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**Patronage and Plays:
William Stanley and the Revival of the Children of Paul's in 1599**

EDEL LAMB
Queen's University Belfast

William Stanley, Sixth Earl of Derby, was, according to one tantalising reference, a key financier and patron of an important—but often perceived as minor—playing company in early modern London: the Children of Paul's. In a letter reporting on London affairs to Sir Robert Sidney in 1599, Rowland Whyte comments "My Lord Derby hath put up the plays of the Children in Paul's to his great pains and charge" (cited in Wickham et al. 313). This allusion to a connection between the Earl and the children's company based at St Paul's Cathedral is unspecific but intriguing. The late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century version of the Paul's playing company was a central component in the history of the children's playing companies. This connection is made at a critical moment in that history. In the autumn of 1599, the Children of Paul's resumed theatrical activities after an eight-year hiatus (see Gair, *Children*; Lamb). Whyte's letter of 13 November 1599 coincides with the earliest performances of the new version of the company. As a result, most scholars have interpreted the reference to Stanley's "pains and charge" in supporting the children's "plays" as evidence that he was the financial backer for the revived company (see Gair, *Children*; Wickham, Berry and Ingram; Thomson). But what exactly might the Earl's interest in and relationship to the company have been? Was he instrumental in reviving performances by this company? The performance of John Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* by Children of Paul's in autumn 1599 marked not only their revival but also the beginning of an intense period of commercial and professional performances by children's theater companies. These companies flourished from 1599 until 1613, and, although they were short-lived, they were an integral part of early

modern English theatrical culture (see Lamb; McCarthy; Munro, *Children*; Shapiro). Did Stanley play a role in instigating this unique phase of children's performance in English theater history?

The exact nature or extent of Stanley's involvement with the Children of Paul's is not definitively disclosed by any other piece of evidence. However, this essay will re-evaluate this key moment in the history of early modern children's performance and the Sixth Earl of Derby's place in it by bringing together evidence about the children's playing companies at this time and about William Stanley's role as theatrical patron. In doing so, I follow Elspeth Graham and Rosemary Tyler's micro-historical method in seeking to develop a "fuller understanding" of the relationship between Stanley and this theatrical phenomenon (Graham and Tyler 115). Like Graham and Tyler, I seek to do so by privileging connections and contextualisation. This essay will thus explore what the Earl's relationship to the company might have been via an evaluation of the necessity of such support for Paul's revival and of the benefits of such patronage to Stanley. Focusing firstly on the conditions that enabled the revival of this company after they had been dissolved for almost a decade, it will begin by scrutinizing the practices of managing, financing and writing for a children's playing company. It will then situate the allusion to Stanley's patronage in the context of these practices, his involvement in theater, and the wider history of the family's theatrical patronage to investigate his role in the revival of this company. Evidence of the Earl's other theatrical ventures indicate his enthusiasm for patronage of players; and his attempts at writing plays just a few months before Whyte's letter raise the alluring possibility that he may have not only financed but also written for this company. Considering the novelty and prestige of these highly trained and well-educated performers with a history of proximity to the court, this essay will examine the potential benefits of patronising such a company, for

both the Earl and the Children of Paul's, to shed new light on Stanley's contribution to this distinct element of early modern theater history.

I. (Re)creating a Children's Company

1599 marked the beginning of a new phase of children's performance in early modern London. The Children of Paul's were revived, potentially under the patronage of William Stanley, and the following year the other successful sixteenth-century children's playing troupe, the Children of the Chapel, began playing again and subsequently evolved under various titles, most significantly becoming the Children of the Queen's Revels in 1603 (see Gair, *Children*; Lamb; Munro, *Children*; Shapiro, *Children*). These two companies developed from the chorister troupes at St Paul's Cathedral and the Chapel Royal who had begun to perform plays as part of a wider tradition of children's performance in educational contexts in the sixteenth century. It was common practice for schools to use dramatic performance as a means of developing boys' skills in oratory and rhetoric, and under the reign of Elizabeth I such groups were frequently invited to perform for the entertainment of the court. The Children of Paul's were favoured in this respect, and at one point were the company to appear most frequently at court (McCarthy 144). In the 1570s both companies began staging their plays for commercial gain at private playhouses, within Paul's and at the Blackfriars, claiming they were rehearsing for court performances. In 1584 they came together and operated for a brief period as a combined company under the patronage of the Earl of Oxford, the future father-in-law of William Stanley, performing—at court and in the playhouse at Paul's—plays primarily by John Lyly, who became a joint master of the company alongside the cathedral's master of the choristers, Thomas Gyles (Gurr 223; Munro, "Children's Companies" 99; Shapiro, "Boy Companies" 318). These early versions of a children's company operating commercially at their own playhouse within Paul's, with a patron and

master-manager, paved the way for the turn of the century version of the company with which Stanley is associated. However, the company was required to begin anew at the end of the sixteenth century as in the early 1590s it was dissolved, apparently due to Lyly's involvement in the Marprelate controversy (Gurr 225).

The version of the Children of Paul's who resumed playing in 1599 had clear links with the earlier company. Like the earlier company, they were primarily managed by the master of the choristers, who in 1599 was Edward Pearce, and they continued to function as a chorister group as well as a playing company. The core troupe of actors were the 12 choristers who, in 1599, were aged between 6 or 7 and early adolescence (Gair, *Children* 440). The company included older youths in its later years and an account of their final performance in 1606 suggests that the boys had grown older with the company, referring to them as the "youths of Paul's, commonly called the *Children* of Paul's" (Gair, *Children* 154-5), but at the time of Stanley's involvement the troupe consisted of a group of young boys who were highly educated and skilled as choristers. They were also skilled as theatrical performers more generally as they performed comedies and tragedies by John Marston, who acted as the main playwright for the company in their early years, and continued performing plays of a range of genres by many of the period's major playwrights, including Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, Thomas Dekker and John Webster, George Chapman and Thomas Middleton (Lamb x). Yet in spite of this ability to successfully perform generically diverse plays, the first performance by this troupe playfully highlights the players' youth and humorously draws attention to their relative inexperience in performing on stage. Marston's *Antonio and Mellida*, performed in autumn 1599, self-consciously draws attention to the theatrical novelty of the performance by this troupe, its specific playing practices and the distinct status of the players. It opens with an "Induction" scene that brings the players on-stage "*with parts in their hands, having cloaks cast over their apparel*" ("Induction" s.d.) for a quasi-rehearsal

discussion of how they will present their allocated roles. In response to the urgent questioning of "Are ye ready? Are you perfect?" ("Induction" 2) by one child who is to play the part of Galeazzo, another child, who is to play the part of Piero, the Duke of Venice and villain of the piece, demonstrates both the capabilities and anxieties pertaining to children's performance in the period. He confirms that "we can say our parts" ("Induction" 3), indicating that they have been trained to learn and recite the lines contained in the scrolls in their hand, but he worries that "we are ignorant in what mould we must cast our actors" ("Induction" 4), suggesting that they lack experience and also comically hinting that their smaller bodies fall short of the expected "mould". As Reavley Gair persuasively suggests in his seminal study of the company, this play seems to be written to introduce the players and this new company to the audience (*Children* 118). This first performance also potentially does this by introducing and memorializing their playwright by bringing on a portrait of him in act five. The play's fictional painter brings two portraits on stage, one described as twenty-four years old, which was likely to have been of Marston (Gair, *Children* 123); the other is described as being of "a good settled age" (Marston 5.1.9-10). Gair reads this moment within the play as part of an "intensive campaign to familiarize [the] audience with the new theater, the new company and its talents" and proposes that the second portrait may have been thirty-eight-year old William Stanley, arguing that "to show the audience a portrait of the patron of Paul's is a natural extension of this policy" (*Children* 123). Portraits were commonly used on the early modern stage, as Emanuel Stelzer has shown, to catch the audience's attention and to make self-conscious connections between the world and the theatrical culture in which it was being performed. In a play that clearly works to introduce this new playing company and their playwright, it is not implausible that the second portrait is also being used to introduce another key figure associated with the troupe. Yet, whether or not this is Stanley is more difficult to ascertain.

Little is known about how the Paul's company was structured when it re-formed in 1599. Edward Pearce, as master of the choristers, and Marston, as company playwright, provided a similar management structure to earlier versions of the chorister-playing company. Yet as one of the most well known contemporary commentaries on the children's companies highlights, supporting a children's company came at a cost. When Rosencrantz comments on the "late innovation" (*Hamlet* 2.2.32), "an eyrie of children" who are "now the fashion" (2.2.326–27), Hamlet's response of "What, are they children? Who maintains them? How are they escoted" (2.2.33–2) draws attention to the practical dimension of having to provide for a company consisting entirely of dependent children. The cost of maintaining a children's company is a primary concern of the master-managers of the children's troupes throughout their extended history. When Sebastian Westcott took the Children of Paul's to perform before the eighteen-year-old princess Elizabeth at Hatfield House in 1552, he received what, Michael Shapiro points out, was a disproportionately large sum for "charge of the children with the carriage of the garments" ("Early Boy Companies" 126). In a letter to the royal household in 1583, William Hunnis, master of the Children of the Chapel, complains that although the Queen provides food and clothing for the children of the chorister company, there is no fee for the master and no lodging for the children when they entertain the court (Gurr 224). Shapiro goes as far as suggesting that the sixteenth-century boy company performances at their private playhouses may even have been a way of making money to support these court performances ("Early Boy Companies" 130). Yet the Children of Paul's were in need of significant financial support in 1599 even before taking court visits into account. As choristers they were already struggling. The report of Bishop Bancroft on his visit to the Cathedral the previous year notes the difficult conditions of maintaining a group of children, noting that "their apparrell not in suche sorte as decencie becometh" (cited in Gair, *Children* 41). Although the company's investors and managers would have had free access to

the playhouse within the Cathedral, because they were also the choristers of this Cathedral, and, as Andy Kesson points out, had the advantage of not having to pay their performers (28), maintaining a children's playing company required a high level of investment. Unlike the adult companies of the period which would have been made up of a number of players who also were sharers in the company, the children's companies were entirely dependent on a limited number of investors who acted as co-managers, because the child players would not have had the means to act as sharers in their company. Moreover, as children they required an additional investment for daily welfare and for schooling. The potential investors for the Children of Paul's in 1599 would have been their choirmaster, Pearce, and their playwright, Marston. Neither of these figures was likely to have brought significant investment to re-establishing the Children of Paul's as a playing company. Although Pearce had been appointed as choirmaster of Paul's, the old master Thomas Gyles remained in post until July 1600 (Gair, *Children* 5), limiting Pearce's access to any material advantages that came with the job. John Marston was in even more extreme financial circumstances, suffering from serious debt, and may have even turned to playwriting out of economic necessity (Gair, "John Marston" 31). Involvement with Paul's did not guarantee a lucrative income. While the company may have brought in some money through their performances, the children's companies only performed once a week, in contrast to the daily performances at the playhouses in which their adult counterparts performed. The private playhouse at Paul's charged higher prices for entry, with seats ranging from two to six-pence, but it was also a small playhouse, seating a limited numbers of spectators, even compared to the other children's company private playhouse at Blackfriars, for these limited performances (see Dutton, "The Revels Office" 343; Gair *Children* 66-69; Shapiro, *Children*). To put up "plays of the Children in Paul's" would then indeed have been at "great pains and charge". A significant financial investment was likely required to reposition this troupe as a playing

company and to sustain them in this role. A patron-investor would not simply have been an enormous help in reviving this company; it may even have been crucial.

II. Fashioning a theatrical patron

The economic and organisational structures of the Children of Paul's in 1599 demonstrate the extent to which patronage and investment by an external party would be likely a critical part of the revival of this company. If the company had a patron, as Whyte's letter hints, the Sixth Earl of Derby? William Stanley's activities and connections in 1599 support this possibility. Despite his own financial difficulties in the 1590s (Coward 50), he was actively investing in theater at this time. As long-term patron of Derby's Men, he helped to finance the launch of London's Boar Head playhouse by the leading actor of that company, Robert Browne, in summer 1599 (Manley and MacLean 326; MacLean in this edition; Berry). His potential connections with the Paul's company, however, go beyond this evidence of his London-base and theatrical interests at this particular historical moment. Stanley had been a member of the Inns of Court c. 1594 at the same time as another individual crucial to the revival of Paul's—John Marston (Daugherty 'Stanley'; Finkelpearl 86). Both were shaped, therefore, by the literary and theatrical cultures of the Inns of Court, which involved regular revels and mounting of entertainments (Finkelpearl 18-61). Whether or not this shared context was the basis of a relationship that led to their working together on the revival of Paul's, Marston's work as a playwright overlapped with the theatrical interests of the Derby family in other ways. In 1607 he wrote *The Entertainment at Ashby* for Alice Countess Dowager of Derby's visit to her daughter. Although some scholars have suggested that this may even have been at Stanley's invitation (Bednarz), it is perhaps more likely that this performance was organised by the Countess' son-in-law, Henry Hastings, 5th Earl of Huntingdon, another previous member of the Inns of Court and patron of the arts (Knowles).

Nonetheless this series of connections between Marston and Stanley's familial networks offers a wider context in which to situate Stanley's involvement with Paul's. It hints at a form of patronage possibly instigated by personal connections but also informed by shared experience of particular performance cultures. The distinct theatrical milieu of the Inns of Court, which Marston and Stanley, as well as Hastings, had experienced was not dissimilar, Philip Finkelpearl suggests, from the elite mode of performance often associated with the chorister playing companies. The involvement of Stanley and Marston in reviving this chorister troupe potentially drew on their common experiences of theatrical culture, if not on a direct relationship. Their combined theatrical interests and shared experiences informed the venture being established at Paul's in 1599, which straddled the worlds of private performance and commercially competitive theater.

Yet, although relationships, location and an interest in theatrical affairs lend support to Whyte's claim that Stanley invested in the Paul's revival and may have had substantial involvement that required not only "charge" but great "pains", it does not shed any light on why Stanley may have decided to invest in this new theatrical venture. As patron of Derby's Men from 1594 he was already actively involved in the theater industry. Under his patronage, this company maintained a substantial touring career (MacLean 219 and MacLean's article in this edition), and at the time of Stanley's interest in Paul's, Derby's Men were flourishing in London, being invited to perform at court in addition to establishing the Boar's Head playhouse (Gurr 265; Rowland 2; Berry). Why then might Stanley also invest in another playing company, particularly one which might potentially attract playgoers away, as *Hamlet* suggests the children's company ultimately did, from the playhouses of the adult companies? It is possible that Stanley recognised an opportunity for extending the family's tradition of patronage and his own personal enthusiasm for theater. As Sally-Beth MacLean points out, "tradition is fundamental" to any exploration of the members of the Derby family's patronage

(MacLean 204). As this special issue demonstrates, Stanley inherited a rich family tradition of theatrical patronage (see also Manley and MacLean). Moreover he was, MacLean highlights, perhaps the "keenest of his clan" in this arena (219). The investment in Paul's offered not only an opportunity to extend his theatrical patronage, but to participate innovatively in the development of the rapidly expanding London playing culture. Launching a new playhouse with his adult playing company combined with investment in a children's company and their "private" playhouse within the cathedral would have placed Stanley at the center at multiple and diverse theatrical ventures at the center of the developing business of theater at the end of the sixteenth century.

Taking on the role of patron of the Children of Paul's potentially also facilitated emulation of another family tradition. William Stanley's father-in-law, Edward De Vere the Earl of Oxford, had acted as patron of "Oxford's Boys", a company that, as noted earlier, brought together the Children of Paul's and the Children of the Chapel in the 1580s (Gurr 223). Although Michael Shapiro questions if William Stanley was even involved in the revival of Paul's at all, he suggests that if he was he may have wanted to imitate his father-in-law by patronising a chorister company (*Children* 20). Stanley's patronage of an adult touring troupe establishing a place in the London theater scene and associations with an alternative tradition of London-based chorister performance, therefore, may have been part of a project of furthering his identity and status in line not only with his own familial traditions but also with those of his new wife's family. The Earl of Oxford's patronage of a children's company in the 1580s was combined with patronage of an adult troupe in his name at the same time, which as Alison Findlay and Richard Dutton point out, outdid the Stanleys in terms of theatrical patronage (Findlay and Dutton 17). William Stanley's patronage of two troupes perhaps not only imitated his father-in-law's example but also sought to match it. Patronising

multiple playing companies might have functioned as mode of signalling cultural authority and power.

If Stanley's extension of his theatrical activity formed part of a strategy for shaping individual and familial status via patronage, then association with the tradition of chorister performance promised a range of advantages that went beyond those of being a patron of an adult company. As noted earlier, children's company performance did not operate in terms of the most lucrative economic model, but it carried with it the prestige of the sixteenth-century children's companies. Although Kesson's important recent work discloses the potential limitations of focusing solely on the differences between multiple types of companies and performance spaces in the late sixteenth century, and revealed what might be gained by instead exploring connections, the children's companies nonetheless might be deemed as holding a distinct status in early modern playing cultures at this time due to their associations with chorister troupes and indoor playing spaces and their particular identities as child players (Lamb; McCarthy). Becoming part of a mode of performance that, in 1599, continued to be closely aligned with the well-trained chorister troupes performing in a private playhouse may have seemed an attractive option to the Earl of Derby seeking to extend his theatrical involvement. The new Children of Paul's brought with it, Andrew Gurr suggests, that history and an associated level of respectability (339). Its continued alignment with the chorister troupe and the fact that it performed in the private playhouse within the cathedral meant that it maintained, at least in the early days of the revived children's companies, a sense of being distinct from performances in the outdoor playhouses. As has been widely agreed in scholarship, the higher prices of the private theaters led to audiences primarily consisting of wealthier playgoers who could be part of a "smaller, select audience indoors", resulting in a sense of exclusivity and prestige (see Gurr and Karim-Cooper, esp. 6). Of course, this association between the children's playing companies and these performance spaces was

preceded by a longer history of children's and adult performance in indoor theatres (see Kesson 25-26) and was further elided by the increasing connections between children and adult companies in the early seventeenth century and the fact that the indoor theaters were soon to be occupied by the adult companies (see Van Es; Gurr and Karim-Cooper). But in 1599 the revived Paul's was unique in the domain of London theater in offering this exclusive concept of playing. The company, therefore, had a distinct air of novelty in 1599, which is highlighted by its opening performance of Marston's *Antonio and Mellida*'s introduction to the company and its players. The Children of the Chapel were revived soon after, but in the autumn of that year the revival of Paul's as a commercial children's playing company was an innovative move. This novelty and innovation may have particularly appealed to Stanley as a keen participant in early modern performance cultures.

Another element of the company's history may have equally rendered an affiliation with the Children of Paul's attractive to the Earl of Derby. This playing troupe had an unprecedented history of favour with the court of Elizabeth I. While both sixteenth-century children's companies had been invited regularly for court performances, the Children of Paul's, Michael Shapiro points out, "emerged as the dominant boy company in court performance" (Shapiro, "Early Boy Companies" 127-129; see also McCarthy 144). The revived company continued to find favour at court, and on New Year's 1601 notably appeared on the same billing as Stanley's adult company, Derby's Men (Gurr 346; Streitberger 204). This simultaneous participation in court entertainment by the Earl's potential two companies may be coincidental, but it constitutes another fascinating intersection between Stanley's theatrical patronage and the performances of the Children of Paul's in the early years of their revival. In a recent examination of the relationships between patrons and playing companies, Siobhan Keenan asks if early modern patrons might have used players to "advance their own ideological agendas" (Keenan, *Acting Companies* 176). A

company with a history of court performances and the favour of the monarch may have promised an opportunity for Stanley to use his theatrical patronage not only for regular court attendance but more specifically for political effect. Child actors offered a unique mode of conveying social and political agendas. Children's playing companies may have come to prominence under Elizabeth I, as Jeanne McCarthy suggests, as part of an Elizabethan aesthetic of the miniature (McCarthy 146); but they also had the potential in performance to act as ciphers for political messages, made possible because of their dual status as innocent and representative of the future (see Norrie). Patronage of the Children of Paul's, therefore, was not simply a necessity from the perspective of the company itself; it had the potential to associate the patron with a prestigious and novel element of theatrical culture and to act as forum for furthering the patron's cultural and political identity. Stanley's patronage of Paul's offered a mode for further establishing the family's dynastic identity and Stanley's own identity as theatrical patron through involvement with this distinctive company.

Yet if this range of possibilities was available to Stanley when he invested in the company in 1599, there is limited evidence to suggest that he used his relationship with the company to take advantage of them. It is possible that he engaged with the company in a more sustained way than an initial investment. Whyte's ambiguous allusion to the Earl's putting up of plays at Paul's might also be interpreted as providing support of a different form for this new version of the children's company. As has been widely documented, the Earl was, according to a note by George Fenner in June 1599, "busy penning comedies for the common players" at this time (Thomson 46). This allusion to his playwriting practices has been interpreted as a reference to writing for the public theaters (see, for example, Daugherty 'Stanley'). As the *Hamlet* allusion to the rivalry between children's and adult troupes indicates, a distinction was being drawn, even in the period itself, between the "common" adult companies and the children who played at higher-priced, private theaters. Yet this is not

a rigid distinction. In spite of some competition, there were many substantial connections between the adult and children's playing companies in the period, and managers, playwrights and even plays and players moved between the two types of company (see Lamb 15). The description of his comedies as being for "common players" may instead function to denigrate the activity of writing plays for any professional playing company. If Stanley was writing plays for the children's company in which it seems he was investing, he would not have been the only noble man to do so. His friend, William Percy, son of the eighth Earl of Northumberland, wrote a number of plays in the early seventeenth century which may have been performed by the Children of Paul's and, at the very least, are imagined as potential performances by this company as the manuscript copy contains a series of annotations detailing how the plays should be performed if staged at Paul's (Keenan, *Travelling* 16; Lamb 21). The 'comedies', which Stanley was apparently writing, would have fitted within early Paul's repertoire. However, although Reavley Gair tentatively includes the lost plays of William Stanley in his list of Paul's 1599 performances, there is no further evidence to suggest that Stanley was writing his plays for this company (*Children* 186). Nonetheless, Stanley's enthusiasm for theater in the form of playwriting alongside active patronage of Derby's Men and the "putting up of plays" for Paul's does raise another possible reason for his involvement with the company in 1599. In a letter to Robert Cecil, Lord Burghley, in the same year, Stanley's wife, Elizabeth, Countess of Derby, writes to her uncle to request that Stanley's adult company might "not be barred from their accustomed playing" as her husband takes "delight in them" and so it "will keep him from more prodigal courses" (cited in Wickham, Berry and Ingram 105). Stanley's extension of his participation in theatrical affairs may be simply a result of his enthusiasm for performance cultures and the business of theater. Patronage of a children's company potentially offered a unique mode of extending the family tradition of involvement in performance culture and a means of fashioning Stanley's distinct

identity within this; but it ultimately it may have been nothing more than a distraction from other affairs. His wife's allusion to the profligate nature of these unspecified other 'courses' conveys her personal concern over Stanley's behaviour to which theater intriguingly forms a preferable alternative (see Daugherty, *William Stanley* 11-12). Early modern theatrical patronage certainly offered, as Keenan highlights, opportunities to display power, advertise name, wealth and status, and to advance ideological agendas (*Acting Companies* 170-177); but in the case of Stanley's involvement in Paul's it may merely have been a temporary indulgence of a wider interest theater and a divergence from other aspects of life.

III. Conclusion: The ends of patronage

Indeed it seems that William Stanley's involvement with the Children of Paul's was short-term. The wider contexts of the revival of the Children of Paul's and Stanley's various intersections with London's theatrical culture in the late 1590s and early seventeenth century, as well as a series of connections between Stanley and others associated with the boys at Paul's, undoubtedly lend support to Rowland Whyte's claim that the Sixth Earl of Derby was involved with the children's playing company in 1599. The nature and extent of this involvement, however, remains uncertain. It is plausible that Stanley not only facilitated the revival of this company through his financial investment but also through artistic production, as Gair suggests, but it is perhaps more likely that he was writing plays with his own existing adult company in mind and simply acted as a financier of the revival of the Children of Paul's. If he was involved in the company as a patron in any way that extended beyond a one-off investment, this relationship must have been relatively brief. When Edward Pearce and Thomas Woodford are sued as masters of the Children of Paul's for the company's

performance of George Chapman's *The Old Joiner of Aldgate* in 1603 because of its depiction of the elopement of a local heiress, there is no hint of the protection of a patron (Sisson 12-79). Perhaps Stanley's involvement with Paul's had ended when his adult company resumed their regularly touring activities in 1601, taking his theatrical attention elsewhere; perhaps his involvement had not even been maintained beyond autumn 1599.

As Richard Dutton has recently suggested, patronage was crucial to the survival of the revived Paul's company, but it is something that the company lacked (*Shakespeare's Theatre* 277). Ultimately, the version of the Children of Paul's established in 1599—under the management of Edward Pearce, with the involvement of their playwright John Marston and the investment of William Stanley—was not a sustainable entity. To a certain extent, this may have been because it lacked the support or ongoing investment of a patron, such as the Sixth Earl of Derby. While the other major children's playing company of the period, the Children of the Chapel, received a royal patent following the accession of James I to become the Children of the Queen's Revels, and also adapted their management structures so that a team of managers ensured more sustained investment in the company, the Children of Paul's did not. Their last performance can be dated to 1606. This performance of a lost play, *Abuses*, took place before the King, suggesting that although the company did not formally benefit from a royal patent they continued to enjoy royal favour. It seems nonetheless that this children's company was operating under a model that was not sustainable, or at least not profitable, in the competitive theatrical market of early seventeenth-century London.

Yet in spite of the brevity of this company's activities and the uncertain nature of the exact relationship between the Children of Paul's and the Sixth Earl of Derby, Stanley's association with the "plays of the Children of Paul's" positions him as intervening at a crucial moment in the history of the early modern English playing companies. Stanley's involvement with Paul's came at a moment which saw, as Bastian Kuhl terms it, "the transition of the

children's companies from what were effectively troupes of amateurs who were recruited from the eponymous boys' choirs to professional enterprises in a fiercely competitive theatrical environment" (121). More significantly, although the success of the Children of Paul's was brief, the revival in 1599 had an impact that extended beyond a tradition of children's company performance. Their revival was a significant factor in advancing the theatrical culture of the early seventeenth century and instigated a form of playing company that seemed to worry even Shakespeare. William Stanley's patronage of the Children of Paul's, whatever precise form it took, actually functioned as more than personal distraction, even if that was the original incentive for investment; it placed him at the centre of a new and unique phase of English theatrical culture in which youthful groups sat alongside the adult troupes in commercial stage culture. The Sixth Earl of Derby played a part in widening theatrical culture and innovation at the turn of the seventeenth century. Whether this was a deliberate investment in the development of alternative modes of playing and theatrical spaces, a conscious act to shape his own cultural and political identity as patron, or a side-effect of a personal fancy for theatre remains unknown.

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