

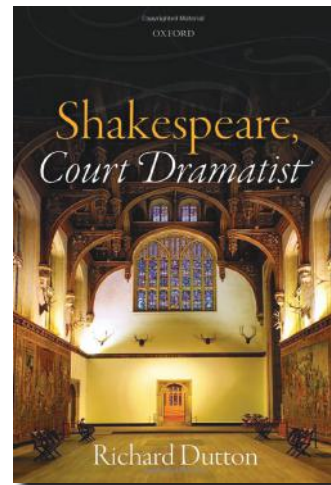
Shakespeare, Court Dramatist

Reviewed by Ramon Jiménez

Shakespeare, Court Dramatist. By Richard Dutton. Oxford University Press, 2018, 336 pages (Hardcover \$30.05, Paperback, reprint \$27.95).

In *Shakespeare, Court Dramatist*, Richard Dutton has assembled the evidence and advanced the argument that Shakespeare wrote for Elizabeth I and her court, a fact that most Oxfordians have been aware of for some decades. Briefly, "...court performance stood at the center of Shakespeare's professional life." But, Dutton asserts, before he wrote for the courts of Elizabeth and James I, Shakespeare wrote for the public stage. The twenty or so shorter Quarto versions of his plays, and the unknown others that have not survived, were intended for performance in London's playhouses, and the longer Folio texts were "most likely" his revised versions for presentation at the court.

Dutton also expands on the prevailing view that Shakespeare was a working dramatist, claiming that he "wrote to order and within the busy, demanding schedule of professional theater." As their "ordinary poet," he "almost certainly" had a contract with the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594 that required him to produce perhaps two plays a year, and to revise his plays, and those of others, for court performance. There is no record of Shakespeare being paid for writing or revising a play, although such records exist for several other playwrights. But on the title pages of fifteen quartos of six of his plays, some



sort of revision or correction is indicated, half of which names Shakespeare as the reviser.

In line with his theory, Dutton questions various explanations for the fact that many of Shakespeare's plays exist in two or more significantly different states, some of which were only half as long as the First Folio versions. For no other playwright of the period are there multiple versions of so many plays. Beginning with the earliest serious Shakespeare criticism, scholars have argued over the reasons for, and circumstances surrounding, these alternate texts. Did they predate or postdate the Folio versions? Are they memorial reconstructions by actors, or stenographic transcriptions of performances? Or are they deliberate condensations of the longer versions and, if so, by whom were they produced? Dutton's answer is that these shorter and simpler texts preceded the Folio versions, and that they were actors' reconstructions of Shakespeare's first versions, intended for the public theaters.

In the first half of this lengthy book, Dutton describes the evolution of the performance of dramatic entertainments for the court during the reigns of Elizabeth and James. This involves a detailed account of the functions of the Revels Office, the institution responsible for all types of diversions at the court, and of the various Masters of the Revels—Sir Thomas Cawarden, who was appointed to the Office by Henry VIII in 1544; Edmund Tilney, who served from 1578 to 1610; and Sir George Buc, who occupied the position from 1610 until his death in 1622. Dutton supplies the evidence that until the late 1570s, the Revels Office arranged, supervised and financed dramatic entertainments for the court (primarily masques) that were largely staffed and performed by courtiers and their attendants. "No professionals were employed." The costs of these productions, which were elaborately and expensively staged, were borne entirely by the Revels Office and thus by the Exchequer. By the time that Edmund Tilney became Master of the Office in 1578, the outlay for these productions had become so high that he was charged with reforming the process and substantially reducing its expenses.

Over the next three decades, as various playing companies mounted hundreds of plays in the proliferating public theaters, Tilney transformed the Revels Office into a screening body to which companies brought their plays for audition, censoring, revision and rehearsal for performance at court. The costs of the scenery, the props and the wardrobe were contracted out, so to speak, to the playing companies themselves, who were then paid a standard

Ramon Jiménez *is an independent historian focusing on Ancient Rome and Renaissance England. He is the author of Shakespeare's Apprenticeship (McFarland, 2018) as well as two books on the Roman republic (Caesar Against the Celts and Caesar Against Rome), and has published more than twenty book reviews and articles on Shakespeare and his works.*

fee for their performances. In 1581, Tilney was given a special commission to oversee all players, playing companies and “playing places” in London, its liberties, and elsewhere in the country as a means of “reinforcing his ability to provide entertainments of suitable quality and cost at court.” It was in this context, according to Dutton, that Shakespeare was required to expand and refine his Quarto versions to produce the Folio texts that were then staged at court. These longer versions, with their more complex plots, lengthier speeches and sophisticated language, were specifically intended for the court, where candles allowed an evening performance and a longer playing time. Dutton thinks it likely that virtually every play that Shakespeare wrote was performed at court, some several times.

In the second half of the book, Dutton examines in detail six sets of plays to support his claim. His examples are the short Quarto versions of *2 and 3 Henry VI*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry V*. In his view, these texts were intended for the public stage, and preceded the revised Folio texts. In his scenario, Shakespeare first composed versions of these plays that were performed on the public stage; those versions were reconstructed by actors and then printed. “Each is, in its own way, a poorly reported version of that early play; it does not derive closely from an authorial manuscript, but in my view was probably transmitted (at least in part) by actors who performed in it, though in the case of *Hamlet* shorthand may have played its part.” The “good” versions, the Folio texts, “all derive directly from authorial manuscripts or written versions based closely upon them.” He cites various scholars, early and late, who agree with him, but in this regard, he is in conflict with the majority of modern editors and critics who maintain that the Quarto versions of these plays were in most cases derived either legitimately or clandestinely from the longer Folio versions, and were subsequently performed in public theaters.

The disagreement between Samuel Johnson and Edmond Malone in the eighteenth century about the relationships between *2 and 3 Henry VI* and the five Quartos associated with them (four of them anonymous) has persisted into modern times, although, as Dutton admits, the majority of present-day critics consider the Quartos of *The First Part of the Contention* and *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York* to be derived in some way from the Folio texts. Dutton disagrees, and maintains the precedence of the Quartos. He describes passages in the Quartos that are “in no sense a misremembered or misreported account of what appears in the folio.” He cites previous research that detects a correlation between historical events and details in the Quartos and those in Edward Hall’s *Chronicle* (1548, 1550), and a similar correlation between events and details in the Folio texts and those in Raphael Holinshed’s later *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1577, 1587). He does not dispute that all four plays are Shakespeare’s compositions.

Quarto 1 of *Romeo and Juliet* is only three-quarters the length of the other three Quartos and the Folio text; Dutton describes it as “an earlier, hastier, less reflective version of the play.” But it is almost unanimously regarded by modern day scholars and editors as a bad, or memorially reconstructed, version derived in some way from Quarto 2. But again Dutton disagrees, claiming that Quarto 1 was Shakespeare’s first version, and that Quarto 2 is a “psychologically more acute” revision for a court performance. His principal reasons are the more nuanced, complex and convincing roles of Juliet and Friar Laurence in Quarto 2, which have been “entirely rewritten,” and the “rethinking” of the role of the clown, Will Kempe. In this case, his claim is supported by the fact that on the title pages of Quartos 2 (1599), 3 (1609) and 4 (n. d.) of *Romeo and Juliet*, the phrase “Newly corrected, augmented, and amended” appears, but no name is given. On the title pages of some copies of Quarto 4, “Written by W. Shake-speare” precedes the “Newly corrected” phrase. (The Folio text is based on Quarto 3.) On the other hand, there is no record of a court performance of the play.

Dutton is on firmer ground, although still in disagreement with most scholars, when he declares that Quarto 1 of *Hamlet* was Shakespeare’s first version and Quarto 2 a revision of it. He suggests that this revision was made with “the expectation of presenting the vastly expanded play at the court of Fortinbras himself, James I.” One of his arguments for this late date (1603/4) is his interpretation of the revised “explanation of why the players are travelling” in II.ii of Quarto 2. Gone are the references to “the humour of children” and “little eyases” in Quarto 1, and in place of them is the remark by Rosencraus (*sic*) that “I think their inhibition comes by the means of the late innovation.” (The “little eyases” phrase reappears in the Folio text.) Dutton interprets “inhibition” as meaning “a ban on playing,” referring to the temporary closing of the theaters by the Privy Council in March 1603, and “innovation” as referring to the “new regime” of James that began the next month. There is no question that the texts of Quarto 2 and the Folio are too long to be played in a public theater, but Dutton would have found his task much easier if he had consulted Margrethe Jolly’s *The First Two Quartos of Hamlet* (2015), which clearly demonstrates that Quarto 1 was Shakespeare’s first version.

The 1620-line Quarto 1 of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602) has for many decades been widely regarded as one of the worst Quartos to be derived from a First Folio text (2729 lines). Quoting W. W. Greg, E. K. Chambers called it a “mere perversion” of the Folio text, and referred to the obvious presence of a “reporter,” who revealed himself in every scene, bringing “gross corruption, constant mutilation, meaningless inversion and clumsy transposition.” For the majority of scholars, this opinion has not changed, although in the 1990s a movement arose that questioned the concept of bad quartos, especially those created by memorial reconstruction. But no one

seems to have a satisfactory explanation for the claim on the Quarto title page that it had been performed “before her Majesty and elsewhere.” As Dutton reports, virtually all editors have assumed that this performance “was something much closer to F than to Q1.” His own explanation is that it was “a very poor rendition of something else, now lost.” He goes on to claim that Shakespeare, “working under Tilney’s direction,” transformed that “lost” version into what we find in the First Folio, for a performance at James’s court in 1604. Neither of these explanations is convincing and it is not likely that either can ever be proved. Unfortunately, a “lost” play or a version of it is a regular recourse for theories that can’t otherwise be explained.

In the case of the four editions of *Henry V*, Dutton argues that Shakespeare first wrote the shorter version that we find in Q1, printed in 1600, and based it squarely on the anonymous *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, which was printed in 1598. The two texts are similar in that each supplies a simple and short narrative of Henry V’s invasion of France, his victory at Agincourt, and his engagement to Katherine, daughter of the defeated French King. They are almost the same length, that is, about half the length of the Folio text, *Famous Victories* being only eighty or so lines shorter than Q1. Quartos 2 and 3, printed in 1602 and 1608, are based on Q1 with only minor changes. He dates the much longer Folio text to 1602.

On the other hand, as Dutton admits, eight prominent modern editors, from J. H. Walter in 1954 to Andrew Gurr in 2000, assert that the Folio text of *Henry V* was Shakespeare’s original and that the Quarto version was derived from it. The shortened and simplified text, requiring no more than two hours on stage, was more suitable for the public theater and for touring purposes. They confidently date the Folio premier between 1599 and 1602, and locate it at the Globe or the Curtain, neither of which could have been a court venue.

To bring in a third explanation, my own research collected in *Shakespeare’s Apprenticeship* (2018) demonstrates that the sequence of the *Henry V* editions was different from that of the other five pairs in Dutton’s study. I contend that the Folio text, which the author completed in 1583/84, was his revision of the latter half of his own *Famous Victories*, which he had composed many years earlier. The short Quarto, republished twice, was then derived from the Folio text, shortened and simplified for performance in public theaters. Shakespeare’s obvious re-use of characters, plot elements and dramatic devices from *Famous Victories* when he constructed the three-play Henriad makes it clear that he was revising his own play. His substantial use of prose in the trilogy, virtually absent from his other history plays, is another indication that he was revising the all-prose text of *Famous Victories*. Dutton, of course, is not alone in his failure to realize this. Nearly all modern scholars have refused to acknowledge that several anonymous plays, which are nearly identical to Shakespeare’s canonical plays in terms of characters, plots and

dramatic devices, are actually his first versions of these plays. To do so would put in great jeopardy the largely circular dating scheme they have constructed for their village candidate. And it would strongly suggest that he was not the author.

Despite these shortcomings, Dutton's theory is a forward step toward the revelation of that author. His conclusion that the Folio texts were intended for the monarch and the court is much closer to the truth than the notion that Shakespeare was primarily a playwright of the people and wrote for the public stage. Dutton also delivers a blow to the notions of widespread memorial reconstruction, piracy and "foul papers" that were promoted by the New Bibliographers. He also strengthens the evidence that Shakespeare revised nearly all his plays, some more than once. And, finally, he hardly mentions collaboration at all, and in one instance questions the claim of Brian Vickers and others that *Pericles* was a collaboration between Shakespeare and George Wilkins.

But Dutton and the other orthodox scholars still have to explain how an unlettered commoner from the Midlands knew so much about the court that he was able to portray individual courtiers and administration officials, and comment on their foibles and their quarrels. That he escaped censure and punishment for this is also unexplained. Another mystery is the lack of alternate versions of other playwrights' texts. Dutton admits that "The plays of no other dramatist have survived in so many varied states." He can cite only a dozen entries out of hundreds in *Henslowe's Diary* that refer to revisions or additions of some kind, only five of which were "for the court" (see pp. 100–01). As we know, *Henslowe's Diary*, skimpy and limited as it is, contains the names of twenty different playwrights and more than half-a-dozen playing companies, including the Queen's Men and the Lord Chamberlain's Men. The name of Shakespeare is absent from that *Diary*.

Shakespeare, Court Dramatist is a highly-detailed and meticulously argued theory that a hard-working Shakespeare essentially prepared two versions of his plays, one for the public and then one for the court. It offers a simple answer to a centuries-old puzzle. As such, it merits serious consideration by both orthodox and revisionist scholars, but it is not likely to be embraced by either. Nevertheless, the scope and depth of Dutton's research is impressive. Despite its length and complexity, the book has attracted more than half-a-dozen reviews, and is likely to continue to attract commentary for years to come.