

# “DIVINING THOUGHTS”

FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN SHAKESPEARE STUDIES

Edited by

**Peter Orford with Michael P. Jones,  
Lizz Ketterer, Joshua McEvillia**

“Divining Thoughts”



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Future Directions in Shakespeare Studies

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## FOREWORD

The Britgrad conference, inaugurated in 1999 and run by students for students, takes place annually at the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Institute, founded in 1951 by Professor Allardyce Nicoll, eminent historian of world drama, has long been recognised as a centre of excellence for study of Shakespeare, of the literature and drama of his time, and of performance history. Remarkably, its earliest Fellows, Professors R. A. Foakes, John Russell Brown, and E.A.J. Honigmann, continue to be active as scholars to the present day; in 2001 they were honoured at a special degree congregation celebrating the Institute's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary which also saw the award of honorary doctorates to the actors Harriet Walter and Kenneth Branagh. Successive directors of the Institute have been General Editors of the Penguin, New Cambridge and Oxford editions of Shakespeare, editors of *Shakespeare Survey*, published by Cambridge University Press, and of a number of series of scholarly publications. Over the years members of its faculty have contributed greatly to their discipline, and many of its students have themselves achieved international distinction as scholars and teachers. Numerous dissertations undertaken by Institute students have formed the basis of substantial publications in the form of editions, books, and articles in learned journals, and the Institute has been responsible for the biennial International Shakespeare Conference since 1951.

The Britgrad Conference is an admirable initiative which provides a much-needed opportunity for graduate students not only from British universities but from all over the world to present the results of their research on Shakespeare and other early modern drama and to discuss their work with fellow scholars. The papers printed in the present volume, all emanating from a single conference, in 2006, bear witness to the range of current research in this area and to the high standards of scholarship prevailing. It is good to see discussion of relatively neglected dramatists, such as Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood, alongside studies of their more illustrious contemporaries; good also to see the deployment of new and intellectually demanding critical techniques alongside more traditional scholarly approaches. The essays printed here demonstrate that the future of early modern dramatic scholarship and criticism is in good hands. It is a

privilege for me to commend the volume and to congratulate both those who have contributed to it and its compilers.

Stanley Wells  
The Shakespeare Centre, August, 2007

## PREFACE

PETE ORFORD

It can never be said that there is a lack of criticism on Shakespeare. In fact, new scholars of the bard invariably find themselves in awe of the sheer volume of academics who precede them. The scholars who are idealistic or foolish enough to pursue a postgraduate degree in Shakespeare often face their greatest challenge in the initial stages of choosing their topic, when they must find something new to say, lest, like Shakespeare's sonnet 76, the author writes 'still all one, ever the same...So all my best is dressing old words new,/Spending again what is already spent'.

At least fifty per cent of a doctoral thesis must be original; that is to say, that once the views and criticism of the past has been summarised and discussed, the remaining half of the thesis must offer entirely new thoughts on the subject. When the thesis is to be written on Shakespeare, this presents a problem, for the bard's prevailing popularity has ensured that almost everyone, from the Duke of Marlborough to Daffy Duck, has had an opinion on him. When I first started my PhD at the Shakespeare Institute, Russell Jackson, the director at the time, offered the following encouragement to counteract the originality conundrum: for all that has been said on Shakespeare, it hasn't been said by *you*. Each new scholar brings with them their own unique experience and insight to the plays, unlocking new ideas that can only be seen from a fresh point of view.

And so within the vast body of work which constitutes Shakespearean criticism, each young researcher must find their niche, their own platform from which they can express their individual views, adding their own names to the likes of Johnson, Malone, Schlegel, Kott, Wells and Greenblatt. Of course, the trouble with standing upon the shoulders of giants is that it is a very tall height from which to fall, and postgraduate students contemplating their future success must anticipate the extremes to which their work will be received; will they become the next prodigy, that current scholars wax lyrical about, as Cranmer did about Elizabeth, promising 'Upon this land a thousand, thousand blessings/Which time shall bring to ripeness' (*Henry VIII* 5.4.19-20), or shall they be told, as Hal is by his father, that 'The hope and expectation of thy time/Is ruined, and

the soul of every man/Prophetically do forethink thy fall'(*I Henry IV*, 3.2.36-38)?

Such hopes and fears can only be confirmed by time and hindsight. As a writer's reputation grows, so their work will influence others and thus reinforce their position in contemporary scholarship; to that effect there are numerous critical anthologies which celebrate the work of our predecessors, and confirm their status as key thinkers on Shakespeare. In contrast, what this collection offers for the here and now is a rare moment of foresight into what is going to happen next in Shakespeare studies; rather than celebrate what has been written, it anticipates what is going to be written. The articles collected here are the work of the next generation of Shakespeare students. These are postgraduate academics all in the process of completing doctoral theses and progressing on to the beginning of their careers in Shakespeare studies. These are the scholars of tomorrow, the people who eventually will teach future students, write the books and edit the plays. These are the people to whom today's scholars will entrust the future of Shakespearean criticism.

Each of the contributors was present at the Eighth Annual International Shakespeare Conference for Postgraduates, held at The Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon in the summer of 2006. The conference was host to eighty delegates from around the world, each one pursuing new avenues of Shakespeare studies. The collection here is therefore a representation of a larger body of work, and encapsulates the wide range of current research on Shakespeare, his works and that of his contemporaries. The articles have been divided into two broad sections looking at, in the first part, Texts and Contexts, then in the second part, Performance and New Comparisons. However, the great success of these articles lies in their variety as an indication of the many ways in which Shakespeare criticism may develop. Each of these authors has found their own personal niche within which to develop and strengthen their ideas and skills, which in turn will impact on their impressions of, and approaches to Shakespeare.

Opening the selection is Matteo Pangallo's frank and refreshing account of his own endeavours to edit *The Launching of the Mary*, a play that has thus far been consigned to obscurity. Pangallo highlights the many difficulties in editing this challenging manuscript, whilst raising significant questions regarding the merits of reviving this forgotten drama and the particular insights which these forgotten works can provide to our established view of Shakespearean theatre.

Eleanor Collins' article stems from our growing appreciation of Shakespeare's contemporaries and their achievements, which has been one of the major developments in current Shakespeare criticism. Collins has been building upon this move away from Shakespeare-centric research to explore the significance of Queen Henrietta's Men. Her research into this largely unexplored area raises new light on our conceptions of how playing companies of the era developed and used their repertory. The article explores specifically the interaction of the company with Thomas Heywood, and investigates how Heywood's prologues can inform our view of the contemporary attitudes to the company's repertory, challenging the prevalent notion that we can generalise the taste of an audience at an outdoor and indoor theatre.

Shelly Hsin-Yi Hsieh then investigates the bawdy elements of Shakespeare's plays. While A. C. Bradley and other character critics have previously explored the many facets of the great tragic characters and princes in Shakespeare, the bard's lower characters have been largely overlooked. Hsieh redresses this through a methodical and comprehensive appraisal of the bawdy characters of the Renaissance stage, analysing the significance of their portrayal, ethics and resolution within the context of contemporary society to provide the reader with an appreciation of the Elizabethan attitude to crime and sexual offences.

Hsieh's exploration of Shakespeare's drama in the context of contemporary culture is complemented by Dong-Ha Seo's succeeding article on the military culture and its impact upon publications in the Elizabethan era. Seo's meticulous research has provided a unique insight into the Elizabethan public's thirst for military books and how the market for these works is much larger than hitherto expected.

The exploration of text and context continues in Audrey Birkett's article on the publication of Richard Brome's *The Antipodes*. Brome has been an undervalued playwright from the era, who is now growing in popularity among scholars. Birkett presents an engaging discussion of *The Antipodes* in which she is able to draw conclusions on Brome's attitude to the professional sphere he was working in, questioning the author's support of the commercial theatre and highlighting the lack of control which the author had over his play in this era.

Completing the first section of articles, Conny Loder challenges the popular opinion of Richard of Gloucester as a Machiavellian villain, arguing that this is a misconception. She addresses how the view of prior scholars has developed from earlier ideas of Richard amongst Tudor mythology and morality, before then going on to compare Machiavelli's original theory of the prince with the dramatic figure created by

Shakespeare, to reveal how Richard actually undermines and contradicts the convention of critics to pigeonhole him as a stock vice-figure.

The second section opens with Brian Schneider's article on the role of women in the audience of a Renaissance theatre. Schneider's article explores the effect which this growing audience had upon the drama being presented to them. Schneider's innovative research into this area presents a startling conclusion which challenges our common conception of the Elizabethan theatre's attitude to women, and suggests a precedent for the subsequent development of female actors once the theatres reopened.

The subsequent article jumps from its predecessor's new insight into original performances, to a speculation on how modern performances are trying to emulate those of the past. Kelly Jones' work focuses upon the recent attempts to recreate an 'authentic' Shakespearean production at the Globe Theatre in London. Jones explores the theatre's joint function as historical reconstruction and contemporary acting space, exposing the artificiality inherent in the Globe's ambitions to present a theatrical experience identical to that of Shakespeare's time.

Kristine Johanson offers an engaging comparative study by employing Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* to draw new insights into Percy Shelley's *The Cenci*, whilst also using the latter to suggest new ways of approaching Shakespeare. By contrasting the two rape victims, Lavinia and Beatrice, Johanson challenges the concept of a raped woman as a victim by applying both modern sensibilities and the work of Mary Wollstonecraft. She reviews the treatment of the two women in their respective plays and the resulting significance that this has upon feminine attitudes.

The penultimate article of the collection, by Will McKenzie, addresses the sonnets, so often neglected in favour of Shakespeare's dramatic works, and re-assesses them as works of modernity. McKenzie builds upon the groundbreaking work of Joel Fineman, and develops his appreciation of modernity in the sonnets by exploring how narcissism influences and shapes these poems.

The concluding article by Miles Gregory reflects upon the remarkable change in fortune which *Cymbeline* has enjoyed in the past twenty years, from a once-neglected play to one which is being staged more now than ever before. Taking the unique perspective of Thomas Kuhn's theory of paradigm shift in science, Gregory applies the theory to *Cymbeline* to explore how the apparent incoherence and instability of the text, which once deterred earlier critics from the play, is now being embraced in the post-modern community to champion this play. It is a fitting close to the collection to reflect upon how a paradigm shift can affect all subsequent

thinking on the subject, for it is precisely such an occurrence that may occur within the next generation of Shakespeare scholarship. Just as new historicism has dramatically affected the way in which we approach Shakespeare's plays over the last twenty to thirty years, so too may another major reconsideration be imminent that questions and challenges our current thoughts on the bard.

As I said at the beginning, there is no shortage of criticism on Shakespeare. His work continues to be an important part of our heritage, so the vast amount of writing about him will persevere and grow. Though the presence of Shakespeare in English studies remains a constant, the opinions and approaches we employ are ever-shifting, making the study of Shakespeare a dynamic, fluid and vibrant atmosphere; just as the scholars of the past have been reinterpreted in different eras, either to be revered and reviled, celebrated or challenged, so too shall our current views become equally contestable in the light of future discoveries and shifts in prevailing attitudes.

Within this environment of ever-changing opinions, new scholars continue to join universal debate, wherein any person reading *Hamlet* for the first time can proudly join age-old arguments with new insights. This places scholars at a disadvantage, for while every academic has the opportunity to engage in discussion with the texts of the past, it is by definition a one-way dialogue; we can address the criticism of our predecessors, but not our successors. What this unique collection offers is a rare opportunity to glimpse around the corner at what is coming next, to foresee the oncoming developments in Shakespeare studies, and allow academics the opportunity to engage with the texts of the future.

## Note

All quotations from Shakespeare's works are taken from the Oxford Complete Works, edited by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery, unless otherwise stated.



**PART ONE:**  
**TEXTS AND CONTEXTS**

## CHAPTER ONE

*SELDOME SEENE:*  
OBSERVATIONS FROM EDITING  
*THE LAUNCHING OF THE MARY,*  
*OR THE SEAMAN'S HONEST WIFE*

MATTEO PANGALLO

The field of early modern drama is full of fascinating stories that, because they do not centre on the person or works of William Shakespeare, have gone largely untold over the years. Many of these unique narratives can be best explored through the rigours of the editorial process. This essay will explore one of those stories and will offer some observations that have come to light in the process of preparing a modern-spelling edition of the Caroline play *The Launching of the Mary, or the Seaman's Honest Wife*. This particular text is unique in that it is written in English, by an Englishman, for the English stage, but it was not written in London, or England, or even Europe. Nor was it written, perhaps most importantly, by someone attached to the professional theatres, either as sharer, actor, or dramatist. In the process of telling this story, I emphasise how important it is that rising generations of scholars learn to interrogate the primary source evidence available in the few manuscript playbooks that have survived.

These playbooks represent the complex intersection between the literary work of the author (with its accompanying ideas of fixity, closure, and permanence) and the theatrical work of the playhouse (with its own ideas of fluidity, circularity, and open-endedness). If the literary work is read ideally as a final product of a univocal, authoritarian (in the literal sense) process, the playbook document should be seen as a multivocal, polysemous process itself. Without this primary manuscript evidence, all theoretical and dramaturgical analyses would be ultimately groundless, for it is this manuscript evidence that helps the theoretical scholar or the

dramaturgical scholar determine what, precisely, the text for study actually is or should, ideally, be. Bowers once made the observation that we know someone better as an adult if we have known them as a child and as they have grown older; the same holds true for the evolution of texts. Though the printed work “may stand rejoicing in finished maturity, we must surely understand it with superior intimacy if we have watched its growth and seen its perfection in the very act of shaping”, that is, from its origins as a manuscript. We should have a concern, Bowers goes on, “for the childhood and adolescence, awkward or charming, of the living seed of a writer” (Bowers 1966). The image of the awkward adolescent, in fact, is particularly appropriate for the play in question.

*The Launching of the Mary* was written in 1632 by the nonprofessional dramatist Walter Mountfort and licensed by Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, in June 1633. It was never printed, probably never performed, and exists only in Mountfort’s holograph manuscript. Being a comparatively dull piece of drama and written by an amateur, the play has, in most studies of early modern English theatre, fallen to the periphery, if not off the map altogether. But there is still much to learn about (and from) this peculiar play.

The action of *Launching of the Mary* is set in east London, around the Blackwall shipyard during the early autumn of 1626, and is centered on the building and launching of the East India Company ship *Mary*. The bulk of the main plot consists of extremely long and dramatically-uncompelling exchanges between the Lord Admiral Hobab and several officers of the East India Company. In these encounters, Hobab presents the officers with popular arguments made against the Company and the officers’ attempt to refute them through both lengthy argumentation and conspicuous displays of political rhetoric. These scenes are adapted almost verbatim from the 1621 economic tract *A Discourse of Trade*, written by Thomas Mun, one of the Company’s actual officers. Though Mountfort demonstrates a remarkable ability in setting the tract into verse and dialogue, the sheer dullness of the material from which he was working renders this part of the play tedious.

The subplot includes two main threads showing the less affluent side of the east London dockyards, and it is in these two threads – particularly the first – that Mountfort’s abilities as a dramatist are most apparent. The subplot as a whole, unlike the main plot, is pointedly critical of the East India Company and actually contradicts a number of the defence arguments from the main plot, lending the play a complexity and sophistication that previous commentators, reluctant perhaps to examine the text in any detail, have largely ignored or denied. In the first part of the

subplot, we meet five shipyard workmen named, appropriately, Thomas Treenail, Osmond Oakum, Tarquin Tar, Tacklemouth Tallow, and Simon Sheathing Nail. We join them between shifts as they frequent local taverns, swap bad jokes, get drunk, start fights, encounter loose women, rehearse amateur dramatics, and exchange off-hand offensive comments about the Dutch (many details that seem to come almost directly from Mountfort's own life). The second part of the subplot is the story of three wives of East India Company sailors, whose husbands are on a Company ship and have left them alone in London for two years. The first two women, Isabel Nut and Mary Spark, take advantage of the situation to go bar-hopping, get drunk on sugar-infused wine, gorge themselves on pickled oysters, engage in petty thievery, and seduce young apprentices. The third, however – aptly named Dorotea Constance – stays at home, takes up sewing to support herself, and rebuffs a series of suitors (including a clergyman) using such artful rhetoric in her rejections that she convinces all of them to give up their womanising ways and get married. At least one commentator has observed that Dorotea's argumentative speeches echo the style and language of the Company officers in the main plot, though to better effect and with much more conviction (Christensen 2006). The economic, moral, and sexual plight of husbandless wives left in London would have had a personal resonance for Mountfort, who himself left behind in London a wife and possibly children when he sailed on Company business to Ireland, the Netherlands, and for several years Persia.

It is important, at this point, to say a few words about the author, Walter Mountfort, one of the approximately two-hundred nonprofessional playwrights from this period of whom we have any evidence. Biography is particularly critical when the text that survives is in the highly personal and idiosyncratic form of a holograph manuscript, a document that is at once both flexible and, by definition, authoritative. Such is the case with Mountfort and *Launching of the Mary*; indeed, as will be explained, Mountfort seems to have quite literally left his fingerprints upon the play.

In reconstructing Mountfort's life we have an excellent account of much of his career in the Court Minute Books of the East India Company. Unfortunately, fundamental details such as his birth, education, family-life, marriage, and even death are unknown (though a brief entry in the Probate Acts of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury suggests that he was deceased by at least 1647 and succeeded by a son, Francis, and a daughter, Rebecca). All that we know for certain of the man comes from his employment and from his play – a work that reveals a man well-read in both contemporary and classical writers (borrowing from economic and

political tracts, royal genealogies, several classical authors, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and a number of other works), who spoke and read Latin and Dutch, was a theatre-goer, and was familiar with rudimentary theatrical jargon and the format of both print and manuscript plays.

We do not know precisely when he began working for the Company, but as early as August 1615 Mountfort was in their employ as an assistant and was praised by his superiors for his "honesty, sufficiency, and civility". He was soon promoted, and by 1618 he was entrusted with the important task of provisioning ships before departure. The year 1621 is the first we begin to see what may have been Mountfort's greatest fault: he was either extremely incompetent in his bookkeeping or he was defrauding the Company. The administrators of the Company decided upon the latter. When he was confronted on the charge of "short accompting" to the impressive sum of thirteen hundred pounds, Mountfort denied the allegations and refused to submit his books for review. It was only with the threat of suspension for his "great slackness" that Mountfort handed them over. There is no indication in the Company records of what happened next, but over the next several years – despite occasionally getting in trouble for speaking "overboldly" and, on one occasion, starting a tavern brawl – the Company continued to employ him in various, oftentimes sensitive capacities, such as delivering diplomatic letters to the English ambassador at The Hague.

In July 1623, following a routine voyage to Ireland, Mountfort ran into further trouble. The Company discovered he was unable to account for seven thousand pounds of hard currency and one thousand pounds worth of pepper and cloves that had been entrusted to him. On 21 November, a report was issued to the Court remarking that Mountfort's records were too poorly kept to be decipherable. The Court decided that until the auditors could be satisfied no further salary or employment would be issued him. In short, he was dismissed from the Company. Undaunted, Mountfort solicited the Court for several years, seeking back-wages and some form of good employment. A few years later things had evidently taken a turn for the worse, for in a petition dated 18 August 1624, he is described as seeking "relief in his poverty and infirmity". Over the next four years Mountfort continued his petitions and in 1628 engaged the assistance of some sympathisers further advanced in the ranks of the Company to solicit on his behalf. The tactic turned out to be effective.

On 9 March 1629, the Company hired Mountfort as lieutenant onboard the ship *Charles*. They sailed from the Downs on 10 April 1629, reaching Persia on 20 January 1630. There, Mountfort took charge of shipping silk between Ispahan and Gombroon and was lauded by the local English