

## Foreword

The essays collected in this volume testify to the ongoing appeal of Shakespeare as both dramatist and thinker. While their contents are varied – the essays here touch on a range of thinkers from Ibn Sīnā to Jean-Luc Marion – they explore the ways in which Shakespearean drama presents thought with powerful and, at times, sensuous objects for reflection. Shakespeare studies has begun to move towards philosophy again after a period of wariness: poststructuralism offered new ways of talking about subjectivity, discourse, and the language of these plays, but it made the sustained study of ideas in the plays problematic. The essays in this collection do not solve that problem, which grows out of a sense that the study of *concepts* in drama is a misnomer. Certain forms of poststructuralism and historicist criticism, for example, have questioned the diagrammatic power of concepts to bring persons, events or things into intelligible kinds of relation. That power is being tested anew by scholars and thinkers willing to stray back into the hinterland of ideas.

What is important about this collection of essays, aside from the insights advanced by the individual authors, is what it represents as an undertaking: a desire to count the benefits of our engagement with Shakespearean drama as *conceptual* ones, a process that deepens our understanding of basic notions such as art, forgiveness, tragedy, dreams or desire and asserts the ongoing claim of these concepts on life and thought. Continental philosophy is a powerful resource in this enterprise, powerful precisely because it recognises (and perhaps even demands) imaginative experience of the sort we have in the theatre as a source of productive thinking and reflection.

If, as the commonplace goes, all great artists are also thinkers, we might think of this collection as an exploration of the commonplace's three key terms: 'great', 'artist' and 'thinker'. Take any two of these names and apply them to an individual; the first two will often explain

why that individual also deserves the third. Exploring this geometry and these questions is an admirable goal for a collection of essays on Shakespeare and Continental Philosophy, one that is accomplished in the pages that follow.

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