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Edited by Paul Whitfield White and Suzanne R. Westfall
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INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare and theatrical patronage in early modern England

Paul Whitfield White and Suzanne R. Westfall

During the past quarter of a century, the study of patronage/theatre relations in early modern England has grown immensely, partly because of the sharp increase in archival research and data collection relating to theatrical culture, and partly because of new methodologies and innovative approaches. Yet despite a number of distinguished studies focusing on individual patrons and writers and on patronage in general, the field remains without an extensive, wide-ranging, and representative study of patronage as it relates to Shakespeare and the theatrical culture of his age. In seeking to fill that void, this volume's twelve theatre historians address such questions as: What important functions did patronage have for the theatre during this period? How, in turn, did the theatre impact upon and represent patronage? In what ways do patronage, political power, and playing intersect? How did patrons and theatre artists mutually affect one another's sense of personal and professional identity? Where do paying spectators and purchasers of printed drama fit into our discussion of patronage? In what ways did patronage practices change and develop from the early Tudor period to the years in which Shakespeare was the English theatre's leading artist?

In the opening chapter, Suzanne Westfall endeavors to contextualize our study; she observes that patronage is not easily defined, especially with reference to an art form as multifaceted and socially complex as the theatre. Her discussion of the history of patronage theatre studies from Victorian times onward demonstrates the many ways in which the term has been used within the theatrical context. She argues that while nineteenth- and early twentieth-century archivists and historians published and commented insightfully on a wealth of records relevant to the royal and aristocratic sponsorship of drama, the study of patronage in general and theatrical patronage in particular has benefited significantly during the last quarter of the twentieth century from methods of inquiry and insights brought to the discussion by scholars who seem far afield

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from traditional theatre studies, among them Clifford Geertz, Michel Foucault, and Wolfgang Iser, from the respective disciplines of anthropology, cultural history, and reception theory. Now a more interdisciplinary and theoretically sophisticated undertaking, the study of theatrical patronage has moved beyond its early preoccupation with royal and noble sponsorship of playing; it now explores the positioning and mediating role of theatre within a complex web of interdependent, though often discordant, relationships crossing class and regional boundaries and involving kinship ties, political loyalties, and economic transactions. Westfall also shows that recent approaches to the topic have changed our view of "theatre" itself from the conventional generic confines of dialogue-centered spectacle to encompass, at one end of the spectrum, a variety of performance – masques, processions, and other quasi-dramatic entertainments – to, at the other end, drama sold and read in printed texts.

Westfall's discussion sets the stage for several clusters of essays, the first of which concentrates on Shakespeare, his immediate theatrical milieu and the publication of his plays. In "The King's Men's king's men: Shakespeare and folio patronage," David Bergeron turns to the 1623 Folio to show that theatre's entry into book publishing, like the emergence of commercial playgoing, complemented and sometimes competed with, but did not undermine, the practice of aristocratic patronage, and thereby increased the opportunities available to playwrights for support. Indeed, Bergeron indicates that the "king's men" addressed in the Folio's "Epistle Dedicatory," Lord Chamberlain William Herbert and his brother Philip, Gentleman of the King's Bedchamber, were among the Jacobean court's most active patrons of both book publishing and the public stage, and that the Lord Chamberlain, himself, was clearly instrumental in creating opportunities for theatrical artists within the printing industry, intervening on their behalf with the Stationers' Register and patronizing Jonson's *Works* of 1616 (a major event in legitimating drama as serious writing). Furthermore, Bergeron shows that, like their fellow actor Edward Alleyn who knew a thing or two about manipulating noble patrons (as Andrew Gurr's essay will later relate), the two King's Men behind the 1623 Folio, John Heminge and Henry Condell, had the future in mind in seeking Philip Herbert's patronage in addition to William's, since the younger brother was predicted to become (and in fact became in 1626) their next boss as Lord Chamberlain. Yet in their "Address to the Variety of Readers," the editors appeal assiduously for the support of book buyers, since the fate of the Folio largely rested in their hands.

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The Folio editors were also aware of rival claims to the buying public's patronage, presenting themselves as rescuers of the plays from the stolen, maimed, and fraudulent versions also available on the print market.

Paul Whitfield White's chapter on "Shakespeare, the Cobhams, and the dynamics of theatrical patronage" explores a range of patronage-related issues that link Shakespeare and his fellow players to the Elizabethan Lords Cobham, particularly to William Brooke, tenth Baron Cobham, during his Lord Chamberlaincy between August 1596 and March 1597. White challenges one-dimensional accounts of Cobham as antitheatrical – evidence shows that he was actually well-qualified to administer court festivities during the years leading up to his appointment – or as an impartial/indifferent Lord Chamberlain. In an important letter virtually ignored by theatre historians, Robert Jones, the Earl of Essex's secretary, shows that Cobham was active in overseeing and intervening in court festivities, though in a manner that clearly upset members of the Essex faction, and probably also the players – Shakespeare's company it turns out – whose 1596/97 holiday season performance at court was interrupted by a staff-waving Lord Chamberlain. An analysis of the implications of this document for the theatre and politics of Cobham's Lord Chamberlaincy leads to questions about the complex web of patronage relations Shakespeare's company found itself in during the late 1590s, about playwright/player criticism of patrons (as manifested in the second *Henriad* and *Merry Wives of Windsor*), the conflicts and tensions between major figures in the patronage system (the Lord Chamberlain and his deputy the Master of the Revels), and the role of patronage drama in factional politics at court. The production of a series of Oldcastle plays by Lord Admiral Nottingham's Men, beginning with *The History of Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham*, may tell us something about the broader functions and effects of patronage drama on the Cecil–Cobham/Essex rivalry at the end of Elizabeth's reign.

The intriguing question of Shakespeare's links to the Essex circle is further considered by Leeds Barroll in the following essay, although for Barroll power-brokers like the earls of Southampton, Pembroke, and Rutland, along with the Countess of Bedford, were drawn to the theatre by the sheer pleasure it could provide; politics had little, if anything, to do with it. In "Shakespeare, noble patrons, and the pleasures of 'common' playing," Barroll reappraises the rationale behind aristocratic sponsorship of the drama. While many assume that the nobility retained players simply for "magnificence," for social status, or because they were interested in staging polemical battles, Barroll explores aristocratic taste as a

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motive for hiring players and supporting playwrights. Beginning with a discussion of the "carnival" atmosphere of public court occasions, when the aristocracy might be constrained, by custom, to entertain strangers and be entertained by a variety of questionable characters, Barroll moves on to discuss the types of plays he believes that the aristocracy actually enjoyed and admired. During the Christmas season, Barroll argues, aristocrats were expected to associate with the commoners, including the "common" player, who did not command the same status as the court minstrel or painter. But some aristocrats, like the extended Sidney and Spenser families, the Essex and Derby/Oxford circles, seem to have supported players because their own literary tastes led them to, because they took pleasure in, theatrical performance. Most significantly, Barroll brings to our attention the fact that many women, including the Dowager Countesses of Derby and Pembroke, were instrumental in maintaining the family player troupes after their husbands died, shepherding their entertainers to new patrons. His thorough examination of the complex family relationships between and among patrons reveals once again that theatrical patronage was multifaceted and multi-purpose.

The next group of essays expands our discussion chronologically and geographically, tracing the nature and development of theatre/patronage relations at the royal court and in various provincial centers from the late fifteenth through the early seventeenth century. In "'What revels are in hand?' Marriage celebrations and patronage of the arts in Renaissance England," David Bevington and Milla Riggio focus on a type of occasion that necessitated extravagant patronage of the arts: aristocratic marriage celebrations. By comparing the wedding festivities for three of Henry VII's children (Prince Arthur in 1501, Princess Margaret in 1502, and Princess Mary in 1508) to those for James I's daughter Elizabeth over a century later (1613), they highlight several significant points of continuity and change concerning the nature of court patronage for such occasions and the role of the artists commissioned to produce the festivities. If advancing the dynastic ambitions of the royal family was a shared ideological function of the disguisings, masques, and plays designed for both early Tudor and early Stuart royal marriages, Bevington and Riggio observe a pronounced shift in the roles and attitudes of court-based artists. Specifically, the largely anonymous artists commissioned for the wedding festivities under Henry VII subsumed individual identity and expression in the higher political interests of their patrons who, while allowing some measure of artistic freedom, maintained tight control over the political contents of such entertainments.

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In marked contrast a century later, court entertainers for Princess Elizabeth's wedding – Campion, Chapman, and Beaumont among them – were more conscious of their identities as artists of reputation who used their creations to comment on patronage, to advance aesthetics, and to criticize their patrons. Their work, the essay concludes, is characterized by a conflicted and ambivalent attitude towards the patronage of the governing class, reflecting a shift in literary focus from text to author.

Alexandra F. Johnston, editor-in-chief of the Records of Early English Drama project that has collected and published so many of the archives that are revolutionizing the study of Renaissance theatre, considers a different type of patron, the entire city of York. Through a detailed examination of the relationship among the city authorities, the confraternities, and the plays, Johnston traces the polemical and economic factors that led eventually to the demise of the Corpus Christi cycle in York. "The city as patron: York" also investigates an issue that Mary Blackstone pursues in the essay that follows – the relationship between crown and local authority. While many had long supposed that Tudor hegemony and Tillyard's "great chain" had enforced national interest on local populations, Johnston and Blackstone find that the politics of local patronage are far more complex. Johnston's investigation of fifteenth-century local patronage also speaks to the final essay in this volume, Alexander Leggatt's "The audience as patron: *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*." While most of the essays in this volume concentrate on patronage by the baronial class, these two are concerned with the merchant, professional, and artisan classes. The craft guilds of York and their brother businessmen in London one hundred years later affected the theatre differently, but just as significantly as did the Earl of Northumberland in his court. As we consider how patronage and power interrelated, it is vital that the "public" part of the equation be fully appreciated.

In "Theatrical patronage and the urban community during the reign of Mary," Mary A. Blackstone shifts our attention to the mid-sixteenth-century reign, precisely midway between the early Henrician and Jacobean termini of Riggio and Bevington's work, marking quite different conditions of theatrical patronage at court. Yet Blackstone, drawing on models of political power and subjection developed by Michel Foucault and Charles Phythian-Adams, extends the discussion far beyond the royal court to explore the complex array of patronage networks in the provinces, where locally based power structures overseen by town corporations and noble magnates sometimes worked in conjunction,

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sometimes at odds, with each other and with the central government. Theatrical entertainment functioned in several significant ways within this patronage system. In the final analysis, Blackstone proposes that unlike her brother and her father, Queen Mary inefficiently utilized patronage, theatrical and otherwise, to win broad-based noble and popular support for her policy of reunification with Rome and her marriage to Philip of Spain. The pronounced rift between her and "the temporal nobility" who refused to return church lands is addressed in the touring troupe interlude, *Health and Wealth*.

As the first essay in our final section on patrons, players, and audiences, Andrew Gurr's chapter on "Privy Councilors as theatre patrons" draws us into the heart of Elizabeth's reign when the Queen's chief political advisors at court virtually dictated the course of professional playing in and around London during a time of rapidly developing theatrical conditions, fierce opposition from the London Corporation, and division within the Privy Council itself. Gurr argues that despite the Council's official reason for protecting weekday performances of the adult companies – to prepare them for the Queen's annual entertainments at court – individual councilors, most notably Thomas Howard and Henry Carey, worked behind the scenes as well as up front to secure a place for the players in the London area. Howard and Carey adroitly used the patronage system with its kinship ties and political networking to carry out a policy that aimed to provide the Queen with the best possible theatrical entertainment at court, prevent amphitheatre closings, and exercise the dominance of their own companies (the Lord Admiral's Men and Lord Chamberlain's Men) in London during the mid-to-late 1590s. In addition to demonstrating the continuing power of aristocratic patrons after the advent of commercialism, Gurr shows the political resourcefulness of clients such as James Burbage and Edward Alleyn who divided their allegiances among two or more stage patrons in a period of intense rivalry to attract the status and protection that went with aristocratic sponsorship.

The next two chapters give more attention to individual acting companies and their relationship with aristocratic patronage. Following up on her work with Scott McMillin on *The Queen's Men and their Plays*, Sally-Beth MacLean analyzes the historical records relating to Leicester's Men, a company employing some of the nation's most important theatre producers – James Burbage, Robert Wilson, John Laneham – that first formed as Lord Robert Dudley's Men near the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign. Like Blackstone, MacLean is concerned with touring

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patterns, since the Queen's Men were, perhaps, the most widely traveled of the troupes in the 1580s. Her work (including detailed itineraries and maps) investigates the relationship between patron and player troupe by studying private and municipal accounts, asking some of the same questions that Leeds Barroll poses about patronage and taste. To what extent did the personality of the patron, or his pursuit of power, affect the repertoire, itinerary, and profits of the performers he maintained? As MacLean demonstrates, by using the Records of Early English Drama collections, we can begin to piece together a more detailed model of how and where player troupes actually operated. By linking texts with troupes, we can also begin to decode the intricate workings of ideology and patronage theatre.

Michael Shapiro adds a new dimension to our study in his consideration of patronage of the children's companies, which he shows, like other patronized entertainers, to have undergone a number of complicated developments from the early Tudor era through the first decade of James I when they fell into decline. Shapiro cites the royal performances of the Westminster grammar school boys during the 1560s to illustrate the traditional pattern of gift-exchange patronage in which the school offered plays (along with elaborately decorated manuscript copies) to the Queen as reward for her patronage of the school, the foundation of which she restored at her accession. Challenging the theory that the Paul's boys and Children of the Chapel Royal rapidly developed into crass commercial ventures during Elizabeth's reign, Shapiro proposes that gift-exchange patronage remained important, and that the income gained from box-office returns in their own playing venues may not be a simple instance of profiteering on the part of such masters as Westcote, Mulcaster, and Ferrant, but rather the necessary means to fund elaborate entertainments that they presented in tribute to Elizabeth. At the same time, the directors of such troupes sought court patronage for traditional reasons: advancement at court (John Lyly and the Earl of Oxford) and protection from enemies (Westcote, the Catholic master at Paul's). Shapiro acknowledges, however, that if the boys remained part of a ritualized gift-exchange system right to the end, their exploitation for commercial advantage was intensified during the early years of the new century when Paul's boys and the Blackfriars company fell into the hands of astute entrepreneurs who capitalized on the London playgoers' taste for satire and controversy.

As David Bergeron shows in the collection's second chapter, Heminge and Condell's "Address to a Variety of Readers" in 1623 tacitly

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acknowledges the theatre community's financial dependence on the general public's patronage, even if it comes many years after the fact and applies to drama in print. The implications of that dependence so far as it applies to commercialized spectatorship in the so-called "private" as well as public playhouses of London concerns Alexander Leggatt in the collection's final essay, "The audience as patron: *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*." As Leggatt demonstrates, Beaumont, Jonson, and other playwrights expressed an acute anxiety about the potential loss of artistic and interpretive control in an environment where regular playhouse patrons, by virtue of paying for dramatic fare, believed they were entitled to dictate its nature. The irony, of course, is that, as Bevington and Riggio reveal, theatre artists never had it so good in terms of artistic license; never before had accomplished writers enjoyed such unrestricted freedom to work apart from royal and aristocratic patronage. And yet, in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle,* Beaumont's raucous burlesque of playhouse audiences, we are presented with the dramatist's worst nightmare: spectators climbing onto the stage to protest a play only moments after it begins, and demanding that the actors perform a different one suiting their tastes and expectations. Leggatt argues that the play explores several problems raised by the audience as a demanding collective patron: the often unavoidable disparity between authorial intention and audience reception, the difficulty of reconciling the playwright's and players' desire for a carefully crafted artistic experience with a popular audience's demand for cheap jokes and sensationalism, and the inability to keep everyone happy when the spectatorship is demographically mixed and ideologically diverse. Like other essays in the volume, Leggatt's piece dwells on the need for patrons, as well as artists, to reinforce their sense of identity through the theatrical experience; and it explores the divisions and breakdowns within patron–client relationships. Whether we are talking about propaganda or taste in dramatic fare, artists often failed to deliver what patrons, aristocratic and popular, expected. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* provides us with a tellingly rich and ironic example of this both in reality (it turned out to be a theatrical bust) and in its representation of failed relations between play producers and playgoers.

As much as it may be commonplace now to claim that all drama in early modern England operated within the confines of patronage, the essays in this volume attempt to fully explore that assertion. In some instances, as illustrated by the wedding masques at Henry VII's court, anonymous artisans and writers seem to have unselfconsciously labored to advance the dynastic claims of the monarch, in others they may have

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attempted to assert their autonomy in the face of the demands of paying spectators. Yet playwrights and players have always perceived themselves as expendable, and in early modern England where this was acutely felt patronage was a constant concern; the frequency with which the drama itself displays and interrogates this condition is a telling indication of how seriously all members of society felt it. It is our hope that these assembled essays not only demonstrate the crucial importance of patronage for the study of Tudor and early Stuart drama, but that they contribute to the ongoing research of other scholars for many years to come.

Inspired by a seminar we co-directed at the Shakespeare Association of America annual meeting of 1993, this book has accumulated many debts of gratitude during its near-decade in the making. Not the least of these is owed to the distinguished group of writers who generously accepted our invitation to contribute to this volume. Their spirit of cooperation, not to mention an almost saintly level of patience and faith in this project, was essential in seeing it develop through several phases of expansion and revision to final production. Our gratitude is also extended to several institutions which have been generous in providing financial support, including the Lafayette College Advanced Research Council, the Purdue Research Foundation, and the Purdue Medieval Studies Committee. We would like to thank our readers at Cambridge University Press for suggesting corrections and revisions which significantly improved the manuscript. Finally, for reading all or significant parts of the manuscript and offering timely advice and encouragement, we are especially grateful to Steven Putzel, Patricia Donahue, and Paula Leverage.

Note on supplementary website: For readers interested in pursuing further the topic of *Shakespeare and Theatrical Patronage in Early Modern England*, we refer them to http://icdweb.cc.purdue.edu/~pwhite/patronage, which features supplementary materials, particularly maps and appendices pertaining to Chapters 6, 7, and 9.

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Theories and histories

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