



# Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England

*Jeffrey Knapp*

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## **Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England** Jeffrey Knapp


Most contemporary critics characterize Shakespeare and his tribe of fellow playwrights and players as resolutely secular, interested in religion only as a matter of politics or as a rival source of popular entertainment. Yet as Jeffrey Knapp demonstrates in this radical new reading, a surprising number of writers throughout the English Renaissance, including Shakespeare himself, represented plays as supporting the cause of true religion.

To be sure, Renaissance playwrights rarely sermonized in their plays, which seemed preoccupied with sex, violence, and crime. During a time when acting was regarded as a kind of vice, many theater professionals used their apparent godlessness to advantage, claiming that it enabled them to save wayward souls the church could not otherwise reach. The stage, they argued, made possible an ecumenical ministry, which would help transform Reformation England into a more inclusive Christian society.

Drawing on a variety of little-known as well as celebrated plays, along with a host of other documents from the English Renaissance, *Shakespeare's Tribe* changes the way we think about Shakespeare and the culture that produced him.

Winner of the Best Book in Literature and Language from the Association of American Publishers' Professional/Scholarly division, the Conference on Christianity and Literature Book Award, and the Roland H. Bainton Prize for Literature from the Sixteenth Century Society and Conference.

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