

# Issues in Review

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TOM RUTTER (*Contributing Editor*), ELEANOR C. COLLINS,  
CHARLES CATHCART, ELIZABETH FORD, AND CLARE SMOUT

## Dramatists, Playing Companies, and Repertories

### Introduction: The Repertory-Based Approach

In their different ways, the four essays below are products of a tendency that has been increasingly in evidence in early modern theatre studies over the last twenty years; namely, a willingness to approach plays in relation to the acting companies that staged them and the other works in those companies' repertories, rather than simply as part of the oeuvre of a particular dramatist.<sup>1</sup> Studies of individual companies and their repertories exemplify this tendency; such works include Roslyn Knutson's *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company 1594–1613*, Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean's *The Queen's Men and Their Plays*, Mary Bly's *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queens on the Early Modern Stage* (which deals with the King's Revels company), Andrew Gurr's *The Shakespeare Company, 1594–1642*, and Lucy Munro's *Children of the Queen's Revels*.<sup>2</sup> The single year 2009 saw the publication of books by Andrew Gurr on the Admiral's Men and by Brian Walsh on Shakespeare and the Queen's Men, as well as a collection of essays on the Queen's Men edited by Helen Ostovich, Holger Schott Syme, and Andrew Griffin.<sup>3</sup> It also saw the appearance of *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*, edited by Richard Dutton; the first eight of thirty-five chapters explore playing companies, with further chapters devoted to players, patrons, and an individual company, the Lady Elizabeth's Men.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, an earlier landmark volume, *A New History of Early English Drama* (edited by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan) devotes one chapter of twenty-five to 'The Repertory', and a further two to 'Personnel and Professionalization' and 'Patronage

and the Economics of Theater'.<sup>5</sup> While Cox and Kastan's book registers the importance of acting companies and their repertories within early modern theatrical culture, it does not offer them anything like the space or prominence they get in Dutton's, and the contrast may reflect the expansion of this particular field in the intervening decade. The introduction below outlines why critics and theatre historians have come to see repertory studies as a productive way of thinking about early modern drama; makes reference to recent developments; and finally situates the essays that follow in relation to those developments.

Various commentators have explored the possible reasons for, and the interpretive advantages of, the 'repertory approach'. For Munro, it reflects a post-structuralist willingness to question the position of the author as guarantor of literary meaning. She cites Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, where authors are presented as subordinate to linguistic systems that are outside their control; in her earlier ground-clearing piece, she also makes reference to Barthes's 'The Death of the Author'.<sup>6</sup> Surely the French theorist most relevant to repertory studies, however, is the third one Munro cites, Michel Foucault, whose essay 'What is an Author?' presents the very concept of authorship as a historical phenomenon:

Although, since the eighteenth century, the author has played the role of the regulator of the fictive, a role quite characteristic of our era of industrial and bourgeois society, of individualism and private property, still, given the historical modifications that are taking place, it does not seem necessary that the author function remain constant in form, complexity, and even in existence.<sup>7</sup>

If the modern notion of the author is understood as a product of the Enlightenment, then that prompts the question of how we ought to approach pre-Enlightenment texts. One critical response has been to problematize Renaissance notions of authorship, and to investigate how writers such as Spenser, Jonson, and Milton, rather than simply inhabiting a pre-existing or trans-historical role as author, actively create such a role for themselves.<sup>8</sup> This approach still leaves the problem, however, of how to treat texts whose relationships with their authors are less amenable to modern preconceptions.

One obvious category of texts that fits into this description is pre-Shakespearean drama. Lukas Erne's *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* has done a great deal to contest the notion that it is not until the early seventeenth century that 'the concept of dramatic authorship emerges ... with

the advent of a new kind of scholarly writer' represented by Ben Jonson;<sup>9</sup> yet Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean persuasively make the case in *The Queen's Men and Their Plays* that the pre-1590s theatre, at least, was primarily 'an actors' theatre': 'The evidence that we have to go on produces names for actors in 1583, names for companies, and names for playhouses, and it is that kind of detail, the names of things, that one does not find for writers and their plays in the professional theatre of the same time'.<sup>10</sup> This state of affairs is one justification of their decision to use the acting company as the framework within which to investigate the drama of this period, a decision that proves highly fruitful. It enables them to make connections between the company's plays and to identify common features (as one might do with the texts within an individual dramatist's corpus of work), as well as using the company's titular patron and its probable founders, Francis Walsingham and the Earl of Leicester, as a means of locating it in the political networks of Elizabethan England.

In terms of the range of practices considered by McMillin and MacLean — patronage, touring, publication, casting, dramaturgy — *The Queen's Men and Their Plays* is an eclectic work, and this element reflects another advantage of the repertory approach. That is, it offers commentators a means of 'considering the impact of all those involved in the production and dissemination of plays: dramatists, actors, shareholders, playhouse functionaries, patrons, audiences and publishers'.<sup>11</sup> It is at the level of the acting company, where the work of playwrights becomes a product offered up for public consumption, that these various agencies intersect. Accordingly, it makes sense to see repertory studies not simply as a response to the ideas of French theorists of the mid to late twentieth century, but more widely as a way of synthesizing the findings of theatre historians over a rather longer period. To give one example, Gurr's *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, which considers whether different types of playgoer frequented different theatres and the extent to which the companies' repertorial practices reflect this phenomenon, participates in a long-running critical dialogue that takes in Ann Jennalie Cook's *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London*, Alfred Harbage's *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*, and Robert Bridges' 'On the Influence of the Audience' (first printed in the ten-volume 'Stratford Town Shakespeare' of 1904).<sup>12</sup> Roslyn Knutson's *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company* can be seen as the outcome of a similarly well-established debate over how we ought to interpret Philip Henslowe's theatrical records and what they have to tell us about the business practices,

not just of the Admiral's Men and the other companies with which he was involved, but also of the Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men.<sup>13</sup> Focusing on the repertory enables a critical engagement with early modern plays that demonstrates an awareness of the multiple economic and political contexts which produced those plays. To this extent, repertory studies grows out of the historicist emphasis in early modern studies during the late twentieth century, in that its emphasis on the material institutions of play-making enables its practitioners 'to posit tangible relationships between plays and other aspects of early modern society'.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to this pragmatic justification, focusing on acting companies arguably reflects the priorities of early modern playgoers and play-readers themselves, for whom the names of dramatists may not have been paramount: 'In the libraries and bookstores in which we normally encounter them the plays of Jacobean England are arranged by author; in their own time they were arranged by playhouse'.<sup>15</sup> Early quartos of Shakespeare's plays invariably name the company that performed the plays rather than the dramatist with whom we tend to associate them, but, as Munro points out, 'as late as 1619' *The Maid's Tragedy* was attributed to the King's Men on its title page 'with no mention of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher as the authors'.<sup>16</sup> It follows that considering *The Maid's Tragedy* as a King's Men play may be a legitimate correction of an author-centric bias in criticism of early modern plays. Indeed, the repertory approach can be used as a means of struggling against the biggest critical bias of them all: the tendency to devote disproportionate attention to the single dramatist, Shakespeare. In their respective studies of the Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men, both Knutson and Gurr make attempts to correct this bias. In his discussion of how the company's repertory developed, Gurr devotes a respectable amount of space to plays like *A Warning to Fair Women* and *The Fair Maid of Bristow* as well as to better-known works; furthermore, considering the lifetime of the company rather than the career of the dramatist allows sustained discussion of the work of John Fletcher and later Caroline dramatists.<sup>17</sup> The company focus similarly enables Knutson to give sustained attention to such plays as *The Devil's Charter* and *The Captain*, but it also permits a sly reevaluation of Shakespeare, whom she presents as sublimely gifted, not as a dramatist per se, but in his understanding of how repertories work: 'In addition to providing the company with new and old plays in the number needed by the Elizabethan repertory system, Shakespeare supplied the kinds of plays

that audiences liked, with stories that they liked, in dramatic formulas that they liked'.<sup>18</sup>

An especially good example of the repertorial approach facilitating discussion of less canonical dramatists is Bly's *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queens*, which concerns the plays of the King's Revels company. These include Lording Barry's *Ram Alley*, John Day's *Humour Out of Breath*, and *The Turk* by John Mason and others — none of which is exactly a staple of undergraduate curricula. Bly's provocative discussion of the plays stresses the transgressive nature of their heroines and suggests that the company's products helped to foster a homoerotic subculture in Jacobean London; however, she also argues for a kind of corporate authorial identity among the company's dramatists as 'a community of authors who appreciated homoerotic humour' and 'wrote their plays with a specific audience in mind'. As such, Bly's book seems like a good argument for the view that we ought perhaps to see acting companies, not individual dramatists, as the 'authors' of early modern plays. A brief consideration of the Henslowe records shows that the practice of collaboration was very common among early modern playwrights, while the misattribution (in Bly's view) of *The Turk* to 'John Mason, Maister of Artes' is typical of an environment in which title-pages of published plays, if they name any author at all, do not necessarily name the right one.<sup>19</sup> Given this circumstance, relocating the Foucauldian 'author function' from writers to dramatists might seem like a safe bet.

Bly herself, however, in a review of Munro's book, has more recently expressed scepticism about just this aspect of the repertory approach. She praises Munro's criticism of *Eastward Ho* but adds that her

thoughtful, learned comments do not prove that the Queen's Revels repertory is the best lens through which to examine *Eastward Ho*. Though its collaboratively authored status makes the tag 'Queen's Revels play' an attractive substitute for listing all three authors, I was not convinced that the company was responsible for — or even truly implicated in — exaggeration of generic conventions such as she identifies.

Bly goes on to argue that 'without much reference to other repertories as bal-  
last to her argument about the Queen's Revels, the question of whether the  
company had a relevant, creative influence on its plays is stated, not proved'.<sup>20</sup>  
Whether or not Bly's comments are justified as a critique of Munro, they do  
point towards a possible criticism of the repertory approach as a whole: could

it be argued that to identify a discipline called ‘repertory studies’ is, in fact, to beg the question? Does the term itself assume what it should really be seeking to prove — the distinctness of particular repertories? McMillin and MacLean, for example, write, ‘We think it clear that each company would have had its own style, its own textual procedures, its own sense of purpose, and its own impact on audiences and other acting companies’, but did it?<sup>21</sup> In an essay included in the 2009 Queen’s Men collection, Knutson points out the problems of distinguishing between ‘company ownership and company influence’, going on to ask, ‘how much of a house style is the result of the dramatists’ sense of identity rather than that of the company?’. Noting the appearance of elements supposedly typical of Queen’s Men plays in the Derby’s Men play *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*, she wonders, ‘if frame structures, template romance characters, and a medley of linguistic styles are present in non-Queen’s Men plays in the 1580s, how is it possible to put any weight on these characteristics as signs of a play owned by the Queen’s Men?’.<sup>22</sup>

A second problem perhaps inherent in repertory studies concerns the place within it of the very figure whose influence, in some ways, it attempts to counteract; namely, Shakespeare. If the approach is one that tries to reflect a less individualized model of authorship than the one that has been dominant since the Enlightenment, and if one of its benefits is that it offers an alternative structure within which to consider plays that are anonymous and/or collaboratively written and/or by minor dramatists, then how does it deal with a playwright who effectively represents the notion of author as individual genius, and the majority of whose extant work is regarded as singly authored? For that matter, is there something of a tension between the drive to recuperate minor plays and the likelihood that Renaissance drama receives the degree of critical attention it does in part because of its practitioners being contemporaries of Shakespeare? Ironically, *The Repertory of Shakespeare’s Company*, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies*, *Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare’s Time*, and *The Shakespeare Company, 1594–1642* refer to Shakespeare in their titles, as does *Shakespeare’s Opposites*, a book about a company for whom Shakespeare neither wrote nor acted. To a striking extent, the discourse of repertory studies seems to be one that Shakespeare is called upon to authorize, even as it seeks to move him to the margins.<sup>23</sup>

To present the essays that follow as an answer to, or even as a deliberate response to, these problems would be schematic and overstated, but they do

appear at a time when critics interested in repertory studies seem prepared both to develop the insights of 'first generation' practitioners of the approach and to question some of their assumptions. While McMillin and MacLean challenged in 1998 the prevailing narrative of the Queen's Men's decline in the 1590s, arguing that 'the company's diminishing role in London can be seen in balance with their continuing success in the provinces', the editors of *Locating the Queen's Men* challenge even this more 'sophisticated version' of the decline narrative, pointing to the company's successful performances at the Rose in April 1594.<sup>24</sup> They also note that the company seems to have performed Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* during this run, a phenomenon that complicates the earlier critics' identification of an 'anti-Marlowe campaign' waged through plays such as *Selimus*.<sup>25</sup> Other critics, while accepting as both productive and appropriate a consideration of the plays in relation to the companies that staged them, do so alongside more traditional ways of locating them. While the title of Brian Walsh's *Shakespeare, the Queen's Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History* seems to promise a repertorial approach, what we get is an analysis of *The Famous Victories of Henry V* and *The True Tragedy of Richard III* as Queen's Men plays, followed by an analysis of *1 Henry VI*, *Richard III*, and *Henry V* primarily as plays by Shakespeare (rather than plays staged by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, or anyone else). Indeed, Walsh's distinction between the Queen's Men, who 'most likely did not set out to pose questions about representation' of history but stumbled on them by accident, and the more self-conscious Shakespeare, seems to privilege the latter in a way that some readers may find at variance with the repertory approach.<sup>26</sup> My own *Work and Play on the Shakespearean Stage* identifies variations between the ways different acting companies presented work in the 1600s and suggests that these may have derived from those companies' attempts to align themselves with specific play-going cultures, but its reading of individual plays presents them very much as the work of individual or collaborating authors.<sup>27</sup>

A willingness to challenge prevailing narratives underpins the first of the essays that follows, 'Repertory and Riot: The Relocation of Plays from the Red Bull to the Cockpit Stage', by Eleanor Collins. Its focus is the riot that took place at the Cockpit playhouse in March 1617, an event that, as Collins shows, critics frequently interpret as a response to the transfer of Queen Anne's Men and their repertory from the Red Bull to the Cockpit. This interpretation, Collins argues, both derives from and reinforces the belief that early modern playgoers cared about repertory, identifying strongly with

specific playhouses and companies. Collins, however, mobilizes evidence about play-going practices, rioting crowds, and the Red Bull and Cockpit repertoires themselves that complicates this reading of events. While she retains an emphasis on the importance of different playing companies, repertoires, and playing spaces as a means of structuring our response to early modern drama, she questions both the overly straightforward association of specific groups of playgoers with specific companies evident in many modern responses to the riot, and the assumption of a primarily theatrical motivation for it.

The second essay, Charles Cathcart's 'Romeo at the Rose in 1598', also problematizes the easy linkage of particular companies with particular demographics (and dramatic styles). Cathcart identifies a number of echoes of *Romeo and Juliet* that appear in two Admiral's Men plays of 1598, *Englishmen for My Money* and *The Two Angry Women of Abingdon*, and suggests that we should regard these as earlier examples of the intertextual playfulness we more readily associate with the companies of child actors that recommenced performing, supposedly for more socially elevated and dramatically sophisticated audiences, at St Paul's and the Blackfriars a year later. As well as challenging assumptions about company styles, Cathcart offers a response to the question of how to fit Shakespeare into repertory-oriented approaches. Rather than a genius whose work is pillaged by lesser dramatists, Cathcart presents Shakespeare as a participant in a dramatic culture that, even before the revival of the children's companies, privileged intertextuality and playfulness. (As Knutson has argued, Shakespeare himself seems to have derived the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* from the Christopher Marlowe/Admiral's Men play *The Jew of Malta*.<sup>28</sup>)

Another way of situating Shakespeare within repertory studies appears in the third essay, Elizabeth Ford's 'Will Kemp, Shakespeare, and the Composition of *Romeo and Juliet*'. Ford's stress is on Shakespeare as a dramatist writing for a specific company of actors, and she sees the variant versions of *Romeo and Juliet* 1.2 in the first and second quartos as seeking, in their different ways, to accommodate that company's chief clown, Will Kemp. At the same time, though, Ford presents Shakespeare as retaining control over the text through these very strategies of accommodation, and as turning Kemp's talents to his own ends in the creation of a generically innovative drama. Rather than Shakespeare's drama being the effect of the repertory, what we see here is Shakespeare paradoxically using the constraints of the repertory system to fashion his own dramatic authority.

The final essay below, Clare Smout's 'Actor, Poet, Playwright, Sharer ... Rival? Shakespeare and Heywood, 1603–4' similarly insists both on the importance of company auspices and on the status of individual dramatists within those companies. Considering Shakespeare and Thomas Heywood in relation to the companies to which they belonged helps to highlight the similarities between them as actors, playwrights, and sharers. Furthermore, using their company affiliations to place them within a specific commercial context makes it easier to see how, in the case of *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare was responding to the commercial success of another company's play, Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness*.

Arguably, the reading of the two plays that Smout offers, which identifies structural, thematic, and generic similarities between two plays, might just as well be carried out within a more traditional, author-centred context. The influence of the repertory approach here, however, is that it offers a way of thinking about the relationship between Shakespeare and other dramatists that is less skewed by assumptions of Shakespeare's centrality, and that reflects an awareness of commercial as well as aesthetic imperatives. Locating plays as contemporaneous offerings within the repertoires of two companies deepens our sense of how early modern playgoers might have experienced them. And the repertory approach offers a way of understanding Shakespeare's achievement that takes account of his position in relation to a company in which, like Heywood, he was an actor, a tenured dramatist, and a sharer with a degree of control and security.

The approaches taken by the last three of the essays collected here do suggest that any fears (or hopes) that an emphasis on acting companies and their repertoires might mean that the elimination, or at least marginalization, of authors, critically speaking, have proved premature. Alexander Leggatt's decision, in *Jacobean Public Theatre*, to refer to plays in relation to playhouses rather than authors, in order 'to bring us a little closer to the initial effect of these plays on audiences', has been the exception rather than the rule.<sup>29</sup> (A playhouse, clearly, is not the same as a playing company, but given the secure tenure of the King's Men at the Globe, Prince Henry's Men at the Fortune, and the Queen's Men at the Red Bull by the Jacobean period, there is a significant overlap between the two for the purposes of Leggatt's study.) In the long term, the rather less apocalyptic outcome of the repertory approach has been something more complex: as well as offering a framework in which to understand the many early modern plays that, because of widespread practices such as anonymous publication and

collaborative writing and rewriting of plays, do not straightforwardly fit into a more author-centred approach, it has produced a more nuanced sense of the institutions within which dramatic authors worked.

TOM RUTTER

## Notes

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- 1 The essays derive from papers submitted to the seminar 'Locating Early Modern Repertories: Shakespeare and the London Playing Companies' at the 2009 conference of the British Shakespeare Association, co-hosted by King's College London and Shakespeare's Globe. I would like to thank the conference organizers for giving me the chance to run the seminar, and the other seminar contributors for their helpful and productive comments.
- 2 Roslyn Lander Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company 1594–1613* (Fayetteville, 1991); Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, *The Queen's Men and Their Plays* (Cambridge, 1998); Mary Bly, *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queens on the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford, 2000); Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company, 1594–1642* (Cambridge, 2004); Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge, 2005).
- 3 Andrew Gurr, *Shakespeare's Opposites: The Admiral's Company 1594–1625* (Cambridge, 2009); Brian Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen's Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History* (Cambridge, 2009); Helen Ostovich, Holger Schott Syme, and Andrew Griffin (eds), *Locating the Queen's Men, 1583–1603: Material Practices and Conditions of Playing* (Farnham, Surrey, 2009).
- 4 Richard Dutton (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre* (New York, 2009).
- 5 John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York, 1997).
- 6 Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels*, 4; 'Early Modern Drama and the Repertory Approach', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 42 (2003), 1–33 (13). See also Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, 1976), 158; Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York, 1977), 142–8.
- 7 Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, 1979), 159.

- 8 See, for example, Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley, 1983); Richard Dutton, *Ben Jonson: Authority: Criticism* (Basingstoke and New York, 1996); Joseph Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* (Cambridge, 2002).
- 9 Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge, 2003), 31.
- 10 McMillin and MacLean, *The Queen's Men and Their Plays*, 7.
- 11 Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels*, 4.
- 12 Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1996), 50–80, 119–96; Ann Jennalie Cook, *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London* (Princeton, 1981); Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (New York, 1952); Robert Bridges, *The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Drama* (London, 1927).
- 13 Knutson surveys this tradition in *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company*, 15–20, making reference in particular to J.P. Collier, *The Diary of Philip Henslowe* (London, 1845); F.G. Fleay, *A Chronicle History of the London Stage 1559–1642* (London, 1890); W.W. Greg (ed.), *Henslowe's Diary*, 2 vols (London, 1904–8); R.A. Foakes and R.T. Rickert (eds), *Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge, 1961); Bernard Beckerman, *Shakespeare at the Globe, 1599–1609* (New York, 1962).
- 14 Tom Rutter, 'Repertory Studies: A Survey', *Shakespeare* 4 (2008), 344.
- 15 Alexander Leggatt, *Jacobean Public Theatre* (London, 1992), 1.
- 16 Munro, 'Early Modern Drama and the Repertory Approach', 2.
- 17 Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company*, 131–4, 139, 187–99.
- 18 Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company*, 123–5, 146–8, 168.
- 19 Bly, *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queens*, 23–4, 98.
- 20 Mary Bly, review of Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory, Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 22 (2009), 245.
- 21 McMillin and MacLean, *The Queen's Men and Their Plays*, xii.
- 22 Roslyn Knutson, 'The Start of Something Big', *Locating the Queen's Men*, Ostovich, Syme, and Griffin (eds), 99–100, 102.
- 23 Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford, 1996); Roslyn Lander Knutson, *Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare's Time* (Cambridge, 2001).
- 24 McMillin and MacLean, *The Queen's Men and Their Plays*, 53; Ostovich, Syme, and Griffin, 'Locating the Queen's Men: An Introduction', *Locating the Queen's Men*, 6–8.
- 25 McMillin and MacLean, *The Queen's Men and Their Plays*, 155.
- 26 Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen's Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History*, 34–5.
- 27 Tom Rutter, *Work and Play on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge, 2008).

28 Knutson, *Playing Companies and Commerce*, 62.

29 Leggatt, *Jacobean Public Theatre*, 4.

### Repertory and Riot: The Relocation of Plays from the Red Bull to the Cockpit Stage

On 4 March 1617 the newly built Cockpit playhouse in Drury Lane was assailed by a band of 'lewde and loose persons, apprentices and others'.<sup>1</sup> Writing four days after the event, Edward Sherbourne claimed that between three and four thousand apprentices had mobilized themselves, 'wounded divers of the players, broke open their trunckes, & whatt apparreil, bookes, or other things they found, they burnt & cutt in peeces; & not content herewith, gott on the top of the house, & untiled it'.<sup>2</sup> Consequences were not limited to loss of property. Sherbourne elaborates that 'one prentise was slaine, being shott throughe the head with a pistoll, & many other of their fellowes were sore hurt'.<sup>3</sup> On the same day, John Chamberlain wrote to Dudley Carleton of the disorder in town, adding that the players of Queen Anne's Men, the current occupants of the Cockpit, 'defended themselves as well as they could and slew three of them [the rioters] with shot, and hurt divers'.<sup>4</sup> The gravity of the situation, at least as far as city authorities were concerned, is clear. In a letter to the lord mayor and aldermen of London, it was reported that 'there were diverse people slayne, and others hurt and wounded'. Later that month, the privy council ordered security and vigilance against the behaviour of citizens and apprentices to be tightened.<sup>5</sup>

A number of historical narratives have prioritized the riot, which took place on Shrove Tuesday that year. It has become representative of an English tradition and folklore of misrule, and functions as a crucial underpin to constructions of the role and social status of the 'suburban' apprentice in early modern England.<sup>6</sup> Within the historiography of rioting its intensity is foreshadowed only by the notorious Evil May-Day riot of 1517, and amplified in the terse political demonstrations of the 1640s.<sup>7</sup> It has also been assigned particular privilege in theatre history, and grants the Cockpit theatre and its repertory a central position in enduring narratives. Charles J. Sisson first established its importance to theatre history, positing a direct causal relationship between the riot and the recent transfer of Queen Anne's Men from the old Red Bull to the new Cockpit theatre, built and managed by Christopher