

WOMEN EDIT SHAKESPEARE

JEANNE ADDISON ROBERTS

Between the years of 1903 and 1913 two remarkable women, Charlotte Endymion Porter and Helen Armstrong Clarke, published three editions of the complete works of William Shakespeare.¹ Before that they had already edited the complete works of both Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning and founded a literary journal still in existence called *Poet-Lore*.² Throughout their careers they were extraordinarily productive. The Library of Congress catalogue lists sixty-nine titles for Porter and sixty-seven for Clarke.

The publishing careers of these two amazing women began in Philadelphia. In 1875 Charlotte Porter had been one of the graduates of Wells College in Aurora, New York (illustration 4) where she had created scale models of Shakespeare's stage (illustration 5) and planned to write a series of essays on 'Staging Shakespeare's Wit'.³ She had studied briefly at the Sorbonne and then settled in Philadelphia. There, in 1883, with the encouragement of Horace Howard Furness, she became editor of a new periodical called *Shakespeareiana* (begun by the Shakespeare Society of New York). Among the articles she published in the journal was one on Shakespeare's music by Helen A. Clarke, a young scholar with a certificate in music from the still all-male University of Pennsylvania.⁴ Porter and Clarke formed a life-long friendship.

The two women lived unconventional lives. The best source of information about them is a long account of their friendship written by Porter and published in their journal *Poet-Lore* after Clarke's death.⁵ The Wells College archive contains not only the early photographs, but also some

letters and poems; and the Folger copy of the women's First Folio Shakespeare has, pasted into

I am extremely grateful for the help of the Folger Shakespeare Library staff: Dr Georgianna Ziegler, the Reference Librarian, has been constantly helpful in locating materials both from the Folger and from Wells College and the University of Pennsylvania; Betsy Walsh and the circulation staff have been wonderfully helpful and unfailingly patient in dealing with the forty volumes in the Shakespeare Collection. The staff of the American University Media Center performed miracles of reproduction. I am also indebted to Professor Edward Kessler who has located information about Porter and Clarke in Boston. I especially want to thank Professor Patricia Parker for her persistent nagging and Professor Valerie Wayne for her useful suggestion about the history of criticism.

¹ (1) Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke, eds., *The Pembroke Edition* (New York, 1903), 12 vols. (2) *The First Folio Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare* (New York, 1903–1913), 40 vols. (3) *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare Reprinted from the First Folio*, Introduction by Churton Collins (London, 1906), 12 vols. These volumes were greeted with praise by many critics. H. H. Furness included the editors in the notes of his last Variorum, *Cymbeline*, in 1913, and his son lists them in his *Works Collated* in the editions which he edited. Two recent critics, both writing in the series *Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition*, have notably discussed the introductions of these editions: Joseph Candido in his 1996 volume on *King John* and Charles Forker in his 1998 study of *Richard II*. Both found them important contributions. Indeed Candido considers Charlotte Porter's 'neglected essay one of the most important in the interpretative history of *King John*' (p. 16).

² The journal is currently published by the Writing Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

³ I am grateful to Helen T. Bergamo of the library at Wells College, who sent me pictures of Porter and her design for a model of the Globe stage.

⁴ Clarke's article, 'A List of Shakespeare Operas, Operatized Dramas and Overtures', *Shakespeareiana*, 5 (1888), 457–62,

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4 Charlotte Porter as an undergraduate

A Midsummer Night's Dream (vol. 8), three fascinating photographs of the two women (illustration 6). One shows them in a study with a reproduction of Shakespeare's epitaph among the pictures on the wall. A second one shows the two women standing with a First Folio and one of the volumes of their own First Folio edition in their hands. The third shows the two women standing behind an iron rail fence with hands extended through the fence holding the two volumes, now open, on the other side. No explanation is provided.

Both women had early developed an interest in Shakespeare but, by 1888, Porter had begun to find the limits of *Shakespeareana* confining, and she proposed broadening its focus to include other writers. When the proposal was rejected, she resigned as editor, and in 1889 she and Clarke announced the formation of the new monthly journal called *Poet-Lore*. They moved with the magazine to Boston in 1891. They had not lost their interest in Shakespeare, but they had broadened it to include the Brownings and the comparative study of literature. Porter's account reflects vividly their excitement in starting this new adventure:

Did ever two women before dare embark so independently on publication of a periodical so unprecedented? When so young in experience, moreover so recently through some special courses, Miss Clarke at the University of Pennsylvania and I after graduation at Wells College, briefly in Paris at the Sorbonne, before we met in Philadelphia . . . To venture upon an unoccupied field requiring arduous ploughing up, we liked . . . We were singular in our belief in Genius and the excelling in the Arts, as the true breadth and incentive of the larger progress in life.⁶

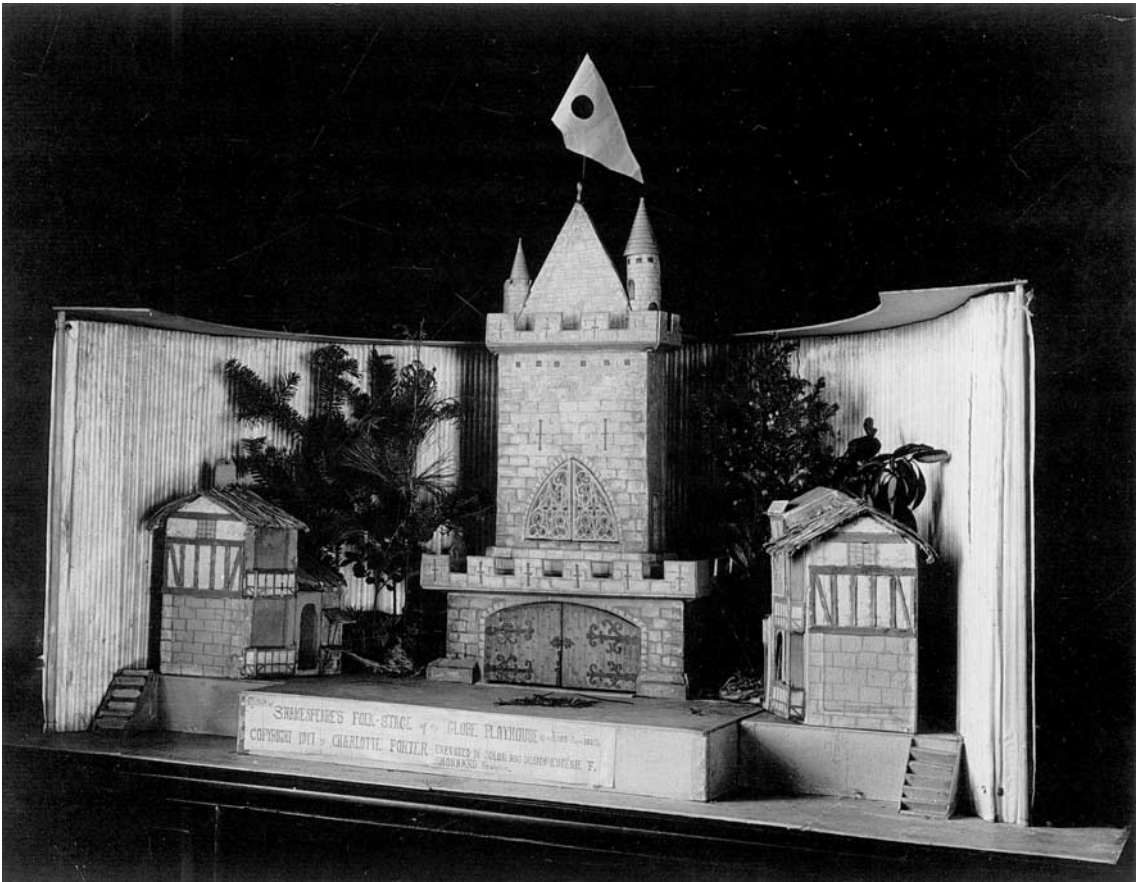
Their belief in the importance and evolutionary nature of art and criticism is evident in all their work. Porter says,

Our standards were evolutionary and relative in principle in a day when the static and the has-been rather than

540–5, is cited by Richard Knowles twelve times in his New Variorum edition of *As You Like It* (New York, 1977).

⁵ 'A Story of *Poet-Lore*', a first-hand account by Charlotte Porter of her long friendship with Helen Clarke, was published in *Poet-Lore*, 37 (1926), 432–53, after Clarke's death.

⁶ 'A Story of *Poet-Lore*', 438. Perhaps because of her relative freedom from academic influences, Porter writes in a distinctive and original style.



5 Porter's design of an Elizabethan Theatre.

the dynamic and coming-into birth constituted the measure in criticism. As it looks to me it is better now, and worse. It is possible now to be as intolerant to excellence through much adherence to 'up-to-dateness' as a fixed measure as then it was to fail to discern fresh merit or even aliveness in a new direction. We were champions then for what is still needed, it may be – the standards that relate all aesthetic expression to evolving life. This we were convinced is the only criterion capable of looking before and after. Because it is aware of flux it alone can be trusted to anticipate and also encompass the genuinely progressive.⁷

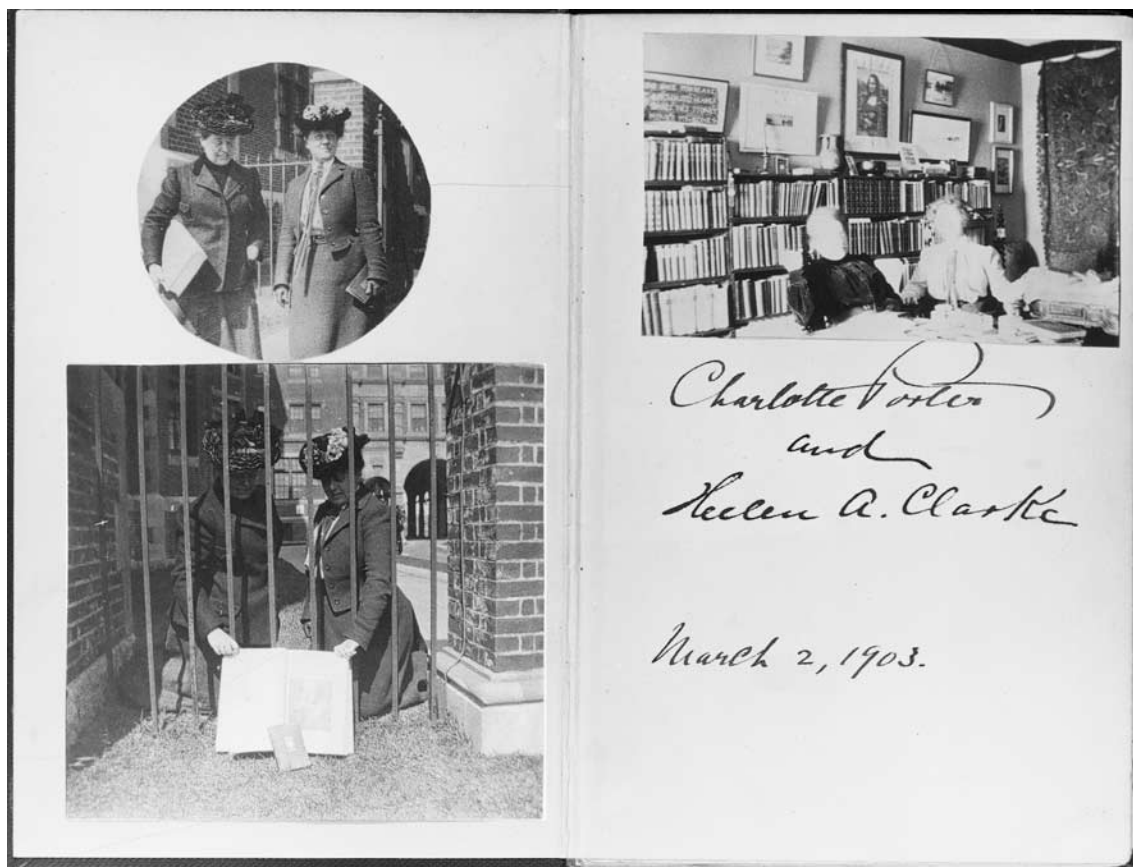
Porter and Clarke's interest in how individuals and societies change and how art may influence those changes is pervasive throughout their work. It was perhaps their belief in genius that led them to focus

again on Shakespeare and, in 1903, to begin their publications of his works. They see his genius as raising him above time-bound contemporaries and critics and producing works which literally evolve like pictures seen under changing lights as individuals and societies change. It is not certain when their Shakespeare editing projects were started, but in 1901 they reproduced from *Poet-Lore* a whole volume of Study Programmes devoted to *Macbeth*.⁸

⁷ 'A Story of *Poet-Lore*', 439.

⁸ Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke, *Shakespeare Study Programs: The Tragedies* (Boston, 1914), p. 101. A second volume, *The Comedies*, appeared in the same year. Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke, *Shakespeare Study Program*:

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6 Photographs pasted into the front of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Porter and Clarke's First Folio edition.

They later collected two more volumes devoted respectively to comedies and tragedies. The most striking feature of these programmes is their use of questions rather than answers, a policy consistent with the authors' conviction that critical principles should not be engraved in stone. However, the questions often imply only one answer. For example they ask about Shakespeare whether it is true that his 'mind was not confined to the level of most of his contemporaries' or audiences then or now. And they conclude with a query about the possibility that critics who object to Shakespeare's extravagances in diction or design may simply 'make it clear to the modern eye that their critical powers were for a day, the subject of them

for all time.'⁹ The expected answer is hardly in doubt.

The editions of Shakespeare's complete works began to follow soon after the first Study Programmes. In 1903 in New York and in 1906 in London the two women published the

Macbeth (New York, 1901) is the only single play programme. The Preface records their debt to their male mentors and an advertisement enclosed in the Folger copy includes enthusiastic blurbs from some of them. Rolfe says the programmes are the best he has ever seen.

⁹ *Programs: Tragedies*, p. 131. Porter and Clarke see Shakespeare, Shelley in 'The Revolt of Islam' and Browning as precursors of Darwin and his evolutionary theory. See also *First Folio* edition, *The Tempest*, vol. 1, pp. viii–ix.

twelve-volume *Pembroke Shakespeare* with several plays to a volume. The first volume of the forty-volume *First Folio* edition of single plays and poems was also published in 1903 and the last in 1913. The volumes did not come out in the order of the First Folio, but the volume numbers follow the Folio order. Porter writes that the first four volumes were jointly edited by both women, but that after that Clarke developed other interests and Porter edited the rest alone.¹⁰ However, many of the later plays still bear the names of both women, and the Study Programmes credit both names.

Although their Shakespeare editions have been largely ignored, they represent a crucial development in the history of Shakespeare criticism. For the first time smart, educated, and free-spirited women were devoting themselves to editing the complete Shakespeare canon. Gary Taylor, in an important essay in 1988, begins with the statement that ‘Women may read Shakespeare, but men edit him.’¹¹ And he points out, I think correctly, that the absence of women editors has hampered critical development in Shakespeare criticism. Taylor obviously did not know about the Porter and Clarke editions. He says, ‘To my knowledge no edition of Shakespeare’s complete works has ever been prepared by a woman’ (p. 196). (And the edition’s obscurity is eloquently testified to by the Folger Library edition, which still includes a large proportion of uncut pages.) But Taylor’s conclusions seem to me accurate. Within the value system which rates textual scholarship as the most important activity of academic humanism, he finds that ‘editing is work, criticism is play; editing is primary, criticism is parasitic.’ The paucity of women ‘in the Shakespearean editorial club tends to perpetuate various myths about editing and about gender’ (p. 197). Thus, he contends that the whole history of Shakespeare scholarship has been warped by the relative absence of female views.

The presence of female views is abundantly evident in the women’s *First Folio* Shakespeare edition. It is intriguing to try to discover what these views are. I should like to begin an exploration of how such views are expressed by two enlightened women at the start of the twentieth century.

The two women acknowledge their debt to H. H. Furness, W. J. Rolfe, Hiram Corson and R. G. Moulton, and the publication of the first volume was well received. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* reprints twelve rave reviews by critics and scholars from major publications. The editors’ desire to edit the works was sharpened by their disapproval of earlier editions with their multiple emendations and modernizations. They expressed in their prefaces the conviction that the closest one could get to Shakespeare was the original First Folio, and argued that ‘there is practically nothing in the First Folio . . . which should cause the present-day reader to stumble’. Chaucer and Spenser are not modernized, they say, and Shakespeare should not be. To add to the problem of later editions they report that all modernized editions trace their ancestry back to the worst of the Folios, the fourth.¹² A few modern scholars have dismissed their texts because ‘They reprint the First Folio, so what’s to edit?’ In fact the editors do edit and supply many textual notes as well as sections on sources, date of composition, early editions and examples of selected criticism and variorum readings. The whole texts are worth study, and some of their defences of restored Folio readings are notable; but the chief interest is probably in their introductions.¹³

Two major questions arise in my reading of the Porter and Clarke editions: (1) what is the evidence of their application of their evolutionary theory?, and (2) to what extent can the criticism can be considered ‘feminist’? Obviously in this limited space my discussion of these two issues will be severely selective, and the two issues inevitably overlap. Both invite further study.

¹⁰ ‘A Story of *Poet-Lore*’, 451.

¹¹ Gary Taylor, ‘Textual and Sexual Criticism: A Crux in *The Comedy of Errors*’, *Renaissance Drama* n.s., 19 (1988), 195–225 (p. 195).

¹² The Editors’ Prefaces at the beginning of many of the volumes spell out their reasons for a new edition.

¹³ The volumes of the *First Folio* edition are numbered in the order of the original First Folio and not in the order of publication. Hereafter all notes citing short forms of titles of plays with volume numbers refer to the women’s *First Folio* edition.

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Perhaps the more difficult of the two questions is the effort to analyze the nature of the editors' 'feminism'. They are certainly interested in female characters and often see them in different light from male critics, but I find no evidence of complaint against Shakespeare as sexist for his portrayal of women as victims or inferiors because of their gender. The editors do declare an interest in freeing themselves from academic 'old fogginess' and 'the learned idiots who inveigh upon fixed standards, "central figures", etc'.¹⁴ and, in fact, their most striking conclusions are refreshing because of their freedom from inherited wisdom.

Although they do hope to interrogate patriarchal values, in my view they treat all characters of the plays, male and female, primarily as people, and in general dwell on women only when they see them differently from earlier critics. For example, they spend more time than one might expect on Adriana and Luciana in *The Comedy of Errors*, portraying them as two important types of woman, 'the new woman', and 'the man's woman'. Adriana, the wife, is described as 'a thoroughly human type, who expects completely to possess her husband, and whose jealous affection for him conjures up the vision of a rival when he does not happen to come home on the moment'. And when the Abbess suggests that her jealous behaviour may not be the best way to improve a man, reminding her that a man is master of his liberty, she makes a retort worthy of a new woman, 'Why should their liberty be more than ours?' On the other hand the editors praise Luciana as 'the type called "the man's woman", who longs to be a sweet and passive recipient of some man's love, willing to obey him and let him have all the liberty he wants'. The editors conclude, 'That Shakespeare in this early stage of his work should have sketched so truly two opposite types of womanhood, making them at once human and loveable is one of the most powerful indications that a great genius had arisen – one who . . . would surely in the end portray, more fully, greater women.'¹⁵

But other women pass more quickly. Helena and Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are declared 'hardly worth considering'.¹⁶ The edi-

tors say almost nothing about the wives in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Although they admire the play, they say very little about Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and there is little analysis of women in *Measure for Measure*, *King Lear* or *Hamlet*. Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew* is singled out briefly but curiously because 'her proud and sensitive shrewishness arouse interest'. When tamed she develops 'wariness and judgment, self-control and poise, and finally, finesse and stratagem . . . in order to gain by policy . . . a surreptitious purpose'. 'The tamer and the tamed . . . exhibit a congenial interplay . . . while they win . . . over all the competitors in the final scene'.¹⁷ This is not so much 'feminism' in the modern sense as an analysis of how a smart woman may succeed in a patriarchal society.

A few women are blamed for their destructive behavior. Ophelia represents an 'undertow dragging fatally at [Hamlet's] heart and vital force'.¹⁸ Other women are overlooked or accepted with their limitations. Volunnia does not even get mentioned by name in the discussion of *Coriolanus*. Cressida in *Troilus and Cressida* is 'too passive, too weak and wavering' but is nonetheless praised for her 'charming ingenuousness', her 'exquisite naivete' and the 'beautiful timidity and innocent artifice which grace and consummate the feminine character'.¹⁹

A few strong women are praised specifically for traditional 'feminine' qualities. Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* receives high praise as an 'exemplar of all that is beautiful in womanhood'. 'She is exalted and alluring and equipped to lead the best specimens of present day womanhood'. Jessica is beautiful and fascinating with an 'intuitional perception of higher laws of justice'.²⁰ Helena in *All's*

¹⁴ *King John*, vol. 15, p. viii. See also the *Comprehensive Index of Poet-Lore*, 1–58, compiled by Alice Very with an introduction by Melvin H. Bernstein, which records that the goal of the founders was to 'undercut academic "Old Fogginess"' (p. 16).

¹⁵ *Err*, vol. 5, pp. xxxii–xxxiii.

¹⁶ *Programs: Comedies*, p. 74.

¹⁷ *Shr*, vol. 11, pp. xii. 18.

¹⁸ *Ham*, vol. 31, p. xxvii.

¹⁹ *Tro*, vol. 24, pp. xv, 20.

²⁰ *MV*, vol. 9.

Well That Ends Well is an especially interesting case. The editors see her as a young woman who knows what she wants and is true to herself, but as such she excites the ‘repulsion felt for such a nature’. Bertram, the crude young male, sees her as the average man sees men of genius or culture in a realm beyond his range. To such a rough youth the powerful is ‘manly’ and the weak is ‘girlish’. ‘Masculine sex pride . . . contemns the feminine to exalt the soldierly’, but the talented Helena finally becomes ‘our surety for the latent capacity of Bertram’.²¹

In general Porter and Clarke see the men of the plays in more need of evolution than the women. The editors show an unusual sympathy for the widely neglected Posthumus of *Cymbeline*, seeing him as mistaken but not evil, and in the end susceptible to change. They ask ‘Is only the brain of genius acquainted with error and equal to the task of the offending it?’²² Falstaff in *1 Henry IV* and Parolles in *All’s Well* are classed together as exponents of ‘male’ principles which need to be superseded,²³ and Ford of *The Merry Wives*, Othello, and Leontes of *The Winter’s Tale* represent progressive stages of the ‘male’ problem of jealousy.²⁴ In the comedies such as *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, probably the editors’ favourites and, they suggest, the favourites of their author, Berowne and Benedick, the scholar and the soldier, are brothers under the skin. In the ‘twin plays’ they credit the poet with the sceptical point of view of the artist toward ‘certain intellectual assumptions’, a view which facilitates change – in this case it modifies the ‘exclusiveness of the ultra masculine view of life and love’ by the introduction of feminine opposition to masculine ideas. In these two plays, they suggest, the poet reveals ‘more relish of his work than is necessary to achieve the plot’s predestined end – in order to reveal the supremacy of love as an emotional motive power in life to those who have decried, depreciated, and opposed it’. The plays celebrate the powers, not necessarily rational, which lie behind evolutionary change.²⁵

The focus on the need to change men does perhaps constitute a form of feminism, but it is interestingly joined with the insistence that the interpretation of art is not bound by rules or reason and that

it is shaped by evolutionary forces both personal and social. Feminism and evolutionary theory are merged. I will return to the two most interesting and extensive analyses of women in the introductions to *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Macbeth* but, since these involve both critical subjects, I will first say a bit more about the editors’ critical principles.

Perhaps the only constant theme in Porter and Clarke’s criticism is that every work of art should be interpreted by its own standards. They insist that

in fixed methods in art no virtue exists but in the harmonious correlation of changing material, organic design, under the molten handling of genius, all virtue.

Criticism, they insist, has no independent grounds of exercise. It is therefore ‘still suggestive of new patterns to the present age’. They consistently oppose didacticism in art, seeing Shakespeare as superior, for example, to Ben Jonson’s evident desire to teach. Shakespeare’s strength, they say, is that ‘he contented himself without condemning or taking sides with any one way of art’ and ‘thus is able to humanize, refine, and idealize history, comedy, and tragedy’. And his work did not suffer in its moral significance from his refusal to adopt Jonson’s conscious aim at teaching. Shakespeare wrote, they say,

Not limiting his mimic world to the objectively known side of life commending itself to the rational mind, always transcending realistic action by making it suggestive, the inner light of idealism graced it with gifts bearing better fruit in men than a conscious didacticism could urge or conceive.²⁶

Porter and Clark’s rejection of the idea of Shakespeare as moralist, and their conception of his freedom from rigid adherence to the restrictions of the prevailing social, political, intellectual, and literary

²¹ *AWW*, vol. 12, p. xv.

²² *Cym*, vol. 35, pp. xiv, vii.

²³ *AWW*, vol. 12, p. xv.

²⁴ *Wiv*, vol. 3, p. vii.

²⁵ *Ado*, vol. 6, pp. x–xx.

²⁶ *WT*, vol. 14, xvii–xxvi. This introduction contains one of the editors’ most sustained discussions of their theories.

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conventions helps them to see in his works evolutionary insights in individual plays but also broader trends throughout the works. They ask, for example, whether the sequence of events in *The Winter's Tale* may indicate a passing from aristocratic to democratic ideals and whether the play may even show signs of the changing status of women by its movement away from self-sacrifice toward self-development.²⁷ In *Coriolanus* they query whether this play also may be ahead of its times in depicting the serious foes that block 'moral growth to genuine democracy.'²⁸ They compare Shakespeare to Ibsen in being the defender of the enemies of the 'compact majority'. In *1 Henry IV* they find a partisanship for the outlaw in the representation of Falstaff, which may reflect memory of the Saxon defeat by the Normans, but still hampers progress.²⁹ They see signs of changing culture in the rise of covert puritanism in *Twelfth Night* and *Measure for Measure*.³⁰ *The Tempest* shows Shakespeare's consciousness of 'a new breath blowing over the sea', and Caliban reveals signs of ability to 'pass through stages of evolution'.³¹

Romantic love does seem to be an ultimate good for Porter and Clarke – either in itself as a human achievement or as guide to fuller humanity. *Troilus and Cressida* and *Love's Labour's Lost* show both its successes and its limitations. *Love's Labour's Lost* shows the victory of natural emotion over the artificial elements of educational schemes. Porter and Clarke ask in their study programme whether love should be seen not as the only thing in life but as the 'typical experience of life that should open up the depths of knowledge not of love alone but of death and suffering in relation to it?' Women in general seem better at love than men, and they are left in charge in *Love's Labour's Lost*.³² However, Porter and Clarke do suggest that the sonnets are Shakespeare's 'most absolute expression of self' and that they 'permit the inference that Shakespeare or else an imagined self loved a fair and gifted youth.'³³ And in *Troilus and Cressida* the editors see Shakespeare's adaptation of the inherited story as revealing 'a tragic effect peculiar to himself'. They argue that the gentler, kindlier, artless Troilus, although defeated in war by the hard,

keen, dominating and cunning Greeks, and in love by the passive weak Cressida's vulnerability to 'the crude masculine ways' of young Diomed, nevertheless represents 'the slow human up-struggling of romantic love'.³⁴

Porter and Clarke's studies of Cleopatra and Lady Macbeth are both feminist in their detailed examination of two leading women and evolutionary in their interpretation of the plays. Both are specifically related to their historical moments and credited with foreshadowing the future. The editors see them as not just strong and distinctive portraits of women but also as focuses of their conviction that drama operates as an evolutionary force. For Cleopatra the force is primarily personal but also points to changing human values which transform Antony, while Lady Macbeth fails to change her society but foreshadows the retreat from superstition in later culture.

Porter's analysis of *Antony and Cleopatra* begins with an evocation of the Queen based on the picture of her face on an ancient coin: a face with a 'thick, strong, aquiline nose, a presence of imperial vigour, rather than feminine softness', the face of a self-assertive woman, a face which does not seem consistent with views of her as 'the sensuously alluring and suavely fascinating woman' usually imagined in the play. Porter argues that the view of critics that Cleopatra is 'the betrayer of Antony's higher self through his corporeal weakness' cannot be reconciled with the 'indubitable Cleopatra of the historic coin'. Although the face on the coin does not quarrel with the idea of culture, cleverness, or 'the artistic quality of her luxuriousness', it does not allow for 'mere feminine seductiveness'.³⁵ On the contrary, she argues, it is Cleopatra who

²⁷ *Programs: Comedies*, pp. 138, 132.

²⁸ *Programs: Tragedies*, p. 29; *Cor*, vol. 25, p. vii.

²⁹ *1H4*, vol. 17, p. viii.

³⁰ *TN*, vol. 13, pp. xvii–xviii.

³¹ *Tmp*, vol. 1, pp. xxvii, xiv.

³² *Programs: Comedies*, p. 53.

³³ *Son*, vol. 39, pp. viii–xiii.

³⁴ *Tro*, vol. 24, pp. viii–xv.

³⁵ *Ant*, vol. 34, p. vii.

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inspires Antony and helps him to realize his higher self.

Porter's view of Antony in the beginning is that he is quintessentially a Roman male. Although aware of Cleopatra's charms, he is in no sense enmeshed in them:

Queen as this rare woman is, he regards her as an alien as men have long been able to regard women outside the protection of their own class or outside the pale of laws and customs accepted merely because they were born into them.

Porter goes on to elaborate the gradual development of Antony's change:

Shakespeare's Antony was crude when he first met Cleopatra. He regards her as a Roman would; leaves her without dreaming that he has yielded her any encumbering allegiance; meets the test proposed for him by Caesar and Agrippa in the way a Roman would applaud; and only develops a nobility of soul passing the limitations of temporal situation, race, or fortune because of the subtler power latent within his relation to Cleopatra. This transforms his disposition into that of a lovership so devoted that no Roman could approve it and but few Englishmen besides Shakespeare appreciate it without reservations.

In the beginning the Roman Antony is obsessed with ambitions of domination and conquest of the east, but this ambition gradually yields to the influence of Cleopatra. His transformation takes place gradually. As he leaves Cleopatra in Act I, after the start of their love, Porter believes that she means to tell him she is pregnant, but breaks off because she sees he is not ready for such news. 'That she would have told him that she was with child comes out clearly . . . to the audience, but not to Antony when she says it is "sweating Labour to beare such Idleness so neere the heart."' But she realizes that he is deaf to such a message and she 'is too mature a woman not to accept the fact'.

It is evident then that Shakespeare's Cleopatra 'did not purse up Antony's heart when first they met'. Modern critics' belief that she has done this is 'due to the modern borrowing of the Roman standpoint'. Antony's turning point comes when he follows Cleopatra away from the sea battle, a

moment which signals not defeat, but victory. He chooses love over war, and Porter sees that

In the end, it appears that Anthony is spiritually indebted to Cleopatra and she to him. Their loss was merely a material mess of pottage . . . In the deepest sense of values to the individuality he is saved and not ruined by the development through her of those higher heroic capacities of the soul that render it superior to loss.

Finally in her conclusion Porter returns to the image on the coin:

The quality in Shakespeare's Cleopatra that despite a tragic clash with the Roman majority educes such nobility of soul, and that meets it with the like heroism, successfully challenges life-likeness with the ripe imperious woman whose effigy on her ancient coins demands a deeper conception of her power.³⁶

Porter does not argue for Shakespeare's intention but rather that his texts present visions large enough to evoke an ambiguous world which persistently invites new ideas and promotes evolutionary thinking.³⁷

Porter and Clarke's introduction to *Macbeth* is feminist in the sense that again it devotes special attention to a female character, Lady Macbeth. It is evolutionary in that it sees her as a voice of the future, countering the superstition and credulity of her age. As others have done, they interpret the whole play as a negotiation between King James's belief in witchcraft as set forth in his 1599 *Demonologie* and the sceptical views of Reginald Scot as adumbrated in his 1594 *Discovery of Witchcraft*. They conclude that Banquo is as piously credulous as James. Macbeth is as wickedly credulous as any doomed soul addicted to black magic. And Lady Macbeth, 'no such baby prey to credulity', is 'as cool-headed as Scot, without a trace of his piety'. Lady Macbeth 'does not bother with the supernatural'. She moves efficiently to effect her husband's vague and feeble desires. The only fear she shows is not of prophecy or murder, 'but the very rational fear, as events prove,

³⁶ *Ant*, pp. xxi–xxiv.

³⁷ See especially *WT*, pp. x–xxii.

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of the “compunctious visitings of Nature” within herself’. They conclude that

Such natural visitings do indeed make up the permanent conscience of the most liberated and enlightened intelligence; and it is one of Shakespeare’s profoundest revelations that the boldest mind in his play and the freest from superstition suffers the quickest and most inwardly by outraging its own finer quality and descending from its right level of spiritual leadership to put itself at the service of violence.³⁸

The editors argue that Shakespeare had a vision broader and more imaginative than most of his contemporaries and that *Macbeth* has been misread because “[i]t naturally takes a long time for the generations to grow up to a sympathetic level with a poet “for all time” on a subject involving a profound conception of human life’.³⁹ Shakespeare uses the views of both Scot and James without prejudice as matters of psychological human fact of the profoundest human interest. Unlike the others in the play, however, Lady Macbeth ‘does not bother with the supernatural’. She focuses instead on ‘reckoning up the difficulties’ of effecting her husband’s desires and marshalling her forces to supplement his often vague and feeble ones. Porter and Clarke find that Lady Macbeth is ‘more entirely Shakespeare’s creation than either Macbeth or Banquo’. The author enhances the value of her executive ability and credits her with a ‘magnetic wifely allegiance’ to her husband’s powerful ambition, ‘an allegiance the more captivating in that it appears not in a weak but a strong feminine nature, rich in resources and resolution’. Finally they ally Lady Macbeth with Shakespeare himself: ‘Shakespeare’s own creative touch upon her is the natural temper of her mind toward supernaturalism. It suggests the breadth of his own attitude as necessary to animate hers.’⁴⁰

The editors recognize that many later critics have seen the play differently. In their study guide they quote Dr. Johnson’s view that ‘Lady Macbeth is merely detested . . . while the courage of Macbeth preserves some esteem.’⁴¹ But it is a view they challenge. They sympathize with her suffering, noting: ‘Her unrecriminating silence through all she took

no part in . . . and her shielding of Macbeth as long as she could.’ And they quote her last words of sanity as showing her ‘agonized conviction of the stupidity of her husband’s stubborn quest to secure peace of mind by violence’:

’Tis safer, to be that which we destroy
Then by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.
(3.2.6–7)

Their conclusion is:

This psychical quality of Lady Macbeth’s hell, together with the unusual rationalism of her mind make her antichristian almost, as judged by the Elizabethan standards Scot and James furnish of the witch-superstition. And the pagan mode of her death, “by selfe and violent hands”, as reported by Malcolm, is the accordant final trait in the awful majesty of Shakespeare’s picture of her.

She is clearly seen as the aspect of the play which points to the future. By contrast they characterize her husband as ‘the slave of fortune . . . the abject creature of bewitchment [and] . . . the laughing stock of witches’. They judge that his bloody head in Macduff’s hands is ‘the just and necessary sentence upon so unconscionable a beast of prey’. But they also concede that the ‘self-innocence of the man at the start’ and the power of his language ‘always sets him in intimate favor with the common understanding’.⁴² Porter and Clarke’s singling out both Cleopatra and Lady Macbeth as the voices of the future seems both feminist and evolutionary.

I have focused especially in this preliminary study of the First Folio Shakespeare on only a selection of commentaries which seemed to me of special interest because of their examples of early feminist criticism, their insistence on the uselessness of

³⁸ *Mac*, vol. 30, pp. xxxii–xxxiv. The whole introduction returns frequently to the relation of James and Scot.

³⁹ *Mac*, p. xxv.

⁴⁰ *Mac*, pp. xxxiii–xxxv.

⁴¹ *Programs: Tragedies*, p. 129.

⁴² *Mac*, xxxv–xxxvii. Dr Johnson’s view is still pervasive. My students regularly blame Lady Macbeth for Macbeth’s tragedy, and a recent newspaper critic refers to Lady Macbeth as ‘a total monster’.

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fixed standards of criticism, their rejection of didactic intention in Shakespeare's work, and their application of principles of revolutionary change in the perception of literary productions. Their discussions of all the plays provide new and provocative interpretations of Shakespeare's works, and challenging insights into the functions of drama in

general. Finally, they offer intriguing views of the remarkable minds and careers of two remarkable women. Their work should be belatedly recognized as a landmark in the history of editing, and the women should be recognized as a welcome addition to the long-standing brotherhood of 'the Shakespearian editorial club'.