



LORD STRANGE'S
MEN AND
THEIR PLAYS

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Lawrence Manley and
Sally-Beth MacLean

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*Lawrence Manley dedicates this book to his children,
Jonathan and Laura*

*Sally-Beth MacLean dedicates this book to her grandchildren,
Lachlan, Rebecca, Hunter, Malcolm, Kingsley, and Giles*

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PREFACE

This is a collaboration in which responsibilities have been divided but also shared at every turn. Discussions of family patronage traditions and touring in Chapters 1, 8, and 10 were the primary responsibility of Sally-Beth MacLean, with portions contributed by Lawrence Manley; the remaining chapters were the primary responsibility of Lawrence Manley, but with numerous contributions from Sally-Beth MacLean. Appendixes A and C were prepared by Sally-Beth MacLean; Appendixes B, D, and E, by Lawrence Manley. Together, we have discussed and revised every aspect of this book over a period of several years. We fully share responsibility for the result.

We have attempted as much as possible to use original sources, which have been transcribed and cited according to editorial principles established by the Records of Early English Drama (REED) project (see Appendix A for details). Every attempt has been made to seek out surviving family records and correspondence of the Stanleys, at the Lancashire Record Office in Preston; the British Library; the Huntington Library; and in collections such as the Cecil Papers at Hatfield House and the Shrewsbury/Talbot Papers at Lambeth Palace Library. Manuscripts relating to other aspects of Strange's Men's career have been consulted at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford; Dulwich College Archive; the Essex Record Office; the London Metropolitan Archives; The National Archives: Public Record Office, Kew; and the Suffolk Record Office. We are grateful to these institutions for permission to quote from manuscripts in their collections.

Plays are quoted, whenever possible, with through-line reference to Malone Society Reprint editions. In cases where these are unavailable, plays are cited by reference to signatures in original editions or, in the case of Shakespearean plays never published in a quarto attributable to Lord Strange's Men, by reference to through-line numbers in the second edition of *The Norton Facsimile: The First Folio of Shakespeare Based on Folios in the Folger Shakespeare Library Collection*.

Portions of the material in this book have been published previously in *Region, Religion, and Patronage: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, ed. Richard Dutton et al. (2003); *Shakespeare and Theatrical Patronage in Early Modern England*, ed. Paul Whitfield White and Suzanne R. Westfall (2002); *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*, ed. Richard Dutton (2009); *Locating the Queen's Men, 1583–1603*, ed. Helen Ostovich et al. (2009); *Rethinking Historicism*, ed. Ann Baines Coiro and Thomas Fulton (2012); and *Early Theatre, Huntington Library Quarterly, Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England, Medieval Theatre*, and *Shakespeare Quarterly*. We thank the editors of these journals and books for permission to reprint.

We could not have completed this project without the support of numerous institutions, colleagues, friends, and family. Publication has been generously supported by the Cunningham Fund of the Elizabethan Club at Yale University and by a Research Publication Grant from Victoria College, University of Toronto. A short-term fellowship awarded to Lawrence Manley from the Huntington Library and support from the Griswold Fund at Yale University supported research on the Egerton manuscripts and the Bridgewater House library. Sally-Beth MacLean's UK archival research was supported by grants from Victoria College and the Department of English at the University of Toronto.

Among those individuals to whom this book owes most we count Robert Tittler, who introduced us to each other; the late Scott McMillin, who set us a daunting example but offered much help and encouragement as we began to work together; Alan Nelson for sharing not only his new discovery about the London Watermen's petition but also for generously housing Sally-Beth at his Bloomsbury flat on more than one research trip in this cause; and Julian Bowsher for his up-to-the-minute advice on archaeological work at the Rose Theatre site.

Two readers for Yale University Press offered thoughtful suggestions for improvement. It has been a pleasure to work with our supportive editors at the Press, Eric Brandt and Niamh Cunningham.

At Yale, David Kastan and David Quint have been generous and astute readers as pieces of the project evolved. On the third-floor corridor of Linsly-Chittenden Hall, Jessica Brantley, Ian Cornelius, Roberta Frank, Alastair Minnis, and Claude Rawson contributed lore, expertise, and many good questions. Robert Babcock, Kathryn James, Maija Jansson, Andrew Kau, Stephen Parks, Brian Walsh, Alexander Welsh, and Keith Wrightson helped with crucial inquiries and made useful suggestions. Elsewhere, we want to thank Calista Lucy, librarian and archivist, for her help and warm hospitality at Dulwich College Archive; Byron Moldofsky, our expert cartographer; Alan Somerset for

freely sharing his digital images for Caludon Castle and Southampton's Bargate; Andrew Paterson, our photographer for Coventry Guildhall and Manchester Cathedral images; Manchester Cathedral for granting permission for access to their fine woodcarvings, and Tina Machado, who maintains the Historic Canterbury website (www.machadoink.com), for supplying us with old photographs of the vanished Canterbury Court Hall.

Research on the provincial itinerary of Strange's Men was facilitated by the generous collaborative support given by numerous REED editors, most of whom are individually cited in the chapters following where their unpublished records are mentioned. In a few cases, REED collections in progress yielded no evidence, but the editors were helpful nonetheless and so we thank here Anne Brannen (Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire); Jane Cowling (Winchester); Audrey Douglas (Salisbury); Jessica Freeman (Middlesex); James Gibson (Kent: Diocese of Rochester); Peter Greenfield (Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Hampshire); Rosalind Hays and Ted McGee (Wiltshire); Alexandra Johnston (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire); David Klausner (Yorkshire North Riding); John McKinnell (Durham); Alan Somerset (Staffordshire, Warwickshire); James Stokes (Suffolk); and Diana Wyatt (Yorkshire East Riding).

For reading our work, checking, listening, and sharing their knowledge and research, we are grateful to Jennifer Andersen, Emily Anderson, John Astington, Ann Baines Coiro, Alan Dessen, Richard Dutton, Lukas Erne, Thomas Fulton, Paul Hammer, Ralph Hanna, Deborah Harkness, Jean Howard, William Ingram, Grace Ioppolo, Macdonald P. Jackson, Heather James, John Jowett, David Kathman, Sarah Knight, Roslyn Knutson, Peter Lake, Randall Martin, Paul Menzer, Lena Cowen Orlin, Helen Ostovich, A. J. Pollard, Mary Robertson, James R. Siemon, Joanna and Robert Smith, Stephen Tabor, Leslie Thomson, Brian Vickers, and Stephen K. Wright. We remember especially how much we, with all students of theater history, owe to the late Barbara Palmer, a dear friend and colleague.

Finally, our thanks would not be complete without expressing our loving and appreciative thoughts to our families and especially our spouses, Ruth Manley and Paul MacLean.

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INTRODUCTION

On 6 May 1593, some three months after the London theaters had been closed by the worst outbreak of plague in London before the Great Plague of 1665, the Privy Council licensed “the *seruauntes to our verie good the Lord Strainge*” to continue their “quallitie of playing” on tour outside of London. The license named six sharing actors in this company, which was patronized by Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange and later 5th Earl of Derby: “Edward Allen, seruaunt to the right honorable the *Lord* high Admiral, *William kemp*, *Thomas Pope*, *John Heminges*, *Augustine Phillipps* & *George Brian*, being al one companie.”¹ Of these six leading players in Lord Strange’s company, five of them—Pope, Phillips, Heminges, Kemp, and Bryan—would later be named, along with Richard Burbage, William Shakespeare, and Richard Cowley (the last another former player in Lord Strange’s Men) as the payees for performances at court by the Lord Chamberlain’s/King’s Men between 1594 and 1604. The names of these former Strange’s Men appeared also in the lease for the grounds of the new Globe Theatre in February 1598/99: a moiety share in the arrangement (the other half being divided between Richard and Cuthbert Burbage) was to be divided among “*William Shakespeare Augustine Phillipps Thomas Pope the said John Heminges . . . & William Kempe*.”²

The name of Shakespeare, absent from the sharers mentioned in the Privy Council license for Strange’s Men but regularly linked as a fellow to them after 1594, provides one essential motive for our study of Lord Strange’s Men: this may be the company, or one of the companies, for whom Shakespeare was writing or acting before he can be documented as a Lord Chamberlain’s man. Strange’s Men was, in any case, the company from which nearly all of Shakespeare’s subsequent partners in the Lord Chamberlain’s Men were to come. A

history of Lord Strange's Men amounts, then, to a prehistory of what has been called "the Shakespeare company."³ The belief "that Shakespeare performed with Strange's is probably the most popular of all the arguments" about his undocumented early career.⁴

While one of our aims in this book is to reexamine and to add to the grounds for a direct association between Shakespeare and Lord Strange's Men, another is to provide the fullest possible account of Shakespeare's fellows at an earlier stage in their career, for that earlier fellowship clearly had a profound influence on Shakespeare's own career. John Heminges was one of the three theatrical associates to whom Shakespeare affectionately willed money for the purchase of a memorial ring in 1616, and in 1623 the favor was returned when Heminges, with Henry Condell, oversaw the publication of *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*. Of the twenty-six players named in the first folio as "the Principall Actors in all these Playes," those mentioned first, after the two names of William Shakespeare and Richard Burbage, were, in order, the same former members of Lord Strange's Men:

John Hemmings.
 Augustine Phillips.
 William Kempe.
 Thomas Poope.
 George Bryan.

Three names farther down the list came "Richard Cowly," who in late July 1592 had borne a letter from Joan Alleyn in London to her husband, Edward Alleyn, while he was playing with Lord Strange's Men in Bristol.

It is not just the prominence of future Lord Chamberlain's Men among them that lends importance to the study of Lord Strange's Men. Also important is the name of Edward Alleyn, whom the Privy Council license identifies as a leading member of the company even while he was continuing to wear the livery of a servant of Charles Howard, the Lord High Admiral. While Alleyn was playing with Lord Strange's Men, he became the son-in-law of Philip Henslowe, owner of the Rose Theatre on the Bankside, and he later returned to acting with and, together with Henslowe, managing the Lord Admiral's Men, who became the other leading London company of the late Elizabethan period. Through the organization of Lord Strange's Men, in other words, passed the key theatrical innovators who, in June 1594, formed the two acting companies that dominated the London theatrical world for much of its most vibrant decade. In examining Lord Strange's company, its activities, and its plays, we

are also examining a formative episode in the history of the later Elizabethan stage.

It is our primary conviction, however, that this transitional moment holds an intrinsic interest. At the height of their achievements in the winter season of 1591/92, the servants of Lord Strange garnered an unprecedented six performances at court (a feat not matched until the Lord Chamberlain's Men did so in 1596/97 and not surpassed until their descendants, the King's Men, performed eight times at court in 1603/4). In keeping with their extraordinary success, Lord Strange's Men may also have been the first company to attempt long-term residence and extended daily repertory in London. Philip Henslowe's diary of expenses and income associated with the Rose Theatre documents the activities of Strange's Men during the first known long-term residence by any company at a London theater: an extended run at the Rose from 19 February–22 June 1592, during which the company offered 105 performances of twenty-four different plays, and a shorter series of twenty-nine performances at the Rose between 29 December 1592 and 1 February 1592/93, when they mounted two more new plays.⁵ Apart from the later records of the Admiral's Men in Henslowe's diary during periods of 1594–97, there is no fuller record of the daily repertory of an early modern acting company than Henslowe's account for Strange's Men in 1592–93. As compared with their contemporaries, Strange's Men showed a marked preference for residence in London. It was in a letter addressed to his traveling son-in-law Edward Alleyn, "on[e] of my lord stranges players," that the Rose's owner, Henslowe, spoke of the recently traveling Pembroke's Men, who had failed on tour and pawned their apparel, as being "all at home."⁶ Lord Strange's Men are the best answer we have to Andrew Gurr's question "When did London become 'home' for the players under Elizabeth?"⁷

Associated with the ambitious roster of plays belonging to Strange's Men are the names of nearly all the emerging playwrights of the time: Robert Greene, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Lodge, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nashe, George Peele, and, we believe, Henry Chettle, Anthony Munday, and Shakespeare. Only the work of John Lyly, among this new generation of theatrical writers, appears not to have been performed by the company. From the longer-term life of the company's plays—which in some cases had originated with earlier companies, such as the Admiral's Men or Queen's Men, and which in several instances passed on from Strange's Men into the repertories of later companies—it is evident that Strange's Men had an important transitional role to play through their selection of plays and players with star quality and through their flair for grasping current interests and new literary fashions. A number of the plays that passed through the company's hands—*The Spanish Tragedy*, *The Jew of Malta*,

and *1 Henry VI* among them—developed a canonical status, both on the London stage and in print. The durability and influence of the company’s repertory seems to have gone hand in hand with its having been written by this emerging new generation of professional playwrights and with its having the capacity to survive in print as dramatic literature. Several key texts in the history of play-book publication—by Kyd, Marlowe, and Shakespeare, among others—came into print for the first time during the lifetime of *Strange’s Men* or in the months immediately following their apparent demise.

The exceptional talent of the company’s personnel and the quality of its plays were no doubt mutually supporting, but both of these were owing as well to the circumstances of the company’s patronage. Until recently, aristocratic patronage was regarded for the most part as a legal fiction, a mere technical convenience allowing players to perform under the restrictions of the 1572 “Acte for the Punishment of Vacabondes,” which had subjected to punishment all players “not belonging to any Baron of this Realme or towards any other honorable Personage of greater Degree.”⁸ Sir Walter Greg, for example, suggested that “the relation between the patron and his ‘servants’ . . . appears in practice to have been little more than nominal.”⁹ Nothing could be further from the truth in the case of *Lord Strange’s Men*. Ferdinando Stanley, together with his wife, née Lady Alice Spencer, took their places in a longer family tradition of theatrical patronage. Records show that the Stanley earls of Derby had supported companies of actors and other entertainers throughout much of the sixteenth century, and a number of surviving texts and documents, including plays of *Strange’s Men*, suggest that the Stanleys actively pursued an agenda of promoting the family’s history and their close connection to the Tudor dynasty. The *Derby Household Book*, which records activities at the family households in Lancashire between May 1587 and August 1590, mentions no fewer than twelve household performances during that period by leading touring companies, including the *Queen’s Men*, the *Earl of Essex’s Men*, and the *Earl of Leicester’s Men*. Ferdinando, Lord *Strange*, was present for each of four performances during these same years by an unnamed company that we conjecture was his own. It is one of our main purposes to connect the achievements of the company and the character of its apparently daring and innovative repertory to the patronage traditions and political interests of their aristocratic patrons. The prominence of the Stanleys in the early history plays of Shakespeare is also one of our reasons for thinking he wrote, and possibly acted, for *Lord Strange’s* company.

While our exploration of the relationships among the acting company, its plays, and its patrons owes much to the place of acting companies in traditional

theater history, and thus to the work of scholars like W. W. Greg and E. K. Chambers, it draws also on a more recent trend of interpreting early modern plays “not primarily in terms of their authorship but in terms of the theatre companies for which they were written.”¹⁰ This trend has drawn support from a number of scholarly developments, including new work on companies and their patrons, studies in the material conditions and aesthetics of performance, New Historical methods that situate the Elizabethan drama in relation to contemporary institutions, social practices, and historical events, and textual studies that have drawn new significance from variant texts on the basis of their different theatrical settings. In combination these developments have inspired theater historians to “remove the barriers” between the archival dimensions of traditional theater history and literary fields like textual studies and dramatic criticism.¹¹ While drawing upon these developments, we have striven to bring even more fully into the picture the plays in the repertory of Lord Strange’s Men, their connections with contemporary politics and religion, and their relevance to the family history and agenda of the company’s aristocratic patrons. In doing so, we are attempting both a collective portrait and, especially in chapters 5–7, a description of what Scott McMillin came to call “company style,” in keeping with his hypothesis that “each company had its own political and theatrical characteristics.”¹²

In our central chapters, we describe the company style of Strange’s Men in terms of the distinctively literary nature of their innovative blank verse drama repertory, a body of work distinguished from that of earlier companies by its being written by educated authors rather than theatrical artisans. The plays involved a new degree of interest in what *The Battle of Alcazar* called “modern matter,” especially contemporary or near contemporary geopolitical affairs. In keeping with its learned and literary bias, the repertory also featured stage genres and representational paradigms drawn from classical and contemporary continental sources like the Senecan play and the Italian novella, using them to support suspenseful and intrinsically compelling structures that, in contrast to older techniques of narration, commentary, or allegorization, let the embodied performance of plot and character tell the tale. We examine in chapter 6 the performance techniques geared to these innovations: the use of machines and properties and the architectural resources of the Rose stage, remodeled for the company, to produce a charismatic theater of wonder and spectacle; the staging of extraordinary violence and cruelty to support the suspenseful narration, powerful passions, social imperatives, and moral dilemmas that go with Senecan revenge and courtly or erotic intrigue; the use of framed or inset performance (especially in the company’s several magician plays) to transform the

immediate emotional impact of sensational actions transpiring in the *mise-en-scène* into critical awareness of performance in the theatrical here and now; the use of acting styles that replaced stereotypical markers of status and allegorical personification with the embodiment of situation-specific purposes and passions; and the attempt to render, through the impersonation of passion and madness, the experience of individual consciousness in duress. As we proceed, our analysis of these techniques points also to their innovative epistemological and moral consequences. We explore the more heterodox or skeptical effects to be found in the complication or confounding of moral judgment by the excess of Senecan violence and cruelty; in the emphasis on illusion and disillusionment in patterns of spectation that mirror the theater's own "art of diagnosis";¹³ in the disenchantment of magical beliefs by staging that connects them to *Realpolitik* and political persecution; in the demonstration of the absurd and dehumanizing consequences of fanatical commitments in the company's staging of war and mass violence; and in the conscientious resistance to conformity that emerges from the impersonation of individual passion and consciousness.

Our study of the intellectual effects of the company dramaturgy is followed, in chapter 7, by a discussion of the political and religious dimensions of the company's work. Beginning with a discussion of the company's use of onstage immolations and judicial violence, the chapter connects the plays to the religious and political developments of the later Elizabethan age, including religious persecution and the state control of religious belief and practice in the years 1589–93. As we explain, the apparently irenic views of the Stanleys, their local commitments to their northern Catholic domains, and their respect for the Catholic neighbors on whom it was their unhappy task (at peril of the family's traditional power and standing) to impose the religious policies of the regime, all harmonize with the politically sophisticated repertory of Lord Strange's company. In the company's many uses of antipuritan and antipapal satire we find signs of the Catholic loyalist moderation of the Stanleys, while in the company's preoccupation with "virtuous pagans"—societies and heroes whose virtues derive from non-Christian sources and challenge orthodox belief—we describe elements of the heterodoxy attributed to the inscrutable Lord Strange, whom one contemporary described as "of al three religions, and . . . of none."¹⁴ Based on our interpretation of plays like *The Jew of Malta*, *The Battle of Alcazar*, and *The Massacre at Paris*, we find in the company's treatment of "war for religion's sake" elements of the irenic and *politique* thinking that the Stanleys appear to have shared with their most innovative intellectual contemporaries.

There are a number of potential difficulties involved in characterizing the "company style," beginning with the fluid nature of Elizabethan acting compa-

nies and the interchangeability of the many properties that companies necessarily shared with each other. The leading members of Strange's Men probably came from at least three other companies—Leicester's Men, the Queen's Men (if that had been the company of John Heminges), and the early Lord Admiral's Men—and within a very few years they dispersed back into the later Lord Admiral's Men, the new Lord Chamberlain's Men, and possibly other companies as well. Moreover there is evidence to suggest that at least two other companies contemporary with Strange's Men—Pembroke's Men and Sussex's Men—were tied up with plays such as *Titus Andronicus* and *The Jew of Malta*, which also have links to Strange's Men. The difficulty of disentangling the identity of Strange's Men from these other contemporary companies (a subject to which we return several times in the chapters that follow) is compounded by the fact that the period of their flourishing, 1589–93, was marked by exceptional fluidity and volatility (as well as artistic ferment) in the theatrical profession.

Henslowe's records for the Rose and the theater at Newington Butts for January through June 1594 document various short performance runs by "the earle of susex his men," "the Quenes men & my lord of Susexe togeather," "my lorde admeralls men," and "my Lorde Admerall men & my Lorde chamberlen men," while also containing hints, in their mention of *Titus Andronicus* and *The Jew of Malta*, of former Strange's Men lurking among these companies' personnel.¹⁵ This complicated succession of companies appearing over just a few months exemplifies theatrical volatility in its most extreme form, at a moment when all the major acting companies were reorganizing after having struggled through the worst plague outbreak of the century. Plays, especially successful plays, followed shifting alliances like these, coming into one company from previous ones and then passing on to subsequent owners. These unstable circumstances—to say nothing of competition for desirable scripts in the theatrical marketplace, of the common practices and conventions necessary for making the profession's artistry intelligible to audiences, or of the potential for collaborative playwrighting to produce a common stylistic currency stronger than company affiliation—must all qualify the sense in which we can speak of a wholly distinctive troupe identity or company style. In the early 1590s, the numerous "handovers between collaborators and acting companies" may have contributed to a degree of uniformity in practices and styles across companies, as Bart van Es has recently suggested.¹⁶

Nevertheless the company-based organization of the theatrical profession was no mere legal convenience but an important artistic and economic reality. Strange's Men, when they were led by Edward Alleyn, playing 134 performances at the Rose, six at court, and many on the road inside a single year, were clearly

a distinctive, desirable, and successful company, both a market phenomenon and an artistically accomplished ensemble. The company performed on a daily basis before their London audience a repertory of plays that, however subject to borrowing, collaboration, and dispersal, formed at that moment a body of work in which each element, each play, each performance, was conditioned by those surrounding it. As each play took its place in the repertory, it could in turn be informed not just by the others and by the exigencies of theatrical management but by the contemporary moment in the nation's life and, we suggest, by the status, fortunes, and interests of the company's aristocratic patron. Just as with any individual or any individual work of art we would want to insist upon the presence of shared attributes, generic traits, and transhistorical influences, so with the company style of Lord Strange's Men. But by the same token we would also want to insist that a particular combination of such traits and influences, realized at a particular moment, can yield a singular identity.

Despite what we have said about the generic traits of the profession and about economic competition and artistic emulation, the surviving evidence suggests that acting companies generally recognized and respected the properties of others—perhaps more so, for example, than did Elizabethan publishers. Acknowledging that these properties could be exchanged and recombined with others, we do not insist that Strange's Men were separate from the theatrical world around them; on the contrary, in trying to produce this group portrait we are forced to engage with the history of other companies as well. Much more work is needed, especially on the companies that are more difficult to document: the earlier Admiral's Men, Sussex's Men, and Pembroke's Men. More knowledge about these nearest contemporaries and their work would undoubtedly shed further light on Strange's Men as well.¹⁷

A second challenge in the study of acting companies is the problem of identifying the specific published texts that might have belonged to a given company's repertory, as well as any other surviving materials that might shed light on it. Given the migration of playbooks among companies, to say nothing of the complexities of playbook publication and variant texts, it can be difficult to attribute specific extant texts to a given company. That is especially the case with Lord Strange's Men, a company with a relatively short life and a repertory containing plays that had very long ones. Only in two cases do the title pages of published plays assign them to Strange's Men, and in these cases the title page attributions pose further problems. To begin with, neither *A Pleasant Commo-die, of faire Em the Millers daughter of Manchester . . . As it was sundrietimes publiquely acted in the honourable citie of London, by the right honourable the Lord Strange his seruauants* (n.d.) nor *The Most Lamentable Romaine Tragedie of*

Titus Andronicus: As it was Plaide by the Right Honourable the Earle of Darbie, Earle of Pembroke, and Earle of Sussex their Seruants (1594) appears among the 134 performances by the company at the Rose. Moreover, *Titus Andronicus* (Strange's Men became Derby's Men when Ferdinando succeeded to his father's earldom in September 1593) mentions multiple companies in a way that is not clearly explained. Henslowe's diary provides much additional information about the repertory, but another set of difficulties arises from trying to match Henslowe's idiosyncratic and sometimes cryptic titles to the title pages of extant plays. Even in the best cases, where it is possible to link plays to Henslowe's titles, there are problems involving date of publication, multiple company ownership, and evidence of later revision that stand in the way of a straightforward or exclusive attribution to Strange's Men. In cases of yet another sort, where there are no extant plays to match Henslowe's titles, the plays must be considered "lost." Here Henslowe's titles sometimes enable us to identify subject matter and potential source material for these lost plays, while at other times no plausible identification avails itself. Finally, there is a group of extant plays *not* found in Henslowe, and with plausible connections to other companies, for which there are nevertheless grounds for attribution to Lord Strange's Men. Some of these, such as the three parts of *Henry VI*, were eventually published, perhaps with subsequent revisions, in *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*.

These various attributional problems require us, in a two-chapter census of candidate plays, to explore in some detail and, we hope, to add to the grounds for linking extant plays and source materials for lost plays to Lord Strange's Men. Although no study of Lord Strange's Men is possible without some such set of attributions (and the many inferences and conjectures they entail), we have, for reasons explained more fully in the census itself, opted for a maximal rather than minimal discussion of what might reasonably be suspected to have been in the repertory. There is more to be learned about Strange's Men and theater history generally by way of such maximal engagement with the problems of defining and characterizing the company's repertory. We include in our study of the company's repertory several candidate plays not mentioned in Henslowe's diary, as well as several titles now lost, and we sometimes refer to them when we discuss such aspects of the company style as the literary sources and dramatic genres that formed the company's archive, the practices that defined its performance style, and the political and religious implications of the repertory.

As we build up this portrait of the company, we remind the reader—and we try to remain mindful ourselves—of Terence Schoone-Jongen's anatomy of the

various kinds of arguments and hypotheses encountered in theater history: the possible (“a hypothesis which no evidence flatly contradicts”), the plausible (a “conjecture . . . based on some sort of positive evidence, rather than on the absence of negatory evidence” but “not strong or convincing enough to rule out other possibilities or plausibilities”), the probable (a hypothesis enabling other possibilities to “be laid aside because the probable hypothesis is so much stronger or more likely than any alternatives”), and the demonstrably certain.¹⁸ Claims of all four kinds will be found throughout this study. The nature of the subject being what it is, we cannot claim to be certain of all that we propose, nor will we pause to place precisely on this scale the status of each one of our conjectures. But we have tried, first, to make it clear when we are dealing with conjectures and speculations, and second, to build, where we can, from certainties toward possibilities and to avoid the mistake of building in the opposite direction. Specifically we organize our two-chapter census and our three-chapter analysis of the repertory by beginning in each case with what we deem to be the more secure attributions and only then turning to those involving more steps of inference or conjecture. This is also true of the book as a whole, since we take up last the difficult question of Shakespeare’s early company connections.

Our use of narrative is balanced, we hope, by analysis of the evidentiary and interpretive difficulties that stand in its way. We begin with a two-chapter narrative of the company’s early history, placing the company in the longer perspective of Stanley theatrical patronage and tracing it from its formation through its residency at the Rose. Toward the end of the book we resume the narrative, following the company on tour and recounting the somewhat obscure circumstances of its demise. But even in our more analytical chapters on the repertory, we are forced repeatedly to engage with previous conjectural narratives about this company’s relations to others, to endorse aspects of older stories in the field of theater history, and to offer hypothetical narratives of our own to account for the features of key theatrical texts, including some by Shakespeare. Such narratives, William Ingram notes, pose a “procedural dilemma for a theater historian”: “Are ambiguities and contradictions in our data problems to be solved, requiring a selective narrative supporting one preferred interpretation against others and offering that as ‘what really happened’? Or are they a condition inherent in the data and in the nature of our own scholarship, requiring a fuller and more accommodating narrative with room for ambiguity and contradiction and alternative versions?”¹⁹ In the pages that follow, we do commit ourselves to a set of “preferred interpretations,” which take something like the form of a story, but at the same time we have observed the spirit of the analytical prescription implied in Ingram’s questions by writing a narrative that accommodates—

and in places even highlights—the ambiguities and contradictions in the data. Included in the data are a significant number of remarkable early modern plays, and the difficult problems engaged and created by those plays are what have drawn us in the first place to the idea of reading repertory in the way we do, through company history. We hold with a conundrum of Scott McMillin's: "We make narratives in order to organize and remember the evidence."²⁰ We stand by our story, even while we find ourselves remembering, at every turn, that the evidence with which we are working is incomplete, recalcitrant, and sometimes contradictory.



ORIGINS OF LORD STRANGE'S MEN

PATRONAGE: A FAMILY TRADITION

Family tradition was fundamental to the creation and patronage of Lord Strange's Men. From the standpoint of the players who formed the company, aristocratic patronage was both a working condition dating back to the medieval period and, following the 1572 "Acte for the Punishment of Vocabondes," a legal necessity, since the Act declared that "Bearewardes, Comon Players in Enterludes & Minstrels, not belonging to any Baron of this Realme or towards any other honorable Personage of greater Degree," were subject to punishment as "masterless men" akin to "Roges, Vocabondes, and Sturdye Beggers."¹ But from the standpoint of the company's patron, Ferdinando Stanley, a key motive for his backing of players lay in a tradition of patronage developed through previous generations of the family.

The Stanley Earls of Derby were landed aristocrats without equal in the north-west of England, where their vast estates centered in the two residences of Lathom and Knowsley in southwestern Lancashire.² The founding member of the Stanley earldom was the same Lord Stanley familiar from the final scene on Bosworth Field in Shakespeare's *Richard III*. A cunning politician, Thomas Stanley was able to parlay his inherited position as 2nd Lord Stanley and Lord of the Isle of Man into an earldom from a grateful Henry VII in 1485. Although this Tudor elevation to the higher nobility brought him a windfall of lands and important offices, Stanley had managed to develop political status through two previous Yorkist reigns, serving both Edward IV and Richard III as a privy councillor and lord steward of the royal household (1471–85), while accumulating numerous local appointments across the kingdom and offices in Cheshire and Lancashire, where his family had held lands for several generations.³ A telling

indication of his ability to maneuver his way through the upheavals of the time are his back-to-back appointments as constable of England, first by Richard III (1483) and then by Henry VII (1485/86). His marriages matched his political strategies. He first married Eleanor Neville, sister of Warwick the Kingmaker, and then in 1472, after her death, took a bride from the other side of the conflict, Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond and, after Bosworth, Henry VII. As the newly created Earl of Derby, Stanley bore the sword of state at Henry VII's coronation, presided at his wedding to Elizabeth of York, and stood as godfather to their son, Prince Arthur.⁴

By 1489 Lord Thomas stood confirmed as a leading member of the new Tudor peerage and, "in consideration of good service," became the landowner of estates in no fewer than fourteen counties, stretching from the northwest through the Midlands as far south as Somerset.⁵ In the same decade, the marriage of his eldest son, George Stanley, to the heiress of the Lestrangle estates in Shropshire and the Welsh marches had brought further lands and the title Strange of Knokyn into the family. Thus was established "an extensive territorial empire that was to last virtually unchanged for over two centuries."⁶

Numerous members of the gentry, nobility, and royalty in the later fifteenth century are known to have patronized performers, either for their own personal entertainment when in residence or as part of their traveling retinues. Such individual performers or small troupes seem to have toured on their own account as well, though the extent of their circuits can be difficult to trace because of the sporadic survival of records from the period. Members of a traveling retinue wore their lord's livery, thereby claiming his protection while upholding his honor at home, at court, or on the road. This traditional bond between medieval minstrel and lord underlies the later Elizabethan links between player and patron.⁷ In the case of the Stanley Earls of Derby, a tradition of patronage was developed to support the family's new prestige in the Tudor era and, we believe, to advance their influence in the northwest of England, at court, and, through touring, across the new Tudor nation.

Lord Thomas Stanley does not seem to have been an especially active patron of performers. The accounts of medieval households are more elusive than civic records, but one roll of Lord Thomas Stanley's accounts from an early stage in his career happens to be among those extant. In 1459–60 Lord Stanley paid wages for a piper, Thomas, and a trumpeter, Mordoc, attached to his Lancashire household,⁸ and there are external records for his "minstrel" or "minstrels" at King's Lynn in 1457–58 and the second a decade later, also for minstrels, in 1468–69 at Grimsby.⁹ The most consistent form of entertainment associated with Lord Stanley's name before and immediately after his acquisition of the

Derby title is the itinerant bearward who was rewarded eleven times along the southeast coast not far from London between 1474 and 1491.¹⁰

After his elevation to the earldom of Derby, three “mimi” under his patronage appeared at New College, Oxford, in mid-July 1485 and one or more of his “minstrels” showed up on their own at Rye in 1491, in Salisbury in 1498–99, and at Bridgwater in 1504.¹¹ There is one more important notice of a Derby troupe, termed “histriones,” at Shrewsbury in July 1495, in company with “histriones” of Prince Arthur and of the Earl of Shrewsbury. The occasion, which included a play in the Quarry, was a royal visit by the king and queen to Shrewsbury, where in 1485 Henry Tudor had crossed the Severn on his way to Bosworth and received the final messages of support from his Stanley allies. The king’s visit to Shrewsbury, which perhaps commemorated events from a decade earlier, was part of the royal family’s progress through the West Midlands on their way to the Derby residences of Knowsley and Lathom, where they were entertained from 28 July to 5 August.¹² Of the events of that visit little is known, but it seems reasonable to suppose that the “histriones” who entertained the royal entourage at Shrewsbury may have been part of the lavish great house hospitality described in the early family verse chronicle known as “The Stanley Poem”:

King Henry the Seaventh . . . did lye their eight dayes,
 And of all houses he gave it the most praise,
 And his haule at Richmond he pulld downe all,
 To make it up againe after Latham hall;
 To speake of his fare was sure so excellente,
 The king and his company so well contente,
 I hard noble men say that were of his trayne,
 They thought they should never se such faire againe.

...

The earles buttry and seller open night and day,
 Come who would and welcome, no man was said nay.¹³

Thomas Stanley’s grandson, the second Earl Thomas, inherited the title in 1504. His offices and appointments were mostly confined to the northwest, where he principally resided. The only evidence of his patronage of household entertainers comes from the Shrewsbury bailiffs’ accounts of 1517–21. The fact that Shrewsbury is just a few miles southwest of the residence he inherited from his mother at Knockin Castle may explain why the 2nd Earl’s bearward and two entertainers (“histriones”) appeared there.¹⁴ They may have made similar neighborhood appearances at Liverpool, adjacent to their patron’s residence at

Knowsley, or at Ormskirk, near Lathom in Lancashire, but no early sixteenth-century civic accounts survive for either of those towns. The county of Lancashire in this period lacked the diversified cultural life that some southern regions enjoyed. Its parishes were large and somewhat isolated, and its towns were relatively small. The terrain was difficult and underpopulated, with marshland near the coast and higher moorlands to the north and east. Even in the later sixteenth century and early seventeenth, entertainment in the region centered on the private residences of the Lancashire gentry, although a vigorous popular appetite for bearbaiting can be traced in ecclesiastical court records.¹⁵ The first two Derby earls were probably typical of other Lancashire nobility in their limited patronage of entertainers.¹⁶

There is a notable change in attitude toward patronage discernible in the records for the 3rd Earl of Derby's entertainers that illustrates Edward Stanley's vision of expanding family influence through the use of traveling performers. His troupes appear to have established a wide range of travel, their payments appearing at twenty-two locations, including several in the northeast. Forty-three performances have been found so far, starting with the earliest, to his "ludatores" at Selby Abbey in 1522–23, a year or two after he succeeded as Earl of Derby.¹⁷

During the earlier years of his long tenure of the earldom, Edward seems to have maintained the modest pattern of patronage inherited from his father. Stanley "histriones" appeared annually at Shrewsbury near the estate at Knockin,¹⁸ and Derby minstrels are found in the Southampton records for 1526–27.¹⁹ But during these formative years, young Edward was a ward in the household of Cardinal Wolsey, and Wolsey's opulent lifestyle may have influenced the magnificent household and level of hospitality that the 3rd Earl was later to establish for himself in the northwest. After Wolsey's fall in 1529, Edward was married to Dorothy Howard, daughter of the Duke of Norfolk, and shortly thereafter was granted livery of his own lands in January 1530/31. He continued to be active at court and brought renewed prominence to the Stanleys as a power in the north when, during the Pilgrimage of Grace, he was granted extraordinary powers in Lancashire. Just as the 1st Earl's role at Bosworth brought power and titles to the family, so Lord Edward's cautious support of the Crown in 1536 resulted in a "combination of territorial and political predominance . . . unique in mid-Tudor England."²⁰

It is perhaps no coincidence that the decade of the 3rd Earl's rise to power, 1530–40, was the most active for his touring entertainers. Although the ever-popular bearward continued to circulate wearing Derby livery,²¹ a troupe of players under Derby's patronage becomes distinguishable in the English records

for several towns in the 1530s. Pursuing one of the most popular performance circuits in East Anglia, they were touring a region where the patron's in-laws, the Howards, held sway, not far from London and the court. The performance locations—Ipswich, Bury St. Edmund's, Cambridge, Dunmow, and Thetford, where the Latin records use the term "jocatores"—were all new to Derby entertainers.²² Also new were Bristol and the Seymour home at Wolfhall in the southwest, Leicester in the Midlands, and Skipton Castle in the northeast.²³

The most active years on record for Derby's troupe of players seem to coincide with a time of strong connection with the south in their patron's life, either through a continuing need to appear at court or through affiliation in East Anglia with his first wife's family. There is a noticeable gap in the record in the 1540s and 1550s. It appears that with the rise of a Protestant regime in London, Derby infrequently attended Privy Council meetings and became less interested in life at court than in establishing a splendid lifestyle in his own northern power base.²⁴ By the 1560s, Christopher Haigh explains, "the earl had a household staff of 120, and it cost £1,500 a year to feed this vast concourse and the family and its guests. The Stanley household formed the core of the earl's local power, and the patronage he provided gave him considerable influence over the county gentry."²⁵ It is impossible to determine what role entertainers played in this great Lancashire household, since most of the family's records have been destroyed, many probably during the siege of Lathom in the Civil War.²⁶ Only one manuscript survives for the 3rd Earl's era, an account of his expenses in 1560–61 as well as his household regulations for 1568.²⁷ But the expenses are not itemized, so the summary totals for servants' livery and wages cannot be broken down further to help in the search for entertainers retained by the earl. What the totals do indicate is that he spent at least seven weeks and four days "in progress" to and from London.²⁸ Most of the year his household was likely in Lancashire, where he was famous for his lavish hospitality. (William Camden noted in his succinct eulogy that with the 3rd Earl's death "the glory of Hospitality" was "layd asleepe.")²⁹

The evidence for Derby entertainers in other extant 1550s and 1560s sources is fragmentary. In the county records of Cheshire and Lancashire, we find no trace of them, although it must be admitted that almost no household or civic accounts survive in that region to shed light on the touring players of the period.³⁰ Elsewhere players under Derby's patronage show up at Newcastle upon Tyne in the spring of 1566 and at New Romney sometime during 1569–70.³¹

That other traditional entertainer type, the minstrel, was affiliated still, however loosely, with Derby's retinue in this period. "The Lament of Richard Sheale," a ballad surviving in manuscript, pays tribute to Sheale the minstrel's "good

lord & master, whom I sarve / In my greatist povertie from me dyd neuer swarve,
/ But dyd wryt for me frendly aftar a lovyng facion, / And my lord Strang also on
me dyde tak compassion.”³² Sheale’s patron and “good lord” was Edward, the
3rd Earl, and Lord Strange was Henry, his eldest son and heir.³³ One of Sheale’s
poems makes it clear that his task was not just to compose poems but to “syng,”
to offer “myrry tawke,” and to “play the myrry knave.”³⁴ Andrew Taylor has pro-
posed Sheale as the possible author of “The Stanley Poem,” the longest and
most elaborate in the numerous ballads and sagas devoted to the Stanley family.

Like the poems in similar cycles celebrating the Percys and the Howards, these works were produced either by the minstrels who performed them or by “the dependents of the great families whose deeds they celebrated.”³⁵ Dating for the most part from the mid-Tudor period, these poems—which include “The Rose of England,” “The Song of the Lady Bessy,” “Flodden Field,” “Scottish Field,” and “The Stanley Poem”—recount the family’s history from its mythical origins in the eagle-borne Oskell, 1st Lord Lathom, through Stanley heroics at Bosworth, Flodden, and Tournay, to the largesse of Earl Edward. They laud the family’s power in Lancashire and Cheshire and cement the links between leading gentry and loyal supporters in the region. While the ballad form of these works suggests that they may have been sung or recited at the great houses of Lancashire, the existence of multiple manuscript variants indicates that the Stanley legend circulated widely in the family’s domain and beyond.

The compassionate support of the 3rd Earl’s son, Henry, Lord Strange, was praised by Sheale alongside his father’s. Like his father’s, Henry’s roots, through family, marriage, and later office appointments, were in the northwest, but his formative years and early career were influenced by court culture and its splendors. Edward’s eldest son by his first wife, Dorothy Howard, Henry Stanley, spent much of his youth at court as companion to Edward VI and as a gentleman of the privy chamber, both to Edward and to Philip I. Revels accounts for March 1546/47 record the making of “pleyers garmentes for the Kinges person, the duke of Sulffolke & my lorde straunge.”³⁶ In 1555 he married Margaret, daughter of Henry Clifford, Earl of Cumberland. Through her mother, Lady Eleanor Brandon, a daughter of Henry VIII’s sister Mary, Margaret Clifford was a second cousin to Elizabeth I and thus a possible claimant to the throne. Intended to create an alliance between two of the most powerful families in the Catholic north, the marriage was celebrated in a lavish ceremony at Whitehall in the presence of Mary and Philip. Not long after his marriage, Henry bore the sword of state at the feast of St. George.³⁷

In January 1558/59 he was summoned to Parliament and began, with his young wife, to lead a prominent life at the court of the new queen, Elizabeth. He led

a procession of one thousand horse through Fleet Street to escort a French embassy to court in 1561, and he was at the side of his old friend from the court of Edward VI, Sir Robert Dudley, when Dudley was created Earl of Leicester in 1564.³⁸ That same year he accompanied Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, and “diuerse knights and gentlemen” on an embassy to France to invest Charles IX with the Order of the Garter.³⁹ Lady Strange was among the ladies in waiting when the queen visited Cambridge in 1564 and 1566, and Lord Strange served as a member of the advance party preparing the queen’s visit to Oxford; he was awarded an honorary M.A. during the festivities.⁴⁰

During these years at court, at a time when other members of the nobility were adding players to their retinues, Henry Stanley seems to have done the same. His players have been detected first in the south, at Winchester and Southampton, in 1563, followed by a southwestern tour that included Bristol and Gloucester in 1564, and Canterbury in the southeast and Maldon in East Anglia sometime in the same year.⁴¹ From then on, Lord Strange’s troupe can be found on tour most years in various parts of the kingdom. The list of places on the tour is far-flung but mostly unconnected with the family’s widespread landholdings: Cambridge (1565–66) and Ipswich (1566–67) in East Anglia; Beverley (1566–67) in the northeast; Canterbury and Dover (1568–69) and Lydd and New Romney (1569–70) in Kent; and Plymouth and Bristol (1569) in the southwest.⁴² This would seem to have been touring for its own lucrative sake, probably at times when the Derby family had no personal call for household entertainment. If we can know little from extant documents about cultural life at Lathom and Knowsley during the last decade of the 3rd Earl’s life, the regular appearances of his son’s troupe elsewhere suggest that plays at home were an option, whether or not Earl Edward, by this time withdrawn from court life, maintained a troupe himself.

When Henry became the 4th Earl of Derby in 1572, it is reasonable to assume that his troupe continued under his patronage, with a change of title. And the touring in the same southern regions continued for the next decade: Ipswich (1577–78, 1581–82) and Norwich (1581–82) in East Anglia; Dover (1577–78) and Faversham (1577–78, 1579–80) in Kent; and Southampton (1578–79, 1582–83) on the road southwest to Bath (1578–79, 1582–83) and Bristol (1578–79).⁴³ Other stops in the southwest were made in 1579–80 in Gloucester, Dartmouth, and Exeter, and in 1580–81 the route southwest to and from Exeter included Abingdon, Winchester, and Bath. Part of the same route was retraced in 1581–82, when Derby’s men played Winchester again.⁴⁴

The troupe seems to have pursued new directions as well: Coventry, strategically positioned at the crossroads (1573–74, 1577–78, 1579–80), with nearby

Stratford upon Avon (1579–80), and a very popular eastern Midlands route that included Leicester (1579–80, 1580–81, 1582–83) and Nottingham (1577–78, 1579–80, 1580–81, 1581–82). It should also be noted that Derby's players extended their tour as far as Newcastle upon Tyne in 1576.⁴⁵ By the later 1570s Derby's Men had become one of the most prominent of the Elizabethan acting companies.

Evidently successful on their own terms, they were chosen, between 1579/80 and 1582/83, by Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels, for three performances at court. Court performances during the 1570s had been dominated by companies under the patronage of the Earls of Leicester, Warwick (Leicester's brother), and Sussex (at that time the Lord Chamberlain). But Tilney, who received his warrant as Master of the Revels in 1579 and was seeking (partly for reasons of economy) to expand court offerings by professional companies, appears to have turned to companies sponsored by his kinsmen Derby and (in 1582–83) Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon. (All three families were linked by Howard connections.)⁴⁶ Two of the plays that Derby's men performed at court have been lost, although the title of one of these is partially known: "The soldan and the duke of . . ." (14 February 1579/80). "A History of Love and Fortune," performed at Windsor on 30 December 1582, is likely the ten-cast magian romance published in 1589 under the title *The Rare Triumphes of Loue and Fortune*.

Court performances by Derby's men took place either at Christmas or Shrovetide, although never both in a single year.⁴⁷ The pattern suggests the company might have been with their patron's family in the northwest for the other key festive date in any household calendar. We cannot be certain, for lack of family accounts in this period, but it is worth noting that there is a rare appearance by Derby's players in the 1582–83 Liverpool town records.⁴⁸

The quality of Derby's Men must have been high, if court performances are any measure of excellence. But in 1583 they vanish from the records. What could be the explanation? Their patron experienced no fall from grace in this period. On the contrary, in the 1580s he gathered further appointments and distinctions: privy councillor (1585); ambassador extraordinary to France (1584/85); and chamberlain of the County Palatine of Chester (1588). The disappearance of Derby's company falls close in time to March 1582/83, when Sir Francis Walsingham instructed the Master of the Revels to appoint twelve actors to a newly formed troupe under the patronage of the queen.⁴⁹ These actors were plucked from the ranks of the leading troupes of the day: Robert Wilson, John Laneham, and William Johnson from Leicester's Men; Tarlton and John Adams from Sussex's; and possibly John Dutton from Oxford's. But what of the remaining six? The troupes of origin for John Bentley, Toby Mills, John Towne, John Singer,

Lionel Cooke, and John Garland have not yet been traced, but it is probable that they were drafted from one or more of the companies featured at court in the early 1580s. Derby's is a leading contender, therefore, and the formation of the Queen's Men in 1583 may explain why the company disappears from the records at this point.

Unlike the Earl of Leicester, who re-formed his own troupe within two years after the creation of the Queen's Men, the Earl of Derby apparently did not reconstitute Derby's Men.⁵⁰ The years 1584–86 entailed extraordinary expense and responsibility for the earl, who in January 1584/85 outfitted and led a retinue of 220 on an embassy to invest the French King Henri III with the Order of the Garter. The earl “displayed such splendour and pomp,” Alberico Gentili wrote, “that France is said to be amazed at the magnificence of the embassy.”⁵¹ When it was rumored in the summer of 1587 that he would be appointed permanent ambassador to the French court, the earl wrote to the queen pleading ill health, but financial strain was the truer motive. Substantial land sales by the earl and his estranged wife in 1582–83 and heavy borrowing by the earl and by his son Ferdinando in the 1584–93 period point to deteriorating finances as one possible reason behind the nonrenewal of the 4th Earl's acting company.

The family interest in theatrical patronage continued, however, in a new form, and this too may help to account for the apparent break in Henry's support of actors. Records of provincial touring in civic and household accounts beyond the northwest demonstrate that his heir, Ferdinando, Lord Strange, had become an early adopter of the family's patronage tradition. When he was just seventeen or eighteen (his birth date is uncertain), a troupe under his patronage surfaces in the southern provinces at Southampton in June 1577: “Item paid to my Lorde stranges *servantes* v young men vauters & Iumpers comonlie called Iumpers or Tumblers the 29 of Iune–x s.”⁵² A tumbling troupe is clearly differentiated in this account from the acting companies, and is also on record, probably along the same southern tour, at Exeter where their 13s 4d reward equaled that of the much more prominent Leicester's Men.⁵³

What motivated Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange, to launch his career as a patron with such a company of tumbling players? A notable performance during the 1575 Kenilworth festivities is worth pausing over. The Earl of Leicester had engaged an Italian tumbler as a special act for the show presented on 14 July, a performance of remarkable dexterity described enthusiastically by Robert Langham.⁵⁴ This spectacular Italian tumbler is one of several recorded between 1574 and 1575 in the provinces and at court. On 19 June 1574, the day after Leicester's Men played for town officials, an Italian tumbler performed at Ipswich, receiving an equivalent 15s reward. Italian performers were also at Nottingham in

September 1574, where they were paid “for *sertheyne* pastymes that they shewed before mr meare & his brethren.” As at Ipswich, their tour may have coincided with that of Leicester’s Men, whose payment on 1 September immediately precedes theirs. The double coincidence of Italian travelers intersecting with the tour of Leicester’s Men at Ipswich and Nottingham⁵⁵ may point to an interest on the part of Leicester himself in featuring a tumbling act at Kenilworth the following year. The timing of their travels would not preclude the possibility that these were the same Italian players who followed the royal progress of the court in July 1574 and “made pastyme” at Windsor and Reading.⁵⁶ Still on the road, Italian “tumblers or players” also performed at the port town of Dover sometime during the September 1574–September 1575 accounting period.⁵⁷ Only a handful of tumblers, vaulters, or rope-walkers, most without patrons, can be identified in provincial accounts between 1465 and 1573.⁵⁸ It is hard to resist the theory that touring acts of spectacular acrobatic skill were innovative in the provinces in the 1570s and grew in popularity in subsequent decades.⁵⁹

Although he was following family tradition by undertaking patronage of his own troupe, Ferdinando’s support of these unusual tumblers may be an early example of the same interest in new performance fashions that would lead to the more spectacular innovations of his later company. After all, Lord Strange had been introduced to a variety of performance traditions and venues from an early age, witnessing plays while matriculated at Oxford⁶⁰ and being “fashioned in good Manners” while a squire in the royal household.⁶¹ Christmas and Shrovetide entertainments at court would have been part of his formative experience, the most consistently featured court performers in the period being Leicester’s Men and the boys’ companies.⁶² Records of royal entry at Worcester on 13 August 1575 include his name among the nobles in attendance to the queen on the same summer progress that featured the two-week extravaganza in July at Leicester’s Kenilworth residence.⁶³ Within the Stanley household itself, young Lord Strange’s troupe of tumblers would have varied the entertainment options, given the already available talents of Derby’s actors. Annual tours, mostly on record in the south, show that the two family troupes followed the same itinerary in some years between 1576 and 1581. At Faversham in 1577–78 and at Bath in 1578–79 and again in 1580–81, both Strange’s and Derby’s players are recorded, though comparing the rewards yields at least one surprise.⁶⁴ Strange’s troupe seems to have launched itself into touring with considerable clout, despite the junior status of its patron, even receiving a higher reward than Derby’s at Bath in 1578–79 and as much as Leicester’s at Exeter in 1576–77.⁶⁵

Within a mere three years, just after Christmas 1579/80, Lord Strange's "tumblers" had achieved the highest honor and reward of all: a command performance before the queen at Whitehall.⁶⁶ Christmastide court festivities for two of the next three years continued to feature tumbling and "feats of activity" by Strange's troupe, presumably the culmination of the annual tours recorded in the provincial accounts, with the likely addition of entertainment provided for the Stanley household at its Westminster residence in Cannon Row or at one of its residences in the northwest.⁶⁷

These court appearances by Lord Strange's Men, as well as performances by Derby's Men in 1579/80 and 1582/83, raised the profile of Stanley theatrical patronage. The success of Lord Strange's troupe might also have been owing to the one important performer whose name can be linked with them. John Symons is named as the payee and leader of the troupe at court in the Chamber accounts for the 1 January 1582/83 "Sundrey feates of Tumbling and Activitie" by a company named in the Revels accounts as Strange's "servauntes."⁶⁸ However, after these years of court engagements, the troupe under Strange's patronage disappears from the royal entertainment calendar. Symons may have had a star's freelancing temperament, or he may have been lured away, but court records for Christmas 1584/85 show Symons and his fellows performing their vaulting and feats of activity under the patronage of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.⁶⁹ In 1585/86 and 1587, Symons and company maintained their court appearances during the Christmas season, but without a patron named.⁷⁰ It seems probable that by then the queen herself had assumed patronage, for when Symons's showmanship was taken into the provinces in 1588, his tumbling act was part of the touring Queen's Men. Their first notice in the fall of 1588 at the town of Nottingham singles out Symons as lead member, but sporadically specific accounts for the next two years identify both tumblers and rope-dancers in the queen's company.⁷¹

Symons therefore may have moved from Strange's patronage soon after 1583, and the dwindling records of Strange's troupe suggest that their heyday was over. Although they surface occasionally in the provincial accounts until 1584–85, the level of the two provincial rewards on record is significantly lower than in times past, reflecting the fact that Symons and perhaps others had moved on to other troupes.⁷² A company of musicians under Strange's patronage does appear for the first time in the Earl of Leicester's entourage in the Low Countries in 1586, but subsequent notices are few: at Nottingham the same summer and a couple of years later at Coventry.⁷³

With their important court performances and extended tours, Lord Strange's early company, like Derby's Men before them, had in a relatively short time

risen to the top of the theatrical world only to suffer the price of success, as leading performers were swept away into new theatrical enterprises. Political preoccupations in the years between 1585 and 1588, together with their attendant financial obligations, may also have contributed to a short hiatus in the Stanley patronage tradition. But in the months following the Armada, the tradition was renewed, this time with the great house performances at Lathom and Knowsley, from which emerged the greatest London-centered company of its time. With their post-Armada revival, Lord Strange's Men would themselves become the company who would sweep others into their enterprise.

MOTIVES FOR PATRONAGE: NEW PARK,
OCTOBER 1588

On 10 August 1588 Henry Stanley wrote from his house in Cannon Row, Westminster, to Sir Richard Shireburn, deputy lieutenant of Lancashire and steward of the Derby household, to announce his recent return to England from his embassy to the Duke of Parma in the Spanish Netherlands. The embassy, which lasted from 25 February to late July, had been a fool's errand, an attempt to postpone or avert Spanish action by means of negotiation. Parma's commissioners, "to surprise England vnawares and vnprovidid," for several months "dallyed with the English, till the Spanish fleete was come to the coast of England, and the thundering of the ordinance was heard from the sea."⁷⁴ By early August, when Stanley and his embassy arrived back in England, the Spanish fleet had been defeated, and the earl's letter to Shireburn, announcing his imminent return to Lancashire, jubilantly reported "my safe aryvall this day at the Court, whither I was well welcome especiallye to her Maiestie, whoe used me most honorable and by her gracious speeches gave me assurance both of her good acceptance of my seruice and of her purpose to recompense the same."⁷⁵

The earl's service abroad had been matched by his son's at home, as Ferdinando, Lord Strange, had taken responsibility during the summer of 1588 for the defense of Lancashire and Cheshire, where invasion was feared from the Irish Sea.⁷⁶ Reporting on the wartime status of Lancashire and Cheshire, a letter of intelligence addressed to Don Bernardin Mendoza, Spanish ambassador to France, had spoken of "the love which the people doe beare to the earle, who with his sonne is firmly bent against the pope."⁷⁷ That love was expressed in the "great rejoycing the 13th of August by the Citizens of Chester, for the happy return of the Earl of Derby from his embassage out of Flanders," when "many Bone-fires were made in Chester."⁷⁸ From his seat at Lathom, where he had arrived by 24 September, Lord Derby commanded his deputy lieutenant Sir

John Byron and the justices of the peace of Lancashire to arrange “some godlie exercyse of thankes gevinge for the same by prayer & preachinge” for “the late ouerthrowe of our Enemies taken vpon the coste of Irelande.”⁷⁹ On 26 September the Derby Household Book, dated from the Stanley residence at New Park, takes note of the earl’s “retorne from his Lorney & Imbassadage from fflanders.” “My *Ladie* Strandge & the little children of hers” arrived on the day following, and over the next two weeks came the usual cavalcade of Stanley clients and retainers. Then, on Thursday, 10 October, the steward records a visit by “the *Qwenes* players.”⁸⁰

Because the keeper of the Household Book, William Farington of Worden, shows little interest in (or approval of) the players whose appearances his diary so frequently records, we know nothing of the plays performed by these companies for the Stanley household. There was, however, in the repertory of the Queen’s Men (some of whose players may have been recruited from Lord Derby’s own earlier company in 1583) a play whose vision of the beginnings of the Tudor reign seems as if it might have been written with the Stanleys in mind. Published in a 1594 quarto, *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third . . . As it was playd by the Queenes Maiesties Players* casts the Stanleys in the starring role in the defeat of Richard III and the rise of Henry Tudor to the English throne. Given that Thomas, Lord Stanley, was rewarded for his service at Bosworth with the earldom of Derby, the play is also an account of the Stanleys’ rise to the Derby earldom and to their preeminence in the northwest of Tudor England.

The play assigns to Thomas Stanley an early resistance to Gloucester’s usurpation. Together with his son George, Lord Strange, Stanley is suspected by the tyrant Richard of supporting Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, and arranging for Richmond’s marriage to Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV. Richmond’s mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, having inherited a Lancastrian claim to the throne through her father, the Duke of Somerset, was Thomas Stanley’s second wife. In the Queen’s Men’s play, she is known as “Lady Stanley.” Distrusting Lord Stanley’s circumspect denials and wary of his wish to return to Lancashire, where he might conspire more freely, Richard takes young George Stanley hostage, threatening to execute him should Stanley support Richmond.

In a secret meeting with Richmond on the eve of battle, Stanley reveals to his “sonne” Richmond that his “onely” purpose in giving up George Stanley as hostage was “to come and speake with thee” (TLN 1826, 1836) about his cautious plans to commit his troops to the Tudor cause while appearing to support Richard on the battlefield. During the battle itself, when Stanley refuses to commit his troops to Richard and sends the defiant claim that he has “another

sonne left to make Lord Standley” (TLN 1937–38), Richard sends Lovell and Catesbie offstage with orders to execute the young Lord Strange. The matter is left hanging in theatrical suspense while the battle plays out and Richmond kills Richard. Lord Stanley himself places the crown on the head of the man he continues to call “my sonne.” Richmond in turn betroths himself to Elizabeth of York, and all seems well concluded but for Lord Stanley’s grief over the fate of the hostage Lord Strange:

Stan. And now were but my sonne George Standley here,
How happie were our present meeting then,
But he is dead, nor shall I euermore see my sweete
Boy whom I do loue so deare, for well I know the vsurper
In his rage hath made a slaughter of my aged ioy.

Rich. Take comfort gentle father, for I hope my brother
George will turne in safe to vs.

Stan. A no my sonne, for he that ioyes in blood, will worke
His furie on the innocent.

Enters two Messengers with *George Standley*.

Stan. But how now what noyse is this?

Mess. Behold Lord Standley we bring thy sonne, thy sonne
George Standley, whom with great danger we haue saued from
furie of a tyrants doome.

L. Stan. And liues George Standley? Then happie that I am
to see him freed thus from a tyrants rage. Welcome, my sonne,
My sweete George welcome home.

(TLN 2122–38)

In this happy conclusion, *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third* is a romance twice over, celebrating both the marital union of Lancaster with York and the reunion of the Stanleys, father and son, at the defining moment that seals the family’s greatness.

Ferdinando Stanley, the contemporary Lord Strange, was apparently not present when the *Queen’s Men* played at New Park on 10 October 1588 (he seems to have returned to Lancashire from London only on 2 November), but if the *Queen’s Men* had performed their Richard III play in October 1588, they would have delivered immense satisfaction to the household and its assembled guests, compliments of the Stanleys’ patron and recent benefactor, the queen. If not on that occasion, then on 6–7 July 1589, when “the Qwenes plaiers plaied ij severall nyghtes” at Lathom, or 6–7 September 1589 or 25 June 1590, when

they appeared again at Knowsley,⁸¹ they would have demonstrated what theatrical performance could do for a noble family and its standing among neighbors and throughout the realm.

In view of the actual historical record, the Queen's Men (though not by themselves) had done rather a great deal for the Stanleys. Modern research shows that Thomas, Lord Stanley actually supported Richard III against the Duke of Buckingham's earlier rebellion on Richmond's behalf and that Stanley received many of Buckingham's estates in reward. The modern historical record also shows that Lord Stanley may not have met his "sonne" Henry Tudor until several days after the battle of Bosworth and that his complicated relationship to Richard III was part of a long-standing struggle with the Duke of Gloucester for supremacy in Lancashire and northern affairs. A representative modern view states that "the involvement of the Stanleys in the various phases of the Wars of the Roses had demonstrated their knack of emerging from each phase of conflict with power preserved or enhanced. This required a great deal of political calculation, which has earned the family a reputation as trimmers. The family attitude was demonstrated at Bosworth, where, despite overtures of support before the battle, the enormous Stanley army remained uncommitted until the outcome of the direct confrontation between the retinues of Richard III and Henry Tudor was in the balance."⁸²

The earliest accounts of Richard III's reign—in the contemporary continuation of the *Crowland Chronicle*, in Domenico Mancini's *De Occupatione Regni Anglie per Riccardum Tercium Libellus*, and in BL: MS Cotton Vitellius A. XVI—attach little importance to the role of the Stanleys in the ascent of the Tudors. In their narratives of Hastings's arrest and execution, none mentions Thomas Stanley or the wound that, according to the Queen's Men, he so honorably acquired on that occasion. In the *Crowland Chronicle*, Lord Strange becomes a hostage only after his father threateningly prolongs his freely granted stay in the north on the eve of Richmond's invasion, and Lord Strange, after his escape and recapture, cravenly reveals to Richard the conspiracy against him.⁸³ These chronicles are likewise silent on the role of the Stanleys at Bosworth and in the battlefield coronation of Henry VII. The *Great Chronicle of London* and Fabyan's *Chronicle*, both compiled in the early sixteenth century, are the first to say that Lord Stanley was present at the Tower on the occasion of Hastings's arrest, wounding, and imprisonment. Neither mentions the taking of George Stanley as a pledge for Lord Stanley's loyalty, though the *Great Chronicle* begins to touch on matters at Bosworth, stating that "therle of derby" secretly aided Richmond by making "slow spede toward kynge Richard," and that his brother "syr wylliam Stanley . . . wan the possesscion of kyng Rychardys helmnett wyth the

Croune beyng upon It, cam streyght to kyng henry and sett It upon his hede sayyng, sir here I make yow kyng of Engeland.”⁸⁴

It is only with the more extensive humanist histories of Thomas More and Polydore Vergil that the full Stanley legend begins to unfold. More's *History of King Richard the Thirde*, which records Richard's attack on Stanley,⁸⁵ breaks off short with Cardinal Morton's entry into the Buckingham conspiracy, but Vergil's version, similar to More's on the earlier events, follows through with a full account of the Stanley rebellion. Trusting Thomas Stanley least of all others, because “he had in maryage Henryes mother,” Margaret Beaufort, the king seizes upon “George lord Strange his soone as a pledge in the court.” Richmond enjoys the support of the full Stanley clan, and at Bosworth Thomas Stanley withholds his troops “in the mydde way betwixt the two battaylles,” while Sir William Stanley commits his contingent at the opportune moment. In this version, for the first time, it is Lord Thomas Stanley, patriarch of the future Derby earls, who sets “King Richerds crowne” on Richmond's head, “as thoughe he had bene already by commandment of the people proclainmyd king.”⁸⁶

The way the story is pieced together has suggested to modern historians that the major reporters for both More and Vergil included not only Thomas Morton, so obviously influential in More's portion of the story, but also the 1st Earl of Derby himself and Sir Christopher Urswick, a Stanley client and chaplain of Margaret Beaufort. Urswick, the son of a lay brother and sister of the Abbey of Furness in Lancashire, was sent to Cambridge at the expense of the Stanleys, and it was through them that he enjoyed the patronage of Margaret Beaufort. He accompanied the Earl of Richmond on his exile to France, became his confessor, landed with him at Milford Haven, and accompanied him to Bosworth. Urswick was amply rewarded for his services to the Tudors with church livings and diplomatic posts. (He negotiated the marriage with Katherine of Aragon, for example.) J. B. Trapp notes that “as Henry VII's trusted personal agent Urswick was one of the clerics whose administrative and rhetorical skills helped to establish and consolidate the Tudor regime.” Urswick, Trapp adds, was well connected to the circle of Colet, More, and Erasmus, and “he is named in the manuscript of Polydore's *Anglica historia* (1512–13), but not in the printed edition (Basel, 1534).”⁸⁷ Shakespeare's version of the story, we shall see in chapter 9, explicitly acknowledges Urswick's role in its creation by having the priest serve as the intermediary between Thomas Stanley and Richmond.

Urswick was not, however, the only intermediary for the Stanley version of Tudor history. There is ample evidence, from a number of versified family sagas dating from the early and mid-sixteenth century, that “the Stanleys took pains

to write themselves into the record of opposition to Richard⁸⁸ and indeed to celebrate their status as creators and loyal supporters of the Tudor reign. The Stanley role at Bosworth, for example, was celebrated both in the early alliterative poem “Bosworth Field,” which lauds “Lord Stanley bothe sterne & stout,” and in the “Song of Lady Bessy,” a ballad that tells the story from the point of view of Elizabeth of York.⁸⁹ In both poems, the grand alliance of Lord Thomas, his brother Sir William, his brother-in-law John Savage, and his good neighbor Gilbert Talbot defeats Richard III despite the tyrant’s threats against the captive Lord Strange. The purpose of the poems, as some lines from the poem “Of the Princesse Elizabeth” indicate, was to present the Stanleys as peers of royalty:

That tyme the Standleyes without dowte
 were dred ouer England ferre and nee.
 Next Kynge Richard that was so stowte
 on any lorde in England free.⁹⁰

Additional Stanley poems, “Scottish Field” and “Flodden Field,” take the family fortunes up through 1513 and the feats of the 2nd Earl of Derby, but they too begin with tributes to the founders of the Derby title, and, to judge from their prominent catalogues of local families and supporters, they were meant to shore up clientage networks and regional alliances.

The fullest version of the Stanley legend is the metrical chronicle of the house of Stanley, probably by Richard Sheale, though once thought to have been composed by Thomas Stanley, Bishop of Sodor and Man (d. 1569).⁹¹ Spanning the entire career of the family, the chronicle gives special attention to the events that made Richmond the first Tudor king and Lord Thomas the first Stanley Earl of Derby. In its rendering of the coronation scene, the poem lays bare some of the more practical motivations behind the creation of the family legend by alluding to the later fate of Lord Stanley’s brother, Sir William:

Then therle of Darby without taking more reade,
 Straighte set the crowne on King Harry the Seaventh his heade.
 Sir William Standleyes tongue was somewhat to ryfe,
 For a fonde worde he spake soone after he lost his lyfe,
 Said, set it on thine owne head, for nowe thou maye.
 King Henry afterwarde hard tell of that saye:
 In such cause is not meete with princes to boorde,
 Good service may be soone loste with a fonde woorde.⁹²

Thomas Stanley's brother Sir William, whose troops were those that actually came to Richmond's aid, and who was himself the one, in earlier versions of the story, who placed the crown on the new king's head, was executed in 1495 for his treasonous support of Perkin Warbeck against Henry VII.⁹³

There was in fact much for the powerful Stanleys to explain, and not just their cautious role at Bosworth or the later rebellion of Sir William Stanley. In January 1586/87 another Sir William Stanley, a cousin from the Hooten branch of the family, surrendered the English garrison he commanded at Deventer and went over to the Spanish; his subsequent probing for pro-Catholic support among the Stanleys and other Lancashire families was a persistent cause of concern to Lord Burghley. Other members of the family too had been known for their Catholic sympathies. Edward, the 3rd Earl of Derby, had used his position on the Privy Council to resist most aspects of the Edwardian religious reform. For the coronation of Queen Mary he rode to London with eighty men in coats of velvet and 218 yeomen in livery, and he contributed troops in support of the Catholic queen against Wyatt's rebellion.⁹⁴ The marriage of Edward's son Henry to Margaret Clifford, arranged by Queen Mary, was an effort to forge an alliance between the leading Catholic families of the north. In 1570 two of Lord Edward's sons (Henry's brothers) were imprisoned in the Tower for conspiring to release Mary, Queen of Scots from captivity and take her to the Isle of Man. The 3rd Earl's support of Elizabeth during the Northern Rebellion of 1569 had also been lukewarm.

Perhaps as a result, when Lord Edward lay dying in 1571 and his son Henry had traveled north to attend him at Lathom, the queen sent a letter that, in requesting the attendance of Henry's son Ferdinando at court, might have recalled events during the reign of Richard III. Surmising that Henry Stanley's absence from court was "not other, than is to attend vppon [your] our Coosyn your father now in his sycknes," and thanking him for "your earnest gud will to serve and please vs ,at all tymes, ye lyke wherof we ,ar sorry [have] not to have found in your brothern," the queen concluded that " ,consideryng your absence, we have bene earnest *with our* Coosyn your wiff, yat she wold [per< . . . >] move yow to send vpp your eldestt sone [our Coosyn] to be here some tyme."⁹⁵ It would be going too far to say that Lord Strange was being taken hostage to guarantee his father's loyalty in December 1571 in exactly the same way that George Stanley, Lord Strange, had been taken hostage by Richard III in 1485. It should be remembered, though, that even in the old saga "Lady Bessy" the captivity of George Stanley began as a friendly arrangement in which Lord Thomas sent "the Lorde Strange to London, / To keepe Richard companye."⁹⁶

The author(s) of *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third* may not have known any of the poems dealing with the Stanley saga; for their purposes, the chronicles of Hall and Holinshed, where the family legend had been enshrined, would have sufficed. But for the Stanleys themselves, who best knew their delicate situation and their past, an important lesson offered by the performance of *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third* (if the Queen's Men ever played it in their four known appearances at New Park or Knowsley) would have been about the ways in which professional theater and aristocratic patronage might combine to protect and promote family interests. Lord Thomas Stanley, under the speech heading of "Darbie," was to reappear in a prominent role in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, and in fact important Stanley ancestors and clients, as we explain in chapter 9, appear with conspicuous prominence throughout Shakespeare's first tetralogy of history plays.

WHO WERE LORD STRANGE'S MEN?

While the Queen's Men were the highest-ranking company to play the Stanley houses in the northwest, there were other troupes recorded in the Derby Household Book. Two of them especially invite our attention in connection with the creation of Lord Strange's new troupe: Leicester's Men and the unnamed "players" who appear repeatedly. In early May 1587 the Earl of Derby returned from London to his principal home at Lathom, where the household settled in again for several summer months.⁹⁷ Intermixed with the weekly dinners, business appointments, and sermons recorded in Faringdon's journal are visits by the leading troupes of the realm, the first being Leicester's Men, who played on 6 and 7 July 1587 before departing on the 8th.⁹⁸

Unlike Henry Stanley, whose company was apparently discontinued after the formation of the Queen's Men, Leicester seems to have re-formed a company of actors within two years of the royal raid that recruited three of his star performers (Robert Wilson, John Laneham, and William Johnson) for the queen's company in 1582/83. A rare household account book⁹⁹ shows evidence of a re-formed company in May 1585, when Leicester's players received several generous payments before setting off "into the Countrie" on a tour that took them through East Anglia, the Midlands, and the southwest as far as Bath and Gloucester.¹⁰⁰ In the 1570s their predecessors had functioned as a quasi-royal company, with a range of touring and a level of reward to be equaled only by the Queen's Men in the 1580s. The new troupe was no less adventurous: they took touring to a new level late in 1585 when they set sail for the Low Countries to join Leicester's splendid courtly retinue as he progressed through Middel-

burg, Dordrecht, Rotterdam, and Delft to The Hague for celebrations at Epiphany 1585/86. As commander of the expedition to the Netherlands, Leicester had a large personal entourage, at the outset approximately a hundred, with a further seventy-two lords and gentlemen with their own retinues to swell the ranks.¹⁰¹ The players were summoned to Leicester House in London and paid £6 on 4 December before their departure, several days before their patron's.¹⁰² A billing list for the Hague entry on 6 January 1585/86 makes provision for fifteen players, as well as twelve musicians.¹⁰³

We know that the players performed at least once for Leicester's household abroad during the Christmas season, while some of them returned to England in the new year.¹⁰⁴ The "jesting player," Will Kemp, who was clearly one of Leicester's Men by this time, set out for England on 4 January, but he was back with Leicester again by early May.¹⁰⁵ Leicester may have recalled other players in time for the St. George's Day celebrations at Utrecht in April. Stow records entertainments at the banquet, a show of tumbling and dance titled "the forces of Hercules" which "gaue great delight to the strangers, for they had not seene it before."¹⁰⁶ Featuring physical dexterity, music, and dance, the show transcended language barriers, and it served the dual political purposes of displaying superior English talents under Leicester's patronage and complimenting Dudley himself, the new Hercules come to lend his strength to the Dutch cause. A month later, embattled but still hopeful of his position, Leicester and his players transferred the custom of touring to a new location on the continent. At Arnhem at the end of May, five named players—George Bryan, Thomas King, Robert Percy, Thomas Pope, and Thomas Stephens—were dispatched, with a letter of introduction from their patron, to tour parts of northern Europe; the courts of Frederick II of Denmark at Elsinore and Christian I, Elector of Saxony, at Dresden, made them welcome. Will Kemp and his boy, Daniel Jones, followed later, to augment or alternate performances at Elsinore in August and September.¹⁰⁷ German archives indicate that the troupe of five actors became attached to Christian's court until July 1587, although Kemp presumably returned home sooner.¹⁰⁸

Three of these actors—Bryan, Kemp, and Pope—were among the six players named as leading members of Lord Strange's Men in a license issued to the company by the Privy Council on 6 May 1593.¹⁰⁹ When Leicester's troupe came to Lathom in July 1587, they therefore included some of the most accomplished performers of the period, experienced in touring not only across the country (Leicester's troupes typically ventured farther than most) but also on the continent. They were supported by a patron known for his sharp political instincts and strong promotion of the Protestant cause at home and abroad. After visiting

Lathom they continued to tour until some time in 1588, when they disappear from provincial accounts, and for good reason: Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, died on 4 September 1588, leaving his players to seek patronage elsewhere.

Leicester's Men could count on a friendly reception at Lathom. The personal lives of Henry Stanley and Robert Dudley had been entwined since the years they spent together in the household of Prince Edward, and their friendship was resumed more than a decade later, when Elizabeth came to the throne and Dudley's status as royal favorite brought him to power.¹¹⁰ Summoned to Parliament as Lord Strange on 23 January 1558/59, Henry Stanley was active in events at the new Elizabethan court through the 1560s, during the period of Dudley's growing influence. Dudley quickly saw the advantage of patronizing players (by June 1559), and Stanley seems to have followed suit in 1563. By the opening years of the 1580s, Derby's troupe had joined Leicester's as one of the most prominent of the Elizabethan acting companies. With lands and a title (Baron of Denbigh) based in North Wales, Leicester was appointed chamberlain of the County Palatine of Chester in 1565, a post that the Stanleys had regarded as theirs by hereditary right. During Leicester's one recorded visit to Chester in June 1584, Stanley, by then the 4th Earl of Derby, was a prominent member of Leicester's entourage—perhaps too prominent, since the orator's assigned speech of welcome to “the Cheefe mentayno< . . . > defendourr and patroner” of the city “was not well liked of because he did direct it to *Earle darby: & hauinge ended sayd God blesse the Earle of darby.*”¹¹¹ A year later, in 1585, Derby joined Leicester on the Privy Council, with consequent regular contact. Notable among the scattered correspondence surviving in various collections of state papers at the British Library are a couple from Derby—“*Youre Lo[rds]hips assured Lovynge Cosin and faythfull frende always*”—to Leicester during his diplomatic mission to the continent in 1588 to treat with the Duke of Parma for peace with Spain.¹¹²

Ferdinando Stanley seems likely to have benefited from his father's long friendship with Leicester when he first joined the royal household as an impressionable youth in the early 1570s. Ferdinando's interests, we have seen, may have been shaped at court and by the Kenilworth festivities in 1575, and Leicester's promotion of tumbling by touring Italians may also have influenced Ferdinando's patronage of acrobatic performers in his first troupe. Beyond these precocious patronage activities, Ferdinando's personal life may also have taken some direction from Leicester's mentoring interests. Leicester was rumored to have had a hand in arranging the marriage of Ferdinando to Alice Spencer, youngest daughter of one of the wealthiest landowners in England, Sir John Spencer of Althorp, Northamptonshire.¹¹³

In July 1587, when Leicester's Men played Lathom, they may have met once again with performers under Ferdinando's patronage whom they are likely to have encountered in the Low Countries a year before. We have noted the dwindling activities of Strange's original troupe, apparently coinciding with John Symons's move to other patrons. Yet Leicester thought well enough of Lord Strange and his musicians to include them in his continental entourage; the same day that Leicester's players set out for Elsinore, their patron gave a reward to "iiiiij of my lords strangs mvscicions at arnam the first daye of Iune 1586 xx s."¹¹⁴ Strange's musicians show up not long after, in Nottingham on 24 June 1586, so Leicester's payment must have been a farewell gift. They appear again only once in provincial accounts, at Coventry, at an unspecified date between 5 December 1588 and 26 November 1589.¹¹⁵

Although the identities of these musicians have proved untraceable, the gradual rebuilding of a second remarkable troupe of actors to promote Lord Strange's reputation can be discerned in the same 1587–88 period. After a two-year hiatus, players under Strange's patronage stopped at Coventry, though their level of reward (5s) was exactly half of what Strange's tumbling troupe had earned at Coventry a decade earlier, and a comparison with the reward of 40s to Leicester's Men in the same year's account suggests that they were either of lesser quality or few in number.¹¹⁶ But at about this same time, Stanley household activities in Lancashire in 1587–88, covered by the surviving Derby Household Book, show signs of an emergent company.

Farington, the family steward, records the return of Lord and Lady Strange to Lancashire on 23 October 1587.¹¹⁷ The family spent the Christmas season up until Shrovetide at Knowsley, and a typically cryptic entry in the Household Book reveals that they enjoyed entertainment by players shortly before 30 December.¹¹⁸ We must pause over this entry, which has achieved some notoriety in the speculative annals of Shakespeare's "lost years." The manuscript entry reads thus: "On ffryday my *Lord* the earle came home from the cowrte & the same night came my *Lord* bushoppe, mr stewarde mr receyver mr foxe, on saturdaye *Sir Thomas* hesketh plaiers wente awaie, & the same daye mr Edwarde halsoll, mr Houghton of houghton & many strandgers came to knowsley."¹¹⁹ Characteristic of Farington's style is the shorthand phrasing and erratic punctuation. Were these "plaiers" patronized by Sir Thomas Hesketh? Or has Farington simply omitted the verb "came" before or after Hesketh's name, as well as the punctuation that would distinguish the note on the players' departure from Hesketh's arrival? And if, as the absence of the possessive form of Hesketh might suggest, the players did not wear Hesketh's livery, could they have been so familiar as not to need a title?¹²⁰

Some attention must be paid first to Hesketh. Sir Thomas Hesketh (1527–88) belonged to the Lancashire gentry, with two residences in the county, at Martholme and Rufford, the latter not far from Lathom in the mosslands of west Lancashire. He was a local landowner of recusant sympathies, without notable appointments at the time of his visit to Knowsley. The likelihood that he had the inclination or purpose to patronize a touring troupe of players needs re-examination, especially as the only definite record of his interest in performers is dated almost two decades earlier, when a bequest was made to Hesketh's minstrel James by Dean Alexander Nowell from his brother's estate.¹²¹ No troupe of players under Hesketh's patronage appears elsewhere in provincial records, and indeed it would have been quite exceptional for the Stanleys to have welcomed such a locally based company for their Christmas revels. A notable aspect of their taste is its apparent sophistication; while Earl Henry and his son might enjoy local entertainments such as the Shepherds' pageant when they visited Chester, in their own homes they seem to have preferred the elite troupes from outside the county: Queen's, Leicester's and the Earl of Essex's.

Nonetheless lack of evidence has not prevented fanciful speculation about the extent of Hesketh's patronage. Because of his friendship with Alexander Hoghton of Lea Hall, Hesketh was mentioned in Hoghton's 1581 will as a possible refuge for the testator's two "players," named Fulk Gyllom and—more controversially—William Shakeshafte. The first choice of household to receive these two was in fact the patron's half-brother, Thomas Houghton of Brinscall, and there is no proof that he refused to do so. The name "Shakeshafte" has given rise to a frenzy of speculation that the player belonging to Hoghton's 1581 household might have been the seventeen-year-old Shakespeare from Stratford, spending some of his "lost years" in the northwest. Without lingering over the arguments, pro and con, we need only note that if Hesketh did inherit one or even both of Hoghton's household entertainers in 1581, we might still question whether the players were still together seven years later, and if they were, why they would have ventured to Knowsley and been made welcome where no other locals seem to have performed.¹²² Hesketh himself was put under arrest in 1581 as a papist, so his inclination to take on entertainers at the time may have been curtailed in any case.¹²³ Theories of Shakespeare's Lancashire sojourn usually include episodes involving priest-holes and recusant Catholicism, but these do not fit well with the pattern of the Stanleys' actions, policies, and apparent sympathies, nor do they fit with what we know of playing in the great houses of the family. If we resist the temptation to equate the Lancashire Shakeshafte of 1581 with Shakespeare of Warwickshire,¹²⁴ and if we remain deeply skeptical that Hesketh patronized a troupe worthy of playing Knowsley at Christmas

seven years later, then who *were* the “players” whose departure was noted by Farington in December 1587? Like some others, we are convinced that these were family players, not needing any further identification from Farington’s point of view, and that this was but the first of their several appearances in the surviving Household Book, which chronicles Lord Strange’s recruitment of a new family troupe.¹²⁵

More notices of an unnamed company follow in subsequent years, always coinciding with Lord Strange’s own residency in the northwest. During the week of 29 December 1588–4 January 1588/89, Farington records an unusually prestigious gathering at Lathom for a performance by an unnamed group of players: “Sondaye mr Carter preched at *which* was dyvers strandgers, on mondaye came mr Stewarde, on Tvesdaye the reste of my *Lords* counsell & also Sir Iohn Savadge, at nyght a playe was had in the halle & the same nyght my *Lord* strandge came home.”¹²⁶ Given the presence of all of Lord Henry’s council and the arrival of Lord Strange, our assumption is that this was Lord Strange’s own new company, but now, a few months after Leicester’s death, significantly expanded to include actors likely taken from Leicester’s Men, actors whose names we know from Leicester’s own continental household accounts and from the 1593 Privy Council license for Strange’s Men. Players, almost certainly the same group, played again the following Sunday, when Lord Strange was again present. During the following year of 1589/90, when Lord Strange was at Lathom on 21 February, once again a troupe of unnamed “players played at nyght.”¹²⁷ The coincidence of Lord Strange’s presence on all four occasions when these unnamed players performed is probably a sign that the keeper of the Household Book did not identify them because he did not need to: they were simply an extension of what Farington elsewhere called “his *Lordes servantes & howseholde* for dailly attendans.”¹²⁸

If, as these circumstances suggest, key players from the late Earl of Leicester’s patronage had migrated to Lord Strange’s newly formed troupe by Christmas 1588/89, their recruitment was likely owing not just to the long-standing connections between Leicester and the Stanleys or to the Stanleys’ venerable history of theatrical patronage but to a renewed ambition on the part of the family to advance their interests and influence through a playing company of national stature. Early in their history Leicester’s Men had become the first company to be licensed under the terms of the 1572 vagabondage act. It was on the model of Leicester’s Men, and partly from their personnel, that the Queen’s Men had been created in 1583, and even in the shadow of the queen’s own company Leicester’s Men had subsequently reemerged as an important troupe—perhaps the only rival to the Queen’s Men—in the provinces, at court, and

abroad. The death of Leicester, and his players' need for new patronage, had created for the Stanleys, at a key moment in the family's history, an extraordinary opportunity to renew and expand upon their history of patronage. Little is known of the repertory of Leicester's Men, but the plays of Robert Wilson (most of them written after he left Leicester's for the Queen's Men in 1583) are perhaps an indication of a willingness on the part of Leicester's players to advance their patron's agenda by engaging in satire, polemic, controversy, and matters of political moment.¹²⁹ To recruit players from Leicester's company was thus to do precisely what the queen and her advisors had done just five years earlier; Lord Strange was assembling, from Leicester's former servants, an elite group of well-traveled professionals who might rival and surpass their contemporaries in distinction and influence.

It was not long after Christmas 1588/89, when the Stanley household, council, and clientage had assembled for "a playe . . . in the halle," that Ferdinando Stanley was summoned to Parliament as Lord Strange. His departure with his wife and father is noted by Farington on 27 January, when "my lord & my lord strandge & ladie Strandge went all towardes London, and the same daye his Lordeshippes howse broke vppe at lathom."¹³⁰ The unnamed players of Farington's Household Book may indeed have been the same group that, before the year was out, had gained notoriety in London under the name of Lord Strange's Men. These new liverymen—Kemp, Pope, and Bryan probably among them—would boldly bring distinction to their patron and their trade, rivaling and surpassing the queen's own company in popularity and influence. Other actors would later join them: Edward Alleyn, for example, from the Lord Admiral's Men, and John Heminges, who might have come from the Queen's Men, perhaps bringing others with him. There may have been connections with James Burbage's Shoreditch theater enterprise, and there is evidence, as we shall see, for connecting Shakespeare with the company as well. Their strongest connection was forged with the enterprising Philip Henslowe, owner of the Rose Theatre. This part of the story does not belong to Lancashire, however, but to London.



LORD STRANGE'S MEN IN LONDON, 1589–1593

When Lord Strange departed for London, where, from 8 February to 29 March 1588/89 he sat through his first thirty-one sessions in the House of Lords, his players may have followed; no records of the company on tour elsewhere during that spring or summer have as yet been found. If the new company did go to London, they arrived in the capital at a crucial moment, just as the developing controversy over Martin Marprelate was taking to the public stage. By the following November, Lord Strange's Men had taken a prominent role in this controversy, arousing the ire of the Lord Mayor and giving "great offence" to "the better sorte" for daring (in the words of a Privy Council minute) "to handle in their plaies certen matters of Diuinitye and of State vnfitt to be suffred."¹

"TO THE GREAT OFFENCE OF THE BETTER SORTE": LONDON, 1589

Learned puritan debate with the Elizabethan Church and its episcopal hierarchy had been forced underground in the autumn of 1588, but it reemerged shortly thereafter in the form of unlicensed satirical pamphleteering by the pseudonymous Martin Marprelate and his offspring, Martin Junior and Martin Senior. In the scurrilous abuse that Martin heaped on Archbishop Whitgift and other Anglican apologists, the puritan campaigners, led by the Welshman John Penry, borrowed from the popular stage, and perhaps especially from the Queen's Men, vernacular tools of improvised mockery and derision. Declaring that the bishops and conforming clergy had "come unto their promotions by simony," the *Epistle to the Terrible Priests* (October 1588), the first of Marprelate's pamphlets, reported that "Tarleton took him not long since in Don John of