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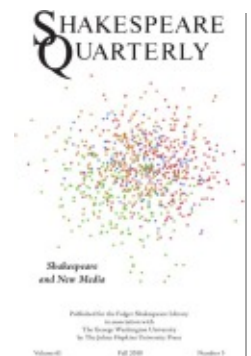
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## **The Meaning of Success: Stories of 1594 and Its Aftermath**

Holger Schott Syme

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## The Meaning of Success: Stories of 1594 and Its Aftermath

HOLGER SCHOTT SYME

WHEN IT COMES TO SUCCESS, hindsight is hard to beat. In hindsight, the stationer Thomas Creed's decision to buy and print quite so many Queen's Men's plays in and after 1594 looks like an unwise choice, since none of them saw more than a single edition. However, Creed's purchase of *A Looking Glass for London and England* (not performed by the Queen's Men and reprinted four times) looks considerably more savvy than his colleague Cuthbert Burby's investment in *A Knack to Know an Honest Man* (one quarto).<sup>1</sup> And a third stationer, William Jones—who would soon strike gold with *Mucedorus* (eventually appearing in sixteen editions)—perhaps should not have wasted resources on *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, with its single quarto. But hindsight is deceptive in these cases, turning calculated, risk-taking decisions into acts of obvious foolishness.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I ask what it might have meant for a play, a playing company, or even a stationer to be successful in 1594 and if we can reconstruct early modern conditions and meanings of success or failure at all. I focus on that particular historical moment for two reasons. On the one hand, the survival of Philip Henslowe's *Diary*—the collection of business records and other, seemingly unrelated scraps and fragments containing detailed, day-by-day data on takings at the Rose theater—allows us to construct a near-complete account of the plays the Admiral's Men staged in London from May 1594 to November 1597 and assess the success of those performances.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, 1594

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<sup>1</sup> In this essay, titles of lost plays are indicated by quotation marks; titles of plays printed or surviving in manuscript are indicated by italics.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Douglas Bruster's recent argument that what modern historians know "about publishing in this era could have been *known*, in the strong sense of that word, by no publisher of the time"; see "The Birth of an Industry," in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Volume 1: Origins to 1660*, ed. Jane Milling and Peter Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 224–41, esp. 237.

<sup>3</sup> R. A. Foakes, ed., *Henslowe's Diary*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), 2002.

marks the emergence of drama as a popular form in print. More plays were published that year than in the previous ten years combined; for the first time, there was a set of books potentially representative of the repertory of the professional theaters.

Given this unusual wealth of information, it is not surprising that the dominant theater-historical narratives about that period give the impression that we know quite a lot about what took place and about what those events meant. Conversely, I will be guided by the assumption that our knowledge is severely circumscribed and that we understand far less about the theatrical scene of the mid-1590s than the actors, investors, writers, and publishers active in and around it did. Even if that scene often appears relatively cohesive, in reality it may have been a more fragmented field, populated by agents motivated by divergent agendas and assumptions. What seems important to us, with hindsight, might have appeared trivial at first hand. I will give early modern theater professionals their due, tracing the rationales behind some of their business moves and highlighting just how far modern narratives of success and failure on the London stage differ from the practices and perspectives embedded in the commercial transactions and records of theater managers and stationers.

## I

Definitions of success are contingent on expectations and standards, so any discussion of the commercial fate of plays in the 1590s relies implicitly on a broader understanding of the theatrical environment of those years. Here, too, retrospective points of view prevail. Literary history has come to value Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare above all other Elizabethan playwrights, and their centrality to the modern canon has been projected back into the 1590s. In hindsight, they appear just as indispensable to the repertories of the Admiral's Men and the Lord Chamberlain's Men as they are to the history of English literature. No one has been more forthright in constructing this claim than Andrew Gurr, who has repeatedly stated—in surprisingly apodictic terms, given the near-total absence of documentary evidence for the claim—that both companies were assigned by their patrons the texts they supposedly came to rely on for many years. "All of Shakespeare's earlier plays," he writes, "went into the new Chamberlain's," while Marlowe's plays "were and remained for decades the [Admiral's] company's favorite plays. . . . They became the defining features of [their] repertory."<sup>4</sup> Besides the questionable presumption that the players' pa-

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Gurr, "The Great Divide of 1594," in *Words That Count: Essays on Early Modern Authorship in Honor of MacDonald P. Jackson*, ed. Brian Boyd (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004), 29–48, esp. 45, 35. For Gurr's consciousness of the lack of any concrete evidence for his position, see *The Shakespeare Company, 1594–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 2n.

trons, privy councillors or not, could override legal property rights at will, another problem with this theory is that it imposes a rigid binary structure onto a repertory that is marked by staggering variety.<sup>5</sup> True, much of that richness is lost to us and preserved only as titular traces in Henslowe's business records, but to assert that "the Fortune" survived on a diet of "Marlowe, Peele and Kyd" into the 1620s and beyond seems arbitrary.<sup>6</sup> It invites us to concentrate on plays that survive while it downplays the fact that a far greater number of texts keeping them company in the *Diary* have disappeared. The hypothesis also mistakes one kind of success—the ability to be considered a worthwhile investment by a stationer or the ability to attract a reading audience, perhaps even for centuries—for another: the power to appeal to theatergoers.

Gurr's identification of these more or less canonical plays "as the beating heart of the company's repertory," however, corresponds to a programmatic reductivism similarly at work in his theory of the duopoly of playing companies supposedly established by government fiat in 1594 in playhouses just north and south of the city. This theory posits the simultaneous disappearance of all other theater troupes from London.<sup>7</sup> Gurr's more recent suggestion that the Lord Chamber-

<sup>5</sup> Such rights figure prominently in Glynne Wickham's discussion of the 1598 Privy Council order that demanded that all public playhouses be "plucke[d] downe quite." Wickham acutely points out that these instructions "cannot be taken at . . . face value" since they beg "legal questions of ownership and compensation" and thus perversely might actually have "protected the players" from the implementation of such drastic measures. See Glynne Wickham, "The Privy Council Order of 1597 for the Destruction of London's Playhouses," in *Early English Stages, 1300 to 1660*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972–81), 2.2:9–29, esp. 10–11, for the full treatment of the order. There is more evidence for a genuine change of government attitudes towards the theater in 1598 than in 1594, and Richard Dutton has proposed a less generous reading of the Privy Council's order and the associated actions and documents; see *Licensing, Censorship and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2000), 16–40.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Gurr, *Shakespeare's Opposites: The Admiral's Company 1594–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 170. The association between the company and two of those playwrights is shaky at best. I will argue below that the Admiral's Men cannot be linked to Thomas Kyd conclusively, certainly not before 1618. The connection with George Peele is even more tenuous, based on the entirely speculative identification of two entries in Henslowe's diary ("Mahamet" and "Longshanks") as two of his plays (*Battle of Alcazar* and *Edward I*). See Roslyn L. Knutson, "Play Identifications: *The Wise Man of West Chester* and *John a Kent and John a Cumber*; *Longshanks* and *Edward I*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 47 (1984): 1–11; and Charles Edelman, ed., *The Stukeley Plays: "The Battle of Alcazar" by George Peele; "The Famous History of the Life and Death of Captain Thomas Stukeley"* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2005), 16–24.

<sup>7</sup> Gurr, *Shakespeare's Opposites*, 171. The duopoly idea, which in its reception and in its later formulations has often been treated as a statement of fact, has its origins in Gurr's "Intertextuality at Windsor," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 (1987): 189–200, and received its first full treatment in his "Three Reluctant Patrons and Early Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44 (1993): 159–74; it has since been developed and restated in all of Gurr's book-length publications. Although it has been widely adopted, especially by scholars outside the theater-historical community, the view has always had its critics. Roslyn Lander Knutson's critique has been the most bracing,

lain's and Admiral's Men were, at the same time, equipped with readymade repertoires, each dominated by one author, conflates a number of different trajectories of success: success at court, where these two companies held sway from 1594/5 to 1599/1600; success in print, where few playwrights rivaled Shakespeare's and Marlowe's selling power; and finally, their posthumous success in reception history. As Gurr himself affirms, "History has not devalued the judgment made in 1594"—the "judgment," that is, to distribute the two "best" authors' plays to the two "best" companies.<sup>8</sup> However, this scheme fails to account for one major kind of success: popularity in the theater, the medium for which the plays were written in the first place.

Gurr's approach may be understandable in the case of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, since we know so little about them. Their dominance at court is our one sound indication of their theatrical prowess. We have a handful of their plays, some of which did well in print.<sup>9</sup> We know quite a bit about the venues where they performed (although less than for other companies, including the Admiral's Men from 1594 to 1601 and Derby's Men in the late 1590s).<sup>10</sup> But about their repertory, we know very little. Given this documentary vacuum, tethering a history of the troupe to what has survived—Shakespeare's plays and court performance records—is almost the scholar's only choice. The same is not true, however, of other companies, especially the Admiral's Men. The far richer archive documenting that company's fate shows that different kinds of success did not inevitably coincide in the period. It seems to me that this archive should encour-

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especially in *Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare's Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 8–11.

<sup>8</sup> Gurr, "Great Divide," 46.

<sup>9</sup> Beyond Shakespeare's plays, the list is very short indeed: the Lord Chamberlain's Men are named on the title pages of only five plays: the anonymous *A Warning for Fair Women* (1599), Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humor* (1601), W. S.'s *Thomas Lord Cromwell* (1602), the anonymous *A Larum for London* (1602), and, problematically, Thomas Dekker's *Satiromastix* (1602). To these, we may add Jonson's *Every Man out of His Humor* (1600, printed without company attribution but linked to the Lord Chamberlain's Men in his *Workes* [1616]); *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* (1608), assigned to the King's Men on the title page of its first quarto, but on stage considerably earlier, since it is alluded to in Thomas Middleton's *Black Book* (1604); and possibly the anonymous *Mucedorus* (1598), advertised in 1610 as performed by the King's Men. When the Lord Chamberlain's Men played at Newington Butts with the Admiral's Men in June 1594, Henslowe listed two plays, "Hamlet" and "Heaster & Asheweros," that do not reappear in his records of the Admiral's Men's shows, so those two can be added to the Lord Chamberlain's Men's repertory as well, bringing the total number of titles associated with them to no more than ten, in addition to Shakespeare's works.

<sup>10</sup> The Admiral's Men's two theaters, the Rose and the Fortune, are fairly well known both from surviving documents, including the builder's contract for the Fortune, and from archaeological digs at the site of the Rose. The architecture of the Boar's Head Inn is extensively discussed in a series of legal disputes documented by Herbert Berry; see *The Boar's Head Playhouse* (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1986).

age us to question an interpretative principle of thrift that assumes that different modes of popularity followed identical trajectories and that consequently links achievements at court and in print directly to stage popularity. The danger in this approach is the temptation to treat archival absences as historical ones. For instance, scholars regularly point out that the Queen's Men must have been in rapid decline in the 1590s, because of their supposed disappearance from London stages after a brief stint at the Rose theater in April 1594.<sup>11</sup> It is true that they are not mentioned as playing in or near the City after that date. But this is not unusual; in fact, we have almost no records at all of that company ever performing for the London public. Between the first year of the Queen's Men's existence and April 1594, we find an archival void, defined by Henslowe's entries on one edge and two earlier sets of documents on the other, one dealing with a season at the Bull and Bell Inns from November 1583 to Shrovetide 1584, and the other a petition for permission to play in the City from November 1584.<sup>12</sup> That is to say, the assumption that the Queen's Men vanished from theaters after 1594 has as much evidentiary basis as the assumption that they did not perform publicly in London during any of their years of unrivaled popularity after 1584. Both suppositions may or may not be correct, but both place too much faith in a flawed archive; they conclude that the Queen's Men were absent from the capital because they are absent from the historical record. In reality, scholars have treated the archive's silence in even more problematic ways. For the 1580s, the years in which the company was allegedly more successful than any other, the void is filled with a narrative of popularity; for the 1590s, the very same void is left open in order to support a narrative of failure. An admission of ignorance strikes me as a more appropriate response to such lacunae than a confident assertion of certainty.

The Queen's Men are not the only victims of archival attrition. Although records of failure from the 1590s are hard to come by, narratives of commercial and professional collapse are a necessary corollary of narratives of success, such as the duopoly hypothesis. If "the Shakespeare Company" and "Shakespeare's Opposites" were the only troupes allowed to perform in London from 1594 on, other companies had to lose that right first. And if the Lord Chamberlain's Men were

<sup>11</sup> Even Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean's seminal revisionist history of the company seems to affirm this orthodox reading of the Queen's Men's London fortunes. Rebuffing the traditional narrative, indebted to W. W. Greg, of the company's financial woes, McMillin and MacLean make a strong case for the players' continued success on the touring circuit. At the same time, however, they concede that "in London their situation was giving way" and that "the London decline of this company is part of what makes the early 1590s a watershed in English drama"; see *The Queen's Men and Their Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 49–51.

<sup>12</sup> Foakes, ed., *Henslowe's Diary*, 21; E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1923), 4:296–302; and McMillin and MacLean, 175–88.

“given” all of Shakespeare’s plays that year, they first had to be taken away from their previous owners.<sup>13</sup> History’s losers, from this perspective, include Derby’s Men, Pembroke’s Men, Sussex’s Men, and, inevitably, the Queen’s Men. But what do we really know either of these companies’ fates or of what happened to those Shakespeare plays assumed to have been written before 1594? *The Two Gentleman of Verona* was likely performed by someone before 1594, but it is absent from recorded history until its publication in 1623. “A” *Shrew* (which may or may not have been Shakespeare’s “*The*” *Shrew*) was staged at Newington Butts on 11 June 1594, likely by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, but a play of the same title was published that year as played by Pembroke’s servants, an ascription repeated in 1596 and 1607. “A comedy of errors” (probably Shakespeare’s) was performed at Gray’s Inn by an unidentified troupe in December 1594 and by the King’s Men at court in 1604/5 (as was *Love’s Labor’s Lost*).<sup>14</sup> The first Henriad can be linked to Edward Alleyn (tentatively) and to Pembroke’s Men (more securely), but not to Richard Burbage and company until the Folio; *Richard III* and *Romeo and Juliet* are both ascribed to Hunsdon’s Men or the Lord Chamberlain’s Men on title pages in 1597.<sup>15</sup> The only reason for assuming that the majority of these plays became part of the repertory of the new company in 1594 is the fact that they appear in the Folio almost thirty years later—that, and the unspoken desire to think of Shakespeare as coextensive with the “Shakespeare Company.”

It is troublesome enough that this narrative glosses over gaps in the archive. But more troublingly, it actually requires us to ignore the scant documentary evidence we do possess. As I mentioned above, “a comedy of errors” was staged on 28 December 1594, during the Christmas revels at Gray’s Inn.<sup>16</sup> The *Gesta Grayorum*, the account of the festivities that records that fact, says only that the comedy “was played by the Players,” without identifying the privy counselor who was the company’s patron. This is a curious omission, especially if the Lord Chamberlain’s Men had recently been anointed to the status of the theatrical elect. Or maybe not so curious: it so happens that the Lord Chamberlain’s Men received a payment for a court performance on 28 December at Greenwich—a “difficulty,” as R. A. Foakes puts it.<sup>17</sup> According to the duopoly narrative, after all, there were only two troupes that could have staged “a comedy of errors” that night. All others had failed or had been pushed out of London. Since no “comedy

<sup>13</sup> Gurr, *Shakespeare Company*, 282.

<sup>14</sup> See John H. Astington, *English Court Theatre 1558–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 239; and H. R. Woodhuysen, ed., *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1998), 83–85.

<sup>15</sup> I have taken this list from Gurr, *Shakespeare Company*, 282.

<sup>16</sup> Excerpted in E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1930), 2:319–20, esp. 320.

<sup>17</sup> R. A. Foakes, ed., *The Comedy of Errors* (London: Methuen, 1962), 116.

of errors" is listed in Henslowe's diary, the company in question therefore must be the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Consequently, the court payment record must be wrong. In fact, it almost certainly is. Two court performances are listed for 28 December, one for each troupe: a practically unprecedented event. But while the Admiral's Men's shows are entered by date (28 December, 1 January, 6 January), the Lord Chamberlain's Men are recorded as having played "vpon S<sup>r</sup> Stephens daye & Innocentes daye" (that is, 26 and 28 December).<sup>18</sup> Without other evidence, the latter seems less likely to be a scribe's slip than the former—and there is no corroborating evidence either way, unless we simply assume that the duopoly theory is correct and that the "comedy of errors" belonged to the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594.

Neither of these presumptions can be verified, and there are equally plausible alternatives. Sussex's Men, who played at the Rose theater from December 1593 to April 1594 with above-average success, may not have collapsed.<sup>19</sup> The Queen's Men, supposedly in rapid decline but still appearing at court in 1593 and making very decent money on tour, may not have imploded after their stint at the Rose in April 1594 (again, with above-average returns).<sup>20</sup> Pembroke's Men may have survived their bad spell in August and September 1593, when they were "all at home . . . for they cane not saue ther carges <w><sup>th</sup> trauell . . . & weare fayne to pane the<r> parell for ther carge."<sup>21</sup> They were healthy enough, after all, to appear in the Welsh marches in 1593/4, at Ipswich in 1595/6, and in London at the Swan Theatre by 1597 at the latest.<sup>22</sup> Any one of these companies could have been "the Players" at Gray's Inn. It is usually assumed that *The Comedy of Errors* was one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, and we simply do not know if he maintained owner-

<sup>18</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, 4:164–65.

<sup>19</sup> See Foakes, ed., *Henslowe's Diary*, 20–21; and Carol Chillington Rutter, ed., *Documents of the Rose Playhouse*, rev. ed. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999), 77–79.

<sup>20</sup> See Foakes, ed., *Henslowe's Diary*, 21; Rutter, *Documents*, 80–81; and Helen Ostovich, Holger Schott Syme, and Andrew Griffin, "Locating the Queen's Men: An Introduction," in *Locating the Queen's Men, 1583–1603: Material Practices and Conditions of Playing*, ed. Helen Ostovich, Holger Schott Syme, and Andrew Griffin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 1–23, esp. 7–10. It is worth reminding ourselves that Henslowe's nephew Francis invested £15 in a share in the company in May 1594, money his uncle thought wisely enough spent to loan it to him; see McMillin and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, 49. That the Queen's Men "brocke & went into the contrey" at that point (Foakes, ed., *Henslowe's Diary*, 7) is no evidence for a decline in their fortunes, but likely simply a reflection of their normal touring patterns.

<sup>21</sup> Foakes, ed., *Henslowe's Diary*, 280 (letter from Henslowe to Alleyn, 28 September 1593). Henslowe does not say that the company sold its plays nor, in fact, that they sold anything; he writes that they were "fayne" to pawn their costumes, an eminently reversible action (and in his letter, possibly a desire or need, not a *fait accompli*).

<sup>22</sup> See Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 276; and William Ingram, *A London Life in the Brazen Age: Francis Langley, 1548–1602* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978), 151–66.



ship of those texts or sold or traded them to his own or another company. Perhaps the play was Pembroke's, as were one or two of the *Henry VI* plays, certainly in their quarto versions and possibly in others as well. Perhaps Sussex's Men, who also performed *Titus Andronicus*, were the owners. What if the Queen's Men had tried to modernize their repertory by picking up Shakespeare's riff on Plautus? Might not any one of them have performed that night at the revels?

These are not particularly powerful hypotheses. But they have as much claim on the truth as the standard account that the Gray's Inn show was put on by the Lord Chamberlain's Men; we do not know either way. In fact, we cannot even say with certainty that the "comedy of errors" in the *Gesta Grayorum* is really the play published much later under an almost identical title. That said, my suggestions aim to restore a sense of the fecundity of the London theatrical scene in the 1590s, a fecundity virtually erased by the reductive duopoly narrative. The hypotheses' chief merit is that they avoid using the court, surely the most regulated site of theatrical production in the realm, as a model for the popular stage.<sup>23</sup> They do not assume that we know who the winners and losers were in 1594 or that such categories applied at all. To sketch this alternative picture in more detail, I move from things about which we are necessarily ignorant to some of the scraps of knowledge we can actually lay our hands on.

## II

What do we know about the mid-1590s? We know that, in October 1594, adding a fourth theater to the three already operating in the London suburbs seemed like a wise business decision to Francis Langley, and we know that he did not abandon that plan subsequently.<sup>24</sup> We know that just a month later, Oliver Woodliffe signed a lease for the Boar's Head Inn, including a contractual obligation to outfit the yard with galleries and a stage for playacting within seven years. He concluded this project in 1598 and expanded upon it a year later, when Der-

<sup>23</sup> The logical leap from court to popular success has influenced the work of even the most careful theater historians. Witness Dutton's argument that "when the theatres re-opened [in 1594] the Admiral's and Chamberlain's Men had been shaped as predominant companies, in ways that commercial practice alone would not explain" (17–18). The statement presupposes an equivalence between court and commercial prominence, suggests (quite rightly) that the spontaneous formation of a duopoly in the entertainment market of the 1590s is unlikely, and concludes that the situation must have been brought about by government intervention. However, while it is reasonable to assume that the two companies' court success was an effect of policy (the Master of the Revels favoring the companies of two important counselors, perhaps), we do not have the data that would allow us to assess the two troupes' predominance in commercial terms, although we can make inferences, all of which suggest that such widely held assumptions about connections between courtly and commercial prominence are questionable.

<sup>24</sup> Ingram, *London Life in the Brazen Age*, 107–11.

by's Men moved into residence.<sup>25</sup> We know that two companies, Sussex's Men and the Queen's Men, played successfully at the Rose theater in 1594; we do not know the London fortunes of either of them after that.<sup>26</sup> We know that in 1596, four playhouses were remarkable enough to be noted in two travelers' accounts.<sup>27</sup> We know that someone was performing at the Swan theater that year, and we know that in 1597, there were at least three adult companies occupying at least three of the suburban theaters for most of the year.<sup>28</sup> We know that a number of stationers began to consider plays worthwhile investments and apparently assumed that naming the many companies whose texts they published was good advertising (for the books, and perhaps for the players as well), a practice they continued until the end of the century.<sup>29</sup> None of these facts suggest that the theatrical scene had been radically transformed in 1594, by the government or otherwise, nor do they speak to a collective collapse of the older playing companies. If they suggest anything it is that the near-total absence of London records other than Henslowe's does not reflect the failure of all other ventures but might actually obscure a wealth of activity now lost to us.<sup>30</sup>

In 1594, London had three major playhouses—the Theatre, the Curtain, and the Rose—as well as a number of inns still used for performance and (at least until September) the unloved playhouse in Newington Butts.<sup>31</sup> But who exactly played at the Curtain and Newington Butts, let alone the inns, once the alleged

<sup>25</sup> Berry, *Boar's Head Playhouse*, 24–36.

<sup>26</sup> Rutter, ed., *Documents*, 80–81; and Ostovich et al., “Locating the Queen's Men,” 7–8.

<sup>27</sup> Prince Lewis of Anhalt-Cöthen mentions four playhouses (“vier spielhäuser”) in his account (Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, 2:360); the more famous reference is Johannes de Witt's description of the four playhouses and their signs, which singles out the Swan theater as the most excellent and grand (“prestantissimum est et amplissimum”) (Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, 2:362).

<sup>28</sup> As David Mateer has recently shown, in 1596—barely two years after the supposed establishment of the duopoly—leaving the Admiral's Men and joining Pembroke's at the Swan Theatre instead seemed like a good idea not only to Richard Jones and Thomas Downton, but also to the boy player Richard Perkins, who breached his contract with Alleyn in an attempt to become one of the actors at Langley's theater. See David Mateer, “Edward Alleyn, Richard Perkins and the Rivalry between the Swan and the Rose Playhouses,” *Review of English Studies* 243 (2009): 61–77. This suggests that Pembroke's Men functioned as a genuine popular alternative to the two troupes in favor with the court. Otherwise, the decision of three professionals to leave the Admiral's Men for the Swan is difficult to explain.

<sup>29</sup> See Knutson, *Playing Companies and Commerce*, 73.

<sup>30</sup> Of course, we have a lot of information on the rich and varied array of theatrical activities in the provinces in the increasingly complete collection of the Records of Early English Drama; my argument here, in essence, suggests that the London scene was no different from dramatic life in the country at large.

<sup>31</sup> Glynne Wickham, Herbert Berry, and William Ingram, eds., *English Professional Theatre, 1530–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 321; and William Ingram, *The Business of Playing: The Beginnings of the Adult Professional Theater in Elizabethan London* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992), 176–77.

duopoly had been established? And if the Privy Council did indeed force players to abandon those theaters, who in their right mind would at that very moment hatch the plan Langley came up with—that is, to build a fourth, particularly opulent theater, the Swan? Langley's idea (and a month later, Woodliffe's) only makes sense if playing in London continued at similar levels as before 1594 and, in fact, showed signs of increased diversity. In other words, everything we actually know—rather than surmise—about 1594 points to a fair degree of success and growth in the theatrical world, not to widespread failure and severe government intervention.

Even so, the history of playing companies in the later 1590s remains patchy, with one major exception: that of the Admiral's Men. We have more detailed information about this company from 1594 to 1597 than about any other early modern troupe of players. Henslowe's *Diary* mentions approximately 230 plays from their repertory, and we have concrete financial data for more than 80 of them.<sup>32</sup> Yet in critical history, as well as in the most recent analysis of the Admiral's Men, they have been reduced by analogy to "the Shakespeare company," to "the Marlowe company." A mere five texts putatively defined the repertory for the duration of the company's existence. Allegedly, while Alleyn was with the company, until 1598 and again from 1601 to 1603, "his favourite roles, Tamburlaine, Faustus, Barabbas, Hieronimo and Tamar Cham, all featured most strongly"—texts by Marlowe and Kyd and one other, presumably Marlowe-esque, play dominated their offerings.<sup>33</sup> Marlowe's plays, the argument goes, "became the defining features of the Admiral's company repertoire."<sup>34</sup>

Uniquely, Henslowe's *Diary* allows us to put such statements to the test, even if doing so (*caveat lector*) will require a good deal of number-crunching. Along the way, some other widely held convictions also should come under scrutiny. It is generally assumed that *Tamburlaine* was one of the most important and successful plays of the period. *The Jew of Malta* was a massive, perennial box-office

<sup>32</sup> The exact count depends on how one interprets some of the more ambiguous entries. In what follows, I have largely taken Henslowe literally, assuming that distinct titles refer to distinct plays, with two exceptions: I accept Knutson's identification of a number of separate but similar entries as all denoting a play I here call "The Grecian Comedy"; and, like her, I interpret the single entry for "Welshman" (yielding a mere 7s. for Henslowe) as a reference to the lost "Longshanks." See Roslyn Lander Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company, 1594–1613* (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1991), 21–22, 214n. I discuss neither of these plays in any detail and adopt Knutson's arguments mainly because they reduce the risk of introducing statistical artifacts; the overall effect on my figures below is minimal. I also treat "Long Meg of Westminster" as an "old" play, since Henslowe does not mark it as "ne"; others have interpreted the "j" that precedes its first entry as a version of the "ne" marker. Wherever the *Diary* calls a play "ne," I assume it was either actually new or considered equivalent to a new play by Henslowe for reasons we may never be able to recover.

<sup>33</sup> Gurr, *Shakespeare's Opposites*, 170–71.

<sup>34</sup> Gurr, "Great Divide," 35.

hit, and *Doctor Faustus's* enduring popularity is undisputed. Surely the idea that Marlowe's plays formed the backbone of the Admiral's Men's economic fortunes makes sense? At first glance, it might. During the three years for which we have income data for the Admiral's Men (1594 to 1597), Marlowe's plays account for 10.5 percent of all performances (74 of 704), although they only make up 6.7 percent of the plays staged in those years (5 of 75); they were performed significantly more frequently, on average, than others. Unsurprisingly, they made Henslowe, and by extension Alleyn and the other sharers, a fair bit of money: 10.3 percent of overall takings (approximately £105 7s. out of approximately £1,024 9s.).<sup>35</sup> That could be called a bedrock of sorts; over £100 in three years was considerably more than small change in the 1590s. But averages can be deceptive. If we break down Marlowe's figures by year, we discover a remarkable trend (Figures 1 through 3).<sup>36</sup> From 1594 to 1595, their first season at the Rose theater, the Admiral's Men relied on Marlowe's plays almost 19 percent of the time, presenting them 52 times out of a total of 278 performances. Not only did they stage them often, they staged them more frequently per play than others (10.4 times, compared to the average 7.5 performances of other productions). But while Marlowe was played a lot, those performances were less lucrative than the company's non-Marlovian offerings; those brought in, on average, 33s. per performance, whereas the Marlowe plays made an average of 30.7s. Most significantly, the £79 14s. that those five productions earned Henslowe in the Admiral's Men's first season at the Rose theater account for almost 76 percent of the total income generated by Marlowe's plays over three years. Once that fact is realized, it cannot be surprising that during the company's second season, 1595 to 1596, Marlowe's share drops precipitously, to 7.7 percent (18 of 235 shows) and a mere 6.7 percent of Henslowe's income, £22 15s. out of a total gross of £338 9s. These plays now underperformed others by almost 4s. per performance. Finally, in their third season, the company nearly made their "defining feature" disappear altogether, staging just four performances of *Doctor Faustus*, with an average yield of a paltry 15s. (compared to the non-Marlovian average of 25s.). By November 1597, what Gurr characterizes as the "beating heart of the

<sup>35</sup> A brief gloss on these figures might be useful here. Theater historians commonly assume that all playgoers paid a penny to enter the playhouse, another penny to gain admittance to the galleries, and a third penny for the better gallery seats; admittance to the lords' room(s) probably located in the galleries immediately next to the stage cost sixpence. In the currency of Shakespeare's time, there were twelve pence to the shilling, and twenty shillings to the pound.

<sup>36</sup> I have broken down the Admiral's Men's seasons at the Rose theater into three more or less yearlong sequences: 14 May 1594 to 26 June 1595 (disregarding the two weeks at Newington Butts with the Lord Chamberlain's Men in June 1594, since those extremely low receipts are nonrepresentative of takings at the Rose and would unduly distort averages), 25 August 1595 to 18 July 1596, and 27 October 1596 to 5 November 1597.

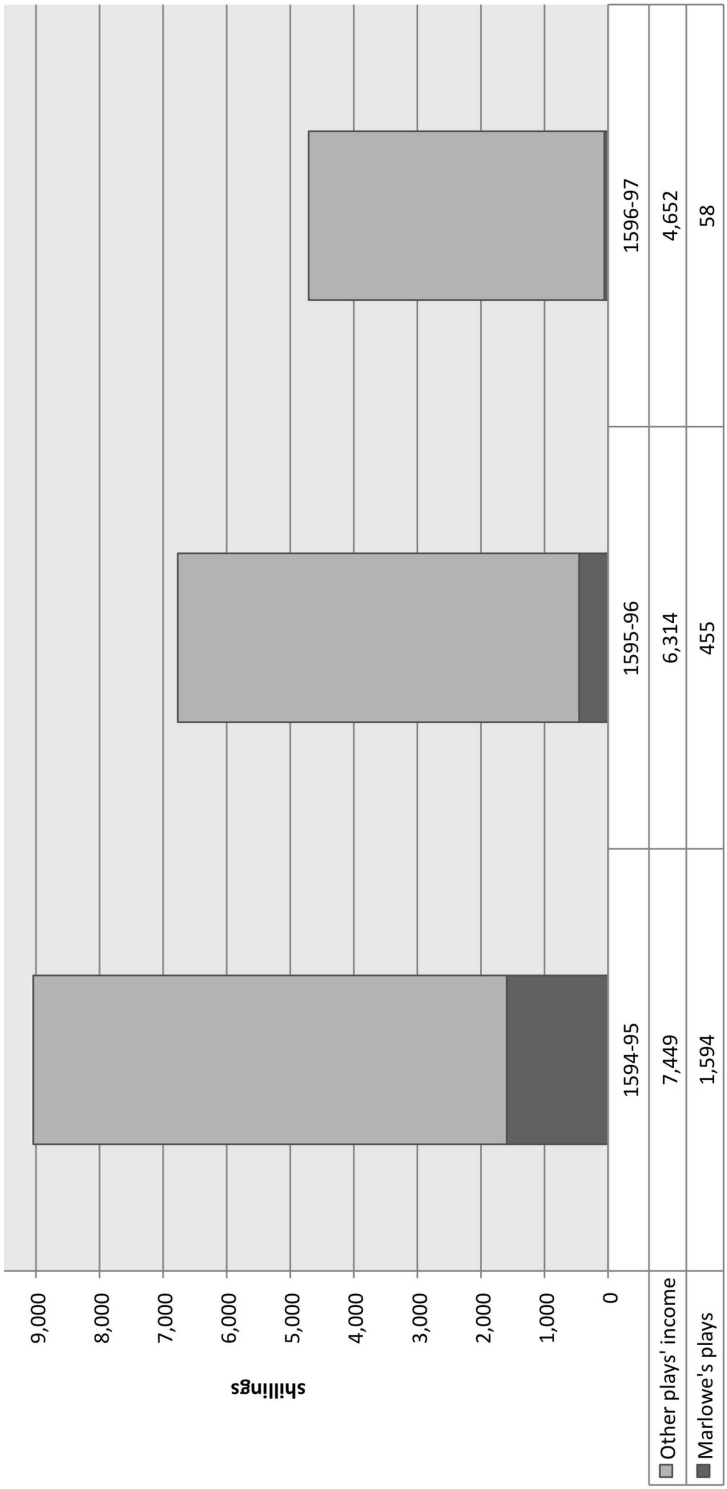


Figure 1: Total season income generated by Marlowe's plays compared to other plays in the Admirals Men's repertory, 1594–97, in shillings.

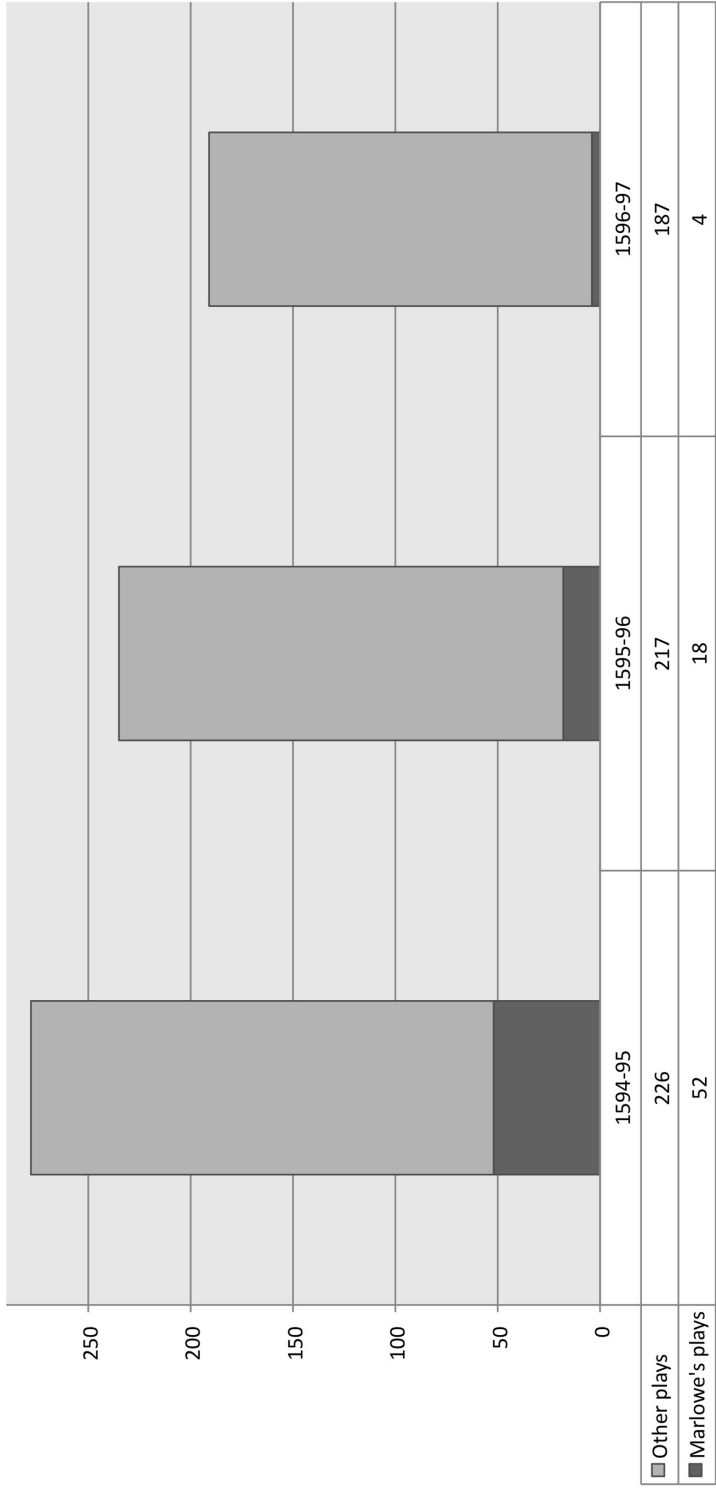


Figure 2: Number of performances of Marlowe's plays compared to other plays in the Admiral's Men's repertory, per season, 1594-97.

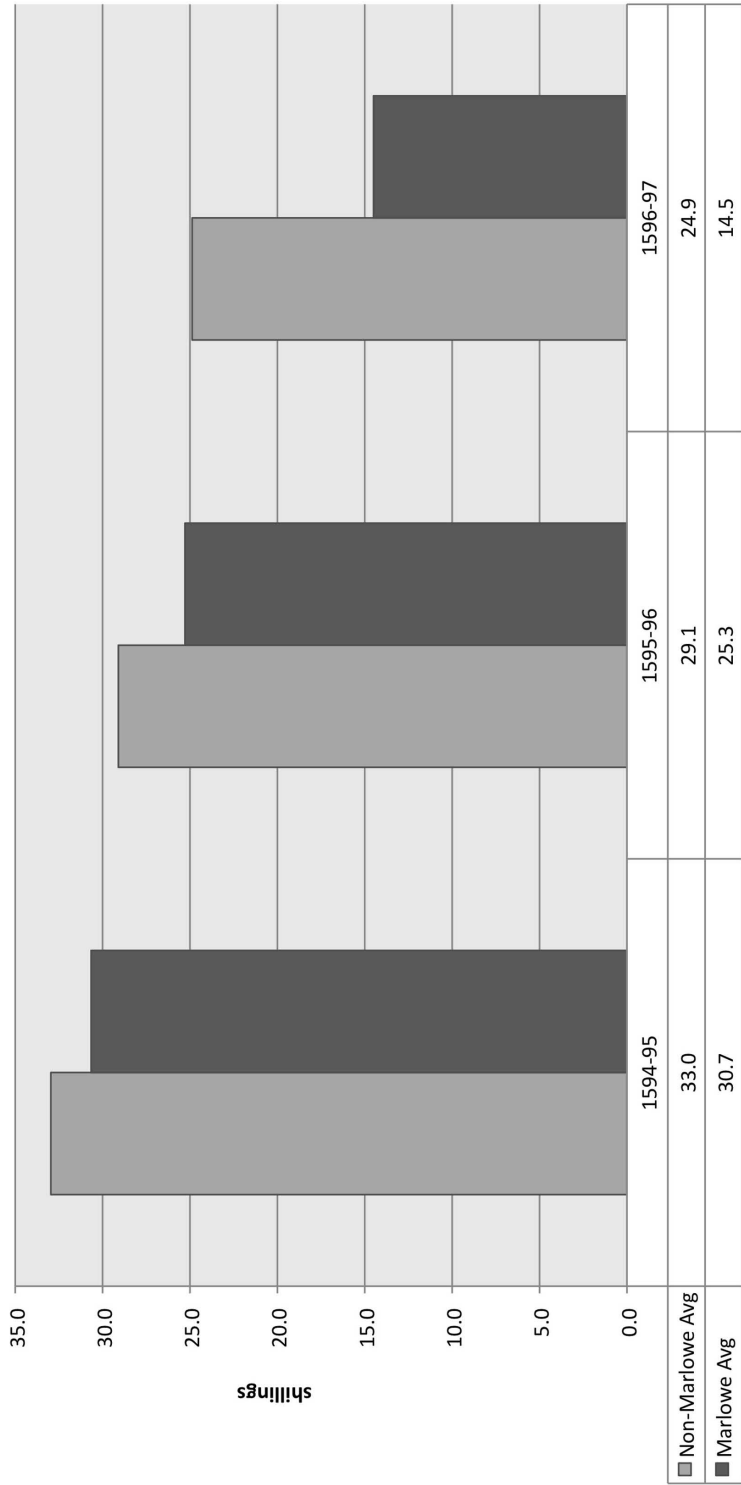


Figure 3: Average takings per performance of Marlowe's plays compared to other plays in the Admiral's Men's repertory, 1594-97, in shillings.

company's repertory" accounted for 1.2 percent of its income and 2.1 percent of its performances.

The data suggest that, while the Admiral's Men started out, unsurprisingly, with Marlowe as a strong presence in their repertory, they quickly cycled his work out of rotation, as they would have done with any play—old or new. In most other regards, his plays do not look all that exceptional either.<sup>37</sup> Among old works in the company's repertory for the 1594–95 season, for instance, *Doctor Faustus* and *1 Tamburlaine* outperform all others (making Henslowe £19 12s. and £22 1s., respectively) only because they were staged more frequently; in terms of average daily revenues, *1 Tamburlaine* (thirteen performances) did no better than "The Siege of London" (seven performances, both 33.9s.), *Doctor Faustus* (thirteen performances) did a little worse than "Mahomet" (eight performances, 30.2s. versus 30.8s., respectively), and none of their revenues compared to the 41s. that "Long Meg of Westminster" (nine performances) brought in, on average. It is worth pointing out, however, that all of Marlowe's plays did significantly better than that other alleged staple, *The Spanish Tragedy*—if that is the text behind Henslowe's "Jeronimo."<sup>38</sup> The play does not appear in the company's playlist until January 1597, when it quickly plummets from a promising set of opening performances to utter mediocrity, generating an average income of 23.5s. over thirteen performances.

These figures left me a little befuddled. It was like being told that 1990s cinema was dominated by Quentin Tarantino's work, only to discover the actual dominance of *Forrest Gump*, *The Santa Clause*, and *Dumb and Dumber*.<sup>39</sup> I had

<sup>37</sup> Tom Rutter argues that "Marlowe's plays were central to the repertory of the reconstituted version of the company that moved to the Rose in 1594" and that new plays written for the Admiral's Men may have imitated Marlovian drama in order to tap the abiding power of his plays to draw crowds; see "Marlovian Echoes in the Admiral's Men Repertory: *Alcazar*, *Stukeley*, *Patient Grissil*," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 27 (2009): 27–38, esp. 28. He may well be right; it is entirely possible that the lost works that outperformed Marlowe's financially merely offered slight updates on an established pattern. But there is no way of testing such a hypothesis.

<sup>38</sup> This may seem like unwarranted skepticism, but no one ever mentioned Alleyn and Hieronimo in the same breath, whereas Burbage is linked to the character in at least two sources, and further connections between the Lord Chamberlain's / King's Men and the play may be traced in both *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair*. None of the many printings of *The Spanish Tragedy* mentions the Admiral's Men on the title page. On the other hand, the only fairly unambiguous link between the company (or rather, one of their later incarnations) and Kyd's play is a reference to the wide-mouthed Richard Fowler in the role from Thomas Rawlins's *The Rebellion* (1640); Fowler was a member of the Palsgrave's Men after 1618.

<sup>39</sup> Theatrical grosses are as follows: *Forrest Gump*, \$329,694,499; *The Santa Clause*, \$144,833,357; *Dumb and Dumber*, \$127,175,374; and *Pulp Fiction*, \$107,928,762. Tarantino's four films of the 1990s (*Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Four Rooms*, and *Jackie Brown*) netted \$154,691,307; the theatrical gross for those five years (1992 to 1997) was \$33,192,300,000. Tarantino's work thus accounted for 0.47 percent of film revenues; see <http://www.boxofficemojo.com> (accessed 8 July 2009).



been skeptical about the “defining feature” claim, but I did not expect to find that Marlowe had become irrelevant by late 1596.<sup>40</sup> My point is not that his plays did poorly. There is no question that when they were staged, they generally performed well: *1 Tamburlaine* earned Henslowe an average of 32s. over its fifteen performances, *The Jew of Malta* 28.2s. over eighteen performances (two runs of ten and eight stagings), *The Massacre at Paris* almost 27s. over ten performances, and *Doctor Faustus* 24.1s. in twenty-four performances. But here, as earlier, success is a matter of context. The most successful “old” play (“Long Meg of Westminster”) was not by Marlowe. While his plays did better on average than most plays written before 1594, those only accounted for a fraction of a repertory that was dominated, both in terms of what was staged and in terms of revenue, by newer work. Many of those new plays did significantly better than his, and many other plays were performed more frequently (Table 1).<sup>41</sup>

However we might want to characterize these figures, they can hardly be described as evidence of Marlovian dominance or lasting central importance. Instead, they suggest that his plays (and “Jeronimo,” for that matter) were entirely ordinary and played more or less the same role as other tried and tested items in the repertory. They did well for a while but could not routinely be expected to play to sellout crowds; as they aged, they perhaps continued to serve as reliable fallback options to fill out a schedule replete with newer, more exciting, and more appealing offerings.

This argument may offer a less impressionistic interpretation than the hypothesis I questioned, but it is undeniably based on a fairly desiccated, if occasionally colorful, text: an account book rather than actual, abidingly fascinating, dramatic literature. If Marlowe were, in fact, central to the Admiral’s Men’s repertory, we could feel that we understand it—and them—because we still have and value those plays. Henslowe’s *Diary*, on the other hand, does not tell us that a single play or author dominated the company’s stock. However, the rich variety of the repertory recorded by Henslowe has almost entirely disappeared; worse, many of the plays that survived now largely languish in critical disregard. A list of the most successful non-Marlovian Admiral’s Men productions contains few

<sup>40</sup> The last two performances of *Doctor Faustus*, on 17 December 1596 and 5 January 1597, brought in 9 and 5s., respectively. The latter is one of the ten lowest-grossing shows in the *Diary*, a list of flops topped by the 9 December 1594 staging of *Jew of Malta*, which made 3s.

<sup>41</sup> The figures for “old” plays do not include Marlowe’s but represent the average of all other plays not entered as “ne” in Henslowe’s lists of Admiral’s Men performances. In Table 1, I count revivals of old plays in that category and revivals of plays earlier entered as “ne” as part of the “new” set. Given that revivals almost always made less money than first runs, this works to Marlowe’s advantage, since it lowers the averages for new plays somewhat in the last two seasons. Amounts for “Old + New” plays exclude Marlowe’s.

Table 1: Yearly income in Henslowe's *Diary*<sup>1</sup>

Year and production type	Income (shillings)	
	Average per performance	Total per year
1594–95		
Old	28.4	2,076
New	35.1	5,372
Old + New	33.0	7,449
Marlowe only	30.7	1,594
1595–96		
Old	21.1	401
New	29.9	5,913
Old + New	29.1	6,314
Marlowe only	25.3	455
1596–97		
Old	21.0	546
New	25.5	4,106
Old + New	24.9	4,652
Marlowe only	14.5	58
Total, 1594–97		
Old	25.6	3,023
New	30.1	15,391
Old + New	29.2	18,415
Marlowe only	28.5	2,107

<sup>1</sup>Marlowe's plays were not included in the calculation of the first three categories (Old, New, Old + New).

familiar titles. Yet measured by both gross revenue and income per performance, these plays did better than almost all of Marlowe's (Table 2).

The list gives figures only for single runs; they all happen to be first runs. Some of these plays were revived and made the company even more money on those occasions.<sup>42</sup> Of all of Marlowe's works, only the company's production of *1 Tamburlaine* could compete with these hit plays. It can happily take its place among "Alexander and Lodowick," "Tasso's Melancholy," and "Crack Me This Nut," with one noteworthy exception: we know that the company revived the latter two in 1602 and at least secured its rights to the book for "Alexander" in 1598, while no efforts to revive *Tamburlaine* are recorded. *Doctor Faustus* would come in sixth place for the 581s. it generated, but its 24.2-shilling average per-

<sup>42</sup> I use "run" or "production" anachronistically to refer to a coherent sequence of performances or shows of any given play; a revival staged after a significant break would constitute a new production, often involving an additional investment in costumes or textual additions. The *Diary* thus lists two productions of *The Jew of Malta* by the Admiral's Men, the first ending on 9 December 1594 after ten performances, the second running from 9 January 1596 to 21 June 1596 for a total of eight shows. But neither run makes the cut for our list.

Table 2: Top-grossing productions in Henslowe's *Diary*

Play	Revenue (shillings)		No. of performances
	Gross	Average income per performance	
"The Wise Man of West Chester"	1,032	35.0	29
"Seven Days of the Week"	703	41.4	17
<i>The Blind Beggar of Alexandria</i>	686	31.0	22
"The Comedy of Humors"	648	49.0	13
<i>A Knack to Know an Honest Man</i>	599	28.5	21
"1 Hercules"	512	46.5	11
"Crack Me This Nut"	471	29.4	16
"Alexander and Lodowick"	458	30.5	15
"Belin Dun"	456	28.5	16
"Longshanks"	435	29.0	15
"Long Meg of Westminster"	414	34.5	12
"Tasso's Melancholy"	360	30.0	12

formance yield would not be competitive.<sup>43</sup> More relevant for my present point, however, is the story the italics tell. A mere two of these texts survive—*The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* and *A Knack to Know an Honest Man*—and neither can be called canonical in our century.<sup>44</sup> *Knack to Know* has not been reprinted since the 1912 Tudor Facsimile Texts edition, and *Blind Beggar* has only the 1928 Malone Society edition and inclusion in the collected works of George Chapman to its name. Why was "Belin Dun," which seems to have been entered in the Stationers' Register in November 1595, never printed?<sup>45</sup> What happened to the two "Her-

<sup>43</sup> Neither of the two runs of *The Jew of Malta* was lucrative enough to make the list; the ten performances of the first made Henslowe a total of 254s., with an average of 25.4s.; the second grossed 253s. over eight performances, for an average of 31.6s.

<sup>44</sup> "The Comedy of Humours" may be George Chapman's *Humorous Day's Mirth*, but that is a reasonable conjecture rather than a certainty. Some critics have suggested that "Wise Man of West Chester" is identical to Anthony Munday's *John a Kent and John a Cumber*, which survives in a manuscript that can be tentatively linked to the company, although Grace Ioppolo has shown just how weak the paleographic link between the play and the Admiral's Men is. See Grace Ioppolo, *Dramatists and Their Manuscripts in the Age of Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and Heywood: Authorship, Authority, and the Playhouse* (London: Routledge, 2006), 101–2. Part of the play is indeed set in Chester, but Henslowe's entries consistently refer to a single "wise man" (or "wissman," "wisman," "wisseman," or "wismane"), whereas Munday's play features more than one titular magician, a fact obliquely registered by Gurr, who strengthens his case for the identity of the two plays by silently altering Henslowe's title to "Wise Men" (italics added); see, for instance, *Shakespeare's Opposites*, 211.

<sup>45</sup> Two texts about "Belin Dun" were entered in the Register in quick succession, "a booke intituled The famous Cronicle of Henrye the first, with the life and death of Bellin Dun the firste thief that ever was hanged in England" to Tho[mas] Gosson on 17 May 1594, and "The true tragicall historie of kinge Rufus the first with the life and deathe of Belyn Dun the first thief that ever was hanged in England" to Will[iam] Blackwell on 24 November 1595; see W. W. Greg,

cules" plays, the two parts of "Tamer Cham," and the other high-grossing multipart plays, like the "Godfrey of Boulogne" pair or the rather improbable two parts of "Seven Days of the Week"? And crack me this nut: why did no one register or publish that unparalleled blockbuster, "The Wise Man of West Chester"?

What a serious consideration of the *Diary* seems to reveal more than anything else is our profound ignorance. It shows that the world of early modern drama we are familiar with is but a fragment of a far larger textual and theatrical universe now lost to us. Most disturbingly, it suggests that what has survived may be neither the most popular drama nor representative of what has vanished. It may seem like allusions to *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus*, or *The Spanish Tragedy* can be found everywhere, while no one ever alluded to these other popular-but-disappeared plays. But how can we know for sure? How can we recognize quotations from texts we cannot read?

### III

Allusions, such as those to Kyd's and Marlowe's heroes, may be a measure of longevity, but distinguishing between their functions as means of cultural recall and as indices of currency is a challenge. The phenomenon is still with us. References to *Seinfeld* or *Simpsons* episodes regularly crop up in print, online, and in conversation, even if the shows themselves have not attracted a large viewership for years. People still recite Monty Python sketches and films, although the originals have been off the air and absent from cinemas for years, if not decades. And phrases like "goe by Jeronimo," put in circulation by Kyd's play and other writers' recollections of it, pepper our daily discourse while few using them know their origins.<sup>46</sup> Think of "jump the shark" or "close, but no cigar." Such cultural jetsam registers significant moments or events but does not unequivocally indicate whether the allusion relies on shared memory or ongoing shared experience. In other words, even if we acknowledge that identifiable references to known texts constitute only a few strands of a now-invisible intertextual web, the evidentiary significance of even this small subset of recognizable allusions for theater history still remains unclear.

A more reliable indicator of theatrical longevity might be the frequency with which plays were revived, although the record is spotty. Based on payments for

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*A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, 4 vols. (London: Bibliographical Society / University Press, Oxford, 1939), 1:11–12. These may be references to the same play or to two distinct texts (neither of which was necessarily a play). In any case, neither entry led to publication; or if it did, the book is lost.

<sup>46</sup> On the popularity of "goe by Jeronimo," see Emma Smith, ed., "Hieronimo's Afterlives," in Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedie, with Anonymous, "The First Part of Jeronimo"* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1998), 133–59.

revisions and new costumes in Henslowe, however, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions. A number of entries in my list of top-grossing productions were given second runs during the three years for which we have detailed data. “Belin Dun,” “Long Meg of Westminster,” “Seven Days of the Week,” and “The Wise Man of West Chester” were all revived, but with the exception of the indefatigable “Wise Man,” their second runs were less successful than the first. *The Jew of Malta* is a somewhat different story. Its first Admiral’s Men production, from May to December 1594, was not a major success, grossing barely over two pounds only twice; it shut down after a disastrous 3s. day. However, when it was remounted over a year later in January 1596, it did better, with two performances over 50s. and an average gross of 31.5s. But the commercial trajectory of Marlowe’s play may also explain the lackluster showing of those other previously popular revived items. Just before its first run, *The Jew of Malta* had been staged seven times by Sussex’s Men and twice by the newly formed Admiral’s Men at Newington Butts. By the time they mounted the play at the Rose theater, it was already a little stale, and it took over a year before it regained marketable appeal. Plays that reached commercial exhaustion needed a recovery period if they were to be restaged at all, but revivals in any case were unpredictable and risky. A former hit like “Long Meg,” remounted in November 1596, flopped after a successful opening (47s., compared to three later performances at 5, 11, and 7s.). On the other hand, “Wise Man” did not receive the same kind of initial bump from its revival in July 1597 but did not drop below a 30s. gross during the three performances of its second run recorded in the *Diary*.

Other entries in my list were revived later, and no data documenting their further commercial history exist. But we know that the company considered “Tasso’s Melancholy,” “Crack Me this Nut,” *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, and the two parts of “Hercules” promising enough to invest in second runs, revisions, and new costumes. In the case of *Blind Beggar*, they thought a revival justified a new investment of £8 18s. 4d., whereas “Hercules” required a more reasonable £3 5s. for new outfits. Plays older than the company itself were brought back, too—“Mahomet,” *The Massacre at Paris*, “Jeronimo,” and *Doctor Faustus*.<sup>47</sup> However, we know neither how they fared nor whether they were revived again after 1602. That is to say, our sense of those plays as enduringly successful depends on the conviction that the players had enough business sense to mount only revivals guaranteed to be lucrative.

<sup>47</sup> Since the majority of these plays were brought back to coincide with—or celebrate—Alleyn’s return from retirement and the opening of the Fortune, these reruns are not necessarily a sign of the plays’ longevity, but rather are context specific. On Alleyn’s “personal repertory,” see S. P. Cerasano, “Edward Alleyn, the New Model Actor, and the Rise of the Celebrity in the 1590s,” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 18 (2005): 47–58, esp. 52.

Whether this trust is warranted can at least be doubted. Some of their decisions during the three documented years seem downright perverse. Why let the revival of the "French Comedy" in 1597 drag on for six performances averaging 10s. each, given that it already had seven shows with more respectable earnings under its belt? Why let the once-high-grossing *Blind Beggar* languish for six performances with an average yield of 10.6s. at the end of its 1596/7 run, given that it had been in the repertory for a remarkable seventeen shows up to that point? In general, the company displays a pattern of sticking with what once worked for rather too long, regularly stretching the runs of their most profitable plays to the point where they underperform average expectations by more than half. "Jeronimo" seems like a clear example: a classic in its own time but lingering below 20s. for most of its 1597 production despite a decent, if unremarkable, start. At the same time, this somewhat dubious commercial principle of hope, rarely rewarded at the end of a play's run, could pay off at other times. Only one new play had a worse opening than "The Wise Man of West Chester," but after two unimpressive performances, the production exploded into unprecedented popularity, delivering a string of four £3 (60s.) days and not dipping significantly below the 40s. mark until its fourteenth show (Figure 4).<sup>48</sup> The only play to rival this sort of exponential growth is "The Comedy of Humours," which opened with a mediocre yield of 43s. but then went on a rampage of eight performances of close to or more than £3, including the only 70s. entry for a midrun performance recorded in the *Diary*. This may have been the most successful play the company ever staged, but since Henslowe's daily receipts break off in early November 1597, a day after its last recorded performance, we will never know.

In some cases, we might be able to guess at the players' commercial motivations. "Nebuchadnezzar," the only new play to have a worse opening than "The Wise Man of West Chester," is such an instance. The story of its run is one of rapid deterioration from bad to worse, from its abysmal 30s. first performance (when "ne" productions averaged over 53s. on opening day) to its 5s. gross at its eighth and last show.<sup>49</sup> But in the middle of this dismal streak we encounter an uncharacteristic jump to £3 8s. (Figure 5). What are we to make of this? "Ne-

<sup>48</sup> The line for average take per number of performance (that is, how much a play made on average when it was staged for, say, the tenth time) ends at fifteen in these graphs, since after that the average figures are dominated by too few plays to be statistically meaningful.

<sup>49</sup> Henslowe's annotation "ne," placed against most titles upon their first appearance in the *Diary*, has puzzled scholars for centuries, and its precise meaning remains opaque. It appears to designate first shows of entirely new plays or plays new to a particular company or playhouse. Such performances may have yielded higher incomes because of their inherent attractiveness or because the base admittance fee was doubled for "ne" plays, with every playgoer being charged twopence to gain entry to the theater; see Diana Price, "Henslowe's 'ne' and the tyering-howsse doore," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 42 (2003): 62–78; and Knutson, *Repertory of Shakespeare's Company*, 25.

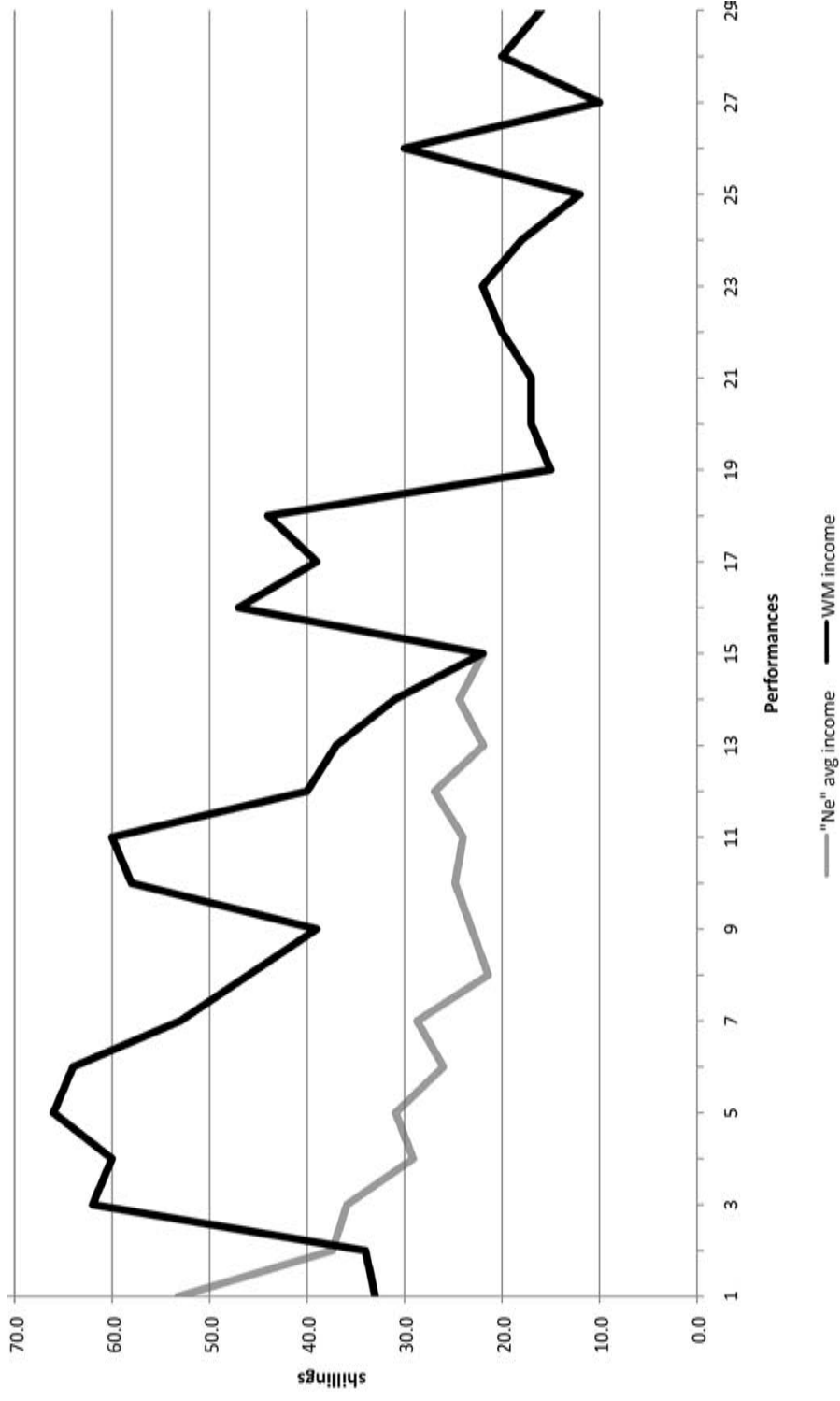


Figure 4: Performance takings of "The Wise Man of West Chester," compared to the average income per performance of other "ne" plays, in shillings.

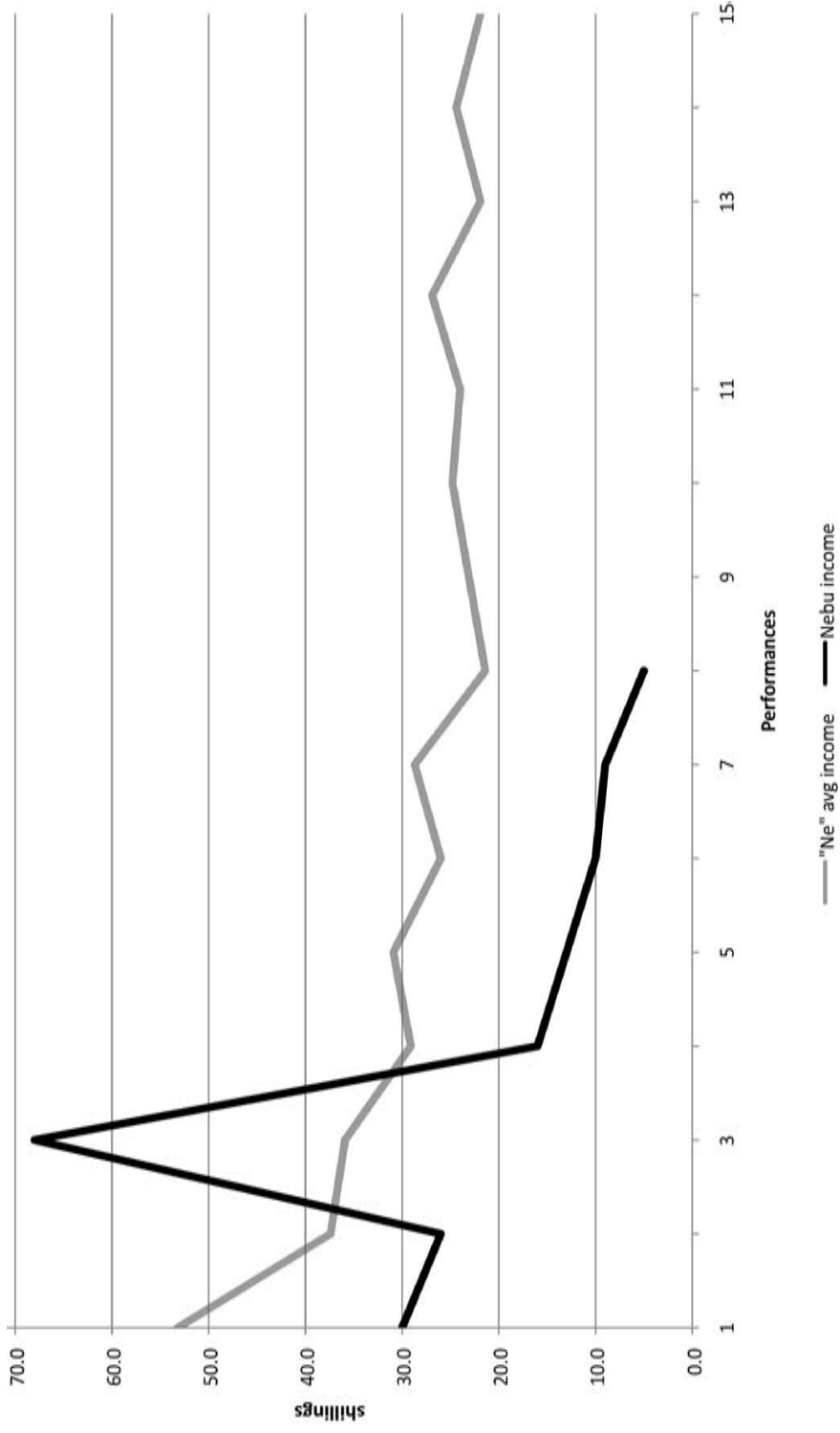


Figure 5: Performance takings of "Nebuchadnezzar," compared to the average income per performance of other "ne" plays, in shillings.



buchadnezzsar” had not suddenly become a sleeper hit. Its record performance took place on Saint John’s Day, 27 December 1596, and holidays always produced huge income spikes for the players, apparently irrespective of what was presented. Two years earlier, *Doctor Faustus* was staged on Saint John’s Day and yielded its best nonopening gross, 52s. *A Knack to Know an Honest Man* may have looked like a production in serious decline by April 1595, for instance (Figure 6), but staged on Easter Monday, its gross jumped to 55s. Two months later, the company used the same device to squeeze another high-yield performance out of the play on Whitsunday for another 55s. And the first part of “Hercules” received a final shot in the arm when it was staged on Epiphany (6 January) in 1595, leaping from 13s. to 60s. (Figure 7). It probably made good economic sense to use one of those virtually guaranteed high-grossing days either to jumpstart “Nebuchadnezzsar” or at least to maximize the income generated by an obvious failure, especially given that the ancient subject matter likely called for impressive and costly costumes.

What kinds of commercial strategies and assumptions about success and failure underpinned the Admiral’s Men’s decisions, then, remains a complex issue, and a question with a host of different, specific answers that resist generalization.<sup>50</sup> Spending £5 10s. on another revival of *The Jew of Malta* in 1601 must have made sense to the company, although it might seem unduly optimistic, given that Henslowe’s share from each of the play’s previous runs, when it was newer, amounted only to £12.<sup>51</sup> Investing at least £6 to have Ben Jonson provide additions to “Jeronimo” seems a wiser choice; certainly, the play could have done with an update, given the lack of appeal evident from its lackluster performance in 1597. But whether either of those investments paid off and what motivated them, we do not know. It is clear, though, that the *Diary* contains a multitude of divergent, even disjointed narratives of hits, flops, and steady earners, and any attempt to streamline or simplify its complexity into a story of one author’s, player’s, or text’s dominance necessarily and radically distorts the submerged reality Henslowe’s records erratically document.

<sup>50</sup> The best attempt to construct a set of strategies from the data in Henslowe remains Knutson, *Repertory of Shakespeare’s Company*, 15–55, largely because she maintains a clear sense of the tentative nature of her conclusions throughout.

<sup>51</sup> Precisely how Henslowe’s receipts related to the company’s revenue is a vexing question. While his records of gallery income tells us little about how many groundlings paid their single pennies, at least we can posit that the players took in roughly three times Henslowe’s share from the galleries: the other half of what he collected as rent, plus the penny each gallery spectator paid to gain entrance to the yard. With this in mind, an investment of more than £5 may not seem as risky, given that *The Jew of Malta* must have generated an income of easily more than £45 for the Admiral’s Men during each of its two runs. It is almost impossible to estimate what any one production would have cost to mount, which means that all statements about profitability, break-even points, or financial prudence must necessarily be speculative.

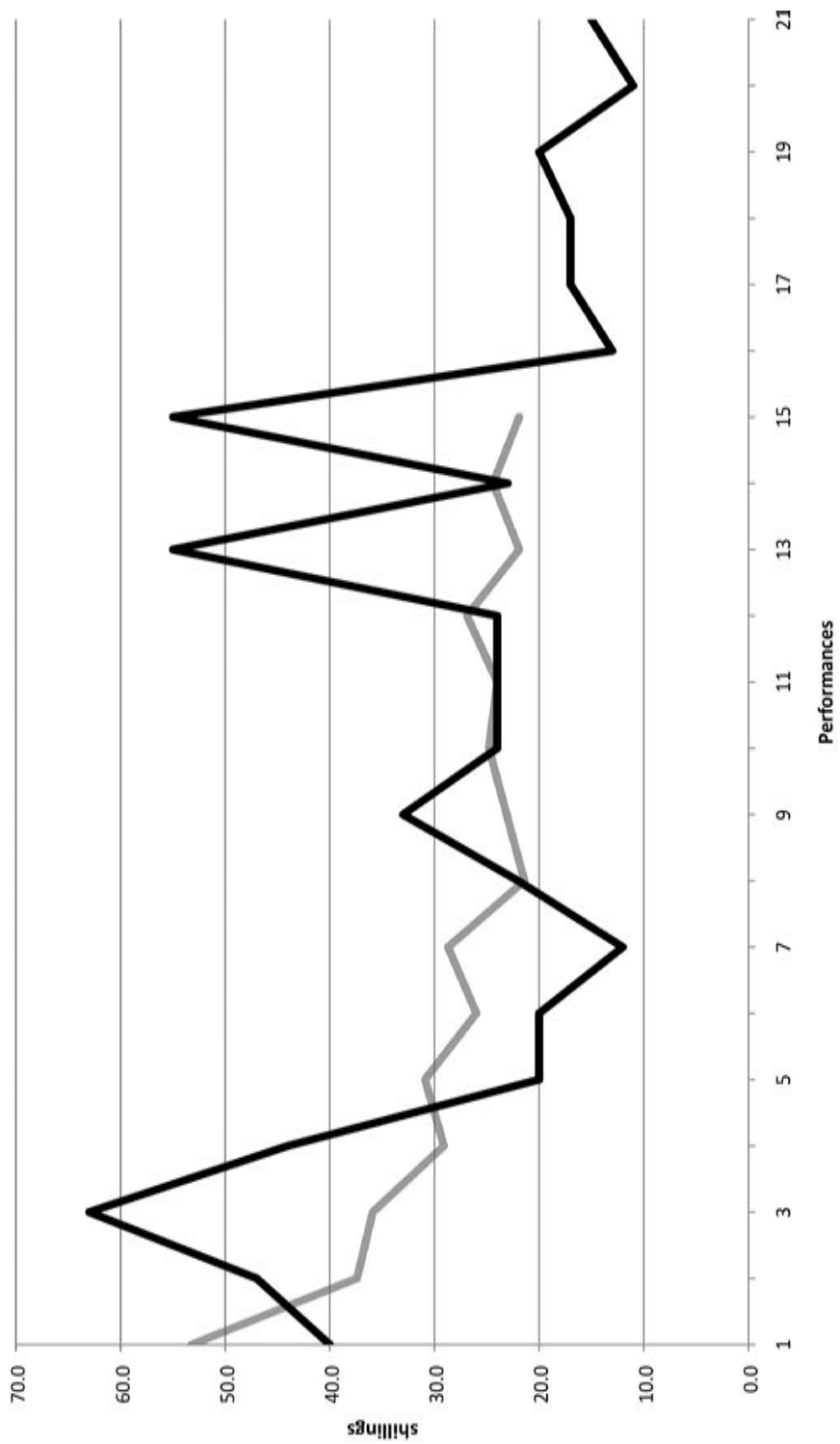


Figure 6: Performance takings of *A Knack to Know an Honest Man*, compared to the average income per performance of other "ne" plays, in shillings.

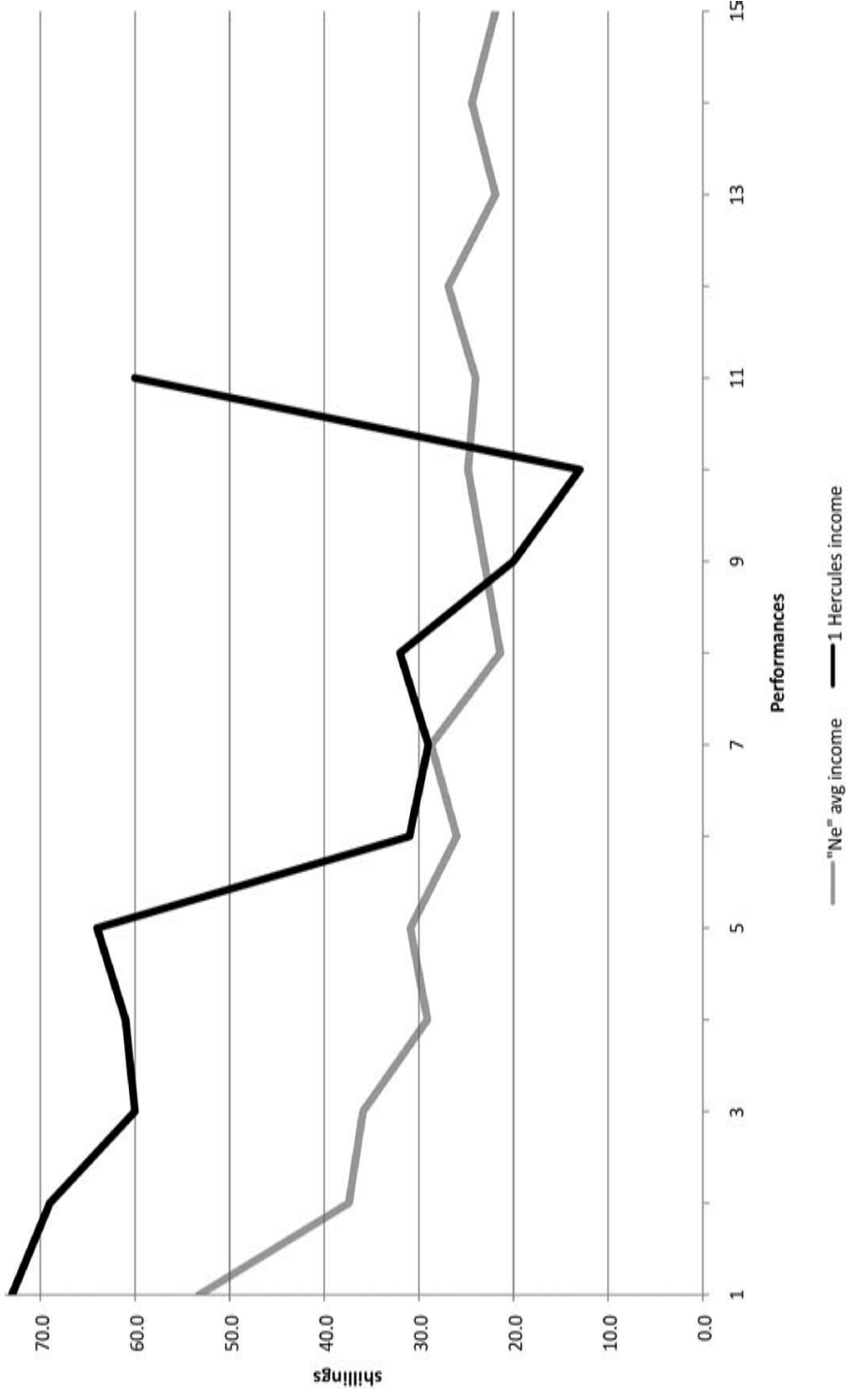


Figure 7: Performance takings of the first part of "Hercules," compared to the average income per performance of other "ne" plays, in shillings.

In this spirit of antireductivism, I end this section with an aspect of the Admiral's Men's commercial concerns that again draws our attention to the fecundity of the London theatrical scene in the 1590s. If the company had indeed gained a monopoly over performances on the South Bank in 1594, we might expect their finances to reflect this privileged position. The opposite is true (Figure 8). In their first season, they clearly did very well, netting Henslowe almost £450. The next year, however, his revenue plummeted to just over £340, and by the third year of their residency at the Rose theater, his takings came to less than half of the 1594 gross, barely £215. In part, these totals reflect the number of performance days in each season, which varied significantly from year to year; they also reflect the deterioration of Henslowe's bookkeeping after July 1597. A more accurate picture might emerge if we take show-by-show averages into consideration (Figure 9). But that only confirms the narrative of decline; over the three years, the average performance income dropped from 32.5s. to 29.1s. from the 1594–95 season to 1595–96 and finally to 23.2s. from the 1595–96 season to 1596–97. Most tellingly, the Admiral's Men never reached the average performance income of their predecessors at the Rose theater, Strange's and Sussex's Men, both of which recorded revenues of over 34s. per performance.<sup>52</sup>

The creation of a duopoly is a poor explanation for this commercial decline. We may find a more satisfying context for Henslowe's figures and a more credible explanation for the story they seem to tell in an atmosphere of open competition arising or subsisting in those years. A strong and popular version of Pembroke's Men may have been playing right next door at the Swan theater as early as June 1595; they were certainly there from February 1597, possibly still staging some of Shakespeare's plays and perhaps reviving Marlowe's *Edward II*. Other companies must have performed at the Curtain before the Chamberlain's Men moved there. And yet others, quite probably, were using the old Inns.<sup>53</sup> Unlike the im-

<sup>52</sup> Neil Carson's detailed breakdown of the *Diary* data into weekly figures produces a similar picture, with the Admiral's Men outperforming Strange's Men only once, for a stretch of ten weeks in the spring and summer of 1595. Those weeks, however, contained both Whitsun and Easter, as well as four "ne" productions, including both parts of "Hercules" and "Seven Days of the Week," and thus are more extraordinary than representative. If we redistribute Carson's weekly figures within my own seasonal breakdown, his data confirm my conclusions but allow me to extend them to the end of the century, since Henslowe continued to record weekly receipts until July 1600. In their time at the Rose, the Admiral's Men never did as well as Strange's Men before them. See Neil Carson, *A Companion to Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 85–100, 118–31, 138, 141.

<sup>53</sup> For voices critical of the conventional assumption that the inns had ceased to function as playing spaces by 1596, see Ingram, *London Life in the Brazen Age*, 140–41; Paul Menzer, "The Tragedians of the City? Q1 *Hamlet* and the Settlements of the 1590s," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57 (2006): 162–82; and Lawrence Manley, "Why Did London Inns Function as Theaters?" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71 (2008): 181–97. Manley suggests that "there are certainly some signs . . . that the suppression of inn playhouses was not final until at least 1600" (195). The

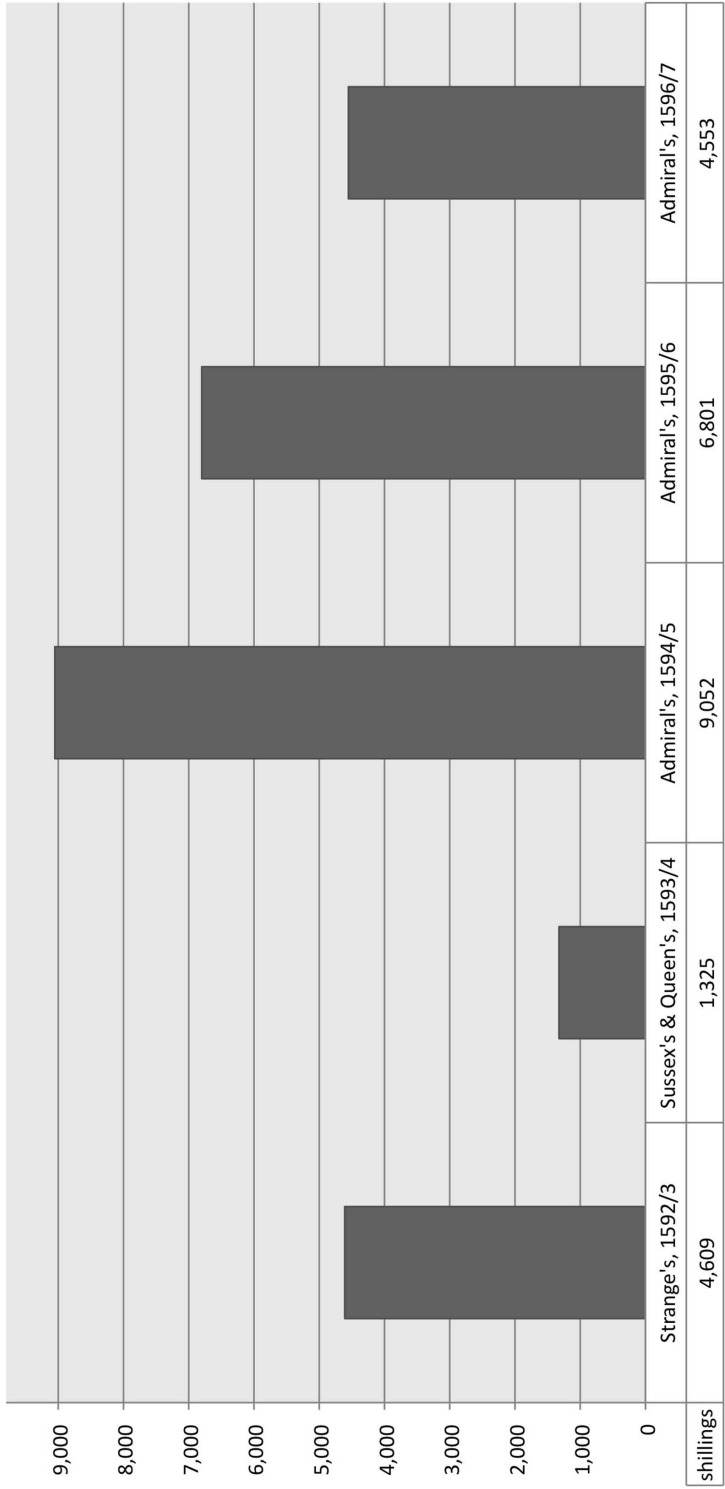


Figure 8: Total season incomes for companies at the Rose theater, 1592–1597, in shillings.

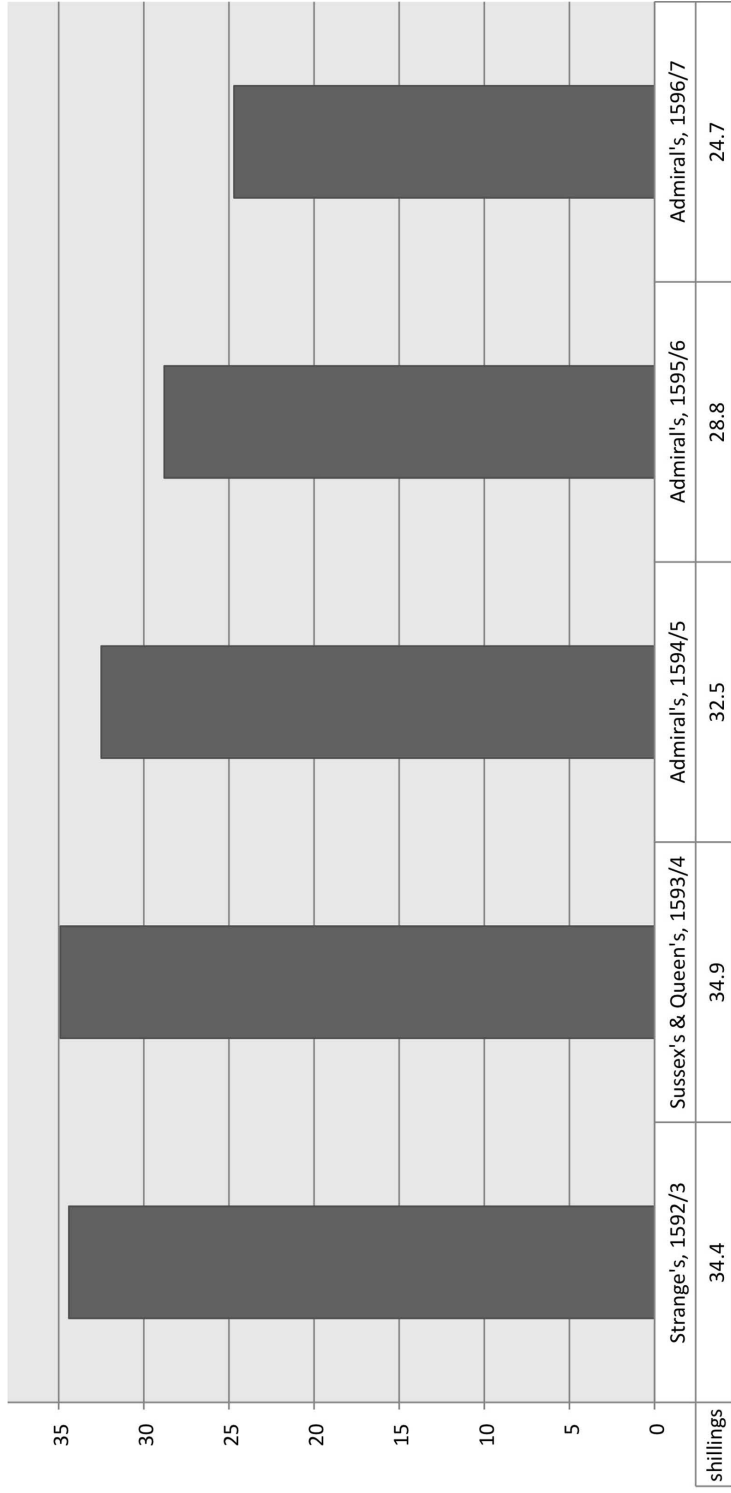


Figure 9: Average income per performance for companies at the Rose theater, 1592–97, per season, in shillings.

pression of stability conveyed by the relatively steady series of court engagements the Admiral's Men enjoyed from 1594 to 1600, everything we can glean about the company from the *Diary* suggests that, as theatrical entrepreneurs, they had to think on their feet, adjust repeatedly to audiences' shifting tastes and demands for both the old and the new, respond to surprising indifference and unexpected hits, and calibrate their repertory to take into account the constantly changing patterns of competition from other playhouses and playing companies.<sup>54</sup> Exactly what those various contexts were remains unknown, but we can try to get a sense of their contours from the responses to an ever-fluctuating market recorded in Henslowe.

## IV

Just how volatile that market was becomes more evident if we widen our scope to include the medium with which I began this essay: the printed book. The fact that we have access to plays of the period not in a theatrical format—neither in their original performances nor, by and large, in manuscript—but only in print is a severe limitation that has resulted in distortions and false equivalencies. Historically, it has contributed to the emergence of (what I hope by now appears as) the myth that Marlowe and Kyd were the twin patron saints of the Admiral's Men's repertory, with Peele thrown in for good measure. In print, Marlowe and Kyd reigned supreme, responsible for half the company's plays from the 1590s; Chapman accounted for two more. The world of commercial publishing, however, was not commensurate with or analogous to that of the theater in the sixteenth century. Success in one medium did not necessarily lead to success in the other although, as Douglas Bruster has pointed out, few stationers could have anticipated that in 1594.<sup>55</sup> In the seventeenth century, entrepreneurs like Walter Burre or Thomas Archer took on theatrical failures such as *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* or *The White Devil* under the assumption that they would do better if refashioned as books, but such a sophisticated approach to marketing likely had not developed by the 1590s, when printing playtexts was still a novel enterprise.<sup>56</sup> It seems clear that assumptions about a fairly straightforward

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conjecture was popularized by Chambers and has had its most vocal recent advocate in Gurr; see Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, 2:359–60; and Gurr, "Henry Carey's Peculiar Letter," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56 (2005): 51–75.

<sup>54</sup> This impression of courtly stability is also somewhat tempered by the disappearance of the Admiral's Men from court records in 1596/7, when the Chamberlain's Men played all six shows; see Astington, *English Court Theatre*, 235.

<sup>55</sup> Bruster, "Birth of an Industry," 237.

<sup>56</sup> See Zachary Lesser, *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 52–80, 115–56. Jonson's *Sejanus* was a slightly earlier example of this approach and can be seen as a particularly obvious effort at

correlation between success on stage and projected success in print determined which Admiral's Men's plays were bought by stationers: *A Knack to Know an Honest Man*, *The Jew of Malta*, "Chinon of England," *The Massacre at Paris*, *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, "Belin Dun"—all these plays did well for Henslowe, and presumably the stationers who purchased them assumed they would do as well for them.

It was not to be. None of these texts saw more than one edition, and some, including the hugely successful "Belin Dun," were never, as far as we know, published at all. *The Jew of Malta* did not appear until 1633, at which point it had been registered anew to a different stationer. On the other hand, the print success of *The Spanish Tragedy*, which sold well enough to be reprinted three times in seven years during the 1590s, does not correspond to a similar level of theatrical popularity (assuming that Henslowe's "Jeronimo" is in fact Kyd's play). Nevertheless, I would still surmise that, in general, plays that did well as books had likely been successful on stage. I cannot help but imagine that Shakespeare's histories were blockbusters in both media. *Mucedorus* surely was not simply a phenomenon in print, although it may have been. But I am interested less in print success as evidence of stage success than in the connection between stage success and a stationer's decision to publish. Publication implies an investment, and many of the stationers involved with playbooks in the mid-1590s were still establishing their businesses and had to choose their investments wisely. The very fact of a play appearing in print therefore seems fairly strong evidence that it was popular or well known, no matter how well or poorly it would eventually do as a book. When Burby published *A Knack to Know an Honest Man* and Jones invested in *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, they made sound commercial decisions, based on solid records of stage popularity for both plays. That those decisions turned out to be informed by a flawed model of the market for printed plays owes much to the fact that the market was still in its infancy when these stationers began to participate in it.<sup>57</sup> Put differently, while historians of the book have recently debated vigorously whether playbooks sold unusually well and were thus a lucrative investment for stationers, my interest here is in a different set of "structures of popularity," to borrow Alan Farmer and

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transforming a play into something else altogether, with its learned annotations and neoclassical typography; see John Jowett, "Jonson's Authorization of Type in *Sejanus* and Other Early Quartos," *Studies in Bibliography* 44 (1991): 254–65; and my own "Unediting the Margin: Jonson, Marston, and the Theatrical Page," *English Literary Renaissance* 38 (2008): 142–71.

<sup>57</sup> On the development of a market for printed plays from the commercial theater in the mid-1590s, see Zachary Lesser, "Playbooks," in *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture, Volume 1: Cheap Print in Britain and Ireland to 1660*, ed. Joad Raymond (Oxford: Oxford UP, forthcoming).



Zachary Lesser's phrase.<sup>58</sup> Farmer and Lesser show that although printed plays had a smaller overall market share than some other kinds of books, their unusually high reprint rates indicate that, compared to other books of similar length, they were popular and consequently uncommonly profitable for their publishers. If we can decouple the questions of market share and popularity, we can do the same for questions of print and stage success.<sup>59</sup> A play in the theater and a play in book format inhabited separate economic and aesthetic spheres and hence relied on distinct—if occasionally overlapping—structures of popularity.

These considerations take me back to Creede, the Queen's Men, and the question of fecundity. If it would have seemed like financial suicide to build new playhouses while most companies were being forced out of business (as Langley and Woodliffe did), it would seem similarly wrongheaded for a publisher to purchase, register, and print a set of plays associated with companies that had allegedly just collapsed or been suppressed—and then to advertise the plays' connections to those outmoded companies on title pages.<sup>60</sup> Yet that is exactly what Creede and his colleagues supposedly did. Of course, Creede's decision will appear considerably less absurd if some of our almost entirely unfounded suppositions turn out to be untrue: if, say, the Queen's Men were still going strong and if the plays they performed continued to appeal to audiences—plays like their *King Leir*, which averaged 32s. in April 1594, a month before Edward White entered it into the

<sup>58</sup> Over ten years ago, Peter Blayney's seminal essay reversed long-standing scholarly convictions in arguing for the relatively marginal commercial significance of printed drama. His position was questioned by Bruster ("Birth of an Industry," 235–38) and subjected to serious revision by Alan Farmer and Zachary Lesser. See Peter W. M. Blayney, "The Publication of Playbooks," in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia UP, 1997), 383–422; and Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, "The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56 (2005): 1–32. For the second round of this debate, see Peter W. M. Blayney, "The Alleged Popularity of Playbooks," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56 (2005): 33–50; and Allan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, "Structures of Popularity in the Early Modern Book Trade," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56 (2005): 206–13.

<sup>59</sup> Farmer and Lesser, "Structures of Popularity," 211–12.

<sup>60</sup> The special case of John Lyly's plays written for the boys of Saint Paul's is a useful counterexample. Although that company had been defunct for over a year when Joan Broome published *Endymion*, *The Man in the Moone* (London, 1591), *Gallathea* (London, 1592), and *Midas* (London, 1592), she still chose to mention them on the plays' title pages. However, each attribution coincides with the commemoration of a particular court performance—"Playd before the Queenes Maiestie at Greenwich on Candlemas day at night, by the Chyldren of Paules" in the case of *Endymion*, while *Gallathea* mentions a New Year's Day staging, and *Midas* one on "Twelfth Day at night." The plays thus are presented quite explicitly as one-offs, with the text referring to a specific quasihistorical occasion, much as Jonson's published masques would a decade or more later. What is more, the widow Broome took special pains to highlight the retrospective quality of her publications, writing in her preface to *Endymion* that "certaine Commedies" had "come to my handes by chaunce" "since the Plaies in Paules were dissolved" (sig. A2r). Such nostalgia cannot readily be traced in any of the books based on plays from the public playhouses.

Stationers' Register. In other words, if we consider the failure of most of Creede's ventures a surprise rather than a foregone conclusion, a rather different picture of theatrical success and failure emerges, and this picture reinforces the general impression of a rich and unpredictable world of dramatic activity in London that I have attempted to produce here.

This impression is confirmed if we consider how that world was represented in the sphere of the printed book: Figure 10 shows the numbers of separate theatrical troupes advertised on the title pages of plays that made it to booksellers' stalls between 1592 and 1599, both first and subsequent editions. We are confronted with a wide range of companies: boys and adult, old and new, supposedly dominant and possibly defunct, and incomplete, too, as Strange's Men are entirely absent. What emerges is a sense of fecundity, flux, maybe chaos, certainly vitality, with the unknown as the only constant. At least one play was published in every one of those years without any company attribution on its title page (in Figure 10, I counted these unattributed works as all performed by the same, anonymous troupe). The only year after 1593 that seems to point towards a duopoly of some kind is 1596, when only a single company other than the ever-present nameless troupe was considered worth advertising by name. That company, however, was neither the Admiral's nor the Lord Chamberlain's Men, but rather Pembroke's servants, while the Admiral's Men's *A Knack to Know an Honest Man* and the still-unattached *Edward III* were issued anonymously. What the theatrical scene of the 1590s looks like depends entirely on the lenses we use. This chart, like Henslowe's *Diary*, suggests that lenses ground in Whitehall may fatally distort our vision of what was happening farther down the Thames.

## V

The technical nature of most of my points may seem to tether my arguments firmly in theater history, limiting their ramifications to the confines of that discipline's concerns. In closing, let me counter that impression and suggest what the admission of our ignorance that I have been calling for—the realization that there was a world elsewhere and that we know little of that world's relationship to the scattered islands we are so intimately familiar with—might mean for our broader understanding of the dramatic literature of the period. Given the fondness for graphs and charts everywhere apparent in these pages, it cannot come as a surprise if I declare an intellectual affinity not just with Farmer and Lesser's recent work in book history, but also with Franco Moretti's literary-historical approach. Like him, I am convinced that most influential narratives of generic

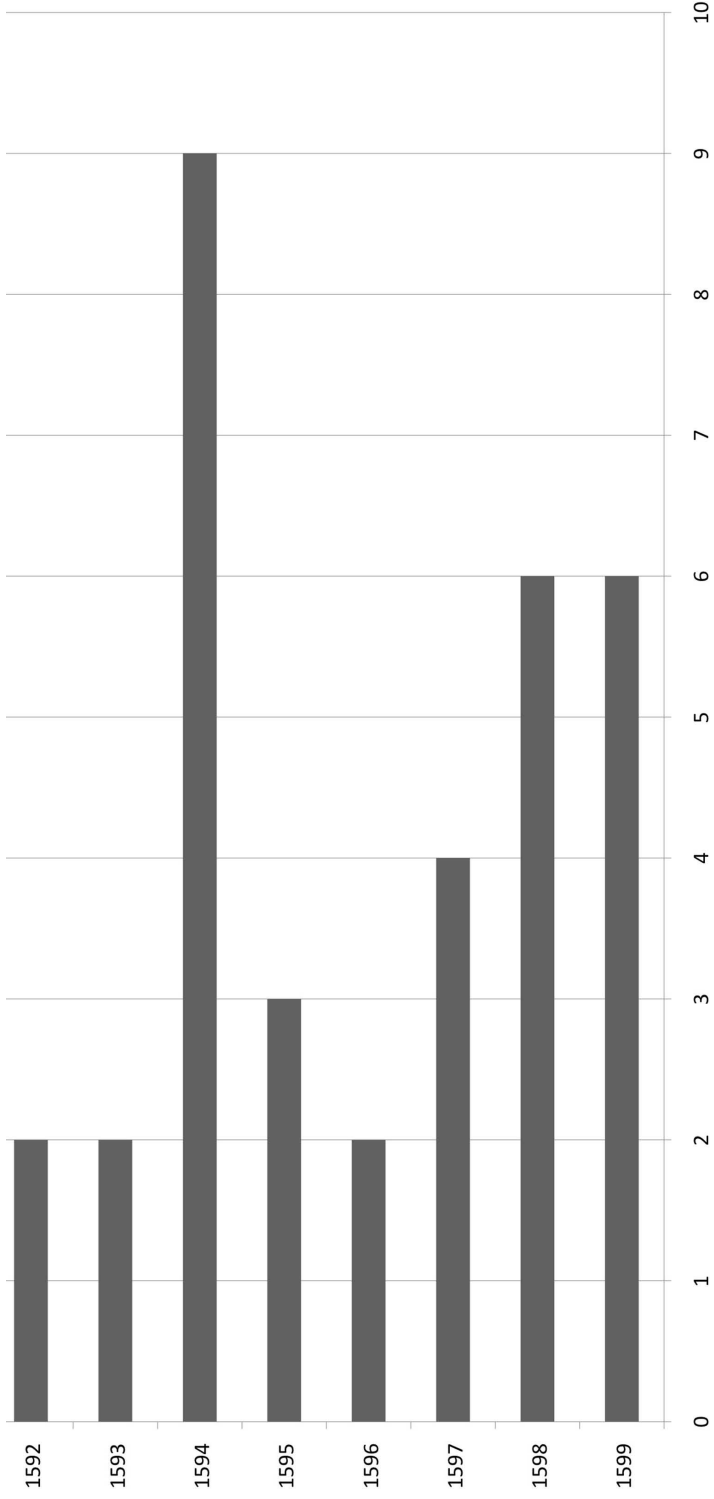


Figure 10: Number of separate theater companies listed on title pages of printed books, 1592–99.

developments depend for their very elegance and power on the erasure of vast swathes of literary history—"nine tenths" of the history of the novel, in Moretti's estimate, likely more than that for early modern drama.<sup>61</sup> This would be my first point: that the reductivism I have critiqued in theater-historical accounts is also a hallmark of the ways in which most of us conceptualize the literary history of early modern drama. The Marlowe-Shakespeare sequence, leading to the Jonson disturbance and the Middleton-Webster continuum before things descend, via Ford, to Caroline murkiness takes its cues from plays that were printed. I do not mean to suggest that Marlowe was not a major influence on Shakespeare or that the plays the two wrote in the early 1590s are not marked by familiarity with each other's work. But I would argue that any account that places Marlowe or Shakespeare at the heart of the history of 1590s drama reads that genre with a great degree of hindsight and confidence that the dozens of plays we have lost were negligible in their influence. This may be inevitable; doubtless, it is the condition of historiography. What is more, the aesthetic imperative inherent in literary history may lead it to ignore questions of popularity and dismiss playhouse receipts if necessary. To return to my earlier example, a history of 1990s cinema that celebrated *The Santa Clause* while relegating *Reservoir Dogs* to a footnote would only make sense as an exercise in sociology or economics, not as an exploration of the development of the art of filmmaking. Works with limited commercial impact can wield vast intellectual authority. But narrating the history of such works still requires the construction of multiple contexts. And in the case of early modern drama, it must matter that that construction takes place on such very unstable and largely unknowable grounds. My argument differs somewhat from Peter Blayney's contention that "literary scholars are predisposed to assume that their own attitudes toward highly valued texts were shared by the public for whom those texts were first printed" in that I do not doubt, in principle, that plays that are canonical now were also highly regarded and even popular in the period.<sup>62</sup> The danger lies in assuming that everything that was valued and broadly influential has survived and that the literary development of early modern drama was largely a print phenomenon, with trajectories of influence dominated by published plays. My point is not that audiences and playwrights did not share our enthusiasm for particular texts (they may well have); it is that we almost certainly only have access to a sliver of what was considered valuable, admirable, or worthy of imitation.

My second concluding observation concerns the relationship between literary history and theater history, and the misperception that either has the answers

<sup>61</sup> Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005), 30.

<sup>62</sup> Blayney, "Publication of Playbooks," 384.

that the other is looking for. Literary scholars all too often turn to theater historians for factual information, unaware of or deliberately blinding themselves to the sheer scarcity of clear and unambiguous historical data. At the same time, theater historians have tacitly turned to the dominant narratives of literary history to establish their own accounts of what happened on early modern stages, relying on readings of plays that, at best, serve as fragmentary representations of what was being performed or, at worst, survive for reasons that have little to do with their importance as theatrical artifacts. Both disciplines could benefit from a greater degree of skepticism concerning the other's methods and convictions. The development of drama as a form of literature may have followed a radically different trajectory than the development of theater as a commercial form of live entertainment; and that development, in turn, may have followed rather different paths in different venues. It seems to me that tracing these divergent trajectories and the separate and potentially conflicting aesthetic and economic impulses that propelled them will necessarily call for an at least provisional and temporary parting of ways.