



# Shakespeare and the Poets' War

*James Bednarz*

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In a remarkable piece of detective work, Shakespeare scholar James Bednarz traces the Bard's legendary wit-combats with Ben Jonson to their source during the Poets' War. Bednarz offers the most thorough reevaluation of this "War of the Theaters" since Harbage's *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*, revealing a new vision of Shakespeare as a playwright intimately concerned with the production of his plays, the opinions of his rivals, and the impact his works had on their original audiences. Rather than viewing Shakespeare as an anonymous creator, *Shakespeare and the Poets' War* re-creates the contentious entertainment industry that fostered his genius when he first began to write at the Globe in 1599.

Bednarz redraws the Poets' War as a debate on the social function of drama and the status of the dramatist that involved not only Shakespeare and Jonson but also the lesser known John Marston and Thomas Dekker. He shows how this controversy, triggered by Jonson's bold new dramatic experiments, directly influenced the writing of *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Hamlet*, gave rise to the first modern drama criticism in English, and shaped the way we still perceive Shakespeare today.

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