

# THE HEROINES AS VIEWED FROM THE STAGE—

On Every Fresh Perusal of the Plays the Actor Finds New Facets

Written for THE NEW YORK TIMES  
By Margaret Anglin.

It would seem that little more could be added to the three centuries of praise bestowed on Shakespeare. He has been viewed from every angle and his worth has been measured to the full. We can but express what he has meant to us individually, and if, as actors, we write about him there is no obligation imposed upon us to indicate what he has been to us and what in our limited power we have been able to draw from him.

Naturally, it is to the women of Shakespeare that an actress instinctively turns. But when she begins to study a rôle she finds how necessary is a complete understanding of the entire play before the character which she is about to assume grows and develops in her understanding.

No greater variety can be found than in Shakespeare's portrait gallery. Faces full of intellect and animal spirit, full of reflection and high imagination look down upon us, and we marvel at the massive, all-embracing observation of human nature possessed by the poet. To the actor his infinite variation is the fascination of Shakespeare. Through three centuries others have found the same about him, and the theatrical tradition that has grown up around him on the stage measures the rich effort great actors of the past have exerted to externalize his full meaning.

Shakespeare is elusive; for, at one and the same time, he has created individualities and he has reflected human nature in the abstract. He endows his women with all the common virtues, graces, and weaknesses of womankind, yet makes them definite characters, unlike in their womanly attitudes of mind and sentiment. He gives intellect to Portia and Beatrice, yet they are not confused in our mind through any similarity; he makes love the consuming passion in "Romeo and Juliet" and "Antony and Cleopatra," yet the emotional color in each of these plays is widely different; he delights in contrasts, making it possible for actresses to play as foils to each other, there being contrasting opportunity for creative work in Beatrice and Hero, Rosalind and Celia, Viola and Olivia.

He is so simple in his depiction of the innocence of Miranda, so unerring in his reflection of womanly trust in Imogen, so subtle in his analysis of the tremendously variable temperament of Cleopatra, that when we approach him as interpreters we have to take particular care that we understand the physical and spiritual qualities of the parts. In his texts Shakespeare provides richly for the outward picture, but he saturates his dialogue with inward meaning and spirit.

That is why the actor has to bring to Shakespeare an infinite capacity and inclination for study; on every fresh perusal of the plays new facets are discoverable. It is not only the richness of his portraiture that attracts and fascinates; the actor has something more to do with Shakespeare's characters than to reflect in due proportions of art their uttered sentiments. Rich though the reading of his lines may be, with the spiritual beauty and imaginative significance of their poetry, it is the portrait come to life that matters to the actor. I can well imagine the concern of Helen Faucit, (Lady Martin), who was so brilliant an interpreter of Shakespeare's heroines, in Macready's support, when she declared at the time she came to study Rosalind and Juliet that she feared she might do too much with the little parts. Shakespeare calls for balance in the actor, and maybe it is this lack of balance that occasionally brings a Shakespearean production to its ruin.

But as infinite in their variety as Shakespeare's characters are, they are, nevertheless, each motivated by one absorbing passion. Actors who approach a Shakespearean character for the first time are often confused in their interpretation because they strive to give forth the infinite shades of meaning without having first determined to themselves what is the fundamental note of the characterization. If an actress does not immediately determine to herself the real quality of Juliet's love, if she does not comprehend fully the exact moment when the beautiful unfolding of the girl blossoms into the woman, then her interpretation is likely to fall into sugary sentimentalism, which will turn the

tragedy into a love-romance rather than make of it the epitome of love itself. Shakespeare's characters cannot be acted hastily; they cannot be studied hastily. They do not reveal themselves on the surface, although they have a surface charm which makes them comprehensible to all people. If they did reveal themselves so easily, then Lady Macbeth would be only a symbol of bloodthirstiness as great as her lord, the Thane of Cawdor, and an actress would fail to see in the rôle a woman of strong will and of absorbing ambition for the man she fiercely loves.

It may be a wrong theory of mine, but at least it fires the imagination to believe that in the very choosing of his heroines'



Margaret Anglin as "Katharina"

"An amusing part, a dash of color, a romping red"

PHOTO BY BANGS



Margaret Anglin as "Rosalind" "She's the epitome of April"

PHOTO BY ARNOLD GENTHE

names Shakespeare showed the premeditated method of a great character artist. Miranda, to me, expresses the miracle of latent woman; Portia measures equally the proportion of womanly grace and intellect; Katharina has in the mere pronouncement of her name the incisive rhythm of quick temper; Viola reflects the mauve quality of a violet, and conjures up the subtle sadness of romantic love. Rosalind is the full-blown rose, her nature bubbling with the mirth of outdoor existence. On this idea I have often allowed my imagination to work, and it has helped me in maintaining consistency in mood toward the character I am impersonating.

Surely there is no more inspiring book to read than Mrs. Jameson's "Shakespeare's Heroines," a series of essays saturated with the most penetrating analyses of womanly characteristics. Mrs. Jameson's judgment is sound and her distinctions are splendidly and clearly stated. There is in particular one passage that is sufficiently subtle to impress any beginner with the indisputable fact that, while the psychological interpretation of Shakespeare's women may very largely be a matter of temperament on the part of the actress, his characters expand from scene to scene, and with their growth

comes a consequent change of feeling which must be understood and planned for, otherwise it is passed over in the acting.

Mrs. Jameson writes: "The love that is so chaste and dignified in Portia—so airy, delicate, and fearless in Miranda—so sweetly confiding in Perdita—so playfully fond in Rosalind—so constant in Imogen—so devoted in Desdemona—so fervent in Helen—so tender in Viola—is each and all of these in Juliet."

Here is a bit of compressed criticism that should bring pleasure to the player in verifying. It is a large order to achieve. The possibilities in comparative study of this kind immediately suggest themselves. It is for us as actresses to test these subtle differences in Shakespeare's heroines, as only in this way do we become sure in our interpretations. When we are told by Mrs. Jameson that Juliet is dominated by strength of passion, and that Portia and Isabel are dominated by strength of character, we are mentally stimulated, and our conceptions are enriched by a wider range of understanding.

To me that is the inestimable value of reading literary criticism in the preparation of a rôle. We may have our own definite



Romeo and Juliet, Act II, Scene VI. Romeo shall thank thee, daughter, for us both.

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(FROM THE WENDELL COLLECTION)

conceptions, but it is mentally invigorating to be questioned by others—not as to the archaic meaning of a word, but as to the character and circumstances of the part. Foolish as it may seem to some for Mrs. Jameson to raise the question as to what would have happened to Hamlet had he, in opposition to his own weak will, been brought face to face with the strong will of Portia rather than with the insufficient spirit of Ophelia—the girl heroine who is thought but sweet bells jangled out of tune—there is none the less room for interesting speculation in such a relationship.

Of course the mere borrowed story of Shakespeare's plays has to be known by the actor, and the words have to be memorized. But that is not understanding Shakespeare, nor is it playing him to the full.

The plot of "Cymbeline" gives nothing of the complete character of Imogen, though I must confess that even in the simple language of Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare" we are given much of the beauty and clearness of Imogen's presence. That does not suffice, however. It seems to me that the Shakespeare stories are but the circumstances that grow out of the characters, not acting alone, but interrelated. And, therefore, the more one contemplates the character of Romeo, not only in relation to Juliet, but in relation to Mer-

cent to hide her consequent state of mind from the guests assembled at the banquet table. It is such points of view that vivify the biographies of the actors famed in theatrical history as players of Shakespearean rôles; we are thus able mentally to follow the traditions established by them or tried by them and found wanting in consistency and truth.

I always approach the playing of a Shakespeare heroine with great joy, the demands are so manifold, the variation in temperament so elusive. The study of Juliet, opposite as the comparison may seem, brings to mind the hesitant, inexperienced character of Ophelia. The positive ecstasy of Juliet finds utterance in no uncertain tones; if there is any uncertainty it is in Romeo, whom she questions more than once. The passion in "Romeo and Juliet" is sweeping, quickly consuming, and the entire play bears a fatality about it that relates it to Greek tragedy. There is no austerity about it, as there is in Greek tragedy, but there is the same inevitableness. The love element is positive, passionate, and the love scenes hold a sensuous quality. But there is nothing positive in the likeness of Ophelia; it is her very negativateness that results in her insanity. Had she been articulate in her love for Hamlet she would have been other than herself.

belief, held by many and supported by the literary beauty of Shakespeare, that the poet's longest speeches are undoubtedly among his best. But I think that Mrs. Jameson is quite right in this instance.

However, long speeches are often pitfalls for actors who have been brought up with too much reverence for their beauty and effectiveness. I have heard players catch their breath when, as Hamlet, they approached the soliloquy, or when, as Mercutio, they reached the rightly abundant description of Queen Mab, or, as Portia, the "quality of mercy" speech. These are the "household" jewels of Shakespeare, on which we have all been brought up from the days of our schoolbooks. Over-intensified readings sometimes give these lines a wrong value. They are not expressions and passages for elocution, but they are reflections of spirit and character, and unless they are worked into the actor's conception they stand out in undue proportion.

Sometimes Shakespeare generalizes, but that is no excuse for an actor to step outside of his rôle and adopt a self-conscious tone. That is the fault of many a Jaques. Such "gems" should, for the safety of the actor, always be slightly underplayed, then they will be lifted to the proper pitch through the sheer music of their words, and through the luxuriant imagery of the picture. There are exceptional cases. In Viola's "Build me a willow cabin" she is speaking to Olivia for Orsino who woo. She is uttering love "by rote," so to speak—so the player can seek rather for emotional tone for personal mood; the lines can be more floridly read than they would be if they were expressions of Viola's own feeling. Yet when she slips into her own mood, it is full of infinite sadness—to use a phrase of Matthew Arnold's: it suggests sorrow rather than tragedy. To heighten too many of her lines, however, would only serve to hide the lyrical simplicity of Viola's nature.

Katharina is an amusing part, a dash of color, a romping red. I always like to feel that Shakespeare just had a good time with her, and certainly he allowed his better self to creep into the text less often than in other plays. It would seem to me that Katharina's taming begins just after she is formally betrothed. Having fought so desperately against any idea of marrying Petruchio, after the actual betrothal—which in those days was almost equivalent to a marriage—her religion told her to go, and though her pride and vanity might thereafter have been hurt, the greatest obstacle in her way was overcome. She had a sense of humor as well as her temper.

I leave to others the problem of how far Shakespeare is himself to be found in his plays, how much is the man expressed therein. I let others wrangle over whether or not Mary Filton is the Dark Lady of the Sonnets, and whether Shakespeare's love for her had anything to do with the passionate expression of love in "Romeo and Juliet." I simply accept his infinite understanding of womankind as a fact, and I approach him as the creator of marvelous characters.

Of course, we all aim for the highest. That is why every actress wishes to play Portia, Juliet, Rosalind, Beatrice, Cleopatra, and Lady Macbeth, to say nothing of the misty Ophelia. But a beginner should relish Celia as much as she might long for Rosalind, and she should elicit over the portrait of Jessica as much as strive for the beauty of Portia. Shakespeare is as great in his minor portraits as he is in his larger canvases. The smaller characters do not lack definiteness. They may be surprised by characters with more absorbing interests, whose motives are of greater import to the plot. But their subdual is not a measure of any lack in human quality or in character value. The women of Shakespeare afford infinite possibilities in his acting. If this is not realized, then the actor does not fully appreciate the all-embracing and all-pervading power of the playwright.

Though they are minor portraits—these lesser women—they are shapen out of the same human clay as the more important heroines, and they are subject to Shakespeare's elusive delicacy and his profound understanding of life and its mysteries. There is only one important way in which Shakespeare, the man, appears to me in his work. I like to realize how ripe his spiritual nature becomes as he approaches the maturer period of his career. His wisdom then towers over his imagination and feeling, while his fancy becomes more spiritualized. But I doubt whether, though his vision may have grown deeper and his treatment more subtle, his fathoming of the character of women as reflected in his earlier period was any the less searching or true to life than the women of his later period. In all of his plays his heroines seem to be supreme.



"Much Ado," Act III, Scene I. - But are you sure, that Benedict loves Beatrice so entirely?

cutio; the more one considers the attitude of the Nurse and of the minor characters surrounding Juliet—watching how they act and react on all become—the more illuminating does it all other when this knowledge is centered on an interpretation of the character of Juliet.

I do not believe it wise to clog one's natural artistic impulse with any outside limitations set by others. Yet, as I have said, I do believe that an actor appearing in a Shakespearean rôle for the first time is falling into grave error when the acting traditions of the past are not carefully weighed and brought into service if they are found to be of value, to be illuminating. It is interesting to me when I read "Macbeth" and sum up the character of Lady Macbeth to be told that when Mrs. Siddons appeared in that rôle she adopted some stage "business" which heightened her psychological interpretation. When Banquo's ghost appeared before Macbeth Mrs. Siddons made it evident to her audience that the apparition was likewise seen by Lady Macbeth, but that her superior strength of will and intellect were suffi-

The love of Juliet and the love of Cleopatra cannot be compared—only contrasted. Juliet's love is a pure flame of consuming fire. Cleopatra's love is volcanic.

The warm sunlight in Rosalind naturally appeals to me. She is the epitome of April. In her Shakespeare has infused freedom and buoyancy, yet in no way are her sanity and wisdom hidden from us. In very truth hers is a "playful fondness"; and she is really in love! She possesses the spirit of Beatrice, yet with not the same flashy, electric temper of Beatrice, who has a sharp tongue and a soft heart. In spirit, Beatrice stands midway between Rosalind and Katharina, though in her natural wit she is more tart than the former and quicker in her response. She lacks Rosalind's clear intelligence.

I have always liked Mrs. Jameson's distinction made between Portia and Rosalind. She claims that Portia's sound judgment displays itself in her longest utterances, in which she loves to generalize on the affairs of life; whereas Rosalind's long speeches are not her best. It is a common

## French Criticisms of Shakespeare's Taste

Translated for The New York Times from Lamartine's "Shakespeare and His Work."

Men are so changeable and susceptible to distastes and infatuations that even cold posterity itself does not preserve their genius, and fashion, that fickle caprice of taste, rules over the immortal dead whom we call great men, raising some of them above the others, sometimes placing one above all, sometimes beneath all, until, impelled by a new whim, she relegates them to the bed of oblivion, where they may again resume the sleep of centuries, until again snatched forth.

We ourselves have seen in our short span of life this phenomenon of instability and infatuation, of immortal reputations renewing themselves several times without apparent cause, especially around 1820 and 1830, when a literary sect called Romanticism waged war against a literary form of routine called Classicism. It was because of such a caprice that a great Italian poet, Dante, on account of a barbarous conception written in well-nigh superhuman language, was recently elevated above Virgil and Homer, those mortal deities of the beautiful in epic conception and expression. It was for such a reason that Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Corneille, Racine, Goethe, Schiller, those admirable regulators of poetic drama on the ancient and modern stage, were suddenly flung from their pedestals to make way for the lone figure of a man, a very great man, doubtless, but great, nevertheless, as chaos is great, and less great than the ordered and regulated greatness of the world.

Let us leave aside these vicissitudes of literature, excusable this time by the immensity of the rude genius of this national poet of the English. Let us compare him only with himself. Let us call him the great Pan of their popular literature, if they so wish, but let us nevertheless pity him for having written at a time when taste, the mind's civilization, did not exist; when barbarism and genius alternately darkened and illumined the plays submitted to the judgment of the multitude. William Shakespeare, we willingly acknowledge, would have been more than a man had he written half a century later for the élite of a more polished people. However that may be, when his mas-

terpieces, long neglected, were suddenly rescued from oblivion and placed before his fellow-countrymen by the talent of a marvellous actor, Garrick, and when the rumors of this new birth and the first translations of Shakespeare reached the ears of Voltaire, at the end of the last century, that universal oracle of European taste rose up and, in a letter to the French Academy, read by D'Alembert, protested in favor of Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Corneille, Racine, and, without naming him, of himself, against this exclusive obsession of the English. He wished Europe to become acquainted with the writer held up for adoration, so he translated literally certain passages from the gross and obscene dramas of the English poet. The French Academy, that child of antiquity, drew back in horror. Such language, such shameful blemishes, hid from it the glittering genius of Shakespeare.

Fanatical adherents of this great man unjustly impugned the faithfulness of the translation and questioned the existence of such scandalous passages in the original. They were wrong. The translation was exact, the passages were there, in truth, and if a chaste pen should today dare to translate the ignoble obscenities with which Juliet's nurse defiles the virgin ear of Romeo's sweetheart, it would be found that Voltaire by no means revealed everything to France. Decency has always been a part of the beautiful in the drama and poetry of every land and century. The civilized populace of Athens and Paris was a thousand times more respected by its great dramatic poets than the populace of London. The reason for this was that the audiences of Athens and Paris were a whole people, while that of London was just a populace.

Of course, if one judges from the errors of taste, improprieties, vulgarities, and obscenities, from the shortcomings of style even, which mar the plays of the English, Æschylus and Molière, one must confess that Voltaire was not too severe; indeed, if all must be said—and I adduce here as proof the most pathetic of Shakespeare's dramas, "Romeo and Juliet"—the indignation of the man of taste in Voltaire falls to do full justice to the villainess. If I should be asked for proofs, I should answer: "Read for yourself, read far from your wives and daughters, for a pen with any

respect for itself could not copy such horrors without making even troopers blush."

But if one bases judgment on the conception, eloquence, fecundity, truth, and sublimity of genius of this incomparable man, Voltaire is wrong. He allows a speck in his telescope to obscure the sun of art. To speak the truth, one must say, in place of what Voltaire said, that everything about this eminent man (Shakespeare) was immense, bad taste as well as genius. That is the truth.

But was this bad taste Shakespeare's or was it due to his audience? We are inclined to believe that it emanated more from the audience than from the poet. The people in the stalls are absolute rulers over the dramatic author. And just as one seeks to please a tiger by throwing him rotten meat, one ingratiates one's self with the populace by throwing out bad taste and indecency to catch its immoral and stupid laughter. Bad plays are the counterpoise of bad periods.

This does not imply that the literary century of Elizabeth, the sixteenth century, when Shakespeare wrote, was a barbarous century; it was rather an over-refined century, an age of affectation and corruptions of style. For it must be borne in mind that in Italy and France, as well as in England, national literature does not commence with barbarism, but with affectation. Nations in their periods of birth or rebirth mistake mannerisms for nature; before being simple they are artificial. It is this pretentiousness of style, combined with barbarism, that is the principal characteristic of the writers in such periods. Simplicity in greatness, the true characteristic of the beautiful or sublime, does not come until later. This affectation of language, together with vulgarity of expressions and images, is also characteristic of the dramas of Shakespeare. Nothing less than the immeasurable superiority of his genius and eloquence was needed in order that his good qualities might triumph, deservingly and forever, over his defects.

To analyze his works would be to analyze the human heart; he is its greatest painter. Virtue, crime, passion, vices, follies, greatness, littleness—all are open to him. The whole keyboard of man's nature is at his finger ends.