FEMALE FIGURE AND THE IDEA OF FEMINITY
ACROSS TIME

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Abstract: The history of women's struggle for equality during the last two centuries is relatively well documented; studies of women's history often construct a meliorate narrative in which the progress women have made in recent times represents the final stage in a long upward trajectory. Women's power and authority extended beyond the limits of their families. The example of the Tudor queens Mary and Elizabeth is well known, and the 'anomaly' of Elizabeth's position has been endlessly noted; but they were not the only women who exercised political authority.

Generations of women have found a source of their own empowerment in the power of Shakespeare's writing and in the cultural authority it carried. In the recent years, as we have seen, the validity of these enthusiastic responses has been called into question by arguments that mobilize the authority of history to insist that the original productions of Shakespeare's plays-written by a male author to be performed by an exclusively male company of players-expressed an overwhelmingly masculine point of view. The most compelling of these arguments rest on the fact that the presence of a male body beneath the costume of a female character was never far from the awareness of Shakespeare's original audiences.

Keywords: stereotype, natural expression, dramatic adaptation, spectacular mannequin, heroine.

Despite the ample evidence of a history of women's oppression, in Shakespeare's world, women's power and authority extended beyond the limits of their families. All of Shakespeare's female characters were designed for travestied performance and yet they still possess an enormous cultural power to define our notions of women's roles in life. The enduring allure of the show of feminity that was performed in their names continues to shape, over four centuries later, what it means to act like a woman.

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Although recent criticism has been understandably fascinated by the erotic excitement activated by cross-dressed heroines, it is difficult to read the nature and directions of the erotic feelings mobilized under a sexual regime that was strikingly different from our own.

Moreover, despite the fact that there is considerable evidence for the erotic excitement generated by cross-dressing, it was probably not the only reason for the popularity of cross-dressed heroines in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. A remarkable number of the plays featured them. On traditional explanation for their popularity seems to rest on the same anachronistically modern assumption we saw in Shakespeare in Love: Shakespeare put his heroines into male disguise, it was claimed, because it was easier for the boy actors to play as boys. This explanation never made much sense because most of Shakespeare's female characters, including such demanding roles as Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra, never take on male disguises.

At a time when feminists were challenging the restrictions that limited women's opportunities in our own culture, major feminist scholars often emphasized the libratory potential of Shakespeare's representations of cross-dresses comic heroines. Male disguise allowed female characters to perform heroic actions that were generally reserved for men. It is only by disguising herself as a man that Portia in The Merchant of Venice can act as a lawyer in the Venetian court, where she demonstrates the legal skill that saves Antonio's life after the male characters have been unable to do so.

The capacity of cross-dressed performance to destabilize the gender norms of the represented action was also cited in early feminist studies of Shakespearian cross-dressing. The oppressive implications of Kate's performance of submission in The Taming of the Shrew are complicated and called into question by reminders in the play script that her part, like that of Christopher Sly's supposed wife in the Induction, was performed by a boy actor.

Women also possessed considerable economic power, not only through inheritance from fathers and husbands, but also by virtue of their own gainful employment. Women lower on the social scale earned their livings, not only as servants, but also in a variety of trades that took them outside the household. In Shakespeare's world, inequalities between men and women were taken for granted. Sanctioned by law and religion and reinforced by the duties and customs of daily life, they were deeply embedded in the fabric of culture. However, the gender hierarchy in Shakespeare's time coexisted with a hierarchy of status and rank, which was also rationalized by theology, and by history as well.

The familiar stories of women's oppression in Shakespeare's world have proved difficult to displace even as recent historical scholarship has provided the material for alternative narratives. We know now that great many women exercised their own choice in negotiating margins for themselves and for other women as well, but we still tend to assume that patriarchal control was the norm. We also

know that the majority of executors of wills in Shakespeare's England were women, but we still assume that most women were deprived of economic power and authority. We have evidence of women's widespread participation in pre-Reformation drama, but we still tend to assume that women's exclusion from the London professional companies followed a long-standing tradition of all-male performance.

In Shakespeare's London, women were a visible presence all over the city, including the playhouse, but we still tend to assume that Shakespeare's plays should be read from the point of view of a male spectator who would have responded to representations of women's power and autonomy as occasions for anxious hostility.

Giving the difficulty of rethinking our basic assumptions about women's place in Shakespeare's world, it is tempting to abandon the work of trying to see their roles in his plays in historical context. Recent feminist Shakespeare scholarship has relied heavily on historical accounts of the place of women in Shakespeare's world, which is often invoked to ground interpretations of the play scripts in a foundation of historical facts. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that historical writing itself is a kind of story-telling. There are far fewer historical records of women than of men, and the questions with which modern historians approach the records that have been found are heavily fraught with present concerns and present controversies. Because the experience of women tends to be occluded in the historical record, there is the temptation to universalize- to assume that essential aspects of women's experience were always and everywhere what they are now and here.

As a result, the fact that male superiority was taken for granted does not mean that every woman was subordinate in every way to every men or that many women did not occupy positions of authority and power that would be considered exceptional even today. The easy assumption of a broad, schematic opposition between past oppression and present equality ignores the variety, the complexity, and the contradictions of women's positions in our own world, not to mention thus of a remote-and finally inaccessible- past. Unlike our own conceptions of gender differences, male superiority was rationalized less in the then relatively marginal discourse of the new biological science than in the established and privileged discourse of theology. Nonetheless, even in Shakespeare's plays, anticipations of the biologically grounded ideology of compulsory heterosexuality that authorizes the modern nuclear family can be found in plays that focus on the life of the proto-bourgeoisie. In The Taming of the Shrew, for instance, Kate's final speech rationalizes the submission of wives to husbands not only on the traditional analogy between husband and king, but also on the now-familiar ground of the physical differences between male and female bodies.

In late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England, some women adopted the fashion of masculine attire, and although moralists strenuously

condemned the practice, it was never made illegal. Moreover, male and female children were dressed in the same attire-in skirts-until they reached the age of seven. Apparently, the physical difference that separated boys from girls was not considered sufficiently significant to be marked by clothing, but the difference in social rank that separated one man from another was so important that clothing which obscured it was forbidden by law.

Another indication that both age and status were at least as important as gender in determining an individual's identity is the fact that medical casebooks referred to children of both sexes as "it" until they reached puberty. In our own culture, by contrast, clothing is gendered from birth, but it is less reliable as an indicator of status and rank.

Political leadership is another example of the ways the status hierarchy-and religious allegiance as well-complicated the relative positions of men and women in ways that are difficult to understand in modern times. At the time of Shakespeare's birth in 1564, women first Queen Mary and then Queen Elizabeth-had already occupied the English throne for eleven years, and Elizabeth was to reign for most of his adult life. Reluctance to accept women in positions of power has kept women from ever holding the presidency and even from being nominated for that office by a major political party, but it is rarely expressed so vehemently as it was by John Knox in his *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women,* which was published in 1558. Knox argued that any authority held by a woman above a man was a monstrous usurpation, forbidden by God, repellent to nature, and condemned by ancient authorities. It is important to remember that Knox's diatribe was in fact directed against Mary Tudor and other Catholic queens who were governing in France and Scotland.

Only a few months after the publication of Knox's First Blast, Mary Tudor died, and her protestant sister Elizabeth ascended the English throne.

In Shakespeare`s time, England and Scotland were both ruled by female monarchs, and Catherine de Medici was the regent of France. Shakespeare lived in a time and place when women were excluded from the universities and the learned professions, married women lost the right to their own property unless special provisions were made to preserve it, and wife-beating was regarded as a perfectly acceptable means of resolving domestic disputes.

In that same time and place, however, aristocratic women managed great estates and wielded economic power comparable to that of the head of large modern corporation; and women lower on the social scale were active in trades that are now regarded as `traditionally male`. The construction of a historical narrative inevitably involves multiple selections. The records that supply the materials for that narrative are themselves the product of a long process of record–keeping, which is conditioned at every point by the personal motivations and institutional constraints that determined what information would be recorded and which records would be kept and retrieved. The selection of the materials for a historical

narrative, is similarly constrained by the resources and limitations, both personal and professional, of the historian who makes the selection.

In historical research, you`re likely to find what you are looking for, and what most of us have been looking for in recent years is a history of men`s anxiety in the face of *female power,* women`s disempowerment, and of outright *misogyny.* We need to interrogate that history, not because it is necessarily incorrect but because it is incomplete. It constitutes only one of many stories that could be told about women`s place in Shakespeare`s world and we need to consider the implications of its current hegemony. Some of the most important recent *feminist/historicist literary scholarship* includes reminders that  the period was fraught with anxiety and rebellious women and particularly their rebellion through language; that women`s reading was policed and their writing prohibited or marked as transgressive even when they were not engaged in other criminal activities, and that an obsessive energy was invested in exerting control over the unruly woman-the woman who was exercising either her sexuality or her tongue under her own control rather than under the rule of a man.

The female characters we encounter in Shakespeare's plays are not the same ones that appeared in the original productions. In the theatre, we rarely see them portrayed by male actors, but even in reading the women we imagine represent the end product of over four hundred years of modernization to redefine their roles in terms of new conceptions of women's nature and women's roles in the world. Not all of Shakespeare's women have changed to the same degree: in some cases, they have been easily recruited to serve as role models- both positive and negative – for women born hundreds of years after their original creation.

In other cases, they have required more updating because the fit between the roles they originally had and the roles post Shakespearian readers and revisers have imagined for them is less than seamless. An examination of the roles that have been most drastically reshaped both in theatrical production and in readers 'comments can tell us a great deal about the history of women's roles in the disparate worlds in which the plays have been performed and read. Paradoxically, however, this implication of Shakespeare's female characters in the process of historical change has tended to occlude their own historicity, as they served, and continue to serve, in ever-changing guises as models of an unchanging, universal female nature.

It is also important to recognize that this process of updating Shakespeare's female characters and the consequent occlusion of their historical difference did not begin with post-Shakespearian revisers. Shakespeare himself often updated the women he found in his historical sources to shape their roles in forms that made them recognizable in term of his own contemporaries' expectations about women's behavior and motivation. These changes offer a revealing glimpse of the contested and changing gender ideology that shaped Shakespeare's original audiences' conceptions of women's proper roles, not only in the plays they went to see but also in the lives they lived.

Probably the most obvious manifestation of the way the updating of Shakespeare's female characters both bespeaks and obscures their historical location can be seen in theatrical costume. Illustrations of eighteenth and nineteenth and even early twentieth–century productions of the plays almost always look outdated. In their own time, the costumes and sets these illustrations depict were undoubtedly designed to provide the most appropriate possible realizations of the characters Shakespeare created, but in ours they look like quaint period pieces, and the period to which they belong is not that in which the plays were originally set or produced but that of their own production. Clearly what it shows us is not the way the characters were originally conceived but the ways they were imagined in times and places that are now unmistakably marked as distant, both from our world and from that of Shakespeare.

Illustrations of recent productions, by contrast, tend to obscure their own historicity, coming to us either as "authentic" recreations of the plays' original productions or their historical settings, or else as manifestations of the timeless contemporary of Shakespeare's representations of universal human experience.

The only sixteenth – century illustration of a Shakespearian text that we have is a drawing that dates from the mid – 1590 in which Tamora, the Queen of the Goths in Titus Andronicus, pleads with Titus to spare her two sons. In keeping with the ancient Roman setting of the play, Titus is dressed in a classical-looking draped garment, perhaps copied from a Roman statue; but Tamora wears a much more modern costume. We do not have an illustration of Cleopatra as she appeared when Antony and Cleopatra was first performed, but the play script indicates that she must have been dressed in anachronistically modern clothing. Early in the play, Shakespeare's ancient Egyptian queen orders her attendant to cut her lace, a demand that would have made sense only if she wore a tight, stiffened bask or bodice like the costumes worn by fashionable ladies in Shakespeare's own time.

To be sure, on Shakespeare's stage modern costume was more the rule than the exception: the two soldiers who attend Titus are also dressed in contemporary Elizabethan costume; in Julius Caesar, the conspirators pluck anachronistic hats about their ears; in Richard II, one courtier threatens another with an anachronistic rapier and many other examples could be cited. Nonetheless, the anachronism in Tamora's costume is suggestive because it implies that even when her male antagonist is seen as belonging to a specific historical context, the woman's characterization is untouched by the contingencies of time and place.

The anachronistic details of speech and dress evoke a contemporary female stereotype-that of the respectable citizen's wife-which would have been entirely familiar to members of Shakespeare's original audience.

Like Tamora's anachronistic costume of Cleopatra's anachronistic laces, they depend on-and also reinforce- the assumption that women are always and everywhere the same, immune to the historical contingencies of time and place.

They interpolate the women in the audience with identities that are defined solely by their gender-identities constrained by usually hostile and always restrictive stereotypes.

All of Shakespeare's female characters, the figure who seems to offer the most unmanageable resistance to those stereotypes is Cleopatra. It is not surprising that modern film-makers have never chosen to produce Shakespeare's version of her story is a big-budget film, despite the obvious attraction of the fabulous Egyptian queen as a cinematic subject[1].

Already legendary when Shakespeare produced his version of her story, the powerfully ambivalent Cleopatra he staged drew on a variety of sources. These included the Roman writers who had defined her as Eastern, barbarian, "harlot queen" and the fifteenth and sixteenth century predecessors who had identified her with threatening power of women's insatiable appetite[2] as well as the antitheatrical polemicists who had insisted on the deceptiveness and corruption of Shakespeare's own theatrical medium.

The combination of erotic power and political authority that had made Cleopatra such a troubling figure to Romans and humanists alike might also have struck a responsive chord in Shakespeare's original audiences: they had, until very recently, lived under the sway of their own powerful queen. For twentieth – century American filmgoers, by contrast, Cleopatra had to be reduced to a fetishized female body, adorned in spectacular costumes for the pleasure of male spectators and the emulation of other women. Her motivation is clear and simple: to pleasure her man. For instance, Cleopatra's suicide is no longer staged as a demonstration of her royalty. Instead of ordering her women to show her like a queen, Elizabeth Taylor's Cleopatra says she wants to be seen by Antony, as he first saw her.

The film domesticates Cleopatra into a spectacular mannequin who intends to give pleasure only to her man.

Even at the end of the seventeenth century, when John Dryden produced his own version of the play, he found it necessary to transform Shakespeare's dangerously powerful and supremely artful heroine into a stereotype of artless feminine helplessness. Dryden's play, unlike Shakespeare's, brings Octavia to Alexandria for a meeting with Cleopatra, an encounter that Dryden justifies in his Preface as a "natural" expression of their characters as women. To justify his innovation, Dryden relies on what he imagines as the unchanging nature of women to discount any distinctions of nationality, rank, or historicity.

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[1] Katherine Eggert, *Age Cannot Wither Him: Warren Beatty's Bugsy as Hollywood's Cleopatra*, in Lynda E. Boose, Richard Burt (eds.), *Shakespeare the Movie: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, and Video*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997, pp. 198–214.

[2] Mary Hamer, *Signs of Cleopatra: History, Politics, Representation*, London, Routledge, 1993, pp. 33–44.

Dryden wrote at a time when neoclassical beliefs that general nature should supersede the accidents of individual identity in the representation of dramatic characters were widely endorsed; and all for Love was explicitly designed as a new version of the story of Antony and Cleopatra rather than merely an adaptation of Shakespeare's play. Nonetheless, Dryden's insistence upon transforming Shakespeare's female characters to bring them into conformity with what he regarded as an unchanging female nature outlasted his era. Even when Shakespeare's plays were not rewritten, the women's roles repeatedly reshaped to fit the Procustean bed of whatever gender ideology prevailed at the time and place of the plays' production. This practice is strikingly illustrated in the collection on nineteenth-century images of Shakespeare's heroines that were exhibited in 1997 at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC. As Georgianna Ziegler pointed out in the accompanying catalogue, Shakespeare's female characters were imagined to conform to Victorian ideals of female behaviour. She notes that even Lady Macbeth was redeemed as a good, Victorian wife, a woman whose "ambition was all for her husband"[3].

If, as Ziegler argues, "Lady Macbeth, with her aggressiveness and murderous instincts turned to madness, was one of the most difficult of Shakespeare's heroines for the nineteenth century to appropriate", she has proved remarkably adaptable to twentieth–century understandings of feminine psychology. O Mary McCarthy, writing in the 1960s, Lady Macbeth was clearly recognizable in temporary terms as: "a woman and has unsexed her, which makes her a monster by definition... the very prospect of murder quickens an hysterical excitement in her, like the discovery of some object in a shop – a set of emeralds or a sable stole – in which Macbeth can give her and which will be outlet for all the repressed desires he cannot satisfy. She behaves as though Macbeth, through his weakness, will deprive her of self-realization; the unimpeded exercise of her will is the voluptuous end she seeks". McCarthy's references to "hysteria", repressed and unsatisfied desires that are clearly sexual, and a lust for the glittering objects of conspicuous consumption mark her diatribe as a mid-twentieth-century period piece; but it, no less than the Victorian apologia cited by Ziegler, measures the character against modern norms of wifely behaviour. "Her wifely concern", McCarthy charges, is "mechanical and far from real solicitude". She regards her "as a thing, a tool that must be oiled and polished"[4].

Despite the three centuries that separated Dryden's Cleopatra from the Victorians' and Mary McCarthy's Lady Macbeth, and despite the manifold differences between the roles of the two characters and the play worlds in which

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[3] Georgianna Ziegler, with Frances E. Dolan and Jeanne Addison Roberts, *Shakespeare's Unruly Women*, Washington, The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1997, p. 75.

[4] "General Macbeth" originally published in *Harper's Magazine*, June 1962, reprinted in the Signet Classic Edition of *Macbeth*, edited by Sylvan Barnet, New York, New American Library, 1963, p. 234.

Shakespeare set them, all were judged by reference to the paradigmatic modern embodiment of female virtue, the good wife. Dryden's Cleopatra may have engaged in an illicit alliance with Antony, but, like all good women- she was designed by nature for marriage and domesticity as "a wife, silly, harmless household dove". The Victorian's Lady Macbeth may have been guilty of regicide, but, like all good women, she was motivated by ambition of her husband's advancement. Mary McCarthy's Lady Macbeth was monstrously unwomanly because she was ambitious only for herself.

McCarthy's satirical portrait of Lady Macbeth is exaggerated and oversimplified, but it expresses in the simplest possible terms the preoccupations with her sexuality and her relationship with her husband that have dominated modern conceptions of her character. Modern critics and playgoers, like McCarthy, have found in Lady Macbeth a character easily understandable in terms of their own preconceptions about female psychology, especially in the soliloquy in which lady Macbeth calls on murderous spirits to "unsex" her. Along with sleepwalking scene, this soliloquy offers a great showpiece for modern actresses, as well as a powerful advertisement for modern assumptions about female character. Often accompanied by autoerotic display as the actress folds her own breasts, breathes hard, and writhes in the throes of passion, the speech clearly demonstrates that the lady is, in fact sexed; and it locates her sex in the eroticized breasts of the woman who performs the role. On a modern stage. Its meaning seems perfectly transparent.

The implications of the speech when it was first performed would have been much more complicated. First, of course, it would have been spoken by a male actor. Some scholars have speculated that the actor may have gestured toward his crotch when he said "unsex me here", alluding to his own "unsexing" as he took on the woman's part. However, although it is impossible to know exactly how to soliloquy was originally performed, the references in the speech to "my woman's breasts" and "my milk" suggest that he probably did gesture towards the place where the woman's breasts would have been if he had them. But although the erotic implications of the character's breasts seem overwhelming in a modern production, they may have been much less central on Shakespeare's stage, not only because the original actor did not really have a woman's breasts but also because women's breasts had other implications as well as erotic.

To modern Western eyes, the eroticization of women's breasts seems "natural"; on a modern stage, the meaning of Lady Macbeth's soliloquy seems equally self-evident. The beliefs it assumes-that there is a psychological polarity between men and women, based on sexual differences that are embodied, natural, biologically grounded, and virtually self-evident-are by now too familiar to require explication.

At the time the speech was written, however, these assumptions did not yet represent a cultural consensus.

Lady Macbeth's association of her woman's milk with remorse and compunction also implies that women have a natural aversion to killing, physically grounded in their sexed and gendered bodies, which are designed to feed and nurture. Before she can kill, the spirits that "wait on nature's mischief" will have to unsex her.

This implication that feminine gentleness is grounded by nature in a lactating female body is clearly legible in twenty-first-century terms. It also provides a striking example of the ways Shakespeare female characters have participated in the historical production of feminity as naturally grounded in women's role as wives and mothers, not because it misreads Shakespeare's play script, but because it does not.

In this speech, Shakespeare transformed his historical sources to define Lady Macbeth's character in terms of an emergent gender ideology that culminated, over three centuries later, in the kind of reading quoted by Mary McCarthy. The beginnings of the process can be seen in Shakespeare's transformations of his character's historical prototype, and post-Shakespearian transformations of the character he created illustrate its realization, especially in twentieth–century readings which emphasize her sexuality and analyze her behavior in psychoanalytic terms.

But the version of Lady Macbeth that looks so familiar to modern audiences is the product of a long history of anachronistic revision, not only because the psychological motivation we so easily recognize is distinctly modern but also because Shakespeare's own representation of her character required a radical revision of the descriptions of ancient Scotswomen he found in his historical source.

Although Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth retains some of the fierceness of her ancient predecessors, she lacks their taste for blood. The obsessive theme of her sleepwalking, in fact, will be her repeated, futile efforts to wash what she calls "damned spots" of Duncan's blood from her hands. Here, as in her preparation for Duncan's murder, Shakespeare's eleven-century Scotswomen rehearses a prototypically modern conception of universal feminity, proving once again in her madness that killing is antithetical to woman's essential nature.

Shakespeare's antithesis between women's milk and murder, which also became an essential feature of Lady Macbeth's character, required an even more radical revision of his source. In the "Description of Scotland", lactation is not opposed to killing; the two, in fact, are associated.

Here maternal breastfeeding is evidence both of the women's physical hardiness and of the equality of the sexes in a primitive culture that lived close to nature. Neither the chronicle nor the play offers a reliable picture of ancient Scotswomen. Both are inflected by sixteenth and seventeenth-century debates about breastfeeding-and also by changing conceptions of women's place in the

world, and the basis of gender itself. Historians of sexual difference have argued that "sex as we know it was invented" some time "in the eighteenth century", but the modern conception of sexual difference that Thomas Laqueur as the "two-sex model"[5] seems clearly anticipated in Shakespeare's representation of Lady Macbeth. For although both the chronicler and the playwright can be said to advocate maternal breastfeeding, their advocacy takes strikingly different forms. In the chronicle it is a means by which the strong mothers of ancient Scotland produced strong offspring; in Macbeth it is a distinctively female activity which express the gendered gentleness that is the natural disposition of all women in every time and place.

Because this conception of womanhood has become so well established, Shakespeare's characterization of Lady Macbeth has been both accessible and acceptable to modern audiences. The new requirement that all mothers nurse their own children emphasized instead the distinctions between the male domain of public economic and political action and the female enclosure of private, domestic affairs. This is not to say that all women have ever been enclosed within the household. Even women who might have preferred domesticity have been forced by economic necessity to work outside their homes; but the ideal of woman's "natural" and "traditional" place at home is undisturbed by that reality. The only division that "counts" is the "natural" division between men and women that was to become one of the salient features of modernity.

Mountains of evidence have been adduced in support of both accounts of Elizabeth's reign –the older and more popular emphasis of her remarkable success as a monarch and the recent scholarly emphasis upon the disabilities produced by her gender that haunted her entire reign. Evidence about the ordinary women Shakespeare would have known as a boy in Stratford -upon-Avon is harder to come by; but in this case as well, alternative descriptions can be constructed. Scholarly accounts of Shakespeare's youth and family focus on men, such as his father and schoolmaster, partly because of the greater visibility of men in surviving records, and probably also because of the modern scholars' own greater interest in their activities. Thus, for instance, a glance at the indexes to two standard biographies of Shakespeare shows respectively twenty –six and twenty-seven entries referring to his father but only twelve and fourteen for his mother.[6]

Conclusions, emphasize the idea that like all humanists, Shakespeare placed man and human society, man's lofty aspirations regarding his social and moral existence in the very center of his drama. It would be wrong to claim Shakespeare's realism as a mere faithful reflection of events and delineation of

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[5] Thomas Laqueur*, Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 149.
[6] S. Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life,* New York, Oxford University Press and Scholar Press, 1975.

certain historical personages. This paper tried to follow the growth of Shakespeare's genius, both as a poet and a dramatist, to analyses his trend of thought and hi mood as far as can be interfered from his plays, and to point out some prominent traits of Shakespeare's artistry in the respective works. The Shakespearian drama mirrored the life of Shakespeare's age, meaning the life of Renaissance England, its greatness, its conflicts and contradictions.

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