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7

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FIFTY YEARS OF THE CRITICISM OF SHAKESPEARE'S STYLE: A RETROSPECT

BY

M. C. BRADBROOK

There is no question relating to Shakespeare as a writer which does not involve his style. His only art was that of dramatic speech: his thoughts and beliefs are known only through his art: he left no equivalent of Milton's *De Doctrina* or Boswell's private papers. Yet on this central problem comparatively little has been written. It is too vast and intimidating; critics evade it for topics of characterization, theatrical conditions, philosophic implications; or they nibble at a corner—imagery, punctuation, Euphuism. In Ebisch and Schücking's *Shakespeare Bibliography* (1930), nineteen pages out of nearly three hundred suffice for Language, Vocabulary, Prosody and Style; C. H. Herford's little sketch (1925) does not include the subject, 'Mind, Art and Personality' being his nearest approach.[1] The earliest definitions of Shakespeare's style—Webster's "right happy and copious industry", Heminge and Condell's "easiness", the tributes of Jonson, Milton and Dryden have not since been matched in comprehensiveness and assurance. Restoration poets showed their views of Shakespeare's style by the freedom with which they 'improved' him; the adaptations of Rowe and Otway, Davenant and Tate and of Dryden himself are documents in the history of criticism (see Hazelton Spencer, *Shakespeare Improved*, 1927). Many editors of the eighteenth century allowed themselves almost comparable liberty of emendation, erasing such unheroic nouns as "hats", "fishes" or "blanket". Dr Johnson's pronouncement is representative: "The style of Shakespeare was in itself ungrammatical, perplexed and obscure." The Romantics exalted Shakespeare, but even the criticism of Coleridge revealed the dangers of personal judgements in matters of style, as in his notorious pronouncement upon the Porter's scene in *Macbeth*. It was the great achievement of nineteenth-century scholarship to refound the criticism of style upon a basis of historic knowledge: the twentieth century has widened and deepened this knowledge until a division between linguistic and literary criticism has reopened: the present need is for a synthesis of aesthetic judgement and scholarly insight, of taste and learning.

Grammar and Lexicography

Fifty years ago, the study of Shakespeare's style was in the hands of philologists, for the last half of the nineteenth century had seen the rise of a new science of language. The work of James Murray and Henry Bradley, which culminated in 1928 with the last volume of the *Oxford Dictionary*, reinforced by the scholarship of Germany and Scandinavia, focused attention upon Aussprache, Wortbildung and the like. This was the Industrial Revolution of Shakespearian studies, this the generation that constituted scholarship on a professional scale; the age of the 'Variorum Shakespeare', a monument that time has to some extent surprised.

The linguists did their work once for all. The *Oxford Dictionary* cannot be superseded though it may be corrected; more specialized works may appear, such as the *Early Modern English Dictionary* projected by the University of Michigan; but Abbott's *Shakespearian Grammar* (1869), Schmidt's *Lexicon* (1874: revised by Sarrazin 1902), Wilhelm Franz's *Shakespeare-Grammatik* (1900: revised 1909, 1924, 1939), and Onions's *Glossary* (1911) can never grow outmoded. Nevertheless, the direction of linguistic studies has changed. Studies of dialects and of contemporary speech, the whole science of phonetics with its international alphabet, such concepts as phonemes, morphemes (not that they are always accepted by linguists of the older schools) with the emergence of semantics and semasiology have shifted the emphasis from literary language towards observation and record. The change may be paralleled by the shift in the field of anthropology from Frazer's great assimilative collection based on classical reading as well as on modern science towards field work which requires specialized medical, linguistic, agricultural and psychological training. Such development has been made possible only through the achievement of the first generation. It is thanks to Abbott that such readings as these, 'emended' in the Globe text, now stand:

His tears runs down his cheeks like winter drops... (*Tempest*, v, i, 16)
There is no more such masters... (*Cymbeline*, iv, ii, 371)
We had droven them. (*Antony and Cleopatra*, iv, vii, 5)

Yet Abbott and even Franz leave room for further annotations upon such lines as:

If trembling I inhabit then, protest me
The baby of a girl, (*Macbeth*, iii, v, 105–6)

as a glance at the New Arden edition of *Macbeth* will show.

These scholars were still ruled by classical theory, especially in prosody; their interest in words was etymological first and foremost; Eilert Ekwall's *Shakespeare's Vocabulary, its etymological elements* (1903) may fitly represent the earlier contribution of Uppsala. The chapter on Shakespeare's English in *Shakespeare's England* (1916) was written by Henry Bradley with emphasis on pronunciation, orthography and grammar; it concludes with a survey of colloquial English and of dialects in which older views of the predominance of London English are still discernible. The modern view is that while the transition from Middle to Early Modern English began sooner than was formerly supposed, the standard language was still only incipient and that the three dialects upon which London English drew were by no means assimilated to a norm. Shakespeare wrote to be heard and not to be read: his tongue had the flexibility and careless ease of the popular stages, rising from colloquialism to high astounding terms but depending always upon the ear of the auditory—as richly variable as it was copious and voluble.

In a chapter on Shakespeare in his *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (1905), Otto Jespersen anticipated the general trend. He discussed the scope of Shakespeare's vocabulary, and his use of language to individualize character—a trait on which Pope had commented in his time and which has been examined with sensitive acumen recently by Arthur Sewell. Shylock is instanced as an example. Shakespeare's boldness of sentence structure, his readiness to adapt and use new words and his taste for the 'unpoetic' language of ordinary life are likewise noted.

Fifteen years later, in his *History of Modern Colloquial English*, H. C. Wyld amplified and confirmed some of the views of Jespersen.

Studies in Shakespeare's dialect have appeared ever since Wright's *Dialect Dictionary* (1898–1905) opened up this field. Among them are those of Appleton Morgan and Baker. Another such is being at present undertaken by H. E. Collins. Law terms, sea terms, sports and other specialized subjects have been investigated by professionals and amateurs, with the general result that Shakespeare is found to be apt rather than exact, though well furnished with all kinds of diction.

Orthography, Pronunciation and Prosody

These three topics are closely related; in these fields linguists and bibliographers have to some extent collaborated. Pollard followed up *Shakespeare's Fight with the Pirates* (1917), in which he discussed his author's idiosyncrasies of spelling and punctuation, as traceable from the texts, with an article upon 'Elizabethan Spelling as a Literary and Bibliographical Clue' (*The Library*, 4th Series, IV, 1923). The work of Greg, McKerrow and Dover Wilson has shown how closely a knowledge of printing practice and of palaeography is related to emendation: Shakespeare's spellings may identify a good text, the peculiarity of his hand guide the editor past a misprint (always, however, the problems of the playhouse intrude). The text of Jonson's plays, prepared by himself for the press, illustrates by contrast the complexity of Shakespeare's. There was perhaps no final text of *Hamlet*: what we have may represent genuine alternatives. As there may have been two or more pronunciations of a word open to Shakespeare, so there may have been two ways of acting Brutus's reception of the news of Portia's death. An open choice between alternatives must be accepted if Shakespeare's art is to be glimpsed with the lambent glow of life upon it. Except in the narrative poems, his style was not that of a bookman: his plays, for good or ill, had something of the fluid life of ballads, as the 'Bad' Quartos (whatever their origin) make plain.

Punctuation, like spelling, is no longer taken as within the editor's discretion. Alfred Thiselton first propounded the theory that Elizabethan punctuation was rhythmic rather than syntactic: Percy Simpson maintained this view in his *Shakespearian Punctuation* (1911) and stoutly defended it, as Dover Wilson also did in the first volume of the Cambridge New Shakespeare (*The Tempest*, 1921). The historical background has recently been investigated in an important article by Walter J. Ong, S.J. (*PMLA*, June 1944); in 1945 Peter Alexander, in *Shakespeare's Punctuation*, illustrated the relation of stops to style by an analysis of the Quarto and Folio versions of "What a piece of work is man!". He thinks Shakespeare's punctuation, in those texts nearest to his manuscript, is intended for the actor, not for the reader: "what Shakespeare thought suitable for the public and Lord Southampton can be studied in his *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*". Once again we penetrate beyond the printed page to a colloquial style: but even punctuation intended for the reader will have conventions different from those of today.

In matters of pronunciation, opinion has shifted since the days of Franz and of Wilhelm Viëtor, who in 1906 published two volumes on *Shakespeare's Pronunciation*, with translations into phonetic script. The older scholars were challenged by the late R. E. Zachrisson of Uppsala (*Shakespeares Uttal*, 1914; *The English Pronunciation at Shakespeare's Time*, 1927), and more recently by Helge Kökeritz, who also attacks the English phonologist Daniel Jones. Kökeritz's

work has appeared in various periodicals but his book *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* (1953) sums up his views comprehensively. He stresses the variant pronunciations open to Shakespeare; he believes with Zachrisson that Elizabethan pronunciation was much nearer to modern speech than is generally allowed. Revivals of the plays in what was taken to be original speech must thereby forgo some of their most attractive effects.

Kökeritz derives his evidence largely from puns, of which he has made a special study, and by which he claims to have solved "not a few textual cruces". Evidence on elision and stress can be gathered from song books, and an important article on this subject by E. H. Scholl appeared recently (*PMLA*, March 1948). Metrical studies, which are closely related to this subject, have been infrequent, and prosody has been left to general students of language, such as T. S. Osmond (*English Metrists*, 1906; *A Study of Metre*, 1920) and Sonnenschein. In her *Elizabethan Lyrics* (1951), however, Catherine Ing has a section on Shakespeare's songs.

Milton Crane's book on *Shakespeare's Prose* (1951), which relies upon earlier work by G. F. Krapp, Morris Croll and W. Hendrickson, surveys Shakespeare's work in relation to that of other Elizabethan dramatists. But it was journalists like Nashe who influenced him most deeply, with their acute sense of an auditory to be captivated, their variety, range and flexibility. Perhaps the most useful hints towards a study of language are not to be found in considering Euphuism, the doublet, or other traditional topics, but in glimpses towards the general development of the language afforded in Owen Barfield's *History in English Words* (1926), G. H. McKnight's *Modern English in the Making* (1928) or F. W. Bateson's *English Poetry and the English Language* (1934).

Vocabulary, Reading and the Popular Style

The growing specialization of linguistic studies has meant that language and literature are too often taught separately; this has been particularly unfortunate for students of Shakespeare. Comparatively few students of language would wish to confine themselves to a single author, especially one with so complicated a textual history. A holograph of that semi-literate Stratford yokel whom Baconians delight to dishonour would be more tempting to them. Studies of the vocabularies of individual writers other than Shakespeare are even rarer, though the value of these to Shakespearian studies cannot be over-estimated. One such volume, A. H. King's *The Language of Satirized Characters in Poetaster* (1941), will indicate some of the possibilities: H. C. Hart and A. C. Partridge have worked on the vocabularies of Jonson and Shakespeare.

Recent criticism of Shakespeare's language and style shows a distinct cleavage between that stressing the colloquial and popular elements, and that emphasizing the influence of rhetorical theory, the practice of other writers, and Elizabethan doctrines of poetry. The first, developing from the work of Zachrisson and Wyld, was favoured by the general literary taste of the inter-war years, when colloquial and unpoetic language was the vogue, and James Joyce was experimenting in the novel. The second type of criticism, developing on the academic side from work into the history of ideas by Arthur Lovejoy and his school, is proving much to the taste of research students in search of subjects. Here too the general return to formality—that "rage for order" which has led Eliot from *The Waste Land* to *The Four Quartets*, and has elevated the later as against the earlier Yeats—may have helped to transform Shakespeare from a Protean entertainer of Elizabethan prentices to a hierophant, fully armed in the panoply of symbols and allegory.

A third view, originating with Croce, and with Lascelles Abercrombie's *Plea for the Liberty of Interpreting*, would cut out all historic considerations. This is the view of the New Critics in America, but the doctrine has not been for export only. In particular the great body of criticism devoted to Shakespeare's imagery has been largely written without reference to the historic context of the plays, and to the differences between Shakespeare's English and that of today. Such critics may claim to have learned Elizabethan English by the direct method—which is one of the best ways of learning it; but a direct knowledge from reading only will lack some fullness of life, especially for the understanding of a popular dramatist, as a purely linguistic approach will also miss nuances only to be gained by a knowledge of the theatre.

An unlearned, though not uneducated, Shakespeare, adapting himself to the needs of the common stages, was bound to be influenced by his audience. Hence recent works dealing with the audience are frequently concerned with style and structure; as for example S. L. Bethell, *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (1944) and Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare's Audience* (1941), each of which, in different ways, adds a stereoscopic depth to the plays. The riches of popular speech are gathered up in W. G. Smith's *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (1935) and in Morris P. Tilley's *English Proverbs of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1950); posies and mottoes were collected by Joan Evans in *English Posies and Posy Rings* (1931). George Gordon, in *Shakespeare's English* (1928) dealt chiefly with new words, as did H. C. Hart in *Stolne and Surreptitious Copies*, and in two articles on Shakespeare's vocabulary which appeared in the *Review of English Studies* in 1943. Gladys Willcock, in *Shakespeare and Elizabethan English* (in *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, 1934) provides the best short introduction to the subject: if her essay is compared with Henry Bradley's (written eighteen years earlier) the growth of emphasis on popular elements will be evident. Miss Willcock's and Miss Walker's preface to their edition of Puttenham's *Arte of Poesie* (1936) dilates at more length upon courtly style. On other occasions, Miss Willcock, E. C. Pettet and Alwin Thaler have stressed Shakespeare's conscious artistry (Shakespeare Association Pamphlet, 1934; *Essays and Studies*, 1949; *PMLA*, December 1938), whereas Hardin Craig sees him as working by rule of thumb (*Studies in Philology*, April 1942).

F. P. Wilson in *Shakespeare and the Diction of Common Life* (1941) stressed the value of puns, images and proverbs, three of the most frequent subjects for discussion in the following decade. His article on 'Shakespeare's Reading' (*Shakespeare Survey*, 1950) again suggests that Shakespeare learned through talk and popular channels as much as through books. The extent to which Shakespeare's speech has captured general interest may be illustrated by citing half a dozen articles which appeared recently: those of Kenneth Muir in *The Cambridge Journal* (May 1950) and M. M. Mahood in *Essays in Criticism* (July 1951), both on the pun: those of D. S. Bland in *Shakespeare Survey* (1951) and Maurice Evans in *The Cambridge Journal* (April 1951), both on colloquialisms: and two by L. S. Cormican on 'Medieval Idiom' in *Scrutiny* (Autumn 1950 and Spring 1951). None of these are by professed linguists, and some suffer from an inattention to the facts of linguistic history, but all are concerned with Shakespeare's speech in terms of his particular time and profession.

The effect of Shakespeare's contemporaries upon his style has been a topic of controversy since Malone's day. His imitation (followed by his parodies) of Euphuism and Lyly's comedy has not proved a very fruitful subject although forty years ago it was not an unpopular one. Shakespeare's

supposed imitation of Beaumont and Fletcher in his last plays or the influence of Marlowe and the University wits upon the early histories are bound up with questions of the Shakespearian canon. The disintegrators, whose work in the early years of this century forms one of the curiosities of critical history, relied heavily upon arguments from style to support their case for collaboration or botching. The works of J. M. Robertson, once thought worthy of refutation by Chambers or Greg, are now hardly read at all. It is at present fashionable to claim even *Titus Andronicus* for the canon, and Hardin Craig has defended 'Shakespeare's Bad Poetry' (*Shakespeare Survey*, 1948). A far more objective use of literary tests than former critics used has recently enabled A. C. Partridge to make out a case for collaboration in *Henry VIII* (*The Problem of 'Henry VIII' Reopened*, 1949). By a strict examination of grammatical idioms (the obsolescent expletive *do*, the literary *hath*) and of Shakespeare's anacolutha, Partridge evolves an effective system of checking, based on his previous work on Jonson's vocabulary. This book is a rare example of literary-linguistic interplay.

Meanwhile, in the Cambridge New Shakespeare, Dover Wilson continues to postulate revision and rewriting of many of the plays, largely upon the evidence of conflicting styles. This rewriting, however, he quite often allows to represent Shakespeare's own second thoughts.

An annotated edition of Shakespeare is of course the best test of the swing of critical taste: the Cambridge Shakespeare was started over thirty years ago, and the new Arden edition is circumscribed by need to retain its old format; which also, to some extent, affects the volumes of the New Variorum. The differences which the last fifty years have made to editorial policy will, however, need no emphasizing to those acquainted with any of these works.

Rhetorical Theory and Elizabethan Doctrines of Poetry

Advocates of the popular Shakespeare stress his debt to the Bible, the Prayer Book, the Homilies, the medieval drama and folk literature. Critics with a bias towards the history of ideas investigate his debt to Wilson, Puttenham and the Ramists. Hardin Craig voted for Wilson, Thaler for Sidney: Miss Frances Yates in her study of *Love's Labour's Lost* (1936) saw Shakespeare the "villanist" opposed to the "artsmen" whom he satirized in Holofernes and Armado. Modern poetry itself has now returned to formality, and rhetoric is no longer a term of abuse. The history of W. B. Yeats's use of the word, for example, is enlightening, especially in the light of his dramatic practice. The more rhetorical of Shakespeare's contemporaries, Jonson and Chapman, Tourneur and Marston, enjoy popular favour at the expense of Heywood, Fletcher and Massinger, the nineteenth century's choice. T. S. Eliot has explored the possibilities of dramatic rhetoric in his plays and advocated it in his criticism. This revolution in general literary taste has reinforced the new understanding of Elizabethan critical theory which scholars, mainly American, have instituted. The most extensive contributions have been made by T. W. Baldwin, who in *William Shakspere's Five Act Structure* (1947), *Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* (1944) and *The Literary Genetics of Shakspere's Poems & Sonnets* (1950) has amply demonstrated the extent to which Shakespeare could draw on a knowledge of Latin authors and on classical and modern systems of rhetoric, grammar and logic. For the Elizabethans, poetic theory and rhetorical theory were closely combined; the Orator as hero was no mere figure for bookmen in days

when a man might have to rely on his own efforts to plead for his life; the practice of listening to sermons and court cases meant that even the uneducated would have a trained ear, and the series of experiments by which the Elizabethans evolved their great literary forms in the nineties had been planned by poets like Gascoigne and Spenser, by the practice of noblemen and travellers, and by popular journalists such as Nashe and Greene. Baldwin himself is not concerned with the general literary development of the Elizabethan age, but with its educational grounding: in fact it is sometimes doubtful whether Shakespeare is illustrating the history of ideas or the history of ideas is illustrating Shakespeare. Nevertheless, his work ensures a full appreciation of the precise theoretic and literary aids which were open to Shakespeare: it answers the old query of the nature of his reading.

In a study which rests upon Baldwin's work, *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language* (1947), Sister Miriam Joseph C.S.C. investigates in detail Shakespeare's use of schemes, figures, topics of invention, argumentation, pathos and ethos. She is concerned simply to record and tabulate the extent to which the practice of rhetoric and logic may be illustrated from the works of Shakespeare, and neither to estimate its relative significance nor to survey its development: she has done for him what E. K. did for Spenser: "a pretty Epanorthosis and withal a Paronomasia" etc. Others have explored Shakespeare's use of particular devices, such as the Oration (Milton Boone Kennedy, *The Oration in Shakespeare*, 1942) or the Monologue (Warren Smith, *Shakespeare Association Bulletin*, October 1949). A. Sackton has also examined the works of Jonson from a rhetorical point of view (*Rhetoric as a Dramatic Language in Ben Jonson*, 1948), and has written (*University of Texas Studies*, 1949) on the Paradoxical Encomium in Elizabethan Drama. A comparative study of rhetorical figures in Elizabethan poets may eventually be expected, but much remains to be done. The literary quarrels of Harvey and Nashe, the Poetomachia, and the value of parody—especially in Shakespeare's own works—would all be relevant here. One of the chief needs is a full study of the learned poets, Chapman and Jonson.[2]

The formidable scholarship of Rosemond Tuve in her *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (1947) is not directed specifically upon Shakespeare: she is concerned with the history of aesthetic theory and its relation to the non-dramatic poets of Shakespeare's day, but her discussion of the concept of decorum, the garment of style and the doctrine of "ut pictura poesis" is bound to affect the reading of all Elizabethan poetry. She represents the extreme Right in critical scholarship, and speaks for the "Artsmen". The relation of poetic theory to the practice of the popular stages (and indeed of poetic theory to poetic practice at any time) is a subject that inflames the passions; Miss Tuve's views have not been unchallenged, and the dramatic genre in any case raises special problems which have not yet been fully worked out. Certainly the older views of a primitive dramatic structure, as put forward by Stoll and Schücking, now lie in considerable danger. One of the by-products of the new interest in rhetoric has been its effect upon modern conceptions of Elizabethan acting. Alfred Harbage, who favoured a formal type of acting, has been followed by Bethell and B. L. Joseph, who in *Shakespeare's Acting* (1951) virtually identified the actor's art with that of the orator.

In exploring the various kinds of Elizabethan drama—history, comedy, tragedy, pastoral and the rest of Polonius's catalogue—the rhetoricians have helped especially to a better understanding of the problem plays. *Measure for Measure* has emerged as fully "doctrinal" according to the best Elizabethan prescriptions from the scrutiny of Roy Battenhouse and Elizabeth Pope. The

study of *Hamlet* in relation to other revenge plays, which was begun by Thorndike and Stoll and carried on by Lily B. Campbell, Percy Simpson and Fredson Bowers, depends partly on the continuity of theme, and partly on stock phrases, recurrent images and lines. Continuity of doctrine is inseparable from traditions of style in Revenge drama, for this was a pragmatic literary definition, one evolved within the theatre itself. The work of Dover Wilson, Tillyard and Lily B. Campbell on the English histories, if it is chiefly concerned with the recovery of older patterns of thought and belief, is also dependent partly upon the Elizabethan view of the moral end of poetry. Comedy has received least attention, but E. C. Pettet, in his little book on *Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition* (1949) discusses Shakespeare in relation to the romantic comedies of Lyly and Greene. *In Shakespeare and Spenser* (1950) W. B. C. Watkins compares the two poets in their use of common themes and images, and their common interest in the craft of language. Like Tillyard and others, Watkins sees in Shakespeare the continuing influence of late medieval literary forms.

Symbolism, Imagery and Ambivalence

It may be said that while exploration of theatrical conditions was the outstanding feature of Shakespearian criticism in the first three decades of this century, the exploration of language and style has been gaining ground since that time and now predominates. Of this study, one of the most important branches is the examination of imagery, sometimes in historic terms, but more often in Crocean independence of time, place or background. An investigation of similes and metaphor was anticipated as long ago as 1794 by Walter Whiter, it was foreshadowed by Coleridge in some of the most famous chapters of *Biographia Literaria*, but not developed. Suddenly, about 1930, several works appeared, all dealing with related aspects of this subject. In her little pamphlet, *Some Recent Research in Shakespeare's Imagery* (1937), Una Ellis-Fermor described the first stages of the movement. Spread and development of interest has led the intrepid explorers into the paths of psychology, anthropology, mythology and Jungian metaphysics: image-clusters, or unconscious associations of words have been tracked down: Shakespeare's fellow-dramatists have been put to the question: there has been a vast deal of repetition and much disagreement. (As Kenneth Muir noted, two critics will interpret the disease imagery of *Hamlet* in totally different ways.)

One of the earliest works on these lines was George Rylands's *Words and Poetry* (1928), which had as subtitle to Part II, 'Notes and Quotations preparatory to a study of Shakespeare's diction and style'. While citing parallels from Marlowe, Spenser and others, Rylands was not really concerned with Shakespeare's contemporaries or even with himself *qua* Elizabethan—rather as one who contained in himself the seed of development, and was not of an age but for all time. His article, 'Shakespeare's Poetry' in *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies* reaffirms the position, showing Shakespeare's progress "from conceit to metaphor".

The work of Caroline Spurgeon, beginning with a couple of essays in 1930 and 1931, culminated in her book *Shakespeare's Imagery and what it tells us* (1935). It was preceded by writings of Colin Still, F. C. Kolbe and Elizabeth Holmes, and contemporary with those of Wilson Knight and Wolfgang Clemen. (*The Wheel of Fire*, 1930; *The Imperial Theme*, 1931; *The Shakespearean Tempest*, 1932 by Knight; *Shakespeares Bilder*, 1936 by Clemen.)