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WILEY Blackwell
In memory of Normand Berlin, and in honor of Tony Burton and R. Malcolm Smuts
A.F.K.

In honor of Ed, Ruth, and Kayla
T.W.H.
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Notes on Contributors

Ian W. Archer is Associate Professor in History at the University of Oxford, and a Fellow of Keble College, Oxford. He is the author of several books and articles on early modern London.

Amanda Bailey is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Maryland. She is the author of Of Bondage: Debt, Property, and Personhood in Early Modern England (2013) and Flaunting: Style and the Subversive Male Body in Renaissance England (2007), and coeditor with Roze Hentschell of Masculinity and the Metropolis of Vice, 1550–1650 (2010), and with Mario DiGangi of Affect Theory and Early Modern Texts (2017). Her essays have appeared in Criticism, Renaissance Drama, English Literary Renaissance, and Shakespeare Quarterly, as well as in numerous edited collections and companions. She is currently working on a book about the relation among dramatic literature, astrology, and political feeling, tentatively titled A Natural History of Politics: Sympathy, Shakespeare, and the Stars.

Valerie Billing is a Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Knox College. She received her PhD from the University of California, Davis, and is currently working on a book titled Size Matters: The Erotics of Stature in Early Modern English Literature and Culture. Her previous publications have appeared in Renaissance Drama and the Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies.

William C. Carroll is Professor of English, Boston University. He has published The Great Feast of Language in Love’s Labour’s Lost, The Metamorphoses of Shakespearean Comedy, and Fat King, Lean Beggar: Representations of Poverty in the Age of Shakespeare; editions of Shakespeare’s Macbeth: Texts and Contexts (Bedford), The Two Gentlemen of Verona (Arden), Love’s Labour’s Lost (New Cambridge); and editions of Thomas Middleton, Women Beware Women (New Mermaids), and Thomas Middleton: Four Plays (New Mermaids).

S. P. Cerasano is the Edgar W. B. Fairchild Professor of Literature at Colgate University and Editor of Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England. Most recently she has edited Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar for the Norton Critical Editions series. She is currently writing on Philip Henslowe, the owner of the Rose Playhouse, his son-in-law, the actor-entrepreneur Edward Alleyn, and Christopher Marlowe.

Jane Hwang Degenhardt is Associate Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her new project, *Fortune’s Empire*, focuses on the ways that narratives of fortune, chance, and luck intervened in the discursive relationship between imperial exploration and divine providence. She considers the economic and cosmic dimensions of “fortune” to explicate the term's shifting meanings at the start of the seventeenth century and ultimately to complicate our received history of secularization. She is the author of *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage* (2010) and *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England* (2011).

Lara Dodds is Associate Professor of English and Graduate Coordinator at Mississippi State University. She is the author of *The Literary Invention of Margaret Cavendish* (2013) and of essays on John Milton, Cavendish, and other early modern topics in several journals. She is currently working on a book project on early modern women’s writing and negative affect.


Raphael Falco is a Professor of English at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and held the 2012–2013 Lipitz Professorship of the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. His books include *Conceived Presences: Literary Genealogy in Renaissance England*, *Charismatic Authority in Early Modern English Tragedy*, and *Charisma and Myth*. His articles have appeared in a wide range of journals, including *Diacritics, Modern Language Notes, Modern Philology, Shakespeare Studies, Criticism, Soundings, Max Weber Studies*, and *English Literary Renaissance*.

Margaret Ferguson is Distinguished Professor of English at the University of California at Davis; she previously taught at Yale, Columbia, and the University of Colorado at Boulder. Her book *Dido’s Daughters: Gender, Literacy and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (2003) won several prizes. A past president of the Modern Language Association, she has coedited eleven books, including *Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry*, by Elizabeth Cary (1613).

Lori Anne Ferrell is Professor of Early Modern History and Literature at Claremont Graduate University. She is the author of *Government by Polemic* (1998) and *The Bible and the People* (2008), and is the editor of volume XI of *The Oxford Sermons of John Donne: Sermons at St Paul’s Cathedral, 1623–25* (2016).

Alison Findlay is Professor of Renaissance Drama at Lancaster University (United Kingdom). She is the author of *Illegitimate Power* (1994), *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* (1998),
Notes on Contributors


Mary Floyd-Wilson is the Bowman and Gordon Gray Distinguished Term Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is the author of English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama (2003) and Occult Knowledge, Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage (2013). She has also coedited the essay collections Reading the Early Modern Passions: A Cultural History of Emotion (with Gail Kern Paster and Katherine Rowe, 2004) and Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England (with Garrett Sullivan, 2007).

Marissa Greenberg, Associate Professor of English at the University of New Mexico, is the author of Metropolitan Tragedy: Genre, Justice, and the City in Early Modern England (2015) and numerous articles on the relationships among space, history, genre, and performance in early modern English drama.

Peter H. Greenfield is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Puget Sound. He has written on traveling performers and local dramatic traditions, and is a past editor of Research Opportunities in Medieval and Renaissance Drama. For the Records of Early English Drama project he edited Gloucestershire (1986) and is currently completing work on Hampshire and Hertfordshire.

Thomas Warren Hopper is a PhD candidate at the University of Massachusetts Amherst whose research focuses on classical reception. He has previously worked as the Walter T. Chmielewski Fellow for English Literary Renaissance, contributed to the editing of The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare, and served on the committee of the UMass Student Writing Anthology. He teaches at Eagle Hill School in Hardwick, MA.

Martin Ingram is Emeritus Fellow in History at Brasenose College, University of Oxford. His publications include Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640 (1987), and numerous articles on crime and the law, sex and marriage, religion and popular culture in the Early Modern period. He is currently completing a book on sexual regulation in Tudor England. He has also published on the history of climate.

Grace Ioppolo is Professor of Shakespearean and Early Modern Drama at the University of Reading (United Kingdom). She is the author of Revising Shakespeare (1991), Dramatists and Their Manuscripts in the Age of Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton and Heywood (2006), and numerous journal articles and book chapters on early modern literature and drama. She is the founder and Director of the Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project (www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk) and has edited plays by Shakespeare, Middleton, and Fletcher.


David Kathman is an independent scholar in Chicago, Illinois. His research focuses on playing venues in early modern London, especially those other than custom-built playhouses; boy actors
and theatrical apprenticeship; and biographies of early modern theater people. His work has appeared in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, *Shakespeare Survey*, *Early Theatre*, and *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, among other places.

**Arthur F. Kinney** is Thomas W. Copeland Professor Emeritus of Literary History at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Chair of the Faculty Senate Research Library Council, and Director of the Massachusetts Center for Interdisciplinary Renaissance Studies. He is the author of many books and essays; the most recent is *Renaissance Reflections, Selected Essays 1976–2012* (2014). He is the only recipient of both the Paul Oskar Kristeller Lifetime Achievement Award from the Renaissance Society of America and the Jean Roberts Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Sidney Society.


**Natasha Korda** is Professor of English at Wesleyan University. Author of *Labors Lost: Women’s Work and the Early Modern English Stage* (2011) and *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (2002), and coeditor of two anthologies, *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama* (2011) and *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama* (2002), she is currently writing a book entitled *Shakespeare’s Laundry: Theater Historiography, Material Culture, and Feminist Counter-Archives*.

**François Laroque** is Professor Emeritus of English Literature and early modern drama at the University of Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle. He is the author of *Shakespeare’s Festive World* (1991) and *Court, Crowd and Playhouse* (1993). He has also coedited a two-volume anthology of *Elizabethan Theatre* (2009) and published French translations of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* and *The Jew of Malta*, and of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Tempest*.

**David Lindley** is an Emeritus Professor at the University of Leeds. He has edited Shakespeare’s *Tempest* for the New Cambridge Shakespeare (2002; rev. ed. 2013), and eleven of Jonson’s masques for the *Cambridge Works of Ben Jonson* (2012). He has published monographs on Lyric (1983), Thomas Campion (1985), and on the scandalous story of Frances Howard (1993), and articles on music and poetry.

**Tara L. Lyons** is an Assistant Professor of English Literature at Illinois State University. She has published articles and chapters on Shakespeare in print and gender on the early modern stage. She is currently working on a book project that constructs a genealogy of the drama collection in the hundred years before the publication of Benjamin Jonson’s *Works* (1616) and William Shakespeare’s *First Folio* (1623).

**Lawrence Manley**, Professor of English at Yale University, is the editor of *London in the Age of Shakespeare: An Anthology* (1986), and the author of *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (1995) and (with Sally-Beth MacLean) *Lord Strange’s Men and Their Plays* (2014).

**Leah S. Marcus** is Edwin Mims Professor of English at Vanderbilt University. She is the author of several books and editions, including the writings of Queen Elizabeth I and, most recently, *The Merchant of Venice* (2005), *As You Like It* (2011), and *The Duchess of Malfi* (2009). Her recent
work on John Milton and Andrew Marvell investigates them in relation to seventeenth-century vitalism. She is putting finishing touches on a new book currently titled *How Shakespeare Became Colonial* about British colonization and the history of the texts of Shakespeare’s plays.

**Cyrus Mulready** is Associate Professor of English at State University of New York at New Paltz. His publications include *Romance on the Early Modern Stage: English Expansion before and after Shakespeare* (2013), and essays on genre and book history. His current project, *Shakespeare Uncatalogued*, demonstrates how agents who have largely been peripheral to studies of genre (librarians, collectors, booksellers, and common readers) in fact had a significant influence on current understandings of early modern drama.

**Ian Munro** is Associate Professor of Drama at the University of California, Irvine. He is the author of *The Figure of the Crowd in Early Modern London: The City and Its Double* (2005), and *'A womans answer is neuer to seke': Early Modern Jestbooks, 1526–1635* (2007), as well as a number of articles on Renaissance drama and related topics.

**Scott Oldenburg** is an Associate Professor of English at Tulane University where he regularly offers courses on Shakespeare and his contemporaries. His book *Alien Albion: Literature and Immigration in Early Modern England* (2014) argues that England was accommodating of and less thoroughly xenophobic toward immigrants and that the stage allowed subjects to imagine various modes of early modern multiculturalism.


**Matteo Pangallo** is an Assistant Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. Previously he was a Junior Fellow in the Society of Fellows at Harvard University. His current research explores theatrical failure in early modern England. He is the author of *Playwriting Playgoers in Shakespeare's Time* (2017). He has published articles on early modern dramatic text, performance, and reception in journals such as *English Literary Renaissance, Early Theatre, Early Modern Literary Studies*, and *Review of English Studies*. In addition to editorial projects for the Malone Society and Digital Renaissance Editions, he is an editor for the Oxford *Collected Works of Thomas Heywood* and assistant editor for the New *Variorum Titus Andronicus*.

**Lawrence F. Rhu** is the Todd Professor of the Italian Renaissance at the University of South Carolina. His publications include *The Genesis of Tasso’s Narrative Theory* (1993) and *Stanley Cavell’s American Dream* (2006). He edited *The Winter’s Tale* in the Evans Shakespeare Editions (2011) and is currently translating *Il libro del cortegiano* by Baldassare Castiglione for Hackett.

**Michael Shapiro** taught at the University of Illinois and at Loyola University. He is the author of *Children of the Revels* (1977) and *Gender in Play* (1994), and is the coeditor of *Countering Shylock* (2016), a collection of essays on Jewish responses to *The Merchant of Venice*.

**William H. Sherman** is Director of Research and Collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum (where he leads the V&A Research Institute) and Honorary Professor at the University of York (where he was founding director of the Centre for Renaissance and Early Modern Studies). He has published widely on the history of books and readers and the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.


Brian Walsh is the author of *Shakespeare, the Queen’s Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History* (2009) and *Unsettled Toleration: Religious Difference on the Shakespearean Stage* (2016), as well as many essays on the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. He teaches at Yale University.

Don Weingust, before directing Centers for Shakespeare Studies in Ashland, Oregon, and Cedar City, Utah, taught at Tufts University and University of California at Berkeley, where he earned a PhD. Founder of the Shakespearean Performance Research Group of the American Society for Theatre Research, he is a member of the editorial board of *Theatre Survey*, Equity actor, a director, professional dramaturg, student of Stella Adler, and author of *Acting from Shakespeare’s First Folio: Theory, Text and Performance* and the forthcoming *Shakespeare and Original Practices*, as well as many articles, including for the Folger Shakespeare Library and the *Cambridge Guide to the Worlds of Shakespeare*.

Suzanne Westfall is a Professor and theatre director at Lafayette College. Author of *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels* and coeditor, with Paul W. White, of *Shakespeare and Theatrical Patronage in Early Modern England*, she also serves on the executive and editorial boards for Records of Early English Drama and *Early Theatre*. At present she is editing *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for the Internet Shakespeare Editions, and researching Northumberland records for REED.


Deborah Willis is Associate Professor of English at the University of California, Riverside, where she teaches Shakespeare, Early Modern Drama, and Cultural Studies. She is the author of *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (1995) and articles on Shakespeare, Marlowe, witchcraft, and gender. Her current book project is on addiction and bewitchment in early modern culture.

David Houston Wood serves as Distinguished Professor of English and Honors Program Director at Northern Michigan University. The author of *Time, Narrative, and Emotion in Early Modern England* (2009), and coeditor, with Allison P. Hobgood, of two essay collections, *Disabled Shakespeares* (*Disability Studies Quarterly*, Fall 2009) and *Recovering Disability in Early Modern*
England (2013), he has also published widely in journals such as *Shakespeare Yearbook, Renaissance Drama, Disability Studies Quarterly, Prose Studies*, and *Interfaces*.

**Adam Zucker** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts Amherst where he teaches courses on early modern drama and poetry. He is the author of *The Places of Wit in Early Modern English Comedy* (2011) and the coeditor of *Localizing Caroline Drama* (2006) and *Historical Affect and the Early Modern Theater* (2015).
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Introduction

Arthur F. Kinney and Thomas Warren Hopper

On January 30, 1649, Charles I, condemned two days earlier “to be putt to death by the severinge of his head from his body … In the open Streete before Whitehall,” was wakened before dawn. He asked Thomas Hacker, his Groom of the Bedchamber, to trim his beard “more than ordinary, by reason the season is so sharpe as probably may make me shake, which some observers will imagine proceeds from fear. I would have no such imputation.” He placed in his pocket a clean handkerchief and an orange spiked with cloves to refresh him. About 10 a.m. he joined Colonel Hacker to make the short journey to Whitehall. As they went, Charles checked the time and handed the clock to Hacker as a memorial. At Whitehall, they went to the King’s bedchamber, “where he used to lye,” to await their final appearance. At first refusing to eat after taking the sacrament, the King requested half a loaf of manchet and a glass of claret wine “in case some fitt of fainting might take him upon the scaffold.” Being allied with the Presbyterians, he declined an offer of prayer from Puritan ministers. Then the call came. Proceeding as he had regularly done to see Court entertainments, Charles and Hacker passed through the privy gallery and through the banqueting hall, where a hole had been struck in the wall allowing the King to step out onto the public scaffold.

This historic moment, culminating three years of debates and treatises decreasing royal authority, now seemed inevitable. Key army documents over a three-year period largely written by Henry Ireton, the Commissary General, had charted the decline. The Heads of the Proposals (August 1647) restructured Parliament. The Remonstrance of the Army (November 1648) argued for a monarch as figurehead voted by the people, but disenfranchised of veto power. The Levellers raised the objection that the King had abused his powers by asserting rights that denied the right of liberty to his people and should be brought to trial for treason. Finally, the Agreement of the People (January 1649) eliminated both the monarch and the House of Lords, creating a new system based solely on a unicameral legislative body which appointed the executive branch reporting to it. These documents were approved by the Levellers and by the
New Model Army which, since 1644, had called themselves Saints, appointed by God and thereby providential in their activities.

The self-styled Saints employed biblical language to impugn Charles I and to remove divine associations with the Crown. They called him this “man of blood,” which refers to 2 Samuel 16:7, in which King David is cursed as a “bloody man” for spilling innocent blood. As Crawford (1977) explains, this association of Charles with the “blood guilt” of murdering innocents indicted him according to long-standing cultural practices stemming from both the Bible and Anglo-Saxon laws. After years of Charles holding off opposing forces by dividing their loyalties, his attempt to invade Scotland with Scottish support was the last straw. His trial was short and the execution hard upon.

Charles I and Colonel Hacker stepped onto the makeshift platform between Whitehall and the broad London street. While a small group of men gathered around to hear him, a vast crowd jostled for position behind a ring of protective cavalry. These spectators thronged everywhere – on the ground, before a chest-high railing draped with black cloth, and from rooftops of neighboring buildings. The executioner and his assistant came on the platform disguised in black robes and wearing masks, wigs, and false beards. With the full attention on him, Charles remained standing to make a speech. He affirmed his innocence, excused Parliament, and blamed the army for his death. Given the increasing charges against him, it was his last chance, with a scribe in the audience taking notes, to rewrite history. He emphasized the “liberty” and “freedom” of his people and spoke of “having a government [with] laws by which their life and their goods may be most their own,” adding, “If I would have given way to an arbitrary way, for to have all laws changed according to the power of the sword I needed not to have come here. And, therefore, I tell you, and I pray God to be not laid to your charge, that I am the martyr of the people.” Then he removed his cloak. He removed his St. George medal, his most precious jewel, and gave it and his gloves to Bishop Juxton saying, “Remember.”

A few days later, similar remarks were published in his *Eikon Basilike*, compiled from his notes by the clergyman John Gauden, which would go through forty editions in English by the end of that year:

> The odium and offences which som men’s rigor or remisness in Church and State had contracted upon My Government, I resolved to have expiated by such Laws and regulations for the future, as might not onely rectified what was amiss in practice, but supplie what was defective in the constitution. No man haveing a greater zeal to see Religion settled, and preserved in Truth, Unitie, and Order then Myself, whom it most concern’s both in Pietie, and Policie, knowing, that, No flames of civil dissections are more dangerous then those which make religious pretensions the grounds.

Then he put his head on the block as the axe rose. The King asked the executioner to pause until he signaled with outstretched hands. The axe struck with a single blow. The head was held aloft and soldiers dispersed the crowd. But, noted Sir Roger Manley,

> They were inhumanely barbarous to his dead corpse. His hair and his blood were sold by parcels. Their hands and sticks were tinged by his blood and the block, now cut into chips, as also the sand sprinkled with his sacred gore, were exposed for sale. Which were greedily bought, but for different ends, by some as trophies of their slain enemy, and by others as precious reliques of their beloved Prince. (qtd. in Fumerton 1991, 9)
The execution of Charles I was a conscious performance that shared many elements with early modern theater, such as costumes, properties, speeches. The performance was enacted upon a temporary, public stage, with Whitehall functioning as a backdrop. The execution made characters of Charles, his escort, the bishop, and the headsmen, all in costume and some wearing masks. They employed such properties as the clove-spiked orange, the Eucharist host, the St. George medal, the axe. Speeches were delivered customary to both staged and real executions (Martin 2009). The performers acted upon cues, for how else might one read Charles's gesturing with his outstretched hands? These events were recorded, illustrated, and spread (see Fumerton 1991, 15 passim). Alongside five-act comedies, tragedies, and histories, alongside Court masques and entertainments, alongside pageants and royal progresses and Lord Mayor's shows, the execution of Charles I is yet another presentation of Renaissance English theater.

Since the publication of the first Companion to Renaissance Drama in 2004, the landscape of early modern scholarship has changed. This volume reflects those changes for scholars, students, and general readers. The rise of essay collections dedicated to the major authors of the period, some of which are now receiving second editions, has lessened the need for author-centric chapters. We have repurposed that space for more recent critical perspectives that indicate the primacy of literary theory in the field. Returning contributors have updated their chapters to incorporate new research, and new contributors add their established voices to a rich conversation. All essays survey their field before adding new ideas and suggesting future directions for study, which the editors hope actively to advance. In some ways, the chapter titles suggest a limited focus that belies the interrelatedness of many topics. Some particularly wide-ranging subjects, such as women in drama, are discussed in more than one essay. Readers will find the index useful in tracing these cross-references. As diverse and nuanced as those conversations are, this volume cannot encompass them all; readers interested in reading deeper should consult the references at the end of each essay. A New Companion to Renaissance Drama, then, acts both as an index of current conversations within Renaissance drama and a predictor of their evolution.

Part I situates Renaissance drama within its political, economic, religious, social, intellectual, geographic, and historical contexts. Norman Jones details the major historical events of the Elizabethan and Stuart periods that serve as a backdrop for the drama. The next two chapters examine two convergent influences upon Renaissance drama. On the one hand, Lawrence F. Rhu traces the effects that Continental thought, particularly the Reformation and humanistic studies, had on English culture, and how drama expressed those changes despite initial resistance to, and ambivalence about, accepting such elements of Continental culture. In the face of that Continental influence, Raphael Falco, on the other hand, looks at the debt that Renaissance drama owed to its medieval counterpart, and the ways that early modern dramatists adapted medieval dramatic conventions.

Writing about the popular culture that shaped such consumption, Sophie Chiari and François Laroque work to break down the supposed barrier that existed between learned and folk cultures. Scott Oldenburg provides context about the immigrant communities that formed in London after the Reformation, and the ways that the stage mediated anti-alien sentiment against multiculturalism. Ian Archer, writing about the cultural center of London and neighboring Westminster, stresses the nuance to be found in the stage’s portrayal of a social reality in flux caused by a rise in wealth, trade, and social mobility. William H. Sherman writes about the drama’s role in portraying travel and trade. The theater proved ideal for condensing the world into a small space and time, and by alluding to actual events and staging foreign peoples and
customs, it shaped audiences’ reactions to them. A rise in trade leads to a rise in wealth, risk, and debt; thus Amanda Bailey’s essay, on Tudor and Stuart economics, argues how the staging of a culture of debt allowed drama to negotiate emerging moral and ethical problems in early modern society. One such problem, vagrancy, is the subject of William C. Carroll’s chapter. Carroll argues how vagrants’ association with both disorder and the theaters was exaggerated in the period, and how the tension between the historical and literary accounts of vagrancy has shaped scholarship, which has only recently been embracing a more nuanced view of the topic.

Often at stake in those staged problems of debt and vagrancy was the status of the early modern household, which, as Martin Ingram details, served as the basic economic and social unit of the period. By staging domestic life, Renaissance drama, especially domestic tragedy, participated in changing the cultural attitudes about courtship, partnership, and household business, and Ingram further calls upon historians to take more seriously into account the dramatic representations of family life.

The next three essays of Part I summarize the broad metaphysical modes of thought, inquiry, and skepticism during the period: religion, science, and magic. Lori Anne Ferrell encapsulates the religious instability and paradox of the period 1580–1620, and the historiography of its scholarship, as it was expressed through religious tracts, prayer books, vernacular Bibles, and sermons. Against this state of religious turbulence, Barbara Traister explores the motivations and means behind various kinds of natural inquiry in the period, from astronomy to mathematics, from chemistry to medicine, as evidenced in close readings of drama. Just as inquiry into nature could be seen as an act of further discovering divinity through its works, so could that inquiry be seen as an arcane, even demonic transgression against natural laws. Deborah Willis explores this further with an overview of the early modern understanding of witchcraft and magic. The figures of the witch and the magician held an uncanny fascination for early modern culture, and continue to do so now.

Part I ends on a contrapuntal note, with a discussion of antitheatricality by Leah S. Marcus. Renaissance criticism of the theater depended upon its very existence, and theater critics paradoxically acknowledged its power over audiences. Their voice was a necessary counterargument to the theater’s supporters that helped define the social place and function of theater, a fact that future scholarship must take as its starting point.

Part II, Theater History, seeks to recover the various physical, commercial, legal, and social conventions surrounding the production and consumption of Renaissance drama. The essays within the section have a high degree of intertextuality, and speak alongside one another in natural ways. S. P. Cerasano foregrounds Part II by defining the historical concepts of performances, playing spaces, and rehearsal practices writ large. David Kathman revises Herbert Berry’s chapter from the earlier *Companion* to describe developments in playhouse design, from the adaptation of inns to outdoor public theaters, and to indoor private ones, taking into account evidence from archives, city records, and archaeological digs between 1989 and 2016. Richard Dutton outlines the pressures that playwrights and playing companies faced from the licensing and censorship of their work.

With the physical legacy and legal history of Renaissance theater established, Part II turns to the practices of repertory and rehearsal that are recoverable from period evidence and modern experimentation. From the legal records of the Master of Revels, among others, Roslyn L. Knutson constructs the repertory practices of early modern playing companies. The rise, fall, and convergence of actors, playwrights, patrons, censors, and theater owners speak to the evolving tastes of early modern audiences within the complex networks outlined in Part I. The original
practices of early modern actors are another matter entirely, one that Don Weingust seeks to recover with as little speculation as possible in his essay on acting practices. Speaking to both Kathman and Knutson, Weingust hypothesizes that early modern theater troupes, working within a repertory schedule in an established space, would have had precious little time for the luxuries afforded “late modern” actors, especially rehearsal time for cues, blocking, and choreography. Weingust cautions that the difference between early and late modern acting practices further prevents Renaissance dramatists from being considered our full contemporaries.

With this in mind, the next two essays further analyze how the conditions of performance shaped early modern drama. One popular playing condition that waned in the face of Puritanism was the boy companies, which is the subject of Michael Shapiro’s essay. Rising from Court performances by grammar school choristers, boy companies unevenly enjoyed royal patronage during the decades before the ban and, in performing works by the major playwrights of the era (except Shakespeare), helped usher the shift to indoor, private theaters. While many of the boy companies’ performances were satiric, in part because the audience was aware that boys were personating women onstage, women themselves were not allowed to perform. As Natasha Korda reminds us, this does not mean that women were not extensively involved in theatrical production. After historiographically orienting her argument, and noting that women are as absent in the historiography as early theater historians assumed they were in the world of Renaissance drama, Korda delves through the evidence to argue that the all-male English stage was itself an anomaly, and that women participated as patrons, authors, actresses in Court masques, and costumers, in addition to working in the box office and hawking concessions.

The final four essays of Part II discuss the performances for elite audiences and the nuanced ways in which drama was used to negotiate power relations within and without the Court. Peter H. Greenfield, writing about traveling companies, elaborates upon the advantages that traveling afforded to both the companies’ purses and their patrons’ reputations, and the constraints it imposed. Adaptation – to spaces, of material, to local customs – defined the playing companies’ experience, but the rewards from traveling outweighed the risks until the rise of Puritanism in the seventeenth century caused a decline in traveling that culminated in the 1642 ban. R. Malcolm Smuts advocates for an interdisciplinary approach by drawing upon the histories of dance, the theater, and the book as a supplement to the historical context when studying Court masques and royal progress entertainments. Suzanne Westfall, writing of performances in the great households, speaks to Korda and Greenfield from the perspective of the patrons, who were often women, and who would often write and act in the entertainments they and their household produced. These types of performances spoke to the patrons’ urge to display their connections, taste, and power. Lawrence Manley concludes the section by discussing how London city officials borrowed from the Court performances to reframe public life as a spectacle, as seen positively in the Lord Mayor’s shows and the 1559 coronation entry of Queen Elizabeth, and negatively in the lack of pageantry under Charles I.

Part III analyzes drama by genre, as defined in both today’s terms and those of the period. David Lindley, writing about masques, echoes and offers an example of Smuts’s call for an interdisciplinary approach as he discusses the genre’s evolution from earlier social rituals and festivals to its epitome under the Stuarts and its dissolution at the outbreak of the civil wars. Brian Walsh, writing about the history play, negotiates the contested definition of the genre in its four-hundred years of history, arguing instead that any play is a history play that imaginatively engages with, and also reflexively shapes, the shared “historical culture” of a time period. Opposite the history play’s dealings with the past stands the domestic tragedy’s probing of the
present, as catalyzed by the trial of Anne Suttill and the staging of *Arden of Faversham*. Lena Cowen Orlin contends that domestic tragedy, a term coined in 1831 for plays sharing a thematic kinship that have been seriously studied only since 1924, stages contested the power relations of domestic life within households, between households, and between households and the state, of which the household was considered an analogue. While Alice Arden’s murder of her husband moved audiences beyond mere titillation, another genre, revenge tragedy, used murder and revenge as vehicles to explore the cyclical motion of lawlessness, social contamination, and punishment. Marissa Greenberg close reads several revenge tragedies to argue that the predictable, cyclical nature of the genre allows audiences to gratify violent urges from a removed place that may not be as distant as might be imagined. Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Cyrus Mulready continue reading this cyclical movement as they discuss two other genres with varied and contingent definitions: romance and tragicomedy. Degenhardt and Mulready point out that the two genres have been conflated only recently, and, by tracing the critical conversation surrounding them, hope to separate them in order to reveal the genres’ diverse engagements.

Critical Approaches, Part IV, presents a range of viewpoints grounded in contemporary literary theory. Twenty years removed from the “corporeal turn,” the prominence of performance studies surrounding sexuality, gender, race, and disability cannot be denied. Part IV opens with Valerie Billing, who offers valuable lessons from queer theory about sexuality, desire, and same-sex relationships. Billing traces the historiography of queer theory, which stems from Foucault and new historicism; performs close reading to illustrate the instability of gender norms that performance illustrates; and ends by describing a recent movement within queer studies, that of unhistoricism. Unhistoricizing sex means to read early modern sexuality on its own terms, rather than as a precursor to modern concepts of desire. Reading against the dominant narrative spun by Foucault frees scholars from the need for slavish historical accuracy and opens up broader interpretations. As an example of such an interpretation, Alison Findlay closely reads a variety of drama to show how playwrights and performers, especially boy players and women actors, deconstructed essentialist gender norms by calling attention to the arbitrariness of everyday gendered performance. This can be read in conjunction with Shapiro, Korda, and (in Part V) Dodds and Ferguson.

Mary Floyd-Wilson and David Houston Wood provide overviews of two other historically contingent critical fields that constitute selfhood, race and disability, respectively. Floyd-Wilson covers the exhaustive amount of early modern etiologies of and responses to race, both of which often overlap with concepts of religion, heredity, and beauty, among others. Floyd-Wilson’s close readings show how drama reified and/or complicated those cultural assumptions. Wood treads well beyond the usual wake of Richard III’s twisted steps; the sheer variety of plays he interprets argues strongly for the ubiquity of deformity writ large on the early modern stage. By approaching early modern disability on its own terms, Wood unpacks the cultural forces that defined impairment of all types. Ultimately, these four essays offer new and different ways of accessing early modern difference and selfhood through the drama.

The final three essays of Part IV mark the “material turn,” that is, emerging critical perspectives on how humans shape, reshape, and are shaped by physical space and objects. Adam Zucker’s reading of space and place illustrates how the drama’s use of material space to portray imagined spaces responds to the real-world relationship between people and the spaces, particularly urban ones, through which they move their persons and their capital, both physical and intellectual. Ian Munro reads wit as one such kind of intellectual capital that can be exchanged within mutable
“fields,” that is, physical spaces, rhetorical settings, and social groups. Wit also constitutes the matter of drama itself insofar as characters use speech and rhetoric to frame their actions for the benefit of other characters and the audience. Elizabeth Williamson reflects upon the rise of materialist criticism and its uses for scholars. Cultural materialism seeks to reconstruct early modern culture from its material artifacts, on its own terms, from its own perspectives. Rather than making an objective study of material culture, as found in scientific materialism, cultural materialism embraces subjectivity by distancing itself from modern concepts of individuality, ownership, and thought. This perspective offers a re-visioning of book history, global trade, religion, cognition, nature, and performance.

One aspect of cultural materialism, the rise of the history of the book and manuscript studies, is the concern of Part V, Playwrights, Publishers, and Textual Studies, which explores the textual history of writing, recording, and transmitting drama and entertainments. Grace Ioppolo describes the insights to be gained from recovering the circuitous route that a play-text would follow from manuscript to stage to print. Focusing on one aspect of this path, Tara L. Lyons provides a brief introduction to the publishers of drama active between 1580 and 1640. Case studies of the most prolific publishers, supported by data from court records, guild registers, and wills, paints a picture of a vibrant, diverse, and complex network that still has much to offer scholars.

The final two essays of the volume each read one subset of authors against the world described by Ioppolo and Lyons. Lara Dodds and Margaret Ferguson read the life and work of three early modern female playwrights – Sidney, Cary, and Cavendish – to unpack the constraints they faced as educated, elite women authors writing drama to investigate the nature of good rulers and to resist being made political subjects. Dodds and Ferguson resist labeling the work of these women as “closet drama,” and, alongside Korda, call for more inquiry into the participation of women in Renaissance drama. Matteo Pangallo writes about nonprofessional playwrights, often working-class playgoers with no professional experience who still sought to participate in dramatic production. From their work, Pangallo argues, we can learn about how the art form was experienced and perceived against the tastes, desires, and ideals of some of its consumers.

We offer this New Companion as an expanded call for more and varied engagement with the drama, along any and all of the interpretive avenues presented in this volume, and of the criticism yet to arise. The trends of the past decade’s scholarship teach us to understand the period on its own terms; to embrace nuanced interpretations; to read negotiation of identity and beliefs against dominant ideologies; to discover the networks connecting authors and actors, patrons and performers, audience and reader, rulers and vagrants alike. The power of drama remains potent centuries later, as evidenced by the exciting scholarship presented in, and perhaps presaged by, this New Companion.

References


Part I

Context