

A Concise Companion to
English Renaissance
Literature

Edited by Donna B. Hamilton

A Concise Companion to
English Renaissance Literature

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Contents

Notes on Contributors	vii
Introduction <i>Donna B. Hamilton</i>	1
1 Economics <i>S. P. Cerasano</i>	11
2 Religion <i>Donna B. Hamilton</i>	32
3 Royal Marriage and the Royal Succession <i>Paul E. J. Hammer</i>	54
4 Patronage, Licensing, and Censorship <i>Richard Dutton</i>	75
5 Humanism, Rhetoric, Education <i>Peter Mack</i>	94
6 Manuscripts in Early Modern England <i>Heather Wolfe</i>	114
7 Travel, Exploration, and Empire <i>Ralph Bauer</i>	136

Contents

8	Private Life and Domesticity <i>Lena Cowen Orlin</i>	160
9	Treason and Rebellion <i>Andrew Hadfield</i>	180
10	Shakespeare and the Marginalized “Others” <i>Carole Levin</i>	200
11	Cosmology and the Body <i>Cynthia Marshall</i>	217
12	Life-Writing <i>Alan Stewart</i>	238
	Index	257

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Introduction

Donna B. Hamilton

This *Concise Companion* approaches Renaissance literature not from the perspective of authors, texts, or chronology, but by way of categories and contexts understood to have informed this literature from the later decades of the reign of Elizabeth I to the end of the reign of James I, or 1575–1625. Each chapter provides a self-contained introduction to a topic, as well as an entry point into a subfield for the reader who wishes to pursue more particular research and study. Chapters on economics, religion, and education deal most directly with the ideological underpinnings of Renaissance culture. Chapters on manuscripts and on patronage and licensing consider the mechanisms by means of which ideas circulated in the public sphere. The chapters on treason and rebellion and on private life and domesticity compare the one-sidedness of treatises written to dictate behavior to the many actions that flaunted those rules. Consideration of exploration, royal marriage, and those the English regarded as “outsiders” takes us to matters of English national identity, to the economic and religious significance of travel, and to the political and ideological implications of defining England in isolation from or as a part of nations in Continental Europe. Finally, two chapters on the human subject – one from the perspective of cosmology and the body and one from the perspective of life-writing – turn our attention in yet a different way to the individual as a part of a cultural system.

Our study of the English Renaissance begins from the perspective of business and economics not only because the topic is foundational but because it gives easy entry to the period. We all know something about money and business, at least as those topics affect our own lives. Then as now, the production of art – music, painting, entertainment, and literature, including play-writing – had an economic basis. During the reign of Elizabeth, one of the great innovations in business was the

large public playhouse, the first of which, built in London in 1576, was called the Theatre. The business model for a playhouse that could hold 2,000–3,000 paying customers mimicked that of other entertainments, such as bear baiting, which people attended at a set time and for which they paid money. By 1594, two playing companies dominated the theatre scene, the Lord Admiral's Men and the newly created Lord Chamberlain's Men. Philip Henslowe, who together with his son-in-law Edward Alleyn built the Rose theatre, mostly hired writers for plays to be acted by the Lord Admiral's Men. Shakespeare belonged to the Chamberlain's Men. These companies competed with each other for their market share of the public's attention.

In her chapter "Economics," Susan Cerasano defines the economic situation in Renaissance England by focusing on the economics of the theatre business. Using as a baseline the monopolies granted to individual guilds, Cerasano defines the late sixteenth-century theatre business as characterized by a set of "innovative business models" that depended to a large extent on what she calls "dynastic capitalism," a system comprised of family business and dependent on family connections – such as those shared by Henslowe and Alleyn. In developing that definition, she sees that such a self-contained structure with close-knit relational rules was also "guild-like." These definitional terms help us understand both the business aspect of the theatre and the theatre's complex relationship to other institutional practices. Her attention to plays by William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Thomas Middleton leaves no doubt that for the playwright timeliness in topics often included economic issues.

The topic of religion in Renaissance England is as well known as it is elusive, as Donna Hamilton emphasizes in her chapter on religion. The basic narrative that underlies all discussions must be that of Henry VIII's break with Rome in 1534, combined with the process by which Protestant beliefs and practices replaced over time their Roman Catholic counterparts. The high stakes involved in this shift can hardly be overstated.

In breaking from Rome, Henry VIII eliminated the political control of English institutions that had been the pope's prerogative. The English monarch was now head of church and state. Throughout the rest of the sixteenth and well into the seventeenth century, matters of royal or dynastic marriage, treason and rebellion, war with European countries, competition in trade, and the treatment of English citizens abroad and of English Catholics in England remained bound up with the implications of taking actions that might return

England to papal control, a destiny most people decried but others sought. Clinging to the political and religious autonomy they had gained in the separation from Rome, the English struggled to come to terms with competition and threat from Spain but also with a recurring desire to cultivate Spain as an important ally. In matters of religious belief and practice, England's break with Rome meant first a long struggle in England to work out what the English church would be. It was not until the late 1580s that Protestantism clearly dominated as the religion of England. Throughout the 1570s, strong Catholic communities existed throughout England, even as the tactics to enforce uniformity in religion gradually became more effective. The execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587 and the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 completed the task of making England a Protestant nation, even as Catholics continued their less public religious existence. To read Renaissance literature with understanding requires that one be attuned to the religious register. Protestant characterizations of Catholic traditions as superstitious hocus-pocus, their disparaging of Catholic emphasis on meritorious deeds, and their mocking Catholic belief in purgatory document ongoing religious debate. Protestants understood their differences from Catholics as necessary reform; Catholics saw them as innovations that were destroying the unity of Christendom. Despite some sharp differences between Catholics and Protestants, there remained much in common. Many individuals converted back and forth between Protestant and Catholic beliefs. Any notion of an essentialized Protestant or Catholic identity does injustice to the variation within communities, the indecisiveness of individuals, and the hybridity in all kinds of religious experience in a nation where a single generation had seen the standards of strict uniformity change at least once and sometimes three times from Edward VI to Mary to Elizabeth.

Matters of royal marriage and succession felt strongly the implications of religious controversy, especially when the marriage involved a foreign power of a different religion than England. The long-drawn-out negotiations for a marriage between Queen Elizabeth and the duke of Anjou, a French Catholic, carried a double threat. England might succumb to Catholic influence, and, as Paul Hammer emphasizes in this volume, Elizabeth might succumb to French domination, an especially fearsome prospect should she die in childbirth. For this momentous controversy, both Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser made their publishing – in manuscript and print – debuts, with some damage to their careers as a result. Hammer's review of the pressure

brought to bear on Elizabeth by her rival Mary Queen of Scots introduces a second rivalry rooted in issues of succession and religion. Many English Catholics longed for events that would put Mary on the throne; others acted subversively and treasonably to try to make that happen. Any idealized view of Elizabeth clouds the political force of those plots and masks the continuing significance of Catholic opposition to the royal supremacy. One element of this significance lay in the claims to the English throne that were made by Philip II of Spain. Further, having finally executed Mary, Elizabeth and her nation had then to face the prospect of eventually welcoming Mary's son James VI of Scotland to England as their own James I. With the accession of James, England once again had a royal family. Understanding fully the international implications of royal marriage, James eventually succeeded in marrying his daughter Elizabeth to a Protestant and his son Charles to a Catholic. Both negotiations caused political upheaval at home and abroad. The disastrous reign of Elizabeth's husband, the Elector Frederick of Bohemia, led shortly to a Spanish invasion of the Palatinate and the Thirty Years War. After an involved courtship with the Spanish Infanta, Charles finally married Henrietta Maria, a marriage alliance that did not bring peace between the two nations.

Alongside economics, religion, and the international implications of marriage and succession, patronage stands as the central social system of the period. Suitors looked for advancement by offering service to a patron, and the reward the patron gave in return advanced his own standing with his superior, a reciprocity that encouraged a repeat performance of the entire cycle. Writers could attract patrons because their skills were highly regarded by the ruling class.

Richard Dutton introduces us to the many-sided aspects of patronage by reviewing the patronage relationships of Ben Jonson, who celebrated his patrons in poems printed in *Epigrams* and *The Forest*, and also sought and received commissions to write occasional shows and entertainments, Lord Mayor shows, and masques for the court. Also a playwright, Jonson withdrew from writing plays after King James I granted him a pension, thereby again proving his capacity to avoid the world of business and make a living instead by way of the patronage system.

More telling about the relationship between patronage and the theatre is what we know of the office of Master of the Revels, which held the power to license plays. This power was somewhat moderated by the simultaneous requirement that playing companies had to have patrons who beginning in 1594 were members of the Privy Council.

Nevertheless, the licensing power meant that the Master of the Revels could allow plays to be performed, could censor plays, and could give a company exclusive rights to perform a play. Dutton provides important examples of all actions.

In a seminal discussion, Dutton examines the intricacies of the licensing and patronage systems by way of the uproar caused by the publication of *The First Part of the Life and Reign of King Henry IV*, printed first in February, 1599. Months later, when Essex objected to the dedication, it was removed. Still later, after a second printing, the entire print run was burned. Eventually, Essex's involvement with Hayward's books was used as evidence for charging him with treason. Thus, concludes Dutton, licensing and patronage systems were for the most part "*inclusive* processes, calculated to keep writers, dramatists, publishers, and players within the circle of authority, rather than to exclude them from it."

The study of rhetoric, which constituted early modern training in reading and writing, helps us deal with that conclusion. As Peter Mack urges, in acquiring knowledge of the skills on which Elizabethans depended for "communicative competence," a skill set based in a curriculum comprised of Greek and Roman writers, we gain greater access to the implications of their writing. Study of sentence structure, of figurative language, and of pertinent examples from the writings of Greek and Roman writers constituted the central elements of grammar-school and university rhetorical training. Such training enabled the virtuoso writing of Sidney and Shakespeare, as Mack demonstrates. That training also set the standards for the controversial literature of the period, as well as for the more indirect forms of argument that populate history writing and prose narrative.

Mack's densely packed chapter furnishes both an introduction for the student uninitiated in rhetoric and concise reminders for those with more familiarity. Stylistic tools direct us to the implications of content and to the community of readers that are the object of address. Writers knew what their rhetorical options were, and that those options included choice of genre. Rhetorical options also affected and were affected by the means of publication.

In the Renaissance, there were basically two means of publication: print and manuscript. Publication in the form of a printed book or pamphlet meant entering a system governed by licensing regulations, and affected nearly always by the economics and sometimes by the ideological leanings of publishers, printers, and bookshop owners. Watershed dates for the publication of material on various topics are

worth bearing in mind. Sometimes the initial date is especially important, such as that of *Tottel's Miscellany* in 1557, or *The Shepheardes Calender* in 1579. Sometimes the repeated publication over many years may seem more significant, the situation for *The Paradise of Daintie Devices*, printed in 1576, 1578, 1580, 1585, 1590, 1596, 1600, and 1606. Sometimes key historical events affect our understanding of why a text or group of texts made an appearance at a certain time. The negotiations for the marriage of Queen Elizabeth to the duke of Anjou (1579–82) and the execution of Edmund Campion in 1581 merit study together for their effect on writing and printing. In instances where works were revised prior to reprinting, it often matters a great deal which edition one cites. One would rarely cite the first edition of John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, printed in 1563, because it was vastly changed already by 1570. However, if one is citing Foxe in relation to a work, let us say, in the 1590s, then the edition one probably should use is the one in 1583, the last edition Foxe himself had a hand in prior to his death.

An important alternative to print, manuscript publication defined itself in relation to the standard practices developed for printed works. Prior to the point where print had reached dominance, manuscript publication had been the central, if not the only, means to circulate writing. With the prevalence of print, manuscript transmission took on new significance. Confining the circulation of one's work to a manuscript usually meant that one was writing more privately to a selected audience. As Heather Wolfe emphasizes, the agendas for such writing ranged across domestic, legal, and business transactions. And while such writing could have seriously private significance, use of manuscript transmission for subversive political and religious texts displays yet another strength of manuscript publication. While the significance of some famous examples – *Leicester's Commonwealth* or *The Game at Chesse* – is readily accessible, in other cases the intimacy of the social context for the production, revision, and rearranging of works in manuscript eludes us. By the same token, in instances where works originally in manuscript made their way into print, the conventions of printing and the very act of making something more public removed the manuscript from the conventions of privacy that might have given us access to a work's significance. Understanding some of the opportunities as well as the challenges that lie in the study of print and manuscript must remain a central part of our work in English Renaissance literature.

Certain genres have seemed more resistant to ideological classification or cultural attribution, especially poetic miscellanies, history writing, prose narratives, chivalric and pastoral romances, and travel

writing. Length contributes to their seeming impenetrability. In this volume, Ralph Bauer's discussion of travel literature gives this category of works a new accessibility.

Working across a body of works spanning the period 1580–1620, Bauer draws a dividing line between works printed before and after 1613. As Bauer notes, while travel writing from the medieval period onward focused primarily on an inner spiritual progress, beginning in 1580 such writing began to grapple more specifically with the external world. Competition for geographical knowledge and trade routes motivated the production of manuals on how to travel. Expeditions began to include personnel with a wider range of skills, including the skill to sketch and paint what travelers had seen. Maps and lists of natural resources soon populated the reports. To reach these conclusions, Bauer surveys the works of Richard Hakluyt, Francis Bacon, Jerome Turler, Thomas Palmer, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Thomas Harriot. Across all of them, Bauer finds narratives that held up the European standard for discovery while reconstructing the task as one meant for Protestant dominance.

As Bauer argues, a major shift in definition of the travel and commerce project came with the writing of Samuel Purchas. In a series of works announced as post-Hakluyt – *Hakluytus Posthumus* – Purchas redefined the project ideologically as consonant with a growing corporate and transoceanic imperial state. Instead of praising the accomplishments of individuals, Purchas understood the project as an initiative of the monarchy and of strong central government. This ideological repositioning built on a growing understanding of imperial ideology as dependent on a notion of British identity, that is, of Britain as a composite kingdom comprised of three kingdoms – England, Scotland, and Ireland – functioning as one. Though fledgling and barely surviving, the Jamestown settlement in 1607 was one step in the process of England's evolving interests in discovery and commerce. The most lasting settlement in Plymouth in 1620 was another.

Writings about private domestic life pose still other challenges. In her survey of relevant texts, Lena Orlin considers the range: guidebooks to courtship, marriage, child rearing, and servant supervision; instructions from the church; diaries and letters – in all of which texts there is a striking absence of challenges to the basic structure and expectations of the household. Conflict and opposition have no representation.

However, as in other instances from the period, if one shifts to other genres the information and perspective change, in some cases erasing the opacity, in others exchanging one form of veiling for another.

Church-court records in particular record charges of adultery, fornication, and beatings. These documents expose the conflict, discord, and aberrant behavior that instruction manuals and homilies forbade. But even these records are not always what they seem, according to Orlin. Because the church courts deployed sexualized language for many topics, one cannot always tell whether the issue was in fact the sexual matter that the language expresses literally. This peculiarity dims the light that court records seem to shed on private matters, while at the same time clarifying that a sexualized discourse, to whatever it refers at any moment, nevertheless registers anxiety about the culture's ability to maintain monolithic control over private matters. According to Orlin, some of the most graphic representations of disorder in the domestic sphere exist in stageplays, where spouse killing, adultery, and other forms of disobedience abound.

Matters of obedience and disobedience as represented for the private sphere had a corollary in the public sphere, where disobedience could be labeled treason or rebellion and punished by execution, issues discussed by Andrew Hadfield. Issues of treason and rebellion were regularly related to matters of religion. In a period in which uniformity in religion was mandated in the context of great religious controversy, open expression of opposition could be understood or defined as treason. In 1536, opposition to Henry VIII's break with Rome resulted in the uprising known as the Pilgrimage of Grace, in which an army of approximately 30,000 gathered in the north to protest the enforced change in religion, with several hundred subsequently executed in punishment. In 1570, the Catholic nobility in the north of England led what we know as the Northern Rebellion or the Rebellion of the Northern Earls. Later the Ridolfi Plot, one of several plots against Queen Elizabeth's life, resulted in the execution in 1572 of Thomas Howard, fourth duke of Norfolk. Another attempt on Elizabeth's life, the Babington Plot of 1586, led directly to the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587.

Questions about succession raised issues regarding the source of a monarch's power and so the conditions under which a monarch might succeed to the throne or be removed from it. Everyone understood that an English monarch ruled by divine right and was God's substitute on earth. But that idea was conjoined with and interrelated to other ideas. A number of political thinkers argued that the king held his power also from the people. In the stronger versions of this republican notion there was advocacy for an elected monarch and for the ability of the people to depose a ruler. Obviously, one implication of such

ideas could be the possibility that rebellion was not treason. Hence, such notions were offered and quashed, offered and quashed.

The full range of these ideas makes its way into the poetry and plays of Shakespeare, confirming that the ideas had currency for him and members of his audience. These were not topics for the reclusive legal scholar, but matters that affected the daily lives of the English people, who had to gauge how their spiritual, domestic, economic, and social lives might be determined or affected by how they chose to express their citizenship.

In her discussion of marginalized “others” in England, Carole Levin considers how identities that made some of the English uncomfortable are recorded in various literary works, tracts, and treatises. Discussions elsewhere in this volume of the power of religious controversies are enriched by Levin’s noting the expressions of anti-Spanish and anti-French feelings. An example of how Shakespeare’s Joan of Arc attempts to find a safe association for herself points to a contemporary self-consciousness around these issues. In discussions of Africans and Jews, Levin takes up the otherness of race and religion that was inscribed in Renaissance culture by law and custom, including Elizabeth’s attempt to expel all of African descent in 1601 and her unflagging efforts to make all “others” conform outwardly to the nation’s official religion. In a surprise closing, Levin points to evidence of a tradition that the inability to enjoy music was regarded as a characteristic of those of a race or religion regarded as inferior.

The systems of thought and practice that defined the spheres of language and action during 1575–1625 included ideas about cosmology and the body, the topic of Cynthia Marshall’s chapter. Within this topic, there is the same range of clarity and complexity as in others. The conservative view of the human place in the cosmos credited divine control over the heavens with influencing human existence, individually and generally. Such understanding provided the basis for expressing all political, social, familiar, and individual affairs in hierarchical terms. The result, says Marshall, was a template for regarding relationships and identities as “essential and fixed, not as historically and culturally derived.” This system incorporated most aspects of the natural world, fending off full acceptance either of Copernicus’ ideas about a heliocentric model of the solar system, offered in 1543, or of Kepler’s description of the laws of planetary motion in 1619. John Donne and others speculated that these theories called others into question. But for the most part there continued ongoing belief in planetary influence on human affairs, as well as in the need to achieve

balance of the four humors corresponding to the natural elements of earth, water, air, and fire. Blood-letting and purging were standard treatments for a range of ailments. When we come across this language in the literature of the English Renaissance, our challenge always is to understand not only the theory behind it but the implications of its particular use. When does our identifying it instruct us in a worldview radically different from our own, and when does it refer to a situation of another sort for which humoral language provides expression?

In a chapter that implicitly crosses virtually all topics in this volume, Alan Stewart considers the significance of the genre of life-writing during the English Renaissance. The centrality of the genre is neatly illustrated by Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, and by the fact that Edward Hall, Raphael Holinshed, John Stow, William Camden, and others organized their writing of English history according to the period of each monarch. Within the hagiographical genre of saints' lives, the goal was to use the example of an individual to teach how to live a holy life, not always the goal of the history writers, who recorded mixed views of emperors and monarchs. The use of life-writing to fashion an exemplary life was especially useful for self-fashioning. In his *Life of Sidney*, Fulke Greville represented the nobility of Sidney by interpolating from Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* the story about providing water for a soldier, but making Alexander's action into an action by Sidney. The fact that Greville incorporated his account of Sidney's life into a preface for a book of his own, not Sidney's, poems suggests that self-representation was a key motivator in the construction even of the account of Sidney. Stewart's discussion of Francis Bacon, an author about whom Stewart has written previously, takes his account in yet another direction. At the end of his life, having been discredited by impeachment, Bacon represented the private, individual significance of his downfall by comparing his situation to that of some of the greatest Greeks and Romans – Demosthenes, Seneca, and Cicero – all of whom had been redefined by the justice systems as criminals. In claiming that he merits comparison with these predecessors, he identifies himself both with their fate and with their greatness, while passing brutal judgment on those who had engineered his downfall. Here and elsewhere, Stewart's examples challenge any satisfaction we may have with how we have understood one or another biographical (or other) account by a Renaissance writer.

Chapter 1

Economics

S. P. Cerasano

On January 3, 1589, actor Richard Jones signed a deed of sale surrendering his share of “playing apparel, playbooks, instruments, and other commodities” to another, more eminent actor named Edward Alleyn with whom Jones had performed for at least six years, probably since both were members of the Earl of Worcester’s Company in 1583. In return for his share Jones was to be paid £37 10s., a substantial sum equal to roughly three times the annual income for a schoolmaster of the same period (Greg 1907: 31–2). From what little historians know of the next few years it appears that Jones had decided to leave Alleyn’s company in order to travel on the Continent with a touring company; but by 1595 he had returned to London, and he was again performing alongside Alleyn as one of the Lord Admiral’s Men. So for a second time Jones purchased a share in the company. Despite the fact that these financial arrangements might, at first, appear unusual to us, Jones and Alleyn were clearly comfortable with such transactions. By the late 1580s it was customary for actors to venture their own money in order to share the risk of operating an entertainment business. The players understood that they were investing not only in the aesthetic business of play production, but also in the financial necessities associated with making a living as professional players.

As the Jones–Alleyn transaction, and so many documents of the Elizabethan theatre, make clear, the mixture of players, property, and profit was central to the organization of professional theatre. By Shakespeare’s day acting companies had relied on their own financial resources for generations, even though this had not always been the case. A hundred years earlier the court interluders who were patronized by Henry VII, and subsequently by his son Henry VIII, collected an annual fee (on a per-player basis) along with occasional rewards from the monarch; and between these sources of income the players were

guaranteed a basic wage. Under this arrangement, whatever earnings could be brought in through performance constituted income over and above what the players were guaranteed. However, by the early years of Elizabeth I's reign the situation had altered completely. In the 1560s playing companies began to depend primarily upon their performances (often conducted in provincial locales) in order to make a living; the queen no longer provided an annual fee, although some companies enjoyed occasional rewards for performances at court. Thus, in large part the players were required to fund themselves, an arrangement that transformed acting into an even more precarious profession than it had been previously. To complicate matters, not all of the players' earnings were returned to them in the form of salaries. The profits had to defray the costs of purchasing playbooks, costumes, and props, not to mention the expenses incurred by travel.

This economic model persisted well into the last quarter of the sixteenth century when the Queen's Men (established 1583) still made their living on the road, having only the queen's livery to show for their association with the monarch. Patrons – whether royal or aristocratic – offered their blessing in the form of a patent, a gesture that allowed actors to assume the status of servants; but ultimately patrons did not provide a salary. In some measure this hands-off approach was a useful arrangement since it allowed the players more artistic freedom than a more dependent relationship with their patrons might have permitted. Yet it did not provide a regular income, a key element influencing the preservation and development of any profession. Under an arrangement such as that which governed the Queen's Men, actors gained access to a large market in the provinces; but they had to make their living outside of London's more convenient theatrical marketplaces.

However, a few companies were more fortunate than this; and the business model that they evolved prevailed into the seventeenth century. By the 1590s what set Alleyn and Jones apart from those players who made a living on tour is that they enjoyed the advantages of performing in a permanent playing space (the Rose playhouse, located on Bankside, just across the river from the city of London). Furthermore, the company could depend upon the backing of a financier (Philip Henslowe) to assist them in meeting their ongoing expenses. Both of these factors guaranteed the Admiral's Men an important level of professional security; but more than any other development it was the construction of the early public playhouses (the Red Lion in 1567, the Theatre in 1576, the Curtain in 1577, and the Rose in 1587) that

transformed, in a fundamental way, the financial basis of stage-playing. Nevertheless, as favorable as these conditions were, they did not occur randomly; nor did investors undertake such projects for altruistic reasons. Rather, the construction of the playhouses and the financing of actors were encouraged by other economic trends during the second half of the sixteenth century. The gradual professionalizing of theatre, as a business, converged with the growing climate of capitalist expansion that predominated at the time.

The Economic Conditions: Europe and England

Because the profession of playing was inextricably bound up with financial arrangements, the story of theatrical economics is rooted more generally in the economic history of the early modern period; and, in turn, the economic conditions that shaped the early modern period were influenced by several previous centuries that alternately experienced devastation and growth. In general, economic historians describe the thirteenth century as an unusual time, an era that exemplified the culmination of several centuries of relative stability and consistent increases, both in terms of a swelling population and in terms of expanding trade and commerce. These elements heightened the productivity that normally accompanies such growth; and although various social crises, such as war and pestilence, occasionally disrupted this upswing, the thirteenth century marked an auspicious period that preceded more catastrophic times. Douglass C. North and Robert Paul Thomas characterize the thirteenth century as a period of “economic awakening”: “Urban places expanded. Trade and commerce flourished locally, regionally and internationally. In short, this was a dynamic era” (North and Thomas 1973: 46).

By the beginning of the fourteenth century things had begun to change, and the effects of these changes peaked in the middle of the century when the Black Death (1347–51) not only decimated the population in many parts of Western Europe, but destroyed the underpinnings of the economy as well (North and Thomas 1973: 46, 73). Although precise estimates of the actual decline in population disagree with one another, it is generally accepted that the Great Plague – in combination with other elements, and less severe plague periods that followed in the second half of the fourteenth century – reduced the European population by 20–5 percent. The economic results were very mixed: while the labor market and the markets for

goods shrank, simultaneously wages rose and rents fell (North and Thomas 1973: 71–3, 88). During the second half of the fifteenth century a combination of population growth and commercial expertise, shored up by the stability of secure nation states (that had replaced the former city states), fostered expansion and economic vitality. “The market expanded, efficiency required the substitution of money payments for labor dues in a new contractual arrangement. In the process serfdom died, labor became free to seek its best rewards, land received rent, and the basic feudal-manorial relationship withered and died” (North and Thomas 1973: 92).

By the end of the sixteenth century these trends were firmly embedded in both Europe, as a whole, and England, in particular. The European economy featured new growth in population, an absence of plague (at least, in comparison with what had occurred earlier), and an accompanying increase in trade. In some sense, of course, there was not one organized, overarching European economy, but many smaller “economies.” Some of these were regionally based industries, while others tended to be exported for sale outside of local and national borders in a kind of quasi-“international” market (although this lacked the kind of sophisticated organization that such terminology might suggest). The cloth trade, which had sustained the European economy for several centuries, remained the seminal industry (despite the fact that heavy woolens were eventually replaced by lighter woolens), while other emerging industries, such as the silk trade and later on various metal trades, emerged to take their place alongside the woolen industry. With the development of trading routes to the east, a market for spices, china, and other luxury goods opened up new possibilities for commerce.

These trends were replicated in the economic history of England, despite the fact that the country suffered major setbacks in the centuries up to 1500, which included the Hundred Years War, the War of the Roses, and the ravages of the Black Death. Nonetheless, by 1550 foreign trade was flourishing, and the wool industry, still strong, remained the staple of the English economy (Bowden 1962). In the wake of these auspicious developments London gradually became a city where sophisticated economic transactions could take place. In June, 1566, Sir Thomas Gresham laid the cornerstone for the first Exchange at Threadneedle and Cornhill streets, which was modeled after the Bourse in Antwerp. The building – which contained shop space and meeting rooms, halls, and gardens – would, according to Gresham, offer “cloistered walkways to shelter our merchants from

the elements while they conduct their business, 'an inside . . . will be halls and rooms aplenty for their pleasure . . . [The shops will be spaces in which] your wives and ladies may buy their fill of exotic trinkets from beyond the seas . . . or take sweets of an afternoon.'" The Exchange, which eventually acquired the status of being "Britain's Bourse," was such an overwhelming success that Queen Elizabeth paid it a personal visit in 1571, whereupon she gave the building its official name, the Royal Exchange of England ("to be henceforth so designated and called, and not otherwise!"). It stood, in great splendor, at its full height of three stories, with a steep-pitched roof, statues of the queen adorning the parapets, and a tower whose bell rang out twice daily, calling the merchants to business, until it burned down in the Great Fire of 1666, whereupon another exchange was constructed on the same site (Gresham 1995: 241–2, 289).

All this is not to say that the economy of sixteenth-century England was wholly without problems; but even in the face of declining real wages, substantial inflation, food shortages, and periodic setbacks due to plague or war, the economic landscape was marked by a spirit of innovation, amidst which the capitalist adventurer and the investor-shareholder seemed to gain substantial ground. D. C. Coleman, noting that there is considerable controversy over the condition of life for the "ordinary person" of the late Tudor period, commented: "The gainers were to be found in all ranks of life but more especially amongst the enterprising yeomen and landowning gentry, amongst traders, merchants, and lawyers" (1977: 26–9).

Concepts of Capitalism

One of the hallmarks of the changing economy during the sixteenth century was what historians have referred to, generally speaking, as a "new capitalism." However, when they invoke this term they are not referring to the kind of widespread industrialization and free market capitalism that characterizes the modern western world. Rather, they are suggesting that there was vigorous activity amongst speculative entrepreneurs, and perhaps even that the numbers of such investors increased (Grassby 1999: 1–17). For many theorists early versions of capitalism have also been associated with the cult of individualism, which looms large in discussions of the early modern mentalité. Nonetheless, as useful as these theoretical constructs might be, it is important to bear in mind that early manifestations of the capitalist enterprise were

radically different from contemporary concepts. To begin with, there was no organized economic “system,” either on the Continent or within England. Further, the sense of open, self-regulating trade that defines contemporary theoretical ideas of capitalism was wholly missing. Trades were regulated through the granting of monopolies to individual guilds; and the guild system was so extensive – incorporating 75 percent or more of adult males over the age of 28 in London – that it not only provided professional training, but also maintained control over the quality of the goods produced by its members and regulated competition. Thus, through their well-established internal court system individual guilds were in a position to perform a policing function for their trade (Archer 1991: 114–31). In these circumstances trade was not conducted within individualized standards. Instead goods were produced according to specific professional expectations. Tradesmen’s business practices were established by the tradition and custom of guilds.

Two concepts were central to the inner workings of early capitalism: the first was “innovation,” in all of its aspects, from the creation of new products to new markets to new commercial structures; and the second was what modern economists frequently refer to as “dynastic capitalism,” which, in simpler language, refers to the degree to which family-owned businesses controlled trade, sometimes for generation after generation. Increasingly during the decades between 1550 and 1600 the impulses to mercantilism and the evolution of a mercantile culture – which had been evident since the late Middle Ages – were stimulated by the emergence of new kinds of businesses, as well as by the fact that increasing numbers of people began to speculate in businesses. The great trading companies, such as the Muscovy Company (chartered in 1555 to explore trading opportunities with Muscovia and Russeland, both located in modern Russia, and Cathay, now part of China), also provided new kinds of organized structures for investment. Consequently, it was a combination of innovative business models and the increasing prevalence of dynastic capitalism that served as the motor of economic growth. In his book-length study of this phenomenon Richard Grassby concludes: “The business family was in several respects the individual writ large . . . In the early modern period the economy would have grown at a much slower pace without corporations and lone adventurers, but it would not have functioned at all without family networks” (Grassby 2001: 416–17).

In this, theatrical businesses were no exception. The Theatre (constructed in 1576) was, in actuality, the property of the Brayne–Burbage family (although the widow Brayne claimed that she was