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# Professor Michael Dobson

Director of the Shakespeare Institute; Professor of Shakespeare Studies

**Shakespeare Institute (/schools/edacs/departments/shakespeare/index.aspx)**

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## About

Like his own Falstaff, Shakespeare is not only witty in himself but is the cause that wit is in others. My career as a teacher of and writer about Shakespeare's plays and poems has been devoted not just to examining these extraordinary writings in their sixteenth- and seventeenth-century contexts, but to exploring how they have stimulated and enabled the creativity of other people, individually and collectively, across time – whether actors (both professional and amateur), scholars, directors, philosophers, composers, critics, sculptors, poets, or novelists. As a result I enjoy working as a consultant to theatre directors and actors as well as publishing scholarly essays and books, and although the central focus of my work has been on the interpretation of Shakespeare in the theatre down the centuries since his death, and on the history of our continuing love affair with Elizabeth and the Elizabethans more generally, I take an enthusiastic and informed interest in most things done in Shakespeare's name in different media around the world.

## Qualifications

- BA (Oxford, 1982)
- MA (Oxford, 1984)
- D.Phil (Oxford, 1990)
- Honorary Doctorate (University of Craiova, Romania 2014)

## Biography

I trained at Oxford, where as an undergraduate I won the Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize in 1981. My doctoral thesis, on the development of Shakespeare's reputation from the Restoration to David Garrick's Stratford Jubilee, was supervised by Stanley Wells (then visiting Oxford from the Shakespeare Institute in order to edit Shakespeare's complete works for Oxford University Press), and much of it was written during two years spent as a visiting scholar and teacher at Harvard. In 1987 I married Nicola Watson, now president of the British Association for Romantic Studies and a major authority on literary tourism, among much else, with whom I sometimes co-write (in between co-parenting our twin daughters).

After Harvard we worked at a number of other North American universities (principally Indiana, Northwestern, and the University of Illinois at Chicago), and held research fellowships at the University of California, Los Angeles, before returning to Britain in 1996, where I took up a professorship in Renaissance drama at the Roehampton Institute. From there I moved in 2005 to Birkbeck College, University of London (where I convened a new masters programme in Shakespeare and contemporary performance, taught in collaboration with Shakespeare's Globe), before being appointed to the Directorship of the Shakespeare Institute in 2011. I have held grants and fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies, the British Academy, the American Philosophical Society, the Society for Theatre Research, and the Leverhulme Trust, have taught as a visiting professor at Peking University in China and at Lund University in Sweden, and have served on the programme committee of the Shakespeare Association of America.

I am a founder and board member of the European Shakespeare Research Association; the Academic Dean of the Shakespeare programme at the British-American Drama Academy; a regular book and theatre reviewer for the BBC and for the *London Review of Books*; general editor, with Dympna Callaghan, of the Palgrave Shakespeare Studies monograph series; and I have served on the editorial board of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, and continue to serve on the boards of *Memoria di Shakespeare*, *Sederi,* and *Shakespeare Survey*. For the latter I reviewed every major production of a Shakespeare play in England between 1999 and 2007

## Teaching

Besides conducting doctoral supervisions, I teach postgraduate seminars in the performance history and the cultural history of the Shakespeare canon at the Shakespeare Institute, and lecture on Shakespeare on undergraduate courses on the main University of Birmingham campus at Edgbaston. Beyond the works of Shakespeare, I have in the past taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses on subjects including seventeenth-and eighteenth-century literature, theatre and culture; the development of baroque opera; Shakespeare's contemporaries; the writings and reputation of Elizabeth I; the literary representation of London; the culture of post-war Britain; the history of the West End theatre; the meanings of farce; the work of Edmund Spenser; the literature of nationalism; and the uses and limitations of literary theory.

## Postgraduate supervision

Over the years I have supervised doctorates on topics ranging from the career of the Jacobean actor John Lowin to the influence of the theories of R.D. Laing on the plays of Harold Pinter. I am especially interested in supervising research into Shakespeare's afterlives, both on stage and off, and both within and beyond the Anglophone world.

## Research

As well as working on a monograph about Shakespeare and the idea of national theatres, I am involved in a number of collaborative projects. I have been a consultant on the RSC's 'Open Stages' project, their experiment in involving amateur groups in the organization's activities, and I will be helping to study their '*Dream 16*' initiative, a nationwide RSC tour of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in which the play's amateur actors will be played by a different set of real-life amateur actors at each successive venue. I am heavily engaged in preparations for the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death in 2016, including an original practices revival of David Garrick's 1769 Jubilee

ode, complete with Thomas Arne's music, and with the redisplay of the site of Shakespeare's family home at New Place. I am also part of a Singapore-based project making a digitally animated film adaptation of *As You Like It* with designs based on Indonesian shadow puppets.

## Other activities

I have acted and directed on both an amateur and, more rarely, professional basis (on occasion, with the likes of Samuel West, Patrick Marber and Frank Cottrell-Boyce), and as an undergraduate I was particularly involved in revue. In 1995 I played Henry VIII at the Chicago Humanities Festival, in a televised retrial of the papal inquest into the validity of his marriage to Katharine of Aragon; this event used much of Shakespeare's dialogue before submitting the principals to cross-questioning by eminent Chicago lawyers. Ever since my teenaged years in Bournemouth, which coincided with the heady mock-renaissance represented by punk, I have also played in rock'n'roll bands, usually on an unwieldy Burns Sonic electric guitar.

## Publications

As well as a large number of scholarly articles, book chapters, reviews, and programme notes (for the RSC, for Shakespeare's Globe, for Sam Mendes, for the Mokwha Repertory Company of Korea, and for Peter Stein, among others), my publications include:

- *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance: A Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press, 2011)
- *Great Shakespeareans: John Philip Kemble*, in *Great Shakespeareans volume 2*, ed. Peter Holland (Continuum, 2010)
- *The Complete Oxford Middleton: Wit at Several Weapons* (Oxford, 2007). The Oxford Middleton, produced under the general editorship of Gary Taylor, won the MLA Prize for a Distinguished Scholarly Edition, 2007-8.
- *Performing Shakespeare's Tragedies Today: the actor's perspective* (Cambridge, 2006). Contributors include Sir Antony Sher, David Warner, Simon Russell Beale, Imogen Stubbs, Nonso Anozie, Samuel West.
- *The New Penguin Shakespeare: Twelfth Night* (Penguin, 2005).
- *England's Elizabeth: an afterlife in fame and fantasy*, co-authored with Nicola Watson (Oxford, 2002). The paperback edition was named a *Choice* Outstanding Academic Book for 2004.
- *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* (Oxford, 2001, revised 2005, 2009, 2011), with Stanley Wells as Associate General Editor. Winner of an American Library Association Award as an outstanding reference work, 2001, and of the Bainton Prize for best reference book in sixteenth-century studies, 2001-2.
- *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660–1769* (Oxford, 1992). The paperback edition was named a *Choice* Outstanding Academic Book for 1994

## Expertise

Shakespeare; the history of Shakespeare in performance and in culture generally; the Royal Shakespeare Company; British theatre history, 1570 to the present; Elizabeth I and her reputation; amateur theatre; cultural relations between the US and the UK. **(http://www.lrb.co.uk/contributors/michael-dobson)**

## Languages and other information

Professor Dobson regularly provides programme notes for the RSC, Shakespeare's Globe, Mokwha Repertory Company, Peter Stein, and other theatre companies.

## Media experience

Professor Dobson is a frequent contributor to British and international media. He has made numerous appearances on BBC Radio 4's *Front Row* and BBC Radio 3's *Night Waves* and is a regular contributor to *Around the Globe* and ***The London Review of Books*** **(http://www.lrb.co.uk/contributors/michael-dobson)** .

He has recently received national and regional media coverage commenting on the 2011 blockbuster movie, *Anonymous* including a streamed debate with the film's director Roland Emmerich on **ESU (http://www.esu.org/news/2011/shakespeare-authorship-debate-monday-06-june)** , an interview for *Channel 4 News* and a self-penned commentary piece for ***The Guardian*** **(http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/oct/26/shakespeare-is-no-fraud)** .

Alternative contact number available for this expert: **contact the press office (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/contacts/index.aspx)**

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