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**Collection Enhancement Report No. 9 for the V&A, Theatre and Performance
Department (June 2012)**

The Whitefriars Theatre

NB: Earlier, the ShaLT Collection Enhancement Reports have used the printed collections at the National Art Library (particularly the unique Dyce Collection) to highlight printed texts in terms of issues such as authorship and genre. However, bearing in mind that the key outreach goal of the AHRC funding for the project was to further public awareness about the actual theatre sites (The Theatre, Blackfriars, and so on) it seems highly appropriate for a series of reports to focus on the actual theatre spaces. Thus, this report highlights the playhouse at Whitefriars. Indeed, it is envisaged that the T&P Department at the V&A might be able to host a small exhibition of Dyce material in terms of the actual Shakespearean London Playhouses. With this in mind, this report picks-out printed work at the V&A that links to Whitefriars. This topic should prove interesting to visitors to a potential exhibition because often the title page is the only evidence we have for the performance of a play at a certain location.

Whitefriars was an indoor theatre for the boy-players. Located at the old monastery site, this theatre was clearly designed to rival the Blackfriars and staged plays from 1609 to 1613. Philip Rossiter opened this indoor theatre to the south of Fleet Street in the City of Westminster, when the boy company who could no longer play at Blackfriars were moved here (the King's Revels Children). Like Blackfriars before the arrival of the King's Men, therefore, Whitefriars was aimed at a well-to-do fee paying audience unlike the larger outdoor playhouses from this period.

At Whitefriars Rossiter took the Blackfriars boys to put on plays as the older theatre had recently been closed down by James I, owing to the scandal of the satire of the boy company plays at both the second Blackfriars and St Paul's. This was because controversial plays had been put on that caused a stir at court and started attracting the serious ire of the censor Sir Edmund Tilney. For example, in 1605 the Blackfriars company was reprimanded for performing *Eastward Ho!*, an authorial collaboration by George Chapman, Ben Jonson and John Marston, which gave offence to the court because of its anti-Scottish sentiment. Then in 1606 John Day's *The Isle of Gulls* was seen as contentious for its use of political satire against the government. Sir Thomas Edmondes wrote that 'at this time there was much speech of a play in the Blackfriars where, in the Isle of Gulls, from the highest to the lowest, all men's parts were acted of two divers nations.' The boy players evidently found it easy to parody London's courtly newcomers by adopting Scottish accents. Eventually, things came to a head. Angered by the accumulation of political satires, James banned the boy companies at Blackfriars and St Paul's from further playing.

The Whitefriars was very clearly modelled on the success of the earlier two indoor playhouses, but it must have enjoyed only relative success, since plays were no longer being performed there after 1613. In that year, the boy company combined with the adult company of players known as Lady Elizabeth's Men until the lease ended. We know that John Marston's *The Insatiate Countess* was performed here by the boy actors in 1610 but after 1613 the boy companies vanish from playing for ever.

Whitefriars and the V&A Collection

The image below (courtesy of the V&A Museum) is taken from the collection's titlepage for John Marston's tragedy *The Insatiate Countess*, a Jacobean play performed at the Whitefriars playhouse.

THE
 INSATIATE
 Countesse.

A
 TRAGEDIE:

Acted at White-Fryers.

Written

By IOHN MARSTON.



LONDON,

Printed by I. N. for Hugh Perrie, and are to be
 sold at his shop, at the signe of the Harrow in
 Brittaines-burse. 1631.