



Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1605-1708

Judith Milhous Ph.D.

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This thoroughly new investigation into the theatre management competition between the Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields companies revises the established view of Thomas Betterton's management abilities by documenting the fact that his competition with the Drury Lane company made both an immediate and a permanent change in the course of British drama.

Judith Milhous's meticulous investigation of an astonishing range of reference which includes unpublished and partially published documents in the Public Record Office of London, The British Library, and the Harvard Theatre Collection allows her to present a fresh assessment of the chaotic events of the 1695–1708 period and of the competence of Thomas Betterton as manager of Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre.

The breakaway of Betterton and some of the older actors from Drury Lane in 1695, the flood of new plays at the turn of the century, the rivalry between the new acting company at Lincoln's Inn Fields and Drury Lane, and the resulting competition for the playgoers' attention spawned an extravaganza of singers, jugglers, animal acts, and double bills. Despite great difficulties, Milhous shows, Betterton was able to bring about an accommodation that permitted the two acting companies to enjoy a period of modest prosperity and to exert a continuing influence on English drama and the organization of theatrical production.

This careful study of shifts, devices, and the fortunes of the years of rivalry between acting companies provides students of English theatre history and drama with invaluable new insights into the practical factors that influenced the history of drama.

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