



EMRYS JONES

Photograph: Deborah Elliot

Emrys Lloyd Jones 1931–2012

EMRYS JONES was the most original scholar–critic of his generation in the field of Shakespeare and sixteenth-century literature. He was born on 30 March 1931 in Hoxton. His parents, Peter and Elizabeth (née Evans), had moved to London from Wales in the 1920s, and ran a corner shop and dairy at 155 Pitfield Street. Emrys used jokingly to refer to himself as a cockney, and as Pitfield Steet is not much more than a mile from St Maryle-Bow, as the crow flies, he almost certainly had a right to that title. At the outbreak of the Second World War he was sent, for safety, to Wales, where he boarded with relatives of his mother at 59 High Street, Glynneath.

He attended Neath Grammar School, where he was in the same form as Peter Lewis, later a Professor of Medieval History at Oxford, David Nicholas, later Sir David, head of Independent Television News, and Roger Howells, who became a senior administrator with the Royal Shakespeare Company and was a close friend. As this suggests, the school was distinguished academically. Notable on the staff were the English master Elis Jenkins and the Latin master W. J. Stratton. There was a strong musical tradition, with an orchestra led by John Hopkin Jones. Emrys sang in the choir, but his main interest was drama. The school magazine records him directing and acting in several plays, and Howells recalls their intensive rehearsals of the tent scene from *Julius Caesar* for a school competition, with Emrys playing Cassius to Howells's Brutus.

In June 1949 Emrys entered for, and won, a Violet Vaughan Morgan Scholarship. This was a privately endowed scholarship, worth £80 a year for three years, and eligible for supplementation by the Ministry of Education. A scholarship had been advertised the previous year, but not

awarded, so Emrys was the first ever Violet Vaughan Morgan Scholar. In his year there were twenty-one competitors and the chief examiner was Lord David Cecil. The scholarship did not guarantee admission to an Oxford college, and in his acceptance letter Emrys asked if he might do his national service before coming up as this would give him more time to arrange college admission. In the event he applied to and was accepted by Magdalen.

Having passed his army medical examination, 22343242 Gunner Jones, E. L., Royal Artillery, spent his two years of national service performing clerical duties at the HQ of 6 Ack Ack Brigade at Orsett Camp near Grays in Essex. He later said that he was grateful to the army for teaching him to type.

Howells did his national service in the Royal Engineers, but they kept in touch and would meet on weekend leaves and, later, at Oxford where Howells read law at Pembroke. They went to the theatre and concerts together—Howells recalls a Colin Davis concert in Oxford in 1952, and Berlioz's *The Trojans*, a rare staging of the complete work, at Covent Garden in 1957. He vividly remembers their seeing Ugo Betti's *Summertime* at the Apollo in Shaftesbury Avenue in 1955. It was Dirk Bogarde's last stage appearance, and when they came out the smog was so thick that men were walking in front of the buses with blazing torches. Emrys, who had a precise knowledge of London's streets and buildings, led the way and Howells followed with a hand on his shoulder until they reached Hoxton where the welcoming Jones parents insisted on him spending the night.

At Magdalen Emrys's tutor was C. S. Lewis. In those days the Oxford English syllabus terminated at 1832, so there was no opportunity to study Victorian or modern literature, and Emrys's own scholarly interests were to be largely in the Renaissance and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Surprisingly, perhaps, he did not act at Oxford. But he was a naturally reserved and reticent man and may not have found Oxford's undergraduate thespian community quite to his taste. He took Schools in 1954 and did outstandingly well, gaining, by all accounts, the top first.

When C. S. Lewis was elected to the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge, Emrys, seemingly on the strength of his Schools papers, was appointed his successor as Fellow and Tutor in English at Magdalen, taking up the post in Michaelmas Term 1955. His reputation as a brilliant tutor and lecturer quickly spread, and undergraduates at other colleges clamoured to be taught by him. His lectures, drawing on his experience as an actor, were vividly histrionic, and not only when he was lecturing about plays. A lecture on Thomas More's *History of King*

Richard III is remembered as virtually a dramatic performance. His tutorials were similarly enlivened. During a discussion of Johnson's poem 'On the Death of Dr Robert Levet' he surprised the two students present by remarking, 'It's really a hymn, isn't it?' and proceeded to sing it. He shared his passion for opera with his students, playing records for them of an evening. His breathless commentary on *Tristan und Isolde* has lodged in several of their minds. His favourite operatic composer, though, was Bellini.

Another passion was architecture. He had a close knowledge of London's churches, both in the city and further afield. Martin Dodsworth remembers being rushed off from outside the British Museum to admire Hawksmoor's St George's, Bloomsbury—'You *must* see it!' One of my own memories of Emrys is meeting him one day as I came out of the Bodleian Library and, instead of passing with a nod and a smile as he normally would, he stopped me and, taking in with a sweep of his arm the whole vista—the Radcliffe Camera, St Mary's, All Souls—he exclaimed 'Isn't it *wonderful!*' It was as if a sudden impulse had broken through his usual reserve. He lived in college until his marriage to Barbara Everett in 1965, and Dodsworth recalls the lovely rooms he had in Magdalen's eighteenth-century New Building, overlooking the Deer Park.

He was increasingly in demand as a supervisor of postgraduates, and in 1977 he was appointed a University Reader in English. Though he was unfailingly kind and helpful, the depth and range of his learning could make his supervisions demanding. Colin Burrow, now a Senior Research Fellow at All Souls, recalls arriving in Oxford from Cambridge to write a thesis on Spenser, and being placed in Emrys's care.

He meticulously corrected small errors in the first piece of incoherent work I gave him (over sherry—blue glasses I remember) and since it didn't have a point worth talking about he said, 'You should read Ariosto'. Which I did. When I gave him a piece on Ariosto he then said, 'You should read Tasso'. When I gave him a piece on Tasso he said, 'You should read Chapman's Homer'. It wasn't until my third year that he confessed he didn't like Spenser, and I realised why I had been steered towards the *Faerie Queene* by such a circuitous route.

His first book was an edition of the *Poems* of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in the Clarendon Medieval and Tudor Series (Oxford, 1964) and it combines two factors that were to become hallmarks of his work—precise learning and imaginative innovation. Previously Surrey had been chiefly known as a Petrarchan sonneteer. Emrys, however, switches the focus to the translations from Virgil's *Aeneid*, which most commentators had neglected. For him they are primary—the arena where Surrey learned his

distinctive verbal skills. Anticipating some of the arguments that he was to marshal in the first part of his book *The Origins of Shakespeare*, he sees Surrey as a neo-classical poet, a forerunner of Milton, Dryden and Pope, and a product of the 'prime age of northern humanism'. He was, he contends, a beneficiary of the educational ideals of Erasmus and Colet, and of a new way of teaching Latin, promoted by them and by Lorenzo Valla in his *Elegance of the Latin Language*, that concentrated not on abstract rules but on the example of the best ancient authors.

He considers Surrey the first English poet to respond to this new teaching, and he sees the movement of his verse as 'neo-Latin', echoing the 'rich orchestration of Virgil and Horace'. Surrey, he suggests, invented blank verse in order to allow himself to compose unrhymed verse after the Virgilian pattern, and his working rule was fidelity to the syntactical and rhetorical forms of Virgil, as far as it was possible to imitate them in an uninflected language. Influenced by Virgil's 'magnificent inventiveness in syntactical forms' he tried, in many cases, to follow Virgil's word order, and the structural unit in his verse as in Virgil is the phrase or clause not the line. Compared to the Virgil translations, Surrey's Petrarchan sonnets are dismissed as 'insipid and excessively smooth', though interesting as 'performances in elocution'. Besides, Surrey turned to Petrarch, as Emrys sees it, only because Petrarch was the original instigator of the neo-classical movement, modelling his vernacular poems in diction and clausal structure on the Roman poets. The Introduction to the edition offers several analyses of lines from Surrey that capture 'the interwoven density of Latin', and which make one regret that Emrys never wrote on Milton.

Other characteristic features of the Surrey edition are its honesty and modesty. Though he writes more searchingly about Surrey than anyone had previously done, he admits that 'a severe criticism' will find Surrey's achievement 'small in scale and flawed'.

His first full-length book, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1971), is remarkable for its authority, its sensitivity and the precision of its knowledge, but above all—like the Surrey edition—for its originality. Unlike most books about Shakespeare it is not concerned with interpretation, nor with biography, historical context or the other common topics. It looks at Shakespeare's plays in a new way, focusing on the scene as the crucial unit of drama and on Shakespeare as an artist in scenic form. Plays, it claims, 'are made of scenes before they are made of words', and the structural shaping of the individual scene is so fundamentally important that it shows up even when a play is performed in an unfamiliar language or in an operatic version (as in the banquet scene in Verdi's *Macbeth*).

It is, the book argues, primarily because of Shakespeare's mastery of scenic structure that his plays have held the stage so well. For the inventor of scenes needs an exceptional degree of insight into the psychology of an audience. In his hands the audience must become a 'charmed crowd' who look, listen and wait for something to happen. The dramatist must anticipate, monitor and control their reactions, creating expectancy and nurturing an informed interest in what will happen next. In this respect, it is suggested, plays are comparable to musical works as experienced in a concert hall or opera house: 'When we see them performed what we enjoy is, in part, the process of "going through" the work, taking pleasure in its texture and structure in a way which critical accounts which limit themselves to interpretation can hardly do justice to.' An instance of this is the way we laugh at jokes in plays even when, as with the gravedigger's jokes in *Hamlet*, they are stale and feeble. 'When the joke comes it feels new; it is in fact made new by being part of a new performance.'

The dramatist's management of time, and his ability to control how the audience experiences time, are crucial to scenic form. To illustrate this, the letter scene in *Twelfth Night* (II. v) is analysed from a temporal aspect, bringing out the 'nature of its movement': 'In performance a certain tempo is established akin to that maintained in an orchestra by the conductor's beat.' This, though, is only one of a rich profusion of intricate and illuminating scenic analyses offered in the book. Even scenes mainly concerned with conveying information to the audience are 'choreographed', it is shown, so that 'the effect is of watching a game or a group dance'—a claim supported by an analysis of the four speakers in *2 Henry IV*, I. iii, who are discussed as if they were players in a musical quartet.

An important element in the book's argument is frequent reference to Shakespeare's sources so as to show how scenic art converts its raw materials into exuberant dramatic form. These source studies repeatedly reveal a deep and precise knowledge of the other dramatists of Shakespeare's time and earlier. It is suggested, for example, that the structural source for *Julius Caesar*, I. ii, might have been the first scene of Greene's *James the Fourth*—a play in which Shakespeare may have acted. Scenic form does not necessarily relate to the subject matter of the scene, and the book's alertness to it reveals patterns of resemblance between scenes that might at first sight seem markedly disparate—the forum scene in *Julius Caesar*, for example, where Antony works on the credulous plebeians, and the temptation scene where Iago works on Othello.

The examination of Shakespeare's time-management distinguishes between scenes that make us want to speed time up and others that make

us want to slow it down. The balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, or the scene in *The Merchant of Venice* where Bassanio chooses between the caskets, show Shakespeare exploiting ‘the elementary fact that time passes’ so as to make us wish to linger in ‘the precincts of a particular situation’. Recognition scenes (for example, Lear awakening to Cordelia) are comparable, though different, in that they resemble drawn-out rituals, for which the ultimate prototype in Western drama is, it is suggested, the recognition scene in Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Tauris*. ‘The essential beauty of these scenes lies in their deployment of time’, in that the ritual depends on breaking time up into small steps or segments and on the use of repetition. Again, scenes that seem very different in tenor are found to be similar in scenic form—Hal and Falstaff’s tavern scene in *1 Henry IV*, II. iv, for example, and the scene at the start of *King Lear* Act II where Goneril disputes about the number of knights Lear is to retain.

The book’s sophisticated understanding of time-management allows it to expose the fallacies inherent in the critical approach that busies itself with detecting ‘double-time schemes’ in plays such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Julius Caesar*. To expect the time references within a play to adhere to a coherent chronology—as in a detective novel—is, it is argued, pedantic and mistaken. An understanding of Shakespeare’s art requires that we should think of time ‘in terms of a more illusionist and mimetic system, in which the prime concern is not duration but continuity, and above all continuity between scenes’. Viewed in this way the treatment of time in the plays displays a ‘brilliant expediency’. Shakespeare introduces references to ‘tonight’ or ‘tomorrow’ and suchlike when it suits him dramatically, and with no thought for any strict overall chronology.

Being concerned with scene-to-scene continuity, the book questions the customary division of the plays into acts and scenes. This division (begun in the First Folio, but not found in the Quartos) has, it is argued, obscured the plays’ real structure, which will normally be found to consist of two unequal movements, corresponding roughly to the first three and the last two acts in modern editions. The ‘natural interval’ between the two needs to be observed as scrupulously in performance as the pause between movements in symphonic works. Each of the two parts has its own ‘imaginative unity’, and characterisation may be ‘radically modified’ in the transition from the first part to the second (the character of Richard in *Richard III* is a case in point). In *Hamlet* the natural break comes unexpectedly late—after what is in modern editions IV. iv—and there is ‘structural rhyming’ between the two parts, in that each ends with the

appearance of Fortinbras. Examples are cited to show Shakespeare using the two part structure at all stages of his career.

That career emerges from the book as itself a continuity, in that it reveals Shakespeare repeatedly borrowing from himself. The fineness of critical perception brought to this task is remarkable. Shakespeare is shown, for instance, remembering the affray scene in *Romeo and Juliet* when he wrote the affray scene in *Othello*, and Tyrell's description of the murder of the princes in the Tower in *Richard III*, iv. iii. 1–22 is remembered in Othello's soliloquy when he murders Desdemona. Many examples are marshalled to show that the structural sources of the mature tragedies can be detected in the early history plays, which emerge as of crucial importance for Shakespeare's development, providing him with a source of 'scenic form and contrivance' until the end of his career.

The book brilliantly combines two aptitudes which might be thought mutually inhospitable—an acute sensitivity to the immediacy of the theatrical experience and, collaborating with that, an incisive scholarly intelligence that seeks and finds parallels to the plays in unexpected places. The appeal to what one actually feels in the theatre is used, for example, to reject F. R. Leavis's criticism of Othello's character. What Leavis fails to take into account is that in the theatre 'we are *with* Othello'. Like Hamlet, he is the focus for 'the readily available erotic feelings of the audience'. Othello as a character 'acquires full reality only in the presence of a theatre audience'.

Working with—or against—this theatrical immersion is the detached scholar-critic, who observes how much affinity *Othello* has with comedy. It takes its main action from *Much Ado* (the Don John–Claudio plot) and in its earlier part it adapts incidents from *Merry Wives*. Another comedy it draws on is Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* (the first version with the Italian setting). The comic provenance of this material explains why so much of *Othello* 'seems to take place in a comic setting, with its shrewd sanity and worldliness and its commonplace sense of actuality'. *Othello*'s comic affinities explain, too, why the play seems 'so much more a theatrical contrivance than a dramatic poem' compared to other tragedies.

Much of Emrys Jones's finest criticism seems to reflect, as here, a dialogue with himself—or, perhaps it is more correct to say, with his wife, the scholar and critic Barbara Everett. She is the book's dedicatee, and he acknowledges his great debt to her for 'encouragement and support, criticism and innumerable discussions'. As it happens a chance to see and hear the two of them talking about Shakespeare, and to compare their personal styles, has been preserved. In Al Pacino's 1996 film *Looking for*

Richard, which is available on DVD, they speak briefly about *Richard III*. Interestingly, Emrys comments vehemently about social class: ‘Shakespeare saw Richard of Gloucester and Buckingham as gangsters, they were thugs, high-class, upper-class thugs.’ Is this the boy from the Hoxton corner-shop remembering the snobbery which, some say, he encountered in 1950s Oxford?

The Origins of Shakespeare (Oxford, 1977) is as strikingly and persistently original as the first Shakespeare book and even more remarkable in scope. It, too, pays tribute at the outset to Barbara Everett’s collaboration, and is dedicated to her. In its first section it demonstrates, with convincing precision, Shakespeare’s dependence on the classical knowledge that was disseminated through the Elizabethan grammar schools and radically influenced by Erasmus. In its second section it sheds new and vivid light on Shakespeare’s debt to the passion story as mediated through the traditional structure of the medieval mystery plays. Its third section shows how closely the *Henry VI* plays, *Richard III* and *King John* are involved in the political life of their time.

What we need, it insists at the outset, is ‘a more historically adequate idea’ of Shakespeare the man and of the age that produced him. A work to which it pays tribute, in supplying that need, is T. W. Baldwin’s painstaking detection of Shakespeare’s multiple debts to the sixteenth-century grammar school syllabus in *William Shaksperes Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* (Urbana, IL, 1944). Building on Baldwin’s foundations, the claim that *The Origins of Shakespeare* makes is that the grammar schools and the dissemination of print culture brought about an ‘educational revolution’ in the sixteenth century, creating levels of literacy not matched in any previous era. Far from being directed at unlettered groundlings, Shakespeare’s plays were ‘the most intellectually demanding entertainment ever put before a large audience in the history of England’.

Taking issue with his former tutor, C. S. Lewis, who saw humanism as the ‘new ignorance’, Jones celebrates the depth, richness and variety of the knowledge of men and ideas that spread from Colet’s St Paul’s through the Tudor grammar schools, Shakespeare’s at Stratford among them. Shakespeare, he claims, ‘unavoidably breathed the neo-classical atmosphere’ and ‘responded more deeply than anyone to the Erasmian paradoxes of the wisdom of folly and the folly of wisdom’. To exemplify this he shows how the plays exploit, and assume knowledge of, Erasmus’s *Adagia*—a standard grammar school text—and argues that the society Shakespeare wrote for, which could pick up such allusions, was ‘by modern standards pedantically bookish’.

It is a frequently noted feature of Shakespearean drama that it does not allow us to identify with a single point of view. Romantic critics ascribed this to Shakespeare's 'myriad mindedness', but it is actually the direct result, *The Origins of Shakespeare* argues, of academic rhetorical training in the writing of *controversiae* which was standard in grammar schools, and which also influenced Shakespeare's choice of subject for his plays. Instances can be found of grammar school students being asked 'Was Brutus right or wrong to murder Caesar?' or required to compare Henry VI and Richard III. *Imitatio*—the imitation of a classical source in a new context—was another universal grammar-school practice and accounts, Jones claims, for the uncanny and curious resemblance between the Hostess's description of the death of Falstaff and the account of Socrates' death in Plato's *Phaedo* (an aperçu that he brilliantly extends by proposing affinities of a general kind between Falstaff and Socrates). Noting the 'freedom and casualness and audacity' with which the classical text is put to work in this instance, he observes that 'it is often as if at some deep level of his mind Shakespeare thought and felt in quotations'. In illustration, Hamlet's 'O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I' speech is shown to derive from passages in Quintilian and Seneca's *Thyestes*; and Desdemona's 'lie' at her death (saying she has killed herself to deflect blame from Othello) is shown to be traceable to a heroically faithful wife in Horace, *Odes*. iii. xi.

The most challenging of the book's claims in this section is the proposal that Shakespeare knew of Greek tragedy, notably Euripides, probably from Latin translations. It is argued that Euripides' *Hecuba* was Shakespeare's chief dramatic model for *Titus Andronicus*—'Titus is in essence nothing else than a male Hecuba'—and that the quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius in *Julius Caesar* iv. iii (the scene that Emrys had rehearsed at school with Roger Howells) is based on the quarrel between Agamemnon and Menelaus in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

These new perceptions are matched by equally spectacular findings when the book turns to the subject of Shakespeare and the mystery cycles. The last performance of the Coventry cycle, it is noted, was in 1579, so Shakespeare might have seen it as a boy. However it is not part of the book's argument that Shakespeare necessarily knew any of the four surviving cycles. Much Catholic drama was destroyed in the Reformation and texts have disappeared. The aim, rather, is to show that Shakespeare knew something sufficiently like the extant cycles for us to posit a deep indebtedness. Shakespeare, it is claimed, carried the passion and death of Christ and the manner of their presentation in the mystery cycles 'perhaps

half consciously, at the back of his mind' as a dramatic paradigm. To give a specific instance, the mystery cycles' baiting scenes, in which the enemies of Jesus, the high priests Caiaphas and Annas, revile and persecute the redeemer, are the model, it is argued, for the fall and death of Duke Humphrey of Gloucester in *2 Henry VI*. The nobles who conspire against Gloucester are a secular version of the high priests, while Henry VI as head of state is, like Pilate in the mystery cycles, sympathetic to the hero-victim. That is not to say that Gloucester is a 'Christ-figure'. The book is not interested in making that sort of vague claim. It is concerned only with resemblances in structure. The insulting diatribes of Christ's mockers in the mystery cycles are, it is shown, also reflected in the murder of York by Margaret and Clifford in *2 Henry VI* (the comparison with Christ is in this case made explicit in Shakespeare's source, Holinshed)

Interestingly, the book finds, Christ's passion as the paradigm of tragic drama suggests itself to Shakespeare in relation only to some of the histories and tragedies. Others—*Titus Andronicus*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*—owe nothing to the scenes of group violence in the mystery cycles. But plays that derive their crucial power from that source include *King Lear* (the baiting of Lear by Goneril, Regan and Cornwall) and *Coriolanus* (the humiliation and threats Coriolanus is subjected to in Act III). In catching glimpses of the passion story in Shakespeare's texts, the book's critical procedures are at their most brilliantly sensitive. We are shown that Coriolanus appearing disguised after his banishment mirrors the play in the mystery cycles where Christ appears to his disciples on the road to Emmaus, and that the scene where the three women of Coriolanus's family appeal to him to spare Rome resembles in theatrical effect the scene in the mystery cycles where the three Marys visit Christ's tomb. In *Timon of Athens*, the scenes (II. ii and III. iv) where Timon is arraigned by bankrupt and predatory creditors, together with Timon's angry responses ('Cut my heart', 'Tear me'), also make the passion analogy apparent. Again, there is no attempt in this critical analysis to make Timon into a 'Christ-figure' as Wilson Knight strives to do. Timon's relation to Christ is, it is argued, as much a matter of contrast as of similarity. Nevertheless the claim is unequivocally made that without the gospel narratives and the passion plays *Timon* would not have come into being.

The book's perception of links between the passion narrative and the plays can be breathtaking—both completely new and totally convincing. This is nowhere more true than in the sections on *Othello* and *Macbeth*. Behind *Othello*, I. ii (the 'Keep up your bright swords' scene) we are made startlingly to see a biblical prototype—the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of

Gethsemane, with Jesus telling Peter to sheathe his sword. Both are scenes of torch-lit tumult, with the central figure remaining majestically calm, and the fact that the resemblance is more visual than verbal makes us wonder, again, whether the young Shakespeare might have seen, and remembered, the mystery play being acted. Behind the banquet scene in *Macbeth* we are made aware of two episodes from the mystery plays, the Massacre of the Innocents and the Death of Herod, and within this nexus we are shown how Macbeth meeting the three sisters parallels Herod meeting the three kings. Though Herod is the chief prototype of Macbeth in the mystery plays, we are also shown that there are links between Macbeth and Judas. Macbeth's 'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well | It were done quickly'—spoken while Duncan is eating his last supper—picks up Jesus's words to Judas at the last supper (John, xiii. 27) 'That thou doest, do quickly.'

The book's third section stresses the topical relevance of Shakespeare's early histories, relating them to current political concerns (notably the fear of civil war and the danger of having two rulers in one realm) in the period between the Babington Plot of 1586 and the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587. Jones sees Richard III as essentially a 'dynastic drama'. The ghost scene and dreams at the end make the establishment of the Tudor dynasty part of a divinely controlled universe. Richmond's dream relates to a famous vision of the true cross that came to Constantine before battle, and Queen Elizabeth is shadowed in the person of Richmond, her grandfather, whose queen's name she shared. Richmond is the play's Constantine and Queen Elizabeth a 'second Constantine', empress and head of the church.

For a student of Jones's work this third section is of particular interest in that it makes two suggestions that are not (so far as I know) matched elsewhere in his writing on Shakespeare. He thinks that *3 Henry VI* may be part of the official propaganda campaign which continued after Mary's death, and thus shows Shakespeare and his company cooperating with a government initiative. In his comments on *1 Henry VI* he makes the equally unusual suggestion that Shakespeare's feelings about his subject matter can be detected from the way he writes. Shakespeare, he contends, was 'far too reasonable to give the full weight of his sympathy to simple fame-hungry Talbot. The play accordingly suffers from a lack of authorial conviction in many of Talbot's scenes: the writing often rings hollow. More than anything else, perhaps, it is this felt insincerity that has prevented *1 Henry VI* from surviving the century in which it was written.' Extending this claim, Jones points to other areas of Shakespeare's work

where he senses a lack of engagement on the dramatist's part. When Shakespeare was writing with 'deep creative involvement', he argues, a 'clash of viewpoints' is felt. But this is lacking in, for example, *3 Henry VI* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and after Mercutio's death in *Romeo and Juliet*, when the play 'runs aground into dramatic shallows'.

A challenging initiative in the book's third section is the case that Jones makes out for Shakespeare's *King John*. While admitting the play's weaknesses, he believes that it has been 'absurdly underrated'. Its chief concern, he argues, is the acquisition of moral experience, and in pitting innocence against worldliness it resembles morality plays like *Mundus et Infans* and *Respublica*. The Bastard Faulconbridge is a 'sensitive moral agent' who brings the play 'within hailing distance of *Hamlet*'. He relates to morality play figures such as Conscience, Honesty and Faithful Service, and is in effect a 'folk-hero' who 'speaks for the unknown multitude who make up the people of England'. The reign of King John, as presented in the play, shows 'the abject plight of England during the Dark Ages, when the Pope made the King do what he wanted', and consequently it throws into relief Elizabeth's role as England's Constantine, asserting her imperial authority against the meddling priests of Rome.

Jones's edition of *Antony and Cleopatra* in the New Penguin Shakespeare series came out in the same year as his *Origins of Shakespeare* and is, like it, provocative and challenging. Whereas *Antony and Cleopatra* is often thought of as a work of cosmic scope with larger-than-life characters, it is, Jones contends, 'essentially a small-theatre work'. He suggests that Shakespeare wrote it primarily as a Blackfriars play, intending it, that is, for an indoor theatre with a small intimately placed audience. It works, he points out, through short scenes and small groups of characters. Unlike Shakespeare's other Roman plays it has no crowd scenes, and its verbal effects are often of minute delicacy.

In part Jones's Introduction is an illustration of his scenic form theory in operation. He takes readers through the play's first scene, showing how Shakespeare manipulates our expectations and our responses, and keeps us guessing about the two main characters—their sincerity, their pasts, their futures. Shakespeare's source, Plutarch's *Life of Antony*, is, he points out, essentially interested in character—a man's habits and way of living 'What sort of a man is he?' is the question it asks, and *Antony and Cleopatra* reflects these aspects of Plutarch in a way central to its structure and meaning, accounting for some of its puzzling features. Antony is always either on stage or being talked about when off. He is 'the observed of all observers' much more than Hamlet, or for that matter Othello, Lear or

Macbeth. In this respect the play is closer to Shakespeare's two other Plutarchan tragedies of the same period, *Coriolanus* and *Timon*, and like them is permeated with anecdote, gossip and reminiscence.

The drifting movement of *Antony and Cleopatra*—its virtual lack of plot—is also ascribable, Jones argues, to Plutarch's influence, and its comic scenes reflect Plutarch's concern with the realism of comedy rather than with epic or tragedy, directing attention to the 'tangle of good and bad, honourable and dishonourable' in the actions of the characters. Nothing in Plutarch's *Life* suggests dramatic form—it consists of a multiplicity of small incidents—and Shakespeare, Jones suggests, decided to accept and exploit this lack of structure in order to represent life in all its haphazardness, wastefulness, untidiness and inconclusiveness. The view of human activity reflected is one of 'discontinuity and multiplicity, volatility and impulsiveness', and this encourages in the audience (in the first half of the play) a critical and ironical frame of mind. We see that Antony has surrendered to passion—he is dominated by will and impulse—and that he struggles in a formless, watery void (epitomised in his fatal choice to fight by sea).

Plutarch thought of Antony as a great man ruined by sexual passion, and Jones raises the question of whether the play endorses this traditional, moralistic view. As he sees it, for many modern readers Antony's love is justified by its transcendence, whereas Caesar's circumspect worldliness is mean and hollow—and by remaining ambiguous and open on this question the play encourages differences in response. Antony's behaviour is condemned by a wide range of characters in the play, but no one speaks up for the lovers except the lovers themselves. So the play allows readers to give Antony and Cleopatra's love their blessing, but does not require them to do so. On the other hand, Antony's earth-scorning, transcendent love ('Let Rome in Tiber melt') might, Jones suggests, be expected to strike a note in a Christian audience, reflecting a Christian contempt for the world, and so might the lovers' vision of themselves in the afterlife together. 'We are surely invited to respond sympathetically', Jones thinks, to their vision of reunion after death. So he concludes that the play—as always in Shakespeare—'refuses to identify reality with any one viewpoint'.

He sees the style of *Antony and Cleopatra* as 'lyrical'. But whereas the lyrical style of *Romeo and Juliet* is sometimes clearly modelled on Petrarch, the stylistic qualities of *Antony and Cleopatra* are, he believes, those of Horace's *Odes*. The themes of empire, love and wine are Horatian and, he notes, Horace wrote a famous ode on the defeat and death of Cleopatra (i. 37). This is a suggestion that leaves us longing for a fuller elaboration,

and adds to one's regret that, after his 1977 book, Jones unaccountably did not again write at book-length about Shakespeare.

Or for that matter about anything else. It seems at first sight surprising that in the twenty years between *The Origins of Shakespeare* and his retirement in 1998 no further book appeared, even though his election in 1982 to a Fellowship of the British Academy and in 1984 to the Goldsmith's Chair at Oxford, which necessitated a move to New College, can have left him in no doubt about the esteem in which his published work was held. The answer to this apparent conundrum is to be found, I think, in the scope of his erudition and his personal modesty. If we look at the short things he produced—reviews, lectures—we realise that anyone else would have made them into book-length studies. This is particularly true of his two British Academy lectures, 'Pope and Dulness', the Chatterton Lecture on Poetry, given on 13 November 1968, and 'The First West End Comedy', the British Academy Shakespeare Lecture for 1982.

The first of these (*Proceedings of the British Academy*, 54 (1969), 231–63) starts with the suggestion that to see Pope, in the *Dunciad*, as a defender of cultural values is too narrow, and ignores the extent to which he was dramatising his own divided cultural feelings in the poem. The *Dunciad*, the lecture suggests, allowed him to escape from the distrust of the imagination and the dogmatic rationalism of Augustan culture, and gratify his desire to write about 'the low, the little, the trivial, the squalid and the indecent'. A topos like the garret life-style of a Grub Street poet, which Jones finds recurrent in seventeenth-century literature, cultivated images of the sordid and gross that were, he argues, both repulsive and exciting to Pope. The games and the diving match in the second book of the *Dunciad* allowed him to regress into the world of childhood, where ordure and physicality are free from shame or inhibition. This world of pre-literate infancy is adjacent to the world of Bedlam and madness and perhaps, Jones suggests, to the Freudian unconscious. It represents the challenge of the unconscious mind to the over-confidently conscious.

As the argument develops it becomes more and more apparent that there is a book here—an investigation not just of Pope but of Augustan culture. It would show how the forms Jones touches on—the mock-heroic, and the mock-encomium or adoxography, a classical form revived in the Renaissance and applied to gross or indecent subjects—provided writers with an outlet from rationalism, and allowed them simultaneously to repudiate the anarchic and respond to its vitality and excitement. But it was a book that remained unwritten.

The Shakespeare lecture, 'The First West End Comedy' (*Proceedings of the British Academy*, 68 (1983), 215–58), starts with a topical reference to Noel Coward's *Present Laughter* currently, Jones tells his audience, enjoying a revival at the Vaudeville, just up the road. That play starts with a famous actor rising late in the morning and being fussed around by friends and attendants—a scene that might be called, generically, Jones suggests, 'the levee of a man of fashion'. He then proceeds to find similar scenes in various eighteenth- and seventeenth-century plays until he reaches Jonson's *Epicoene*, first performed in 1609, which the title of his lecture refers to. But it does not stop there. He traces the genre further back, via Jonson's *Poetaster* and Donne's first satire, to Persius's third satire which opens with the poet still in bed. Then, in what is really a separate lecture, he traces the growth of London's 'West End', noting how the fashionable addresses in the late sixteenth century were the Savoy and the Strand, and how Inigo Jones created the first West End square with his piazza in Covent Garden and the first West End church with St Paul's. A book about theatre history and urban history and their connection with fashion seems the obvious follow-up to a lecture like this. But it, too, never got written

Another answer, though, to why no book appeared after 1977 is that one did—an enormous one—but it was an anthology. Concluding *The Origins of Shakespeare*, Jones observed that 'despite all that has been done we still need an adequate literary history of the sixteenth century, bold in outline and not overloaded with detail—a map of the region that will bring out the shape of the terrain and help explorers to master it'. His *New Oxford Book of Sixteenth-Century Verse*, published in 1991, answers this need, at any rate in relation to verse-writing. What is remarkable about it, apart from the astonishing wealth of knowledge, is its uncompromising modernity and its rejection of almost everything that its predecessor, Sir Edmund Chambers's 1932 *Oxford Book of Sixteenth Century Verse*, stood for. In his introduction Jones makes it clear—though with tact and courtesy—that he differs radically from Chambers both in his understanding of what constitutes poetry and in his estimate of what a just and adequate representation of sixteenth-century verse would look like. Chambers's anthology, though 'admirable' on its own terms, belongs irretrievably, in Jones's account, to a world that has gone. Behind Chambers's *Oxford Book*, he argues, stood Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* which 'lyricized' the expectations of generations of English readers of poetry. It had inclined them to identify poetry with short personal poems, and Chambers, following this prescription, had conceived of Elizabethan

poetry largely in terms of ‘dainty’ pastorals and pretty love songs, giving inordinate coverage to the lesser late Elizabethans and failing to find space for a whole range of other writing. His partiality for the pretty and genteel, and his avoidance of the grotesque and ugly, confirmed a ‘trivializing’ image of the whole period. He represented Skelton, for example, by two extracts from *Philip Sparrow* and three short lyrics addressed to highborn ladies from *The Garland of Laurel* while excluding Skelton’s satirical and didactic writing.

Another limitation of Chambers’s book was that, equating poetry with ease and naturalness, it fought shy of anything difficult. Modernism has changed our perspective in this respect, and Jones takes advantage of this change of taste to include, for example, excerpts from Skelton’s *Speak Parrot*, one of the most resplendently witty and versatile of sixteenth-century poems, as well as one of the most difficult. He recognises, too, that the huge expansion and experimental audacity of the English language in this period has left its texts full of words that are unfamiliar to most modern readers, and consequently he steels himself, ‘even at the risk’, as he puts it, ‘of disfiguring an otherwise handsome page’, to including footnote glosses far more extensively and helpfully than previous Oxford Book editors judged needful.

His selection also gives a new sense of the bewildering range of verse-production in the century, ‘probably the most disorientating age of transition ever’ in his estimate, with its change from feudalism to early capitalism and from Catholicism to the Protestant Reformation. In its poetry, he argues, forms and styles differ so radically that it is not possible to think of it as a single period. In the 1590s, poets are writing satires in heroic couplets that anticipate Dryden and Pope. But at the start of the century we are still in the middle ages, with an unknown Cheshire poet celebrating the English victory at Flodden in 1513 in the alliterative metre of which the greatest achievement had been *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the fourteenth century.

For Jones, sixteenth-century verse is in another respect a broader category than Chambers’s selection allows because he recognises how much of it was written for practical purposes by people with no literary ambitions. He includes, for example, extracts from Thomas Tusser’s *One Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*, a work intended to teach the reader how to be a good farmer or housewife, and from William Warner’s *Albion’s England*, an enormous hotchpotch of history, romance, folklore and travelogue which, though it may seem crude to us, had wide contemporary appeal.

The new *Oxford Book* finds room, too, for the unnamed and unknown. There are sixty-three anonymous entries—more than for any named writer except Shakespeare. Alongside the great and famous are obscure people who are remembered for only one poem. Here is Chidiok Tichborne, a young Catholic gentleman executed for his part in the Babington Plot, whose ‘My prime of youth is but a frost of cares’ is said to have been written just before his death. Here is Francis Tregian, an imprisoned recusant, writing a poem to his wife, using the carbon from his candle wick as ink and a pin as pen. There are poems by women as well as men, and children as well as adults. The destitute and down-and-outs, though they have regrettably left no written account of themselves, being illiterate, are recorded in Robert Copland’s little-known poem *The High Way to the Spital House*—a dialogue with a hospital porter about the vagabonds, tramps and beggars who come his way. Atheists and unbelievers have also for the most part been written out of the century’s poetic record, but Jones discovers a broadside ballad by Thomas Gilbert, about the execution of an otherwise unknown heretic called John Lewes who, when he came to the place where he was to be burned to death, refused to kneel or repent and replied only, ‘Thou liest’, when a pious bystander told him he would go to hell. Generally speaking Jones’s scholarly objectivity and self-effacement prevent any indication of his religious or political views, but he allows himself the comment that Lewes’s words ‘strike a refreshing and heartening note’ in a period when repeated expression of orthodox religious belief can become ‘somewhat oppressive’.

For that matter, a personal preference for the democratic and the anarchic might be deduced from the overall aim of his anthology which, he says, is to ‘evoke however faintly a sense of the resistant, unassimilable disorderliness of the period’s actual life, as opposed to what usually gets into the historian’s tidied narrative’. His strong sense of himself as a Londoner is reflected in his rejection of the tendency, among previous commentators, to emphasise the poetry of the court as opposed to the town. Counteracting this, he gives special attention to ‘poet-observers of society’ like Sir John Harington and Sir John Davies, ‘social poets of a new and forward-looking kind’, and also to the foremost of the London poets, John Donne. Chambers’s prettified notion of Elizabethan lyric poetry had excluded Donne from his *Oxford Book*, classifying him as a seventeenth-century poet. Jones, however, emphasises that the verse satires of the 1590s, which Donne pioneered, were an exclusively Elizabethan phenomenon, and he also includes some of Donne’s *Songs and Sonnets* that can be shown to belong to the 1590s. (In an excusable moment of

partiality he finds space for ‘The Anniversary’ among these, though from its references to ‘kings’ and ‘favourites’ it is clearly Jacobean.)

A constant characteristic of his critical approach is his awareness of both the classical and the contemporary European context of English writing. This shows itself in his *Oxford Book* in his emphasis on the crucial part played in the Elizabethan literary renaissance by the Pleiade poets, notably Ronsard and du Bellay, who, he claims, revitalised French poetry by rediscovering the natural world. A major difference, he suggests, between early Tudor and late Elizabethan poets is that Wyatt and Surrey were pre-Pleiade, whereas Sidney and Spenser took full advantage of the Pleiade’s example, with the result that whereas early Tudor poetry is relatively poor in natural imagery, the post-Pleiade Elizabethans make themselves free of a freshly apprehended world of living things.

The same outward-looking perspective makes him aware of the important part translation played in the poetry of the period. The common prejudice against verse translation makes no sense, he insists, in the sixteenth century, when much of what counts as original poetry (the sonnets of Wyatt and Surrey, for example) is actually translation, and many translations are also original poetry. Accordingly his *Oxford Book* gives prominence to excerpts from Wyatt’s Petrarch, Horace, Seneca and *Penitential Psalms*, Surrey’s Virgil, Golding’s *Metamorphoses*, Marlowe’s *Amores* and Lucan, Harington’s Ariosto, Chapman’s Homer and Fairfax’s Tasso—all important in their own right as English poems.

Emrys Jones’s achievement, not just in this remarkable anthology but in all his work, rested on painstakingly acquired knowledge. He was a scholar first, a critic second. It seems right to point out, too, that his grammar school education was vital because it introduced him to Latin and the Latin classics, and revealed to him the foundations of European culture which are hidden from the Latin-less. In that respect Neath Grammar School has as much reason to be proud of him as has Oxford University.

Emrys enjoyed a long and happy retirement, pursuing his love of theatre and opera. He died of stomach cancer in Oxford’s John Radcliffe Hospital on 20 June 2012, and is survived by his widow, Barbara Everett, and their daughter Hester who is a lecturer in English at the University of Bristol.

JOHN CAREY
Fellow of the Academy

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