

Stern, Tiffany, ed. *Rethinking Theatrical Documents in Shakespeare's England*. London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2020. Bloomsbury Collections. Web. 24 May 2025. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350051379>>.

Accessed from: www.bloomsburycollections.com

Accessed on: Tue Aug 08 2023 14:28:14 Eastern Daylight Saving Time

Copyright © Holger Syme, Tiffany Stern and contributors 2020. This chapter is published open access subject to a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 3.0 International licence (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). You may re-use, distribute, and reproduce this work in any medium for non-commercial purposes, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

2

A Sharers' Repertory

Holger Schott Syme

Without Philip Henslowe, we would know next to nothing about the kinds of repertories early modern London's resident theatre companies offered to their audiences. As things stand, thanks to the existence of the manuscript commonly known as Henslowe's *Diary*, scholars have been able to contemplate the long lists of receipts and expenses that record the titles of well over 200 plays, most of them now lost. The *Diary* gives us some sense of the richness and diversity of this repertory, of the rapid turnover of plays, and of the kinds of investments theatre companies made to mount new shows. It also names a plethora of actors and other professionals associated with the troupes at the Rose. But, because the records are a financier's and theatre owner's, not those of a sharer in an acting company, they do not document how a group of actors decided which plays to stage, how they chose to alternate successful shows, or what they, as actors, were looking for in new commissions. The *Diary* gives us the outcome of a planning process, but it does not reveal much about that process itself – and in particular, it says almost nothing about the considerations a company of actors might have brought to the challenge of constructing a viable repertory. In this chapter, I will offer new

readings of a number of extant performance-related documents in order to hypothesize about what we might know if the *Diary* of an actor-sharer such as John Heminges or Thomas Downton had survived.

That early modern theatre companies assembled their repertoires with a great deal of forethought has been persuasively argued by Roslyn Knutson, whose foundational work established parameters for analysis both broad (that companies pursued fairly evident ‘commercial tactics’ in assembling a repertoire) and specific (what the schedule of performances was; how often new plays were introduced; the place of revivals; the mixing of plays from different genres; a taste for multiple plays on the same subject matter; the importance of serial or multi-part plays; and so on).¹ She traces in Henslowe’s records strategies for the introduction of new plays (and the materials and costumes they required), the internal coordination of multi-part plays, and the external coordination of plays responding to titles in other companies’ repertoires – all of which would have required advance planning. Marketing, too, seems to have relied on at least a weekly planning cycle. Tiffany Stern has drawn our attention to accounts of playbills advertising upcoming shows with up to a week’s notice, though, as she also notes, a strong demand for different plays could occasionally lead to overnight changes in programming, and the same presumably was the case if a new play proved surprisingly unpopular.²

In their attempts to reconstruct how repertoires were built and performed, scholars have primarily focused on economics and markets on the one hand, and on dramatic content on the other: plays were scheduled because of their presumed popularity, and one of the primary grounds for popular appeal was what the plays were about. Actors appear in these analyses under two rubrics: the star and the cast. Stars are discussed as individuals (almost always Edward Alleyn or Richard Burbage) and considered a major reason playgoers came to the theatre. Casts are used analytically to establish the makeup of companies: ‘the size and constitution’ of the Queen’s Men, for

instance, can be deduced from a reading of their repertory that reveals the 'sameness rather than variety' of its casting demands.³ But casts also consisted of specific actors – and even a repertory that regularly required a dozen adult players would not regularly have placed identical demands on each of those players.⁴

To understand more fully how early modern performance schedules took shape and to develop a more comprehensive view of the relationship between repertory and casting, we need to reconsider the importance of 'variety.' As I will argue in detail later, no sharer in a theatre troupe consistently took the largest role in all shows: staging plays was a company effort, and different kinds of plays were associated with different distributions of role sizes and modes of actorly exertion. Generic diversity thus must be analysed not just from the perspectives of marketing and economics, but also as an aspect of company management. In other words, repertories were not just designed to maximize revenues, but also to make the most of a troupe's talents while avoiding mentally and physically exhausting its sharers. We therefore need to reconstruct the programming and casting strategies early modern players adopted to achieve those goals.

Current accounts of early modern acting emphasize the importance of the companies' most famous actors, with Alleyn and Burbage as the paradigmatic embodiments of the type. As a result, in hypothesizing about casting choices, these players are often treated as the obvious choice for lead roles as a matter of course. John Astington makes this assumption explicit: 'given [Burbage's] position as leading actor we can reasonably infer he took the major roles in plays with a dominant central character: Henry V, Macbeth, Coriolanus, Antony, and so on.'⁵ The same triple assumption is also applied to Alleyn: that there was such a thing as *the* leading actor; that Alleyn or Burbage was it; and that the 'leading actor' would as a matter of course play 'the lead' – here understood as the role with the largest share of the text. Andrew Gurr, considering a week of Admiral's Men's performances in August 1594, gives all title roles to Alleyn:

‘Monday the 17th’ he appeared ‘as Marlowe’s Lord High Admiral of France, on Tuesday as Tasso, on Wednesday as King Henry I confronting the clown Belin Dun, on Thursday he was the hero of *The Ranger’s Comedy*, on Friday Galiaso and on Saturday he stalked as the heroic Cutlack.’⁶ Astington, contemplating Alleyn’s return to the company when it moved to the Fortune in 1600, gives him a similarly comprehensive list of roles, made up of revivals (‘the multiple disguised roles in *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, Hercules . . ., Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy*, and Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*’) as well as new parts: ‘new additions to the repertory . . . suggest that Alleyn also took the title roles in biblical plays of *Samson*, *Jephthah*, *Joshua*, and *Pontius Pilate*, as well as the great cardinal in two plays on the rise and fall of Wolsey.’⁷ And S. P. Cerasano names a slew of other lost plays that may have featured the ‘large roles’ she believes were a popular feature of the Admiral’s Men’s repertory, since they provided ‘natural roles for Alleyn’: ‘Mahomet’, ‘Godfrey of Boulogne’, ‘Antony and Vallia’, ‘Constantine’, ‘Harry of Cornwall’, ‘Zenobia’.⁸ Of all these roles, Cutlack and Barabas are the only ones with a verifiable connection to Alleyn.

Much of the actual contemporary evidence for the parts Alleyn and Burbage played derives from anecdotal allusions and commemorative poems – sources likely to note their most memorable performances. If it were not for a surviving backstage ‘plot’, for example, we would certainly never have guessed that Burbage took the role of a mere messenger in the lost ‘The Dead Man’s Fortune’.⁹ But even so, the very brief lists of roles Burbage and Alleyn verifiably played do not support the idea that they habitually took the lead. Consider what we actually know of Burbage. He was Gorboduc and Tereus in ‘The Second Part of the Seven Deadly Sins’, Hieronimo (presumably in Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy*), Hamlet, Lear, Othello, Malevole in the King’s Men’s remount of Marston’s *Malcontent*, Volpone, Subtle in Jonson’s *Alchemist*, Ferdinand in Webster’s *Duchess of Malfi*, probably Richard III – and a messenger in ‘Dead Man’s Fortune’.¹⁰ We thus know of eleven plays in which

he acted; he took the lead role in six of them. What of the other five? Othello, the second lead in the eponymous play, is over 2,000 words shorter than Iago; Volpone is slightly shorter than Mosca; Subtle is substantially shorter than Face (by about 500 words); Ferdinand is the third-longest role in *Duchess*, after Bosola (well over 2,000 words longer) and the eponymous heroine, and barely longer than the next most substantial role, Antonio. Some of Burbage's leads were exceptionally large, especially Richard III (c. 8,800 words, over 31 per cent of the text) and Hamlet (over 11,500 words; 39 per cent). But others were not: Hieronimo, with c. 5,400 words, has 27 per cent of the text; Lear, just over 22 per cent (c. 5,600 words). Others still were dominant without being especially long: Malevole speaks c. 32 per cent of *The Malcontent*, but only has about 4,500 words.¹¹

The evidence leads to two conclusions. First, that Burbage frequently acted major parts, taking outsized leads with disproportionate frequency. In the entire corpus of printed professional drama, only 8 per cent of all leads (33 out of 415) have more than 30 per cent of their play's text, yet a full third of Burbage's recorded roles fit that profile. But a second conclusion must be that other members of the Chamberlain's/King's Men were similarly capable of large roles. The same evidence that gives us Burbage's parts, after all, informs us that Henry Condell played Mosca, the lead in *Volpone* (c. 6,500 words; over 25 per cent); Nathan Field was Face, the lead in *The Alchemist* (c. 4,300 words; over 30 per cent); John Lowin played Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 5,800 words; over 25 per cent); and *someone* else played Iago (c. 8,400 words; over 32 per cent).¹² What is more, while anecdotes do often mention Burbage, other company sharers were also household names: the foolish playgoer in Webster's induction to *The Malcontent*, for instance, asks for 'Harry Condell, Dick Burbage, and Will Sly' – and instead of Sly, John Lowin then comes on.¹³ Similarly, although Burbage is identified as the 'best actor' in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, we ought to remember the full context for that identification:

COKES

. . . Which is your Burbage now?

LANTERN

What mean you by that, sir?

COKES

Your best actor: your Field?¹⁴

If Burbage was a synonym for ‘best actor’, so was ‘Nathan Field’. Three years earlier, William Ostler, another prominent-but-now-forgotten sharer in the King’s Men, and Antonio in *The Duchess of Malfi*, was apostrophized as ‘the Roscius of these times’ in John Davies’s *The Scourge of Folly*.¹⁵

For Alleyn, although we have even less documentary evidence about his parts, a similar case can be made. He played most of Marlowe’s outsized leads (Tamburlaine, Barabas, and Doctor Faustus) as well as Orlando in Greene’s *Orlando Furioso*; Muly Mahamet in Peele’s *Battle of Alcazar*; the title roles in the lost plays ‘Cutlack’ and ‘The First Part of Tamar Cham’; and the secondary role of Sebastian in ‘Frederick and Basilea’.¹⁶ At first glance, this short list may seem to support Cerasano’s assertion that the Admiral’s Men’s repertory ‘require[d] a single, imposing actor who was capable of carrying many roles that placed him continually . . . in the spotlight.’¹⁷ But closer scrutiny of the evidence does not bear out this impression of relentless singularity. Take Everard Guilpin’s well-known reference to Alleyn’s ‘Cutlack gait’ in the 1598 epigram ‘On Clodius’. The poem satirizes a ‘Bragart’ trying to learn to ‘play the man’ by copying actors. Cerasano uses the allusion to argue that Alleyn’s ‘unique swagger and overwhelming voice imprinted the part in the audience’s memory’ (50). But Guilpin’s line undercuts such claims, since Clodius’s ‘passing big’ persona is a hybrid of *two* theatrical antecedents:

Clodius, me thinkes, lookes passing big of late,
With Dunstan’s brow and Alleyn’s Cutlack’s gate . . .¹⁸

'Dunstan' may be the bishop in *A Knack to Know a Knave* – if so, and if Clodius's new persona is an assemblage of Alleyn roles, Guilpin is telling us that Alleyn played the fourth-largest role in *Knack*. Alternatively, 'Dunstan' was played by another actor, but impressed Clodius so much that he modelled his facial expression on that performance, while adopting Alleyn's posture. Or perhaps 'Dunstan' is an actor – either James Tunstall, a leading Admiral's Man until at least the summer of 1597, whose name is regularly rendered 'Donstone' by Henslowe; or Thomas Downton, one of the company leaders from October 1597 on, whose name also appears in many variations in the *Diary* and elsewhere.¹⁹ Whoever is being alluded to, Guilpin's epigram does not support the notion that leads were Alleyn's exclusive domain.

Not that Alleyn's roles lacked impact: all three of his Marlovian characters are textually dominant. Doctor Faustus has a larger share of his play than any other early modern role (over 45 per cent; *c.* 5,000 words), and Barabas is close behind (*c.* 42 per cent; *c.* 7,500 words), as is the Tamburlaine of *Part 2* (*c.* 38 per cent; *c.* 6,600 words).²⁰ Both Tamburlaine in *Part 1* and Orlando in *Orlando Furioso* (in the printed text) also have an outsized textual presence, with *c.* 34 per cent each. Hence, five of Alleyn's six roles in extant plays come from that small group of parts with a share of 30 per cent or more of the text – compared to the third of Burbage's known roles that meet that standard. But the remaining three roles for which we have some information are of a different kind.

Muly Mahamet, although the longest part in Peele's *Battle of Alcazar*, only speaks around 17 per cent of the text (by word count, the shortest tragic lead in the entire corpus). Other major characters' word counts are quite evenly distributed, with Sebastian, Stukely, Abdelmelec, and the Presenter each taking 10–15 per cent of the script. Alleyn does not tower over this cast as in his Marlowe roles. Of the two backstage plots for lost plays, '1 Tamar Cham' gives Alleyn the title role, but he is always accompanied by Humphrey Jeffes's Otanes – and Otanes has several scenes alone on stage, which seem to

represent soliloquies.²¹ William Bird's Colmogra is present in almost as many scenes as Alleyn and unlike him has at least two opportunities for soliloquies. Finally, and most tellingly, in the backstage 'plot' for 'Frederick and Basilea,' it is Richard Alleyn (no relation) who plays Frederick; he appears in three scenes more than Edward Alleyn's Sebastian and speaks both the Prologue and the Epilogue. Basilea, played by a boy named Dick, has more scenes than anyone else (eleven).²² Edward Juby's King, Martin Slater's Theodore, Thomas Towne's Myron-hamec, and Sam Rowley's Heraclius feature in seven scenes, as many as Sebastian. The narrative is impossible to reconstruct from the plot, but the document does not suggest that Edward Alleyn's part was especially prominent: he is never alone, and while he may be an important supporting character, the plot clearly focuses on the title figures.²³

Alleyn's sample of roles is not quite as varied as Burbage's, but it supports the same conclusions: he sometimes played very large roles, sometimes regular-sized leads, and sometimes stepped back into the supporting cast. We do not know how many of the 190 or more lost Admiral's Men's plays had dominant leads, nor do we know which of them were designated Alleyn's. But he certainly did not play the leading role in 'Frederick and Basilea' – and he may well also have taken a supporting part in 'Tasso's Melancholy', 'Bellendon', 'Constantine', Rowley and Juby's 'Samson', Rowley's 'Joshua' – or Chapman's *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*.

Despite their fame, Alleyn and Burbage did not define their companies, nor were they irreplaceable. We do know, after all, that neither the Admiral's nor the King's Men collapsed when they suddenly had to cope without them. But did company repertories change when their supposed stars died or retired? Scott McMillin has argued as much for the years of Alleyn's temporary withdrawal from playing (1597–1600), when 'the new plays written for the Admiral's men had no role as large as 600 lines; the company's dramaturgy can be charted according to the presence or absence of Alleyn'.²⁴ But what was that dramaturgy? We cannot say for the years before or during Alleyn's absence, since too many plays of the period are lost (as

Knutson and McInnis discuss in their chapter here). Nor can we track whether Alleyn's established roles disappeared from the repertory, since Henslowe stopped recording daily receipts in late 1597. The company picked up 93 plays in those three years, however, and even if McMillin were right about the extant nine texts, we cannot know how many of the 84 lost plays had large leads. But it is not in fact the case that those nine plays are notably deficient in long roles. Pisaro in Haughton's 1598 *Englishmen for my Money*, at over 6,200 words (nearly 29 per cent), is longer than one of the parts McMillin identifies as exceptionally large, Tourneur's *Atheist's Tragedy's* D'Amville. Moreover, if we follow Martin Wiggins and others in accepting that the play published as *Lust's Dominion* is Dekker, Haughton, and Day's 'The Spanish Moor's Tragedy', recorded in Henslowe's *Diary* in February 1600,²⁵ it would seem that the Admiral's Men quickly found a suitable replacement for Alleyn: the part of Eleazer is longer than any associated with him (over 7,600 words, c. 40 per cent of the total text). In sum, the available evidence suggests that Alleyn's 'retirement' had no discernible effect on how the Admiral's Men went about their business.

Letting go of the notion that London's adult theatre companies had singularly dominant 'leading actors' necessarily affects our understanding of repertory planning. Take the first performance of 'Frederick and Basilea', recorded in Henslowe's *Diary* in the summer of 1597. It follows hard on the introduction of another new play, 'The Life and Death of Henry I' eight days earlier, which in turn comes fifteen days after the premiere of 'The Comedy of Humours' (usually identified as Chapman's *A Humorous Day's Mirth*). Conventionally, we might think Alleyn played the lead in 'Henry I' and in Chapman's play; we *know* he played a supporting role in 'Frederick and Basilea.' Perhaps convention has it right. If so, that supporting role might have been precisely what Alleyn needed after picking up two leads in quick succession: opening as Frederick a week after he had premiered his Henry may have been too tall an order. Equally plausibly, Alleyn's Henry I could have been

paired with a secondary lead, or an even smaller part, in *Mirth* and the supporting role in 'Frederick and Basilea'. As the schedule developed over the coming weeks, Chapman's comedy and the new history play were often performed in close succession; taking the lead in both may have been a lot to ask of Alleyn, since unlike most comedies, Chapman's has a hefty lead in *Lemot* (c. 4,700 words; over 29 per cent). What if the three plays had three different actors in their longest roles? In that case, offering the three new shows one after the other from 7–9 June might have meant showcasing three different configurations of the company: one led perhaps by John Singer, their greatest comic actor; one with Edward Alleyn at its head; and one centred on Richard Alleyn.²⁶ Alternating plays with different actors in the leads would not only have allowed for a more diverse display of skills, it would also, crucially, have made for a more equitable distribution of labour among players who were, after all, formally equal sharers in the company. If so, the company in planning its schedule must have paid as much attention to who was playing how many large roles in any given week as to the other questions we usually consider central to repertory construction.

Two further data points support the notion that spreading the workload was a factor in managing the repertory. For one, plays with the kinds of outsized roles we might associate with a star system – the Barabases and Hamlets – are exceedingly rare, as we have already seen. Only 8 per cent of all extant plays, 33 in total, had leads with more than 30 per cent of the text, and they were not prevalent in any company's repertory (the fourteen such plays the King's Men owned were distributed over at least 40 years, from *Richard III* to Massinger's *The City Madam*). For another, two-thirds of those 33 plays are tragedies or histories; only nine are comedies. Tragedies, however, do not dominate the corpus as a whole: they only make up a third of all extant plays, a mix, as Knutson has shown, that was reflected in the repertory at the Rose.²⁷

Generic diversity did not just enhance audience appeal, it also directly affected the division of actorly labour. Different

types of plays, the data shows, favour a different distribution of roles.²⁸ Tragic leads are, on average, much larger than leads in other plays; speak almost 4,300 words, over 650 more than comic or tragicomic leads; and are responsible for almost a quarter of the entire text (over 23 per cent, compared to *c.* 19 per cent for other genres). Playing the lead in a tragedy was simply more work, on the level of the text alone, than playing the lead in another kind of play – and given the likelihood that these performances involved fights, they were probably more physically exhausting as well.²⁹ More comedies meant fewer overly-demanding lead roles.³⁰

Second, the distribution of roles in comedies follows a different logic than in tragedies. While secondary leads, like the leads themselves, are shorter in comedies (by a far smaller margin of about 170 words), all other roles are more substantial. The fourth, fifth, and sixth longest part are all over 200 words longer than the equivalent roles in tragedies; their share of the text is correspondingly larger. The third longest role has an almost identical share of the text across all genres, but from the fourth on down, comedic roles are between 15 per cent and 30 per cent more textually present than tragic ones. Comedies thus tend to engage the entire ensemble: they may still have identifiable leads, but those leads are not usually textually dominant; the texts of comedies (and hence stage time and presence) are typically divided quite equitably among at least ten players. Tragedies put a much heavier emphasis on the two leading roles, who on average speak almost 40 per cent of the text and whose relative size compared to all other parts is also much greater than in comic plays.³¹

The benefits of a generically diverse repertory can be observed in casting records for the Caroline King's Men. The eight surviving cast lists, all but one from 1629–31, show patterns similar to those I have traced for Burbage and Alleyn; they also do not support narratives centred on a singularly prominent player.³² By the 1620s, the company had at least two actors a conventional account might recognize as 'stars' (Joseph Taylor and John Lowin). Both frequently play the largest roles,

but not exclusively. Taylor has the longest part in four of the eight performances, the second-longest in two others, the third-largest in a seventh play – and is not listed for the eighth. Lowin takes the lead in three shows and the second largest role in two more, but is also cast in a third, a fourth, and even a sixth-longest role in the other three plays.³³ One play, Carlell's *Deserving Favourite*, has a third actor, Richard Sharpe, as the lead (Lysander); he also takes the second-longest role in Wilson's *Swisser*. Only half of the lead roles are of noteworthy length: in a mix favouring comedy over tragedy 5:3, this is what we should expect. Lowin's Bosola in *Duchess of Malfi* and his Caesar in *The Roman Actor* have over 25 per cent of the text; Taylor's Antiochus in Massinger's *Believe as You List* does too, as does his Mirabell in Fletcher's *Wild Goose Chase* – the longest role in the sample, and an outlier for a comedic lead. The leads that follow generic norms, though, reveal the advantage of a diversified repertory for the workload of their actors. For instance, as Mathias in Massinger's *Picture*, Taylor played the lead; but with fewer than 4,000 words (around 19 per cent of the text), this would surely have been a less demanding task than roles such as Antiochus or Mirabell, though it was probably comparable to the even shorter Arioldus in *The Swisser* (his other comedic lead).

The small Caroline sample is not representative of the range of plays the company had in its repertory at that point, but even so, it affirms an ensemble-based approach to distributing workload and shows how a cannily constructed repertory supported that effort. Leading actors could take middle-of-the-pack roles (as Lowin does on two occasions); they could sit out some shows altogether (as Taylor does once); and even in a company that had two particularly prominent players, other actors could still play lead roles (as Sharpe did). Finally, *some* sharers seem to have specialized in supporting roles; for an actor such as Robert Benfield, the role of Antonio in *Duchess of Malfi* might have been an unusually demanding part (with *c.* 3,100 words), but he appears in the middle ranks in all eight cast lists. Sometimes, that position meant a role such as

Antonio; sometimes, a role of a mere 500 words or so (such as Rusticus in Massinger's *Roman Actor*).

Our limited knowledge of the King's Men's repertory in Burbage's prime leaves little scope for informed speculation, but one example, the second Henriad, allows us to trace a similar approach to casting in Shakespeare's work. Assuming the three Henry plays were staged in sequence or close proximity to one another, the trilogy seems tailor-made for an equitable distribution of labour (even if each of the plays also could be, and surely was, performed individually). *1 Henry IV* has exceptionally balanced co-leads: Falstaff's part (c. 5,500 words, 23 per cent) is somewhat longer than the others, but Hal and Hotspur have to fight more than him; their parts are of almost identical length (c. 4,300 each, c. 18 per cent). And Henry IV is an unusually substantial fourth part, at almost 2,600 words (c. 10.5 per cent) – before the 1610s, only Puntarvolo in Jonson's *Every Man Out* is longer. When we turn to the trilogy's second part, though, things change radically: where *1 Henry IV* distributes its roles much like a comedy, *2 Henry IV* looks more like a tragedy. The part of Falstaff remains at almost the same length as in part one, but most others shrink dramatically; the lead is twice as large as the next part. That role, Hal (2,400 words, less than 10 per cent), is shorter than his father's in *1 Henry IV*; and only one other part, Henry IV, has more than 1,500 words. That makes good sense, too, from the perspective of distributed labour: Henry dies, after all, so whoever played him probably could take a break in *Henry V*. The Hal actor, on the other hand, was in for a serious workout, in one of Shakespeare's most demanding roles. But the trilogy carefully set him up for that challenge, with the relative breather in *2 Henry IV*.

The second Henriad, then, is constructed as we might expect from a playwright familiar with the interrelation of casting and repertory. The trilogy, like the repertory as whole, strikes a balance between the company's various, potentially competing interests: an equitable distribution of labour; making the most of everyone's talents and public appeal; and catering to the

ambition, described by Tiffany Stern and Simon Palfrey, ‘to “Act Great Parts”’ – an ambition not limited to the ‘master or chief players’ in any company of actors.³⁴ Maintaining this delicate balance would have required a thorough knowledge of the relative lengths of the parts in the repertory and of the various sharers’ needs, desires, and challenges. This would have had an effect on the acquisition of new plays, too, since additions to the repertory needed to respond to the same network of considerations as the scheduling of established parts of the repertory. It seems unlikely that such a complex task was handled entirely collectively; instead, it might have fallen to experienced sharers with quasi-managerial responsibilities (and possibly reduced stage time) – figures such as John Heminges in his last two decades with the King’s Men.

Let me end by considering the question of repertory from the perspective of London’s theatre industry four generations or so later. David Garrick’s star status can hardly be questioned; from our modern understanding of the concept, we might expect him to have performed every night, as often as possible in roles for which he was famous. But that is not what the eighteenth-century theatrical records show. With the exception of his entirely atypical debut season, Garrick never appeared in more than 61 per cent of his company’s performances. In his busiest season at Drury Lane, 1757–58, he performed 111 times.³⁵ He rarely acted his most famous roles more than a handful of times a year. After 1743–44, London audiences never had more than four chances a season to see his Hamlet. And Garrick frequently took on minor characters: Druggier in *The Alchemist*; Chamont in Otway’s *The Orphan*; Lusignan in Aaron Hill’s *Zara* (the latter no longer than 136 lines).³⁶

He explained to Francis Hayman in October 1745, ‘I am not able to act two nights successively two principal carracters. I endeavour’d at it last season (contrary to my agreement) in King John, Tancred, &c & the whole town knows the consequence’³⁷ (he suffered a physical breakdown and did not return for months). An analysis of a typical season, 1753–54, confirms that he carefully managed his appearances. Only in

new plays did Garrick act leads on more than two successive nights, appearing in the same role on up to six consecutive occasions. What caused strain was not repeating a role night after night (the norm for modern Anglophone actors) but playing different major roles in quick succession. The only time this happened on three consecutive nights that season it was followed by a four-day break. As a consequence, his famous roles were regularly played by other actors: Henry Mossop was Richard III twice as often as Garrick that season (four to two), Macbeth three times as often (three to one).³⁸

Garrick's practice probably differed somewhat from early modern professional habits; the companies he worked in were larger, with more settled repertories. But we should take seriously his sense of the mental and physical limits to what an actor can do in any given week. Until he reduced his appearances in 1763, Garrick averaged about 92 performances a year; the most roles he ever played in one season was 29 (his average was 21). He acted many of those parts for 20 years or more, and not all of them were leads. Contrast that with what we conventionally assume Alleyn managed in the Admiral's Men's seemingly paradigmatic run from June 1594 to June 1595: 270 performances, playing 36 *leads*, while learning 20 of them from scratch.³⁹ How plausible is it that the limit of what was sustainable for an acting company had shrunk this drastically within four or five generations? Is it not more likely that the realities of the 1590s bore a closer resemblance to the 1750s than we have traditionally believed?

The reading of the Admiral's and King's Men's casting practices I have offered here encourages a rethinking of how a company of equal sharers would have approached the division of actorly labour. The most significant member of the company, from this perspective, would not be the one we have anachronistically identified as its 'star' but the one organizing a set of individuals into a collective. A Shakespearean character may serve as our patron as we begin to attend to these organizational endeavours. Appropriately, it is a worker. Not Nick Bottom, the hogger of leads in *Midsummer Nights*

Dream, but Peter Quince, a sharer in every sense: a manager of equals, a distributor of parts, and a man with a list.

Notes

- 1 Roslyn Lander Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company, 1594–1613* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991); see esp. 20–55 for a detailed account of these parameters. For an overview of subsequent developments in repertory study, see Tom Rutter, 'Repertory Studies: A Survey,' *Shakespeare* 4 (2008), 336–350, and Rutter, 'Introduction: The Repertory-Based Approach,' *Early Theatre*, 13 (2010), 121–132.
- 2 See Tiffany Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 36–62, 264–265.
- 3 Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, *The Queen's Men and Their Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 97–98.
- 4 In insisting on the construction of plays as systems of parts, James Marino's chapter in this volume pursues an argument related to mine: the ways in which changes to one part affected other actors' parts needed to be carefully managed. As I suggest here, the distribution of those parts across a repertory had casting implications that always affected the entire company, and required equally thoughtful management.
- 5 John Astington, *Actors and Acting in Shakespeare's Time: The Art of Stage Playing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 128. Cf. Bart van Es's assertion that the King's Men had a 'leading man', and that of the eleven 'dominant roles' Shakespeare wrote from 1599–1608, nine were written 'for' Burbage; see *Shakespeare in Company* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 237–238.
- 6 Andrew Gurr, *Shakespeare's Opposites: The Admiral's Company, 1594–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 50.
- 7 Astington, 112.

- 8 S. P. Cerasano, 'Edward Alleyn, the New Model Actor, and the Rise of the Celebrity in the 1590s', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 18 (2005), 50.
- 9 'Plots' were large single-page documents that listed entrances and sometimes the appearance of major props; in the handful of surviving examples, many of the actors playing the listed characters are named. 'The Dead Man's Fortune' cannot be reliably dated (or even assigned definitely to a particular acting company).
- 10 See Edwin Nungezer, *A Dictionary of Actors and of Other Persons Associated with the Public Representation of Plays in England before 1642* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), 68–70. He also took unknown roles in Jonson's *Every Man in* and *Every Man out of his Humour*, *Sejanus*, and *Catiline*, and further plays by Beaumont and Fletcher.
- 11 Data about the length of roles is drawn from a database built using Martin Mueller's 'Shakespeare His Contemporaries' corpus and the Folger Shakespeare Digital Texts. It was assembled from the XML-tagged playtexts with code developed by my research assistant Lawrence Evalyn. Imperfections in the tagging mean it is prudent to use rounded rather than exact figures for word counts; the broader conclusions about company repertoires and generic trends discussed later in this essay are sustainable despite this lack of precision.
- 12 See Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 248–294.
- 13 *The Malcontent*, ed. W. David Kay, New Mermaids (London: A & C Black, 1998), Induction 11–12, 26SD.
- 14 *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), v. 4, 397, 5.3.64–67.
- 15 Nungezer, 262.
- 16 See Nungezer, 8.
- 17 Cerasano, 50.
- 18 *Skialetheia. Or, A Shadowe of Truth, Epigrams and Satyres*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Manchester: Charles Simms, 1878), 18.

- 19 See Nungezer, 117–119, 381.
- 20 Mueller's corpus includes only the 1604 A-Text, but this is likely closer to the version Alleyn would have performed than the B-Text published in 1616.
- 21 Reprinted in W. W. Greg, ed., *Henslowe Papers, Being Documents Supplementary to Henslowe's Diary* (London: A. H. Bullen, 1907), 144–148.
- 22 Reproduced and transcribed in W. W. Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), n.p.
- 23 Nonetheless, T. J. King insists that Edward Alleyn, as 'the leading actor of the company . . . plays Sebastian, the leading role' – a misrepresentation of what the plot indicates; *Casting Shakespeare's Plays: London Actors and Their Roles, 1590–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 30.
- 24 Scott McMillin, *The Elizabethan Theatre and The Book of Sir Thomas More* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 63.
- 25 Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue*, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 206–210 (#1235).
- 26 See *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 58–59.
- 27 See Knutson, 40–41, 44.
- 28 To avoid the difficulty of fine distinctions between genres, which are not crucial to my argument, I am counting all history plays as tragedies (which reduces the average size of leads, since most chronicle plays are more evenly distributed than tragedies) and all romances and tragicomedies as comedies (which makes virtually no statistical difference, as these genres have nearly identical distribution patterns).
- 29 I am grateful to Ben Naylor for a spirited exchange on this question.
- 30 The one role that, as Richard Preiss demonstrates in his chapter here, eludes this text-based analysis is also the one that may have defied such generic distinctions: the clown. His part probably varied in length show-by-show, depending on the performer's

whim and the performance's needs, and those factors probably mattered far more than what kind of play the clown appeared in or what the playwright had set down for him.

- 31 This analysis ignores doubling, but distribution patterns suggest that actors beyond the third largest part would have had to double more in tragedies than in comedies. However, my reading of T. J. King's tabulations of casting records suggests a limited use of the practice across genres for the 8–12 'principal parts'. Even in the heavily doubled *Duchess of Malfi*, only two of the nine largest roles have a minor second part. See King, 96–143.
- 32 This information, gleaned from manuscript sources and a number of plays printed mostly in the 1630s, is summarized in King, 115–126.
- 33 Additional sources give Lowin the fourth-largest role in *Volpone* (Sir Politic), the third-longest in *The Alchemist* (Mammon), and perhaps the second-longest role in *Philaster*, Leon/Dion (Taylor being notably absent, Philaster is played by Hugh Clarke).
- 34 Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 46. For the phrase, see King, 17.
- 35 Data collected from John Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage, from the Restoration in 1600 to 1830*, vol. 4 (Bath: H. E. Carrington, 1832); Arthur H. Scouten, ed., *The London Stage, 1660–1800. Part 3, 1729–1747* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961); and George Winchester Stone, ed., *The London Stage, 1660–1800. Part 4, 1747–1776* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962).
- 36 See George Winchester Stone and George Morrow Kahl, *David Garrick, a Critical Biography* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), 481, 524–528, 564–568 and Appendices B and C.
- 37 Quoted in Kalman A. Burnim, 'The Significance of Garrick's Letters to Hayman', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 9 (1958), 150.
- 38 See Stone, 377–433. I am indebted to Terry Robinson and David Taylor for conversations on this subject.
- 39 See *Henslowe's Diary*, 22–30.