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MURIEL BRADBROOK

Muriel Clara Bradbrook 1909–1993

MURIEL CLARA BRADBROOK has been the most creatively influential Shakespeare scholar of our time. She was busily occupied as a college and university teacher and administrator from her appointment as a teaching Fellow of Girton in 1936, with an interlude of wartime service at the Board of Trade, on to her appointment as vice-mistress of her college in 1962, as the first woman Professor of English at Cambridge in 1965 and as Mistress of Girton from 1968 until her retirement in 1976; and for many years she travelled and lectured across the world. At the same time she was exceptionally productive in scholarship. Beginning with the two books from her twenties that can fairly be called seminal—*Elizabethan Stage Conditions* (1932) and *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (1935)—she brought out a dozen books on Shakespeare and the Elizabethan theatre, supplemented by many lectures and articles, some of which are assembled in three of the four volumes of her *Collected Papers* (1981–89); and besides these, a centenary history of Girton (*That Infidel Place*, 1969) and a wide variety of literary studies in books and articles ranging in subject from Marvell to Beckett and from Malory to Lowry, and spanning her long career, with undiminished energy in her years of nominal retirement, from her pungent essay on Virginia Woolf in the first number of *Scrutiny* (1932) to her freshly-researched lecture saluting Vaclav Havel in 1991. A friend and former research pupil, Marie Axton, has described her (in conversation) as ‘the most omnivorous reader I have ever known’—and she was also an indefatigable playgoer, coupling her

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enthusiasm for books and plays with a piercing attention to detail and with exceptional mobility in her powers of association and recall. Perhaps the outstanding qualities of her critical writing were her intuitive insights, enriched (or, at times, encrusted) with associative cross-references, and her unflinching grasp of practical realities, reinforced by a controlled but insuppressible dry sense of humour.

She was born in Wallasey, the eldest child of her father's third marriage, with two adult half-sisters surviving from his previous marriages and then four younger brothers, one of whom died in infancy. She came, as she was proud to say, from seafaring people on both sides. Her father, Samuel Bradbrook (1856–1928), was the son of a Brightlingsea shipbuilder and had been at sea before joining the Waterguard; her maternal grandmother, Mary Elizabeth Harvey, was the daughter of a pilot and the wife of a captain and daughter-in-law of a master mariner and shipowner, all three from Falmouth. The Falmouth connection was important to her. In a late autobiographical note she called her grandmother there her 'first love', who gave her the name, 'Muriel, the bright sea, a Celtic name'; while Falmouth, familiar from holiday visits, had always been 'my spiritual home', where 'my grandmother's little house, full of curiosities from all over the seven seas' (which included a model of the elder Harvey's ship), together with 'my father's collection of poets and novels, shaped my childhood'. No doubt the fascination of the sea was to count for a great deal in her subsequent eagerness to travel, her interest in writers such as Conrad and Lowry, and her sensitivity to the local surroundings of Ibsen and of Strindberg.

Her childhood was enclosed within the family, with her father's books. John, the oldest of her brothers, recalls that she 'was very much in her own world and had quite a sharp and sarcastic tongue on occasions'. But she had delicate health, suffering from asthma until she was eighteen. Her first school was Hutcheson's School in Glasgow, where her father had moved as Superintendent of HM Waterguard in 1917, returning to Wallasey in 1919, upon his retirement. But she was not able to attend school regularly until she was thirteen, when she was admitted to a free place at the new grammar school, the Oldershaw Girls' School, in Wallasey—the headmistress, as she puts it, taking a risk on her. Oldershaw launched her, thanks to the headmistress, Violet Blyth, who was an old Girtonian, and her English mistress, Molly Kane, an Irishwoman who not only gave her a grounding in Donne as well as Shakespeare and the Romantics but fostered her lifelong admiration for Yeats and her love of the theatre. At seventeen she won an Exhibition to

Girton, to be supplemented by a State Scholarship, in those days a rare and, for those without ample means, an indispensable prize.

The tight but cosmopolitan community of Girton prepared Muriel Bradbrook for wider social horizons. And Girton meant or came to mean for her a quiet but deep identification with women's advancing struggle for equal opportunities. The older Girtonians she was to remember with respect were formidable women from the suffragette generation, women who had found the confirmed purpose and strength of will necessary to affirm themselves. The fight for the vote had partly been won a few years before she came to Girton in 1927, but not equality with men's right to vote at 21, until 1929. And educational equality was still far from perfect at Cambridge, in spite of the achievements of the women's colleges. While she was an undergraduate reading English the Professor, Quiller-Couch, still refused to admit women to his evening classes on Aristotle's *Poetics*. In 1930, after a starred First and a double First in the Tripos, she obtained nothing better than a college certificate stating that she would have been entitled to a BA if she had been a man, and a university degree certificate 'in which the word "titular" had been inserted by hand'. She did not gain her first temporary teaching post from the university until 1945, by which time she had five books to her credit, equality of opportunity in academic appointments being even further off then than now. And not until 1948 did Cambridge grant women full membership of the university, including voting rights for MAs. For Muriel Bradbrook, equality of educational opportunity, the opportunity to develop intellectual parity with men, was always to be the central plank in the feminist cause. However, this was far from a restrictive commitment. Speaking of Barbara Bodichon, the friend of George Eliot, painter, propagandist for women's rights and co-founder of Girton, she said that 'The lack of a single commitment seems to me . . . to be her rare and peculiar strength'; and (in the Foreword to Muriel Bradbrook's *Collected Papers on Women and Literature 1779–1982*) Inga-Stina Ewbank has picked out these words to characterise the multiple scholarship and outgoing human interests of the speaker herself.

She came to Cambridge at a fortunate moment, effervescent with new ideas and as yet unperplexed by fears about mass unemployment, fascism and war. Among her student contemporaries were William Empson and Jacob Bronowski, Michael Redgrave, Alistair Cooke and Malcolm Lowry, Kathleen Raine and—her next-door neighbour in Girton—her aloof senior, Queenie Roth, the future Queenie Leavis.

Her principal supervisor at Girton was the lexicographer's daughter, Hilda Murray, an exacting and evidently bracing medievalist who 'conferred on her pupils the benefit of an Oxford point of view quite opposed to that of Cambridge'. But the main drive of the new and innovative English Tripos, just established in 1926, led away from philology to literary criticism, with Aristotle's *Poetics* as one of the set books—a Tripos with no chronological cut-off, but with an emphasis on modern literature, with some requirements in reading foreign literatures, and with openings on philosophy, psychology and social history. There was no critical orthodoxy, but a prevailing tone of cool yet intensive analysis. The outstanding lecturer and formative mind was I. A. Richards, who was soon, in 1929, to publish his epoch-making *Practical Criticism*. And, besides Richards, there was the influence of his friend, T. S. Eliot; the great good fortune of Muriel Bradbrook's student generation was that new academic ideas coincided and partly interlocked with the progress of new major developments in creative literature. Miss Murray invited F. R. Leavis to Girton to take classes in practical criticism, and Leavis laid stress on modern poets, including Empson; (in her contribution to Ronald Hayman's *My Cambridge* (1977) Muriel Bradbrook asks 'how many people have been taught poetry written by a contemporary undergraduate?'). Moreover, in addition to the university, her Cambridge encompassed Terence Gray's Festival, which proclaimed itself the best avant-garde theatre west of Moscow. Something of the exhilaration of those years can be guessed from a post-obituary letter to the *Guardian* (19 June 1993), where a younger Oldershaw pupil, Sylvia Hall, recounts how Muriel, still a student, returned to her old school ('wearing a wonderful straw hat decorated with daisies and a strange, long cotton dress') to deliver a fascinating and memorable talk about Cambridge University.

At the same time, her undergraduate and post-graduate years were full of personal strain. Her father died in 1928, leaving the family badly off. Her mother died in 1934. She had to provide for her two younger brothers and their education, shepherding them both eventually into Downing College. Meanwhile, in what was now a climate of depression, she lived through a love affair which ended unhappily (she never married). 'The years 1930–6', she writes in *My Cambridge*, 'gave me a taste of extremities which have ever since enabled me to put other difficulties in proportion'. Nevertheless, these were also the years of her first books and articles, energetic and resourceful.

Elizabethan Stage Conditions, awarded the university's Harness

Prize for 1931, cleared the way for a new phase in Shakespeare interpretation. The critical assumptions of Victorian realism, implicit in Bradley's prestigious studies and polemically sharpened by William Archer against the Elizabethans, were already coming under challenge. The mass of documentation assembled by E. K. Chambers and others had thrown new light on the historical conditions, material and institutional, under which Elizabethan plays had been performed, and on the transmission of Shakespeare's texts. Stoll and Schucking had directly challenged the presumed realism of Shakespeare's characters, emphasising their conventional, even 'primitive', aspects. In his *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, Harley Granville-Barker had begun to combine historical scholarship with his practical and creative experience on the stage. Above all, T. S. Eliot was shifting the grounds of criticism from realistic psychology to the language of poetry in action, towards an ideal of drama as the projection of a poetic vision close to ritual. And, as against realism, Wilson Knight was expounding his brilliant if wilful interpretation of Shakespeare's plays in terms of a network of symbolic images. In effect, Bradbrook provided a synthesis between the new criticism and the new scholarship. She showed that, without condescending to realism (and without being 'primitive'), an Elizabethan stage gave an adaptable framework for movement and pageantry, while concentrating attention on the actors themselves and the actors' speech; the prime vehicle for dramatic action was the poetry. It was not poetry by itself that counted, however, but poetry for delivery on the stage.

One feature of her critical writing is her vigorous common sense, tempering her sensitivity and avoiding abstractions or extremes. Another is her gleeful capacity for pertinent irreverence. In her first book, for example, she adduces Eugene O'Neill to mark a contrast between modern, non-poetic techniques and Elizabethan dramaturgy: '*The Emperor Jones* produces a powerful abdominal response, as much akin to literature as the feeling of going up in a lift'. In the 1962 reissue she confesses that, knowing that Granville-Barker was to be one of the adjudicators of her prize essay, she 'was determined not to curry favour. So I slapped the examiner'. And, as she was well aware, she stung Virginia Woolf by her *Scrutiny* essay of 1932, accusing the novelist of a lack of intellectual fibre. Elsewhere, she made amends to Granville-Barker and Virginia Woolf and—within limits—to O'Neill. But she continued to produce deflating asides and terse, summarising comments, often with a dismissive edge, verging on epigram. In *English Dramatic Form* (1965), for example, she observes that although

Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is 'iconoclastic' in relation to religious street pageantry, it 'derives its energies from the tradition it abjures'. Again, there is a similar neat placing of Pirandello's *Henry IV*: 'Pirandello suffered from the disabling weight of Italian professional theatre—probably the most powerful tradition in Europe of its kind. His cerebral drama gives an exaggerated display of intellectual agility, that does not disguise emotional poverty'. As these examples together illustrate, she was concerned for both emotional and intellectual strength in literature. Equally, from *Elizabethan Stage Conditions* onward, she was concerned to balance evaluative judgment with appreciation of the historical environment of a writer's work.

Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (1935) treated Shakespeare only incidentally, but surveyed in detail his predecessors and successors in tragedy, major and minor, from Marlowe to Shirley, in the light of what she brings out as their common working artistic assumptions, as distinct from those of neo-classical drama or the novel. It made a landmark in dramatic criticism. Bradbrook demoted the criteria of psychological realism on the stage, showing how the Elizabethans achieved a heightened and variegated but (at their best) coherent poetic effect. She points out how (and, to some extent, why) characters emerge as accentuated types; how action is often mixed, embracing side by side allegory and local naturalism, hornpipes and funerals, and often crowded and complicated, with the sequential links between one intensified episode and another schematised emphatically or passed over in favour of developing an interplay between different aspects of the dominant moral theme; and how Elizabethan stage speech, with its freedom in soliloquies and asides, is not an imitation of the meanders, fumbings and understatements of natural dialogue but essentially an application of rhetoric, keyed to the dramatic theme as much as the speaker, and designed for explicitness with an overlay of suggestion, conspicuous patterning and theatrical impact. In the face of critics of the school of William Archer, she points out that in drama, unlike the novel, such deviation from ordinary speech can be a positive advantage, if not a necessity, because in drama 'the dialogue has to define as well as to present the feelings' of the characters—whereas a novelist is free to explain or qualify them in his own words; drama 'must be more selective' than the novel, 'and selection is only possible through a convention'.

A convention has been defined at the outset as 'an agreement between writers and readers (or spectators), whereby the artist is

allowed to distort and simplify his material through a control of the distribution of emphasis'. This definition implies that a convention is an artistic device or method departing from a (notional) unselective, photographic reproduction of actuality; and secondly, that such a device is not peculiar to a single work but is shared by a number of writers in the same genre or the same period and is presumably accepted or even encouraged by their public. One may object to Muriel Bradbrook's definition on the one hand, that it makes the compact between, say, dramatists and spectators seem too conscious and deliberate; and on the other hand, that it does not go far enough, since what may be called the writer's choice or summoning of material involves some kind of accord with his potential public over interests and values, even prior to his simplification or manipulation of it. His material may be affected by convention, as much as his method. A list of technical conventions to be found in Elizabethan plays would be of no more than descriptive use without further examination. And there is the danger, as Christopher Ricks has insisted, of treating Elizabethan stage conventions as self-justifying, self-explanatory. As a rule Muriel Bradbrook is quick to point out that what counts about a convention is how it is used, the dramatic context. But occasionally she brings forward a convention as a sufficient critical argument by itself; as when she writes that 'Credibility of slander was a most useful convention for complicating the action'—so that criticism of, for instance, Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing* would be simply beside the point. This is one of the few places where she seems to be carried away by her thesis.

More generally, however, her idea of convention empowers a critical break-through, conjoining literary insight with awareness of the demands and opportunities of the Elizabethan stage. There is a finely-tuned chapter on Marlowe, for example ('Marlowe's sensuousness has the maximum of concreteness and the minimum of particularity'); and her chapter on *The Revenger's Tragedy* gives a highly original demonstration of her sense of poetic drama, of the interplay between stage action, allegory, topical reference and verbal imagery: 'All the betrayed women [in the play]', she writes, with reference to the central episode, 'are in a sense represented by the poisoned skull of Vindice's mistress'; and she goes on to analyse Vindice's address to the skull (the tirade already singled out by T. S. Eliot) so as to show the dramatic relevance of its charged verbal ambiguities. With Webster, her touch is not quite so sure, as when she says with regard to the ambivalence of Vittoria in *The White Devil* that the repetition of the

epithet, 'devil', 'would have great force' to 'a literal-minded Jacobean audience'—though not enough to make them 'ready to take an oath, if cross-examined, that Vittoria was possessed; but then they were not accustomed to judge their impressions separately or even to analyse them out fully, and the absence of any soliloquy or choric aside from Vittoria deprives them of any direct lead for their judgment'; and there are further, similar comments on the indistinct suggestiveness of Webster's allusions to the supernatural. Here straightforward observation of the text edges over into presumptions about an audience's state of mind. However, there is at least indirect evidence to support such presumptions; and they do not interfere with sharp comments on Webster's dramatic technique—'The difficulty of *The White Devil* is that the feelings are frequently naturalistic, but the characters are not. The impression of the parts conflicts with the impression of the whole'. This is critical comment in the main line reaching back to Arnold and Johnson.

Muriel Bradbrook's attachment to a central tradition of criticism, with its concern for wholeness and balance in a writer's work and for comparative evaluation, an attachment no doubt fostered by Leavis, is prominent in her early articles, notably in her critique of William Empson (in *Scrutiny*, II, (1933)), which advanced an unusually coolly measured appraisal of *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, in spite of her high admiration of her contemporary's acclaimed brilliance: 'Mr. Empson's intellectual analysis and his emotional stimulation are each apt to get dissociated and out of focus. . . . Something more than the working of a properly qualified mind and the expression of a lively sensibility goes to the making of a great critic'. She extended her literary approach through a post-graduate year at Oxford (1935–6), where she studied under C. S. Lewis. Meanwhile, she had devised, for her work on drama, a method of her own, that she describes in the preface to the third volume of her *Collected Papers* (1983): 'I had devised a technique of reading and re-reading an Elizabethan text till the shape of its themes and conventions emerged. Sometimes I would read a great play twenty or thirty times, along with all the minor plays that have survived. I know no substitute for laminating the text into one's mind in a variety of moods and settings, the equivalent of an actor's study and rehearsal'. The effect of this intensive absorption with her subject, together with her darting intuition and remarkably retentive memory, can be seen again and again in her writings. A survey of 'Bogeymen, Machiavels and Stoics' (in *Collected Papers* III) touches on, quotes or discusses some fifty plays

by Chapman and a score of other Elizabethan or Stuart playwrights (including the glancing aside, apropos of *The Virgin Martyr*, that 'Martyrdom was the one profession open equally to both sexes') in the space of sixteen pages. Sometimes what she once called (if I remember correctly) her own 'dot-and-carry manner of writing' can bewilder her reader with unexpected cross-references; as, for example, where, in *Shakespeare the Craftsman* (1969), she sets out to clarify the style of *Timon of Athens* with the help of successive allusions to Joyce's *Ulysses*, Corneille and Japanese Noh plays. In general, she remained indifferent to aesthetic theorising, although in her later work she made occasional raids on psychology. She could write concise and impressive surveys of aspects of dramatic history, but her attempt to expound a theory of development, in *English Dramatic Form* (1965), was left unsustainable. And, especially in her later books, she could be accused of neglecting the clear exposition of an argument in favour of vivid and varied particulars. As Mary Ann Radzinowicz has written, in her obituary article in the *Girton College Newsletter*, 1993: 'Her books scarcely announced their theses; she had a rooted preference for the presentation of richly detailed evidence accompanied by the continuous light pressure of what Andrew Gurr has called "significant inferences"'. In a way, this shows a continuation from her apprenticeship in *Scrutiny*.

On the other hand, as she noted herself, she differed from Leavis and L. C. Knights in her fascination with theatrical performance. It is noticeable that she compares her own method of research with that of an actor studying a part—though with her slight physique and her thin, reedy voice she was quite untheatrical and undemonstrative in her personal bearing (which, however, is far from saying either constrained or ineffective). Her love of theatre and her focus on concrete details correspond to her keen appreciation of other personalities. A thumbnail sketch from her contribution to Reuben Brower's volume of essays in honour of I. A. Richards (1973) is typical of this responsiveness to personality, especially since she concentrates here on the way Richards could project himself, on Richards the performer rather than the philosopher: 'Ivor Richards cannot be met adequately through his books alone. To hear him read aloud is the best education in poetry; his voice, melancholy, slow-cadenced, sinks with an emphatic fall to clinch his argument. His impish humour, his personal courtesy and his surprising union of the authoritative and the mischievous are more fully shewn in talk, lectures, or possibly—and if he has not made any, he should do

so—in film’. To anyone who knew Richards and attended his lectures this is a convincing vignette.

Apart from an over-ingenious foray into topical allusions in *The School of Night* (1936), her first book dwelling on Shakespeare, *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry* (1951), was a literary study, as the title announces; and *The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy* (1955) was also mainly a survey of literary forms and conventions. But *The Rise of the Common Player* (1962), dedicated to Edith Evans, marked a decisive shift of perspective, in a pioneering study of the social conditions governing performance in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and of the emergence of acting as a profession. As against the tendency to assume that a play must be a self-contained literary statement, she brought out the coexistence, during Elizabeth’s reign, of performances as parts of a mixed popular entertainment, in conditions resembling a fun-fair; of acting in noble households or college halls; and of shows devised for a special occasion, addressed as ‘offerings’ to the principal spectator, notably the Queen. She discussed the status of the commercial player under moralistic attack and sketched the composition and progress of the first well-known companies, with a clinching demonstration that Laneham’s often-cited public Letter from Leicester’s famous entertainment for the Queen at Kenilworth in 1575 should be read as an elaborate puff for the newly advancing professional company of Leicester’s Men; and she outlined the careers of the early actor-playwright, Robert Wilson, and the first stars of the English theatre, Richard Tarlton, the clown, and the great and prosperous tragic actor, Edward Alleyn, theatrical entrepreneur, joint patentee of the Mastership of the Royal Game and ultimately founder of Dulwich College. Much of the documentation for all this could be found in E. K. Chambers’ great work; but it was Muriel Bradbrook who brought the Elizabethan actors to life as practitioners of a developing craft within a complex society. There is a similar slant towards socio-economic considerations in her articles of 1960 and 1962 on ‘Spenser’s pursuit of Fame’ and on ‘Beasts and Gods: Greene’s *Groats-worth of Witte* and the social purpose of *Venus and Adonis*’ (in *Shakespeare Survey* XV), where she interprets the poem in the light of a riposte to Greene’s slur on Shakespeare as a thievish, unlettered player. The new outlook conveyed in *The Rise of the Common Player* did not mean the abandonment of the critic’s original views, however, but a fresh development. As she does not fail to point out, Alleyn, who was Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s junior by a couple of years,

made his name in leading parts for Marlowe, Greene and Kyd; and she emphasises that it was the poets who in the 1580s fused together the Elizabethan public and crowned the development of a new art form—in effect, the self-sustaining dramatic poem. In the Preface she writes, extending the argument from *Elizabethan Stage Conditions*, that ‘The greatest triumphs [of the Elizabethans] were in dramatic poetry, involving the special use of language as part of a larger social context, including also the “languages” of music, gesture, spectacle, the “traffic of the stage”’. The traffic of the stage in various forms, but crucially as poetry in performance, was to remain the principal object of her later studies.

A guiding thread here was her subtle and suggestive investigation of Shakespeare’s relation to his actors—though it is characteristic of Bradbrook’s many-sided approach that she did not isolate the subject. For example, in a late article (in *Collected Papers IV*) she interpreted *Two Gentlemen of Verona* as a piece intended for boy actors—not professionals—performing before a noble household during the plague year of 1593, when the men’s companies had broken up and Shakespeare was presumably away from London; in justification she pointed to the limited demands made on the players, who have soliloquies and duets, but are not required to operate as a group (and pointed also to the play’s courtly ethos of love-service, deriving from Lyly and Castiglione). By way of contrast, in *Shakespeare the Craftsman* she had described *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as a ‘completely professional accomplishment’, a unique portrayal of ‘small town society’, designed to give everyone in the company ‘a good fat part’. Shakespeare’s evolving relationship with his fellow-actors is precisely the main theme of that book, based on her Clark lectures of 1968. An important, well documented topic is Shakespeare’s engagement with the distinctive personality of Robert Armin, his clown player from *As You Like It* to *King Lear*. Above all, Bradbrook dwells here on Shakespeare’s interaction with the Burbage family, as a family belonging to what was virtually a craft guild, but a guild at work under novel, post-medieval conditions, entrepreneurial and technical. Richard Burbage’s adaptability in expressing varied moods and roles within a single part and his power to dominate the audience stand out as key factors in the decisive achievement of *Hamlet*, which the critic sees as a production triumphantly self-aware. The Players within the play are supposed to be ‘trudging away’ from their base in the capital, but their arrival at Elsinore ‘Could not really be staged at the Globe except as part of a

dazzling public success. No one really advertises his own failure'; and Bradbrook suggests that the First Player was made up to look like Burbage himself, confronting the actual Burbage as the Prince; (this would not have been the only play in which Burbage came on, or was supposed to come on, in person). The tragedy draws and depends upon the audience's knowledge of older revenge plays, but it also draws upon their knowledge of more recent Burbage parts, as in *Julius Caesar*. *Hamlet*, she writes, 'is not so much a play as a geological deposit of accumulated dramatic experience. It is the embodied history of the English stage. . . . Because it is most traditional in theme, it is most revolutionary in terms of relationships, their precision, their definition by gestures married to words'. Rather than proposing a psychological reading of the tragedy, she emphasises its capacity to stand as an enduring, self-explanatory dramatic fiction, thanks especially to its incorporation of theatrical experience, of the play within the play. In *Hamlet* 'drama [has] come of age, arriving at a new configuration of actors and audience, in their relation to the play and the world beyond', precisely because the actors have come to be 'fully recognised as a body separate from the audience, guardians of their own craft mystery', with an identity of their own, embodying a kind of "'second world" of art', more vivid than everyday existence.

It was the Burbage family that marked out crucial moments in this development. When in 1576 the father, James Burbage, set up London's first purpose-built playhouse, the Theatre, 'what [he] really invented was the Box Office'—an indispensable preliminary to the future triumph of *Hamlet*. Much later, 'the modern theatre effectively began' in the autumn of 1608, when the son, Richard Burbage, took over the Blackfriars for the King's Men, with its requirement of new scenic and acting techniques for an intimate playhouse with an indoor stage. Bradbrook adds the important qualifying observation that Shakespeare does not simply adapt himself to a new fashion in his last plays, after 1608, but 'paradoxically recalls and transforms the romances of his youth, as the links with the old craft stage disappeared'—in effect, that is, a reassertion of professional identity and continuity. But she also suggests that it may have been Richard Burbage's death three years after Shakespeare, at the age of forty-five, that prompted their two fellow-actors to bring out the plays they had largely shared together in the nearly unprecedented grand format of a Folio.

In one respect Bradbrook's interest in 'the dynamics of performance' led her to a change of critical emphasis. In a late discussion

of *Hamlet* ('Production and Performance in Blackfriars' drama' (1984); in *Collected Papers* IV) she argues for the constructive potential of 'non-verbal aspects' of a 'rich'—but, as the early printing history shows, a changeable—text, owing to the repeated interplay between Burbage and the other members of the company, including Shakespeare himself: 'Performance itself had shown that the apparent inconsistencies, contradictions, unexplained changes could add depth and integrity to the actor's role. . . . The gaps allow the actor to "breathe" inside his part'. Elsewhere, on the other hand (in *The Living Monument: Shakespeare and the Theatre of his Time* (1976)), she had noted that 'Edith Evans has always refused the part [of Lady Macbeth] because she thinks it lacks the third quarter—the development between the banquet scene and the sleep-walking scene'. But meanwhile, in her book on Webster (1980), she had dwelt on the performative value of his "poetry of the gaps", considerably modifying her criticism of his plays in *Themes and Conventions*: 'the thickly laminated dramatic poetry, built with alternating views, shifting perspectives, allows the audience to insert any variations they wish; the actor can "breathe" inside his part'. In *The Duchess of Malfi* 'the legendary, the contemporary, the dramatically ritualistic are laminated', in a manner she compares with the multiple allusions in the poetry of T. S. Eliot and Allen Tate. 'Lamination', again, is the metaphor she uses to define her own method of study in building up successive, overlapping impressions of a play. This view of an Elizabethan play in performance was not a concession to drama by way of sub-literary shocks (such as she had criticised in Eugene O'Neill). But it altered and supplemented, if it did not contradict, her original view of the hegemony of poetry; as in her article on 'Thomas Heywood, Shakespeare's Shadow' (1982; in *Collected Papers* III), where she argues that for Heywood, an actor-playwright who, like Shakespeare, neglected the printing of his own plays, what counted was not the poetry but the performance: 'Words alone represented a scenario, an operatic score for a collaborative cultural event, when actors and audience bestowed the final shaping'. Noting the burden of the new wave of textual scholarship, she adds that 'To reconstitute a dramatic text is an act of cultural archaeology'.

This view of performance involves the audience as well as actors and playwright; and reconstruction of an audience's share in a 'cultural event' implies an awareness of place, perhaps sponsorship, historical period, and occasion. In her first books Muriel Bradbrook had tried to analyse the mentality of Elizabethan playgoers in terms of their reading

and their education in rhetoric. Her later comments within this area are more specific and pragmatic. She had an acute sense of topography; several of her books are furnished with maps of Elizabethan London. In *Shakespeare the Craftsman* she brought out the modernity (or actuality) of *Julius Caesar* by showing how Shakespeare's Rome resembles London in its social structure, and how Shakespeare reveals his actors' awareness of their audience, and power to manipulate it, through the speeches of Caesar, Brutus and Antony. In *The Living Monument* she brought out the significance for *Macbeth* of the public moment when it appeared—the moment of Gunpowder Plot, following hard upon the resplendent procession (in which Shakespeare, as one of the King's Men, must have taken part) welcoming James I to London and his coronation. However, with regard to *King Lear*, which she would date after *Macbeth*, she considered that the topical significance was to be found less in any oblique reference to Stuart politics than in 'the rejection of Court rites', with a deep-lying 'decision to stay with the popular stage'; adding, in her next book (*Shakespeare: The Poet in his World* (1978)), that a major source of the power in the tormented middle scenes of the play must have been Shakespeare's resentment over Harsnett's pamphlet against *Popish Impostures*, with the persistent, malicious association it makes between acting and devilry. She provides a further range of significant topical references in *The Poet in his World*: for example, with reference to *Romeo and Juliet*, she touches on the background of public fears of the plague, and she brings out the novelty of Shakespeare's treatment of the story in condemning the parents, not the young lovers; or, again, she notes that in the production of *Henry IV* by the Lord Chamberlain's Men the presentation of the historical defeat of the Northern Earls at Shrewsbury parallels and tacitly celebrates the other, nearly contemporary defeat of Northern Earls in 1569 by the first Lord Hunsdon, the original patron of Shakespeare's company and the father of their current patron. Her books are rich in suggestive links between Shakespeare and the lives or the common knowledge of his company and their audience. In her book on Webster, similarly, she provides a fuller account of the man and his milieu than had been available before, with the help of details about the London neighbourhood he lived in and with the support of two other biographical chapters, concerning Sidney's Stella, Penelope Rich, and the Spanish spy and political exile, Antonio Pérez. These two life-stories are not presented as likely source material or objects of allusion in the plays, but as 'London Legends', as Bradbrook calls them, or as

parallel lives, one might say, to set beside the lives of Webster's characters; they help to bring home some of the resonance of the tragedies for a modern reader, configurations of passion and political intrigue that, by repute, at least, Webster's first audiences would have found familiar.

As a rule, her books on Shakespeare do not offer a thoroughgoing analysis, a comprehensive study in depth, of any of his plays. Instead, they provide fresh, darting perceptions into major aspects of the plays, with sidelights from scholarly digressions. But those digressions bring to bear an unrivalled command of the enviroing factors in Elizabethan stage conditions, literature and general history, as well as of modern, international interpretations of Shakespeare on the stage. And probably no other scholar has given us such lively, many-sided impressions of an Elizabethan play as 'a collaborative cultural event', in all the complexity of the traffic between the dramatist and his fellow-writers, the actors and the public.

Muriel Bradbrook's work on the Elizabethans accounts for something like two-thirds of her considerable output. But altogether her active range as a scholar and critic was very much wider. She drew freely on poets as far apart as Chaucer and Edwin Muir and produced studies of Marvell, T. S. Eliot and Kathleen Raine, as well as of novelists as unlike one another as Jane Austen and Conrad and Lowry. And she wrote with insight and an easy command of her material about the modern theatre over the past century: about the Paris of Sarah Bernhardt; Yeats and the Irish revival; and the progression of avant-garde drama from Strindberg and Jarry to Beckett and Pinter. She should be remembered for this work on modern drama and for her studies of some departments of twentieth-century literature in general as much as for her work on the Elizabethans. A genuinely cosmopolitan range of sympathies counts for a good deal in this achievement, backed up by her alert-minded world-wide travels. Two of her best books are *Ibsen the Norwegian* (1946) and *Literature in Action: Studies in Continental and Commonwealth Society* (1972), a highly original but somewhat neglected book where she considers modern European drama in company with the writings of New Zealand, Australia and Canada.

During the war years she learned Norwegian from Norwegian naval officers in exile in London, and she used her knowledge of Ibsen's language decisively. She transformed the already dated English view of the dramatist championed by William Archer and Bernard Shaw as Ibsen the social challenger and pamphleteer. She concentrated instead

on Ibsen the poet. Not that she ignored the problematic aspects of the plays—pointing out, for example, that modern playgoers are liable to underrate the social risks Nora confronts at the end of *A Doll's House*. But she dwells on the presence in the plays of Norway, its geography and history, and of Ibsen's love-hate relationship with his country; on the continuity of themes from his lyrical poems to his plays; and on the style of his stage dialogue, 'in grain' (as she contends) with the tendency of Ibsen's language towards pithy and ironic statement or 'inference and riddle'. She brings out the poetic resonance of Ibsen's style not only in *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* but in his prose masterpieces as well. She describes *A Doll's House*, for example, as the 'first Modern Tragedy', consummating and surpassing the tradition of the well-made play, not because of its contribution to the cause of feminism, but because of its poetic concentration, in gestures and visual images and above all (using her favourite metaphor) in its 'sparse and laminated speech'. 'It was no accident' (she observes) 'that it fell to a Norwegian to take that most finely tooled art, the drama, and bring it to a point and precision so nice that literally not a phrase is without its direct contribution to the structure'; and, in a telling summary, she adds, 'Ibsen will not allow the smallest action to escape from the psychopathology of everyday life'. As a critic, she was not impressed by drama with a message or by realism for its own sake, but she responded keenly to the intensity of overlapping implications in *A Doll's House*, which she even compares, in that respect, to *Oedipus the King*—though that does not prevent her from noting that the play is even overcharged with irony, and contrasting it with Ibsen's later, finer and more restrained achievement in *Hedda Gabler*.

Another side of Ibsen, his treatment of the past in relation to the present, comes to the fore in *Literature in Action*. There, Bradbrook brings out how Ibsen moved from a public to a private domain of myths, from the direct recounting of national history, legend or folklore in his early plays to a different form of composition where (as in *Rosmersholm*, for instance) the past, of an individual, a family, a society, lives on in the inhibitions and fantasies of the characters and where simultaneously the characters' present reconditions their past. This chapter in turn forms part of a broader study of drama and its value for modern society. Drama is still the most potent of the arts in making for psychological stability, she argues, because it offers a collective experience wherein divergent, possibly conflicting, impulses can meet and balance one another, an experience focused on the living voice of the

actor, reinforced by gesture and by scenic effect. In modern culture, however, the imaginative binding force once exercised by tradition and by history has gone; although a modern dramatist like Eliot or Giraudoux may readapt a Greek myth for a modern application, he can no longer build on the direct authority of a traditional narrative, as Ibsen's example illustrates. Private dreams or obsessions have come to speak more powerfully to an audience than unmediated public myths; hence the emergence of the Theatre of the Absurd. The first production of *En Attendant Godot* in Paris in 1953 was as much 'a turning-point' in the theatre as the first production of *A Doll's House* in 1879. As Bradbrook expertly shows, *En Attendant Godot* stems largely from Beckett's experience of secrecy, uncertainty, tension and danger as a volunteer for the Resistance during the occupation of France. But the heroism of that traumatic period is not merely masked in the play but seemingly nullified, reduced to the language and gesture of clowns—because 'direct recording' is not possible for such 'experience of extremity', and only by transmutation can the writer 'recover it for himself, as an involuntary memory' and share it with others. Paradoxically, the communication here comes through a medium of apparent non-communication, incoherence. But it is a disciplined incoherence, Bradbrook insists (another form of that poetry of the gaps to be found in Webster—or in Chekhov). And it has proved expressive for audiences and for other playwrights precisely through its denial or caricature of explicit communication, through its commitment to blocked impulses and to memories inwardly relived, without apparent coherence, without explanation or rationalisation.

In the second half of *Literature in Action* Bradbrook turns to New Zealand, Australia and Canada. Through a series of incisive sketches she provides an English reader with what in effect is an introduction to the distinctive problems and qualities of each of these new literatures. The indirect link with the first half of the book lies in the general twentieth-century 'crisis of communication' (since 'easy communication at a superficial level' has made 'communication in depth more precarious') and in the need of the writers in each of the new countries to find a voice of their own: 'The maturity of a literature depends on the discovery of a characteristic form—not a theme or a vocabulary, but an approach'. As Bradbrook shows, each of the three literatures has been affected by distance from the mother-country, or, additionally, by a chosen self-distancing; by the social composition of the dominant settlers, their history and their contact with others (the natives, or compet-

ing European language groups); and by the configuration of the country and its geopolitical position. She brings out the corresponding traditions in each country—in surviving balladry, for instance, in the reception of modern metropolitan poetry, in variant attitudes towards England, of nostalgia or derision. And she shows how the conditions of each country have favoured a particular literary genre or a dominant image—as with the short stories of Katherine Mansfield, portrayals of small insulated groups; the long symbolic novels of Patrick White; or Malcolm Lowry's extended images of a journey. Her sharp sense of the active presence of varied component literary strands comes out, for example, in a comment on a passage of French-Canadian writing ('It was a Breton who wrote the words, perhaps forged from his own ancient tradition, little regarded'), or in her summary description of White's *The Solid Mandala*: 'The tension between the visionary and the cool, between the open myth and the satiric observer . . . corresponds to the mingling of grandiose lyric freedom and sardonic deflationary jest in the Australian tradition, the Irish and the Cockney strains, very thoroughly transmuted'. In more general terms, she observes that Patrick White's contribution has been to show 'the interaction of the life that is imposed by the nature of the country with the life that develops in the country of the mind'. This type of literary insight is strengthened by her sense of place; for instance, in a panoramic view of Sydney, or in her observation that in *Kangaroo* 'Lawrence records the healing power of the Australian landscape, the aerial fragility of the gum-trees, the defencelessness of the animals—and the violence of a tornado'. And her quick, sensitive response to personality is present as well: 'To meet Patrick White is to meet someone who conveys at once the sense of an extremely active but a purely internal life; it is like listening to the purring of a dynamo in a power house to which there is no direct access'. *Literature in Action* is a critical achievement, all the more impressive because lightly carried.

In a recent book, dedicated to Muriel Bradbrook's memory, Giorgio Melchiori has saluted her as one of the greatest Shakespearean critics of this century. She has been widely influential through her university teaching and her firm and patient fostering of students' research, as well as through her published work. And in a very real sense she was a citizen of the world. She travelled and lectured untiringly in North America and Europe, Africa, Asia, Australasia and the Far East; and she corresponded with widely scattered friends and enquirers. She maintained that 'the fellowship of scholars, the happiest international society that really adheres, is held together by Shakespeare'; but in her

case it was also held together by generosity. She was a woman of warm family feeling, but her generosity went far beyond her own family. She helped women students from abroad to adapt themselves to the strange environment of Cambridge; she went to great lengths to find ways and means to enable *émigrés* from Czechoslovakia to settle in England; she befriended South African liberals in the bitter climate of apartheid. Besides her academic honours at home—she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1947 and a Fellow of the British Academy in 1990—she received a number of academic distinctions from America, Foreign Membership of the Norwegian Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Freedom of the City of Hiroshima.

She was a shrewdly unobtrusive academic administrator; and her contribution to the Cambridge English Faculty was greater than anything required of her. It was generally understood within the faculty, for example, that the important Judith E. Wilson bequest for the study of drama was allocated to Cambridge because of Muriel Bradbrook's friendship with Judith Wilson and with Edith Evans. And many years after her retirement from professional duties she played an active and constructive part in a faculty committee planning for a Cambridge Chair in Commonwealth and International Literature in English, a new departure in the academic programme that her own writing had no doubt helped to originate.

During her term of office as Mistress of Girton from 1968 to 1976 she launched the construction of Wolfson Court in 1969, to mark the centenary of the College and provide it with a permanent extension near to the centre of the university. But once some of the men's colleges had begun to admit women undergraduates in 1968 the question whether Girton also should go mixed became a troubling preoccupation. By a wise precaution, in 1971 the College obtained an Enabling Act which would allow the change to be accomplished smoothly if and when it was decided on. But meanwhile discussion continued among the Fellows throughout Muriel Bradbrook's Mistress-ship. Her private feelings were 'alarm' at first and probably regret at the prospect of eroding the great bastion of feminine education she had always been devoted to. But she was realist enough to face the arguments for change and stoical enough to repress her own feelings and to preside 'impartially and poker faced' (as she said later) over the discussion of alternatives. Once it was clear that a two-thirds majority among the Fellows favoured the move, the decision was reached 'cordially' to embark on what she was to call 'a gamble which paid off very handsomely'; and in

1976 Girton admitted its first male Fellows, as a preliminary to the admission of male undergraduates.

Muriel Bradbrook said she was 'very exhausted' by the time age had brought her period of office to an end. But an outsider might not have thought so. She continued to lead a very busy life. She often preached at the university church, Great St Mary's. In the first fine careless rapture of retirement she listed among the things that gave her enduring pleasure at Cambridge 'the lecture that sends me rushing to the University Library, and then writing furiously into the small hours'. She attended lectures and research seminars—retaining her capacity for disconcertingly sharp or enliveningly detailed interventions,—Shakespeare conferences at Stratford and meetings about the reconstruction of Shakespeare's Globe. And she continued to travel, and to write books and articles into her eighties. As late as February 1991 she was giving a painstakingly prepared and stimulating new lecture to the Royal Society of Literature about the life and work of Vaclav Havel, dwelling on the playwright-President's undemonstrative but unbending moral integrity. On the two last complete days of her life, in June 1993, she took part in the ceremony of welcome to the Queen Mother at Girton, and then in the university ceremony for the conferring of honorary degrees.

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Note. There is a bibliography of M. C. Bradbrook's writings in the book of essays in her honour, *English Drama: Forms and Development*, ed. Marie Axton and Raymond Williams (Cambridge 1977), and a supplementary bibliography in her *Collected Papers IV, Shakespeare in his Context: The Constellated Globe*, ed. Andrew Gurr (1989).

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