

ERNST HONIGMANN

Ernst Anselm Joachim Honigmann

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by

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Summary. Ernst Honigmann was a major Shakespeare scholar who made important contributions to the fields of editing, biography and literary interpretation. Most notably, he controversially pursued the argument for Shakespeare's 'early start' as dramatist, and he pioneered the approach that the playwright habitually revised his works. This memoir traces his academic development from an upbringing in an animal-centred, refugee family, through Glasgow, Oxford, and Newcastle upon Tyne where he held the Joseph Cowen Chair of English Literature. Some context explains his intellectual development and illuminates his memorable personality. He was a distinguished scholar, a supportive colleague, and a kind, compassionate man.



E. A. J. Hoijman

There can hardly have been a more unlikely and inauspicious journey to a professorship in English Literature and a Fellowship of the British Academy than that travelled by Ernst Anselm Joachim (E.A.J.) Honigmann. His family came to Britain in 1935 as pre-war refugees when Ernst was seven. Showing an early gift for languages, he had to learn English from scratch, picking up 'reasonable' English in 'about three weeks'.¹ As the son of a zoologist, he had what he described as the 'good fortune' to grow up surrounded by animals:

We lived in zoos, and our home became the first home of new-born tigers, a giant ant-eater, a chimpanzee, a weasel etc., and my brothers and I were encouraged to keep guinea-pigs and tortoises and to catch newts, slow-worms and other reptiles. No doubt this closeness to the animal world stimulated the imagination ... my picture of childhood is not the conventional one. Such memories of pre-verbal awareness perhaps fed into those extraordinary moments of togetherness with rats, a huge sea lion, a frightened tigress, a llama dying in labour, an angry elephant, a mischievous chimpanzee and so on, moments of panic and joy and wonder, and of sympathy and non-verbal communion. I now see that these special moments with animals must have helped to shape my general development.

Animals were his closest companions (and often bedfellows) as a boy. Ironically, when he became a father himself he was to allow his children small pets, but not large animals.²

His father Dr Hans D.S. Honigmann (1891–1943), after qualifying as both a medical doctor and veterinary surgeon, worked in several zoos. From 1927 to 1934 he was director of the Zoological Gardens in Breslau, Germany (now Wrocław, Poland). When in Germany he had shown great 'moral courage' (Ernst's words) in daring to take the Nazis to court for unfair dismissal as director of the zoo because he was denounced by a fellow worker as Jewish (though brought up in the Jewish faith his scientific training made him

¹ This and some other quotations come from Honigmann's last book, *Togetherness: Episodes from the life of a Refugee* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Tyneside Free Press, 2006). Since this rare, self-published book was primarily written for his family, is sometimes painfully personal, and often signalled as fictional short stories, I have tried as tactfully as possible to draw on it only for information that is public knowledge or for revealing Ernst's feelings about his academic life. I try to heed Ernst's words: 'At the age of twelve or so I started to write down these stories (if I may address a warning to my future biographer I would say to him, or them, that these stories were personal and yet not personal: they still exist as faded manuscripts and may be misunderstood)' (p. 149). He is especially detailed about his days at Oxford, but perhaps curiously thin on his forty-odd years spent in Newcastle upon Tyne where clearly he was most settled and fulfilled. Perhaps this is because his family grew up there, so that time was within his children's living memory. He concedes that memory is fallible and that some recollections may be close to fictional, perhaps bearing out an observation he had jokingly made many years earlier: 'Autobiography, of course, is the highest form of fiction' (*New York Review*, 'Me, Myself and I', 7 December 1989).

² Paul Honigmann, correspondence.

personally sceptical of all religions).³ Although he won the court case, Hans did not get his job back and his name was recorded in the Nazi secret *Black Book*, among almost 3,000 émigrés and hostile nationals in Britain who it was intended would be arrested after the war.⁴ Left with little choice, he emigrated to England with his family, whereupon they were all stripped of German citizenship by the Nazis. After the war they were able to apply for reinstatement, but Hans and later Ernst himself as an adult chose *not* to, out of aversion to their past. The uprooting was radical in all ways, including social and financial, and left in Ernst psychological scars leading to a lifelong yearning for ‘togetherness’. He was to describe himself as ‘German and English and Scottish’, and not entirely comfortable in any cultural niche.

The following information is supplied by Ernst’s son, Paul, who writes:

Looking back I can see that [Ernst] was quite traumatised by the experience of having to flee Germany in 1935 and of course the war. It was hugely disruptive at a key formative part of his life. He lost several Jewish relatives in the Camps, and when he did talk about those years, which was typically only when directly questioned about genealogy, he had some grim tales. One for example was about his parents sponsoring Jewish relatives over before the War, whenever they could scrape together enough capital as a bond. Finally it was clear they had enough for one more couple before the borders closed to Jews, and they had to make an awful choice about *who* they would rescue.

The transition from a privileged life to one in Britain must have been stark. Ernst told us in a matter-of-fact way of a nanny, maid and cook in his childhood German home. (After the war, he stayed in touch with his nanny until she died aged around 80.) The family was only allowed to take a limited amount of cash out of Germany when they left.⁵

From 1935 to 1937 Hans was invited through a network headed by Julian Huxley to work on animal nutrition in London Zoo, living in Welwyn Garden City. Then from 1937 to 1940 Honigmann the elder was the ‘scientific adviser’ (or zoologist) in Dudley Zoo, near Birmingham. After an interlude employed as a science master at Blundell’s School (Tiverton, Devon, 1940–1), in wartime conditions in 1941 he was briefly interned as an ‘enemy alien’ and had to move north twice, out of the invasion zone on the south coast, eventually landing in Glasgow where somebody in the Jewish community rented them an apartment. After the war the family was granted British citizenship. In Glasgow Hans worked as a research scientist in the Zoology Department at Glasgow University and was appointed its Head, until his death in 1943. Ernst recalled, ‘life in a zoo therefore

³ *Togetherness*, p. 145. Ernst’s mother was Lutheran.

⁴ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Black_Book_\(list\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Black_Book_(list))

⁵ Paul Honigmann, correspondence.

turned into an “Alice in Wonderland” experience filled with animals that seemed very human, and men and women in uniform who struck me as, somehow, either more or less than human’. He mused in his memoir, ‘I seem to have inherited an instinctive rapport with animals ... more so than with people’. His father was fascinated by animal intra-species communication which, Ernst wrote enigmatically without further explanation, ‘must have stimulated my passion for Shakespeare’.

His father’s decline after a series of strokes was witnessed by Ernst who was fifteen. The death was a bitter blow since they were very close, and Ernst candidly describes him as the ‘hero’ of his own memoir. His relationship with his mother Ursula (1903–76), also a trained zoologist, was always ambiguous and conflictual, partly because he sensed friction between his parents. He later also recognised that, since his father had died penniless, it was not easy for her being left as a single mother of boys – Friedrich (‘Fred’), Paul and Ernst – in a still unfamiliar culture. At one stage she was forced to work in a rag factory. It was a devastating descent in class for a family distinguished by intellectual achievement and comfortable circumstances, stemming back through a grandfather who was a lawyer. Honigmann’s son writes of Ernst:

He once told me there was a family tradition of ensuring children got the best education possible, because Jews had learned that if you have to flee in a hurry, it’s one thing that can’t be confiscated off you. He sent all his own children to private school.⁶

Having personally experienced privilege and poverty must have driven and coloured Ernst’s central critical orientation in stressing Shakespeare’s tolerance and understanding of social extremes, spanning the range from kings to paupers. Ursula did encourage Ernst’s early literary pursuit in writing ‘stories’, while his father instilled in him a love of literature and reverence for education in general. On his deathbed Hans told his son ‘Go where the best minds are’, which in Ernst’s case, after attending Hillhead High School in Glasgow, meant studying English Literature at Glasgow University, and then a BLitt at Oxford.

As an undergraduate at Glasgow (1944–8), Honigmann unwittingly found a new father-figure in Professor Peter Alexander (FBA 1951),⁷ who increasingly came to take him under his wing after Ernst graduated. Alexander had long braved the notoriously raucous Glaswegian student audiences to become a respected lecturer, and had eventually established his professional mark as Regius Professor (1935–63). He was the distinguished Shakespearean editor and critic whose future *Collected Works of Shakespeare* (1951), also known as ‘The Tudor Edition’, was to become the universally standard, British single-volume edition until the 1980s. Ernst described Alexander as a man combining ‘Scottish canniness with an extraordinary remoteness’. The academic

⁶Paul Honigmann, correspondence.

⁷J.C. Bryce, ‘Peter Alexander, 1893–1969’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 66 (1980), 379–405.

association between them was indeed life-determining for Honigmann in many ways, including scholarly suggestions that Ernst systematically followed up in his own research.

At Glasgow, Ernst was the recipient of one of the university's best postgraduate awards (the George A. Clark Scholarship), a four-year travelling scholarship for 'anywhere in Europe'.⁸ Driven on by his father's dying words he entered Merton College Oxford for a postgraduate research degree. However, this turned out to be a very mixed blessing, and almost disastrous since the scholarship carried prestige but very little money. He could not afford to live in college, and in fact he was hardly able to live comfortably in his self-catering lodgings since tuition and college fees swallowed up more money and, besides, postgraduates were not allowed to live in college accommodation. He survived on vacation jobs, which officially were forbidden by the University but the experience gave him a sympathetic insight into a working-class community ethos with which he could identify. At Oxford, although enchanted by the gardens with their natural beauty, he found himself shut out from any social life and cruelly made aware of his poverty. He was treated as a provincial outsider amidst the 'malign competitiveness of the place' and class-bound privilege of the English upper-class undergraduates who all seemed to know each other. 'He resented – he hated – Oxford's public-school Englishness, its upper-class certainty that "we are the best, we shall inherit the earth" ...'⁹ On his first visit to Duke Humphrey's Library he found all desks occupied except those marked as 'reserved for the use of Professors' and fled, painfully convinced that there was no place for him. He was made to feel humiliated when he joined a play-reading group and was told the only role left was to read the stage directions. (Ironically, this experience fed into a later article on the textual misplacing of many stage directions – little is wasted for scholars and writers.)¹⁰ He gravitated to the congenial company of equally impoverished and socially ostracised postgraduates from provincial British universities or overseas, who resented the arrogance of public schoolboys as much as did Ernst. I cannot help speculating that this lay behind his apparent preference for Scottish and antipodean recruits as staff at Newcastle, among which I was a grateful beneficiary.

Honigmann dedicated his book *Shakespeare's Impact on His Contemporaries* (1982) to Peter Alexander whom he lists among 'three brilliant teachers' (p. xi), the other two being J.C. Maxwell and F.P. Wilson who was the most eminent Shakespeare textual scholar of Elizabethan drama at the time, and who in 1947 succeeded Nichol Smith at Merton. J.C. (James Coutts) Maxwell (1916–76) was Honigmann's supervisor, also a Scotsman (Edinburgh) and something of an Oxford outsider himself. He was the English

⁸ On leaving Oxford he did not take up the fourth year of the scholarship, since he felt duty-bound to find a more lucrative job to help his mother financially.

⁹ *Togetherness*, pp. 85, 84.

¹⁰ 'Re-Enter the Stage Direction: Shakespeare and Some Contemporaries', *Shakespeare Survey*, 29 (2007), 117–25; reprinted in *Myriad-Minded Shakespeare* (1989).

Fellow at Balliol College, which since 1677 has been linked with Scotland and especially Glasgow University through the Snell Exhibitioner scheme, and in Shakespearean circles through A.C. Bradley's attachment first as student, then Balliol Fellow (twice), and later Regius Professor at Glasgow. Supervisors were at that time not inclined to undertake a pastoral role with graduates and their help was often nominal, but there is nothing to suggest Maxwell was not assiduous, and he supported Honigmann's later career as Shakespeare editor, and also coincidentally later was Ernst's immediate predecessor as professor at Newcastle. However, Maxwell (who was much later to act as my own 'pastoral tutor', sharing interests in Shakespeare and cricket) was also temperamentally very shy and socially disconcerting. He came to be regarded with universal fear as an unsparing scourge of lazy scholarship, with a gimlet eye for spotting misprints, mistranslations and errors, a trait most clearly revealed in his unsparing reviews and when he became editor of *Notes and Queries*. Maxwell had originally matriculated as a student to Oxford (Balliol College) in 1934, and was elected to a fellowship there in 1946, the year Ernst arrived. As a conscientious objector he had served in the Fire Service during the war. From 1966 to 1968 he was appointed professor at Ernst's future perch in Newcastle, before returning to Oxford, first as Reader and then professorial fellow. Ernst was to take his place at Newcastle, probably with Alexander and Maxwell as referees.

Maxwell was fortunate in acquiring in his role as supervisor not only Honigmann but also another Glaswegian postgraduate student, G.K. (George) Hunter, who also went on to become a star in the Shakespearean firmament, and in his case a Corresponding Fellow in the British Academy. After graduating MA (Scottish equivalent of BA with honours) at Glasgow in 1939 (presumably also taught by Peter Alexander), Hunter then worked in military intelligence during the war. He was among the remarkable intake of mature, ex-servicemen students who re-entered academia after losing some years by serving in the Second World War, in his case listed on the Bletchley Park Roll of Honour among ex-Intelligence servicemen.¹¹ He entered Oxford in 1946 and completed a DPhil 1950, so he and Ernst overlapped exactly, both beginning and submitting their postgraduate theses in the same years. Hunter was at Balliol and therefore may have had more contact with Maxwell as supervisor.¹² I can find no evidence whether Honigmann and Hunter met as students or were aware of each other's existence at the time, but the coincidences make it more than likely.¹³ However, the facts that Hunter was seven years older than Honigmann (and only four years younger than Maxwell his supervisor), having travelled the world to Colombo and Hong Kong in the navy from 1941 to 1945, and a more

¹¹ <https://www.bletchleypark.org.uk/roll-of-honour/16130/>. A list of other humanities scholars who worked in intelligence in the Second World War can be found at <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publishing/memoirs/humanities-scholars-who-worked-military-intelligence-second-world-war/>

¹² *Balliol College Register*, 5th edn, 556; 193.

¹³ At that time it was not customary to acknowledge or even name a supervisor in the thesis.

extroverted character than Ernst, would have created a significant experiential gulf between them, given Ernst's social and intellectual isolation at Oxford. They certainly were friends later. Hunter's thesis, its status upgraded from BLitt to DPhil, is a formidably learned work, tracing *sententiae* from Seneca's ten tragedies into the works of eight Elizabethan dramatists (but not Shakespeare). Honigmann's dissertation remained as a Blitt, though that was no stigma since it was the norm at Oxford for research degrees, and equally ambitious in its way.

Honigmann's Oxford thesis, entitled *Studies in the Chronology of Shakespeare's Plays*, is the first sign of what would become a tenacious, lifelong pursuit, his conviction of Shakespeare's 'early start' as a dramatist. In this and other themes, he was nurturing seeds planted by Alexander at Glasgow. Alexander's 'dates of composition' chronology in his edition of *The Complete Works* (1951) allows for the possibility that the first seven plays could have been written anywhere between 1584 (when Shakespeare was just twenty) and 1592, which is up to five years earlier than the orthodoxy. In developing his own detailed argument for the 'early start', Honigmann in his thesis also scrupulously acknowledges but severely criticises the work of E.K. Chambers, who had cornered the field on dating and also on the so-called 'lost years' of Shakespeare's life (generally dated from his marriage in 1582 to a clearer emerging timeline from 1592). Ernst regarded Chambers' work as flawed and responsible for embedding the 'traditional' view of Shakespeare's 'late start', which Alexander rejected and which one of Honigmann's mentors, the eminent F.P. Wilson, was chipping away at before he died in 1963: '... the chronology of Shakespeare's earliest plays is so uncertain that it has no right to harden into an orthodoxy'.¹⁴ Although nowadays the view is still unfashionable, the door is just ajar for further research.

Not for the last time in Ernst's methodology, a section inserted as an appendix to his thesis, on the anonymous (possibly Peele's) *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, itself was a major plank in the argument, and led to Honigmann's first edited play. The crucial text and test for Ernst's early dating argument was *King John*, which he was certain had predated *The Troublesome Reign* (undeniably published in 1591). In his view, then, *The Troublesome Reign* was a rather incompetent derivative from Shakespeare's *King John*. The currently accepted 'late' dating of 1596 for *King John* was consolidated by Bullough's conclusion (published just four years after Honigmann's edition),¹⁵ and this has been followed by a majority of more recent scholars, making *Troublesome Reign* much earlier and therefore Shakespeare's source. Arguing for Shakespeare's early start forms the basis for Honigmann's dating of *King John* in his Arden edition of the play (1953). Again, he was building upon Alexander's firm assumption that 'Shakespeare

¹⁴ F.P. Wilson, *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare* (1953), p. 113.

¹⁵ Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (1957) in 8 vols, vol. 4.

must have been working as a dramatist for some years before 1590'.¹⁶ Alexander had also dated *Troublesome Reign* before Shakespeare's *King John*.¹⁷ J.C. Maxwell seems to have leaned towards his graduate student's dogged adherence to an 'early start', tentatively dating *King John* as early as 1590 himself as evidence for at least leaving open the Alexander-Honigmann dating of *Titus Andronicus*: 'there does not seem to be anything that flatly contradicts a date of about 1589–90'. He also noted that William Matchett in the American Signet edition, like Honigmann, accepted that *King John* preceded *The Troublesome Reign*. It sounds like the Scottish verdict 'not proven', but it is clear that both Maxwell and Wilson took seriously their student's argument for an early start.¹⁸

With the commission of the Arden *King John* (see below), Honigmann was given the chance to consolidate his thesis for a wider audience. However, his argument about the dating of *King John* has never gained universal acceptance. It was trenchantly refuted from on high by Kenneth Muir in *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (1977), and later by Gary Taylor who expresses scepticism about the 'early start' argument in general, considering it an unhelpful distraction. More mildly, the early dating is described as 'controversial' by R.L. Smallwood in his New Penguin edition, while John Jowett, one of Ernst's later graduate students, cautiously concluded, 'There remain substantial objections to Honigmann's interpretation of *King John*'.¹⁹ Ernst in his own edition of *King John*, after a lengthy and detailed consideration of the matter, diplomatically ventured that 'scholars have been unable to agree on these matters', while firmly staking his own line in the sand:

We believe that *John* was written in the winter/spring of 1590/91. Critics of exceptional authority prefer a date between 1593 and 1596. Students of the period will realize that more is at stake than meets the eye, and that the problem, obscure and elusive though it might be, must be faced.²⁰

This is true, since upon it hangs major issues of interpreting Shakespeare's career. He returned to the fray several times over decades, and never shifted from his and Alexander's position that *King John* preceded *Troublesome Reign*. G.K. Hunter in his authoritative *English Drama 1586–1642: The Age of Shakespeare* (1997) keeps the theory just pulsing on life support by describing it as 'attractive' but one which has 'dissuaded most scholars' (p. 217 fn).

¹⁶ Alexander, *Works*, xvii.

¹⁷ Peter Alexander, *Shakespeare's Life and Art* (1939), p. 85.

¹⁸ J.C. Maxwell (ed.), *Titus Andronicus* (1953), p. xxi (on *King John*), and p. xxiv (on *Titus Andronicus*).

¹⁹ Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (1977); R.L. Smallwood (ed.), *King John* (1974); 'The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare's Plays', in Stanley Wells & Gary Taylor, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (1987), p. 125; John Jowett (ed.) in Oxford, *Complete Works*, ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan (2001).

²⁰ E.A.J. Honigmann (ed.), *King John* (1954), xliii–lviii, lviii.

Honigmann later pursued the ‘early start’ in *Shakespeare’s Impact on his Contemporaries* (1982), a title which may be misleading if one equates literary and theatrical influence with ‘impact’, since Honigmann is here considering what Shakespeare’s contemporaries (in particular Ben Jonson) thought of him. The material is midway between the dissertation and *The Lost Years* (see below), showing the writer’s progress from editing to biography, or rather the mutual reliance of the one activity on the other. Yet again he vigorously defended his thoughts on dating *King John* – ‘a text that may well turn out to be the key-stone of the early Shakespeare chronology’ (p. 79) – and attacking Chambers’ ‘late start’ assumptions; and he offers publicly the revised chronology as presented in his BLitt. Already, one might divine something of the future scholar – following almost pedantically a trail of circumstantial details in advancing a surprisingly bold and radical overall theory that proved controversial. The tendency carried through to the later *The Texts of Othello and Shakespearian Revision* (1996) and his Arden edition of *Othello* (1997) (also with an ‘early’ dating of 1601–2 rather than the more usual 1603–4). The paradoxical combination of traits – conservative methodology and radical conclusions – was one that Ernst came to detect in the plays themselves, seeing a writer willing to embrace antitheses as the signature Shakespearean vision of ‘myriad-mindedness’, life as ‘mingled yarn’, and accordingly raising ‘mixed responses’ in audiences, ‘good and ill together’.

After Oxford, Ernst was appointed from 1951 to 1954 as one of three founder Fellows of the Shakespeare Institute at Birmingham University located in Stratford on Avon, under the directorship of Allardyce Nicholl (significantly another Glasgow graduate) and C.J. Sisson. This appointment and his ensuing Arden edition of *King John* were both the result of practical help from Peter Alexander. First, the Institute post resulted from words of mouth passed between Alexander and theatre historian Allardyce Nicoll, who was setting up the Institute. (‘He’s one of us, he’s a Glasgow graduate’, Alexander advised Ernst.) The ‘interview’ unexpectedly turned out to be a leisurely stroll in the Malvern Hills with Nicoll and his energetic dog Gyp. Secondly, it was again at the suggestion of Alexander himself that Ernst was invited to edit *King John* by Una Ellis-Fermor, one of the Arden General Editors. It was these strokes of luck (and patronage) that launched directly his own career in Shakespeare scholarship. Ernst was appointed alongside Reg Foakes and John Russell Brown as the three founding Fellows under Nicoll’s Directorship. Ernst later acknowledged Foakes in some of his publications as ‘an old friend’, and later invited him several times as external examiner at Newcastle.

As Ernst’s first direct experience of working under a head of department, Ernst’s own later leadership style may have been influenced by that of Nicholl, who is described in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as ‘a fair-minded, democratically inclined head of department and intensely loyal to all his staff’. As Ernst’s colleague in Newcastle for sixteen years, I would describe his own leadership qualities in similar terms.

Having consolidated his standing in the three years at the Institute, Ernst returned to Glasgow as lecturer (1954 to 1967), first as assistant to Alexander. His tasks included marking student essays in the hundreds, but he gradually shared more of the teaching load. In the book *Alexander's Introductions to Shakespeare*, a succinct and authoritative section on 'Shakespeare's Theatre' was contributed by Honigmann with 'full approval of Alexander'.²¹ He published an erudite edition of *Milton's Sonnets* (1966). It was in this period that he researched and published his first monograph, *The Stability of Shakespeare's Text* (1965), which arguably remains his most significant though initially underrated book.

The Stability of Shakespeare's Text, which could just as well have been entitled *Instability*, certainly brought him to critical attention, for better or worse, since it was widely reviewed by well-known experts. Its argument needs some context, since it affects how we rate Ernst's contribution to the future field of Shakespeare editing. Given that it came so early in his career, it seems remarkably audacious that here he single-handedly challenged a whole generation of towering 'new bibliographers' prevailing at the time (Greg, Pollard, McKerrow, Hinman, Bowers and others). They had developed a quasi-scientific discipline of editing, positing distinctions between 'foul papers' and 'fair copies', 'memorial texts' by actors with fallible memories, texts 'corrupted' in publishing transmission by careless compositors, and simply pirated 'bad quartos' published without the author's permission. Their main engagement was in a quest for an elusive and perhaps illusionary conflated text for each play, which never actually materialised to universal satisfaction, since each modern edition hailed as 'authoritative' differed from its predecessors.

Pushing against a strong and coercive tide, Honigmann directly challenged the whole enterprise. Shakespeare, he wrote, 'may have been indifferent to a "truly finalised text"' (p. 192) since he was writing not for a book but for the stage, with its practical demands of adapting to changing circumstances on a daily basis and to exigencies of touring. The assumption that playtexts were continually changing was anathema to the phalanx of scholars seeking to construct each play as a single grail of textuality. Honigmann's prophetic argument uses the later examples of obvious revisions by hand in manuscripts of Keats and Burns, showing that the process is much closer to the habits of actual writers who constantly have second thoughts, even from moment to moment. Clearer examples come from Wordsworth's two versions of *The Prelude*, and the painstaking composition methods of a poet such as Dylan Thomas. That writers revise, and that differences between texts are just as likely to be authorial changes as 'corruptions', seems now to be common sense, but in part that is due to Ernst's pioneering book itself. If his approach centred on *King John* is styled the 'early start' theory, this one might be summarised as

²¹ *Alexander's Introductions to Shakespeare* (1964), pp. 39–46.

the dramatist's 'second thoughts' or 'Shakespeare as reviser'. Because he was writing two decades before the ideas became orthodox, he makes the task no easier for himself by feeling it necessary at times to use confusing and unduly complicated reasoning, and to supply no fewer than six appendices full of details and difficult to digest. For all that, he never loses sight of the practical demands of the Elizabethan professional theatre, and of the habits of writers whose 'quick forge and working-house of thought' worked faster than the quill in their hands.

Almost all reviewers were flummoxed by *Stability* and its reception was frosty to the point of dismissal.²² Speaking for most from the highest pedestal of bibliographical eminence, T.H. Howard-Hill legislated that the author offered 'no evidence', 'does not prove his case', and relied more on subjective opinions than facts. The book 'will cause editors some dismay'. However, for all its detractors at the time, *The Stability of Shakespeare's Text* was to prove a brilliantly original and prophetic intervention in the history of Shakespearean editing.

One open-minded reviewer was to foresee this. James G. McManaway was himself a seasoned editor who had for a time overseen the mammoth *New Variorum* project. He was more intrigued than threatened by Honigmann's book, and intuitively understood its radical implications.²³ He begins his review, 'Rarely has a book moved me to ask as many questions as *The Stability of Shakespeare's Text*'. After offering a brief, judicious summary of the primary arguments, he concludes hesitantly that '[the] interpretation of the evidence will not be readily confuted'. McManaway highlights the originality of another plank in Ernst's analysis of Shakespeare's method of composing (in Chapter xi, 'Order of Writing'). Shakespeare, Honigmann suggested, wrote scenes in 'irregular' order as they interested him, and only later (in our computer-age terminology) would 'copy and paste' the drafted scenes to make a 'master-plot' by filling in the narrative gaps. This was the idea that the dramatist thought primarily in terms of constructing a scene as the basic imaginative unit in a play, which gave him 'a willingness to abandon sequential writing' (143). In McManaway's summary, 'scenes and episodes may have been written out of order and then pieced together', which he finds an attractive theory supported by plenty of evidence. As well as supporting the theory that Shakespeare revised his texts, this also incidentally accounts for some unexplained inconsistencies in the plays. Essentially the same argument was soon proposed and developed quite independently and apparently without knowledge of *Stability* by Emrys Jones in *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (1971), and it has not caused controversy. McManaway was the

²² See for example, Cyrus Hoy, *Modern Language Review* (1969); Lester A. Beaurline, *Renaissance News* (1966); R.W. van Fossen (*Shakespeare Quarterly* (1967); T.H. Howard-Hill, *Review of English Studies* (1966); Cyrus Hoy, *Modern Language Review* (1969); R.W. van Fossen (*Shakespeare Quarterly* (1967).

²³ James G. Mcmanaway, *The Library* (1967).

most perceptive commentator among the reviewers of Honigmann's book since he seems genuinely to grasp the revolutionary potential in *Stability*.

Honigmann's theory of Shakespeare's 'second thoughts' or revision was ahead of its time, and its drift was to be vindicated two decades later with the advance of a generational change in editorial philosophy and practice amongst Shakespeareans. The earlier, so-called 'new' bibliography challenged by Honigmann, based on conflating different editions to create a speculative, non-existent authorial text, was to be conclusively swept away by the next wave of 'new-new' bibliographers, the so-called Oxford school, in a team headed by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor who had been employed by the Oxford University Press towards the end of the 1980s. They used the Folio as their primary reference point and gave priority to performance evidence over other printed quartos. More importantly, this approach, as one of its central pillars, conceived of textual variants not necessarily as 'corruptions' or publisher's 'contamination', but as evidence of Shakespeare's habit of revising his plays.²⁴ In this view there could be no 'final text', but instead a process subject to authorial change. In hindsight, it can be argued that Ernst Honigmann had helped originate this groundbreaking development way back in 1965 in *The Stability of Shakespeare's Text*.

So extensive could be such revisions that in at least one example they were seen to amount to two substantially different 'arch-texts' or versions. In the Oxford text, *King Lear* is printed as the 'History' (a quarto) side by side with the 'Tragedy' (Folio) respectively, as separate works. Michael Warren amplified the 'two-text *Lears*' by producing a box set purporting to present all the raw materials of the various texts. Honigmann reviewed this with his characteristic blend of caution and radicalism, sympathy and stricture, as a 'Do-it-yourself Lear'.²⁵ The battle over *King Lear* was unveiled in grand fashion in a collection of essays in the Oxford Shakespeare Studies series, *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of 'King Lear'*, edited by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren (1983). In this volume, the writers contend that the two main texts of *Lear* were 'independent Shakespearian versions', and as such should be published separately rather than being conflated. In essence it is Honigmann's 'revision theory', though his *Stability* is not mentioned in this book until the endnotes, and then without comment on its pioneering stance. Nor is highlighted his extremely dense and substantial article which had already appeared in *The Library*, 'Shakespeare's Revised Plays: *King Lear* and *Othello*', which is described by Taylor and Warren as 'important' but framed ambiguously as 'endorsing' the Taylor-Warren volume as though it had appeared later than theirs.²⁶

²⁴ For some background, see Gary Taylor & John Jowett, *Shakespeare Reshaped: 1606–1623* (1993).

²⁵ Honigmann, 'Do-it-Yourself Lear', *New York Review* (25 October 1990).

²⁶ 'Shakespeare's Revised Plays: *King Lear* and *Othello*', *The Library*, 4 (1982), 142–73.

Honigmann himself was generous in his review of *The Division of the Kingdoms* in the *New York Review* – after all, how could he not agree with his own theory? But he somewhat darkly writes: ‘this volume is part of a campaign – some will say a conspiracy – that has now continued for some years’.²⁷ He scrupulously traces early premonitions cited in his book but overlooked by others, such as remarks by Samuel Johnson, Granville-Barker, Coghill, and Madeleine Doran. Doran had in 1931 claimed that ‘Q [Lear] looks like a first draft rather than a bad quarto’, which she reiterated in 1941 as ‘the Quarto must represent an earlier form of the play than the Folio’. Ernst raises the question, ‘If Miss Doran was in the right, as is now suggested, it is worth asking why her views did not prevail’, answering ‘Miss Doran ... arrived at the wrong time, just when the good ship Shakespeare had swung around and sailed off majestically in another direction’:

From the 1920s to the 1960s so much exciting pioneer work was concerned with textual corruption that an assumption silently took root that *all* textual variants are best explained as corruptions.

In his review-article, he unobtrusively slips in a mention of his own *Stability*. He is surely hinting that his own argument twenty years earlier had suffered a similar fate to Doran’s of simply missing the tide and being left at the wharf. Although celebrating the new approach, he scrupulously points out some ‘contrary evidence’ and admits that the theory had not as yet commanded universal agreement. His own pioneering work gained some new recognition, for example by Anne Barton, describing him as ‘the man who, in *The Stability of Shakespeare’s Text* (1965), laid the foundation upon which others (including Taylor) have built’. Reviewing Taylor and Warren’s book, Barton goes on, ‘Honigmann’s role in what is coming to be seen as the textual revolution that has given us new versions of several of the plays is entirely ignored. He can console himself, at least, that he is in good company’.²⁸ Stanley Wells, in the vanguard of the ‘new Oxford’ approach, did in 1987 pay handsome tribute to Ernst’s 1965 book, writing that it was ‘with hindsight, the most significant, indeed seminal study’ in the field.²⁹

The ‘campaign’ or ‘conspiracy’ proceeded to unfurl from 1985 in a series of editions, monographs and ‘Textual Companions’ collectively known as the ‘Oxford Shakespeare’ and more recently ‘New Oxford’, edited by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, William Montgomery and John Jowett. Many bold decisions were made, not only

²⁷ ‘The New Lear’, *New York Review* (2 February 1984), and ‘Do-It-Yourself Lear’, *New York Review* (25 October 1990).

²⁸ Anne Barton, review of Taylor & Warren’s *The Division of the Kingdoms*, *New York Review* (1 February 1990).

²⁹ Stanley Wells, ‘Shakespeare and Revision’, Hilda Hulme Memorial Lecture, University of London (1987).

concerning revisions, but also relegating to appendices even some passages from *Hamlet* made famous from established editorial conflations but not included in the Folio used as copy text (or ‘Control text’ in Taylor’s term) – for example, the soliloquy ‘How all occasions do inform against me’. Neither ‘the canon’ nor a mythical ‘final text’ is fetishised, while some works are claimed as collaborative, and others included which had been regarded as apocrypha. Although the critical reception was somewhat mixed, this comprehensively planned and executed project has pretty much cornered the market, superseding Alexander’s as the standard one-volume *Collected Works*, especially since (in a publishing coup?) the various Norton teaching editions (with small textual changes) incorporated it in America. It may in time be superseded itself by a Norton third edition published in 2015, edited by Gordon MacMullan and Suzanne Gossett.

At the same time, it should be noted that Ernst was not a root and branch ‘revisionist’, and he distanced himself from too slavishly assuming ‘authorial afterthoughts’ as the cause of all variants. In his exhaustive article in *The Library* he revisited *Stability*, and was at pains to point out that in his book he had identified several reasons for textual discrepancies other than revision in *King Lear* and *Othello*. He warned that Greg’s earlier methodology and detailed work were not so benighted as the new theorists believed, and many variants were indeed caused in publishing houses. In *The Texts of ‘Othello’ and Shakespearean Revision* he conducts a thorough examination of all the evidence, and concludes that for this play, despite signs of revision amongst the texts, this is not a significant issue for the play as a whole. His Arden edition of *Othello* (1997) is accordingly based on a more empirical, contextual and *ad hoc* examination of each textual detail in turn. Richard Proudfoot’s Foreword draws attention to Honigmann’s great strengths as an editor, including ‘scrupulous attention to the minutiae of editing, such as elision, versification and punctuation, matters too often deemed beneath the conscious notice of editors and readers’. It might be safe to conclude that he positioned himself as ‘independent’, somewhere between the traditional and radical, close reading and theory, caution and bravado. Such eclecticism may not have pleased either camp in the field of 1980s’ English studies, a decade when overarching literary theories were on the march and compromise was liable to be scorned as craven fence-sitting.

In dealing with textual and biographical matters as a section I have ‘jump[ed] the life to come’ in Ernst’s career between 1965 and 1997, and now return to his career timeline. In 1967–68 he swapped jobs and houses with an academic in Boston (Lexington), USA, where the family spent a year. In 1968 he was appointed to a Readership at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, in effect replacing Maxwell who had in 1966 moved back to Oxford. On Peter Ure’s untimely death at the age of fifty, Ernst was promoted to the Cowen chair in 1970. In quick time he produced three efficient editions which proved uncontroversial and helped consolidate his reputation: *King Richard III* (1968),

Twelfth Night (1971), and (with C.A. Patrides) Book X of *Paradise Lost* (1972). Monographs of literary interpretation were to follow in the 1980s.

Newcastle upon Tyne was to be Ernst's professional and family 'home' for the rest of his university tenure (1970–89) and until his death in 2011. He surely would not have stayed so long if he had not been content there in finding some trusted 'togetherness' in family, amiable colleagues, and (for the first time) secure, tenured employment.

Some historical background may be of interest. From 1871 the university had been Armstrong College of Physical Sciences, University of Durham, then in 1937 King's College, Durham, and in 1963 it was renamed the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. A detailed and 'discursive' account of the early teaching of literature and the wider Armstrong College ambience written by Nichol Smith (originally a public lecture) was published in the *Durham University Journal* in 1958 when J.C. Maxwell was its editor.³⁰ By the time Ernst arrived, the department and then School had been built up by a line of distinguished professorial predecessors in the Joseph Cowen chair. After Nichol Smith (1904–8) came Allen Mawer (1908 to 1920), an eminent philologist of Anglo-Saxon, the Vikings, and most importantly early Scandinavian place-names in Britain. He lived in the Northumberland countryside when in the chair, producing in 1920 a distinguished volume on origins of placenames in Northumberland and Durham. His successor was W.L. Renwick (1921–45) who, like Nichol Smith and Honigmann, was a Glasgow graduate who went on to complete a BLitt supervised by Nichol Smith at Merton – wheels within wheels. According to the British Academy memoir, Renwick found this 'a notable and happy' experience, living in style at Corbridge cocooned from the industrial realities of the city itself.³¹ Then came John Butt (1946–59) who yet again had been a student of Nichol Smith at Merton. His Academy memoir attests that 'the years at Newcastle were happy ones' for Butt.³² Ernst's immediate predecessor in the Cowen chair was Peter Ure (1959–69). He was remembered by Frank Kermode, (his friend since undergraduate days at Liverpool, and colleague at Newcastle), as a 'solemn and solitary' man, 'withdrawn and melancholy' whose life was 'clouded by illness'.³³ His unpublished essays on Shakespeare were posthumously edited by Maxwell, and those on Yeats by Claude Rawson (both 1974). In his own inaugural lecture, Ernst paid homage to Ure as head at Newcastle, and also to David Nichol Smith, another Scotsman and the English Fellow at

³⁰ D. Nichol Smith, 'Armstrong College Fifty Years Ago', *Durham University Journal*, 50, ns 19 (1958), 49–57.

³¹ Winifred Maynard, 'William Lindsay Renwick, 1889–1970', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 57 (1971), 477–85 at 481.

³² James Sutherland, 'John Everett Butt, 1906–1965', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 52 (1966), 303–10 at 305.

³³ Frank Kermode, 'Peter Ure 1919 to 1969', in C.J. Rawson (ed.), *Yeats and Anglo-Irish Literature: Critical Essays by Peter Ure* (1974), pp. 1–39. Ure's Newcastle years are described pp. 32–9; Honigmann is mentioned on pp. xi, 37.

Merton who had welcomed young Ernst with tea in his college rooms, little to know the student would eventually hold the same Newcastle chair.³⁴ Ernst's successors in the chair have been literary biographer John Batchelor (1990–2011), and the first female incumbent Renaissance scholar Jennifer Richards (2016–23).

Who, then, was the benefactor of this Chair, Joseph Cowen (1829–1900)? He was certainly a more colourful character than most university benefactors, and remarkable enough to warrant a digression. He was a brickmaker, or more accurately magnate owner of a family-owned brickmaking company from which he derived considerable wealth, and was nicknamed accordingly 'the Blaydon Brick'. He devoted himself to radical politics, and in 1873 was elected as member for Newcastle in Parliament. Nominally a Liberal, he was in reality fiercely independent and equally querulous with all factions and office-holders. Not just radical but revolutionary, he helped political exiles and refugees to escape from Europe, and came under spy surveillance for his habit of smuggling out important pamphlets hidden in his bricks to continental figures like Mazzini, Garibaldi, the philosophical anarchist Bakunin and other insurgency leaders in Poland, Hungary and Russia. He had become interested in European revolutionary politics when a student at Edinburgh University (though he took no degree). Despite his wealth, he aligned himself with miners and Chartists. He insisted on wearing miners' clothes to parliament, and proudly delivered his speeches in an uncompromising Geordie accent. His parliamentary speeches have been published, and were nothing if not rhetorical and laced with literary quotations. He was exceptionally active in the whole range of north-east culture:

Cowen served on the committee of the Arts Association of Newcastle upon Tyne and took leading roles in the founding of the Tyne Theatre and Opera House and Newcastle Public Library Service. By the early-Twentieth Century, the working-class had a prominent culture in Newcastle.³⁵

Later in life Cowen became editor and proprietor of the Newcastle Chronicle. As a zealous Chairman of the Educational League he dedicated himself to lifelong learning for all, especially the working class. The Joseph Cowen Chair in English at King's College was endowed by his family in 1898 (named in 1909), consistent with his cultural interests. I am not sure how much of this Ernst knew. He was himself politically progressive (at one time canvassing for the Liberal Party as it was known until 1988), remembering acutely his early outsider status and poverty. But certainly he was not an activist to anywhere near the same extent as Cowen, unless he kept this secret.

³⁴ E.A.J. Honigmann. 'Shakespearian Tragedy and the Mixed Response: An Inaugural Lecture' (1971).

³⁵ For more fascinating material on Cowen see: <https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/speccoll/tag/joseph-cowen/>. Another early, generous benefactor to English at Newcastle was Robert Spence-Watson, friend of Cowen and prominent anti-war campaigner who funded a student prize at the same time.

As a new head of Literature Ernst had the enviable chance to oversee the recruitment of half a dozen young lecturers with diverse skills and interests to augment the department's already solid academic reputation. His 'leadership style' was unobtrusive and egalitarian. His chairmanship was consensus-driven and he genuinely disliked conflict, preferring to let us all go our own sometimes eccentric ways in shaping teaching policies and innovating new courses. Far from the 'god professor' stereotype of the time, and given his reticent, self-effacing temperament, he was reluctant to take on the headship of Literature in the first case and more so of the School of English Literature and Language. As head at Newcastle he was supportive of younger colleagues who introduced courses on film studies (Bruce Babington), feminist approaches (Linda Anderson), creative writing (Desmond Graham and Linda), and post-colonialism (Judi Newman), before these were *de rigueur* in English departments. He seemed gratified to build up a strong academic team offering a full range of literature from Anglo-Saxon to contemporary.

Although Ernst's unassertive approach to headship was welcomed by colleagues, it was not always a strength as a head of School representing two disciplines in the cut-throat politics and bureaucracy of Faculty and higher committees. As a sign of the times there was a concerted drive from on high to close down both Music and Fine Arts as financially unsustainable, both of which were saved more by community outrage and advocacy from other departments, compensating for their own vulnerable representation. Ernst returned bruised and dispirited after such adversarial encounters, though this in itself bonded us in sympathy and we felt oddly protective of him at such times.

As heads of School Ernst alternated with the head of Language, Barbara Strang, who by contrast (and complement) relished the bear-pit of university politics. She was deeply involved in faculty, senate and university administration, and from 1975 she served in the national University Grants Committees in Britain and also Hong Kong. She was steeped in bureaucracy and adept in regulatory procedures, as Ernst never was nor wished to be. Randolph Quirk in a memoir paid homage to Strang's 'Sparkling intellect and originality. Profound moral strength. Unshakable dedication to the most demanding standards of scholarship. Generosity. Loyalty. And sense of fun'.³⁶ Another memorialist speaks of her steely style of administration: 'despite her humanity, there was about her a certain austerity, and a sometimes formidable composure'. Barbara no doubt learned to be tough as one of a small number of women to become professors by the 1960s. A keen fox-hunter and angling for a convert, she invited me to join the family on a weekly pursuit, adding 'I know you disapprove but we never catch a fox and you'll find it an enjoyable sport'. (I declined.) Barbara died tragically while (as it were) 'still in the

³⁶Randolph Quirk, 'Foreword', in Graham Nixon & John Honey (eds), *An Historic Tongue: Studies in English Linguistics in Memory of Barbara Strang* (1988).

saddle' planning for early retirement, after being thrown from her horse and suffering a brain haemorrhage.

Ernst was keen to build up an MA in Renaissance drama which proved successful in attracting international students and training future editors, historians and theatre practitioners. Despite his hopes, the teaching fell largely to him since, of his staff recruits in the field, Bruce Babington was slowly disengaging from Ben Jonson and embracing film history, while I made it clear from the start that my second interest was not non-Shakespearean drama but Romanticism. I suspect we disappointed him. He often dangled offers to us to contribute to the Revels Companion series of which he had been appointed general editor, but without success.

If Honigmann's editing theories had proved controversial, so did his forays into biography. *Shakespeare: The Lost Years* (1985, 1998) is what he describes as a 'detective story'. The book amplifies an earlier suggestion made first by Oliver Baker and then Chambers, that as a teenager Shakespeare was the 'William Shakeshafte' who may have served as tutor and actor to Alexander Ho[u]ghton, a wealthy, devoutly Roman Catholic landowner in Lancashire. The argument goes that here Shakespeare already shows signs of embarking on playwriting – the 'early start' rears its head again, this time as early as 1580 when Shakespeare was just sixteen. A primary connection, it is argued, may have come through the Stratford grammar school master John Cottam who hailed from Lancashire himself. The remarkable depth of Honigmann's foot-slogging research that went into this book can be discerned in the number of acknowledgments and footnoted references to local libraries and archives all over Britain. Nonetheless, he anticipates and braces himself for 'howls of anguish' from critics unwilling to accept some (or any) of his conclusions. To answer them he later issued a revised second edition in 1998 in which he adds more evidence. Ernst was wryly self-aware of his own compulsion for revising, since he re-issued virtually all his books and major articles in 'revisited' form throughout his career. In this book, as in *Stability*, he once again shows an apparently inveterate addiction to appendices, including this time no less than ten, and genealogical tables of four different families. *The Lost Years* was greeted enthusiastically by some (especially at Lancaster University where a conference was built around it), while others were more lukewarm, or positively hostile, especially to the idea of Shakespeare's presumed attachment to an openly recusant family. Amongst the most trenchant 'howls' was a review from theatre historian and archivist David George, who points out that Honigmann's evidence is 'unconvincing', that he overlooks some earlier work preempting parts of his evidence, and bases his argument on several 'doubtful claims', including the 'early start' argument: worse, said George, Honigmann has failed entirely to see that speeding up Shakespeare's start as a writer and simultaneously placing him with Lord Strange's Men throughout the later 1580s are mutually incompatible, noting that this company was notoriously unstable and specialised in 'tumbling' rather than

original plays.³⁷ Admittedly, upon close inspection the reasoning in *The Lost Years* is at times speculative in 'joining dots', and maintains enthusiastic pursuit of a quarry that may move too readily from a 'possibility' to a 'persuasive plausibility'. However, Honigmann's exhaustive research set new standards for Shakespearean biography, showing that overlooked sources in local archives may reveal more treasures than we know. The jury is still out on the outcome of this 'detective story', but Honigmann's sleuthing is impressive. The research bore more fruit in two other books, basically spin-offs from the research for *The Lost Years*, giving more information about Shakespeare in his times. One is a biography of John Weever, 'a literary associate of Shakespeare and Jonson' (1987), and the other (with Susan Brock), *Playhouse Wills, 1558–1642* (1993), both appearing in the Revels Companions series.³⁸ They are further evidence that nothing is lost for the scholar.

With an eye to institutional symbolism, Honigmann used the distinguished occasions of his Inaugural Lecture at Newcastle, and the annual Shakespeare Lecture invited by the British Academy, to signal a change of direction, away from the diligent rigours of editing and biography and into the imaginative expanses of literary interpretation. In 'Shakespearian Tragedy and the Mixed Response' (1971) and 'Shakespeare's Mingled Yarn and *Measure for Measure*' (1981) respectively, the emphasis is on the related issues of how changing audience responses are guided by the dramatist, and secondly on the multivocal diversity and ambiguities of Shakespeare's vision. Aesthetic and generic *mêlanges* and metaphorical 'interweavings' are advanced as 'Shakespeare's own special talent'. Not that he endorses unbridled subjectivity which is dismissed as 'fingering our own pulses ... plugging ourselves into a private galvanometer', but both themes commit him to accepting emotional openness as unashamedly central to the critical enterprise. Writing just before the dam of theory-driven methodologies was to burst in the 1980s, this brand of 'liberal humanism' committed to pluralism and truth to emotional subtleties enabled Ernst to advance personal insights and perceptions, without worrying too much about spiky ripostes from exponents of deconstruction, post-structuralism, and ideological constructs. In his critical essays he does, however, engage fruitfully with new historicism and gender issues.³⁹

These lectures led on to two monographs in which Ernst developed his inclusive 'mixing' themes. Since both mainly consisted of revised public lectures and some published articles, they are aimed at a 'general readership', and written with the light, conversational and witty touch of the spoken word rather than the specialised lexicon of an editor. His writing mirrored his lecturing style, combining a stance of firm authority

³⁷ David George, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 37 (1986), 525–9.

³⁸ (With Susan Brock), *Playhouse Wills, 1558–1642* (1993).

³⁹ One of the most influential works on theoretical approaches which dominated critical discourse in the 1980s was John Drakakis (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares* (1985).

stemming from command of detail and methodical reasoning, with an accessible clarity and wit.

Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies: The Dramatist's Manipulation of Response (1976) was reissued in 2002 with the word *REVISITED* added to the subtitle and with three new chapters (including a comedy, a history, and a romance, doubly belying the 'Seven Tragedies' subtitle). The publisher's blurb describes it as a 'classic text, reprinted several times since its first publication in 1976', suggesting that sales (acknowledged in the revised 'Preface' to be a pragmatic publishing house's concern), favourable reviews, and ongoing influence justified republication. It is possible that renewed critical and historical interest in emotions in the 21st century have revived its appeal. We have rediscovered a vocabulary of fluctuating 'sympathies' subject to 'manipulation', and these are the key concepts in the book. Broadly speaking, the central argument is that Shakespeare, using a range of observable 'technical skills', adeptly controls audience responses through an interplay of sympathy and antipathy, closeness and detachment, in the presentation of character. Brutus is examined as a litmus test of opposing evaluations, now hostile and now respectful, adding up to a dual and ambivalent yet integrated impression. Macbeth is seen as both murderer and victim. The critical methodology is said to be a 'response regulator'. By its very nature this dynamic opens up a flexible and 'responsive' set of readings of the plays, alert to fluid changes and affective nuances as they proceed in the theatrical experience. The method offers Ernst a capacious vessel through which to express his own complex and contradictory view of life as a 'mingled yarn'. It is noticeable and telling that right through to this last academic book in 2002 he kept loyally referencing his quotations as from 'the Alexander edition (Tudor edition, 1951)'. No matter 'who's in, who's out' among the dozens of 'new, freshly edited' texts which he had wrestled with over the previous five decades, it remained his bible.

The second book of (mainly) literary criticism, published in the year of Honigmann's election to the Fellowship of the British Academy, was *Myriad-Minded Shakespeare: Essays chiefly on the tragedies and problem comedies* (1989). It also deals with issues of response in drama, but its catchment is more miscellaneous, applying the term 'myriad-minded' in different directions and avoiding restrictive or dogmatic concentration on one aspect: 'The open-minded reader learns that Shakespeare criticism is a *jeu sans frontières*'. The chapter 'Shakespeare's Mingled Yarn and *Measure for Measure*' is a reprint of his British Academy lecture delivered in 1981 on 23 April, Shakespeare's birthday.⁴⁰ Its theme of 'mingled yarn' provides a *leitmotif* for the book. 'In search of William Shakespeare: the public and the private man' reveals a picture of 'the man' that may illuminate the way in which Ernst saw himself and how he was perceived by many, especially since he observes how frequently biographers imprint their own self-image on

⁴⁰ This lecture was first published in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 67 (1981), 101–21.

their subject: 'We must learn to live with two images of Shakespeare', convivial with his friends but at the same time deeply reserved and private, altogether 'more forbidding to the world at large' – 'more Hamlet than Falstaff'. The dichotomy seems to fit well, in their different ways, Peter Alexander, James Maxwell ... and Ernst. The chapter 'Shakespeare suppressed: the unfortunate history of *Troilus and Cressida*' considers how the downfall of Essex bears upon the intriguing circumstances of the play's history. It remains a tersely descriptive set of potential explanations of the various confusing issues surrounding a play that has many 'problems' and mysteries. The final chapter, 'Shakespeare at Work: Preparing, Writing, Re-writing', based upon an article published in 1985 with a now familiar title 'Shakespeare as a reviser', returns for one more bite at refining revision theory. All the plays dealt with in the book are considered with ample consideration of both performance potential and the written word. In a nod to contemporary theory Honigsmann raises the question, '*All's Well That Ends Well*: A feminist play?', answering in the affirmative. In general, he was more intrigued than threatened by new approaches. Each essay gives evidence of a keenly sensitive and intelligent critic offering subtle, penetrating perceptions. Possibly due to his multi-lingualism or having learned English fresh as a seven-year-old, he had a gift for acutely defamiliarising passages that have grown clichéd with use, and lighting up others whose significance may have gone unnoticed. The model of 'myriad-minded' duality in empathetic projection is broad and all-encompassing enough to bind the eclectic contents together convincingly as his own unified and stimulating set of original literary interpretations.

Ernst was prone to occasional social *faux pas* or unintentionally failing to 'read the room', a trait of which he was aware, putting it down to 'his foolish habit of not disguising his thoughts' (*Togetherness*, p. 108). Most people found it well-meant and even endearing rather than offensive, but he was not always so lucky. At the height of feminism in the heady mid-1970s he addressed the new cohort of students with 'Welcome to all you intelligent young men and beautiful young women'. This may have passed as complimentary gallantry in Ernst's own student days, but the cultural climate in the 1970s in universities was very different. I fielded some complaints at the time in tutorials, but I'm not sure if they came to Ernst's attention. At the same time, it was not always easy to distinguish between unconscious *faux pas* and his own wry and puckish sense of humour.

Despite his public formality and impressive learning, there was a deeply engaging and amusing side to Ernst's personality which could inspire affection. In his determination to establish an amicable and egalitarian ambience in the Literature department at Newcastle, he instituted a tradition of regular 'informal' evening meetings to be held at the home of a staff member (whose spouse, where existent, was expected to provide food). These were occasions when his professional and social paradoxes were most on show. An anxious lecturer or terrified postgraduate would give a paper, after which Ernst

would often curtail more probing questions with a cheerful but chastening afterword and usually an inadvertently cutting summation, after which we would uneasily retire, heeding his cheerful ‘Shall we dine?’.

The most significant person in Ernst’s life was undoubtedly his wife, Dr Elsie McConnachie Packman (1929–94). Raised in a croft, she became a talented academic herself, holding teaching posts in Zoology at Aberdeen and Genetics at Glasgow, which she gave up on marrying. As her children grew older she returned to work as a part-time teacher and as a lecturer in Genetics at the Open University, which could largely be done at home with an annual seminar meeting with students. Elsie had a wonderful Scottish burr, and she was a gracious hostess at the Ernst-instigated departmental *soirées*. At one of their home parties, always anxious to avoid dealing with drunken postgraduate guests, Ernst told me, ‘Elsie is a genius, you would swear this punch has alcohol, but she assures me that it does not’. Sceptical, I afterwards questioned Elsie herself and her reply (so memorable it is recalled verbatim) was, ‘what would punch be without a little rum? What Ernst doesn’t know won’t hurt him’. It is understandable that Ernst was completely shattered by her premature death, which he recorded movingly in the dedication to his edited *Othello*, using words from George Herbert. He wrote to me describing her death – she was ‘conscious to the end’ and thinking only of her gathered family, not herself: ‘After almost forty years of marriage I thought I knew her well – but Elsie’s heroism in dying astonished me’.

Their children are Elaine, Richard and Paul, and Ernst’s letters to me after I left Newcastle regularly show him doting over emerging grandchildren. Ernst loved children but was wary of their potential Bakhtinian misrule which approached that of postgraduates. When he met my own first daughter, he advised us that the way to handle children’s parties was to set them all in a large park and first tell them to ‘run up that hill and back and you’ll get a prize’. He vowed that, when they returned and received a trinket each, they would be collectively so worn out that all would be peaceful for the afternoon.

I am not sure whether Ernst often strayed on foot from leafy Gosforth where the professors lived and from the university at Barras Bridge, down to the Newcastle I loved myself, with its student ghetto in Jesmond, the cobbled streets, handsome Georgian buildings, diurnal shouts of market vendors, and the working quayside. The regular parties for us at 18 Wilson Gardens were sociable but could be awkward. One sunny Saturday afternoon we were all conversing in his garden about the shortage of academic jobs when redundancies were being enforced in Britain. As we were all invited to admire his beloved pippin tree, he turned to me (still nervously on insecure ‘probation’) and asked, ‘what would *you* do if you were made redundant?’ Flustered and wishing to keep my job, I replied ‘I don’t know Ernst, what would *you* do?’ ‘I should be an apple farmer’, he replied and mercifully the conversation shifted to pruning trees rather than staff. He said it with such serene satisfaction that the thought may have momentarily taken him

back to his boyhood years when he and his brother had taken casual vacation jobs picking apples. He was a very keen gardener, especially proud of cultivating plants so far north. Always enviably slim, he had ever since his father's death been 'fanatical' about health and exercise, playing tennis with friends (often doubles with Elsie) well into his seventies.⁴¹

He had his own unique accent in which perfectly enunciated English was underlain by Scottish and faintly discernible, clipped German rhythmic cadence, in a somehow surprisingly deep baritone voice with an actor's attention to verbal nuance. No hint of Geordie, despite forty-five years in the north-east. In stature upright and neither tall nor short, he was equally sartorially moderate, on most occasions preferring 'smart casual' jumper and tie, adding a tweed jacket on formal occasions. On returning from conferences abroad he would often sport the fashionable attire of mid-career American academics, incongruously contrasting striped light blue blazer with mustard-coloured trousers. But this would not last more than a few days back in Britain.

On his seventieth birthday Ernst was presented with a *festschrift*, *Shakespearean Continuities* (1997),⁴² containing essays by friends and colleagues. Its twenty-six chapters include some by the most eminent Shakespeare scholars of his own generation, many of whom were Arden editors (Kenneth Muir, T.W. Craik, Inga-Stina Ewbank, G.K. Hunter, R.A. Foakes, Stanley Wells, Philip Edwards, Laurence Lerner, A.D. Nuttall, Park Honan, and Brian Vickers). Other essays by immediate colleagues showcase the impressively broad departmental range of interests and talents he had helped to foster at Newcastle, and they reflect his own eclectic knowledge of the whole field of literary history from medieval to modern. There is even a comic poem written by Ernst himself, 'A Book-Binder's Grumble', along with some grainy but touching photographs of him and his family ('from twenties to sixties'), and a bibliography of his own publications to that point of time. The book was launched in the Hatton Gallery at Newcastle University, an event attended by many of the contributors, some visiting from several countries. His friend, the literary biographer Park Honan, made the celebratory speech.

There were occasional hints that, even with his election as Fellow of the British Academy, Ernst seems to have felt he had not been fully welcomed into wholehearted 'togetherness' in the Shakespearean scholarly pantheon where he deserved to be, perhaps that he had not received full credit for the radical originality of his ideas and how they had opened up and shaped future scholarship with an exacting attention to detail. Two of his favoured theories – Shakespeare's 'early start' and 'the Lancashire connection' – had failed to achieve acceptance, while 'Shakespeare's revision and second thoughts' was only later accepted as an edifice for the foreseeable future and without full

⁴¹ Paul Honigmann, correspondence.

⁴² John Batchelor, Tom Cain & Claire Lamont (eds), *Shakespearean Continuities* (1997).

acknowledgment of his role. If some disappointment lingered, I wonder if it stemmed from a sense of vestigial ‘cultural cringe’ derived from an unusually deracinated childhood still vividly recalled in his final book: ‘My first year in England therefore became the most mind-shattering of my life’.⁴³ Encountering painful experiences and not speaking English until he was seven, not ‘fitting in’ at Oxford, and lukewarm, patronising, or openly critical reviews of some of his books on their first appearance, left scars. However, the thread he perceives is expressed in a tone only Ernst could manage, guilelessly mingling both a humble and a grand mission. After expressing ‘reservations’ about religion, he adds, ‘I myself became a kind of priest in my later years. That is, I preached the gospel of literature, I became a lecturer on literature, and I believed in what I was doing’.⁴⁴

Ernst was proud of his record as a lifetime attender of the World Shakespeare Congress from its inception. He died on the day before this illustrious gathering congregated in Prague in 2011, the first he had missed. Informed by early-morning email, it was my mournful duty to inform the organisers.

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⁴³ *Togetherness*, p. 140.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

