

General Introduction

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Studies of the conditions of the early modern Globe and Blackfriars theatres have considerably enriched our understanding of the production and meanings of dramatic scripts and improvisations performed there. Curiously, except for the masque, the circumstances of performance at the Elizabethan and early Stuart courts have received little critical attention. This, however, has started to change, especially since 1999, when John H. Astington's *English Court Theatre* (1999b) presented, for the first time, a comprehensive account of the physical and aesthetic conditions under which Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline actors and their audiences viewed the plays. Taking this seminal analysis into account, critics have increasingly seen the need to reassess the multiple texts left by most of the early modern playwrights whose plays have been preserved. Yet we still lack information about the practices of playing companies at court and about what may have been fruitful exchanges between court entertainments and popular performances. To close this gap, the present volume starts with the pioneering work of Richard Dutton's *Shakespeare, Court Dramatist* (2016b) and W. R. Streitberger's *The Masters of the Revels and Elizabeth I's Court Theatre* (2016), and then explores court performance as a multimedia phenomenon through closely intertwined chapters proposing challenging hypotheses, thoroughly documented discussions, and new case studies of Shakespeare and his contemporaries – with a prominent place also given to Jonson. All of these chapters address two crucial questions: how did early modern court shows shape dramatic writing, and what do they tell us of the aesthetics and politics of the Tudor and Stuart regimes?

Shakespeare himself was first and foremost a royal player – a status officially granted by James I, who almost immediately adopted the King's Men as his favoured troupe, probably following in this the decision made by the Master of the Revels (possibly together with the Lord Chamberlain). These players alone provided '177 of the 299 plays performed [at court] between 1603 and 1616' (Kernan 1997, xvii). Significantly, early modern

companies went back and forth between courtly venues and commercial theatres, the latter providing a remarkable number of plays likely to be adapted for royal occasions. On the one hand, some productions were first performed at the Globe to be polished and taken to Whitehall or Hampton Court. On the other, a number of plays – possibly *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Marcus 1996, 68), for example – first targeted an aristocratic audience and were subsequently reshaped for the popular stage.

While it is now well established that the playwright was closely acquainted with aristocratic forms of entertainment, Dutton further contends that Shakespeare not only wrote for performance, but that the court occupied a central place in the playwright's career and 'impacted significantly on the texts that have survived, especially the "good" quartos' (Dutton 2016b, 147). He bases these claims not on considerations of genre, but on date and play length. Playing time 'beyond what was normal for the public stages . . . is one of the best markers we have of plays quite probably adapted for court' (Dutton 2016b, 37). Such adaptations were accomplished under the supervision of the Master of the Revels. For example, as his 1587/8 accounts indicate, Edmund Tilney (1579–1610) was paid for 'attending, making choice, perusing, reforming & altering of such plays, comedies, masques and inventions as were prepared, set forth & presented before her majesty' (quoted in Dutton 2016b, 48).

Dutton's case for the influence of court performance in Shakespeare's career and, more generally, in the composition and presentation of early modern plays, is usefully complemented by Streitberger's corrective of E. K. Chambers's *The Elizabethan Stage* (1923). Among other issues that Streitberger brings to light are the revision of plays for court and the relationship between the commercial and court theatres. Royal patronage, in fact, ensured not only the best plays for the court revels but also a viable commercial theatre. The Master of the Revels worked with privileged companies to produce plays to be performed at court, and since playing companies 'used commercial theaters as rehearsal spaces . . . the standard at court became generalized' (Streitberger 2016, 222). Edmund Tilney assumed great power as 'dramatists' scripts and public theatre operations were subject to [his] approval; artisans and merchants were subject to his power of purveyance; and the chief acting company of the day had been chosen by him' (Streitberger 1986, xx). Royal patronage 'protected players from local authorities, engendered new scripts, allowed for sufficient practice, and developed the increasing sophistication of court entertainments' (Streitberger 1986, x). Court taste and support, as Streitberger

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demonstrates, significantly affected the plays performed both at court and in private and public theatres.

In light of these insights, to apply what we know about court performance in the era of Shakespeare to his own as well as his contemporaries' plays is to achieve a more comprehensive interpretation than we have had, so far, of the early modern dramatic productions. Thus, the sixteen chapters of this volume aim to shed fresh light on multiple aspects of Elizabethan and early Stuart court performances, considering all forms of drama, music, dance, and other entertainment.

English Court Theatre from 1558 to 1603

It is appropriate that Richard Dutton and W. R. Streitberger, who have done so much to call attention to the significance of court performance for Shakespearean plays, should open this book, highlighting both the political and the economic conditions that fashioned the changing nature of aristocratic shows during Elizabeth's reign. Foregrounding elements of early Elizabethan court performance within the aura of contemporary political issues, Dutton (Chapter 1) extrapolates from contemporary descriptions of the now lost play *Palamon and Arcite* the ambience of the early Elizabethan court production: its extensive planning, splendour, and political intimations. At its 1566 Oxford performance, the queen shared the stage with the performers and, in so doing, was as much on display as the actors. Her proximity ensured that any of the play's political signals, especially those regarding the delicate subject of marriage, were amplified. *Palamon and Arcite* was performed as Sir Thomas Benger was Master of the Revels (from 1559 to 1572). He was most likely appointed as Master because of his loyalty to Queen Elizabeth when she was detained at Hatfield and, as Master, had a hand in the production of Richard Edwards's entertainment (Dutton 2016b, 41). Benger's extravagant shows, as W. R. Streitberger asks us to imagine, were 'brilliantly lit, visually oriented productions using three dimensional scenery, elaborate properties, startling special effects, striking verisimilar performances, and a wide variety of subject matter' (2016, 89).

Benger thus had a decisive influence on the court performances staged over the first decades of Elizabeth's reign. Streitberger precisely traces the journey of the Revels Office from Cawarden's tenure to Benger's extravagances and to Tilney's effect on early Shakespearean performances. That the outsized cost of Benger's productions was unsustainable led the queen, on the advice of Burghley and others, to insist on economies. Over the course of more than thirty years, an accommodation between the

court and the professional companies eventually developed: the professional companies supplied the plays and performance accoutrements, and the Master of the Revels vetted those plays with court performance in mind. Additionally, the Revels Office permitted select professional companies to practice in the public theatres for court performances and to secure an income from their public performances. Thus, according to Streitberger, the Lord Admiral's Men and the Lord Chamberlain's Men were legitimized. The evolution of this arrangement between the court and professional companies, as brokered by the Office of the Revels, especially Edmund Tilney, flowered into a robust, interconnected court and public theatre culture. Without the patronage of the court, it is difficult to imagine the professional companies ever achieving the heights of Shakespearean drama; without the material assistance of the profession, playing companies, the court (and future generations) would not have enjoyed such high-quality, profound theatre.

These new findings about the dynamic influence of the court on the production of plays inform the next two chapters, each of which tests traditional assessments of, respectively, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Agreeing with Dutton (2016b) that the length of a play most likely indicates a court performance, Roy Eriksen (Chapter 3) offers a thought-provoking argument about the lengthier B-text of *Doctor Faustus*, which may well have been performed for Elizabeth I, especially if we examine those scenes available only in the B-text. As Dutton proposes that Edwards's *Palamon* addresses Elizabeth's political concerns, so Eriksen posits that the B-text of *Doctor Faustus* indirectly reflects issues of Tudor religious politics – namely, Catholicism and enlightened absolutism.

As Marlowe knew perfectly well, the use of magic thrilled early modern court audiences. Like *Doctor Faustus*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* relies on a magical background to seduce its spectators; yet contrary to Marlowe's play, Shakespeare's comedy is one whose commentators (Dutton included) have obsessively interpreted in connection with the possibility of an occasional court performance. Jenna Segal's reflections on the *Dream* (Chapter 4) take this idea further, arguing that the antic performance of the 'rude mechanicals' (3.2.9) at the Athenian onstage court could be viewed by the Elizabethan court as a defence of the public stage against the attacks of contemporary antitheatrical polemics. Remarkably, the onstage courtly audience reacts in a very limited way to the artisan's imaginative show, an attitude of which Tilney did not disapprove. This suggests that Shakespeare

and his contemporaries knew how far they could go, and that playing for an aristocratic audience must have been an exhilarating experience.

The Jacobean Court Shows

Regarding the response of the Jacobean court to theatrical performance, the traditional view is that James showed only a passing interest in the revels: while biographers claim that ‘the masques often bored him’ (Willson 1966, 191), he is also accused of creating the King’s Men so quickly after his ascension only because it was an ‘unimportant favor to a noble courtier who interceded on the company’s behalf’ (Barroll 1991, 41). There are, however, anecdotes that cast James’s interest in theatre in a more favourable light. At Cambridge, the king is reported to have viewed with enthusiasm George Ruggles’s four-hour play, *Ignoramus* (1615), interrupting it with cries of ‘Plaudite!’ and requesting another viewing (Kernan 1997, 188–92). He must have paid specific attention to the play’s not-so-subtle lampooning of his political arch enemy, Chief Justice Edward Coke. If his interests were selective, his support of the court entertainment culture never flagged. In 1611/12, according to Chambers, he ‘was present at plays on October 31, November 1, and November 5, on the four nights after Christmas, and on Shrove Sunday and Tuesday. On January 6 was the mask’ (1923, I: 215). Even if the king, as Rickard notes, may have been missing from some court performances and impatient with what he did not like (2015, 243, n. 63), he was, it seems, engaged when he found the play’s subject compelling.

If court performance sometimes received a mixed reception by James, his queen and children more than made up for it. Queen Anne and Prince Henry were both such avid fans of the theatre that, according to their contemporary Dudley Carlton, they ‘were more the players’ friends [than James], for on other nights they had them privately, and hath since taken them to their protection’ (Chambers 1961, I: 7). It is well known that Queen Anne enthusiastically promoted the masque and had an interest in drama of all kinds, ‘which even led her to the innovation of visiting a theatre’ (Chambers 1961, I: 7). The ‘new reality of multiple royal households’, Dutton remarks, increased ‘demand for theatre at court’ under King James (2016b, 167). During the first decade of his reign, the court performance schedule ‘reverted in some years, to the practice of opening the play season at the beginning of November’ (Chambers 1961, I: 215). Plays were performed even during Lent; that is, ‘in some years the performances continued at intervals until after Easter’ (Chambers 1961, I: 215).

All in all, James and his royal family viewed four times as many plays by Shakespeare's company than did Elizabeth.¹ During his first year as king, he saw eleven plays, gradually increasing the number to twenty-three in 1609/10 (Chambers 1961, I: 215). The figures thus speak for themselves. By the same token, the Declared Accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber 'ma[de] allowance between 1558 and 1642 for 969 plays. Of these ... 271 were presented to Elizabeth's court' (Cook and Wilson 1961, xxiv). In James's reign, no less than 421 were paid for (Cook and Wilson 1961).² Such opportunities at court were not only a determining force in the precipitate rise of the theatre culture in England but also, as Part II of this volume demonstrates, a significant factor in the shaping of Shakespeare's Jacobean plays – one, therefore, we should systematically take into account in our interpretations of these works.

The chapters in Part II all situate their discussions within the Jacobean court theatre milieu, building on the revisionist view that James was politically engaged when viewing plays and on Dutton's findings that Shakespeare's longer plays were probably revised for court performance. The first two chapters in this part examine the socio-political implications of staging plays written during Elizabeth's reign and performed at King James's court. Discussing *Henry V*, Murat Ögütcü (Chapter 5) furthers Dutton's theory that the play's choruses were added to its Folio version, a revision that suggests the play's quartos were revised for its 1605 court performance. Locating the play before the Jacobean court, Ögütcü compares the dramatized monarch and the real one, while reminding us that no other history play was performed at the court of James I, probably because it traces the ascendancy of a king rather than his decline. A Jacobean *Henry V*, then, can be seen as a problematic performance of idealized masculinity meant to highlight the crucial issues of the time: dissimulation, treason, royal favouritism, war and peace, and a united Britain.

If, with the exception of *Henry V*, Shakespeare's history plays did not appeal to the court, tragedies and comedies were often performed there. In times of plague, the pressure of circumstances must have prompted the playwright to adapt and meet the demands of the nobility.³ Yet Shakespeare may not have

¹ Dutton notes that 'there were 155 instances when we know that Shakespeare's company played at court, but for which we do not have titles of the play; 33 of those in Elizabeth's reign and 122 in James's' (2016b, 276).

² Under the reign of Charles I, '277 [were] paid for' (Cook and Wilson 1961, xxiv).

³ The absence of opportunities for public performances between 1607 and 1610, for example, meant that court performances were the norm in times of plague. In 1609, the King's Men were paid an extra £40 for their involvement in the previous Christmas holidays, as they had played before James I 'in the time of infection' (Dutton 2018, 291).

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been driven to court venues out of sheer necessity. On the contrary, he may have been genuinely interested in specific royal occasions. Maintaining, for example, that he addressed King James's concerns more directly than he ever did Elizabeth I's, Jason Lawrence offers the readers a nuanced reading of Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*. Indeed, Chapter 6 questions the current critical orthodoxy regarding the primacy of public performance to court performances as the standard working practice of Shakespeare and the King's Men at the Jacobean court. Lawrence offers a new scenario for Shakespeare's post-1603 working practice, arguing that premier performances then occurred at court with prior limited public stagings intended as final rehearsals. He tests this hypothesis with *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*, and the results are efficacious. While an *Othello* intended for the court and possibly performed on 1 November 1604 gains in epic grandeur by foregrounding James's and Shakespeare's mutual interest in the Turkish threat, a *Measure for Measure* performed for the opening night of the king's Christmas revels on 26 December 1604 highlights a similarly shared concern about the relationship between justice and mercy.

In the case of *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*, through documentary evidence hypotheses become forceful arguments. All of which raises an important question: what can be considered evidence in early modern studies? That is the crucial issue addressed by David M. Bergeron in 'Pericles: A Performance, a Letter (1619)' (Chapter 7). The question of accuracy in a field so dependent on so few documents upon which so many interpretations of Shakespearean plays rest is an important reminder of the value of hard-nosed scholarship and the judicious handling of evidence. A letter written by Gerrard Herbert (24 May 1619), which provides valuable details of a performance of the Shakespearean *Pericles* at court (20 May 1619), is Bergeron's target. Examining the original letter, he concludes with the idea that Ludovic Stuart, Duke of Lennox, did not sponsor the 1619 court performance of *Pericles*, a claim which, until now, was falsely predicated on a nineteenth-century transcription of the letter.

Private reports, when carefully handled, can thus tell us much about court entertainment, and, like Bergeron, Catherine Clifford (Chapter 8) turns to another famous seventeenth-century letter, namely that of Sir Henry Wotton to Sir Edmund Bacon, to give us an insight into royal Jacobean shows. Wotton's letter provides a vivid narrative of the fire in relation to the production of *All is True*, titled *Henry VIII* in the 1623 Folio. This letter, taken together with other contextual elements, allows Clifford to reconstruct the Jacobean court spectator's experience when viewing the business of monarchs at a time of Tudor nostalgia. Although no extant

documentary evidence points to a knowable court performance of *All is True*, it stands to reason that, in the years immediately following its likely date of composition, the Whitehall Palace commonplaces upon which the play relies might have been more meaningful to a court audience than to that of the public theatre, thus positioning it as a piece we can suppose for a royal performance. The masque scene in particular must have created associations for the court audience who viewed a play in the very place its action is set.

A Focus on the Stuart Masque

Prompted by more favourable circumstances, as Clifford's assessment of *All is True* attests, the resurgence of the masque under James I created 'much [aesthetic] give and take between plays and masques' (Chambers 1961, I, 232). These fruitful interactions are convincingly foregrounded in *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (2009), where Tiffany Stern explains how whole sections of court masques were repurposed in plays slated for court performance. One thinks, for example, of the country dance in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Two Noble Kinsmen*, which was taken from the second anti-masque in Francis Beaumont's *Masque of the Inner Temple and Grey's Inn*, or the dance from Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, which was resettled in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* via Middleton's *The Witch* (Stern 2009, 150–1). This was assuredly a widespread practice, cheap and efficient at the same time. Indeed, the masque elements which were recycled in plays for performances at court 'would readily add length, variety, and spectacle – without adding to the labours [. . . and] at least in some cases, without additional cost' (Dutton 2016b, 282).

If rearrangements of this kind were made to plays to suit court taste (Dutton 2016b, 282–3), the contrary was also true in that masques increasingly reflected the theatrical tradition which had been firmly established in London by the players' companies. As noted by Chambers, the debt of the masque to the play 'may be traced in the increased skill in which the later masques are arranged around a "device" or dramatic idea' (Chambers 1961, I: 190). The combined mimetic skill of the plays and the masques' spectacular effects probably culminated in the 'splendor of the court festivities' that 'reached a climax with the wedding of the Princess Elizabeth in 1613' (Chambers 1961, I: 7). Performed during these celebrations, Thomas Campion's *The Lords' Masque* took 'all the devices of juxtaposition, superimposition, partial and complete transformation, by which a variety of scenic interest is reconciled with a concentrated setting' (Chambers 1961, I: 183).

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Dance was one of these elements that blurred the thin line between masques and drama. Strongly promoted by Queen Anne, it was a quintessential dimension of court performances. Offering courtiers coveted opportunities for conspicuous self-display before the monarch, it was as much an instrument of diplomacy as a means of self-advancement. Opening Part III, Anne Daye (Chapter 11) incisively discusses the cultural politics entailed in dancing practices, and shows how courtiers, trained since childhood, were proficient dancers able to display their personal command and personal style. By contrast, when used in a play, ‘silent dancing highlighted pivotal moments in the action and added to the suspense’ (Ravelhofer 2007, 32). Performed at some point in 1612/13 during either the betrothal or nuptial celebrations, *The Tempest* significantly contains readily recognizable masque elements, including the aborted dance of the reapers and the nymphs (4.1). This ‘masque *en miniature*’ (Ravelhofer 2007, 32) powerfully testifies, of course, to the playwright’s interest in the masque tradition and to his innovative ways of dealing with illusion through theatrical artifices.

Much has been written, in regard to the masque, about Ben Jonson’s influence upon Shakespeare. Questioning the traditional view that prototypes of Prospero’s masque can be found in Jonson’s *Hymenaei* and *The Haddington Masque*, Martin Butler makes the case, in Chapter 10, that Shakespeare’s dramatic practice actually departs from Jonsonian court productions: in Prospero’s masque there is no scenery, no moment of transformation, no critical kingly figure ‘towards whom the action is directed’. Instead, Butler finds in the country house masques and the early Jacobean court festivities suggestive analogues of Prospero’s interrupted masque and ‘Our revels now are ended’ speech.

That the masque targeted highly educated audiences by reflecting their visual ideologies appears rather odd today, at a time when, more often than not, the entertainment industry bombards audiences with visual extravaganzas of no particular ideology. That is perhaps one of the reasons why critics, even if they have long acknowledged the masque’s spectacular features, continue to highlight what was written to the detriment of what was then seen. In Chapter 11, Leeds Barroll points to this major omission as he turns to Ben Jonson and takes the multi-dimensional aspects of his flamboyant spectacles into account. Critical impressions that rely on the Jonsonian literary emphasis have distorted, sometimes even obscured, Jonson’s own achievement. Masques should indeed be judged, Barroll contends, from the circumstances of their occasions, and especially from the perspective of the nobles who appeared in them. As a result, the dance,

and not just the commentary, should be acknowledged as a most meaningful aspect of the Jacobean masque, one that provided the nobles with coveted opportunity for self-exhibition and royal recognition.

Like Barroll, Agnieszka Żukowska (Chapter 12) shifts our focus from the verbal aspects of court entertainment to the visual. Examining the Stuart predilection for the marvellous and the bizarre, she particularly shows how early modern masquers bridged the gap between the metaphysical world presented on stage and that of the royal audience, and explains that the automaton mania which existed at the court – even though, outside court circles, automata were clearly ‘subject to early modern English iconophobia’ (Drábek 2014, 179) – was conducive to the display of the monarch’s supernatural reach. When the magician-king infused life and motion into supposedly inanimate performers he was thought to create a quasi-divine race of nobles on stage – something all the more miraculous as the sovereign himself never went on stage. With its mechanized ballet of trees, Thomas Campion’s *The Lord Hay’s Masque* was something of a *tour de force* which perfectly illustrates the metaphysical dimension of the Stuart masque when turned into a kind of *Kunstkammer*, housing quasi-divine masquers testifying to the sovereign’s mystical powers.

The Material Culture of Performances at Court

While the association of court revels and commercial theatres generated a creative synergy, the monarchy’s patronage and the special conditions of the court performance space affected the style and substance of plays during Shakespeare’s era. For performances at court, royal chambers were made available well before the use of commercial theatres. Astington reveals, for instance, that ‘early Tudor palace chambers’ were ‘adopted for use as theaters for over a hundred years’ within the largest spaces available, i.e. ‘the great halls of Whitehall, Greenwich, Richmond, and Hampton Court, and the Whitehall Banqueting Houses’ (1999b, 96–7). As R. Malcolm Smuts makes clear, it was Charles who became ‘the first monarch to build a theater attached to Whitehall itself, to facilitate the twenty or thirty performances he commanded each year’ (1987, 191).

Yet already under James’s reign, procuring entertainment space seems to have been a priority. In 1606, he ordered Elizabeth’s 1581 Banqueting House to be replaced, and it was finished the following year (Nicols 1828, II: 155). In 1619, after a fire destroyed it, he commissioned a more permanent space designed by Inigo Jones. It was again the king who originally approached Rubens to commission paintings for the Whitehall ceiling, of