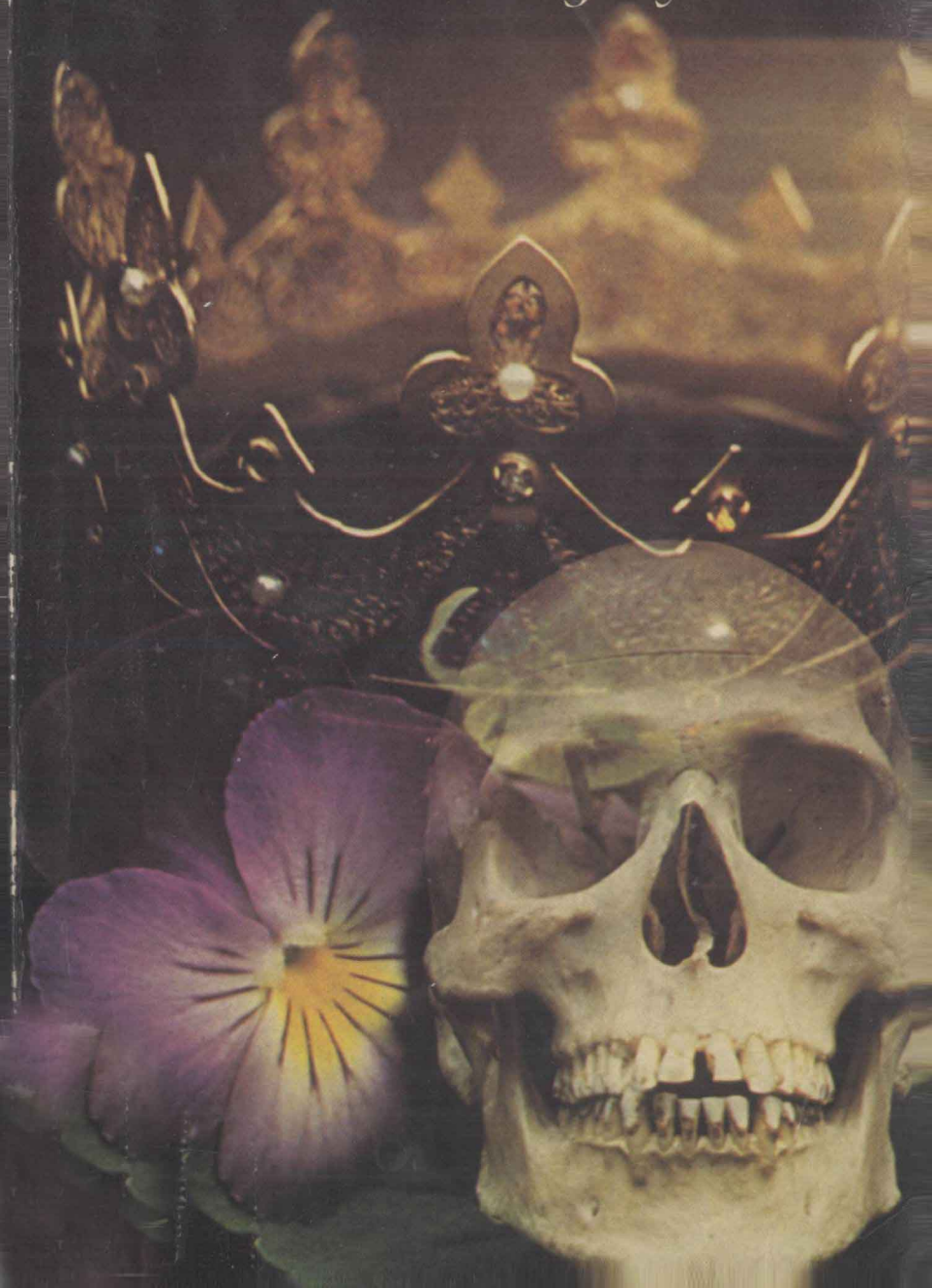


WOLFGANG  
CLEMEN

The  
Development  
of Shakespeare's  
Imagery

SECOND  
EDITION



THE  
DEVELOPMENT  
OF SHAKESPEARE'S  
IMAGERY

*Wolfgang Clemen*

SECOND EDITION, WITH A  
NEW PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR

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## PREFACE

### LOOKING BACK OVER FORTY YEARS

IT is now twenty-five years since this book was first published in England and forty years since *Shakespeares Bilder*, which formed the basis for it, appeared in Germany. These dates provoke a retrospective survey, self-criticism and a prospective look into the future, for in the meantime the study of Shakespeare's imagery has developed in various quite divergent directions.

It was my good fortune to be among the first to concentrate on this subject, for my book was published almost simultaneously with Caroline Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us*. But it was also fortunate that our two books took a different line, supplementing each other rather than overlapping. However, it also needed the boldness and inexperience of a young man not deterred by the complexity of his subject and not wholly aware of it, and who was, moreover, not bowed down by the burden of secondary literature which would have suggested many other possible approaches. For anyone settling down to write about Shakespeare's imagery nowadays would have to take these possibilities into consideration. The task I had set myself in those early years was shortly afterwards described justly as "exploring a field far beyond the power of any one man".<sup>1</sup>

When, in 1950, I was preparing the English version of my German book, altering a good deal, I was again fortunate in receiving Una Ellis-Fermor's advice. For she encouraged me to stick to my original scheme, advising me to extend the inquiry into the specifically dramatic functions of imagery and not to abandon the variety of approach which I had used and furthermore not to give up the wide concept of imagery which in the meantime she too had advocated

<sup>1</sup> Una Ellis-Fermor, *Some Recent Research in Shakespeare's Imagery*, Shakespeare Association Pamphlet, Oxford, 1937.

in her book *The Frontiers of Drama*.<sup>1</sup> Her encouragement was supplemented by that of John Dover Wilson who recommended the book in a preface which he contributed to the first edition, thus introducing its author to Shakespeareans in the English-speaking world.

Looking back on my book today I would still contend that the general drift of my argument was right and that many of its conclusions and points-of-view are still valid for our present interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. Inquiring into the development of one particular aspect of dramatic art has proved a fruitful approach, which later on was applied to other elements of drama as well. My aims went in the right direction but I could achieve only part of them. At many points I would now acknowledge the desirability of additions and qualifications and, in quite a few cases, of corrections. I would also try to make up for one major omission, the chapter on *Macbeth*, for which I had collected material but which, because of the complexity of this very subject, I never succeeded in completing. Yet were I to carry out all this, the book would grow to at least double its size and would become less readable, though perhaps more learned and more balanced in its presentation. Even if one is in possession of more knowledge one should perhaps not rewrite an early book which owed its origin to a situation which cannot be recreated. Moreover, this 'new' book would be a less original one. The original text has therefore not been changed substantially for this second edition and references are still made to the text of the Globe edition. Some changes, however, have been made in language and presentation. The notes have been checked and the bibliography – as far as articles and books on Shakespeare's imagery are concerned – has been brought up to date.<sup>2</sup>

My aim, then as now, has been to trace the changing functions of Shakespeare's imagery against the background of the general evolution of his dramatic art. As was evident

<sup>1</sup> Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Frontiers of Drama*, London, 1945, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> The author wishes to thank Dr. Ingeborg Boltz for her assistance in the preparation of the new edition.

from related studies which were published in the years following the first edition, my book, which I had described in my summary as a "first tentative endeavour", could not at that time exhaust the subject. Several aspects, which I had neglected, such as Shakespeare's derived imagery, his iconographic, religious, and emblematic imagery, his 'image clusters', his use of personification, his stage imagery, have received adequate treatment in subsequent articles and books, as have the relationship between image and symbol and the question of imagery as a test of authorship.<sup>1</sup>

My major concern, however, had been to relate Shakespeare's imagery to other elements of his dramatic art and to examine its specific dramatic function within this wider context, linking it up with situation and character, plot and scenic action. Strangely enough, this line was taken up again only at a much later date, although this approach, judged from today, may well have been the most promising for further research and the one, moreover, that could have counterbalanced certain exaggerations and vagaries which the study of Shakespeare's imagery was to produce.

For the main trend in this area continued to be the exploration of the associations and hidden meanings of Shakespeare's imagery, the unravelling of its symbolism, its undertones and its subtle ambiguities. G. Wilson Knight's first important books,<sup>2</sup> which developed the analysis of poetic symbolism in Shakespeare's plays, had in fact been published before the investigation of imagery became a major field of research. Another influence came from the new methods of analysing poetic texts and led to Shakespeare's imagery being looked upon primarily as an instrument of poetic expression, while its use as a dramatist's tool was overlooked. There is no doubt that these new

<sup>1</sup> E.g. J. E. Hankins, *Shakespeare's Derived Imagery*, New York, 1953; J. Doebler, *Shakespeare's Speaking Pictures, Studies in Iconic Imagery*, Albuquerque, 1974; D. Mehl, "Emblems in English Renaissance Drama", in *Renaissance Drama II*, ed. S. Schoenbaum, Evanston, 1969; E. A. Armstrong, *Shakespeare's Imagination*, 1946, repr. Lincoln, 1963 (for "image clusters"); T. R. Henn, *The Living Image*, London, 1972; K. Muir, "Image and Symbol in *Macbeth*" (and in *Hamlet*), in *Shakespeare the Professional*, London, 1973; H. Zimmermann, *Die Personifikation im Drama Shakespeares*, Heidelberg, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> *The Wheel of Fire*, London, 1930; *The Imperial Theme*, London, 1931.

modes of textual interpretation, reinforced by what could be learned from the New Criticism, helped us to discover in Shakespeare's language, in his "poetic texture", subtleties, ironies, and interconnections which had previously passed unnoticed. A perusal of recent annotated editions of plays or of articles commenting on certain passages shows that today we are indeed better equipped to understand difficult passages and sound their meanings. But, on the other hand, this development has also led to a certain isolation of studies in imagery. Imagery was looked upon as almost autonomous, as belonging to "the pattern below the level of plot and character" (T. S. Eliot), as a key to the play's themes and ideas which were to be unfolded rather by images and repeated words than by the action on the stage. Robert B. Heilman's two books on *King Lear* and *Othello*,<sup>1</sup> in which he examines many strands of imagery, relating them to the structure and the basic themes of the play, are perhaps the best example of the value, the ingenuity, but also of the limitations of this method.

Specialized studies are often in danger of distorting the perception of the work as a whole, and the specialized critic, concentrating his attention on one aspect and attempting to consider everything from this angle only, is apt to overvalue his approach. The temptation was great to base the interpretation of a play solely on what its imagery could disclose about the play's underlying themes and symbols. The obvious meaning, which could be derived from the course of the action, from "plot and character", from direct statement, was taken to be less important and sometimes even esteemed less than those hidden meanings supposedly conveyed by the imagery. "To read the plays through theme and imagery was an invitation to all kinds of doctrinal irrelevances" was Muriel Bradbrook's comment on this trend in her retrospect "Fifty Years of Criticism of Shakespeare's Style".<sup>2</sup>

Five years later Helen Gardner expressed even more dissatisfaction with this development: "This method seems now to have come to the point where its deficiencies are

<sup>1</sup> *This Great Stage*, Baton Rouge, 1948; *Magic in the Web*, Lexington, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 7, 1954.

becoming more obvious than its merits."<sup>1</sup> Again five years later, Kenneth Muir, in a detailed account "Shakespeare's Imagery – Then and Now"<sup>2</sup> in which he did full justice to the divergent lines of research in imagery came to the conclusion: "...it must be confessed that in recent years the study of imagery has fallen into disfavour." This surely has always been the fate of a specialized study pushed to its limit and sometimes beyond its limit.

The time had come to turn away from the close and exclusive analysis of verbal imagery towards a wider concept which would include "Visual imagery" and, by emphasizing its dramatic function, would link it up with other dramatic elements. This demand was in fact formulated as early as 1952 in an important article by R. A. Foakes, "Suggestions for a New Approach to Shakespeare's Imagery",<sup>3</sup> in which the author made many valuable proposals for studying imagery in its relation to other aspects of Shakespeare's dramatic art. His claim that "The poetic image in a play is set in a context not of words alone, but of words, dramatic situation, interplay of character, stage-effect, and is also placed in a time sequence" confirmed in some ways what I had myself outlined at the end of my book (his article was written before the English version of my book was published). Foakes was quoted by other critics who were also dissatisfied with the prevalent trend of imagery analysis and were looking out for correctives.<sup>4</sup> Even before Foakes expressed his warnings, an article had been published in *Hudson Review* (1949) whose author, Alan S. Downer, also advocated an approach that would bridge the gap between Shakespeare the poet and Shakespeare the playwright. For Downer showed how Shakespeare used the language of imagery in action, how he dramatized the image, so that it "is more than a verbal one" and "is realized, made visual in the action of the play". But this important article did not become known to a wider public until 1957.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Helen Gardner, *The Business of Criticism*, Oxford, 1959.

<sup>2</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 18, 1965.

<sup>3</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 5, 1952.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. John Lawlor, "Mind and Hand, Some Reflections on the Study of Shakespeare's Imagery", *Shakespeare Quarterly* VII, 1957.

<sup>5</sup> "The Life of our Design. The Function of Imagery in the Poetic Drama", *Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. L. F. Dean, New York, 1957.



However, it was only in 1961 that the demand to integrate the examination of imagery into a combined consideration of plot and character, stage-action and style was put into practice. Maurice Charney's book *Shakespeare's Roman Plays* refers to imagery only in its sub-title ("The Function of Imagery in the Drama"), thus indicating the subsidiary role of image-analysis within a comprehensive interpretation of the plays. Charney's book appears as a milestone. Not only does he show at many points the interplay between verbal imagery and dramatic events, demonstrating how imagery merges into the stage action, he also draws attention to the occurrence of many "non-verbal presentational images", noting "how these work together with verbal images and help to realize them in dramatic terms" (p. 205). Charney's book helped to overcome the division between the study of Shakespeare's poetic language and the study of his stagecraft, a division which had for quite some time prevented critics from recognizing the close interrelationship of the two.

This line of approach was extended to cover more plays in two illuminating articles, Martha H. Golden's "Stage Imagery in Shakespearean Studies"<sup>1</sup> and Dieter Mehl's "Visual and Rhetorical Imagery in Shakespeare's Plays".<sup>2</sup> The important discussion of the impact of symbolic and often mute spectacle initiated by Robert Fricker<sup>3</sup> and further developed by Inga-Stina Ewbank<sup>4</sup> into Shakespeare's "use of a visual-verbal dialectic" was thus continued. The relationship between spectacle and expressive stage images on the one hand and metaphorical language on the other hand, which these critics demonstrate, is so striking and convincing that in retrospect one wonders why it took such a long time to be recognized.

At this point I should say something about my own experiences after 1951. For my interest had shifted from the analysis of imagery and style to an inquiry into other aspects of Shakespeare's dramatic art. But most of these

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespearean Research Opportunities* I, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> *Essays and Studies* 25, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> R. Fricker, "Das szenische Bild bei Shakespeare", *Annales Universitatis Saraviensis* V, 1956.

<sup>4</sup> "More pregnantly than words", *Shakespeare Survey* 24, 1971.

subjects which I discussed in the 1950s and 1960s, including some excellent work carried out by students of mine, also taught me something about Shakespeare's imagery and made me aware of its role in new contexts. The function of imagery within Shakespeare's art of preparation, and also its rôle in evoking the past, actualizing retrospect and narrative, clarifying the central theme of appearance and reality, and dramatizing the soliloquy,<sup>1</sup> all this made me see that imagery may play an important part in even more respects than I had realized when my first book was written. Although I did not pursue the study of imagery for its own sake I kept on coming across it. Even in my scene-by-scene commentary on *Richard III*<sup>2</sup> I had to deal with new features of Shakespeare's imagery, although this play is certainly not among the most rewarding plays for this purpose.

It was discovered indirectly, too, that imagery could be used as a valuable aid for the producer. For only within the last decade has Shakespeare's text been systematically scrutinized for its numerous implicit stage-directions, the signals for gesture and costume, physiognomy, speech, and movement on the stage. This approach which was successfully carried out by Rudolf Stamm and those working with him was another step towards relating poetic language to the reality of the stage. As Stamm has shown,<sup>3</sup> these hints for the producer and actor are conveyed by various means, imagery being only one of them. Such studies also provide support for what had already been demonstrated by Charney and others (and what confirmed the line followed in this book): that we must not restrict the concept of dramatic imagery to the traditional definitions of metaphor, simile, comparison and other figures of speech as laid down in our textbooks. These definitions may be useful for other pur-

<sup>1</sup> The relevant essays are: "Foreboding and Anticipation in Shakespeare's Early Histories", *Shakespeare Survey* 6, 1953; "Shakespeare's Art of Preparation", "Past and Future in Shakespeare's Drama", "Shakespeare's Use of the Messenger's Report", "Appearance and Reality in Shakespeare's Plays", "Shakespeare's Soliloquies" in *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art*, London, 1972.

<sup>2</sup> *A Commentary on "Richard III"*, London, 1968.

<sup>3</sup> See especially "The Theatrical Physiognomy of Shakespeare's Plays", *The Shaping Powers at Work*, Heidelberg, 1967; "The Alphabet of Speechless Complaint" in *The Triple Bond*, ed. J. G. Price, London, 1975. Arthur Gerstner-Hirzel, *The Economy of Action and Word in Shakespeare's Plays*, Bern, 1957; Jörg Hasler, *Shakespeare's Theatrical Notation: The Comedies*, Bern, 1974.

poses. If, however, we wish to recognize connections and interrelationships, and to grasp the complexity of a dramatic process, we need a concept as broad and as inclusive as possible. For what matters here is the ancillary role of imagery, its constant interchangeability and interaction with direct statement, description, visual stage-effect and other elements of dramatic representation.

When we review the present situation of Shakespearean studies and look into the future it appears doubtful whether any more specialized studies focusing on imagery alone would help us to see these relationships. Imagery studies would best serve our purpose if they were integrated in a coordinated interpretation of Shakespeare's plays, so that one could draw upon them whenever the occasion arose. This does not of course mean that we know enough about imagery and that there are no aspects left which might deserve a fresh consideration. But these new approaches could most fruitfully be worked out in connection with constant renewal of our attempts at interpretation. The contours of some of these new approaches may already be discerned.

In analysing the imagery the chief concern has been to explore what was going on in Shakespeare's mind, what associations and imaginative processes could be detected.<sup>1</sup> Much less emphasis was laid on what went on in the mind of the audience when, watching the consecutive scenes, they take in a certain passage rich in imagery. What would its impact on *their* imagination be, what would be remembered when the next scene passed over the stage? Our habit of analysing a given passage at our desk may lead us to neglect what is going on in the playhouse, and the scholar's intellectual response is different from the imaginative response of the audience. This imaginative response during a performance is difficult to describe and to examine with our customary critical methods. However, it is what matters when a play is not read but staged.

To inquire into the impact of imagery on the mind of the audience during a performance necessarily leads to a consideration of the consciousness of the passing of time

<sup>1</sup> See especially Edward A. Armstrong, *Shakespeare's Imagination*, 1946, repr. Lincoln, 1963.

which we experience while watching a play. That there are in each of Shakespeare's plays several conflicting planes and temporal modes has often been demonstrated. The important rôle of imagery in this context, however, has less often been shown. But in some cases a passage of imagery may have the effect of halting, for the audience, the passage of time and with it the action: a moment of suspense is created in which we forget about the advancing movement of the plot, "a window is thrust open admitting a glimpse of a remote past or of a sphere removed from the actuality of what we have just been witnessing on the stage".<sup>1</sup> These effects which transpose us into another time and another place, introducing a new dimension and with it another perspective of time, apply in particular to what Francis Berry in his valuable study has called "Inset".<sup>2</sup> His merit is to have shown, through many different examples, how much these "Insets" vary "in their degrees of temporal recession or perspective in relation to their dramatic context". For the time of an "Inset" is almost always different from the time of its context. Berry's insets are, in most cases, passages of intricate and complex imagery, working strongly on our imagination, and his findings could therefore help us to establish new criteria for evaluating the function of imagery in the time-sequence of the play as experienced by the audience.

A play's movement and pace, as reflected in the time-consciousness of the audience, is influenced by many factors, not only by the varying speed of the action and the movements of the characters, but also by the alteration of verse and prose, by syntax and diction, the use of rhetorical figures and several other means by which the dramatist can influence the tempo of speech and delivery on the stage. In this context Shakespeare's prose-imagery, which in my book I treated only perfunctorily, plays an important rôle, which may be deduced from Brian Vickers' thorough analysis of Shakespeare's prose.<sup>3</sup> Different types of images, used by different characters in prose-passages, may have an

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art*, London, 1972, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Berry, *The Shakespeare Inset*, London, 1965.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Vickers, *The Artistry of Shakespeare's Prose*, London, 1968.

accelerating or retarding effect, besides influencing, by their very rhythm and movement, the mood of that particular scene or passage.

In his important survey "Shakespeare's Imagery – Then and Now" Kenneth Muir proposed as "one of the ways in which the study of Shakespeare's imagery could be profitably pursued in the future" a "comprehensive study of the use of imagery by Shakespeare's contemporaries". This approach could be expanded into the question of what, in this respect – within an overall comparison – would distinguish Shakespeare's drama from that of all other playwrights, ancient and modern. Una Ellis-Fermor, in an early chapter on "The Functions of Imagery in Drama", had already given thought to this fundamental problem,<sup>1</sup> discussing the increase of concentration, unity, depth, amplitude and imaginative significance which Shakespeare's poetic drama possesses compared to drama without imagery. Renewed reflection along these lines would be fruitful. Apart from the manifold "functions" which Shakespeare's imagery fulfils in his plays, there appear to be two qualities particularly characteristic of Shakespeare, distinguishing him from all other major dramatists, and both are closely related to his use of imagery.

One is his way of making us aware of his characters' physical life in all its aspects. For we not only see before us – as has often been observed – locality, scenery and setting, but we watch these characters experiencing night and day, sleeping and waking, physically suffering or enjoying, eating and drinking, walking, standing and sitting, doing all sorts of things; we sense the climate, the weather, feel the cold and the heat, know whether it is dusk or dawn, gloomy or bright. Moreover our sense of taste, of smell, of touch is mainly awakened through the sensations of the characters on the stage. This would apply to the drama of other playwrights as well, but only to a limited extent and on a much smaller scale. For would we find this complexity and fullness of physical conditions and sensations elsewhere?

This physical existence of man is situated within the

<sup>1</sup> Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Frontiers of Drama*, London, 1945.

context of Elizabethan life. To an extent not yet fully realized Shakespeare's imagery reflects the economic realities of his age, foreign trade, crafts and merchandise, so that a study along these lines, in comparison with other dramatists, should be rewarding.

If the physical complexity of life is fully represented in Shakespeare's language, there emerges, at the other end of the scale, the world of imagination, of the spirit. In particular the tragedies and romances gain an additional dimension through the numerous references to this higher spiritual world, which nevertheless is brought close to the audience by concrete symbols and images. These two planes or modes of experience, the physical and the metaphysical, the ~~real~~ and the imaginative, counterbalance each other in a manner which prevents Shakespeare's drama from becoming either too realistic or too metaphysical. This perfect balance, unequalled in European drama, lends Shakespeare's work one of its unique qualities; nor is the breadth of experience, as reflected by his use of imagery, paralleled in the work of any other playwright. A fruitful area for future research may therefore lie in this direction.

WOLFGANG CLEMEN

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# I

## INTRODUCTION

ANYONE who will take the trouble to compare the imagery in *Antony and Cleopatra* with the imagery in *Henry VI* or in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* cannot but be greatly impressed by the vast difference between them. They lie so far apart that a connection, a transition between these two styles seems scarcely possible. But if one delves deeper into Shakespeare's dramas, and if one examines each of the plays in turn, from the earlier works to the late tragedies, it will become apparent that in the former, this art is prepared for, step by step. Here we stand before an amazing and unique development of an element of poetic expression, an evolution so striking and of such compass as is difficult to find in any other poet. It is the aim of this book to describe this in its separate phases and forms and to show its connection with Shakespeare's general development.

Anyone who has occupied himself with Shakespeare at all has at least some conception of the general development of his art. If, however, we are to study this evolution more in detail and if we are to become fully conscious of what we at first feel in a vague and general way, we shall be constrained to return again and again to the individual, concrete fact; we must fix our gaze upon separate courses of development in order to grasp the more comprehensive and the more general. Thus, for example, similar scenes and situations in the various plays must be compared with one another; we must investigate how Shakespeare manages his plot, how he characterizes his men and women, and how his description of nature, his technique of exposition, his method of preparing for a crisis, and his manner of resolving a conflict undergo changes and attain to perfection. Only from such individual investigations can we gain a definite picture of what one may term the general development of Shakespeare's art. By investigating the special