belly.
Ros. Is he of God's making? What manner of man? Is his head worth a hat, or his chin a beard?
Cel. Nay, he hath but a little beard.
Ros. Why, God will send more, if the man will be thankful: let me stay the growth of his beard, if thou delay me not the knowledge of his chin.
Cel. It is young Orlando, that tripped up the wrestler's heels and your heart both in an instant.
Ros. Nay, but the devil take mocking: speak, sad brow and true maid.
Cel. I' faith, ooze, 'tis he.
Ros. Orlando?

(III.ii.196-229)

Such significant good news is not to be divulged briefly or casually; Celia shares Rosalind's joy "out of all hooping," and her holding off with it prepares her cousin for the shock. Depending on how these lines are directed, Celia could possibly be played here as a sullen jealous lover of Rosalind preparing herself for a letdown in Rosalind's new happiness, but since nothing in the text requires it, Hugh Richmond's description of Rosalind's bisexuality seems gratuitous, if
fashionable. Its most damaging effect on the play might be to make Celia a sufferer, as we have seen. It appears more likely that the Rosalind-Celia relationship is a plain and simple classic Shakespearean sisterhood.

5. The Merchant of Venice: a conspiracy to balance the power in marriage

We see that Rosalind and Celia conspire successfully to bring happiness out of distress. Such conspiring links them not only with the Princess of France, but also with Portia and Nerissa and with Mistresses Page and Ford. All these sets of characters, when confronted with threats to their happiness mild in comparison to those in the problem plays and tragicomedies, work together manufacturing to quell the opposition, as it were. Celia and Rosalind make what might be called a team response to Duke Frederick's jealousy, the perils of the forest and the anxieties and frustrations of courtship. The Princess of France, Rosaline, Katherine and Maria, as we have seen, confront the rudeness and insensitivity of Navarre with a well-organized and consistent subversion of his exclusivist male purposes. As we will see, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford deal soundly not only
with Falstaff's presumptuousness but also with Master Ford's jealousy in a series of carefully-planned and successful routs. In a similar way, Portia and Nerissa, who have in marriage willingly put themselves in a subordinate position vis-a-vis Bassanio and Gratiano, regain a measure of the control which they have resigned by tricking their husbands in the ring plot.

The significance of the ring plot cannot be fully appreciated without taking into account Portia's long speech to Bassanio when she bestows the ring on him in the first place:

You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand, Such as I am: though for myself alone I would not be ambitious in my wish, To wish myself much better; yet, for you I would be trebled twenty times myself; A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times More rich; That only to stand high in your account, I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends, Exceed account; but the full sum of me Is sum of something, which, to term in gross, Is an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractised; Happy in this, she is not yet so old But she may leam; happier than this, She is not bred so dull but she can leam; Happiest of all is that her gentle spirit Commits itself to yours to be directed As from her lord, her governor, her king. Myself and what is mine to you and yours Is now converted: but now I was the lord Of this fair mansion, master of my servants, Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now, This house, these servants and this same myself Are yours, my lord: I give them with this ring;  

(III.ii.150-176)

Portia says that she loves Bassanio and wishes to be esteemed by him; she sees herself in relation to him as "an unlesson'd girl" whose greatest happiness is to be ruled by him; but she also points out that
a few minutes ago she had great power, and it is now his; her power is his because she relinquishes it to him 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.

(III.ii.174-6)

One can see that it is important for Portia's survival to get that ring back, whether there will be a trial in Venice or not. It would be difficult for any human relationship to grow and prosper with such master-slave overtones operating in it, and a grown woman of great wit and intelligence playing the role of "unschool'd girl." As with other happy successful lovers in Shakespeare like Rosalind and Orlando, in order for the relationship to prosper there must be a corrective to the traditional woman-as-object-and-servant wifely role. Shakespeare does not allow it, just as he does not allow the Rosalynd-as-object passage from Lodge's Rosalynde into As You Like It (see note 13 above), perhaps because he saw its dehumanizing force. He gives his comic heroines freedom and power, which is "the compliment" Granville-Barker says women "are always quick to appreciate." His source, it may be noticed, also puts the Lady of Belmonte in control of her lovers; but the Lady of Belmonte is a figure in a folk-tale, not the human being that Portia is.

Rather than merely resigning her worldly power, Portia in this speech locates it on Bassanio's finger, in the ring. Her tone at the end of her speech has a mixture of nostalgia for lost power, generous love, and caution. Although she's quite happy with Bassanio
for a husband, Portia has been chafing under the controls of her father's will. She has, of course, no choice in giving Bassanio her house and fortunes, as laws and her father's will and Bassanio's choice—with her help, to be sure—of the leaden casket control her action. In bestowing the ring, however, she behaves as if it's her choice, not because she is ignorant of the forces controlling her:

"O me, the word 'choose'! I may neither choose whom I would nor refuse whom I dislike; so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father. Is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one nor refuse none?"

(I.ii.23-29)

If Portia, having taken an active role in Bassanio's choice of casket, can make him accept her as the giver rather than her father's will, a feat she accomplishes in this long speech by pretending to be an "unschool'd girl" and flattering him, she can retain her self-respect, her sense of being "Queen o'er myself," in marriage; if, in addition to this, she gets the ring back, she's retained at least a glimpse of control of her lost worldly power as well. When she returns from Venice, we should notice that she is still in charge.

Professor Coppélia Kahn says regarding The Taming of the Shrew that when Katherine is delivering her "place your hands below husband's foot" speech (V.ii. 136-179) she is manifesting a partnership relation with Petruchio, a partnership in exaggeration and jest. She proves herself the more his equal the more convincingly she plays and states the dutiful wife's role. Portia and Bassanio play a power game in The Merchant of Venice, and like Katherine and Petruchio, they both win not only because they respect each other, but also
because the females retain their independence and self-respect.

Notice how closely the ring plot rhetoric is tied to concepts of wifely duty and husbandly loyalty. At the end of the court scene Bassanio tells the young lawyer he will pay three thousand ducats for "his" services (a sum he will presumably make up with the lawyer's money, for another irony), and Portia replies that she is already paid: "I, delivering you, am satisfied." Bassanio presses the issue, so Portia says "I'll take this ring from you," and thus throws Bassanio into one of Shakespeare's most enjoyable comic conflicts:

This ring, good sir, alas, it is a trifle!  
I will not shame myself to give you this.

Now Portia turns on the heat:

I will have nothing else but only this;  
And now methinks I have a mind to it.

Bassanio says it is too cheap a ring and he will get the best ring in Venice, but she becomes haughty:

I see, sir, you are liberal in offers:  
You taught me first to beg; and now methinks  
You teach me how a beggar should be answer'd.

Finally poor Bassanio tells the truth, but Portia won't relent:

Good sir, this ring was given me by my wife;  
And when she put it on, she made me vow  
That I should neither sell nor give nor lose it.  
Portia. That 'scuse serves many men to save their gifts,  
An if your wife be not a mad-woman,  
And know how well I have deserved the ring,  
She would not hold out enemy forever,  
For giving it to me. Well, peace be with you!

At Antonio's request, Bassanio sends the ring after her:
Ant. My Lord Bassanio, let him have the ring:
Let his deserving and my love withal
Be valued 'gainst your wife's commandment.
Bass. Go, Gratiano, run and overtake him;
Give him the ring . . .

(IV.i. 421-57)

Bassanio will pay for this mistake, as we shall see. Nerissa joins
the conspiracy in the next scene; when Gratiano comes to deliver
Bassanio's ring, she plans to get his ring from him too. Portia
encourages her in a tone I read as confident and wickedly gleeful
rather than angry:

We shall have old swearing
That they did give the rings away to men;
But we'll outface them, and outswear them too.

(IV.ii. 13-17)

Back at Belmont, when Nerissa "discovers" Gratiano has given away
the ring, Portia lays a reproof on him which tortures Bassanio:

Portia. You were to blame, I must be plain with you
To part so slightly with your wife's first gift;
A thing stuck on with oaths upon your finger
And so riveted with faith unto your flesh.
I gave my love a ring and made him swear
Never to part with it; and here he stands;
I dare be sworn for him he would not leave it
Nor pluck it from his finger, for the wealth
That the world masters. Now, in faith, Gratiano,
You give your wife too unkind a cause of grief;
An 'twere to me, I should be mad at it.
Bassanio. [Aside] Why, I were best to cut my
left hand off
And swear I lost the ring defending it.

(V.i. 166-176)

At this point it is clear that Portia's and Bassanio's marriage will
not be a case of "unschool'd girl" relating to "lord and master," if
that has not been clear before. Bassanio's "fault" has given Portia
freedom to reclaim the power she gave away. In the following she mocks him mercilessly:

Bass. Sweet Portia,
If you did know to whom I gave the ring,
If you did know for whom I gave the ring
And would conceive for what I gave the ring
And how unwillingly I left the ring,
When nought would be accepted but the ring,
You would abate the strength of your displeasure.

Portia. 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.

(V.i.191-201)

When Bassanio again tells Portia that her accusation is unjust and that "No woman had it, but a civil doctor," Portia openly asserts her claim to freedom from traditional marriage vows:

Let not that doctor e'er come near my house:
Since he hath got the jewel that I loved,
And that which you did swear to keep for me.
I will become as liberal as you;
I'll not deny him anything I have,
No, not my body nor my husband's bed:
Know him I shall, I am well sure of it:
Lie not a night from home; watch me like Argus:
If you do not, if I be left alone,
Now, by mine honour, which is yet mine own,
I'll have that doctor for my bedfellow.

(V.i.223-33)

Nor does her revenge stop there; when Antonio expresses his misery at this scene, she only stops a moment to reassure him welcome, and then proceeds to turn the knife in her husband. Antonio pleads again and before Bassanio is relieved he receives, in front of the entire group, news of the ultimate wifely insult:

Antonio. I dare be bound again,
My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord
Will never more break faith advisedly.
Portia. Then you shall be his surety. Give him this
And bid him keep it better than the other.
Ant. Here, Lord Bassanio; swear to keep this ring.
Bass. By heaven, it is the same I gave the doctor!
Portia. I had it of him: pardon me, Bassanio;
For, by this ring, the doctor lay with me.

(V.i.251-59)

Nerissa joins her at the top of the fray, giving no one a chance to remonstrate with Portia:

And pardon me, my gentle Gratiano;
For that same scrubbed boy, the doctor's clerk,
In lieu of this last night did lie with me.

(V.i.26-2)

The entire ring-conspiracy is necessary, of course, for convincing the men that Portia and Nerissa were doctor and clerk: the rings are identification devices. But in the handling of this device Shakespeare has Portia play very daringly with her new husband, as if to have her make clear to Bassanio that she knows she is less the beneficiary of their marriage than he is. In the discovery scene, as well, Portia is able to reverse the prevailing low expectations for women's intelligence, by taking credit for Antonio's delivery. Her language is clear, plain, terse:

Speak not so grossly. You are all amazed:
Here is a letter; read it at your leisure;
It comes from Padua, from Bellario

(V.i.266-8)

She has the no-nonsense approach we saw in the Princess of France. Like the Princess, she has gladly participated in a plot which successfully embarrassed and caused pain, if brief pain, to her
husband. Why? Maybe she'd read Greene's Pandosto, and, being interested in survival, saw the need for turning the tables, of which more later.

Portia and Nerissa carry out their plan without much interaction: they seem to relate on a level which doesn't require much verbalizing. I.ii. established their relationship of mutual confidence and respect, as well as their consciousness of present and potential oppression, from Portia's father and her suitors. After their marriages, Portia and Nerissa must act, not talk.

6. The Merry Wives of Windsor: a conspiracy against male presumption

The final comic conspiracy sisterhood which we will examine forms the main plot of The Merry Wives of Windsor. The entire action is a revenge plot manufactured and delivered by Mistresses Page and Ford to Falstaff and Master Ford. Falstaff has presumed upon his knighthood and assumed these rich but untitled commoners' wives will be honored not only to commit adultery with him but also to feed
and equip him. There is something of a class or economic war as well as a war between the sexes going on in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in other words; but Shakespeare's plot emphasizes the reduction of more than one kind of male presumption.

A thorough-going recounting of this theme in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* would entail quoting almost the entire play, which is one of the best examples of Shakespeare's active good will toward women. As in the case of *Love's Labour's Lost*, the main plot of this play describes the victory of women over men who have made false and derogatory assumptions about them; this similarity, together with the fact that these two plays are apparently sourceless and original in plot and characterization with Shakespeare himself, leads one to suspect that Shakespeare consciously planned at least some of his feminist effects. In a later chapter we will deal with *The Merry Wives of Windsor*’s emphasis on the exchange of women and money, which is reflected to some degree in Falstaff's motive for courting but to a much greater degree in the Anne Page raffle in the subplot. Here we will pass over that, and even let the "great watery pumpkin" himself pass by, to concentrate on the sisterhood of the merry wives. The plot of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* requires a conspiracy of at least two women: without a confidante a single woman receiving Falstaff's insulting propositions would have to swallow them in silence and deal with his repulsive presumption alone. The wives of Windsor, however, have not only each other but also a staff of servants for support.
Falstaff is as totally oblivious to the possibility that the women will confide in each other as he is fantastical in interpreting the wives' pleasant behavior; having assured himself and Pistol that Mistress Ford "gives the leer of invitation," he proceeds to Mistress Page:

O she did so course o'er my exteriors with such a greedy intention, that the appetite of her eye did seem to scorch me up like a burning-glass! Here's another letter to her: she bears the purse too; she is a region in Guiana, all gold and bounty. I will be cheater to them both, and they shall be exchequers to me; they shall be my East and West Indies, and I will trade to them both. Go bear thou this letter to Mistress Page; and thou this to Mistress Ford: we will thrive, lads, we will thrive.

(I.iii.72-82)

Egoistic fantasies controlled Falstaff's behavior in earlier plays; he is in character here, and holding "the mirror up to nature," no doubt, for some gentlemen of the audience. His verse, like that of the King and his friends in Love's Labour's Lost, leaves something to be desired, but only his verse. Mistress Page reads the letter ending

Let it suffice thee, Mistress Page--at the least, if the love of soldier can suffice,—that I love thee. I will not say, pity me; 'tis not a soldier-like phrase: but I say, love me. By me,

Thine own true knight,
By day or night,
Or any kind of light,
With all his might
For thee to fight,

JOHN FALSTAFF.

(II.i.10-19)

Even though she has not read Love's Labour's Lost and has no way of knowing how envoys come in for satire there, Mistress Page quite naturally explodes:
What a Herod of Jewry is this! O wicked wicked world! One
that is well-nigh worn to pieces with age to show himself a
young gallant! What an unweighted behaviour hath this Flemish
drunkard picked—with the devil's name!—out of my conversation,
that he dares in this manner to assay me? Why, he hath not been
thrice in my company! What should I say to him? I was then
frugal of my mirth: Heaven forgive me! Why, I'll exhibit a bill
in the parliament for the putting down of men. How shall I be
revenged on him? for revenged I will be, as sure as his guts
are made of puddings.

(II.i.20-32)

Mistress Page finds herself insulted in a way that is unhappily
not uncommon for such is the ego of a common species of male that he
easily presumes the least smile to be an attempt to win him: such a
man sees himself as a prize and assumes women are eager to please him.
A word currently in use which covers this category is "macho"; it is
the macho consciousness which can justify assaults like rape on the
grounds that women find men irresistible. Shakespeare's giving such
a consciousness to Falstaff is, assuming a feminist consciousness or
even the traditional "woman's point of view" (an ill-defined term but
a common and perhaps useful one), extremely ludicrous. But it is also
clearly threatening, for one never knows how far the macho's egoistic
assumptions can carry him.

What a comfort, in the face of this threat, for Mistress Page to
have a friend in whom she may confide. When she and Mistress Ford
meet they both express great relief just at seeing each other. Their
language openly reflects the relationship they have to each other:

Mrs. Ford. Mistress Page! trust me, I was going to your house.
Mrs. Page. And, trust me, I was coming to you. You look very ill.

(II.i.33-34)

When the two women realize that they are both undergoing the same
trauma, their strength to combat Falstaff is further multiplied.

The successful combat against the presumptuous male is the subject of the rest of the comedy. Mistress Ford and Mistress Page are in a sense precursors of contemporary feminist groups who "rap" or discuss common problems and plan actions to solve them. Far from being merely a slapstick comedy, this play is therapeutic entertainment in the best sense of the word. If all such aggressive egotists as Falstaff could see a good production, perhaps complete with smell-o-rama when Falstaff goes out with the laundry, we might have less violence against women in the world.

The female heroines have been treated rather condescendingly, perhaps because they are merely middle-class, and perhaps because they are also women. Actually, they are both marvelous Shakespearean comic figures. Looked at with unbiased eyes, they are seen to be fitting dramatic rivals to Falstaff (whose attractiveness, though great, has been given perhaps too adulatory a press over the years). It is clear from the structure, the title, and the action of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* that Shakespeare intended them to be at least as compelling comic figures as the fat Knight, and likely more so. If they have not been received this way, the fault may lie not in the quite Elizabethan comedy where we find them, but in our cultural antifeminism, which insists on discounting women and women's wits. Duping Falstaff in the Thames is no less truly funny than the robbery caper in *Henry IV*.

Let us look again briefly at the action of *The Merry Wives of*
Windsor. As we have seen, Mistresses Page and Ford trust each other implicitly and they share a common response to a threatening situation. Their ensuing conspiracy is eminently successful: Falstaff, smothered in filthy laundry, is dumped into that less-than-crystalline stream, the Thames; and, honesty about his own excess being his redeeming quality, he lives to tell the tale on himself to none other than the jealous husband, Master Ford. Ford, disguised as one Master Brook, is paying Falstaff to help him acquire the favors of Mistress Ford, and his punishment for this low scheme is meted out simultaneously with Falstaff's. Next Falstaff is frightened to death and severely beaten by Master Ford while disguised as the fat woman of Brentford; last, all the community, including the repentant Master Ford, join in setting him up for a moonlight tryst in which he is to be disguised as Merne the hunter. Here even the schoolchildren join in burning and pinching him when he arrives in Windsor Forest at midnight with antlers on his head. All of this didactic antic is carefully planned and smoothly executed by the merry wives. They put on roles for Falstaff; Mrs. Ford does a wonderful act, playing the lascivious, outwardly modest wife, grieved to hear from her neighbor who just happens by that her husband is approaching, one who tries to the last moment to hide Falstaff's presence from all eyes. In order to keep things moving, Mistress Page does a marvelously plausible rendition of the wide-eyed and unsuspicious neighbor, who is so stupid even after the basket escape that she doesn't realize Falstaff is courting both herself and her friend. Falstaff is convinced by
their performances not only in III.iii. 81ff., but again in IV.ii., having been convinced by Mistress Quickly that the buckbasker incident caused more grief to the wives, who've forgiven his duplicity, than to him. Falstaff visits Mistress Ford for a second time when Mistress Page calls out before entering so Falstaff will have time to hide, and then the wives go to work:

Mrs. Page. How now, sweetheart! Who's at home besides yourself?
Mrs. Ford. Why, none but mine own people.
Mrs. Page. Indeed!
Mrs. Ford. No, certainly. [Aside to her] Speak louder.
Mrs. Page. Truly, I am glad you have nobody here.
Mrs. Ford. Why?
Mrs. Page. Why, woman, your husband is in his old lunes again: he so takes on yonder with my husband; so rails against all married mankind; so curses all Eve's daughters, of what complexion soever; and so buffets himself on the forehead, crying, 'Peer out, peer out!' that any madness I ever yet beheld seemed but tameness, civility and patience, to this his distemper he is in now: I am glad the fat knight in not here.

They lay it on very thick indeed for poor Falstaff who is of course listening, and chilled to the bone with fear:

Mrs. Ford. Why, does he talk of him?
Mrs. Page. Of none but him; and swears he was carried out, the last time he searched for him, in a basket; protests to my husband he is now here, and hath drawn him and the rest of their company from their sport, to make another experiment of his suspicion; but I am glad the knight is not here; now he shall see his own foolery.
Mrs. Ford. How near is he, Mistress Page?
Mrs. Page. Hard by; at street end; he will be here anon.
Mrs. Ford. I am undone! The knight is here.
Mrs. Page. Why then you are utterly shamed, and he's but a dead man. What a woman you are!—Away with him, away with him! better shame than murder.

(IV.ii.12-44)

Mistress Ford is marvelous as the weak-willed lying woman here, and Mistress Page does a fine rendition of a forgiving but realistic moralist. The scenes where they are pretending in this way are as
hilarious as any of Falstaff's more celebrated tavern scenes, but the consciousness of the audience who sees them will determine to some extent their comic effectiveness. Perhaps we have only recently become ready again to appreciate this play.

A secondary benefit of Falstaff's education in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is Master Ford's jealousy cure, which the wives also purpose. When Ford is wildly searching his house in III.iii. for Falstaff, Mistress Page is standing by with Mistress Ford, totally enjoying their consciousness that Falstaff is in the basket on his way to the river:

*Mrs. Page.* Is there not a double excellency in this?
*Mrs. Ford.* I know not which pleases me better, that my husband is deceived, or Sir John.
*Mrs. Page.* What a taking was he in when your husband asked who was in the basket!
*Mrs. Ford.* I am half afraid he will have need of washing; so throwing him into the water will do him a benefit.
*Mrs. Page.* Hang him, dishonest rascal! I would all of the same strain were in the same distress.

(III.iii.188-98)

Later Mistress Page again generalizes the moral: without actually "exhibiting a bill in parliament for the putting down of men," as she had earlier threatened to do, she makes it clear that this soggy shoe fits more men than Falstaff. Through this character Shakespeare seems to be pointing a lesson:

*Mrs. Page.* Hang him, dishonest varlet! we cannot misuse him enough!

We'll leave a proof, by that which we will do,
Wives may be merry, and yet honest too:
We do not act that often jest and laugh.

(IV.ii.104-9)
Ford's jealousy requires such a reproof as well as Falstaff's presumption, for they are opposite sides of the same coin. In IV.ii. Ford's second search of his house convinces his friends that he is insane. Here is the Othello-Leontes type in comedy; compared to these, however, poor Ford has abundant evidence. When his friends tell him openly that he is insane as he curses his wife and wildly rips open the second (empty) basket of laundry—"Why this is lunatics!" says Evans, "this is mad as a mad dog!"—the wives are content with the extent of their revenge on him, and they soon disabuse him by telling him the whole story. With the whole community, Ford then joins the festival of the final arraignment of Falstaff in Windsor Forest.

The sisterly conspiracies of Love's Labour's Lost, The Merry Wives of Windsor, As You Like It, and The Merchant of Venice, as we have seen, each have a depth, tone, and extent fitted to the unique demands of the plays wherein they appear. In Love's Labour's Lost, The Merchant of Venice, and The Merry Wives of Windsor these successful relationships work directly as correctives to traditional derogatory views of women: in Love's Labour's Lost women's intelligence and independence and in The Merry Wives of Windsor women's honor and loyalty are defended by the women who have been victimized. In The Merchant of Venice the chances for husbandly tyranny are weakened in the success of the ring plot. In As You Like It women's powerlessness in the face of male determination of their economic and social destinies is defied when Duke Frederick's tyrannical malice precipitates Celia's commitment to Rosalind and their escape to the
forest (which bears the name of Shakespeare's maternal grandmother, by the way). In creating these relationships Shakespeare may have been partly inspired, as Granville-Barker and others might suggest, by a team of young actors who could bring off such conspiracies bravely and no one would deny that without such a team these scenes would not succeed, but it is undeniable that Shakespeare exhibits an exquisite awareness of the capacities of an oppressed social group for working together to change their conditions by changing their oppressors' mind-sets. These comedies, then, may be seen both as products and as tools in human evolution. Great drama has social force, as Elizabeth saw regarding Richard II, and as most readers and spectators of King Lear would attest.


The next group of sisterhood relationships we will consider is much more serious in tone. Beatrice must defend Hero from serious charges of unchastity in Much Ado About Nothing; Mariana and Isabella in Measure for Measure must carry out the Duke's complicated bed trick in order to assure Mariana's marital rights and preserve
Isabella's virginity as well as, presumably, her brother's life; similarly, Diana undertakes to outface Bertram at court in serving Helena's desires to attain her husband in *All's Well That Ends Well*; and Paulina in *The Winter's Tale* must maintain Hermione's life and the secret thereof as well as Leontes' celibacy if the play is to end happily. All of these plays deal specifically with questions relating to sexual intercourse—whether or not it has occurred, when, and so forth. It is this morbid and unhappy pre-occupation with the sex act as opposed to a more wholistic human interaction which especially infects the atmosphere of *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*. Such a concentration on the performance or non-performance of one bodily deed, as the plot of *Measure for Measure* requires, is necessarily reductive of human personality. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, however, the very suddenness of Claudio's accusation and his equally sudden and total remorse keep the question of Hero's virginity from occupying too much of the stage; in the total effect of *Much Ado About Nothing* the sex-deed question is like a nasty and frightening flash, whose effect is distributed or diluted as Hero's defense is taken up in the serio-comic interchanges of Beatrice and Benedick which set the tone for most of the action.

We observe that the concentration on sex deeds in life, as in these four plays, *Much Ado About Nothing* included, is evidence that the culture in which this occurs is heavily ridden with sex-role stereotyping which is to the disadvantage of both sexes. Sex-role stereotyping is always limiting to everyone, of course, but it is
particularly limiting to women, because in such cultures men's chastity is not considered important, while women's is heavily over-emphasized. Only in Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, where Claudio is to die for fornication, is a male's chastity worth account.

Some students of Measure for Measure cannot accept Isabella's pardon of Angelo, who, having promised to pardon her brother's fornication if Isabella will allow him to fornicate with her, sentences him to die anyway. Isabella escapes Angelo because Mariana, Angelo's betrothed, stands in for her. The Duke has returned and all Angelo's crimes are known; the Duke tells Isabella her brother is dead, and she must comfort herself with the knowledge that he is in a better place (he is really alive). The Duke orders Angelo to marry Mariana, which he does; then he condemns Angelo to the very block where Claudio stoop'd to death, and with like haste. Away with him.

(V.i.418-20)

At this point Mariana becomes increasingly desperate to save the life of her new husband, whom she loves; she begs the Duke:

O my most gracious lord
I hope you will not mock me with a husband.

(V.i.421-22)

The Duke replies that she will be better off, as Angelo's estate will "buy a better husband." In what follows, it is clearly Mariana's desperate appeal which brings Isabella also to her knees. Because she accepts Mariana, Isabella accepts Mariana's love for Angelo as
cause enough to plead for his pardon. This is one of the most
electrifying examples in all the plays of a woman's putting herself
in the place of another against all her own impulses and for no
reward:

Mariana. O my dear lord,
I crave no other, nor no better man.
Duke. Never crave him; we are definitive.
Mariana. Gentle my liege,— [Kneeling.
Duke. You do but lose your labour.
Away with him to death! [To Lucio] Now sir, to you.
Mariana. O my good lord! Sweet Isabel, take my part;
Lend me your knees, and all my life to come
I'll lend you all my life to do you service.

(v.i.430-7)

Isabel will kneel, of course, in answer to this pathetic plea, but
as if to point up the generosity in her kneeling, Shakespeare has
the Duke interrupt before Isabel can answer:

Against all sense you do importune her:
Should she kneel down in mercy of this fact,
Her brother's ghost his paved bed would break,
And take her hence in horror.

(v.i.438-41)

Mariana begs again, although Isabella has not yet had a chance to
respond to the first plea:

Sweet Isabel, do yet but kneel by me;
Hold up your hands, say nothing; I'll speak all.
They say, best men are moulded out of faults;
And, for the most, become much more the better
For being a little bad: so may my husband.
O Isabel, will you not lend a knee?

(v.i.442-7)

Again the Duke interrupts; this has the obvious effect of heightening
dramatic tension so that when Isabella kneels the entire audience
sighs with relief as she bends her knees:

Duke. He dies for Claudio's death.
Isabella. Most bounteous sir, [Kneeling.
Look, if it please you, on this man condemn'd,
As if my brother lived: I partly think
A due sincerity govern'd his deed,
Till he did look on me: since it is so,
Let him not die.

(V.i.448-52)

Those who find Isabella's kneeling for Angelo incredible or inadequately motivated perhaps do not recognize the power of sisterhood, sympathy and understanding among women.

J. W. Lever's explanation of Isabella's plea for pardon in his introduction to the Arden edition, like many other interpretations of the actions of other Shakespearean heroines, discounts Isabella's independent emotions and will and ignores not only the relationship of sisterhood, but also the facts of the plot:

The Duke further contrives that Angelo's fate should appear to depend on Isabella's pleading. She too is placed in a position which calls for a profound readjustment of values. The "natural" urge to seek revenge for her dead brother must be converted into a desire for mercy that will benefit the living Mariana. To that end the fact that Claudio survives is withheld until she has made her decision. . . . Her plea is surely not designed to instruct her ruler in Christian mercy. She is in fact learning, not teaching, a lesson in public and private demeanour towards wrongdoers. The decision to show judicial clemency has already been taken by the Duke. 16

Lever gives not one shred of evidence for this lofty conclusion; I have searched the text and find that he is possibly referring to the fact that Angelo is condemned to the same block where Claudio died, and since Claudio did not die, this means Angelo shall not either.

If that is the case, the Duke is being dangerously coy with the messages he is giving to the executioners in the ensuing dialogue.
At several points it looks as if Angelo will be dragged off and beheaded if Mariana and Isabella don't keep kneeling. Even after Isabella kneels, the Duke still apparently wishes to execute Angelo (V.i.459-60); if he has planned from the beginning to grant clemency, perhaps he has told Lever about it on the sly.

Angelo is saved through the intercession of Mariana and Isabella, but this editor blithely ignores the text. So credit for active, effective, and beneficial participation in affairs of the world is drained from yet another woman, as a respected scholar finds evidence that the good Duke, not the good and compassionate and sisterly Isabella, caused Angelo's life to be saved. (This kind of discounting does not surprise students of traditional Love's Labour's Lost criticism: one grows to expect it.) The play as a whole is more consistent if we read the Duke as leaving in the first place because he recognizes the hypocrisy of Angelo and wishes to give him enough rope to hang himself, then returning to mete out fitting punishment. Otherwise the Duke seems mysteriously irresponsible. In any case, the point where Isabella kneels in response to Mariana's pleas is the most dramatic moment in this play.

All's Well That Ends Well illustrates a much less powerful example of sisterhood in Diana's aid of Helena, which culminates in her courageous stand against Bertram and the King of France in V.iii. Helena has promised Diana a dowry if she will cooperate in tricking Bertram, and after her success, the King also offers to pay it. Her commitment to Helena's cause, although it is to be thus rewarded,
nonetheless surpasses expectation. She is very deft and persistent: even in the face of the King's angry accusation and Bertram's insulting and vigorous denials, she insists on the truth of her story, allowing her riddles to untangle gradually until the moment when Helena and the widow appear.

An equally important relationship of sisterhood in All's Well That Ends Well is that of the Countess and Helena. At the outset the Countess is Helena's guardian. She is told by a servant that Helena is in love with her son, Bertram, and she then forced Helena to admit it. From the time the Countess hears Helena's admission, she encourages her to try her plan for going to Paris to cure the King and thereby win Bertram:

Be gone tomorrow; and be sure of this, What I can help thee to thou shalt not miss.
(I.iii.261-2)

The Countess thus provides motivation for Helena's persistence. What is most significant about this relationship in All's Well That Ends Well, however, is the fact that Shakespeare added it to his source in the Decameron. Anne Barton, in the introduction to All's Well That Ends Well in the Riverside edition, observes the effect of Shakespeare's source changes:

Helena, unlike Giletta [the heroine in the source], is poor as well as low-born, and she lacks the total self-sufficiency and cunning of her prototype. Bertram, her reluctant husband, stands convicted of faults considerably more damning than Beltramo's aristocratic pride. He is callow and insensitive, a lecher, an oath-breaker, and a liar, who not only misprizes Helena but makes other serious mistakes of judgment as well. Shakespeare also added four major characters for whom there are no equivalents in his source; the old Countess of Rousillon, Lafew, Parolles,
and the fool Lavatch. All four have one thing in common: they operated in their different ways, throughout the comedy, to raise Helena in our estimation and to degrade Bertram. 17

As Barton goes on to say, Shakespeare here converts a folk-tale into a drama, albeit a drama which rarely succeeds.

In the humanizing process which Shakespeare brought to all his sources, Helena is given in the Countess a "sister" at the beginning of the play who helps her as much as Diana does at the end. If we judge Helena separately and apart from these women who have in every sense supporting roles, she will appear insensitive, brazen, grasping. In winning her husband, Shakespeare allows Helena to borrow rank from the Countess and sexual attractiveness from Diana. Because of Diana's social position vis-a-vis Bertram, "beauty" is a dangerous possession for her to have, potentially a source of degradation to its "owner," as it brings the notice of persons like Parolles and the attentions of persons like Bertram. Helena is doing Diana a favor beyond the promise of a dowry: having become the general of the Florentine army, Bertram's next move might have been to "forcibly seduce" or rape the poor widow's reluctant daughter (compare the scene at the end of The Two Gentlemen of Verona); Helena and Diana thus work together to avert a mutual disaster.

In The Winter's Tale, Paulina, like Diana, controls the last scene of the play as she unravels a mystery; like the Countess, Paulina is an addition whole-cloth to Shakespeare's source, Greene's Pandosto; like both the Countess and Diana, Paulina serves to humanize the story she enters. In Pandosto, the dishonored queen dies,
and it may be that Shakespeare invented her primarily as an agent for keeping Hermione alive and carrying out the statue trick sixteen years later. But Paulina has other functions as well: she keeps reminding Leontes of Hermione's superiority over all other possible wives, and in this sense she is a stand-in wife for Leontes until the prophecy is fulfilled and Perdita is found. In the source, the widowed king tries to marry his lost daughter when she returns; in The Winter's Tale, Leontes swears to marry only when Paulina tells him to:

Leontes. Good Paulina,
Who hast the memory of Hermione,
I know, in honour, O, that ever I
Had squared me to thy counsel! then, even now,
I might have look'd upon my queen's full eyes,
Have taken treasure from her lips—
Paulina. And left them
More rich for what they yielded.

(V.i.49-55)

Notice that in this conversation Paulina seems to be providing an almost sensual gratification for Leontes: although their relationship is by no means a physical one, Paulina does effectively stand in Hermione's place.

Hermione embraces Leontes when she awakes, but she has no words for him. She tells her daughter that Paulina gave her hope and she stayed alive in order to see her lost child: Hermione speaks only to the gods and Perdita. Here in the last scene of The Winter's Tale is a sisterhood of strong suffering women: Paulina, Hermione and Perdita stand apart from the rest of the court, and exalted above it.
We have seen that in many plays Shakespeare portrays relationships wherein women give courage, strength, motivation and credibility to each other. We have not dwelt at much length on any of these relationships, nor have we mentioned them all. Although each is unique, the sisterhood relationships generally fall into conspiratorial or defensive alliance patterns. The conspiracies are usually in aid of achieving a better balance of power vis-a-vis a man or a group of men: *Love's Labour's Lost*, treated in Chapter I above, is one of the best examples of this, and the pattern is repeated in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The defensive sisterhoods occur in plays where women characters are truly threatened: *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale* are good examples here. Sometimes, as in *As You Like It*, a defense strategy, like Rosalind's male disguise to escape Duke Frederick's wrath in safety, can evolve into a conspiracy, as she keeps her disguise to test the truth of her lover.

A further study of Shakespeare's treatment of sisterhood should include comparisons of the history plays and their sources to see if Shakespeare invented any sisters; Lynn Blechman Sawyer has already shown his increasing freedom from stereotypes of women in the history plays. In this chapter I have only brushed the surface of what is the most effective sisterhood of all, the beautiful, deep and complex, but relatively widely recognized, relationship among Cleopatra, Charmian, and Iras. All of these plays would of course reward a more thorough account of the interactions of the women characters and their relationships within their total plots. Secondarily, a
vast lore of Shakespeare commentary needs to be read again in order
to see which critical problems are only the result of the limitations
of a belief in male superiority, or, if you will, male chauvinist
oversights of the dramatist's recognition that sisterhood is
powerful. 20
CHAPTER II

NOTES


4 Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father (Boston, 1973), pp. 59-60.

5 Craig, p. 132.


7 Cambridge 2GV, p. xii.

8 Cambridge 2GV, pp. ix-xii.

9 The following recent studies accept this long-standing view, but their interpretations allow for a slight complicating of the stereotype: Anne Barton, introduction to The Comedy of Errors in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, 1974), p. 81; Miriam Anne Gilbert, "The Shrew and The Disguised Girl in Shakespeare's Comedies," Diss. Indiana University, 1969. The Riverside Shakespeare is hereinafter cited as Riverside.
According to a report given to me by Susan Zimmer, a student at Oberlin College, a production of *As You Like It* by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1973-74 portrayed Rosalind and Celia as lesbians.


It is interesting, however, that Lodge's *Rosalynde*, which Bullough, Craig, and most others give as the major source for *As You Like It*, and which Craig says Shakespeare followed "with great fidelity," contains a description of Rosalynd-as-object which is not even hinted at in Shakespeare:

To feede their eyes, and to make the beholders pleased with the sight of most rare and glistening objects, he had appoynted his owne daughter Alinda to be there, and the faire Rosalynd daughter to Gerismond, with all the beautiful damosels that were famous for their features in all France. Thus in that place did Love and Warre triumph in a sympathie: for such as were Martiall, might use their Launoe to bee renowned for the excellence of their Chevalrie; and such as were amorous, might glut themselves with gazing on the beauties of most heavenly creatures. As everie mans eye had his severall survey, and fancie was partiall in their lookes, yet all in generall applauded the admirable riches that Nature bestowed on the face of Rosalynd: for uppon her cheekes there seemed a bataille betwixt the Graces, who should bestow most favors to make her excellent. The blush that gloried Luna was not tainted with such a pleasant dye, as the Vermilion flourisht on the silver hue of Rosalynds countenance; her eyes were like those lampes that make the wealthie covert of the Heavens more gorgeous, sparkling favour and disdain; courteous and yet coy, as if in them Venus had placed all her amors, and Diana all her chastitie. The travells of her hayre, fouled in a call of golde, so farre surpasst the burnisht gister of the metall, as the Sunne dooth the meanest Starre in brightnessse: the tresses that foldes in the browes of Apollo were not halfe so rich to the sight; for in her haires it seemed love had laide her selfe in ambush, to intrappe the proudest eye that durst gaze uppon her excellence: what should I needs to decipher her particular beauties,
when by the censure of all she was the paragon of all earthly perfection. This Rosalynd sat I say with Alinda as a beholder of these sportes, and made the Cavaliers crack their lances with more courage: many deeds of Knighthoode that day were performed . . . . (Bullough, II, 169-70).

Shakespeare's account is a sharp contrast with this. He has Rosalind and Celia appear at the wrestling match by chance only: they are conversing in the place which happens to be appointed for the match, and stay to watch it out of their own curiosity, not because their eyes, cheeks, hair, etc. are part of the exhibit. This studious omission, taken with the fact that Shakespeare also satirizes the conventional beauty "catalogue" in "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun," indicates that in that sonnet he is perhaps not so much honoring a dark lady as satirizing all such descriptions.

14 Coppélia Kahn's study, "The Taming of the Shrew: Shakespeare's Mirror of Marriage," (unpublished ms.), argues that Katherine is participating in Petruchio's comic exaggeration when she makes her final speech, just as she participated in it in her sun/moon speech. Professor Kahn points out several processes in that play which combine to indicate that it is meant to satirize conventional methods of courtship. For example, the entire Bianca subplot can be seen this way. Her study argues that Katherine and Petruchio understand each other and have a good marriage.

15 See Craig, p. 834. J. W. Lever in his Arden introduction sees Isabella's pardon as part of a preconceived plan of the Duke and as evidence of her spiritual growth toward an ability to accept human frailty. He puts Angelo and Isabella on the same level, referring to them as "these two absolutists." This view of Isabella as somehow inhuman in her unwillingness to fornicate for her brother's life is widespread, reflected most recently in Anne Barton's introduction to the play in The Riverside Shakespeare. Ms. Barton says Isabella is a "chilly maiden" and a "terrified virgin" who finally arrives at a "new and juster knowledge of herself" (p. 546). In my opinion, Ms. Barton has, inadvertently perhaps, swallowed the ancient line that a woman is somehow incomplete when she eschews sex. This is the line priests give outside the confessional, of course, having used the opposite one—that sex is really quite sinful—to fill its chairs in the first place. (Here I use this term metaphorically, having chosen "priests" to stand for all western male purveyors of exploitative ideas.) W. W. Lawrence in Chapter III of Shakespeare's Problem Comedies (New York, 1931) not only traces the history of the defamation of Isabella from Hazlitt and Quiller-Couch, but also lays it to rest in a thorough study of the play which is generally free of conventional
antifeminism. Students of Quiller-Couch's heavily insinuating and essentially unscholarly "Paternity in Shakespeare" (Annual Shakespeare Lecture, 1932) wherein, like Leslie Fiedler, he attempts to convince an audience, with slender or no evidence, that Shakespeare was repelled by women, will not be surprised to read his attacks on Isabella's "rancid chastity." Happily, Lawrence's study, which includes meticulous source comparisons, is a corrective for this view, and it should be reviewed by anyone who still doubts that Isabella was intended by her creator to be a true heroine.

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The title Sisterhood is Powerful, ed. Robin Morgan (New York, 1970), formed part of the inspiration for this chapter.
CHAPTER III

THE FATHERLESS HEROINES AND SHAKESPEARE'S NEGATIVE TREATMENT OF TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

1. Introduction: two contrasting examples of marriage arrangements. Hardin Craig's definition of theme

In the opening scene of A Midsummer Night's Dream, Egeus comes to Duke Theseus to complain that Lysander has bewitched his daughter Hermia and

Turn'd her obedience, which is due to me,  
To stubborn harshness: and, my gracious duke,  
Be it so she will not here before your grace  
Consent to marry with Demetrius,  
I beg the ancient privilege of Athens,  
As she is mine, I may dispose of her:  
Which shall be either to this gentleman  
Or to her death, according to our law  
Immediately provided in that case.

(I.i.37-45)

The Duke's reply indicates that he concurs with Egeus:

To you your father should be as a god;  
One that composed your beauties, yea, and one  
To whom you are but as a form in wax  
By him imprinted and within his power  
To leave the figure or disfigure it.  
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

(I.i.47-52)

Hermia proves herself a worthy grand-daughter of the self-directed
Princess of France, and she asks the Duke to tell her the alternatives:

I know not by what power I am made bold,
Nor how it may concern my modesty,
In such a presence here to plead my thoughts;
But I beseech your grace that I may know
The worst that may befall me in this case,
If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

(I.i.59-64)

The alternatives are severe: Theseus tells her that she may choose between death and the life of a nun, "for aye to be in shady cloister mew'd," if she refuses to obey her father. When she quickly chooses celibacy, Theseus tries to dissuade her, and tells her to "take time to pause," for at the next new moon she must die, wed Demetrius, or vow chastity forever.

Theseus and Egeus here argue the voice of convention, with the weight of tradition behind them. The "power" Hermia speaks with is that of Nature, moving through her own emotional experience. Here is a dramatic conflict, indeed, and one which was not far beyond the real experience of Shakespeare's contemporary audience. Hardin Craig's comment on this scene inspired me to investigate and compare Shakespeare's treatment of marriage customs in other plays, my assumption being that in them we would find a clearer conception of his views than we could find in secondary texts of the period, which may not agree with each other and which may not reflect the dramatist's thinking even if they did. Craig says: "The theme of the willful and disobedient daughter who would choose her own husband is a familiar one. Shakespeare probably did not deny the conventional
right of fathers to arrange their daughters' marriages, yet he and his audiences, like all persons and all audiences, sympathized with true love."

Why "the theme of the willful and disobedient daughter"? Why not as well label it "the theme of the tyrannical father"? As Craig points out, Shakespeare's and the audience's sympathies are surely with Hermia. In this chapter we will see that many of Shakespeare's other works provide evidence for concluding that he did indeed question the right of fathers to choose their daughters' husbands. Just after the scene quoted above, Lysander sarcastically suggests

You have her father's love, Demetrius,
Let me have Hermia's; do you marry him,

(I.i.93-4)

a line good for a laugh, the first one in this comedy. The story unfolds with the lovers finally obeying their own responses, not their fathers' or those induced by the fairies' drugs. In IV.i. Egeus insists, like Shylock, on the law, and only Demetrius' changed affection saves Hermia; Egeus is thwarted and unredeemed. His language in his last speech of the play is calculated to make him a dotard and a fool:

Enough, enough, my lord; you have enough:
I beg the law, the law, upon his head.
They would have stolen away; they would, Demetrius,
Thereby to have defeated you and me,
You of your wife and me of my consent,
Of my consent that she should be your wife.

(IV.i.158-63)

That there are at least ten repetitions in six lines indicates mind-
less enthusiasm. Sara Ann Mason Miller has shown that Shakespeare often resorts to such extravagances of language to satirize his characters.² Here it would seem to be the father whose tyrannical impulses are rebuked through the action of the play, rather than the wilful daughter who is corrected.

In contrast to Egeus, Prospero handles Miranda's marriage choice with impeccable respect for her desires. He does, to be sure, contrive the meeting between Ferdinand and Miranda, but Prospero's concern for her feelings is qualitatively different from Egeus' attempted cruel domination of Hermia. Having assured himself that Miranda and Ferdinand suit each other, Prospero pretends indifference to the match in order to test their mutual commitment, and he is pleased to see its strength. In the following scene, Miranda has been taking Ferdinand's part against her father, who has promised to imprison the young man and make him drink salt water:

Prospero. Silence! One word more
Shall make me chide thee, if not hate thee. What!
An advocate for an imposter! hush!
Thou think'st there is no more such shapes as he,
Having seen but him and Caliban: foolish wench!
To the most of men this is a Caliban
And they to him are angels.
Miranda. My affections
Are then most humble; I have no ambition
To see a goodlier man.
Prospero. Come on; obey:
Thy nerves are in their infancy again
And have no vigor in them.
Ferdinand. So they are;
My spirits, as in a dream, are all bound up.
My father's loss, the weakness which I feel,
The wreck of all my friends, nor this man's threats,
To whom I am subdued, are but light to me,
Might I but through my prison once a day
Behold this maid: all corners else o' the earth
Let liberty make use of; space enough
Have I in such a prison.
Prospero. [Aside] It works. [To Ferdinand] Come on.
Thou hast done well, fine Ariel!

(I.ii.475-94)

Miranda knows, and she tells Ferdinand, that her father is "of a better nature" than "appears by [this] speech." She is satisfied and secure in the awareness that her father will maintain her happiness; if she is being manipulated by magic, so much the better. Shakespeare gives only two words to indicate Prospero's true feelings: "It works." For Miranda to love Ferdinand at first sight and for Ferdinand to respond with an acceptance totally innocent of Miranda's true identity, totally free of mercenary considerations, ready to endure hardship only for the sight of her, is all Prospero hopes for. Doubtless Shakespeare prefers this vision of fatherhood to that represented by Egeus.

2. Shared characteristics of the fatherless heroines, a group which includes all Shakespeare's major comic heroines

Testing the strength of the love and the worthiness of the lovers happens in many other plays, but since there are, apparently, no other fathers like Shakespeare's own creation Prospero, the test-
ing is usually done by fatherless female heroines. In Love's Labour's Lost, as we have seen, the Princess of France is newly freed from parental control when she openly recommends a year's fasting and prayer to her suitor who has proved himself discourteous, unwise, and unrealistic. She forthrightly makes the year's service a condition of her marriage. In other plays, as we shall see, the testing is administered with more subtlety. For examples, in The Merchant of Venice, Portia's father reaches from the grave to test his daughter's lovers and she helps her choice win, only to proceed after marriage with the role-readjustment program we noticed in Chapter II. In Much Ado About Nothing, Beatrice's test for Benedick is an ultimate one which seems to grow spontaneously from the main plot, but we know that Shakespeare invented it. Benedick's positive response to her "Kill Claudio." clears from Beatrice's and the audience's minds any doubts they may have had about the potential success of their relationship, founded as it might seem to be on the lies of their friends. Actually, it is clear that Beatrice and Benedick have had an emotional interaction of some kind before the play's action began. The test is clear, and Benedick passes it. Rosalind's tests for Orlando and her response to his apparent failure of one of them provide the most delightful moments of As You Like It. Since they are so well known, we shall not detail them here.

It happens that these comic heroines share other characteristics than a propensity for testing their lovers. They are not shy; almost all of them share with Juliet and Desdemona a transparency
which frees them from being coy, an openness which enables them to
tell the men they love how they feel almost immediately. Miranda's
innocence and fullness of spirit in this regard are shown in the
passage quoted above. Rosalind tells Orlando that he has "overthrown
more than [his] enemies" after she has given him a chain, saying,
"Wear this for me" (I.i.258ff.). Portia helps Bassanio choose the
lead casket by singing a song whose lines all end with words that
rhyme with lead; because her other suitors had chosen gold and silver
she knew which casket contained her picture. Her singing was probab­
ly meant to be performed in such a way as to be more obvious in its
message than it is on the printed page. By the time she sings this
song she has already made it clear to Bassanio that he is her choice:

I would detain you here some month or two
Before you venture for me. I could teach you
How to choose right, but I am then forsworn;
So will I never be: so may you miss me;
But if you do, you'll make me wish a sin,
That I had been forsworn . . . .
One half of me is yours, the other half yours.

(III.ii.9-16)

Other comic heroines share this transparency in expressing affection.
Olivia is freer than Viola (who is hampered by her male disguise) in
this respect, but they are both choosers, and both free to choose,
being orphans.

This consideration brings us to the characteristic shared by the
liberated comic heroines which is most significant for the present
study: they are all fatherless. Portia's father exercised control
from the grave to an extent; and Rosalind's father, the good Duke,
is alive and happy in the Forest of Arden, but he does not know she 
is there nor does she meet him until the play is almost done. 
Beatrice is an orphan living with a kind and affectionate uncle, in-
effectual in influencing her behavior, ill-equipped to force her 
marrige. He contrives it, to be sure, but she retains to her 
certain satisfaction a sense of choosing it herself. Olivia and 
Viola are orphans, as is Helena in All's Well That Ends Well, a 
special case because she makes her choice but must also undergo 
testing. Isabella is an orphan in Measure for Measure, and it is 
significant that when the Duke proposes to her he admits the 
possibility that she may prefer not to marry (V.i.542).

It happens that all the major comic heroines are thus liberated; 
that is, they are free to make major life-decisions independently 
of fathers, mothers, brothers. Whether or not Shakespeare conscious-
ly set them up this way we don't know. Their self-direction is 
surely a necessary ingredient of their vitality as comic actors and 
responders, decision-makers within the play frame vis-a-vis their 
lovers. What interest could there be in watching, for example, a 
virgin and submissive Juliet bleakly wed County Paris with the 
Capulets smiling proudly by? Would an audience be moved by the 
resulting marital conversation? Only if they had rats or rebellious 
servants or something else that moved. Even Poe's raven gives a 
quoth per stanza, but the ideal submissive wife may only smile, nod, 
and walk gracefully about. Shakespeare appears to have been aware 
quite early that not one but two alive, interesting and responsible
people are required for a dramatic or even a credible love relationship.

His comic heroines meet their lovers at least as equals, and they often have, like Portia, Olivia, and even the banished Rosalind, superior political and economic power. Thus a relationship credibly based on a mutual recognition of equality may develop: it is possible that Shakespeare consciously built extraordinary wit and power into his women characters because he recognized the need for counterbalancing his culture's meager assignment to them. In any case, the coincidence that these heroines share the antistereotypic traits of openness, the insistence on testing their lovers, and fatherlessness is quite interesting, if coincidence it be.

3. Compelled marriages in comedies and tragicomedies

The evidence of Shakespeare's treatment of traditional arranged marriages leads to the conclusion that these heroines' shared trait of fatherlessness is not coincidental but planned. Let us examine some cases where there is a father. We will see that in The Taming of the Shrew, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, The Two Gentlemen of Verona and the instance in A Midsummer
Night's Dream quoted above, interference by fathers is a source of dramatic conflict short of tragedy. In Titus Andronicus, Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra, and to some extent Hamlet, such interference precipitates or exacerbates the tragic calamity. First let us look at the compelled marriages which cause either comic conflict or dramatic conflict short of tragedy.

The best known example of comic conflict arising from a compelled marriage is probably that in The Taming of the Shrew. Coppélia Kahn's study of this play shows in detail how the play satirizes conventionally arranged marriages and provides in the final relationship between Katherine and Petruchio evidence that they are communicating on the same plane. Baptist will not let Bianca wed until Kate does; he insists on economic considerations in return for his daughters; in short, the last things he considers are his daughters' personal preferences and emotional responses to their suitors. As Professor Kahn shows, Kate is thus justified to an extent in her shrewish rebellion against her father and the world of men in general. She commands sympathy and respect from the audience despite the fact that her role and type are said to be anathema. She is an underdog, and we wish her well: we rejoice in the final happy interaction with her husband. In The Taming of the Shrew, those who disregard personal and emotional interactions between lovers are thwarted as the honest and relatively unmercenary suitor Lucentio wins Bianca and the mercenary Petruchio, who is refreshingly honest about his goals, is able to elicit respect from
his wife.

The same mercenary ethics that control most of the marriage-seekers and planners in *The Taming of the Shrew* are also illustrated in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, III.i. and ii., where the Duke of Milan tricks Valentine into showing him the ladder he has made to effect an elopement with the Duke's daughter Silvia. Valentine is banished under threat of death, Silvia grieves, and her father redoubles his efforts to marry her off to Sir Thurio, one of those repulsive suitors fit only for hanging around in Shakespeare's comedies to threaten the hero's and heroine's happiness by having enough money and genealogical prestige to appeal to the heroine's father. Because *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is a comedy, the Duke does not, like Capulet, absolutely force Silvia to wed Thurio, and before long Valentine proves to the Duke's satisfaction that he is a worthy husband for her despite his relatively low birth. The forced marriage is only a threat in comedy and a frame for intrigue.

Another example of the comic effect of an attempted arranged marriage appears in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Anne Page is the center of a controversy between her parents, who again come short of forcing her. Her father wants her to marry Slender, who is conspicuous for having less social grace than any other character in Shakespeare, and concomitant wit. Her mother, on the other hand, is willing to have her carried off to wed Dr. Caius, an old Frenchman. Of course both of these suitors have the financial security to be acceptable to Anne's parents, and they in turn are both more interes-
ted in the seven hundred pounds bequeathed to Anne by her grand-
father than they are in her. Anne herself prefers Master Fenton, a
poor but well-born courtier who openly admits (shades of Petruchio)
that he originally courted her for her dowry but insists believably
that he now truly loves her. Of course this is a comedy, so Fenton
and Anne escape in the final scene to be married, thus thwarting
both her mother's plan to have Dr. Caius carry her off in the night
and her father's plan to have Slender do the same. The only
compelled marriage in comedy is in Measure for Measure, where Lucio
is forced by the Duke to marry his betrothed; the bride is very
pleased in this case, for having thought herself abandoned out of
wedlock with a child, she had become—if we may believe the groom--
a whore. Only Lucio is offended with his forced marriage. No other
Shakespearean comedy admits compelled marriage: as Hardin Craig says,
Shakespeare "and his audiences, like all persons and all audiences,
sympathized with true love."

In the tragocomedies true love also elicits our sympathy, but
the trials of lovers in the face of parental disapproval are more
severe, in keeping with the genre. The opening lines of Cymbeline
show that such parental disapproval can cloud an entire state:

First Gentleman. You do not meet a man but frowns:
our bloods
No more obey the heavens than our courtiers
Still seem as does the king.
Second Gentleman. But what's the matter?
First Gent. His daughter, and the heir of 's
kingdom, whom
He purposed to his wife's sole son--a widow
That late he married--hath referr'd herself
Unto a poor but worthy gentleman: she's wedded;
Her husband banished; she imprison'd; all
Is outward sorrow; though I think the king
Be touch'd at very heart.
Second Gent. None but the king?
First Gent. He that hath lost her too; so is the queen,
That most desired the match; but not a courtier,
Although they wear their faces to the bent
Of the king's looks, hath a heart that is not
Glad at the thing they soon at.
Second Gent. And why so?
First Gent. He that hath miss'd the princess is a
 thing
Too bad for bad report: and he that hath her--
I mean, that married her, alack, good man!
And therefore banish'd--is a creature such
As, to seek through the regions of the earth
For one his like, there would be something failing
In him that should compare. I do not think
So fair an outward and such stuff within
Endows a man but he.

(I.i.1-24)

Imogen's trials as she stays in court while her husband is banished;
Posthumus' weakness in believing Iachimo's lies about his wife; the
evils of Cloten and his mother--all these sources of dramatic conflict
derive ultimately from Cymbeline's refusal to honor his daughter's
marriage. It is significant that Shakespeare added this fatherly
disapproval to the source stories from Holinshed and Boccaccio and
elsewhere, and he invented the character Imogen. Perhaps he recog-
nized that all kinds of troubles may ensue if a good woman is
dominated by a tyrannical father, and he reached out to such a
situation when he needed to join the diverse elements of Cymbeline.
Imogen is clearly a paragon, and her love for Posthumus natural
since he was brought up in her father's court; Shakespeare goes to
some trouble to motivate Imogen's disobedience when he spends
twenty-seven lines on a glowing description of Posthumus's back-
ground and behavior (I.i.28-54). Imogen ultimately survives the imprisonment and the maligning and all her other trials: her achievement of these successes is the major interest of the play. It is certainly her play. Her case makes the question as to whether the best label is "the theme of the wilfull and disobedient daughter" or "the theme of the tyrannical father" now seem easy.

The Winter's Tale gives us a picture of the tyrannical father responding in tragicomic anger to a son's marriage. When Polixenes hears that Florizel is seeing a country maid, he disguises himself to attend the harvest feast where he may verify this. The King is very much impressed with Perdita, the "low-born" lover; Shakespeare again takes every precaution to show us that Polixenes' anger is not motivated by considerations beyond blood and fortune. Perdita proves herself wise and pure as well as beautiful. Only a tyrant controlled by inhumane conventions would object to her for a daughter-in-law. Actually, Shakespeare may have drawn Polixenes so nasty in this scene in order to prepare the audience to accept and forgive his old friend Leontes' earlier cruelty in the coming reconciliation scene: Leontes would thus not be the only angry sinner. Certainly when he discloses his identity to his son and Perdita it is a highly theatrical moment. Polixenes fairly begs his son to take him into his confidence, in vain:

Polixenes. Soft, swain, awhile, beseech you;
Have you a father?
Florizel. I have: but what of him?
Pol. Knows he of this?
Flo. He neither does nor shall.

Pol. Have you a father?
A. I have: but what of him?
Pol. Knows he of this?
Flo. He neither does nor shall.
But in the ensuing debate Florizel steadfastly refuses to disclose his engagement to this father, who is of course sitting there disguised talking to him. Florizel's decision not to tell the King proves to be the better course, for when Polixenes finally discloses his identity, he is very fierce:

**Pol.** Mark your divorce, young sir,
[Discovering himself.]
Whom son I dare not call; thou art too base
To be acknowledged: thou a sceptre's heir,
That thus affect'st a sheep-hook!

He spares nobody, attacking the old shepherd and Perdita:

Thou old traitor,
I am sorry that by hanging thee I can
But shorten thy life one week. And thou, fresh piece
Of excellent witchcraft, who of force must know
The royal fool thou oopest with,—

With this news the shepherd faints of a heart attack and Polixenes returns to excoriate the lovers:

I'll have thy beauty scratch'd with briers, and made
More homely than thy state. For thee, fond boy,
If I may ever know thou dost but sigh
That thou no more shalt see this knack, as never
I mean thou shalt, we'll bar thee from succession;
Not hold thee of our blood, no, not our kind,
Far than Deucalion off: mark thou my words:
Follow us to the court.

**(IV.iv.426-442)**

Florizel elects not to follow, thus proving his worthiness. Polixenes speaks here in terms of sheephooks and sceptres, not in human terms, to show that here he is not a sympathetic character; Florizel's
reluctance to inform him of his betrothal is thus justified by his father's angry response. The young man has shown his wisdom in keeping information of this kind from a father who thinks in economic rather than human values. To be sure, the audience does feel great sympathy with Polixenes before he discovers himself; we can at that point see him as a father who loves his son and hopes, nay pleads, to share the son's experience and joy.

Perdita's response is interesting: she is very clearly his peer—unafraid and vulnerable, strikingly like Prince Hal before Agincourt, whose ideas she echoes:

I was not much afeard; for once or twice I was about to speak and tell him plainly, The selfsame sun that shines upon his court Hides not his visage from our cottage but Looks on alike. Will't please you, sir, be gone? I told you what would come of this; beseech you, Of your own state take care: this dream of mine— Being now awake, I'll queen it no inch farther, But milk my ewes and weep.

(IV.iv.452-9)

It is useful to compare this and *Henry V*, IV.i.103-17: there Hal not only tells three of the soldiers that the king is "but a man" and "the violet smells to him as it doth to me," he also discusses the fact that the king's fears must not be shown "lest he dishearten his army." Youth, wisdom, courage, vulnerability, and an ultimate concern for others, extending to a concern for the whole state, mark both Hal and Perdita, whose speech above is a brave one meant to bolster Florizel. Again like Hal and like Lear in the storm, Perdita recognizes the essential natural democracy underlying the hierarch-
ical socio-economic world; this awareness fits her for the ruling class, as the disguised Hal's conversation with his troops fits him for it. Shakespeare's own personal recognition of the pain his monarch must have felt at the knowledge of her mother's death, i.e., his own practical application of the truth that kings and queens share the essential joys and pains that we all do, may have motivated the therapeutic treatment we noticed in *Love's Labour's Lost*: in fact, he might have guessed that Elizabeth was disturbed knowing that her mother was beheaded because of unproven charges of adultery.

In any case Perdita, the daughter of a woman accused of adultery, shows herself to be thoroughly royal before it is discovered that she was to the manner born, and Florizel proves that he is worthy of her by renouncing his succession in language reminiscent of Antony's "Let Rome in Tiber melt": he says that if he violates his faith to Perdita

> Let nature crush the sides o' the earth together
> And mar the seeds within! Lift up thy looks:
> From my succession wipe me, father: I
> Am heir to my affection.

(IV.iv.488-91)

In such cases as this, where true love runs counter to the wishes of the parents, Shakespeare is very careful to make the disapproving parent the villain, the "heavy," if you will, rather than the child. But this is a tragicomedy or romance, and everyone will be redeemed at the end of the tale, even if Mamilius and Antigonus are already dead. If Polixenes has been harsh, he has been made so in keeping with the genre.
4. Compelled marriages in tragedy

Moving on to consider tragedies, we come very early upon an appalling case—perhaps the case which is so hideous that it will clinch our argument, in fact—in a place where we might very well expect to find one—Titus Andronicus. This play is so crowded with atrocities that it is easy to overlook some of the opening ones, where victims are merely killed, and killed promptly. Saturnine has already courted Tamora in dumb show when Titus takes it upon himself to kill his youngest son Mutius because Mutius defends his sister's previous betrothal to Bassianus, Saturnine's brother. Titus thinks to wed his daughter Lavinia to Saturnine himself to cement the two families; the newly-crowned emperor find in this idea and the conflict between Titus and his sons an excuse to cast Titus from his favor. When Bassianus claims Lavinia, Titus goes after them with his sword. Titus' son Mutius bars Titus from pursuing the fleeing lovers and Titus easily kills him:

Mutius. My lord, you pass not here.
Titus. What, villain boy!
Barr't me my way in Rome? [Stabbing Mutius.

(I.i.290-2)

Nor is Titus in the least remorseful:

Lucius. My lord, you are unjust, and, more than so,
In wrongful quarrel you have slain your son.
Titus. Nor thou, nor he, are any sons of mine;
My sons would never so dishonour me:
Traitour, restore Lavinia to the emperor.

(I.i.293-7)

Later in the same scene Bassianus begs his brother to forgive Titus, because Titus has been so loyal as to kill his own son in the interest of the emperor. In murdering Mutius, Titus has given Saturnine an excuse to accuse him, instead—just what Saturnine wanted. Titus thus precipitates his own downfall in defending an arranged marriage; with his downfall, of course, also comes Lavinia's. Titus' earlier refusal to grant Tamora's plea for mercy, which is the major source of tragic conflict, might be justified on grounds of national security, but his murder of Mutius is totally gratuitous. He remains oblivious to Lavinia's humanity, and he has an inhuman rage for asserting authority, his own parental authority and Saturnine's civil authority. Only when he sees his daughter mutilated does he begin to see that she is a person. Titus' tyrannical fatherhood is the extreme case, but it illustrates the theme very clearly. Mutius' only crime was to defend his sister's betrothal to no less a person than an emperor's brother. Titus loses his children because, until late in the play, he is not truly a father, but an authority to be obeyed and a power to be placated, like an angry god. He is an extreme case, to be sure, but not so different from other Shakespearean fathers as one would like to think.

Capulet, for example, operates out of the same definition of fatherhood as Titus. He follows the tradition wherein the daughter
is merely his own imprint in wax, as Theseus reminds Hermia. This was of course based on the faulty biology which prevailed from the time of Aristotle until late in the nineteenth century, when the microscope made it possible to disprove the assertion that the male provided a tiny human at conception and the female body only fed it. Biology, in other words, supported the social customs wherein women were thought to need male direction, being less rational, less highly developed. The Judaeo-Christian tradition also supported the kinds of inhumane cultural conventions which we see operating in Titus' and Capulet's behavior, indeed, in the behavior of all fathers who would compel marriages. Biology and religion also explain why we don't see mothers compelling marriages: in the case of the Widow and Diana in All's Well That Ends Well, the mother left with a daughter is a supplicant, begging for a son-in-law, not a merchant bargaining for one. This background is all in aid of treating poor Capulet with as much kindness and understanding as we can: as we all are to some extent, he is a victim of his culture. Fathers know what is best, for daughters and even sons, as the case of Polixenes and Florizel shows, because they are male; males, so went prevailing thought, were wiser than females. I believe Shakespeare questioned this prevailing ethic very consciously, and his plays yield evidence that he did not share it.

Of all the evidence I could amass to prove this point, the case of Juliet and her father is most appropriate here. Juliet is a tragic heroine; her father is very nearly comic in his shallowness. Shakes-
peare may have intended the exaggerated effect of his formalized wailing at Juliet's death, coming as it does soon after Capulet's threat to kill her if she disobeys him. He seems to be making a point about forced marriages and the sort of persons who arrange them. Like Titus, he begins to appreciate his daughter's humanity very late.

At the point in the play when Romeo and Juliet are married, Tybalt slain, and Romeo banished, Capulet is shown discussing Juliet with Paris. Paris has proclaimed his desire to marry her, and Capulet replies:

Sir Paris, I will make a desperate tender
Of my child's love: I think she will be ruled
In all respects by me; nay, more, I doubt it not.

(III.iv.12-15)

When it turns out that Juliet will not be ruled by her father, he is very savage; perhaps because "he doubts it not," he is totally unprepared for her disobedience. In his ensuing discussion with Paris, he shows himself concerned with whether or not the day of the week for the wedding is appropriate, how many guests will be invited, whether or not he will be thought careless of Tybalt in having a wedding so soon after his death, and, later, what food is to be served: these questions overshadow any concern he may have about the bride's response to the marriage. I think Shakespeare shows Capulet's interest in these smaller matters to indicate that he is a man who blows in Fortune's winds, the sort diametrically opposite to Horatio, who doesn't feel them at all according to his admiring
friend Hamlet. Capulet will lose his daughter not only because the Montagues are at war with his family, but also because he is too busy courting public opinion to have time to discuss her marriage with her. Discuss it he does, of course, in the following terms:

God's bread! it makes me mad:
Day, night, hour, tide, time, work, play,
Alone, in company, still my care hath been
To have her match'd: and having now provided
A gentleman of noble parentage,
Of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly train'd,
Stuff'd, as they say, with honourable parts,
Proportion'd as one's thought would wish a man;
And then to have a wretched puling fool,
A whining mammet, in her fortune's tender,
To answer "I'll not wed; I cannot love,
I am too young; I pray you, pardon me."
But, an you will not wed, I'll pardon you:
Graze where you will, you shall not house with me:
Look to 't, think on 't, I do not use to jest.
Thursday is near; lay hand on heart, advise:
An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend;
An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets,
For, by my soul, I'll ne'ev acknowledge thee,
Nor what is mine shall never do thee good:
Trust to 't. bethink you; I'll not be forsworn.

(III.v.177-97)

The audience could never take Juliet for a disobedient and wilfull daughter, but her father wins accolades as inhumane, short-sighted and passionate in the worst sense of the word. His anger and his confidence in his own wisdom are ungodly.

The tragedy of Hamlet proceeds from another cause than Polonius' interference in Hamlet's and Ophelia's love. Once Ophelia obeys her father, however, Hamlet is effectively cut off from all humans except Horatio. Polonius' demand that Ophelia return Hamlet's letters does not cause the tragedy but it contributes to one of its major currents. It is based, like Capulet's, on his insistence on
his own honor, that is, on considerations of social class, controlled by Fortune, above personal human considerations controlled by Nature. Polixenes, Titus, Cymbeline, Capulet and Polonius share a disrespect for Nature in this regard. For punishment they reap embarrassment or tragedy according to the genres they appear in.

The last marriage we will consider is not forced in the strict sense that Juliet's is; however, it is very much a marriage of politics, conceived by a third party not even related to the principals. Caesar and Antony are discussing their mutual slights at Lepidus' house in Rome. Tension between the two is unresolved; Enobarbus suggests patching up their differences only until Pompey's threat is confronted: "You shall have time to wrangle when you have nothing else to do" (II.ii.107). Antony quiets him, but Caesar picks up Enobarbus' cynical suggestion when he is interrupted by Agrippa. It is Agrippa's marriage:

Agrippa. Give me leave, Caesar,—
Caesar. Speak, Agrippa.
Agr. Thou hast a sister by the mother's side,
Admired Octavia: great Mark Antony
Is now a widower.
Caes. Say not so, Agrippa:
If Cleopatra heard you, your reproof
Were well deserved of rashness.
Antony. I am not married, Caesar: let me hear
Agrippa further speak.
Agr. To hold you in perpetual amity,
To make you brothers, and to knit your hearts
With an unslipping knot, take Antony
Octavia to his wife . . .

(II.ii.118-28)

Agrippa continues at some length to describe the benefits to the state of such a marriage. Antony and Caesar carefully negotiate
with each other through Agrippa:

**Ant.** Will Caesar speak?
**Caes.** Not till he hear how Antony is touch'd
With what is spoke already.
**Ant.** What power is in Agrippa,
If I would say, "Agrippa, be it so,"
To make this good?
**Caes.** The power of Caesar, and
His power unto Octavia.
**Ant.** May I never
To this good purpose, that so fairly shows,
Dream of impediment!

(II.ii.138-46)

This coldly calculated marriage is performed and Antony and Octavia prepare to leave for Athens. But Octavia and Caesar soon sense doom in this heavily political contract. In their parting scene they both seem to struggle against the fate they have set for themselves—more correctly, the fate which concerns of empire have forced them to. Octavius, cold as he is, seems really to love his sister as he said he did. Octavia elicits sympathy from the brother who used her as a pawn and who already seems uneasy about having done so: when she cannot speak and whispers a last message to him, Enobarbus asks Agrippa, "Will Caesar weep?" (III.i.51). We do not learn what Octavia asks that brings her brother to the brink of tears.

Octavius' concern for his sister motivates his final vengeance on Antony, of course, but it also rings of truth in this parting scene. In this detail Shakespeare makes Octavius a sympathetic character worthy to survive the tragedy at the same time that he clarifies Caesar's motive for bringing it to fruition. Unlike the fathers who force their daughters into wedlock, Octavius appears to
have a sense—belated and inadequate, to be sure—of his sister's feelings.

If we are to generalize about Shakespeare's view of marriage customs (and that activity itself is questionable), we must then take into account his negative treatment of traditional customs as indicated in the plays discussed here. I have not found an arranged marriage, presented to either of the parties as a fait accompli, in any Shakespearean play which is not either thwarted in comedy or doomed in tragedy. I do not include the histories, as they would appear to be controlled to a greater extent by their sources. Only in The Taming of the Shrew is a "wilfull and disobedient daughter" corrected in the action of the play to do her father's will, and the correction there is administered not by the father but by the husband who loudly insists he is doing all he does for his bride out of deference to her. Whether or not Kate is comfortable, she is surely shocked to find such thorough and sudden attention to her needs coming from anyone. Thus arrested and fascinated, she seems truly to fall in love with Petruchio; later she shows herself willing to play his games in the sun/moon speech and to join in his lucrative final joke by laying the conventional wifely submission ethic on with cream in front of her sister and the widow, who are presumably more conventional than she.

I know of no other successful compelled marriage in all Shakespeare's plays, saving the histories and the comic example from Measure for Measure discussed above. It appears at least possible
that Shakespeare recognized the human cruelty inherent in arranging marriages. Such a realization may have affected his plays in many ways; for example, it may have orphaned Beatrice. A character who must have her father's approval before making major decisions cannot be quite so free to interact with other characters as one who may make such decisions independently. We see that Shakespeare's major comic heroines may not share the characteristics of openness and fatherlessness by accident.
CHAPTER III

NOTES

1 Craig, p. 183. I should perhaps note that I have in many other instances found Craig's notes and comments to be totally free of the inadvertent antifeminism this remark may be taken to suggest.


3 Coppelia Kahn, "The Taming of the Shrew: Shakespeare's Mirror of Marriage," Modern Language Studies, 1 (Spring, 1975), 88-102. Professor Kahn very kindly let me read the manuscript of this study.
CHAPTER IV

SOME IRONIC PROCESSES IN OTHELLO AND KING LEAR

1. Introduction

The foremost Shakespearean suffering heroines, Cordelia and Desdemona, have been almost universally admired. This admiration has perhaps obscured Shakespeare's purpose in creating them. For example, it is very easy, especially in the light of a strong cultural predilection for self-effacing women, to overlook the dramatic context of tragedy in which Shakespeare placed these women and thus to derive a "Shakespearean" opinion that Desdemona and Cordelia represent the best that real women can be. Shakespeare himself certainly does not condone all the actions he depicts, however, and the complexity of his portrait of human life is so vast that we may validly question previous views of what he thought best or worst in it. I will suggest here that within the play in which he presents suffering, forgiving heroines there are also deeply ironic treatments of the cultural expectations for women which these particular heroines fulfill. So although Cordelia and Desdemona may be rightly admired, they are not meant by their creator to be imitated. The dramatic context of tragedy qualifies the vision of women articulated in the heroine's character.
2. The Patres Dolorosi

The strongest of these qualifying devices, a device which has to my knowledge not been noticed before, is what I call the Pater Dolorosus. Much of the irony apparent in Shakespeare's treatment of self-effacing women is articulated by the presence of a male figure who castigates and rejects a good woman. The woman usually dies, and after her death the Dolorosus is apparently motivated by his guilt the more bitterly to mourn her loss. Because he is always forgiven by the dying heroine, his guilt is never overwhelming; in comedy and tragicomedy she remains alive to forgive him and to enjoy her own vindication.

I have chosen to label this group of castigating, remorseful male figures the Patres Dolorosi, or, since some lovers and husbands fit the same pattern, the Dolorosi. This label was inspired by the fact that Lear's carrying his dead child is a reverse image of the Mater Dolorosa image, e.g. Michelangelo's Pieta. Lear is the archetypal Pater Dolorosus.

Lear howls, his dead child in his arms; with hers, the Virgin quietly weeps. Their pain is equal, and both these images cause witnesses pain; one difference between them is that we know that Lear in his initial arrogance helped cause his daughter's death, but the Virgin is innocent. The death of Cordelia by murder and the howling father are Shakespeare's additions to his sources; it is
noteworthy that several of his other plays include a remorseful male parent bewailing the death of a daughter he has recently castigated. A comic example is Leonato in Much Ado, who says to his unconscious daughter

Do not live, Hero, do not ope thine eyes;  
For did I think thou wouldst not quickly die,  
Thought I thy spirits were stronger than thy shames,  
Myself would, on the rearward of reproaches,  
Strike at thy life.

(IV.i.132-7)

Leonato is entreated into reason by the Friar who plans Hero's false death: although his daughter is not dead and he knows it, Leonato easily plays the role of wailing father after this scene. In the tragi-comedy The Winter's Tale, Leontes shares with this Leonato more than a name: both men despise their daughters for little reason and ultimately feel remorse for it. Capulet joins their fraternity; and Cymbeline, who has imprisoned his daughter before the play begins, refers to her as "the great part of my comfort, gone" after she has disappeared (IV.iii.4).

Posthumus, though he is no more a father to Imogen than Hamlet is to Ophelia, also mourns her loss as Hamlet mourns Ophelia's, after a scene of rejection and castigation. Through all these plays the castigated woman's behavior recalls Patient Griselda, smiling and forgiving, if not dead. Shakespeare even takes pains to keep Desdemona alive long enough to forgive Othello. Her last words, "A guiltless death I die . . . Command me to my kind lord" befit the attitudes of smiling forgiveness exhibited by several Shakespearean
heroines: Cordelia, Hermione and Perdita, Isabella, Helena, Hero—all unassailable women who are nonetheless assailed.

As Lear comes onstage with Cordelia's body, Kent asks, "Is this the promis'd end?" (V.iii.264), a question which is left with all of us at the end of the play. In the imaginary re-run which haunts spectators after a play of the magnitude of King Lear, we notice that Lear has come full circle from the pain and anger he felt at Cordelia's inability to "heave her heart into her mouth" (I.i.91-2). Lear's agony at her death is almost matched in intensity by his extreme viciousness throughout the first scene; after he has threatened Kent's life and banished him, he reiterates his hatred of Cordelia:

Better thou
Hadst not been born than not t'have pleased me better.

Therefore be gone
Without our grace, our love, our benison.

(I.i.233-4, 264-6)

As he is leaving Goneril's he begins to see his error, and he refers to Cordelia for the first time with a note of repentance:

Woe, that too late repents!

O most small fault,
How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show!

(I.iv.257, 266-7)

In what is perhaps the most eloquent line Shakespeare ever wrote, "No cause, no cause" (IV.vii.74), Cordelia has made her total forgiveness clear by the time Lear has asked her to "forget and forgive"(IV.vii.84). Like the majority of the Dolorosi, Lear is
granted a reconciliation with Cordelia in which he admits and enjoys her loyalty. It is after this reconciliation that his anguish reaches epic proportions:

Howl! Howl! Howl! O, you are men of stones!
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone for ever!

(V.iii.258-60)

We know that Lear has done a lot to bring himself to this pass, but he is both guilty and innocent of causing Cordelia's death, just as Othello is both guilt and innocent of causing Desdemona's. Both Lear and Othello live long enough to learn remorse for casting out good women.

Two other Dolorosi in the tragedies are Hamlet and Capulet. We will discuss Hamlet in detail, since it may not be readily apparent why he is included in the group. Unusual as it may seem to discuss Hamlet and Capulet in the same context, the deep and moody Prince beside the shallow and confident burgher, they do share a Dolorosi pattern of rejection of a good woman and remorse.

Hamlet's responses to Ophelia are, like all his responses, ambivalent and unclear, but deep and passionate:

If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunn'ry, farewell. Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunn'ry, go, and quickly too. Farewell.

(III.i.133-40)

Hamlet's rejection here may be read as his way of preparing for his own departure, as a cutting-off of all things dear because he knows
he must murder the King and he doubts the consequences of that action. It might be read otherwise, the most obvious explanation being that he rejects her because she asked him to return her letters, or because in this scene he thinks she is a willing pawn of Claudius. In any case, we are prepared to accept the authenticity of his final grief at her funeral because we see Hamlet and Ophelia reconciled at the play (III.ii.112-54, 245-251). Ophelia's response to Hamlet's "nunnery" outburst has already affirmed for us her devotion to Hamlet, so that in III.ii. only Hamlet's true feelings toward her are in question. When Ophelia remarks on the Player's prologue, "'Tis brief, my lord," and Hamlet replies, "As woman's love," it is possible to read Hamlet's remark as a mild indictment of Ophelia, who, so far as he knows, has rejected him. Hamlet has no way of knowing she was merely following her father's orders in returning his letters, nor does he hear her agonized response to the nunnery scene.

Hamlet thus has some possible cause for his anger at Ophelia, or he thinks he does, as Lear, Othello, Leontes, Cymbeline, Capulet and the other Dolorosi think they have cause for anger at innocent women. Hamlet's remorse, like theirs, is very great. When Hamlet discovers it is Ophelia's grave being prepared, he has few words ("What, the fair Ophelia!") and he attacks Laertes for indulging in a grief which cannot match his own. Hamlet's shock and anger are exacerbated by his distaste for mere language; he finds Laertes unbearable because he "rants" and "mouths," but he is desperate and he does the same (V.i.254ff.). Although he never admits to having
helped Ophelia on her way, his passion at her funeral betokens sincere grief, if not open remorse for having misused her. Insofar as Hamlet sincerely mourns Ophelia after denouncing her, he follows the Dolorosi pattern.

Capulet's denunciation of his daughter and his subsequent grief and remorse are much less complicated than Hamlet's, as one might expect from the difference in characters. As we saw in Chapter III above, Capulet tells Juliet to go die if she won't marry Paris at his command. Originally Capulet had planned to let Juliet make her own decision—"My will to her consent is but a part" (I.ii.17), he tells Paris before the feast, but later after Tybalt's death, Capulet tells Paris

Things have fall'n out, sir, so unluckily
That we have had no time to move our daughter.

(III.iv.1-2)

and he makes his "desperate tender" of Juliet's love. Juliet refuses and Lady Capulet begins the castigation, "I would the fool were married to her grave!" (III.v.140), only to be so outdone in anger by her husband that she soon tries unsuccessfully to restrain his fury. Juliet goes to her knees, only to be excoriated:

Capulet. Out, you green-sickness carrion! Out, you baggage, you tallow-face!
Lady Capulet. Fie, fie, what, are you mad?
Juliet. Good father, I beseech you on my knees,
Hear me with patience but to speak a word.
Capulet. Hang thee, young baggage! disobedient wretch!
I tell thee what: get thee to church a' Thursday,
Or never after look me in the face.

(III.v.156-62)
Despite pleas from Lady Capulet and the Nurse, he continues his cursing, telling Juliet finally to "hang, beg, starve, die in the streets" (III.v.192).

Soon after, when Capulet sees Juliet apparently dead, his mourning is extreme; it is meant to be taken as a comment on his character when he, Lady Capulet, the Nurse and Paris break into their symphonic dirge which ends

Despis'd, distressed, hated, martyr'd, kill'd!
Uncomfortable time, why cam'st thou now
To murther, murther our solemnity?
O child, O child! My soul, and not my child!
Dead art thou! Alack, my child is dead,
And with my child my joys are buried.

(IV.v.59-64)

As Frank Kermode remarks, "There are few more daring rhetorical adventures in all the tragedies." Shakespeare's heavy use of patterns here is clearly intended to indicate the artificiality of the sentiments being expressed; the Capulets' speech, however, is perfectly natural for them, for we have already seen in Capulet's denunciation of his daughter that theirs is a heavily form-ridden relationship. Capulet does not respond to others as persons but as shells for containing status: it is this inhuman habit of interpersonal response, this materialistic mentality, if you will, which facilitates continuance of the Capulet-Montague feud and which also prompts Capulet to seek not just a nice person to marry his daughter, but a Count. The artificiality of his lament points up the artificiality of his general response habits, his life-style, one might say. Nonetheless, by the end of the play one has the sense that the
Capulets have truly suffered as others do at the loss of their children (e.g. the Montagues). Indeed, if the tragedy is to work, the audience must have this sense, and be able to identify with Capulet in his pain. If, as I am suggesting, one intended effect of the Dolorosi pattern is to dissuade audiences from purely materialistic responses and persuade them to more spiritual consciousness or humane habits—the sorts of habits which Shakespeare's contemporaries would have seen as being under the guidance of the rational soul—in their own daily lives, then the audience must continue to identify with Capulet. If the audience is to feel his remorse vicariously, he must not be thoroughly discredited. If he were, we would not be ready to see ourselves in him and learn from his experience to use our own authority and parental wrath fearfully if at all. No statistics are likely to become available on the numbers of young women whose lives have been happier because their fathers saw and became involved in Romeo and Juliet; nonetheless, perhaps because Shakespeare recognized the traditional oppressions of fathers over daughters, he intended the effect Capulet has so often elicited of mixed disgust and pity. So with most of the Dolorosi. Compelling negative examples, their message would seem to be, "Go, but don't by any means do likewise."
3. Desdemona and Iago

Othello's Dolorosi pattern of rejection and remorse is perhaps the most striking of all: rejection, recognition and remorse are all condensed into one scene. Desdemona proves her innocence, strength and loyalty with her dying breath, so that Othello's recognition of his error begins just at the moment when it is too late to correct it. The horror generated in this scene is only bearable because we have seen its slow preparation, and we are thus braced for it.

The final scene of this play has been more carefully prepared than most commentators have been willing to recognize. Shakespeare's extraordinary sensitivity made him aware of many human interactions which most people simply ignore, to the point that they fail to see sometimes even what is presented on the stage or in the most admired works of dramatic literature, as the following example will illustrate.

The first scene in Cyprus contains one of Shakespeare's most ironic treatments of the woman question. As Carroll Camden has pointed out, Iago there quotes almost directly from several of the antifeminist handbooks, or guides on what to expect from women, which were current when the play was written. Camden noticed the extreme irony of having Iago speak in this disparaging tradition to Desdemona, a woman who in herself belied all the antifeminist saws, or, as she herself labels them, "old paradoxes to make fools laugh in the alehouse" (II.i.139). Camden almost recognized that Shakespeare himself disapproves of this kind of thinking about women: in putting it
in the mouth of his arch-villain, Shakespeare was conscious that the effect would be to discredit antifeminism.

Blindness or immunity to the cultural disease of woman-baiting has, however, kept many readers from appreciating the dramatic functions of this part of Shakespeare's most carefully-constructed tragedy. As M. R. Ridley notes, many readers (including Ridley himself) cannot imagine any very good reasons for Shakespeare's having put it in the play:

This is to many readers, and I think rightly, one of the most unsatisfactory passages in Shakespeare. To begin with it is unnatural. Desdemona's natural instinct must surely be to go herself to the harbour, instead of asking parenthetically whether someone has gone. Then, it is distasteful to watch her engaged in a piece of cheap back-chat with Iago, and so adept at it that one wonders how much time on the voyage was spent in the same way. All we gain from it is some further unneeded light on Iago's vulgarity. It is true that it leads up to 11. 163-77, which are dramatically effective, but they could have been introduced otherwise and much more briefly. The fact that Othello would then enter after too short an interval would hardly trouble an Elizabethan audience. Perhaps the passage was just a sop to the groundlings, for whom otherwise—the clown being negligible—there is little comic entertainment; this is just the sort of interchange that might occur between the great lady and the professional jester. It is difficult not to sympathize for once with Rymer, who, for all his regrettably crude ebullience of expression, does sometimes hit the nail on the head. "Now follows a long rabble of Jack-pudding farce... between Jago and Desdemona, that runs on with all the little plays, jingle, and trash below the patience of any Country Kitchenmaid with her Sweetheart. The Venetian Donna is hard put to 't for pastime! And this is all, when they are newly got on shore, from a dismal Tempest, and when every moment she might expect to hear her Lord (as she calls him) that she runs so mad after, is arrived or lost."

Granville-Barker, however, in a brilliant analysis of the passage says "Shakespeare now stimulates suspense by giving no less than a ninety-line stretch of the scene to showing us Desdemona's silent anxiety, which he frames (for emphasis by contrast) in a bout of artificially comic distraction."
Build suspense this scene does, but it is not artificial. Nor should it be taken to indicate frivolity or low-mindedness on the part of Desdemona. Nor is it a comic sop for the groundlings.

This scene is carefully pointed in the direction of the horror to come. Read without bias, it gives a new depth to Desdemona's character, although the opposite effect has too often obtained. It prepares us for her urging of Othello to reinstate Cassio, as it shows her taking here Emilia's part; it also prepares us both for her final struggle with Othello and for her last words, which, as Othello sees, show that she is strong enough to go "to burning hell" for another. The reasons for including this passage are manifold.

First, notice that Emilia has only very recently been assigned to attend Desdemona (I.iii.296); lest anyone suspect Emilia's loyalty to Desdemona in the ensuing tragedy, Shakespeare gives Emilia a motive for loyalty here. Desdemona's main reason for entering into the "cheap backchat" with Iago is to arrest his attack on his wife, as the text makes perfectly clear. The passage begins with Iago's gratuitous attack on Emilia which leaves Emilia speechless; he remarks to Cassio:

Iago. Sir, would she give you so much of her lips As of her tongue she has bestow'd on me, You'd have enough.
Desdemona. Alas! she has no speech.
Iago. I know, too much: I find it, I; for when I ha' list to sleep—Marry, before your ladyship, I grant, She puts her tongue a little in her heart, And chides with thinking.

(II.i.100-6)
Iago's lines apparently refer to the fact that he does not approve his wife's silence any more than he approves her speech. Emilia at this point responds with a mild defense—"You ha' little cause to say so," whereupon Iago extends his denunciation with an insinuating and authoritative

Come on, come on, you are pictures out o' doors;
Bells in your parlours; wild-cats in your kitchens;
Saints in your injuries; devils being offended;
Players in your housewifery; and housewives in your beds.

(III.i.109-12)

It is here that Desdemona enters the argument, as an advocate of Emilia, who has been attacked. Her motive is probably sisterly concern. When she says to Iago, "O, fie upon thee slanderer" (III.i.113) she is not joking or flirting with Iago, she is saying, as the text shows, "Fie upon thee slanderer." This statement can be missed only with difficulty, and apparently it has been by those who share the antifeminist tradition that maintains women never say what they mean—if a woman says "No" she really means "Yes," and if she says, "Fie, slanderer" she really means "Aren't you cute and isn't this fun," which is how most commentators seem to take it. The implication of Rymer's comment which Ridley would have hit the nail on the head is that Desdemona really enjoys this banter so much that she has been doing it during the voyage and she continues it forgetting that her husband may be dead or dying; there is, however, no evidence for such a view. Othello later discounts Desdemona's honest clear denials, but Shakespeare's play should have taught its admirers and students not to follow suit. The dramatist here intends to discredit
antifeminist thinking; but although he imagined many things, he did not imagine the strength of the derogatory tradition.

Shakespeare wrote in Desdemona a consistent character who is, as has been generally believed, always and constantly beyond flirting with Iago; commentators aside, most audiences find her thoroughly admirable, I suspect, including those low-minded groundlings who Ridley assumes crave nothing but laughter. Rymer may have been reluctant to grant her words their usual denotations and her character consistency and nobility because he disapproves of her marrying a Moor. Shakespeare, however, carefully avoided this theme of disapproval; indeed, he articulates it and discredits it, as Frank Kermode has pointed out: "To Cinthio the point of the story is, briefly, that Desdemona made an unhappy choice in marrying a man so different from her in every way . . . [but] Cinthio's moral is expressed only by Brabantio and Iago." 4 Shakespeare has gone to some trouble to obliterate racism from his play, and to keep Desdemona above reproach.

After she has called Iago a slanderer, he responds with another gibe characteristic of his fixation on the physical plane—"You rise to play, and go to bed to work" (II.i.115). Emilia answers with an understatement the intent of which may be to change the subject—"You shall not write my praise": Emilia may have been trying here also to lighten the atmosphere. Iago, however, continues his nasty tone with "No, let me not." Given this context, Desdemona's subsequent request to Iago can easily be taken as a blocking action,
intended to keep Iago from further attack on Emilia, for it would be unthinkable (were we not dealing with Iago) for him to continue attacking women when forced to aim at his General's wife. Desdemona is aware that Iago will not dare attack her, and she presents herself as his target, and insists on having his attention, not because she wants or needs it, but to divert him from Emilia and blunt his general denunciation of women.

Indeed, this rather aggressive insistence by Desdemona that Iago praise her has its desired effect, for he immediately becomes somewhat more respectful:

O gentle lady, do not put me to 't.
For I am nothing, if not critical.

(II.i.118-9)

With this he tries to back off, but Desdemona's continued hostility to him is clear when she insists on keeping him in his corner by replying, "Come on, assay . . ." (II.i.120). She asks then, "There's one gone to the harbour?" and in case the audience is unaware (as it sadly has been) of her intent, she makes the aside "I am not merry," another line it is difficult to fit in Rymer's and Ridler's interpretation. Again insisting on Iago's praise, she terms his intended wit "old paradoxes, to make fools laugh i' the alehouse" (II.i.139). There is no reason to insist that Shakespeare did not share Desdemona's opinion of Iago's view of women.

The most ironic moment of all, however, suggests perhaps more clearly than any single passage in all the plays that Shakespeare was painfully aware of the oppression of women. Desdemona, who later
proves herself to be an unassailable woman, asks Iago, who will
destroy her, what he would say of an unassailable woman, and he
replies with a description of one who has wisdom and self-control as
well as beauty. But Iago's conclusion is sadly true: should she
escape slander and death, the unassailable woman will be discounted:

Iago. She was a wight, if ever such wight were––
Desdemona. To do what?
Iago. To suckle fools, and chronicle small beer.

(II.i.158-60)

When Desdemona replies, "O most lame and impotent conclusion: do not
learn of him Emilia, though he be thy husband," and the remainder of
the action of the play reinforces her vision and all she represents
as opposed to Iago's and his, it is difficult not to conclude that
the dramatist concurred with her. Even her interruptive "To do what?"
seems to be a device to emphasize Iago's bitterly ironic answer.

One may assume that Shakespeare wrote this passage for a reason,
and included it in his most tightly constructed play for a purpose.
We may speculate as to what that purpose may have been and come up
with answers different from the one I suggest here, but in reading
it we must at the very least credit Desdemona's words with their
traditional denotations. If we do so, I think that most readers will
see that Shakespeare is here using his paragon of wives, Desdemona,
to disestablish a more insidious species of antifeminism than that
which informed the King of Navarre's interdictions against women in
the opening of Love's Labour's Lost. Thus we see that the dises­
tablishment of the antifeminist position is another of the deeply
ironic processes which contribute to the powerful general effect of
the tragedy of Othello.

4. Hierarchic ethics in The True Chronicle History of King Lear contrasted with the egalitarian ideas of King Lear

One is tempted to assert on the basis of Othello alone that Shakespeare recognized that women generally are oppressed by the derogatory stereotypes which have been traditionally assigned to them, but it is perhaps the better part of valor to leave the question open. We should consider, however, that recognition of this traditional oppression is the only requisite for a feminist outlook and feminist impulses. Before oppression can be stopped it must be noticed, and for those who see themselves as active contributors to human happiness, an effort to combat evil follows quickly on its recognition. Whether or not he did it consciously, Shakespeare repeatedly pointed up cases where women were unjustly maltreated. In fact, in many such cases the emphasizing, pointing elements in the plays, those devices which arrest our attention, have been considered impediments, as the example from Othello discussed above illustrates. Leonato's quick belief of the slander directed
at Hero and Hero's quick forgiveness of her father and Claudio; Hamlet's attack on Ophelia and her ready willingness to accept him as if nothing had happened in the play scene which follows; Desdemona's speaking after she has been choked to death to clear her husband of the crime: these are only some of the puzzles one might explain if the hypothesis that Shakespeare intended to point up the injustice dealt to worthy women were accepted. He may have emphasized the women's forgiveness because it shows how little they deserved the maltreatment. The same hypothesis would go a long way toward explaining the unusual character of All's Well That Ends Well: that is, it may have been conceived as a "consciousness-raising" work wherein injustice to women is unmistakably illustrated for purposes of correction. Several questions which have been raised about Measure for Measure might similarly be understood under such an hypothesis. In both these plays not one but two women, the heroine and a subordinate figure, are victims of derogatory concepts regarding the whole class, concepts which are widely held today and which were publicly articulated in Shakespeare's day.

Of all these oppressed heroines, however, Cordelia is an archetype, as her father is the archetype of the Dolorosus, or Weeping Father. A close study of her case may throw light on some of Shakespeare's motives in creating several other wronged women: Julia, Hero, Ophelia, Isabella, Helena, Imogen, Perdita. Alfred Harbage has noticed that "the playwright is always at his best when portraying a true woman falsely accused." It may be that he was particularly inspired by true women falsely accused because he was making an effort
through them to change attitudes towards women. One may ask how emphasis on unjustly suffering women can be expected to effect change. Consider this analogy: for Christians the suffering Christ gives pause partly because they feel—thanks to the Doctrine of Original Sin—that to some extent they drove the nails, yet they are cleansed of guilt by Christ's death and forgiveness; so the suffering, forgiving Shakespearean heroines give pause—they arrest the audience's attention. Although the audience may find consolation with the Dolorosi who enjoy the heroines' forgiveness, their main interest remains with the heroines themselves: witness the fact that until now the Dolorosi group in Shakespeare has gone unnoticed. Such a focus on the suffering heroine, like that of the Christian witnesses of the crucifixion, prompts a re-examination of moral codes. Thus what Harbage has called Shakespeare's "best" may derive from the fact that with these portraits of suffering women Shakespeare was sending a message.

In comparing Lear's agony and the Virgin's and in comparing these women's forgiveness to Christ's, I have tried also to suggest a mythic level of response. This level is particularly evident in King Lear. Here Shakespeare has combined his recognition of the strength, virtue, and helplessness of the unmarried daughter with a consciousness of the injustice of the universe and the power of human evil. Cordelia is the hero of the play with her father. She gains economic and political strength through her husband while her father, losing that, simultaneously gains the spiritual wisdom Cordelia already had; her power-gain makes it possible for her to mani-
fest her devotion to her father. Such a good woman, backed by an
amy, is not enough, however; for human society (in which her sisters
define themselves as sexual manipulators of men) is far too suscep-
tible to error. Cordelia is in a sense a dying god, whose example
teaches, as Christ's did, new ways of human interaction.

Vast concepts such as these are not without precedent in Lear
criticism. In Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear,
John F. Danby gives Cordelia even more importance: "To understand
Cordelia is to understand the whole play. In all Shakespeare's work
character as such must be subordinated to the 'idea' which ensures
'the organic coherence of the whole.' This idea, in King Lear, is
the idea of Nature. . . . And [Cordelia] is not only Nature—the
Nature violated in society. She is also Art—the Art pledged to
present and express the wholeness society violates. Cordelia is the
apex of Shakespeare's mind." 9 Danby examines and corrects the long
critical tradition which finds Cordelia at fault in the first scene;
he finds "character-criticism," including that of Coleridge and
Bradley, insufficient to deal with "the apex of Shakespeare's mind."
It is not my purpose here to evaluate or criticize Danby's view
(although it is generally congruent with my own) or anyone else's,
but merely to point out a few processes working in King Lear which
to my knowledge have not been noticed before and which relate directly
to the question of how Cordelia, the archetypal suffering heroine,
was conceived by Shakespeare.

We would like to know what was in Shakespeare's mind: it does
not make the plays better or worse to know that, but it does satisfy the aficionado's curiosity. An easy and certain way to learn at least part of what was in his mind is to look at the sources he used: It is almost universally accepted that in creating the part of Cordelia Shakespeare looked at the Leir play, among other sources. What all the known sources taken together do not contain that is yet contained in Shakespeare's play may be construed as material Shakespeare consciously chose to add. We may then narrow our search for his intention to a consideration of what possible motives he may have had for adding this particular material. By the same token, his deletions from the sources may aid our understanding of authorial intention; of course, neither additions nor deletions will unalterably prove anything, but they are the best evidence we have.

The Leir play is only one of nine possible sources cited by Bullough, and Shakespeare may have looked at all of them; in the Arden preface Kenneth Muir suggests a poetic source and two narrative sources which are not included by Bullough. Reconstruction of Shakespeare's uses of all these sources is impossible to detail accurately, of course, but in none of them does Cordelia die by murder: she is either happy and alive at the end or she dies by her own hand in prison. Shakespeare's choice to have her die and his assignment of her death to an agency of chance and evil have by turns appalled and dismayed readers of King Lear. She was safely rescued by Tate; Johnson could not bear even to read the last scenes of the play. This death is for many readers the most painful in all of
The *Leir* play ended happily, but it is (contrary to the view of Tolstoi, who liked it better than Shakespeare's, possibly because of a language problem) a supremely ridiculous and unconvincing play. It is a commonplace of discussions on the two plays that the kneeling contest in *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* is the high point of ridiculousness, but the matter is usually dismissed there. Keeping in mind the possibility that Shakespeare may have shared our enlightenment about the oppression of women, let us look at this source and try to see some of the reasons why the play disgusts most readers. The *Leir* play articulates very crude and extreme statements of "woman's place." Since it also articulates uncritically an extreme statement of proper relations between retainers and kings, a side-glance here at the case of Perillus, who becomes Kent in *King Lear*, will make clear the fulsome and crudity of its author's acceptance of traditional values. Toward the end of the play Leir and Perillus are nearly dead of starvation, and Perillus offers Leir his arm to eat:

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0, if you love me, as you do profess
Or ever thought well of me in my life,
[He strips up his arme.
Feed on this flesh, whose veynes are not so dry
But there is virtue left to comfort you. 10
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Leir, to his credit, replies, "I am no Caniball," but the author's stamp of approval on Perillus' offer is certainly implicit in Cordella's calling Perillus the "Myrrour of vertue and true honesty" shortly after in the reconciliation scene.
In the opening scene of the play similar extreme statements of duty come from Gonerill. Shakespeare also has Goneril exaggerate the daughter's profession of duty, but he has toned down the material in the *Leir* play considerably:

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I hope my gracious father makes no doubt
Of any of his daughters love to him:
Yet for my part, to shew my zeal to you,
Which cannot be in windy words rehearst,
I prize my love to you at such a rate,
I think my life inferiour to my love.
Should you injoyne me for to tye a milstone
About my neck and leape into the Seas,
At your commaund I willingly would doe it:
Yea, for to doe you good, I would ascend
The highest Turret in all Brittany,
And from the top leape headlong to the ground:
Nay, more, should you appoyn me for to marry
The meanest vassayle in the spacious world,
Without reply I would accomplish it:
In briefe, commaund what euer you desire,
And if I fayle, no favour I require.
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(Scene III, ll. 37-54)

Here Gonorill has verbally aligned herself with the Biblical prototype of the dutiful daughter whose self-sacrifice is described in the story of Jephthah (Judges 11). Leir accepts her vows in a very different spirit from the one he uses later in greeting Perillus' extreme offer: he replies, "O how these words revive my dying soule!"

Cordella, who later proves herself to be much closer to the dutiful daughter prototype, responds to Gonorill's statement in a more critical vein: "O, how I do abhorre this flattery!" She apparently knows that her sister is swearing falsely, but she does not quarrel with the basic principle on which Gonorill's vows are based; as we will see, Cordella also believes that fathers are infinitely more impor-
tant than daughters.

A hierarchy of human worth obtains, then, in the Leir play, in which the king and father is considered more worthy of life than the retainer, and the daughters are considered less worthy than either. Having glanced at the manifestations of this hierarchical ethic elsewhere in the play, observe now its work in the kneeling scene:

Cordella. Condemne not all, because of others crime:
But looke, deare father, looke, behold and see
Thy louing daughter speaketh vnto thee.

[She kneels.

Leir. O, stand thou vp, it is my part to kneele,
And aske forgiuenesse for my former faults. [he kneels.

Cor. O, if you wish I should enjoy my breath,
Deare father rise, or I receive my death. [he riseth.

Leir. Then I will rise, to satisfy your mind,
But kneele againe, til pardon be resigned. [he kneels.

Cor. I pardon you: the word beseemes not me:
But I do say so, for to ease your knee.
You gave me life, you were the cause that I
Am what I am, who else had neuer bin.

Leir. But you gave life to me and to my friend,
Whose dayes had else, had an untimely end.
Cor. You brought me vp, when as I was but young,
And far vnable for to helpe my selfe.

Leir. I cast thee forth, when as thou wast but young,
And far vnable for to helpe thy selfe.
Cor. God, world and nature say I do you wrong,
That can endure to see you kneele so long.

King. Let me breake off this louing controversy,
Which doth reioyce my very soule to see.
Good father, rise, she is your louing daughter,
[He riseth.

And honours you with as respective duty
As if you were the Monarch of the world.
Cor. But I will neuer rise from off my knee,
Vntill I have your blessing, and your pardon
Of all my faults committed any way,
From my first birth vnto this present day.

Leir. The blessing, which the God of Abraham gaue
Vnto the trybe of Iuda, light on thee,
And multiply thy dayes, that thou mayst see
Thy childrens children prosper after thee.
Thy faults, which are iust none that I do know,
God pardon on high, and I forgive below.

[she riseth.

(Scene XXXIV)

Although the visual effect may also contribute to the ridiculous aura of this scene, it is imbalanced in other ways as well. The King, who is Cordella's husband, "rejoices" in the "loving controversy," wherein it is clear that to his wife her father's knee is more important than her own life. Leir is comfortable being treated as "the Monarch of the world," and Cordella seems to invest in him a God-like power to forgive every sin she ever committed. These exaggerated attributions of importance to Leir have probably helped in eliciting a general amused disdain from students of Shakespeare's sources. Cordella's total self-effacement and her glad subservience to her father's knee, together with his willing acceptance of her worm-like attitude and her husband's clear approval, combine to make this scene tasteless, to say the least. We may safely assume that Shakespeare recognized such crudity as readily as we do.

If he recognized it, he must also have been aware of the current vitality of this kind of thinking, for Shakespeare lived at a time when male domination of women was sometimes publicly defended. Carroll Camden has cited numerous Elizabethan documents which prescribe proper behavior for women, and the first principle of all of them (it is one which Camden himself does not seem to recognize) is that women need to be told their place, and that all of them should be in more or less the same place. It is unlikely that Shakespeare
was unaware of this type of literature: as we have seen, he makes Iago echo some of its most common themes; and Thomas Heywood, Shakespeare's colleague and rival, contributed pro-feminist works to the public debate on the nature and proper place of women. It is possible that Shakespeare himself made the conclusion that women might operate as well or better without such sources of self-definition and guidance. Rather than perpetuate such a system of male domination by having Cordelia safely married at the end as in Leir, Shakespeare has not only softened Goneril's testament at the beginning; in a sense he has the whole system self-destruct by making Cordelia its victim. Nor does he allow her suicide, probably because most of his audience considered that the ultimate crime, and he makes an effort to keep Cordelia heroically virtuous. An effort in this direction absolves Cordelia of the ambiguity in Holinshed's account which might leave us thinking she invaded England out of greed, for example: Shakespeare makes it clear that her only motive is to help her father (IV.iv.23f.). A happy ending may have been precluded, as Bullough suggests, only because Shakespeare's company wanted a tragedy; but Bullough also admits, "We cannot be sure why Shakespeare altered the Leir play the way he did." 12 He may have been sufficiently appalled at the code suggested by Perillus and Cordella to see that persons operating with these ethics could not live long.

One of the elements which make the kneeling contest laughable, then, is the fact that Leir's knee is given precedence over Cordella's whole mind and body; but for the Leir author and presumably for the
contemporary audience, this precedence was apparently fitting and proper. For them it appears not to have been laughable but instead rather touching; to its author it represented an exemplary state of father-daughter relations. What was it to Shakespeare? Posing such a question is valid critical activity because we know that he knew the play; answering it will depend on how we interpret the evidence of his changes in creating King Lear. The comparable scene in King Lear is extremely moving: Cordelia's very few quiet lines—"And so I am, I am, my lord"; "No cause, no cause"—show her to be totally forgiving, but they do not include statements from which we could deduce an unbalanced father-daughter ethic. We sense that Cordelia's self-sacrifice, which is only at this point a great risk, derives from love unadulterated by any kind of societal expectation or role-playing. Cordelia acts rather than speaks, characteristically. If she would sacrifice her life for her father's knee she has the grace to keep quiet about it.

Her silence is her mark: it has been noted by many commentators. I am not aware, however, that Shakespeare's final twist of the knife regarding Cordelia's "soft voice" has ever been related to the beginning of the play, where her father's outrage is prompted by the same quality he dies admiring. The deep irony of this situation is overwhelming, if we consider it in the context of societal expectations for women's proper behavior. As we have seen, a comparable irony obtains in Othello. Camden has found a plethora of tracts which articulate the expectation that women should be quiet,
and he notes that Iago echoes them. Shakespeare was, then, aware of
this kind of literature, and probably also aware of the severe
limitations it put upon "good" women, or women who wanted to be
considered good. His creation of at least two women, Cordelia and
Desdemona, who meet all the standards in this clearly antifeminist
context is in itself strong evidence that he disagreed with the
misogynists of his day. These women are found in tragedies; they
do not thrive.

The _Leir_ play's author, in contrast, apparently accepts the out-
of-balance father-daughter ethic, and he does so in a naive way.
Shakespeare seems to have recognized this naiveté, which depends upon
an uncritical acceptance of an inhumane view of women and the proper
place of daughters. He could not allow, it seems, a truly good
woman's survival in such an ethical system. He could not re-create
this world uncritically; hence, Cordelia's death, which leaves us
painfully aware of something rotten in human society.

Before her death Shakespeare gives us a brief glimpse of a
human world built on a vastly different ethic. Compare again the
kneeling scene in _The True Chronicle History of King Leir_ with Lear's
vision of life in prison in the caged bird scene. Lear wishes only
to be alive and in Cordelia's company; for perfect happiness, he sees
no need for power over anyone, least of all his daughter. In Lear's
vision the father-daughter relationship is in perfect balance. Lear
has learned a democratic ethic in his painful experience in the storm;
his pomp has taken its physic, and he requires for joy only an honest
and loving one-to-one communication with his child. His willingness
to live on this new level is what makes his loss of his child so excruciating, to Johnson and to others.

It seems likely, then, that Shakespeare recognized in the Leir play, in the antifeminist tracts cited by Camden and quoted by Iago, and indeed in the life all around him, that a major source of human pain was the imbalance of power relationships illustrated therein. I think Lear's reference to "an excellent thing in woman" as he searches for life in Cordelia was consciously chosen by the playwright to drive the audience's memories to consider their easy platitudes about what women should be, and perhaps to drive them to consider the beginning of the play where he found softness of voice not excellent at all. Much of Lear prompts us, as Danby says of its beginning, to "examine again our habitual approvals," to search critically for a re-consideration of societal hierarchies. Gloucester's and Edmund's considerations on bastardy point us in the same direction, only to lead toward confirmation of the habitual approvals. But the great ideas of the storm require us to ask again and again, "What sort of thing is man?" perhaps in the hope that better knowledge of that "poor forked animal" will bring with it a proper humility in man's defining what is "excellent . . . in woman."
5. Conclusion

Whether or not Shakespeare intended Cordelia (and her sisters, who can be seen as working in opposite ways to the same effect) to shatter stereotypes, she has certainly done so: there is only one Cordelia in all of western literature, when all is said and done. As feminists would have all people do, Shakespeare seems to have treated his women characters as unique and individual, and so they live in the cultural consciousness. Possibly their literary existence has wreaked untold beneficial effects in the lives of real women. The final test of any hypothesis, however, is its use in explaining what was hitherto inexplicable or unsatisfactory. The feminist reading of Desdemona's "banter" satisfies this criterion, for it makes a long-vexed passage simple, clear, and consistent with most readings of the remainder of the play. The ironies carried by the Patres Dolorosi generally and by Lear particularly are perhaps less obvious evidence that Shakespeare questioned traditional roles, but it is at least certain that his plays repeatedly depict the sad and unfortunate effects, for men as well as women, of male oppression and societal structures based on sexual difference.
CHAPTER IV

NOTES

1 Riverside, p. 1057.


4 Riverside, p. 1198.

5 An effort to rehabilitate the reputation of a particular woman may account for the fifth act of Antony and Cleopatra, for example. Lest it be objected that Desdemona's ability to speak may be accounted for by reference to stage convention, we note that what she says is not dictated by the convention, nor is Shakespeare constrained to use conventions just because they are available.

6 See, for example, the extensive bibliography of Elizabethan tracts on women in Carroll Camden, The Elizabethan Woman (Houston, 1952), pp. 303-315.

7 Harbage, p. 446.

8 Here I follow Carolyn Heilbrun's use of the word hero when applied to women. See Toward a Recognition of Androgyny (New York, 1973), p. 49, where a woman hero is one who "bears[s] the burden of the tragic action."

10 All my quotations from the *Leir* play are contained in the excerpts included in Kenneth Muir's Arden edition of *King Lear* (London, 1952), pp. 221-234.

11 Although Camden is the most sensitive writer on Elizabethan views of Shakespeare's women I have found, and he is certainly the most learned, writing in 1952 he could not possibly have foreseen the ironies that the feminist enlightenment of the 60's and 70's would make apparent in his work. His preface states, "In this book, then, we endeavor to learn the nature of the Elizabethan woman, philosophically and actually. We try to discover what role she was intended to play and how her education prepared her for it." *The Elizabethan Woman*, p. 9.


13 For example, Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 252: "She speaks—it is hard to believe it—scarcely more than a hundred lines; and yet no character in Shakespeare is more absolutely individual or more ineffaceably stamped on the memory of his readers."
CHAPTER V
SOURCE CHANGES IN THE WINTER'S TALE

1. Introduction

Evidence from Love's Labour's Lost and from our consideration of several recurring patterns in the comedies and tragedies tends to confirm the hypothesis that Shakespeare was aware of the oppression of women and tried to mitigate it. In this chapter we will consider evidence from the dramatic romance or tragicomedy, and we will use the method best suited to ascertaining authorial intention, source comparison. A study of some of the source changes in the construction of The Winter's Tale provides further evidence that Shakespeare gave active and sympathetic consideration to "the woman question."

2. Greene's Mamillia: blaming the blasphemous blabs

It is well known that Robert Greene's Pandosto (1592) provided the main source for The Winter's Tale and that Shakespeare followed his source closely: as several comparative studies of the two works
are available, there is no need to recount here each of the similarities and differences. As J. H. P. Pafford remarks in his Arden introduction, however, "the extent of Shakespeare's knowledge and use of Greene has not been fully explored." This is particularly true regarding Shakespeare's use of one of Greene's earlier novels, *Mamillia* (1583): as Pafford also remarks, "the name Mamilius (and perhaps other things) may have come from Greene's *Mamillia.*"¹ Pafford does not tell us what the "other things" might be, but I will in this chapter offer some suggestions of my own as to Shakespeare's possible use of thematic material from *Mamillia.* It may be that Shakespeare read this work very early in his career and that his memories of it influenced many other plays besides *The Winter's Tale.*

The only evidence we have that Shakespeare read *Mamillia* is his use of the name *Mamilius* in *The Winter's Tale,* and his use of another work by Greene as the source for the same play. It is not certain, then, that Shakespeare read *Mamillia.* It may be that he did and that Greene knew it, or that Greene was aware of Shakespeare's familiarity with his works: this would help explain Greene's bitter resentment apparent in his *Groats-worth of witte, bought with a million of Repentance* (1592). If Shakespeare did read *Mamillia,* he probably also read its sequel, *The Anatomy of Lovers' Flatteries,* which was published with it. An early reading of these two works might account for some of Shakespeare's freedom from stereotypes for women in the early plays. As we will see, the character Mamillia and the book as a whole openly question some long-established
generalizations about women. Mamillia may have been a great-aunt, so to speak, of the Princess of France in *Love's Labour's Lost*.

The concern with re-defining the place of women which we have traced in earlier plays would be accounted for in part if we accepted the idea that Shakespeare read *Mamillia* early. It was published in 1583, when he was nineteen years old, with the following title: "Mamillia, a Mirror or Looking-glass for The Ladies of England. Wherein is deciphered, howe Gentlemen under the perfect substance of pure love, are oft inveigled with the shadow of lewde luste: and their fime faith, brought asleepe by fading fancie: until wit ioyned with wisdom, doth awake it by the helpe of reason. By Robert Greene Graduate in Cambridge." If this were not enough to impress a nineteen-year-old, Roger Portington's prefatory poem might elicit respect: there the scholarly author of *Mamillia* is advantageously compared to Clio, Homer, Virgil, and Ovid.

Although it is not clearly indicated in the title, the main theme of the novel is that women, contrary to their reputation, are generally constant and loyal in love. The title suggests that the heroine Mamillia is the focus of the story, but at least as much attention is devoted to the anti-hero, Pharicles, "a youth of wonderful witte, and no lesse wealth, whome both nature and experience had taught the old proverbe, as perfect as his *Pater noster*, he that cannot dissemble, cannot lyve." Just before the climax of the novel, this interesting dissembler is drawn into a discussion wherein the major theme of the action is treated literally and openly. Now
Pharicles has been engaged to Mamillia and simultaneously to her
cousin Publia, who has died, and, forgiving him his sins, has left
him all her money; at this point in the novel he is temporarily
sojourning in Sargasso, Sicily, having left Italy for obvious reasons.
Here he is invited, by some citizens who believe that Pharicles'
travels must have made him wise, to settle an argument "whether the
man or the woman be more constant in love."

Remembering that we have evidence that Shakespeare himself
may have read this passage, notice that it bears directly on at
least one aspect of "the woman question":

Pharicles ... found his mind clogged with a double care. For
to praise men for their loyalty he found his own conscience a
just accuser of their inconstancy, to condemn women for their
fickleness he saw Mamillia and Publia two precedents of perfect
affection: yet for fashion sake he made this or such like answer.

If credit, Madam, may be given to those ancient authors
whose wit, wisdom, and learning hath shrined them in the
famous temple of immortality, your demand is answered and the
question easily decided. For Socrates, Plato, yea and Aristotle
himself, who spent all their time in searching out the secret
nature of all things, assigned this as a particular quality
appertaining to womenkind, namely, to be fickle and inconstant,
alleging this astronomical reason, that Luna, a feminine and
mutable planet, hath such predominant power in the constitution
of their complexion, because they be phlegmatic, that of necessity
they must be fickle, mutable, and inconstant, whereas Choler,
wherewith men do abound, is contrary, and therefore by consequence
stable, firm and without change; so that by so much the more the
body is phlegmatic, by so much the more the mind is fickle, and
where the body is more choleric, there the mind is most constant.
To leave these rules of Astronomy, and to come to human reason,
Pindarus, Homer, Hesiodus, Ennius, Virgil, Martial, Propertius,
and many authors more, whose pithy and golden sentences have in
all ages been holden as divine Oracles, have in all their writings
with one consent averred, that the natural disposition of women
is framed of contraries: now liking, now loathing, delighting in
this, and now again despising the same: loving and hating: yea
laughing and weeping, and all with one wind: so that it is their
natural constitution in this one property to be like the Polipe:
that if it happen some one woman not to be variable, it is not so because it is her nature, but because she hath amended her fault by nurture. For the confirmation of the former premises, Madam, it is not necessary to infer examples, sith there is none here but could report infinite histories of such dissembling dames as have falsified their faith to their lovers, whereas the constancy of men is such, that neither hath any authors found it faulty, neither can I conjecture, if you speak as you think, your conscience can condemn them as guilty, so that to confirm the loyalty of men were as much as to prove that which is not denied. 3

Pharicles' argument is answered by the Marquess, who turns his reasoning against him, assuring him not only that phlegmatic temperaments by nature resist change, as many ancient authors observe, but also that he has no examples of specific inconstant women, whereas she can name Theseus, Demophon, Aeneas, Jason, Paris, and Ulysses as inconstant men who were loved by constant women. When she finishes, Pharicles politely retreats from his position when he hears the influential Master Famese respond: "My Lady Marquess hath played the valiant champion, and hath put in so perfect a plea to defend her client's cause, that if I have ever any case in the court, she shall be my counselor." 4

Pharicles' own actions are, of course, disproof of his claim for the constancy of men; but long before this climactic passage (Pharicles is next accused of being a spy, sentenced to death, and narrowly rescued by Mamillia) Greene has himself intruded on the narrative to emphasize its main point. Upon the death of Publia, the author remarks, "Where gentlemen (think of me what you please) I am constrained by conscience (considering the constancy of Publia) to blame those blasphemous blabs which are never in their vaine except they be breathing out some injurious speeches against the constancy
of women, not yielding any reason of their verdict or reproach, but the reckless rancor of their own perverse will pricks them forward to this despiteful folly." One can imagine a young man reading Greene and perhaps reserving his admiration here and there, but it is difficult to imagine that anyone would after reading this carelessly join the ranks of the "blasphemous blabs." The power of Greene's prose precludes it.

It may be that the upstart crow was indeed beautified with some of Greene's gentler feathers. One may conjecture that the Marquess in Mamilia may have inspired some of Shakespeare's self-confident heroines like Beatrice and Portia, although she is of course one of many such precedents. Mamilia herself represents the kind of heroine into whom Shakespeare was later to breathe life: she is constant, long-suffering, wise, ultimately happy, and an advocate for other women, sharing the kind of relationship described in Chapter II above under the rubric "sisterhood." For example, in the sequel to Mamilia, a shorter work titled The Anatomy of Lovers' Flatteries, Mamilia describes for the "young and virtuous virgin the Lady Modesta" all she has learned about the male art of amatory cozening. Actually, the greater part of Mamilia's advice is given over to the story of Silvia Velasco of Toledo, who, blessed with a rich father and perfect liberty in the choice of a husband, chose to marry a poor scholar, passing over an old rich suitor and a young, merely handsome one; however much one may suspect Robert Greene of having a poor scholar's purpose in dwelling on such a tale,
The Anatomy of Lovers' Flatteries is at least superficially feminist in its cast. It grows from a respect for and sympathy with the point of view of Silvia Velasco, Mamillia, and the Lady Modesta. Shakespeare was to command a more thoroughgoing understanding of women's points of view.

As it had in Mamillia, again in The Anatomy the classical tradition comes in for what one might call a feminist reprimand; in this case Ovid receives particular chastening. Mamillia writes:

That lascivious poet Ovid, Madam Modesta, whom justly we may term the foe to womankind, hath not only prescribed in his bookes de arte Amandi, a most monstrous method to all men, whereby they may learn to allure simple women to the fulfilling of their lust, and the losing of their own honor, but also hath set down his books de remedio amoris, to restrain their affections from placing their fancies but for a time upon any Dame, which books are so sauced with such blasphemous descriptions of women's infirmities, as they show that with the Satire he could out of one mouth blow both hot and cold. Yea Juvenal, Tibullus, Propertius, Calimachus, Phileta, Anacreon, and many other authors have set down caveats for men, as armours of proof to defend themselves from the alluring subtleties of women. But alas, there is none contrariwise which hath set down any prescript rules wherewith women should guide themselves from the feigned assault of men's pretended flattery, but hath left them at discovert to be maimed with the glozing gunshot of their protested perjuries, which seemeth repugnant to nature. For if the silly lamb had more need of succour than the lusty lion, if the weak and tender vine standeth in more need of props than the strong oaks, women sure, whom they count the weak vessels, had more need to be counselled than condemned, to be fortified than to be feared, to be defended than with both Nature and Art to be assaulted. 6

It may be that this kind of thinking about some of the classical authors, coming as it did to Shakespeare from the Cambridge graduate Robert Greene and bearing his clear stamp of approval, helped liberate the younger man's mind not only from traditional stereotypic thinking about women but also from other intellectual trammels. It
is at least clear that not only in writing *The Winter's Tale* but also in a much broader consideration of almost all his work, Shakespeare was far from being with Mamillia's Ovid "the foe of womankind."

His portraits of constant women—Helena, Desdemona, Imogen, Hermione, and others—are surpassing. Moreover, he seems to have intentionally avoided drawing inconstant women, perhaps because he was influenced by *Mamillia* and *The Anatomy*. Of course one can only speculate on matters of authorial intention; but it is interesting to note that his most inconstant, changeable women, Cressida, Anne in *Richard the Third*, and Cleopatra, are all required to be so by their historical sources. Shakespeare was confronted with the historical fact that the widow of the Prince of Wales married Richard Duke of Gloucester, and to fulfill the demands of the sources dramatically he made Richard a Pharicles-type whose smooth flattery can convince a woman of anything. George Brandes took this scene as evidence of Shakespeare's contempt for women, and although he gave only vague and slender evidence for that conclusion, it is justified even less if we consider Shakespeare's sources. It would be similarly impossible for a playwright to depict the story of Cressida without making her inconstant. In creating his Cleopatra, Shakespeare seems to be making the point in Act V that a changeable woman may develop constancy: indeed, Cleopatra's loyalty to Antony has raised many critical doubts about the consistency of Cleopatra's character in the play, but it is possible that Shakespeare fully intended to draw her just as he did. If we consider that all three of these inconstant women were not Shakespeare's own creations insofar as they were all well-known
historical figures, and if we put them alongside Shakespeare's several paragons of constancy whom he wilfully created, we can fairly conclude that Shakespeare himself did not share the opinion of the "blasphemous blabs" on women. It may even be that he consciously set out to defend them against the traditional "assaults" of "Nature and Art" which Greene refers to.

3. Paulina, Shakespeare's feminist heroine

If Shakespeare did consciously defend women from such assaults, he certainly created a useful agent for the cause when he added the character Paulina to Greene's story. Not only in action but also in character Paulina is admirably suited to bring down male injustice. Greene's story is subtitled "The Triumph of Time," and Shakespeare's might be subtitled "The Triumph of Paulina and Time." It is through her agency that the stark and depressing Pandosto, wherein the Queen dies and the King commits suicide after finding out that the lovely girl he has tried to rape is his own daughter, is elevated into a tragicoedy so lofty in final effect as to be often mentioned with The Tempest as one of Shakespeare's masterworks on the theme of reconciliation.
For some reason, perhaps because she is a female character who speaks out firmly in disagreement with the king, entirely heedless of her reputation as a "good wife" or "good woman," or more simply, because she is a female character, Paulina's role in The Winter's Tale has been widely discounted. Oscar James Campbell's article on source changes in the play in The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare, for example, omits all mention of Paulina. Harbage admires her, but with an edge in his praise he calls her "the grandest scold in drama." In his introduction to the Pelican Shakespeare, Baldwin Maxwell sees her function as "to torture the king," no more. Hallett Smith, in the more recent Riverside Shakespeare, has more respect for Paulina's dramatic function: "The dignified patience of the accused queen, Hermione, makes necessary the presence of some other character to express resistance to Leontes' tyranny, so Shakespeare creates Paulina, who in her fearless assertion of her mistress' innocence is reminiscent of Emilia in the final scene of Othello, and in her later manipulation of affairs toward a happy ending recalls the capable women in the problem comedies." There has been an undercurrent of disapproval in response to Paulina generally, but Shakespeare, I suspect, would not have appreciated having his creation labelled "the grandest scold in drama." She does scold, but she is not "a scold"; rather, she is a fully-drawn dramatic character, possessing both verisimilitude and individuality, as do many other Shakespearean heroines who have been dismissed with this kind of one-word label. Nor would Shakespeare probably have chosen the word "scold" to
describe her action: squirrels and jaybirds scold and make a lot of noise, whereas, like an eagle, Paulina attacks. Here, for example, she echoes the majestically angry Lear in his rage:

What studied torments, tyrant, hast for me?
In leads or oils? What old or newer torture
Must I receive, whose every word deserves
To taste of thy most worst? Thy tyranny,
Together working with thy jealousies
(For girls of nine), O think what they have done,
And then run mad indeed: stark mad! for all
Thy by-gone fooleries were but spices of it.
That thou betray'dst Polixenes, 'twas nothing;
That did but show thee, of a fool, inconstant
And damnable ingrateful: nor was't much,
Thou would'st have poison'd good Camillo's honour,
To have him kill a king; poor trespass,
More monstrous standing by: whereof I reckon
The casting forth to crows thy baby daughter,
To be or none or little, though a devil
Would have shed water out of fire, ere done't:
Nor is't directly laid to thee the death
Of the young prince, whose honourable thoughts
(Thoughts high for one so tender) cleft the heart
That could conceive a gross and foolish sire
Blemish'd his gracious dam: this is not, no,
Laid to thy answer: but the last—O lords,
When I have said, cry 'woe!'—the queen, the queen,
The sweet'st, dear'st creature's dead: and vengeance for't
Not dropped down yet.

But, O thou tyrant!
Do not repent these things, for they are heavier
Than all thy woes can stir: therefore betake thee
To nothing but despair. A thousand knees
Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
Upon a barren mountain, and still winter
In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
To look that way thou wert.

(III.ii.175-201,207-214)

We shall return to this passage later.

Neither Mamillia nor Pandosto contains a figure like Paulina,
although Mamillia's strong counsel to Lady Modesta grows from a sisterly impulse not entirely unlike that which gives rise to Paulina's intercession in Hermione's troubles. We have seen in Chapter II above that Shakespeare repeatedly depicts sisterly relationships among women throughout his career, but his characterization here represents the culmination of his understanding of this kind of interaction. Paulina also shares important characteristics of the self-directed heroines of the earlier comedies: she is fatherless and husbandless for most of the play. Her husband, Antigonus, disappears early and she is thus free to be responsible for keeping Hermione alive in secret. Even before his death, however, Antigonus makes it clear that he is not the traditional husband who demands and retains control over his wife's speech and action:

Leontes. How!
Away with that audacious lady! Antigonus,
I charg'd thee that she should not come about me.
I knew she would.
Antigonus. I told her so, my lord,
On your displeasure's peril and on mine,
She should not visit you.
Leontes. What! canst not rule her?
Paulina. From all dishonesty he can: in this—
Unless he take the course that you have done,
Commit me for committing honour—trust it,
He shall not rule me.
Antigonus. La you now, you hear:
When she will take the rein I let her run;
But she'll not stumble.

(II.iii.41-52)

Having clearly conveyed to Paulina his own disapproval of her action, he is nonetheless willing in this national emergency to trust
her, when she appears before Leontes with the newborn princess. Antigonus only questions her methods: he would be very glad if she could indeed persuade the king to relent from his anger. So could Camillo, who is at the end of the play glad to marry Paulina, by then an old woman with a clear history of making major decisions independently.

It is interesting to observe that Antigonus' support of Paulina's advocacy represents the second time in the play that a husband, failing to persuade someone of a desired point, leaves the task to his wife. Leontes, unlike Antigonus, is first jealous of his wife's success at the art of rhetoric, following as it does close upon his own failure at it. It is this resentment of Hermione's rhetorical strength which triggers Leontes' distrust and sexual jealousy. Whereas Antigonus not only accepts his wife's disobedience but also expresses confidence in her rhetorical ability in the passage quoted above, Leontes seems to find it impossible to imagine that his wife Hermione could persuade Polixenes to stay by legitimate means, that is, with the force of her wit and reason. "If she's got something I couldn't obtain, then she must have used her body" is a line of thinking possible only for those who assume that women's minds cannot be so sharp as men's. In discussing the grounds of his distrust with Camillo, Leontes is gripped by a fear that other courtiers notice his failure to persuade and Hermione's success in persuading: he thinks that such notice alone can bring him disgrace, adultery aside:
Leontes. Is he won yet?
Hermione. He'll stay, my lord.
Leontes. At my request he would not.

(I.ii.86-87)

A little over one hundred lines later, Leontes has reeled into a full-blown conviction, and Camillo's notice of his inadequate rhetoric is all he needs to be assured that Camillo also "knows" the Queen is an adulteress:

Leontes. Camillo, this great Sir will yet stay longer.
Camillo. You had much ado to make his anchor hold:
When you cast out, it still came home.
Leo. Didst note it?
Cam. He would not stay at your petitions; made His business more material.
Leo. Didst perceive it?
Leo. How cam't, Camillo,
That he did stay?
Cam. At the good queen's entreaty.
Leo. At the queen's, be't: 'good' should be pertinent,
But so it is, it is not. Was this taken
By any understanding pate but thine?
For thy conceit is soaking, will draw in
More than the common blocks: not noted, is't,
But of the finer natures? by some several
Of head-piece extraordinary? Lower messes
Perchance are to this business purblind? say!

(I.ii.212-28)

Thus Leontes' whole identity is threatened and cracked only because he couldn't easily respect his wife's mind: unlike Antigonus, he could not recognize a woman to be his peer. Notice that he also suffers from a belief in a hierarchy of intelligence, wherein, presumably, he and Camillo preside over an assembly which includes "the common blocks," and no telling where the women would fall. It is probably no accident that Leontes' blindness to women's wit and
his own sense of intellectual superiority echoes the thinking of the King of Navarre in Love's Labour's Lost, while Hermione's playful sarcasm with Polixenes in the opening scene—"A lady's Verily's/As potent as a lord's"—echoes the rebellious tone taken by the Princess of France and her comic grand-daughters, Rosalind, Beatrice, and Portia.

Antigonus, however, is not a tyrannical husband whose presence might limit the dramatic vitality of his wife: he is related to Paulina in much the same way as the Good Duke is related to Rosalind in the Forest of Arden: kindly and largely absent. Shakespeare makes Antigonus allude to their daughters perhaps in order to show the normalcy of their marriage, although we are told nothing more of them than that they are ages eleven, nine, and five, and Antigonus will geld them if Hermione is proven unchaste (II.i.44-45). Antigonus' death is not to be taken as a statement about men who let their wives speak (as it may be supposed), but about men who don't follow the dictates of their highest faculties: his crime is to abandon Perdita, and his punishment is swift.

The free rein Antigonus allows Paulina in the confrontation scene is necessary if she is to carry out her assigned role as agent in changing the stark tale of Pandosto into an acceptable tragicomedy. Someone must keep the queen alive, and keep the secret that she is alive: the character must be kind and bold, accustomed to being thought eccentric, fearless of common opinion, and female so as to be free of any overtones of sexual involvement with Hermione during the
frozen years.

To create such a character was not at all a problem for Shakespeare, however. One imagines that he enjoyed it very much. Shakespeare gave Paulina not only Antigonus' "rein" but also the necessary courage and intelligence for making a strong advocacy of Hermione's cause. Earlier in his career he had depicted such women in Portia and Beatrice, women capable of intelligent advocacy. Paulina, like her creator, is older, wiser, and playing for higher stakes: whereas Portia argues successfully only for the life of her husband's friend and Beatrice successfully convinces her lover that he must challenge his best friend to a duel to prove her cousin's chastity, Paulina must be equal to restoring the health of an entire state.

Let us consider some of the tasks Paulina must perform. First, if the play is to remain tragicomic and not tragic, someone must separate the baby from the accused queen. Consider what we might have missed had Paulina not appeared with the baby. Someone, somehow, would have had to bear a much more horrifying responsibility, for if the play is to go on and Perdita lost that she may be found, the baby must be separated from its mother. Without a character whose intentions are good but misplaced, like Paulina, Shakespeare might have had to drag onto the stage evil, heartless characters of the ilk of the hired murderers of Macduff's family in Macbeth, or the murderers of the princes in Richard the Third, characters of the sort which, we may safely observe in the lofty tone of Granville-Barker, Shakespeare avoided whenever he could. Such characters would seriously
strain the limits of the tragicomic genre. In Greene's novel and in Francis Sabie's rendering of the story, the scene where the baby is taken from the imprisoned mother is extremely heavy, unbearably so in anything but tragedy. In each case the mother makes a long and soul-rending lament at the parting. As a matter of fact, I suspect that Shakespeare may have got the idea for Lady Macbeth's most vicious brag from reading Sabie's stories, for there the true mother laments that her lost child must drink seawater rather than "mother's sugred milk" just before the step-mother attempts to dash out the brains of the new-found baby she considers to be a bastard child of her husband's: two more contrasting "motherly" responses could not easily be imagined. Happily, the stepmother is persuaded to kindness when she finds out the child comes complete with some jewels her husband found with it. In Shakespeare's rendering of the story, the queen herself has the idea that the sight of the child will soften the king's anger, as Emilia tells Paulina. Emilia also estimates that Paulina will succeed: "There is no lady living/ So meet for this great errand" (II.i.45-46). So Paulina is not to be blamed for the failure of her plan.

The Hermione-Paulina-Perdita connection is also crucial to the resolution of the play. In the final scene Hermione tells Perdita that she has preserved herself in order to see her:

I, knowing by Paulina that the Oracle
Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserv'd
Myself to see the issue.

(V.iii.125-8)
Evidently Hermione is referring here to Paulina's interpretation of the Oracle's "if that which is lost be not found," because Hermione herself heard the Oracle. Immediately after hearing it, however, she faints at hearing that Mamillius is dead (III.ii.132ff.). We are thus asked to understand that without the restoration of one of her two lost children, Hermione's grief would not have been assuaged. Leontes' quick, thorough, long-lasting repentance has not been enough to revive her; it would appear that she has been told of Leontes' grief and repentance, but she has preserved her life only because she hopes to see her child again.

Hermione, then, is not a merely smiling, suffering and forgiving Griselda. Her integrity is inherited by Perdita; as we have already noticed, Perdita is able to summon some hauteur of her own and rise above Polixenes' attack at the sheep-shearing festival. Hermione's last words, few though they are, clearly emphasize her sense of a deep and transcendent relationship to her daughter:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{You gods, look down,} \\
\text{And from your sacred vials pour your graces} \\
\text{Upon my daughter's head!}
\end{align*}
\]

(V.iii.121-3)

In contrast, she touches her husband, but she has no words for him; she has forgiven him, certainly, but she does not show a sense of spiritual connection with him.

Paulina, then, serves the function of helping to preserve the link between the "dead" queen and her lost child; without her intercession we are asked to understand that the queen would have died.
To keep the queen alive is one of Paulina's primary functions in the play, but she must also keep Leontes from remarrying. Her open denunciation of the king is necessary, if she is to carry out this function: Leontes must be brought to see that he has been wrong, and he must admit it openly and submit himself to someone else. Paulina, who has been treated with such amused scorn by many critics—Harbage refers to her "familiar termagant threat," and his view of her is typical of the kindest ones, 10—must of necessity be the sort of character who can stand up to a king and keep reminding him of his errors, if the play is to end happily. Otherwise, as in the sources, he will very easily fall in love with his daughter; there is a hint of this, indeed, in The Winter's Tale: Florizel begs Leontes to speak for him because "at your request,/ My father will grant precious things as trifles," and Leontes replies, "Would he do so, I'd beg your precious mistress,/ Which he counts but a trifle" (V.i.220-3). Paulina steps in instantly at this point to quell Leontes' desires with praise of Hermione. Such a character as Paulina is then necessary also to preserve Leontes' celibacy.

She speaks as a Chorus to Leontes, saying what the sane majority in the audience would like to say; for example, in her majestically angry speech, Paulina articulates what the audience and the other courtiers feel. Identifying as we do with her there, we have a vicarious catharsis of sorts, so that we are prepared for the final reconciliation. Paulina also speaks for Hermione, telling her husband what she cannot say if she is to retain the integrity of her unspeak-
able grief.

It is Leontes, whose opinion is disestablished by his actions and later by his own word, who insults Paulina, calling her "Dame Partlet" (II.iii.75-76), "crone," and "a callat of boundless tongue, who late hath beat her husband,/ And now baits me" (II.iii.90-92). When Leontes threatens, "I'll ha' thee burnt," Paulina replies,

I care not:
It is an heretic that makes the fire
Not she which burns in it.

(II.iii.113-5)

An appropriate audience response here would be to cheer her on, not to disapprove. (This scene should go over better today than ever before, thanks to the feminist enlightenment.) Leontes' negative point of view regarding Paulina's speaking without waiting for husbandly approval is also disestablished by the comic remark of Antigonus, which Pafford says may be an aside. This remark, in any case, is very powerful in its effect because it provides some much-needed comic relief and it also asks the audience to accept with laughter their own "disobedient" women:

Leontes. A gross hag!
And lozel, thou art worthy to be hang'd
That wilt not stay her tongue.
Antigonus. Hang all the husbands
That cannot do that feat, you'll leave yourself
Hardly one subject.

(II.iii.108-10)

Leontes here has articulated the traditional derogatory view of independent women, and it is instantly put down with the laughter prompted by Antigonus' aside. Those insecure gentlemen watching the
play who may have been used to insisting upon their wives' silence
and perfect obedience would perhaps in the laughter at this line
recognize that is is after all acceptable for women to speak out,
and so bear their "authority" more gently at home after the play.
Compare the self-acceptance in the laughter at the cuckoldry jokes
in Love's Labour's Lost, where again we have a glimpse of a possible
audience response to what seems to be a manifestation of Shakespeare's
contemporary reputation for gentleness and beneficence. In any case,
it is unfortunate that critics have either dismissed Paulina from
very serious consideration as an important figure in the play, or
gone a long way toward sharing Leontes' clearly disestablished
opinion of her as a character. She is a Kent figure, a courageous
loyal counselor, not a "scold."

Like Hermione, Paulina has a capacity for forgiveness and a
certain self-effacing quality which Shakespeare found becoming not
only in some of his women characters, but also in Prince Hal, Malcolm,
Ferdinand, and Mercutio, to name a few. When Paulina realizes that
Leontes is sorry, she immediately apologizes for attacking him:

Alas! I have show'd too much
The rashness of a woman: he is touch'd
To th' noble heart. What's gone and what's past help
Should be past grief. Do not receive affliction
At my petition. . . .

(III.ii.220-24)

Leontes then shows that he is still suffering from a sense of his own
superiority, for he responds:

Thou didst speak but well
When most the truth: which I receive much better
A few years of prayer will make him more humble. At the end of the play he has grown in humility to the point that he is willing not only to be pitied by Paulina but also to put his major life decisions into her hands:

Paulina. Will you swear
Never to marry, but by my free leave?
Leontes. Never, Paulina; so be blest my spirit!

(V.i.69-71)

She has taken over the role of counselor, a position vacated by Antigonus and Camillo. Cleomenes, to be sure, is still available, and his attitude toward Paulina is clearly one of condescension in V.i. when he and Dion are trying to prevail upon Leontes to remarry. During this scene Paulina is left with the unenviable task of persuading three men to ignore the usual neuroses of statesmanship and

Care not for issue:
The crown will find an heir.
Great Alexander
Left his to th' worthiest.

(V.i.45-7)

She of course succeeds in this task, but had she not been the strong character required for her other tasks in the play, the fact that Leontes remains unmarried would perhaps seem unmotivated.

Thus we see that Paulina is the key figure in The Winter's Tale's construction, the character of them all who humanizes the dark story of Pandosto. The fact that Shakespeare has Leontes and Cleomenes refer to her in derogatory and condescending ways makes
it clear that Shakespeare was aware of common views of such daring and outspoken women, but the play also makes clear that he did not intend commentators on his plays so largely to agree with these common views. Paulina may indeed derive her name from the Apostle Paul, who set out to do no less a thing than change the world, and found some success in that effort. Paulina's creator no doubt smiled on her with satisfied respect.

4. The transfiguration of the shrew

Paulina is Shakespeare's most significant source change in The Winter's Tale: his wholesale addition of this strong outspoken woman to the story supports our hypothesis that the dramatist recognized and attempted to destroy the common stereotypes for women. Another source change of far less importance leads us in the same direction, however. Only two names in the play are suggested in the works of Greene: Mopsa and Mamillius. We have already discussed the possible source for the name Mamillius, and we will return to this name later. Shakespeare's use of the name Mopsa is also very interesting.

Not only in Pandosto but also in Francis Sabie's retelling of the Pandosto story, The Fisherman's Tale, the stepmother of the lost princess is a "shrew" named Mopsa—in Sabie it is Mepsa. Now a
complete definition of the word *shrew* as it is applied to women must be left to more thorough studies than this one, but the stepmother in Greene's story is to say the least an unpleasant person:

As soon as he was got home, entering in at the door, the child began to cry, which his wife hearing, and seeing her husband with a young babe in his arms, began to be somewhat jealous, yet marvelling that her husband should be so wanton abroad sith he was so quiet at home: but as women are naturally given to believe the worst, so his wife, thinking it was some bastard, began to crow against her goodman, and taking up a cudgel (for the master went breechless) swore solemnly that she would make clubs trumps if he brought any bastard brat within her doors. The goodman, seeing his wife in her majesty with her mace in her hand, thought it was time to bow for fear of blows, and desired her to be quiet, for there was none such matter; but if she could hold her peace they were made for ever: and with that he told her the whole matter, how he had found the child in a little boat, without any succour, wrapped in that costly mantle, and having that rich chain about the neck. But at last, when he shewed her the purse full of gold, she began to simper something sweetly, and, taking her husband about the neck kissed him after her homely fashion, saying that she hoped God had seen their want and now meant to relieve their poverty, and seeing they could get no children, had sent them this little babe to be their heir. 11

Shakespeare, whose compliment in this case all women readers may with reason quickly appreciate, deleted this woman entirely, and not because there was a scarcity of boys to act women's roles: her name is taken over by a young shepherdess at the sheep-shearing festival. To be sure, Shakespeare does not make his new Mopsa without flaws: she has bad breath (IV.iv.163-4), and she encourages her lover the Clown to buy ballads and trinkets for her from Autolycus. Her best lines emphasize her credulity: "I love a ballad in print, for then we know they are true" (IV.iv.261-2). Mopsa, Dorcas, the Clown and Autolycus are additions to the source who divert our attention
while Polixenes sorts out his feelings about his disobedient son. They also provide comic and musical relief. Shakespeare has added these characters, but he deletes the foster father's wife, perhaps because she represents such a common derogatory stereotype. Another consideration is that if the shepherd has a wife, she may be left—as she is in Greene's tale and in Sabie's—behind to mourn when her husband sails off to Sicily. The Winter's Tale already contains enough sadness for a tragiomedy, for Mamillius is dead.

5. Mamillius, the casualty of his father's oppression of his mother

Only two casualties are allowed in the play, Antigonus and Mamillius. Antigonus may be said to deserve his fate, as he obeyed the bad command of an unwise ruler and in so doing went against the dictates of his reason. Shakespeare tries to redeem Antigonus by making Leontes threaten to kill Paulina if he fails to obey, so that we can see his fear of Leontes arising from a desire to protect his wife and possibly his daughters. Nonetheless, it is difficult I suspect for many in the audience to share Paulina's sorrow when he is killed: unlike her, we saw him abandon the baby.
Mamillius is another case entirely. He is innocent, and completely so. Shakespeare emphasizes Mamillius not only by having him die but by having him give the title of the play—"A sad tale's best for winter" (II.i.25). Mamillius demands our attention because he himself becomes ultimately the object of the sorrow one feels after The Winter's Tale: the title does not let us forget him. In the final reconciliation scene only he is missing from the Sicilian royal family.

The cause of his death cannot be forgotten either (except by commentators incapable of sharing his consciousness, evidently): he died of grief at his mother's unspeakable humiliation and pain. His sensibility gives him mortal pain: it is fine and sharp. Like Macduff's child, he is observant, curious, devoted to his mother, and less than totally accepting of his father. He is also a victim.

In Greene's story we are not told of the reason for Mamillius' prototype's death: we are only told that word of the child's death is brought to Pandosto as he is apologizing to his wife, having been convinced of his error by the Oracle. When the queen hears it, she too dies. Shakespeare leaves no room for speculation as to the cause of the child's death: as the messenger tells Leontes:

The prince your son, with mere conceit and fear
Of the queen's speed, is gone . . . is dead.

(III.ii.144-5)

Such a report has the obvious effect of heightening the audience's sympathy for Hermione and their fear of the effects of unjustly or rashly castigating women. No one escapes suffering from injustice.
6. Bellaria's dalliance

Still another source change in *The Winter's Tale* supports our hypothesis. In Greene's novel, the queen does indeed indulge in questionable behavior:

Bellaria, who in her time was the flower of courtesy, willing to shew how unfeignedly she loved her husband by his friend's entertainment, used him likewise so familiarly that her countenance bewrayed how her mind was affected towards him, oftentimes coming herself into his bed chamber to see that nothing should be amiss to mislike him. This honest familiarity increased daily more and more betwixt them; for Bellaria, noting in Egistus a princely and bountiful mind, adorned with sundry and excellent qualities, and Egistus, finding in her a virtuous and courteous disposition, there grew such a secret uniting of their affections, that the one could not well be without the company of the other: in so much, that when Pandosto was bruised with such urgent affairs that he could not be present with his friend Egistus, Bellaria would walk with him into the garden, where they two in private and pleasant devices would pass away the time to both their contents. 12

This scene is innocent enough, but it contrasts sharply with what we have in Shakespeare's play. There is no evidence of Hermione's meeting Polixenes in his bedroom or having any secret affection for him at all: she is only a gracious hostess, capable of convincing her guest that his presence is desired. Her innocence is above question to all observers save Leontes, and for accusing her unjustly he receives the moral indictment that the play may be seen to present, an indictment that is presented by his full court as well. If he shares the burden of his crime with anyone it is not with his wife,
but with those counselors who do not stand against him with greater
determination: as they are pushing Paulina from the royal presence,
she tells them not to touch her and she indicts them as well:

You, that are thus so tender o'er his follies,
Will never do him good, not one of you.

(II.iii.127-8)

As the Mamillius source change provided more audience sympathy
for Hermione, so does this one. It precludes anyone's wondering, as
one may in Pandosto, if perhaps the jealousy was justified. Hermione,
like nearly all the tragic heroines, remains faultless, and Shakes­
peare has gone to some trouble to make her so.

7. Polixenes and Perdita

The final source change which we will notice in The Winter's
Tale is Shakespeare's choice to have Polixenes attend the feast in
disguise and disclose himself in anger to Florizel and Perdita. In
Greene's story the king does not learn of his son's flight until two
days after he has sailed. Polixenes' behavior in this scene has
the effect (among others—see Chapter III above) of bringing into
the sharpest focus Perdita's strength and purity. Polixenes admires
Perdita's beauty and graciousness, but he does not appreciate her character: without this scene, the audience too might be left with the "Ain't she sweet?" response to Perdita. As we have seen, however, she is also possessed of that hauteur so familiar in Shakespeare's heroines, familiar because they so often need to summon it in defensive actions. She is not just another pretty girl, but a fully-drawn character. If Shakespeare had intended to give us memorable examples of female superiority and virtue being unwisely and unjustly assailed by authoritarian males, he could not have done better than to put Paulina and Hermione beside Leontes and Perdita beside Polixenes as he did.

8. Some other source changes

If to these source changes in The Winter's Tale we add consideration of Shakespeare's deletion of a woman-as-sex-object passage from Lodge's Rosalynde, his sympathetic expansion of the characters of such diverse women as Cleopatra and Julia in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, his several changes in All's Well That Ends Well which combine to make Bertram look worse and Isabella look better, his deletion
of mercenary motives from the heroine of the source for *The Merchant of Venice*, his addition of the sympathetic sister counselor to the abused "shrew" wife in *The Comedy of Errors*, and his use of a cure for shrews suggested by a Barnabe Riche story not against a woman but against the presumptuous Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, it is easy to understand how the hypothesis I have suggested may be seen rather as a rule. Shakespeare avoided the derogatory stereotypes for women whenever he could, and he made his female characters not only good but above reproach whenever the plot allowed it. In the case of Julia, as Craig noticed, we have an early example of Shakespeare's moving his own consciousness into that of an imagined woman, a feat he was to perform throughout his career. Craig, we remember, said of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*: "The most original thing Shakespeare did in this play was to center the interest of his story in the disguised woman, a thing which had never been so definitely done before in England or in Italy. There is a new consistency in Julia's character. Shakespeare has indicated to us how she felt as a woman in men's clothes and how she took her helplessness ..." Julia, indeed, behaves in such a way that we can no longer call her state one of "helplessness," and Craig points to the fact that she and Silvia contain the seeds of later comic heroines. As he says, these two early comic heroines "are at least conceived of in the Shakespearean way."  

Lucrece is also conceived in a spirit of respect and sympathy, and a study of *The Rape of Lucrece* provides still more evidence from
which we can generalize that Shakespeare was fascinated very early with the special problems of being a woman, that he found the suffering of women unjustified, and that he did his best to change attitudes toward women. Coppélia Kahn has done an analysis of this poem which points up Lucrece's dilemma as it had been seen traditionally and Shakespeare's sympathetic treatment of it. 16

Skeptics may ask where in this hypothesis is room for the great Shakespearean villainesses: Lady Macbeth, Goneril, Regan, perhaps Gertrude. Hamlet's famous, nay, celebrated line "Frailty! thy name is woman!" overshadows a great deal in Shakespeare's corpus generally and in that single play. Notice, for example, that Hamlet is disgusted with all life, including woman, when he says that, and that the ghost reminds Hamlet not to judge Gertrude, but instead to "leave her to Heaven," and that Gertrude repents. Shakespeare in drawing Gertrude depicted a typically male-dependent woman, whose morality derives from that of the nearest male: Gertrude is thus not immoral but grossly passive, and thus very close to the "traditional ideal" for an unassertive woman. Goneril and Regan are good studies of persons motivated by jealousy and hunger for power, who abuse power with vengeance when they get some. Lady Macbeth is an excellent portrait of a person who defines herself according to her husband's position: such a method of self-definition is indicative of emotional precariousness, and indeed Shakespeare has Lady Macbeth die without control of her rational faculties. More importantly, however, we must remember that Shakespearean villainesses were necessary products of the
source stories where he found them. To use them as evidence that Shakespeare hated women or even thought unkindly of them is no more rational than to assert that Iago is evidence that Shakespeare was a misanthrope.

9. Conclusion

Our discussion here of source changes and other evidence indicative of Shakespeare's recognition of traditional oppressions and his own good will toward women is by no means exhaustive. Other studies, including consideration of the histories as well as the comedies and tragedies, will perhaps turn up further evidence to confirm or deny the hypothesis that Shakespeare had what we would call today a feminist consciousness. In the meantime such confirmation as we now have provides solution to several cruxes, gives us new vistas to appreciate in the plays, and unfolds new ways of understanding the human process of Shakespeare's art and the human experience we see reflected in it. In order to understand any other culture it is necessary to go outside one's own, lest the refracting power of one's own milieu distort perceptions of another's. The feminist enlightenment provides a way to go beyond our present culture
without leaving it altogether; it is thus an excellent vehicle for expanding our perspectives on literature and on ourselves.
CHAPTER V
NOTES


2 Robert Greene, Mamillia, in Grosart edition Works, II, 19. I have modernized the spelling in this and subsequent quotations from this work, hereinafter cited as Mamillia.

3 Mamillia, pp. 220-222.

4 Ibid., p. 226.

5 Ibid., p. 173.


8 O. J. Campbell, Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare (New York, 1966), p. 951; Baldwin Maxwell, ed., The Winter's Tale (Baltimore, 1973), p. 15; Hallett Smith, Riverside, p. 1565; Harbage, p. 448. Seeing the play for the first time in 1956, I was appalled at Paulina's behavior, and thought her not only very stupid to bring the newborn baby into the presence of the wrathful king, but also entirely beyond the limits of acceptable behavior—what my father used to call "off base." In the fifties, when most respectable women were "polite," one could hardly admire or appreciate someone who was "off base," and it was very easy for me to assume that the playwright's definition of that sorry state would be at least somewhere in the environs of my father's and the culture's definition generally. Now nearly twenty years later I think my early response to Paulina was misguided and that a post-Shakespearean antifeminist enculturation had got in the
way of my understanding Shakespeare's purpose in creating her.

9 Francis Sabie, Flora's Fortune (London, 1595), S.T.C. reel 352, sigs. E 1 v - 4 v:

"Ah little babe (quoth she) but even now borne,
And readie now to yeeld to cursed Fate.
Shalt thou be fed with frothy salt sea fome,
In steed of thy sweet mothers sugred milke?
Shalt thou be rockt with windes and raging waves
In steed of milde and gentle lullabies?
Alass, thy Sire, thy flintie-hearted Sire
Will have it thus, begotten of a Beare,
Nurst with a savage Tygers cruell milke,
More cruell then blood thirsty Nero was.
And now farewel, my haplesse babe, farewell,
Yet let me kisse they tender cheekes againe
The Gods I hope, the Gods will thee defende."

... ... ... ... ... ...
"I will take the brat
And ding the braines against the flinty stones."

10 Harbage, p. 448.

11 Arden Winter's Tale, pp. 200-1.

12 Ibid., pp. 185-6.

13 Ibid., p. 216.

14 See Craig, pp. 803-4, 616, and Chapter II above.

15 Craig, p. 132.

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