

BOOK REVIEW

Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes: Shakespeare in 1619, Bibliography in the Longue Durée, by Zachary Lesser, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021, x + 198 pp., £40 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-812-25294-1

In 1619, the stationers William Jaggard and his son Isaac printed a set of nine books containing 10 plays attributed to Shakespeare. In this set, the alternative versions of 2 *Henry VI* and 3 *Henry VI* that had appeared in 1594 as *The Contention of York and Lancaster* and 1595 as *Richard Duke of York* were reprinted together under the title *The Whole Contention of the Houses of York and Lancaster*. The other eight plays were reprints of *Pericles*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, *Henry V*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, and *Sir John Oldcastle*. All but *Henry V* were attributed to Shakespeare on their titlepages, although of course *A Yorkshire Tragedy* and *Sir John Oldcastle* are not now thought to be his. Being simple reprints of preceding single-play-volume editions without additional textual authority, these 1619 editions are of no value in establishing what Shakespeare wrote; they are 'derivative' rather than 'substantive'. But for understanding the history of play printing and Shakespeare's place in it – that is, from Zachary Lesser's point of view – they are crucial evidence from which new knowledge can be derived.

Since the early twentieth century this set of 9 editions of 10 plays has been known as the Pavier Quartos, after the stationer Thomas Pavier who is identified as the publisher using the expression "for T.P." on the titlepages of five of them: *The Whole Contention*, *Pericles*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, *Henry V*, and *Sir John Oldcastle*. Three of the other four plays' titlepages give the names of the men involved in the preceding edition in each case: *The Merry Wives of Windsor* "for Arthur Johnson", *The Merchant of Venice* "by J. Roberts", and *King Lear* "for Nathaniel Butter". Lastly, the publication of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is said to be "by James Roberts" although as far as we know Roberts had no connection with the play. Although all were printed and published in 1619, five of the nine editions have false dates on their titlepages. Four of these five false dates are the dates of the preceding first editions: *The Merchant of Venice* ("1600"), *King Lear* ("1608"), *Sir John Oldcastle* ("1600") and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ("1600"), while *Henry V* has the false date of "1608". The signatures of *The Whole Contention* and *Pericles* run consecutively, implying that they should be bound together. Almost all discussion of the Pavier Quartos has centred on what these misleading titlepages tell us.

Until the publication of the ground-breaking article "On Certain False Dates in Shakespearean Quartos" by W. W. Greg in 1908, the false dates were believed to be true. Trying to figure out just why Pavier and the Jaggards practised this deception takes up much of Lesser's book. The starting point is Greg's discovery, from shared watermarks, that the nine editions were made together by the Jaggard printshop in 1619 and that they were sometimes bound as a set. This would make the Pavier Quartos a small collected-plays edition of Shakespeare available four years before the First Folio collection of 1623. But why the false dates? The Stationers' Company records contain a note dated 3 May 1619 from the Lord Chamberlain, William Herbert, prohibiting the printing of any of the King's men's plays without their permission. Perhaps the

playing company learnt of the Pavier Quartos project and sought to prevent it, possibly because they were already planning the much larger collection (dedicated to William Herbert and his brother Philip) that became the 1623 Folio.

Lesser's book builds upon an essay he co-authored in 2015 with Peter Stallybrass that delivered the extraordinary news that the Pavier Quartos was not a single-author collection at all: Thomas Heywood's play *A Woman Killed with Kindness* was routinely bound into the set at the point of sale. The evidence came from the methods for book-binding, and now Lesser adds new evidence concerning what he calls 'ghosting'. This is where the inked image of one page is transferred to another page that is pressing against it, via a chemical reaction between the linseed oil of the ink on the first page and the acidic paper of the second page. This transfer tells us which pages spent time being tightly pressed against which other pages, and hence which books were bound together. Many of the surviving individual Pavier Quartos are thus shown by Lesser to have been bound with other Pavier Quartos. He plausibly argues that this binding is most likely to have occurred in 1619 and not subsequently.

Lesser surveys recent accounts of the Pavier Quartos from Andrew Murphy, Lukas Erne, Cyndia Susan Clegg, James J. Marino and Sonia Massai, the last of whom pointed out that even the plays Pavier had the rights to have false dates, which is hard to understand. According to Massai, the false dates are meant to give the impression of "scattered old editions" (30), brought together for the discerning book buyer, and to whet the public appetite for the forthcoming 1623 Folio. If so, the Jaggards as printers of the Folio were in on this plan. Lesser sketches Marino's alternative theory that the collection's purpose was to assert that publishers' rights trumped playing companies' rights. Thus, Pavier put Shakespeare's name on *Sir John Oldcastle* in order to insist that no matter what authorial distinctions the players might make, say between *Oldcastle* and *Henry V*, a stationer's rights pertained to a story in all its tellings.

Cyndia Susan Clegg even went as far as claiming that the false dates on the Pavier Quartos' titlepages are not really false but rather they intentionally and accurately reflect the original dates of publication (with the exception of the slip of "1608" for 1600 on the *Henry V* titlepage) and the titlepages likewise credit the original publishers. Thus, according to Clegg, all they do is assert the rights of Jaggard, Pavier, Johnson, and Butter to print these plays and the plan was to force the players into letting the Jaggards and Blount have the plays they needed to put together the First Folio. As Lesser points out, this is a bizarre hypothesis: a publisher putting a year other than the present one and a name other than his own on a titlepage was clearly "subterfuge" not standard practice (31).

Lesser convincingly shows the inadequacy of existing accounts of the Pavier Quartos, all written before his discovery that Heywood's play was routinely part of the collection. His book is built on the examination of over 300 copies of the Pavier Quartos, most now separately bound as individual plays, which represent over 90% of all those that remain. From physical evidence, he is able to tell which were once bound with others, and so reconstruct 19 sets. Unfortunately, the new physical evidence does not go far to solving the mysteries of these editions. Indeed, in some ways, it only adds to them. As well as the 'ghosts' of transferred images and "holes" from binding, Lesser explores the "rips and scrapes" that the titlepage dates on several copies were subjected to after printing, and he finds no explanation that completely satisfies him.

What can confidently be said after Lesser's investigation? He argues that we should call them the Jaggard Quartos, not the Pavier Quartos, as the Jaggards were more clearly behind the whole thing. It was not purely a Shakespearian collection: uniquely for a publisher-made collection, which are otherwise always authorial, some of the bound

sets had a Heywood play in them. More complete bound sets of this collection were sold from the London bookshops than we thought. The Lord Chamberlain's order of May 1619 did not stop the collection: Jaggard continued printing after the order, and not simply to sell the plays as individual books but "precisely so that they could make up a bound collection" (135). There was, no doubt, some deceptive intent by the Jaggards, perhaps to fool the King's Men and the Lord Chamberlain, perhaps to fool Edward Blount who might already have been working with the King's Men on the Folio project. The deception is less likely to have been Pavier's idea than the Jaggards' and it included not binding *The Whole Contention* and *Pericles* together despite their continuous signatures and altering the imprint dates in some copies.

Lesser sees the Jaggards at the heart of a consortium including Thomas Pavier, Nathaniel Butter, and Arthur Johnson. The Jaggards had inherited James Roberts's printing business so putting Roberts's name on the false 1600 imprint for *The Merchant of Venice* could have been a ruse to pass these books off as stock that they had inherited since Roberts printed the real 1600 edition. Arranging the plays in varying orders in different bound sets was a way of making each set seem more like a reader's sammelband than a publisher's collection. But why after printing were the titlepage dates on some copies altered by tearing or scraping? Lesser speculates that this enabled Jaggard to present the altered copies to some authority – the King's men? the Stationers' Company? – as if they represented the whole project. If the King's men were trying to suppress a collected plays of Shakespeare that would rival their planned Folio, they entirely succeeded: what the Jaggards made did not look much like a publisher's collected plays edition.

This is a work of meticulous physical bibliography and Lesser provides 50 colour images of the objects of his investigations to help the reader follow the claims. Even though these images are reproduced in admirably high resolution, this reviewer was sometimes unable to make out what the caption said he was meant to see. Lesser ends with a series of questions about the Pavier (or rather the Jaggard) Quartos that remain unsolved by his investigation, and it is a dispiritingly long list. He holds out hope that in their examinations of the surviving copies others will find evidence that he has been unable to see and so perhaps some of his questions will receive answers. It seems unlikely that a better detective than Lesser will apply themselves to these questions, and they may remain largely unsolved until new and as-yet undreamt-of technical means for gathering new evidence become available.

Gabriel Egan
De Montfort University
 gegan@dmu.ac.uk

© 2021 Gabriel Egan
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2021.1938193>

