The first publication of 'Sir Thomas More'

Professor John Jowett discusses his work on textual editing and his role in the first publication of a collaborative work which includes Shakespeare's hand.

Title: **The first publication of 'Sir Thomas More' (/schools/edacs/departments/shakespeare/research/videos/jowett-john-research.aspx)**
Duration: 3.13 mins

Well hello my name is John Jowett, I'm Professor of Shakespeare Studies at the Shakespeare Institute and also Deputy Director at the Institute.

When I'm asked what my research interests are I explain that I'm interested in textual editing, textual criticism, now what that means is that I'm involved in preparing the kinds of edition that most people read their Shakespeare from. I see this as being a fundamentally significant activity in that all research, all cultural engagement, all performance of Shakespeare begins from a book. And textual editing creates those books.

So it's a responsible task and it's a complicated task, but one that I enjoy very much and I'm very deeply committed to. One of the things I insist upon to myself is that when I take on a project, I feel that it's not just producing another edition, but that there's some kind of real purpose and drive behind it. And I can take from my latest edition as an example of that - I've got a copy here, it's Sir Thomas More, and as you can see it's in the Arden Shakespeare series.

Now this is the first time that this play has appeared in a Shakespeare series and that's really saying something - it's staking a claim - it's staking a claim for this play and it's also saying 'maybe Shakespeare is a different kind of writer from the one that we're accustomed to think about'. Shakespeare is someone who doesn't just write a finite number of plays entirely on his own, but here we see him collaborating with other dramatists.

In fact, four other dramatists - there's an original manuscript and three others revise it and it's a very complicated process. And it's particularly interesting to see Shakespeare in a way that we don't usually see him, because this play survives in manuscript. And you can see that some of the pages are extremely complex in their physical organisation. Crossings out, paste-ins, material written at the margin, this is an extremely complex document, largely because so many people are actually involved in it. And it's tracing Shakespeare's involvement in this project that is so fascinating.

And I think becomes an important project when you say this is part of Shakespeare, this isn't just on the fringe, it's not just something that is doubtful but we are fairly sure now that Shakespeare’s hand exists in this manuscript and that this play belongs in a series such as the Arden Shakespeare.

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