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'my good sweett mouse' Letters in Time of Plague

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Abstract

Among the Henslowe-Alleyn papers donated by Edward Alleyn to Dulwich College in 1619 is a group of letters exchanged in 1593 between the Henslowe household in London, where Alleyn's young wife Joan then lived, and Edward Alleyn, then touring in the provinces with Lord Strange's men, when the London theatres were closed on account of the plague. These letters have always been read for the (scanty) contribution they give to the history of Elizabethan theatre. What has not been considered is their pragmatic peculiarity, which illustrates a real, and probably very rare case of collaboration in letter-writing. Joan Alleyn's literacy was probably either incomplete, or null, and the letters sent to Alleyn were written by Henslowe, who was Joan's step-father, and who, in turn, 'received' Alleyn's letters to Joan and probably read them to her. The essay first describes the context in which the exchange took place: the 1592-1594 London plague epidemic, the consequent closing of the theatres, and the plague's impact on the suburb of Southwark where the Henslowes lived; it also outlines the particular social, economic and affective features of the Henslowe family; then it examines the particular pragmatic situation in which the drafting of the letters a young bride addressed to her husband was entrusted to a figure of authority like a father rather than a scribe, a servant, a secretary, or a clerk, that is, the only figures considered by letter-writing theorists as a woman's 'extension' of meanings, or 'ventriloquist' substitute. The article also intends to illuminate the figure of Joan Alleyn, née Woodward, her role as subject to her father's patriarchy in her parents' house, her management of her own household, and, for many years, the object of her husband's love and care, when she followed, and was part of Edward Alleyn's fortune – first as a renowned 'model actor' and later as a successful entrepreneur and philanthropist.

Keywords: *Henslowe-Alleyn Papers, Joan Alleyn, Letter-Writing Pragmatics, London, Plague*

... 'Tis e'en as uncertain as playing: now up, now down; for if the bill rise to above thirty, here's no place for players ...
Thomas Middleton, *The Fyve Wittie Gallantes*, 1608

1. *The Context*

1.1 *Infection(s)*

On June 23 1592, the Rose Theatre, where Lord Strange's men were performing, was closed on account of certain 'late mutynous and foule disorder in Southwarke' by 'certaine apprentyces and other idle people theire adherentes'. The Privy Council, therefore, ordered 'that there be noe playes used in anye place neere thereaboutes, as the theator, curtayne or other usuall places ... untill the feast of St. Michaell',[1] that is, until September 29. It seems, however, that the theatres were not reopened at Michaelmas because, in the meantime, cases of plague infection had been reported. Two different reasons concurred, in this circumstance, to enact the closing of theatres: in June, not only the Rose in Southwark, but also the Theatre and the Curtain in Shoreditch, and 'other usuall places' were closed on account of disorders; but the London authorities seized the first accounts of plague infection as an opportunity to keep them closed. Generally speaking, it is not easy to say whether the prevention of disorders outside of theatres or the fear of contagion was the stronger reason for discontinuing public entertainments: indeed, both reasons were suitable, for both gave an apt pretext for stopping the social infection of public spectacles.[2]

We do not know when exactly Lord Strange's Men, hindered from playing in London, began their tour in the provinces; but we know that in London, on 22nd October, their principal player Edward Alleyn 'wasse maryed vnto Jone Woodward' (*Diary*, 6), the step-daughter of his financial co-investor Philip Henslowe.

The 1592-94 epidemic was the last serious sixteenth-century visitation of the city, liberties and suburbs of London. 'The epidemic of plague', Charles Creighton says, 'began to be felt in London in the autumn of 1592, and is said to have caused 2000 deaths before the end of the year' (1891, 351-352).[3] The rate is difficult to establish because we do not have systematic,

[1] *Acts of the Privy Council* XXII, 549, 550, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/acts-privy-council/vol22/pp526-550>, accessed 1 August 2020; henceforth *APC*. The texts of the letters examined in this article have been published in their entirety first by W.W. Greg in Greg 1907 (henceforth *Papers*), 34-61; then by R.A. Foakes and R.T. Rickert in Foakes and Rickert 1961 (henceforth *Diary*), 274-298; reprinted with addition of a new preface and reading list, but no variations in the texts considered in this article, Foakes 2002. The first six letters examined here had been published by J.P. Collier (1841, 24-33). Unless otherwise stated, my texts are taken from *Papers*, 34-61. Images of the manuscripts are in The Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project, MSS 1, Articles 009, 010, 011, 012, 013, 014, 015, 038 (<https://henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/>, accessed 1 August 2020). For Middleton's quote in the exergo, see Taylor and Lavagnino 2007, 615. I wish to thank my perceptive and accurate referee for providing most welcome suggestions; Jeanne for her discerning and insightful reading, and John for 'washing my clothes in the Thames'.

[2] Barbara Freedman holds that the power of the theatre and 'narratives of containment' have been exaggerated by (new historicist) critics, and that 'If we accept the tradition which merely hears the complaints of "persecuted players," we not only trivialize the complaints of social disorder by London's mayors but deny the complaints of the protesters themselves during the summers of the 1590s'; 'little work', she says, 'has been done on the degree to which local protest influenced these restraints' (1996, 20, 18, 27).

[3] Scott and Duncan note that there is no agreement as regards the number of deaths: 'This epidemic began in the autumn of 1592 and is said to have caused 2000 deaths before the end of the year' (2003, 162); they add that 'Mortality in London from the plague of 1593 has been estimated differently, but probably over 17 000 people died, i.e. 60% of the total of deaths from all causes' (165). The Privy Council seems to have been conscious of the earliest manifestations of the epidemic since August 13, 1592, when they mention a suit by a certain Hugh Pollard to be released from prison and sent to his dwelling place in Devon 'by reason of his present indisposicion of bodie and the contagion of the plaige dailie increasing in London, where he now remayneth.' (*APC* XXIII, 118, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/acts-privy-council/vol23/pp101-125>, accessed 1 August 2020).

therefore reliable, accounts of week-by-week numbers of deaths in each London parish; and neither the sources nor further research agree about the total number of those who died of the infection. But, although official Bills of Mortality had not yet been compiled during this epidemic, by comparing the numbers given by later scholars (Barroll 1991; Wilson 1999; Scott and Duncan 2003), Creighton's estimate may be considered realistic. Indeed, that the alarm was already high in the autumn is also shown by the publication, before the end of the year, of a book of counsels and remedies against the plague (Anonymous 1592) and a book of sermons inviting thankfulness to God for preserving the city from a worse visitation (Cupper 1592). Worse, however, was yet to come during the following spring.

The first London Bills of Mortality were compiled during the 1603 epidemic. The only one to have survived from that date, and which is probably also the earliest one, goes through a quick history of epidemics in Britain and, of the 1592-94 epidemic, says that 'in the last great visitation, from the 20. of December 1592. to the 23. of the same month in the yéere 1593. died in all 25886. of the plague in and about London, 15003. And in the yéere before, 2000'.[4]

The Bills of Mortality were compiled and distributed by the Company of Parish Clerks, a Guild of *clerici* and *literati*. They were single-sheet weekly reports 'that listed on one side the mortality figures for each of the 130 parishes of London, and on the other the various causes of death'. To compile the Bills, the Company relied on the 'searchers', who 'were not medical professionals: rather, they were usually pairs of older women who were recipients of parish money, and their job was to determine the cause of death' (Boyce 2020).[5]

Information about plague mortality in London during the week from 14 to 21 September 1592 is extant in a manuscript plague bill which was found by a builder, together with another piece of paper, on December 12, 1992, 'in the stone work of Park Farmhouse in Kingston, near Somerton, Somerset' (Berry 1995, 3). One of the two sheets found in Kingston is described as follows:

> On one side of the strip is a manuscript weekly plague bill for the City of London. On the back, in another hand, is a summary of plague statistics for the week beginning September 14, 1592 ... The plague bill is, it seems, the fourth known to survive for London up to 1603 and the only one from 1536 or so to 1603. ... More important, it provides the first reliable city-wide details so far discovered about the major London plague of 1592. (*Ibid.*)[6]

[4] 'A true bill of the whole number that hath died in the Cittie of London, the citty of Westminster, the citty of Norwich, and diuers other places, since the time this last sicknes of the plague began in either of them, to this present month of October the sixt day, 1603. With a relation of many visitations by the plague, in sundry other forraine Countries' (<http://tei.it.ox.ac.uk/tcp/Texts-HTML/free/A06/A06259.html>, accessed 1 August 2020). According to Jack's lines in Middleton's *The Fyve Wittie Gallantes* (1608) quoted in the exergo, plays were stopped when the number of deaths for the plague 'rose to above thirty'; J.T. Murray says that 'it seems safe to conclude that prior to 1575-6, when the plague deaths rose to 50 a week the theatres were closed, and that from 1575-6 to *c.* 1603 the theatres in the City proper were closed whenever the "whole deaths" reached 50 a week, while in the suburbs the old regulation of 50 plague deaths a week causing the closing of the theatres was continued. From *c.* 1603 to *c.* 1608 the theatres were closed when the weekly plague deaths exceeded 30, and from *c.* 1608 to 1642 when they were over 40' (1910, II, 179). See also Barroll 1991, 98-101.

[5] On the office of searcher, see Wilson 1999, 64-66.

[6] Comparing the situation in England and Italy, C.M. Cipolla says that 'The famous and always quoted seventeenth-century London Bills of Mortality derive from a practice that in Italy was started by the second half of the fifteenth century' (1985, 23; my trans.). As regards the 1592-1594 epidemic, Thomas Nashe complained about the lack of hospitals to isolate the sick at various stages of development and contagion of the infection as was done in other countries and said that in London no such distinction was made and people were housed 'mixing hand ouer heade, the sicke with the whole' (1593, 84). Dekker, in turn, complained about the fact that the poor were

The description of the contents is as follows:

> The plague bill is a list of thirty-five parishes in which people had died of plague during the week of September 14 to 21, together with the number of people who had died of plague in each. All the parishes are within the twenty-six wards of the city of London, including Southwark (which had joined the City as the twenty-sixth ward in 1550). None is in the City of Westminster or the suburbs in Middlesex. (11-12)

The other piece of paper is a fragment which arguably accompanied the bill: a letter sent by a London resident (apparently the compiler of the plague bill) to a woman then staying at Kingston. From the bill's transcript it appears that by far the most seriously affected parish was St Olave Southwark, with 43 dead in the week, the next most numerous being St Bride Fleet Street with 14 dead; next come three parishes with 8 dead: St. Andrew Holborn, St Botolph Bishopsgate and another Southwark parish, St. Saviour.

1.2 *Southwark*

Demographic research on the social geography of London has shown that, not surprisingly, 'the affluent were strongly concentrated in a central belt of intra-mural parishes, with prosperity declining as one approached the city wall and river'. However, there were times when the plague was generated internally, within the city wall, rather than 'imported through the docks in the east of the city from foreign ports' (Cummins *et al.* 2015, 8,19), as is commonly believed to be the case. Paul Slack discusses extensively and convincingly his idea that the incidence of epidemic disease was to a degree a socially determined fact. There was, Slack argues, a significant evolution of this pattern, for 'after the middle of the sixteenth century', the plague 'became what it had not been before, a conspicuously suburban phenomenon'. Slack also notes that 'Deaths of mayors and aldermen from plague were exceptional, accidents, one might say, arising from the proximity of the houses of the governing class to poorer tenements in the cities' (1985, 164). Furthermore, he also points out that the social geography of towns was not accidental:

> social zoning was itself the product of human decisions and a response to fashion: it sprang in part from the desire of the well-to-do to avoid the risks in some urban quarters and to move to others where the danger of epidemic disease, while never negligible, was less. We still know all too little about social change in early modern English towns, but there can be no doubt that the social context did much to shape the urban impact of plague. (169)

Stephen Mullaney says that the Liberties were a place of contradictions where 'alongside gaming houses, taverns, bear-baiting arenas, marketplaces, and brothels, stood monasteries, lazar-houses, and scaffolds of execution. Whatever could not be contained within the strict bounds of the community found its place here, making the Liberties the preserve of the anomalous, the unclean, the polluted, and the sacred' (1995, 22).[7] 'The other ills infesting the Liberties', Mullaney says, 'ranged from masterless men, "strangers and foren Artifficers", to the ever-present plague' (49).

whipped 'when they are alive', but none provided to 'Set up an Hospitall to comfort them being sick, or purchase ground for them to dwell when they be well – and that is when they be dead' (1606, 60).

[7] Mullaney says that 'By the end of the sixteenth century, there were ten lazar-houses stationed on the outskirts of London' (1995, 38).

One of the 'unclean' presences in Southwark were obviously the theatres. In 1592-1593, the only theatre in Southwark was Philip Henslowe's the Rose, but Southwark was also an otherwise troublesome district. Part of its 'anomalous' and 'polluted' landscape were also the jails, five according to Stow:

The Clinke on the Banke.
The Compter in the late parrish church of S. Margaret.
The Marshalsey.
The Kinges Bench.
And the white Lyon, all in long Southwarke. (1908, II, 53)

Stow also says that, among the attractions of the Southwark Liberty, was also 'the Bordello or stewes, a place so called, of certaine stew houses priuiledged there, for the repaire of incontinent men to the like women, of the which priuiledge I haue read thus' (54); and it is again from Stow that we know of a Lazar House in the same area: 'Then in Kent Streete is a Lazer house, for Leprous people: called the Loke in Southwarke' (68). No mention is made by Stow of the Rose Theatre in the heart of Southwark which certainly belonged to the 'unclean' and 'polluted' sites; not only on account of the playing activity which took place there, but also for the disorders which broke out in its vicinity, as happened on June 23 1592, when the theatre was closed. The place of the stage was indeed also the place of the plague.

1.3 '*over agaynst the clink*'

As Steven Mullaney says, London 'was shaped not by the dictates of urban planning and population control – prime movers in the shaping of the modern city – but by the varied rites of imitation, celebration, and exclusion through which a ceremonial social order defined, maintained, and manifested itself, in time and in space' (1995, 10); and it was also, as Slack argues, a town in which 'a distinct urban topography of plague' was gradually emerging (1985, 153).

The Liberty of the Clink in Southwark was where the Henslowes lived, next to, or in front of one of the five jails listed by Stow. The Clink, Stow says, was

a Gayle or prison for the trespassers in those parts, Namely in olde time for such as should brabble, frey, or breake the Peace on the saide banke, or in the Brothell houses, they were by the inhabitantes there about apprehended, and committed to this Gayle, where they were straightly imprisoned. (1908, II, 55-56)

Between the Autumn of 1592 and the Autumn of 1593 (more or less the time to which the letters I am going to examine belong), the Henslowes continued to live in the Liberty of the Clink in Southwark.[8] The household comprised Philip and his wife Agnes, and Agnes' two daughters by her first husband: Joan – who was then 19 and had just married Edward Alleyn – and Elizabeth, Joan's younger by two years. Philip was already a well off and well known impresario. He had started to keep a diary of his theatrical activity in 1591, but we have papers regarding his enterprise at least from the year he built up the Rose in 1587, in partnership with John Cholmley.

[8] Paul Slack discusses the consequences, both social and epidemiological, of the 'increasingly popular habit' of 'escaping from an infected town' (1985, 167). In a letter probably written in January 1593, a certain A. Robinson writes to a Thomas Phelippes: 'The plague is so sore in London that none of worth stay about these places' (Calendar of State Papers: Queen Elizabeth CCXLIIII, February 1593, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/edw-eliz/1591-4/pp312-324>, accessed 1 August 2020).

It is not surprising that well-off families lived side by side with unclean and sloppy households (the Bishop of Winchester's palace was in the Clink), neither is it surprising that in poor, overcrowded and degraded parts of the town wealthy families kept living even in time of plague. As Paul Slack says, in the outskirts of pre-industrial towns there was a 'social mix' of different households, and 'in any urban parish there were always well-to-do households and some poor families living side by side ... The "poor" and "rich" parishes', he adds, 'were never homogeneous in their social make-up'. Furthermore, Slack says that 'Trade and occupation often helped to determine the character of a neighbourhood as much as wealth or status' (1985, 165). This seems to have been the case with Henslowe, who found it convenient to keep his household as near as possible to his business (not only the Rose, but also the Bear Gardens), and in an area which was apt for the development of his various activities. Furthermore, unlike many affluent families who had, or could have, the possibility of leaving the city to escape contagion, during the 1592-94 epidemic the Henslowes apparently remained in Southwark, 'over agaynst the clink'.[9]

All in all, the Henslowe family does not seem to have suffered from the obvious social repercussions of the epidemic, normally determined by the fact that 'The sickness or death of a quarter or a third of a town's labour force impoverished the whole community of which they were the essential foundation ... But the effects were worst at the level of the household', not only for the economic impact of the sickness, but also because 'After a plague, ties of family and friendship had to be reformed' (Slack 1985, 17, 18). The Henslowes were not wage earners and Philip had apparently stored enough money to continue living by his resources. Furthermore, it appears that the family and business ties were by no means weakened during the present epidemic: indeed, they were kept alive also by the letters they exchanged.

1.4 *'now up, now down'*

As I said, we do not know when Lord Stranger's Men started their tour in the provinces. From Henslowe's diary, we know that there was a gap in their London activity from 22 June to 29 December 1592 (*Diary*, 19), but it is possible to follow tentatively a few of their steps in the months following the closing of the Rose thanks to some extant records.[10]

Two documents that, according to Chambers belong to a period 'hardly later than July' 1592 (1923, IV, 311), and according to Greg (*Papers*, 42) to a period between July and August, show that the authorities were pressed for a reopening of the playhouses. The first is a petition that the players addressed to the Privy Council, in which they complain about having to travel for, they say,

> oure Companie is greate, and thearbie o^{r} chardge intollerable, in travellinge the Countrie, and the Contynuaunce thereof, wilbe a meane to bringe vs to division and seperac$\bar{o}$n, whearebie wee shall not onelie be vndone, but alsoe vnreadie to serve her ma^{tie}, when it shall please her highenes to commaund vs. (*Papers*, 42)

[9] The expression 'over against the Clink' is used twice in addressing to Henslowe the letters I am going to examine: the first time in Alleyn's letter of 1st August 1593 (*Papers*, 36); and, later, in a letter by John Pyke, one of Alleyn's fellow players, to Joan Alleyn, probably during the 1593 tour (*Papers*, 41) . The letter is undated, but, Greg says, was sent 'evidently while travelling in the country' (*ibid.*).

[10] For a reconstruction of the ups and downs of theatrical activity between June 23 1592 and June 3 1593, see Chambers 1923, I, 296-297.

The second, probably belonging to the same time, is a petition from the Bankside watermen to Lord Admiral Howard, 'Lorde highe Admirall of Englande' against 'the restraynte of a playe howse belonginge vnto the saide Phillipp henslo ...' The watermen say that they 'have had muche helpe and reliefe for vs oure poore wives and Children by meanes of the resorte of suche people as come vnto the said playe howse', and they ask 'to give leave vnto the said Phillipp Henslo to have playinge in his saide howse ... according as it hathe byne accustomed ...' (*Papers*, 42-43; *Diary*, 284).[11]

A third document, which Chambers gives as 'undated', '*c.* 1592, *c.* July' (1923, IV, 311) and Greg as 'August 1592?' (*Papers*, 43), is a 'Warrant from the Privy Council for the reopening of the Rose' (*Papers*, 43-44), arguably written in response to the previous two. The warrant says that 'since vpon some Consideracōns we did restraine the Lorde Straunge his s[r]vauntes from playinge at the rose on the banckside, and enioyned them to plaie three daies at newington Butts ...',[12] permission is given to reopen the Rose. The reasons why the Privy Council decided on the reopening were, on the one hand, 'the tediousnes of the waie' adduced by the players and 'for that a nomber of poore watermen are therby releeved'. Permission, however, was given 'solonge as yt shalbe free from infection of sicknes' (*Papers*, 43-44; Chambers 1923, IV, 312-313).[13] Chambers also says that

> Whether the Newington Butts episode and the watermen's petition followed or not [the closing of the Rose on 23 June], at any rate plague intervened in the course of the summer, and the company had to face the disadvantages of travelling. They were afoot by 13 July and still on 19 December. (1923, II, 122)

Almost certainly, therefore, if there was any theatrical activity, this may have been intermittent and of a short duration for, as we have seen, Henslowe's papers do not record any activity from June 22 until December 29. On the other hand, that in the month of August 'contagion of the plaige [was] dailie increasing in London'[14] is a fact. In September, the infection was further increasing, 'causing alarming mortality until cold weather began to diminish the activity of plague-carrying rat-fleas that cause the disease. After their usual pattern of hibernating for the winter, the fleas broke loose in April 1593' (Kohn 2008, 230).

The uncertainty about the alternate opening and closing of the theatres probably kept the players in London for a while; indeed, since travelling abroad was an 'intollerable' effort, it was not easy to make that choice unless a long period of London inactivity announced itself. Further uncertainty was determined by the fact that, perhaps owing to the intermittent course of the epidemic, the theatres were reopened for a short time, from 29 December until 1 February.

It was in this time of uncertainty, now up, now down, as Middleton says, that Edward Alleyn and Joan Woodward were married on 22 October 1592.

[11] By reading them sequentially, one gets the impression that the two petitions may have been written by common accord, probably in the belief that they would reciprocally strengthen one another.

[12] The Newington Butts theatre was located far south of the Rose; it was probably built about 1575-1576 and was intermittently used both by the Lord Admiral's and the Lord Chamberlain's men. It was in use probably until the mid-1590s. On the Newington Butts episode, see Chambers 1923, II, 122.

[13] The three documents quoted above are also in *Diary*, 283-285.

[14] *APC* XXIII, 118, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/acts-privy-council/vol23/pp101-125>, accessed 1 August 2020.

2. *Joan Woodward/Mrs Edward Alleyn*

Few basic facts are known about the life of Joan Alleyn, née Woodward, before her marriage to Edward Alleyn. She was the daughter of Henry Woodward, a London dyer, and his wife Agnes. She was six when, 'at some date in the 'seventies', her wealthy widowed mother Agnes Woodward married Philip Henslowe, 'to whose former husband he had been "servant" ' (Chambers 1923, I, 358). From then on, she lived in the Henslowe household. Without quoting his source, J.P. Collier says that 'There is ground for believing that Alleyn's wife, Joan Woodward, possessed property in her own right, which she had derived under her father's will' (1841, 15). Collier also says that 'From the date of the marriage of Alleyn with Joan Woodward, he and Henslowe entered into partnership in their theatrical concerns; and as far as we can learn from extant letters ... the two families, until Alleyn's house was ready, lived together, occupying the same dwelling in Southwark' (17).

It appears that Joan did not receive any formal or informal education; indeed, from a deed in Henslowe's papers (*Diary*, 190), we gather that she signed with a mark.[15] As David Cressy says, 'Only one type of literacy is directly measurable – the ability or inability to write a signature', although 'a mark does not really indicate an inability to write' (1980, 53, 57). The fact that Joan could not write her signature, however, does not mean that she could not read: the abilities of reading and writing were taught separately and sequentially, and it is possible to argue that 'If you could not even form a signature your literacy was incomplete, although you might be able to manage some reading' (55). James Daybell, in turn, says that 'it was possible for a completely illiterate (in the modern sense) woman to be part of an epistolary culture, albeit via an amanuensis or reader' (2006, 6).[16] As we shall see, this point is relevant for determining the pragmatic context in which Alleyn's letters to his wife and step-father and, especially, their replies to Alleyn are concerned. From the letters, we know that Joan took care of at least part of the economic management of her husband's and her properties, and that in this capacity she appears to have been trusted both by her husband and her step-father.

During the epidemics of 1592-1594, she lived with the Henslowes, where probably also her husband had been living after they married and before he went on tour to the provinces. It is to this period that the letters I am going to consider belong. They are, therefore, letters exchanged between a just married young couple (Edward was 26 and Joan was 19 when they married), but materially drafted, and therefore in part managed and governed, by the girl's step-father. In these years, Alleyn had already become a celebrity especially in the Marlovian roles of Tamburlaine and Barabas. As S.P. Cerasano says, 'Alleyn's celebrity status remained such an overwhelming influence on the Rose repertory that by his personal example he created a "new model" actor whose professional profile became necessary for the continuance of the acting company's success through the end of the 1590s, and even later' (2005b, 51).

[15] The sheet is reproduced in the Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project, MSS 7, Image 098 recto: <https://henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/catalogue/mss-7/098-recto/>, accessed 1 August 2020. Of Joan Alleyn's mark, Greg says that 'it is not difficult to see with the help of a little imagination the initials "J A" ' (1904, I, xxxiv). For an Introduction to the Dulwich papers and to Alleyn's Diary and Account Book in particular, see Ioppolo (n.d.).

[16] Apart from 'amanuenses' and 'readers', Daybell speaks, in his work, of such figures as 'scribes', 'servants', 'secretaries', or 'clerks' as writing helps for women who could not or did not want to write their letters. As we shall see, none of these positions applies in the case of our letters, which illustrate a real, and probably very rare, case of collaboration. It is surprising that the unusual triangular exchange Henslowe-Joan-Alleyn has not been noted and examined by letter-writing scholars in its pragmatic peculiarity.

Joan was therefore the young wife of a celebrity and of an already economically substantial young man;[17] and she was also the step-daughter of a successful impresario, who was on the point of going (or had already gone) into business with her husband. She had recently gone through the rite of passage that was marriage, that 'major defining moment' that 'involved transformation' for it implied, for a woman, 'her social, domestic, and reproductive future' (Cressy 1997, 287). By the time we are considering, however, the 'transfer of authority' from father to husband which Cressy discusses (337) was not complete, for no new household had yet been established, and the father's authority and influence was still prevailing, especially when the husband, as in the time we are considering, was absent. As Greg says, 'Alleyn's wife, Joan, appears to have been still residing with her step-father, though Alleyn had a house and garden of his own. The former appears, however, to have been in the hands of the workmen' (*Papers* 34, note to Article 9). As we will see from the letters, however, she was already managing some of her husband's economic transactions (purchases, rents, and smaller tasks), in a spirit of collaboration rather than subservience.

The Henslowe-Alleyn management was a complex, but probably harmonious mixture of affective ties, money-raising, business-sharing and cultural and artistic engagement. Socially, it was not easy to allocate, for it belonged to a comparatively new social group, that of arts- and entertainment-producers who were in the process of gaining a social status of their own, granted by the public success of their trade, but still depending on patronage and protection. But they were also otherwise different, for in the tragic context in which we are viewing them, they seem to have been rather pragmatic as regarded the danger of infection, as well as agnostic about the transcendent meaning and moral import of the 'visitation'.

In a sense, the diversity of the Henslowe household mirrored, or was an extension of the contradictions of the Southwark area. As Steven Mullaney says commenting on the Liberties where theatres were built,

> popular drama did not move into a blank or neutral field when it occupied the margins of the city. It moved into a province with its own tradition of ambivalent spectacle and cultural license: a tradition which served, in a sense, to prepare the ground for Elizabethan drama, and which the stage appropriated and adapted to its own dramatic ends. (1995, 22-23)

3. *The Letters and Their Context of Utterance*

I am going to examine six letters exchanged between the Henslowe household and Edward Alleyn from 2 May to 28 September 1593; in addition, I shall briefly consider a letter, probably written during the same months, addressed to Joan Alleyn by the player John Pyk. A further letter I will consider is that of Joan Alleyn to her husband, dated 21 October 1603, during the following, and more serious plague epidemic, when again her husband was absent from home. The last is the only letter we possess that Joan wrote without the help and influence of her father, directly addressing her husband, probably from their marital home.

[17] In order to illustrate the difference in social status between common player and common playwright William Shakespeare and 'model actor' and true capitalist Edward Alleyn, Leeds Barroll pens a concise but complete biography of the latter: 'This famous Marlovian actor, later an entrepreneur, married the step-daughter of his older business partner, Philip Henslowe (financier of the Rose and Fortune playhouses), bought and sold much property, took a percentage of all performance profits made by the Lord Admiral's Servants and some from other playing companies, attained the monopoly on bringing bear-baiting to court several times a year, and made a real fortune in the theater, founding the College of God's Gift at Dulwich' (1991, 2).

From the point of view of their context of utterance, the most interesting letters are those addressed to Alleyn from the Henslowe household and Alleyn's to them in 1593, because they share a rather intriguing, maybe unique pragmatic configuration. As G. Del Lungo says, 'By applying pragmatic analysis to correspondence, it is ... possible to reconstruct epistolary historical meaning as dialogic: it is not just writing, but also reading, and their mutual relation that generates meaning. Letters are genuine interaction between correspondents in which their identities are linguistically and discursively produced' (2014, 20).[18]

That there were many reasons, apart from the degree of literacy, for which women did not always write their letters has been amply discussed, especially by James Daybell. Daybell examines the figures of scribes, amanuenses, servants, secretaries, readers, clerks who were charged to 'script or "ventriloquize" "female voices" ' (2006, 21 and *passim*); but these were obviously figures that were appointed (arguably, against a fee) to write expressing a woman's thoughts. Entrusting their views and considerations to vicarious figures who were simply lending their writing ability to the letter's sender obviously implied collaboration; but this was a kind of collaboration that only to a certain extent determined the issues the sender wanted to convey, and did not imply a real modification of the contents intended, but, probably, simply a careful disguise of certain sensitive issues. Even one of the cases quoted by Daybell, that of Elizabeth Talbot, who 'asked her son to write for her [a letter to Burghley] rather than a secretary' (86), shows a different kind of mediation: the preferred scribe was, in this case, her son probably because Talbot thought that the issues she intended to communicate were better not entrusted to a scribe or a clerk. As we shall see, none of these positions applies in the case of our letters which, as I said, illustrate a real, and probably very rare, case of collaboration.[19]

Perhaps the first thing to be noted is the fact that these letters, although probably part of a group which may have been more numerous, have survived as part of the papers donated by Alleyn to Dulwich College.[20] Evidently, both Henslowe and Alleyn considered these familiar letters as important as their business letters and accounts. But who kept them in the first place? Unless copies of the Henslowe-Joan letters to Alleyn were made (which seems improbable), these letters were kept by Alleyn when he received them while on tour, while those addressed by the same to his father-in-law and wife were kept either by Henslowe or by Joan. If they have survived, therefore, it is thanks to the fact that the three correspondents involved in the writing kept them as valuable papers for a long time: at least until 1619, when the imposing archive of his own and Henslowe's papers was donated to Dulwich College by Alleyn. The other contextual framework to keep in mind is that all the letters were written in time of plague, and during the months in which the mortality caused by the infection was highest.[21]

[18] As regards the pragmatics of letter-writing and reading, see Fitzmaurice 2002. Fitzmaurice, however, is more interested in exploring the presence and function of speech acts than examining the letters' context of utterance that is my issue here.

[19] Daybell quotes Joan's letters to her husband only to say that 'It is doubtful that Joan Alleyn personally wrote her own letters to her husband, the actor Edward Alleyn, since elsewhere in the documents relating to him she witnessed a deed with a mark' (2006, 94). Even to consider these as '[Joan's] letters to her husband' is not correct.

[20] The Henslowe-Alleyn manuscripts are all reproduced in The Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project, <https://henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/>, accessed 1 August 2020. The sheets of Alleyn's Diary and Account Book (MSS 9) are almost entirely transcribed.

[21] Writing about letters in time of plague, R. Totaro quotes a passage in *The Wonderfull Yeare* in which Dekker comments on the fear of contagion saying: 'How many vpon sight of a Letter (sent from *London*) haue started back, and durst haue laid their saluation vpon it, that the plague might be folded in that emptie paper ...' (Dekker 1925, 59); and comments the passage saying that 'London's plague traveled literally within the fibres of the letter ... By letter, your own loved ones might unknowingly send death after you' (2003, 88). The Henslowes seem to have been immune from such fears.

3.1 *1593*

The first of the letters I am going to consider was written by Edward to Joan from Chelmsford on 2 May 1593 (*Papers*, 34).[22] Generally speaking, Alleyn's letters are more personal, in that they are directly addressed to Joan, although Edward always inquires about the health of the family members naming them one by one.

The letter opens with the endearing address 'My good sweett harte & loving mouse', followed by the conventional 'J send the a thousand comendations' (*ibid.*).[23] Edward knew that the letter would be read by the whole family (read aloud to Joan?), and therefore continues, saying: 'hoping thou art in good helth w^{t} my father mother & sister'; then, he informs Joan (and the whole family) about his news, which concern especially his and his companions' health, and wishes them to stay safe (far from the plague, we may think) and in good health: 'J thank god we ar all well & in helth w^{ch} J pray god to contine[w] w^{t} vs in the contry and w^{t} yo^{u} in london'. The passage that follows is rather enigmatic because it probably refers to a previous message or piece of information or jesting allusion which Alleyn had received from home: 'mouse J littell thought to hear y^{t} w^{ch} J now hear by [about?] you'. The passage, as Greg suggests, was written 'in jest' (*Papers* 34, note to Article 9). Alleyn probably imagines that Joan was conveyed in a cart through the streets (by way of punishment?) with the whole family ('it is well knowne they say y^{t} yo^{u} wear by my lorde maiors officer mad to rid in a cart yo^{u} & all yo^{r} felowes'), but that Joan was probably able to run away ('but yo^{u} may thank yo^{r} ij suporters yo^{r} stronge leges'). Edward then assures Joan that she will be avenged ('but mouse when J com home Jl be revengd on them'). Then follow closing 'harty comendations to my father mother & sister' and a further special commendation to Joan: 'to thy owne self and so swett hart the lord bless thee' (*ibid.*).

Here and elsewhere in this group of letters, although Edward knew that his missives would be read by Henslowe, he does not allude to business, not even in terms of the company's success, or lack of success: only the physical health of Edward and his companions is mentioned; evidently, his main addressee was Joan, who seems to have been construed by the sender as provided with some sense of humour, since jesting innuendos could be addressed to her. The position of Henslowe, instead, was considered as that of a mediator. This, however, did not altogether delete the possible influence that the knowledge of the fact that the letters were going to be read by the whole family exerted on the sender, although no signs of self-censorship are linguistically perceivable; knowledge of communal reading, all in all, did not constitute so strong an impediment as to inhibit the use of endearing terms or the inclusion of jesting passages directed only to Joan, as appears, after the rather conventional closing: 'thyn ever & no bodies els by god of heaven', in what seems to be a post-script added below the signature 'Edward Alleyn', as if Edward felt that he had not yet expressed his love in sufficiently familiar, affectionate, private and jesting terms: 'farwell mecho mousin & mouse & farwell bess dodipoll'. Bess 'dodipoll' (naughty?) was Joan's sister Elizabeth, here addressed with a term that is both fond and facetious.[24]

[22] The first six letters I am going to examine (Articles 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 in *Papers*) were also published, with slight variations, by J.P. Collier (1841, 24-33). They were later published as part of Appendix 1 in *Diary*, 274-283, 285-286 and 296-298.

[23] For more or less conventional modes of address in marital correspondence, see Daybell 2006, 204-210.

[24] Collier says that 'Dr. Dodipoll was a character in a play of the time, and hence perhaps the nickname' (1841, 25).

The following letter (*Papers*, 35) is more puzzling because it involves two senders (Henslowe and Joan) who are differently engaged to the addressee, but are 'inscribed' in the text, principally if not wholly, with the words of one. It was sent to Alleyn from London on 5 July.

The address from Henslowe is simply 'Sonne Edward allen', followed by the conventional 'hartie comendaticions [*sic*]' from 'you^{r} mother & J with you^{r} syster elizabeth'. Then, obviously, Henslowe feels that a special position should be reserved to Joan, and writes that 'laste yet not leaste you^{r} mowse desiereth to be Remembered vnto you & she sendeth frome her harte that comendationes vnto you w^{ch} youe desyer of & prayeth nyght & daye for you^{r} good health & quicke Retorne'. Although what follows probably concerns work being done for the house the couple is going to live in, Joan disappears into the background and efficient businessman Henslowe occupies the whole scene, which is limited to a commercial transaction: 'the cause of ou^{r} wtitinge vnto you Js to seartefie you y^{r} the Joyner hath bene wth vs & hath broth thinges & hath the money w^{ch} you promesed hime & all other maters thanckes be to god ar weall & to you^{r} lickinge' (*ibid.*). On f. 1v of Henslowe's Diary, a number of expenses made by, or for, Joan are listed, together with rent received by Joan on some of her husband's or her own properties; among the expenses is also listed: 'Itm pd vnto the Joyner for the bedstead ... xv s' (*Diary*, 5). The exact date of the payments and rents received in this period is not stated, but it certainly refers to transactions made in 1593, during Alleyn's absence in the months we are considering. The circumstance of Alleyn's absence restores authority and a paternal position to Henslowe, who feels entitled to act as business mediator on behalf of her daughter and to inform her husband of transactions made to his liking. Then follows a quick closing of the transaction ('I sease to trubell you of forther maters') and the duly reported 'comendations' from 'John gryges & his wife' (friends? neighbours?).

The closing salutation of the letter also contains Henslowe's special commendations 'vnto all the Reste of you^{r} fealowes', but no enquiry about the way in which the tour is proceeding. Surprisingly, no allusion is made to the plague epidemic, that in those months was particularly severe, except an indirect one when Henslowe writes 'J praye god to seand you all that good health y^{t} we haue *as yet* at london w^{ch} J hoope in god yt will contenew ...' (my emphasis). The ending conveys a trace of more personal meanings: the pet name 'mouse' ('You^{r} power mowse for euer') returns as if the writer wanted to amend the matter-of-fact tone of the letter; another remedial hint may be seen in the fact that the first signatory of the letter is Joan, so as to make Henslowe's part in the relationship appear in the end as that of an adjuvant, in the role of 'you^{r} asured frendes tell death phillipe Henslow', rather than that of the overbearing father. Reading the letter again, we may note the phrasing the father gives to Joan's commendations to her husband: these are not qualified, but are expressed as those 'w^{ch} youe desyer'. Does the father refrain from expressing himself in more explicitly loving terms? If this is the case, is he hinting at what Edward would wish to hear (and Joan to say) simply by using the verb 'desire'? And, indeed, how else could a father express the ardour of a young couple if not by reticence, reserve and control? Further, how did the affectionate epithet 'mouse' sound both to Joan and to Edward when uttered by the father? We should keep in mind that, at least the male components of the triptych were people exceptionally alert to the tricks of dialogic communication, to hidden meanings and presuppositions in conversation, and to nuances conveyed by whisper.

The address and addressee bring Joan again to the forefront: 'This be delyvered vnto my welbeloued Husband m^{r} edward allen wth speade' (*ibid.*).

The third letter (*Papers*, 35-36) was written by Alleyn from Bristol the 1st of August. For the first time, this letter mentions the plague.

The address to Joan is, again, 'My good sweett mouse', followed by the ritual hearty commendations to the whole family ('my father my mother & my sister bess'). This time, however, the wish for the family's good health is directly connected to the epidemic: 'hopinge in god thought [though] the siknes beround about you' (35), it may spare the house from sickness. Edward, then, instructs Joan about possible remedies, both material and spiritual:

kepe yo^{r} house fayr and clean w^{ch} J knowe you will and every evening throwe water before yo^{r} dore and in yor bakesid [Bankside] and haue in yo^{r} windowes good store of rwe and herbe of grace and w^{t} all the grace of god w^{ch} must be obtaynd by prayers and so doinge no dout but y^{e} lord will mercyfully defend yo^{u}. (*Ibid.*)

Basic news about the company's health follow: 'we haue all ou^{r} helth for w^{ch} the lord be praysed' (*ibid.*).[25] Then, dutiful commendations to 'm^{r} grigshis wif and all houshould and to my sister phillyps' (36) follow. After signing 'Yo^{r} Loving housband E Alleyn', in a sort of postscript, as if he realizes that he has forsaken the dutiful attention to the family, he asks Joan news about 'yo^{r} domestycall matters' and 'such things as hapens att home'. In the last paragraph of the letter, for the first time, Joan appears in Edward's words as the sharer of common, if not intimate details of their married life. This is the longest and least formal passage in the letter, written 'vertically in left-hand margin' (*Diary*, 277):

and Jug J pray yo^{u} Lett my orayng tawny stokins of wolen be dyed a very good blak against J com hom to wear in the winter yo^{u} sente me nott word of my garden but next tym you will but remember this in any case that all that bed w^{ch} was parsley in the month of september you sowe itt w^{t} spinage for then is the tym: J would do it my self but we shall nott com hom till allholand tyd [All Saints tide] and so swett mouse farewell and broke ou^{r} Long Jorney w^{t} patienc. (*Papers*, 36)

The letter is to be delivered 'to m^{r} hinslo on of the gromes of hir maīst chamber[26] dwelling on the bank sid right over against the clink' (*ibid.*). The letter, however, was almost exclusively written and meant for Joan: apart from the stockings to be dyed, Edward mentions the sowing of his garden, and asks Joan to keep the white waistcoat he is sending back to her 'because it is a trobell to me to cary it' (*ibid.*). But, though Henslowe appears only as one of the people to whom commendations are addressed, and as the owner of the house where the letter is to be sent, there is also useful information to the father and manager about the company's theatrical activity ('being redy to begin the playe of hary of cornwall', *ibid.*). This shows that the double receiver was apparently well present in Alleyn's mind when writing to his wife.

In the reply (*Papers*, 36-37), probably sent during the same month of August, the prevailing *persona* is Henslowe. Joan is again 'you [your] mouse' whose commendation 'as she sayes comes from her harte & her sowle' (37). In the following lines, for the first time from the London side of the exchange, the prevailing subject is 'the sycknes', a topic which concerns the whole household and also touches neighbourhood and friends. In this passage, Joan remains in the background, or is seen as simply one of the members of the family, 'we' is the predominant

[25] This letter is one of those which have been considered on account of the scanty news it gives of the company's activity. Two of the players, R. Cowley and Mr Pope are mentioned; and Alleyn says that he is closing the letter 'being redy to begin the playe of hary of cornwall' (36). On R. Cowley and Mr Pope, see *Papers*, 36, note to lines 11-12; for 'hary of cornwall', see *ibid.*, note to line 17.

[26] Greg explains in a note that 'Henslowe's appointment to this office must have been recent' (*Papers* 36, n. to line 29). On Henslowe's court service, see Cerasano 2005a, 333-341. 'Jug' was a pet name for Joan.

personal pronoun, and the rhetorical construction (the house, the neighbourhood, some friends, and finally the whole city) as well as the feelings expressed are the *pater familias*'; the framework communicates a certain fear of the contagion, adding reassurance of the family's well-being: 'we haue be flytted [frightened?] wth feare of the sycknes', but 'we are all this time in good healthe in our howsse'; then, the gaze shift first to neighbours in general: 'Rownd a bowte vs yt hathe bene all moste in every howsse about vs & wholle howsholdes deyed', and then to a particular friend who almost seems to have lost his mind: 'my frend the baylle doth scape but he smealles monstrusly for feare & dares staye no wheare';[27] then, a more general look at the situation in London, where 'ther hathe deyed this laste weacke in generall 1603 of the w^{ch} nomber ther hathe died of them of the plage 113-0-5 w^{ch} hause bene the greatest that came yet' (37). Then come news about a particular family: 'Robert brownes wife in shordech & all her chelldren & howshowld be dead & heare dores sheat vpe' (*ibid.*).[28]

The following lines are meant in part as an answer to Alleyn's queries in the previous letter (the joyner brought the cupboard and said that 'you [Alleyn] shall have a good bed stead', in his garden the spinach is doing well, the orange-coloured stockings have been dyed), or to other of his requests: in no market in Smithfield it has been possible to buy some cloth, and his horse has not been sold for the offer, 'fower pownd', was too low, Henslowe deemed.

The closing salutation is rather long and elaborate. Thanks to god for the family being as yet free from contagion are penned in a form which is unusually poetic: 'Reioysinge that the lorde hath in compased vs Rownd & kepeth vs all in health'; then, the wish that all, including Alleyn's temporary companions, be spared, the usual commendations to them all, and the assurance that 'you^{r} poore mowsse hath not ben seack seance you weant' (*ibid.*).

The first signed sender is Joan, with the ritual formula 'You^{r} lovinge wiffe tylle death', and the second, with equally ritual formula, 'You^{r} poore & a sured frend tell death', is Henslowe. Finally, the letter is not addressed, as the previous one, 'vnto my welbeloued Husband', but 'To my wealle loved Sonne Edward allen', and also stresses Alleyn's professional, rather than personal position as 'one of my lorde Stranges Players' (*ibid.*).

There are no more letters from Alleyn to Joan in this period, a lack of information which, as we shall see, is in fact cause for complaint in the two letters below.

Henslowe's following letter to Alleyn (*Papers*, 38-39) was sent on August 14. The address is the same as that of the previous letter ('welbeloued Sonne edwarde allen'); therefore, the exchange is signalled as developing between the two male parties. Information about Alleyn during the tour must have reached the Henslowes through a different source and channel, for Henslowe mentions a sickness which, at Bath, did not allow Alleyn to play: 'we hard that you weare very sycke at bathe & that one of you^{r} felowes weare fayne to playe you^{r} parte for you w^{ch} wasse no lytell greafe vnto vs to heare' (38). Note that Henslowe is worried about the incident at Bath only because of Alleyn's sickness, not because of the company having to find a substitute for him, the possible flop of the performance, or the name of the man who played Alleyn's part. Then Joan enters the scene, in the role of loving and afflicted wife, and of the woman who fears

[27] Greg gives a name to this friend: he is 'no doubt Matthew Woodward, bailiff to Lord Montague' (*Papers*, 37, note to line 9).

[28] Robert Brown was a player; Greg says that he was 'probably travelling, though not, it would seem, with Alleyn' (*Papers* 37, note to line 13). Infected houses were shut up to isolate the sick. Whether sick or sound, those who lived with the sick were obliged to keep inside the house, except when constrained to go out to get food or other necessary items. This provision had various adjustments in time, but it remained substantially the same until the 1665 epidemic. See Wilson 1999, 55-60. Here it is not clear whether the house was shut up after the death of all the inhabitants.

to have been forsaken by the man she loves. The whole family was anxious about Edward's health, 'because we had no leatter frome you when the other wifes had leatters sente w^{ch} mad you^{r} mowse not to weape a lyttell but tocke yt very greauesly thinckinge y^{t} you hade conseved some vnkindnes of her' (*ibid.*); but there also seems to be a different note of reproach apart from that of the father for the daughter's grief, that of the entrepreneur and financier of the company: 'because you weare ever wont to write wth the firste & J praye ye do so stylle for we wold all be sorey but to heare as often frome you as others do frome ther frendes' (*ibid.*); further, he addresses what seems to be a personal reproach, saying 'we wold write oftener to you then we doo but we knowe not whether [where] to sende to you therfor J praye you for geat not you^{r} mowsse & vs' (*ibid.*). What follows seems to be matter-of-fact business about things which Alleyn had asked them to do for him: the sale of his horse, the beans planted in his garden, his tenants not willing to pay the rent until 'myhellemas' (Michaelmas), the joyner who is doing his job to his liking (38-39). The 'sickness' appears for the first time when Henslowe says that Joan 'prayeth vnto the lord to seace his hand frome punyshenge vs wth his crosse' (38); but returns more explicitly toward the close, when he says that 'for newes of the sycknes J cane not seand you no Juste note of yt be cause there is commandment to the contrary but as J thincke doth die wth in the sitteye and wth out of all syckneses to the nomber of seventen or eyghten hundreth in one weacke' (39). The commendations sent to the company are expressed with warmer words than in previous letters, indirectly reminding them of the writer's position: 'J praye ye sonne comend me harteley to all the Reast of you^{r} fealowes in generall for J growe poore for lacke of them therfor haue no geaftes to sende but as good & faythfull a harte as they shall desyer to haue comen a mongeste theme' (*ibid.*).

The usual two signatures, with slightly different formulas, are followed by the address, which is entrusted to Joan: 'Too my wealbeloued husbande m^{r} Edwarde Allen on of my lorde stranges players this to be delyuered wth speade' (*ibid.*).

This and the following one are the letters in which Henslowe's personality and *persona* appear most cumbersome and Joan's is respectively more vague. Unlike the above letter, where some at least of her reported utterances are introduced by the expression 'she says', this letter reports her presence indirectly, and we believe in the truth of her tears and praying, or of her complaints, only if we accept the drafter's reliability. We may notice that some topics about which Joan could hardly have said a word of her own, such as the weekly number of people killed by the plague, or the selling of Alleyn's horse are introduced; but we may ask ourselves whether she agreed with the terms in which the lack of news on Alleyn's part are stigmatised; or whether she really prayed to the Lord to stop punishing the people with the sickness.

The last of Henslowe's letters (*Papers*, 39-41), dated 28 September, is even more strongly patronizing.

The rhetorical structure and contents are similar to those of the previous letter, but certain issues are expressed in a less friendly mood. The ritual commendations are sent separately by two parties: on one side, there are 'all in generall', on the other is Joan, to whom a special role is reserved as 'you^{r} wiffe & mowsse', who 'desieres to send heare Comendationes alone w^{ch} she sayes Comes ffrome heare very harte' (39). In the rest of the long letter, Joan's voice is absent. There had probably been no other letters from Alleyn, a fact that is complained of in a stronger and more personal register than in the previous letter: 'now sonne leate vs growe to alyttell vnkindnes wth you becausse we cane not heare frome you as we wold do', that is, 'when others do' (*ibid.*); the reproach is made stronger by the allusion to the fact that they are being 'wth in the crosse of the lorde' and yet 'you littell knowe howe we do' (40). The sickness is here a more crucial issue, for it is everywhere around them and 'almoste alle my nebores dead of the

plage & not my howsse ffree for my two weanches haue hade the plage & yet thankes be to god leveth & are welle' (*ibid.*).[29] This part of the letter is evidently meant as strengthening the reproach, for Henslowe now passes to other subjects introducing them by 'now to caste a waye vnkindnes'. But, in the following lines, a more subtle kind of grievance, this time economic, appears: Alleyn's horse was not sold because 'we hade a very bade market at smyth fylld' and so it was sent 'Jn to the contrey' '*to saue carges*' (my emphasis); the cloth which Alleyn had asked to be bought for him was not bought because there was none 'by Retaylle' but only 'wholle saylle'; however, his stockings have been dyed and his garden has been sown. The other recurring economic issue, that of the joyner, is also mentioned: he has brought a few things among which a cupboard, but not the rest, because 'his howsse is visited' (*ibid.*).[30] Evidently, Alleyn had also asked for news about the Lord of Pembroke's men; Henslowe's reply brings to the foreground the enterpreneur and financier: the Lord of Pembroke's players are 'all at home' and have been for the last five or six weeks, 'for they cane not saue ther carges [w]th trauell' (*ibid.*).

The closing salutation of the letter again evokes the plague, this time 'praysinge [praying?] god that it doth pleass him of his mersey to slacke his hand frome visietinge vs & the sittie of london' (*ibid.*); and, again, the number of deaths in the last two weeks are given.

Joan appears again in the signature: 'comendinge to her mvnshen' (a pet-name for Edward), and, finally, in a postscript, as regards other economic transactions (rents to be paid to her by tenants) (41).

From the rhetorical, pragmatic and linguistic point of view (that is, the text's argumentative organization, the context of utterance, and the wording of contents), the ones examined cannot be said to be Joan's letters, nor is Joan to be ranked, as James Daybell does in the cases he examines, among 'those women employing secretaries to write for them' (2006, 111). Obviously, even in such cases in which a woman employed her secretary or servant to write her letters, the influence of the presence of an amanuensis interfering, so to speak, between sender and material executor must be felt, inevitably, as impinging on the message sent, and therefore also on the contents delivered to the addressee. This was all the more true about the letters we have examined, where the weight of the drafter was not simply that of a material scribe: father, financier, business partner and head of the household, Henslowe could not possibly fail to inscribe his personality, will and evaluations in the texts he composed to help his young daughter get in touch with her newly-wedded husband; Joan, in turn, was not free to vent her feelings, or choose the contents she would like to communicate, or describe in her own words her anxieties and fears, or choose the way in which she would have liked to complain about what she thought was Edward's neglect (but, did she really think so?). The letters examined are unmistakably collaborative, but they are collaborative on a markedly unequal plane.

Another letter, whose context of utterance, aim and overall meaning are uncertain was addressed to Joan Alleyn 'on the banck syd over agaynst the clynk' and is signed by John Pyk, a boy player (*Papers*, 41). The letter is undated, but, Greg says, it was written 'evidently while travelling in the country'. It is 'in the hand of Edward Alleyn' (*ibid.*).[31] The letter, however is

[29] This might be a further element of pressure for Alleyn's return: the plague is getting nearer and nearer, and, unlike his companions, Edward is still dallying far from home.

[30] The final lines of the sheet are lost: 'about eight lines are wanting at the foot of the page: the letter continues on the back' (*Papers*, 40).

[31] In the Catalogue of the Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project (MSS 1, Article 015), the letter is presented as 'written out by Thomas Dowton'; Greg says that it is 'in the hand of Edward Alleyn, with autograph signature' (*Papers*, 41); Chambers, in turn, says that it is 'by the hand of Mr Doutone' (1923, II, 124). It is not clear of whose

not signed by Alleyn, but by John Pyk and it 'is evidently meant in jest' (*Diary*, 282). But who inspired the jest addressed to Joan? Is the letter entirely Alleyn's fabrication, or was he really drafting the text on Pyk's behalf?[32] Moreover, also a third party collaborates (or is said to collaborate) to the writing of the text, for John Pyk says that he 'gott on to wright it m[r] doutone[33] & my m[r] [Alleyn?] knowes nott of it' (*Papers*, 41). Greg says that the mention of 'mr doutone' in the postscript is 'part of the joke'. John Pyk's (or Pyg's) qualification in the closing is also jesting: the extensive alliteration of 'yor petty prety pratlyng parlying pyg by me John pyk' (*ibid.*) are maybe an allusion to certain characteristics attributed to the young actor the whole family shared: they probably represent, or recall a fragment of family lexicon describing Pyk.[34]

If the source and circumstance of its invention, and even the physical and imaginative actual sender of this letter are uncertain, they again tell us something about the way in which Joan, as addressee, was construed by the sender: she was evidently part of some kind of social group in which reciprocal and more or less sharp jesting innuendos were exchanged.

3.2 *1603*

The 1603 London epidemic was far more serious than the 1592-94 one. It appears that the plague attacked first the suburbs. On 9 March, Anthony Rivers, an Englishman, wrote to the Venetian Gio. Battista Galfredi: 'The plague begins in the suburbs, especially Southwark'. But 1603 was also, to quote the title of Dekker's pamphlet, the wonderful year of Queen Elizabeth's death. Anthony Rivers, writing to another Venetian correspondent, Giacomo Creleto, describes her state of dejection after the death of the Countess of Nottingham:

> The Queen loved the Countess well, and hath much lamented her death, remaining ever since in a deep melancholy that she must die herself, and complaineth much of many infirmities wherewith she seemeth suddenly to be overtaken; as imposthumation in her head, aches in her bones, and continual cold in her legs, besides a notable decay of judgment and memory, insomuch as she cannot abide discourses of government and state, but delighteth to hear old Canterbury tales, to which she is very attentive; at other times impatient and testy, so as none of the Council, but Secretary, dare come in her presence. All are in a dump at Court; some fear present danger, others doubt she will not continue past the month of May, but generally all are of opinion that she cannot overpass another winter.[35]

Elizabeth died on 24 March, while the plague was raging in London. Thomas Dekker, who opened *The wonderfull yeare* inviting his readers to 'happilie laugh' because 'mirth is both

autograph signature Greg is talking; the letter was not signed by Allyen, but by 'John pyk'. I tend to agree with Greg about Alleyn's handwriting, which would also explain the especially familiar tone of the message, as well as some of its personal allusions. However one interprets the letter, some kind of actorial 'impersonation' seems to be its main inspiration and constitutive element.

[32] However, some kind of contribution or sharing on the part of Pyk is present. As Greg says, 'In the inside of the sheet are several lines of scribble arranged after the manner of a letter, perhaps by Pyk' (*Papers*, 41). However, I wish to remark that the expression 'over against the clynk' which appears in this letter as address to the Henslowe home is identical to the one which appears in Alleyn's letter of 1 August. The use of the same expression suggests at least some kind of collaboration by Alleyn in the composition of Pyk's letter.

[33] Thomas Downton, another player , who 'figures frequently in the *Diary* as an important member of the Admiral's Men' (*Diary*, 282).

[34] On Pyk or Pygge, see Chambers 1923, II, 124, 150.

[35] Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Elizabeth, 1601-3, 295-309, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/edw-eliz/addenda/1547-65/>, accessed 1 August 2020.

Phisicall, and wholesome against the *Plague*, with which sicknes ... this booke is ... somewhat infected' (1925, 3), says that '... all this while, Death ... hath pitcht his tents, (being nothing but a heape of winding sheetes tackt together) in the sinfully-polluted Suburbes' (31); and continues saying: 'Men, women & children dropt downe before him: houses were rifled, streetes ransackt, beautifull maydens throwne on their beddes, and rauisht by sicknes, rich-mens Cofers broken open, and shared amongst prodigall heires and vnthriftie seruants, poore men vsde poorely, but not pittifully' (33).

As regards the activity of the theatres, Chambers says that

> Plays were suspended by the Council on 19 March 1603 during the illness of the Queen, which terminated fatally on 24 March. Their resumption was anticipated on the coming of James, one of whose first acts was to issue on 7 May a proclamation against plays or bear-baiting on Sundays. But plague intervened, a plague more deadly even than that of 1592-4; and it was not until after Lent of 1604 that on 9 April the Council authorized the three companies of players to the King, Queen, and Prince to perform at the Globe, Curtain, and Fortune, so long as the weekly plague-deaths should not exceed thirty. (1923, I, 302)

The last letter I am going to consider (*Papers*, 59-61) was written in the 'wonderful year' of Elizabeth's death, and during the 'more deadly [epidemic] even than that of 1592-94' mentioned by Chambers. It is a letter Joan addressed to her husband on 21 October 1603. This time, it was arguably on account of some business not concerning the closing of the theatres that Alleyn was far from home, for he had left off playing in 1597 (*Diary*, 83);[36] however, it was evidently written during one of the periods in which the London theatres were closed on account of the plague. Joan, indeed says that 'All the Companyes be Come hoame & well for ought we knowe' (*Papers*, 59).[37] The material drafter of the letter has not been established; it was certainly not Henslowe (and as certainly it was somebody who mastered literacy a little better than him), of whom Joan says 'my father is at the Corte but wheare the Court ys J know not' (60).[38]

Ten years after the exchange of letters examined above, we find a Joan emancipated from her father's influence, and independently sharing her husband's views in a mood of complicity: 'J am of your owne mynde, that it is needles to meete my father at Basynge[39] the Jncertayntye being as it ys & J Co̅mend your discreation Jt were a sore Journey to loase yo^{r} labour besyd expenses & Change of Ayre mighte hurte you therfore you are Resolved vpon the best Course' (60).

This time, as in one of the letters of ten years before (that of 28 September 1593), it appears that Alleyn has not come back home when he was expected. Joan does not refrain from stressing this fact, but she does it by using an expression whose illocutionary force is not that of complaint and reproach, as was that of 'vnkindnes' penned by Henslowe ten years before; rather, she does it by using a subtler form of persuasion: she leaves the decision to her

[36] Cerasano says that 'Alleyn gave final "valedictory" performances of *Doctor Faustus* and *Jeronimo* in mid-October, 1597, just weeks before he exited the stage' (2005b, 52).

[37] 'Although retired from acting', Ioppolo says, 'Alleyn's Diary records that he still took an active interest in his theatrical investments' (n.d., 20).

[38] For Henslowe's position as one of the grooms of her Majesty's chamber in 1593, see *supra*, note 26. Greg says that 'The court appears to have been at Winchester on Oct. 18, but had removed to Wilton by Oct. 25' (*Papers*, 60, note to line 9 of the letter).

[39] Greg explains that 'The king had been at Basing, near Basingstoke, the seat of William Powlet, fourth Marquis of Winchester, on 17 Aug.' (*ibid.*).

husband's judgment, at the same time reminding him that his return would be most welcome, and also that that it would be safe on account of the fact that the contagion is lessening:

for yo^{r} Cominge hoame J am not to advyse you neither will J, vse yo^{r} owne discreation yet J longe & am very desyrous to see you, & my poore & simple opinion is yf it shall please you you may safely Come hoame, heare is none now sycke neare vs, yet let it not be as J wyll but at yo^{r} owne best lykynge ... (*ibid.*)[40]

An indirect supplement to the above alluring gestures comes soon after this: Joan is 'glad to heare' that her husband is 'tak[ing] delight in hauckinge' and, rather than chide him for spending his time idly, she warns him, from a 'maternalistic' advantage position, that his apparel must now be in rags; you, she says, 'knowe wheare to have better' (where else than at home?), although you would be 'wellcome to me ... wth yo^{r} rags as yf you were in Cloathe of gold or velvet'. The brief conclusion of this sentence is brilliantly seducing: 'trye & see' (*ibid.*).

Nothing comparable to these communicational and rhetorical devices is present in the letters of ten years before. Obviously, we may ask ourselves who imagined these devices, if Joan herself or the letter's drafter. However, the following pieces of information and evaluations also show that Joan is perfectly aware of the way in which business should be conducted. She has 'payd fyfty shillings for yo^{r} Rent' and, when Mr Woodward's deputy was sent to receive it, she 'had witnesses' with her 'at the payment of the money & have his quittance'. Only, she had to pay 'a groat' for the quittance, which 'they sayd it was the baylives fee'; previous transactions have been made by Edward, and therefore, she says, 'you knowe best whether you were wont to paye it'; then, a little annoyed, she adds: 'yf not they made a symple woman of me' (*ibid.*).

4. *Conclusion*

Reading the letters examined above, we get the feeling that Joan was a cherished daughter, and that her welfare, both material and sentimental, was one of her father's cares. The impression is strengthened when we read Henslowe's *Diary*, where the very first items concern her: 'Jonne allen Receued for Rente as folowthe ...' (*Diary*, 5); below, on the same page, the step-father penned a list of expenses, including 'xvs' (that is, fifteen shillings) to the joyner 'for the bedstead' we have already heard about (*ibid.*); in the following page, Henslowe wrote an entry concerning the marriage of the couple, which had been celebrated a few months earlier: 'Edward alen wasse maryed vnto Jone Woodward the 22 of daye of octob3 1592 In the iiij & thirtie yeare of the Quene' (*Diary*, 6).[41] Alleyn's Diary and Account Book, in turn, shows that Joan was, as Grace Ioppolo says, a 'beloved wife' (n.d., 22). The last item in her husband's account book bears the date of 1 October 1622. She died less than a year later, on

[40] Commenting on a similar judgment of Joan's part when, at the beginning of her letter she says that 'about vs the sycknes dothe Cease' (59), Greg says that 'Mistress Alleyn's pious anticipations were not quite realised, for the deaths from plague continued to be over forty a week from 9 June to 22 December' (*Papers*, 59, note to Article 38). Leeds Barroll says that 'Mrs Alleyn's letter may have been sincerely meant, but, from the viewpoint, say, of the city or crown authorities, it was overly sanguine' (1991, 110). Prudently, however, Joan is only saying that there are no sick persons in their neighbourhood.

[41] These items were probably entered by the time the three started to exchange the letters examined in 3.1.

28 June 1623 and is buried in Dulwich Chapel. Her husband had a portrait made of her, which is shown in the Dulwich Picture Gallery (see figure below).

Figure 1 – *Joan Alleyn*, British School, oil on panel, 79.1 x 63.2 cm, 1596, DPG444.
Courtesy of the Dulwich Picture Gallery, London

We may be disappointed by the fact that, a few months after Joan's death, Edward married Constance, John Donne's daughter, who was about forty years his junior; and, even more, that he strongly wanted to marry this very young girl, for he married her against her father's will. But his second wife does not seem to have received the loving and jesting letters the husband addressed to her 'mousse'; neither did she share with him the enthusiasm of the young couple preparing things to share in their first household: the raising of spinach and beans in their newly-set garden, or the impatiently awaited for bedstead the joiner made for their first wedding bed in their first house as a married couple; Constance had not the thrill of living as the loved wife of a 'model actor' whose daily work was to impersonate Tamburlaine or Barabbas, or that of seeing him 'in the role of the "*Genius Urbis*", or the Genius of the city, in *The Magnificent Entertainment Given to King James*, written by Ben Jonson and Thomas Dekker and performed on 15 March 1604 as James and his court processed through London' (Ioppolo n.d., 11).

Furthermore, the Diary and Account Book of Edward Alleyn (1617-1622),[42] by listing scrupulously Alleyn's day-by-day expenses, reveals much of the kind of life the couple was leading at Dulwich, where they moved in 1613. Many of the expenses concern Joan and her apparel, but, more significantly, the Diary lists the celebration of such festivities as Christmas and Easter, Alleyn's birthday and the couple's wedding anniversary; and it shows that Joan was an active part in the social life of her husband: nearly every Sunday they had friends at dinner (the formula is so and so 'dined with us'); she went with her husband to Queen Anne's funeral and, obviously, to all the official ceremonies at Dulwich; the main yearly festivities were celebrated both privately and as part of the College's functions, and, occasionally, the couple was invited to spend some time at the residence of friends, as was the case in 1598, when they 'spent some months at the home of Arthur Langworth in Sussex' (see Ioppolo n.d., 9).

Ioppolo also says that Alleyn must have been conscious of the historical importance of his papers and those he inherited by Philip Henslowe: 'That his foundation deeds and other documents for Dulwich College insisted that all of his papers, and those inherited from Henslowe, be kept together in perpetuity at the College ... suggests that he saw his Diary and the other papers as important historical documents that would be used for generations to come' (n.d., 8).

While agreeing with this evaluation, one feels that a further, more crucial reflection stems from it. What manuscript sources from the era of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre have reached us have been preserved by chance, randomly salvaged from the action of devouring time, and later 'discovered' by some scholar or antiquary. The only corpus of manuscripts preserved entirely (except for a few thefts performed by later scholars) and intentionally are the thousands of papers Alleyn donated to the College of God's Gift. How can we evaluate the fact that no one else among the hundreds of people who were involved in the activities of that memorable theatrical era thought that to preserve some bits of its memory would have been an invaluable cultural gesture? Even Henslowe, we may imagine, would not have kept his diary for posterity: it is only thanks to Edward Alleyn that that most conspicuous holograph source of information has been handed down to us, intentionally and legally preserved. We would have many more original manuscript documents witnessing the story of the unique experience that was the Elizabethan-Jacobean theatre and its cultural and social context than we do if more people had discerned the uniqueness of that experience. Not even William Shakespeare did.

While, in 1619, when they were donated, the thousands of papers documenting Edward Alleyn's activities and those of Philip Henslowe were probably not a marketable asset, they have become a priceless patrimony for future generations of scholars. Only an exceptionally open mind might have foreseen that even the personal familiar letters examined in this essay would have been considered by some future readers as precious historical, cultural and sociological testimony.

[42] MSS 9 in The Henslowe Alleyn Digitisation Project, <https://henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/catalogue/mss-9/>, accessed 1 August 2020.

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