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This paper traces the historical process by which the Master of the Revels, originally created as an officer of the English crown to preside over entertainments at Court, came to act as the censor of the stage. Its focus is on Edmund Tilney, the first Master of the Revels in Renaissance England to act as dramatic censor. Mainly drawing on E. K. Chambers' "Documents of Control" (*The Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 4, 259-345), this paper explores how Tilney emerged as more a sympathetic licensor of the stage than a repressive censor.

Tilney, who had been installed by a royal patent in 1579 as Master, received another royal patent in 1581, which authorized him to censor all plays to be performed in England. Although censorship is usually associated with a repressive form of control, dramatic censorship by Tilney, as well as by his successors in Renaissance England (George Buc, John Astley, and Henry Herbert), was sympathetic rather than inhibitory toward the actors. Documents relating to the control of the stage suggest that, while regulating the players' activities, Tilney exercised his power as the licenser of the stage so as to promote rather than curtailing the theatre industry: whether he required the playing companies to revise the plays they submitted for his approval or he licensed them without condition, Tilney usually allowed the submitted plays to be performed, and the official licence he gave to the players protected them against the City of London and other enemies of the stage of the day. One important reason for Tilney's taking a sympathetic attitude toward the actors is that his position and income depended heavily on how the theatre industry flourished.