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## **THE SHAKESPEARIAN METAPHOR – AN OVERVIEW OF METHODS AND ITS FUNCTIONS IN A DRAMATIC TEXT**

However much has been said about the Shakespearean metaphor, it still attracts the attention of critics and readers of Shakespeare. And the reasons are manifold. In the first place, metaphor attracts the attention because of the ambiguities of meaning that it offers regardless if it is studied from a rhetorical angle or a cognitive linguistics' perspective. Narrowing down the scope of studies to Shakespeare, metaphor is an invaluable tool in approaching his plays as it offers the readers insight into Shakespeare's poetry through language.

A number of studies have been conducted to relate the attitude to Shakespeare's imagery over the years and the findings have been summarised in, e.g. Muir (1965, 1966, 1973); Foakes (1952); Bradbrook (1954); Weimann (1974); Sławińska (1988); or McDonald (2001). It is the purpose of the present paper to reiterate what were some of the methods adopted to the study of imagery in the twentieth century, and delineate the paths along which the approaches to imagery were led. Particular attention will be paid to those critical works that have been considered groundbreaking in the study of the Shakespearean metaphor. It has to be stressed here that serious imagery criticism started with Walter Whiter's (1794) *Specimen of a Commentary on Shakespeare* (Weimann 1974:151; cf. Muir 1973) although the metaphorical quality of Shakespeare's language in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was either ignored or even deprecated (Weimann 1974:151). A bulk of imagery criticism came in the late 1920s and early 1930s with the works of G. Wilson Knight, Elizabeth Holmes, H.W. Wells and others, however a breakthrough in the study of Shakespearean imagery was marked by the publication of C. Spurgeon's (1935) *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us*. Until then, the only profitable approach to Shakespeare's plays was as studies in character (Foakes 1952:81). With Spurgeon, or rather Knight (see Foakes (1952:81)), came the necessity of regarding Shakespeare's plays as dramatic

poems,<sup>1</sup> and imagery started to be regarded as an essential tool in studying the action of the plays instead of merely noticing its poetic quality. Since the publication of Spurgeon's notable book on imagery, a number of writings on imagery has increased enormously. Following Bradbrook's (1954) classification, I wish to point to some authors and titles that largely influenced the study of Shakespeare's imagery.

In the first place, Wolfgang H. Clemen's *Shakespeeres Bilder* (1936), revised after the war as *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (1951), came forward as another revealing study after Spurgeon's publication. Knight wrote and published a number of books dealing with the subject of imagery, e.g. *The Wheel of Fire* (1930), *The Imperial Theme* (1931), *The Shakespearean Tempest* (1932). Una Ellis-Fermor, in her *Frontiers of Drama* (1945) dealt with some implications offered by Spurgeon (1935), and Clemen's method of dealing with imagery was applied by her in *Jacobean Drama* (1938). Muir (1973) recounts other influential critics who dealt with the subject; e.g. Robert B. Heilman in *This Great Stage* (1948) and *Magic in the Web* (1956) analysed the pattern of imagery in *King Lear* and *Othello* and related them to the characters and the structure of the plays thus directing our attention to the dramatic use of imagery.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, Muir (1973) points to M. Charney's *Shakespeare's Roman Plays* (1961), which he highly evaluates as the study of imagery that does not separate imagery from its dramatic context. Other studies are: a New Critical writing of Cleanth Brooks' *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947), Ralph Berry's *The Shakespearean Metaphor* (1978), and finally R. McDonald's *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language* (2001), a short survey of the attitudes to studying imagery including Spurgeon, Clemen, Brooks and Charney.

Although the list of works dealing with the subject of imagery is far from being complete,<sup>3</sup> one could risk saying that the late 1970s saw a decline in the concern for Shakespeare's imagery and a new perspective in studying imagery was cast, I believe, by Foakes (1980)<sup>4</sup> who suggested relating imagery to the notion of style. In recent years the Shakespearean metaphor has been studied from a cognitive linguistics' angle and one could quote here such authors as, e.g.,

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<sup>1</sup> A *dramatic poem* is a term rarely found in dictionaries of literature. Foakes (1952) regards it as a term whose definition can be reached by studying various approaches to imagery. He grouped the approaches under the following headings: concentration on poetic imagery, further limitations on the 'subject matter' of imagery, classification of images and interpretation of images. I understand the term, as a fusion of drama and poetry, in which one literary mode affects and complements the other.

<sup>2</sup> Dramatic imagery has to be distinguished from poetic imagery (e.g. Foakes 1952). I will deal with this issue further in the paper.

<sup>3</sup> For more details see: Bradbrook (1954), Muir (1965, 1966, 1973), Foakes (1952), Weimann (1974), Sławińska (1988) and McDonald (2001).

<sup>4</sup> I will deal with his method further in the paper.

Freeman (1993, 1995); Thompson and Thompson (1987). Alongside all the mentioned approaches, the focus of attention on Shakespeare's metaphor was shifted to its theatrical dimension, that is, the point for discussion is how to perform poetry in the theatre (see, e.g. Lyons (1963); Foakes (1980); Rosenberg (1979); Samuelson (1979)).<sup>5</sup>

It is beyond the scope of the present paper to deal exhaustively with all the books on imagery quoted above; I only wish to pursue here selected approaches to Shakespearean imagery. Let me stress here that the selection of the works on imagery criticism is only a matter of my personal choice and is meant to show the evolvement of the views on imagery and its functions. In the following pages I wish to focus exclusively on Spurgeon (1935), Clemen (1951), Knight (1930), Brooks (1947) and their implications for the study of imagery. I would also like to briefly solve the 'old-age' controversy surrounding the terminology *image* and *metaphor*, and eventually arrive at what one could understand by the dramatic potential of metaphor and present a short overview of the functions of metaphor in a dramatic text.

According to Weimann (1974:158–9), approaches to Shakespearean imagery in the early 20th century went in two directions: one was seeing metaphor as some autonomous entity, or as part of a pattern which is taken to inform or even to determine the structure of the play. The first approach is represented, e.g., by Brooks (1947) who disclaims viewing images as linked by some elaborate pattern except for 'a predominant passion' (Brooks 1947:27). Although he admits the existence of, e.g. 'clothing images' or 'chains of imagery' in his essay 'The naked babe and the cloak of manliness' (Brooks 1947), he regards them as linked not by some elaborate pattern, *but organically related, modified by a "predominant passion", and mutually modifying each other* (Brooks 1947:27). The images are treated by him autonomously in the sense that except for their mutual interrelations, the images exist in the play for their own sake, and not for the sake of the structure of the play. To conclude, according to Brooks (op.cit.), regarding Shakespeare's figures as forming some elaborate pattern in a play reduces the writer's status as a fervent poet to *a preternaturally cold and self-conscious monster* (Brooks 1947:23).

The second direction is demonstrated by, e.g., Knight (1930) who sees a Shakespearean tragedy as *set spatially as well as temporally in the mind* (Knight 1930:3). By the 'spatial' content of the play Knight means *the play's*

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<sup>5</sup> The approach represented by these authors deals with transferring the language of Shakespeare's plays onto the stage, i.e. taking into account non verbal means of expression such as: props, grouping on the stage, theatrical space, etc. As a result, a dramatic text becomes a basis for the whole theatrical performance, and it is no longer a text on the page, but becomes a text on the stage. On the differences between a dramatic text and theatrical performance, see, e.g., Limon (2002); Ubersfeld (1996).

*atmosphere* (ibid.), which includes imagery, the pattern of metaphors and symbols. He postulates that each incident, or speech, or turn of thought or a suggestive symbol should be related to either the ‘temporal’ (time-sequence) or the ‘spatial’ (the play’s atmosphere) content of the play, which binds the play (Knight 1930:14–15). The critic thus regards the play as an expanded metaphor<sup>6</sup> which sets the play’s pattern below the level of plot and character and, in this way, abstracts imagery from all dramatic context (such as plot and character). That approach, using Weimann’s (1974) words, *left many questions unanswered* (Weimann 1974:155). Both these attitudes to Shakespearean imagery Weimann (op.cit.) discounts as an unnecessary element of reductiveness.

Spurgeon’s method, defined as cataloguing or classifying images in Shakespeare’s plays in order to reveal more facts about the personality of the writer, his interests and preferences, was also disclaimed as ineffective by critics (see, e.g., Weimann, op.cit.; Foakes (1952); Muir (1973)). The main objection raised against her method was that she focused on the subject matter of images,<sup>7</sup> on that from which the comparison is drawn thus abstracting one part of the comparison (the subject matter) from the underlying idea or the object matter, which led to reductiveness (see Weimann, op.cit.). Modern criticism tends to focus more on that with which the comparison is made and it is at that point that Spurgeon’s method went wrong. Clemen (1951), unlike Spurgeon, pointed to the dramatic context in which an image appears, thus favouring the approach to metaphor as a part of the pattern in drama. He conceded that each image must be related to the train of thought, a dramatic situation (a specific motive or inducement behind an image) and a character, thus rooting imagery in the totality of the play (Clemen 1951:3). Clemen also followed the development of imagery in Shakespeare’s plays claiming that, in the early plays, the playwright used imagery as a means of poetic ornament only, and in the later plays (especially the great tragedies) became more conscious of its dramatic function. As an example of the dramatic function of imagery, Clemen shows that in the great tragedies imagery serves to foreshadow the coming events and prepare the atmosphere (Clemen 1951:89). All in all, Clemen’s approach followed the methodological attitude of stressing the existence of the chains of imagery which contributed to the dramatic effect.

McDonald (2001) comments briefly on the faults with the former approaches to metaphor and warns against repeating some of his predecessors’ errors. By

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<sup>6</sup> This view of regarding a play as an expanded metaphor was shared by Knights and Heilman (see Weimann (1974:159); Berry (1978)). Berry (1978:1) speaks of informing and organising the drama according to some prevailing metaphoric idea.

<sup>7</sup> Nowadays, *tenor* and *vehicle* are most commonly used terms in the formation of a metaphor. Others are *source domain* and *target domain*, or *recipient field* and *donor field* (McDonald 2001:59).

such errors he means the methods of Spurgeon, Clemen and Brooks which led to *seeing patterns everywhere – and seeing little else* (McDonald 2001:71). The main faults that must not be repeated in imagery criticism is the necessity of not abstracting the tenor from its vehicle (ibid.) and also of not depriving the metaphor from its social and historical function (Weimann 1974:166).

What is, however, meant by the Shakespearean metaphor? A host of critics would have rather used the term *Shakespearean imagery* (Spurgeon (1958); Clemen (1951); Foakes (1952); Muir (1965, 1973) whereas some others would have resorted to the term *metaphor* (see e.g. Berry (1978); Finch (1981); Melchiori (1988); Weimann (1974); McDonald (2001)).<sup>8</sup> Generally speaking, *imagery* is a broader term than *metaphor* and many images (but by no means all) are conveyed by figurative language.<sup>9</sup> It seems to me that with regard to Shakespeare, however, these two terms are often used interchangeably with the aim to denote a phenomenon of figuration. Therefore, speaking of imagery, I mean *figurative language*, such that makes use of the figures of speech and thus departs from a literal language. The most conspicuous and most frequently used figure of speech is a metaphor and below I wish to demonstrate what is commonly meant by this term in Shakespearean criticism.

Although there are many definitions of metaphor available, let me quote McDonald (2001:58), who, in very simple terms, defines metaphor as a process of substitution: *one word (B) is used in place of another word (A) to clarify the nature or function of A*. Thus, for example, when Demetrius waking speaks to Helena of *thy lips, those kissing cherries, [...] (III. 2. 130)*,<sup>10</sup> the effect of this transference is to apply the properties of the cherries to Helena's lips. McDonald (2001) notices that what governs metaphor is the perception of resemblance (cf. Limon (2002:484)).

Apart from the underlying sense of analogy behind the formation of metaphor, a lot of attention has been paid to the constituent parts of metaphor. Most frequently, metaphor is defined by means of *tenor* and *vehicle*, the distinction first made by I.A. Richards (see, e.g., Holman and Harmon (1986:298–9)). The tenor is the idea being expressed or the subject matter of the comparison (cf. Weimann (1974:163)) and vehicle is the image by which a given idea is expressed. In addition, Weimann (1974:164) claims that to fully explore the nature of this metaphorical unity one should distinguish between its two functions: **referential** or **representational** function and **expressive** or

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<sup>8</sup> On the history of the terms *image* and *metaphor* in literary criticism as well as the search towards defining *image* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century criticism see my paper (2002). On the preference of using the term *metaphor* over *image*, see, e.g. Furbank (1970), Foakes (1952), Weimann (1974), Murry (1960).

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g. Cuddon (1991).

<sup>10</sup> Quoted after *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Harold F. Brooks, ed.). The Arden Shakespeare.

**evaluative** function.<sup>11</sup> The first function of the metaphor is to illustrate to us some remote or abstract situation by means of the *vehicle* whereas the second function is to evaluate the *tenor* through its pictorial representation (vehicle), to denounce or to praise it, to diminish or to increase. It is only through the interaction of these two functions that we can speak of the poetic and dramatic potential of a metaphor.

The presented sample of views on the nature and constituent parts of a metaphor does not, however, mention yet another distinction necessary in the study of Shakespearean metaphor. In the light of regarding a Shakespeare's play as a dramatic poem, Foakes (1952:81) differentiates between poetic imagery and dramatic imagery; the latter fully exploits the functions of imagery or metaphor in a dramatic text. The functions of metaphor in drama make up for the dramatic potential of metaphor, i.e. they open to us the possibilities of a dramatic text as the text planned for staging.

Dramatic imagery as different from poetic imagery was discussed, e.g., by Downer (1949–50:257) who came forward with the following functions of imagery in the poetic drama: **providing of a background for the action, enriching the language of the play and serving to unify its execution**. He stated that the function of imagery in poetic drama consists in the use of language of *imagery in action* (1949–50:246) and it is here that the language of action and the language of poetry unite in performance. In a similar vein, Scragg (1994:35) suggests the following functions of imagery: defining the place and time of a dramatic action, defining a character, and projection of a theme. Pfister (1988:156–8), in his comprehensive *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, suggested the following functions for the metaphor in drama: **ornamentation**, the **concretisation** or **illustration of a particular situation**, and **emphasis** that is used to direct the audience's attention. It can also have some other functions specific to drama. Pfister enumerates here a **characterising** function, **space-creating** function or general **thematic** function (cf. Foakes (1952:89)). **Characterising** function of a metaphor in drama serves to highlight either the stylistic code of the work, or the personality of a character that aptly resorts to figurative speech. **Space-creating** function conveys a sense of overall spatial context within which the play is set. And finally, **thematic** function elucidates the main themes and helps to understand the play through metaphorical bonds.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. McDonald (2001:64): *Figuration is a potent affective device, not only describing the world, but also shaping the audience's feelings about characters, events and arguments.*

<sup>12</sup> While Pfister (1988:156-8) speaks of *metaphorical bonds*, Foakes (1952) calls these patterns 'dominant' pattern of images or iterative images. McDonald (2001:72-7) speaks of networks of images, i.e. perceived semantic coherence among images. One should be careful however that, e.g., analysing *King Lear* through the metaphor of seeing may lead to vague

Foakes (1952), using the distinction made by Una Ellis Fermor (1949), provides us with more general functions of imagery, such as: revealing relations between the world of the play and the outside world, knitting together the plot by iteration, revealing and keeping in mind the underlying mood.<sup>13</sup> In addition, Foakes speaks of many more particular functions of imagery such as: differentiating between characters, relating imagery to plot or a situation, describing an event or scene, relieving tension, closing a scene, providing information, creating a setting, or showing powerful emotion on the part of a character. Summing up, we might say that functions of metaphor in a dramatic text can be grouped under the following headings: metaphor in relation to a character, to a plot or scene, and also in terms of some higher, thematic structures of meaning. It is worth stressing here that all these functions of metaphor relate to its function in a dramatic text and not to its theatrical representation on the stage. It is doubted whether metaphoric speech can be realised in any other way beside verbal when it is performed on the stage (see Limon (2002:484), cf. McDonald, op.cit.).

In his revealing article, Foakes (1980), signals yet another approach that can be adopted to the study of imagery. He postulates that imagery should be related to style, i.e. *such features as the rhetorical pattern of the dialogue, the mood and tone of what is spoken, all that may be summed in a notion of style* (Foakes, op.cit., 83). It is a way in which we can reach towards ‘the dramatic significance’ of Shakespeare’s plays and Foakes defines it in the following way:

*So perhaps the time is ripe for the development of an approach to Shakespeare which would ask how **dramatic significance**<sup>14</sup> is established in plays, and how this differs from the meanings investigated in the process of glossing a text or studying imagery; it would necessarily consider style, and the ways in which the demands of character or character over scene, or scene over character, or play over both scene and character, may affect Shakespeare’s treatment of his material, and how an understanding of such things may throw light on the deeper structure and a significance of a work* (Foakes 1980:92).

His words may be interpreted as an encouragement to study Shakespeare’s figurative language in combination with other factors, such as, e.g., the rhythmical pattern of the speech (which belongs to the text), and also study figuration with regard to its dramatic context in various relations: scene-character, play-scene, play-character, etc.

To illustrate his method, Foakes provides the following example. He captures the elusive element of figuration of a single line in *Macbeth: Things*

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abstractions and be seen as an unhelpful element of reductiveness (see Weimann (1974:165)). Cf., e.g. Berry (1978); Weimann (1974); Lichtenfels (2001).

<sup>13</sup> These functions of imagery can be shared by many other factors, e.g. stage effects, use of properties, etc.

<sup>14</sup> Emphasis mine.

*bad begun make strong themselves by ill* (3.2.55)<sup>15</sup> and claims that this line is probably unintelligible to the majority of theatre-goers and readers as they hear/read it. If they cannot grasp the sense, they must sense ‘the magic’ of this line (Foakes 1980:82), which has about it something of the incantation of the Weird Sisters at the beginning of the play and carries us forwards, to the beginning of Act IV, when Macbeth conjures and invokes devils. Thus ‘the magic’ Foakes speaks of can be evoked by means of the rhetorical pattern of this speech, and this, in turn, gives us the insight into the recesses of Macbeth’s dark mind, establishes the mood of the scene, ominous and sinister as Macbeth’s is at the moment.<sup>16</sup>

In view of the critics’ opinions on imagery in drama, it seems to me that despite a great number of critical works on this issue, metaphor in drama still presents problems of interpretation possibly because of the lack of the right method of study, or because of the ‘elusive quality’ of figuration that frequently cannot be pinned down to sophisticated terms offered by dictionaries of literature or the Renaissance theory of rhetoric. Another reason for the insufficient extent to which metaphor in drama is studied is that imagery criticism has recently fallen in disfavour giving way to New Historicism, and other postmodern approaches to Shakespeare, which however may be very short-lived, as claimed by Kermode (2000). Kermode discounts any modern approaches to Shakespeare, which, for example, demand reading of Shakespeare’s plays as involved in the political discourse of the time. Such and similar approaches, he defines as: *taking Shakespeare down a peg*, and [...] *only as evidence of a recurring need to find something different to say, and to say it on the topics that happen to interest the writer more than Shakespeare’s words, which are, as I say, only rarely invoked* (Kermode 2000:ix). Kermode signals then that after all the enthusiasm with which the postmodern approaches to Shakespeare were received, the time is ripe to return to Shakespeare’s language, treating it as a most potent device of the drama. And these words, more than any other, justify the further search for the possibilities that metaphor can offer in a dramatic text.

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted after W. Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (1999), K. Muir (ed.). The Arden Shakespeare.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Knight (1930:3) who speaks of ‘the spatial content of the play’. See, e.g. Weimann (1974) and Foakes (1952) for in depth commentary on this approach.



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