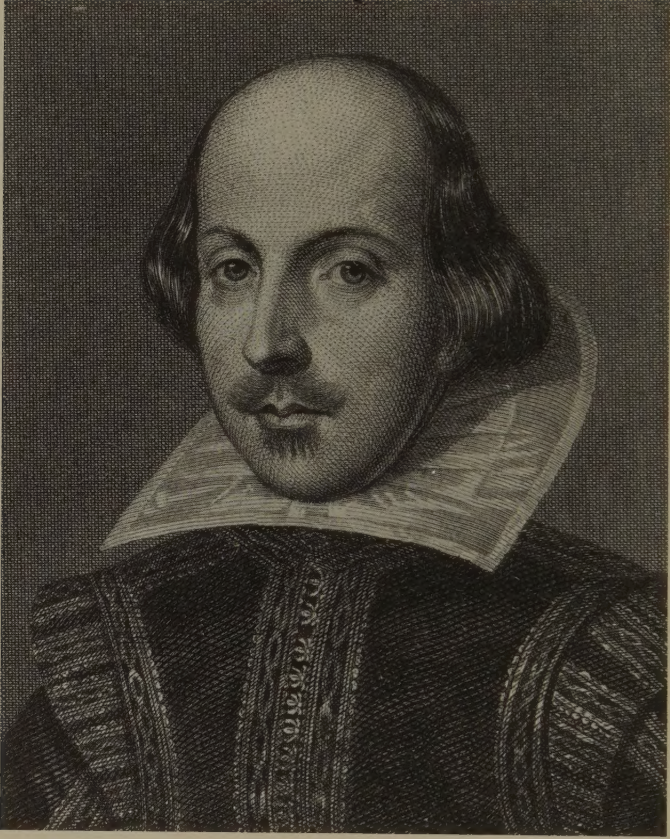


SHAKESPEARE'S GEMSTONES

DAVID W. BERRY, PHD



Droeshout engraving of Shakespeare from the First Folio 1623

SHAKESPEARE'S GEMSTONES

by

David W. Berry, PhD

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The many uses that Shakespeare makes of precious stones in his plays and poems is the topic of this book. This topic first appealed to me because it provides a manageable approach to the canon. The thirty-seven plays, one hundred and fifty-four sonnets, and other poems, along with a mountain of criticism about these works can overwhelm a reader. However, the subject of gemstones offers a narrow focus that is quite manageable. Another reason why this topic appealed to me is that it provides a special insight into Shakespeare's art. If a reader is familiar with the use of jewels in the romance tradition, for example, the reader will appreciate more fully the uses of the diamond ring in *Cymbeline*.

Although many critics have made limited comments on the rings and jewels in Shakespeare's plays, no one has done a comprehensive study of the topic; there are no book-length studies that focus just on gems. This study aims to fill that void. The parameters of the study will include the thirteen individual types of gems that the poet refers to. Pearls and coral are included in this list since they are traditionally called gems even though they are made from animal secretions rather than being geological minerals. The viewpoint here is the jeweler's rather than the geologist's. This study will also examine unspecified gems that Shakespeare uses. The playwright sometimes refers to eyes that sparkle like beautiful "gems", and even though he does not say which type of stone, these images of worth or beauty fall within the boundaries of a study of gemstones.

Many of Shakespeare's uses of precious stones offer an "entrance" into an important theme in a play. Furthermore, the stone often underscores that theme. One example of this is found in Act Two of *Macbeth* when King Duncan has Banquo deliver a diamond to Lady Macbeth as a gift. Since diamonds are "the king of gems," it is fitting that the monarch present such a kingly gift to his hostess, and Shakespeare uses this diamond to make a point: Duncan has a kingly nature and deserves to be on the throne; Macbeth does not. The brief scene with the diamond underscores the play's themes of kingly nature, ingratitude, and irony.

This book will start with an examination of the background of gems in Elizabethan culture. Precious stones conveyed a deep significance in Shakespeare's time, as they do today, because of the suggested meaning of the stones. The diamond, for instance, is traditionally given to a woman when she becomes engaged not only because of the stone's beauty and worth, but because it symbolizes purity and durability. Some of the symbolic meaning attached to different gems was derived from lapidaries of medieval and classical times. The influence of Pliny's *Natural History* is witnessed in Shakespeare's "A Lover's Complaint" when Shakespeare writes that emeralds heal tired eyes (lines 213-14). Here Shakespeare is contented simply to repeat the concept that Pliny records. In his complex use of the diamond ring in *Cymbeline*, however, the playwright selects certain meanings from the traditional lore, combines them in a way that fits the artistic needs of that particular play, and adds his own emphasis.

Customs from Elizabethan England that seem strange to modern readers, such as swallowing a pearl, are woven into the fabric of his plays. Both Falstaff and Puck make reference to the practice of carving human figures into agates. Some Elizabethans believed that jewels possessed supernatural qualities and wore them as talismans to fend

off evil. Astrologists associated the color of stones with the color of various planets, thus assigning a role in the cosmos to these stones and linking them to seasonal changes. In all these ways, gems tell a great deal about certain aspects of Elizabethan culture, and, in turn, an understanding of the culture permits a reader to understand the plays better. Therefore, the background chapter on culture leads into the literary analysis that follows.

The main part of this book will examine Shakespeare's use of jewels in the plays. The plays that he wrote late in his career draw from the tradition of the romance genre found in medieval tales of chivalry and the romance epics of Italy and Greece. Yet the influence of the romance genre is even evident earlier in Shakespeare's career. The two rings in *All's Well That Ends Well* perform several functions of romance tokens. Bertram's ring becomes a test for Helena because she must get possession of it in order to fulfill the seemingly impossible task set for her. The ring that the king gives to Helena has a protective function since it represents the pledge of royal assistance. The exchange of rings in the dark is proof that the two characters have consummated their love. When the king recognizes the ring on Bertram's finger at the end of the play, it helps to clear up all the confusion; thus the ring also works as a plot device. This use of jewels reflects the well-known romance tradition. The comical twist that Shakespeare gives to the use of identifying tokens at the end of *The Merchant of Venice* is more original. The rings serve as both a pledge of love and as identifying tokens. After the disguised women trick their husbands into giving up the rings, the women display the rings to identify themselves as the lawyer and the clerk. Thus, the rings operate on several different levels of the play and connect several different themes.

Perhaps the playwright's most significant use of gems is as imagery. Caroline Spurgeon's charts in *Shakespeare's*

Imagery and What It Tells Us show that few subjects are used more often for images. Shakespeare commonly uses gems as metaphors for worth and beauty, as is seen in *Cymbeline* when the precious and beautiful diamond is compared to the precious and beautiful princess. The playwright makes an ironic reversal of this use of gems in *The Merchant of Venice* when Shylock declares, "I would my daughter were dead at my foot/ and the jewels in her ear!" (III, i, 82-83).

In addition to Shakespeare's use of jewels in the romance tradition and for imagery, certain gems are employed in a multi-dimensional way. The diamond in *Cymbeline* is one such jewel since it serves as a complex symbol, a plot device, and one means of unifying a play full of divergent and sometimes conflicting material. A lesser example is the union in *Hamlet*. (A union is a large, uniquely shaped pearl.) Claudius boasts that he will drink the gem which is worth more than any worn by four previous kings. The boast needles Hamlet since it means that the union is richer than any that Hamlet's father owned. Hamlet puns on the word "union" as he forces Claudius to drink the rest of the poisoned wine: "Is thy union here?" Claudius's union had been with Hamlet's mother, but now it will be with death. The pun underscores the theme of marital union which is developed throughout the play.

Chapter XI explores the number of references to gemstones in order to determine if a pattern exists. Did Shakespeare refer to gems more frequently late in his career? Are there more references to stones in comedies than there are in tragedies? Which type of stone does the playwright refer to most frequently, and is this frequent usage due to the stone's prominence in English culture or did the playwright have a personal preference for the stone? Numerical studies of Shakespeare's plays have proved enlightening for some other topics, so chapter XI offers a numerical study of gems.

At the end of this book is an index of individual gemstones

in alphabetical order, quoting the line in which the stone is mentioned and explaining the context of the reference.

All line references to Shakespeare's works are to *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Oxford University Press, 1986) edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor.



JEWEL BEDECKED KING HENRY VIII
Engraving by T.A. Dean after the Holbein portrait.
Library of Congress.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND ON THE USE OF GEMS IN ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

Before a reader can grasp the deeper significance of Shakespeare's use of gemstones in the plays, a reader must first have some understanding of the traditions surrounding gems in Elizabethan society. From the earliest times in man's culture gems have been used in a wide variety of ways. Precious stones were used as ornamentation and money because of their beauty, rareness, and durability. Believing that jewels possessed spiritual qualities, people wore them as talismans to fend off evil and injury. Certain stones, such as rubies, were used for medical treatment, and astrologists associated the color of stones with the color of various planets, thus assigning a role in the cosmos to those stones. In religion, too, people have employed valuable stones, whether it be wearing a ring of office or embedding jewels in a crucifix. Gems touch upon and connect many parts of human culture from medicine to folklore and from fashion to finance. The meaning that Shakespeare's audience associated with jewels was varied and complex and added to their appreciation of his art.

THE WORLD VIEW IN ELIZABETHAN SOCIETY

A few characteristics of the way in which Elizabethans viewed the natural world, including gemstones, need to be clarified before examining the lore contained in lapidaries.

Education was far less common in the sixteenth century than it is in the twentieth century, and most of the population was illiterate. In addition, there was less scientific knowledge of the natural world. Instead, people were steeped in the Christian Church's doctrine of miracles and faith; thus, people were more likely to explain puzzling phenomena by means of some mysterious force rather than by rational explanations. Julia Briggs reports that science was restricted by the church which "regarded it as a threat and a dangerous prying into forbidden mysteries" (26). Thus, superstition abounded.

In any society there will be a portion of the population that is superstitious, and that portion was probably greater in Elizabethan than in twentieth-century society. Joyce Youings notes that Elizabethan law punished "witches" and that fear of "apparently magical or supernatural powers" affected many people (341). Shakespeare presents witches in *Macbeth*, fairies in *A Mid-Summer Night's Dream*, and a ghost in *Hamlet*, and he echoes the folklore of his time in many plays. Hamlet, reciting a speech about Pyrrhus, may be referring to the belief that carbuncles glow with their own light (II, ii, 465-66). Shakespeare may be echoing this belief about carbuncles a second time when he writes that "a precious ring" lightens the man's deep wounds "like a taper in some monument" (*Titus Andronicus* II, iii, 227). The authors of *Shakespeare's England* report:

In Tudor times, superstition permeated man's life; and very limited success attended the efforts of the reformers of religion to repress superstitious customs. Shakespeare and his contemporaries bountifully illustrate the superstitious credulity which guided their contemporaries' conduct, moulded many of their social customs, and governed their habitual interpretation of natural phenomena. Superstition which crystallized into folklore absorbed much that passed for scientific observation even among the educated.

Around Birth and Marriage and Death and Burial, stars rained influences, and omens, hung, according to the teaching of astrology. Fairies hovered about the cradle and sagacious gossips shook their heads over portents, while they knapped ginger and circulated the gossips' bowl. Among the superstitious, belief in the efficacy of charms is always strong (529).

Wearing charms and talismans, some made of gemstone, was probably common enough in Shakespeare's society. And even without the playwright's making deliberate reference to the notions of talismanic power, some members of his audience would think of such notions when diamonds or turquoises are mentioned in the plays.

Nor was superstition regarded with the same disdain by intelligent people in the sixteenth century as it is by intelligent people in the twentieth century. There was not a clear distinction between science and magic in the Renaissance. In sixteenth-century England the scientist was part magician, tinkering with mysterious substances and performing feats that were often regarded as magical, sometimes having to hide his activities from church authorities who disapproved of his arts. The sixteenth-century magician was part scientist, learning principles of chemistry in order to make his "magic" work. Alchemists were scientists and magicians at the same time. The best known scientist-magician in Elizabethan England was John Dee. Hugh Kearney notes that it is "impossible to separate Dee's magical interests from what we would now regard as 'legitimate' scientific ones" (112). Kearney also observes that "It was a magical and not a 'rational' assumption which led Paracelsus to bring about an alliance between chemistry and medicine" (124). In the "magical tradition" of science, "the best model for the scientists to follow was to become a mystic who could hear the magical music of the universe," Kearney concludes (37).

This marriage between science and magic was partly due to the Neo-Platonic school of thought which competed with the Aristotelian school of thought during the Renaissance. Kearney explains that Neo-Platonism was “mystical and anti-rational in tone . . . it presented a view of the world in which miracles did not seem out of place” (14). Furthermore, “Neo-Platonists held that the mineral and vegetable kingdoms offered reflections of spiritual realities” (Kearney 41). Kearney suggests that Neo-Platonism is presented favorably in *The Tempest* in the person of Prospero who controls the natural world by mystical means: “Prospero was the ideal type of the Hermetic scientist bringing justice and peace to a disturbed world”(41).

Englishmen during the reign of Queen Elizabeth viewed the world as highly structured. In the Elizabethan world view “man was joined to the whole of creation by a continuous chain or ladder, reaching from God’s throne, through the various orders of angels, to his own structured society, from king to peasant, and then down to animal and vegetable, carefully ranked, to the final insensate condition of stones” (Briggs 21). E. M. W. Tillyard notes that each part of the Great Chain of Being is important. Part of that importance is to serve as an example to man. “Stones excel in durability, and the best of them are the hardest and the most brilliant, like the ruby and the diamond” (Tillyard 75).

THE USE OF GEMS AS TALISMANS

Aside from the obvious uses of jewels for adornment and investment, the most common use of gems in the Renaissance was as talismans to ward off evil. In *The Book of Secrets* Albertus writes that agates “maketh to overcome perils, and give strength to the heart, and maketh a man mighty, pleasant, delectable, and helpeth against adversities” (32). Carbuncles also can be used as talismans: Robert

Burton cites Laevinus Lemnius as claiming that carbuncles “drive away childish fears, Devils, overcome sorrows and hung about the neck, repress troublesome dreams” (568).

MEDICAL USES OF GEMS

The medical uses that were ascribed to stones are almost as numerous as the talismanic uses and in some cases it is difficult to distinguish between the two. Agates counteract the venom of spiders and scorpions, as Pliny reports in his book. When Pliny wrote about “achates”, he probably did not have in mind the stone that we know today as the agate, but through the confusion of the names of gems, what Pliny wrote became part of the lore attached to agates. Pliny praises the intense green color of the emerald for its ability to sooth tired eyes. Shakespeare echoes this belief in *A Lover’s Complaint*: “The deep-green emerald, in whose fresh regard/
Weak sights their sickly radiance do amend (lines 213-214).

Shakespeare’s profound interest in medicine includes the use of magical stones for restoring health. The passage from *Titus Andronicus* (II, iii, 227) cited above is one example. In *All’s Well That Ends Well* the king declares, “Plutus himself,/ That knows the tinct and multiplying medicine,/ Hath not in nature’s mystery more science/ Than I have in this ring” (V, iii, 102-05). A third example is in *Pericles* when Cerimon admits:

‘Tis known, I ever
Have studied physic, through which secret art,
By turning o’er authorities, I have,
Together with my practice, made familiar
To me and to my aid the blest infusions
That dwell in vegetives, in metals, stones;
And I can speak of the disturbances
That nature works, and of her cures
(III, ii, 30-37).

The pattern in Shakespeare's use of magical gems is that the stones are used for medical purposes exclusively and that the use of the stones is mysterious and secret. This use is easy to understand since "there were effectively no theories of illness The more sudden the onset of an illness, the more magical it seemed" (Briggs 23).

Much mystery surrounded the origin of pearls. An oriental notion was that oysters rise to the surface of the ocean on a certain day each year and open their shells to catch a drop of rain which becomes a pearl (*Folk-Lore of Shakespeare* 368). Shakespeare refers to this notion in *Richard III* (IV, 4, 321). Without scientific knowledge about oysters, such pseudo-scientific notions gained acceptance in the Renaissance.

RELIGION AND GEMSTONES

Certain gems have taken on a religious significance from their use in the Bible. S. M. Burnham notes that the Hebrews employed gems to adorn the sacerdotal robes, the Tabernacle, and the Temple at Jerusalem. Most interesting of all is the breastplate of Aaron. "This priestly ornament was a square of eight inches set with twelve different gems engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel," explains Burnham (118).

Christian thinkers used certain gems to "designate the twelve apostles, the Christian virtues, and other religious ideas. Also, faithful noblemen frequently gave gifts of precious jewels to the church. The shrine of Thomas a Becket, at Canterbury, "glittered with the rarest and most precious gems, of extraordinary size," writes a chronicler of the times (Burnham 129). And Henry III presented to the Shrine of Edward the Confessor, in Westminster Abbey, offerings of rubies, sapphires, emeralds, pearls, and other stones (Burnham 129). Sacrificing jewels to deities is also

described in Greek romances of the third century A.D. The queen in *King Henry VI, Part Two* makes a kind of sacrifice when she is close to drowning:

I took a costly jewel from my neck --
A heart it was, bound in with diamonds --
And threw it towards thy land: the sea received it
(III, ii, 106-08)

The Bible's impact on European authors is impossible to exaggerate. "The greatest authority of all was vested in the Bible, the revelation of God's word," testifies Briggs. "Some way after came the Church Fathers, and then the great classical authors" (4). In past centuries especially all educated men were conversant with the scriptures, and even unlettered people became familiar with the more popular stories and proverbs through sermons heard in church. The Biblical allusions in the poems and plays of English writers are numerous. Shakespeare's works share this penchant for Biblical allusion, and his references to gemstones illustrate this.

Shakespeare's most obvious echo of the Bible's use of gems occurs in *Love's Labour's Lost* when Holofernes declares: "Piercing a hogshead! a good lustre of conceit in a / turf of earth; fire enough for a flint, pearl / enough for a swine: 'tis pretty; it is well" (IV, ii, 86-88). [These lines are mistakenly assigned to Nathaniel in the Folio Edition.] Holofernes, the schoolmaster, has been punning freely in this scene and when Costard exhibits his own wit about piercing a hogshead of liquor, Holofernes speaks the lines above. The "turf of earth" must refer to Costard (who is a "clod of earth"). "Pearl enough for swine" seems to mean that there is a sufficient amount of wit for a brute like Costard. Holofernes also seems to imply that a swine would not require many pearls. Lastly, the Biblical reference to "swine" undoubtedly puns on "hogshead."

The Bible warns, "Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you" (Matthew 7:6). Through allegory this passage warns that giving valuable things to those who cannot appreciate them wastes your valuables and that you might even be attacked since the valuables will not cause a feeling of gratitude in those who cannot appreciate them. The connection between the Bible and *Love's Labour's Lost* seems clear: since the Bible tells us that swine will not appreciate pearls, Holofernes concludes that swine require few (or no) pearls.

As will be explained in the chapter on Desdemona, Linda Boose believes that Shakespeare used "chrysolite" in *Othello* because he found the stone mentioned in the Geneva Bible. Boose observes that in the Song of Solomon, "the well-beloved is first described as a garden of perfumed flowers and spices and then as a priceless treasure of jewels Likewise Othello . . . luxuriates over the balmy breath of the bride he initially describes as a rose to be smelled before it is plucked from the tree. His next image of her is of a jewel, a chrysolite" (428-29).

Boose also believes that Shakespeare was influenced by the Gospel According to Matthew: "Behind Othello's image of himself as a gem merchant offered a perfect, heaven-forged chrysolite lies the analogue of the biblical pearl of great price, the image which later surfaces as the pearl which he, the base Indian (or Judean), threw away" (431). In Matthew 13:45-46 Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls: and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it." This Biblical pearl would serve as a fitting symbol for Desdemona who is worth more in Othello's eyes than everything else combined.

The Bible may have contributed to a comparison between coral and ruddy flesh tones that became commonplace in

Elizabethan times. Lamentations 4:7 declares, "Their bodies were more ruddy than coral." In three works Shakespeare compares coral to a woman's lips, including sonnet 130 which reads:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are
dun

In this poem Shakespeare is mocking trite comparisons, including the comparison of lips to coral that was commonplace in Elizabethan and Petrarchan love poetry.

CUSTOMS OF ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

Besides providing images for poetry, precious stones and jewelry in Elizabethan society were used as tokens of royal favor, symbols of betrothal, and signs of wealth. Thistleton-Dyer explains the first use: "It was anciently the custom for every monarch to have a ring, the temporary possession of which invested the holder with the same authority as the owner" (362). In *Henry VIII* (V, i, 151 and V, ii, 133) the king gives his ring to Cranmer to be used against the plotting of Gardiner and other members of the council, and in *Richard II* (II, ii, 92) the Duke of York sends his ring along with his servant to secure a thousand pounds.

In *Macbeth* we see the custom of kings presenting gemstones to those in favor. Since the diamond is the most precious of stones, it is a fitting gift for a king to give. The princess in *Love's Labor's Lost* receives a diamond from the king who woos her, and after Timon of Athens has driven the lords away from the mock feast, one lord complains, "One day he gives us diamonds next day stones" (III, vii, 118). Male monarchs in the plays tend to give diamonds as gifts; whereas, women tend to give pearls. (However, men do give pearls as gifts three times). Why this distinction along

gender lines? While diamonds and pearls are given as gifts because they are both highly valued stones, the diamond is the “king” of gems and is the most valued, and therefore more appropriate for a king’s gift. Perhaps the hard quality of a diamond and its rough feel suggested a more masculine trait in contrast to the smooth pearl with its milky hue which may have suggested a more feminine trait.

In Shakespeare’s plays, wearing pearls and gold represents fine dress, and is notably the dress of a man courting a woman. In *The Taming Of The Shrew* Tranio demands, “Sir, what ‘cerns it you if I wear pearl and gold?” (V, i, 68). In *Henry V* the king thinks of the royal “intertissued robe of gold and pearl” (IV, i, 259). Finally, in *Titus Andronicus*, Aaron talks about wooing Tamora: “Away with slavish weeds and servile/ thoughts!/ I will be bright, and shine in pearl and/ gold,/ To wait upon this new-made empress” (II, i, 18-20).

Queen Elizabeth had a passion for jewelry, and especially for pearls. She bought “hundreds of false [pearls] for a penny each” to sew onto her dress for her portraits, notes Guido Gregoriotti (192). Her father, Henry VIII, wore many jewels in his portraits, too. Among Elizabeth’s important acquisitions was a fine pearl necklace that had been worn by Mary, Queen of Scots, which Elizabeth bought from James I for the sum of three hundred pounds. This necklace later was known as the Hanover Pearls (Gregoriotti 195). Elizabeth “had received as a surety the Portuguese crown jewels and could not bear to return them to Henry IV until the day she died” (Gregoriotti 192).

Monarchs and commoners alike were also fond of wearing rings. Rings have been used for centuries to represent engagement, marriage, or merely friendship, as is seen in *Richard III* (I, ii, 191), *Cymbeline* (I, i, 113), and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (IV, iv, 83). Some rings, such as the one Nerissa gives to Gratiano (*Merchant of Venice* V, i, 147)



ELIZABETH I WEARING PEARLS.
Original portrait is in Windsor Castle. Reprint is
from the Library of Congress.

had a posy inscribed on the inside. In *As You Like It* Jaques tells Orlando “You are full of pretty answers. Have you not been/ acquainted with goldsmiths’ wives, and conned them out of rings?” (III, ii, 265-66), and Hamlet asks, “Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?” (III, ii, 145).

“Rings engraved with skulls and skeletons were not necessarily mourning rings, but were also worn by persons who affected gravity,” notes Thistleton-Dyer (364). In *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Biron refers to “a death’s face in a ring” (V, ii, 607), and Falstaff does, too (*2 Henry IV*, II, iv, 236). It should be noted that in his will, Shakespeare ordered memorial rings to be made. Another type of ring was the thumb-ring. Thistleton-Dyer explains, “These were generally broad gold rings worn on the thumb by important personages” (365). Falstaff claims that in his younger days he had been so thin that he could “creep into an alderman’s thumb-ring” (*1 Henry IV* II, v, 334).

Two of Shakespeare’s works refer to the custom of throwing a rare gemstone into the water as a sacrifice. In *A Lover’s Complaint* the Bard writes, “A thousand favours from a mound she drew/ Of amber, crystal, and of beaded jet,/ Which one by one she in the river threw” (lines 36-38). The queen in *Henry VI, Part Two* tells of her near-drowning and of her sacrifice to the sea:

I stood upon the hatches in the storm,
And when the dusky sky began to rob
My earnest-gaping sight of thy land’s view,
I took a costly jewel from my neck--
A heart it was, bound in with diamonds--
And threw it towards thy land: the sea/
received it

(III, ii, 103-08)

A more bizarre custom among kings was the swallowing of gems. According to Thistleton-Dyer, “To swallow a pearl in a draught seems to have been common to royal

and mercantile prodigality” (367). Claudius swallows a large pearl in the last act of *Hamlet*. The eastern custom of powdering rulers at their coronation with gold dust and seed pearl (Thistleton-Dyer 367) is referred to in *Antony and Cleopatra*: “I’ll set thee in a shower of gold, and hail/ Rich pearls upon thee” (II, v, 45-46).

Other customs of Elizabethan times include carving human figures into agates and making buttons out of crystal. Some fine garments had clasps made from coral, as a line in “The Passionate Pilgrim” testifies. In *The Taming of The Shrew*, Gremio offers Bianca’s father “Turkey cushions ‘bossed with pearl” (II, i, 349), which presumably would be more costly than comfortable; and in the same play, Sly is told that the harnesses of his horses will be studded with pearls.

The customs of Elizabethan England made great use of precious gems as symbols of betrothal, tokens of royal favor, and signs of wealth. The lore surrounding stones in lapidaries of the classical ages and the allegory attached to certain stones in religious teaching added meaning to how people in the Renaissance viewed gemstones. All of these traditions contributed to the significance of Shakespeare’s use of precious gems.

1871
1872
1873
1874

CHAPTER III

SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF GEMS AS IMAGERY

Imagery may be a poet's most important tool in creating a poem; it adds life to a passage, just as subtle shades of pigment give life to a painting. The image that is suggested to us is the means that the poet uses to awaken our imagination so that we can "see" what he wants us to see. "Imagery may be defined as the representation through language of sense experience," says Laurence Perrine quite succinctly (46). Of course, visual images are only one kind of imagery; the other four senses as well as internal feelings (such as fear, delight, or motion) provide images too. Caroline Spurgeon defines an image as "the little word-picture used by a poet or prose writer to illustrate, illuminate, and embellish his thought. It is a description or an idea, which by comparison or analogy, stated or understood, with something else, transmits to us through the emotions and associations it arouses, something of the 'wholeness', the depth and richness of the way the writer views, conceives or has felt what he is telling us" (9).

Shakespeare's imagery is perhaps the most vivid in the English language, and several critics have devoted books to the origin, types, and purposes of his images. Spurgeon's early book (1935) observes the playwright's tendency to employ a dominant image throughout a play: "The theme he is handling raises in his imagination as he writes some picture or symbol which recurs again and again in the form of simile and metaphor throughout the play" (214).

These recurrent images raise and sustain emotion, provide atmosphere, and emphasize themes (213). One example is the recurring image of disease in *Hamlet*: “There hovers all through the play in both words and word pictures the conception of disease, especially of a hidden corruption infecting and destroying a wholesome body” (213).

Another of Shakespeare’s characteristics is the image cluster. “Shakespeare’s tendency to have a similar group of ideas called up by some one single word or idea is a very marked feature of his thought and imagination,” notes Spurgeon (186). The image cluster of dog, licking, sweets, melting was associated in Shakespeare’s mind with flatterers or fair-weather friends. There are several other image clusters that constitute a kind of fingerprint of Shakespeare’s authorship.

Gemstones are an important part of the Bard’s imagery in both plays and poems from the beginning of his career to the end of it. Gems are an obvious subject for images since they are beautiful and costly and have occupied a prominent place in man’s culture down through the centuries. The rubies in a monarch’s crown and the diamond on a lady’s finger captured the playwright’s eye and he used them as images in his writing.

Spurgeon’s chart V indicates that nearly eighty images based on jewels are found in the bard’s works. This means that jewels are among his most frequently used topics for images. This may be because the poet liked jewels, or because he knew that such images would appeal to his audience, or perhaps for both reasons.

Most of Shakespeare’s uses of gem imagery can be grouped into categories. Images of beauty occur most often in comparing women’s eyes to gems and comparing lips to coral or rubies. Also common in Shakespeare’s plays are images of worth, as in the worth of a loyal soldier like Marcius from *Coriolanus*. The playwright frequently used

gems to represent the combination of worth and beauty. Never does a gem represent a woman who lacks virtue (even though Shakespeare frequently comments on beautiful women who lack virtue) because in his mind gems represented the combination of worth and beauty. Finally, the poet also used certain stones to represent colors, as in emerald green.

The poet's uses of gems as images of worth occur frequently. His tendency to return to a certain image whenever he felt the same emotions is evident in his association of a valuable person with a valuable stone. In *Coriolanus* (I, v, 25-27) Lartius declares: "Thou art left, Marcius:/ A carbuncle entire, as big as thou art, / Were not so rich a jewel." The noblemen who surround a monarch are equated with precious gems in two plays. Speaking about a hypothetical king, Helicanus tells the lords, "You shall like diamonds sit upon his crown" (*Pericles* II, iv, 52-53). Macduff declares to Malcolm:

I see thee compass'd with thy kingdom's pearl,
That speak my salutation in their minds;
Whose voices I desire aloud with mine:
Hail, King of Scotland!

(*Macbeth* V, xi, 22-25) (This is an intriguing analogy where the oyster represents the kingdom, the pearl represents the noblemen, and the grain of sand within the pearl represents Malcolm). Worth is clearly differentiated from beauty in *As You Like It* when Touchstone is explaining why he will marry the unattractive Audrey: "Rich honesty dwells like a miser, sir, in a poor house; as your pearl in your foul oyster" (V, iv, 60-61).

Shakespeare often used gems as metaphors for the combination of worth and beauty, as when Suffolk says, "Farewell, Reignier: set this diamond [Margaret] safe/ In golden palaces, as it becomes" (*Henry VI, Part One*, V, v, 25-26). In *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Valentine declares his love for Silvia:

She is my own;
And I as rich in having such a jewel
As twenty seas, if all their sand were pearl,
And the water nectar, and the rocks pure gold

(II, iv, 166-69)

When King Simonides says that the disguised Pericles is like any other knight, the king's daughter, Thaisa, secretly disagrees: [aside] "To me he [Pericles] seems like diamond to glass" (*Pericles* II, iii, 36). In *Troilus and Cressida*, Troilus declares:

Why, she is a pearl,
Whose price hath launched above a thousand ships,
And turn'd crown'd kings to merchants.
If you'll avouch 'twas wisdom Paris went...

(II, ii, 80-83)

In this passage the poet seems to echo Job 28:18 : "The price of wisdom is above pearls." Only in the play it is Helen, and not wisdom, who is as costly as a pearl; the wisdom belongs to Paris who brought her to Troy.

Related to the metaphor of worth is the metaphor of chastity. Bertram is trying to impress the lovely Diana (the classical reference speaks of her chastity) with his ancestral ring, and Diana asserts, "Mine honor's such a ring:/ My chastity's the jewel of our house" (*All's Well* IV, ii, 47-48). Miranda, who, considering her circumstances, has little choice but to be a virgin, speaks of her modesty as "the jewel in my dower" (*Tempest* III, i, 54). Iachimo refers to an unseduced woman as a jewel: "If I come off, and/ leave her in such honour as you have trust in, she/ your jewel, this your jewel, and my gold are yours" (*Cymbeline* I, iv, 149-51). It is interesting to note that the word "jewel" rather than "gem" or "diamond" or "pearl" is associated with modesty in Shakespeare's mind.

"The touches of jewel imagery in *Richard II* should also be noticed, for they add beauty to the conception of the

value of love, especially of love of country--a leading note in the play," observes Caroline Spurgeon (241). England is described as "This precious stone set in the silver sea" (II, i, 46). And Gaunt, trying to lessen the torment of his son's exile, tells him to think of it as "foil wherein thou art to set/ The precious jewel of thy home return" (I, iii, 255-56). (The "foil", of course is the background or setting of the gem.) Yet, the son disagrees: "Nay, rather, every tedious stride I make/ But will remember me what a deal of world/ I wander from the jewels that I love" (I, iii, 268-70). Imprisoned, Richard declares that love "Is a strange brooch in this all-hating world" (V, v, 66), meaning that love is precious, but unfashionable, for "the brooch, which was a large valuable ornament, seems to have been out of fashion in Shakespeare's day (compare *All's Well* I, i, 166)" (Spurgeon 242). Earlier, Mowbray tells the king that honor is a precious treasure: "A jewel in a ten-times-barr'd-up chest/ Is a bold spirit in a loyal breast" (I, i, 180-81).

An intriguing passage employing gem imagery is found in *Richard III* when Clarence tells Brakenbury about his dream of drowning.

Methought I saw a thousand fearful wrecks;
 Ten thousand men that fishes gnaw'd upon;
 Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
 Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,
 All scattered in the bottom of the sea:
 Some lay in dead men's skulls; and in those holes
 Where eyes did once inhabit, there were crept,
 As 'twere in scorn of eyes, reflecting gems,
 Which woo'd the slimy bottom of the deep,
 And mock'd the dead bones that lay scattered by.

(I, iv, 24-33)

Shakespeare's association of shipwrecks and jewels lodged in a skull's eyesockets is seen in *The Tempest* ("Those are pearls that were his eyes" I, ii, 402) and in

this passage. Perhaps tales of pirates and sunken treasures suggested this association to the poet. The nightmare image of gems taking the place of eyes is also found in *Hamlet* (although there is no shipwreck) when Hamlet refers to hellish Pyrrhus with eyes like carbuncles (II, ii, 465), and Clarence seems to allude to carbuncles when he tells of “reflecting gems,/ Which woo’d the slimy bottom of the deep” because Clarence’s gems seem to radiate their own light, a concept that Shakespeare associates with carbuncles (see section below on carbuncle images).

Wolfgang Clemen observes that certain situations, especially death, “breed” images in Shakespeare’s work (220), and Clarence’s dream about death supports this observation. Clemen also notes that Shakespeare would fuse, in a complex image, the expression of personal mood with the atmospheric background as well as with the play’s leading motif (222). Furthermore, the imagery forebodes coming events, and thus influences dramatic structure (223). These observations which Clemen makes about *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Merchant of Venice* are also true of Clarence’s dream. The imagery expresses Clarence’s personal dread, contributes to the atmosphere of the play, and also foreshadows Clarence’s fate.

The irony of material wealth lying in a place where it cannot be used (the bottom of the sea) and lying near those (the dead bones) who cannot use it adds an intriguing twist to the passage and underscores the conflict between worldly possessions (the crown and gold) and the destruction of human life that runs all through *Richard III*. Of course, murder is the ultimate injury, but it is also the ultimate insult, for it reveals a supreme disregard for Clarence’s feelings, rank, and rights as a human being. The insult of murder is driven home by the image of the reflecting gems mocking the dead bones.

Shakespeare also used the contrast between a gemstone and its foil for several images. In the Renaissance, jewelers

frequently placed a piece of metal beneath a stone to reflect light upwards through the stone. Guido Gregoriotti in his book *Jewelry Through The Ages* explains: "A thin piece of metal foil was often placed under the stone in a box setting in order to enhance its colour" (196). The contrast between a gemstone and its metal background suggested to Shakespeare's mind many different kinds of contrast. In the lines quoted above from *Richard II* when Gaunt tells his son to think of exile "as a foil wherein thou art to set/ The precious jewel of thy home return" (I, iii, 255-56) we see how effective this image can be for suggesting contrast. Spurgeon also points out the reverse contrast (where the foil is bright but the stone is dull) when Richard III is equated with "A base foul stone, made precious by the foil/ Of England's chair, where he is falsely set" (V, v, 204-05). In the image of England as "This precious stone set in the silver sea" (*Richard II*, II, i, 46) both the gem and the foil are attractive and enhance each other's beauty. Shakespeare also uses a foil image in *A Lover's Complaint*: "Experience for me many bulwarks builded/ Of proofs new-bleeding, which remained the foil/ Of this false jewel, and his amorous spoil" (152-54). Prince Hal explains:

Like bright metal on a sullen ground,
 My reformation, glittering o'er my fault,
 Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
 Than that which hath no foil to set it off

(*Henry IV, Part One*, I, ii, 209-12)

Hamlet puns on the word when Laertes calls for a fencing foil, "I'll be your foil, Laertes; in mine ignorance/ Your skill shall, like a star in the darkest night,/ Stick fiery off indeed" (V, ii, 201-03). These several examples demonstrate that foils provided Shakespeare with one of his favorite images.

Like other writers, Shakespeare used some gems to represent colors. Pink coral represents the shade of pink of a lady's lips in *The Rape of Lucrece*: "He admired/ Her azure

veins, her alabaster skin,/ Her coral lips, her snow-white dimpled chin” (418-20). Rubies indicate the color of lips, too, as in *Venus and Adonis*: “Once more the ruby-colour’d portal open’d,/ Which to his speech did honey passage yield” (451-52), as well as the color of a cheek blushed with the natural flow of blood: “You can behold such sights/ And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,/ When mine is blanch’d with fear” (*Macbeth* III, iv, 113-15). Emerald, of course, represents the most intense green as when Mistress Quickly refers to “emerald tufts” of grass (*Merry Wives* V, v, 69). The blue of sapphires is compared with the color of the sky in “A Lover’s Complaint”: “The heaven-hued sapphire” (215), and Mistress Quickly talks of “flowers purple, blue, and white;/ Like sapphire, pearl, and rich embroidery” (*Merry Wives* V, v, 69-70).

Titus Andronicus offers to provide Tamora with “two proper palfreys, black as jet” (V, ii, 50). Jet is used to express a sharp contrast, too, when Salarino asserts that Shylock and Jessica are very different: “There is more difference between thy flesh and hers/ than between jet and ivory (*Merchant of Venice* III, i, 35-36). On a less concrete level, the opal, which has a variety of colors and which changes hues in different light, appealed to the poet as a symbol of fickleness. Feste blesses the Duke, “Now, the melancholy god protect thee; and the/ tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for/ thy mind is a very opal” (*Twelfth-Night* II, iv, 72-74).

Specific gemstones are used by the poet for particular images. Pearls, for instance, are associated with drops of water, especially tears. Several critics have observed Shakespeare’s penchant for the image cluster of dog, licking, sweets, melting which is associated with flatterers or fair-weather friends. In a more limited way, tears and other droplets of water suggested to Shakespeare’s mind the image of pearls. A fairy in *A Midsummer-Night’s Dream* explains,

“I must go seek some dewdrops here,/ And hang a pearl in every cowslip’s ear” (II, i, 14-15) and earlier in the play Lysander refers to nighttime “when Phoebe doth behold/ Her silver visage in the watery glass,/ Decking with liquid pearl the bladed glass” (I, i, 209-11). In *The Rape of Lucrece*, the poet mixes the dew image with a reference to sweat:

Without the bed her other fair hand was,
On the green coverlet; whose perfect white
Show’d like an April daisy on the grass,
With pearly sweat, resembling dew of night.

(393-96)

There are nine images referring to tears. Sonnet 34 declares, “Those tears are pearl which thy love sheds,” and *The Rape of Lucrece* tells how she “Wiped the brinish pearl from her bright eyes” (1213). Proteus blends images of sea water, tears, and pearls when he describes Silvia’s tears: “A sea of melting pearls, which some call tears” (*Two Gentlemen of Verona* III, i, 223). When Richard is telling Queen Elizabeth how he will marry her daughter, thus amending her family’s sorrows, he says:

The liquid drops of tears that you have shed
Shall come again, transform’d to orient pearl,
Advantaging their loan with interest
Of ten times double gain of happiness.

(*Richard III*, IV, iv, 321-24)

Thiselton-Dyer interprets this passage in *Richard III* as a reference to the oriental belief that pearl oysters rise to the surface and open their shells to catch drops of rain which then become pearls (368). This myth may also explain why Shakespeare began associating pearls with water. The myth may explain the logic behind Proteus’s image of a sea of melting pearls and why Lucrece’s tears are brinish.

Diamonds are used by the playwright to represent a woman’s eyes in three passages. Cerimon, discovering Thaisa in a chest, declares:

She is alive; behold,
Her eyelids, cases to those heavenly jewels
Which Pericles hath lost, begin to part
Their fringes of bright gold: the diamonds
Of a most praised water do appear
To make the world twice rich

(*Pericles* III, ii, 97-100)

This scene exudes the very essence of the romance spirit. Discovering a woman, previously thought to be dead, in a chest is the type of magical event that one expects in a romance. The use of gem imagery, then, is appropriate to the scene since romances often include gems as discovered treasure and identifying tokens. The lines indicate that Pericles had lost these “jewels” previously, but will now regain them. Describing the eyes as “heavenly” jewels is appropriate to the theological belief that humans are created by God, to the maxim that the eyes are the “windows of the soul,” and perhaps to the azure color of her eyes. The poet’s metaphor is complex. The queen’s eye sockets and eyelids are the “cases” that jewels are sometimes stored in, and her eyelashes are the “fringes of bright gold” that are part of the jewelry case. Evidently, Thaisa has blond hair. The reference to the “most praised water” of the diamonds seems to echo the terminology of jewelers concerning the clarity of a stone. The opening of Thaisa’s eyes makes the world “twice rich” in two ways: she obviously has two eyes, each one a diamond that brightens the world; and she has entered their lives a second time. The magic of rebirth in this scene is appropriate to the tone, theme, and events of romance.

A second example is when Falstaff tells Mrs. Ford, “I see how thine eye would emulate the diamond” (*Merry Wives* III, iii, 50). A very clever reference to gems occurs in *King Lear* when a gentleman describes tears falling from Cordelia’s eyes “As pearls from diamonds dropp’d” (IV, iii, 22). Here Shakespeare’s association of tears with pearls and

his characteristic use of jewels for a woman's eyes result in a double gem image.

While diamonds represent the eyes of a beautiful woman, carbuncles represent the fiery eyes of a demon. Hamlet, giving an actor his cue, recites, "With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus/ Old grandsire Priam seeks" (II, ii, 465-66). In addition to the satanic suggestion of red eyes, Shakespeare may be referring to the superstition that carbuncles glow (see Thiselton-Dyer 366). In *Titus Andronicus* (II, iii, 227-28) the playwright tells of "a precious ring" that illuminates a man's deep wounds "like a taper in some monument"; Thiselton-Dyer believes that this is a reference to a glowing carbuncle (366).

Carbuncles, rubies, and sapphires are used to represent blemishes in the comic scene where Dromio is describing Nell: "Upon her nose, all o'er embellished with/ Rubies, carbuncles, sapphires" (*Comedy of Errors* III, ii, 137-38). These gem images are appropriate to the shape, hardness, and color of the blemishes. Also, the comic tone is heightened by the ironic use of something beautiful and precious (gems) to represent something ugly and unwanted (blemishes). In the twentieth century the word "carbuncle" can literally mean an inflamed blemish, but in the passage above, the reference to rubies and sapphires indicates clearly that Shakespeare is using "carbuncle" as a gem image.

Carbuncles are associated with Phoebus's chariot, too. Shakespeare obviously knew that in classical mythology the sun god pulled the sun across the sky with a chariot that had wheels decorated by carbuncles. Iachimo recounts that Posthumus:

stakes this ring;
And would so, had it been a carbuncle
Of Phoebus' wheel; and might so safely, had it
Been all the worth of's car.

(*Cymbeline* V, v, 189-91)

And Antony asserts that Scarus deserves the golden armour even if it were “carbuncled/ Like holy Phoebus’ car” (*Antony and Cleopatra* IV, ix, 28-29).

When the playwright used coral as an image it was for lips as in *The Taming of the Shrew* when Lucentio sighs, “I saw her coral lips to move/ And with her breath she did perfume the air” (I, i, 172-73), and in *Venus and Adonis* that tells of “The coral mouth,/ Whose precious taste her thirsty lips well knew” (542-43). No doubt it is the color of pink coral which suggested the similarity to lips, yet Shakespeare was hardly the first poet to make use of the image. In Sonnet 130, he writes, “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun;/ Coral is far more red than her lips’ red:/ If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun.”

Shakespeare, in this sonnet, is undercutting the clichés of the love poetry of his day, including comparing lips to coral which was commonplace in Elizabethan and Petrarchan love poetry.

Rubies are used as images for lips, too, as in *Cymbeline* when Iachimo longs for “One kiss! Rubies unparagon’d” (II, ii, 17), and in *Venus and Adonis* which tells that “Once more the ruby-colour’d portal open’d,/ Which to his speech did honey passage yield” (451-52). The red of rubies is used to represent the red of blood, as was noted earlier; *A Lover’s Complaint* mentions “rubies red as blood” (198). Isabella informs Angelo that rather than have sex with him, “The impression of keen whips I’ll wear as rubies” (*Measure For Measure* II, iv, 101). The color, raised shape, and hardness of congealed blood make this a fitting image. Also, the irony of wearing an undesirable kind of “ruby”, instead of the usual jewel, adds a cutting edge to Isabella’s declaration. In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare combines his images of lips and blood: “Over thy wounds now do I prophesy,/ Which like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips” (III, i, 262-63). Caesar’s wounds have lips and they are bloody; therefore, in two ways are they like rubies.

The Elizabethans carved human figures into agates, and this suggested to Shakespeare's mind a comparison with small people. In *Romeo and Juliet* Mercutio tells of Queen Mab, the fairies' midwife, who is "no bigger than an agate stone/ On the forefinger of an alderman" (I, iv, 57-58). Miniatures, be they toy poodles, small paintings, dolls, or small people, are often charming, and the poet's image of a beautiful gem carefully carved by a jeweler emphasizes how charming it might be to see a tiny fairy. In *Henry IV, Part Two* Falstaff berates his page:

Thou whoreson
mandrake, thou art fitter to be worn in my cap than
to wait at my heels. I was never manned with an
agate till now: but I will insert you neither in gold
nor silver, but in vile apparel.

(I, ii, 14-18)

This passage tells how the Elizabethans might set an agate to enhance its beauty, yet the page's "setting" will be vile apparel to show Falstaff's contempt for the small boy.

In *Much Ado About Nothing* Hero agrees that Beatrice makes all men out to be bad, "If tall, a lance ill-headed;/ If low, an agate very vilely cut" (III, i, 64-65). This image illustrates that even a valuable stone may not necessarily be attractive if the jeweler does a poor job of cutting it. Agates are used for a different type of image in *Love's Labour's Lost*. The line "His heart, like an agate, with your print impress'd" (II, i, 236) compares the Elizabethan custom of carving the likeness of one's beloved into an agate with such an image being imprinted on one's heart. Here the concept is highly romantic rather than being of small people.

The literal images carved into agates by Elizabethan jewelers added to Shakespeare's store of gem imagery which, in turn, contributed to the success of his plays. Whether referring to stones to create an image of beauty or of worth, the poet was drawing upon a well established literary

tradition and making use of objects with which his audience was quite familiar. Of course, Shakespeare added his own individual use of certain stones to the literary tradition, such as his use of the opal to represent a fickle mind. He also had a penchant for contrasting jewels and their foils, and he described gemstones lodged in the eye sockets of drowned skulls. By examining Shakespeare's use of gem imagery, a critic understands better how Shakespeare's mind worked and how these images succeed.

CHAPTER IV

SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF GEMSTONES IN THE ROMANCE TRADITION

Near the end of his career Shakespeare turned his energy toward a new genre, the romance. The four plays which clearly exemplify this genre, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, are distinct from his earlier style and were composed in the same brief period from approximately 1607 to 1611 (Adams 4). Gemstones play a more vital role in Shakespeare's romances than in any other of the dramas, but before moving on to the critical interpretations in the following chapters, it may prove helpful first to define the genre and explain the literary traditions that have a bearing on Shakespeare's romances.

As many critics have noted, these four plays share many of the same traits: exotic settings, fantastical occurrences, action that ranges from country to country and over several years. Near the beginning of each play (except for *The Tempest*), a father loses his child as a result of his own emotional folly, and the play's action centers on the sufferings and remorse which result from their separation. At the finale of each drama, the daughter is restored to her father. The names of three of these daughters sound the same: Marina, Perdita, and Miranda; and the names suggest clear symbolism. Yet perhaps the most important trait that these plays share is the theme of reconciliation. When the wrongdoers like Antonio are reconciled with the main characters

such as Prospero, a tone of harmony prevails in the last scene of these romances.

Although only the last four plays that Shakespeare wrote can clearly be labeled as romances, the influence of the romance genre is evident throughout his career, as Howard Felperin and other critics have demonstrated. Romance traits such as the fairy-tale quality of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the sudden change of character of the usurping duke in *As You Like It*, the sylvan setting in both of the aforementioned plays, and the reconciliation of long-lost brothers in *A Comedy of Errors* tell of the influence of the romance genre. Robert M. Adams comments, "It's quite impossible to say how much of the semi-romance, pseudo-romance, romance-tinged literature Shakespeare was acquainted with, except that it must have been an immense lot. Shades and traces of romance-feeling go back to his very first work for the stage" (17).

The playwright used Thomas Lodge's prose romance, *Rosalind*, as the source for his early work, *As You Like It*. In addition, he borrowed from other romances to develop sub-plots in many of his plays, e.g. the mistaken identity at the window in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the casket sub-plot in *The Merchant of Venice*, and the action involving the mistaken identity of the twins in *Twelfth Night*. Three of Shakespeare's romances are based on the romances of earlier authors. *Pericles* was primarily based on John Gower's version of the tale of *Apollonius of Tyre* which appeared in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (Adams 25). Shakespeare even acknowledges this source by having "Gower" appear as the "presenter" in the play. For *Cymbeline*, the playwright drew from several sources which may partly account for the lack of unity in the play. In addition to *Holinshed's Chronicles*, he relied on the *Decameron* (story 9 of day II), and probably *Frederyke of Jennen*, and possibly *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune* (Adams 59-60). *The Winter's Tale* is

a straightforward dramatization of Robert Greene's prose romance, *Pandosto* (Granville-Barker and Harrison 237). *The Tempest* has no definite source; nevertheless, Shakespeare's indebtedness to the romance tradition in general is quite obvious in this play, as it is throughout his canon.

This romance tradition can be traced back to the Greek romances such as *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, a long prose work which was composed by Chariton of Aphrodisia in the middle of the second century, A.D., *An Ephesian Tale* by Xenophon of Ephesus in the second or third century A.D., *Apollonius of Tyre* from the second or third century A.D., *Clitophon and Leucippe* by Achilles Tatius in the second century A.D., and the locus classicus of the genre, *Daphnis and Chloe*, attributed to Longus and dating from the third century A.D. (Gesner 5-12). Of course, Roman writers borrowed these stories in order to render their own versions of these tales in Latin, and many Europeans in later centuries read the Latin versions. In the medieval period, romances about knights became popular in the aristocratic courts of Germany and France. Chretien de Troyes in the late 1100's wrote about King Arthur, and introduced the quest for the Holy Grail into European literature. Gottfried Von Strassburg composed *Tristan und Isolde* in the early 1200's. Meanwhile in Britain, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was written in the mid-1300's, and Geoffrey Chaucer included some romance elements in *The Canterbury Tales* (particularly "The Knight's Tale") and used a romance source for *Troilus and Cressida*. Sir Thomas Mallory, adapting Chretien's material, contributed *Le Morte Darthur* to the English romance tradition in 1485. Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1580/1590) was popular in court circles, and Robert Greene's *Pandosto* (1588) and Thomas Lodge's *Rosalind* (1590) found audiences, too. In the same year as Lodge's publication, Sir Edmund Spenser issued *The Faerie Queen* with its emphasis on chivalry and religious duty.

The main subject matter of romance is chivalric adventure. Religious allegories and love stories are often interwoven into this material. Classical history and legends, as well as tales about knights, are three main sources for the plots of romances. Romance as a genre is defined by certain characteristics. "All romance is in some sense or on some level a love story and an odyssey," observes Howard Felperin (9), and he adds that romance tells of "faraway places and legendary times" while the action tends to sprawl across continents and takes years to complete; thus romance transcends considerations of time and place (8). Felperin states that Shakespearean romance is defined by "its archaism, its spatial and temporal sprawl, its fondness for music, dance, and spectacle, and especially, its inclusion of nonnatural elements and reliance on nonnaturalistic techniques of presentation" (291).

Precious gemstones and golden jewelry perform special functions in romances. Brooches and rings are often employed as identifying tokens which are found lying next to an abandoned infant or worn by a long-lost relative. In *Daphnis and Chloe*, a goat-herd discovers the baby boy, Daphnis, "wrapped in swaddling clothes better far than beseemed his castaway lot. He had a little mantle of fine purple, a golden brooch, and a tiny sword with an ivory hilt" (Hadas 4). The infant, Chloe, is found next to "swaddling clothes and trinkets--a headband of gold, gilt shoes, and golden anklets" (Hadas 5). Late in the story, the two are recognized by their natural parents by means of the carefully preserved tokens. In *An Ethiopian Romance* Charicleia proves to the nobles that she is the princess of Ethiopia by producing a ribbon token, jewels, and a ring originally owned by Hydaspes. At the end of the Roman play, *Curculio*, Planesium is identified by her long-lost brother by means of the ring on her finger.

A second function that gemstones play in romances is that of treasure--either discovered treasure or the dowry

that comes with a good marriage. In a dream, nymphs tell Daphnis to search for a treasure of silver coins from a shipwreck, so that he will be a proper suitor for Chloe. *The Decameron* tells of Landolfo who is shipwrecked and clings to a wooden chest to escape drowning. On land, he opens the chest and discovers that it is full of precious stones (second day, fourth tale).



some swords were said to be magical

Sometimes gems perform a protective function. A stone may be a good luck charm or a spirit may dwell within the stone and protect the wearer. "The pommel and the haft was all precious stones" on King Arthur's sword, Excalibur (Mallory, Ed. Davies 234). The magical properties of Excalibur are evident in that only the true king could pull the sword out of the stone. The gemstones perhaps account for the sword's special protective properties. In Chretien de Troyes' romance of *Lancelot*, Lancelot's ring was "of such virtue that anyone who gazed at it was freed from the power of enchantment." On a more earthly level, a person who wears the king's ring has royal protection, as anyone who recognizes the ring realizes.

Occasionally, precious gemstones will be used as a test that a hero or heroine must pass. As King Arthur is dying, he orders Sir Bedyvere to throw the bejeweled Excalibur into the lake. Twice Bedyvere fails to part with the precious sword, and Arthur asks Bedyvere if Bedyvere "would betray me for the riches of this sword?" (Mallory, Ed. Davies 234). The third time, Sir Bedyvere does throw the precious sword into the lake, and thus proves himself worthy of Arthur's praise. In *Sir Gawain And The Green Knight* the magic girdle that Gawain accepts proves to be a means of testing his honor.

These uses of gemstones in the romance tradition are found in Shakespeare's work. The playwright used gems as identifying tokens from the early to the late part of his career. The courtesan in *The Comedy of Errors* had given a diamond ring to Antipholus of Ephesus at dinner and he, in turn, had promised to give her a chain that the goldsmith, Angelo, made for him (IV, iii, 68-70). The twin, Antipholus of Syracuse, is, of course, totally baffled by the courtesan's and Angelo's statements about the jewelry. Yet, in the final scene the jewelry is used to untangle the knot. Angelo declares, "That is the chain, sir, which you had of me." To

which the twin from Syracuse responds, "I think it be, sir; I deny it not" (V, i, 380-81). And the courtesan asserts, "Sir, I must have that diamond from you."⁵ To which the twin from Ephesus answers, "There, take it; and much thanks for my good cheer" (V, i, 394-95).

The denouement of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* uses the same plot device, for Julia, in her confusion, hands Proteus the very ring that he had given to her as a token of his love, and Proteus recognizes it instantly (V, iv, 92). This discovery compels Julia to throw off her disguise, which leads to a reconciliation of the couple. *The Merchant of Venice* also uses a pair of rings as both pledges of love and identifying tokens, but here the playwright adds a comic twist. Portia and Nerissa give rings to their husbands, and the husbands swear never to part with the rings. After the disguised women trick the husbands into giving up the rings, the women feign jealousy, making the husbands squirm. Finally, Portia and Nerissa display the rings to identify themselves as the lawyer and the clerk.

At the end of *All's Well That Ends Well*, Lafeu recognizes in Bertram's possession the ring that The king gave to Helena. This leads to much questioning about how Bertram gained possession of it. Then Diana produces Bertram's ancestral ring, which further darkens Bertram's predicament. When Helena enters, the matter becomes clear, and the exchange of rings proves what really took place in the bedroom in Florence. Gemstones are also used as identifying tokens in *The Winter's Tale* (V, ii, 33 and 66), *Cymbeline*, and *Twelfth Night*.

Some of the treasures in Shakespeare's plays (either discovered treasure or the dowry that comes with a favorable marriage) contain jewels. A kindly shepherd discovers jewels and a bag of gold next to the infant, Perdita, in *The Winter's Tale* (III, iii, 118) [Also see the reference to "jewel" V, ii, 33]. When Perdita blossoms into a beautiful woman and is engaged to Florizel, the old shepherd offers a large dowry

(the gems and gold that he found next to Perdita): "I will give my daughter to him, and will make/ her portion equal his" (IV, iv, 383-84). Thus, in this play, the jewels serve as identifying tokens, discovered treasure, and dowry. In other plays, Shakespeare included the romance element of discovered treasure, but without using gemstones. Timon is digging for roots and seems annoyed to unearth a vast amount of gold (IV, iii, 26). When the sea tosses a large chest upon the shore in *Pericles*, Cerimon suspects that it contains gold (III, ii, 50). Instead of gold, the chest contains a different kind of treasure, the precious queen.

A character in a romance may also acquire a fortune through a lucky marriage, as Lorenzo does in *The Merchant of Venice* when he elopes with Jessica who takes her father's diamond, turquoise, and ducats with her. In the same play, Bassanio tries his luck at guessing the correct casket. He succeeds, of course, but the treasure inside is not a literal treasure, but rather, a representation of what he has gained. Portia wastes no time in translating the representation for him: "This house, these servants, and this same myself,/ Are yours, my lord: I give them with this ring" (III, ii, 170-71).

A third function that gems perform in the romance tradition and that we see in Shakespeare's plays is that of protective device. Protection may come in the form of magical or spiritual force or it may come in the form of earthly authority. The King of France has much earthly authority and declares in *All's Well That Ends Well*:

This ring was mine; and, when I gave it Helen,
I bade her, if her fortunes ever stood
Necessitated to help, that by this token
I would relieve her. (V, iii, 84-87)

By presenting a letter from the king, or his seal, or his ring, Helena might have benefited from his protection. If Helena had sent his ring back to him along with a request for help,

the king may have sent aid to her. Yet, the royal assistance that does benefit Helena, in this play, takes an unexpected course. In Italy Helena slips the ring onto Bertram's finger. Later, the king recognizes the ring on Bertram's finger, and in demanding an explanation, draws the whole truth forth, which allows Helena to come out of hiding and take her proper place as Bertram's wife.

It may be that this ring also contains some magical properties, for the king states:

Plutus himself,
That knows the tinct and multiplying medicine,
Hath not in nature's mystery more science
Than I have in this ring. (V, iii, 102-05)

For an audience that accepted the supernatural (and in the romance tradition that believed in the guidance of deities) it may be that the ring shows up at just the right moment due to a benevolent force of its own.

Gems serve as tests in Shakespeare's plays, too. Bertram's ring is a test for Helena since she must get it off his finger in order to win him as a husband. His parting letter taunts, "When thou canst get the ring upon my finger, which/ never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of/ thy body that I am father to, then call me husband" (III, ii, 57-59). Through machinations so complicated that they would only be found in a romance, Helena succeeds at the test of obtaining Bertram's ring, and tells him, "There is your ring . . . Will you be mine, now you are doubly won?" (V, iii, 312 and 316).

Whether employed as identifying tokens, treasure, protective devices, or tests, precious stones serve the plots as well as the themes of Shakespeare's romances. The romance tradition was not remote for Shakespeare's audience, as Carol Gessner explains in her book, *Shakespeare and The Greek Romance*. Influences from the Greek romances as well as from the medieval tales of chivalry and the romance

epics of the Italian Renaissance found their way into the literature of the Elizabethan period--the prose romances of Sidney and Greene, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, some of the novelles in the collections by Pettie, Riche, and others, and dramas ranging from *Mucedorus* to *Philaster*. Thus, romance conventions were available to Elizabethans at every social and intellectual level. This may be one reason why Shakespeare's romances, especially *Pericles*, were box office hits (Felperin 287). Gemstones are an intrinsic part of the romance tradition and the intrigue of precious gems adds to the popular appeal of Shakespeare's romances.

CHAPTER V

THE DIAMOND IN *CYMBELINE*: SYMBOL AND MEANS FOR UNITY

Among Shakespeare's plays, *Cymbeline* forms one of the lesser constellations, outshone by the effulgence of his best comedies and tragedies. Because of this relative dimness, due in part to an apparent lack of unity, *Cymbeline* has not been very popular with critics in general. Yet several critics have examined the way in which imagery ties in with both theme and plot. Father A. A. Stevenson, for example, has pointed out the significance of the images of fidelity, rarity, and related ideas which support the play's emphasis on worth (329-338); and James Nosworthy, noting that images of buying and selling "pervade the whole play," relates these to two elements of plot (the wager and the Roman tribute) as well as to the concept of value (Arden edition of *Cymbeline* LXXII). Such recurrent verbal images are certainly important, but also of importance is a recurring visual image--the ring that Imogen gives Posthumus. This jewel not only reinforces the verbal images of value, but also serves other important functions of meaning and structure. To put the matter most simply, the ring serves as a plot device, as a multi-faceted symbol, and as one means of achieving unity in a play full of diverse and sometimes conflicting matter.

Even in its most mechanical aspect as a plot device, the ring takes on allusive significance because of the romance tradition that forms the background of the play. Identifying

tokens, often thought of as commonplace and sterile, may in fact be used to strengthen dramatic points. For an audience familiar with romance, the presence of a token that makes recurring appearances at important points in the play would have a potential significance like that of such familiar but pithy images as the lamb or the moon, whose connotations could easily be evoked. Shakespeare knew this potential and utilized it. One should be alert, then, to the different kinds of uses that Imogen's ring may serve in the plot of *Cymbeline*, and one should be sensitive to the aura of "magic" which clings to it from its romance associations.

A second tradition that sheds light on the significance of Imogen's ring is the ancient lore of gems found in lapidaries. Lapidaries tell of the age-old use of gems as amulets and talismans, which ties in with the romance tradition's use of jewels for testing or protection. Also, certain gems traditionally represented certain moral qualities and conferred particular powers on those who wore them, as was noted in the introduction. Since the owner of the gem partakes of the virtue of that gem, there is a close relationship between the two. Thus the diamond in *Cymbeline* may stand for Imogen herself, and the qualities traditionally attributed to diamonds may also be attributed to her.

The fine qualities reflected in Imogen are noted by Stevenson who says that Shakespeare was preoccupied with the concept of perfection in *Cymbeline* (Arden edition of *Cymbeline* XLV), and E. C. Pettet who asserts that such women as Imogen "are idealized figures who belong to the main romance tradition" (168). This idealism is reflected in the token associated with the princess: "The most valued stone for a ring in Elizabethan England was the pointed or table-cut diamond" (*Shakespeare's England* II, 117). Imogen, like her diamond, is of the highest worth, an "unparagon'd mistress" (I, v, 78), and Posthumus makes the equation of worth explicit: "I prais'd her as I rated her:

so do I my stone" (I, v, 75). This stone is of exceptional beauty, causing Iachimo to declare, "That diamond of yours outlustres many that I have beheld" (I, v, 71-72). Imogen equals this exceptional beauty, as Iachimo states in his soliloquy in the bedroom scene.

The virtues ascribed to the diamond "are almost all directly traceable either to its unconquerable hardness or to its transparency and purity," observes George Frederick Kunz (70). The diamond in *Cymbeline* represents all of these qualities as manifested in Imogen: her adamant spirit resists parental pressure and adverse conditions; the transparency of her noble nature always shines clearly even when she is disguised as a commoner, although Posthumus is persuaded to misinterpret his senses at one point. Thus the qualities associated with diamonds are manifested in the princess.

The quality of purity is especially germane for a female heroine for whom sexual chastity is, of course, a necessity. Imogen demonstrates her purity by steadfastly resisting the sexual advances of Iachimo. This sexual purity is represented by the clear appearance of the diamond, which is one reason why the bride is traditionally given a diamond engagement ring. The theme of sexual propriety runs throughout the main plot of the play, and every time the diamond appears, the audience is reminded of sexual purity and the obvious embodiment of such purity--Imogen. Peggy Munoz Simonds notes that Imogen's diamond represents "the rare qualities of goodness, beauty, and indestructible virtue" (273).

The gem also relates to the motif of worth. The value of material objects and of individual character are both essential subjects in Shakespeare and are crucial in *Cymbeline*. This is seen through Shakespeare's frequent use of economic terms and terms referring to worth. This motif ranges from one level of the plot to another, thus helping to unify it: from Rome's demand for tribute to Iachimo's greedy coveting of the jewel. The diamond naturally plays

a leading part in this theme and by extension, Imogen also plays a part in it. The princess is a valuable prize whether seen through Iachimo's carnal eyes or Posthumus' idealistic eyes. Apart from economic significance, the diamond also has other symbolic uses which will become clear in the following paragraphs.

At the beginning of the play Imogen owns the ring; thus, we naturally think of her when we see the stone just as we think of Desdemona when we see Desdemona's handkerchief. The equation of the jewel with Imogen is reinforced by her words upon presenting the ring to Posthumus, "take it, heart;/ But keep it till you woo another wife,/ When Imogen is dead" (I, i, 113-15). Posthumus is supposed to keep the ring until the princess is dead; thus the ring has a relationship to her life. A further connection between the heroine and the diamond arises from the gem's nuptial import. Posthumus gives Imogen a jeweled bracelet and she gives him the ring. The exchange of bands and Imogen's term "another wife" indicate that this is a wedding scene, and a wedding ring will naturally remind one of his spouse.

The ring and Imogen form a paradoxical side of the appearance-versus-reality theme which runs through the play. Each of the main characters in *Cymbeline* is mistaken at some point in the play by another character, but whereas the queen, Iachimo, and Pisanio fool others on purpose by taking on a different appearance, Posthumus mistakenly condemns Imogen and parts with the diamond even when their appearances have not changed. Imogen is what her outer, "most fair" appearance indicates, but Posthumus, at the prompting of Iachimo, misinterprets what his eyes tell him. He ceases to speak highly of the princess and the gem, although she is still beautiful and the stone continues to sparkle. Persuaded to ignore his sense, Posthumus loses the ring, thus fulfilling the statement that he will wear the ring as long as "sense can keep it on" (I, i, 114).

As Posthumus' view of Imogen changes, so does the way he regards the diamond. Posthumus' love and adoration of Imogen is unspoiled in scene one of Act One when he says, "Remain, remain thou here" (line 118) while putting the ring on his finger. In scene four of the same act, Posthumus, though challenged by Iachimo, still esteems Imogen and says of the ring that he holds it "as dear as my finger, 'tis part of it" (line 131). But when Posthumus is convinced that the princess has been unfaithful to him, his regard for the diamond changes: "It is a basilisk unto mine eye,/ Kills me to look on't. Let there be no honor/ Where there is beauty: truth, where semblance" (II, iv, 107-09). Imogen echoes this same reaction to the sight of the ring in the last scene before the reunion. In the final scene of the play when Posthumus learns of Imogen's innocence, he willingly receives the ring, which symbolizes her sexual purity, once more.

As noted earlier, the exchange of bands by the lovers represents a kind of marriage ceremony. The unadulterated and precious diamond ring which Imogen gives Posthumus can be seen as representing the unadulterated and precious relationship between the lovers. At the beginning of the play when there is harmony between Imogen and Posthumus, the diamond ring is highly visible. As soon as disharmony shatters Posthumus' adoration of the heroine (II, iv), the diamond disappears from view. The stone does not resurface until the last scene of the play, the scene in which Imogen and Posthumus are reconciled and harmony prevails. In this general way, the presence of the diamond reflects the presence of nuptial harmony. The reappearance of the gem in Act Five foreshadows a reconciliation of the lovers. One authority on gem lore calls the diamond a gem of reconciliation because it enhances the husband's love for his wife (Steele 37), and in this play the diamond is indeed a gem of reconciliation.

The plot of *Cymbeline* depends on the diamond ring in several ways. It is used as the test prize in the wager

plot, which tests Posthumus' faith. "The central concern of the wager plot is the problem of human faith in both its moral and its spiritual aspects," states Andrew James Kelly (*DAI* 37, 2861A). Posthumus does not have enough faith in Imogen to pass the test of Iachimo's "proof." Consequently, he loses the diamond which represents Imogen. This use of the jewel follows in the romance tradition and resembles the use of the girdle of Florimell in Book IV of the *Faerie Queene*. The girdle is a test since it will not stay around the waist of an unchaste person. In *Cymbeline* the diamond will not stay on the finger of a man who lacks adequate faith in his beloved.

The gem also serves the plot by forming a tangible connection between the three major characters' of the main plot, therefore girding the unity of the play. Imogen, the original owner, gives the ring to Posthumus, who loses it to Iachimo. This link is vital to the last scene of the play.

In addition, the movement of the ring from Britain to Italy and back to Britain reflects the broadest movement of the plot. Barbara Mowat sees the movement of Shakespeare's romances as being circular (108), and we do get a sense in *Cymbeline* of coming full circle home again. The play begins in Cymbeline's court with Britain at peace with Rome and the young lovers in harmony with one another. As the drama unfolds, the scene shifts to different parts of the world, and Rome wages war on Britain. The lovers are torn by disharmony. At the end of the play, we return to the court of Cymbeline; harmony is restored between Britain and Rome and between the lovers. This circular form is seen in the shape of the ring, and it is worth noting that the circle denoted perfect harmony in Elizabethan society.

In the final scene the playwright uses the diamond ring as an identifying token to untangle the plot. Imogen and the diamond work together, sharing a similar identity and role. The focus is on Imogen as first Belarius, Arviragus,

and Guiderius, and then Pisanio recognize her ("Imogen . . . moves on and connects every level of action in *Cymbeline*," observes Howard Felperin [194]). Imogen then shifts the focus to the diamond by asking Iachimo how he came to possess it. A surprisingly changed Iachimo confesses his whole deception. This explains to Posthumus and Imogen how each could have appeared to the other to be so faithless. The truth now known, Posthumus and then Imogen reveal their true identities, followed by Pisanio, Belarius, and the princes. At last all the truth is out in the open, sparkling as conspicuously as the diamond. As a key to the plot and as a multi-faceted symbol, the diamond serves as an important means of achieving unity in a play which generally has received little praise. With this recognition of unity, the reader sees more merit in *Cymbeline*.



Doctor Faustus practicing black magic from the title page of Marlowe's play 1631

CHAPTER VI

THE TWO RINGS IN *ALL'S WELL* *THAT ENDS WELL*

Shakespeare's comedy *All's Well That Ends Well* makes important use of a pair of rings: Bertram's ancestral ring and the King of France's ring. Although the playwright does not identify the specific type of stone, we know that Bertram's ring has a gemstone. Diana, looking at the ring, says, "Mine honor's such a ring:/ My chastity's the jewel of our house" (IV, ii, 47-48). Later in the play, the countess refers to the ring as "that gem" (V, iii, 198). The king's ring probably has a gemstone as well, for Lafeu, asking Bertram to hand over the king's ring, says, "give a favor from you,/ To sparkle in the spirits of my daughter" (V, iii, 75-76). A gemstone is much more likely to "sparkle" than a plain band of metal is.

As was noted in an earlier chapter these two rings perform many of the functions of romance jewels. While *All's Well That Ends Well* is not classified as one of Shakespeare's romances, it does exhibit many traits common to the romance genre. The rings both serve as identifying token: Bertram's ring serves as a test for Helena, and the king's ring serves as a protective device. Yet there is a suggestion of magic that is derived from the lapidary tradition too. The king states:

Plutus himself,
That knows the tinct and multiplying medicine,
Hath not in nature's mystery more science
Than I have in this ring. (V, iii, 102-05)

The occult magic of jewels and the mysteries of nature's secrets are clearly suggested in the king's statement. The mysteries of occult power are mentioned earlier in the play by Lafeu who swears:

I have seen a medicine
That's able to breathe life into a stone,
Quicken a rock, and make you dance canary
With spritely fire and motion; whose simple touch
Is powerful to raise King Pepin. (II, i, 71-75)

G. K. Hunter asserts that the favorable ending of the play comes about "only by coincidence and submission to the supernatural" (Arden Edition xxxii). Within the context of this play, occult magic is quite real. For an audience that accepted the supernatural, it may be that the king's ring protects Helena from harm and aids her in fulfilling her quest.

In the ninth tale of the third day of *The Decameron*, Shakespeare's ultimate source for *All's Well That Ends Well*, it is the young count's ring that is magical. The young count prizes his ring highly because "he had been told that it contained some occult virtue." While Shakespeare followed his source very closely in writing this comedy, he makes the king's ring magical and not the young count's. It makes more sense dramatically for the king's ring to possess occult powers since his ring is given to protect Helena, and the young count's ring serves no such purpose. There is a neat balance, too, between the magical medicine through which Helena restores the king and the magical ring by which the king protects Helena.

The two rings carry a symbolic import as well. While modern critics are wary of symbol mongering, some of the associations are obvious. Bertram's ancestral ring, that has been in his family for six generations, represents to Helena the dignity of marrying into a titled family. When she gains

possession of the ring, she has fulfilled Bertram's challenge and she truly becomes the wife of a count. Robert Grams Hunter believes that "In Elizabethan terms, Helena is the victim of Fortune, who has assigned her a worldly position which is inappropriate to her deserts" (113). By marrying Bertram, Helena attains the nobility which the ring represents and her just deserts. Upward mobility was important to Shakespeare personally, as is seen in his application for a coat of arms, and is a common theme in his plays which abound with marriages between the gentry and the nobility.

On a more Freudian level, the ring represents Bertram's freedom and sexuality, which he challenges Helena to capture: "When thou canst get the ring upon my finger, which/ never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of/ thy body that I am father to, then call me husband" (III, ii, 57-59). The ring and sex are linked together in this challenge. The unbridled count vows, "I will not bed her" (II, iii, 267); yet Helena captures the ring and Bertram's sexuality at the same time in the bedroom. Being costly, the ring also represents the wealth which Helena, "a poor physican's daughter" (II, iii, 116), will acquire with a fortunate marriage.

Bertram's ring plays an important role in the theme of nobility versus virtue. Bertram would rather marry a woman of a titled family than marry the virtuous Helena. Yet he later surrenders his ancestral ring, which represents the nobility of his family, in seeking to have an adulterous affair with a commoner, which demonstrates how little virtue Bertram possesses despite the nobility of his rank. The ironic twist is that in attempting to surrender the symbol of his nobility for an adulterous affair, Bertram actually surrenders it for a virtuous wife who enhances his nobility by giving him an heir who will some day wear the ancestral ring. The young count fears reducing the nobility of his family by marrying the "poor physican's daughter", yet when he acts unwisely

in Italy, it is Helena who preserves his family's nobility and the ring which is the emblem of that nobility.

In many ways, Helena saves Bertram, and one of the questions that arise in this problem comedy is why the playwright makes Bertram appear so unworthy of Helena's devotion. G. K. Hunter answers that in making Bertram appear so undeserving (especially his lying in the final scene) "Shakespeare seems to aim at emphasizing the virtue of forgiveness; the greater the crime to be forgiven, the greater the virtue of the person forgiving. The major victory at the end of the play is not the achievement of a husband but the ransom of wickedness by the overflowing power of mercy" (Arden Edition LIV).

The King's ring obviously represents the king himself and his royal protection. Since the king acts as a father figure for Helena and forces Bertram to marry her, the king's ring is almost a kind of shackle that she slips onto Bertram's finger in the darkness. In Act Two the king bids Helena choose:

this youthful parcel
Of noble bachelors stand at my bestowing,
O'er whom both sovereign power and father's voice
I have to use. (II, iii, 53-56)

The authority of the father figure will bind Bertram to her, and the ring is the device that calls forth that authority in the last act. And perhaps it is not stretching matters too far to point out that the physical action of a finger entering a ring is suggestive of the mechanics of sexual intercourse. Helena and Bertram do have sex in the darkened bedroom and that is when they exchange rings; the two acts of sex and exchanging rings mirror each other. In the daylight of the crowded court, the proof of that commingling is the rings on their fingers, along with Diana's testimony and Helena's pregnancy. In this way, the finger inserted through

the ring is a visual symbol for the sexual union between Helena and Bertram.

The exchange of rings also symbolizes the real wedding ceremony between Helena and Bertram. The earlier wedding ceremony in France made the two husband and wife in name only. Bertram taunts Helena that she can call him husband only when she obtains his ring and is impregnated by him. These conditions are met in Diana's bedroom. That is where the two truly become man and wife, and that is where they exchange rings, as man and woman have always done in the ancient ritual of marriage.

Of course, the rings function as important plot devices as well, and this goes beyond the simple use as identifying tokens mentioned earlier. W. W. Lawrence observes that the plot is a combination of two traditional stories: the first is "the healing of the king", in which a poor person gains a reward by knowing the secret of the king's sickness and curing him; the second is "the fulfillment of the tasks", in which a person (usually a wife) is faced with seemingly impossible tasks before she can live happily --despite hardships, she fulfills the tasks (68). The king's ring is one means that Shakespeare uses to weld the two stories together, since the ring is one of the rewards that Helena receives for curing the king of his fistula, and it is also used to prove that she has fulfilled both of her tasks. Thus, the ring plays a part in both stories and is vital for linking the two stories together to form one play.

As was seen in *Cymbeline*, the movement of the play is circular, and this circular shape is evident in the rings which are at center stage in the last scene. *All's Well That Ends Well* begins in France at a time of peace and with Helena known to be alive. The action then moves to Italy at a time of war and with Helena thought to be dead. In the final scene the action returns to France and a time of peace with Helena known to be alive. Shakespeare uses this circular movement in his romances and it does give the audience a sense of

coming all the way around to the original starting point. The circular movement is seen in the important rings that everyone focuses on in the denouement.

Anyone who sees *All's Well That Ends Well* will recognize the importance of the two rings as identifying tokens and as symbols for sovereign protection and a noble family. Yet our appreciation of Shakespeare's play is enhanced if we recognize, in addition, the sexual and ceremonial symbolism of the rings, and observe how the king's ring is used to weld the two stories into one play. The magical power of the king's ring also reinforces the magical aura of the play which eventually restores health, appropriate sexuality, and harmony to the characters so that, finally, all does end well.

CHAPTER VII

CLAUDIUS'S UNION: RITUAL AND REVENGE

In the final scene of *Hamlet*, King Claudius drops a large pearl into his cup of wine before drinking a toast to the prince. The ritual of toasting the prince's health is ironic, of course, but in a very sincere death ritual that follows, Gertrude and Claudius drink from a poisoned chalice and die. Revenge has at last been exacted for the late king's murder. Shakespeare's use of a large pearl, a "union", in this scene allows the playwright to pun on the word, linking the marital theme to the act of revenge. Furthermore, the pearl itself carries symbolic meaning. And the theatricality of Claudius's swallowing the pearl underscores the playwright's motif of what is theatrical versus what is real. The king declaims:

Set me the stoups of wine upon that table.
If Hamlet give the first or second hit,
Or quit in answer of the third exchange,
Let all the battlements their ordnance fire;
The king shall drink to Hamlet's better breath;
And in the cup an union shall he throw,
Richer than that which four successive kings
In Denmark's crown have worn. (V, ii, 214-221)

Shakespeare's word, "union", may puzzle the modern reader. "Union" is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a pearl of large size, good quality, and great value, especially one that is supposed to occur singly." Pliny

explains that since no two pearls were exactly the same, this gem was named “unio”, meaning unique (*Natural History* IX, XXXV, 56). King in his book *The Natural History of Precious Stones* adds that “in Low Latin ‘margarita’ and ‘perla’ became a generic name, ‘unio’ being restricted to the fine spherical specimens” (*The New Variorum Hamlet* 444).

In order for Claudius’s boast about the great value of the gem to be taken seriously, he must use the special term “union” instead of the more ordinary word “pearl”. Of course, Claudius’s word choice allows Hamlet to pun on the word later.

A minor crux exists because the third and fourth quartos read “onixe” (meaning “onyx”), whereas the First Folio reads “vnion” (meaning “union”). This crux is cleared up when Claudius uses the word “pearl” in line 234 to refer to the gem, confirming that Shakespeare meant “union” in line 219. Of course, “onyx” would not suit the scene since people never swallowed onyxes and onyxes are not very impressive gemstones.

It is fitting that the playwright should employ a fine pearl in this scene of high drama because fine pearls occupied a prominent place in Elizabethan society. Queen Elizabeth had a devotion to pearls which is seen in the famous portrait of the queen in a pearl-studded dress with a map of the world at her feet. While small or flawed pearls could not compete with the esteem of diamonds or rubies, a large and well-formed pearl (a “union”) could. The action would seem much weaker if Claudius were to swallow a carbuncle or an onyx. Therefore, Claudius’s grand boast and the high drama of this final scene demand the grandeur of a fine pearl.

Claudius’s boast that his pearl is richer than any worn by the last four kings angers Hamlet because it means that the pearl is worth more than any worn by Hamlet’s father. Naturally, the bereaved prince would be sensitive about any comparison between Claudius and his father, and this



*ELIZABETH I IN PEARLS AND ERMINE. Portrait by
F. Zuccherò. Reprint from The Library of Congress.*

comparison belittles his father. His father's wealth and regal appearance upon ceremonial occasions should not be referred to lightly, especially not by a usurper. Claudius has murdered King Hamlet, usurped his kingdom, defiled his widow, and now slights his wealth. Claudius's claim of superiority in this area of worldly possessions adds seasoning to the already boiling feud between Claudius and young Hamlet, spurring Hamlet on to revenge his father's death, which, of course, is the main theme in the tragedy.

As Hamlet finishes off the usurper, he throws Claudius's boast back at him by demanding "Is thy union here?" (V, ii, 278). Hamlet is the punningest character in Shakespeare's plays, and he puns on the word "union" in this scene: "Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,/ Drink off this potion: is thy union here?/ Follow my mother" (276-78). However, critics disagree on how to interpret the pun. Father A. A. Steevens believes that Hamlet is referring to the literal poison in the wine (New Variorum *Hamlet* 445). Harold Jenkins, the editor of *The Arden Edition*, believes that Hamlet is referring to Claudius's marriage (414). This second interpretation must be correct, considering the statements before and after the pun. Hamlet calls Claudius incestuous, then asks if Claudius's "union" is here, and finally commands that the king follow Hamlet's mother. All three thoughts are linked: Hamlet's mind is following a single train of thought about Claudius's marriage with Gertrude.

Yet, there might be additional meaning in the word. Claudius had been united with Gertrude, a union that upset the prince almost as much as his father's murder, but now Claudius will be united with death. The marriage theme is nearly as important in this play as the theme of revenge. Hamlet had believed that his parents enjoyed the perfect marriage:

[King Hamlet was] so loving to my mother,
That he might not beitem the winds of heaven

Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on. (I, ii, 140-45)

The prince was bitterly disillusioned by Gertrude's hasty marriage and the suggestions of adultery (the ghost calls Claudius that "adulterate beast" [I, v, 42]). Gertrude's marriage to her former brother-in-law is considered incestuous by Hamlet which further soils the institution of marriage in the young prince's mind. When Claudius and Gertrude are united in death and not in marriage, the second major conflict in the play is resolved.

The ostentatious act of swallowing a pearl and the king's declamatory language set a very theatrical tone for the final action. William Empson and other critics have pointed out that this play sounds very theatrical throughout. Shakespeare wrote his masterpiece this way because Thomas Kyd's earlier version of the play was thought by Elizabethans to be absurdly theatrical, and in revising the old play, Shakespeare wanted to develop a tension between what is theatrical and what is lifelike (Empson 98). All the characters are highly theatrical: "Everybody is 'acting a part' except Horatio," observes Empson (101).

Also, the wordy, declamatory language of revenge plays is toyed with by Shakespeare. Empson feels that "the Player's Speech and so forth was a parody of the ranting style of the Admiral's Company" (100). Claudius's declamation about drinking the union is also very theatrical and it sets the tone for the final action of the fencing match, which itself is a kind of drama, complete with an audience onstage. The characters are not even sure whether they use swords in play or in earnest, until the end when death claims both of them.

While the last scene may be very theatrical, the king actually does swallow the pearl. Pearls were occasionally

smashed into a powder and swallowed in past centuries. Pliny tells of Cleopatra's drinking a pearl (IX, 35). Another case, "which Shakespeare presumably knew is that of Sir Thomas Gresham, who was fabled to have crushed a pearl in wine to drink the Queen's health when she visited the new Exchange in 1571" (Arden *Hamlet* 568). Why would anyone do such a thing? The grandiose act of wasting a precious gem for a person's own pleasure would make a person famous, but in addition, "it may be observed that pearls were supposed to possess an exhilarating quality" (New Variorum *Hamlet* 444).

Some critics believe that the union is how the cup of wine is poisoned. Jenkins in *The Arden Hamlet* says, "It is generally supposed . . . that the 'pearl' is the poison" (411). Stevens believes that under the pretense of throwing a 'pearl' into the cup, the king drops some poisonous drug into the wine (New Variorum *Hamlet* 445). The *Arden Hamlet* reports that a nineteenth-century tradition "made Claudius 'pretend to drink' and then offer the same cup to Hamlet." "Spencer supposes that he drinks before the 'pearl' has time to dissolve." "W. J. Lawrence, however, maintained that as the king prepares to drink from one cup, he puts the poison in another." "Dover Wilson concludes that how the poison got into the cup 'we are not told'" (411).

When Claudius is explaining his plot to Laertes, he says:

And that he calls for drink, I'll have/
 prepared him
A chalice for the nonce; whereon but sipping,
If he by chance escape your venom'd stuck,
Our purpose may hold there. (IV, vii, 131-34)

Claudius's use of the future perfect verb tense suggests that he intends to prepare the poisoned cup prior to the fencing bout and not at the moment of the fencing bout; thus

the cup has already been poisoned before the servant carries it into the room. Furthermore, we note that there are two cups of wine and that one is poisoned, but the other is not.

When Claudius commands, "Give him the cup" (V, ii, 235), his words suggest that the second cup is the poisoned one and that the cup in Claudius's hand (which he threw the union into) is not the poisoned one. Claudius does not say, "Give him THIS cup," which Claudius drank from. Therefore, the union is not the source of the poison. In addition, when Gertrude drinks, Claudius remarks, "It is the poisoned cup", indicating that only one cup is poisoned and that it is in her hand. The cup from which Claudius is drinking is not poisoned, and in front of everyone he tosses the pearl into it and then drinks from it. Thus, the union is not the source of poison, nor does the pearl end up in the poisoned cup that Gertrude holds. How the poison got into Gertrude's cup "we are not told," as Wilson observes, but we know that it has nothing to do with the pearl.

This matter of the poison does present a further problem when Hamlet puns on the word "union" as he forces Claudius to drink the poisoned wine. Hamlet asks, "Is thy union here?" Yet, the union is in the other cup filled with wholesome wine. Was Shakespeare being careless about this detail or did he merely take poetic license and assume that the audience would not be following this business with the cups so closely?

On another front, the drinking of the pearl may be seen as part of a dark ritual. Drinking and eating can be rituals, of course, as is witnessed in the Eucharist, and Claudius claims that his drinking the wine is a ritual of toasting Hamlet's health. The audience views the toast as ironic, for they know that Claudius expects to see Hamlet poisoned by one means or another. This ritual is an invitation to death, and Claudius and Gertrude drink from the poisoned cup and die.

In addition the pearl itself can be seen as a symbol. It

could represent the earthly wealth and indulgence in luxury that have marked Claudius's and Gertrude's reign. Of course, Christian audiences know that the glory of the earth is passing, and as Claudius dies, rich pearls are worthless to him. Yet he has lived for just the kind of wealth and luxury that the pearl represents, and his act of wasting a valuable jewel for his own indulgence epitomizes the kind of life he has lived. Now as he dies, the audience realizes that spiritual matters are important and that pearls are useless to him.

Of course Elizabethan audiences would be familiar with Jesus's parable comparing the kingdom of heaven with a pearl of great price. In Matthew 13:45-46 Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls: and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

Claudius has ignored the pearl of heaven in his pursuit of earthly pearls. Pearls are also equated with holy worth in Matthew 7:6 which warns, "Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you." As Shakespeare's audience watches Claudius, who wallows in "the nasty sty," swallowing an earthly pearl, they may well think of the pearl of heaven that eludes him.

Had Shakespeare chosen any other stone for this scene, so much would have been lost. The exotic quality of a fine pearl from the orient cannot be matched by a carbuncle or an onyx; moreover, those gems are never swallowed. The name "union" allows the poet to pun on the word, tying in the marital theme with the act of revenge. Claudius's boastfulness and luxuriousness are underscored by the pearl just before they are undercut by the prince. In addition, the theatrical stunt of swallowing a pearl only proves to make the final events of vengeance seem more real. In all these ways, Shakespeare's use of the union adds substance to the final scene of his great tragedy.

CHAPTER VIII

DUNCAN'S GIFT OF A DIAMOND IN MACBETH

Always too trusting and very generous, King Duncan sends a diamond to Lady Macbeth when he stays at her castle. Although the diamond only appears onstage in one brief action, that one action (as is often true in Shakespeare's dramas) has several layers of meaning which tell much about the characters involved. Specifically, the giving of the diamond says something about the nature of Duncan, who gives the stone; Lady Macbeth, who receives the stone; Banquo, who delivers the gift; and Macbeth, who as king does not give gems to his followers.

King Duncan, a houseguest in Macbeth's castle, sends the diamond to Lady Macbeth. Banquo informs Macbeth:

The king's a-bed:

He hath been in unusual pleasure, and
Sent forth great largess to your offices:
This diamond he greets your wife withal,
By the name of most kind hostess.

(II, i, 11-15)

Diamonds are associated with kings in that the diamond is "the king of gems." No other gem is harder than the diamond or purer. The value of the diamond is likewise unsurpassed. As noted earlier in the chapter on background, Pliny testifies that "The most highly valued of human possessions, let alone gemstones, is" the diamond (207). The Elizabethan, John Swan, agrees: "The most precious of

all stones" is the diamond (*Speculum* 292). Diamonds are prominent in the crown of England. Shakespeare's works show this association between diamonds and kings, too. Henry VI declares. "My crown is in my heart, not on my head;/ Not deck'd with diamonds and Indian stones" (*Henry VI, Part Three, III, i, 62-63*). Helicanus also refers to diamonds bedecking a king's crown (*Pericles, II, iv, 52-53*).

Since the diamond is the king of gems, it is fitting that a monarch present such a kingly gift to those in favor. The tradition of the king as gift-giver is an ancient one. R. W. Chambers explains, "Before minted money became current, rings were used everywhere among the teutonic people" (351). Alvin A. Lee observes that in *Beowulf* "The gift-throne in Hrothgar's hall is a seat of ring dispensing, a symbol of royal favor on earth that reflects the grace shown toward men by the heavenly Gift-dispenser" (186). In addition to this religious import, there is a military benefit, too. The beginning of *Beowulf* explains: "A young man ought by his good deeds, by giving splendid gifts while still in his father's house, to make sure that later in life beloved companions will stand by him, that people will serve him when war comes" (Norton Ed. 1). Shakespeare's works also show this tradition of the king as gift-giver. In *Love's Labour's Lost* the king gives the princess that he is wooing a diamond (*V, ii, 1-4*), and in *Macbeth*, of course, Duncan gives Lady Macbeth a diamond.

What Lee says about Hrothgar might apply to Duncan, too, for when the Scottish king gives a precious stone, he performs a similar office to the king of heaven who gives gifts to people. The Scots recognize Duncan as a source of bounty who is like the Father. In addition, Duncan's generosity creates harmony among the thanes, since satisfied thanes are loyal thanes.

Shakespeare uses the diamond in *Macbeth* to make a point: Duncan has a kingly nature and deserves to be on

the throne; Macbeth does not. When Macbeth murders his way to the throne, his faults become obvious. Among those faults is being miserly. One Scottish lord hopes that “we may again . . . receive free honors:/ All which we pine for now” (III, vi, 33-37). And young Malcolm calls Macbeth “bloody,/ Luxurious, avaricious” (IV, iii, 58-59). Being an avaricious tyrant, Macbeth gives his followers no diamonds.

An interesting parallel to Macbeth is Heremod, cited in *Beowulf* as an example of a bad king. “No rings did he give to the Danes for glory” (Norton Ed. 30). This miserliness also has religious implications: “No plated rings does he give in men’s honor, and then he forgets and regards not his destiny because of what God, Welder of Heaven, has given him before, his portion of glories” (Norton Ed. 31). Heremod, like Macbeth, is bloodthirsty and even kills his table companions.

The gift of a diamond also underscores Lady Macbeth’s faults: she is treacherous, cruel, and ungrateful. Although the king is always gracious towards her, promotes her husband, and even sends her a diamond, she spurs her husband on to commit murder and then she smears the innocent grooms with Duncan’s royal blood in order to hide the truth about the unnatural crime. Shakespeare’s audience recognizes at once just how little such a woman deserves a diamond.

Of course, there is heavy irony in all this. Duncan presents a precious gift to a woman who is plotting his murder. Along with the jewel, he greets her as “most kind hostess.” The hostess and host have a sacred duty to protect the guests in their home, as Macbeth himself explains: “[I am] his host,/ Who should against his murderer shut the door,/ Not bear the knife myself” (I, vii, 14-16). However, far from guarding against the violence that others may pose for the guest, she herself plans his murder. We are told that the king has gone to bed “In measureless content,” yet he will never wake again! And the last act that he performs

before retiring is to send a beautiful diamond to the woman who has planned his death.

Nor does the irony end there, for who should deliver the gem into Macbeth's hands but Banquo who will also be murdered by Macbeth. In bearing the diamond, Banquo seems to share in the diamond's high qualities and plays his part in Duncan's royal generosity. Like Duncan, Banquo has a kingly nature: the witches prophesy that Banquo "shall get kings, though be none" (I, iii, 65). And like Duncan, Banquo also trusts Macbeth. Traditionally, the bearer of glad tidings was rewarded, but though Banquo bears the king's diamond to Macbeth, the only reward he will get is to lie in a ditch "With twenty trenched gashes on his head,/ The least a death to nature" (III, iv, 26-27).

This small action of giving away a diamond sheds much light upon the characters in Macbeth. Duncan's kingly behavior and Banquo's royal nature are witnessed in this scene. In contrast, Macbeth's baser nature is evident when he withholds diamonds and other gifts from his followers. His throne is not the treasure-throne described in Beowulf, and his miserliness spreads disharmony among the thanes. Furthermore, Lady Macbeth's lack of desert is underscored by Duncan's generous gift. While Duncan's and Banquo's kingly natures are revealed elsewhere in the play, and the irony of the murder is expressed in other lines, nowhere are these truths revealed in such a compact way as when Duncan sends the diamond to Lady Macbeth.



CHAPTER IX

SHYLOCK'S TURQUOISE AND DIAMOND

Two specific gemstones, the turquoise and the diamond, play a part in driving a wedge between Shylock and his daughter Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock loves both his daughter and his material possessions at the beginning of the play, but when the daughter takes away his material possessions and shows a complete lack of respect for gems that Shylock especially cherishes, he rails bitterly against her. Shylock's specific comments about the price of the prized diamond and the value of his turquoise make the pain of his loss quite clear, and in turn help to explain his gradual alienation from Jessica, which started with the elopement and continues to worsen with each bit of bad news that Shylock hears.

When Shylock's daughter runs off with Lorenzo, taking a treasure with her, Shylock loses the two things that are most dear to him. The old man runs into the streets crying, "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!" (II, viii, 15), seemingly unsure of which loss to put first. Salanio testifies that he "never heard a passion so confused,/ So strange, outrageous, and so variable" as when Shylock bewailed the loss of his valuables and his daughter (II, viii, 12-13). His material possessions and his daughter seem to be of equal importance; furthermore, they seem to be interconnected in his mind, as the following passage makes clear.

Shylock: How now, Tubal! What news from Genoa?
Hast thou found my daughter?

Tubal: I often came where I did hear of her, but cannot find her.

Shylock: Why, there, there, there, there! A diamond gone, cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfurt! The curse never fell upon our nation till now; I never felt it till now. Two thousand ducats in that, and other precious, precious jewels. I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! Would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin.

(III, i, 74-85)

Although Tubal does not mention the diamond in his answer, Shylock immediately thinks of the diamond when he hears that his daughter is still missing because his valuables and his daughter are linked together in his mind. His bitter wish for his daughter's death suggests that at this point in the play the diamond is worth more to him than his daughter is. The theft of the two stones has driven deeper the wedge between the Jew and his daughter.

Shakespeare added the diamond and the turquoise to the story: no gemstones are mentioned in the chief source for this play, the first story of the fourth day of *Il Pecorone* (The Dunces) by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino. Shakespeare's addition seems quite natural in light of the traditional connection between Jews and gemstones. Over the centuries a great number of Jews have been jewelers and gem merchants. The diamond business in Amsterdam, for example, has been plied by many Jewish merchants. One reason for this connection between Jews and gemstones is that in the past many European countries had laws that barred Jews from owning land; therefore, successful Jews often invested in precious stones instead. For instance, Jews were not permitted to buy land in England until 1723 when Parliament finally granted Jews that right (Calisch 46). Furthermore,

in the Renaissance a father usually taught his trade to his son, and so jewelry would become the family business for generations of Jews.

According to the traditional association between Jews and gemstones, Shylock would be expected to have more knowledge about gems than wealthy gentiles like Antonio or Portia would. Shylock mentions that the diamond cost him two thousand ducats in Frankfurt. The New Cambridge edition of the play notes that Frankfurt was “the scene of a famous jewelry fair every September” (111). Shylock, then, is serious enough about purchasing stones that he even travels to foreign countries to buy gems at the best jewelry fairs, which suggests that Shylock is indeed a knowledgeable dealer in precious stones. These specifics make the play more realistic and add color to Shylock’s character as a Jew.

The phrase “the jewels in her ear” in line 83 is cryptic. It probably does not refer to earrings, but to gemstones placed within her ear like an apple in a roasted pig’s mouth, so that Shylock could pick the gems up easily. The phrase is parallel to “the ducats in her coffin.” Presumably, Shylock could easily retrieve his ducats before shutting the lid to the coffin for the last time.

The loss of the second gem, the turquoise, is just as upsetting to Shylock. Tubal’s news that Jessica traded Shylock’s turquoise ring for a monkey stabs Shylock deeply. Because the audience sees the Jew’s pain, the audience believes his passion for revenge. The turquoise and the diamond, both mentioned in the same passage, help to make Shylock’s passion believable. Shakespeare’s probable source, *Il Pecorone*, does not give the Jew a motive for wanting a pound of flesh. This psychological weakness in the story Shakespeare had to correct in order to make the plot more plausible. The loss of the jewels, the ducats, and the daughter, in addition to past conflicts with Antonio, give Shylock a fervent motive. That the two stones are



Lithograph based on Gilbert's Shylock After The Trial

mentioned in the same passage indicates that Shylock's mind is focusing on gemstones in this scene. This passage juxtaposes Shylock's sorrow at his own losses (emphasized by the loss of the two stones) with his joy at Antonio's losses, which creates a singular, dramatic effect. The deep loss that Shylock feels over his gems helps to achieve the effect in addition to contributing to his motive for revenge.

There is no debate over the identity of Shylock's stone even though the Quarto and the first Folio use the term "turkies", a term that is unfamiliar to the modern reader. "Turkies" and other phrases such as "turkey-stone" were commonly used to refer to the bluish-greenish stone that modern readers know as the turquoise. Since there is no debate that Shakespeare's term, "turkies," refers to the turquoise, many twentieth-century editors have substituted "turquoise" in place of the original term for the sake of clarity.

The real debate is why Shylock treasures the turquoise so highly. When Tubal tells Shylock that one of Antonio's creditors showed Tubal a ring that he had received from Jessica in exchange for a monkey, Shylock declaims,

"Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal. It/ was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor./ I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys"

(III, i, 112-114).

One view is that Shylock treasures the ring for its sentimental value. Since his beloved and departed wife gave him the ring when he was courting her, it reminds him of her and of those youthful days. This view shows a softer, more human side of Shylock. It indicates that he is not merely a materialist who values objects because of their monetary worth. Knight comments: "Shakespeare here, with marvelous art, shows us the betrayed and persecuted Shylock, at a moment when he is raving at the desertion of his daughter, and panting for a wild revenge, as looking back upon the days when the fierce passions had probably no place in his

heart” (New Variorum Merchant of Venice 132).

Yet another view is that Shylock values his stone so highly because of its occult powers. Father A. A. Steevens in his 1793 edition asserts: “As Shylock had been married long enough to have a daughter grown up, it is plain he did not value this turquoise on account of the money for which he might hope to sell it, but merely in respect of the imaginary virtues formerly ascribed to the stone” (New Variorum Merchant of Venice 132). The turquoise had the legendary power to reflect its owner’s health. John Swan, an Elizabethan, writes that it “helpeth weak eyes and spirits, refresheth the heart; and, if the wearer of it be not well, it changeth color and looketh pale and dim, but increaseth to his perfectnesse as the wearer recovereth to his health” (296). Ben Jonson writes in *Sejanus*: “And true as turquoise in my dear lord’s ring, / Look well or ill with him” (I, i, 37-38).

The Globe’s audience may have thought of the Jew’s turquoise as a magical aid to health. As an ethnic group, Jews are health-conscious. The dietary restrictions in the Old Testament and the emphasis on living a clean, Kosher life are just two examples that support this image of Jews. In addition, some prominent physicians have been Jewish, including Queen Elizabeth’s personal physician, Dr. Roderigo Lopez. In fact, Lopez’s execution for treason in 1594 may have provided a context for the play and a model for Shylock. At any rate, Londoners had a famous connection between Jews and health care in the person of Lopez. Some Jewish physicians used Eastern remedies, which might have been regarded by naive Europeans as magical, so the Globe’s audience may have regarded the Jew’s turquoise as a magical, health charm.

The ambiguity of why Shylock values his turquoise so highly is likely to remain unresolved. It seems doubtful that Shakespeare intentionally created the ambiguity; it occurred

accidentally. How one interprets this matter has much to do with how one views Shylock. A more sympathetic view of him will mean that one sees Shylock valuing the turquoise because of its sentimental meaning. A less sympathetic view will mean that one sees Shylock valuing it because of its occult power. Yet, it is possible for one to see Shylock valuing the turquoise for both reasons at once, which would contribute to an ambivalent interpretation of the character.

Just as critics differ on why Shylock values his turquoise, they also differ on why Leah gave it to him in the first place. She may have given the turquoise to the young Shylock because the stone was believed to contribute to a better marriage, according to Steevens. George Frederick Kunz points out that the turquoise was a popular engagement ring in Germany until the beginning of the twentieth century (Boswell 483). Steevens cites Thomas Nicols, of Jesus College, Cambridge: the turquoise “is likewise said to take away all enmity, and to reconcile man and wife” (New Variorum Merchant of Venice 132). This belief would make the turquoise a fitting stone for Leah to give to her beloved.

Jackson Campbell Boswell speculates about the superstitions associated with the turquoise, too. He writes:

It is eminently appropriate that Shakespeare would have Leah give Shylock a turquoise ring as a betrothal gift, for she would have been familiar with the Eastern folklore of safety, prosperity, and love associated with the stone, and in addition, the stone was at the height of masculine fashion. Jessica, who was more Venetian than Jew in outlook, was readily willing to part with it because of the European superstition that it would cause sterility. Seemingly when Jessica decided to leave her father’s house she rejected her entire heritage: she flouted the Jewish tradition which forbade women to dress in male attire (Deuteronomy 22.5); she showed extreme disrespect for her father by robbing him of his very means

of livelihood-his money; and she showed her contempt for a Hebraic talisman by trading it for a monkey (483).

Boswell's speculations beg several questions. Did Shakespeare know of the Eastern folklore of safety, prosperity, and love associated with the turquoise? This Eastern concept is far less common than the superstition of the turquoise as a talisman for health. Did Shakespeare know of the European superstition that the turquoise would cause sterility? The playwright never mentions this idea in any of his plays. While Boswell is correct that Jessica rejects Jewish tradition, it seems doubtful that trading the turquoise shows her contempt for a Hebraic talisman. Her trade for a monkey suggests a mood of mere whimsy.

The diamond and the turquoise, deliberately placed together by Shakespeare in this scene, are contrasting stones and represent contrasting sides of Shylock's nature. The diamond is the hardest of gemstones; it is clear, and it is valued for its monetary worth. Whereas the turquoise is much softer; it is multi-colored--even muddled--and it is not as costly as most gemstones. Shylock may value his turquoise for sentimental reasons: "I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor." This statement tells of the private and sentimental side of Shylock. The turquoise was a gift. Whereas Shylock values his diamond for its monetary worth: "[it] cost me 2,000 ducats in Frankfurt." This is clearly the public and materialistic side of the man. The diamond was an investment. Thus the diamond and the turquoise are sharply contrasting stones and represent the hard, public, materialistic side of Shylock in contrast to the soft, private, sentimental side of him. One side balances the other in this scene to portray a complex man.

The diamond and the turquoise placed together in this scene help to illuminate several key points. One point concerns Shylock's alienation from his daughter. Although Shylock

loves Jessica as much as his possessions at the beginning of the play, he gradually is alienated by her betrayals. When he discovers that she has squandered his cherished diamond and turquoise, his alienation progresses one step further. The two gemstones are an important addition to the Italian source for the play because they add color to Shylock's characterization as a Jew and add even more motivation for Shylock's revenge. Finally, the diamond and the turquoise are contrasting stones which represent the hard and the soft sides of Shylock's nature.

CHAPTER X

DESDEMONA AS CHRYSOLITE AND PEARL

Having lost his beloved wife to his own violent jealousy, The Moor, in the final act of the tragedy, compares his dead wife to a chrysolite and then to a pearl. The two references to precious gems tell the audience much about Othello's state of mind and also reflect on some of the dramatic themes in the play. The gems that Shakespeare chose to use in this act carry a special significance within Shakespeare's canon as well as in Elizabethan culture. A few critics, Nancy A. Gutierrez, Richard Levin, Valerie Traub, and Lynda E. Boose, have published articles on these two gem references in *Othello* that shed light on the play.

Gutierrez addresses the Indian versus Judean crux in line 347 of Act five, scene two. In the first quarto of 1622 Othello, speaking about himself, says, ". . . of one whose hand,/ Like the base Indian, threw a pearle away/ Richer than all his tribe (V, ii, 346-48). However, the first folio of 1623 reads "Like the base Judean." This crux is one of the most controversial ones in Shakespeare's works, causing many critics to offer an opinion on it. Gutierrez, Richard Levin, Rodney Poisson, and others argue for "Indian", while Richard Veit, Naseeb Shaheen, Paul Siegel, Laurence Ross, and others argue for "Judean." Gutierrez cites a passage from William Warner's *Albions England* which says, "Well know I, that Pearles low-prised in India are precious in England." This book was first published in 1586, before *Othello* was

composed, and went through six editions. “The popularity of *Albions England*, as well as its rather middle-brow appeal, strongly suggests that the idea of Indians not valuing pearls was a commonly accepted notion,” asserts Gutierrez (220). Although Gutierrez does not mention it, pearls were thought to be plentiful in India, and thus taken for granted. One might also point out that Shakespeare refers to Indian pearls in *Troilus and Cressida*: “Her bed is India; there she lies a pearl” (I, i, 100), but never refers to a Judean pearl.

Richard Levin states, “The contemporary audience would certainly not have regarded indifference to valuable possessions as a generic Judean trait. All defenders of this reading have agreed that the pearl-throwing must be a metaphor alluding to a specific act of one Judean”: Herod’s execution of his wife, Jephthah’s sacrifice of his daughter, or Judas’ betrayal of Christ (64). However, these biblical references would cause problems concerning the dramatic appropriateness of the reference. Othello’s purpose in his final speech is to ensure that his listeners will judge him fairly. He makes no attempt to deny his guilt, but he does seek to mitigate it by explaining that he acted in ignorance. “That is why it would be very appropriate for him to compare himself to the Indian, whose action had also resulted from ignorance . . . and very inappropriate for him to compare himself to Judas, whose action was regarded as a conscious choice of evil, made with full knowledge,” reasons Levin (66). He even doubts that the word “Judean” was part of the English language in Shakespeare’s day and notes that the root word “Judea” was rare. “The usual name for the region was ‘Jewry,’ which is how Shakespeare always refers to it” (61).

The second gemstone that Othello compares Desdemona to is the chrysolite:

had she been true
If heaven would make me such another world,

Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,
I'd not have sold her for it.
(V, ii, 150-53)

While there is no hotly debated crux in this passage, Boose makes a convincing case that Shakespeare actually meant to refer to the crystal when he used the term "chrysolite": "I also think it likely that he borrowed the unfamiliar term without really knowing what precise gemstone 'chrysolite' denoted, but erroneously assumed that the stone was kin to its homonymic relative, the more familiar crystal" (428). R. Grant White, editor of the second Variorum *Othello* (1883), suspects that Shakespeare had never seen a chrysolite, but chose the word because "it sounded well" (312). Perhaps it should also be noted that "chrysolite" fits the meter and "crystal" does not. White and Boose are most probably correct; this isolated reference to "chrysolite" is the only time that the playwright uses the term; whereas, "crystal" was a common word in Elizabethan English. Furthermore, chrysolite is a pale green, translucent gemstone, and Boose argues that associating Desdemona with a green gemstone would violate the play's use of color symbolism. Associating her with a clear crystal would make perfect sense (428). Finally, Boose notes that "Othello's sense of Desdemona as 'snow' and 'cold, cold, my girl' fits closely with the properties commonly assigned to the crystal" and "the belief that crystal rocks were congealed ice" (432-33). "Crystal" comes from the Greek word "krystallos" meaning "ice."

M. R. Ridley, editor of the Arden *Othello*, believes that Shakespeare is actually referring to topaz: "Chrysolite] topaz; only here in Shakespeare." Although Ridley offers no further explanation, this idea probably comes from Philemon Holland's translation of Pliny's *Natural History*. In attempting to find the correct English word to render

Pliny's Latin word, Holland offers two guesses: "topaze or chrysolith." This association of chrysolite and topaz is probably what influenced Ridley. Yet it seems unlikely that Shakespeare was referring to the yellowish-brownish topaz when imagining a statue of Desdemona.

Othello compares his wife to a crystal in order to fulfill his deep need to see her once again as pure. The Moor is tormented by Desdemona's supposed sexual impurity and "obsessed with retaining his vision of Desdemona as something frozen and immobile--her skin like snow and alabaster--ideas which relate closely to the belief that crystal rocks were congealed ice" (Boose 433). At this juncture he imagines her as "'one entire and perfect chrysolite,' the flawlessly clear, ice-like crystal which is part of this important white-translucent-shining-pure-cold-virginal image cluster" (Boose 433).

Boose also believes that Shakespeare took the image of this precious stone from the Song of Solomon in The Geneva Bible and not from Holland's translation of Pliny, as R. Grant White states (Variorum 312). Pliny says that when chrysolite was first found, it surpassed all other stones in price. Pliny also tells of a king of Egypt who had a statue of his wife carved out of chrysolite. "Had Shakespeare picked up his 'chrysolite' from Pliny he would have had to visualize it as a definitely green gem" (435), which would violate the play's color symbolism, as noted earlier. However, in the Song of Solomon the stone's color and properties are not defined, thus allowing the playwright to imagine the stone as clear and being associated with ice. The Geneva Bible reads:

His chekes are as a bed of spices, and as swete flowres
and his lippes like lilies dropping downe pure myrrhe. His
hands as rings of golde set with the chrysolite his bellie like
white yvorie [ivory] covered with saphirs (5:13.14).



Capiculū. lxxviii.

PEARL DEALER.

From the "Hortus Sanitatis" of Johannis de Cuba [Strasbourg, Jean Prys, ca. 1483]; De lapidibus. cap. lxxviii. Author's library.

The chrysolite and the pearl are connected as part of an image cluster in this play, states Boose. She claims, "Behind Othello's image of himself as a gem merchant offered a perfect, heaven-forged chrysolite lies the analogue of the biblical pearl of great price [Matthew 13:46], the image which later surfaces as the pearl which he, the base Indian (or Judean), threw away" (431). There may be a connection between the two stones as Boose claims, but such a connection remains unproven. Boose says further that when Othello "contemplates selling Desdemona for an unblemished chrysolite, the image of the gem merchant subsumes that of the flesh merchant. At the end of the play Othello redeems his vision of sexuality from its association with commercial prostitution by replacing the chrysolite of the first image with the pearl beyond price of the second" (431). Boose is indulging in "clever" criticism here. Shakespeare does not use the term "flesh merchant" or "gem merchant" nor does he have Othello picture himself as a pimp. Boose is using terms that do not occur in the play just to make her reasoning sound complete. What Othello actually says is that he would NOT sell Desdemona for a perfect chrysolite. Thus, he is not imagining himself as a "flesh merchant", and therefore, the pearl image is no purer than the chrysolite image. Both gem images are pure and free from venality. In addition, both gems in Act V might be described as priceless; Boose is incorrect to say that the pearl is a more ideal image than the chrysolite.

Valerie Traub also believes that the gem images reflect the sexual themes in the tragedy, but her view is markedly different from Boose's. Traub states that "in certain plays male anxiety toward female erotic power is channeled into a strategy of containment. Through this strategy, the threat of female erotic power is psychically contained by means of a metaphoric and dramatic transformation of women into jewels, statues, and corpses" (216). Traub discusses

Desdemona's metaphoric transformation into a chrysolite and then a pearl. Yet Traub's discussion underplays the most obvious point: Othello contains Desdemona's erotic power by literally killing her. Once Desdemona is dead, she clearly is no longer capable of seducing Cassio or anyone else. And this transformation is not "metaphoric", but literal.

Traub continues: "By imaginatively transforming Desdemona into a jewel--hard, cold, static, silent, yet also adored and desired--Othello is able to maintain both his distance from and his idealization of Desdemona" (226). At the moment when the Moor compares Desdemona to a chrysolite, she is dead, but in his mind, still guilty. At this moment, Traub's view seems correct because Othello is able to distance himself from the guilt of killing a person and from the grief of having lost his wife, and he can also idealize her. However, when Othello characterizes Desdemona as a pearl, her innocence has been proven and he knows that she truly is an ideal woman; characterizing her as a precious pearl merely expresses her real merit, it does not "idealize" her, so at this moment Traub's interpretation does not fit.

Shakespeare's use of a pearl image in this scene is apropos because it conveys a sense of how valuable Desdemona was and how great a loss Othello feels. The whiteness of the pearl and its traditional associations with virginity make it an especially appropriate image for the innocent heroine. Being small, a pearl is more easily lost or thrown away than other valuables. A wealthy man might invest his money in buildings or ships, as well as gems, but buildings and ships cannot be thrown away, and therefore, would not serve as appropriate images. A wise man would treasure such a wonderful possession as a pearl or Desdemona for whom the pearl stands, but the "base Indian" does not. This image is also apropos because Othello is a foreigner of dark skin, just as Asian Indians would be in Venice. He is "base" in that he is ignorant of what is truly important, namely Desdemona's

great value. Through this ignorance Othello loses his “pearl.”

The chrysolite passage also needs some explanation. White in the *Variorum Othello* refers to Pliny’s story of an Egyptian king who had a statue of his wife made out of valuable stone. “Can it be doubted that it was the story of this precious statue which suggested “chrysolite’ to Shakespeare?” asks White (312). Yet Shakespeare’s lines indicate that a “world” (a round globe) and not a woman is to be made out of chrysolite. It also seems unlikely that “world” is a metaphor for Desdemona. What the playwright means is that Desdemona is being weighed in the balance against a world made of chrysolite. Shakespeare’s use of the gem image in this line works well. Ounce for ounce nothing is as valuable as a gemstone, so to think of a gemstone the size of the Earth is to imagine as much wealth as is possible. The clarity of crystal (to which Shakespeare is probably referring by “chrysolite”) suggests an unflawed and pure image. This image is more fitting than a colored stone or gold or any other image would be.

CHAPTER XI

STATISTICS ON GEM REFERENCES

Examining the number of references to specific gemstones in Shakespeare's works reveals some interesting patterns. Pearls seem to be Shakespeare's favorite stone since they are named forty-three times compared to twenty-two references to diamonds, which are second on the list. Perhaps Queen Elizabeth I's fondness for pearls and the prominent references to them in the New Testament contributed to Shakespeare's preference for pearls. The prominence of diamonds (twenty-two references compared to only ten for the third most often named gem) can be explained by the eminence of diamonds throughout western culture. Shakespeare referred to rubies ten times and carbuncles five times. The color red and the carbuncle's association with glowing eyes probably account for the playwright's favoring these two red stones. His single reference to the turquoise and chrysolite suggests that these stones were not very important in his daily life, even though the references are pithy ones.

The genre that the playwright was working with apparently affected how often gemstones came to mind. Shakespeare referred to gemstones most frequently in romances: there are a total of fifteen references to specific gemstones in his four romances (*Cymbeline*, *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Pericles*) which averages out to be 3.75 references per play. In twelve comedies he made thirty-seven citations of specific stones for an average of 3.08

per comedy, and in eleven tragedies he referred to gems twenty-two times for an average of 2.0 per tragedy. Yet, there are merely eleven references to specific gemstones in ten histories for an average of 1.1 per play, so gems came to Shakespeare's mind infrequently when writing history plays. It seems that the closer to fantasy Shakespeare was, the more often gems came to his mind; whereas, the closer to reality he was, the less frequently gems entered his thoughts. Then, too, in romance tradition exotic heroes often discover treasure; in history real people rarely do.

A chronological study of Shakespeare's references to precious stones indicates no sudden growth or waning of interest during any one period in his life. Instead, the playwright's references to precious stones is evenly distributed throughout his writing career. From *The Comedy of Errors* to *Henry VIII* there are a few references to stones in most of the plays but not an avalanche of references in any (see the index of gem references by play). Naturally, the plays that make special use of gemstones, e.g. *Cymbeline*, have more references to gems, but these plays are scattered throughout the poet's career.

Shakespeare tells the audience exactly what certain gemstones are worth. Imogen's diamond is the most valuable stone, being worth ten thousand ducats. Iachimo declares: "I will lay you ten thousand ducats to your ring" (I, v, 125). Shakespeare's number is greater than the number in the likely sources for the play. In the *Decameron* (ninth tale of the second day) the wager is one thousand florins against five thousand, and in *Frederyke of Jennen* each man lays down five thousand guilders. Shylock tells the audience that his diamond cost him two thousand ducats in Frankfurt. This figure is also Shakespeare's creation since *Il Pecorone* (first story of the fourth day) does not even mention a gemstone. The diamond in the *Comedy of Errors* is worth forty ducats. The courtesan demands, "Give me the ring of mine you had

at dinner,/ Or, for my diamond, the chain you promised” (IV, iii, 68-69), and she later comments, “A ring he hath of mine worth forty ducats,/ And for the same he promised me a chain” (IV, iii, 83-84). The *Menaechmi* employs a bracelet and a dress in this scene with no mention of price, so the forty ducats Shakespeare deliberately added to his story.

The relative price of these stones is apropos to the context of their plays. Imogen is equated with her diamond and both are unparagoned. While Shylock’s diamond is not equated with a heroine nor unparagoned, it is precious and its loss hurts him. The diamond in *Comedy of Errors* functions simply as a plot device and is just costly enough for the courtesan to be concerned about it.

The statistical study of Shakespeare’s use of gemstones, while a minor study, is objective in a way that interpretive criticism is not and yields a few intriguing patterns. The poet’s special attraction to pearls and then to diamonds is clearly evident as is his even use of gem references from the beginning to the end of his career. The high number of references to stones in the romances contrasted with the low number of references in the histories distinctly shows that genre had an impact on Shakespeare’s use of gems. Even the relative price that the playwright assigns to certain stones suggests something about his creative designs.



Shakespeare coat of arms 1602

INDEX OF INDIVIDUAL GEMSTONES

AGATE

-- *Henry IV, Part One*, II, v, 68-70

Prince: Wilt thou rob this leathern jerkin, crystal-button, not-pated, agate-ring, puke-stocking, caddis-garter, smooth-tongue, Spanish-pouch,--

(The prince refers to a merchant by listing the typical apparel of merchants.)

-- *Henry IV, Part Two*, I, ii, 14-20

Falstaff (to his page): Thou whoreson mandrake, thou art fitter to be worn in my cap than to wait at my heels. I was never manned with an agate till now: but I will insert you neither in gold nor silver, but in vile apparel, and send you back again to your master, for a jewel,--the juvenal, the prince your master, whose chin is not yet fledged.

(Agates were frequently cut to represent the human form. Falstaff is comparing his small page to a human form carved in an agate.)

-- *Much Ado About Nothing*, III, i, 64-65

(Hero is agreeing that Beatrice makes all men out to be bad.)

Hero: if [the man be] tall, a lance ill-headed; If [the man be] low, an agate very vilely cut.

-- *Love's Labour's Lost*, II, i, 236-237

Boyet: His heart, like an agate, with your print impress'd, Proud with his form, in his eye pride express'd.

(This refers to the custom of carving the likeness of one's sweetheart into an agate.)

-- *Romeo and Juliet*, I, iv, 54-58

(Mercutio is commenting about Romeo's dream.)

Mercutio:

O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.

She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
On the fore-finger of an alderman.
(To the typical comparison between small people and the
figure carved in an agate is added the suggestion that
aldermen typically wore agate rings.)

CARBUNCLE

-- *Coriolanus*, I, v, 25-27

Lartius: Thou art lost, Marcius:

A carbuncle entire, as big as thou art,
Were not so rich a jewel.

(The gemstone is used as a comparison of worth.)

-- *Cymbeline*, V, vi, 187-92

(Iachimo is explaining the wager.)

Iachimo: he, true knight [Posthumus],

No lesser of her honour confident
Than I did truly find her, stakes this ring;
And would so, had it been a carbuncle
Of Phoebus' wheel; and might so safely, had it
Been all the worth of's car.

(The actual worth of the diamond was about ten thousand
ducats, the sum that Iachimo bet against it. Shakespeare
repeats the belief that Phoebus' chariot was decorated with
carbuncles.)

-- *Antony and Cleopatra*, IV, ix, 26-29

(Antony and Cleopatra are praising Scarus after a victory.)

Cleopatra: I'll give thee, friend,

An armour all of gold; it was a king's.

Antony: He has deserved it, were it carbuncled

Like holy Phoebus' car.

-- *Comedy of Errors*, III, ii, 136-40

(Dromio is describing Nell as a globe of the world.)

Antipholus: Where America, the Indies?

Dromio: Oh, sir, upon her nose, all o'er embellished with rubies, carbuncles, sapphires, declining their rich aspect to the hot breath of Spain; who sent whole armadoes of caracks to be ballast at her nose.

(In irony, Dromio uses gems as a metaphor for warts and pimples.)

-- *Hamlet*, II, ii, 465-66

Hamlet:

With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus
Old grandsire Priam seeks.

(These lines may be referring to the superstition that carbuncles glow. Compare *Titus Andronicus*, II, iii, 250.)

CHRYSOLITE

-- *Othello*, V, ii, 150-53

Othello: had she been true,
If heaven would make me such another world
Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,
I'd not have sold her for it.

(The gemstone is used as a comparison of worth. Lynda Boose argues that Shakespeare was actually thinking of crystal in this scene.)

CORAL

-- *Tempest*, I, ii, 400-02

(Ariel sings a song to Ferdinand, telling him that his father is dead.)

Ariel: Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes.

-- *The Taming of the Shrew*, I, i, 172-73

(Lucentio tells of meeting Bianca.)

Lucentio: Tranio, I saw her coral lips to move

And with her breath she did perfume the air.

(The comparison of lips to coral was commonplace in Elizabethan poetry. See sonnet 130.)

-- *Venus and Adonis*, 541-43

Till breathless he disjoin'd, and backward drew

The heavenly moisture, that the coral mouth,

Whose precious taste her thirsty lips well knew.

-- *The Rape of Lucrece*, 418-20

With more than admiration he admired

Her azure veins, her alabaster skin,

Her coral lips, her snow-white dimpled chin.

-- *The Rape of Lucrece*, 1233-36

(Lucrece and Collatine are weeping.)

A pretty while these pretty creatures stand,

Like ivory conduits coral cisterns filling:

One justly weeps; the other takes in hand

No cause, but company, of her drops spilling.

-- *The Passionate Pilgrim*, 19.14

With coral clasps and amber studs

(A literal use: apparently some garments had clasps made from coral.)

-- Sonnet 130, 1-3

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;

Coral is far more red than her lips' red:

If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun.

(In this sonnet Shakespeare is undercutting trite comparisons such as the comparison of lips to coral.)

DIAMOND

-- *Merry Wives of Windsor*, III, iii, 50-51

Falstaff: I see how thine eye would emulate the diamond:

thou hast the right arched beauty of the brow
(In this comparison, the beauty of the eye is similar to the diamond.)

-- *Comedy of Errors*, IV, iii, 68-70

(The courtesan has just been rebuffed by Antipholus of Syracuse.)

Courtesan:

Give me the ring of mine you had at dinner,
Or, for my diamond, the chain you promised,
And I'll be gone, sir, and not trouble you.

(The words "ring" and "diamond" refer to the same piece of jewelry: a diamond ring, which is apparently worth about as much as the gold chain.)

-- *Comedy of Errors*, V, i, 394-95

Courtesan: Sir, I must have that diamond from you.

Antipholus of Corinth: There, take it; and much thanks for my good cheer.

(The diamond ring functions as an identifying token to straighten out the plot.)

-- *Merchant of Venice*, III, i, 78-79

Shylock: Why, there, there, there, there! a diamond gone,
cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfort!

-- *Henry VI, Part One*, V, v, 123-26

(Suffolk addresses Reignier with Margaret present.)

Suffolk:

I'll over then to England with this news,
And make this marriage to be solemnized.
So farewell, Reignier: set this diamond safe
In golden palaces, as it becomes.

(Suffolk refers to Margaret as a diamond that should have a gold setting. This is a metaphor of worth and beauty.)

-- *Macbeth*, II, i, 14-15

(Banquo delivers the king's gift of a diamond to Macbeth for Lady Macbeth.)

Banquo: This diamond he greets your wife withal,

By name of most kind hostess
-- *Cymbeline*, I, i, 112-15

Imogen: Look here, love;
This diamond was my mother's: take it, heart;
But keep it till you woo another wife,
When Imogen is dead.

(Imogen's words indicate that the diamond ring is being used as a wedding ring. That it is an heirloom makes the diamond even more valuable.)

-- *Cymbeline*, I, iv, 70-75

(Two references to the word "diamond".)

Iachimo: If she [Imogen] went before others I have seen, as that diamond of yours outlustres many I have beheld, I could not but believe she excelled many: but I have not seen the most precious diamond that is, nor you the lady.

Posthumus: I praised her as I rated her: so do I my stone.

(The comparison of the diamond with Imogen means that the heroine shares the stone's characteristics of beauty, worth, and invincibility.)

-- *Cymbeline*, I, iv, 140-41 (wager scene)

Posthumus: I shall but lend my diamond till your [Iachimo's] return: let there be covenants drawn between's.

-- *Cymbeline*, I, iv, 148-49

Iachimo: [If I lose the wager] my ten thousand ducats are yours; so is your diamond too.

-- *Cymbeline*, II, iv, 97-98

(Iachimo claims to have won the wager.)

Iachimo:

it [Posthumus' bracelet] must be married
To that your diamond; I'll keep them.

-- *Cymbeline*, V, vi, 138-39

Cymbeline: That diamond upon your finger, say
How it came yours?

(Iachimo's answer clears up much confusion, thus the diamond works as a plot device.)

-- *Pericles*, II, iii, 36

(King Simonides says that the disguised Pericles is like any other knight; Simonides' daughter, Thaisa, secretly disagrees.)

Thaisa: [aside] To me he seems like diamond to glass.

(The diamond is a metaphor of worth.)

-- *A Lover's Complaint*, 211-12

(This passage is a mini-lapidary. The persona is telling of the gems that she received as gifts.)

The diamond, why 'twas beautiful and hard,

Whereto his invised properties did tend;

(Hardness is perhaps the best known property of diamonds.)

-- *King Lear*, IV, iii, 17-24

Gentleman: You have seen

Sunshine and rain at once: her smiles and tears

Were like a better way: those happy smilets

That play'd on her ripe lip seem'd not to know

What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence

As pearls from diamonds dropp'd. In brief,

Sorrow would be a rarity most beloved,

If all could so become it.

(In this double reference to gems, tears falling from Cordelia's eyes are compared to pearls dropping from diamonds.)

-- *Love's Labour's Lost*, V, ii, 1-4

(The princess addresses her female companions.)

Princess:

Sweet hearts, we shall be rich ere we depart,

If fairings come thus plentifully in:

A lady wall'd about with diamonds!

Look you what I have from the loving king.

-- *King Henry VI, Part Two*, III, ii, 103-09

Queen: I stood upon the hatches in the storm,

And when the dusky sky began to rob

My earnest-gaping sight of thy land's view,

I took a costly jewel from my neck--
A heart it was, bound in with diamonds--
And threw it towards thy land: the sea received it,
And so I wish'd thy body might my heart
(The gem is used as a sacrificial offering by the queen during
her near-drowning off the coast of England.)

-- *Henry VI, Part Three*, III, i, 61-63

(Two keepers are about to apprehend the deposed king in a
forest.)

Second Keeper:

But, if thou be a king, where is thy crown?

King Henry:

My crown is in my heart, not on my head;

Not deck'd with diamonds and Indian stones

(This passage indicates that diamonds and Indian stones
[probably pearls] were worn in the crown of England.)

-- *Timon of Athens*, III, vii, 116-18

Second Lord: Lord Timon's mad.

Third Lord: I feel 't upon my bones.

Fourth Lord: One day he gives us diamonds, next day
stones.

(As in *Macbeth*, diamonds are seen as an appropriate gift
from a king.)

-- *Pericles*, II, iv, 52-53

(Helicanus tells the lords that if matters do not run smoothly,
they can find another person to be king.)

Helicanus: Whom if you find and win unto return,

You shall like diamonds sit upon his crown

(Again, diamonds are associated with crowns. Also,
diamonds act as a metaphor of worth in this passage.)

-- *Pericles*, III, ii, 97-100

Cerimon: She is alive; behold,

Her eyelids, cases to those heavenly jewels

Which Pericles hath lost, begin to part

Their fringes of bright gold: the diamonds

Of a most praised water do appear
To make the world twice rich.

(This is a metaphor of beauty, comparing Thaisa's eyes to diamonds.)

EMERALD

-- *Merry Wives of Windsor*, V, v, 68-72

(Mistress Quickly, disguised as a fairy, is putting a good charm on Windsor Castle.)

Mistress Quickly:

And Honi soit qui mal y pense write
In emerald tufts, flowers purple, blue, and white;
Like sapphire, pearl, rich embroidery,
Buckled below fair knighthood's bending knee:
Fairies use flowers for their charactery.

("Emerald" in this context refers to the color of the stone that Pliny calls the greenest green.)

-- *A Lover's Complaint*, 213-214

The deep-green emerald, in whose fresh regard
Weak sights their sickly radiance do amend;

(These lines refer to Pliny who reports that looking at an emerald soothes sore eyes.)

JET

-- *Merchant of Venice*, III, i, 35-36

Salarino: There is more difference between thy flesh and hers
than between jet and ivory

(The intense black color of jet is used as an image of contrast.)

-- *Henry VI, Part Two*, II, i, 114-17 (Three references)

Gloucester: What color is my gown of?

Spitcox: Black, forsooth: coal-black as jet.

King: Why, then, thou know'st what color jet is of?

Suffolk: And, yet, I think, jet did he never see.

(In this literal passage, jet simply is associated with the color black.)

-- *Titus Andronicus*, V, ii, 48-51

Titus: And then I'll come and let thy waggoner,

And whirl along with thee about the globes.

Provide thee two proper palfreys, black as jet,

To hale thy revengeful waggon swift away

(The black color of jet is seen as appropriate to the act of revenge.)

-- *A Lover's Complaint*, 36-38

A thousand favours from a mound she drew

Of amber, crystal, and of beaded jet,

Which one by one she in a river threw

(This is another example of gems being thrown into water, but here the motive is anger: the wronged woman is throwing away gifts.)

OPAL

-- *Twelfth Night*, II, iv, 72-74

Clown: Now, the melancholy god protect thee; and the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal.

(The clown is saying that the Duke's mind is vacillating. The opal is used to represent inconstancy perhaps because some opals are of many colors.)

-- *A Lover's Complaint*, 215-16

The heaven-hued sapphire and the opal blend

With objects manifold

(This means that the colors of these stones allow them to blend easily with the colors of other objects.)

PEARLS [OR “UNION”]

-- *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, II, iv, 166-69

Valentine: Why, man, she is my own;

And I as rich in having such a jewel

As twenty seas, if all their sand were pearl,

And the water nectar, and the rocks pure gold.

(Jewel and pearl imagery contribute to this statement of Silvia's worth and beauty.)

-- *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, III, i, 223

Proteus: A sea of melting pearls, which some call tears

(Pearls for tears is one of Shakespeare's favorite uses of gem imagery.)

-- *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, V, ii, 8-14 (two references)

Thurio: What says she to my face?

Proteus: She says it is a fair one.

Thurio: Nay then, the wanton lies; my face is black.

Proteus: But pearls are fair; and the old saying is,

Black men are pearls in beauteous ladies' eyes.

Julia:[aside]'Tis true, such pearls as put out ladies' eyes;

For I had rather wink than look at them.

(No such saying is listed in either *The Proverbial Wisdom of Shakespeare* by F. P. Wilson or *Shakespeare's Proverb Lore* by Charles G. Smith.)

-- *Merry Wives of Windsor*, V, v, 68-70

Mistress Quickly:

And Honi soit qui mal y pense write

In emerald tufts, flowers purple, blue, and white;

Like sapphire, pearl, and rich embroidery

-- *Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, ii, 86-88

Holofernes:

Piercing a hog'shead! a good lustre of conceit in a turf of earth; fire enough for a flint, pearl enough for a swine: 'tis pretty; it is well.

-- *Love's Labour's Lost*, V, ii, 53-54

Maria: This and these pearls to me sent Longaville:
The letter is too long by half a mile.

Princess: I think no less. Dost thou not wish in heart The
chain were longer and the letter short?

(The princess' statement indicates that women in the
Renaissance wore pearls on a string even as women do in
modern times.)

-- *Love's Labour's Lost*, V, ii, 459

(Biron mistakenly woos the disguised princess and gives her
a pearl. The princess teases Biron.)

Princess: What, will you have me, or your pearl again?

(The pearl is used as an identifying token.)

-- *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, II, i, 14-15

Fairy: I must go seek some dew drops here,

And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.

(The pearl is a metaphor for a drop of dew.)

-- *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, I, i, 209-11

Lysander:

Tomorrow night, when Phoebe doth behold

Her silver visage in the watery glass,

Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass

(The same metaphor as above.)

-- *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, IV, i, 52-55

Oberon:

And that same dew, which sometime on the buds

Was wont to swell, like round and orient pearls,

Stood now within the pretty floweret's eyes,

Like tears

(This passage shows that in Shakespeare's mind pearls are
associated with dew drops and tears.)

-- *As You Like It*, V, iv, 60-61

Touchstone: rich honesty dwells like a miser, sir, in a poor
house; as your pearl in your foul oyster.

(In explaining why he will marry the unattractive Audrey,
Touchstone says that honesty [chastity] is found in an

unattractive woman just as a miser lives in a poor house or a pearl is found in a foul oyster. This metaphor is unusual because the pearl represents worth but not beauty.)

-- *Taming of the Shrew*, Induction, scene ii, 41

(The lord tells Sly that if Sly wants to ride, he will have fine horses.)

Lord: Their harnesses studded all with gold and pearl.

-- *Taming of the Shrew*, II, i, 349

Gremio: Fine linen, Turkey cushions boss'd with pearl

-- *Taming of the Shrew*, V, i, 68

Tranio: sir, what 'cerns it you if I wear pearl and gold?

(Shakespeare mentions pearl and gold together a few times to represent very fine dress.)

-- *Twelfth Night*, IV, iii, 1-2

Sebastian:

This is the air; that is the glorious sun;

This the pearl she gave me, I do feel 't and see 't

(The pearl is an appropriate gift for an upper class woman to give in Shakespeare's plays.)

-- *Henry V*, IV, i, 259

King: The intertissued robe of gold and pearl

(Presumably, Shakespeare, who performed at court, knew what the royal cloak was made of.)

-- *Richard III*, I, iv, 26-28

(Clarence tells of his nightmare of drowning.)

Clarence:

Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,

Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,

All scattered in the bottom of the sea

-- *Richard III*, IV, iv, 321-22

Richard:

The liquid drops of tears that you have shed

Shall come again, transform'd to orient pearl

(Thiselton-Dyer believes that these lines refer to the oriental belief that pearl oysters rise to the surface and open their

shells to catch drops of rain which then become pearls [368].)

-- *Troilus and Cressida*, I, i, 100-04

Troilus:

Her bed is India; there she lies, a pearl:
Between our Ilium and where she resides,
Let it be call'd the wild and wandering flood,
Oneself the merchant, and this sailing Pandar
Our doubtful hope, our convoy and our bark.

(In many of his references, Shakespeare thinks of pearls as coming from the East, particularly India. Here the elaborate conceit is based on importing pearls from India.)

-- *Troilus and Cressida*, II, ii, 80-82

Troilus:

Is she worth keeping? why, she is a pearl,
Whose price hath launched above a thousand ships,
And turn'd crown'd kings to merchants.

(This is another metaphor of worth and beauty, only now Helen is the pearl.)

-- *Titus Andronicus*, II, i, 18-20

Aaron:

Away with slavish weeds and servile thoughts!
I will be bright, and shine in pearl and gold,
To wait upon this new-made empress.

(Another reference to a man wearing pearl and gold while courting.)

-- *Titus Andronicus*, V, i, 40-43

(A soldier leads in Aaron and his child.)

Lucius:

O worthy Goth, this is the incarnate devil
That robb'd Andronicus of his good hand;
This is the pearl that pleased your empress' eye;
And here's the base fruit of his burning lust.

(This metaphor of beauty is unusual because it refers to a man. Perhaps Shakespeare is thinking of the old saying in

Two Gentlemen of Verona, V, ii, 12.)

-- *Macbeth*, V, xi, 22

Macduff: I see thee compass'd with thy kingdom's pearl
(In this complex metaphor, the kingdom is an oyster, the noblemen form a pearl, and Malcolm is the grain of sand in the center.)

-- *Hamlet*, V, ii, 218-21

King:

The king shall drink to Hamlet's better breath;
And in the cup an union shall he throw,
Richer than that which four successive kings
In Denmark's crown have worn.

(A "union" is a large, well formed pearl.)

-- *Hamlet*, V, ii, 234-35

King:

give me my drink. Hamlet, this pearl is thine;
Here's to thy health.

-- *Hamlet*, V, ii, 277-78

Hamlet:

Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,
Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?

-- *Othello*, V, ii, 355-57

Othello: of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe

(This metaphor of worth expresses Desdemona's great value.)

-- *Antony and Cleopatra*, I, v, 39-40

Alexas:

He kiss'd--the last of many doubled kisses--
This orient pearl.

(Antony sends a pearl as a gift to Cleopatra.)

-- *Antony and Cleopatra*, II, v, 45-46

Cleopatra:

I'll set thee in a shower of gold, and hail

Rich pearls upon thee

(Thiselton-Dyer says that this passage alludes to the eastern custom of powdering monarchs with gold dust and seed pearl at their coronation [367].)

-- *The Rape of Lucrece*, 393-396

Without the bed her other fair hand was,
On the green coverlet; whose perfect white
Show'd like an April daisy on the grass,
With pearly sweat, resembling dew of night.

(This image is a variation of Shakespeare's usual imagery: here the drop of water that is compared to a pearl is a drop of sweat.)

-- *The Rape of Lucrece*, 1212-13

This plot of death when sadly she had laid,
And wiped the brinish pearl from her bright eyes
(Tears described as pearls.)

-- *The Rape of Lucrece*, 1552-1554

(The speaker tells Priam, who is crying in sympathy, that Simon's tears are false and treacherous.)

His eye drops fire, no water thence proceeds;
These round clear pearls of his that move thy pity
Are balls of quenchless fire to burn thy city.

-- *Passionate Pilgrim*, X, 2-3

Pluck'd in the bud and vaded in the spring!
Bright orient pearl, alack, too timely shaded!

-- Sonnet 34, 13

Ah, but those tears are pearl which thy love sheds

-- *King Lear*, IV, ii, 22

Gentleman: As pearls from diamonds dropp'd.

(This line, telling of tears falling from Cordelia's eyes, was cited under diamonds above.)

-- *Tempest*, I, ii, 402

Ariel: Those are pearls that were his eyes

(This is Shakespeare's second reference to gems being housed in the eye sockets of drowned men; see *Richard III*, I, iv, 29.)

-- *Much Ado About Nothing*, III, iv, 19
(Margaret is describing a woman's gown.)

Margaret:

set with pearls, down sleeves, side sleeves

-- *King John*, II, i, 168-72

(Constance is talking about a boy's tears.)

Constance:

His grandam's wrongs, and not his mother's shames,
Draws those heaven-moving pearls from his poor eyes,
Which heaven shall take in nature of a fee;
Ay, with these crystal beads heaven shall be bribed
To do him justice and revenge on you.

-- *Henry IV, Part Two*, II, iv, 47-48

(Falstaff and Doll are arguing, twisting logic, and punning.)

Falstaff:

'Your brooches, pearls, and ouches:' for
to serve bravely is to come halting off, you know

-- *Venus and Adonis*, 979-981

Whereat her tears began to turn their tide,
Being prison'd in her eye like pearls in glass:
Yet sometimes falls an orient drop beside

-- *A Lover's Complaint*, 197-98 and 201

Look here, what tributes wounded fancies sent me,
Of paled pearls and rubies red as blood . . .

In bloodless white and the encrimson'd mood

(The persona tells of the jewels that her former lover sent her, associating the color of the stone with his mood. The next stanza tells how sonnets enrich the gift of gems, a concept also mentioned in *Love's Labour's Lost*.)

RUBY

-- *Pericles*, V, prelogue, 8

Gower:

Her inkle, silk, twin [match] with the rubied cherry
(Rubies often suggest a certain color in Shakespeare.)

-- *Measure for Measure*, II, iv, 101

Isabella:

The impression of keen whips I'll wear as rubies
(Comparison of rubies to blood.)

-- *The Comedy of Errors*, III, ii, 137-38

Dromio:

Oh, sir, upon her nose, all o'er embellished with rubies,
carbuncles, sapphires

(In addition to offering humor, Dromio's statement reflects the old concept that the New World was a land of rich treasure.)

-- *Midsummer Night's Dream*, II, i, 10-13

Fairy: The cowslips tall her pensioners be:

In their gold coats spots you see;

Those be rubies, fairy favours,

In those freckles live their savours

(The red spots on the flower are compared to rubies worn on a golden coat. The scent of the flower is produced from those red spots.)

-- *Cymbeline*, II, ii, 17

Iachimo:

But kiss; one kiss! Rubies unparagon'd,
(Rubies are a metaphor for red lips.)

-- *A Lover's Complaint*, 197-98

Look here, what tributes wounded fancies sent me,
Of paled pearls and rubies red as blood

(Again, rubies are associated with blood in Shakespeare's mind.)

-- *Twelfth Night*, I, iv, 31-32

Duke: Diana's lip

Is not more smooth and rubious

-- *Julius Caesar*, III, i, 262-63

Antony: Over thy wounds now do I prophesy,

Which like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips
(Here rubies are associated with both blood and lips.)

-- *Macbeth*, III, iv, 113-15

Macbeth:

When now I think that you can behold such sights,
And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,
When mine is blanch'd with fear.

-- *Venus and Adonis*, 451-52

Once more the ruby-colour'd portal open'd,
Which to his speech did honey passage yield

SAPPHIRE

-- *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, V, v, 68-72

Mistress Quickly:

And Honi soit qui mal y pense write
In emerald tufts, flowers purple, blue, and white;
Like sapphire, pearl, and rich embroidery,
Buckled below fair knighthood's bending knee:
Fairies use flowers for their charactery.

(The color of the gems is being compared to the color of the flowers.)

-- *A Lover's Complaint*, 215-16

The heaven-hued sapphire and the opal blend
With objects manifold

(The color of these stones blends well with the color of other objects.)

-- *Comedy of Errors*, III, ii, 137-38

Dromio:

Oh, sir, upon her nose, all o'er embellished with rubies,
carbuncles, sapphires

(Gems are ironically compared with blemishes.)

TURQUOISE

-- *Merchant of Venice*, III, i, 112-13

Shylock:

Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal: it was my turquoise;

I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor

(Shakespeare's spelling is sometimes given as "turkis".)

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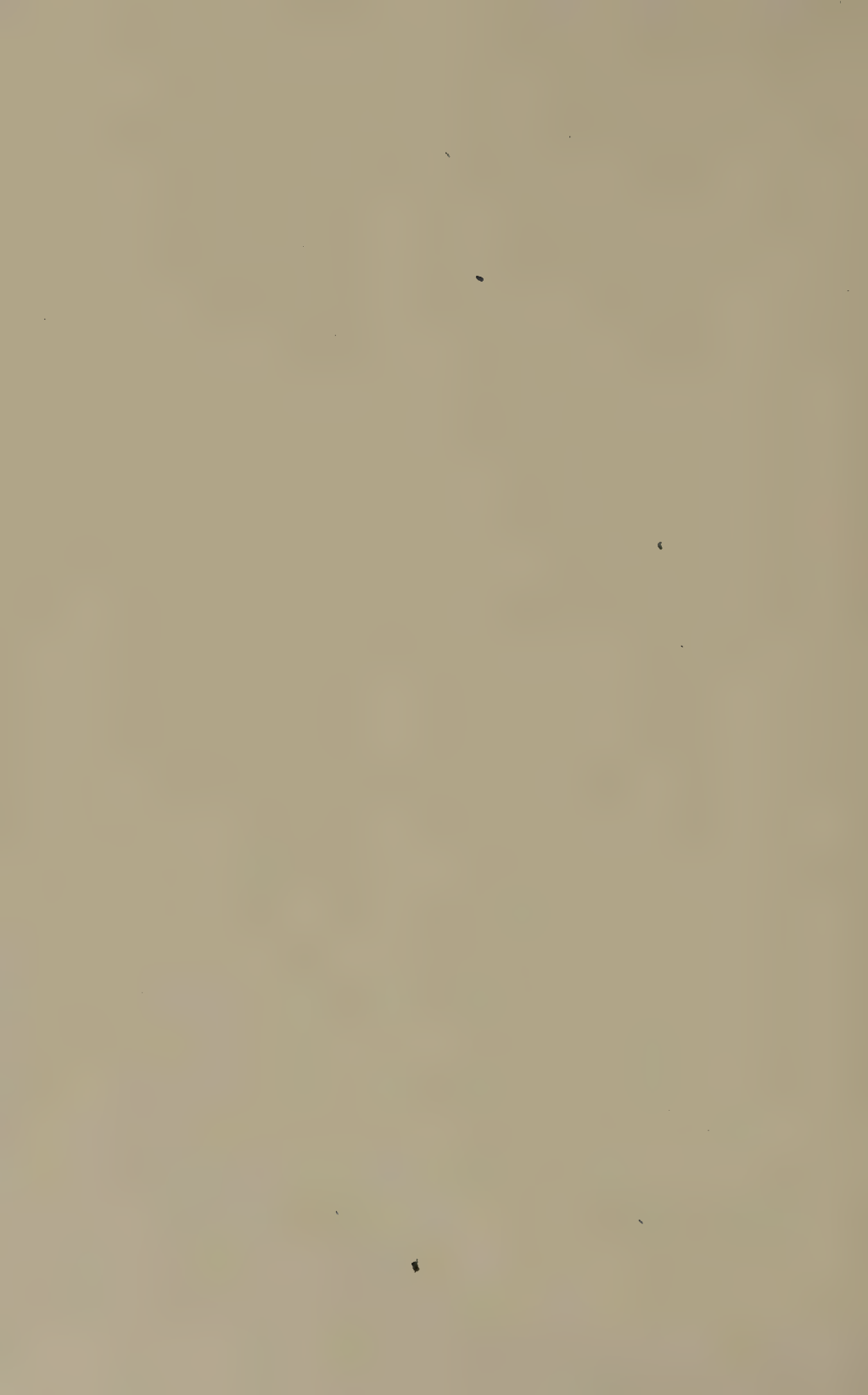
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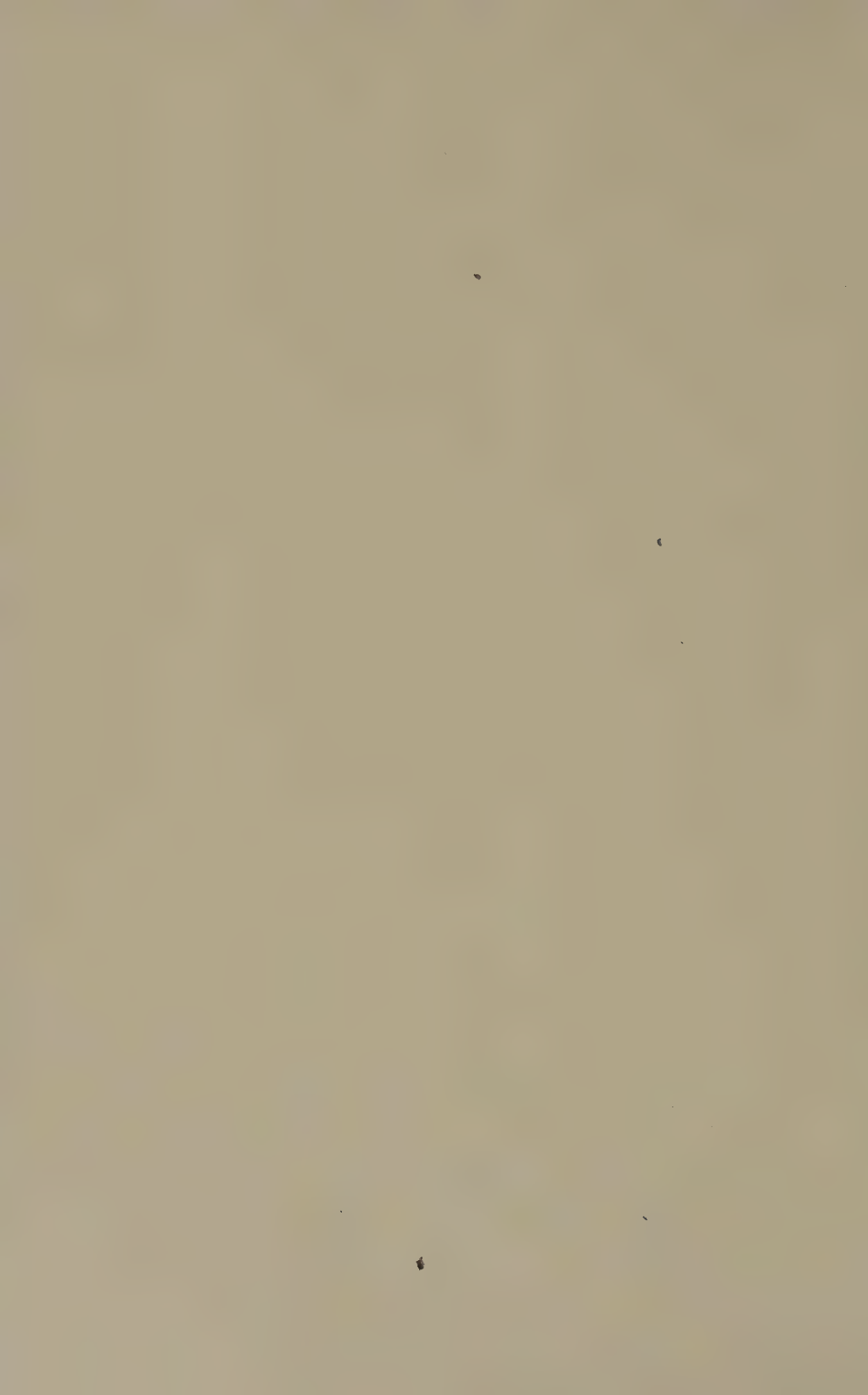
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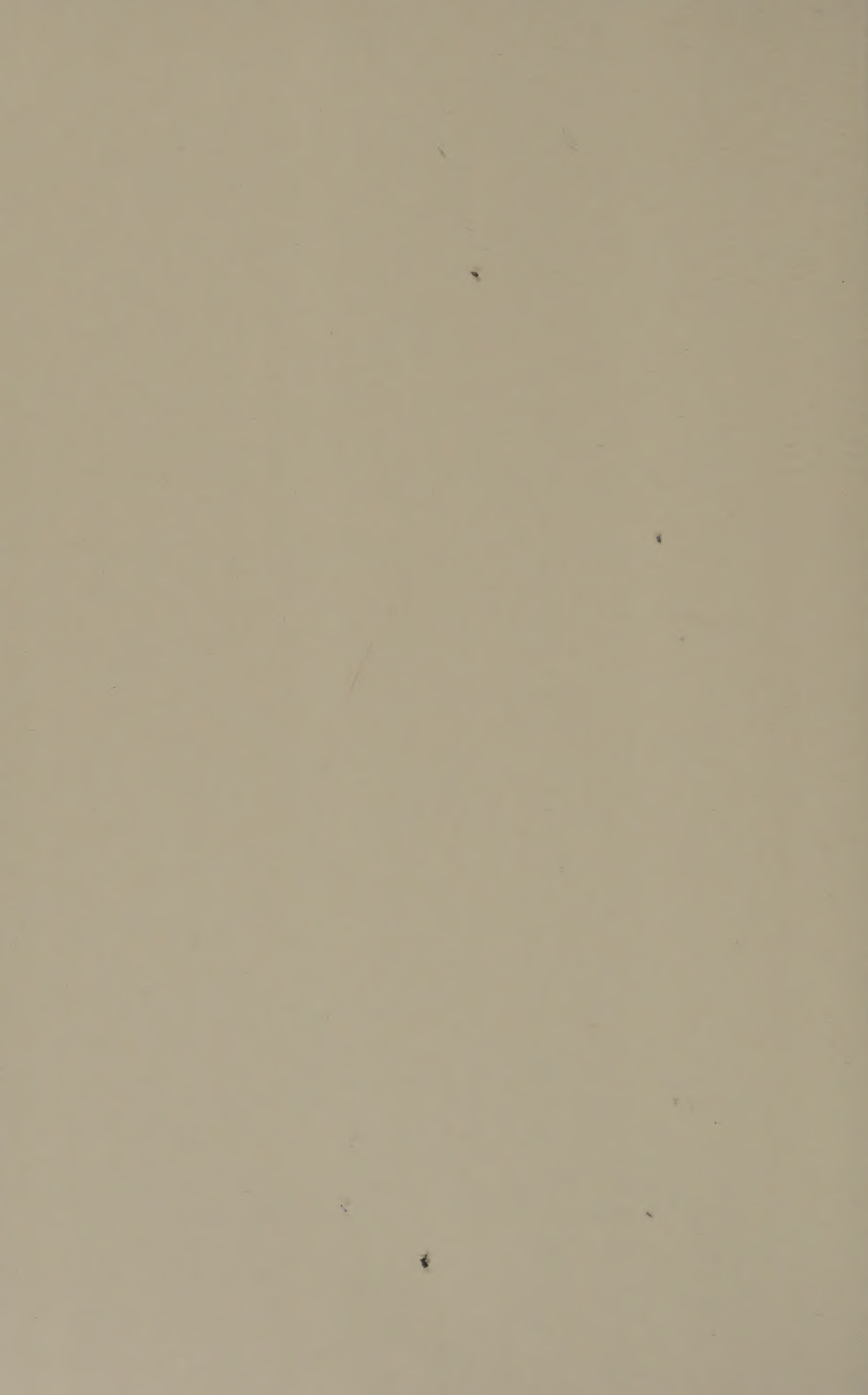
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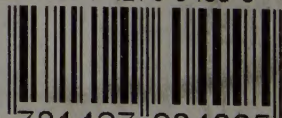






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