CHAPTER 1

Theatre history as personality

> Be not scurrulous in conu*er*sation nor Satiricall in thy iest*es*,
> thone will make thee vnwelcome to all company,
> thother pull on quarrells & gett thee hatred of thy best freinds,
> for Sulphrous iest*es* when they savour too much of truth
> leave a bytternes in the myndes of those that be toucht.
>
> A Jacobean Commonplace Book[1]

John Alleyn, an innholder and stage player, who might have been best known even in his own day as the brother of the stage player, Edward Alleyn, deposed in a 1589–90 lawsuit in the Court of Chancery on behalf of Margaret Brayne, widow of John Brayne, a financier of the Theatre and brother-in-law of James Burbage, against whom the suit was filed. Alleyn was one of four deponents who answered interrogatories for both parties. Speaking to the widow's questions on 6 February 1592, Alleyn acknowledged knowing that the suit concerned the division of profits from the playhouse and contiguous buildings and that an arbitration had formerly been sought. Alleyn did not know details of the payments related to the arbitrated award, but he had witnessed encounters on divers occasions when the widow and an ally, Robert Myles, came to the Theatre to claim the Braynes' share. On one occasion in particular, Alleyn arrived just after Richard Burbage had chased them away with a broomstick. According to Alleyn, James Burbage bragged that he feared no retaliation from Myles and the widow because "my sones/ yf they wilbe Rueled by me/ shall at ther next com*in*g provyde charged Pistolles w^{t} powder and hempsede/ to shoote them in the legg*es*."[2] Alleyn claimed that he appealed to Burbage to "haue A conscience in the matter" and pay his widowed sister-in-law her due, to which Burbage answered, "hang her ho^{r} . . . she getteth nothing here/ lett her wyn it at the Com*m*en lawe/ and bring the Shiref w^{t} her to put her in possession."[3]

Alleyn deposed further that eight days after the broomstick episode he asked Burbage for the money that had been withheld from him and his fellow players, money due them for performances at the Theatre. When Burbage refused payment, Alleyn chided him "that belike he ment to deale w^{t} them/ as he did w^{t} the po^{r} wydowe" and that, if he did, Alleyn "wold compleyne to ther lorde & M^{r} the lord Admyrall"; Burbage "in A Rage" countered "that he cared not for iij of the best lord*es* of them all."[4] Deposing for the Burbage faction three months later (6 May 1592), Alleyn stood by his account of the broomstick episode; further, he refused to confirm the charge invited by the phrasing of the Burbage interrogatories that he had reported Myles's threat to "pull the defend^{t*es*} Burbag*es*" out of the Theatre "by the eares."[5] Alleyn added three key details to the matter before the court: that James Burbage had paid Henry Laneman half the profits of the Theatre in exchange for half the profits of the nearby Curtain playhouse; that Burbage had disparaged Alleyn's lord and lords generally "in the Attyring housse/ or place where the players make them readye . . . in the hearing of one James Tunstall . . . and others"; and that Burbage's boasts following the broomstick episode had happened "about A yere past."[6]

In 1913 Charles W. Wallace, who found the interrogatories in the Chancery lawsuit and collated them in *The First London Theatre* with already published materials, deduced solely on the basis of the angry exchange between John Alleyn and James Burbage that Alleyn's "interference" in the confrontation between Margaret Brayne and the Burbages "led to the withdrawal of the Admiral's company from the Theatre."[7] Wallace deduced further that Tunstall and the rest of the Admiral's Men, when they heard Alleyn request their pay and receive nothing but verbal abuse, left the Theatre to rejoin Alleyn at Philip Henslowe's Rose playhouse (which Wallace believed Alleyn had leased when he left the Burbages at the Theatre). By commenting subsequently that "the Burbages and the Alleyns belonged to rival companies" after the incident at the Theatre, Wallace implied a link between personal quarrels (the Alleyn-Burbage encounter at the Theatre in 1590) and commerce (the Admiral's Men versus the Chamberlain's Men, 1594–1603).[8] E. K. Chambers, in *The Elizabethan Stage* (1923), and W. W. Greg, in *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses* (1931), accepted Wallace's inference of polarized relations between the Alleyns and the Burbages. Robert B. Sharpe was therefore in the mainstream in 1935 when he constructed a

narrative of commercial rivalry on the hypothesis of a "bitter personal enmity between the Burbadges and the Alleyns and their violent quarrel at the Theatre in 1591."[9] In a recent commentary on playhouse commerce, Andrew Gurr does not mention the feud but accepts its corollary that "between 1594 and 1600 . . . only two companies were competing for the London playgoing crowds"; he describes business between the Admiral's Men and the Chamberlain's Men as a "settled rivalry at opposite ends of the City."[10]

The narrative of an Alleyn-Burbage feud might have been new in 1913, but the telling of theatre history by way of personal quarrels was not. It was at least as old as the conversations in 1619 between Ben Jonson and William Drummond of Hawthornden. Jonson, in addition to taking pot-shots at fellow poets such as the jibe that Shakespeare "wanted Arte," told Drummond at least one story germane to issues of theatrical rivalry: that "he had many quarrells with Marston beat him & took his Pistol from him, wrote his Poetaster on him the beginning of y^{m} were that Marston represented him jn the stage."[11] These conversations did not become public until 1711, when *The Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden* appeared in print. Already, however, the perception of Jonson as choleric had influenced literary criticism. The complementary pairing in Thomas Fuller's *Worthies* of Jonson, the Spanish galleon, in contests of wit with Shakespeare, the English man-of-war, as well as the measured comparison in John Dryden's "Essay on Dramatic Poesy" (1668), were supplanted by Dryden himself in "Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire" (1693). There he criticized Jonson's poem, "To the Memory of my Beloved, the Author Mr. William Shakespeare," which appeared among the dedicatory verses in the First Folio in 1623. Dryden called the poem an "An Insolent, Sparing, and Invidious Panegyrick," and he labeled Jonson "*the worst-Natur'd Muse*" for offering the "most God-like Commendation" of Shakespeare-the-personality while denying that praise to Shakespeare-the-playwright.

In "Some Account of the Life, &c. of Mr. William Shakespear," the biographical essay accompanying an edition of Shakespeare's plays in 1709, Nicholas Rowe added to the impression that Jonson was jealous by telling a story of his ingratitude. According to Rowe, Jonson took a play to the Chamberlain's Men, some of whom "turn'd it carelessly and superciliously over," and were to reject it "with an ill-natur'd Answer" when "*Shakespear* luckily cast his Eye

upon it, and found something so well in it as to engage him first to read it through, and afterwards to recommend Mr. *Johnson* and his Writings to the Publick."[12] Rowe, observing that afterward the two men "were profess'd Friends," implied that Jonson might not have given Shakespeare "an equal return of Gentleness and Sincerity" for the good turn of recommending his playscript.[13] Rowe's tone, which disparaged Jonson and praised Shakespeare, was perpetuated in the commentary that accompanied editions of Shakespeare's works at the end of the eighteenth century.

By 1808 Jonson's supporters had had enough. In *An Examination of the Charges Maintained by Messrs. Malone, Chalmers, and Others of Ben Jonson's Enmity, etc. towards Shakspeare*, Octavius Gilchrist railed at Shakespeare's recent editors, George Steevens in particular, claiming that the "fair fame" of Jonson had "been blackened, his memory traduced, and his writings perverted, for the unworthy purpose of raising a rival poet [Shakespeare] on the ruins of his reputation."[14] In 1816 William Gifford replaced Gilchrist as Jonson's apologist. In *The Works of Ben Jonson*, in an essay called "Proofs of Ben Jonson's Malignity, From the Commentators on Shakspeare," Gifford insisted that the relations between Jonson and Shakespeare had been all sweetness and light: "It is my fixed persuasion . . . that Jonson never received either patronage, favour, or assistance of any kind from Shakspeare. I am further persuaded that they were friends and associates till the latter finally retired – that no feud, no jealousy ever disturbed their connection – that Shakspeare was pleased with Jonson, and that Jonson loved and admired Shakspeare."[15] In an accompanying biography, "Memoirs of Ben Jonson," Gifford absolved Jonson and blamed everything on his critics: "Having gratuitously supposed a quarrel, the next step is to make it up."[16]

Gifford blamed not only Shakespeare's editors for maligning Jonson but also a group of Jonson's fellow playwrights. In the biographical essay that accompanied his edition of the plays ("Memoirs of Ben Jonson"), Gifford claimed that John Marston and Thomas Dekker "viewed his success with peculiar mortification, and . . . lent themselves to the cabal already raised against him."[17] Dekker had been charged with enmity toward Jonson for some time, but the naming of Marston was new. The charge against Dekker was that he resented being satirized in the figure of Crispinus in *Poetaster* and retaliated in *Satiromastix* by mocking Jonson in the character of Horace (Jonson's admiring self-portrait in *Poetaster*). The resulting

face-off, *Satiromastix* vs. *Poetaster*, took the name of "Poetomachia," a term coined by Dekker to describe the wits-combat in an address "To the World" published with the quarto of *Satiromastix* in 1602. In *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (1691), Gerard Langbaine dismissed Dekker and his play with a shrug of critical disdain, declaring that they "were no ways comparable" to Jonson and his.[18] However Gifford, perhaps influenced by Jonson's remarks about Marston in the Drummond conversations (information unavailable to Langbaine), named Marston as the butt of Jonson's scorn in the character of Crispinus. In a note on *Poetaster*, Gifford exclaimed enthusiastically "that the CRISPINUS of Jonson is MARSTON" and "Decker . . . the Demetrius of the present play."[19]

Gifford failed to convince Shakespeareans of Jonson's innocence, but he succeeded in promoting a scholarly industry based on satirical pointings in the plays of 1599–1601 that came to be called the "War of the Theatres," or "Stage Quarrel." Dr. Robert Cartwright, in an 1864 essay that otherwise pitted Jonson against Shakespeare, found characters in *Cynthia's Revels* that satirized Marston, Dekker, John Lyly, and Shakespeare.[20] Richard Simpson opened a new line of research in 1878 when he proclaimed in *The School of Shakspere* that Marston was part-author of *Histrio-Mastix*.[21] Scholars rushed to detail the dramatists' rivalry by way of additional satirical pointings both in dramatic and non-dramatic literature. Josiah H. Penniman took the phrase, "War of the Theatres," as the title of his monograph in 1897, which used material developed by F. G. Fleay in *A Chronicle History of the London Stage* (1890) and *A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama* (1891). Coincident with Penniman's work, James T. Foard published "The Dramatic Dissentions of Jonson, Marston, and Dekker" in *The Manchester Quarterly* (1897). Building on Penniman, Roscoe A. Small published *The Stage Quarrel Between Ben Jonson and the So-Called Poetasters* (1899). Fleay thus spoke for his generation by calling the War of the Theatres the defining event in the history of relations among the Elizabethan companies: "any criticism of any play bearing as date of production one of the three years 1599 to 1601 which does not take account of this, for the time, stage-absorbing matter must be imperfect and of small utility."[22]

Fleay, by characterizing the War of the Theatres as "stage-absorbing matter," invited scholars to assume that quarrels among dramatists had commercial ramifications, specifically, an equivalency in quarrels among the playhouses. Small asserted the complicity of

company commerce in professional quarrels explicitly by claiming that the rivalry among the dramatists "and the theatrical companies represented by them must necessarily have grown very strong, and given rise to many petty feuds."[23] In *The Elizabethan Stage*, E. K. Chambers declared that the War of the Theatres was an issue "for literature and biography," yet he did not reject the concept of company rivalry in which personality was treated as theatre history.[24] In *The Real War of the Theaters* (1935), R. B. Sharpe merged the players' and dramatists' quarrels into an explicit theory of commerce; appropriating Penniman's title and Wallace's feud among players, he constructed an argument about commercial rancor between companies and playhouses: the Admiral's Men at the Rose and Fortune vs. the Chamberlain's Men at the Theatre and Globe. In *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (1952), Alfred Harbage transformed Sharpe's war between the two men's companies into a class war between the public and private playhouses. Harbage identified the rival companies as "the 'common players' with their repertories, and the 'little eyases' who cried out on top of question," that is, the men's companies versus the boys'.[25] There, in effect, the perception of playhouse commerce rests: typified in 1594–1599 as a rivalry between the Admiral's and Chamberlain's Men and in 1599–1603 (or 1609) as a rivalry between the men's and boys' companies.

In making the argument for the Admiral's Men vs. the Chamberlain's Men, Sharpe gave the competition a political spin. He argued that playhouse rivalry mirrored the rivalry of the two powerful factions in Elizabethan politics, the Cecil party (Admiral's Men) and Essex party (Chamberlain's Men); for, as he noted, the men's companies "were of course in politics, whether they wished to be or not; they were attached to the persons of the great place-holding nobles."[26] The ways in which government and patronage affected the business relationships among companies has received more attention in recent years. In *The Business of Playing* (1992) William Ingram notes the influence of a decree in 1550 by the Court of Aldermen that prohibited players without a license from playing in London; according to Ingram, this decree hastened not only the affiliation of players into companies with a patron but also the disappearance of "loose and informal associations of players in the City of London."[27] It seems also to have led some players to think of their business in terms more specifically managerial. As Ingram puts

it: "The licensing regulations and the increased governmental assertion of control impelled the players . . . to take into their own hands . . . the terms and circumstances under which they played."[28] For some players, as Ingram shows, one such circumstance was the erection of buildings to be used exclusively for playing. Another, as I argue in subsequent chapters, was the development of a business protocol and repertory practices that enabled individual companies to flourish and the industry itself to expand. The model for these relationships, as I also argue, was the guild.

Several recent studies have explored the ways in which specific politicians and patrons affected the formation and success of individual companies. In *The Queen's Men and their Plays* (1998), Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean consider the role of Sir Francis Walsingham in the creation of the Queen's Men in 1583 and the circumstances of their playing. McMillin and MacLean see Walsingham as having had two basic intentions for the Queen's Men: they were to travel, and thus "carry the name and influence of the monarch through the country"; and they were to perform plays that promoted Walsingham's agenda of moderate Protestantism and Tudor allegiance.[29] As a politically protected company, as well as explicitly the Queen's Men, the company had significant advantages commercially: the players received rewards for performances in the provinces that were "double or triple the amount usually given to visiting troupes";[30] also they were guaranteed performances at Court (eleven of fourteen performances by adult professional companies, winter 1583 – spring 1586). Otherwise, the Queen's Men were on their own to develop strategies by which their company might flourish. As McMillin and MacLean tell the story, their decisions were successful for a while. Perhaps their most important repertorial decision was to take the mandate of presenting Tudor history and turn it into the English history play. This strategy proved to be commercially sound as long as the presentation in the plays of the "substantial truth and plain speech" of history was a novelty to audiences,[31] but the Queen's Men did not foresee that their dramaturgical style would soon look old-fashioned and that a new generation of dramatists would work magic with blank verse and characterization. Perhaps their most important decision about location was to continue being primarily a touring company. Initially, too, this was smart, for the company split up and multiplied its profits. But by the 1590s other companies were established in

London in their own playhouses where they attracted crowds six and seven days a week without paying for horses, a wagon, and lodging for twelve men and some boys.

Andrew Gurr and Richard Dutton consider the influence in the 1590s of the Privy Council and a pair of its members who were also the patrons of players. In *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (1996), Gurr describes the years of 1583–1594 as ones of cooperation between Charles Howard, briefly Lord Chamberlain and later Lord Admiral and Earl of Nottingham, and Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon and Howard's father-in-law as well as his successor as Lord Chamberlain. After 1592–3 when plague disrupted playing, Hunsdon, by then Lord Chamberlain, thought it was "essential to set up a new regime with strong companies."[32] His model was the monopoly of the Queen's Men established by Walsingham, and the result was a duopoly of the Admiral's Men and Chamberlain's Men, who divided up the best players and settled comfortably across town from one another. And, according to Gurr, this arrangement was understood by the respective companies who "knew themselves to be based in London as part of the government's policy, with accompanying privileges."[33] Dutton, extending an argument in his *Mastering the Revels* (1991), considers the pivotal order of 22 June 1600 by the Privy Council in the licensing and control of playing companies. In that order the Privy Council allowed "two howses and noe more" to be used for stage playing,[34] specifying their addresses in Middlesex and Surrey. In this allowance, the order named the servants of the Lord Admiral and the Lord Chamberlain as the authorized companies; it further specified that "the two howses allowed maie play each of them in there seuerall howse twice a weeke and noe oftener."[35] In Dutton's opinion, this order "re-inforced the prerogatives of the status quo," that is, it reinforced the Privy Council's endorsement of the cartel, or duopoly, established by the lords Howard and Hunsdon in 1594.[36]

And yet, as Dutton himself observes, the order of 22 June 1600 – clear and categorical though it was – did not prevent the expansion of the playhouse industry. The Curtain was in business after 1600, as it had been since 1576. The Swan, built in 1595, might have been closed in 1598, but William Ingram finds "no clear evidence" that it was and some evidence that Francis Langley, owner of the playhouse, "was not yet finished as an entrepreneur at the Swan."[37] The Boar's Head was built in 1598 and expanded in 1599; Herbert Berry

determines that it served alternately as the London venue for Derby's Men (1599 to 1601, 1602 to 1603) and Worcester's/Queen Anne's Men (1601 to 1602, 1603 to 1605 or 1606). The boys' playhouses were arguably exempt from the Privy Council's order; nonetheless, their business contributed to the spread of the theatrical industry: the playhouse at Paul's opened in 1599; Blackfriars opened in 1600. And more playhouses were to come, including the Red Bull and Whitefriars. Neither did the June 1600 order stop the lord mayor and aldermen from complaining about "the great abuse and disorder within and about the Cittie of London by reason of the multitude of Playhowses,"[38] as they did some time before 31 December 1601, as they had for years, and as they were to continue to do. Neither did the order succeed in limiting the days of playing to two. In fact, regulations by the Privy Council and apparent favoritism by powerful lords seem to have had no more effect in the 1590s than had the lord mayors' and aldermen's regulations on "the continuing expansion and prosperity of the enterprise" in the 1550s and 1560s.[39]

Scholars interested in a "material theatre" have directed attention to the Elizabethan marketplace, in both its real and metaphoric senses, as a stimulant in the economic success of the playhouses. For Steven Mullaney the theatrical industry succeeded in that market by "dislocating itself from the strict confines of the existing social order and taking up a place on the margins" of civic, governmental, and economic life in London; outside the City, the companies could develop "a new and ideologically mobile drama" that, presumably, might subvert political hegemonies but draw in customers (*The Place of the Stage*, 1988).[40] Paul Yachnin modifies this argument by claiming that the players won "a privileged, profitable, and powerless marginality" and appealed "to a large and heterogeneous audience" by promoting the idea that drama, as play, was "separate from real life . . . [and therefore] separate from power" (*Stage-Wrights*, 1997).[41] Douglas Bruster takes a less political and more sociological approach to the theatrical marketplace by pursuing the thesis that "[p]roviding dramatic commodities for public consumption, the Renaissance theater functioned as an institutionalized, profitable market" (*Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare*, 1992).[42]

By perceiving theatres as markets and plays as commodities, scholars loosen the hold on playhouse competition of the tightly scripted narrative about quarreling dramatists. In the following

chapters, I separate further the commercial policies of the companies from the personal or ideological quarrels of players and poets. I argue in chapter two that commerce among the playing companies was built on patterns of fraternity, the roots of which were feudal hierarchies such as kinship, service, and the guild. In doing so, I build on Ingram's observation that there was a transition of companies from loosely organized groups of common players to relatively stable companies under the banner of a lord, a transition that (I suggest) coincided with a shift from troupes with discrete economic existences to companies with a shared commercial agenda. Governmental pressures might have actually, if unintentionally, facilitated the economic cooperation of the companies. By a combination of sanctions and limitations, various political powers – e. g., lords, Privy Council, aldermen, lord mayor, Bishop of London – defined a space wherein the companies could do as they pleased commercially. That the companies quickly recognized this safe zone is suggested in the response of the Corporation of London to the Queen's Men's petition in November 1584. The Queen's Men asked the Privy Council for permission, now that winter was coming on, to play in the City; the Corporation objected, giving as one reason that the toleration granted the previous year had been abused, and "all the places of playeing were filled with men calling themselues the Quenes players."[43] Viewed from this angle, the protection given one company in 1583, and two companies in 1594, made it possible for all companies to operate within limits somewhat protected from the collective disapproval of civic officials and churchmen.

Also, the official expectation that the Queen's Men would travel appears significant to several developments in company business. For one, touring was further institutionalized as normal commerce. Scholars in the Records of Early English Drama project (REED) have found by mapping the provincial visits of companies that touring was neither an act of economic desperation nor the refuge of bad companies. Companies traveled, even after playhouses were built in London; thus, when those playhouses were closed, the companies had a familiar and routine business practice to fall back on. For another, the continued habit of touring meant that there was some fluidity in the London theatrical marketplace. The Admiral's Men might have had an exclusive lease at the Rose and Fortune, and the Chamberlain's Men at the Theatre and Globe, but companies came and went at the Swan, Curtain, and Boar's Head. New