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Activist Discourse and the Origins of Feminist Shakespeare Studies

Abstract: This essay reconsiders interpretations of Shakespeare by Irish writer Anna Murphy Jameson and the American Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller. Developing an informal method in which the voice of the female critic rallies in defence of Shakespeare's heroines, they intervene in a male-dominated intellectual sphere to model alternative forms of women's learning that take root outside of formalized institutional channels. Jameson, in *Shakespeare's Heroines*, invokes the language of authentic Romantic selfhood and artistic freedom, recovering Shakespeare's female characters from earlier critical aspersion as figures of exceptional female eloquence and resilience; she adopts a conversational critical voice to involve her female readers in the interpretative process itself. Fuller, in *Woman in Nineteenth Century*, speaks authoritatively as a kind of female prophet to argue that women's creative reinterpretations of Shakespeare point the way to a revitalization of a sterile literary critical field. Both writers call for the reform of women's education through revisionist interpretations of history attuned to the representation of female exceptionalism. In embryonic form, these nineteenth century feminist writings formulate a persistent strain of socially engaged, activist feminist criticism of Shakespeare.

Keywords: Anna Murphy Jameson (1794-1860), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), feminist literary criticism, *Shakespeare's Heroines* (1832), *Woman in the Nineteenth-Century* (1845), Romantic literature, Romantic literary criticism, Romantic sociability, nineteenth century public sphere

In 1895, Jane Addams (1860-1935) first addressed the Pullman Strike (1894) in a speech at the Social Economics Conference in Chicago. She revived the speech on numerous occasions between 1895 and 1897 (Knight 111). The social worker, pacifist, women's rights advocate, and founder of Hull House

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documented conditions in Chicago's slums—notably in *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902) and *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1910)—in an "anecdotal style" (Crunden 66) that furnished material for professional sociologists. For her speech addressing bloody labour unrest, Addams looked to *King Lear* to read the Pullman crisis as the tragedy of the aging patriarch. By calling Pullman "a modern Lear," Addams comments not only on Pullman's need to exercise control over his employees but also on the ideology of benevolence he espoused—a generous impulse that nonetheless pits employees and employers against each other. She suggests that any adherent of benevolent paternalism, no matter how generous or visionary he might be, is corrupted by refusing "frank equality" with his men (Addams 272). The argument of Jane Addams's "A Modern Lear" culminates in the sweeping observation that, to embrace change fully, the workingmen of America must, like Cordelia, turn their backs on the noxious "old relationships" (Addams 279). For Addams, the conflict between the employer and his employees is presented on a psycho-dramatic level as the conflict between the father and the adult child.

Susan Kemp and Ruth Brandwein (343) have argued that feminism and women's social work in the United States share roots in nineteenth century charitable and benevolence schemes. We might trace a similar correspondence between Shakespeare Studies and activist rhetoric in the nonfiction prose of nineteenth century women intellectuals—most strikingly in the programmes of self-development they advocate for women readers. From the late eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries, leisured American women reading in the home—through independently designed and often idiosyncratically constructed schemes of self-improvement—supplemented their reading of Shakespeare and the Bible with the latest British novels (Kelley 154-155). By the late nineteenth century in America—the period of Addams's girlhood and formative education in an evangelical seminary—many young American Progressives would find in social reform causes an outlet for the repressed energies fostered by their strict religious upbringings (Crunden 16-38).

The Progressives' familiarity with Shakespeare assisted them in their efforts to find common ground with nineteenth century audiences and made the reform lecture of the variety delivered by Addams into a mesmerizing performance. In countless Gilded Age novels—from James's *The Bostonians* (1886) to Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905)—Addams's fictional counterparts signalled alternative routes for women's fulfilment outside of traditional marriage and spinsterhood through the emergent profession of social work. In tandem with familiar novelistic patterns, the Progressive reformers' habit of borrowing powerful Shakespearean archetypes to narrate their version of history as a series of struggles against the forces of evil, tyranny, and abuse—both material and psychological threats—supplied nineteenth century women

intellectuals with additional records of female strength and persistence in orchestrating challenges to authority.

The origins of contemporary feminist engagements and reinterpretations of Shakespeare are rooted in the even earlier efforts of nineteenth century female intellectuals such as the Irish art historian and critic, Anna Murphy Jameson, and her transcendentalist counterpart Margaret Fuller. Though Jameson's and Fuller's complementary feminisms have been compared by scholars previously, Fuller has not been widely recognized as an important voice in the early nineteenth century feminist criticism of Shakespeare. Jameson's *Shakespeare's Heroines* and Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* turn to interpreting women's roles in Shakespeare as relevant and educative for their readers and vitally inform the second wave of feminist criticism of Shakespeare in Britain and the United States. Like their nineteenth century predecessors, second wave feminist literary critics described their enterprise as revisionist historiography that promotes "an understanding of the interdependence of the private and the public, family and society, work and home" (Greene and Kahn 20). Specifically, nineteenth century feminists' tendency to read Shakespeare's plays for the critical insights they furnished on women's psychology under patriarchy remains one dominant lens for the critical reinterpretation of Shakespeare from a feminist vantage point. The nineteenth century essays anticipate modern feminist engagements with Shakespeare's portraits of eloquent—and potentially subversive—female characters voicing challenges to patriarchal power. For Jameson and Fuller, Shakespeare's plays offer sites for the feminist recovery of unlikely sources of feminine eloquence and resistance, and the insights that the plays offer may be applied to the situation of their nineteenth century female readership. In this respect, these nineteenth century essays depart from any simplistic veneration of Shakespeare's genius in the prevailing critical idiom, as Shakespeare's female characters are reconsidered in terms of their analysis of power struggles.

Because nineteenth century intellectuals were inclined to read Shakespeare in explicitly moral terms and to take from the plays pointed lessons for the present, commentaries on Shakespeare reflect a significant feature of the nineteenth century culture of social reform with its focus on oratory. Unlike Emerson's and Coleridge's lectures, the early feminist commentaries on Shakespeare by Anna Jameson and Margaret Fuller that I am concerned with here were intended as guides and motivational texts for women reading *in private*, and, in this respect, they retain a conversational, improvisational tone and extemporaneous quality. As recent scholarship on "Romantic sociability" has demonstrated, a more accurate conception of the nineteenth century public sphere incorporates even the informal channels (Wallace 68) through which women writers intervened in the intellectual discourse.

Thus, Anna Jameson's extensive writings on Shakespeare's women illustrate what the dialogue with Shakespeare meant to nineteenth century women intellectuals, both with respect to their allegiance to the literary tradition and creative departures from it. Jameson's work, above all, is an astonishing piece of early feminist criticism of Shakespeare. The work is a *tour de force* that demonstrates her intimate knowledge of Shakespeare's heroines, from Portia to Isabella, debates male Shakespearean critics, and implicitly directs women readers in their desire for self-improvement. This appeal to Shakespeare pervades nineteenth century literature of reformists and intellectuals. However, to illustrate how the activism of notable nineteenth century women intellectuals was measured against their reading of Shakespeare, it is also necessary to place those women in relation to works by their male contemporaries: Emerson's *Representative Men*, Coleridge's lectures, and Hazlitt's essays—texts that attempted to conform to the patterns and rhythms of everyday speech (Gustafson 72) and the university lecture, all the while disseminating the Romantic critical idiom in an accessible style. For these writers. Shakespeare exemplified evolving Romantic conceptions of the artist and the critical spirit (St. Clair 140-57). In Hazlitt's formulation, Shakespeare "was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become" (324). Hazlitt's words reflect the image of Shakespeare favored by Romantic critics. He is not only a rich source of literary interest but also furnishes a version of the artist as a self-effacing student of human psychology. Jameson borrows extensively from this habit of interpretating Shakespeare as one powerful source for the Romantic imagination by explicitly commenting on the psychology of Shakespeare's women in a way that was potentially emancipatory for her largely female readership.

In 1832, Anna Jameson published *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical and Historical*, a hybrid genre of literary criticism that appealed to readers of her previously published collected biographies of women and announced the ambitious aim to render Shakespeare's heroines persuasive as portraits of feminine psychology. Both *Memoirs of the Loves of the Poets* (1829) and *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns* (1831) had been well received by nineteenth century women readers, allowing Jameson to make a name for herself (Hoeckley 9-37) in the interconnected sphere of women's biography, historiography, and conduct book literature. Anticipating a wide readership, Jameson's text appeals to women readers on many levels at once, while dwelling on the psychology of Shakespeare's heroines and their enduring relevance. Jameson's tendency to praise certain Shakespearean heroines more than others—namely, Portia, Isabella, Beatrice, and Rosalind—illustrates how Shakespeare grants argumentative forcefulness and strength of conviction to certain young heroines and encourages readers to form attachments to these figures with an eye

toward self-cultivation along the lines exhibited by Shakespeare's figures of female exceptionalism.

Feminist scholars have commented extensively on both *Characteristics* and *Woman*. Though Fuller is not considered a major voice in feminist criticism of Shakespeare, Jameson's reputation has been salvaged by scholars who regard her as an influential feminist forebear. It is odd that these accounts dwell on Jameson's role in mythmaking, disseminating gendered stereotypes (Russell 39) and softening Shakespeare's heroines into exemplars of the nineteenth century domestic virtues. For instance, Julie Hankey (426) has been troubled by Jameson's unconvincing "idealization of Shakespeare's women" and circular reasoning. Though Jameson's method is innovative and informal, her *readings* tend to celebrate Shakespeare's heroines behaving altruistically, not rationally—a critical stance that is justified strenuously by an appeal to the sympathy of her readers. Her *Characteristics* is therefore often misread as part of the standard fare in nineteenth century conduct literature, compromised by her turn to feminine models of nurturance and self-denial.

Yet this first wave of rather tepid recovery of Jameson overlooks the novelty of Jameson's intervention in the Romantic critical discourse through her careful dialogue with male critics and through her tendency to celebrate the integrity and emotional authenticity of Shakespeare's figures of female eloquence. Jameson's text functions largely as a self-help manual that affirms Western culture's exemplars of female excellence vis-à-vis a rapid survey of Shakespeare's plays. Dispensing with academic formalities, Jameson's critical voice is at once colloquial and confident, illustrative of her deep engagement with the plays and her intertextual range. Thus, Jameson restores Juliet to a position of prominence among Shakespeare's female leads; her intense emotional responsiveness is not read as a sign of weakness but rather tied to a "singleness of purpose, and devotion of heart and soul" (*Characteristics* 131). Jameson praises Juliet's youthful warmth by aligning her commentary with Hazlitt's enthusiastic appraisal of Juliet's character by underlining Juliet's Romantic counterparts—Haidée of Byron's *Don Juan* and in Schiller's Princess Thekla. Jameson further insists that the true "French Juliet" (*Characteristics* 131) is not to be found in the pages of Rousseau's eighteenth century Héloïse—a text she finds disturbing—but rather by turning to the original twelfth-century nun Héloïse for a model of integrity and courage; as Jameson indicates in a lengthy footnote that severs the connection between Juliet and Rousseau's heroine, Jameson recovers the twelfth-century historical figure and links "her eloquence, her sensibility, her fervour of passion, her devotedness of truth" (*Characteristics* 131) to Shakespeare's Juliet.

With extreme care, Jameson champions "Characters of the Intellect" such as Portia and Isabella as paradigms of female excellence that women readers might emulate. Jameson's version of Isabella is that of a *portrait of*

feminine integrity whose "conscientiousness is overcome by the only sentiment which ought to temper justice into mercy, the power of affection and sympathy" (*Characteristics* 105). Here, the effort to align Isabella's perceived sainthood with nineteenth century conceptions of domestic virtue rings false. Though jarring to modern ears, such tensions recur throughout Jameson's text and point to the strain involved in clarifying her exact position on Shakespeare's women, while placating the male-dominated critical establishment. As an intellectual that must measure her enthusiasm against the standards of her era and social class, the commentary may not fully represent her authentic critical voice, but one tempered by audience expectations and what her own set of self-imposed constraints imposed by current orthodoxies would allow.

Jameson's Anti-Satirical Education

Jameson's successful take on the collected biography itself, and her appeal to a wide audience of women readers speaks to the nineteenth century reading public's interest in reframing the past from the "moral and picturesque point of view" (Jameson, *Memoirs* x). By broadening the possible subjects available in the "popular archive" (Booth 259), Jameson's writings opened the field onto a range of hitherto unexplored and unlikely female subjects for investigation to supply a series of lively records of feminine exceptionalism. This approach, in turn, established the scope and aims of her subsequent brand of feminist Shakespearean criticism. *Characteristics* thus marks a shift in Jameson's writing from one kind of anthology to another—from a catalog of historical role models to the more nuanced analysis of Shakespeare's rendering of feminine psychology.

The form of *Characteristics* is experimental, incorporating imagined dialogue with male interlocuters—both fictive and real. Conversations with Shakespeare's women generate revisionist readings of the plays. Through these negotiations with voice, genre, and intertextuality, Jameson deftly negotiates a prominent place for her book within the overcrowded and male-dominated field of Shakespearean criticism. Speaking on behalf of "woman" and in support of a code of feminine morals somewhat paradoxically upheld by nineteenth century traditionalists, she aligns her project with a humane philosophy that grants strong and eloquent women a broader sphere of activity. Anne Russell has suggested that Jameson's conception of "womanliness" is far more permissive than it is reactionary, incorporating both "the restrictions of ideal womanliness while still offering a potential freedom" (46). Jameson redefines "proper womanhood" as more emancipatory through her writing on Shakespeare and implies that freedom for women readers is to be found to some extent in creatively reinterpreting the classics.

Anna Jameson's collected body of writings furnishes, as Alison Booth indicates, "models for Anglo-American middle-class women's cultural quest" (264). The relatively early *Characteristics* anticipates later works such as *Legends of the Madonna* (1852) and *Sisters of Charity and the Communion of Labor* (1857), insofar as it equates the pursuit of culture with religious forms of veneration and prayer. Jameson addresses the *Characteristics* to a potentially wide readership—aspirational women—committed to restoring the "serious spirit of Christianity" (Jameson, *Characteristics* 52) to women's educational programmes. In eschewing fashions and trends in literary criticism, Jameson borrows heavily from the language of nineteenth century reformers and intellectuals to stress the timeliness of her cause:

> I wished to illustrate the manner in which the affections would naturally display themselves in women—whether combined with high intellect, regulated by reflection, and elevated by imagination, or existing with perverted dispositions, or purified by the moral sentiments. I found all these in Shakespeare; his delineations of women, in whom the virtuous and calm affections predominate, and triumph over shame, fear, pride, resentment, vanity, jealousy. (Jameson, *Characteristics* 70)

Her analysis of Shakespeare's women lends credibility to her campaign in defense of women's experiments with educational methods devised outside of formal institutions of higher learning. Further, her selected case studies seek to demonstrate the strategic advantage of women's learning in the face of external pressures, real and perceived attacks, and assaults against one's integrity.

Characteristics inserts itself into nineteenth century debates about gender through a pointed framing device that takes the form of a heated exchange between the personae of Medon and Alda, a figure for Jameson herself. Because Medon is a figure of impenetrable male skepticism, Alda must work hard to convince him that her study of Shakespeare's women is worthwhile. He considers it trivial, a frittering away of her time, "dreaming over Shakespeare" (Jameson, *Characteristics* 50). He urges her instead to create satirical portraits from "real life" that "would at least stand a better chance of being read" (Jameson, *Characteristics* 50). She counters with the charge that satire belongs to:

> A state of society in which the levelling spirit of *persiflage* has long been a fashion; to the perverse education which fosters it; to the affections disappointed or unemployed, which embitter the temper; to faculties misdirected or wasted, which oppress and irritate the mind; to an utter ignorance of ourselves, and the common lot of humanity, combined with quick and refined perceptions and much superficial cultivation; to frivolous habits, which make serious thought a burthen. (Jameson, *Characteristics* 52)

Jameson perceives in a culture that rewards verbal cruelty only bad faith efforts and shallow performances. She interprets the Romantic rejection of the witty, urbane fare favored in the eighteenth century as one facet of her feminist enterprise. Jameson decries satire—perhaps unfairly—to promote a new model for women's education, however. She thus dismisses the neoclassical tradition to link—or, in her view, simply to return—the pursuit of culture to more authentic forms of self-expression. Above all, she wishes to link women's writing to an anti-competitive, humanistic spirit.

Anticipating the quest for an authentic female voice in nineteenth century poetry undertaken subsequently by Elizabeth Barrett Browning in *Aurora Leigh*,[1] the voice of Alda in the introduction's frame debate stresses her anomalous position and solitary endeavor—as well as her vulnerability to swift attack. She also underlines the corrective function of the emphasis on Shakespeare's women. Alda refers her project directly to Shakespeare and to readers' attachment to Shakespearean characters; rejecting the weight of formalized critical opinions, she appeals to readers that wish to live vicariously through Shakespeare's memorable figures. Her method resists formal academic training, insofar as it combines "history and real life" (Jameson, *Characteristics* 55) to spur spontaneous reflection and unusually intense personal identification with Shakespeare's characters.

Alda defends her tendency to moralize about literary characters when her stern interlocuter, Medon indicates that her position is naïve and untenable. Her Essentialism, according to Medon's logic, fails to consider anomalous positions and dissenting opinions. Alda thus turns to the rhetoric of self-help to scold him:

> We can do with [Shakespeare's characters] what we cannot do with real people: we can unfold the whole character before us, stripped of all pretensions of self-love, all disguises of manner. We can take the leisure to examine, to analyse, to correct our own impressions, to watch the rise and progress of various passions—we can hate, love, approve, condemn, without offense to others, without pain to ourselves. (Jameson, *Characteristics* 56)

Alda's sense of the possible forces Medon to assent to her point of view. Her approach deconstructs the study of Shakespeare into a fine analysis of the emotions, a strategy that actively involves the reader's own psychology. The "leisure" (Jameson, *Characteristics* 56) that makes this kind of study possible is neither frivolous nor misdirected, fostering rather fresh readings of seemingly minor figures from Shakespeare's plays. Blending a colloquial

[1] Browning writes: "The works of women are symbolical. / We sew, sew, prick our fingers, dull our sight,/Producing what?" (Aurora Leigh, ll 456-58).

voice with encyclopedic knowledge of Shakespeare's women, Jameson's text inaugurates a modern direction in feminist Shakespearean criticism. Intermingling psychological observations (if somewhat amateurishly) with directives for aspirational readers, Jameson indicates how even the private study of Shakespeare forced nineteenth century readers to examine the reach of gendered stereotypes on their own cultural moment and activity, while extending her critique to a broad audience. Jameson's criticism implies that more traditional commentaries on Shakespeare—focused exclusively on the psychology of the leading male—might no longer engage a mass readership or heterogenous mixture of nineteenth century publics. Though her text eschews traces of formal academic training and coding, it prefigures the modern interest in somewhat arbitrarily resurrecting minor literary figures from obscurity, while labelling Shakespeare himself a kind of feminist playwright.

Jameson also designates her text a protected space for women to indulge in even exaggerated or highly idiosyncratic responses to purely fictive characters, aligning her reinterpretation of Shakespeare with a broader ambition to stir up her readers' "sympathy and interest" in imaginative subjects (Jameson 260). She interprets Cordelia as a "passive and tender" testament to the wisdom that suffering confers and compares her to "one of the Madonnas in the old Italian pictures, 'with downcast eyes beneath th'almighty dove'" (Jameson 260). The image of the Madonna recurs throughout Jameson's writing, signaling her attempt to settle on an ideal of feminine purity and singularity. She also counters the nineteenth century attack on the bluestocking to link real historical figures such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Mme de Staël to her reading of Portia. Alongside Jameson's central emphasis on Portia's savvy and knack for strategizing, Jameson's chapter on Portia asserts that an intellectual woman can also be "a trusting spirit," exhibiting "hopefulness and cheerfulness of temper" (Jameson 86). This pointed refutation of the pervasive nineteenth century image of the bluestocking as dour and conniving is striking; it also allows Jameson to gradually divorce the images of feminine exceptionalism she recovers from history from any hints of scandal or impropriety.

Moreover, Jameson's voice of female self-reliance and intellectualism—Alda—detaches the study of Shakespeare from formal strictures and paradigms, employing characterological rhetoric to position Shakespeare at the forefront of her readers' quest for authentic selfhood. At first glance, *Characteristics* appears improvisational, an incomplete performance. Yet if we extend Lionel Trilling's account of the distinctive features of "nineteenth century art" (99) to *Characteristics*, Jameson becomes both a significant Romantic critic and a feminist avant la lettre—both in terms of her dialogical framework and conception of women's education as a series of idiosyncratic responses to major figures and formative texts. In Trilling's view, the nineteenth century writer's assertion of "personal

authenticity" (99) encourages audience participation and strives for self-determination. According to this critical paradigm, "the authentic work of art instructs us in our inauthenticity and adjures us to overcome it" (99). Jameson's Romantic critical idiom gains further momentum, of course, in the absence of any one single teacher, guide, prompter, or dominant cultural influence, drawing instead from disparate fields that she attempts to reconcile to her critical stance.

Nonetheless, Jameson's *Characteristics* does exhibit considerable dialogue and concurrence with mainstream critical norms and inflections: memorably, the extension of Schlegel's desire to classify Shakespeare's characters, and Coleridge's assertion that we are drawn to Shakespeare primarily for the emotions, and for his representative rather than aberrant figures. For instance, she takes a Coleridgean position on Iago, asserting that the villain's "disbelief in the virtue of Desdemona is not pretended, it is real. It arises from his total want of faith in all virtue; he is no more capable of conceiving of goodness than she is capable of conceiving evil" (Jameson, *Characteristics* 64).[2] Jameson's repeated borrowings from Romantic critical discourse suggest neither repetitiveness nor deference to her more authoritative predecessors. Rather, the stress on representative figures and on the emotional force of Shakespeare that animated critical discourse in the early nineteenth century gives Jameson the confidence to present herself as a competent critic on the basis of this shared philosophical stance.

Jameson, like the Romantics in general, repudiates eighteenth century critical models, and the tendency to dismiss Shakespeare's female characters on the grounds of apparent powerlessness and dullness. In Jameson's view, it is patriarchal social arrangements that have stripped women of their inherent forcefulness, and any role that Shakespeare had in reproducing these arrangements is tied to a larger dramatic strategy bent on the representation of "nature" (Jameson, *Characteristics* 57). In the frame debate, Alda corrects Medon's tendency to rehearse the familiar consensus on Shakespeare's "inferior" women: "In Shakespeare the male and female characters bear precisely the same relation to each other that they do in nature and in society—they are not equal in prominence or in power—they are subordinate throughout" (Jameson, *Characteristics* 57). Jameson insists on the contrast between male and female deviations from rectitude through Alda's juxtaposition of Lady Macbeth and Richard III as illustrative of the "essential distinction between masculine and feminine ambition" (*Characteristics* 57), a theory that distinguishes daringly between Richard's villainy and Lady Macbeth's astuteness. In Jameson's view, "the consistent preservation of the feminine character" (*Characteristics* 58) manifests itself in the figure of Lady Macbeth who remains susceptible to the

[2] Compare Jameson's view to Coleridge's assessment of Iago in the memorable phrase, "the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity."

full range of emotions that Richard suppresses. If the extent to which Jameson's defense of Shakespeare's representation of inherent feminine principles is often strained to the point of illogic, her overarching emphasis on how a dramatic strategy facilitates a feminist challenge to patriarchal power is fundamentally sound.

Jameson positions her feminist reappraisal of Shakespeare most stridently against Samuel Johnson, both on the grounds of faulty conclusions and "learned scorn" (*Characteristics* 73). Whereas Johnson faults Shakespeare for inelegant formal arrangement and failure to produce a moral, Jameson rallies to the defense of Shakespeare's "anachronisms" (*Characteristics* 73) in terms of their expression of a higher logic and responsible engagement with the historical record. Thus, Shakespeare's portraits of historical figures receive a special note of praise from Alda:

> He has not metamorphosed Cleopatra into a turtle-dove, nor Katherine of Aragon into a sentimental heroine. He is true to the spirit and even to the letter of history; where he deviates from the latter, the reason may be found in some higher beauty and more universal truth. (*Characteristics* 73)

Alda's voice in the frame dialogue thus participates in wider nineteenth century efforts to recover Shakespeare from the eighteenth-century critical standard while also introducing an embryonic form of feminist criticism. Alda wishes instead to apply to the plays the same critical acumen normally reserved for "objects of faith and worship" that remain "eternal under every aspect, and independent of all time and all locality" (*Characteristics* 73). Jameson here uses Alda's voice defensively when responding to Johnson and the weight of eighteenth-century scholarship. Using this persona as a distancing device when choosing to develop the feminist alternative to Johnson and disregarding gendered expectations for historical figures, Jameson experiments with the feminist critical voice to counter Johnson's cool appraisals with Romantic speech to argue for the value of forming literary opinions and resolving conflicts of interpretation on the basis of "one's own individual taste and judgment" (Jameson 329).

Alda allows Jameson to use her gender strategically, presenting herself as an amateur scholar, at once non-threatening but also well-versed in Shakespearean literary criticism, and thereby capable of intervening in this discourse. Her evasiveness and refusal to engage directly with political debates is a striking feature of this strategy. She refuses to adopt a political idiom, instead presenting her feminist campaign through the layered façade of Alda's seemingly innocuous, often flighty assertions: "I do not choose presumptuously to fling these opinions in the face of the world, in the form of essays on morality and treatises on education. I have rather chosen to illustrate certain positions by

examples, and leave my readers to deduce the moral themselves, and draw their own inferences" (*Characteristics* 50). In this declaration to the reader, Jameson through the voice of Alda further clarifies her critical stance: she offers what are meant to be flexible guidelines for her readers. Jameson's text reframes the critical discourse on Shakespeare in terms of an evolving conversation among scholars and dilettantes alike.

Jameson's defensiveness about the relative informality of her project is apparent. The chapter devoted to Portia opens with a qualification that nonetheless signals her preference for female exceptionalism: "The intellect of woman bears the same relation to that of man as her physical organization; it is inferior in power, and different in kind" (Jameson, *Characteristics* 75). Jameson's critical approach attests to the value of dissenting from the weight of the established critical consensus and determining for oneself the precise value to be derived from the study of Shakespeare. In the ensuing chapter on Rosalind, she justifies her preference for Beatrice's forcefulness, while praising Rosalind's "superiority as a woman": "It is easy to seize on the prominent features in the mind of Beatrice, but extremely difficult to catch and fix the more fanciful graces of Rosalind" (Jameson, *Characteristics* 118). Jameson asserts that Rosalind's "softness and sensibility" (Jameson, *Characteristics* 118) eclipse Beatrice's wit but also that Beatrice's intellectual superiority is easily supported by textual evidence. Jameson recognizes that bold heroines who depart from the gendered expectations of her day could be (and, in fact, were) summarily dismissed by readers and critics alike.

For instance, Jameson perceives in Hazlitt's essays—praised effusively throughout her text and cited often as a justification for her method—a glaring deficiency that she finds impossible to ignore: in Hazlitt's interpretation of eighteenth-century texts, he expresses a marked preference for the demure servant Pamela at the expense of the controversial Clarissa Harlowe (Jameson, *Characteristics* 78). For Jameson, the recovery of Shakespeare's heroines is susceptible to similar challenges in the face of dissenting or skewed precedents; her undertaking must be substantiated by various means, by the persuasiveness of her own authorial voice and its explicit moralizing on the interdependent fields of feminine exceptionalism and perfection, and by a careful refutation of the arguments of other critics. Due to these contributions, Kimberly VanEsveld Adams has positioned Jameson's arguments in a critical conversation extending back to Mary Wollstonecraft and through the 1840s to Margaret Fuller. Rarely deviating from this premise, "Jameson makes her starting point the sameness of men and women as 'souls' or 'moral natures,' in order to demonstrate that her feminist beliefs are not contradictory but founded on religious beliefs" (62).

Set in this context, Jameson's text implies that the study of Shakespeare develops the whole person, preparing women most of all for public life and altruistic ventures. In so doing, she demonstrates how an engagement with

Shakespeare's women suggests a new model of women's education that takes place outside of formal avenues—one that privileges creativity, independence, and energy. In her championing of the usual suspects (Viola, Portia, Isabella) Jameson stresses intellectual forcefulness and argumentative vigor; and, in a memorable passage in her text, she lays claim to Lady Macbeth as a powerful figure of the imagination, as *the expert* on female suffering. For Jameson, Lady Macbeth is more sinned against that sinning. In downplaying the monstrous elements of Lady Macbeth underscored principally by Samuel Johnson, Jameson settles instead on an image of resourcefulness brought to the surface under intense pressure. Jameson also ties Lady Macbeth's perverse ambition to the impulse to supply what her husband lacks through the resources of her "splendid imagination" (*Characteristics* 358). Similarly, she finds Katherine of Aragon an interesting case study neither on account of her rank nor for her religious devotion but principally for her ability to exploit her modest abilities to the fullest. Jameson's Queen Katherine is not even remotely royal or formidable in the traditional sense: "The natural turn of her mind was simple, serious, and domestic, and all the impulses of her heart kindly and benevolent" (337). She is recovered here not in terms of her display of aristocratic privilege but in terms of an exemplary industriousness that prefigures Victoria; thus, Katherine's letters feature prominently throughout Jameson's discussion of Shakespeare's late romance of *Henry VIII* to promote a version of the "pacific, domestic, and unpretending Katherine" that is faithful to Shakespeare's dramatic representation of her (339).

In early nineteenth century anti-feminist polemic, the extent of a woman's learning indicated her presumed impropriety and monstrosity beneath the formidable bluestocking exterior (Polwhele 1798). Jameson's discussions of Shakespeare's heroines address the question of whether the early modern representation of female wit is compatible with nineteenth century conceptions of sexual purity and submissiveness. Jameson elides this central tension by claiming that: "Women … are by nature too much subjected to suffering in many forms—have too much of fancy and sensibility, and too much of that faculty which some philosophers call *veneration*, to be naturally satirical" (*Characteristics* 53). The text's emphasis on the socially efficacious power of female intelligence both reinforces and undermines contemporary reactionary writings, in which the bluestocking's literary activity threatens the social whole because their prodigious output removes women from the domestic sphere. For Jameson, however, the eloquence of Shakespeare's heroines enhances her plea on behalf of women's private study and reflection.

Similarly, her comments on Hermione defend the wronged queen's "consciousness of her own worth and innocence, and the necessity that exists for asserting and defending both" (Jameson, *Characteristics* 206). In impassioned language, Jameson translates early modern eloquence into a nineteenth century

conception of duty: Hermione's gender and integrity justify her defense of her actions in the trial brought against her by her husband. The assault against the bluestocking movement and the reactionary moment in which they were disseminated indicate that there was no fixed opinion on how women's education should be reformed—though women's pursuit of intellectual rigor is strenuously justified and modelled by Jameson throughout her writings on Shakespeare in an effort to counter the weight of the polemicists' ire.

Margaret Fuller's Miranda: An Intertextual Approach to Feminist Criticism

Whether she knew it or not, it is the American Margaret Fuller in her capacity as a densely allusive essayist who most fully realizes Jameson's vision for feminist criticism of Shakespeare, a version of which appears in fits and starts in the expanded text of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Originally published as an essay in *The Dial* (1843), it is highly likely that Jameson read the revised text of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) and that it informed her later work (Adams 17-21). Constructed as a form of prophecy that takes root in the manic reading of canonical texts, Fuller's intertextual method yields a caustic feminist critique of a culture in decline, severely incapacitated critically, constrained linguistically, and incapable of reaching its immense potential as a result—especially for women.

The nineteenth century literary critical scene is demonstrably barren, in Fuller's view, given its failure to engage responsibly with the past—and with available discourses on self and society. At various junctures, Fuller's *Woman* extends the essay structure beyond what it can reasonably bear or contain within its rather narrow boundaries. Jameson herself called the essay "ill put together and … obscurely expressed" (qtd. in Adams 18). Nonetheless, at various points it is apparent that Fuller's attempt to unfold from within herself and from within her emergent critical voice the resources that her culture failed to supply requires strenuous effort—and one that cost her the enthusiastic and wide reception that Jameson had received in England in the previous decade. In Julie Ellison's words, Fuller's "abstruse research reveals the desire for the feminine soul in the founding texts of Western culture" (277). On the one hand, Fuller's frenetic reading attests to her unchecked ambition and confidence in her ability to assess the European tradition according to her emergent set of feminist values. On the other, Fuller's manic reading underscores the difficulties she encountered in attempting to square her activist agenda and feminist voice to the tradition—given even the support that Shakespeare and other models lend to her cause.

Lacking a tight structure, Fuller's commentaries on Shakespeare are interspersed throughout the text of *Woman* and reveal the search to find voice for her generation among Shakespeare's women: she settles rather abruptly on Miranda. In *Woman*, the Miranda figure appears not to second Fuller's rapid-fire survey of the American scene in the 1840s, but rather to challenge and clarify the democratic aims of the feminist critique. Fuller's Miranda is not a faithful reproduction of the dutiful daughter and model pupil in Shakespeare's *Tempest*—nor does she reflect an attempt to rank Shakespeare's heroines in order of their importance and according to their merits in the manner of Jameson—but rather a strategic reconfiguration of the Romantic critical voice and critical spirit.

A kindred spirit and necessary check on Fuller's pessimism, Miranda anchors Fuller's prophecy in the potential for female self-reliance. Fuller's experiments with the critical voice therefore carry Jameson's earlier critical engagement to their logical extreme, responding to the aims of a more ambitious and expansive democratic project for women's education. In Fuller's text, Miranda's path is unimpeded, for "not only refined, but very coarse men approved and aided one in whom they saw resolution and clearness of design" (Fuller 21). Correcting the errors of wayward, "coarse men" (Fuller 21) is one emphasis of the feminist critique that Fuller derives from Jameson, thereby deepening and intensifying the aims of the earlier model. Fuller shares in Jameson's mania to correct the negative weight of cultural training on women's psychology and intellectual formation. As the textual incarnation of "a dignified sense of self-dependence," Fuller's Miranda suggests that the feminist complement to Emersonian self-reliance takes root not in the rejection of the authority of the fathers but rather in revisionist readings of the feminine spirit.[3] Where Emerson calls for an investigation of the nineteenth century scene and an autonomous and independent American literature, Fuller suggests that American literature can emerge from readers' responsible engagement with the critical tradition. Textual "fathers" may be enlisted and positively reframed in support of feminist capability, and as key sources of the emancipated self. In the expanded 1845 text of *Woman*, Fuller's engagement with Shakespeare is extensive, far-ranging, and complex. The figure of the eloquent Miranda allows Fuller to arrive at a sense of the fundamental problem before her: "The difficulty is to get [women readers] to the point from which they shall naturally develop self-respect and learn self-help" (21). If, as feminist critics concur, Miranda is another version of Fuller, she also points to the inner resources available to particularly energetic and self-disciplined women. Jameson's *Characteristics* indicates what alternatives self-directed study made available to nineteenth century women. Her pointed rejection of the culture of public ridicule and

[3] For the fullest expression of Emerson's view, see his essay "Nature."

literary feuding reflects, of course, a familiar tenet of Romanticism. Perhaps even more importantly, the philosophical turn in Jameson's writing generates a muscular feminist idiom, turning women into collaborators rather than competitors in the pursuit of knowledge. As feminist scholars have repeatedly shown, Jameson's character studies of Shakespeare's women produce feminist role models. What is less often noticed is the extent to which these remarkably suggestive responses to Shakespeare's women speak in the language of authentic Romantic selfhood, to resist cultural training for submission and supporting roles. Jameson's method thus reflects the Romantic impulse to celebrate the powers of the imagination and to glean from Shakespeare's figures powerful models of feminine eloquence.

Jameson's text and its influence on subsequent feminist criticism of Shakespeare, and on the feminist recovery of Jameson herself thus point to negotiations within feminism over the methods that might turn Shakespeare into an ally for reformist and feminist causes. That feminists over the centuries from Mary Wollstonecraft through Margaret Fuller have showcased their learning by a habit of quoting from and reinterpreting Shakespeare may speak volumes about the trappings of patriarchal culture, and the anxieties that have attended female authorship in the past. To take one notable example: Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) has disturbed feminist scholars who distrust her tendency to place her work in dialogue with male authors in an apparent discrediting of her female predecessors. This approach, which suggests that Wollstonecraft's method is inauthentic and overburdened by a recourse to patriarchal authority, has influenced other feminists that perceive in Anna Jameson's writing a similarly banal conformity that is oversaturated in religion. Seen another way, the work of Jameson, Fuller, and other early feminists who have struggled over how to interpret the woman's part in Shakespeare, and what it might mean to recover lost women's voices, demonstrate continual reworkings of the feminist critique of Shakespeare at a crucial origination point for this strand of scholarship. The models of female self-reliance developed in Jameson's and Fuller's engagement with Shakespeare's women constitute an active site of resistance to customary forms and reflect a strategic renegotiation of what it means to engage meaningfully within an established critical tradition.

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