

## Today's News

### Eddie Shah and the Newspaper Revolution

David Goodhart and Patrick Wintour  
Coroner £2.50

'National newspapers are an industry ripe for the taking' bragged Eddie Shah when he began the long march of his 'newspaper revolution'. However, many doubted that this self-important union buster from Warrington really had the financial or political resources to take on the multimillionaire proprietors of Fleet Street. *Today* is now out and to that extent Shah has more modestly entered the national newspaper jungle. Surely nobody seriously expected existing newspaper proprietors to allow themselves to be turned over by the upstart who is generously deified in this new book?

We learn that Shah is a self-made businessman and the fourth cousin of the Aga Khan. He therefore belongs to one of the oldest and richest royal families whose lineage traces back to the prophet Mohammed. It is not surprising that this drifting son of a quasi divine family, who believes himself to be telepathic, has a powerful sense of destiny. While awaiting destiny's ultimate call he has awarded himself an annual salary of £100,000, lives in a £150,000 house, drives a BMW and a Range Rover, plays golf and flies a plane, mixes with the local elite and sends the kids to a private school. Mammon has clearly replaced Mohammed for the street-wise rich kid.

This affectionate, teetotal, daydreaming romantic will in the long run be treated benevolently by Fleet Street despite his

bravado in going national. The style and content of *Today* is unlikely substantially to threaten the market that it most wants to penetrate. *Today's* politics are expressed better in the *Daily Mail* as is the sycophantic coverage of the royal family. The promised news in colour has been very disappointing and second-rate.

More importantly Shah gave an object lesson in deviousness in the early 1980s when he liberally used Thatcher's laws over a two-and-a-half year period to de-unionise his Messenger Group Newspapers. This lesson was not lost on Rupert Murdoch and was well chronicled by Mark Dickinson in his book *To Break a Union*. Shah's pressure also quickened the pace of Fleet Street's introduction of more cost-cutting new technology, and for these things the press barons will be grateful. Their gratitude will extend no further than not wanting to personally pauperise him if yet another takeover is in the offing. In the course of prosecuting their circulation war, the ruthlessness of the Fleet Street proprietors against each other, as well as towards their own workers, is legend. They have spent twice as much on bingo promotion than Shah raised to start up; simultaneously journalistic standards have declined. Neither Shah or new technology will change this.

Shah's financial and ideological backers are a roll call of honour to Thatcherism: Norris MacWhirter of the ultra-right Freedom Association; their Lordships Taylor, Forte, McAlpine and Cayzer, all ennobled by Thatcher and generous donors to Tory funds; Andrew Neil, editor of *The Sunday Times* and Murdoch ideologue; the no problem EETPU delivered by the SDP peer Lord Harris completes the picture, not to mention the rogue Bank of Hungary which put up £7m to buy the presses. But the new proprietor is putty in nobody's hands. His own views shine forth. Shah's 13 point guide to his paper's coverage is fully laid out. It is an embarrassing mixture of good intentions and everyday Thatcherism, reflecting much of Britain's media.

When not flattering Shah, Goodhart and Wintour present some useful background and updates on recent developments. They point out the 'slow shuffle to the right', describing the politics of the most recent entrants to Fleet Street, and the complete failure of anti-monopoly law. Equally they highlight declining standards

of journalism and rightly question the cost-saving assumption on which new technology is based.

However their conclusions are commonplace. Trade unions and the Left are blamed for not prioritising new technology as a means of reforming Fleet Street. They repeat and essentially confirm the idea that Shah is the 'harbinger of the rebirth of a politically diverse press' even though all the evidence is the opposite. But they qualify their point by reference to small circulation (100,000) specialist papers aimed at the affluent, who would represent the advertising profile needed, or who could afford the high cover price. This would still leave power in the hands of the Maxwells and Murdochs as the old hot metal monopolies become new high tech monopolies.

They rubbish the efforts of some on the Left to build support for new laws and to win government intervention to establish printing facilities, a fairer distribution system, a launch fund through an advertising levy and limits on ownership. They also ignore campaigns like the right of reply,

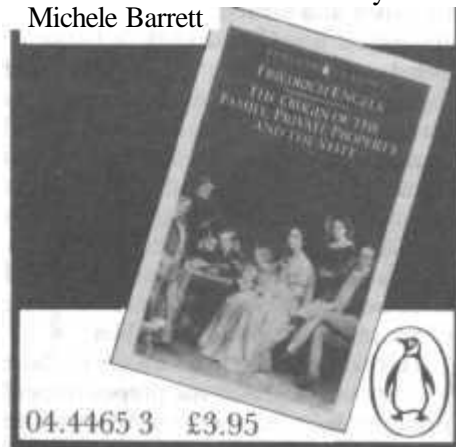
## THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE

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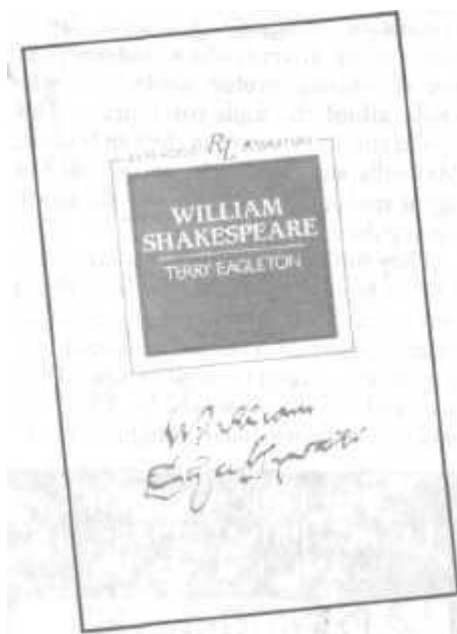


# REVIEWS:

which has been effective and is part of the strategy to build the alliance that will be needed in the run up to the next general election to achieve those wider objectives.

To win a genuinely politically plural press in Britain is a profoundly political question. New technology is no more politically neutral than was old technology when it is subject to the free market and its propensity to monopoly.

**Mike Power**



## Dense Texts

**William Shakespeare**  
Terry Eagleton

Basil Blackwell £12.00 hbk, £3.95 pbk

This slim volume seems to attempt the impossible: to re-read Shakespeare in the light of the insights given by marxism, feminism and structuralism in just over 100 pages. It's a dense book full of occasional and seductive perceptions and flights of semiological wit. Eagleton says in his introduction that 'it is difficult to read Shakespeare without feeling that he was certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida', and the starting point of the book is that these thinkers and writers, and more besides, are inherent in Shakespeare as we, modern readers, read him.

This will come as no surprise to those who are familiar with the propositions of structural linguistics, but for those who are not the book may appear opaque, im-

penetrable and, at times, will seem to indulge itself in high-flown academicism. For example, when Eagleton describes Macbeth (at the end of the play) as 'a floating signifier in ceaseless, doomed pursuit of an anchoring signified' one feels, at first, an impulsive sense of the absurdity of this writer's connotations and it is, at times, hard to digest the anachronisms and dissonances of this kind of hindsight. On the other hand, there is a compact energy in the ideas produced by this recklessness.

Eagleton examines the plays in terms of general themes and uses the plays freely to illustrate his own preoccupations. This allows him to make connections between ideas which come from different disciplines of thought. His observations about language at the beginning of the chapter entitled 'Law' (which deals with *The Merchant of Venice*, *Measure For Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida*) are useful and clear.

I found really interesting and original his description of the relationship between romantic love and language in his chapter on 'Desire' (*Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*). He pins this down with a quotation from Jonathan Culler's book *On Deconstruction*: "To say "I love you" is always at some level a quotation". Thus making the point that in our intimate personal relationships which seem to us so unique the language we use becomes more and more generalised.

He points out the similarity between Shakespeare's description of the anarchic forces released by Macbeth's murdering of Duncan and Marx's description in *The Communist Manifesto* of the revolutionary nature of the bourgeois epoch. The world which Marx describes where 'all fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinion, are swept away, all new formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned . . .' recalls the world in which Macbeth lives and dies.

The perception that Shakespeare is dealing in his plays with the struggle between the values of the aristocratic measured world of honour and feudalism and those of the emerging boundless bourgeois individualism is not new, but Eagleton gives it new light and refreshing implications.

The main drift of the book is that there is a contradiction in Shakespeare between the view of the world expressed in his writing and his political beliefs. Eagleton

seems to be saying that, in the act of writing, Shakespeare knows the world to be chaotic, unfixed and open to chance whereas the triumphant values in his plays are those of a settled, coherent natural order. Eagleton points out that Shakespeare, as a writer, is conscious that words are capricious and unfixed in their meaning and that a situation in which words no longer connect simply with what they mean, or what they refer to, can be compared to a breakdown in that natural order. He shows how Shakespeare associates this order with images of the body and thus he picks out body and language as his major themes.

He sees Shakespeare's last plays, especially *The Tempest*, as offering an illusory resolution of the conflict between body and language at the same time as resolving a contradiction between aristocratic and bourgeois values. He points out that this illusion was quickly dispelled by historical reality.

However, to say, as Eagleton does, that the 'bad news' we have to break to Shakespeare is that 'feudalism and capitalism did not, of course, prove amenable to judicious synthesis' seems to me only partly true. Surely it is the strength of this illusion, rooted as it is in the unfinished character of the English bourgeois revolution, which make Shakespeare's work so powerful and successful.

In his introduction Eagleton makes it clear that 'the present project' seems foolhardy, but there is relish in his task, and when you read this book you feel Eagleton's pleasure in reading Shakespeare's works. He deals with the plays in chapters which cut across the well-used categories and an excitement is created by unexpectedness of the directions which he takes.

The book, however, left me wondering whom it was written for. This is not a general introductory review of Shakespeare's work as the simple title would suggest. The imprint for the series of which it is a part is 'Rereading Literature'. The reader needs to know the works of Shakespeare and be familiar with what appears to be a technical language. It is a struggle to understand what Eagleton is saying because of this. I suspect that the language is a camouflage to disguise old ideas and that the book is only for those who are in the know.

**Jon Chadwick**