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EMMA SMITH is Fellow and Tutor in English at Hertford College, University of Oxford.

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Preface

This book is intended as an introduction in two senses. Firstly it is an introduction in a sense available to Shakespeare's contemporaries: that of a first guide to a topic. Readers in sixteenth-century London could purchase 'introductions' to fields from astrology to Welsh, and from swimming to dying well. Like these, I have tried not to assume existing expertise or familiarity: I have wanted the book to be self-standing, acting as an encouragement and guide to further reading and investigation via 'Where next?' sections after each chapter. Each chapter covers a range of examples with a focus on those plays most frequently studied. The emphasis of this volume, unlike the many other great introductory guides that are currently available, is that it engages less with facts than with critical approaches to Shakespeare's plays – with the question of what we 'do' when we read or study Shakespeare. And I have also thought of it as an introduction in a more recent sense: 'the action of introducing or making known personally' (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Meet Shakespeare ('s plays): I think you'll find you have some things in common. I hope you hit it off.

Lots of students – particularly at Hertford College, Oxford, at the Department for Continuing Education in the University of Oxford, and at the Bread Loaf School of English – will find this material familiar, either because they've heard me rehearse parts of it in different forms or on different occasions, or because they recognise their own ideas here too. I'm grateful for the serial privilege of those conversations. Emily Bartels has cast a generous eagle eye over it all; Charlotte Brewer has, among other things, saved me from my most egregious forms of mateyness. And since this is a book which comes out of, and I hope may give something back to, teaching, it's made me think with affection about what I owe to those who have taught me: Rita Chamberlain, John Gregory, Katherine Duncan-Jones, and, differently but especially, Viv Smith.

All suggested websites were accessed in April 2006. Except where I've indicated otherwise, the edition of the plays I have used is the New Cambridge: for *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *The Winter's Tale* where there is no New Cambridge edition yet, I've used *The Complete Works* ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (2nd edn, Oxford, 2005).