

Another Folio in Meisei Shakespeare Collection: A Descriptive Introduction to The Vase of Shakspeare with the Complete Transcript of the Larger Plaque

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Fig. 1 The Vase of Shakspeare
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is two-fold: first it aims to describe as accurately and objectively as possible the details of The Vase of Shakspeare (*sic.*, cf. Fig. 1, hereafter “The Vase”) now housed in the Collection of Meisei University Library, providing fundamental information for future scholars to work upon, and giving among others, in Appendix II, the complete transcript of the larger plaque, which is meant for the identification of all scenes and characters on The Vase. The other purpose concerns the plaque descriptions and the epigraph under a forged authorship. I trace the source of the epigraph, briefly consider reasons for the forgery, and argue that The Vase was intended to be a Victorian version of the First Folio in silver. Appendix IV includes a few sample photographs of The Vase, so that readers of the present article, while a detailed website on The Vase currently under way, can admire the ingenious joint workmanship of Monti and Hancock, designer and silversmith, now laid for the first time before the world since it was displayed in London in 1862, or perhaps in Vienna in 1873.

KEYWORDS

The Vase of Shakspeare; Charles F. Hancock; Raffael(l)e Monti;
1862 London Exhibition; Meisei University; Victorian silver work;
Peter Pindar (John Walcott), the First Folio.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend sincere thanks to members of the Meisei University Library staff, notably Ishii Miki, for providing various occasions of special access to The Vase. I am also very grateful for the opinions I received from Professor Sumimoto Noriko of Meisei University and Professor Gabriel Egan of De Montfort University, whose knowledge as Shakespearean specialists proved invaluable in identifying scenes and characters on The Vase. No less important in this research was the contribution of Tanabe Shinji, the photographer, who, with the assistance of Ogawa Hitomi and Suzuki Chie of Kokokusha, devoted himself to capturing the reality of this shining artifact. I should also like to thank Mr Stephen Burton, the owner and managing director of Hancocks, for sharing with me photos of Hancocks’ stand in nineteenth-century exhibitions. In this connection, special thanks are due to Silvia Riccaldi, who pointed out to me what appears to be The Vase amongst their exhibits.



The Vase of Shakspeare (*sic.*, cf. Fig. 1, hereafter “The Vase”), now housed in the Library Collection of Meisei University, is a high Victorian decorative silver work, measuring 1.3 metres high and weighing 43.0 kilograms including the wooden pedestal, depicting characters and scenes from Shakespeare’s plays, at least one from each of his thirty-seven plays, plus two allegorical winged figures of tragedy and of comedy

on either side, all crowned with the figure of Shakespeare at the top. It was executed by Charles F. Hancock, the noted Victorian jeweler and silversmith to the principal European sovereigns and courts, based on the design of the Italian sculptor Raffaele Monti. Who commissioned it is not known.

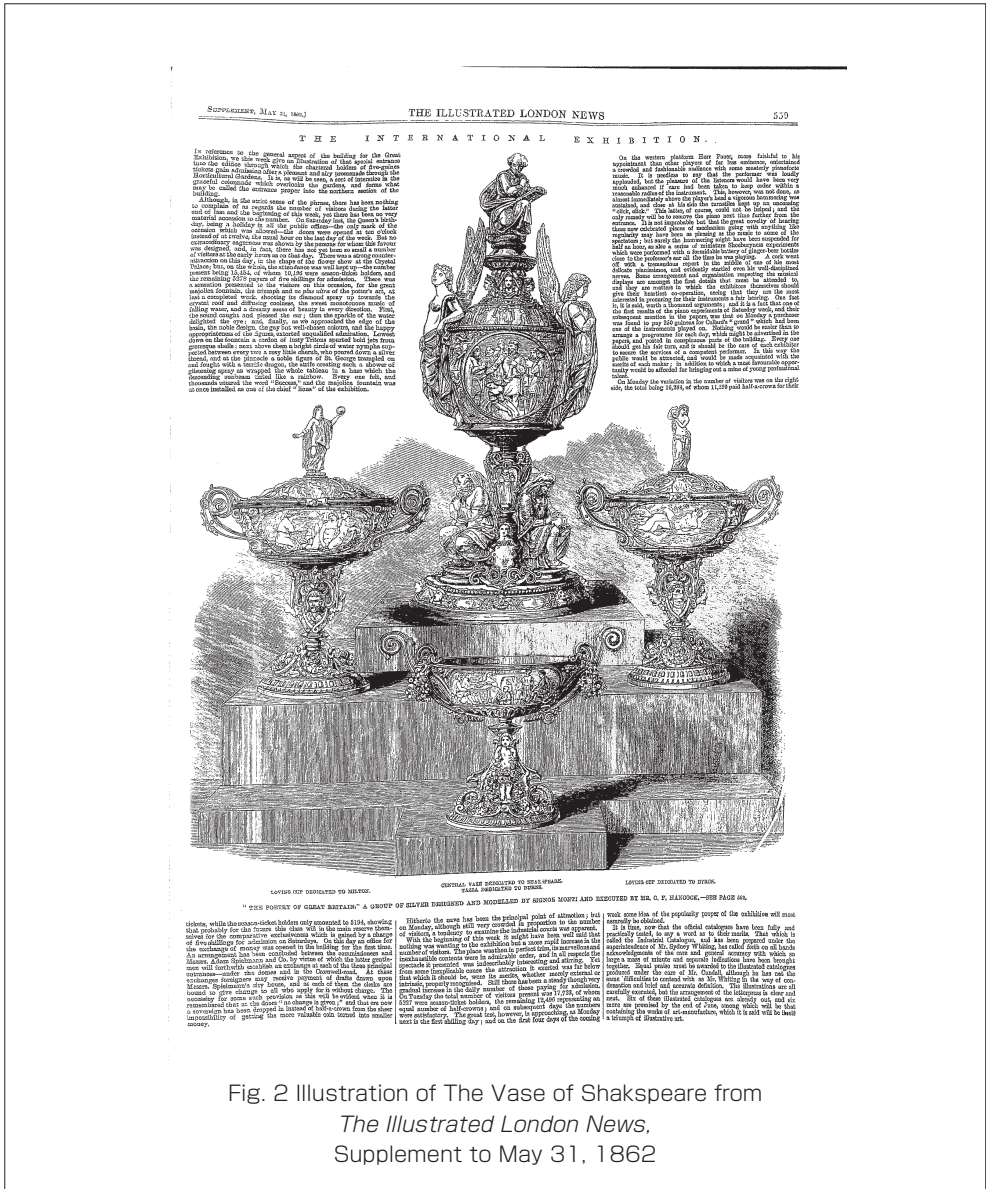


Fig. 2 Illustration of The Vase of Shakspeare from
The Illustrated London News,
 Supplement to May 31, 1862

² If, and very probably since, the Folger dating is based upon the hand-written scribble of "1848" on the sheet, and that there is nothing in this document to support the validity of this year, we could not take it as the earliest record. On the contrary, the Folger sketch of The Vase is drawn along with the Cup of Milton, and the Tazza of Burns, which constitute part of "The Poetry of Great Britain, a Group in Silver" as exhibited at the 1862 London Exhibition. See Annotated Bibliography for further information.

The earliest record we have of The Vase dates back to 1862², when it was exhibited at the London Exhibition, as the centre piece of the silver quintette, named “The Poetry of Great Britain, a Group in Silver”. The rest of the five, according to the *Illustrated Catalogue* of the exhibition, are two loving cups, and two tazzas, dedicated respectively to John Milton, Lord Byron, Thomas Moore, and Robert Burns. See Appendix I for reasons behind this choice, and for the place The Vase occupies among this “Group”.

The Vase as Meisei has it, differs from the mid-nineteenth-century illustrations or photographs given in contemporary books or periodicals in the following two points (cf. Figs. 1 & 2): (1) the two plaques now on the wooden pedestal (measuring 0.535 metres in diameter at base, and 0.250 metres in height) are shown neither in the photographic reproduction of the exhibits, nor in the illustration the *Illustrated Catalogue* gives. The former shows The Vase fixed on a larger pedestal, and the latter shows it without one. On the current pedestal are attached two silver plaques, the larger one giving descriptions of the designs on The Vase, explaining who is speaking what in which plays of Shakespeare, all of which fairly accurately — but not completely — correspond with the descriptions in the *Illustrated Catalogue* (the full transcript of the larger plaque is given in Appendix II³); while the smaller plaque being purely decorative; and (2) as a second difference it is twisted 180 degrees at the upper joint (i.e., one of the two narrow neck-like joints), so that all that is now on the front side below the upper joint had originally been on the reverse side till a certain time. When, why, or by whom it was twisted, is not known. All we know for certain is that The Vase was twisted front-side-back when Meisei University acquired it in 1989. In addition,

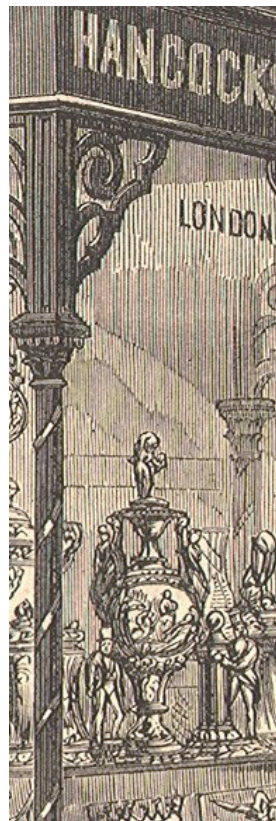


Fig. 3 Exhibits in the Hancocks' stand in the Vienna Exhibition of 1873

By the courtesy of Hancocks

³ The whole process of transcription was much assisted by the transcript given in the *Illustrated Catalogue*, but throughout its process the principle of “fidelity to the Plaque wording” was maintained, to the letter and even to the punctuation mark. No corrections or additions, when thought appropriate, were made.

it seems to have already been twisted when it was exhibited in the Hancocks' stand at the 1873 Vienna Exhibition (cf. Fig. 3), with the book Shakespeare holds coming on the right-hand side of the *Tempest* medallion, in which Caliban is clearly visible with three pieces of log on his back.

The Vase bears numerous hallmarks, which consist of the combinations of the following (cf. Fig. 4): —

- 1) the maker's mark of "C.F.H" under the crown;
- 2) the lion passant (looking ahead, not gardant);
- 3) the (uncrowned) leopard's head;
- 4) an unidentified letter that appears to be a small "i" ;
- 5) the head of Queen Victoria facing to the left.

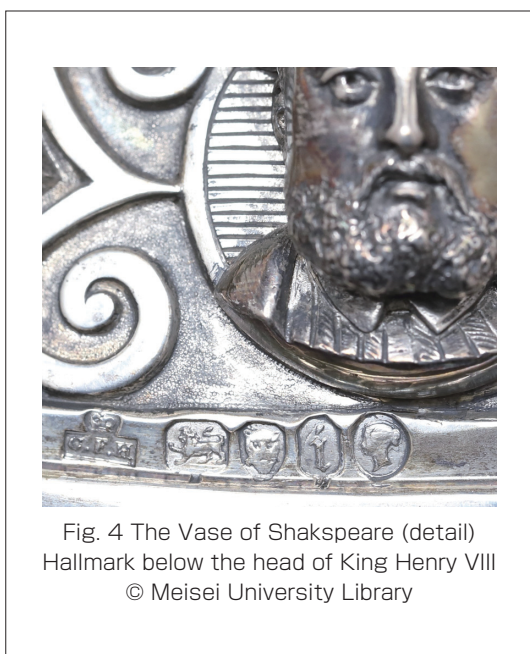


Fig. 4 The Vase of Shakspeare (detail)
Hallmark below the head of King Henry VIII
© Meisei University Library

The Larger Plaque on the Pedestal also bears the same combination of these five symbols. If the unidentified letter mentioned above *is* a small "i", it points to the year 1864, and not 1862 (cf. Banister 27). It could not have been the year The Vase was made. The mystery of the hallmark will perhaps involve a complicated process of the early years of its production, exhibition, and authorization with the hallmark.

The scene descriptions on the larger plaque are preceded by an epigraph claiming itself to have been written by Ben Jonson as follows (cf. Fig. 5): —

This vase is surmounted by the figure of THE POET, designed in such an inspired attitude as that described in Ben Jonson's lines, —

Thus while I wond'ring pause o'er Shakspeare's page,
I mark, in the visions of delight, the Sage,
High o'er the wrecks of man, who stands sublime,

* * * * *

Majestic 'mid the solitude of time.

These lines, in fact, are taken from “To My Candle” by Peter Pindar, the pseudonym for John Wolcott (1738-1819). The original passage runs as follows with the revised or deleted words emphasized with underlines (for the entire poem, see Appendix III): —

Thus while I wond'ring pause o'er Shakspeare's page,
 I mark, in visions of delight, the sage,
 High o'er the wrecks of man, who stands sublime,
A column in the melancholy waste,
(Its cities humbled, and its glories past)
 Majestic 'mid the solitude of time.
 (13-18, underlines added.)

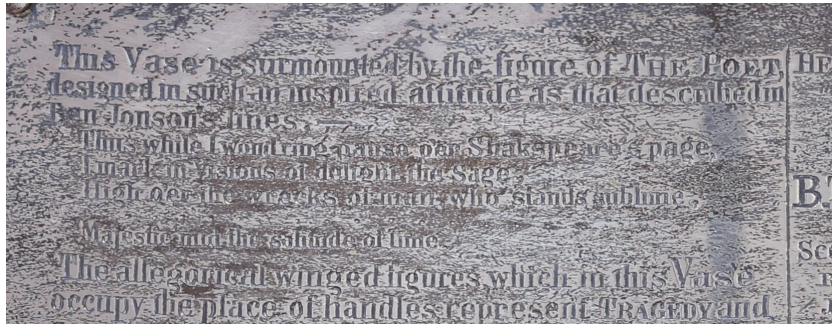


Fig. 5 The Vase of Shakspeare (detail)
 Epigraph on the Larger Plaque on the Pedestal
 © Meisei University Library

With the deleted phrases in proper places, we know that Peter Pindar imagines himself reading works of Shakespeare by the light of his candle, and sees in vision, as a future scene, Shakespeare himself standing sublime as a column amidst ruins to come, where all cities and human glories will have been humbled to waste. All round is the solitude of time, that is, all human races will have been extinct at the end — almost an apocalyptic end — of the vast stretch of time.

Whoever was responsible for this revision/forgery on the plaque, succeeds in erasing a typically romantic vision of a future ruin, thus making the epigraph more suitable for a Renaissance statement made by a contemporary with Shakespeare. Considering the fact that it was Ben Jonson, who, in the First Folio of 1623, supplied lines to the reader, “This Figure, that thou here seest put...” on the verso page facing Droeshout’s portrait of Shakespeare, it may not be too preposterous to suppose that the one who erased the romantic ruin sentiment and put Ben Jonson’s name instead, might

have intended to make this silver artifact as a Victorian version of the First Folio, with the firm belief that this silver work as well as the First Folio deserve an everlasting life much longer than the human race. The Vase of Shakspeare *is* a First Folio in silver.

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This one-sheet document gives as the source creator the name of Robert Hancock, 1730-1817 (*sic.*), and is dated “1848” presumably penciled in. The illustration of The Vase of Shakspeare is given with two more illustrations: the Cup of Milton, and the Tazza of Burns. All these three artifacts constitute part of “The Poetry of Great Britain” as exhibited at the 1862 London Exhibition.

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APPENDIX I
Introductory Remarks in the *Illustrated Catalogue* (1862)

THE POETRY OF GREAT BRITAIN, A GROUP IN SILVER.

Manufactured by C. F. Hancock, Jeweller and Silversmith to the
principal Sovereigns and Courts of Europe, expressly for the Exhibition.

Designed and modelled by Signor Monti.

This group is intended to illustrate and embody some of the greatest and best known creations of the British poets. It consists of a central vase, dedicated to Shakspeare, supported by two loving cups and two tazzas, respectively dedicated to Milton, Byron, Moore, and Burns. Thus embracing illustrations of the dramatic, classical, romantic, lyrical, and popular poetry of the British Isles.

APPENDIX II

The Complete Transcript of the Larger Plaque

THE VASE OF SHAKSPEARE.

[**Column I**]

This vase is surmounted by the figure of THE POET, designed in such an inspired attitude as that described in Ben Jonson's lines,—

Thus while I wond'ring pause o'er Shakspeare's page,
I mark in the visions of delight, the Sage,
High o'er the wrecks of man, who stands sublime,

* * * * *

Majestic 'mid the solitude of time.

The allegorical winged figures, which in this Vase occupy the place of handles, represent TRAGEDY and COMEDY.

TRAGEDY, closely draped, her snake-like ringlets encircled by a Royal Band, plunged in deep thought, holds the dagger, half concealed, under her cloak.

COMEDY, in loose garments, crowned with ivy and vine, the shepherd's staff and the histrionic mask in her hand, looks smiling towards the image of the Poet.

The subjects treated by Shakspeare are rendered in the decorations of the Vase in the following manner:—

Beneath the crowning figure of the Poet.

A. Four Female Heads, on Shields, surrounded by festoons of laurel, represent,—

SILVIA, in the "*Two Gentlemen of Verona*."

Silvia is excelling,

She excels each mortal thing.

VIOLA, in "*Twelfth Night; or, What You Will*."

Conceal me what I am, and be my aid,
For such disguise as hap'ly shall become
The form of my intent. I'll serve this Duke.

ISABELLA, in "*Measure for Measure*."

O, were it but my life,
I'd throw it down for your deliverance
As frankly as a pin.

[Column II]

HELENA, in “*All’s Well that Ends Well.*”

My friends were poor, but honest, so’s my love,
Be not offended, for it hurts not him
That he is loved by me.

B. The Frieze, around the swelling of the Vase, presents
the following subjects—on the front,

Scene of the *Masquerade*, in “*Romeo and Juliet*,”

ROMEO. Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET. Ay, Pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayers.

ANTONIO, BASSANIO, and SHYLOCK in the “*Merchant of Venice.*”

SHYLOCK. Go with me to a notary, seal me there
Your single bond.

HELENA and HERMIA, in “*Midsummer Night’s Dream.*”

HERMIA. God speed, fair Helena! Whither away?

HELENA. Call you me fair? that fair again unsay,
Demetrius loves you fair: O happy fair!

On the reverse—

PETRUCHIO, KATHARINA, and HABERDASHER, in the
“*Taming of the Shrew.*”

PETRUCHIO. it is a paltry cap,
a custard-coffin, a bauble, a silken pie.

FALSTAFF, M^{RS} FORD, and M^{RS} PAGE, in the

“*Merry Wives of Windsor.*”

M^{RS} FORD. He is too big to go in there. What shall I do?

FALSTAFF. Let me see’t, let me see’t, O let me see’t, I’ll in,
I’ll in.

M^{RS} PAGE. What! Sir John Falstaff? are these your letters,
knight?

FALSTAFF. I love thee, and none but thee; help me away; let
me creep in here.

[Column III]

BENEDICK and BEATRICE in "*Much Ado about Nothing.*"

BENEDICK. And now tell me how doth your cousin?

BEATRICE. Very ill.

BENEDICK. And how do you?

BEATRICE. Very ill too.

BENEDICK. Serve God, love me, and mend:

C. The centre Medallions represent—on the front
OTHELLO and DESDEMONA in the Council Chamber in
"*Othello.*"

BRABANTIO. Look to her, Moor! have a quick eye to see,
She has deceiv'd her father, and may thee.

OTHELLO. My life upon her faith. . . .

On the reverse—

FERDINAND brought by the spells of PROSPERO before
MIRANDA, in the "*Tempest.*"

CALIBAN. I must obey! [*exit.*

ARIEL. (*enters as a Water Nymph, playing and singing.*)

PROSPERO. The fringed curtains of thine eye advance,
And say, what thou see'st yond'

MIRANDA. What is't? a spirit:
Lord, how it looks about! believe me, sir,
It carries a brave form:

D. In the space between the Centre Medallions and the
Allegorical Figures, are introduced the fantastic
characters of the Plays of Shakspeare, viz.:—On
the front of the Vase.

The Fiends forsaking La Pucelle, of Orleans. (Act V,
Scene 3, First part of "*King Henry VI.*")

The Ghost of Hamlet's Father. (Act I, Scene 5, in
"*Hamlet.*")

Julius Cesar's Ghost in the tent of Brutus. (end of Act IV,
in "*Julius Cesar.*") on the left of the spectator.

The apparition of the *Eight Kings of Banquo's Issue*, and
Banquo's Ghost, evoked by the three Witches in the
presence of *Hecate* (Act IV, "*Macbeth.*") on the
right.

[Column IV]

On the reverse—

Oberon amongst his attendants is shewn by *Puck*, *Titania*,
surrounded by her Fairies, caressing *Bottom*, waited
on by *Peasblossom*, *Cobweb*, and *Mustard-Seed*.

(Act IV, Scene 1, “*Midsummer Night’s Dream*.”)

The *Nymphs*, *Iris*, *Ceres*, and *Juno*, of the Mask. (Act IV,
Scene 1, “*Tempest*.”)

E. Four Bas-reliefs on the Stem of the Vase record:

THE PRINCE OF FRANCE, in “*Love’s Labour Lost*.”

Tell him the daughter of the King of France
On serious, business craving quick dispatch,
Importunes personal conference with his grace.

ÆMILIA as *Abbess*, in the “*Comedy of Errors*.”

What then became of them I cannot tell;
I, to this fortune that you see me in.

ROSALIND, in “*As You Like it*.”

I’ll have no father, if you be not he [to DUKE.
I’ll have no husband if you be not he [to ORLANDO.
Nor e’er wed woman if you be not she. [to PHEBE.

HERMIONE, in “*Winter’s Tale*.”

LEONTES. . . . Her natural posture!
Chide me, dear stone, that I May say indeed,
Thou art Hermione!

F. The Foot of the Vase is surrounded by Figures in

Round-relief representing—

LEAR in the Storm in “*King Lear*.”

Blow, wind, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and Hurricanoes, spout.
Till you have drench’d our steeples.

HAMLET in the churchyard in “*Hamlet*.”

Alas! poor Yorick! I knew him.

OPHELIA distributing flowers in “*Hamlet*.”

There’s a daisy; I would give you some violets: but they
Withered all, when my father died:

[Column V]

LADY MACBETH *during the Murder of the King*, in
 “*Macbeth*.”

Hark! Peace!
 He is about it;

The Base of the Stand is ornamented in the following
 manner:—

G. By Eight Cameo Reliefs, in which are given Troilus,
 Cressida, and Pandarus, in “*Troilus and Cressida*;
 Timon and the Steward in the Wood, in *Timon
 of Athens*; Coriolanus and Volumnia, in *Corio-
 lanus*; Brutus and Portia in the Orchard, in *Julius
 Cesar*; Cleopatra applying the asp in *Anthony
 and Cleopatra*; Imogen as Fidele and her bro-
 thers, in *Cymbeline*; Lavinia making known her
 misfortune, in *Titus Andronicus*; Marina nursing
 her father in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*; and,

H. By Heads in High-relief, representing the Kings
 treated of in the historical pieces, viz.:—*King
 John, Richard II., Henry IV., Henry V.,
 Henry VI., Richard III., and Henry VIII.*, to
 which has been added that of *Queen Elizabeth*,
 as the Sovereign under whom the Poet lived and
 flourished, and of whom he says (in the play of
 Henry VIII):—

. . . She shall be
 * * * *

A pattern to all princes living with her,
 And all that shall succeed . . .

APPENDIX III

To My Candle by "Peter Pindar"

Thou lone companion of the spectred night,
I wake amid thy friendly-watchful light,
 To steal a precious hour from lifeless sleep—
Hark, the wild uproar of the winds! and hark,
Hell's genious roams the regions of the dark,
 And swells the thundering horrors of the deep.
From cloud to cloud the pale moon hurrying flies;
Now blackened, and now flashing through her skies.

But all is silence here—beneath thy beam,
 I own I labour for the voice of praise—
For who would sink in dull Oblivion's stream?
 Who would not live in songs of distant days?

Thus while I wondering pause o'er Shakspeare's page,
I mark, in visions of delight, the sage,
 High o'er the wrecks of man, who stands sublime,
A column in the melancholy waste,
(Its cities humbled, and its glories past)
 Majestic 'mid the solitude of time.
Yet now to sadness let me yield the hour—
Yes, let the tears of purest friendship shower.

I view, alas! What ne'er should die,
A form, that wakes my deepest sigh;
 A form that feels of death the leaden sleep—
Descending to the realms of shade,
I view a pale-eyed panting maid;
 I see the virtues o'er their favourite weep.

Ah! could the muse's simple prayer
 Command the envied trump of Fame,
Oblivion should Eliza spare:
 A world should echo with her name.

Art thou departing too, my trembling friend?

Ah! draws thy little lustre to its end?

Yes, on thy frame, Fate too shall fix her seal—
Oh let me, pensive, watch thy pale decay;
How fast that frame, so tender, wears away!
How fast thy life the restless minutes steal!

How slender now, alas! thy thread of fire!
Ah, falling, falling, ready to expire!

In vain thy struggles—all will soon be o'er—
At life thou snatchest with an eager leap:
Now round I see thy flame so feeble creep,
Faint, lessening, quivering, glimmering—now no more!

Thus shall the suns of Science sink away,
And thus of Beauty fade the fairest flower—
For where's the giant who to Time shall say,
“Destructive tyrant, I arrest thy power?”

APPENDIX IV
Scenes and Characters from The Vase of Shakspeare

Photographs were taken by Tanabe Shinji,
with the assistance of Ogawa Hitomi and Suzuki Chie of Kokokusha.

The Vase of Shakspeare (detail)
Lady Macbeth
“Hark! ...He’s about it.”
© Meisei University Library

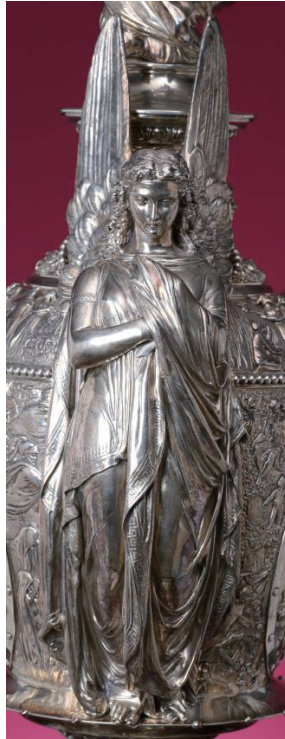


The Vase of Shakspeare (detail)
Shakespeare on top
© Meisei University Library



The Vase of Shakspeare (detail)
Othello in the Council Chamber
Brabantio: ...she has deceiv'd her father, and may thee.
© Meisei University Library

The Vase of Shakspeare (detail)
Tragedy holding a dagger
underneath her cloak
© Meisei University Library



The Vase of Shakspeare (detail)
A histrionic mask
in the hand of Comedy
© Meisei University Library



The Vase of Shakspeare (detail)
Falstaff and the buck basket
in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*
M^{RS} Ford: He's too big to go in there.
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The Vase of Shakspeare (detail)
Titania caressing Bottom in
A Midsummer Night's Dream
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