

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

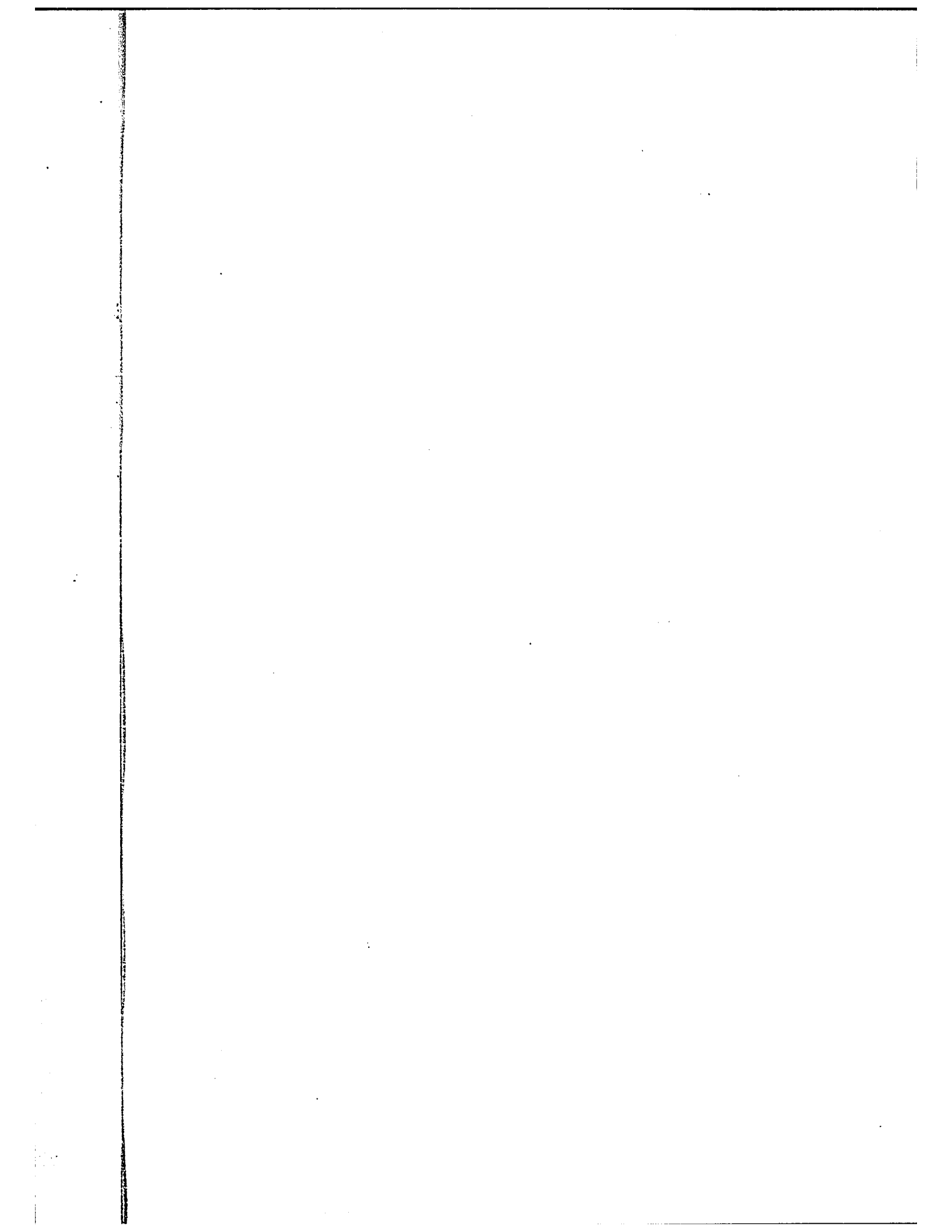
The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]



THE VEHICLE CHARACTERS

IN

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Ottawa University

In Part Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

With English as Major Subject

by

Edward James Cunningham

May, 1936.

Université d'Ottawa
BIBLIOTHÈQUES



LIBRAIRES
University of Ottawa

UMI Number: EC52090

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform EC52090
Copyright 2007 by ProQuest LLC
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

INTRODUCTION

I trust that the reader will hold in abeyance any charge of presumption that he may be inclined to level at the writer for venturing to offer another work on William Shakespeare, nature's oracle, and interpreter. The field may appear to have been covered very thoroughly but I would call attention to the nature of the various articles, essays and books that the importance of the master dramatist has called forth. They are nearly all in praise of him. There is then a certain justification for this work which aims at focussing attention on a weakness in Shakespeare's Plays. I shall be content if I at least intrigue the reader. I shall be very happy indeed if he admit that there is the germ of an idea in my contribution.

In his introduction to the Women of Shakespeare Frank Harris writes, "Criticism is an act of worship, a dedication of the spirit in love and an interpretation of the divine, the result of intimate communion of soul." (I)

(I) Frank Harris. The Women of Shakespeare
Introduction Page IX.

This is the spirit in which this dissertation is offered. It is not an attempt to detract from Shakespeare. Neither does it aim at displacing him as the first dramatist. I think I group myself with those who hold that Shakespeare at his weakest is superior to other dramatists at their best, but he is not perfect. It is impossible and unnecessary to be perfect. My contention then, is that in one department at least Shakespeare is weak, I refer to his female characters. They are not the living flesh and blood individuals that his males are. Wherever the action of the play requires a woman he supplies an ephemeral character, a mere outline, a suggestion of an individual - anything that will serve the purpose or "get the play across". I do not believe that he could not draw strong female characters. In fact it is my conviction that had he wanted to do so he could have portrayed clear-cut well-defined females. He had the ability to do this but he was not interested in the female world nor in the problems of that world. In support of my theory I will present the plays in

chronological order and point out the defects in the female characterization. Taking the plays in this order too it will be possible to notice the improvements of Shakespeare in all departments but this one. This, as an added proof of his lack of interest, will strengthen my case.

It might be well to reiterate here that the aim is not to subtract from Shakespeare's fame. As the critic Shucking has said, "Shakespeare's incomparable genius is rich enough to stand in no need of borrowed renown". (I) Again Frank Harris supplies this: "It is not given to man to injure the immortal". (II)

(I) Shucking. Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays. Page 28.

(II) Frank Harris. The Women of Shakespeare Introduction. Page XIX.

Agnes Mure Mackenzie, in the introduction to her book, *The Women In Shakespeare's Plays*, supplies us with this: "Shakespeare was interested in showing the relation of his women characters to the general action of his plays rather than in the characters of the women within themselves. Generally he is content to draw them in a somewhat more external fashion than his men". (I)

This quotation of Mrs. Mackenzie supplies us with the basis of this work. We will develop this theory in our examination of the different plays. Another remark of the same author is here most fitting. She says: "At the beginning, in the earliest plays and in the poems, the women are not unimportant, but their main interest is as supplying motives for the action of their men. In themselves, they are drawn perfunctorily enough, and when the plot of the histories demands from them an active role, are simply men in petticoats". (II)

(I) Mackenzie. *Women in Shakespeare's Plays*. Page XII.
(II) " " " " " " Page XIII.

To call attention to this quotation is not sufficient. We must now examine the early plays to substantiate this view. In so doing we remark that the women are mere puppets who move and talk mechanically. There is hardly an attempt at any characterization. The action centres around the male characters and the merest outline has to do for the women. Shakespeare is interested in the emotions the women arouse in the breasts of his men but not in the women themselves.

In Titus Andronicus Tamora and Lavinia are mere shadows. There is nothing solid about them. As a rule Shakespeare presents us with a real personality in his characters or rather in his male characters; but these two at best can only be regarded as persons. "Only the course of the action, and the name at the head of her (Tamora's) speeches, distinguish her from anybody else." (I) Lavinia's sole purpose in the play is to provide motive action. She is even more of a shadow than Tamora. She is more a machine than a person. To quote Frank Harris, "it is sufficient to remark that Tamora is a mere fiend, and that Lavinia

(I) Mackenzie. Women In Shakespeare's Plays. Chap. I
Page 6.

has no nearer relation to womanhood than her name". (I)

In Henry VI we have another illustration of Shakespeare using the woman as a vehicle to keep his play going. We are impressed most herein by Margaret, and yet Shakespeare permits her to speak but seldom. On those occasions when we hear from her we do not learn anything that will reveal her character as a real live person. On the other hand she serves a very definite purpose in as much as she gives voice to some of those passages which have built up for the author his appellation, "the master dramatist". By way of example I refer to Act III, Scene I, where we find this speech:

"Free lords, cold snow melts with the sun's hot beams.
Henry my lord is cold in great affairs,
Too full of foolish pity, and Gloucester's show
Beguiles him, as the mournful crocodile
With sorrow snares relenting passengers
Or as the snake roll'd in a flowering bank,
With shining checker'd slough, doth sting a child
That for the beauty thinks it excellent.
Believe me, lords, were none more wise than I -
And yet herein I judge mine own wit good -
This Gloucester should be quickly rid the world,
To rid us from the fear we have of him."

(I) Frank Harris. The Women of Shakespeare.
Chap. I, Page 8.

A perusal of this passage should convince an unbiased reader that Shakespeare was more interested in presenting his figures of speech than he was in portraying the character of Margaret. It is typical of the most of the speeches by the women in this play. The female characters do not interest him as women. His portrayal of them is very shadowy, while he concentrates his attention on male characterization.

Frank Harris deals with the character of Margaret after this fashion: "In depicting Margaret, Shakespeare seems to have followed history closely in a dozen different scenes. There was no doubt a clear tradition of her pride, courage, and high spirit, and these are the qualities he gives her from beginning to end, so that she becomes in his pages somewhat hard and wordy and wooden, though the opportunity offered itself to him to do better. When her young son Edward is murdered, she could have been pictured as breaking down, could have been made human for us by some touch

of despairing sorrow; but no! she rails on with dreadful verbosity through scene after scene and play after play, till we are relieved when she disappears from the stage forever". (I)

Two women, Eleanor of Gloucester and Lady Grey, make appearances but that is about all; while, Saint Joan, having a more important part, yet is so poorly drawn as to have given rise to a school that teaches that she is not the work of Shakespeare.

In The Comedy of Errors we have a possible explanation of Shakespeare's lack of interest in his female roles. He sacrifices the harmony of this plot to introduce a rather detailed account of his domestic troubles. The medium that he uses is Adriana. In support of this I quote Frank Harris: "The first thing I notice is that the jealous 'scolding' bitter wife is out of place in the gay comedy of mistaken

(I) Frank Harris. Women of Shakespeare.
Chap. I, Page 16.

identity; it would be in better keeping with the spirit of the play if Adriana were a very loving and affectionate creature, for then there would be some amusement in her mistaking the wrong Antipholus for her husband, and lavishing caresses on the wrong man.Almost the only thing we know certainly about Shakespeare's wife is that she was eight years older than he was. This peculiar trait has nothing to do with Adriana; moreover, it is the very last thing a jealous scolding woman would tell about herself; in the play it weakens her appeal; and yet Shakespeare makes Adriana tell it". (I) Certainly there is no attempt at female characterization in this work. The women are incidental to the situations involving the two sets of twins. The play does not depend on them. They are necessary only to round it out.

"The Taming of the Shrew is an old problem story of a knock-about fun, the equivalent of the

(I) Harris. The Women of Shakespeare.
Chap. II, Page 26.

modern comic film." (I) Mrs. Mackenzie is not alone in this view. Frank Harris suggests it. Now, since it is generally accepted that we do not find much characterization in this type of picture, we are not disappointed in its absence in this work of Shakespeare, and, in particular in the lack of it in the female parts. Any, that there is, is given over exclusively to the male characters. I conclude my remarks on this play with a quotation of Frank Harris: "The women characters in The Taming of the Shrew hardly deserve consideration. Neither Katharina nor Bianca is worthy to be called a woman's portrait; we only know a trait or two of them, and the widow is not even outlined". (II)

(I) Mackenzie. Women in Shakespeare's Plays.
Chap. I, Page 12.

(II) Harris. Women of Shakespears.
Chap. II, Page. 39.

In Love's Labour's Lost and Two Gentlemen of Verona it appears temporarily as if we are confronted with a snag. The women are all-important to these plays. Eliminate them and we have no plays. In spite of this, however, upon study or observation, we notice that it is not the characterization of the women that makes the plays. Rather it is groups of women depicting types but not any particular individual clearly pictured and well drawn. We read these plays with a certain amount of interest but as usual the female roles are offered, Shakespearian fashion, rather filmily.

The reader must here agree that Shakespeare certainly failed in female characterization in the plays examined thus far. True he is not unlike other English writers in this respect, in as much as this is one department in which they have all been noticeably weak. However, it seems more inexcusable in him because of his superiority in all other phases of dramatization. At this time he was about twenty-seven years old and was improving vastly in all

departments but this one. We cannot then, in his behalf, plead inexperience. He was indifferent to his women characters. If they served as vehicles he was satisfied.

In A Midsummer Night's Dream our attention is drawn to two women, Hermia and Helena. Mrs. Mackenzie writes of them: "All through the play they have been little more than puppets, elements in the fantastic pattern of a dream." (1) "Puppets" and "elements" are certainly not to be regarded as characters by any stretch of the imagination. Shakespeare undoubtedly could have portrayed real flesh and blood characters had he wanted to do so; but, here too, he is satisfied "to get his play across" and so only offers us "puppets". A quotation from the text will here serve us well. This is hardly what we expect in a character that is supposed to be a real picture of a woman. We cannot imagine any woman making such an admission as Helena does to Demetrius in Act II, Scene II:

(1) Mackenzie. Women in Shakespeare's Plays. Chap. I, Page 33.

"And even for that do I love you the more.
I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius,
The more you beat me, I will fawn on you:
Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me,
Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.
What worser place can I beg in your love,-
And yet a place of high respect with me,-
Than to be used as you use your dog?

In All's Well That Ends Well the inconsistency in the drawing of Helena is apparent in the second act. Her actions here are in contrast to what we were led to expect of her from the first act. She has changed and there has been no manifestation of this change. The play is sometimes saved in its presentation by capable actresses reading into the part some things which might be there, but, which, in reality, certainly are not in the text, as we have it from Shakespeare. What might be there and what is there are two very different things. Shakespeare's carelessness in this instance typifies his real attitude towards his vehicle characters.

Coleridge has called Helena "the loveliest of Shakespeare's characters". It seems to me that this statement of Coleridge is unworthy of him, in as much as, a close observation of the character of Helena will reveal her chief peculiarity to be her coarseness in thoughts and words. She discusses her virginity at great length with the man in the play whom she despises. The literary prominence of Coleridge warrants a somewhat lengthy quotation from the play. It will certainly discount his appreciation of Helena. Consider these lines of Act I, Scene I:

"..... Who comes here?
Enter Parolles.

(Aside) One that goes with him. I love him for his sake;
And yet I know him a notorious liar,
Think him a great way fool, solely a coward;
Yet these fix'd evils sit so fit in him,
That they take place, when virtue's steely bones
Look bleak i' the cold wind: withal, full oft we see
Cold wisdom waiting on superfluous folly

Parolles. Save you, fair queen!.

Helena. And you, monarch!

Parolles. No.

Helena. And no.

Parolles. Are you meditating on virginity?

Helena. Ay. You have some stain of soldier in you: let me ask you a question. Man is enemy to virginity; how may we barricade it against him?

Parolles. Keep him out.

Helena. But he assails; and our virginity, though valiant, in the defence yet is weak: unfold to us some warlike resistance.

Parolles. There is none: man, sitting down before you, will undermine you and blow you up.

Helena. Bless our poor virginity from underminers and blowers up! Is there no military policy, how virgins might blow up men?

Parolles. Virginity being blown down, man will quicklier be blown up; marry, in blowing him down again, with the breach yourselves made, you lose your city. It is not politic in the commonwealth of nature to preserve virginity. Loss of virginity is rational increase, and there was never virgin got till virginity was first lost. That you were made of is metal to make virgins. Virginity by being once lost may be ten times found; by being ever kept, it is ever lost: 'tis too cold a companion; away with 't!

Helena. I will stand for 't a little, though therefore I die a virgin.

Parolles. There's little can be said in 't; 'tis against the rule of nature. To speak on the part of virginity, is to accuse your mothers; which is most infallible disobedience. He that hangs himself is a virgin: virginity murders itself; and should be buried in highways out

of all sanctified limit, as a desperate offendress against nature. Virginitie breeds mites, much like a cheese; consumes itself to the very paring, and so dies with feeding his own stomach. Besides, virginitie is peevish, proud, idle, made of self-love, which is the most inhibited sin in the canon. Keep it not; you cannot choose but lose by 't: out with 't: within ten year it will make itself ten, which is a goodly increase; and the principal itself not much the worse: away with 't!

Helena. How might one do, sir, to lose it to her own liking?

Parolles. Let me see: marry, ill, to like him that ne'er it likes. 'Tis a commodity will lose the gloss with lying; the longer kept, the less worth: off with 't while 'tis vendible; answer the time of request. Virginitie, like an old courtier, wears her cap out of fashion; richly suited, but unsuitable: just like the brooch and the toothpick, which wear not now. Your date is better in your pie and your porridge than in your cheek: and your virginitie, your old virginitie, is like one of our French withered pears, it looks ill, it eats drily; marry, 'tis a withered pear; it was formerly better; marry, yet 'tis a withered pear: will you any thing with it?

Helena. Not my virginitie yet....."

The reader will hardly claim that it is characteristic of young girls to discuss this theme with the opposite sex; yet, Shakespeare would have

us accept this as customary. As to Coleridge's praise it must be admitted that he is somewhat indiscreet. There is no "loveliness" in this portrayal. Of course, in extenuation of his extravagance in the choice of epithets and in fairness to Coleridge, it should be suggested that he probably was basing his appreciation on the picture of Helena as presented in scenes other than those of the first act, and there is, as already mentioned above, a vast difference between the Helena of the first act and the later Helena.

In Romeo and Juliet we come,- in contrast to the more or less secondary or unimportant female characters that have engaged our attention,- to one of Shakespeare's most serious efforts at the portrayal of woman. Immediately it is conceded that Juliet stands out as one of his best attempts up to this time. It would appear at first glance that he had decided to put forth his best in order that

he might create a female character that would measure up to the standards of his males. Further consideration, however, soon indicates that his usual attitude toward women reasserts itself. If we examine the portrayal of Juliet in an impartial manner we soon discern the flaws. Here we have a child of fourteen exemplifying the mature judgment and leadership of a veteran. The consensus of opinion is that Juliet directs Romeo, dominates the action, and keeps the action of the play progressing. If we keep in mind her age and her reputed inexperience we have difficulty in imagining her as a personality that harmonizes with Shakespeare's description of her actions. Even allowing for the fact that women reach maturity and marry when quite young in the warmer climes and excusing some of the portrayal on that score, still no matter how rapid physical development may be, we have yet to find a character whose mental development and qualities of leadership are so advanced as in the youthful and inexperienced Juliet. On the other hand in his development

of male characters, Shakespeare never makes the mistake of permitting them to act older than their years. Assuredly he was familiar with the habits and actions of women as well as those of men, for Shakespeare was a keen student of human nature; yet his attitude toward the female character was one of lack of interest, and the result in this case again is a rather inconsistent portrayal.

Were Shakespeare's portrayal of Juliet realistic in most of the scenes--which it is not--this one extravagant bit of sensuality is as unreal as it is uncalled for. Says Juliet in Act III, Scene II:

"Leap to these arms, untalk'd of and unseen.
Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
By their own beauties: or if love be blind,
It best agrees with night.--Come civil night
Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
And learn me how to lose a winning match,
Played for a pair of stainless maidenhoods."

And again a few lines further in the same scene:

"O I have bought the mansion of a love,
But not possessed it, and, though I am sold,
Not yet enjoy'd: so tedious is this day
As is the night before some festival---"

Granting the language of the day, the outspokenness of women, the crudeness of their surroundings, the stress of emotion under which she was laboring-- granting all these, no fair minded person will accept these sensual words as coming naturally and characteristically from the lips of a fourteen year old girl. No, the artist Shakespeare was no artist here and his portrayal of Juliet is forever ruined by these ill-sounding words. And are we to think that Shakespeare could not have done better? By no means! It is likely that he saw the flaws in the characterization of Juliet but he was not interested enough in the female character to take the trouble to correct it. As it was, the play would "get across". His interest stopped there.

Taken as a whole Juliet is a conventional heroine of romance, a type, not a particular character. Mrs. Mackenzie admits that there is not a single situation, or action of Juliet that is not

in the orthodox tradition of conventional heroines. (I)

The only other important female character in this play is the Nurse. The chief defect in her portrayal is inconsistency. We find her in one scene brutal and coarse and in the next the essence of kindness and sympathy. It is true that such seemingly opposite traits may be found in the same person but it is the duty of the dramatist to reconcile such conflicting suggestions for the benefit of the reader-- and this Shakespeare has not done. He was content to let the Nurse act in any way that suited the action of the play without regard for the resulting portrayal of character.

There is nothing original about Juliet and the Nurse. Their counterparts are to be found in any cheap novel. In his depiction of these two characters Shakespeare seems to forget that

(I) Mackenzie. Women in Shakespeare's Plays.
Chap. II, Page 68.

originality is not newness of invention but the freshness and depth of the writer's conception of his figures. Shakespeare knew this fact, as is illustrated in his male characters, but lacked the interest to apply it to his women.

In Richard II and Richard III the women are not generally regarded as very important so we can pass over them rather hurriedly. In Richard II the Duchess of York pleading for her son's life flashes before us for an instant a touch of personality. But on closer examination we find that she is merely a brief impression of any terror-stricken mother who pleads passionately for a son who may or may not be guilty. Speaking of the other women of the play Mrs. Mackenzie says: "The Duchess of Gloucester is simply a 'messenger' part,..... and the young Queen a mere reflector to emphasize the fortune of the graceful poseur who is her husband..... She herself has less personality, by a great deal, than the sketch

of Lady Grey in Henry VI." (I)

Elizabeth, Margaret, Anne and the old Duchess in Richard III would be indistinguishable were it not for their names preceding their speeches.

In King John we have two women to deal with-- Constance and Elinor. The latter is shadowy at best and the only objection to my thesis in this play seems to be Constance. At first glance Constance seems to be rather a striking portrait of a woman. That she monopolizes a large part of the action cannot be denied, but on close inspection we discover that Shakespeare merely took the attributes of Constance as given in the old chronicles and molds them into the Constance of his play. He takes the traits as given in the old histories, and, as many of them are contradictory, his finished picture of Constance is, to say the least,

(I) Mackenzie. Women in Shakespeare's Plays.
Chap. II, Page 70.

inconsistent. Certainly he is not deserving of such praise as is given him by Mrs. Jameson in the following passage: "The manner in which Shakespeare has applied the scattered hints of history to the formation of the character, reminds us of that magician who collected the mangled limbs which had been dispersed up and down, reunited them into the human form and reanimated them with the breathing and conscious spirit of life---" (I)

It is true that Shakespeare takes the scattered bits of information he could find regarding Constance, but that he reunites them into the human form, probable and consistent, is not evident. On the other hand, as illustrative of the inconsistencies in the character of Constance, we might mention that at one time we see her majestic, at another imaginative, and still again abject and distracted as at the loss of her son, Arthur.

(I) Mrs. Jameson. Shakespeare's Heroines.
Page 258.

These qualities are contradictory ones, and, while not inconceivable, at least need further explanation in their union in one character than Shakespeare gives us.

A few quotations from the play will bear out the above statements. In Act II, Scene I, we see the majestic, level-headed Constance:

"Stay for an answer to your embassy,
Lest unadvised you stain your swords with blood:
My Lord Chatillon may from England bring
That right in peace which here we urge in war,
And then we shall repent each drop of blood
That hot rash haste so indirectly shed."

The imaginative Constance in Act III, Scene I, when she is advised, by the Earl of Salisbury, of the proposed marriage of Lewis, the Dauphin of France, and Blanch of Spain, neice to King John:

"Thou shalt be punish'd for thus frightening me,
For I am sick and capable of fears,
Oppress'd with wrongs and therefore full of fears,
A widow, husbandless, subject to fears,
A woman, naturally born to fears;
And though thou now confess thou didst but jest
With my vex'd spirits I cannot take a truce
But they will quake and tremble all this day."

The broken-spirited Constance in Act III, Scene IV, lamenting the capture of Arthur:

"K. Phi.

Bind up your hairs.

Const. Yes, that I will; and wherefore will I do it?
I tore them from their bonds and cried aloud,
'O that these hands could so redeem my son,
As they have given these hairs their liberty!'
But now I envy at their liberty,
And will again commit them to their bonds,
Because my poor child is a prisoner.
And, father cardinal, I have heard you say
That we shall see and know our friends in heaven:
If that be true, I shall see my boy again;
For since the birth of Cain, the first male child,
To him that did but yesterday suspire,
There was not such a gracious creature born.
But now will canker sorrow eat my bud
And chase the native beauty from his cheek
And he will look as hollow as a ghost,
As dim and meagre as an ague's fit,
And so he'll die; and, rising so again,
When I shall meet him in the court of heaven
I shall not know him: therefore never, never
Must I behold my pretty Arthur more.

Pand. You hold too heinous a respect of grief.

Const. He talks to me that never had a son.

K. Phi. You are as fond of grief as of your child.

Const. Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;
Then have I reason to be fond of grief.
Fare you well: had you such a loss as I,
I could give better comfort than you do.
I will not keep this form upon my head,
When there is such disorder in my wit.
O Lord! my boy, my Arthur, my fair son!
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world!
My widow-comfort, and my sorrows' cure!"

While the above characteristics can be combined in one woman, they are unusual and call for some explanation. Shakespeare gives us none, but passes blithely on to traits still more inconsistent. Even in his most unimportant male characters, Shakespeare is careful either to build consistently or to call our attention to the unusualness of the combining elements. In Constance, he places the parts together as he found them in the different chronicles and cares not whether they are consistent or ridiculous. If they "get over" he is content.

In The Merchant of Venice we meet another of Shakespeare's creations that is generally accorded a lofty place among the dramatist's characters. Portia is a figure that attracts attention and the defects in her character have been generally overlooked. However, from an impersonal examination of this character we cannot fail to come to the conclusion that Portia is a mechanical sort of person. The

words that Shakespeare puts in her mouth are stock phrases---epigrams, aphorisms, platitudes,--old long before Shakespeare's time. The situation in which Shakespeare has placed her and the actions he puts her through are romantic ones, and account, I believe, for the general interest in this play. The action and the setting are responsible for much of the interest, while the characterization supplies little. Portia is a cold, formal sort of person who acts and talks as she is directed by the playwright. The outline of her figure is there and with the application of a little of Shakespeare's great genius there is no doubt that she could have been made into one of his greatest characters.

Mrs. Jameson in her extravagant praise of the excellence of Portia's character leaves herself open to attack from many sides. I will quote here a short paragraph from Hazlitt which effectively silences the lengthy efforts of

Mrs. Jameson to set Portia upon the highest pedestal of all:

"Portia is not a very great favorite with us; neither are we in love with her maid, Nerissa. Portia has a certain degree of affectation and pedantry about her, which is very unusual in Shakespeare's women, but which, perhaps, was a proper qualification for the office of a 'civil doctor', which she undertakes and executes so successfully. The speech about Mercy is very well; but there are a thousand finer ones in Shakespeare. We do not admire the scene of the caskets, and object entirely to the black Morochius. We should like Jessica better if she had not deceived and robbed her father; and Lorenzo if he had not married a Jewess, though he thinks he has a right to wrong a Jew. The dialogue between the newly-married couple in Act V is a collection of classical elegancies." (I)

(I) Hazlitt. Characters of Shakespeare's Plays.
Page 273.

If we are entirely frank with ourselves and refuse to be carried away by the exorbitant praise showered upon Portia we will have to admit that Portia's beauty and magic are in Shakespeare's poetry and not in his revelation of her character. She is, after all, in many respects much like Juliet and there is very little that is original with Shakespeare in that portrayal.

Speaking of the women in the next three plays I-Henry IV, 2-Henry IV and Henry V, Mrs. Mackenzie offers the following comment: "In the Henry group of histories the women play but the very smallest part, one structurally as trivial, as in Richard II. They have no directly dynamic share in any of the action, like Margaret or Elinor; they do not serve as comment on its ethical or emotional value, like Constance or the women in Richard III; they do not even supply motives for the actions of the men, as in the early comedies. Besides providing parts for necessary

and important members of the dramatic company to which Shakespeare, an actor and a working dramatist, belonged, their only function is to 'feed' the other characters. They are 'reflector' parts, who cast light upon the characters of Hotspur, Falstaff and King Henry, for Shakespeare knew as well as Meredith or Jane Austen that one of the main keys to a man's nature is his fundamental attitude toward women. From the structural point of view, Lady Percy, Mrs. Quickly, Doll Tearsheet, Katherine of France, are thus no more than scenery." (I)

Mrs. Mackenzie states quite clearly in the above paragraph Shakespeare's attitude toward the women characters. He recognized them as vehicles to his needs and therefore spent but little time on their presentation. He sketches them lightly and leaves their success or failure to the people who are to

(I) Mrs. Mackenzie. Women in Shakespeare's Plays. Chap. III, Page 95.

impersonate them on the stage.

In Merry Wives of Windsor Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford are the only women who hold important parts. In print both of them are rather shadowy creatures. They are sketched as usual with that sureness of touch which is Shakespeare's and the result is a sketch merely, with no depth or breadth or substance. The popular conception of the character of Mrs. Page is derived from the performances of the play which has been presented thousands of times since Shakespeare wrote it. Pretty and capable actresses have read into the part much that is not there and have succeeded in presenting a very vivid picture of Mrs. Page. However, if we compare the text with the presentation on the stage we will find that the credit for making Mrs. Page a flesh and blood character should go to the actress rather than to the dramatist.

Rosalind and Celia are the two characters we have to deal with in As You Like It. Of these two Rosalind is, of course, the more important. Mrs. Mackenzie says of her: "---there is nothing very subtle or complex either in herself or in the drawing of her, beyond the profound and perpetual mystery that is under the creation of great melody----- She is not even very new. She is more perfect as art and more delightful as personality than Portia or Sylvia, but she is of their kindred." (I) Again as in Merry Wives of Windsor we have to separate the Rosalind of Shakespeare from the Rosalind of the stage. The possibility of a great character is present in the outline Shakespeare gives us and that possibility has been made a reality by the actresses who have taken the part of Rosalind on the stage. Shakespeare never fails to give us an outline of his characters but in Rosalind and the rest of his female characters he goes no farther than this. In striking contrast to

(I) Mackenzie. Women in Shakespeare's Plays. Chap. III, Page 112.

this is his perfect portrayal of even the most minor male character.

Mrs. Jameson makes a rather weak defense of her inability to visualize clearly Rosalind's character: "It is easy to seize on the prominent features in the minds of Beatrice, but extremely difficult to catch and fix the more fanciful graces of Rosalind. She is like a compound of essences, so volatile in their nature, and so exquisitely blended, that on any attempt to analyze them they seem to escape us." (1)

It is easy to recognize in Mrs. Jameson's remarks a rather ingenious attempt to prove to herself as well as to others that Shakespeare did not fail in his portrayal of Rosalind. Her fanciful explanation is too transparent to be of any value.

(1) Mrs. Jameson. Shakespeare's Heroines.
Page 74.

She cannot visualize Rosalind clearly, because Shakespeare does not present her clearly. The outline is present but the imagination of the reader must supply the substance.

In Much Ado About Nothing Shakespeare has allowed the plot to take the place of characterization and the latter element is noticeably lacking in both male and female parts. Mrs. Mackenzie admits that while Hero is officially the heroine of the play, Beatrice and Benedick seem for most people to be the characters of greatest interest. There is but one solution to a situation of this kind, namely, that there is not a vivid characterization of Hero and the reader loses interest in her and devotes it to the gay repartee between Beatrice and Benedick. If Shakespeare had drawn Hero carefully he most certainly could have attracted enough of the reader's attention to justify Hero as the principal character. But Shakespeare was

not interested in Hero's character. He made a sketch of her that would serve the purpose and proceeded to devote his attention to the plot. Beatrice, Margaret and Ursula suffer the same fate as does Hero, although their defects are not so noticeable owing to their relatively minor positions in the play.

While Beatrice supplants Hero as the leading woman in the play, the former's characteristics do not seem to balance sufficiently to give us a picture of a flesh and blood character. For instance Mrs. Jameson says of Beatrice:

"Shakespeare has exhibited in Beatrice a spirited and faithful portrayal of the fine lady of his own time. The deportment, language, manners, and allusions are those of a particular class in a particular age; but the individual and dramatic character which forms the ground-work is strongly discriminated, and being taken from general nature, belongs to every age." (I)

(I) Mrs. Jameson. Shakespeare's Heroines.
Page 66.

In striking contrast to the above words
I quote these words of Hero from the text, Act III,
Scene I:

"But nature never framed a woman's heart
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice:
Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes
Misprizing what they look on; and her wit
Values itself so highly, that to her
All matter else seems weak: she cannot love,
Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
She is so self-endear'd."

Mrs. Jameson's version of Beatrice
hardly coincides with that of Hero. The solution
of the matter is that Shakespeare failed to
indicate clearly Beatrice's character. He
attributes one trait to her now and another
later, with the result that we are confused in
attempting to sum up her character. Even taking
into account the delightful inconsistency which
is supposed to typify women, we cannot pardon
Shakespeare for the liberties he took in this
portrayal. We do not notice this defect in
Shakespeare's drawing of male characters and
our conclusion is, as usual, that the dramatist

was not sufficiently interested in feminine characters to do his work well.

Twelfth-Night offers a better opportunity for contrasting the male and female characters than any of the plays heretofore have offered. Olivia and Viola are well drawn but lack the life and personality that characterizes even the humblest of the male characters of the play. Malvolio, for instance, though he be but a steward, impresses us as a flesh and blood character as opposed to the mechanical Olivia and Viola. Every word he utters shows his haughty, lofty manner and at the conclusion of the play we feel as though we would recognize him were we to meet him on the street. On the other hand the play closes without giving us a satisfying picture of the women. We are conscious of them as people but not as personalities. Even Antonio, who appears but seldom in the action, leaves his character clearly stamped on the mind. In a few lines in which he

denounces Viola, thinking her Sebastian, Antonio gives us a picture of himself that is not easily forgotten. Shakespeare had an amazing opportunity in this play to display his skill in portraying female characters and we are most likely mistaken if we think that the great dramatist failed to recognize it. It is very probable that he saw the opportunity but purposely ignored it, for the reason that I have already repeatedly set forth.

In Julius Caesar the male characters, of course, occupy the most important positions. The following passages from Mrs. Mackenzie sum up the general impression of this play: "Indeed, the women play small part in it. The data give them no room for any more effect upon the action than the Queen Isabel of Richard II and though the Elizabethan audience relished sentiment it would exist without it, so there was no question of hauling in a heroine by the hair." (I) In speaking of the wives of Brutus and Caesar the same author has this to say: "Probably the main

(I) Mackenzie. Women in Shakespeare's Plays. Chap. IV, Page 177.

reason for their being there at all was the need of finding parts for the clever pair of boys who had played the women in the comedies." (I) I wish to call particular attention to the latter quotation as there is in it a suggestion of one explanation of Shakespeare's attitude toward his vehicle characters. This will be developed more at length in the conclusion of this thesis.

However, there is some female characterization in Julius Caesar but on looking up the sources for the play we discover that that particular portion is not Shakespeare's but Plutarch's. In the scene in which Portia begs Brutus to tell her what is troubling him we discover a female characterization that is more real than any we have met so far. But the scene has been taken almost word for word from Plutarch.

Some of the critics defend Shakespeare on this point claiming that he took the sketch

(I) Mackenzie. Women in Shakespeare's Plays.
Chap. IV, Pages 177-178.

from Plutarch and dramatized it. A careful comparison of the Portia of Shakespeare and that of Plutarch will reveal that the great dramatist added nothing to the character of Portia to make her more dramatic. She is a striking figure in the Lives and is no more striking in the play. While it is very true that Shakespeare took many of the historical figures and made them come alive on the stage it does not follow that he did this with all the characters taken from history. The male characters seem to have attracted him but Portia and her sisters were transplanted almost bodily and show none of the artist's genius at dramatizing.

Mrs. Mackenzie states that one of the most conspicuous characteristics of Shakespeare's women up to now has been their loyalty to their own sex. She claims that they never belittle each other to gain the approbation of a man. (We may well ask if this restraint is a characteristic of the women of real life.) However, according to Mrs. Mackenzie,

Portia is a departure from other Shakespearian women in this regard. She admits that there is more than a hint of self-praise in the following lines:

"I grant I am a woman, but withal
A woman well-reputed, Cato's daughter."

Here we see a natural trait of womankind--and it is not Shakespeare's work but that of Plutarch. In reality Portia comes closer to being a real characterization of a woman than any that Shakespeare has made and upon investigation we find that he borrowed her almost completely from another. Portia's evident femininity is revealed by her lack of self-control and her tendency to give the conspiracy away in the scene at Brutus' door. Her excitement, in contrast to the coolness and manly blood-thirstiness of Lady Macbeth (which certainly is not feminine) is a truer picture of a woman than any of Shakespeare's other female characters. The Portia in the Merchant of Venice

is likewise too cool and collected to be truly feminine.

Portia is in a panic as she dispatches a messenger to the Capitol to see how affairs are progressing. Her lines:

"I must go in. Ay me, how weak a thing
The heart of woman is!"

are truly feminine and we must give the credit for this character not to Shakespeare but to Plutarch. There is nothing more here than a record of Portia's words and Shakespeare has added nothing to our picture of Portia as derived from a reading of Plutarch.

This point seems to strengthen my opinion, voiced several times earlier in this dissertation, that Shakespeare recognized the opportunities for female characterization presented in his plays, but purposely ignored them because he was not sufficiently interested in the women of his dramas. The fact that he selected this excellent portrait of Portia from Plutarch shows us that he appreciated a good portrayal when he saw it, but was

too disinterested to attempt a worth-while characterization himself. The public was accepting his plays with inferior female characterization and that seemed to suffice.

It is true that Portia at other times shows her bravery and stoicism, which in itself is not foreign to women, but she is no constant, cool-blooded character, and she shows her femininity in her moments of fear and lack of self-control. On the other hand Lady Macbeth and the other Portia who are true Shakespearian women present a cool and collected mien at all times and this composure can scarcely be called truly feminine.

In Troilus and Cressida Shakespeare seems to reach the height of his dislike for women. Sir Spencer St. John has the following to say of Cressida:
"-----We find united the efflorescence and poetry of lewdness, the incapacity of self-government, the outburst of sexual passion, the force of temperament, the ready and subtle sophistry, by which the individual seeks to escape from self condemnation by expanding her

own vices so as to make them encompass her whole sex; she sins with intrepidity, gives way at once to the gusts of desire, passes without hesitation or a blush from one lover's arms to another, behaves with equal wantonness to each, and then calmly bases her self-defense on the conviction that all women do the same:

'Ah! poor our sex! this fault in us I find,
The error of our eye directs our mind:
What error leads must err; O, then conclude
Minds sway'd by eyes are full of turpitude.' " (I)

The picture here drawn of Cressida is certainly too exaggerated to be taken seriously. That Shakespeare had some of his acquaintances in mind we cannot doubt, but his displeasure with the particular person was so great as to color his usually fair estimate of his characters. Shakespeare did not usually permit his personal feelings to affect his portrayal of his male characters. Of course, we have an instance or two where Shakespeare caricatures his male friends, (his drawing of Polonius, for example,

seems to be an exaggerated picture of a statesman of Shakespeare's time), but they are, as a rule, intended to be accepted as such. The reverse, however, seems to be true of Cressida and the other women of his plays. He attempts to force us to accept such vulgar and heartless portrayals as Lady Macbeth, Cressida, Goneril and Regan. His reason for so doing was, very likely, due to the fact that he had a private grudge against womankind and, realizing that by treating his female characters carelessly and contemptuously he could do them more injury than by presenting a careful study of them, he proceeded to ignore them as characters and used his mechanical and puppet-like substitutions when he found it necessary to introduce a female. Cressida takes her place among mechanical figures. Shakespeare shows no interest in making her a realistic character but is content to offer the vile and undignified puppet that he calls a woman.

Hamlet is another of Shakespeare's great plays in which the women are kept in the background as much as possible. Gertrude and Ophelia are comparatively insignificant characters, even on the stage. When we contrast the vivid portrayal of Hamlet, Claudius, Laertes, Polonius, even Horatio, with the shadowy figures of the women in the play we see how carelessly Shakespeare went about his work of drawing his female characters. We are not sure of our mental images of Gertrude or Ophelia when the play is finished. In support of the above statement I will quote the following passages from different authors. They are, I believe, self-explanatory:

"There is more to be felt than to be said in the study of Ophelia's character, just because she is a creation of such perfectly feminine proportions and beauty." (1)

"Ophelia, Poor Ophelia! Oh far too soft, too good, too fair to be cast among the

(1) Strachey in the Variorum Shakespeare. Page 173.

briars of this working day world, and fall and bleed upon the thorns of life! What shall be said of her? For eloquence is mute before her! Like a strain of sad, sweet music which comes floating by us on the wings of night and silence, and which we rather feel than hear,---like the exhalation of the violet dying upon the sense it charms,---like the snow flake dissolved in air before it has caught a stain of earth,---like the light surf severed from the billow, which a breath disperses--- such is the character of Ophelia; so exquisitely delicate, as if a touch would profane it; sanctified in our thoughts by the last and worst of human woes, that we scarcely dare consider it too deeply." (1)

"Ophelia is a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon. Oh, rose of May! Oh, flower too soon faded!" (2)

(1) Mrs. Jameson. In the Variorum Shakespeare. Page 60.

(2) Hazlitt. In the Variorum Shakespeare. Page 157.

"It does not appear whether Ophelia's madness was chiefly for her father's death or for the loss of Hamlet. It is not often that young women run mad for the loss of their fathers. It is more natural to suppose that, like Chimene in the Cid, her great sorrow proceeded from her father being killed by the man she loved, and thereby making it indecent for her ever to marry him." (I)

"Had Ophelia been three years older the tragedy of Hamlet would never have been written. Had Ophelia been three years older she would have been a woman - a woman with all that mysterious strength that comes to a woman in the hour that she loves. Had Ophelia been three years older, when Hamlet rushed in upon her, in the hour of his need, he would have found a woman ready to share his burden. She would have looked up into

(I) Sir Thomas Hanmer. In the Variorum Shakespeare. Page 145.

his eyes with a glance as firm, as fearless as his own, for her heart was pure. She would have grasped his hand with a grasp as firm as his; she would have answered with a fearless heart of a woman, 'Yes, Hamlet, I will be true. The sorrows of your life for love's sake I will bear; the burdens of your life for love's sake I will share. Yes, Hamlet, I will be true.' With the tender instinct of a woman she would have brushed back the hair from his fevered brow; she would have whispered calm words of solace into his distracted brain; and, with the better instinct of a woman, she would have pointed heavenward and cried, 'God is the avenger,' and Hamlet would have been saved.

..... But had Ophelia been fully matured, had she been a woman in the strict sense of the word, her love would have made her stronger than all the evil queens in God's creation, and the play would be what it

should be - a beautiful comedy with love dominating." (I)

The above quotations seem to reveal that their authors are baffled in their efforts to visualize Ophelia. Strachey side-steps any attempt at it. Mrs. Jameson, in her usual style, stands in awe at something she fails to see, Hazlitt follows closely Mrs. Jameson's method, Hamner admits frankly that he is puzzled and Father Vaughan imagines her an entirely different person.

As for Gertrude, there is even less evidence of characterization. She is kept more in the background than is Ophelia and we feel as though we would fail to recognize either of the women were we to meet them. Hamlet, Horatio, or any other of the male characters impresses us more

Father Vaughan. Sermons from Shakespeare.
Pages 74 - 75.

forcibly. While Horatio has but relatively few lines in the play his character is well determined and vividly presented. Gertrude and Ophelia presented a remarkable opportunity for characterization, but Shakespeare with his usual attitude for his female characters, spent just enough time on them to keep his play moving and devoted his genius for characterization to the male members of his play.

The women in Measure For Measure seem to have attracted more criticism than the majority of Shakespeare's women. Several critics admit that Shakespeare tried to side-step the female problem in this play and their remarks are directly in point in relation to this thesis. Mrs. Mackenzie has the following remarks:
"And two-thirds of the people simply do not come alive----including curiously enough, the heroine." (I)

(I) Mackenzie. Women In Shakespeare's Plays.
Chap. IV, Page 226.

"But even Isabella is scarcely more than an incarnate formula, and the rest of them are simply ghosts." (1)

"All through the scenes following that in the prison she (Isabella) has spoken only what is absolutely demanded by the action. Shakespeare seems to have grown tired of her, and given up the attempt to make of her a personage. With the other women he has not even attempted it. Marianna.....is frankly incredible.Juliet, at least, is an inoffensive ghost..... She appears in three scenes altogether; in two of them she is silent, in the third speaks only conventional platitudes of repentance. Only once in her last phrase, she shows any real life, in her horror of having to go on living when Claudio must die. But it is hardly enough to make her come alive. Mrs. Overdone is a property-chest puppet." (2)

(1) Mackenzie. Women In Shakespeare's Plays. Chap. IV, Page 227.

(2) Mackenzie. Women In Shakespeare's Plays. Chap. IV, Pages 242 - 243.

Mrs. Mackenzie attempts to excuse the poor characterization of the women in this play on the ground that the play as a whole is a failure. It is her belief that for Shakespeare's sake it is better to admit that Measure For Measure is a failure than to try to justify his poor portrayals of the female characters. It seems to me to be a much more logical argument that the play is a failure because of the poor characterization. Shakespeare's great genius enabled him to save most of his plays, even though he took little care with his female characters, but in Measure For Measure the women were, of necessity, too important to be slighted, and, failing to treat them carefully, he failed to make his play succeed. Mrs. Mackenzie has simply failed to realize that Shakespeare is merely displaying in a more unreserved manner his characteristic attitude toward his female characters.

The German critic Shucking has the following remark concerning this play:

"....Now Shakespeare tries to evade difficult problems of the female soul, a peculiarity in

which he clearly distinguishes himself from contemporary authors like Dekker, Heywood, Beaumont and Fletcher, etc. They----in this respect much more progressive than he----have a certain preference for placing in the center of their representations the changeable nature of the female character, as in A Woman Killed With Kindness, The Honest Whore, The Maid's Tragedy. Shakespeare, then seeks a way out of the difficulty. It is interesting to see how he finds it. He puts a new figure on the boards. The villainous Angelo, who makes the criminal proposal to the poor Isabella in Shakespeare's play has at one time been betrothed to a girl whom he jilted when she lost her fortune. To this woman, then, whose name is Marianna, Isabella hurries and asks her secretly to change places with her and in her stead go to the meeting with Angelo, which is to take place in the dark. What an unheard of, what a revolting thing to ask of a poor forsaken

girl! But will she not refuse to make this sacrifice of her dignity? Is not the girl obliged to use entreaty and tears and go down on her knees in order to move her? Nothing of the kind! Marianna is ready in a moment to entrap the faithless lover by this union in the dark. It is astonishing to see with how little self-esteem a woman is credited here. This solution corresponds to the mentality of Boccaccio, the son of the fourteenth century. It is on a level with the morality of the middle and lower classes of medieval society, but certainly not with the ideas of the beginning of the seventeenth century, the views of which regarding women, as we meet with them in Overburg, Hall, etc., after all represent a considerably higher moral standard than is found in those earlier times." (I)

(I) Shucking. Character Problems In Shakespeare's Plays. Pages 197 - 198.

We know very well that as keen a student of human nature as was Shakespeare realized that he was being inconsistent in his portrayal of the characters of Isabella and Marianna and deliberately refused to correct that inconsistency. He needed the women to form his plot but he did not devote his energy to a characterization of them. Mechanical women would do as well, as far as plot was concerned, and Shakespeare was content with that.

The three women in Othello offer no serious objection to this thesis. Emilia and Bianca are inferior to Desdemona and the latter is far from being one of Shakespeare's greatest characters. We see in Shakespeare's portrayal of Desdemona the same lack of interest that he displays toward his other female characters. Desdemona was absolutely necessary to the play, so Shakespeare placed her there in outline and went on to what, to him, was vastly more important work--the drawing of Othello and Iago. When the play is finished we can close our

eyes and picture vividly the crafty, despicable face of Iago and the honest, unsuspecting countenance of Othello, but try as we may no fixed image of the woman meets our mind's eye.

It is rather difficult to call up a mental picture of a woman quite so childlike as is Desdemona. This is the picture that Shakespeare gives us of her:

"And, after she has roused herself to one great protest against her lord's suspicion, her mind relapses into bewildered helplessness for the short remainder of her life. She goes over again and again the one thought that she can take in--the enormous, utterly impossible crime of which she is accused. She realizes only the accusation; she cannot even think of the existence of the sin. An exquisitely subtle touch shows how she tries with her perfect innocence, to imagine what guilt is. She sees Lodovico, a young and handsome man and wonders if it would be possible for her, another's wife, to love him. She

resolves that she 'could not do such a deed for the whole world'. In the last scene of all there is no spring, no elasticity about her mind; no reflection, one might say no thought." (I)

Such perfect innocence is beautiful and we may say artistic and while not wholly improbable it is too much to agree that it is reality. Desdemona is overdrawn and conflicts with any image we may try to call up in our own mind.

We can picture the women in this play as types but not as personalities and the fault lies not in our ability to visualize but rather in Shakespeare's characteristic lack of care in portraying his women.

The female characters in Timon of Athens play such an unimportant part that nothing is gained by criticizing them too extensively. A remark of Mrs. Mackenzie will here suffice: "In any case, they have no more personality than

(I) Edward Rose. In the Variorum Shakespeare. Pages 429 - 430.

the figures in a theater fresco." (I)

Cordelia, Goneril and Regan in King Lear represent a more worth while effort on their author's part to portray real women than he has attempted up to this time. They were, of course, absolutely indispensable to the play and indispensable as living characters and not merely as puppets. The fact that Shakespeare drew them more carefully than any of their predecessors strengthens the belief that the dramatist could present real female characterizations if he chose to do so. Goneril and Regan, of course, make more of an impression on the mind of the reader than does Cordelia. More effort has been expended in their portrayal, but even here we find that Shakespeare does not individualize them as he does his male characters. Goneril is sometimes indistinguishable from Regan both in speech and in action. This situation never arises between any two of the dramatist's

(I) Mackenzie. Women In Shakespeare's Plays.
Chap. IV, Page 282.

male characters, all of which are clearly drawn, sharply defined. Shakespeare knew that he needed to create Goneril and Regan in such a manner that they would impress the reader as flesh and blood personalities or his plot would fail. He presented them as clearly as he thought necessary, and then dropped them for the more important and interesting task of portraying Lear, Edmund, Edgar and Kent.

Lady Macbeth seems to present at first glance an almost insurmountable barrier to anyone holding the theory that Shakespeare's women are poorly drawn. However, we have but to study the character coldly and carefully to discover that Lady Macbeth is but another example of Shakespeare's listless attitude toward his female characters. Here, as in King Lear, a woman is necessary to the plot and Shakespeare proceeds to draw what some critics are inclined to style his greatest study of a woman. It is true that in Lady Macbeth

Shakespeare has given us a figure that will live long in our memory, but the mistake arises in calling that figure a woman. Only by the farthest stretch of the imagination can we conceive of a human being possessing the fiend-like characteristics of Lady Macbeth. Now it is not the business of a dramatist to call upon his audience to accept highly improbable characters or situations.

Probability is a basic law of the drama and that dramatist has been careless who asks his audience to contemplate the impossible or highly improbable.

Lady Macbeth, to say the least, is improbable.

We can conceive of women who are unladylike, immoral, lacking in conscience and murderously inclined, because these failings are human ones.

On the other hand, what human being, male or female could utter the following lines:

"I have given suck, and know
How tender 't is 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 dashed the brains out, had I sworn as you
Have done to this."

Of course it is necessary to make some allowance for the fact that Lady Macbeth is here laboring under the stress of great emotion, that her desire to influence Macbeth to carry out his bloody plans forces her to use exaggerated speech. But even after duly acknowledging these points the words of Lady Macbeth stand out as too utterly horrible for any woman to use under any kind of circumstance. Shakespeare was intent on creating a picture of a horrible creature, and he succeeded; but the picture is too overdrawn to be called that of a woman. Viewed objectively Lady Macbeth fails to meet the test of a human being. Shakespeare could have softened her lines somewhat and still have a character that would supply the motive action for his plot. But his characteristic attitude toward female characters once more asserts itself and he lets his imagination have free reign regardless of probability. The result is splendid as a horror-producing creature but a failure in female characterization.

Shakespeare's next play, Coriolanus gives us a truer picture of a woman than any of his previous portrayals. Volunmia is more carefully drawn and more consistent than the average Shakespearian woman. We can form a clear-cut picture of her and when the play is finished we are left with a sense of having seen some one real. It is evident, on the other hand, that Volunmia is not a masterpiece of characterization. Shakespeare, in several instances exaggerates and distorts the picture he presents. For example, we are led to believe throughout most of the play that Coriolanus is always very attentive and devoted to his mother. But the following passage rather raises a conflicting suggestion, that is never explained. Volunmia says in Act V, Scene III:

".....here he lets me prate
Like one in the stocks. Thou hast never in thy life
Show'd thy dear mother any courtesy;
When she, poor hen, fond of no second brood,
Has cluck'd thee to the wars, and safely home,
Loaden with honour....."

The true explanation of this is, I believe, that Shakespeare was not particularly interested in whether or not he presented a true picture. He saw an opportunity to express some private feelings of his own and he seemed to care not if his portrayal of Volumnia suffered. It seems that Shakespeare's mother died in 1608, just a very brief time before this play was written. That Shakespeare had a very high regard for his mother is a well-established fact and on pondering the above lines we may assume that Shakespeare is still grieving over his mother's death. Some fancied neglect of his mother may now be present before him and in his grief he cries out in self-condemnation:

"....Thou hast never in thy life
Show'd thy dear mother any courtesy;"

While we may appreciate the dramatist's feelings we cannot conceal the fact that it has partially dissipated our picture of Volumnia.

In comparison, however, with previous attempts at female characterization, Volumnia is outstanding. The defects in her portrayal are noticeable but the inferiority of the other female parts and the equally observable inferiority of the male characters of the play make Volumnia's character seem superior by contrast.

In Antony and Cleopatra we have a striking example of the inferiority of the female characters. Shakespeare's attempt to draw Cleopatra's character is a failure. In the first two acts the Queen is little more than a harlot. Her only aim in life is love and pleasure. Her sensuality is restrained only by her power of calculation. She realizes that if she is too sensual she will disgust her lovers in a brief time. She has a cloak of refinement and training, but beneath that cloak is a common animal, with animal instincts and tendencies. This is the picture we get of Cleopatra in the first two acts of Shakespeare's drama. Now let us examine the

Cleopatra of the remainder of the play. She seems to have changed miraculously. She is every inch a queen, tender, loving, regal. There is scarcely a trace of that harlot of the first two acts. The animal instincts have apparently disappeared and we see a valiant woman preparing to die with her crown upon her head rather than allow herself to be led in disgraceful captivity through the streets of Rome. It takes no trained critical mind to see the discrepancies that exist between these two pictures. Were the change in her character the result of natural growth and development we could register no complaint, but there is positively no evidence of this growth in the play. Many critics have tried to explain the matter by making out Cleopatra not so sensual in the early part of the play and not so noble in the latter part. But the facts are there and cannot be explained away. A few quotations here will substantiate this point.

In Act II, Scene II we have this description of Cleopatra given by Enobarbus:

"Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies: for vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish."

In Act I, Scene I, Philo says the following of Antony's association with Cleopatra:

"Take but good note, and you shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transform'd
Into a strumpet's fool:"

In Act III, Scene VI Caesar makes this reference to Cleopatra:

"No, my most wronged sister; Cleopatra
Hath nodded him to her. He hath given his empire
Up to a whore; who now are levying
The kings o' the earth for war:"

Antony in Act III, Scene XIII, refers to Cleopatra as follows:

"I found you as a morsel cold upon
Dead Caesar's trencher; nay, you were a fragment
Of Cneius Pompey's; besides what hotter hours,
Unregister'd in vulgar fame, you have
Luxuriously pick'd out: for I am sure,
Though you can guess what temperance should be,
You know not what it is."

The following quotations give an entirely different picture of Cleopatra: In Act IV, Scene XV, Cleopatra utters these splendid words, after the death of Antony:

"No more, but e'en a woman, and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks
And does the meanest chares. It were for me
To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods,
To tell them that this world did equal theirs
Till they had stol'n our jewel. All's but naught;
Patience is sottish, and impatience does
Become a dog that's mad: then is it sin
To rush into the secret house of death,
Ere death dare come to us? How do you, women?
What, what! good cheer! Why, how now, Charmian!
My noble girls! Ah, women, women, look,
Our lamp is spent, it's out! Good sirs, take heart:
We'll bury him; and then, what's brave, what's noble,
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion,
And make death proud to take us. Come, away:
This case of that huge spirit now is cold:
Ah, women, women! Come; we have no friend
But resolution and the briefest end."

In Act V, Scene II, we have this regal picture of Cleopatra:

"Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have
Immortal longings in me: now no more
The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip:
Yare, yare, good Iras; quick. Methinks I hear
Antony call; I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act; I hear him mock
The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men
To excuse their after wrath. Husband, I come:
Now to that name my courage prove my title!
I am fire and air; my other elements
I give to baser life....."

Cleopatra is poorly drawn and since we feel certain that the master dramatist could have drawn her carefully and consistently, we can only conclude that he did not care to do so. His problem was Antony, and Cleopatra is important only insofar as she affects Antony. Shucking says: "Had Shakespeare conceived Cleopatra as a consistent character from the very beginning of the work, which he apparently omitted to do, just as he failed to create a unity of action, there would have been at least some slight indication of the traits which were to come out in the latter developments." (I)

Charmian and Octavia, the only other women in the play, need no consideration here. They are present but relatively few times in the action and no complete characterization is attempted.

The five remaining plays of Shakespeare deal so slightly with the feminine element that a

(I) Shucking. Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays. Page 139.

brief discussion of them will suffice. In discussing Pericles and the female characters therein, Mrs. Mackenzie says: "But although they (the women) provide motive for the action, in the manner of the early comedies for the most part they do no more." (1)

"Shakespeare did not trouble with anything but a sketch of her (Thaisa's) adventures." (2)

Cymbeline is Shakespeare's poorest play. The play is very carelessly constructed, is lacking in logic and contains much doggerel verse and strained prose. As a consequence all the characters are poorly drawn, especially the women. Imogen's portrayal, perhaps suffers the most. It is quite inconsistent with our first picture of her to find her later on forgiving a man who has insulted her and her husband, and begging him to prolong his visit

(1) Mackenzie. Women In Shakespeare's Plays. Chap. V, Page 408.

(2) Mackenzie. Women In Shakespeare's Plays. Chap. V, Page 409.

after he has just shown his baseness. In reference to Imogen, Mrs. Mackenzie says: "Imogen's share has power in it, as usual, to live her part, to charm; but after the drug scene Shakespeare's chief interest seems to have been to get the play finished somehow, and even with her he becomes careless." (1)

In The Winter's Tale Shakespeare has again disregarded his female characters in his customary manner. Mrs. Mackenzie attempts to smooth over this defect, at the same time admitting the fault: "They are drawn masterly in a few clear lovely strokes that make them come alive, but neither they nor their experience are studied, analyzed, lived into, as had been Shakespeare's custom:....." (2) A close study of the play will reveal that the women do not come alive. They move, talk and act in a most mechanical manner and while the action of the play is clearly presented the characterization is sadly neglected.

(1) Mackenzie. Women In Shakespeare's Plays. Chap. V, Page 426.

(2) Mackenzie. Women In Shakespeare's Plays. Chap. V, Page 426.

The lack of study and analysis of the women in this play, which Mrs. Mackenzie deplures, is only slightly more pronounced than the same lack in Shakespeare's other plays.

Frank Harris makes the following statement in criticizing the inconsistency of Perdita's portrayal:

"But a girl cannot be painted by two or three single touches such as modesty, a love of flowers and a pout of self-will, for these qualities are common to girlhood. There are not enough individual features given to Perdita to make her live for us, and, worst of all, there are no faults; she does not cast a shadow." (I)

Henry VIII presents but two women characters for consideration, Katherine and Anne Bullen. The latter scarcely takes form at all and Katherine seems to be a contradiction to the Katherine of history. Shakespeare, evidently, intended to make her a dramatic figure, but succeeded, I believe, in giving us a rather con-

(I) Harris. Women of Shakespeare.
Pages 262 - 263.

fusing picture. A comparison at this point between a few passages from the histories and a few from the play will be sufficient to substantiate this statement. The first quotation is from Cavendish's history entitled "The Life of Cardinal Wolsey" which existed in manuscript form in England during Shakespeare's time but was not put into print until 1641. Wolsey and Campeggio call on Katherine to lay before her the proposition of Henry:

" 'Forsooth then' quoth my lord, 'madam, if it please your grace, we come both to know your mind, how ye be disposed to do in this matter between the king and you, and also to declare secretly our opinions and our counsels unto you, which we have intended of very zeal and obedience that we bear to your grace'. 'My lords, I thank you then' quote she 'of your good wills; but to make answer to your requests I cannot so suddenly for I was set among my maidens at work thinking full little of any such matter; wherein there

needeth a longer deliberation and a better head than mine to make answer to so noble wise men as ye be. I had need of good counsel in this case which toucheth me so near; and for any council or friendship that I can find in England, they are nothing to my purchase or profit. Think you I pray you, my lords, will any Englishmen counsel or be friendly unto me, against the king's pleasure, they being his subjects? Nay, forsooth, my lords! and for my counsel, in whom I do intend to put my trust, they be not here; I am a poor woman lacking both wit and understanding sufficiently to answer such approved wise men as be ye both, in so weighty a matter. I pray you to extend your good and indifferent minds in your authority unto me, for I am a single woman, destitute and barren of friendship and counsel, here in a foreign region; and as for your counsel, I will not refuse, but be glad to hear.' " (I)

(I) Contained in Mrs. Jameson's Characteristics of Women.

The picture here presented differs materially
from the glimpse of Katherine we get in Act III,

Scene I:

Q. Katherine. "Is this your Christian counsel? out upon ye!
Heaven is above all yet; there sits a judge
That no king can corrupt.

Campeius Your rage mistakes us.

Q. Katherine. The more shame for ye: holy men I thought ye,
Upon my soul, two reverend cardinal virtues;
But cardinal sins and hollow hearts I fear ye
Mend 'em, for shame, my lords. Is this your
comfort?
The cordial that ye bring a wretched lady."

And later:

"Have I lived thus long - let me speak myself,
Since virtue finds no friends - a wife, a true one?
A woman, I dare say without vain-glory,
Never yet branded with suspicion?
Have I with all my full affections
Still met the king? loved him next heaven? obey'd him?
Been, out of fondness, superstitious to him?
Almost forgot my prayers to content him?
And am I thus rewarded? 'tis not well, lords.
.....
My lord, I dare not make myself so guilty,
To give up willingly that noble title
Your master wed me to: nothing but death
Shall e'er divorce my dignities."

A comparison of the Katherine of the history with that of Shakespeare seems to me to give the historical Katherine more personality and reality than the Katherine of Shakespeare. That Shakespeare differed in his conception of the figure from the history is not a fault but that he failed to give us a character as real as the original is nothing to his credit. He rarely makes this mistake in his dramatization of male characters but his women characters seem to be consistently less real than the originals.

The last play to be considered, The Tempest has for its only female character Miranda. This elfin creature is difficult to picture and certainly no characterization was attempted by Shakespeare. Of course, none was needed, and the play succeeds very well with the sprite-like Miranda presenting almost as elusive a picture to the reader as does the magic Ariel.

CONCLUSION

It seems to me that sufficient evidence has been presented in this work to convince the reader that there are vehicle characters in Shakespeare. To do this it has been necessary to examine one hundred and twenty-seven Shakespearian portrayals of women in thirty-five plays. True, in many cases, the examination was brief; however, greater length hardly seemed necessary. It may be that a re-reading of the plays, in the light of my theory, will permit of a greater appreciation of this thesis the point of which is that Shakespeare used the female characters "to get his plays across" and that he did not exert himself in their behalf. As a consequence they are inferior to the male roles wherein his real interest is to be found. Again I wish to assert that had Shakespeare desired to do better he had the ability to appreciate and depict women. However what he might have done, and

what he did are two very different things. I have taken the practical attitude and dealt with the plays as they are.

Many explanations of Shakespeare's attitude toward women might be offered but there are two in particular that seem most reasonable. Shakespeare's first aim was to please the public. In order that he might do this he had to cater to the audience of that day, which, unlike today's, was composed almost entirely of men. It is not surprising then that Shakespeare should depict those things that would appeal to an Elizabethan audience namely men's problems, and carefully keep the women in the background or portray them as inferior to men.

The second possible reason for Shakespeare's failure to present more convincing female characters is the fact that in his time there were no women actors. The stage had not yet become the place

where women might appear with impunity, and consequently Shakespeare very possibly saw no good reason to spend any great amount of time on a characterization that would, at best, be acted indifferently by the female impersonators of the time. As his plays were written chiefly to be acted, this fact must have borne great weight with Shakespeare. As busy a man as was the great dramatist with his triple duties of playwright, actor and manager, he had little time to devote to tasks that would do him proportionately little honour.

On the other hand the plays would no doubt have been improved had the dramatist paid more attention to his female characterization. Shakespeare probably realized this, but as long as his audience liked his plays and they "got over" he was satisfied. In reference to this

point Bradley claims that Shakespeare after all lacked the conscience of the artist who is determined to do everything as well as he can. (I)

(I) Bradley. Oxford Lectures On Poetry.
In the chapter on Antony and Cleopatra.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

- Frank Harris Women of Shakespeare.
Mitchell Kennerley, New York. 1912.
- Levin L. Shucking Character Problems in Shakespeare's
Plays.
George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd. July 1922.
London.
- A. M. Mackenzie The Women In Shakespeare's Plays.
Garden City, New York. 1924.
- Samual G. Coleridge Coleridge's Works.
Lectures and Notes on Shakspere.
George Bell & Sons, London. 1904.
- Mrs. Jameson Shakespeare's Heroines
George Bell & Sons, London. 1897.
- William Hazlitt Characters of Shakespeare's Plays.
Dent, London. 1905.
- Sir Spencer St. John Essays on Shakespeare and His Works.
Smith, Elder & Co., London. 1908.
- H. H. Furness The Variorum Shakespeare.
J. B. Lippincott, London. 1890.
- Father L. J. Vaughan Sermons From Shakespeare.
Vaughan Publishing Co., Monroe, Wis. 1909
- A. C. Bradley Oxford Lectures On Poetry.
Macmillan & Co., London. 1909.
- Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship.
Henry Holt & Co., New York. 1917.

- Dr. Herman Ulrici Shakespeare's Dramatic Art.
George Bell & Sons, London. 1876.
- Helena Faucit,
Lady Martin. On Some of Shakespeare's Female
Characters.
William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh
and London. 1888.
- Algernon Charles Swinburne Study of Shakespeare.
Chatto & Windus, London. 1902.
- Denton J. Snider The Shakespearian Drama.
Sigma Publishing Co., St. Louis. 1889.
- Dr. G. G. Gervinus Shakespeare Commentaries.
Smith, Elder & Co., London. 1903.
- Edward Dowden Shakespeare, His Mind and Art.
Harper and Bros., New York. 1880.
- James Phinney Baxter Greatest of Literary Problems.
Houghton Mifflin Co., N. York. 1917.
- J. Churton Collins Studies in Shakespeare.
Archibald Constable & Co., Ltd.,
Westminister. 1904.
- Shakespeare. Titus Andronicus.

Henry VI

Comedy of Errors

Taming of the Shrew

Love's Labour's Lost

Two Gentlemen of Verona

A Midsummer Night's Dream

All's Well That Ends Well

Romeo and Juliet

Richard II

Richard III

King John

Merchant of Venice

1 Henry IV

2 Henry IV

Henry V

Merry Wives of Windsor

As You Like It

Much Ado About Nothing

Twelfth Night

Julius Caesar

Troilus and Cressida

Hamlet

Measure For Measure

Othello

Timon Of Athens

King Lear

Macbeth

Coriolanus

Antony and Cleopatra

Pericles

The Winter's Tale

Cymbeline

Henry VIII

The Tempest.