

Abstract

Title of Thesis: PERFORMING IDENTITY: EARLY MODERN PLAYERS AND THE CRAFTING OF PROFESSIONAL LEGITIMACY

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Professional theater developed in Europe during the sixteenth century. Though it quickly became a popular form of entertainment, some viewed professional actors with skepticism and hostility. This thesis seeks to contextualize hostile responses to the theater and professional player by examining the social, religious, and economic conditions perceived by critics of the theater. This thesis begins with an examination of the *commedia dell'arte* and Jesuit school dramas to gain a broader understanding of perceptions of theater across social and religious boundaries. It then turns to England for a close examination of anti-theatrical literature and the methods players employed to craft an aura of professional respectability that contradicted the claims of their detractors.

Performing Identity: Early Modern Players and the Crafting of Professional Legitimacy

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2014

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Harlequins and Jesuits.....	13
Commediadell'arte.....	13
JesuitTheater.....	24
Chapter 2: Dancing, Dicing, and Vain Interludes Reproved.....	29
Theater and Religion.....	29
Theater and Society.....	34
Theater and Politics.....	49
Chapter 3: City Actors.....	55
Women and Amateur Theater.....	56
Players and Patrons.....	58
Companies and Guilds.....	63
Conclusion.....	73
Bibliography.....	76

Introduction

In one of his most famous speeches, William Shakespeare wrote, “All the world’s a stage,/And all the men and women merely players.”¹ In early modern England, the life of a player was often fraught with contradictions. Tudor and Stuart authorities felt ambiguous about players and the playhouses. They enjoyed the theater, they sponsored it, but they also feared it and attempted to regulate it. In order to understand the status of players and playing companies we need to understand their relationship with authority. By looking at the various responses to the stage, it becomes apparent that there was no single perception of the dangers of theater. Attacks on theater were tied to other pressing issues of the day. The changing social and political currents of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries meant that while the popular response to two different plays may have been similar, still one of the plays could be seen by authorities as provoking disorder. The licensing of plays by the Master of the Revels and the Lord Chamberlain, who organized and oversaw the production of entertainment for the court and in so London theaters, was meant to discourage the possibility of public disorder. When licensing failed, and the theater created social or political disturbances, the authorities reacted in revealing ways. One of the most interesting aspects of the early modern stage is the juxtaposition of artistic output and public condemnation. This condemnation has led to the assumption that players were generally perceived as the social equivalent of prostitutes, gypsies, and vagabonds.

¹ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 2.7.1037-8.

The reaction of the authorities to the players is only half of the equation. In order to fully understand the place of players in Elizabethan and Jacobean society we need to consider how actors shaped their own identities. Players consistently resisted accusations of vagrancy, the ways they did so, including relationships with patrons and a reliance on a company structure, had important implications for their self-perception. It is essential to understand how this sense of self affected the ways players negotiated with critics and authorities.

This essay seeks to contextualize both anti-theatrical criticism and statutes regulating the theater within the broader context of civil order and to reevaluate the status and experiences of early modern English players. Statutes regulating the theater are part of a broader series of legislation that touched everyone from peasant farmers to urban gentlemen. This legislation reveals the fear that under the right circumstances any social group could cause a break down of civil order. Anti-theatrical treatises reveal fears about the social, moral, and economic health of England that extend far beyond the walls of the playhouses. In turn players developed a variety of methods to counter criticism and regulation. Their strategies display an astute mix of feudal tradition and economic adventure.

The sixteenth century was a time of increased poverty and hardship for many in England. While the Reformation had done away with many of the traditional sources of charity and traditional views on almsgiving, potential alternatives were not immediately clear. In addition to changing views and practices of charity, sixteenth century England saw a dramatic increase in the number of people requiring charity. There were far more people with the ability and willingness to work, who simply could not find regular

employment. The increasing numbers of people experiencing extreme poverty required the Tudor governments to devise new methods of poor relief, culminating in the 1601 Act for the Relief of the Poor. It placed the responsibility for poor relief at the parish level. It shifted the financial responsibility from the central authorities to local authorities. The emphasis on locality also reflected a concern about the trouble caused by the wandering poor. It also held financial benefits for the central authorities; the cost of poor relief was born at the local level.

Most worrying for authorities both at the center and at the local level were those who were able-bodied but preferred to travel and beg. These beggars are typically classified as “vagabonds,” “rogues,” and “sturdy beggars” in the statutes. They could, and occasionally did pose serious problems, especially when they were former soldiers, traveled in groups, and resorted to criminal behavior to supplement their income.²

Comparisons to these “vagabonds,” “sturdy beggars,” and “rogues” would be a persistent problem for professional players and who deployed variety of methods to counteract these accusations. In *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* Linda Woodbridge suggests that ideas about “rogues” and the word itself migrated from popular literature into the Poor Laws.³ That same migration occurred in the theater. The language and concerns of anti-theatricalists was picked up and mirrored in the regulations on the stage created by the Privy Council. As an arm of government, the Privy Council regulated the theater; while individual members patronized it as private citizens. Their support should be seen as stemming from a genuine interest in the theater.

² Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England, 1350-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 142.

³ Linda Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 4.

As a result, there is a noted ambivalence on the part of the Privy Council as they simultaneously limit and support the commercial activity of playing-companies

Throughout the sixteenth century, theatrical activity occurred with the support of influential members of the government. One example, which received extensive study by Paul Whitfield White in *Theatre and Reformation*⁴ is the playing company that formed around the reform-minded playwright John Bale. Later in life, Bale held several important posts within the English Church, including canon of the eleventh prebend in Canterbury Cathedral.⁵ As a playwright he and his fellow players were not based in London, but rather performed in the shires. The company was identified by three possible names: “Bale and his Felowes”, after their leader and chief dramatist, “Lord Cromwell’s Players” and “Lord Privy Seal’s Men.”⁶ Though players in the 1530s were frequent travelers, the discourse comparing them to vagrants had not yet emerged. There were advantages to publicly identifying themselves with their patron. Though Bale would become a prominent figure in his own right, in the 1530s his name lacked the social and political cachet of Thomas Cromwell. Identifying as “Lord Cromwell’s Players” or “The Lord Privy Seal’s Men” allowed the players to access some of Cromwell’s social and political capital. Utilizing the patron’s name and reputation was an important element in the professional players’ construction of their identity.

In 1559, Robert Dudley, later earl of Leicester, gave his patronage to a troupe of actors. Dudley was one of the most prominent members of Elizabeth’s court. Throughout

⁴ Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁵ John N. King, ‘Bale, John (1495–1563)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2009) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1175>

⁶ White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England*, 12.

his life and career Leicester patronized a troupe of players. In 1572, his troupe petitioned him for a license declaring that they were household retainers:

You will now vouchasaffe to reteyne us at the present as your household
 Servauntes and daylie wayters... your honors License to certifye that we
 are your household Servauntes when we shall have occasion to travayle
 amongst our ffrendes as we do...and as other noble mens Players do and
 have done in tyme past.⁷

The request for this license came in response to a statute against unlawful retainers. Though this statute could affect the lives and operations of players on tour, its restraints were aimed at the military power of the nobility. It was meant to prevent members of the nobility from amassing private armies or usurping prerogatives that were not theirs to employ. In 1574, Leicester's Men became the first troupe to receive a royal license allowing them to perform anywhere in the kingdom. It also stipulated that plays performed in London needed to be approved by the crown through the Master of the Revels.⁸ The 1574 license established a trend which playing-companies would follow until the London theaters closed in 1642. It created a relationship between playing companies and the Revels Office and confirmed the importance of the patron player relationship.

As public theater developed in England so did the tradition of the court masque.

Professional theater and the amateur masque overlapped in a variety of ways. Patrons of

⁷ A letter from Leicesters's Players in Sally-Beth Maclean, "Leicesters Men: Patronage of a Performance Troupe" in *Shakespeare and Theatrical Patronage in Early Modern England*, ed. Paul Whitfield White and Suzanne R. Westfall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 259. Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time, 1590-1642* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 178.

⁸ E.K. Chambers ed., *Dramatic Records of the City of London*, Malone Society Collections I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909), pt. 3, 262-3.

the public stage were often avid participants in court masques. Professional players and playwrights often participated in the masques. Ben Jonson is particularly noted for his collaboration with Inigo Jones on a number of these masques. The court masque reached new levels of popularity in the first half of the seventeenth century with the accession of the Stuart dynasty largely due to the patronage of James I's wife, Anna of Denmark. Under James I and Charles I, court masques became more elaborate and complex. The court masques were generally silent entertainment with ideas represented through symbolic pantomime to preserve the noble dignity of the performers. Who worked with but remained distinct from the professional players who also performed in masques and other plays at Court. Unlike the plays performed in the public theaters, the masque was meant to speak to the court. "The masque presents the triumph of an aristocratic community; at its center is the belief in the hierarchy and a faith in the power of idealization."⁹ The masque existed for the world of the court. It could reaffirm power and hierarchy. It also gave courtiers a chance to display themselves and participate in the symbolism of power and hierarchy.

The court masque gave women the opportunity to create and participate in theatrical productions. Though women were banned from performing the public stage, aristocratic women led and participated in court masques. Anna of Denmark and her successor Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I, were particularly avid fans of the masque as well as sponsoring their own troupes of professional players known as the Queen's Men. Martin Butler argues that the court dramas and masques should be examined with and

⁹ Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975), 40. Other works focusing on the court masque are David Bevington and Peter Holbrook ed., *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Martin Butler, *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

against the dramas produced for the public stage. These productions reveal a wide range of social and political beliefs that were present in the court. Sophie Tomlinson examines the ways in which women could express political and cultural agency in court performances. As the sponsors, authors, and performers in a number of masques, women in the courts of James I and Charles I were able to use theater to petition and negotiate their own political agendas. Women were able to utilize the masque for the same political purposes as male courtiers. The court masques and public plays reveal a broad range of positions and beliefs reflecting the political turmoil of the 1630s.¹⁰ Political and social turmoil often played a role in anti-theatrical writings. Though the stage may be their primary target, these authors often reflect on a variety of social and political issues.

The early modern stage is a popular area of study, one that touches on both courtly and popular culture. E.K. Chambers' four volume *The Elizabethan Stage*¹¹ and Gerald Eades Bentley's *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*¹² were the first comprehensive histories of early modern English drama. Though many of their assumptions have been challenged and revised, they remain important touchstones for further study. The breadth and scope of their work makes renders it virtually unmatched. Gerald Eades Bentley's *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time, 1590-1642*¹³ outlines the experiences of early modern players, particularly those in London. It examines the various positions within a playing company and provides a general portrait of the professional world of

¹⁰ Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹¹ E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* 4 vols. (Oxford: The Clarendon press, 1923).

¹² Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941).

¹³ Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time, 1590-1642* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

early modern theater. Roslyn Lander Knutson¹⁴ and Andrew Gurr¹⁵ have expanded on his efforts, examining theatrical commerce and rivalry in Tudor and Stuart drama. Their works highlight many of the important facets of professional theater. They agree that the members of rival playing companies frequently cooperated with one another to advance the interests of their profession, though they differ on the scope of that cooperation. Knutson argues that cooperation frequently won over rivalry as companies deployed a number of strategies to maintain their business. These include cultivating relationships with patrons and the reading public through the publication of plays.

For early modern players the relationships they cultivated with their patrons were extremely important. Brian O'Farrell's *Shakespeare's Patron*¹⁶ examines the life of William Herbert, third earl of Pembroke. Theatrical patronage was a consistent element in the public reputation Pembroke sought to craft for himself and he possessed a genuine interest in the stage. He also used his patronage of the theater to enhance his social prestige. *Shakespeare and Theatrical Patronage in Early Modern England*,¹⁷ a collection of essays edited by Paul Whitfield White and Suzanne R. Westfall looks at the various interactions between patrons and performers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The essays frame the question of patronage in a variety of ways, from the relationship between a single patron and the company that bore their name to the more complex relations between companies and urban communities.

¹⁴ Roslyn Lander Knutson *Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare's Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company, 1594-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Brian O'Farrell, *Shakespeare's Patron: William Herbert, Third Earl of Pembroke, 1580-1630 : Politics, Patronage and Power* (London: Continuum, 2011).

¹⁷ Paul Whitfield White and Suzanne R. Westfall eds. *Shakespeare and Theatrical Patronage in Early Modern England*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Ann Jennalie Cook examines the London theater-going community in *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576-1642*.¹⁸ She argues that the average playgoer, whether in the open-air theaters such as the Rose and the Globe or at private performances were individuals of means. Cook's work attempts to bridge the gap between court performance and public performance. Martin Butler's *Theatre and Crisis 1632-1642* argues that though most playgoers may have come from the 'privileged class,' this should not be mistaken for social or political unity. Plays advocated for a variety of social, political, and cultural viewpoints in the increasingly fractious atmosphere of the 1630s.

O'Farrell's work on William Herbert includes an examination of his tenure as Lord Chamberlain. The work of the Lord Chamberlain and the Master of the Revels frequently brought the public theater into contact with the court. It was the responsibility of these two men to organize a program of court entertainment and approve all plays performed publicly and before the court and the public theaters. *Mastering the Revels*¹⁹ by Richard Dutton examines the office of Master of the Revels. Dutton examines the ways the Master of the Revels worked with playing companies to license entertainments, arguing for cooperation rather than authoritarian control.

This essay seeks to further that work to study how players engaged with critics and supporters to craft a respected identity. It speaks about players, rather than actors because that was the language and title which identified the profession in sixteenth and early seventeenth century England. This essay seeks to expand the work done on the

¹⁸ Ann Jennalie Cook, *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576-1642* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

¹⁹ Richard Dutton *Mastering the Revels: The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991.)

commercial experiences of playing companies and the studies of theatrical patronage. I argue that the commercial practices of playing companies are reflective of the ways players understood their professional identity, while the relationship with noble patrons allowed players access to the social capital of the elite. Though my concern is with the professional stage, the court masque cannot be ignored. It would impose an anachronous distinction between two popular theatrical forms. Professional playwrights and players participated in court masques in addition to public drama. The court masque allowed playwrights to experiment with new forms of theatrical production. It also saw the introduction of women on the English stage. Though these female performers were all noble amateurs, their presence on the stage played into the anti-theatrical polemics that players grappled with when shaping their public identities.

The first chapter looks beyond the borders of England to Continental Europe with an examination of the *commedia dell'arte* and Jesuit theater. This section is far from a comprehensive analysis of early modern theater in Europe. It seeks rather to focus on the aspects of *commedia dell'arte* and Jesuit drama that can offer a reflective lens for the English paradigm. The *commedia* offers a chance to see other possibilities for the dynamic relationship of new commercial opportunities and traditional bonds of patronage that governed theatrical commerce. The examination of Jesuit Theater shows another model for amateur performance. It also reveals the complex nature of religious theater after the English abandoned religious plays. This section furthers the discussion of both women and transvestitism on the stage. As in England this issue is often at the core of debates surrounding the theater. The players of the *commedia dell'arte*, both male and female, developed a variety of responses to anti-theatrical tracts. One strategy that

warrants particular attention in the development of a flamboyant public persona in line with the players theatrical performances, persona's that ranged from the foolish to the heroic.

By examining instances of both secular and religious theater the peculiar contours of England's experiences are illuminated. The effects of the Reformation were incredibly far reaching, though far from uniform. The history of early modern theater shows just how diverse this impact could be. Theater had long been a tool for religious and secular education. English theater took a particular post-Reformation trajectory, while studies of continental traditions reveal a variety of alternative paths. Religion played a major role in the theater, even the secular traditions of *commedia dell'arte*. Confessional beliefs not only shaped the content of plays, the dictated performance opportunities, how players shaped their identities, and responses by religious authorities. Jesuit Theater proves that Christian thinkers could and did create long-term alliances with the dramatic arts, and the limits of that alliance.

The second chapter examines the social upheavals of sixteenth and seventeenth century England. It contextualizes anti-theatrical literature by framing it in broader discussions of vagrancy and idleness. The fears of a disorderly playhouse were part of broader fears of a disorderly city and a disorderly realm. The desire for greater order in the city and the countryside encouraged the crown to order the gentry and nobility out of London. It also examines the written defenses of the theater. Defenders of the theater such as Thomas Lodge and Thomas Heywood utilized a variety of approaches to assert the legitimacy of the theatrical profession.

Chapter three examines early modern playing companies from an economic and social perspective. It considers the relationship between players, the formation and structure of companies, the relationship between master and apprentice, and the relationship between player and patron. It further examines how the experiences of players reinforced the claims made in written defenses of the theater.

Chapter One: Harlequins and Jesuits

During the early modern period, theatrical practices varied from region to region. England was not the only nation to develop a professional theatrical tradition. *Commedia dell'arte* companies toured the principalities of the Italian city-states and made frequent trips to France under the sponsorship the Medici queens. Examining theater outside of England also lends important insights into the intense debates surrounding women on the stage. Whether played by young boys or grown women, female characters became the focus of frequent anti-theatrical rhetoric. The development of secular theater also coincided with new developments in religious theater. The Jesuits honed the tradition of religious school dramas. They utilized drama for religious instruction and as a tool to cultivate patronage. They adapted dramatic practices to serve the needs of the order across Europe and in missions in the New World. Examining the response to both secular and religious theater reveals the conflicted opinions that crossed confessional boundaries. While theater on explicitly religious subjects disappeared from the English stage by the late sixteenth century, in many areas of the Continent secular and religious theater co-existed. Debates about the importance of plays and the legitimacy of the theatrical profession occurred across the Continent. These arguments reveal the variety of ideological responses to plays across early modern Europe.

Commedia dell'arte

As in England, the origins of theater on the European continent are strongly tied to religious festivals. In fifteenth and early sixteenth century Italy the carnival season was the high season for theatrical performances. The *commedia dell'arte* grew out of the

carnival traditions beginning in Venice with the *buffoni*. The *buffoni* represent a particular tradition in Italian comedy, of stylized characters, and displays of virtuosity. *Buffoni* performances included comedic scenes, musical performances, dance and acrobatics, and physical and vocal impersonations. The themes of *buffoni* theater were secular in nature, often focusing on social satire. While Ruzante is probably the most famous of the *buffoni*, Andrea Calmo, Domenico Taiacalze, and Zuan Polo Liompardi were also noted performers.

Since *buffoni* performances were an occasional event, primarily around the carnival season, the performers all practiced a second trade. The occasional nature of both performers and performance would impact the ways players shaped their identity as theater evolved and because a year round occupation and event. Like the performers in Corpus Christi pageants, the *buffoni* were active participants in artisan guilds. The *Compagnie della Calza* were frequent sponsors of the *buffoni*, who paraded and performed with company members during festivals and the Carnival season.¹

During the 1540s, surviving records indicate that theater was an exclusively male profession. It is likely that women were inhibited from performing out of moral concerns. There were fears that a woman on stage would corrupt her audience, encouraging thoughts of lust. The contracts indicate that these companies thought along the same lines as guilds. Though the players were only bound for the length of the contract, during that period their interests would be shared. There were provisions in case of illness, the division of the profits, a prohibition against gambling with fellow

¹ Robert Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell'Arte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 56.

company members, and against independent theatrical activity.² The formation of the company was seen as a mutually beneficial endeavor and the contract attempted to regulate the behavior of company members in order to maintain those benefits. A notarized contract lent an element of familiarity to this new type of company. It clarified the expectations of behavior and action for both members of the company and the patrons who hired them.

Reciprocally and in turn the company members promise to one another that when they are accompanied by other actors to any city, town, villa, or land where the company is going in order to perform plays, that they can be contracted with the other actors on the condition that, for their part, the said Giovanni and Maphio are able to agree.³

The clause against the pursuit of independent theatrical activity shows that while players were looking to new modes of professional performance, they had not abandoned the tradition of performance in the public piazza. In fact, in the mid sixteenth century it appears players found both independent and company performances were important components of their livelihood.

Though the popular image of *commedia dell'arte* is of outdoor theater for a mixed audience, even in the early years of professional theater patronage was central to company formations. Though *commedia* companies did not bear the name of a specific patron, patrons could dictate a great deal about the companies schedule and performances. The company associations and relationship to patrons were an important

² Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell'Arte*, 70.

³ This excerpt from the 1549 contract for a company under the leadership of Giovanni Trevisan and Ser Maphio is translated and featured in Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell'Arte*, 72.

part of the emerging self-definition of professional players. For their public performances, players needed to compete with charlatans and mountebanks who could employ equally impressive verbal displays to attract the attention of the crowd. “If the mountebanks’ legitimacy was continually attacked, by both medical and ecclesiastical authorities, they defended themselves in part by invoking literary and humanist authority — just as the actors did.”⁴ Public performance posed a challenge to professional players; it was simultaneously an important part of livelihoods that rendered them vulnerable to unfavorable comparisons. These associations were furthered by the archetypal figures of both solo street performances and commedia companies. The *zanni* figures were never completely trustworthy. They were lazy, scheming (even if it was in service to the *inamorati*) tricksters prone to obscene language and gestures. This was particularly true of solo performances in the public piazza. The *zanni/dottore* pretended to possess the same skills of false medicine as the street mountebanks clamoring for the attention of the same crowd. The 1587 poem “La dottrina del Zanni” tells the story of the typical *zanni* figure who comes to Venice and transforms himself into the false medicine man claiming to cure all sorts of ailments. He will become, “[the] very zanni, who by studying for days, months, and years, has made the Bergamask valley famous.”⁵ Players utilized print for a variety of purposes, to publish apologias and defend their profession, for publicity, and to bring their art to a new medium. It contains the same hopes, ambitious schemes, and mockery as a stage performance.

When women joined the ranks of professional *commedia* troupes in the 1560s, this added another layer of complication to the ways players defined themselves and their

⁴ Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell’Arte*, 80.

⁵ “La dottrina del Zanni” (Venice: Segno della Regina, 1587) translated and featured in Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell’Arte*, 130.

profession. As women began appearing on the Italian stage, the Catholic Church was in a period of major reform. The Council of Trent ended in 1563 after instituting sweeping reforms, including tighter control on the activity of nuns both within and outside of cloister walls. The emergence of professional actresses was accompanied by literature that attacked or defended their presence on the stage. Beginning with the first sensational *prima donna innamorata* of the commedia stage, Vincenza Armani, women were simultaneously heralded for their intelligence, grace, and virtuosity and condemned as a corrupting influence for both the audience and their fellow company members. The women on stage were the objects of lust, both within the context of the play and from the audience. Scenes of madness were both the source of an actress' greatest acclaim and condemnation. The displays of madness (*pazzia*) included displays of both verbal and physical virtuosity. Yet these displays often included obscene words and actions. Isabella Andreini was particularly famous for her *pazzia* scenes, in which she would tear her clothes, exposing herself to both the audience and her fellow players. She would speak in nonsense riddled with explicit puns. "According to Aristotle, the soul is a spirit, which diffuses itself through the casks of muscatel of Montefiascone, and because of that you could see the rainbow give a clister to 'Isola' [a pun on the Italian name for Elizabeth] of England, who could not piss."⁶ Female players could blend humanist erudition with the bawdy jests of their fellow actors. The obscene behavior that could be so troubling when performed by their male counterparts was doubly shocking when they did it. Obscene displays blurred the line between female players and prostitutes.

⁶ An excerpt from Scala's "La pazzia d'Isabella" translated and featured in Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell'Arte*, 102.

In the latter half of the sixteenth century, the play expanded to a year-round event. Though plays remained a popular entertainment for festivals and diplomatic events such as the signing of treaties and weddings, companies organized performances year round. It bears repeating that the emergence of organized companies who performed year round did not end the tradition of solo performances in public piazzas and at banquets.

Commedia dell'arte players consistently balanced a mix of public and private; solo and group performance; and patronage and commercial success in order to maintain their livelihood. The 1583 letter of Francesco Andreini to Vincenzo Gonzaga reveals the numerous balancing acts that players were required to perform. Gonzaga, the Mantuan prince, reveals the delicate balance that the players maintained:

I understand from your highness's musician Sig. Antonio your desire and good intentions regarding the New Company that you would like to assemble.... I cannot, without great displeasure, thank you for your most courteous intention... since finding myself bound in faith to the *Gelosi*, and in particular to Sig. Alvise Michiel, patron of the hall in Venice, I am constrained to decline the offer.⁷

Francesco Andreini is carefully balancing a number of opposing interests. There are those of him and his wife as solo performers, certainly joining the elite company Gonzaga hoped to put together would be personally profitable. Participating in a special performance with other notable players offered an opportunity for publicity and financial reward. Yet the needs of the company come first, and Andreini demurred that he and his wife could not abandon the *Gelosi*. Then there is the balance of patronage and commercial interests. Gonzaga's Mantua was an important home for artists, particularly actors. He was a generous patron of the theater, yet Francesco demurs that he cannot abandon his commercial relationship with a Venetian theater to honor the request of this

⁷ The excerpt and translation of this letter dated 13 April 1583 are from Anne MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6.

powerful patron. This refusal is not to suggest that modern commerce was replacing patronage as the primary economic engine of the arts. It simply reveals the necessity to balance styles of artistic and economic interaction in order to maintain their livelihood. In this case Francesco and Isabella's ties to their fellow company members and the obligations of the *Gelosi* to Venice and Alvise Michiel outweigh their private ties to Vincenzo Gonzaga.

The *commedia dell'arte* companies differed from their English counterparts in two important ways, the first informing the second. Unlike in England, the Italian *commedia* troupes of the sixteenth century included women. This meant that companies were often made up of extended kinship networks. For example, Isabella Andreini the *prima donna innamorata* of the troupe known as the *Gelosi* helped run the company with her husband and fellow actor, Francesco. The model they represent, of a family network functioning as the basis of a professional network, was a norm for the *commedia* troupes of the sixteenth century. In *commedia* companies, the entire family could actively participate in various aspects of business to a far greater degree than was possible in England. The Andreini family was, of course, the most famous and successful example, with Isabella and Francesco running the *Compagnia dei Gelosi*; after Isabella's death their son Giovan Battista Andreini and their daughter-in-law Virginia Andreini would lead the *Compagnia dei Fidei*.

There was a certain amount of fluidity in the composition of troupes as players drifted in and out of the ranks of a company at the request of a patron, for economic opportunity, or personal conflict. The 1549 contract discussed above reveals the temporary nature of many *commedia* troupes. Players often floated in and out of a troupe formed around a few star performers, such as the Andreini's who formed the core of the

Gelosi and Fideli. Even the leaders of companies could perform extra-company work at the command of a patron who commissioned a performance from a handpicked troupe of actors.

Commedia dell'arte performers were frequently employed for secular celebrations and diplomatic events. The celebration of treaties and marriages placed players in the center of political events. The famous actresses Isabella Andreine and Vittoria Piissimi performed at the 1589 wedding of Ferdinando de' Medici and Christine of Lorraine in Florence. It was one of the famed instances where the two prima donnas performed in competition with one another. Piissimi starred in *La Cingana* while Andreini performed *La Pazzia d'Isabella*. The only record of the performances is in the diary of Giuseppe Pavoni. "Saturday, which was the sixth, the Duke finding himself at a performance of the Gelosi with those two most famous women Vittoria and Isabella, it occurred to him that for entertainment it would be a good idea if they recited a comedy of their own choosing."⁸ Theatrical performance was one of the central entertainments at the wedding of Ferdinando and Christine Lorraine. The cultivation of theatrical talent was another opportunity for the Medici family to display their wealth and magnificence.

Members of the Medici family were some of the most famous patrons of the arts, their patronage extending far beyond the walls of Florence and the borders of Tuscany to Rome and France. Marie de' Medici, wife of Henri IV of France and mother of Henrietta Maria, was a particularly driven patroness of the arts. Northern Italy remained a center of diplomatic events including the Treat of Tortona between Henri IV and Carlo Emanuele Savoy, and the marriage of Henri and Marie. Theatrical performances were part of the

⁸ The excerpt and translation of Pavoni's diary is from MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century*, 32.

celebrations for the treaty and the marriage. Marie de' Medici continued to support Italian theater even as the queen of France; she brought Italian players to France on several occasions. The patronage of the Marie de' Medici was part of her role as a representative of her family in the French court.⁹

Noble patrons rewarded the most successful players for their artistic services in a variety of ways. In addition to continuing to commission special performances, patrons provided a number of economic and social privileges to players. The dukes of Mantua were particularly generous patrons conferring a number of privileges upon prominent players. In 1599, Francesco Gonzaga of Mantua decreed that Tristano Martinelli, known for pioneering the Harlequin (Arlecchino) role, was to be the supervisor of charlatans and street performers in Mantua. The privilege was confirmed by Francesco's successor, Ferdinando Gonzaga on April 8, 1613. The 1613 declaration puts Martinelli in charge of "mercenary actors, jugglers, acrobats who walk the tightrope, those who present demonstrations and edifices and the like, and charlatans who put up benches in the piazzas in order to sell oils [etc.]... and those who put up signs to advertise treatment, and similar types of people." The position also provided Martinelli with an annual income.¹⁰ This position tied the performer to the Mantuan court and made him the intermediary between court life and piazza performer. The order shows how high a player could rise, although it also shows how lowly he could be. The only distinction between the player and the charlatan was the content of his piazza performance.

Martinelli was far from the only performer to receive a variety of privileges in recognition of his work. The Andreini family was able to secure numerous privileges

⁹ MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century*, 88.

¹⁰ The excerpt and translation of the April 8, 1613 decree is from Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell'Arte*, 123.

from the rulers of Florence, Ferrara and Mantua. The eldest daughter of Isabella and Francesco, Lavinia, served in the house of Eleonora de' Medici, wife of Vincenzo Gonzaga of Mantua, for ten years. Lavinia eventually left the service of Eleonora to enter a monastery, and her patroness paid the required dowry.¹¹ Francesco Andreini was also granted Mantuan citizenship, the privileges of which extended to the rest of his family. As a Mantuan citizen, Andreini and his family had the right to enter and leave the city without permission or taxation, the right to trade, and the right to own property within the duchy. In 1607 Francesco purchased a villa in Castelbelforte, his son and daughter-in-law would add to the property.¹² Like Martinelli, the Andreini's were able to convert their position as popular performers to material gain.

Certain players were able to use their fame for material gain, to purchase land, or hold profitable positions. Many players in the Italian city-state pursued other paths to achieve cultural and intellectual legitimacy. In particular, players sought to integrate themselves into humanist circles through publication and correspondence. Isabella Andreini was particularly adept at this. In 1601 she became a member of the Accademia degli Intenti of Pavia. As part of a society of letters, Andreini was actively engaged with intellectual leaders and patrons. She actively engaged in correspondence with humanists across Europe, particularly Erycius Puteanus an encyclopedist from the Low Countries. Throughout these letters are discussions of the way Isabella's theatrical performances and literary endeavors defy the expectations of her gender.

It has been implanted in women by nature to be able to speak, but in you to be able to speak well, whence it arises that by correcting a feminine vice you surpass even the virtue of the male... You write with accuracy and acuity; you speak extemporaneously, but as if you had composed it—with such richness and

¹¹ MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century*, 48.

¹² MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century*, 80.

fullness, that when nothing can be added, nothing remains unaddressed...Bring out more, so that fertile with children as you are, you may also become fertile with books. Accordingly, you have enclosed for me from your own hand epistles that they might come into the hands of many, compositions in which every comic delight, tragic riches, and everything elegant reside.¹³

The letters between Puteanus and Andreini contained repeated expressions of regard for one another. This particular letter reveals the ways Andreini was able to use her theatrical performances to craft a humanist identity. Her eloquence and the excitement she brought to the stage simultaneously utilized the expectations of a talkative female and also surpassed them. Her work on the stage allowed her to speak in ways that shattered gender expectations. Images of fertility remain central to her image and play a role in her correspondence and publication. Andreini fulfilled the image of a fertile woman in her marriage to her husband Francesco giving birth to seven children.¹⁴ Her physical fertility defines her intellectual output. Her writing, like her children, are the legacy she will leave to the world. Andreini used participation in humanist circles to forge an identity that reconciled her gender, her work on the stage, and her literary output. She created an identity for a female performer far removed from accusations of prostitution and shamelessness.

The *commedia dell'arte* is the iconic model of early modern theater on the Continent. A style of theater closely tied to street performers and the public *piazza*, the players of *commedia dell'arte* always delicately balanced respectable and disreputable aspects of their professional identity: the mountebank and the prostitute contrasted with the craftsman and the devoted mother. Italian players utilized the complex views

¹³ Letter from Erycius Puteanus to Isabella Andreini excerpt and translation from MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century*, 311.

¹⁴ Andreini died at the birth of her eighth child.

surrounding their profession to enhance their renown. They cultivated relationships with their patrons and their art became the centerpiece of courtly celebrations.

Jesuit Theater

Unlike England, where plays were assigned a largely secular function, or the *commedia dell'arte* where plays were part of both secular and religious celebrations, Jesuit theater maintained the use of plays for religious instruction and moral education. In the early modern period Jesuit theater was simultaneously a global and an incredibly local phenomenon. Teachers and missionaries in Europe, the Americas, and Asia instructed a variety of pupils through theatrical presentation. Theater allowed members of the Society to connect with the surrounding community. Though the larger aims of Jesuit plays were consistent, the plays produced in service of those aims could vary widely based on local tastes and concerns. Theater was a tool for education and a weapon against the threat of Protestantism and paganism. Jesuit theater was a product of humanism in as much as the Jesuit order itself was. In creating a particular style of drama, the Jesuits drew on the inherently theatrical nature of the mass and Catholic ceremony. Drama allowed the Jesuit order a way to educate and entertain not only their own pupils but also a larger community. Whatever the reservations and objections moralists raised regarding theater, its ability to draw a large crowd made it an effective means of communication and publicity.

The Society of Jesus was founded in 1540, and from the start education lay at the heart of the Society's mission. The Jesuits sought to train both future priests and members of the laity. As Jesuit schools opened across Europe, then across the globe, Jesuit instructors and dramatists used theater in a variety of ways as an educational tool.

The presence of drama as a feature of Jesuit education from the Society's earliest days is evident from its inclusion in each version of the *Ratio Studiorum*, the educational guidelines created by the Society's founder, Ignatius Loyola. The 1586 edition states: "Our students and their parents become wonderfully enthusiastic, and at the same time become very much attached to our Society, when we train the boys to show the results of their study, their acting ability, and their ready memory, on the stage."¹⁵ From the outset, the Society viewed theater as a multi-purpose tool. Not only could it teach students necessary skills in memorization and public speaking, but plays also became a venue in which to display the virtues of the students.

Theater brought the Society closer to the families of their pupils as well as the surrounding community. In some areas this meant that students of the Jesuit College were performing before a crowd of both Catholics and Protestants. A description of a performance in Speier in 1575 reveals the possibility of a mixed audience:

It was held on the large square before the cathedral in the open air, before a large crowd from the city and the countryside.... Even Protestant spectators were in tears and distinguished Calvinists opined that this play was of more value than all the sermons and psalm-singing of Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists together.¹⁶

This letter by the German Jesuits to their superiors reveals their aspirations for theatrical production. The virtues of their message relayed by the moving performance of the students could successfully reach those who had strayed from Catholic belief as well as followers of the Pope. Theater is a tool to make the yearning for confessional unity into a reality.

¹⁵ This excerpt and translation of the 1586 *Ratio Studiorum* from William McCabe, *An Introduction to the Jesuit Theater: A Posthumous Work* (St Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1983), 13.

¹⁶ *Epistolae e Germania ad Generals* translated in Eugene Devlin, *Jacob Grester and the German Jesuit Drama in the Sixteenth Century* (Lexington, KY: Lexington Literature Series, 1973), 369.

As the educational mission of the society continued to grow, the *Ratio Studiorum* evolved as well. The 1599 edition stated: “Tragedies and comedies must be in Latin, and they must be very few. Their subjects should be religious and edifying, and there should be no interludes that are not in Latin and in good taste. No female characters or costumes may be used.”¹⁷ The guidelines became stricter, though there was a certain amount of latitude allowed in each of these points. There are recorded instances of the Jesuits presenting vernacular dramas in Paris¹⁸ and Greece.¹⁹ Though the rules might be bent for a variety of reasons, including artistic expression, the rationale was typically expressed as the best strategy to capture the audience. A Jesuit performance in Constantinople in 1624 celebrating St. Chrysostome illustrates the recognition that the vernacular was a powerful tool. “To gain more easily the hearts of the Greeks, the whole play was given in their vernacular language and on the same day that they celebrate the feast of St. Chrysostome.”²⁰ Jesuit playwrights crafted works in the vernacular when they found it advantageous to do so.

The rules governing Jesuit Theater were firmly opposed to the presence of women on stage. Yet the absence of female performers created a new conundrum, was it morally sound to allow cross-dressing? The 1599 edition of the *Ratio*, mentioned above, presented a vision of what drama ought to be, whatever the genre the theme ought to offer religious instruction. Since one of the justifications for theater at the Jesuit schools

¹⁷ The 1599 edition of the *Ratio Studiorum* in McCabe, *An Introduction to Jesuit Theater*, 14.

¹⁸ Judith Rock, *Terpsichore at Louis-Le-Grand: Baroque Dance on a Jesuit Stage in Paris* (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996) 12.

¹⁹ Walter Puchner “Jesuit Theatre on the Islands of the Aegean Sea” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 21, no. 2 (October 2003): 207.

²⁰ *Ibid* 214

was to teach the pupils masculine gracefulness, cross-dressing would undermine this purpose.

Frederick the Pious, Elector Palatinate of the Rhine, acknowledged that the same 1575 performance mentioned above, which the Jesuits viewed with triumph, occasioned protest and disgust. He wrote: “From the letter of protest of the city of Speier, it may be seen amongst other things how they (the Jesuits) contrive to weaken our Christian religion in public plays, where the actors wear Saxon women’s garments.”²¹ Frederick’s letter reveals the extent of the fictional response created by the Jesuits to their plays. When discussing the negative reaction to the plays, the appearance of men in women’s garb is a point of emphasis. The cross-dressing of the actors is a point of particular disgust that is given special attention in the criticism of the Jesuits performance. Cross-dressing bears a biblical prohibition: “A woman shall not wear a man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment.”²² For opponents of Jesuit theater, cross-dressing goes beyond the rest of the theatrical performance as a tool to weaken public religion.

Yet many Jesuit playwrights requested, and received permission from Jesuit leaders in Rome to include a female character in their play. “If feminine roles may not be acted, the most important biblical plays, such as *Esther*, *Magdalene*, etc., could not be performed.”²³ The argument was made, and accepted that the lives of female saints and martyrs contained valuable lessons. But those lessons had to be presented carefully. The

²¹ Translated in Eugene Devlin, *Jacob Grester and the German Jesuit Drama in the Sixteenth Century*, 369.

²² Deut 22:5

²³ Letter of the Provincial Superior Theodor Busaeus to the General translated in Eugene Devlin, *Jacob Grester and the German Jesuit Drama in the Sixteenth Century*, 371. See also Joohee Park “Not Just a University Theater: The Significance of Jesuit School Drama in Continental Europe, 1540-1773” in *Catholic Theater and Drama, Critical Essays*, ed. Kevin J. Wetmore (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010) 37. McCabe, *An Introduction to Jesuit Theater*, 180-1.

Jesuit playwrights and their students were able to rationalize the appearance of women on stage; the necessity of cross-dressing was still met with reactions that ranged from ambivalence to disgust.

Responses to theater are only consistent in their inconsistency. Particularly when it comes to the presence of female characters and actresses on the stage. Though the bible proscribed cross-dressing, many moralists and theologians found it preferable to the presence of women on the stage. Though theater frequently posed problems, it was an invaluable addition to many secular and religious celebrations. Patronage of theatrical performances allowed the rulers to cultivate an image of sophistication and magnificence. Professional players, and Jesuit school theatricals cultivated mutually beneficially relationships with powerful patrons. This relationship helped to legitimize theatrical production by providing it with a clear social utility, service to a social superior.

Jesuit drama existed everywhere the Jesuit's had a school. It was endlessly adaptable to suit the needs of both the students and the community surrounding the school. Though the question of women on the stage was a continually vexing issue, it also reveals a flexibility of thought and opinion. Opponents of the Jesuits attacked the presence of female characters in the Jesuit plays because it was a convenient target. Though the Jesuits initially believed it best to ban the feminine body from the stage at all times, they willingly allowed exceptions to this rule. For both the Jesuits and secular players, theater presented opportunities to forge important connections. Theater brought the Jesuits instructors closer to their local community, it allowed professional players to form connections to leading intellectuals, and provided a path to the patronage of local rulers.

Chapter Two: Dancing, Dicing, and Vain Interludes Reproved

Issues of urban disorder and civil control were only one of the factors that shaped views on players. The previous chapter examined often-complex relationship between the theater and the church across Europe. Whether producing a secular or religious production, theater served a variety of purposes and aroused a number of debates. The first part of this chapter explores the origins of theater in England and its shifting relationship with religion in a period of religious upheaval. The second part examines anti-theatrical criticism in the context of social upheaval. It links the trends of anti-theatrical criticism to broader concerns of order and disorder. At times the social and religious concerns are indistinguishable. Social conditions, such as poverty demanded the attention of religious leaders while religious beliefs influenced responses to every aspect of daily life from physical appearance to leisure pursuits. The final part of this chapter examines the relationship between theater and politics. It examines what happened when amateur theatricals, the public stage, and anti-theatrical criticism became issues of political contention that forced the monarch and Privy Council to respond in a variety of ways.

Theater and Religion

In England the alliance between theater and the church can be observed in the tradition of miracle plays to celebrate various religious festival, particularly Corpus Christi. The plays were generally sponsored by various guilds and successful

productions enhanced the prestige of the guild.¹ The Reformation divorced the guilds from traditional associations with patron saints. The evolution of drama and the responses to the theater are closely tied to the religious and consequent social upheavals of the sixteenth century. Dramatists responded to and participated in the theological debates occurring across the Continent. Not only was drama used as a tool for education, it was also a staging ground for the religious debates.

Theater had a distinct role in medieval society. Theatricality was part of popular worship in and out of churches. A sense of theater pervaded the rituals of the medieval church; it was also part of the worship of the laity with special plays performed to celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi. In medieval England, various professional guilds sponsored and performed the plays as part of the Corpus Christi ceremony. The plays contributed to the status and prestige of the various guilds within their communities.² The performance of plays gave guild members a chance to publicly display wealth and status by taking part in a ritual that was important to individuals, corporations, and the community at large. Furthermore, the nature of the play cycles meant that the guilds could both enact their rivalries by attempting to outdo on another with lavish productions and at the same time, each production was part of the larger cycle and each guild was part of the larger community. “The point about the Corpus Christi play cycle then is that it projected a symbolism of temporal mutation within the urban body, while also providing in this respect a necessary complement to the Corpus Christi procession, which defined the static order prevailing in the urban world.”³ The Corpus Christi plays faded under the

¹ Mervyn James *Society, Politics, and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

² Ibid 32.

³ Ibid 34.

pressure of the English Reformation when such traditions were frequently seen as popish. From the medieval tradition of religious playing arose the secular players, forming companies under the protection of the monarch and powerful lords.

The use of plays for spiritual instruction did not end with the Reformation. Paul Whitfield White examines the role of the newly professional playing companies in the early years of the Reformation. Reform-oriented leaders patronized playwrights and players in order to shape public opinion and provide religious instruction during the early days of the Reformation. Plays were an important tool in the dissemination of belief from the Corpus Christi plays through the Reformation. Popular participation was an essential characteristic of the early modern stage. Players and audience members were actively engaged with the dramas unfolding on the stage. When the dramas contained a theological discussion, both players and audience members were active in the religious discussion. Theater was one tool among many that could effectively influence the religious ideals of the populace. The pageantry of theater could engage its audience as Catholic rituals once did.

It was not just the patrons who were committed to religious change; the playwrights, players, and audience were committed participants. "Playwrights of the English Reformation operated under conditions and for purposes comparable to those of other protestant authors, and the players they wrote for, and in many instances organized and participated with were similarly involved in the dissemination of Protestantism."⁴ Whitfield White demonstrates that the Puritan condemnation and official anxiety we associate with the early modern stage was inconsistent, particular in the first half of the

⁴ Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England*, 7.

sixteenth century. He cites Thomas Cromwell's patronage of a company of players as particular evidence that even the most reform-minded members of the elite were interested in plays. They recognized that the stage presented another opportunity to win the masses away from Rome. Theater was a tool for noble patrons to advocate for their vision of the nation's religious future. As long as the course of the Reformation was open to debate, theater was a forum where those debates could be staged.

In 1549 the Act of Uniformity was passed; it instituted the Book of Common Prayer as the sole basis for legal worship in England. Section two declared illegal: "Any interludes, plays, songs, rhymes, or by other open words declare or speak anything in the derogation, depraving, or despising of the same book or of anything therein contained."⁵ In addition to prohibiting theatrical events on religious subjects, the statute seeks to prevent individuals from speaking or acting against the instituted religion, in this case Protestantism. Individuals or ministers who act against the Book of Common Prayer would be punished. Whitfield White astutely argues that section two of the 1549 Act of Uniformity and a 1551 proclamation requiring all plays to be approved by the Privy Council and receive a license should not be read as acts of censorship. Instead they are evidence that the government recognized that plays were a valuable tool for propaganda, one the government could, and did, utilize.⁶ It was not until the reign of Elizabeth that plays on religious subjects were refused licenses; of course this had wide latitude since many of the surviving "popular" plays from the years 1558-1576 have overtly Protestant

⁵ Gerald Lewis Bray, *Documents of the English Reformation*. (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1994).

⁶ Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation*, 47.

messages.⁷ In these plays, Protestants are cast as heroes against villainous Catholic figures.

A Larum for London by anonymous author is a quintessential example of the heroic Protestant and the villainous Catholic.⁸ Depicting the sack of Antwerp the play tells the story of a heroic wounded soldier and the plotting Spaniards. It is a play about Protestant virtue and Spanish-Catholic violence. This sort of pro-Protestant production was acceptable because beyond the conflation of Protestantism with virtue, in the character of the hero, it did not engage in theological debates. The limit on theological debates in the theater was part of a broader set of limitations placed upon religious debate.

After instituting a religious settlement at the start of her reign with the Queen's Injunctions issued in 1559, Elizabeth resisted any further religious reformation. This frustrated many of her subjects who wished to continue the process of religious reformation in England. The limitations on theatrical discourse on religious doctrine should be read in the context of reluctance to continue theological debates. Later plays, while overtly Protestant, did not stage theology. The tensions between the stage and the pulpit increased once the stage was no longer a tool of the pulpit but a competitor for the attention of the masses. The common assumption that players were seen as socially undesirable, akin to beggars, thieves, vagrants and gypsies come from several sources. The most prominent are the anti-theatrical tracts and sermons published by opponents of the theater. William Prynne, the Puritan pamphleteer, published *Histrion-mastix* the most famous of these treatises in 1633, though the first major wave of anti-theatrical

⁷ Ibid 57.

⁸ Anonymous, *A Larum for London: or The Siedge of Antwerpe* (London: Edward Allde for William Ferbrand, 1602).

publishing occurred over forty years before, in the 1570s and 80s. The second are declarations by members of the Privy Council and civil authorities such as the Lord Mayor and Justices of the Peace in London and the countryside. They dictated when and where players could perform. The reaction of the authorities to players, playhouses, and the potential for disorder speaks as much to the issue of civil control as it does to their views on the theater.

Theater and Society

Playhouses were often sites of social disorder, where diseases were transmitted, crimes committed, and riots could break out at a moments notice. Playhouses were designed to attract a large crowd and to engage with them physically, verbally, and emotionally. Lacking an effective police force, civil authorities had to find other ways to ensure the quite and cooperation of their populace. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw increased poverty, with unprecedented numbers of the populace unable to support themselves. Parliament, the Privy Council, and local authorities had to contend with a new problem, not everyone who had the ability and desire to perform honest labor could find work. Of even greater concern was the belief that there were those who could work but did not wish to pursue honest labor. Playhouses were seen as an attractive location for those who hoped to avoid honest labor to congregate. Performances at the public playhouses took place during working hours and might attract apprentices and journeymen who wished to shirk their work. It was also a popular site for thieves and prostitutes to frequent. Playing companies and the individuals who belonged to them had complex relationships with figures of authority in Elizabethan and Jacobean society

from the preachers who decried the immorality of the stage to the members of the Privy Council who sponsored companies.

Elizabethan and Jacobean governments and moralists were not just concerned with vagrants; the idle rich also posed a problem for local order. The wealthy had the means and the leisure to indulge in plays as well as prostitutes, gambling and duels. Though the public playhouse could, and did, bring in a cross-section of the London populace, the populace itself was predominately privileged, especially when compared to the rest of the nation. Ann Jennalie Cook argues that in London close to fifteen percent of the population could be considered members of the elite.⁹ Players and their opponents were attempting to reach the same small but influential portion of England's population. They were attempting to reach those Cook broadly described as privileged: the men (and women) who were not only literate but who had the money and leisure time to purchase books and attend the theater.

Idleness was a concern for authors of moral and social treatises as well as Parliament and the Privy Council. With the development of Elizabethan commercial theater came polemic condemning it for moral and social reasons. In *A Treatise Wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Plaies or Enterludse...Are Reprooved...* published in 1577 the author, John Northbrooke, takes aim at the various pastimes he viewed as detrimental to the English commonwealth. Northbrooke was a protestant clergyman with puritanical leanings.¹⁰ He argues that rather than waste their time on idle and dissipated pursuits such as gaming and play-going, men ought to concern themselves with their labors.

⁹ Ann Jennalie Cook, *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576-1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 73, 93.

¹⁰ Martha C. Skeeters, "Northbrooke, John (fl. 1567–1589)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20323>, accessed 11 April 2014

Northbrooke states, "None ought to live ydelly, but should be given to some vocation or calling to get his living withal, that he maye doe good unto others also."¹¹ Not only are past-times such as dicing, dancing, and play-going immoral, but for Northbrooke they also lead to civil disorder. He may be more pragmatic than some of his peers, insisting that magistrates can cure these ills. Northbrooke does not see his fellow men simply turning from these sins. He insists: "Therefore the magistrate must remember his office: For he beareth not his sworde for naught, for he is gods minister and a father of the countrey appointed of god, to punish offenders."¹² Northbrooke views plays as a social ill that can be cured by magistrates.

In 1579 Stephen Gosson wrote one of the most influential anti-theatrical tracts, *The Schoole of Abuse*. In it he takes aim at poets, players, and other types of performers. The heart of Gosson's argument is the issue of morality; it was the immorality of plays that provoked the disorder bred by playhouses. Gosson, like many of his fellow polemicists, was a clergyman, though he tried his hand as a playwright before condemning the stage in a series of treatises.¹³ He argues that plays are inspired by the devil and even with the best of intentions they still tempt men to sin and disorder. Gosson does make a limited exception for a few plays including *Catalins Conspiracies*, which he wrote.¹⁴ He argues that these plays contain more virtue than the average comedy though he does so with ambivalence, acknowledging that he had sinned in

¹¹ John Northbrooke, *A Treatise Wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Plaies or Enterludse...Are Reprooved...* (London: 1577), E4v.

¹² *Ibid* A1v.

¹³ Arthur F. Kinney, "Gosson, Stephen (*bap.* 1554, *d.* 1625)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2007) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11120>, accessed 11 April 2014

¹⁴ No copies of Gosson's plays have survived.

writing a play.¹⁵ *The Schoole of Abuse* was the first of several treatises Gosson wrote against the theater. In 1580 he attached “A Short Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse” to *The Ephemerides of Phialo* and in 1582 he published *Playes Confuted in Five Actions*. In these treatises Gosson continues to argue that theater is a corrupting force.

Playes Confuted in Five Actions sharpens the rhetoric that Gosson had previously employed. He is reluctant to make any exception to the immorality of plays, claiming that it was so insurmountable that rather than attempt to cure it from within by continuing as a playwright, he would denounce theater to the world. “Neuerthelesse if they should altogether swepe of this donge from the Stage, and employ them selues soberlie to rebukinge of manners; as I haue already proued the Stage to be vnfitte for such a purpose.”¹⁶ Gosson claims that even if the plays themselves were reformed to contain more virtuous material, enacting them would destroy any virtue they might contain. One important reason for this unavoidable immorality was the practice of having young boys portray the female characters. As the previous chapter discussed, the presence of women on stage, as performers or characters, was a matter of intense debate. The next chapter will examine at the appearance of women on stage in the context of amateur theatricals. Though women were banned from appearing on the public stage for moral reasons, the practice of having the young boys apprenticed to a company act the female roles created a new set of problems. Gosson argues:

Whatsoever he be that looketh narrowly into our Stage Playes, or considereth how, and which wasy they are represented, shall finde more filthiness in them, then Players dreame off, The law of God very straightly forbids men to put on womens garments, garments are set downe for signes distinctiue between sexe &

¹⁵ Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse* (London: 1579), C8v.

¹⁶ Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (London: 1582), D7r.

sexe, to take unto us those garments that are manifest signes of another sexe, is to falsifie, forge, and adulterate, contrarie to the expresse rule of the word of God.¹⁷

Gosson makes an explicit attack on one of the defining practices of theater in England. Though women were professional players on the Continent, in England women did not appear on the professional stage.

Salvian of Marseilles, another anti-theatrical author argues, that theater is an opponent of Christian virtue. His opposition to plays and players focuses on the spiritual dangers they pose, particularly that their continued existence will bring divine wrath to the English commonwealth. Salvian acknowledges that his anti-theatrical treatise, published in 1580, owes a debt to the to Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse*. He claims that it is a continuation of the attacks begun by Gosson the year before. Though Salvian likens players to beggars and vagrants, he does so to emphasize moral rather than social disorder:

What credite can returne to the Noble, to cou~tenance his men to exercise that qualitie which is not suffer|able in anie Co~mon-weale... but since the reteining of these Cater|pillers, the credite of Noble men hath decaied, & they are thought to be couetous by permitting their seruants... to liue at the deuotion or almes of other men, passing from countrie to countrie, from one Gentlemans house to another, offering their seruice, which is a kind of beggerie..¹⁸

He reprimands the nobility for making players their servants and accuses them of sponsoring begging and immorality. It is not the disreputability of begging that offends Salvain, it is the fact that players have turned away from the sort of honest labor that enjoys divine favor.

The 1580s saw a fourth popular pamphleteer decry the immorality of the theater.

Phillip Stubbes made his living as a pamphleteer and many of his works were anti-

¹⁷ Ibid C3v.

¹⁸ Salvian of Marsailles, *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters*, 2nd ed. (London: By Henrie Denhame for William Seres, 1580), F4r-F4v.

Catholic in nature. His most famous work, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, attacked contemporary fashions and pastimes.¹⁹ Stubbes attacks the worldly pleasures that London's elite enjoyed. His concern echoes the rationale of sumptuary laws, that apparel should reveal the status of the wearer, although the 1580s marks the beginning of the end for sumptuary laws, and by 1604 the last of those laws was repealed. Though fashion and luxury consumption would remain a contentious issue, views were rapidly changing. The splendor long associated with the monarch and nobility was becoming increasingly accessible to a range of people further down the social scale.²⁰ Stubbes is not only concerned with worldly order, but his attack on the theater also stems from his belief that it is inspired by the devil. He claims that the theater teaches men hypocrisy and deceit.²¹ Stubbes connects theater going and love of fashion with a general lack of piety. His pamphlet seeks to address a greater moral crisis. Stubbes, like many moralists of his day, views prostitution as a failure of moral fortitude and the cause, rather than the result, of poverty. They believed that prostitutes the men who went to prostitutes were squandering their income and would find themselves impoverished. Though he situates the moral crisis in pride and luxury it has far-reaching effects, including prostitution and lechery, which in his view means a rise in poverty. "This filleth the land with such store of poore people, that in short tyme (except some caution be prouided to preuent the same) it is like to growe to great pouertie and scarsnes, which GOD forbid."²² This point of view completely ignored the poverty and desperation that drove women to prostitution.

¹⁹ Alexandra Walsham, "Stubbes, Philip" (*b. c.1555, d. in or after 1610*), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26737>, accessed 11 April 2014]

²⁰ Linda Levy Peck, *Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth Century England*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 18.

²¹ Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (London: 1584), L8v.

²² *Ibid* H5v.

Northbrooke, Gosson, Salvain, and Stubbes are the main anti-theatrical authors of the 1570s and 1580s. Their work was part of a larger conversation with defenders of the theater. Each side mixed moral arguments about the inherent virtue or sins of playing with practical arguments focused on social propriety.

In response to Gosson's first attack, Thomas Lodge, a prolific author of moral treatises, poetry, and plays wrote a defense of poetry in 1579. The surviving copies of the work do not have a title page. Lodge refutes Gosson's attacks on the theater. He rejects the idea that it is an inherently immoral form. Lodge argues:

Many are greatly delighted with imitation, and that it were good to bring those things on stage, that were altogether tending to virtue: all this I admit, & hartley wysh, but you say vnlesse the thinge be taken away the vice will continue, nay I say if the style were changed the practices would profit and sure I thinke our theaters fit.²³

He refutes the assumption that imitation and disguise are inherently hypocritical and sinful. Lodge continued his part in the debate with Gosson in the preface to his 1584 work, *An Alarum Against Usurers*. As Gosson did in *The Schoole of Abuses*, Lodge dedicates his work to Sir Philip Sidney, whose own foray into the debate would be published posthumously in 1595. In the preface of *An Alarum Against Usurers*, Lodge accuses Gosson of slander. Lodge states: "he impugneeth me with these reproches, I am become a vagrant person, visited by the hevy hand of God, lighter then libertie, & lossier then vanitie."²⁴ Lodge argues that his association with the theater does not diminish his standing as a gentleman. His defense of plays and poetry does not reduce him to a vagrant; he is still a member of the Inns of Court. Lodge vehemently refutes the idea that association with the theater is inherently immoral or akin to vagrancy.

²³ Thomas Lodge, *Untitled* (London 1579).

²⁴ Thomas Lodge, *An Alarum Against Usurers* (London: 1584), A3r.

The proliferation of ant-theatrical pamphlets in the 1570s and 80s was part of a broader concern with an orderly society. Treatises on a variety of economic issues from enclosure to usury continued to be popular. Authors such as Thomas Harman laid out detailed treatises on the behavior of “vagabonds” and “sturdy beggars.” Harman’s 1566 work attempts to define and categorize the types of male and female vagabonds. Harman imagines a hierarchy of dishonest men and women that parallels the Elizabethan ideals of social order.²⁵ Beggars develop particular strategies in order to cheat the unsuspecting and it is possible to classify them accordingly. This sort of treatise reveals the desire for a society that is organized even in its anti-social elements. It is a dark reflection of the author’s aspirations for how society should be. All men are easily classifiable whether or not they make an honest living. Harman’s work was very influential, going through multiple reprints and influencing much of the later work on vagabonds.²⁶ It should be noted that while many of the “vagabonds” Harman imagines employ theatrical means to achieve their ends, feigning illness and tragedy, players are not counted amongst the vagabonds.

The assumption that players were generally viewed as threats to the order and stability of English society was part of a larger cultural vision of labor, idleness and disorder. There are countless references made by the Privy Council, JPs, and the Mayors of various towns denouncing the disorder caused by troupes of players. In 1615, a

²⁵ Thomas Harman, “A Caveat or Warening for Commen Cursetors Vularely Called Vagabones” in R.H. Tawney ed. *Tudor Economic Documents; Being Select Documents Illustrating the Economic and Social History of Tudor England* (London: Longmans, 1924), 408.

²⁶ Christopher Burlinson, ‘Harman, Thomas (fl. 1547–1567)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2006) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12352>, accessed 11 April 2014]

Chester official declared: “Moreover at the same Assembly consideration was had of the common bruit & scandal which, this city hath of late incurred and sustained by admitting of stage players to act their obscene and unlawful plays or tradgedies... a receptacle for idle persons.”²⁷ This sort of response to players is part of a broader view of law and order in English society. The players are accused of presenting material that corrupts the population, creating chaos; they are seen as encouraging other men to embrace idleness.

A series of laws and statutes that regulated begging and the administration of charity was one of the hallmarks of Tudor government. The statutes of 1597 and 1601 were the culmination of Tudor efforts to tend to the poor and regulate vagrancy. They shaped views on charity and begging into the early eighteenth century. The 1597 statute declared:

That the Father and Grandfather, and the Mother and Grandmother, and the Children of every poor, old, blind, lame, and impotent Person or other poor Person not able to work, being of a sufficient Ability, shall, at their own Charges, relieve and maintain every such poor Person in that Manner, and according to that Rate, as by the Justices of Peace of that County where such sufficient Persons dwell, or the greater Number of them, at their General Quarter Sessions shall be assessed; upon Pain that every one them shall forfeit twenty Shillings for every Month, which they shall fail therein.²⁸

Though the poor law recognized the need for welfare on a national scale, the ideal execution remained parochial. Parliament sought to create a standard of welfare administration that could be carried out by local communities.

One of the challenges players faced, especially when companies toured was how they fit into these new regulations. Regulations of the theater, like the new poor laws,

²⁷ John Tucker Murray, *English Dramatic Companies 1558-1642* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 235.

²⁸ “An Acte for the Relief of the Poor 1601” in R. H. Tawney, *Tudor Economic Documents; Being Select Documents Illustrating the Economic and Social History of Tudor England*. (London: Longmans, 1924), v. 2, 349-50.

were concerned with the possibility of disorder in an idle population. Regulations against the theater should not be seen as targeting a specific profession and a particular pastime, theatrical regulation was part of a larger program of civil order. During the reign of Elizabeth I, the Lord Chamberlain and Lord Admiral's men were frequently in conflict with their neighbors, the London authorities, and the Justices of the Peace for Middlesex and Surrey, the suburbs where they built their theaters. A 1601 letter to the Justices of Middlesex and Surrey from the Privy Council makes it plain that the authorities of those counties were concerned about the possibility of disorder provoked by the theater. Having passed an order limiting the number of playhouses, the Privy Council now felt that it was the responsibility of the local JPs to enforce that restriction. They informed the JPs of Middlesex and Surrey:

The default of perfourmance of which our saide order we must in greate parte the rather impute to the Justices of the Peace, because at the same tyme wee gave earnest direction unto you to see it streightly executed, and to certifie us of the execution... and especially to call before you the owners of all the other play howses (excepting the two howses in Middlesex and Surrey aforementioned), and to take good and sufficient bondes of them not to exerciese, use or practise nor to suffer from henceforth to be exerciesed, used or practized an stage playinge in their howses, and if they shall refuse to enter into such bondes then to comitt them to prison utill they shall conforme themselves.²⁹

The response of the Privy Council's, which contained many patrons of theater companies, demonstrates a great deal of ambivalence. While they recognize the validity of the complaints made by the Middlesex and Surrey JPs, they are unwilling to take further action against playing companies and theaters. The Privy Council thus maintained the limited protection offered to the playing companies that bore their names while guarding against the potential for disorder.

²⁹ Great Britain, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series 1547-1625* (Nendeln, Liechtenstein : Kraus Reprint, 1967), v.14.

Common laborers, players, and the destitute were not the only groups who faced regulations meant to preserve order in both the city and country; the monarch and Privy Council also attempted to regulate the behavior of the gentry and urban elite. Elizabeth, James, and Charles all issued multiple proclamations ordering gentlemen out of London. The crown reasoned that with the gentry in London, hospitality and care for the poor were neglected in the country. Furthermore, the swelling population of London increased the inevitable spread of diseases and expanded the potential for disorder. The 1603 proclamation issued by James I stated: “Wee have bene mooved rather to want for a time the contentment wee have in the sight and resort of our Subjects to us, then for our owne private delight, to give way to so greate a mischief, as the continuall resort hither may breed.”³⁰ James I issued further statutes ordering the gentry home in 1614, 1617, and 1622. Urban unrest could just as easily come from the idle rich as the idle poor.

Players and supporters of the theater frequently made the argument that it was better for the rich to spend their money and leisure time at a play than in a tavern or a brothel. In the area around the playhouses, prospective customers could also see bear baitings and cockfights. They could spend the day gambling or at Finsbury or Moor Fields. Of course, the argument that the playhouse was a more desirable location could be a tenuous one. There are well-documented instances of cutpurses and whores plying their trade in the theaters and vendors sold the audience both food and spirits. In *The Schoole of Abuse*, Gosson claims that the theater is a second home to prostitutes:

To celebrate the Sabboth, flock to Theaters, and there keepe a generall Market of Bawdrie: Not that any filthynesse in deede, is committed within the compasse of that ground, as was doone in *Rome*, but that euery wanton and his Paramour, euery man and his Mistresse, euery John and his Joan, euery knaue and his

³⁰ James Francis Larkin, and Paul L. Hughes, ed. *Royal Proclamations of King James I, 1603-1625* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 22.

queane, are there first acquainted & cheapen the Merchandise in that place, which they-pay for elsewhere as they can agree. These wormes when they dare not nestle in the Pescod at home, finde refuge abrode and are hidde in the eares of other mens Corne. Euary [one] in one blinde Tauerne or other, is Tenant at will, to which shee colleth resorte, and playes the stale to vtter their victualls, and helpe them to emptie their mustie raskes.³¹

Though thieves aroused the ire of both players and spectators alike, prostitutes aroused the greater ire in opponents of the stage, who often refused to distinguish between the player and the prostitute. Women were not part of the class of professional players who worked on the London stage or toured the country. That did not deter critics of the stage from linking plays and prostitution. Playhouses were often seen as another venue where prostitutes could find a willing customer. Furthermore, the suburbs of Middlesex and Surrey, the location of many playhouses were also the location of many brothels, as both theaters and brothels had been banned from the City of London. This created another link between theater and vice that players were forced to combat as they attempted to shape an identity of respectability.

Despite receiving patronage from the highest levels of society, players were not universally welcomed in cities throughout England. One of the major criticisms of plays and players was that they encouraged idleness. The mid-afternoon performances in the open-air playhouses could pull craftsmen from their labor, assuming of course they could afford the loss of income. A populace distracted from their labor was a dangerous thing in early modern society. Once the population became disorderly, the authorities had no certain and efficient means to restore order. There was no police force or standing army to subdue a rioting populace. A letter from the Privy Council forbidding performances in the town of Hadley in 1597 reflects a continued belief that plays could and did pose a

³¹ Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse*, C2r-v.

threat to good order. "Thether to draw a concourse of people out of the country thereabouts, pretending heerein the benefit of the towne, which purpose we do utterly mislike, doubting what inconveniences may follow thereon, especially at this tyme of scarcety, when disordered people of the common sort wilbe apt to misdemeane themselves."³² In the view of town authorities the presentation of plays simply presented an opportunity for citizens to congregate in an idle setting. The authorities worried that a performance would further unsettle a populace already disgruntled from scarcity.

The hostility that players faced when leaving London had both economic and ideological implications.³³ The death of the monarch, religious festivals, fear of social or political disorder, and fear of the plague could require the closure of the theaters for an extended period of time. When the London theaters closed and the players were forced to tour they faced the possibility of economic losses. In response they developed the rhetoric that to fulfill the purpose of their profession they needed to remain based in London. The 1593 petition to the Privy Council from the Lord Strange's men encapsulates the player's ideology. "In travellinge the Countrie, and the Contynuaunce thereof, wilbe a meane to bringe vs to division and seperacõn, whearebie we shall not onelie be undone, but alsoe vnreadie to server her ma^{tie}, when it please her highenes to commaund us."³⁴ The players felt that the economic necessity of leaving London posed a danger to their profession. Compared to London, even in plague time, the players of the Lord Strange's Men felt that an extended tour of the countryside posed a risk to the stability of their profession. Not only did it put their company, and the bonds of

³² *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic* v.13.

³³ For the economic implications see Bentley *The Profession of Player*, Knutson *Playing Companies and Commerce*, Gurr *The Shakespeare Company*.

³⁴ Philip Henslowe, R. A. Foakes, and R. T. Rickert, *Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge UK: Syndics of Cambridge University Press, 1961) 288.

fellowship that existed within it, at risk but leaving London meant the players also could no longer serve the queen by providing plays for her enjoyment. Playing companies pulled from their repertoire of plays performed at the public playhouses, such as the Rose and the Globe, for their court performances. The players argue that their profession is based around its direct service to the queen. Early modern players developed a discourse of service through entertainment in response to frequent condemnations for idleness.

The belief that playhouses were sites of civil disorder that distracted men from religious worship and honest labor was a hallmark of anti-theatrical discourse throughout the Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline eras until the closing of the theaters in 1642. When the playwright and performer Thomas Heywood wrote *An Apology for Actors*, he took pains to refute the idea that attending plays was a distraction from worthier pastimes. According to Heywood, plays had many social benefits. Not only could they instruct the audience through examples of vice condemned and virtue rewarded, but plays also offered a respite. He turns the traditional claim of theater as a distraction from worthier pursuits on its head by stating that playhouses offer those in attendance a chance to restore their spirits before returning to work. "To refresh such weary spirits as are tired with labour, or study, to moderate the cares and heavinesse of the minde, that they may returne to their trades and faculties with more zeale and earnestness, after some small soft and pleasant retirement."³⁵ Heywood offers an inventive refutation of the notion that playhouses encourage idleness. Instead of distracting men from their labor the work of players was to inspire the audience to return from the playhouse and continue their efforts with renewed vigor.

³⁵ Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (London: Printed by Thomas Oakes, 1612), F4r.

Heywood's defense of the theatrical profession did not pass uncontested. In 1615, a refutation of his work was published. Divided into three parts, the refutation attacked players and the theater as a "heathenish and diabolicall institution," for "their ancient and modern indignitie," and "the wonderfull abuse of their impious qualitie."³⁶ I.G. central point in his refutation of Heywood's treatise is spiritual. The various defenses Heywood offers are worthless because theater is an inherently sinful thing. It cannot have ancient dignity or modern utility because its very nature is corrupt. I.G. claims:

The matter of *Tragedies* is haughtinesse, arrogancy, ambition, pride, iniury, anger, wrath, enuy, hatred, contention, warre, murther, cruelty, rapine, incest, rouings, depredations, piracies, spoyles, roberies, rebellions, treasons, killing, hewing, stabbing, dagger-drawing, fighting, butchery, trechery, villany &c. and all kind of heroyick cuils whatsoeuer. Of *Comedies* the matter is loue, lust, lechery, baudry, scortation, adultery, vncleannesse, pollution, wantonnesse, chambring, courting, ieasting, mocking, flouting, foole|ry, venery drabbery, knauery, cosenage, cheating, hipocrisy, flattery, and the like. And as complements and appendants to both kindes of playes is swearing, cursing, othes, and blasphemies, &c.³⁷

The plays do not present a moral lesson; they simply depict the worst elements of human nature to entertain and corrupt their audience.

The crown and Privy Council enacted a plethora of statutes and acts that regulated the laboring classes. They attempted to exert control over issues like hours and wages. Players were subject to statutes dealing specifically with their labor that included when and where they could perform. The ban on performances on Sundays and holy days can be read as a compromise between conflicting interests as the Privy Council sought to appease a variety of interests. There were the privileged members of society who

³⁶ I.G., *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors Diuided into Three Briefe Treatises. Wherein is Confuted and Opposed All the Chiefe Groundes and Arguments Alleaged in Defence of Playes: and Withall in Each Treatise is Deciphered Actors, 1. heathenish and diabolicall institution. 2. their ancient and moderne indignitie. 3. the wonderfull abuse of their impious qualitie.* By I.G. (London: By W. White, and are to be sold by Thomas Langley in Iuie lane, 1615)

³⁷ Ibid H1v-r

enjoyed attending both public and private performances and the players who bore the names and wore the livery of powerful patrons. While the (often) Puritan opponents of the theater viewed it as a religious affront. The ban on plays during holy days maintained an uneasy balance between competing interests.

Theater and Politics

Though theater was often an issue of social and political contention, trouble could ensue when the plays were political. Though court drama provided a venue where members of the political elite could attempt negotiations through symbolism and persuasion, the public playhouses were a different matter. Political works on the public stage allowed all those who could afford the cost of admission access to political discussion. In 1624, the King's Men performed Thomas Middleton's pointedly anti-Spanish satire *A Game at Chess*. A public success, it received eight consecutive performances, something previously unheard of, before the Privy Council ordered all performances to cease. There were several reasons why *A Game at Chess* would prove highly controversial: it was a political allegory, two characters clearly represented James I and Philip IV, and a host of other political figures were given unflattering portrayals. *A Game at Chess* was an immense success because it tapped into the powerful anti-Spanish sentiment that was dividing English politics. Though James saw himself as the peace-broker of Europe, a Spanish alliance was deeply unpopular with many of his subjects. His son Charles and his favorite, the Duke of Buckingham had joined the popular outcry to join war against Spain. Parliament was willing to grant the king money for a military expedition. Prince Charles and Buckingham were not the only influential figures in favor

of war, so were many of the Privy Councilors who would deal with the fall out from *A Game at Chess*.

On August 12, 1624, Secretary Conway wrote a letter to the Privy Council instructing them on the best way to deal with the wayward players. Conway explicitly states that the players have brought to the stage: "the persons of his Majesty, the King of Spaine, the Conde de Gondomar, the Bishop Spalato &c. His Majesty remembers well there was a commaundment and restraint given against the representinge of anie modern Christian Kings in those Stage-plays."³⁸ Though the last sumptuary law, limiting forms of dress to men and women according to their station in life, had been repealed twenty years prior, the players use of costumes to openly ridicule powerful international figures was the sort of transgressive action that opponents of the theater attacked with gusto.

The fact that *A Game at Chess* was a political allegory was not enough to make the play problematic for authorities. Over the past half-century, plays had frequently been used to convey political and religious messages. The play became a political issue when the Spanish Ambassador Don Carlos Colona complained:

In these two acts and in the third, the matter of which I do not know in detail. they hardly shewed anything but the cruelty of Spain and the treachery of Spaniards, and all this was set forth so personally that they did not even exclude royal persons. The last act ended with a long obstinate struggle... and in it he who acted the Price of Wales heartily beet and kicked the 'Count of Gondomar' into Hell... All this has been so much applauded and enjoyed by the mob that here, where no play has been acted for more than one day [consecutively], this one has already been acted on four, and each day the crowd is greater.³⁹

This letter from the Spanish Ambassador clearly reveals the issues for which Middleton and the players in the King's Men would be held accountable. In addition to holding

³⁸ Dutton, *Mastering the Revels*, 242.

³⁹ Edward M. Wilson and Olga Turner. "The Spanish Protest Against *A Game at Chess*" *Modern Language Review*, 44, 4 (Oct., 1949), 480 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3716583>.

Spaniards up for general ridicule, the Spanish Ambassador felt that his predecessor and his monarch had been particularly singled out for ridicule by the mob. In *A Game at Chess* the players had created a scenario where the pinnacle of Spanish authority was subject to humiliation by other characters on the stage and also to derision by the audience.

Performances of *A Game at Chess* were stopped on 17 August and the King's Men were "[given] straight charge and command that they presume not to act the said comodie any more nor that they suffer any plaie or interlude whatsoever to be acted by them or any of their company untill his Majestie's pleasure be further knowne."⁴⁰

Although the actors avoided immediate imprisonment, the order to cease playing meant a loss of income for everyone involved. The player's relatively light punishment, they were not imprisoned or branded as libelers, owes to the political support of the Privy Council. Many of the Privy Councilors not only acted as patrons to the players, they were also politically sympathetic to the message of *A Game at Chess*. The experience with *A Game at Chess* emphasizes the politically contentious nature of early modern playing. The play became the vehicle that allowed a diverse crowd to ridicule the Spanish King and the Spanish ambassador. It also gave voice to the popular desire for a war with Spain.

During the reign of Charles I new dynamics formed in the relationship between theater and politics. The public theaters continued to thrive and theatrical performance became a mainstay of court entertainment. Theatrical performance became a venue where political discussion could be entertained through symbolic and allegorical representation. The 1630s are a particularly complex decade in English history.

⁴⁰ Dutton, *Mastering the Revels*, 245.

Throughout the decade Charles I ruled without Parliament, however he did rule in a vacuum. The queen, his courtiers, his bishops, even those outside the court sought to influence Charles' domestic and foreign policies.

The religious policies of Charles' favorite, Charles Laud, archbishop of Canterbury, were an area of particular contention. Many of Laud's policies, particularly the placement and elevation of the altar above the pulpit and the push for more elaborate ceremonies, were resisted. Critics viewed Laud's policies as crypto-Catholic and feared the monarch and his Archbishop would turn the nation towards Spain and the Pope. *Histrion-mastix*, William Prynne's monumental anti-theatrical treatise, was just one of the author's many efforts to reform society. In it he cites Gosson, Stubbes, and Northbrooke, reiterating their attacks on the sinful nature of the theater.⁴¹ Like his predecessors, Prynne condemns the theater for a variety of reasons from the cross-dressing of boys to its encouragement of vice. Prynne addresses and defends the Puritan nature of his work, claiming that those who criticize Puritans have not basis for their accusations. He presents the Puritans as the defenders of England's Christian monarch.

But blessed be God, we have heard of no Puritan treasons, insurrections or rebellions in our age; and experience (in despite of scandall and all lying rumours) hath manifested, that these Puritans and Precisians are such persons as both *fear God and honour the King*, though they oppigne the corruptions, sinnes, profanesse, and Popish and Pelagian Errors of the times, with all such factious Innovators, who either broach new heresies and superstitions, or revive olde. As for their loyalty to their Prince, his power and prerogative, it is so apparant, that however Papists and persons popishly affected *now slander them* as enemies to Monarchie and Princes *Prerogatives*.⁴²

In the midst of his prolific attack on the stage, Prynne voices the concerns feelings of many who opposed the religious changes taking place in England. To be anti-theatrical

⁴¹ Prynne, *Histrion-mastix*, S1r

⁴² Ibid 5N2r

and anti-Laudian was not radical or anti-monarchical. Prynne's attempts to align himself with the King failed, the publication of *Histrionomastix* led Prynne to be tried for sedition in the Star Chamber. The long list of charges includes the accusation that he compared Queen Henrietta Marie to a whore, when he claimed that actresses were "notorious whores." At the time of publication the queen was taking acting lessons in preparation for her role in Walter Montagu's *The Shepard's Pradise*. Henrietta Marie's dramatic activity will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The fault lines exposed by Prynne, aligning puritanism and anti-theatricality were far from uniform. Many of those opposed to the Laudian vision of the church were not opponents of the theater. A number of committed puritans were also supporters of the theater. Men such as Bulstrode Whitelocke and Sir Thomas Barrington, were active in parliamentary politics in both the 1620s and 40s. They were also noted opponents of the Laudian church but they were also avid playgoers. Religious and political beliefs impacted but did not dictate views on the theater.

The prevailing social, political, and religious conditions had a tremendous impact on perceptions of the theater. Attacks on the theater beginning in the 1570s were tied to rising anxiety about the social and moral decay of English society. Criticism of the theater was closely tied to shifting views on fashion, vagrancy, idleness, and labor. Objections to the theater were motivated by more than religious sentiment. Political necessity had a great deal of influence on responses to the stage. Though in sixteenth and seventeenth century England it is often difficult to distinguish between the social, the religious, and the political. Innovations and upheavals rooted in one area could, and did, have sweeping implications for the other two. Theater, as with all art forms, responded to

the changing world with new innovations. Though players worked to shape their identity in opposition to the accusations of anti-theatrical pamphleteers, those accusations had a profound effect. English actors were forced to cultivate relationships and behave in ways that could subvert the criticism they faced.

Chapter 3: City Actors

Beyond all else, theatrical performance is about presentation. It allows the participants to present a series of ideas and images to their audience. Both professional players and amateurs at court utilized drama to project an image of themselves. For the courtier this image was often one of splendor, prudence, and influence. Masques and court dramas presented idealized images of monarchy and government. They simultaneously celebrated the king and while emphasizing the influence and prestige of others. For professional players the image projected was one of professional legitimacy. This chapter begins by examining the participation of women in court drama during the reigns of James I and Charles I. It examines the ways women deployed and participated in theatrical performances to craft their identity and put forth their own political visions. The second part of this chapter examines how players utilized their status as servants to the nobility and royal family, revealing that they had a clear idea of their social position, one that stood in contrast to the immoral vagrants their enemies accused them of being. The final section examines the transition from the medieval tradition of guild-sponsored plays to independent playing companies. Guilds helped to define the ways that the post-Reformation playing companies operated. The organization of playing companies closely followed traditional guilds with the leading members of the company taking on apprentices.

Women and Amateur Theater

Anna of Denmark, wife of James I, and Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I, were committed theatrical patrons in their own right; they were also enthusiastic sponsors of and participants in theatrical productions at court. Though the King's Men were always the most prestigious company operating in early seventeenth century England, the Queen's Men also maintained an important presence in the London theaters. Women constituted a large portion of the audience at both public and private performances. The queens were far from the only women to act as patrons for dramatists. Mary Sidney Herbert, the countess of Pembroke, and Lucy Harrington Russell, the countess of Bedford were important patronesses during the reign of James I.¹ Lucy Percy Hay, the Countess of Carlisle, provided another pole of female patronage during the reign of Charles I, rivaling that of Henrietta Maria. Though Elizabeth I had sponsored court masques, the art form reached new levels of popularity and splendor during the reigns of her successors. The masque provided women with the opportunity to exert political and cultural agency. Women utilized theatrical patronage and performance as a means of expressing views that differed from those of their husbands. Women utilized drama and the masque to negotiate for political and cultural influence.²

Queen Anna was an avid fan of the masquerade. In the early years of her husbands reign she not only sponsored but also performed in a number of masques. For the first ten years of her English reign Anna both sponsored and participated in court

¹ David M. Bergeron, "Women as Patrons of English Renaissance Drama" in Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel ed., *Patronage in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 283.

² Clare McManus, "Introduction: the Queen's Court" in Clare McManus ed., *Women and Culture at the Courts of the Stuart Queens* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 5.

masques. After 1613, she no longer performed in masques though she continued to sponsor performances. Whether participating in or viewing a masque she had sponsored, Anna's participation in masques revealed an ideological agenda. Perhaps the most famous of Anna's masques is *The Masque of Blackness*, written by Ben Jonson and performed in 1605, in which Anna and her courtiers performed in blackface. The feminine theatricality of the masque, though silent, presents the female identity as something with the power to disrupt masculine identity and authority.³

Less well known though equally important was the 1617 masque *Cupid's Banishment* by Robert White. It marks a turning point simply for containing the first recorded instance of a female speech in a masque. The masque was performed by the students of the Ladies Hall at Deptford, the first English girl's school. Clare McManus argues that the production of this masque demonstrates how female masques played a vital role in women's self-fashioning. It was simultaneously a school drama, meant to give the female students the chance to cultivate and develop social grace and a tool for education and a tribute to their patroness the queen.⁴ "They pace with majesty toward the presence and, after the first strain of the violins, they dance, [forming] Anna Regina in letters; [in] their second masquing dance [forming] Jacobus Rex."⁵ Part of the ritual was a choreographed recognition of monarchical power, first that of Anna, then of her husband.

³ Sophie Tomlinson, *Women on Stage in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 30.

⁴ Clare McManus, "Memorialising Anna of Denmark's Court: Cupid's Banishment at Greenwich Palace" in McManus, Clare *Women and Culture in the Court of the Stuart Queens* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 81.

⁵ Ibid 90.

Henrietta Maria expanded upon the traditions of English court drama begun during the reign of James and Anna. She brought the cosmopolitan sensibilities of the French court to the English court. Like her mother, Marie de' Medici, Henrietta Maria was an enthusiastic patroness of drama. Her experiences with French theater and the *commedia dell'arte* would expand the presence of women in every sort of dramatic production. The pastoral drama, which was already a popular genre for the actresses of the *commedia dell'arte*, became a vehicle for amateur actresses in court performances. The most famous of the pastoral is *The Shepard's Paradise*. Part of its fame comes from its association with Prynne, discussed above. It was also one of the first masques to offer extensive dialogue to multiple female performers. Participation in *The Shepard's Paradise* gave the women of the Caroline court a chance to represent themselves. Within the context of the masque, they could display the powers of feminine virtue, the triumph of love and grace over masculine violence. The masque offered women new venues to present themselves at court; giving them a chance to participate the symbolic conversations contained within the masque.

Players and Patrons

The Lord Chamberlain's men's transformation into the King's Men in 1604 is the most notable change in the patronage of a playing company. The King's Men were not the only playing company to enjoy royal patronage; Queen Anna, Prince Charles, and the Princess Elizabeth all lent their names to playing companies. The company as a whole could and did name themselves as servants of a particular lord, and later as servants of the royal family. The title pages of plays were often used as a platform to proclaim the

company's status as servants of nobility or royalty in print. It provided another opportunity to publicly refute claims that they were "masterless" men.

When players wore the livery of their patrons they inscribed their bodies with the mark of their patronage and protection. They visibly aligned themselves with members of the nobility and royal family by displaying the coat of arms of their patrons. This visible inscription impacted the experiences of player in and out of London. It protected them from interference of those who were hostile to their profession. Outside of London, players were not always welcome, but the name and livery of their patron could mitigate the hostility they faced. It offered them protection from arrest under vagrancy laws. Identifying with an important patron also offered financial security. Town councils that were hostile to the presence of players and unwilling to allow them to perform might pay the troupe a small sum out of respect for the patron, and to encourage the players to move on. The financial records of many towns contain passing reference to playing companies who were given a sum of money but refused permission to play. For example, in King's Lynn in 1603: "xx^s... Paid out of the hall here to Mr. Mayor that he bestowed of the Earl of Huntington and the Lord Evers their players to keep them from playing here this dangerous time."⁶ This payment, is a fairly standard example of responses to touring companies. Though the reason for the refusal to allow performances and the level of hostility players faced varied, town councils conscious of their connection to members of the nobility were reluctant to insult players, and by extension their patrons.

Though theatrical activity existed throughout the English countryside, London remained the focal point of theatrical activity. With the support of their patrons, players

⁶ Bentley, *The Profession of Player*, 191

continued to build new playhouses in the suburbs of London. The players, and their patrons, justified the building of new playhouses by relying on the rhetoric of monarchical service. The Charles Howard, the Lord Admiral and Earl of Nottingham, issued a warrant on 12 January 1600 supporting the building of a new playhouse (the Fortune) by the company he patronized. He argues that the playhouse is unobjectionable because it serves the queen. He declares:

And that her Majestie (in respect of the Service with my saide Servant and his Companie haue doen and presented before her Highenes to her greate lykeinge and Conentm^t; aswell this last Christmas att sondrie other tymes) ys graciouslie moued toward them wth a special regarde of fauor to their proceeding: theis shalbe thearefore to prairie and require you... to permit and suffer my saide Servant to proceede in theeffecting and finishing of saide Newhowse.⁷

Nottingham presents the erection of the Fortune as part of a broad network of service and patronage. Though the players in question are known as his servants, they are also servants of the Queen. This new playhouse is being constructed with her interests in mind. Players' claims of status via service to the nobility and the monarchy were not empty rhetorical tools. Their patrons reiterated that claim, praising the service of the playing companies they sponsored.

Playing companies could also act as patrons. In addition to gaining the support of the Lord Admiral, the Queen, and the Privy Council for the building of the new theater, the players also gained the support of their community. The residents of Finsbury, part of the suburb of Middlesex, petitioned the Privy Council in support of the construction of the Fortune. They claimed that the location would not disorder the neighborhood; on the contrary it would enrich it. The company would become patrons of the neighborhood.

The Erectors of the saied howse are contented to give a very liberall porcōn of money weekelie, toward y^e relief of our Poore, the nomber & necessity whereof, is

⁷ Henslowe, Foakes, and Rickert 288

soe greate that the same will redounde to y^e contynuall comfort of y^e saied Pooree...wee are the rather Contented to accept this meanes of relief of o^r Poore, because our Parrishe is not able to releuee them. Neither hat the Justices of the Sheire taken any order, for any Supplie oute of y^e Countye, As is enioyned by y^e late Acte of Parliament.⁸

As patrons of their community, the players become supporters of local order. Their contributions to parish relief helped the community apply with the new poor laws designed to prevent vagrancy and disorder. To garner support for the Fortune playhouse, the Lord Admiral's Men created an identity based around patronage. They presented themselves as the faithful servants of both their patron and the queen. At the same time they positioned themselves as patrons within the community, supporter of the parish and the poor.

Although both official and popular views of players and playing companies tended to fluctuate, men receiving even limited sponsorship from leading members of the nobility or the royal family were not amongst the lowest orders of society. The support of their patrons, however limited and ambivalent, allowed players to claim the social respectability of noble servants. Players, patrons and anti-theatricalists each viewed this patronage differently. While opponents of the theater were willing to challenge the legitimacy of players as noble or royal retainers, players emphasized these positions. They proudly defended their connections to their patrons by wearing the livery and printing the patron's names in published plays. Opponents of the theater felt that members of the nobility or royalty were demeaning themselves by sponsoring playing companies. For patrons, the sponsorship of playing companies was part of the image of noble magnificence and generosity they needed to project. Players also maintained a sense of pride in their connection to their patron.

⁸ Ibid 289

In *An Apology for Actors*, Thomas Heywood, who worked as both a playwright and player with several companies throughout his career, defends professional theater. Central to his defense of playing is its ancient origins. Theater was part of the ancient Greco-Roman tradition, and the modern companies were the heirs to that tradition. The weight of ancient custom was used to lend players some of the legitimacy they lacked due to an absence of association with traditional guilds. Though they lacked the power of guilds, playing companies could substitute it with an ancient reputation. Associations with Greece and Rome allowed early modern players to situate their profession within larger professional traditions. Not only was theater part of the classical tradition, Heywood argues that playing is part of the history of England:

One of our best *English* Chroniclers records, that when *Edward* the fourth would shew himselfe in publicke state to the view of the people, hee repaired to his Palace at *S. Johnes*, where he accustomed to see the Citty Actors. And since then, that house by the Princes free gift, hath belonged to the office of the Revels, where our Court playes have beene in late daies yearely rehersed, perfected and corrected before they come to the publike view of the Prince and the Nobility.⁹

Heywood relies on the common defense, discussed below, that playing is a form of service to the monarch. He takes it out of the contemporary context and establishes as part of an ancient tradition. The entertainment of princes and nobility is and always has been the purpose of playing.

Companies and Guilds

⁹ Heywood, *An Apology for Actors*, E1v.

Claims of service were more than just a rhetorical device utilized by players to defend their profession. It was part of the ethos of their labor, a *raison d'être* that was rooted in classical civilization and English custom. As discussed above, identifying with their patrons offered players important protections from potentially hostile town leaders. This combined was with a community identity based on the traditions of guild labor. The bonds of service and fellowship players felt towards their patrons and one another would be familiar to other members of early modern society. Though there was no formal guild for players, the company structure created a close professional network.

Although there was no players' guild, the tradition of playing had a strong association with other guilds, coming out of play cycles sponsored by medieval guilds. In order to fully understand the place of players in Elizabethan and Jacobean society we need to consider how actors shaped their own identities. Players' consistently resisted accusations of vagrancy. Their relationships with patrons and the formation of playing companies had important implications for their self-perception and protection. This sense of self affected the ways players negotiated with figures of authority from their patrons to town councils. The players of the Elizabethan period negotiated their constantly shifting status in a variety of ways. Leeds Barroll argues that the lack of traditional guild structure marginalized players within society at large. He writes: "Players were.... at the margins of society because they had no formal accountability to the authorities through the guild system."¹⁰ The guild system with its internal hierarchy and ability to police and discipline members, in addition to supporting them in times of scarcity and suffering, was a symbol of order in early modern towns.

¹⁰ Leeds J. Barroll, *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theater: The Stuart Years* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 9.

Those performing in early modern playhouses were either share-holders in the playing company, their apprentices, or men hired to fill a role in a given play. Playing companies, like guilds, trained the future members of their profession through apprenticeships. The companies also provided a community and a measure of protection for its members. But early modern playing companies differed from traditional guilds in certain important ways. They did not have the internal policing, as did the traditional guilds, in that players did not sanction their fellows for infractions; instead they were policed from without. Much of the official anxiety surrounding playing companies stemmed from the fact that all regulation came from external forces, such as their patrons, the Master of the Revels, and the Privy Council. The notion that players were marginalized in society, partly due to a lack of traditional guild ties, is one that needs to be revised.

The playing companies had many similarities to traditional guilds. The shareholders of a playing company were analogous to the masters of a professional guild, like guild masters, players took on apprentices. These boys were apprenticed to a specific individual with whom they lived and who was responsible for their training. Although early modern playing companies took on many of the forms of traditional guilds, there was no player's guild. The company took on the role of guild and early modern players were often associated with more than one company throughout their lifetime.¹¹ Early modern players, who moved from one company to another, and by extension on patron to another, did not have the single lifetime bond of the traditional guild. That is not to say players did not have strong bonds of fellowship with one

¹¹ Bentley shows that players who worked as hired men or apprentices for one company would often become shareholders at another.

another. Gerald Bentley shows that many players felt strong ties of fellowship with their colleagues and apprentices both past and present.¹² In their wills players frequently left bequests to one another, passing on money and possessions to their colleagues and former apprentices. Players also turned to their colleagues to act as executors of their estate.

For some players, a playing company was not the only association they participated in, as some were members of traditional guilds. For example, John Heminges was a grocer, John Shank a weaver, James Burbage was a joiner, and Robert Armin was a goldsmith. In his will, John Shank identifies himself as both a player in the service of the king and a weaver.¹³ Yet, when the theaters were closed the players did not turn to these other professions and guilds for work and income. Whatever affiliations they once had to other professions and guilds did not shape their identity. A petition to the Privy Council from the Lord Strange's men in 1593, requesting permission to reopen the theaters and resume playing reveals the extent to which early modern players identified with and depended upon their profession: "In travellinge the Countrey, and the Continuance thereof, wilbe a meane to bringe vs to division and seperacōn, whearebie we shall not onelie be undone."¹⁴ The players argued that the continued closure of the theaters represents a financial loss for them. Closing the theaters means the company must tour, which also threatens the stability of the company as members leave to seek their fortune elsewhere. The petition to the Privy Council reveals that the players in Lord Strange's Company see their financial interests centered around London. Furthermore, part of their professional obligation was service to the queen. They argue that the closure

¹² Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time*.

¹³ PROB 11/170/78 see also Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time*.

¹⁴ Henslowe-Alleyn Digitization Project MSS 1, Article 16, 01 recto.

of the playhouses not only creates financial loss, it inhibits their ability to serve the queen by entertaining her with new plays they have prepared.

Guilds and artisanal workshops provide the context in which early modern players organized their companies and carried out professional transactions, in particular the training of the next generation of professionals. Like most crafts, a master, who was generally a shareholder in one of the companies, trained new players. The taking of apprentices was a vital feature in company life. Not only was the relationship between Master and apprentice frequently a close bond, they remember one another fondly in wills. Augustine Phillips, a player in the Lord Chamberlain/King's Men, left bequests to his apprentices:

Item, I give to Samuel Gilborne, my late apprentice, the sum of forty shillings, and my mouse-colored velvet hose, and a white taffeta doublet, a black taffeta suit, my purple cloak, sword, and dagger, and my bass viol. Item, I give to James Sands, my apprentice, the sum of forty shillings, and a cittern, and bandore, and a lute to be paid and delivered unto him at the expiration of his term of year in his indenture of apprenticeship.¹⁵

Phillips leaves his apprentices both money and items that will aid them as they pursue their career as professional players. Gilborne's career is the easier of the two to trace. He remained with the King's Men and his name appears amongst the principle players in the First Folio, indicating that after completing his apprenticeship he had the ability to become a shareholder in the company.

Philip Henslowe, the owner of the rose theater, kept a diary that like the wills of deceased players, frequently mentioned the apprentices of players. In 1599 there is a reference to a member of the Lord Admiral's Men and his apprentice: "Delyuered unto Tomas Downton's boye Thomas Parsons to bye dyvers thinges for the playe of the

¹⁵ E. A. J. Honigmann and S. Brock, eds., *Playhouse wills, 1558–1642: an edition of wills by Shakespeare and his contemporaries in the London theatre* (1993), 73.

Spensers the 16 of April 1599 the some of £5."¹⁶ Henslowe and Downton entrust the apprentice to with a significant some of money and the authority to make the purchases necessary for an upcoming performance. This implies that Henslowe and Downton trusted the apprentice with financial responsibility and with the responsibility of assisting Henslowe and his master with important preparations for the performance.

Families that had no professional association with playing companies offered their sons as apprentices to the playing companies. If playing was seen as an illegitimate profession, the companies would not be able to acquire apprentices in the manner of other professions. While players took on apprentices, the system lacked the uniformity of the traditional craft guilds.¹⁷ Though the process was not subject to a set of uniform regulations it still provided players with the ability to participate in the system of training new professionals in a recognizable way. In taking on apprentices for a fee, players were participating in traditional labor practices that were integral to early modern production. Players took on apprentices, just as printers, blacksmiths, tanners, et. al. did. One can assume that families chose to apprentice their son to a player just as some players chose to apprentice their children to other craftsmen. The ability of the playing companies to attract apprentices argues for the legitimacy of professional theater.

Apprenticeship ties theater to the prevalent labor trends for urban youth in early modern England. Prynne, laments this practice in *Histrion-Mastix*: "Pity it is to consider how many ingenuous witty, comely youths, devoted to God in baptism, to whom they owe themselves, their services; are oft times by their graceless parents, even wholly

¹⁶ Henslowe, Foakes, and Rickert, *Henslowe's Diary*, 107.

¹⁷ Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time*, 119.

consecrated to the Stage."¹⁸ Prynne laments that the families of these boys have signed them over to the stage rather than an honorable profession. Though Prynne can hardly be considered the most reliable source for theatrical practice, his lament over the fates of these boys is notable. It implies that these families could have sent their boys into other professions. If the boys had the possibility of finding other apprenticeships, it is unlikely their families agreed with Prynne about the degeneracy of the theatrical profession.

In addition to apprenticeship in the adult companies, young boys could join one of the various companies comprised exclusively of young boys that competed for the attention of the theater going public. Unfortunately there is virtually no evidence to provide us with insight into how these young men viewed themselves and their labors. There is a plethora of responses to the boys companies written into early modern plays. One of the most famous is the references that occur in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Rosencrantz claims sudden popularity of children's companies have forced the adult companies into touring for a living.

Sir, an eyrie of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question and are most tyrannically clapp'd for't. These are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages (so they call them) that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goosequills and dare scarce come thither.¹⁹

Historians of the theater have read it as an expression of the commercial rivalry and social frustration experienced by adult players. The boy companies were considered more prestigious than their adult counterparts, as the restrictions often imposed upon the adult players rarely extended to them.²⁰ The boys companies posed a commercial

¹⁸ Prynne, *Histrion-Mastix*, z2r.

¹⁹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 2.2.1427-31.

²⁰ For a full discussion of Hamlet's reference to boys companies see chapter 5 Roslyn Lander Knutson's *Playing Companies and Commerce*.

challenge to the adult players and this bred a certain amount of scorn and resentment.

Though a commercial rivalry was highly likely, the gulf in prestige between the children's and adult companies should be questioned.

The names of the Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights associated with the playing companies are amongst the best-known men associated with the stage. Most of the plays that were printed carry the name of both the author and the company that performed the play. Memory of the players is much more ephemeral. The early quartos seldom contain the original casts. As Gerald Bentley notes, there are many players whom we know of only through mentions in the parish rolls, men in the middle and at the bottom of their profession. These are the men who were most often equated with beggars and vagrants. We lack the sources that record the experiences of the lower rungs of players, the hired men and those who made their living touring the country.²¹ The records of the experiences of Elizabethan and Jacobean players belong to the most famous men of the most famous companies. In reconstructing the experiences of players, their relationship with their patrons, and interactions with authority, we only have the records of the most privileged group. However, this group also provides the closest thing to the ideal model, the heights to which their fellows aspired. The elite players of the top London companies were the farthest removed from the accusations of vagrancy, the most likely to become servants of the king or queen. Yet, the players even more than the playwrights carried the stigma of the profession that lingered and competed with the honor of being servants to a powerful lord or the monarch.

²¹ Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time*. 6.

Bentley argues that the publication of Ben Jonson's folio in 1616 helped to transform the status of players, with its listing of the original cast for each play.²² Certainly, the publication of the Jonson and Shakespeare folios did a great deal to transform the public image of the theater. The presentation of these plays under the heading of "works" conflated plays and poetry in the public mind. This association would have benefited playwrights first, the theater as a whole second, and finally the players. Any status accrued to the actors was an incidental by-product of the enhanced status of the playwright. In producing the original cast along with the text of the play the individual players are credited with their part in bringing a literary work to life. They are part of each play's heritage and are as connected to it as the reader of Jonson's folio. Of course this was limited to the portion of the population that was literate; but this was the same group that had the money and leisure required to visit the playhouses and read anti-theatrical literature.

One of the major challenges in understanding the status of players is the hierarchy that existed within the profession. The differences between the sharers and hired men of a company are worth focusing on, particularly as they affect social standing. The players that famously rose to become gentleman or enjoyed a comfortable retirement: Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, et.al. were all shareholders of their respective companies, the leading artists and businessmen of the company. The wealth, status, and comfort enjoyed by the most successful players was certainly exceptional. Most players did not achieve the level of wealth enjoyed by Edward Alleyn at the end of his life. Very few were able to retire to a manor in the countryside and found a college as Edward Alleyn did. Examining the success achieved by Alleyn or the Burbage family solely in the

²² Ibid 9-10.

context of professional players is to miss the broader economic transformations taking place. Master craftsmen of traditional guilds enjoyed comparable levels of luxury. Furthermore, the world of the privileged was constantly shifting. Actors were not the only professional men to rise to the ranks of gentlemen. The honors James bestowed upon the Lord Chamberlain's Men, making them his servants and permitting them to wear his livery, were part of a broader spread of royal favor in the first year of his reign. Upon his arrival in England, James granted hundreds of knighthoods and broadly dispensed his patronage.

At the other end of the spectrum were the hired men who were paid a wage by the various playing companies rather than taking a share of the profits. It was the sharers who acted as their patrons, rather than the nobleman who gave the company his name. The hired men were much closer to the popular image of actors as vagabonds. The various companies employed men paid a weekly wage for a variety of jobs, the focus here is those who performed with the company. "On 27 December 1624, the Master of the Revels issues a certificate to protect from arrest, imprisonment, or other molestation the hired men of the King's company."²³ This certificate reveals that the hired men of a company were more vulnerable than those who held a share in the company. A special protection for the hired members of the King's Men had to be ordered twenty years after the shareholders had gained the status of gentlemen. When the Lord Chamberlain's Men became the King's Men and earned the right to wear the king's livery and claim the status of gentleman, they earned a new place in the social hierarchy of early modern London. However, this new social rank was not universal. It did not apply to shareholders of other playing companies, let alone the hired men of these companies. The order granting

²³ Ibid 67.

protection to the hired men demonstrates that they were still vulnerable to the traditionally low status of players.

Representation was a powerful tool deployed by those associated with the theater. Women in the courts of Anna and Henrietta Maria utilized the opportunities afforded by court drama to display themselves as active participants in courtly conversations. They utilized theater as a tool to display the powers of feminine advocacy. Professional players reinvented traditional forms of commercial relationships to define their identity. They presented their professional relationships within the familiar framework of guilds. The relationship between members of a playing company was generally that of fellowship and professional support. Players also utilized the social capital of their patrons to protect and advance their economic interests.

Conclusion

In 1642 an act of Parliament closed the London theaters, ending a period of intense artistic output. At times it was matched by an equally intense polemic. Though the stage was constantly a subject of debate and scrutiny, those who attacked it were concerned with more than just the perceived dangers of theater. Though the morality of theater was often framed as the central issue, anti-theatrical polemicists were also grappling with perceived threats to social, religious, and political stability. Their attacks in the theater were part of a broader debate about the future of English society. The first wave of anti-theatrical pamphlets in the 1570s and 1580s were motivated by a rising dissatisfaction with the Elizabethan regime. The desire of many to see further religious reformation was consistently thwarted by the queen and Privy Council. This included limitations on the Protestant messages present in plays, further dividing the theater and Protestant reformers.

Amongst Protestants and Catholics, the relationship between theater and the church had to be constantly negotiated. Jesuit Drama reveals many of the issues that defined the relationship between the Church and the stage; it also revealed the opportunities. The study of Jesuit dramatic practices deserves more attention in its own right. The Jesuits were able to regulate and promote drama to advance their spiritual and educational goals. They utilized amateur theatrics to promote their mission, exploiting educational and patronage opportunities. They adapted theatrical practices to accommodate local necessity.

The presentation and response to female characters and actresses also varied extremely. The Jesuits tried to institute a uniform approach by banning female characters from the plays. For many playwrights, theater required a female voice and Jesuit authors frequently requested and received permission to include female characters. In contrast, the *commedia dell'arte* embraced both female characters and the presence of actresses on the stage. Though the actresses were frequently accused of being little more than prostitutes, the greatest actresses of the *commedia dell'arte* cultivated a persona that combined feminine virtues and masculine intellect. They were simultaneously pious mothers and formidable scholars. Actresses challenged the discourse surrounding female performers. Though they could not eliminate the stigma of acting entirely, they successfully created individual identities that contrasted popular expectation.

Though English women never performed in the public playhouses they were influential patrons in their own right. Elizabeth I, Anna of Denmark, and Henrietta Maria sponsored playing companies and theatrical events. Anna and Henrietta Maria also participated in a number of court masques. Their presence on the stage provoked accusations of immorality and immodesty. William Prynne's *Histrion-Mastix* was the most famous attack of these royal performances. The queens and their ladies faced the same attacks as the professional actresses of the *commedia dell'arte*. Their performances before the court were immodest and promoted lechery in their fellow participants and the audience.

Players faced many challenges when legitimizing their professional identity. In the 1570s and 80s, anti-theatrical pamphleteers attacked the playhouses as hotbeds of sin and disorder. They accused players of tempting men to idleness and encouraging

prostitution. The hostility and accusations of anti-theatricalists forced players to defend and display their respectability in a range of manners. Printed defenses gave players one avenue to respond. It allowed them to compete against the anti-theatrical pamphleteers. Printed defenses also allowed players to proclaim the ancient dignity of their profession and reiterate the role of theater as a service to the state.

Central to the crafting of an identity of respectability was the relationship between theater and service. This remained central to the expression of a player's public identity throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Their connection to members of the nobility and the monarch assisted players in advancing their interests. It protected them from inference when touring towns where the local government was ideologically opposed to the theater. Not only was the identity of noble servant an important ideological tool in defending against anti-theatricalists, it allowed playing companies to advance their business interests. Players used their role as noble servants to petition the Privy Council to re-open the theaters and allow new playhouses to be built.

In addition to patronage, players looked inwards at the companies they formed for personal and professional support. The playing companies modified the structure of craft guilds and workshops to create a system of shareholder, their apprentices, and hired men. This system allowed the companies to be relatively self-sustaining. The shareholders invested a sum of money in the company in return for a share of the profits. They also trained the future generations of players. The shareholders trained their apprentices and provided their food and lodging. The companies formalized the bonds of fellowship that existed between players; it gave them an established community to turn to in difficult times.

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