SHAKESPEAREAN WOMEN—AND WOMEN TODAY*

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Shakespeare, a remarkable "psychiatric clinician," used caricature, counterpoint, role reversal, displacement and perversion of purpose, among other tools, to highlight behavior and character. It appears that, given the distinct and stereotyped roles of men and women in his time, Shakespeare examined the consequences of women acting like men; or not being permitted to be the women they were: to use themselves appropriately, to love, to be autonomous, to be authentic. He demonstrated that when neurotic power drives intercede, women's efforts to love become tragic. Shakespeare—poet and playwright of human values—saw with remarkable clarity and held society, with its faults, and flaws and beauties, up to careful scrutiny.

In my practice as a psychiatrist I have found many of the dramas of Shakespeare's plays enacted, perhaps less beautifully and poetically, and on a lesser scale. There have been rebellious, defiant adolescents and unappreciated daughters—pearls thrown away by their parents because they seemed troublesome. There have been helpless, dependent, obedient wives treated sadistically—perhaps sometimes masochistically inviting ill treatment. Wives have schemed for and reflected their husband's power—though these rarely come for treatment—and women have been deserted and replaced by another, sometimes finding it hard to contain their jealous rage—an increasing problem of older women today. Above all, there have been women struggling to find their independence, their autonomy—a problem they wrestled with in Elizabethan times perhaps more covertly, but just as actively as today.

In Shakespeare's plays, as in life, the human beings parading on the stage are not flat, one-dimensional figures: they are people in depth and, as in life, it takes time and careful observation to discover who they really are, what their character and personality. I have been astonished by the generally

*Presented before the Section on Historical Medicine of the New York Academy of Medicine January 27, 1982.
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unkind and insensitive treatment accorded women by Shakesperean scholars.

Now, although times have changed, and medical conditions for women—especially relating to their reproductive function—are infinitely better, many of the gender roles and stereotypes of Shakespeare's time have persevered, and women have been molded by them as well as seriously constricted by them—one might even say at times "deformed," and this is still true today.

Shakespeare portrayed women with an extraordinarily rich affective display, in response to the special circumstances of their lives—from the raging anger of Kate the Shrew to the depressive reaction, despair, and suicide of Ophelia, the quiet, faithful love of Desdemona and the innocent, generous love of Juliet, the meretricious gaiety of Portia, the affect-poor paternalism of Lady Capulet, the angry, power-directed scheming of Lady Macbeth, the strong yet pathetic silence of Cordelia, the noble, self-abnegating, unblemished love of Katharine, wife of Henry VIII, and the curious glee of the three witches of Macbeth.
Shakespeare was indeed a remarkable psychiatric "clinician," offering clear case histories which ring true, often with early background information validating his portrayals as psychoanalysts would understand them. This is especially so in *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Othello*. Sometimes no background is provided, often purposefully—I believe this to be the case with the play, *Hamlet*. But all of his characters, and particularly women, expressed a brilliant, many-faceted personality, responding to forces operant then and restrictions from which women today still struggle to be liberated.

In Shakespeare’s parade of women in their roles as daughters, sisters, lovers, wives, queens, and mothers—and in one instance only as a quasi-professional, Portia—social, psychological, medical, and legal facts stand out. In a sense, tragedy often hinged on the woman’s refusal to be totally submissive. But, on the other hand, tragedy often struck even when she was submissive, as indicated by what befell Hermione, queen to Leontes, in *The Winter’s Tale*. Further, it is not unfair to say that when it came to nobility of character, Shakespeare gave the “weaker sex” the greater share. One could posit that being excluded from the affairs of the world made this easier—but one could also debate this. Yet, it is of special interest, because another great thinker about women—Sigmund Freud—took an opposing view, believing that women instinctually had weaker superegos, or consciences, than men.1 Many woman psychoanalysts—and some men—have taken Freud to task for this, as it occurred to me in thinking about Antigone, whom I consider “the neglected daughter of Oedipus and Freud.”

I have written some book reviews pertaining to Shakespeare,3–4–5 and especially the ongoing psychoanalytic studies interpreting *Hamlet*. They were interesting and yet to my mind unsatisfying, and I became absorbed with the idea of “plucking out Hamlet’s mysterie”—to quote Hamlet himself. It finally resulted in my paper, “Hamlet: the Coup that Failed.”6 But in the course of this work I discovered that both Gertrude, Hamlet’s queen mother, and Ophelia, his alleged love, were misunderstood and given short shrift. The more I thought about the plays, the more my views of some of the characters differed from generally held concepts.

The fact that our cultural heritage is British, and with it our social style to some degree and our legal structure, makes a consideration of our “roots” all the more significant.

Turning first to the legal, with its vast social implications: a woman was a chattel, a piece of property, to be sold by her father to whomever he felt would do him the most good. True, he often gave a dowry, but he was buying something with this “bride-price”—to use an anthropological term—even if it

was primarily only the annexation of an important family. Sometimes he sold his daughter into a marriage of servitude, just to save the cost of another mouth to feed, if he was poor. A woman owed obedience, first to father and then to husband.

In *Othello*, Desdemona’s father, Brabantio, is considered justifiably enraged by his daughter’s elopement with Othello, in spite of his having had Othello as a welcome and frequent guest in his home. Here, of course, is the additional factor of prejudice against blacks—very noticeable throughout the play. Brabantio proclaims Othello to be a “foul thief” based on his loss of property—his daughter—and he wonders aloud to Othello how Desdemona could have “run from her guardage to the sooty bosom of such a thing as thou....”

To continue along this diversionary path of prejudice for a moment, it was Shakespeare’s genius to use a metaphor of such telling viciousness to enflame Brabantio’s fatherly rage, that it keeps repeating like an echo after one hears it. The villainous Iago says: “Even now, now, very now, an old black ram is tumping your white ewe.” I marvel at what one sentence accomplishes. The precise core of prejudice against blacks, still rampant in this country as well, was recognized by Shakespeare as sexual competition and sexual loss. Nor do I ignore economic factors.

In the *Taming of the Shrew*, the degree to which a wife is a piece of property is indicated by Petruchio’s words to Katherina, or Kate as he calls her, trimming away at her name and status at the same time. He says: “I will be master of what is mine own. She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house [note its sexual meaning], my household stuff, my field, my barn, my horse, my ox, my ass, my anything.”

Katherina, long jealous of her sister Bianca, who is favored by her father and who has chosen a mate, is not yet ready tamely to accept marriage. Considered by her father to be a shrew—a fact he does not hesitate to broadcast—she is offered up for sale at a very high bride-price or dowry, to any bidder to clear the way for the marriage of his younger daughter, Bianca and Petruchio makes no apology for his fortune-hunting. Asked by Hortensio what he is doing in Padua, he replies: “Such wind as scatters young men through the world to seek their fortunes farther than at home, where small experience grows.” An opportunity young women certainly did not have. He adds, of course, that although he has “Crowns in his purse...and goods at home” he has “Come to wive it wealthily in Padua; If wealthily, then happily in Padua.” He adds that “Be she as foul as Florentius’ love, as old as Sibyl, as curst and shroud [shrewish] as Socrates’ Zentippe”, he will not be deterred.

Vol. 58, No. 7, October 1982
He is a fortunehunter and devoid of feeling: "Hortensio, Peace! thou know'st not gold's effect.... "I will board her though she chides as loud as thunder when the clouds in Autumn crack."

Considering how he tames her, so that she becomes the exemplary wife she does, one might suppose that, in addition to the shame and humiliation he pours over her like a flood at their wedding and the starvation and exhaustion which he then imposes on her, along with hints in the play of possible rape, as is suggested in the last line quoted, there is one added threat or actuality, wife-beating. This was perfectly acceptable in that time, and far beyond.

In 1892 Winter* said: "Shakespeare's Shrew calls attention to the fact that long ago it was a settled principle of common law in England that a man may beat his wife, provided the stick was not thicker than his thumb. The ducking stool could be repeatedly soused in a pond or river to punish a scolding woman as late as 1809. John Taylor, one of the so-called water poets, counted 60 whipping-posts within one mile of London prior to 1630, and it was not until 1791 that the whipping of female vagrants was forbidden by statute. The brank—a particularly cruel gag, was in common use to punish "a certain sort of woman." A ballad by Thackeray illustrated this, and afforded an instructive view of British law toward women. Winter stated: "It is not that the gentlemen of England are tyrannical and cruel in their treatment of women; but the predominance of John Bull in any question between him and Mrs. Bull is a cardinal doctrine of English law." He added that plays illustrating the application of discipline to rebellious women found favor with the British audience. Taming of the Shrew may have been one of Shakespeare's "pot boilers."

It seems clear that poor Kate has been transformed through torture and a form of brain-washing into the docile wife she becomes. Yet there is another—or rather, an additional explanation. Kate is a very bright young woman, as revealed in her brilliant repartee. An example of this is when she responds to Petruchio's statement that he is "mov'd to woo thee [her] for my wife," by saying: "Mov'd! in good time: let him that mov'd you hither/ Remove you hence." But finally, Kate has learned her lesson well—the lesson of politics and power—as well as how to satisfy her need to be outstanding. If, unloved, she can no longer attract attention as the worst, she will be the best. Since she cannot avoid being married, she may as well accept her status as the wife of a very wealthy man. Since she cannot fight him, she will join him. She has belatedly made the bargain that many women make. She will, from this point on, share in the reflected position of her husband, accept the demands of her society that she be nothing in herself. And, strange as
it may seem, she revenges herself upon her father by proving him wrong, and leading him to ponder whether the huge dowry he gave was really necessary. Words of revenge are salted away in the play—early, in the play, she says to her father, ‘‘I will go and sit and weep till I can find occasion of revenge.’’

Before turning to other characters, it is worth noting that many of Shakespeare’s best known women are placed in the setting of a motherless home: Ophelia, Katherina the shrew (who was also the older daughter), Cordelia (who was the youngest of King Lear’s three daughters), Desdemona, and Portia. Poor Juliet, an only child, would have been better off without a mother. Of the remaining three of Shakespeare’s major women—Queen Gertrude, Lady Macbeth, and Cleopatra—there is no background history.

In Shakespeare’s time—four centuries ago, no young lady from a ‘‘respectable’’ family was likely to have been permitted to join his traveling troupe of players, nor his later Globe Theatre. One way he handled this was to have female roles played by young men, and perhaps to eliminate as many female roles as possible, much also depending on the composition of the troupe at the time.9 Yet there were many women’s parts in his plays. And the motherless homes depicted in his plays mirrored reality. We, with our medical expertise today, tend to forget the dangers of childbirth and the number of homes in which the young mother was struck down, and remained unreplaced, probably largely because of the lack of geographic mobility, in an earlier day. The consequences of this loss to the husband and father, to the daughter or daughters, and indeed the whole family were varied but major ones.

There is perhaps one additional background fact worth noting. There are quite a few important plays in which fathers have no sons, and this creates special difficulties for the wives and daughters. Although England and Denmark were monarchies and a woman could carry on the royal succession, this was an unwelcome situation, as sons were counted on to carry on the family line in the royal succession and even more in ordinary life. Cordelia, the youngest of King Lear’s three daughters, Desdemona, Katherina, Juliet, and Portia have no brothers. The lack of a son is a crucial, if at times covert, factor in these plays.

I would like to offer another brief comment on the motherless home—or more appropriately, the wifeless home of Elizabethan days. In smaller towns and throughout the countryside, wives were not easily replaced. There was little mobility, and few single women were available. As a result, the eldest daughter was expected to become manager of the household. If incest was not carried out in reality—and of course there could hardly be any statistics on this—then certainly all sorts of incestuous currents streamed inevitably
through family life, even if father made an occasional foray into the territory of the village strumpet—likely as not to serve in some way at the local pub or brothel. One can imagine this leading to considerable strife in the home, and sometimes to extremely paranoid and punitive behavior by the father, as he tried, by projection, to defend himself against his own desires—something seen fairly commonly today. Brabantio’s rage at Othello and his anger at daughter Desdemona may also have contained incestuous elements, evoked by lack of a wife.7

Thinking again of Katherina the shrew, one can wonder what rages her father may have felt, not only for having a female firstborn, but, with the death of wife after producing a second daughter, on being left wifeless and heirless. Surely her father’s attitudes played havoc with Kate’s feelings about herself as a girl, while the lack of a mother with whom to identify and an adolescence quite likely tainted by the incestuous inclinations of her father made for a stormy oedipal phase. Further, the knowledge that marriage would bring with it a new bondage must have been terrifying. I suspect that Katherina must also have been beset with a further difficulty—oddly enough, relating to her assets. A considerable beauty, keen mind, and passionate nature hardly helped her become a submissive maid, salable on the marriage market of that time.

This leads into another point in relation to sexual matters. A girl was expected to be a virgin before marriage—otherwise, she was “damaged goods” and could not readily be “sold” in marriage. But it is necessary to realize as an extenuating factor that no reliable contraceptive means were known, so virginity was a practical necessity. Moreover, virginity insured recognition of the true father, and simplified problems related to inheritance. Yet, that women fretted at the sexual double standard is made very clear by Shakespeare. For he places, not in the mouth of Kate the shrew, but in that of the gentle Ophelia, when her brother Laertes warns her against Hamlet’s blandishments, the words, and they are hardly a fool’s words: “I shall the effect of this good lesson keep…. But, good my brother, do not, as some ungracious pastors do, show me the steep and thorny way to heaven, whiles, like a puff’d and reckless libertine, Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads…. ” Yet, alas for poor Ophelia—her drowning clearly a suicide—there is indication that this warning came too late. One can understand Ophelia’s being dazzled by Hamlet, and believing that his attentions initially reflected love. But alas, in addition to the suffering that Hamlet’s vicious treatment of her caused, and his murder of her father, which pushed her to the brink of madness, there is, in the songs she sings while mad, ample indication

that she has yielded to Hamlet, although Shakespearean scholars seem not to have recognized this—while they remain puzzled by her allegedly bawdy songs.

Here are some examples:

She sings "How should I your true love know from another one?" She continues: "'Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day, all in the morning betime, And I a maid at your window, to be your valentine. Then up he rose, and donn'd his clo' es, and dupp'd the chamber door; Let in the maid, that out a maid never departed more.'" She continues further, "'By Gis and by Saint Charity, Alack, and fie for shame! Young men will do't, if they come to 't; by Cock they are to blame. Quoth she, before you tumbled me, you promis'd me to wed. [Said he] So would I ha' done, by yonder sun, An thou hadst not come to my bed.'" Poor Ophelia carries a guilty burden then, for the disaster which follows her secret defiance to her brother's and father's command, especially now that he is dead by Hamlet's hand. In Ophelia's talk about flowers, again there is a clue—she would offer Laertes violets—emblems of faithfulness—but they all withered when her father died. That is, with his death, she saw Hamlet for what he was and felt overwhelmed with feelings of faithlessness and guilt. Poor Ophelia, longing for life, as adolescents do, rebelling against the proscriptions of their parents, and finding too late their flight was down the wrong path. What was left except to die?

Both Ophelia and Katherina were innocent and inexperienced young girls, yet they seem sexually sophisticated. It is well to keep in mind that farm animals were often part of the Elizabethan household, and nurses—among others—spoke rather freely. The degree of privacy we now take for granted did not exist then; but their sophistication was that of knowledge, not experience.

Having said a few words about Ophelia, let me continue with the same play and turn briefly to Queen Gertrude—one of the most maligned of all Shakespeare's women and an example illustrating the readiness of men to scapegoat women, especially when anxieties are aroused in the sexual area. Hamlet accuses his mother, Gertrude, of an over-hasty marriage, incest, and adultery. She has in fact married her husband's brother—thus there is no reality to the incest accusation. Of course, she has married rather quickly—two months after her husband's death—not two hours, days, or weeks, as Hamlet variously implies. As I indicated in may paper on Hamlet, she is 47, and one can see this action as a response to the fear of being alone the rest of her life. Even further, it carries on the tradition "'The King is dead—long live the [new] king!'" One wonders whether this would occasion much fuss if it
were a king remarrying hastily. In fact, Henry VIII remarried even before he exiled or chopped off the heads of his queens. It seemed not to cause much stir. Yet a veritable stream of psychoanalysts have poured invective on Gertrude—from Freud\textsuperscript{10} to Jones\textsuperscript{11} to Lidz\textsuperscript{12} to Eissler\textsuperscript{13} to Rubin\textsuperscript{14}—all accusing her of venal, lientious behavior and (unkindest cut of all) of being a stupid fool and an uncaring mother.

Listen to her words, her beautiful words, as mother:

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark,
Do not forever with thy vailéd lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust
Thou knowest "tis common" all that lives must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.

These are words of motherly concern. Hamlet assaults her in return: "Aye, madam, it is common." The "it" stands for her—he calls her "a common"—a whore. There is no validation within the play of any of the accusations made by her son. I have pointed out that the play was based on a similar episode in early Teutonic history, that the throne was actually Gertrude's, and that in every word she uttered Gertrude not only conducted herself with quiet dignity, but was extremely keen intellectually, incisively cutting through cant, and expressing herself in a minimum of effective words. An example is her response to Polonius, whose anxiety-ridden tangential language leads him into ever more expanding speech, which she stops saying, "More matter, less art!" Again, to her cruel son: "Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain." Her simple response on learning of Ophelia's death: "Drowned, drowned!" conveys the speechlessness which comes with intense feeling, and her love and acceptance of Ophelia is indicated by her following words, in which she says "I hop'd thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife. I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid, and not have stew'd thy grave." Here is a motherly acceptance not likely in an unloving mother.

An anonymous actress of the 19th century, in an article titled "The Frailty Whose Name was Gertrude,"\textsuperscript{15} suggested that this scene is Gertrude's most genuine and representative moment. She added that we have undoubtedly been influenced in our opinion of Gertrude by "the atrocious statements of her grief-frantic son." (I have offered other explanations of his behaviour.) She observed his jealousy and envy of everyone, adding "Long before Hamlet has any suspicion that his father has died of foul play, he is in the throes of as deadly a jealousy as could fatally poison an otherwise noble and sensitive nature." While seeing in part clearly, she too is taken in by his supposed

nobility. She also has suggested that if Gertrude were played as the mother of Hamlet, rather than Queen Gertrude, her character would be seen much more clearly. All have noted that she has received much more than her share of calumny. I defend Gertrude and speak of her here because, while I do not deny that some mothers are hurtful and uncaring, I feel they are often scapegoats on whom all the blame for family difficulties are placed—as true now as in Elizabethan times.

Now a word about Cordelia, whom Lewes[16] has called "the most tender-hearted of all Shakespearean women." Her father, King Lear, illustrates the discrepancy between conscious and unconscious processes, between a true and an idealized image of himself. Lear is presented as a typical pillar-of-society type, or man of power: insensitive, self-deluding, and carrying an idealized image of himself—a guiding fiction that leads to his doom. How artfully Shakespeare punishes "the man who would not see" with blindness, a punishment meted out by Sophocles to Oedipus, but on different grounds, for Oedipus was initially blind to his own rage and then actually blinded himself in atonement. Lear continually engages in "double bind" communications—a psychiatric concept in which the communication by the more powerful person has two conflicting meanings, and therefore defies interpretation by the less powerful person to whom it is presented, leaving this person frightened and helpless.

Claiming that Cordelia, his youngest daughter, is the most loved, his readiness to see evil in her suggests hate. Again, one can wonder how he felt about his third and last child, also a daughter, leaving him without a son to carry on the succession. Cordelia's problem is that her father engages in sophistry. His demand that his daughters prove their love by speaking eloquently about it allows only one course for any person of integrity—love cannot be proved on command. It is a planted trap, like the well-known "When did you stop beating your wife?" Cordelia thus does the only honest thing—she remains silent.

The play, of course, turns initially upon Lear's command that his daughters speak their love for him so that he can properly divide his worldly goods between them. This sets forth his attempts to control his children through his worldly worth and power—a trend very noticeable among the affluent today. After the first two daughters, Goneril and Regan, have spoken their unctuous lines, comes Cordelia's turn, and she is, in a sense, struck dumb. Lear says to her, "What can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters?" This additional challenge to her amounts to baiting. She replies: "Nothing my Lord." Lear has asked her to speak up and win him. Her reply indicates that
he must give to her as he feels about her. "You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I return those duties back as are right fit. Obey you, love you, and most honour you." Yet Lear is extremely dissatisfied. He questions further: "But goes thy heart with this?" Cordelia: "Aye, good my Lord." Lear: "So young and so untender?" Cordelia's reply to this cruel barb is: "So young, my Lord, and true." Cordelia, one is led to suppose, is not only silent because of the immediate interchange and situation, but has long been silent because she has never been believed—speech is of no avail to her. Perhaps this may offer something to a consideration of delayed speech in children, as one possible factor.

Cordelia has been long-suffering, long aware that her sisters are deceitful. This is often the case where children observe the parents' need for admiration and play on this. Yet it is not Cordelia but Regan who comments: "Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself," while Goneril observes about Lear that "Then must we look from his age to receive not alone the imperfections of long-engraved [engraved] condition, but therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them." They are extremely aware and extraordinarily critical of what Lear is and will be like, but they do not hesitate verbally to embroider their love for him.

Curiously and most unusually for Shakespeare's women, Cordelia is well rewarded for her sincerity. There are men who recognize and prize it. The Earl of Kent, who admires and supports her, suffers banishment. Of the two suitors for her hand, the Duke of Burgundy and King of France, neither of whom Cordelia herself has the right to choose, the one who is himself the most admirable, takes her. Burgundy becomes almost speechless in rejecting her, when Lear says: "But now her price is fall'n. Sir, there she stands... She's there, and she is yours"(sans dowery, of course). Burgundy says: "I know no answer." When Lear proclaims he would not match France to "a wretch on whom nature is ashamed," the King replies: "This is most strange! That she, that even but now was your best object...should in this trice of time commit a thing so monstrous to dismantle so many folds of favor. Sure, her offense must be of such unnatural degree that monsters it...which to believe of her must be a faith that reason without miracle could never plant in me." Even as he reveals in this way that he does not believe she warrants her disgrace, Cordelia, who has apparently secretly chosen him attempts to defend herself in his eyes by addressing her father: "I yet beseech your majesty—if for I want that glib and oily art to speak and purpose not...make it known it is no vicious blot, murther, or foulness, no unchaste action or dishonor'd step, that hath depriv'd me of your grace and favor...."

France, saying "Love's not love, when it is mingled with regards that stand aloof from th'entire point" again offers her to Burgundy, adding "She is herself a dowery." When Burgundy again requests a dowry from Lear, to be refused, the King of France says: "Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich being poor: most choice, forsaken, and most lov'd despised! Thee and thy virtues here I seized upon... 'Tis strange that from their cold'st neglect my love should kindle to inflam'd respect.'" To Lear he says "Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my chance, is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France. Not all the dukes of waterish Burgundy [what a lovely, sly pun] can buy this unpriz'd precious maid of me." Lear's reply is inadvertently prophetic, and one of Shakespeare's remarkable ambiguities: "We have no such daughter, nor shall we ever see that face of hers again." He speaks of unwillingness to see her. Fate has blindness in store for him.

Cordelia, in bidding farewell to her sisters, again indicates her knowledge of what they are like: "I know you what you are....Use well our father....Alas, stood I within his grace, I would prefer him to a better place....Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides...."

Cordelia is silent when to speak challenges her integrity; she speaks up when integrity demands assertion. Her silence is the heart of the opening scene; only one who has attained a sense of identity can be silent. In Lear, silence gives form to the action, substance to the characters and themes. One could compare Cordelia's silence in response to her father's demand she prove her love by speech, to Christ's, when Pilate shouts to him. Sometimes silence forces confrontation with truths too large for language. The noble Cordelia, after her rejection and all her suffering at the hands of her father, says, on seeing the sick Lear again: "Oh, my dear father...let this kiss repair those violent harms that my two sisters have in thy reverence made." Her love has never wavered.

Equally unswerving in her love is Juliet, another tender-hearted and beautiful young woman and, like Cordelia, an "abandoned" daughter. Juliet's disaster hinges on her refusal to be her father's chattel, obedient to his decision about whom she should marry. It seems to me that she catches Romeo's eye because she is not—or has not yet become—conventionally stultified and shallow. Young as she is, there is depth and generosity in her character. She says to Romeo "My bounty is as boundless as the sea,/ My love as deep—the more I give to thee/ the more I have, for both are infinite."

There is an interesting element in relation to Romeo and Juliet, the "star-cross'd lovers" who have been the darlings of the centuries, their story rekindling adolescent fantasies in all of us. Whether they are in any sense
mature lovers is open to question; but that they flee and cling together for comfort, rebelling against demanding and restrictive parents, there is no doubt. In every ongoing feud between families or religious or ethnic groups, including the Hatfields and the McCoys of Tennessee, rebellion has been sparked by and resulted in intermarriage of the young, who find the quarrel senseless, since it was not theirs.

Shakespeare tells us little of Romeo Montague's background, in contrast to Juliet's, where we are given a brief but sufficient glimpse of her childhood so that we can see the roots of her personality. Of Romeo, we know only that he was in love with Rosaline—one of "th' admired beauties of Verona." Again, Shakespeare has his protagonist turn from the conventional to the unconventional, in Juliet. She is an only child, another having died, and, unlike Cordelia, she has the misfortune to have a mother, an unloving mother. Lady Capulet seems incredibly brutal and unkind, yet recalling the circumstances of wives in that time, she had little choice. Yet perhaps she all too readily sacrifices her child on the altar of her own security.

Shakespeare took pains to establish how very young and not quite nubile Juliet is. There is a long discussion over whether she is 12 or 13. It is finally settled that she will turn 14 at Lammas Eve (August 1st), in less than three weeks. It is also established that Count Paris, who wants to marry her and has pressed his suit with Capulet for several years, is 30—a man of the world—like Hamlet, who is considered a boy but is also 30.

Initially, Capulet is not the cruel uncaring father he later becomes, and, although he agrees to wed Juliet to Paris, he urges Paris to wait a year or so, because of her tender age: "My child is yet a stranger to the world, she hath not seen the change of 14 years. Let two more summers wither in their pride ere we may think her ripe to be a bride." Paris is eager, uncaring, lecherous. He responds "Younger than she are happy mothers made." Happy? How does he know? Capulet seeks to protect her: "And too soon marr'd are those so early made. Earth has swallowed all my hopes but she [his other children have died]—she's the hopeful lady of my earth. But woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart, my will to her consent is but a part." Strange that he is the only father among many who shows some concern about his daughter's will in marriage. One asks what turned him into so cruel a father—one who tells her, when the marriage has been arranged and Juliet pleads with him saying, "Good father, I beseech you on my knees..." (Capulet) "Hange thee! young baggage, disobedient wretch! I tell thee what, get thee to church a' Thursday or never after look me in the face. Speak not, reply not, do not answer me! My fingers itch" (that is, he feels like beating her). His angry speech concludes
with: "But and you will not wed I'll pardon you—graze where you will, you shall not house with me.... Thursday is near, lay hand on heart, advise. And you be mine, I'll give you to my friend; and you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets, for my soul I'll ne'er acknowledge thee...." Juliet still begs for delay, and her mother replies: "Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word, do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee."

So, what has turned the gracious Capulet into a brutal disowning father? Because the feud between the Montagues and Capulets makes him vulnerable, he, like Othello, has his Iago—in this case Tybalt, who subtly ignites him. Tybalt points out Romeo saying "Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe, a villain that is hither come in spite, to scorn at our solemnity this night....'tis he, that villain Romeo." Between the promptings of Tybalt, and the insistence of Paris, Capulet is trapped, and becomes increasingly enraged. He is not the strong man he appears to be, as with Othello.

In contrast to the uncaring words of Paris about Juliet ("Younger than she are happy mothers made"), Romeo says: "Did my heart love till now? forswear it, Sight. For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night." This clarifies why Capulet's phrase "'gentle Paris'" falls on our ears with such dissonance. Juliet's fate is sealed by her lack of choice in marriage, seemingly contrived by fate. Yet Shakespeare, through the words of her nurse, gives us the genesis of her ill-starred life, for Juliet has suffered many wounds as a child: "'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years, and she was wean'd (I shall never forget it) of all the days of the year upon that day, for I had then laid wormwood to my dug sitting in the sun under the dovehouse wall... But as I said, when it did taste the wormwood on the nipple of my dug and felt it bitter (pretty fool! to see it tetchy and fall out with the dug)... and since that time it is eleven years, for she could then stand high-lone. Nay, by th' rood, she could have run and waddled all about, for even the day before she broke her brow, and then my husband... took up the child. 'Yes,' quoth he, 'dost thou fall upon thy face? Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast wit, wilt thou not, Jule?'... the pretty wretch let crying and said 'Ay.' To see now how a jest shall come about! I warrant and I should live a thousand years I never should forget it.'" She keeps repeating this tale until Lady Capulet and Juliet both ask her to stop.

Juliet's weaning was done in the cruel fashion of the times, and at a terrible moment. Her weaning, the earthquake, her fall—all heralded trouble, both symbolically and in fact. An anonymous actress pointed out that Lady Capulet has no feeling for Juliet, or else hates her because she is a worthless girl rather than a son. When Juliet is found dead, her mother's comments are

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self-centered. She has lost "the one thing to rejoice and solace in." On the other hand, Capulet, initially loving her though betraying that love, sums up Juliet’s martyrdom succinctly: "Despised, distressed, hated, martyr’d, kill’d!" Farewell, poor Juliet.

Now, let me turn briefly to Shakespeare’s one professional woman—Portia.

In my paper on Hamlet, I referred to The Merchant of Venice, and noted that Portia’s beautiful “mercy” speech was nothing but the rhetoric of persuasion, used to win for an undeserving client. Well, it is not that Antonio, who offered his bond of a pound of flesh for Bassanio, Portia’s fiancé, is undeserving. I mean that in a sense, her arrogant, gambling fiancé is her real client, as the actress, Mrs. Jameson, also saw it.

The Merchant of Venice seems a rambling play—it has a kind of triple plot: the casket riddle, the ring trick, and finally the trial of poor Shylock. Part one hinges on how a father influences his daughter’s choice of husband through his will when he is no longer around to select one for her. The suitor picking the proper one of three caskets—gold, silver, or lead—will win her hand. Here, the covert theme is of control and trickery. Portia has learned these lessons well. She clues Bassanio through song to the right casket. She gives him a ring admonishing him never to part with it, yet in her disguise as lawyer, demands it and gets him to part with it, sadistically toying with him.

Her rhetoric is caustic, ridiculing, sarcastic—her supply of nasty comments about her suitors is seemingly endless. For instance: "I had rather be married to a death’s head with a bone in his mouth." Or "God made him, therefore let him pass for a man." Or "How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behavior everywhere."

But, in addition, it becomes clear as the play proceeds that Portia is an always cheerful deceiver, a trickster, a person skilled in using the letter of the law to overcome the law’s true intent. With her beautiful ‘‘quality of mercy’’ speech, she demonstrates what it is to be merciless. She has the qualities of many a successful type—she is a killer.

Now, why does Shakespeare use a woman to win in court, and to be his only feminine “worldly” success? I believe that she is permitted to pillory Shylock because the men around her do not want to be seen doing it, although this is nowhere overtly stated. When a woman is permitted to masquerade as a lawyer and to succeed so well at her onerous task in a time when, as has been demonstrated, her place is in the home, one can
be sure there is a very good reason why she is permitted to do this. Of course, such a role reversal must have been an amusing jest on the stage in Shakespeare’s time and given women viewers secret pleasure. But, Portia, the arch-manipulator, has little integrity; she has enjoyed her games and her apparent success.

I want to comment very briefly on three other characters—Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra, and Katherine of Aragon. Lady Macbeth is a woman so obsessed by the need for power that she will do anything to get it. She exists at a level where she cannot hope for her own power, and so schemes for reflected glory. She is the only Shakespearean woman to whom the term “penis-envy”—a deep-seated envy of male power with roots in early childhood experience—could apply. Not only is she more willing to commit murder than her husband, but she nudges him on in terrifying fashion. But even more terrifying is her subversion of maternal feeling. In reminding Macbeth of his promise to murder Duncan, she says: “How tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me—I would, while it was smiling in my face, have pluck’d my nipple from his boneless gums, and dash’d the brains out, had I so sworn as you have done to this.” Of course, she has no children in the play, and the brilliant, amusing Shakespearean scholar, Professor Knights, pointed this up by titling a paper “How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?” 18 Macbeth rewards her with this praise: “Bring forth men-children only; for thy undaunted mettle should compose nothing but males.” Here we see again that girls are worth little, and an exceptional woman should not waste herself producing daughters. Lady Macbeth’s duplicity is revealed in her statement, “Look like th’innocent flower, but be the serpent under’t.” She leads Macbeth on with “Art thou afeared to be the same in thine own act and valour as thou art in desire?” And when he has killed Duncan but not the grooms, she chides him: “Infirm of purpose!” and completes the bloody deed herself.

It is clear that her marriage was based on desire for power. What accounts for her madness after the murder? Is it guilt? At the beginning of their venture and in the thread of their relationship, Macbeth was weak and hesitated to take action—perhaps because he is more concerned with the possibilities of failure. She is forceful enough to drive her husband on. But once the murders are accomplished and he becomes king, he has no need for her, and a new Macbeth emerges—impatient, filled with a sense of power, and cutting the thread of their equality as accomplices, no longer turning to her or needing her—a consequence of his alienation. In victory, she is defeated, and this is the deeper root of her madness.
Macbeth’s life has taken a direction in which separation from his wife is almost the final step. Professor Knights pointed out Macbeth’s punishment for his vicious drive to power, for he experienced “a deepening sense of loss of significance ... a radical failure of the human to inhabit his proper world of creative activity.” He points out that Macbeth’s last words attest to the central paradox of evil, which can only lead to “nothing.” Walton corroborates Macbeth’s increasing self-estrangement. This is all revealed in his marvelous brief soliloquy: “‘Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day, to the last syllable of recorded time; and all our yesterdays have lighted the way to dusty death.’” He ends “‘It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.’”

Cleopatra—beautous Queen of Egypt—what is there to say about her? The only character which was modelled on some traits of Elizabeth I, the ‘Virgin Queen’, more beautiful and less sophisticated than Elizabeth, but no more enchanting, she is jealous, has a wild temper, strikes a courtier, and in a sense is deserted for another woman—Antony marries Octavia, sister of Octavius Caesar. It is a power alliance, but it devastates and enrages Cleopatra, just as desertion devastated Elizabeth when her lover left her for another—or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say, took an additional and preferred lady. Cleopatra gets a woman’s come-uppance, regardless of all her gifts and power—a common fate of older women.

Sharing this fate, but in a different way, is one of Shakespeare’s noblest creations. I turn to Katharine, Queen of England, daughter of the King of Spain, as she is summoned before Henry VIII. He has obtained a commission from Rome to divorce her, aided by Cardinal Wolsey, who obtained it. The Duke of Norfolk, who notes the “dangers, doubts ... fears and despairs; all for his marriage” sown by Wolsey, who counsels divorce: “a loss of her/ that like a jewel has hung twenty years/ about his neck, yet never lost her lustre.” Katharine speaks to Henry:

I am a most poor woman, and a stranger, born out of your dominions ... Alas, Sir, in what have I offended you? What cause hath my behavior given to your displeasure, that thus you should proceed to put me off and take your good grace from me? Heaven witness I have been to you a true and humble wife, at all times to your will conformable; ever in fear to kindle your dislike, Yea, subject to your countenance, glad or sorry as I saw it inclin’d. When was the hour I ever contradicted your desire, or made it not mine too? Or which of your friends have I not strove to love, although I knew he were mine enemy? ... Sir,
call to mind that I have been your wife, in this obedience upward of twenty years, and have been blest with many children by you. If, in the course and process of this time, you can report, and prove it too, against mine honor aught, my bond to wedlock, or my love and duty, against your sacred person, in God's name turn me away; and let the foul'st contempt shut door upon me, and so give me up to the sharpest kind of justice.

The speech continues at length. That Katharine speaks of all the virtues considered important in a wife, and especially a king's wife, there is no question. But it is interesting to note that she is no fool—she knows her enemy, and when Cardinal Wolsey urges her to be patient, her response is

I will, when you are humble .... I do believe induc'd by potent circumstances, that you are mine enemy; and make challenge you shall not be my judge; for it is you have blown this coal betwixt my lord and me.

CONCLUSION

In Shakespeare's portrayals of women, it appears that—given the roles of men and women of his time—Shakespeare examines the consequences of women acting like men or not being permitted to be the women they are—to use themselves appropriately, to love, to be authentic.

Shakespeare uses a number of devices to accomplish what I believe to be his purpose: that of holding up society for scrutiny. He uses caricature—the exaggerations which appear ridiculous, as with Kate the Shrew; and also counterpoint: Kate versus Petruchio, another extreme. Other examples of counterpoint are Edmund the Bastard in Lear; and Shylock in contrast to Bassanio and Portia. It leads one to ask: who is more cruel in the cruel society of The Merchant of Venice?

Portia is also an example of role reversal in highlighting behavior. Shakespeare also uses displacement and perversion of purpose, as exemplified by Lady Macbeth's imagery of a babe at the breast, as a vicious means to incite Macbeth to murder; while Macbeth also displaces and distorts, with his image of Lady Macbeth's worth being such that she should produce men only. They each illustrate role reversal—she has an allegedly masculine drive; his hesitation no doubt appears feminine.

All of these devices underscore the pathology, and point up the fact that men, striving for power (neurotic power, rather than creative power) and, depending upon women for feeling, become alienated, cruel caricatures; and women, in losing their authenticity, fail themselves and their human relationships. Even more, women, forced to submit and becoming power-

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less beyond the point of appropriate function, cannot love, and lose their authenticity in this way. Shakespeare appeared to demonstrate that when power intercedes, women's efforts to love become tragic.

I have chosen to consider women of an earlier time—and where the "case illustration" is available to all for consideration—to provide contrast to considering women and their relationships today. The special conditions of women then—as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers—were quite circumscribed, and yet they invite comparison and are not so very different from today. Today, women are not chattels, and have free choice of husbands. Women are entering the outside world, and have many ways of life open to them.

Will they be happier? It is hard to say. Behind all activities and relationships lie emotions and the capacity to love—or the lack of it. Behind all considerations of communication, which we hear about so much today, lies feeling and the capacity—or inability—to respect the rights of another. Shakespeare, poet and playwright of human values, gave us much to think about.

REFERENCES


**GENERAL**