

THEATRE AND GOVERNANCE IN BRITAIN, 1500–1900

This book begins with a simple observation – that just as the theatre resurfaced during the late Renaissance, so too government as we understand it today also began to appear. Their mutually entwining history was to have a profound influence on the development of the modern British stage. This volume proposes a new reading of theatre’s complex and shifting relation to the state, society and the public sphere. Employing a series of historical case studies drawn from the London theatre, Tony Fisher shows why the stage was of such great concern to government by offering close readings of well-known religious, moral, political, economic and legal disputes over the role, purpose and function of the stage in the ‘well-ordered society’. In framing these disputes in relation to what Michel Foucault called the emerging ‘art of government’, this book draws out – for the first time – a comprehensive genealogy of the governmental ‘discourse on the theatre’.

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Democracy, Disorder and the State

TONY FISHER

Royal Central School of Speech and Drama



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For Jean Fisher – in loving memory

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It is almost a decade since I first started work on this study. To be sure, its origin owed more to the vagaries of chance encounters – to the contingencies and serendipities of research – than to any consistent plan on my part at its outset. Indeed, what guided my first foray into the subject was anything but a firm sense of direction, merely a vague hunch that there was something worth pursuing in the development of the theatre and the problem it posed to government. It was only when I broke cover and first exposed what I was working on to colleagues and friends that the project began to take on a coherent shape; and, in truth, without their criticism, guidance and encouragement, I doubt that this book would ever have seen the light of day. Whether that would have been a good thing or not is ultimately for the reader to decide. Suffice it to say, no book can truly succeed without the help of the number of individuals who contribute to it, sometimes without even knowing they have done so; at the same time, in each case it is its author who must bear sole responsibility for its failings – and my book is certainly no exception to this general rule.

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