



ANNE BARTON

Anne Barton

1933–2013

IN 1953 *SHAKESPEARE QUARTERLY*, then, as now, one of the two leading academic Shakespeare journals in the world, published an article concisely titled ‘*Love’s Labour’s Lost*’.¹ The list of contributors identified the author as ‘Miss Bobbyann Roesen, a Senior at Bryn Mawr’, who ‘is the first undergraduate to contribute an essay to *Shakespeare Quarterly*. She attended the Shakespeare Institute at Stratford-upon-Avon in the summer of 1952 and hopes to pursue graduate studies in Renaissance literature at Oxford or Cambridge.’² Looking back forty years later, the former Miss Roesen, now Anne Barton, had ‘a few qualms and misgivings’ about reprinting the article in a collection of some of her pieces. As usual, her estimate of her own work was accurate, if too modest:

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.³

Undoubtedly influential and far from negligible, the article not only continues to read well, for all its Paterisms, but also continues to seem an extraordinary accomplishment for an undergraduate. There is, throughout, a remarkable ability to close-read Shakespeare carefully and with sustained sensitivity, to see how the language is working on the page and how

¹ Bobbyann Roesen, ‘*Love’s Labour’s Lost*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 4 (1953), 411–26.

² ‘Contributors’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 4 (1953), 489.

³ Anne Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge, 1994), p. xiv.

it might work in performance, though Miss Roesen had probably not yet had an opportunity to see the play on stage. If it is not quite what one might encourage one's students to write now, it is also certainly not what students were expected to write then—and I fully understand why the fine scholar Arthur Colby Sprague, teaching her at Bryn Mawr, encouraged this student, who could write with an authority that students rarely have the right to use, to submit the article to *Shakespeare Quarterly*. It is probably still the only article written by an undergraduate to have appeared in the journal.

Though there was not yet a trace of the interest in the piece on *Love's Labour's Lost*, characters' names were a major concern of Anne Barton's criticism. And, though I never heard her comment on it, perhaps it was a result of her own onomastic metamorphoses. Bobbyann Roesen had started as Barbara Ann or even BarbaraAnn (her birth certificate gives the former; she always claimed it was the latter), born in Scarsdale, New York on 9 May 1933, the only child of Oscar and Blanche (née Williams) Roesen. Her beloved father was a wealthy engineer whose passion was his collection of a hundred clocks, the last few of which Anne continued to cherish until her death. He was related to the painter Severin Roesen, and Anne bequeathed a splendid example of his characteristic genre of still-lives to the British Academy. Her rather less adored mother was, according to Anne, the daughter of someone who fought in the American Civil War, left the US for Latin America because of his loathing of the reconstruction of the South and returned having made his fortune. He fathered Blanche at the age of 70. Certainly Anne owned a Civil War revolver that she always claimed to have been her grandfather's. If the account was true—and Anne Barton, always scrupulously accurate when reading Shakespeare, might on occasion have embellished the odd tale of her childhood—Anne must have been one of the last alive to connect back to the American Civil War in only two generations.

In spite of the link to Roesen, the family was not much concerned with literature and the arts and her parents must have found Anne's early bookishness odd. She, in return, clearly found their community's concerns with a social round of parties and dances equally bizarre. One of her favourite stories was of her experience in a different kind of academy from the one of which she later became a Fellow, the dance academy which she was forced to attend as a young girl. It was not simply that she hated dancing. What she hated was, rather, the weekly humiliation of always being the last girl to be picked as a dance-partner. So when, one week, a late-arriving boy sighed loudly when he realised who his partner would be, Anne went up to

him and felled him with a single punch, to the horror of the lady who ran the academy, from which Anne was immediately expelled, causing scandal in the community, shame for her parents and unending joy for Anne.

That pugnacity, of which some were on the receiving end decades later in her brilliant and often biting sharp reviewing, was in part the consequence of intense vulnerability. Painfully shy, often unable to look people straight in the eye, and with an ocular tic that intensified when nervous, Anne found books not only—perhaps not even—a retreat from a society from which she at times felt alienated but also as a space of deep intellectual pleasure. That childhood devouring of a vast range of literature and the easy way in which, throughout her life, she could memorise hundreds of poems gave her an unusual breadth of literary knowledge, even before starting at Bryn Mawr.

Bobbyann Roesen's hopes of graduate study 'at Oxford or Cambridge' were realised and, having graduated *summa cum laude* from Bryn Mawr, she arrived at Girton in 1954, supported by two fellowships, as a Bryn Mawr European Fellow and a National Woodrow Wilson Fellow, early recognition locally and nationally of her academic abilities. Now Anne Roesen, she was also no longer the ugly duckling with braces on her teeth and thick-lensed spectacles but a strikingly attractive woman whose intellectual power impressed all. The topic of her doctoral thesis, directed by the formidable M. C. Bradbrook, had already been adumbrated in the last paragraph of the article on *Love's Labour's Lost*:

Later, in *As You Like It* and *Hamlet* Shakespeare would begin to think of the play as the symbol, not of illusion, but of the world itself and its actuality ... Yet he must always have kept in mind the image as it had appeared years before in the early comedy of *Love's Labour's Lost*, for returning to it at the very last, he joined that earlier idea of the play as illusion with its later meaning as a symbol of the real world, and so created the final play image of *The Tempest* in which illusion and reality have become one and the same, and there is no longer any distinction possible between them.⁴

In the six years between her arriving at Girton and the completion of the thesis in 1960 much happened. She married William Righter (1927–1997) in 1957, spent a substantial period of time with him living in the South of France and a year teaching Art History at Ithaca College while he taught at Cornell. They divorced in 1960. The year teaching in the US was marked by her failing most of the college's football team in her course and returning to England just in time to avoid the collective wrath of the College.

⁴Roesen, 'Love's Labour's Lost', 425–6

The time in France changed her life forever and I shall return to it shortly. In 1960 she became Lady Carlisle Research Fellow at Girton, moving to a teaching Fellowship in 1962 and being appointed Director of Studies in English in 1963, also holding a University Lectureship in the Faculty of English.

The revised version of the dissertation was published as *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* by Chatto and Windus in 1962 and a mark of its significance was its reissue by Penguin Books in 1967 as the first volume in its new series, the Penguin Shakespeare Library. The jacket of this reprint quoted John Wain's review in the *Observer*: 'The result is one of those extremely rare critical works that change one's attitude towards the subject.' Distance has not changed the valuation by Shakespeare scholars: how we understand Shakespeare's response to the theatre may have deepened over the last half-century and the terms in which Anne Righter enunciated them may have been subtly altered but the inflections are within the framework that she theorised and explored in that book. It is much more than a close examination of the *theatrum mundi* trope in Shakespeare's work, for, characteristically, she took the long view, starting with classical comedy, through medieval dramatic forms and the explorations of writers of comedy before Shakespeare. But it was the revelatory approach to Shakespeare's continually changing engagement with the topos that mattered most, an engagement that, by the end, meant that she argued that in the romances he 'restores the dignity of the play metaphor and, at the same time, destroys it'.⁵

Carefully, accurately and stylishly she distinguishes between Shakespeare's attitude and that of a wide range of his contemporaries. This breadth, also characteristic of Bradbrook's work, was habitual for her. As Professor Michael Cordner, once her research student, commented,

... she found it natural to look, for instance, to mid-Tudor plays like *Jack Juggler* and *Johan Johan* to shape a genealogy and context for Shakespeare's achievements ... Such unforced ease of reference, based on encyclopedic reading and outstanding powers of recall, is the foundation on which her richest scholarly achievements are based.⁶

This also produces a discriminating series of comparisons. Jonson, for instance, does not reject 'the theatre itself ... but only its immediate conditions, conditions which he despairs of altering', while Shakespeare's 'disillusionment is of an altogether different kind':

⁵ Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 172.

⁶ Michael Cordner, 'Professor Anne Barton', *The Independent*, 11 Feb. 2014.

It is the whole conception of the play, which seems to disgust him. The actor is a man who cheapens life by the act of dramatizing it; the shadows represented on the stage are either corrupt or totally without value, 'signifying nothing'.⁷

Jonson's struggles with the theatre and with the form of the drama would preoccupy her over the next twenty years, until the publication of *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge, 1984). *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* turns from Shakespeare at the end to look towards the closure of the theatres and 'the end of the theatre for which he wrote'.⁸ Again there is a broad sweep, moving in a few pages from the last English court masques to French explorations by Corneille and Molière, to Bernini's show in Rome in 1637 with its mirroring of one audience by a performed other and an argument between two actors as to which of the theatres was real and which fictitious. In the switch to this large view, the particularity of Shakespeare's achievements is all the more precisely manifested.

While the monograph established the basis of her reputation, it was her experience in Provence while writing it that established the basis of Anne's life-style. It was not her first trip to Europe: she had travelled there with her parents in her early teens and later with a school-friend, staying in Venice very grandly at the Hotel Danieli and travelling around by gondola. But this time in Provence, in a villa somewhere near both Grasse and Saint Paul de Vence, did much more than turn her into a permanent Europhile and, incidentally, someone ever less likely to want to return to the United States. She learned to enjoy, among other things, French cuisine and great gardens. Befriended by the Vicomte de Noailles, she tasted that grand style that was, for her, the hallmark of the Arcadian way of life she subsequently sought to recreate.⁹ By the time she was settled as a Fellow at Girton, she refused to eat in Hall and began to entertain in her rooms with the hospitable elegance that continued to the end. Fine food, her superb cooking, good wines, setting a beautiful table, all were her essential prerequisites for the company of friends and the flow of animated conversation. If the idyll of Provence could not be sustained, then she could at least bring traces of that experience back as something that, for her, would in its new guises bring her great happiness, for I do not think I ever saw her happier than when the buzz of guests' conversation over dinner was exactly right.

⁷Richter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, p. 153.

⁸Ibid., p. 182.

⁹Michael Reardon, 'Anne at Hillborough', address at the Memorial Service for Anne Barton, Trinity College, Cambridge, 12 July 2014.

Her rooms at Girton, as Alison Hennegan recalled them, ‘were heady stuff for entrance candidates and young undergraduates: opulent fabrics, fine pictures, good silver, always many flowers, an unobtrusive harpsichord, and an open fire in winter which, during later afternoon supervisions, made the room a glowing, bejewelled place’.¹⁰ But, while students might be slightly awed by the setting for their supervisions, they also learned Anne Barton demanded hard thinking and powerful commitment from them, delighting in their brilliance and rightly intolerant of those who thought some charm might compensate for laziness. Her fierce support of those who needed her help was invaluable. Dame Gillian Beer has recalled how she and Anne joined forces to battle the College which had wished to send down a pregnant student who told Dame Gillian later that

one of the most valuable things for her at the time was that Anne did not treat the situation as if we had all wandered into the gloom of a Hardy novel. She saw the absurdities in the college’s position as well as the pain and hopefulness in Mary’s. She was determined and yet light in the support she gave.¹¹

In 1969 Anne married John Barton, the brilliant theatre director whose crucial role in the formation of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) was in bringing a certain scholarly understanding of the Shakespeare text and transforming it into superb, thoughtful, provocative theatre, often through radical means—not least in rewriting Shakespeare. The year before their marriage they had bought ‘Haunted Hillborough’, a derelict Tudor manor-house eight miles outside Stratford-upon-Avon, complete with traces of the village in the fields between the house and the Avon. Anne picked Michael Reardon, much later the architect of the Swan Theatre for the RSC, then young and comparatively inexperienced, for the restoration. His task, over the two years of the project, resulted in Anne Barton’s own Arcadian home, a great house with the appropriate accompaniments: two retired racehorses in the paddock and ‘a wolfhound of ferocious aspect but the sweetest possible nature, named “Bran” and known as “Brandog”’. Reardon recalled that

The great social event of the Hillborough year was undoubtedly the ‘Hillborough Christmas Party’ to which the whole acting company of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre would be invited. This took place in the Great Hall of the manor, lit only by candles and firelight, where the Company would perform an entertain-

¹⁰ Alison Hennegan, ‘Barbara Anne Barton’, in *The Year: the Annual Review of Girton College 2013–14*, pp. 113–15 (114).

¹¹ Gillian Beer, ‘Anne at Girton’, address at the Memorial Service for Anne Barton, Trinity College, Cambridge, 12 July 2014.

ment such as a mummers' play—performances in which Brandog often played an enthusiastic, if unscripted, part.¹²

Hillborough Manor, in its new guise as the property of a couple of some celebrity, was the subject of articles, in appropriate magazines, with photographs carefully showing the owners at home. If most saw it as a house full of guests—and the Visitor's Book 'read like a Who's Who of British theatre'¹³—it was also for Anne a retreat, a place of research and writing, of calm and thought. The vast long gallery at the top of the house contained John Barton's study at one end but its walls were lined with Anne's books, her research library as her work took on new directions.

While Brandog travelled to and fro between Hillborough and Cambridge, wedged into the back seat of the Mini Anne drove, in other respects the two spaces were separate. The transition between the two was primarily one from home to work or from research to teaching. And her teaching was magnificent. In Michaelmas Term 1969, having just gone up to Trinity Hall, Cambridge, I went to my first lecture, the first in Dr Barton's course on Ben Jonson. I remember thinking it odd that there was a slide projector set up in the lecture room and worrying that I had gone to the wrong room. The lecture opened up Jonson's work by using images from Brueghel and Bosch. It was inviting, challenging, exciting and captivating and I had never been so intellectually thrilled. I freely admit I fell under the lecturer's spell. My new college friends may have been captivated by other aspects of the experience: 'As a young lecturer at Cambridge in the 1960s . . ., her penchant for miniskirts and thigh-length leather boots left a lasting impression on generations of male undergraduates.'¹⁴ But that is not what I recall and it was not what made me never miss her lectures through the rest of my undergraduate time.

The lectures were written and read. That first Jonson lecture apart, there were never any visual aids or hand-outs. Each lecture was precisely timed to fill the hour, never rushed or mismanaged. Each was shaped and structured to make its argument clear, as lucid as each sentence. Clarity of thought engaged with the complexity of the materials in order to achieve a perception of play or poem that was unfailingly fresh. Her delivery was not performative or theatrical, though her voice was smooth and strong, always precisely alert to the rhythms of the texts she quoted and the text she had written. These were as much characteristics of her published

¹² Reardon, 'Anne at Hillborough'.

¹³ Hennegan, 'Barbara Anne Barton'; p. 114.

¹⁴ 'Professor Anne Barton', *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 Nov. 2013.

prose style as of her lecture manner and some lectures of course reappeared almost unaltered in print. But it remains for me a pity that more did not. So, for instance, her 1971 article ‘Shakespeare and the limits of language’ was no more than a brief summary of a course of eight lectures on the topic.¹⁵ Its most substantial consideration of a single play, *King Lear*, is still only a small part of a whole lecture. Yet it contains perceptions about the ways in which Shakespeare explores language in the play that are both sharply perceptive and brilliantly articulated. Take, for instance, the comment on Edgar’s reaction to the dialogue between Lear and Gloucester, ‘it is | And my heart breaks at it’ (*Lear*, 4.6.141–2): “‘It is’”: to those two words, the barest possible indication of existence, much of what happens in *King Lear* must be reduced.’ Or the following consideration of repeated words:

The last two acts are filled with frenzied repetitions, some of them hammered upon as many as six times in the course of a single line: ‘Kill’, ‘Now’, ‘Howl’, ‘Never’, the monosyllable ‘No’. One comes to feel that these words are being broken on the anvil in an effort to determine whether or not there is anything inside . . . If only one could crack these words: words of relationship, of basic existence, simple verbs, perhaps they would reveal a new and elemental set of terms within big enough to cope. So, Lear’s five-times-repeated ‘Never’ in the last scene is like an assault on the irrevocable nature of death, an assault in which the word itself seems to crack and bend under the strain.¹⁶

No one before had realised that the strange conversation between Marina and Leonine in *Pericles* just before he is about to try to kill her (4.1) is not really conversation at all:

These two people may be placed, formally in the attitude of conversation. Until Leonine draws out his dagger with unmistakable intent, neither one is really listening to the other. Arbitrarily sealed off in separate worlds, they talk at but not really to each other . . . They are simply not listening to any voice but the one which sounds within their own minds.¹⁷

The effect is, as she distinguishes, unprecedented in Shakespeare’s own oeuvre and, I would argue, in all drama to that date. But if this isolation of the speakers from each other seems in some respects strikingly modern, her opening references to Beckett, Pinter, Albee and Ionesco—all so new in 1971—show what is different between their approach to language and what Shakespeare achieves here. I have hopes that, among her papers left

¹⁵ Anne Barton, ‘Shakespeare and the limits of language’, *Shakespeare Survey* 24 (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 19–30.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

to Trinity College, the typescripts of the lectures might surface and the full measure of the project, of which the article is such a tantalising fragment, might again be appreciated.

Her Cambridge lectures covered a predictable range of topics: Shakespeare, Jonson, Restoration Drama (on which last, again, too little of her writing was ever published). In other contexts her choice of lecture topic was distinctly startling, at least to some of the audience. In 1967 she gave the British Academy's Chatterton Lecture on an English Poet on John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. When she quoted in full 'The Earl of Rochester's Conference with a Post Boy', starting 'Son of A whore, God damn you can you tell | A Peerless Peer the Readiest way to Hell?',¹⁸ she was delighted to see some of the ladies present rise and leave in shock. Had they stayed, they would have heard an astonishing exposition of Rochester's lyrics, particularly 'Absent from thee I anguish still' with which she ended, showing how the lover's 'own fantastic mind' creates a vision of a future, asking 'leave to be faithless, knowing it will disgust him, predicting his renunciation of what he already recognizes as folly.'¹⁹ But they had already heard her compare Rochester with Byron, moving beyond the 'biographical and critical cliché' to explore how each 'mythologized his life in verse'.²⁰ It marks, I believe, Anne Barton's first published comments on Byron whose work would form a distinct and powerful strand in her writing for the rest of her career, from an article on Byron's political plays in 1975 to one on Byron and Shakespeare in 2004, including a short book on Byron's *Don Juan* (a work of which she could quote huge swathes from memory), published in the *Landmarks of World Literature* series edited by her dear friend J. P. Stern.²¹

A few years after the Chatterton Lecture, Anne was visited in Cambridge by a representative of Houghton Mifflin. Would she be interested in writing introductions to Shakespeare's comedies for the forthcoming Riverside edition of Shakespeare's works and, since they had had to sack the previously contracted scholar for this part of the project, could she do it by the end of the summer? Having already been thinking of writing on the

¹⁸ Anne Righter, 'John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 53 (1967), 47–69 (51).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 67–8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 49–50.

²¹ Anne Barton, '“A Light to Lesson Ages”: Byron's political plays', in J. D. Jump (ed.), *Byron: a Symposium* (London, 1975), pp. 138–62; 'Byron and Shakespeare', in D. Bone (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Byron* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 224–35; Anne Barton, *Byron: Don Juan* (Cambridge, 1992).

comedies, she agreed. *The Riverside Shakespeare* appeared in 1972 and, even though all the introductions are fine, Anne Barton's thirteen pieces stood out. They probably constitute her most-read work, for the edition became the standard one used in American college classrooms, selling by the thousand every year—and Anne was delighted with the annual royalty cheque. Witty and sharp, scholarly and deft, the introductions grabbed students' (and, indeed, scholars') attention and kept it through the inevitable template need to cover sources and dates, the place of the work in the canon and the play's worth. So, for instance, Barton starts out on *The Two Gentleman of Verona* with the bald announcement that it 'has the unenviable distinction of being the least loved and least regarded of Shakespeare's comedies' but can end having convincingly shown that it has 'a freshness and lyrical charm all its own', along the way having no hesitation about calling Valentine's gift of Silvia to Proteus ('All that was mine in Silvia I give thee', 5.4.83) 'Shakespeare's blunder', 'a nervous recourse to tradition' that 'occurs at the point which, in any comedy, is most difficult to handle with assurance: the resolution'.²²

In each and every case, the play is opened up for reading without recourse to a panoply of others' critical writing. There are occasional points of connection beyond those of early modern culture. On *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, she turns finally to Verdi's *Falstaff* and its fugal conclusion but it is less the words of Boito that matter here than, 'even more profoundly, ... the enormous vitality and expansiveness of the music Verdi found at this point: music which flowers out of and celebrates the values of this comic society',²³ something she would expand on a decade later in her article for the Festschrift for C. L. Barber, whose study of *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton, 1959) had so strongly influenced her own.²⁴

Opera had been and would remain a passion of Anne's—and going to the opera with her was an experience in the grand style. But, with the introduction to *Troilus and Cressida*, there is a new note about performance sounded in her work. She begins by identifying the play as 'the discovery of the twentieth century':

²² Anne Barton, 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona', in G. Blakemore Evans (ed.), *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston, MA, 1974), pp. 143, 146, 145–6.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

²⁴ Anne Barton, 'Falstaff and the comic community', in P. Erickson and C. Kahn (eds.), *Shakespeare's 'Rough Magic'* (Newark, NJ, 1985), pp. 131–48, reprinted in Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, pp. 70–90.

There is no record of any performance of this play before 1898. Since the Second World War it has scarcely left the stage, despite the large cast required for its performance and the considerable technical problems involved. Critics continue to disagree about the tone and meaning of *Troilus and Cressida*. The modern theatre has decided firmly, and surely rightly, that the play is a brilliant but scarifying vision of a world in pieces, all value and coherence gone.²⁵

All her work had been and would continue to be strongly aware of the conditions of early modern performance, one of the compatibilities between her own interests and those of M. C. Bradbrook from their first encounters in Girton onwards. But there is nothing earlier that speaks of the conditions of current performance. The foregrounding here of theatre's discovery of the play, of the ways in which productions' engagement with the play has been decisive and accurate in taking up a position where critics are divided, is surely a consequence of the close and complex interaction between Anne and John Barton in these years. After all, the most 'brilliant but scarifying vision of a world in pieces' that the theatre had yet generated from this play was John Barton's devastating RSC production which opened in 1968.

Anne Barton's interests in seeing performance of plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries were long-standing. Memories of particular productions, their strengths and weaknesses, filled her conversation. Her admiration of *Timon of Athens* was deeply shaped by Paul Scofield's performance of the title-role in John Schlesinger's RSC production in 1965. Her advocacy for particular long-forgotten plays led to productions by the Royal Shakespeare Company, such as Ben Jonson's *The New Inn* directed by John Caird in 1987, Thomas Southerne's *The Wives' Excuse* directed by Max Stafford-Clark in 1994, and Jonson's *Sejanus* directed by Gregory Doran in 2005, all three of which, as recoveries of a repertory too often ignored, were exactly what the RSC's Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, designed by Michael Reardon and Tim Furby, was created for. Many of her students at Oxford and Cambridge became actors and directors; many members of the RSC were close friends. Many of her research students—myself included—wrote dissertations centrally concerned with the performance of drama in early modern and Restoration theatres. Performance inflected her approach to plays and nothing in her writing, from *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* onwards, allowed plays to be analysed as if their narratives could be divorced from the rhythms of performance. She was one of the finest academic theatre reviewers, always

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 443.

trying sympathetically to see what a production was aiming at, even when she damned its success. Especially good at reviewing plays unfamiliar to most readers, she sought to balance exposition of the play with analysis of the performance.²⁶ For plays she adored, a production's distrust of the text could provoke her to the sharpest critique. Peter Wood's production of Vanbrugh's *The Provoked Wife* at the National Theatre in 1980 was summed up as follows:

Audiences all too often believe that the comedy of the seventeenth century is invariably frivolous, inhuman and glib, and that it debases women. Preconceptions of this kind will be amply reinforced by the production offered at the Lyttelton. Underneath it all there lies entombed a good and probing Vanbrugh play.²⁷

She liked some aspects of Gerard Murphy's production of Marlowe's *Edward II* (RSC, Swan Theatre, 1990), such as the costumes which 'help to create a world as stark and colourless as Marlowe's uncharacteristically monochrome and pared-down verse': 'This visual reductiveness seems faithful to the spirit of *Edward II*. Less happy was the decision to strip it of its variousness and complexity.'²⁸

All of this, as significant and powerful as it was as a marked and complex network of interconnections through Anne Barton between the often mutually suspicious and disengaged communities of theatre and the academy, is, though, much less radical than what emerged in the early 1970s in the exchanges—in both directions—between her critical thinking and John Barton's productions for the Royal Shakespeare Company. It was then and remains one of the closest collaborations between scholar and director ever and a model for many subsequent partnerings. John Barton noted, *à propos* his adaptation of the first tetralogy into *The Wars of the Roses* (RSC, 1963–4), that the director is 'engaged in an act of critical interpretation analogous to that undertaken by the literary critic in his study'²⁹ but, as Stanley Wells commented, 'he prefers—wisely, it seems to me—to let the interpretation emerge from the performance rather than to formulate it in critical statements'.³⁰ Instead, Anne Barton's programme essays for a number of John Barton's productions outlined views of the

²⁶ See, as two examples among many, her review of the RSC's production of *The Wives' Excuse*, 'Conditions of the heart', *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 Aug. 1994, p. 16, and her long and enthusiastic study of the New York staging of Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, 'Twice around the grounds', *The New York Review of Books*, 8 June 1995.

²⁷ 'Icing on the top', *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 Nov. 1980, p. 1260.

²⁸ 'Managing the minions', *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 July 1990, p. 777.

²⁹ J. Barton, *The Wars of the Roses* (London, 1970), p. xxv.

³⁰ S. Wells, *Royal Shakespeare* (Manchester, 1977), pp. 46–7.

play that were tightly aligned with the production approach. In turn, the programme essays could become the basis for her own more substantial critical writing. So, for example, her account of *Twelfth Night* set out in the programme for his production (RSC, 1969) was expanded in her article on ‘*As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*: Shakespeare’s sense of an ending’, its title showing the influence of Frank Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending* (New York, 1967).³¹ As Christine Avern-Carr suggests,

There is no doubt [her] ideas were illustrated by Barton’s production, although one cannot say whether the ideas came before the production or whether they emerged from it; it is remarkable that any theatrical realization should be so closely connected to a piece of serious literary criticism, evolving in parallel to each other.³²

John Barton’s 1971 *Measure for Measure* is best remembered for the ambiguity of its ending in which, for the first time in any production, Isabella did not go off happily with the Duke towards marriage but instead remained onstage staring into the auditorium, an approach to the ending that is now almost a cliché in productions of the play. The choice was a precise parallel in the theatre to Anne Barton’s approach to the ending in her *Riverside Shakespeare* introduction which viewed the marriage proposal as ‘an outbreak of that pairing-off disease so prevalent in the fifth acts of Eliabethan comedy’ and offered this view of Isabella’s silence in response to the twice-made proposal: ‘like the theatre audience, presumably, she is dumb with surprise’ or, as she phrased it in the programme essay, ‘It is at least possible that this silence is one of dismay.’³³

When John Barton directed *Richard II* (RSC, 1973), his approach was heavily influenced by Ernst Kantorowicz’s view of the play in his *The King’s Two Bodies* (Princeton, 1957), a book which Anne Barton brought to his attention. But the distinctive comparison of the twin-bodied nature of the king with the twin-bodied nature of the actor is hers and she set it out in the programme essay: ‘Like kings, actors are accustomed to perform before an audience. Like kings, they are required to submerge their own individuality within a role and, for both, the incarnation is temporary and perilous.’³⁴ Equally distinctive was her exploration of Richard and Bolingbroke as ‘[l]ike the two buckets filling one another that Richard

³¹ In M. Bradbury and D. J. Palmer (eds.), *Shakespearean Comedy* (Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 14, London, 1972), pp. 160–80; reprinted in Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, pp. 91–112.

³² Quoted in M. L. Greenwald, *Directions by Indirections* (Newark, NJ, 1985), p. 88.

³³ Evans, *Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 548; quoted in Greenwald, *Directions by Indirections*, p. 103.

³⁴ Quoted in Wells, *Royal Shakespeare*, p. 75.

imagines in the deposition scene, buckets which take a contrary course within the deep well of the crown': 'Both movements involve a gain and a loss. Each, in its own way, is tragic.'³⁵ The most remarkable aspect of the production echoed this: Richard Pasco and Ian Richardson alternated the two roles on different nights, the choice of who would play Richard at each performance being established in an opening dumb show in which each led a file of actors before one dressed as Shakespeare who bowed to the night's Richard, only after which did the two actors put on the wigs and costumes of their character.

The most complete interrelation of Anne Barton's view of a play in print and John Barton's view in production was for his *Hamlet* (RSC, 1980). At this time, he read 'all her pieces and lectures, and I comment on them' and, at the point at which he was finally ready to direct the play, Anne was completing her introduction to the Penguin Shakespeare edition (a task taken on after the death of the editor, T. J. B. Spencer, in 1978), an essay which amplified her identification of *Hamlet* in *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* as 'unique in the density and pervasiveness of its theatrical self-reference', one where the discussion of the 1601 War of the Theatres can appear 'precisely because *Hamlet* as a whole is so concerned to question and cross the boundaries which normally separate dramatic representation from real life'.³⁶ In the rehearsal room John frequently referred to the introduction. In performance the production's emphasis was clear from the first view of Ralph Koltai's set, with its raked stage platform filled with 'theatre artifacts from which the RSC cast could draw to tell the story of *Hamlet*', such as the enormous chalice on the props table, prefiguring its use in the final scene, and lit by 'five naked light bulbs, suspended like theatre "ghost lights", which prompted a rehearsal hall atmosphere appropriate to the production concept'.³⁷ The concept made the audience hear throughout that 'stage imagery' which 'exists independently of the professional actors'.³⁸ Anne's introduction, of course, was not narrowly circumscribed by the play's self-conscious theatricality nor was John's production similarly limited for, as Irving Wardle wrote in his review for *The Times*, this was 'a theoretical exploration of the play by a man who knows that no theory can contain it'.³⁹

³⁵ Quoted in Wells, *Royal Shakespeare*, p. 75.

³⁶ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. T. J. B. Spencer, Introduction by Anne Barton (Harmondsworth, 1980, reprinted 2002), p. xxv

³⁷ Greenwald, *Directions by Indirections*, p. 190.

³⁸ Barton, *Hamlet*, Introduction, p. xxv.

³⁹ Quoted Greenwald, *Directions by Indirections*, p. 196.

In 1972 Anne Barton left Cambridge for Bedford College, London, where she became Hildred Carlile Professor in English. Still under 40, a young age to be given such a distinguished chair, Anne did not enjoy the experience of being Head of Department nor the rhythms of a very different kind of university from Cambridge. The finest outcome of that time was her inaugural lecture on *Antony and Cleopatra*, an exploration of its ‘divided catastrophe’ with a memorable account of Cleopatra’s ‘last obstacle ... on her way to death’, the clown that here becomes ‘Comedy’ itself:

... precisely because she has walked through the fire of ridicule ... she has earned the right to say, ‘Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have | Immortal longings in me’ ... And she does so at once. Comedy flowers into tragedy, without a break or a mediating pause.⁴⁰

She left Bedford College in 1974 to become the first female Fellow of New College, Oxford, rather relishing the fact that one or two of the Fellows were so furious that the all-male bastion was breached that they refused ever to acknowledge her presence in their midst. Her election was later marked by a portrait commissioned by the college; characteristically, she hated the painting. After a decade in Oxford, Anne returned to Cambridge as Grace 2 Professor of English in 1984 and, after waiting out the obligatory time to avoid having to take one of the vacant professorial fellowships (she described it as being ‘in purdah’⁴¹), she became a Fellow of Trinity College in 1986, living in rooms, exquisitely decorated as always, in Neville’s Court (first on one side and then the other) until her last illness. She loved the College and it was to be, ‘however imperfectly, ... [an] embodiment’ of an ideal, the last of the perfect places, like Hillborough, that she tried to find again and again.⁴² She also used her considerable ‘intellectual and personal authority [to help] pave the way for a significant increase in the number of women Fellows’.⁴³ If she could, at times, be ungenerous to young academic women, she could also dedicate her energy to aiding some of them in achieving what they richly deserved.

While at New College she encountered the person she identified as the most brilliant undergraduate she ever taught, John Kerrigan, now Professor at Cambridge and FBA. Anne was the first to realise his exceptional talents

⁴⁰ “‘Nature’s piece ’gainst fancy’”: the divided catastrophe in *Antony and Cleopatra*’, in Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, p. 132.

⁴¹ Adrian Poole, ‘Anne at Trinity’, address at the Memorial Service for Anne Barton, Trinity College, Cambridge, 12 July 2014.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

and she directed his doctoral work on revenge drama. Kerrigan helped her enormously with her own work, both the study of Ben Jonson (published in 1984) and her investigation of names in comedy (1990), enabling her to ‘talk out my ideas, . . . pinpoint[ing] muddles . . . while forcing me continually to re-write and re-think’.⁴⁴ Her approach to Jonson had been set out in articles which would be revised into *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge, 1984), especially her demand for a complex and subtle reevaluation of Jonson’s late plays, not least as deliberately part of a nostalgic reformulation of Elizabethan drama.⁴⁵ But the eventuating book was conceived on the grand scale as a detailed and revisionary account of Jonson’s dramatic *oeuvre* in relation to his predecessors and contemporaries, not least Shakespeare. On plays that have long been highly praised her views are always incisive and revelatory; on plays that have been largely ignored the reevaluation was powerfully transformative. *The New Inn* stood out in bold relief as Jonson’s masterly negotiation with ‘the premises of Shakespearean comedy, to explore its attitudes and, up to a point, make them his own’ in a play whose plot of the reuniting of sisters parted since childhood is ‘wholly alien to the Jacobean Jonson, however familiar from *The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, *Cymbeline* or *The Winter’s Tale*’.⁴⁶ And *A Tale of a Tub*, treated by Herford and Simpson in their great edition of Jonson as Jonson’s earliest surviving work, was persuasively redefined as Jonson looking back at the very end of his life to a much earlier kind of drama, writing ‘an immensely sophisticated attempt to re-create the atmosphere of early Elizabethan drama, and exploit some of its resonances’.⁴⁷ An eloquent consideration of Jonson’s last, unfinished play, *The Sad Shepherd*, ends the book but starts Anne Barton’s investigation of the drama of woods and forests about which she was writing in her own last, unfinished monograph.⁴⁸

Barton is alert to the centrality of the urban environment for Jonson so that *Every Man In His Humour*, the earliest play Jonson included in the great folio of his *Works*, stands out, in its revised form that shifted the location from Florence to London and ‘thickened the dialogue with topo-

⁴⁴ Anne Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge, 1984), p. xii.

⁴⁵ See Anne Barton, ‘*The New Inn* and the problem of Jonson’s late style’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 9 (1979), 395–418 and Anne Barton, ‘Harking back to Elizabeth: Ben Jonson and Caroline nostalgia’, *English Literary History*, 48 (1981), 706–31.

⁴⁶ Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, p. 259.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

⁴⁸ In addition, she provided the introduction to *The Sad Shepherd* in M. Butler *et al.* (eds.), *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, 7 vols., vii (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 419–23.

graphical reference and contemporary allusion', as a drama whose unity of time, a single day, 'evok[es], in detail, the life of a great, mercantile Renaissance city as it moves through a typical day . . . The city is the true centre of the comedy and, to a large extent, its main character.'⁴⁹ Throughout the book, it is the investigation of location and how it could be reconciled with innovative dramatic forms that concerns her and which she triumphantly explores as Jonson's greatest achievement. Her own achievement lies in the placing of Jonson in a historical context and finding his 'greatness as a writer of comedy' visible 'only when his output is considered as a whole',⁵⁰ as someone 'tirelessly experimental',⁵¹ always restlessly and anxiously exploring; not for nothing was 'tanquam explorator' Jonson's motto.

At the midpoint of *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, Anne Barton allowed herself a respite from the chronological, play-by-play structure to write a 'chapter interloping' on Jonson's names for his characters from his earliest plays to *Bartholomew Fair*, a chance to see a continuity that she is well aware might be more difficult to see elsewhere in the monograph.⁵² The fascination with names led to her topic for the Alexander Memorial Lectures at the University of Toronto, 'Comedy and the Naming of Parts', given in 1983. The four lectures were expanded into a book-length study, *The Names of Comedy* (Toronto, 1990), a work of great erudition as it considered the very different conditions of naming that comedy sets up. As Antiphanes argued, as soon as a character called Oedipus appears, 'the audience knows all about him even before he says a word' but 'a character in comedy . . . must be named and built up from scratch'.⁵³

It is especially appropriate that the book opens with an analysis of T. S. Eliot's poem 'The Naming of Cats', for Anne carefully named her succession of beloved cats after characters in Elizabethan literature or actors in Shakespeare's theatres, such as Thaisa and Elissa, Damon and Pythias, Tarleton, Armin and Burbage. But the Introduction explores the potency of names from children's nicknames to a letter from Mozart, from Elizabeth I to Lévi-Strauss's account of the Nambikwara Indians and Derrida's rejection of the anthropologist's account. Inevitably, Barton soon reaches her core text, Plato's *Cratylus*, and its opposition between cratylic names and Hermogenes' argument for the arbitrary quality of

⁴⁹ Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, p. 46.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. x.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 170–93.

⁵³ Anne Barton, *The Names of Comedy* (Oxford, 1990), p. 17.

language. The dispute becomes crucial for comedy precisely because of the frequency of cratylic naming practices that are almost unknown in tragedy. The puns in the name 'Oedipus' are an exception but so too is 'Desdemona', for in Cinthio's tale that was Shakespeare's source, she is the only character named, as Disdemona, and the listeners blame her father for giving her an unlucky name. When Barton reached *Othello*, she becomes intrigued by the words buried in the names Shakespeare gives his characters: *hell* in *Othello*, *ass* in *Cassio*, *demon* in *Desdemona*, even the *ill* in *Emilia*.

The book's scope takes us from the cratylic names of Old Comedy to the bland ones of New Comedy as a tension in the practice of onomastics that will inform comedy thereafter. But Barton is equally interested in the moments when the names are released into a play's dialogue, for example the holding back of Viola's name until the last scene. For play after play both the distinctiveness of its naming practices and the relation of those names to the long tradition of comedy is incisively revealed until, at the end, the namelessness of Samuel Beckett's characters in his late plays links back to 'A' and 'B' in Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucreces* (1497) and the 'extraordinary' way in which Beckett is '(in effect) reinventing, from a position of extreme sophistication, the primitive name taboo'.⁵⁴

Anne Barton was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1991 and gave the British Academy Shakespeare Lecture in the same year under the title 'Parks and Ardens', continuing her frequent explorations of the city,⁵⁵ but here concerned with the park scenes of Restoration drama and the ways in which the cultivated and controlled landscape of London's parks needs to be set against Shakespeare's interest in the different world of parks as rural, not urban spaces, enclosures reserved for hunting. The lecture was dazzling in its scope, from the landscape of Warwickshire and the transformation of Shakespeare's precision in adaptations of, for example, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in the eighteenth century, through to the fleeting appearance of the park in Pinter's *Old Times* or the dystopic vision of it as a landscape of urban decay and danger in Botho Strauss's *Der Park* (1983), a remarkable rethinking of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It also marked her first foray into her last topic for research, the world of the forest, something she explored further

⁵⁴ Barton, *The Names of Comedy*, p. 186.

⁵⁵ See, for instance, Anne Barton, 'London comedy and the ethos of the city', *The London Journal*, 4 (1979), 158–80 and 'Comic London' (1990), both in Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, pp. 302–28 and 329–51.

in her Northcliffe Lectures at University College London in 1994 and the Clark Lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge in 2003 (the latter an especial honour since it has been rare for a Fellow of the college to be invited to give this prestigious series), pieces she tried to bring together in a study of *The Shakespearean Forest* that she simply could not complete. In 1994 Cambridge University Press published a collection of essays in her honour, edited by John Kerrigan, Michael Corder and myself, taking as its topic *English Comedy* as ‘a reflection on and tribute to her work on comedy’,⁵⁶ considering a wide range of drama, poetry and novels and even philosophy from the pedigree of Crab in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* to Wittgenstein and Noël Coward as a way of representing the breadth of her sustained interests in the forms comedy has taken.

English Comedy appeared in the same year as her carefully constructed collection of sixteen of her own articles, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*. The most recent piece in the volume, ‘Wrying but a little’, starting from and ending with *Cymbeline*, considers marriage, law and sexuality, delving into the technicalities of handfasting and marriage contracts in the early modern period to make sense of the particularity of Shakespeare’s analysis of how people behave or, as she phrases it in her introduction, exemplifying her interest in ‘law and social structure, in patterns of human interaction on and off stage on Renaissance England’.⁵⁷ The volume as a whole shows shifts in her concerns, primarily, as she notes, towards ‘an increasing emphasis on historical and social contexts’ and ‘an increasing need for footnotes, the product (in part) of a tendency . . . to situate texts within a complexly understood moment of time’.⁵⁸ But there is, too, a recurrent and unaltered fascination ‘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’.⁵⁹ The second section of the book centres on ‘the active interrelations between Shakespeare and his contemporaries’ and does so, not least, by enjoying writing about a ‘considerable number of obscure and minor works’ not only to set the great plays in relief but also because these, such as ‘Heywood’s delightfully preposterous *The Foure Prentises of London* . . .[.] can richly repay attention when allowed to speak for themselves’, and, quoting Bacon’s belief that critics ‘are the brushers of noblemen’s clothes’, she allows that many of the plays

⁵⁶ M. Corder, P. Holland and J. Kerrigan (eds.), *English Comedy* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 3.

⁵⁷ Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, p. xiv.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

she rescues ‘are very minor gentry indeed, but I have liked presenting them to other readers looking well turned-out.’⁶⁰ There is, throughout, that same clear-sighted concentration on language in performance that she had made so central to her writing, noting traditions such as the ‘disguised king’ line that Shakespeare drew on for *Henry V*,⁶¹ and enabling us to understand the potency of dramatic forms.⁶² Above all, there is, as she herself found when she read back over the articles, ‘a long-term insistence upon literature as a source of pleasure and . . . by my habitual use of it to complicate and extend my own understanding’, as with Montaigne whom she quotes lovingly: ‘if I studie, I onely endeavor to find out the knowledge that teacheth or handleth the knowledge of my selfe’.⁶³

Anne Barton retired from her Cambridge chair in 2000 but continued to supervise a few lucky undergraduates until her final illness. As always throughout her career, she deeply loved working with undergraduates who were excited by the materials they were discovering and she was just as irritated by those others who thought that native wit would be a sufficient cover for indolence and ignorance. She equally enjoyed supervising doctoral students and many, such as Michael Neill and Germaine Greer, have spoken of how much they owed to her willingness to work with them when their topics had taken them outside the concerns of most faculty. She continued to the end to entertain an international circle of friends, cherish her cats and, increasingly infrequently, write long review articles for the *New York Review of Books*, where she had started publishing in 1981 and for which she covered, especially, books on Shakespeare and Byron. Some of her reviews were brutal, as, for instance, her devastating exposition of Stephen Greenblatt’s ‘tendency to handle historical circumstances approximately’ in his book *Learning to Curse*.⁶⁴ Bad scholarship offended her and she was not prepared to excuse it.

Anne inspired and offered intense loyalty from and to those closest to her but her pugnacity could upset others. Cruelly, macular degeneration radically diminished her omnivorous taste in reading and she came to rely on her undimmed memory. In her last months before her death on 11 November 2013, exiled from her beloved rooms in Trinity and her even more beloved cats, she lay in her hospital bed, relieving the tedium and

⁶⁰ Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, p. xv.

⁶¹ Barton, ‘The King disguised’, in Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, pp. 207–33.

⁶² As for instance in ‘Oxymoron and the structure of Ford’s *The Broken Heart*’, in Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, 261–81.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

⁶⁴ *New York Review of Books*, 28 March 1991.

astonishing nursing staff and patients alike by reciting Shakespeare sonnets by the dozen.

But I want to end with a different moment of her powers of recall. It was June 2013, shortly before the fall that led to her last illness, and my wife and I were, as so often, sitting in Anne's rooms over a glass of wine together in the early evening along with other friends. The name of Richmond Lattimore came up, for he had taught Anne at Bryn Mawr. We all of course knew him for his translations of Greek tragedy but my wife wondered if he wrote poetry as well as translating. 'Yes, he did', said Anne, 'and I remember some. Do you want to hear one?' We did. She looked down at the carpet for a few seconds and I am ashamed to admit that I felt a mounting anxiety in case, for once, she would not remember. And then she started to speak. After thirty lines or so, she stopped. 'There's plenty more but that's probably enough.' It was not just that she spoke but rather how she spoke that transfixed us. If she had rehearsed the poem that day she could not have spoken it better—every line perfectly marked, every cadence in place, the metre always exact, the effect overwhelming. It was not an act of memory, not an act of respect for a loved teacher, not a demonstration of how to speak a poem. It was more than that: a deeply felt explanation of precisely why we read poetry, why Anne had committed hundreds of poems to memory, why literature mattered to her and to us, what her lifetime of learning and discovering and writing and enjoying others' writing was for. This was the profound pleasure in engaging with poetry made manifest. That moment, movingly and passionately, through the calm and caring speaking of Lattimore's poem, explained to me, better than anyone else could do, why we do what we do as academics and why I have spent more than forty years inadequately imitating Anne's example. We often talk of modelling for our students, exemplifying what they might achieve. It can be done modestly or extremely arrogantly. This was the modest practice that perfected the lesson of the values of the academic life. It was the sign of a great humanist scholar whose writings were devoted to revealing the power of imaginative language precisely as a sign of our humanity.

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