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English Court Theatre, 1558–1642

Several famous playwrights of the Elizabethan and Stuart periods, including Shakespeare, wrote for open-air public theatres and also for the private indoor theatres at the palaces at which the court resided. This book is the first full account of such court theatre, and examines the theatrical entertainments for Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I.

By contrast with the now-vanished playhouses of the time, four of the royal chambers used as theatres survive, and the author attempts to draw as full a picture as he can of such places, the physical and aesthetic conditions under which actors worked in them, and the composition and conduct of court audiences. He both confirms the role of royal patronage in the growth of professional theatre, and offers a new definition of the function of theatrical occasions in creating the cultural profile of the English court.

The book includes plans and illustrations of the theatres and an appendix which lists all known court performances of plays and masques between 1558 and 1642.

JOHN H. ASTINGTON is Associate Professor of English at the University of Toronto. He is the editor of *The Development of Shakespeare's Theater* (1992) and author of several articles on the private court theatre of Shakespeare's time.

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To the memory of my parents

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Preface

This book grew out of studies begun many years ago; it was first proposed in something resembling its present shape at the close of the 1980s, and I can only thank those who have encouraged me to persevere with it for their patience when it must have seemed unlikely that these pages would ever materialise. I have incurred many debts during its slow progress, and I have particularly benefited from a great deal of excellent scholarship on the English court which has been published during the 1990s, and which has made my task, eventually, easier to complete.

While I was a student my curiosity concerning the performance conditions of early plays was satisfied by many lively and stimulating books about the Elizabethan and Stuart actors and their playhouses, but I found it difficult to understand the place of theatre at court. On the one hand, one was told that the connection between the court and theatrical activity elsewhere was of great significance, while on the other there seemed to be no satisfying and coherent account of the conditions of court theatre itself, beyond the rather special and restricted area of masque performance. While I have taught drama and theatre history for the last twenty-five years this odd gap has remained, and it is as an attempt to fill it that this book has been written.

My indebtedness to other scholars and researchers over a long period is so great that it would be tedious and probably impossible to acknowledge with individual thanks, but I would like particularly to express my gratitude to colleagues in the annual theatre-history seminars of the Shakespeare Association of America, who have winnowed a good deal of the material which now appears in this book. I am grateful for financial support during the preparation of the work from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, from the Folger Shakespeare Library in the form of a Fellowship, and from the

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Preface

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Abbreviations

<i>Ceremonies</i>	Albert J. Loomie, ed., <i>Ceremonies of Charles I. The Notebooks of John Finet 1628–1641</i> (New York, 1987)
<i>CSPV</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, 40 vols.</i> (London, 1864–1947)
<i>Diary</i>	V. Sackville-West, ed., <i>The Diary of Lady Ann Clifford</i> (London, 1923)
<i>ES</i>	E. K. Chambers, <i>The Elizabethan Stage</i> , 4 vols. (Oxford, 1923)
Feuillerat, <i>Edward and Mary</i>	Albert Feuillerat, <i>Documents Relating to the Revels at Court in the Time of King Edward VI and Queen Mary</i> (Louvain, 1914)
Feuillerat, <i>Elizabeth</i>	Albert Feuillerat, <i>Documents Relating to the Office of the Revels in the Time of Queen Elizabeth</i> (Louvain, 1908)
<i>Henry VIII</i>	David Starkey, ed., <i>Henry VIII. A European Court in England</i> (London, 1991)
<i>Herbert</i>	N. W. Bawcutt, ed., <i>The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama. The Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels 1623–73</i> (Oxford, 1996)
<i>HKW</i>	H. M. Colvin, gen. ed., <i>The History of the King's Works</i> , 6 vols. (London, 1963–82)
<i>JCS</i>	G. E. Bentley, <i>The Jacobean and Caroline Stage</i> , 7 vols. (Oxford, 1941–68)

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List of abbreviations

MSC	Malone Society <i>Collections</i> series (see Bibliography for details of individual volumes)
O & S	Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong, eds., <i>Inigo Jones. The Theatre of the Stuart Court</i> , 2 vols. (Berkeley and London, 1973)
PRO	Public Record Office
Thurley, <i>Palaces</i>	Simon Thurley, <i>The Royal Palaces of Tudor England</i> (New Haven, 1993)
WS	E. K. Chambers, <i>William Shakespeare. A Study of Facts and Problems</i> , 2 vols. (Oxford, 1930)