THEATRE, COURT AND CITY, 1595–1610

Drama and Social Space in London

JANETTE DILLON

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Contents

Illustrations

City, court and theatre

Every town is and wants to be a world apart
(Fernand Braudel)

In a speech to Star Chamber in 1616 James I inveighed against a change that seemed to be affecting the whole country as a result of London's growth:

It is the fashion of Italy, especially of Naples (which is one of the richest parts of it) that all the gentry dwell in the principal towns, and so the whole country is empty: even so now in England, all the country is gotten into London; so as with time, England will only be London, and the whole country be left waste: for as we now do imitate the French fashion, in fashion of clothes, and lackeys to follow every man; so have we got up the Italian fashion, in living miserably in our houses, and dwelling all in the city: but let us in God's name leave these idle foreign toys, and keep the old fashion of England: for it was wont to be the honour and reputation of the English nobility and gentry, to live in the country, and keep hospitality: for which we were famous above all the countries in the world. (McIlwain, *Political Works of James I*, pp. 343–4)

For James, as this speech makes clear, the expansion of London was evidence of a rejection of social duty and of a lamentable tendency to imitate foreign fashions. Writers at a more popular level agreed with him. Stow's tone is sternly moralistic: 'the gentlemen of all shires do fly and flock to this city, the younger sort of them to see and show vanity, and the elder to save the cost and charge of hospitality, and housekeeping' (*Survey*, vol. II, p. 212); while Dekker's is more sardonic: 'And thus we that mock every nation, for keeping one fashion, yet steal patches from every one of them, to piece out our pride, are now laughing-stocks to them, because their cut so scurvily becomes us' (*Seven Deadly Sins of London*, p. 44).

The dual focus on fashion and duty, and the moralising cast of mind that sees devotion to the first as evidence of neglect of the second, will

be central to the discussion of relations between court, city and theatre in this book. The opposition pinpoints a set of tensions: between the governors and the governed of the city; between the individual and collective impulses which are part of the necessary undertow of city life; and between the city and all that is not the city, whether that other is conceived in any given context as the suburbs, the country, the nation or the rest of the world. Crucial though boundaries are, however, to the production of space, their demarcation is never absolute. Social spaces interpenetrate one another:

They are not *things*, which have mutually limiting boundaries and which collide because of their contours or as a result of inertia . . . Visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general, give rise for their part to an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity. The space of a room, bedroom, house or garden may be cut off in a sense from social space by barriers and walls, by all the signs of private property, yet still remain fundamentally part of that space. Nor can such spaces be considered empty 'mediums', in the sense of containers distinct from their contents. (Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, pp. 86–7)

As Fernand Braudel states in the epigraph to this chapter, 'Every town is and wants to be a world apart' (*Capitalism and Material Life*, p. 382). In order to define its integrity and apartness it has to construct boundaries (city walls are common to most medieval and early modern cities, and both Stow's *Survey of London* and Fitzstephen's description of London, which Stow incorporates, place accounts of the city wall close to the beginning of their works). It has to conceive of itself as different from, though standing in important forms of relation to, those elements that surround it. Thus, for Stow, to whom this book repeatedly returns, London is first and most fully described in relation to its own components, the twenty-six wards (see figure 4 for Steve Rappaport's map, which is based on Stow); this is followed by a description of the suburbs, summarised together under that one heading rather than itemised like the wards; and London's relationship to the realm is conceptualised through a mixture of self-congratulation and due, if somewhat token, humility ('in respect of the whole realm, London is but a citizen and no city'; *Survey*, vol. ii, p. 206).

At the end of the sixteenth century, when Stow was writing,[1] London was having to come to terms with one of the most marked population expansions experienced anywhere in Renaissance Europe, and the king was not the only one who wanted to hold back the tide of its tremendous growth; contemporaries regularly wrote about its growth as a symptom

of disease rather than health.[2] Its population had more or less tripled in the course of the century, with most of that proliferation concentrated in the last twenty years, 1580–1600; and it continued to expand at speed throughout the Jacobean period. That expansion, furthermore, was entirely due to immigration. London, according to John Norden, 'as an adamant draweth unto it all the other parts of the land' (*Speculum Britanniae*, p. 9). Its population would actually have declined during the same period, given the comparative birth and death rates, had it not been for immigration.

'To understand the extraordinary fascination of London in the sixteenth century', Lawrence Stone argues, 'one must realize that it was not merely the only city but also the only substantial town in England . . . It was not merely a difference in degree, it was a difference in kind: London was unique in a way which it is not today' (*Crisis of the Aristocracy*, p. 386). As King James remarked with bitterness in the speech quoted at the opening of the chapter, 'the new fashion is to be had nowhere but in London' (McIlwain, *Political Works of James I*, p. 343). Stone goes on to discuss London's attractions under the headings of business, pleasure and the lure of court office. His discussion is of course focused on the aristocracy, but it was the gentry and aristocracy in particular who were responsible for the development of the West End. The huge expansion during the sixteenth century of legal business and of the royal court and the central administration necessarily led not only to a rise in those employed within the legal profession or the Elizabethan equivalent of the civil service, but also to an influx of gentry and nobility pursuing lawsuits, court office or men of influence. They were also, of course, in pursuit of pleasure, as were their wives and families, and Stone remarks on the speed with which the London 'season' developed over a relatively short period between about 1590 and 1620 (*Crisis of the Aristocracy*, p. 387). Even seasonal visitors, however, needed places to stay, and this demand stimulated an extraordinary increase in building to the north of the Strand (as well as the subdividing and subletting of many of the Strand palaces). By the 1630s more than three-quarters of peers had permanent or semi-permanent residences in or around London, and several of those peers were developing fields and gardens into fashionable residential areas. The king, meanwhile, reissued in vain proclamations insisting that visitors to London leave when their business was finished and that the landed classes return to their country seats to keep hospitality. Not until 1633, when the government began to prosecute those disobeying the most recent proclamation of 1632, was any notice

taken of the repeated instruction to clear out of London (Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, pp. 385–98).

By the early seventeenth century, then, the majority of London's population was composed of first-generation immigrants, most of whom were from other parts of England, though foreign immigration had also increased during the sixteenth century, reaching its most significant level during the last third of the century. Population estimates for this period vary, of course, because the sources from which the figures are taken may be limited to the twenty-six wards of the city, or may include more or less of the expanding suburban area. Despite the expanding size of the metropolitan area, however, especially to the west of the city, there is evidence to suggest that even to the end of Elizabeth's reign most Londoners lived within the 'bars', the limits of the city's jurisdiction, covering little more than the square mile contained within the walls.

The pressure of the population within that small area was accordingly intense. Stow's laments for the building on and swallowing up of open spaces are well known, but he is not alone in protesting.[3] Both the government and the city authorities were also concerned. In response to a remonstrance from the lord mayor, a royal proclamation attempting to limit new buildings was issued by Elizabeth in 1580. This was then followed up by an act of Parliament in 1593 and repeatedly reinforced by further proclamations throughout James' reign. The Court of Aldermen, besides actively co-operating with these royal directives and making regular searches for breaches of the proclamation, also issued its own directives along similar lines.[4] One of the effects of these repeated directives, however (which by virtue of their very frequency indicate continued defiance of their edicts), was 'to encourage the dividing-up of existing houses and secret construction-work of poor brick in courtyards of old houses, away from the street and even from minor alleys . . . a whole clandestine proliferation of hovels and shanties on land of doubtful ownership' (Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life*, p. 430).

Within the city limits, order was maintained through several intersecting structures, mainly those of ward, parish and company. Though these structures might be individually identified as those of city, church and occupation respectively, they were in fact much more closely inter-related than such a division would imply. The companies, for example, controlled city government: the Court of Aldermen was composed of men elected to office via their companies, and the lord mayor had to belong to one of the twelve great companies.[5] Guilds also took their

religious duties seriously and scarcely distinguished between charitable benefactions and civic duties. Relieving the deserving poor, for example, was simultaneously a spiritual and a political act.

The 'undeserving' poor, however, presented an increasing problem as the population expanded. Church, state and city were united in their hostility to masterless or unattached individuals, 'sturdy beggars', as they were known, physically fit but unemployed. The ideal, from the authorities' point of view, would have been to erase such a category altogether; in practice the steps taken were expulsion and punishment. Vagrants were driven out of the city, sometimes whipped out, in an attempt to return them to the parish of their birth so that they could not become a burden on any other parish's poor relief. The statute of 1572, for example, ordered whipping, burning through the right ear, or serving as an indentured labourer for one year for a first offence. A second offence might incur the death penalty, and a third offence, according to the terms of the statute, undoubtedly would. Though the poor laws of 1597 and 1601 moderated these punishments, they were essentially based on this statute and its successor of 1575 (see further Beier, *Masterless Men*, ch. 9; McMullan, *Canting Crew*, pp. 36–41). Yet the particular circumstances of London's expanding labour market drew the masterless irresistibly towards London. It offered greater opportunities for casual labour than anywhere else in England; its sheer size provided relatively easy accommodation and the possibility of evading the authorities; and its organised poor relief, despite attempts to debar recent immigrants from claiming it, positively attracted vagrants to the capital (McMullan, *Canting Crew*, p. 10).[6]

London's expanding population, then, was a mobile and volatile one, including a relatively high proportion of potentially riotous and disorderly components. Vagrants were not the only group likely to provoke disorder. The ratio of immigrants to native-born Londoners was another destabilising factor, as were the numbers of aliens and apprentices.[7] While several recent historians have stressed the notable orderliness of the city as compared with the riotousness of other European cities, this is not to suggest that tensions were not present or that riots never broke out.[8] Roger Manning, under the heading of what he describes as a 'Late-Elizabethan Epidemic of Disorder', notes thirty-five outbreaks of disorder in the city between 1581 and 1602 (*Village Revolts*, pp. 200–10).

The conspicuous regulation of London's self-government might be read as indicative of anxiety regarding the perceived imminence of dis-

order rather than as pointing to a simple absence of disorder. City walls, especially when their defensive role ceases to be significant, can become, as Braudel notes, 'a system for supervising the townspeople themselves' (*Capitalism and Material Life*, p. 383). Valerie Pearl, stressing the essential orderliness of London, describes the high numbers of citizens who participated in city regulation at the local level of ward and vestry. Londoners lived in small, tightly controlled units within units: household, precinct, parish, ward and livery company all contributed to regulate the life of the inhabitants.[9] Constables and beadles were required to keep lists of householders, noting any 'inmates' (lodgers) and aliens, with the date of their arrival and the length of their stay. Householders were responsible for controlling the members of their household, and were under specific obligations to their community. They had to attend the meeting of the wardmote to elect its officers, and a significant number could expect to be elected to one or more of these offices in their lifetimes.[10] They were further obliged to help maintain order and could be required to arm themselves in order to assist in policing outbreaks of disorder. 'In some ways', Pearl comments, 'sixteenth-century London suffered not from too little government but from too much' ('Social Policy', p. 117). But too much government need not be seen as in contradiction with incipient disorder. London's orderly self-regulation and its outbreaks of riot may be seen as two sides of the same coin.

Amongst these outbreaks of disorder, the most serious disturbance was the sequence of riots of 1595. These constituted, according to Manning, 'the most dangerous and prolonged urban uprising in England between the accession of the Tudor dynasty and the beginning of the Long Parliament' (*Village Revolts*, p. 208). And most historians are agreed that the 1590s was a time of crisis in England. A sequence of bad harvests caused severe dearth and hardship and accelerated a rapid increase in prices already underway since the late 1580s. By the first decade of the seventeenth century prices were 47 per cent higher than they had been in the 1580s, and real wages had fallen significantly (Rappaport, 'Social Structure and Mobility: Part 1', pp. 126, 131). More important than the scale of actual crisis, Ian Archer has argued, was the extent of perceived crisis: 'as far as the nature of social relations is concerned, it is people's perception of their situation, rather than the relativities in which historians so often deal, that matters. Londoners in the 1590s would have given short shrift to historians who pointed out that their suffering was not as acute as that of people on the continent, or that their tax burden was relatively low' (*Pursuit of Stability*, p. 14). That sense

of perceived crisis is most evident, as Archer shows, in the aftermath of 1595, when the city declared martial law, executed rioters and appointed two marshals to contain any further disturbance. A permanent provost marshal was appointed to the city in 1603.

   The influx of people into London at the end of sixteenth century was linked, of course, to significant economic changes. Population expansion both responded to and stimulated economic growth. London's status as 'the largest labour exchange in the country' was inextricably tied to its status as 'the largest single consumer goods market in England, probably in Europe' (McMullan, *Canting Crew*, pp. 9–10). Though bad harvests produced food shortages in the 1590s, the market for commodities was generally an inexpensive and expanding one, founded on an increasing demand for, and capacity to supply, imported foreign goods. New joint stock trading companies, formed from 1553 onwards, represented a form of business organised along lines very different from those of the old merchant companies. Far from restricting their membership to those who had worked their way up from apprentice to master craftsman over a period of years, these companies were open to anyone who had the capital to invest in them. New ways of getting rich quickly thus came into existence alongside more traditional practice linking wealth to work and to established citizen status. London embraced both these forms of business and emerged as 'the focal point of conspicuous consumption' in England (McMullan, *Canting Crew*, p. 12; see also Fisher, 'Development of London as a Centre of Conspicuous Consumption' and Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, pp. 184–8 and ch. 10).

   The building of Sir Thomas Gresham's Royal Exchange in 1566–8 and the subsequent building of Sir Robert Cecil's New Exchange in 1609, set up to rival and outstrip the Royal Exchange, span a period notable for the increasing prominence, self-confidence and self-regard of economic enterprise in London. The Royal Exchange, first called the 'Bourse' in imitation of the Antwerp Bourse, was named the Royal Exchange on the queen's authority in 1571. It was an ambitious and self-important edifice, comprising covered arcades surrounding an open square and incorporating 120 shops selling, according to Stow, 'all kind of rich wares, and fine commodities, as any particular place in Europe, unto which place many foreign princes daily send, to be best served, of the best sort' (*Annals*, p. 869). As Thomas Platter describes it in 1599, it was 'a great square place like the one in Antwerp . . . where all kinds of fine goods are on show; and since the city is very large and extensive merchants having to deal with one another agree to meet together in this

palace, where several hundred may be found assembled twice daily, before lunch at eleven, and again after their meal at six o' clock, buying, selling, bearing news, and doing business generally' (*Travels*, p. 157). It was located in the city, in Cornhill, one block north of Lombard Street, where the old open-air 'bourse' had operated informally since the four-teenth century.[11]

As Platter's comparison with a palace makes clear, the Royal Exchange had aspirations rivalling those of a royal court. It represented the city's expression of its own status in the same way as palace building expressed the court's power and magnificence. Elizabeth's authorisation of its 'Royal' title combined courtesy with necessity. Given her political and financial reliance on the city, she perhaps stood in greater need of its wealth than it did of her blessing; yet the obvious and politic route for both parties was to enact their mutual dependence in ceremonial terms which represented it quite differently, as a matter of mutual obligation, benevolence and respect. Thus were material realities most appropri-ately dressed up to enhance the status and respect both parties craved.

When Robert Cecil's New Exchange was built, over forty years later, its location expressed a significant shift in relations between city and court. It was built in the area of new, fashionable development on the Strand, alongside the great town houses of the nobility and very close to Whitehall. The Strand location seems to give symbolically appropriate geographical expression to the combination of separation and inter-dependence between the royal court and the city of London. It marks both the distance between them and the route that joins them. At a time when the ceremonial perambulation of space pervaded every form of public pageantry from the royal entry to the lord mayor's procession, contemporaries could scarcely fail to be aware of the symbolic geogra-phy underpinning the relative locations of city and court and the placing of institutionalised commerce between them.[12]

As the opulent splendour of both Exchanges demonstrates, one of the most prominent avenues of relationship between city (in both the narrow and the wider sense) and crown was through money, and the monarch was often dependent for loans on either the city as political entity or wealthy individuals within it.[13] Even Stow, nostalgically idealist as his perspective is in many ways, recognises the wealth of London as one of its singular strengths. It is with pride that he reports the city's capacity to relieve the poor, give money to the universities, yield a greater subsidy to the crown than any other part of the kingdom and lend money to the monarch. 'It only', he writes, 'doth and is able to make the

prince a ready prest or loan of money' (*Survey*, vol. II, p. 214).[14]
Merchants, Stow recognises, are 'necessary and serviceable' to both city
and nation; but the only good merchants are rich ones, 'for beggarly
merchants do bite too near, and will do more harm than good to the
realm' (*Survey*, vol. II, pp. 209, 213). Rich merchants were expected to do
their duty towards the city, both in endowing civic institutions such as
schools and hospitals, and in taking up service in city government at high
financial cost to themselves, but in taking up these burdens they thereby
inserted themselves into the hegemony of London.

It was Thomas Gresham, in fact, builder of the Royal Exchange and
a merchant himself, who was primarily responsible for persuading the
merchant-adventurers of London in 1570 to lend the queen money to
pay off her overseas creditors so that at least the interest fed back into
her own realm rather than into foreign coffers. Despite the company's
initial unwillingness, based on Elizabeth's previous high-handedness
when demanding loans, Gresham negotiated terms that satisfied both
parties, and loans from the city to the state became more frequent there-
after (Burgon, *Life and Times of Sir Thomas Gresham*, pp. 340–44;
Blanchard, 'Sir Thomas Gresham', pp. 15–18). Official loans from the
city to the crown totalled £120,000 in the years 1575–98, and unofficial
loans from individual wealthy citizens were over and above that total
(Manley, *Literature and Culture*, pp. 5–6). James I's demands, however, put
considerable pressure on that financial relationship, since his expendi-
ture was so notoriously in excess of his income. In 1610, when fiscal rela-
tions between James and his parliament were sorely tested in the matter
of the 'Great Contract' (a proposal to abolish the monarch's rights of
wardship and purveyance in return for an annual income of £200,000),
even the richest citizens of London refused to lend him any more
money.[15]

Relations between court and city were more than just a matter of
money, however; and all forms of relation were also mediated through
a variety of discursive representations. It was scarcely possible to con-
ceive of political or economic relations other than through powerful
myths and metaphors that carried their own ideological baggage. (One
only has to compare the Dick Whittington story (which became popular
in the 1590s; see Barron, 'Richard Whittington') with the conceit of the
monarch as head of the body politic, for example, to see how the chosen
image puts a particular bias in place.) Money, furthermore, was only one
material expression of power and status; though the direction in which
the money flowed, from city to crown, was an important index of the

monarch's dependence on the city. London, besides being the nation's greatest market and financial resource, was its legal and administrative heart and its seat of government. When a king or queen died, the mayor of London became, briefly, the highest authority in England, since all royal offices were vacant until reappointed by the new monarch. On Elizabeth's death the mayor exercised this authority by closing Ludgate (the gate that led into the city from Westminster) until he received a promise that James was to be proclaimed king.

The mayor, styled 'lord mayor' from about 1545, was revered by an increasing attention to ceremony through the course of the sixteenth century.[16] The gradual rise of the lord mayor's show in tandem with the decline of the midsummer watch has been widely noted, as has Stow's studied silence on the subject of the lord mayor's show.[17] While Stow waxes lyrical on the former glories of the now lapsed midsummer festivities, which for him represent the community's celebration of 'familiarity' and 'good amity' (vol. I, p. 101), he has nothing to say on the more recently introduced civic ceremony. It is difficult to resist the impression that he is passing judgement on the latter as a trumped-up novelty unworthy of serious attention; and his silence on the subject may be compared with his erasure from the second edition of his *Survey* of his already brief references to theatres in the first edition.[18] If he did feel any hostility towards the lord mayor's show, however, the emphasis was on the show rather than the office or person of the lord mayor, to whom the *Survey* is dedicated.[19]

Despite Stow's conservatism on the matter of public ceremony, his own work can be seen alongside the development of the lord mayor's show as part of a growing civic self-awareness in sixteenth-century London. The impulse to map and record the city is not entirely separable from the impulse to honour civic office: both aim to represent the city to itself, and both do so in a way that is either implicitly or explicitly celebratory. Both Stow's *Survey* and the lord mayor's show find their place within the context of a range of activities designed to consolidate the city's sense of its own definition:

The office of the Remembrancer, charged with the maintenance of customary practices and ceremonies, was created in 1571. The City had begun to issue its printed ceremonial calendars in 1568, and in 1596 the Court of Aldermen required "notes to be set down in writing and hanged in the Guildhall what things appertain either by charter, usage, Acts of Common Council or by custome to be yearly done." In the later sixteenth century the Corporation was involved as well in extensive efforts to consolidate its archives, ordering the

recopying of the *Liber Albus* and other custumals, the sequestering of records, and the search for lost registers and papers. (Manley, *Literature and Culture*, p. 271)

Even as late as 1620 the city created the office of city chronologer to record notable acts of the city and to supply it with appropriate entertainments. Projects such as the paving of Smithfield or the rebuilding of Aldgate were part of the same drive as was represented, at a less institutionalised level, by the outpouring of popular literature on London (Knowles, 'Spectacle of the Realm', p. 162).[20] As Ian Archer points out, 'one could hardly claim that such civic self-consciousness was a new development' at the time Stow was writing, but the period is notable nevertheless for 'the range of media involved and the sheer density of representations' (*Pursuit of Stability*, p. 17).

   This increasingly insistent self-representation has been linked to growing friction between city and crown, in the shape of various threats to the city's independence from sixteenth-century monarchs (Manley, *Literature and Culture*, p. 267), and this may be part of the explanation for it. But more evidently and simply it would seem to be a response to the speed of change in the city itself. A rising population was putting pressure on the boundaries of the city; new economic enterprises were challenging the traditional structures of labour; greater social mobility was putting traditional social divisions under pressure; and the more the shape of the city seemed to change, the more important it became to define and make sense of that shape. Telling stories about London, whether in official pageants, popular pamphlets or plays, was a way of making particular social relations visible. Material and psychic space are interdependent. The inhabitants of London produce its meanings by the ways they occupy it: by living within or outside its boundaries, working within or outside its structures of labour, operating within or outside the terms of its government, attending or not attending its civic ceremonies, worshipping or not worshipping in its churches, and so on. Representing the city on stage, in street pageantry, or in print is also a way of occupying its space, though a more mediated and self-reflexive way, in that it meditates on, as well as participates in, cultural practice.

   Plays performed in fixed playhouses were one of the most popular and accessible forms of representation available in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century London, and were a characteristically urban phenomenon. As Michael Neill has noted,

the early modern ambivalence towards the city is nowhere more marked than in attitudes to the theatre. One the one hand, theatre is promoted by apologists

like Heywood as the proper ornament of any metropolis that seeks to emulate the splendours of Greece and Rome; on the other, it is identified by its enemies – and sometimes, surprisingly, even by its own practitioners – as a place of disorder, a bastion of the unruly mob, a leveller of proper distinctions, and a source of moral and physical disease. (*Issues of Death*, p. 24)

Playhouse building in London may be said to begin with the construction of the Red Lion in Stepney in 1567. After that comes a steady stream: the Theatre in 1576, the Curtain in 1577, the Rose around 1587, the Swan in 1595. Around the turn of the century there is a surge of activity, and one that indicates increasing confidence on the part of the players, who are now building upgraded premises: the Chamberlain's Men, driven out of the Theatre by the expiry of their lease, build the Globe on the Bankside in 1599; the Admiral's Men, now uncomfortably threatened at the Rose by the proximity of the Globe, build the Fortune north of the river in 1600, contracting with the builder for conscious imitation of certain features of the Globe. Two children's companies, furthermore, become established around the same time at indoor theatres in St Paul's and the Blackfriars.

The open-air playhouses, as has often been pointed out, are all located either outside the city boundary or within liberties inside the boundary, and hence outside its jurisdiction, though playing at inns within city limits continued until the 1590s.[21] Theatres therefore stand at a crossroads between the city and the non-city. They are not simply 'marginal', as Steven Mullaney's argument would have it (in *The Place of the Stage*). Their location and status is more complex than that, and different playhouses stand in different relation to the city. The Blackfriars Theatre, for example, positioned in a liberty inside the city walls and discussed more fully in chapter 5 below, occupies a different position from either the theatres in the northern suburbs or the Bankside theatres across the river.

The word 'liberties', it should be noted, has contradictory meanings in this period, as seen by comparison of its use here with its meaning in the patent granted to Leicester's Men (quoted on p. 3 above). It can be used to denote the rights and privileges of a city and hence, by extension, its geographical and jurisdictional limits; or it can be used to denote precisely those areas that fall outside the authority of the city on account of their own hereditary rights and privileges.[22] The playhouses, whether situated in a suburb or a liberty, were free of city controls, but crucially determined by the city. They were simultaneously a city and a 'not-city' phenomenon, desired by, and paid for out of the pockets of, its inhabitants, yet banished by its governors.

The legal status of players and the economic foundations of playing companies together confirm their position on a cultural threshold at which city, suburbs and court all meet. The Act Against Vagabonds of 1572 defined players as vagrants, liable to the various punishments noted above, unless they 'belonged' to 'any baron of this realm or . . . any other honourable personage of greater degree' (14 Elizabeth I, c. 5). Hence the various titles of the companies, linking them to powerful noblemen. The Theatre was built with the protection of a patent granted to James Burbage and his company by the Earl of Leicester in 1574 which gave them highly protected status. Others less fortunate than Burbage's company simply pretended: the Common Council of London complained in 1584 that the city was full of players calling themselves the Queen's Men (Gildersleeve, *Government Regulation*, p. 41). After performance at city inns was banned, the players continued to need to show their documents with especial frequency when they were on tour, as they were required to produce them before being allowed a place to perform.

This system of licensing, then, seemed to formalise the old patronage relationship between great lords and players; but the terms of Burbage's letter to Leicester, asking for confirmation of his protection, make clear that the relationship did not extend to financial support. The letter specifically affirms that Burbage and his men do not intend 'to crave any further stipend or benefit at your lordship's hands but our liveries as we have had, and also your honour's license to certify that we are your household servants when we shall have occasion to travel' (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, p. 29). At precisely the same time as the law was demanding that players provide evidence of a fixed affiliation to a noble patron, they were actually establishing themselves as self-supporting economic units. In this respect they also straddled a dividing line between the organised labour of the city companies and the casual labour of the suburbs. The fact that players worked virtually by definition outside city limits by the end of the century and that they were therefore not subject to the regulations that bound city companies into an integrated structure fixing prices and wages was what enabled players to make their fortunes. Not restricted by a powerful, institutionalised hierarchy, as most workmen and businessmen were, actors could become shareholders as and when the opportunity arose. As James Forse has demonstrated, 'being "masterless" is just the point. The theatre business represented one of the few avenues of free enterprise open to an Elizabethan of modest means. Acting took small capital investment, and, at least until after the turn of the century, there was no long period of apprenticeship

required of one who entered the Players' profession. Success depended solely upon one's own effort, talent, craft and thrift' (*Art Imitates Business*, p. 14). Yet, as Forse also shows, playing companies borrowed in many ways from the practices of established city companies. The hierarchy of sharers, hired men and apprentices was clearly modelled on that of master-craftsmen, journeymen and apprentices, and the price of sharer-status (about £70) was the same as that of full status in a craft guild.[23]

The players were therefore operating in conditions that constructed what they did as simultaneously a trade and a service. Even as they played to paying audiences in purpose-built playhouses, the polite fiction was that they were rehearsing for more important performances at court. The argument featured regularly in the Privy Council's responses to the city's pleas for restrictions or outright bans on playing; and though the notion of 'rehearsal' may have been something of a fiction, performance at court certainly was not. The players made their reputations and their profits out of both court and city, and knew how to play one off against the other. They could successfully flout the authority of the city by invoking the support of their patrons, several of whom were members of the Privy Council. William Fleetwood, the recorder of London, wrote to Lord Burghley in 1584 to express his outrage at the insolence of a player, who had refused to submit to Fleetwood's attempt to discipline him and sent word instead 'that he was my Lord of Hunsdon's man' (Gildersleeve, *Government Regulation*, pp. 169–70).

It was not just a matter of players needing both court and city, however. Both court and city, including the city authorities, also needed the players. The city used those same players and commercial playwrights whose public performances were such a thorn in its flesh to write its pageants, just as the court later used them to write its masques. Men like Peele, Munday, Jonson, Dekker, Heywood, Middleton and Webster knew how to write for different audiences and, some of them, how to present material offered satirically in one venue for celebration in another.[24] Jonson, who received commissions from both court and city as well as writing for audiences at both public and private theatres, maintained a strong, even rigid, sense of distinction between his different modes of writing, and discarded his writing for the city, while carefully preserving his entertainments for the court.[25]

The fact that the same writers moved between the court and the city meant too that fashion travelled quickly and that the theatre became a central transmitter of new fashions. Courtly mores had always set high fashion. Now that the court was more firmly fixed in and around

Whitehall, with the Strand palaces stretching eastwards towards the city, and London was spilling over its boundaries to edge ever closer to the court to the west, the physical gap between court and city was less distinct. Architecturally, too, there was some closing of the gap: civic institutions like the Royal and the New Exchanges consciously cultivated a classical, courtly style. Lewis Mumford has argued that the baroque city should be viewed as 'a collective embellishment of the ways and gestures of the palace', a more pervasive cultivation of a lifestyle given over to luxury, leisure and display. The luxury goods displayed in the Exchanges' shops, Mumford argues, are a monument to the 'exquisite uselessness' that he identifies as the mark of the baroque (*City in History*, p. 429). Yet the value judgement underpinning Mumford's thesis here derives from a discourse of usefulness and thrift which might equally well be seen as a mark of the baroque city. Literature produced by and/or for the business classes repeatedly emphasises the need to work diligently, to guard against idleness and to contribute useful service to the common good, and this is a discourse long recognised as supported by a developing moderate Puritanism, also characteristic of London in this period. The emergence of a lifestyle dedicated to leisure, fashion and shopping is inseparable from a moral framework that judges those pursuits as luxurious, wasteful, useless and excessive; the conjunction is not just part of Mumford's critical discourse, it is also part of the 'baroque' moment. Stow's observation that the Londoners of his time privilege 'show and pleasure' over 'use or profit' (chapter 3 below) functions within the same conceptual framework as Mumford's bringing together of exquisiteness and uselessness.

It might also be argued that the interaction between city and court was rather less monolithically court-dominated than Mumford suggests. The cultivation of display surely need not proceed in one direction, starting at court and filtering down to the city. It is more likely to be produced by a combination of court and city influences. Which comes first: the demand for luxury goods or the capacity to supply them? Or, to put the question in a contemporary form: 'How would merchants thrive, if gentlemen would not be unthrifts? How could gentlemen be unthrifts if their humours were not fed?' (*Eastward Ho*, 1.i.38–40). The expansion of the market, and its relation to such developments as the colonial enterprise and the establishment of the new joint stock companies, shape the craving for the exotic as surely as do courtly wealth and leisured extravagance. The shopkeeper's display is precisely not useless;[26] its function is quite consciously to produce consumer desire, and this is what makes it

so morally problematic for those who represent it. The semi-darkness of the shop, where goods are both seen and not seen, on display but creatively (fraudulently?) obscured, quickly becomes a standard element in the satiric representation of buying and selling. (Shopkeepers in the Royal Exchange were ordered to get rid of any blinds or canvas that deliberately darkened the shop; see Saunders, 'Organisation of the Exchange', p. 94.) It is also, however, a practice acknowledged without either irony or outright condemnation in moral handbooks. William Scott's *Essay on Drapery*, alternatively titled *The Complete Citizen*, recommends a qualified honesty to the tradesman, advising him to keep his shop neither too light nor too dark: 'it is, or should be so ordered, that lest commodities be sold too dear, shops shall not be too dark; and lest they be sold too cheap, they shall not be too light' (pp. 41–2).

The craze for the *Wunderkammer*, or cabinet of wonders, in the late sixteenth century demonstrates the symbiosis of court and city in creating the conditions for the collection and display of exotic objects to flourish. Though the earliest collections, such as those in Vienna and Dresden, were dependent on royal or aristocratic wealth, the interest in curiosities was stimulated by travel to distant lands, underpinned by both commercial interest and an urge towards adventure and discovery. Merchants and citizens thus contributed to determining fashion just as much as dukes and emperors, and the fashion was one followed by court and city alike. Thomas Platter's diary, recording his visit to London in 1599, presents the *Wunderkammer* as a primarily urban phenomenon. He devotes considerable space to listing fifty items of special interest in the collection of 'Mr Cope a citizen of London who has spent much time in the Indies', and notes that Walter Cope is not the only such collector of 'strange objects' in London (*Travels*, pp. 171–3). Platter's own pleasure in inspecting the collection, as well as his indication that there are other collectors in the city, offer evidence of the interest in exotica as an established urban fashion in late sixteenth-century London.[27]

Social mobility tended to reinforce the blurring of distinction between court and city. While the sons of tradesmen were rising stars in the new professions of writing and theatre, the sons of gentlemen were becoming apprenticed to trades. The expansion of the educated, 'professional' class extended a social territory which was neither trade nor court, while the growth of literacy and the production of social handbooks supposedly for different classes contributed to the conditions for class mobility. The urban economy was instrumental both in facilitating that mobility and in confounding rigid class distinctions. While the guild system

enabled an apprentice to rise to an alderman, even a lord mayor, new ventures like the joint stock companies attracted subscribers from all social levels and brought the interests of different classes together in colonial enterprise. Men like Sir Thomas Gresham became attached to the court without relinquishing their business activities, while books in praise of the city might conceive of themselves as 'pleasant for gentlemen, not unseemly for magistrates, and most profitable for prentices'.[28]

Social mobility encouraged precisely the consumption and display that made it difficult to read distinctions of birth. As Lawrence Stone points out, it is new money that needs to spend ostentatiously in order to advertise a status that is uncertain by virtue of being tied only to wealth and not to birth (*Crisis of the Aristocracy*, pp. 184–8). Fashion changes swiftly too, because the need to keep up the advertisement and the expenditure stimulates an increasing demand for novelty, for endlessly new ways of signalling one's good taste and spending capacity. It is therefore not surprising that court and city come closest to merging in the arena of fashion, so that a fashionable figure like the gallant is scarcely attributable to either single environment. The *OED*'s first definition of a gallant as 'a man of fashion and pleasure; a fine gentleman' pinpoints fashionable leisure as the area where court and city meet. Indeed Dekker's *Gull's Hornbook*, instructing the city gallant on how to behave, parodies the social handbooks that teach the courtier how to behave. Nor is it coincidental that visiting the theatre is portrayed as one of the pursuits of Dekker's gallant, since theatres were not only new and fashionable haunts in themselves, but places where different social classes came together. Courtiers and gentlemen went to the theatre alongside professionals and apprentices, and the young men of the Inns of Court who are so often identified as forming a significant proportion of private theatre audiences might equally well be progressing towards court office or city employment.

What made possible the mixing of ranks in theatre audiences was the commoditisation of theatre. Once playhouses became established and plays were offered for the consumption of paying customers more often than they were commissioned for private performance, anyone could buy entrance to a performance. Apprentices could see what courtiers saw: the same actors, performing in plays by the same playwrights, and often the same plays. Although patronised performance persisted, both at court and in aristocratic houses, the very fact that these performances were offered by the same companies as offered their plays for sale to a different audience changed the nature of the product. This is particu-

larly clear in cases where the same play moved between different venues; but it was also true of works specifically commissioned for particular audiences. The Alleyn who played his part in the king's royal entry to the city in 1604 was the same Alleyn who had thrilled audiences at the Rose with his portrayal of Tamburlaine, Faustus and the Jew of Malta. The Jonson who wrote part of the text for that royal entry in 1604 and *The Masque of Blackness* for the Jacobean court in 1605 was the same Jonson who had been imprisoned for his part in *The Isle of Dogs* in 1597 and who was again to be imprisoned for satirising the king and the Scots in *Eastward Ho* later in 1605.

What was on offer in playhouses, in city streets, at court revels and, afterwards, in bookshops was a commodity both popular and fashionable, though of course some venues were more or less popular or fashionable than others. Plays offered at the Blackfriars, with its higher prices and more select clientele than at the amphitheatres, consciously set high fashion, while plays at the Red Bull went for popularity even at the cost of seeming old-fashioned. Even the same play performed by the King's Men at the Blackfriars, the Globe and Whitehall had different resonances, and a different fashion status, in each.

As the market for printed play texts expanded, title pages emphasised their functioning first and foremost as commodities for sale. And as Jeffrey Masten has argued, these title pages remind us that the plays they advertise stand 'at the intersection of two interconnected media markets': they are both 'theatrical commodities much like the props and costumes, valued for their ability to draw paying crowds into the often highly successful business places of the theatres' and 'print commodities, marketed by publishers who attempted to capitalize on the popularity generated by theatrical performances' (*Textual Intercourse*, p. 114). Even private patrons were selecting what they wanted from the market that was theatre; and the equation between theatre and the market was one made by contemporaries, as Douglas Bruster's excellent discussion demonstrates (*Drama and the Market*, ch. 1). What was on offer in both, he points out, quoting Stephen Gosson, was 'choice without shame' on payment of the right money (*Drama and the Market*, p. 6).

The new spaces of purpose-built market and theatre were conceived in relation to each other and to changing and developing conceptions of other, wider and more familiar spaces, notably those of court and city. The open courtyard and grandiose pillars of the Royal Exchange translated the architectural values of the palace to a building designed specifically for the expanding city. London had no central public

square for civic display; St Paul's, unlike St Peter's in Rome or St Mark's in Venice, was tucked away amongst narrow streets (Cheapside excepted) with no large forum for assembly extending before it; and such open spaces as the city had, as Stow points out, were continually under threat. Gresham's Royal Exchange attempted to create a space for civic display, though it was a display primarily related to one aspect of the city: its commerce. Civic pride was thus particularly closely associated, for Londoners, with commercial success. The classical composition of the internal facade, furthermore, made the building 'unique in the City in 1566 and for many years to come and, save for Somerset House, with few comparisons in London as a whole' (Saunders, 'Building of the Exchange', p. 41; cf. ch. 3, pp. 61–4 and epilogue, n12 below).

Yet the architecture of the amphitheatres had associations similar to as well as different from those of the Royal Exchange. The pillars seemed to contemporaries to speak from within an elite and classicist architectural vocabulary, and just as John Norden singled out the 'pillars of marble' in the Royal Exchange (*Speculum Britanniae*, p. 35), so Johannes De Witt remarked on their presence at the Swan. Even though De Witt recognised that the Swan pillars were not marble, but wood painted to look like marble, the overall effect for him was still one of magnificence, not tackiness, and he assumed that the construction of the playhouse consciously imitated ancient classical precedent.[29] John Stockwood, like De Witt, emphasised magnificence as a characteristic of playhouse construction when he attacked the Theatre as a 'gorgeous playing place' in a sermon preached at Paul's Cross in 1578 (Ordish, *Early London Theatres*, p. 64).

The yard, on the other hand, was clearly not aiming at a similar effect. Whereas the 'quadrate' (Norden's term) construction of the Royal Exchange around a central courtyard was seen as part of its elegance, the pricing policy of the public theatres linked the central open space with the lower classes. Thomas Platter, another European visitor to London at around the same time as De Witt, admired the decorativeness and comfort of the galleried seating at the Curtain but emphasised the lowliness of the yard, with its one-penny admission and standing room only (*Travels*, pp. 166–7). The spacious open courtyard of the Royal Exchange, designed as a showpiece, inviting free movement and removed to a degree from the shop displays (which were on the upper storeys and would presumably have faced inward into the building),[30] was visually and symbolically quite distinct from a yard packed with

paying customers, which was itself the mere surround to a different central focus: the stage.

What both new forms of building most importantly shared, however, was a foregrounding of display. Both the Royal Exchange and the theatres had products for sale and aimed to display both themselves as buildings and their products to the best possible advantage; but both also created the conditions for the consumers who came to inspect the saleable products to gaze on their fellow consumers, to display themselves and to revel in the pleasures of mutual showing and looking (what Stow sharply labels as seeing and showing vanity, p. 20, above). As Platter pointed out in 1599, the advantage of the galleries over the yard in an amphitheatre was that there the spectator 'not only sees everything well, but can also be seen' (*Travels*, p. 167). Both merchants and actors would have acknowledged, of course, that there were considerable differences between the modes of looking. Amongst these differences, two seem paramount. One is the economic implications. Where goods on display in the Royal Exchange shops aimed to stir consumers' desires to the point where they would put their hands in their pockets, plays were already paid for before they were displayed, nor could they be owned by individual consumers or taken home after purchase. They were by definition ephemeral pleasures. Yet, as the antitheatrical lobby kept saying, they stirred desires to a dangerous degree. Wherever the spectators looked, whether at the show, at the other spectators, or even at the building, their looking was likely to stimulate desires, erotic, immoral, materialistic, or all of these.

The second significant difference between theatre and shopping is also importantly related to matters of desire. It is the playfulness of theatre. Window-shopping may be playful to an extent, insofar as consumers imagine owning the various goods on display and play with notions of possession, of self-creation, of manufacturing a particular persona via particular purchases; but the act of purchase is a real transaction, one that transfers the purchased object from one place and person to another. The display of commodities helps to construct what is fashionable, and the moment of purchase puts the buyer in possession of the fashionable object of desire. In the theatre, by contrast, the spectator participates imaginatively in what is bought. He or she buys entrance to a space where what is on offer is the chance to play in imagination at being someone or something else, the chance to look not at objects for sale but at modes of being. But theatre can equally help to construct what is fashionable, since fashion is not just a matter of owning

the right accessories, but of knowing what to do with objects, how to move, speak or stand still, what to put on show; and theatre in the latter part of the 1590s was especially preoccupied with the fashionable persona. Plays may not themselves be commodities in the sense of objects that can be bought and taken home, but they are learning how to offer commoditised behaviours, pieces of display that can be taken outside the theatre and possessed by way of imitation. Dekker is explicit about this in *The Gull's Hornbook* when he advises his gull to 'hoard up the finest play-scraps you can get' (p. 96). The plays that first create this kind of theatre in the 1590s, offering up their fragments for acquisition and reassembly, are the subject of chapter 3; but chapter 2 first turns to the problems encountered by a play that seeks open celebration of its loyalties to court and city. Though this chapter has sought to demonstrate the numerous points of overlap and interaction between the two, there remains an irrefutable ideological distance between them, and it is the negotiation of allegiances and resistances that emerges as the central focus of the next chapter.