Introduction

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To some extent, the title of this edition of *Critical Survey*, ‘Questioning Shakespeare’, could be regarded as a little misleading in the sense that the objective of the edition is not to question events in the plays and poems themselves, but rather to question and challenge the conventional Shakespearean critical tradition. It would therefore, perhaps, be more accurate to entitle it ‘Questioning “Shakespeare”’; the quotation marks signaling that it is the ‘institution’ of Shakespeare, with all the historical and cultural resonances such a term suggests, rather than the individual man which is the primary focus throughout. It is the ideological trajectory of this institution which is the essential issue being put in question, though this of necessity requires a close and detailed analysis of some of the plays and poems. This would not be the first collection of essays with such an aim in mind; indeed, there is what could be termed a minor ‘tradition of opposition’ to conventional Shakespeare criticism existent in the broad field of Shakespeare studies, though it occupies a position very much determined by its marginality in comparison to the dominant modes of criticism. Graham Holderness’s seminal *The Shakespeare Myth*¹ is perhaps the most important *academic* text in this marginal field of study (there are countless outside of academia), though works which question the Shakespearean critical tradition in this way are still relatively few and far between; not least because that tradition is so dominant and so powerful. To some extent, the likes of Sinfield and Dollimore’s *Political Shakespeare* as well as the *Alternative Shakespeares* series could be seen to be of that ilk, though it is true to say that much of the work contained in these important texts has rather become the new but merely reconstituted orthodoxy in Shakespeare studies.² That so many of the authors of essays which appeared in these

collections have subsequently seen fit to publish work every bit as conventional as those Shakespeareans they originally set out to criticize is a sobering sight for anyone who harboured thoughts of a radical departure from the traditional forms of Shakespeare criticism.³ Despite this fact, there is work currently being carried out which, though it would not wish to place itself in any way on the margins of Shakespeare studies, certainly exists within the parameters of this kind of oppositional criticism. The greatest critic currently working according to such a trajectory is Brian Vickers, whose recent *Shakespeare, Co-Author*⁴ makes an overwhelming case for the partial nature of Shakespeare's contribution to five of the canonical plays. In his book, Vickers continually takes to task the tradition of conventional Shakespearean criticism for its refusal to consider 'truths' outside of those which this tradition has formulated as being beyond analysis. Vickers has continued this interest in Shakespeare's co-authorship of the canonical works and has, though again he would be loathe to say it, shown how *1 Henry VI* is essentially *not* a Shakespeare play.⁵ The majority of his paper concerns itself with the evident and willful denial by conventional Shakespeare criticism of readings and interpretations (and, indeed facts) which in any way compromise the play as being wholly by Shakespeare.

These texts of Vickers question the conventional tradition of Shakespeare criticism in the sense that they not only argue for 'new facts' regarding Shakespeare's plays, but argue against a whole tradition which has sought to deny this kind of uncomfortable analysis. It is precisely within this mode of critical practice, led by the likes of Holderness and Vickers, that this edition of *Critical Survey* places itself and why it has chosen to regard itself as 'Questioning Shakespeare'.

In the first essay, Roger Stritmatter and Lynne Kositsky continue their important work on the problematic dating of Shakespeare's *Tempest* that recently began in the *Review of English Studies*.⁶ According to the authors, a comprehensive review of early modern travel narratives and relevant literary texts reveals the unprecedented influence on *Tempest* of Peter Martyr's *De Orbe Novo decades cum Legatione Babylonica* (1516), translated into English with supplemental extracts from Gonzalo Fernandez Oviedo's *The History of the West Indies* (173v–214) and Antonio Pygafetta's *Brief Declaration of the Voyage or Navigation Made About the World*

(216v–232v) and published under the title *The Decades of the New Worlde* (1555) by Richard Eden. Fusing Mediterranean and Atlantic contexts, which have both left such a decisive imprint on the imaginative topography of Shakespeare's play, the authors argue that Martyr's text as translated by Eden ratifies the colonialist analogy, already implied as early as 1502 in woodcuts of Spanish caravels illustrating editions of the *Aeneid*: as Aeneas colonized Italy, so his progeny are now colonizing the New World. Much of the nautical and New World imagery, especially of an ethnological character, on which the play's ambiance depends, is, they continue, derived from these sources and not, as conventional Shakespearean criticism would have it from William Strachey's *True Reportory* (f.p. 1625). The authors demonstrate that although Eden's influence has been noticed in previous *Tempest* scholarship, the nature and extent of its impact on Shakespeare's work have been profoundly underestimated for more than two centuries. In their devastating critique, the authors show that the continued support of Strachey as Shakespeare's source is, at the very least, highly questionable.

The questionable dating of another of Shakespeare's plays is the basis for Penny McCarthy's essay, '*Cymbeline*: "The first Essay of a new Brytish Poet"?' According to McCarthy, the scholarly consensus that Shakespeare's romances are to be dated in a cluster towards the end of his writing career needs questioning. The composition of *Tempest* has not always been dated to 1611, and following Strittmatter and Kositsky, there are strong arguments for an earlier date. It has been doubted, for example, whether Shakespeare would have waited more than twenty years before responding to Robert Greene's *Pandosto* (1588) with his own *Winter's Tale*. Additionally, the date of *Pericles* is much contested. McCarthy believes that close investigation of *Cymbeline* may strengthen the case for skepticism regarding such dating.

The nature of *Cymbeline*'s relationship to two earlier works is investigated in her essay. The so-called Brytish poet's Arthurian narrative in the Sidneian collection *Loves Martyr*, whose 'phoenix' theme is reflected in the play, and the old play *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune* provide suggestive evidence that the conception and first drafts or versions of *Cymbeline* date back a very long way. Postumus's rant about bastardy, comparable with Shakespeare's interest in the subject in *King John* and *King Lear* (itself a play about early Britain with a history going back to at least 1594), is read by

McCarthy as partly autobiographical. Leonatus's name and Immogen's Boccaccian antecedent 'Zinevra' are likewise interpreted as having an intensely personal resonance for their author. Arguments linking the play to the investiture of Prince Henry in 1610, and to King James's desire to unify Britain, are also countered, with appeal to the chronicle histories of the 1580s, the Spanish threat of invasion up to 1588, and the relationship of *Cymbeline* to Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster*. 'British' has a previously unsuspected meaning – one which alone can explain the unexpected reconciliation with Rome at the play's end.

Roger Stritmatter's second appearance in this edition sees him tackle the tradition of interpretation rather than chronology in 'The Tortured Signifier: Satire, Censorship, and the Textual History of *Troilus and Cressida*'. In this essay, Stritmatter argues that although traditional criticism posits a more or less impermeable barrier between textual and interpretative studies, such a distinction obscures the close relation between the textual history and the literary values of *Troilus and Cressida*. From the 'scurril jests' of Achilles and Patroclus, parodying their Greek superiors in their closet drama, to the railing Thersites, 'whose gall coins slanders like a mint', the play, according to Stritmatter displays a persistent preoccupation with the theory and politics of representation. Not merely a satire Stritmatter says, it is a satire *about satire* – a dramatic study in the creation of state secrets and official myths, the limits of authorized speech, and the uses of literary innuendo.

The play's emphasis on themes of torture and censorship is rarely discussed in the critical literature; still less has it been considered relevant to longstanding, unresolved enigmas in the play's textual history, such as the existence of the two states of Q or F's duplication of Troilus' dismissal of Pandarus. Ironically, the textual history of *Troilus and Cressida* argues Stritmatter, reveals subtle traces of an otherwise imperceptible conflict between publishers and censors over the play's structure of topical innuendo. The 'grand censors' of Q's second state, it is suggested, were especially concerned to erase all history of the play's association with the Bankside jurisdiction of the Bishop of Winchester. This register of meaning, it is further suggested, has been suppressed by a dominant intellectual tradition which unconsciously assumes that 'Shakespeare' would not have written a play deeply implicated in contemporary political matters or susceptible to such early modern textual controversy.

The questioning of traditional Shakespearean criticism is taken somewhat further in Rosalind Barber's essay 'Shakespeare Authorship Doubt in 1593'. As the title suggests, Barber is concerned with that subject so reviled by conventional criticism, the Shakespeare authorship question. As Barber argues, the authorship question has never been the subject of serious academic research. Those who question the attribution of the canon to the theatre shareholder born in Stratford are dismissed as conspiracy theorists of questionable sanity; their arguments assumed to be invalid, unsupported by evidence, and based on erroneous reasoning. However, Barber's essay demonstrates that primary source evidence of authorship doubt not only exists, but by approaching early modern material from an unorthodox perspective, new information of significant interest to orthodox scholars can be unearthed. Adopting such a perspective, Barber shows that passages in Gabriel Harvey's *Pierces Supererogation* suggest that Harvey, and not Richard Stonley is the earliest documented reader of *Venus and Adonis*. That allusions to the first work published under the name William Shakespeare have passed unnoticed during the 125 years since Grosart's edition of Harvey's *Works* may, Barber admits seem unlikely, but can she claims, be reasonably explained by the 'narrowing' effect of interpreting primary sources through a single, orthodox, paradigm. For it is apparent that Harvey believes the name 'William Shakespeare' to be a pseudonym: the author, he says, is a 'mummer' whom he could 'dismaske'. Though he gives reasons for not naming his suspect directly, it is clear says Barber, from several pointed allusions, and a concordance with language he will use in the poem *Gorgon*, that Harvey believes the author to be Marlowe. In addition to establishing that the questioning of Shakespeare's authorship began with the very first work published under that name, Barber believes that decoding Harvey's prose reveals information of interest to all early modern literary scholars, including evidence that the dedication to the Earl of Southampton is already present when *Venus and Adonis* is registered, a full character description for Marlowe's accuser Richard Baines, and an earlier provenance for the Baines Note.

Questioning Shakespeare is a legitimate element of Shakespeare studies, driven by a desire to construct a clearer and more useful understanding of the plays and poems, as well as the tradition of analysis of those plays and poems. It is hoped that this edition of *Critical Survey* fulfils this important brief.

Notes

1. Graham Holderness, ed. *The Shakespeare Myth*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).
2. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds. *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); John Drakakis, ed. *Alternative Shakespeares*. (London: Routledge, 1989).
3. Stephen Greenblatt's *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004) is perhaps the most enlightening example of this development.
4. Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
5. Brian Vickers, 'Incomplete *Shakespeare*: or, Denying Co-authorship in *1 Henry VI*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58.3 (2007), 311–52.
6. Roger Stritmatter and Lynne Kositsky, 'Shakespeare and the Voyagers Revisited,' *Review of English Studies*, 58.236 (Sept. 2007), 447–72.