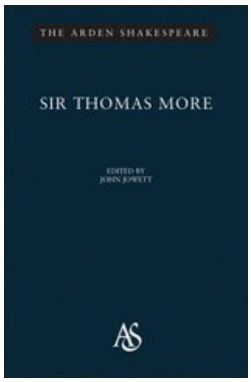
Sir Thomas More

An edition of Sir Thomas More for the Arden Shakespeare series has been **John Jowett (/staff/profiles/shakespeare/jowett-john.aspx)** 's major research project over the past few years, and in 2008 was supported by the AHRC through an award that provided follow-on leave after University study leave.



The edition brings the play into the framework of a major Shakespeare series for the first time. Along with the text I prepared for the 2005 edition of the Oxford Shakespeare Complete Works, it will make the entire play available in the context of Shakespeare study. It contributes to a re-evaluation of Shakespeare, whereby the work he wrote in collaboration comes to be seen as a vital part of his creative output.

As Sir Thomas More survives in manuscript, it provides the only surviving example of Shakespeare seen in the actual process of writing part of a play. He here emerges as a jobbing playwright who made contributions to the revision of a play alongside three unexpectedly minor dramatists, and a theatre book-keeper who was willing to alter what Shakespeare wrote. This picture depends on accepting that 'Hand D' in the play manuscript is indeed Shakespeare. In a world of uncertainties this is less than certain, but surprisingly well testified considering the inherent limitations of the evidence.

Beyond its Shakespeare interest, the manuscript is perhaps the most complex and revealing single document from the early modern theatre. Its significance to the larger field of study is unrivalled. For instance, it contains one of the most explicit and damaging instances of political censorship from the period. The editor plays a vital role in mediating the convoluted evidence to the modern reader. Research for the edition aims to establish a different, clearer, more refined, and more complete account than has been available hitherto.

But I have had to confront the danger that textual discussion might take over to the exclusion of all else. Analysis of the text will come after the play itself. This frees up the Introduction for discussion of the play as a play. The dramatists were attempting a renegotiation of religious politics. They wrote a risk-takingly sympathetic account of a Catholic martyr. To this they added a provocative staging of a violent insurrection. And they developed subtle strategies for dealing with matters that are too risky to present directly. Apart from anything else, Edmund Tilney's censorship is one historically situated reader's response to this provocative attempt.

The play may never have been performed before the twentieth century, but has now been staged and broadcast several times. This edition will be the first to include a full stage history, culminating in the RSC's successful production of 2005.

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