grieves him progressively for twelve lines. It is the present, in the form of the
"deare friend", which intervenes to offer comfort.

It would be hard to maintain that Shakespeare intends his reader to be aware
of an irony, in which "remembrance of things past" has an effect opposite to
that it is supposed to have; there is an obvious difference between the historical
past and that of a single individual which makes the commonplace about the
solaces of history inapplicable here. However, when we note both the identical
phrasing and the neat inversion and adaptation of the conventional process, it
does become possible to maintain that Shakespeare very likely wrote the thirtieth
sonnet under the impetus of North's "Amiot to the Readers".

Williams College

OPHELIA: SHAKESPEARE'S PATHETIC PLOT DEVICE

LINDA WELSHIMER WAGNER

In the words of Dr. Johnson, "The mournful distraction of Ophelia fills the
heart with tenderness." Possibly no critic of today would make such an obvious
comment, yet no one can deny that Shakespeare evokes much response for
Ophelia and her misery after the death of her father and the loss of her lover.
Considering this appeal, my concept is that Ophelia grew to assume greater
importance to the audience of Hamlet than she had ever held for Hamlet him-
self, or for Shakespeare.

It would appear that Ophelia has two primary purposes in her ingenuous
role—that of providing a convenient hinge for several of Hamlet's analytical
scenes, and of providing the already-mentioned emotional impact for the audi-
ence. Apparently Shakespeare intended her to be a minor character, using her
sparingly and almost forgetfully throughout the plot. She appears in only five
of the twenty scenes of the play and is mentioned in only two of the others—
then by Polonius and Laertes. By the paucity of her presence alone, Shakespeare
permits us to forget her, in the midst of other absorbing problems.

In character Ophelia is not an interestingly complex figure: critics speak of
her as "sweet" or "poor" (reacting to her situation rather than to her personal-
ity), but no one is unsure of her character as Shakespeare has presented it.
Ophelia—naively telling Polonius of Hamlet's "mad" behavior, accepting meekly
her father's ultimatums, bearing unquestioningly the restraints of her position—
is pictured as the epitome of unsophistication and of purity. Shakespeare, I feel,
has created an ironic parallel in the characterization of Ophelia as compared
with that of the Queen, whose equally simple, rather carnal attitudes have led
her into deepest sin. Ophelia is a younger edition of the unthinking Queen who
needs the "mirror" Hamlet provides to see her own situation.

Rather than stand created as a memorable character in her own right,
Ophelia serves the play of Hamlet essentially as a useful device, used by
Hamlet, Polonius, and Shakespeare himself.

1 F. E. Halliday, Shakespeare and His Critics (1949), p. 413.
The question of Hamlet’s love for Ophelia has been harangued about for centuries. It is evident in the text that Hamlet had loved her earlier. As A. C. Bradley points out, Ophelia was like Horatio in that she was “intellectually not remarkable”. Yet she had sweetness, innocence, and simplicity; these qualities were “enough—Hamlet asked no more”.2 There is no reason to doubt the actuality of Hamlet’s love at this point. However, in the “Frailty” speech, he groups all women together—characterizing them by wantonness, lack of honor, primitive emotions—and he is repulsed by the natural sex within himself. His relationship with Ophelia becomes an ambiguous one—he wants her, but hates the very desire itself. Despite this revulsion, he tries to see her; but when she refuses him because of Polonius’ wishes, he begins to think she is not so simple as he had supposed. His bitterness, indicative of his bafflement at her withdrawal, is evident in the lines about her painted face.3 the rude insults to womankind, and his suspicions of another lover.4 Whether he loves Ophelia with the previous intensity or only wants someone behind him in his enterprise remains open to interpretation.5 The reader must also consider that Hamlet is so changed in his melancholia that losing Ophelia becomes of minor importance to him.

Whether his love was the passionate search or the evanescent emotion Bradley sees it as, is a secondary matter to the use Hamlet makes of this relationship in juxtaposition to the larger issue of revenge. When it is convenient for Hamlet to assume madness, his motivation is the lost love. This he emphasizes in the scene in Ophelia’s room, a visit at least partially contrived. Knowing her as he does, he can predict the outcome of his action. He has been criticized by Johnson for the anguish his “coarse and wanton cruelty” causes Ophelia, but perhaps the frailty of women has embittered him to callousness. Hamlet again derides her in scathing terms in the decoy scene, perhaps knowing instinctively that he has an audience.6 These scenes give him a perfect explanation for his madness, and supposedly keep Claudius from alarm.

When Hamlet is near Ophelia during the players’ performance, his attitude changes significantly. Obviously, his attention is on Claudius’ reaction to the play; yet, he must, as a love-maddened wretch, pay court to—or insult—Ophelia. Hamlet in the interchange of words with her is much less passionate—calm to the point of disinterest. He does interject a few insults, but these come almost as preoccupied witticisms. I find this scene the key to Hamlet’s true attitude toward Ophelia—an attitude of bitter distraction, subservient to the truly important things in his life. After the play has begun he tries to end his conversation with her by using abruptly crude remarks—for Hamlet here, “the play’s the thing”.7

2 A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (1904), p. 112.
5 William Witherle Lawrence, Shakespeare’s Problem Comedies (1931), p. 4.
6 Maynard Mack finds Hamlet confused by the discrepancy between appearance and reality and uses the line “Get thee to a nunnery” to show the anguish of Hamlet’s uncertainty. If Ophelia is what she seems—the image of innocence and devotion—this decaying world is no place for her. Were she “as chaste as ice, as pure as snow” she could not escape its degradation. If she isn’t pure, then nunnery in the sense of brothel is relevant to her. “The World of Hamlet”, p. 242.
This is the last Shakespeare shows us of Hamlet and Ophelia together. At the graveyard Hamlet professes his love greater than forty thousand brothers' (V. i. 292), but this is probably a remembrance of his first feelings for her or perhaps an indication of his passions in general—stressed to the breaking point. It is hardly an accurate view of their relationship throughout the play.

Ophelia, then, as an excuse for Hamlet's madness is essential to the plot: there is no question that he has used her calculatingly. Inadvertently, Polonius as well uses her. Although we are not told explicitly his motives, they are not obscure: to tie Hamlet to Ophelia was to tie the royal family to Polonius'. However, as the courtier quickly realized, the instigator of such a marriage might lose Claudius' favor. But when it seemed that Hamlet's madness might stem from the loss of Ophelia's love, Polonius seizes the opportunity quickly. He races to court with the news that he has found "the very cause of Hamlet's lunacy" (II. ii. 49). He builds his case, refers to his usually accurate judgments, and continues to hold to these dreams (for himself). Ordinarily subservient, Polonius becomes so ambitious in this situation that even after Claudius has negated the hypothesis he persists in his claims (III. i. 184-186). And so Ophelia has again been used to further the plans of another.

Shakespeare's chief dramatic use of Ophelia is in the evocation of pathos, because Elizabethan tragedy aimed at arousing pity for the play as well as for individual characters. Ophelia is created as an extremely sympathetic portrait from the first scene—a dutiful daughter sweetly counselled by Laertes, the child-like "Rose of May" symbolized by flowers throughout. Her trusting selflessness is shown as she comes to Polonius after the insane Hamlet's visit, not afraid for herself, but entertaining her father to help the prince. Yet Shakespeare artfully controls our thinking of Ophelia and her plight by having no mention made of her aside from "her" scenes themselves. This is, after all, Hamlet's play; its issues are other than those concerning Ophelia. As has been pointed out by Bradley, in all of Hamlet's soliloquies—all dealing with his innermost concerns and most intimate problems—Ophelia is never mentioned. Even in the earliest, before the lust for revenge becomes his overwhelming passion, Hamlet seems far from consumed with love. Nor does he mention Ophelia in any of his confidences with Horatio. This obvious concentrating of pathos in specific scenes fulfills, too, Shakespeare's concept of contrast: he uses the emotional scenes in juxtaposition with the "business" scenes of preliminary exposition; later, as the audience is emotionally aligned with Hamlet, the need for the more obviously pathetic scenes diminishes and so they are omitted. The one necessary mad scene—then oblivion, both literally and literarily. And so, Shakespeare's use of Ophelia, a condescension to the audience, who were expecting some romance and pathos.

That he was successful we see in Johnson's review of the play as he emphasizes throughout the effect of Ophelia's plight on the viewer:

The poet is accused of having shown little regard to poetical justice ... the gratification of the destruction of the usurper and murderer is abated by the untimely death of Ophelia, the young, the beautiful, the harmless, and the pious.

Although we may disagree with Johnson in the matter of Ophelia's importance, she does remain memorable amid Shakespeare's minor characters. Not a thematically symbolic character, the "Rose of May," even as plot device and instrument of pathos, has the traditional touch of the master.

Bowling Green State University

SHAKESPEARE'S CINNA—TRIBUNE NOT POET

W. A. Cook

It is interesting to note, as a point of historical accuracy, that Shakespeare, in following North's Plutarch, was led into error in his play Julius Caesar. The Cinna killed by the mob (III.iii) was not the poet Gaius Helvius Cinna (author of Smyrna) as we are led to believe by Shakespeare. According to Mr. Spaeth,1 Helvius Cinna was

a tribune friendly to Caesar, murdered by the mob on the day of Caesar's funeral because they mistook him to be another Cinna (Lucius Cornelius) hated because of his known antagonism to the dead dictator. This Helvius Cinna is called a poet by Plutarch but by no one else among the ancient sources for the incident.

The truth of the historical fact has not, as far as I can determine, been made known to the student of Shakespeare.

An accounting of the various editions of Shakespeare's play will attest to the accuracy of this statement. Furness, for example, in the Variorum2 does not mention Cinna save to remark that he is found in Plutarch. Neither Wright's edition of 1895 nor the new Yale Shakespeare, 1959, discusses the distinction.3 George L. Kittredge, however, notes: "C. Helvius Cinna was a friend of Catullus and a poet of distinction in his day."4 The statement is true as far as it goes, but Kittredge fails to mention that the Cinna actually murdered by the mob was not G. Helvius Cinna the poet, but Helvius Cinna the tribune. Indeed, in so recent and authoritative an edition as the Arden,5 the footnote on the matter reads:

Scene III

S. D. Enter Cinna the Poet] Helvetius Cinna was a poet of some renown, a friend of Catullus.

This note is misleading, though understandably so. The distinction should be made between Helvius Cinna the tribune and Gaius Helvius Cinna the poet.

State University College
Plattsburgh, New York