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Author(s): ANN JENNALIE COOK

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J. Leeds Barroll III: A Tribute

ANN JENNALIE COOK

YOU never can tell what the future holds. When I embarked on a two-semester seminar in Shakespeare thirty-five years ago, I expected a major extension of my graduate study but not an encounter with a legendary figure. In 1968, though J. Leeds Barroll III had already established credentials sufficient to secure him an endowed professorship at Vanderbilt, he had barely begun the remarkable achievements that now make him so distinguished. Many others whose lives and careers he has touched or transformed might have written this essay in his honor, but no one else, I suspect, has known him in as many different capacities. Teacher, scholar, visionary, administrator, editor, colleague, mentor, friend. It has been my privilege to observe Leeds at first hand in all these capacities.

He might well have made his mark solely as an extraordinary teacher. In that long-ago seminar at Vanderbilt, he set up procedures that demonstrated not only his own enormous grasp of Shakespearean scholarship but also his high standards for professional competence. Each week we heard a brilliant, meticulously crafted lecture on some aspect of the field—biography, theater history, textual studies, bibliography, critical approaches, and other methodological matters in the first semester, with a sweep through the canon in the second semester. I still consult my notes sometimes, humbled yet profoundly grateful for the foundation Leeds Barroll provided us. One unique feature, which I subsequently incorporated into my own teaching, involved weekly assignments at random to two or three students who had to prepare a critical review of some essential work in Shakespearean scholarship related to the topic for the next session. Regardless of any other commitments for any other courses, we had to assess the work in an ungraded but formally written three-minute presentation (accompanied by a handout identifying three significant reviews of the book), delivered as if it were a paper at a professional meeting. Nowadays, when graduate students routinely show up at such meetings and submit papers for pre-PhD publication, this practice may seem commonplace. At the time, however, it provided a rare, realistic foretaste of the pressure to produce which haunts anyone with serious aspirations. After each presentation, the weekly victims received critiques of their performances by fellow students and by Leeds. We learned more than we realized, and though

some despised the experience, I did not. More routinely, final papers and a rigorous final examination covering lectures and assigned readings completed each semester's work. That capacity to create precisely what a particular course should provide for its students has characterized Leeds's teaching, whether at the graduate or undergraduate level, within a university setting or at the Folger Institute, where he has served so ably.

As a Shakespeare scholar, few can match the contributions of Leeds Barroll. Earlier in his career, it seemed as if other significant professional projects might prevent the definitive publications that everyone who knew him well hoped he would produce. He seemed to have read and absorbed everything ever written by anybody else, always preferring the "hard" work of exhaustive research rather than the "soft" work of a trendy critical approach. For a while in the early seventies, it looked as if editing might claim his loyalties. He edited the Blackfriars *Hamlet* and *Othello*, directed the editions of fifteen other plays in the series, and also trained several fine editors, including Paul Werstine and John Andrews. *Artificial Persons* (1974) addressed a vital subject that had lingered in neglect since the old-fashioned criticism of A. C. Bradley, though it did not become the seminal work every scholar wishes to create. Nor did the equally solid, thought-provoking *Shakespearean Tragedy: Genre, Tradition, and Change in "Antony and Cleopatra"* (1983). Fortunately, the passage of time has allowed Leeds to publish the massively detailed *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theater: The Stuart Years* (1991) and *Anna of Denmark, Queen of England: A Cultural Biography* (2001). During the research process, articles and major lectures in prestigious venues have led readers and listeners through the political entanglements of Jacobean drama. Placing Shakespeare's company within a dense historical nexus while negotiating the complexities of theoretical historiography brings to fruition the sort of critical acumen it takes a lifetime to acquire. There is simply no one else presently in the field who could have written these major works of Shakespearean scholarship except Leeds Barroll. And there is more to come. He is preparing a companion volume on the plague for the Tudor years, as well as *Cultural Intertextualities and the Early Modern Reception of Public Drama*, which deals with the effects of audience awareness of rumor, news, and stories related to the Mongols, the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and Spain.

It is one thing to write a definitive book or a series of such books that establish a lasting reputation. It is quite another to transform one's profession. Yet I hope no one will ever forget that Leeds's vision has fundamentally altered the way Shakespeareans conduct their careers. By the time he had completed his doctorate at Princeton in 1956, he was already an unconventional figure. Few, like him, were already husbands and fathers; fewer still had come to graduate school after a stint at secondary school teaching. Those with the right degrees from the right universities and the right connections with established scholars could hope for prestigious, or at least promising,

appointments. Such individuals could also expect preferential consideration of manuscripts, for the readership that determined publication rested in a tight circle of power exercised by prominent figures on the east and west coasts, as well as in England. Leeds thought that situation was wrong because it stifled talented thinkers and bolstered an already entrenched establishment. Amid a storm of criticism at his upstart presumption, he launched *Shakespeare Studies* from the wilderness of Cincinnati in 1965. The new publication had no arbitrary limits for articles, accepted work from known as well as unknown writers, and in its first few volumes featured a valuable assessment of "Significant Articles, Monographs, and Reviews" by the editor. It met with immediate success, though not many who now take for granted its status in the field understand the degree to which *Shakespeare Studies* revolutionized accepted protocols when it began.

Leeds next turned his attention to the wider community of Shakespeareans. At the first-ever World Shakespeare Congress of 1971 in Vancouver, the delegates endorsed a call for future global gatherings and for the establishment of new scholarly organizations. Only the Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft (East and West branches at the time) and the Shakespeare Society of Japan then existed, and there were no comparable groups in any English-speaking country. While most people simply left Vancouver with fond memories, Leeds Barroll returned to the University of South Carolina with a vision. Using his own money, he paid for the legal incorporation of the Shakespeare Association of America, a name graciously vacated by Mary Hyde after an earlier SAA became defunct. (The older organization had founded *Shakespeare Quarterly* but turned over its publication to the Folger in 1972.) Many would have doomed the enterprise because of the rival centers of power based on both coasts as well as a general fragmentation among Shakespeareans. However, Leeds astutely persuaded G. E. Bentley to serve as President, then put together a board that included representatives from every part of the country. With the backing of his university, he issued a call to the first annual meeting of the SAA at Washington, DC, in 1973. A hundred attendees would have represented a triumph. Over two hundred showed up. The organization gathered strength through the next two meetings in Pasadena and New Haven, culminating in the 1976 World Congress of the International Shakespeare Association, an organization Leeds also helped to launch. Over the years some events, such as the annual lecture delivered by an esteemed senior scholar, were scrapped, while groups like the seminars and the workshops came in later under my auspices. Yet certain principles have prevailed: inclusiveness, experimentation, dialogue with theater professionals, and excellence regardless of perceived status.

After bringing to birth *Shakespeare Studies*, the SAA, and the ISA, Leeds Barroll might well have retired from translating vision into reality for the benefit of his profession. However, in 1984, responding to another scholarly

need, he began the publication of *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, in part to facilitate the flow of valuable research generated by the SAA's ongoing theater history seminars. Again, a major venue furthered work in the field, owing its origin to this remarkable man. His ability to perceive crucial areas that scholars ought to address is never merely theoretical. He advises graduate students to tackle significant thesis topics and urges colleagues to continue important projects they may have set aside. One need only imagine the bleakness of a scholarly world without *Shakespeare Studies*, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, the SAA, or the ISA to understand the magnitude of Leeds Barroll's contributions to us all.

As an editor and administrator in his own right, Leeds prefers to set policies and to conceive new schemes rather than handle the details. While stints in New Jersey's system of higher education and at the National Endowment for the Humanities introduced him to the hard, uncongenial limitations of politically driven organizations, in the scholarly realm he became an astute innovator, delegator, and negotiator. As a former Associate Editor of *Shakespeare Studies*, I enjoyed an astonishing degree of freedom at the pre-publication levels, but I always operated with an intense awareness of Leeds's exacting standards for *his* journal. Over the years, he groomed a series of skilled editorial assistants, such as Scott Colley, John Andrews, Barry Gaines, Paul Werstine, James Shapiro, John Pitcher, Susan Cerasano, and Susan Zimmerman. Moreover, he debuted a host of subsequently well-known scholars whose work first saw the dark of print in articles he accepted, my own included.

Yet in my judgment, it was not the publications so much as the organization Leeds founded that showed his generosity of spirit. In 1975, the SAA had committed to host the Bicentennial World Shakespeare Congress of 1976 at Washington, DC, in association with the fledgling ISA and the Folger Shakespeare Library. Set to leave the University of South Carolina for an NEH directorship, Leeds had to vacate his position as Executive Secretary of the SAA, since he could not administer the Endowment's grant for the Congress. At the annual meeting in New Haven, he persuaded the SAA trustees to appoint me as Interim Executive Secretary. Though I was only three years out of graduate school and had never organized a conference or managed a grant, he confidently assumed I could handle the challenges. And I did, with highly visible help from SAA President Maynard Mack and the Trustees, O. B. Hardison at the Folger, and Levi Fox at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Invisibly, behind the scenes, Leeds gave me shrewd advice when necessary but more often simply offered assurance and approval. He never asked for or received the credit he fully deserved for the success of the Washington Congress. And he went on to propose a bylaws change that allowed me to continue in a position he had every right to resume. I have gone into some detail here because so few now remember precisely what personal sacrifices

he made to hand over a position of leadership to someone else. Very quietly, he simply did what he thought best.

That kind of generosity also marked Leeds Barroll's career as an academic colleague. When we served together on the faculty at the University of South Carolina, he made it a point to set up cordial relationships with other members of the department, promoting their careers whenever he could. With the ear and the purse of a generous USC President, he had a Shakespeare Center that provided editing, speaking, and publishing opportunities for various colleagues, as well as for graduate students. Even among luminaries such as James Dickey, George Garrett, Morse Peckham, Matt Bruccoli, and James Meriwether, Leeds wielded extraordinary power. As Joe Katz wryly put it, "With a name like mine, you really have to work hard to establish a reputation, but look what you can do with a name like J. Leeds Barroll III." Thanks to his good offices, at least two talented professors left Vanderbilt, where they and Leeds had been underappreciated, for more congenial positions at South Carolina. Years later, he would arrange a similar change of scene for Lena Orlin, when she moved from the Folger to a faculty appointment at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, bringing with her the SAA offices. Such action might seem Machiavellian to his detractors, but it has won Leeds a cadre of fiercely loyal friends who sometimes marvel that he never asks for return favors and is routinely embarrassed by expressions of appreciation. Indeed, he may not be at all happy with this laudatory essay in his *festschrift*.

Nonetheless, faculty colleagues are not the only ones in his debt, for countless individuals in the profession have profited from his assistance and advice. Sometimes Leeds quietly suggests a place to publish an article, and not always in one of his own journals. At other times, he may set a confused graduate student on a productive path. He may find a spot on a panel for a promising new mind. From the earliest meetings of the SAA, he has brought young, unknown professionals to the podium. He takes a keen interest in the work of fellow researchers at the Folger, often pointing out sources that prove crucial for solving a problem or solidifying an argument. And as a mentor he has a marvelous way of cutting through distracting externals. At the end of my graduate work, when I was set to pick up a doctorate hard on the heels of a divorce, he said, "Just be sure you put all your academic records and all your publications in your own name. You don't want to screw up the bibliographies, and you don't want someone else to get credit for your work. Besides, how do you know how many husbands you'll marry?" I have been Ann Jennalie Cook ever since. It is impossible to know how many others have benefited from Leeds Barroll's wisdom and example. To the names already mentioned, surely dozens if not hundreds could be added.

Ironically, Leeds rarely strikes casual observers as benign or kindly. There is an inherent reserve, a detached dignity that protects him from tedious chatter or fawning adulation. He can sometimes seem aloof, even prickly to those

who do not know him well. Behind such superficial appearances, however, his friends know him as a delightful, sensitive, perceptive, quixotic human being. He is deeply learned and deeply passionate about his work. He loves music and model trains. With the straightest, most serious face imaginable, he can be excruciatingly funny, as he was in his SAA presidential address, lamenting the speech he should have written had not his computer betrayed him. In his papers, brief comments of deadly wit occasionally punctuate some recounting of historical events, betraying Leeds's eye for the absurd. Because he zealously guards his family life from professional view, I will mention only that friends rejoice because his wife, Susan Zimmerman, provides him with the compatible companionship he has always deserved. She stands first among a large company who admire the abilities of Leeds Barroll, applaud his achievements, and appreciate his contributions to their own lives. We all hope he enjoys good research, good health, and good cheer for many years to come.