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Anne Barton's essays on Shakespeare and his contemporaries are characterized by their combination of intelligence, humanity and elegance. This book contains two previously unpublished pieces and makes accessible to a wider public of students and scholars essays which have previously been available only in article form, here revised and updated where necessary. In a linked but wide-ranging collection the author addresses such diverse issues as Shakespeare's trust (and mistrust) of language, the puzzle of Falstaff's inability to survive in a genuinely comic world, the unconsummated marriage of Imogen and Posthumus in *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare's debt to Livy and Machiavelli in *Coriolanus*, 'hidden' kings in the Tudor and Stuart history play, comedy and the city, and deer-parks as places of liberation and danger in English drama up to and beyond the Restoration. Professor Barton looks at both major and neglected plays of the period and the ongoing dialogue between them. Taken together the essays reveal a remarkable range of reference and depth of insight, together with an increasing emphasis on historical and social contexts.

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ESSAYS, MAINLY SHAKESPEAREAN

ANNE BARTON

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In memoriam
Muriel Clara Bradbrook
1909–1993

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0521404444 - Essays, Mainly Shakespearean
Anne Barton
Frontmatter
More information

Contents

List of illustrations — *page* xi
Preface — xiii
Acknowledgements — xviii

PART I

1 'Wrying but a little': marriage, law and sexuality in the plays of Shakespeare — 3
2 *Love's Labour's Lost* (1953) — 31
3 Shakespeare and the limits of language (1971) — 51
4 Falstaff and the comic community (1985) — 70
5 *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*: Shakespeare's 'sense of an ending' (1972) — 91
6 'Nature's piece 'gainst fancy': the divided catastrophe in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1974/1992) — 113
7 Livy, Machiavelli and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (1985) — 136
8 Leontes and the spider: language and speaker in Shakespeare's last plays (1980) — 161
9 'Enter Mariners wet': realism in Shakespeare's last plays (1986) — 182

PART II

10 The king disguised: Shakespeare's *Henry V* and the comical history (1975) — 207

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521404444 - Essays, Mainly Shakespearean
Anne Barton
Frontmatter
More information

11 'He that plays the king': Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* and the Stuart history play (1977) 234

12 Oxymoron and the structure of Ford's *The Broken Heart* (1980) 261

13 Shakespeare and Jonson (1983) 282

14 London comedy and the ethos of the city (1979) 302

15 Comic London 329

16 Parks and Ardens (1992) 352

Index 380

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Cambridge University Press
0521404444 - Essays, Mainly Shakespearean
Anne Barton
Frontmatter
More information

Illustrations

1 A handfast, 'till death us do part', emblem no. 87 in Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Nucleus Emblematum* (Arnheim, 1611). (Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.) *page* 12
2 'Et in Arcadia ego', by Nicholas Poussin. The first version, in the Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth. (Reproduced by permission of the Chatsworth Settlement Trustees.) 96
3 'Et in Arcadia ego', by Nicholas Poussin. The second version, in the Louvre. (Reproduced by permission of the Louvre.) 97
4 A drawing of Simon Eyre, Lord Mayor in 1445, in his aldermanic robes. (Reproduced by permission of the Guildhall Library, London.) 317
5 The first Royal Exchange as built in the centre of the City of London by Sir Thomas Gresham in 1565–9. (Reproduced by permission of the Guildhall Library.) 318
6 Sir Thomas Gresham, mercer, merchant, and the greatest financier of his day. (Reproduced by permission of the Guildhall Library.) 319
7 The lemon tree pelican device in the 1616 Lord Mayor's Show designed by Anthony Munday. (Reproduced by permission of the Guildhall Library.) 320
8 'Sceane with London farr off', from Davenant's masque *Britannia Triumphans*. (Reproduced by permission of the Chatsworth Settlement Trustees.) 347
9 A map of Warwickshire showing 'The old forrest of Arden', from Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1612). (Reproduced by permission of the Syndics, Cambridge University Library.) 355

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Cambridge University Press
0521404444 - Essays, Mainly Shakespearean
Anne Barton
Frontmatter
More information

10 An engraving by Kip showing St James's Palace and part of St James's Park, with the London skyline, from *Britannia Illustrata* (1707). (Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.) 370

11 A detail from the engraving by Kip of St James's Palace and part of St James's Park, from *Britannia Illustrata* (1707). (Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.) 371

12 Ladies and gentlemen taking the air in St James's Park; detail from a view by Kip in the Crace Collection. (Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.) 373

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Cambridge University Press
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Anne Barton
Frontmatter
More information

Preface

With one exception, the sixteen essays in this collection were written over a period of some twenty-five years. Two of them, 'Comic London', the 1990 Patrides lecture at the University of York, and 'Wrying but a little', a paper given at the International Shakespeare Conference in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1992, have not been published before. The others have appeared separately, in various periodicals or volumes of essays, often in honour of former teachers and colleagues. Although I have found, in revisiting the work of earlier years, that the combination of responsibility and distance can be disquieting, I am glad that, by reprinting essays written for such friends as C. L. Barber, M. C. Bradbrook, Kenneth Muir, Arthur Colby Sprague and J. P. Stern, I can give my tribute to them a longer life in print.

I have been guided in my selection by the advice of various colleagues and by readers for Cambridge University Press. Some of these have regretted the omission of the introductions to *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* written for the New Penguin Shakespeare, and the wholesale exclusion of those produced for the comedies in *The Riverside Shakespeare*. The ready availability of these, and their address to a more popular audience than most of the essays chosen, explains that decision. Others have missed two pieces on Jonson, 'Harking back to Elizabeth: Ben Jonson and Caroline nostalgia', which appeared in *ELH* 48 (1982), and '*The New Inn* and the problem of Jonson's late style', in *English Literary Renaissance* 9 (1979), as well as the review article, 'The distinctive voice of Massinger', from *The Times Literary Supplement* of 20 May 1977. The first two, however, were absorbed virtually intact into *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, also published by Cambridge University Press (1984), while the Massinger piece has already been reprinted in Douglas Howard's collection, *Philip Massinger: A Critical Reassessment* (Cambridge, 1985). It has

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Anne Barton
Frontmatter
More information

therefore seemed best to include only an outline sketch of my views on Shakespeare's greatest contemporary, in the form of a paper, 'Shakespeare and Jonson', given originally in 1981 at the Second Congress of the Shakespeare Association in Stratford-upon-Avon, and subsequently published as part of its proceedings. Although this essay foreshadows part of the argument later developed in *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, it is independent of that book as the other Jonson pieces are not.

Not without a few qualms and misgivings, I have allowed myself to be persuaded that '*Love's Labour's Lost*', my earliest article, written when I was still an undergraduate, and published in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 4 (1953) during my final year at Bryn Mawr, ought to form part of this collection. As an essay drawing fresh attention to a play extraordinarily neglected or misrepresented before that date, it does not seem to me negligible. Both its high estimate of the comedy and the particular reading it advances are things in which I still believe. But, however influential it may have been, it is now a period piece, written in a style all too redolent of a youthful passion for Walter Pater. As such, it craves a certain amount of indulgence from readers (myself included) who come to it some forty years later. I have cut the essay somewhat, mainly in order to relieve it of some of its (mostly adjectival) verbiage, but otherwise made no attempt to revise it. Its final paragraph, embarrassing though I now find it, was the germ of what became *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, and I have for that reason allowed it to stand.

Essays, Mainly Shakespearean is divided into two parts. The first is focussed on Shakespeare himself. It begins with my most recent piece, 'Wrying but a little', reflecting my current interest in law and social structure, in patterns of human interaction on and off stage in Renaissance England, and then moves on to the earliest ones included here: '*Love's Labour's Lost*' and 'Shakespeare and the limits of language' (1971). The latter explores a concern (evident throughout the book in various formulations) with what language can and cannot do, both for the characters who must rely upon it and, in more specifically theatrical terms, for the dramatist. The remainder of the first section is devoted to three loosely paired sets of essays: on comedy, on the Roman plays, and on the last plays. In the first group, I consider the immanence of endings in *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night* and beyond, and Falstaff's struggle to survive when he leaves his proper world of the history plays for the alien one of Shakespearean

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Anne Barton
Frontmatter
More information

comedy. The relation of Renaissance drama to its classical inheritance – a recurring preoccupation of this volume – is especially marked in the pieces on *Antony and Cleopatra* (1974) and *Coriolanus* (1985). In the two essays on Shakespeare's last plays which conclude this section, I explore the changed relationship of verse to speaker, and the complex interplay of romance convention with the 'real'.

'Enter Mariners wet', the later of these two essays, also addresses itself to some of the older romances from which Shakespeare drew. In this respect, it looks forward to the second section of the book, concerned with the active interrelations between Shakespeare and his contemporaries: the presence not only of his voice, but those of Jonson, Massinger, Ford and other dramatists, in an ongoing dialogue among plays. A considerable number of obscure or minor works – *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, Cartwright's *The Royal Slave*, the collaborative *Sir John Oldcastle*, or Heywood's delightfully preposterous *The Foure Prentises of London* – feature here. They do so partly out of a conviction that the major achievements of the period can only be understood by way of its adjacent, lesser efforts, but also because the latter (many of them popular in their time) can richly repay attention when allowed to speak for themselves. There is probably a link here with my initial essay on *Love's Labour's Lost* and the Paterian principle that underlay my defence of that (at the time) slighted comedy. Apart from the great artists, Pater wrote in his essay on Botticelli, there are some 'who have a distinct faculty of their own by which they convey to us a peculiar quality of pleasure which we cannot get elsewhere; and these too have their place in general culture, and must be interpreted to it by those who have felt their charm strongly'. That can be as true of individual plays as of their authors. Heywood's *The Foure Prentises of London* is not *Henry V*, any more than *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* is *The Winter's Tale*, but they deserve to be appreciated for themselves, not simply as a way of recognizing (as I unfashionably think we should) the intrinsic superiority of Shakespeare. Critics, Bacon believed, 'are the brushers of noblemen's clothes'. Many of the works which have received attentions of this kind from me over the years are very minor gentry indeed, but I have liked presenting them to other readers looking well turned-out.

The pairing of essays in Part I (those on comedy, the Roman plays and last plays) recurs in Part II. Essays 9 and 10, for instance, are both concerned with disguised kings, while 10 and 11 belong together as

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Anne Barton
Frontmatter
More information

pieces centred on John Ford. The final three are about cities. 'London comedy and the ethos of the city' (1979) meshes with 'Comic London' (1990) and, to some extent, with the wide-ranging essay on 'Parks and Ardens' (1992) which ends the collection. I have not emphasized links of this kind for autobiographical reasons (just as I have avoided a chronological arrangement) but because I hope that putting related essays together will allow different arguments to interact and, without suggesting a monograph in sixteen chapters, provide a sense of continuity. By no means all the connections were apparent at the time of writing: they seem, rather, to have sprung from the gradual discovery of a subject. If this reflects, perhaps, something of what the word 'essay' should mean, it also leaves the writer with a sense (probably illusory) that to have recognized the dimensions of that subject from the start might have benefitted the earlier pieces.

Certainly, I could imagine rewriting any one of these meshed groups, not only consolidating them but developing examples and themes. Only once, however, in the case of 'Nature's piece 'gainst fancy', the essay on *Antony and Cleopatra*, have I actually indulged in a modest amount of recasting. In revising this essay, which began as an Inaugural lecture at Bedford College, I have tried not to stray too far from the spirit of the original – addressed as it was to a general audience; nor have I complicated the analysis at certain points where it would be tempting to re-think 1973 from the vantage point of a further twenty years. Elsewhere in the volume, I have contented myself with corrections only of date, fact, and quotation and with a certain amount of scholarly up-dating in the notes.

In his essay 'Of Bookes', Montaigne offers an apologia for his habits of reading and writing. With disarming but tough-minded modesty, he concedes his casualness of study, selective taste, and large areas of ignorance. 'If one booke seeme tedious unto me', he writes (in Florio's 1603 translation), 'I take another.' Not for him arduous hours among back issues of the *PMLA*. No one these days, myself included, can afford such self-indulgence. Yet there is something to be said for that 'blitheness' which Montaigne seeks to preserve against 'plodding contention', and even (it may be) for his admission that 'hardly could I give others reasons for my discourses, that give none unto my selfe, and am not well satisfied with them'. The cultivation of method in critical practice, as of historical knowledge as an end in itself, has led in some quarters to a neo-scholasticism

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Anne Barton
Frontmatter
More information

resembling that which Montaigne was, so learnedly, reacting against. There is at least partial virtue in the humane principles he claimed to follow: 'or if I studie, I onely endeavour to find out the knowledge that teacheth or handleth the knowledge of my selfe, and which may instruct me how to die well, and how to live well'.

It would be presumptuous for someone who belongs to the academy, and who has necessarily been affected by the winds of critical fashion, to insist that her critical essays are a mode of self-enquiry in the manner of Montaigne. It is easy to recognize in the pages that follow certain evolving, general influences: formalist analysis of play-texts, theories of the role of language in imaginative writing, an increasing emphasis on historical and social contexts. If there is any progression apparent in my essays, it is an increasing need for footnotes, the product (in part) of a tendency, recognizably of the moment, to situate texts within a complexly understood moment of time. What I hope begins to happen in the most recent pieces collected here – 'Parks and Ardens' and 'Wrying but a little' – is the emergence of a style of criticism which is open to historical circumstance without losing touch with the general shape as well as the details of plays. It is in this direction that my work in this and later fields is currently moving. Reading back, however, through my pieces on Shakespeare and other dramatists of his period, I have been struck by a long-term insistence upon literature as a source of pleasure and – somewhat in the style of Montaigne – by my habitual use of it to complicate and extend my own understanding. Bacon claimed, in *The Advancement of Learning*, that 'it is the duty and virtue of all knowledge to abridge the infinity of individual experience, as much as the conception of truth will permit, and to remedy the complaint of *vita brevis, ars longa*'. He was not thinking in that passage of poetry or drama, but the statement has always seemed to me, and still does, peculiarly applicable to that special kind of knowledge which imaginative literature can provide.

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All quotations from Shakespeare have been keyed to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans *et al.* (Boston, 1974). Unless otherwise indicated, dates given for plays are those suggested in *Annals of English Drama 975–1700*, by Alfred Harbage, rev. S. Schoenbaum (London, 1964).

'*Love's Labour's Lost*', my first publication of any kind, and by far the earliest essay reprinted here, appeared initially in *The Shakespeare Quarterly* IV, 4 (1953); 'Shakespeare and the limits of language' in *Shakespeare Survey 24* (Cambridge University Press, 1971); 'Falstaff and the comic community' in *Shakespeare's Rough Magic: Essays in Memory of C. L. Barber*, ed. P. Erickson and C. Kahn (Associated University Presses, 1985); '*As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*: Shakespeare's sense of an ending' as chapter 8 of *Shakespearean Comedy*, ed. M. Bradbury and D. Palmer, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies (© Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1972). 'Nature's piece 'gainst fancy': the divided catastrophe in *Antony and Cleopatra*' was published separately in its original form in 1974 as my Bedford College Inaugural lecture. 'Livy, Machiavelli and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*' first appeared in *Shakespeare Survey 38* (Cambridge University Press, 1985); 'Leontes and the spider: language and speaker in Shakespeare's last plays' in *Shakespeare's Styles: Essays Presented to Kenneth Muir*, ed. P. Edwards, I.-S. Ewbank and G. K. Hunter (Cambridge University Press, 1980); and 'Enter Mariners wet: realism in Shakespeare's last plays' in *Studies in European Realism: Essays in Honour of J. P. Stern*, ed. N. Boyle and M. Swales (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

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More information

State University Press, 1975), pp. 92–117 (© 1975 by The Pennsylvania State University); 'He that plays the king: Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* and the Stuart history play' in *English Drama: Forms and Development. Essays in Honour of Muriel Clara Bradbrook*, ed. M. Axton and R. Williams (Cambridge University Press, 1977); 'Oxymoron and the structure of Ford's *The Broken Heart*, in *Essays and Studies*, ed. I.-S. Ewbank (John Murray for the English Association, 1980); 'Shakespeare and Jonson' in *Shakespeare, Man of the Theatre*, eds. J. Halio, K. Muir, D. Palmer (Associated University Presses, 1983); 'London comedy and the ethos of the city' in *The London Journal* 4, no. 2 (Longman Group Ltd, 1979); and 'Parks and Ardens' in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 80 (1992).

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Over and above the indebtedness to individual scholars and friends that I have tried to record in particular essays (and in my Preface), I should like more generally to thank Michael Cordner for not only urging the idea of such a collection upon me, but taking time from his own work to sketch out a possible table of contents. I am also grateful to John Barton, Alison Hennegan, Peter Holland, John Kerrigan, and Jeremy Maule for valuable suggestions and critical advice on the project as a whole.

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