

# Shakespeare's Plots

A Study in Dramatic  
Construction

By

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“I should have been so poor, so cold, so shortsighted, if I had not learnt in some measure to borrow modestly from the treasures of others, to warm myself at a stranger's fire, and to strengthen my vision by the glasses of art. I have therefore always been ashamed and vexed when I have heard or read anything which found fault with criticism. It ought to stimulate genius, and I flatter myself that I have gained something from it which comes very near to genius.”—LESSING, *Dramatic Notes*, No. 101.

“Criticism has been popularly opposed to creation, perhaps because the kind of creation that it attempts is rarely achieved, and so the world forgets that the main business of Criticism, after all, is not to legislate, nor to classify, but to raise the dead. Graves at its command, have waked their sleepers, oped and let them forth. It is by the creative power of this art that the living man is reconstructed from the litter of blurred and fragmentary paper documents that he has left to posterity.”—WALTER RALEIGH, *Style*.



## PREFACE

“THE intellectual measure,” wrote Ruskin, “of every man since born, in the domains of creative thought, may be assigned to him according to the degree in which he has been taught by Shakespeare.” In harmony with this opinion is that of James Russell Lowell: “There is as much intellectual training to be got from the study of his [Shakespeare’s] works, as from those of any, I had almost said of all, of the great writers of antiquity.” These men were both critics and educators. With their sentiments I think all teachers and students of literature will agree. The consensus of opinion of the competent, therefore, is that the subject of which this book treats is of superlative importance.

The method of studying a drama which I advocate and exemplify is unique. The system now in vogue is to study the play in detail, Scene by Scene, Act by Act. The result is, the student has no conception of a drama as a Work of Art, the primal quality of which is Unity. Amiel says, “There is a way of killing truth by truths. Under the pretence that we want to study it more in detail, we pulverize the statue.” Likewise the present method of studying a drama makes of it a series of disjointed, fragmentary Scenes and Acts having no organic connection.