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978-0-521-41083-0 - Shakespeare and the Mannerist Tradition: A Reading of Five Problem Plays

Jean-Pierre Maquerlot

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This book offers an original approach to Shakespeare's so-called 'problem plays' by contending that they can be viewed as experiments in the Mannerist style. The plays reappraised here are *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*.

But how can a category which characterizes a trend in sixteenth-century Italian painting be made relevant to theatrical analysis? Drawing upon famous works by Michelangelo, Rosso, Pontormo, Parmigianino, Bronzino, Tintoretto and others (with examples illustrated in the book), Maquerlot shows how these artists cultivated structural ambiguity or dissonance in reaction to the classical canons of the High Renaissance.

Close readings of Shakespeare's plays, from the period 1599 to 1604, reveal intriguing analogies with Mannerist art, while illuminating the dramatist's response to the rhetorical formalism of his Elizabethan predecessors. Maquerlot concludes by looking at *Othello*, which marks the end of Shakespeare's Mannerist experiments, and his less equivocal use of artifice in the late romances.

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Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-------------|---|
| <i>EC</i> | <i>Essays in Criticism</i> |
| <i>ELH</i> | <i>English Literary History</i> |
| <i>PMLA</i> | <i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i> |
| <i>SQ</i> | <i>Shakespeare Quarterly</i> |
| <i>SS</i> | <i>Shakespeare Survey</i> |