University of Birmingham

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About

As a critic, I'm about opening up and analysing the life there is in Shakespeare and other literature. This involves thinking about the ways verbal and dramatic art constitute sensuous, ethical and even spiritual experience.

The latter, as a literary aim and effect, has been a particular preoccupation. I'm also interested in the way standard critical forms such as the essay and approved styles of critical prose reveal but also limit the kind of experience reading is held to be, and I'm committed to experimenting with those forms in the hope of revealing more of literature and its possibilities.

I believe in 'big-picture Shakespeare': in putting the plays and poems into dialogue with other great literature, art and thought from different periods and cultures. I believe in a potentially vital reciprocity between criticism and art; I also write creatively. And I'm all for taking Shakespeare and other art into the world beyond education.

Biography

I won the James Elliott prize for my 1994 first-class degree from the University of Edinburgh, where I was also awarded a medal in aesthetics and a number of other prizes. I took my PhD from the University of St Andrews in 1998, and from 1998-9 was the Caroline Spurgeon Research Fellow at Royal Holloway. I was Lecturer in English at the Queen's University of Belfast from 1999-2003, and returned to Royal Holloway as a Lecturer in Shakespeare in January 2003. I was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 2005 and Reader in 2007 before taking up my Chair at the Shakespeare Institute in January 2011.

Teaching

All my teaching is informed by a desire to vivify, explore and extend literary experience and, increasingly, to unlock the potential for creativity in Shakespeare and other historical literature. I devised and co-convene the new MA in Shakespeare and Creativity. I teach on the undergraduate Shakespeare course at Birmingham, and on various postgraduate programmes at the Institute.

Postgraduate supervision

I have supervised PhDs on a range of subjects from Shakespearean narcissism and existentialism to Stephen Greenblatt and the subjectivity of criticism. I presently have students working on Shakespeare and the American imagination; Shakespeare and the Qur'an; androgyny in Renaissance drama; undressing in early modern literature and culture; Shakespeare and the Bible; Shakespeare and Wagner; and forgiveness in Shakespeare and early literature. I also have a PhD student working on a creative and critical meditation on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

I would be particularly pleased to hear from students interested in working with me on literature and religion or philosophy, literature and creativity or on how Shakespeare may be read in conjunction with great European and/or Russian traditions.

Research

My latest book is *The Demonic: Literature and Experience*.This links demonic to psychological, sexual and more positive religious experience and seeks a more experientially honest and intense way of doing and writing criticism. I am also the author of *Shame in Shakespeare*. I co-authored *Redcrosse*, a new Spenser-inspired liturgy for St George's Day, which has been performed in major cathedrals and by the RSC and published as *Redcrosse: Remaking Religious Poetry for Today's World*. I have completed a *Macbeth* novel with Simon Palfrey, with whom I am General Editor of the 'Shakespeare Now!' series of short, provocative books. I have also edited *Spiritual Shakespeares* and *Reconceiving the Renaissance*.

I was Principal Investigator of the AHRC / ESRC funded project,'*The Faerie Queene Now: Remaking Religious Poetry for Today's World*', one major outcome of which was *Redcrosse*. This was additionally supported by grants from the Arts Council, the PRS Foundation for Music, LCACE, Awards for All and the Church Urban Fund.

I am currently working on several projects. One is a short book on *The Tempest* and ecological mysticism which will dialogue with the demonic. Another is a book, titled *Freetown*, on the civic and political possibilities of Shakespeare. This relates to a nascent, international project to make Shakespeare European Laureate, which has already attracted some media attention:

http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2013/jan/05/shakespeare-euro-laureate (http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2013/jan/05/shakespeare-euro-laureate)

I am working with Professor Tobias Döring on related projects, including a conference and book on Shakespeare and Thomas Mann. I have future plans for a book called *Shakespearience* which will share, test and explore the experience of reading Shakespeare and is related to the course I teach at the Institute.

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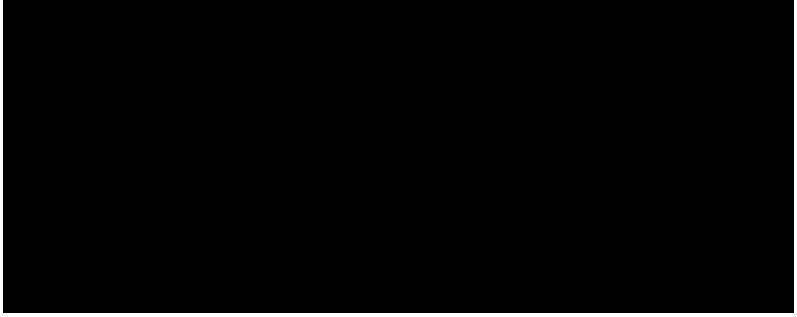

Other activities

In the 2012 / 13 academic session I wasVisiting Scholar at Eton College and Visting Fellow at the Centre for Advanced Studies, LMU, Munich, where I worked with Tobias Döring, with whom I also convened a DFG-funded Anglo-German research group working on civic Shakespeare.

I am a regular speaker and reader (from my creative writing) at national and international venues in Britain, Europe and America. Recent engagements have included: the University of Verona; the Sorbonne; The World Shakespeare Congress in Prague; the Shakespeare Association of America; the University of Sydney; a plenary at the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association conference in Auckland, New Zealand; one of the UCD / Abbey Theatre Shakespeare lectures in Dublin; the Kingston Shakespeare Seminar at the Rose Theatre, and others.

My creative and cultural engagement activities continue with *Redcrosse* and beyond. I sit on the University Cultural Engagement Committee, and the RSC's Committee for the Shakespeare anniversary in 2016. I wrote a new poem for the celebrated choir Ex Cathedra's Candlelight concerts in Birmingham, London and elsewhere. I was an academic consultant for Lucy Bailey's recent RSC productions of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Winter's Tale*, as well as for her celebrated *King Lear* in Bath.

Publications

- *The Demonic: Literature and Experience (Routledge, 2012)*
- *(as editor) Redcrosse: Remaking Religious Poetry for Today's World (Bloomsbury, 2012)*
- (as editor) *Spiritual Shakespeares* (Routledge, 2005)
- (as Co-ordinating Editor) *Reconceiving the Renaissance: A Critical Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2006)
- *Shame in Shakespeare* (Routledge, 2002)
- (as General Editor, with Simon Palfrey) The *Shakespeare Now!* series (Arden), including Eric Mallin, *Godless Shakespeare*; Amy Scott Douglas, *Shakespeare Inside*; Philip Davis, *Shakespeare Thinking*; Douglas Bruster,*To be or Not to Be*; Henry Turner, *Shakespeare's Double Helix*; Michael Witmore, *Shakespearean Metaphysics*; Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare's Modern Collaborators*; Steve Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*; Philippa Kelly, *The King and I*; David Fuller, *The Life in the Sonnets*; Will McKenzie and Theodora Papadopoulou (ed.), *Shakespeare and I*; Graham Holderness, *Nine Lives of William Shakespeare*; David Schalkwyk, *Hamlet's Dreams.*
- 'Wisdom in Reverse', *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton, ed*. Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley (OUP, 2011)
- (with Simon Palfrey) 'Major Excerpt from *Dunsinane*', in *Crrritic*, ed. John Schad and Oliver Tearle (Sussex Academic Press, 2011)
- 'Mea Culpa: *Measure for Measure* and Complicity', in *Shakespeare and I*, ed. Will McKenzie and Theodora Papadopoulou (Continuum, 2011)
- 'Dollimore's Challenge', *Shakespeare Studies* (2007)
- 'Hard-core Tragedy', in *Transhistorical Tragedy*, ed. Sarah Annes Brown and Catherine Silverstone (Blackwell, 2007)
- 'Action! *Henry V*', in *Presentist Shakespeares*, ed. Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (Routledge, 2007)
- 'Terrible Action: Recent Criticism and Questions of Agency', *Shakespeare 2* (2006)
- Shakespeare and the Prospect of Presentism', *Shakespeare Survey 58* (2005)

Expertise

Shakespeare (especially Shakespeare Now: his importance and relevance to contemporary life); literature and religion; literature and philosophy; literature and creativity; Spenser; St George

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

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