

## PERFORMANCES AT COURT IN THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

Even though Shakespeare openly dramatizes aristocratic shows in his own plays, the circumstances of early modern performance at court have received relatively little critical attention. With so much written on the playwright's wide and multi-layered audiences, the entertainment of the court itself has too long been dismissed as a secondary issue. This book aims to shed fresh light on the multiple aspects of Shakespearean performances at the Elizabethan and early Stuart courts, considering all forms of drama, music, dance, and other entertainment. Taking the specific scenic environment and material conditions of early modern performance into account, the chapters examine both real and dramatized court shows in order to break ground for new avenues of thought. The volume considers how early modern court shows shaped dramatic writing, and what they tell us of the aesthetics and politics of the Tudor and Stuart regimes.

SOPHIE CHIARI is Professor of Early Modern Studies at Clermont Auvergne University, France. She is the author of several monographs on Elizabethan drama, including *Shakespeare's Representation of Weather, Climate, and Environment: The Early Modern 'Fated Sky'* (2019).

JOHN MUCCILO, PhD, is an independent scholar and founding editor, with W. R. Elton, of *The Shakespearean International Yearbook*. He is particularly interested in Shakespeare's late plays and early modern political, intellectual, and theatrical backgrounds.

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SHAKESPEARE

EDITED BY

SOPHIE CHIARI

*Clermont Auvergne University, France*

and

JOHN MUCCILO

*Independent Scholar and Founding Editor of The Shakespearean International Yearbook*



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*'April is the cruellest month' (T. S. Eliot)*  
*This volume is dedicated to the memory of Francesca*  
*Mucciolo and Roy Eriksen*

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## Notes on Contributors

JOHN H. ASTINGTON is Professor Emeritus of English and Drama at the University of Toronto. He specializes in the history of theatre in Europe, principally England, 1400–1700. His work on the English court includes *English Court Theatre, 1558–1642* (1999), and the chapter ‘Court Theatre’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre* (2009).

LEEDS BARROLL is at present one of several scholars-in-residence at the Folger Shakespeare Library. He is the author of *Anna of Denmark: Queen of England: A Cultural Biography* (2000), *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare’s Theater* (1991), *Shakespearean Tragedy: Genre, Tradition, and Change in Antony and Cleopatra* (1984), and *Artificial Persons: The Formation of Character in Shakespeare’s Tragedies* (1974). He is the editor and founder of the journal *Shakespeare Studies*, the editor and founder of the journal *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England (MaRDIE)*, and the founder and a former president of The Shakespeare Association of America.

DAVID M. BERGERON is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Kansas. He is the author of many books, including *English Civic Pageantry 1558–1642* (1971; revised 2003), *Shakespeare’s Romances and the Royal Family* (1984), *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire* (1999), *Practicing Renaissance Scholarship* (2000), *Textual Patronage and English Drama, 1570–1640* (2006), and *Shakespeare’s London 1613* (2017). He has edited the civic pageants of Anthony Munday, Thomas Heywood, and Thomas Middleton, and Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*. He served for many years on the editorial board of *Shakespeare Quarterly* and as editor of *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*.

MARTIN BUTLER is Professor of English Renaissance Literature at the University of Leeds, and a Fellow of the British Academy. His books include *Theatre and Crisis 1632–1642* (1984) and *The Stuart Court*



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*Masque and Political Culture* (2008), and editions of *Cymbeline* (2004) and *The Tempest* (2007). With Ian Donaldson and David Bevington, he is General Editor of *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* (7 vols, 2012). He is currently completing a monograph, *Ben Jonson, Man of Letters*, and (with Matthew Steggle) is General Editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Edition of the Works of John Marston*.

SOPHIE CHIARI is Professor of Early Modern Studies at Clermont Auvergne University, France. Her three most recent monographs are entitled *Love's Labour's Lost: Shakespeare's Anatomy of Wit* (2014), *As You Like It: Shakespeare's Comedy of Liberty* (2016), and *Shakespeare's Representation of Weather, Climate, and Environment: The Early Modern 'Fated Sky'* (2019). In addition, she has edited several collections of essays, including *The Circulation of Ideas in Early Modern English Literature* (2015), *Spectacular Science, Technology and Superstition in the Age of Shakespeare* (with Mickaël Popelard; 2017), and *Freedom and Censorship in Early Modern English Literature* (2019).

CATHERINE CLIFFORD is Assistant Professor of English at Graceland University in Lamoni, Iowa. Educated at the Shakespeare Institute, her current research focuses on dramatic performances in palatial spaces during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and on representations of monarchy in and through early modern drama. Her forthcoming book chapters include an analysis of early modern English queens and dramatic agency for *A Palgrave History of Women on Stage* and an essay about John Fletcher and the court for *The Oxford Handbook of John Fletcher*.

ANNE DAYE has lectured in sixteenth- to twenty-first-century dance history since 1991 at the HE level, most recently at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. She is also a freelance researcher and teacher in Renaissance dance, working on the reconstruction of dances from the original sources. Her 2008 doctoral thesis, 'The Jacobean Antimasque within the Masque Context: A Dance Perspective' (School of Arts, Roehampton University, University of Surrey), presented new thinking on royal policy and performance practice of the masque. Her post-doctoral research pursues further investigation of dancing at the Elizabethan and Stuart courts, close analysis of the nature of dance in Stuart masques, and the expansion of dance in the public theatres up to the Civil War. Her recent essays include 'The Role of *Le Balet Comique* in Forging the Stuart Masque: Part 2 Continuation'

in *Dance Research* (2015), ‘English Measures Old and New: Dulwich College MS. XCIV/f.28’ in *Historical Dance* (2017), and ‘“The revellers are entering”: Shakespeare and Masquing Practice in Tudor and Stuart England’ in *The Oxford Handbook to Shakespeare and Dance* (2019).

RICHARD DUTTON is Humanities Distinguished Professor of English (Emeritus) at The Ohio State University and Professor of English at Queen’s University, Belfast. Earlier in his career, he taught for twenty-nine years at Lancaster University. He has published widely on early modern drama, especially on Ben Jonson and on issues relating to censorship. His publications include *Mastering the Revels: the Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama* (1991), *Licensing, Censorship and Authorship in Early Modern England: Buggeswords* (2000), *Shakespeare, Court Dramatist* (2016), and *Shakespeare’s Theater: A History* (2018). He has edited a number of plays, including Jonson’s *Epicene* (2003), *Volpone* in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* (2012), and (with Steven Galbraith) Thomas Drue’s *The Duchess of Suffolk* (2016).

ROY ERIKSEN was Professor Emeritus of English Renaissance Literature and Culture at the University of Agder, Norway. He published in early modern English and Italian studies, and was the author of *The Forme of Faustus Fortunes* (1987), *The Building in the Text* (2001), and *Edificio testuale* (2014). He was Series director of EMMS (Fabrizio Serra Editore). He edited a number of volumes, including *Pre-Novel Narrative* (1994), *Contexts of Baroque* (1997), *Contexts of Renaissance Comedy* (with Janet Clare; 1997), *Form and the Arts* (2003), *Ashes to Ashes* (2006), *Imitation, Representation and Printing* (2009), and *Approaches to the Past* (2014).

JASON LAWRENCE is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Hull. His primary area of research interest is the literary and cultural relationships between Italy and England in the early modern period (and beyond). His first monograph was entitled *Who the Devil taught thee so much Italian?: Italian Language Learning and Literary Imitation in Early Modern England* (2006). His most recent monograph, *Tasso’s Art and Afterlives in England: The ‘Gerusalemme liberata’ in England* (2017), focuses on the reception in England of the life and works of the great sixteenth-century Italian poet Torquato Tasso, spanning literature, opera, and the visual arts from the late sixteenth to the late nineteenth centuries.

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WILLIAM B. LONG is an independent scholar who has been studying late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English manuscript playbooks for more than half a century and has published a number of influential essays on them, including ‘Perspectives on Provenance: The Context of Varying Speech-Heads’ in *Shakespeare’s Speech-Headings: Speaking the Speech in Shakespeare’s Plays* (1997), “‘Precious Few’: English Manuscript Playbooks’ in *A Companion to Shakespeare* (1999), and ‘The Occasion of The Book of Sir Thomas More’ in *Shakespeare and Sir Thomas More: Essays on the Play and its Shakespearean Interest* (1989).

JOHN MUCCILO is an independent scholar and founding editor, with W. R. Elton, of *The Shakespearean International Yearbook*. He is particularly interested in Shakespeare’s late plays and early modern political, intellectual, and theatrical backgrounds. He is the author of several essays, including ‘A Dramatic Function of Caliban’s “Be not afraid” speech’ in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* in *Shakespeare Closely Read* (2011) and ‘Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and the betrothal of Princess Elizabeth ... at Whitehall Palace, 1612–13’ in *Shakespeare’s The Tempest – 1611 to the Present* (2013). He has edited, with John Mahon, *The Tempest*.

MURAT ÖĞÜTCÜ is Assistant Professor at Munzur University, Turkey. He has written book chapters and articles on his research interests, which include early modern studies, Shakespeare, and cultural studies. His recent essays include ‘*Julius Caesar*: Tyrannicide Made Unpopular’, ‘Public Execution and Justice On/Off the Elizabethan Stage’, ‘Shakespeare in Animation’, ‘Early Modern English Historiography: Providentialism versus New History’, ‘Comedy and Fun: Is Shakespeare Funny?’, ‘A Tale of Two Nations: Chaucer, Henryson, Shakespeare, Troilus and Criseyde’, and ‘The “Gothic” in *Hamlet*’.

REBECCA OLSON, Associate Professor of English at Oregon State University, is the author of *Arras Hanging: The Textile That Determined Early Modern Literature and Drama* (2014), as well as a number of articles on Shakespeare and/or early modern textiles in journals including *Textile History*, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, *Word & Image*, and *Modern Philology*.

CHANTAL SCHÜTZ is Associate Professor of English at École Polytechnique, Paris. She holds a PhD on Thomas Middleton’s *A Mad World, my Masters* and published a bilingual edition of the play in 2013. Her recent work includes papers on music in *Love’s Labour’s*

*Lost*; Middleton's *Black Book*, *A Mad World, my Masters*, and *Microcynicon*; Shakespeare and opera; and the Globe theatre.

JANNA SEGAL is an Assistant Professor of Theatre Arts at the University of Louisville. She received her PhD in Drama and Theatre from the UC Irvine/UC San Diego joint doctoral programme. She has published single- and co-authored works on *Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It*, *Othello*, *The Roaring Girl*, and Fo and Rame's *Elisabetta*. Dr. Segal is also a freelance production dramaturg who has given pre-show guest lectures on *Midsummer* and *The Rover* at the American Shakespeare Center's Blackfriars Theatre. She was the invited dramaturg for Loyola University Chicago's 2017 McElroy Shakespeare Celebration, and she is Resident Dramaturg for the Comparative Drama Conference's Staged Reading Series.

W. R. STREITBERGER is Professor of English and a faculty member in the Interdisciplinary Textual Studies Programme at the University of Washington. His publications include *Jacobean and Caroline Revels Accounts, 1603–1642*, Malone Society Collections XIII (1986), *Court Revels, 1485–1559* (1994), and *The Masters of the Revels and Elizabeth I's Court Theatre* (2016): 2017 David Bevington prize winner for best book in early drama studies.

AGNIESZKA ŻUKOWSKA is Assistant Professor at the Institute of English and American Studies at Gdańsk University, Poland. She specializes in early modern festival and cultural theory, particularly in the intersections of theatre and the visual arts. She has co-edited, with Jerzy Limon, three volumes on theatre and art: *Theatrical Blends: Art in the Theatre / Theatre in the Arts* (2010), *Amalgamaty sztuki / Intermedialne uwikłania teatru* (2011), and *An Atomizing Theatre* (2014). Her recent publications deal with various theoretical aspects of the Stuart court masque, with a particular emphasis on its handling of time, occasional architecture and firework displays at the wedding of Elizabeth Stuart and Frederick V (1613), and the artistic vision of Persia in *The Travels of the Three English Brothers*.

## *Acknowledgements*

We were both involved in the tenth World Shakespeare Congress which took place in Stratford-upon-Avon and London in the summer of 2016. John had the idea of proposing a seminar entirely devoted to performances at court in Shakespeare's time.

We received thought-provoking proposals and, during our seminar, an attentive and generous audience asked questions and encouraged us to discuss several issues and concepts that came to shape this book. After the Congress, we immediately felt that it would be both stimulating and rewarding to continue our work on this topic. That is how the idea for this book came about.

We would like to thank all the contributors for their invaluable input, as well as for their patience and responsiveness during the various phases of this project.

The teaching and mentorship of W. R. Elton have been formative influences on John's career, while Sophie owes special thanks to her research team, IHRIM ('Institut d'Histoire des Représentations et des Idées dans les Modernités'), which has always been fully supportive and has allowed her to pursue her research in excellent conditions.

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## *Textual Note*

Unless otherwise stated, all references to plays authored or co-authored by Shakespeare are to *The New Oxford Shakespeare. The Complete Works*, ed. Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus and Gabriel Egan, 2016.

References to *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson, 7 vols, 2012, will be abbreviated as *CWBJ*.

## *General Introduction*

*Sophie Chiari and John Mucciolo*

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