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Brian Gibbons presents the idea of multiplicity as a way of understanding the form and style of Shakespeare's plays: composed of many different codes, woven together in a unique pattern for each play, rather than variations on the fixed notion of comedy or tragedy.

The method of this book is comparison, using an imaginative range of texts and a variety of new approaches, and there is lively discussion of modern stage performance. The study selects plays from different phases of Shakespeare's career. Comparison with major works by Spenser, Sidney and Marlowe is an important feature, while Shakespeare's re-use of his own previous work further demonstrates his artistic decision-making in action and suggests how he himself saw his own earlier plays and poems.

Far from reducing the plays to a formula, Brian Gibbons shows how criticism can make articulate what popular audiences have always instinctively known, that the plays' sheer abundance and variety is their strength. This is an original book: it is scholarly, yet straightforward and lively, and it engages an issue of central interest.

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*To my best friend and collaborator*

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## *Acknowledgements*

The shape of this book reflects my fascination with the variety of interest Shakespeare offers, and the sheer newness of his work. I argue that we can demonstrate directly from the plays their author's critical intelligence at work, both in his eclectic use of the work of others and his re-use of his own previous writings. 'Shakespeare' in this sense is by no means an invisible poet.

Though it has been long in meditation, this book has finally come together quite quickly, and I am most grateful to two institutions, The Folger Shakespeare Library, where I held a Fellowship in 1989, and The Huntington Library, where I was Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in 1990, for giving me space to think at just the right time, and for the stimulus of good company. Speaking of good company, I count myself fortunate to work in a field where intellectual exchange can be so generous and agreeable. I owe a special personal debt to Andrew Gurr, who read and criticised a draft of the whole manuscript, an act of sheer generosity I will not forget. I am extremely grateful to Mick Hattaway and to the anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press for the spirit as well as the substance of their generous suggestions and shrewd criticism. The inadequacies and errors that remain are all mine. Leo Salinger, whose study *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* I find indispensable, kindly presented me with supplementary notes about Elizabethan views of Native Americans for chapter 2. As to published scholarship and criticism, I have done my best to record acknowledgements in notes and in the bibliography, and I apologise for any omissions.

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