

JOSEPH W. DONOHUE JR.

# The Theatrical Manager in Britain and America

*Players of a Perilous Game*



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THE THEATRICAL MANAGER IN  
ENGLAND AND AMERICA



# The Theatrical Manager in England and America

PLAYER OF A PERILOUS GAME

*Philip Henslowe    Tate Wilkinson*

*Stephen Price*

*Edwin Booth    Charles Wyndham*

EDITED BY JOSEPH W. DONOHUE, JR.

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## Foreword

THE ESSAYS collected in this volume were originally delivered as lectures at Princeton University during the course of the 1969-70 academic year. They were arranged in honor of Gerald Eades Bentley, then Murray Professor of English Literature, in the year of his retirement from the Princeton faculty. In order to pay tribute to Professor Bentley's lifetime of scholarship on the theatre, principally embodied in his seven-volume work *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage* (Oxford, 1941-68), his colleague Professor Alan S. Downer conceived the idea of a series of lectures on a subject central to theatrical scholarship but in great need of extensive consideration: the role of the theatrical manager.

In the broadside announcing the series, sponsored by the Department of English at Princeton and collectively entitled "Players of a Perilous Game," Professor Downer explained the importance of the subject:

From Philip Henslowe to David Merrick, the producer or theatre manager has generally been seen as a combination of Shylock and Simon Legree, usurer and slave-driver, wholly concerned with profit and loss, indifferent to art and artists. Yet no single person has greater responsibility in what George Henry Lewes called the "perilous game" of play production; without him the fortunes of the theatre would be completely instead of only largely unpredictable.

This series of lectures will examine six theatre managers and their habits as they worked, spanning four centuries of the English-speaking stage, in an attempt to evaluate the relationship of each to the drama of his time. One of their Roman predecessors, L. Ambivius Turpio,

## FOREWORD

who produced the comedies of Terence, after pointing out that he knew from experience just how uncertain were the fortunes of the stage, that the only certainty was hard work, declared his function very simply: to suit the desires of the spectators to the best of his ability *and* to make it possible for those spectators "to honor the arts of the stage."

That only five lectures, instead of the six projected, appear here is the sad but unavoidable result of Professor Downer's death in January 1970 before he was able to complete his own lecture on the American manager George Tyler (1867-1947), whose papers reflecting a lifetime of theatrical production are held in the theatre collection of the Princeton University Library. After so great a loss, those who knew him and his work have been left with the certainty that his essay on Tyler would have reinforced a deep and long-standing commitment, which he shared equally and enthusiastically with Gerald Bentley, to the theatrical profession as a significant human enterprise and to the scholarly research that recaptures, preserves, and interprets its records.

J.W.D.

*Princeton, New Jersey*  
*January 1971*

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Portrait of Tate Wilkinson by Stephen Hewson. Reproduced by courtesy of the City Art Gallery, York.

Playbills for performances at the Theatre Royal, York. Reproduced from the originals in the Minster Library, York, by courtesy of Canon R.S. Cant and Mr. C.B.L. Barr.

Portrait in oils of Stephen Price by Simpson, probably John Simpson (1782-1847). Reproduced by courtesy of the Walter Hampden Memorial Library in The Players.

Portion of a playbill for *Der Freischütz* as performed at the Park Theatre. Reproduced by courtesy of the New York Historical Society.

Louisa Ann Phillips as Claudia in *Rienzi* at Drury Lane Theatre. Reproduced by courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

John Braham, center, in the title role in *Masaniello* at Drury Lane Theatre. Reproduced by courtesy of the Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Fanny Elssler dancing "La Tarantelle." Reproduced by courtesy of the Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Portrait of Edwin Booth as Hamlet, 1870. Photograph by Napoleon Sarony, reproduced by courtesy of the Walter Hampden Memorial Library at The Players.

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A scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, showing the interior of Booth's Theatre on opening night. Reproduced from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 27 February 1869.

"The Stage—Setting the Scenes," illustration in *Booth's Theatre: Behind the Scenes* (New York, 1870), a pamphlet reprinted from *Appleton's Journal*, 28 May 1870.

A scene from Act III of *David Garrick*, by T. W. Robertson, first revived by Wyndham at the Criterion, 13 November 1899. Reproduced by courtesy of the Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum.

A scene from Act IV of *The Liars*, by Henry Arthur Jones, at the Criterion, 6 October 1897. Reproduced by courtesy of the Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Artist's impression of Wyndham's valedictory performance in *Rosemary*, by L. N. Parker, at the Criterion, 21 July 1899. Reproduced by courtesy of the Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum.

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