plays, and this may be true of other companies. The staging practices of the Admiral’s Men and Strange’s Men can now be tested against the configuration of the Rose stage-and-tiring-house uncovered in the Bankside excavation. The sociological theory which Bayer applies to the 1617 disturbances can be carried across to other well-documented occasions of playhouse and acting-company involvement in their neighbourhoods, and the plays themselves can be brought into this picture as the most specific form of impact actors have on their neighbourhoods. In that regard, Mary Bly, in *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queans on the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford, 2000) has recently read the plays of the King’s Revels company of the early Jacobean years and has found an abundance of sexual humour running through them that seems designed to appeal to trendy audiences at the Whitefriars. This same company will soon be the subject of a major paper by Richard Dutton in *ELR*.

Things are moving along. For the moment, here are the latest three provocative acting-company papers, different in origin but converging on what may become the centre of attention for early theatre history in the years to come. Read on.

SCOTT MCMILLIN

*Playing with Fire: Immolation in the Repertory of Strange’s Men*

In the study of acting companies and their repertories, Strange’s Men must loom large. By name an older company that was reinvigorated by actors taken from other companies in the late 1580s, and dissolved by the end of 1593, this unusually large and successful company helped to transform the drama of its time. In the records associated with Strange’s Men are found the names of the principal actors – George Bryan, Thomas Pope, Augustine Phillips, William Kemp, John Heminges, and Richard Burbage – who became partners with Shakespeare in the newly-formed Lord Chamberlain’s Men in 1594. Aside from the Lord Admiral’s Men’s, Strange’s is the best-documented repertory in our single best source of evidence about repertory companies, the diary of the theatre impresario Philip Henslowe. Henslowe’s diary documents two periods of daily activity by Strange’s Men: an extended period from 1 February – 22 June 1592, during which they offered 105 performances (24 different plays) at the Rose theatre, and a shorter run of 29 performances at the Rose between 29 December 1592 and 1 February 1593.
In what it tells us about Strange’s repertory, Henslowe’s diary enables us to reflect upon the ways in which this innovative and politically daring company addressed itself to the public mood and events of its time. One of the ways in which it did so, I suggest, is by playing with fire. A striking feature of the company’s repertory, in so far as we can reconstruct it and differentiate it from that of other companies, is that it was remarkably pyrotechnical, if not pyromaniac. Fire, fireworks, the threat of fire, and above all the threat and the actual simulation of burning people alive are astonishingly prominent in the company’s repertory. Pyrotechnics were a familiar feature of traditional drama-turgy; they were associated especially with conjuring scenes or with appearances of the devil, which were often accompanied by the effects of squibs. In the repertory of Strange’s Men, old-fashioned plays like A Knack to Know a Knave and John of Bordeaux contain implicit opportunities for these kinds of traditional pyrotechnical effects. But there are more spectacular examples as well. If The Battle of Alcazar is the ‘muly mulucco’ referred to in Henslowe’s diary, then on at least fourteen occasions between 19 February 1592 and 1 February 1593 London audiences witnessed a show in which the fifth act chorus narrated to thunder and lightning as an angel hung the crowns of the play’s combatants on a tree:

Heere the blazing Starre.
Now firie stares and streaming comets blaze,
That threat the earth and princes of the same.
Fire workes.
Fire, Fire about the axiltree of heaven,
Whorles round, and from the foot of Casyopa
In fatal houre consumes those fatal crownes.
One fals.
Downe fals the diadem of Portugall,
The other fals.
The crowne of Barbary and kingdoms fal.

In our risk-averse present, such a scene would result in an emergency call, revocation of the theatre’s insurance, and prompt investigation by the fire marshal. The explicit detail of the stage directions here, however, reminds us that we cannot apply our own notions of risk and liability to a period in which theatregoers apparently brought their own fires with them to the theatre in cold seasons. Elaborate pyrotechnics can be found in another play performed
by Strange’s Men, the Looking-Glass for London and England, where the proud queen Remilia is struck by lightning while putting on her make-up in her tent (‘Lightning and thunder wherewith REMILIA is stroken’. ‘He draws the curtain and finds her stroken with thunder, black’, 1.2. 90, 111) and again when stage directions declare that ‘A hand from out a cloud threateneth a burning sword’ (4.3.114).\

That we are dealing with a company specializing not just in fireworks but in uses of fire more generally is evident from an implicit stage direction in The Battle of Alcazar, where the ambassador from Muly Mahamet to King Sebastian offers a pledge of allegiance by holding his hand in a flame:

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Beholde my Lord, this binds our faith to thee
We offer heere our hand into this flame,
And as this flame doth fasten on this flesh,
So from our soules we wish it may consume
The heart of our great Lord and soveraigne …
If his intent agree not with his wordes. (ll. 601–6)
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A variation on this trick can again be found in the Looking-Glass for London and England, which calls for an entry by sages ‘with the miters on their heads, carrying fire in their hands’ (4.3.99).

Philip Butterworth’s recent study, Theatre of Fire, assembles all the technical information that is needed to convince us that Strange’s Men could indeed have been playing with fire. From Thomas Hyll’s Naturall and Artificial Conclusions (1586), for example, Butterworth reproduces the following recipe:

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How to make a man appeare on a flame burning without any harme.
To doo this, take Brimstone, Orpiment, and common Oyle, of these make an ointment, with the which anoint thy garment all about, & thy head and handes, and after light the same & it wil burne all at once without harme. Also take iuice of Adders tongue, ye iuice of March Mallowes, & the white of an Egge, these mix together, anointing therewith all about thy body, and then cast the fine pouder of Brimston on the same, setting it ouer a fire, & it wil strangely burne, and neither harme handes nor garment anointed therewith.\
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It seems likely that the ambassador of The Battle of Alcazar and the priests of the sun in the Looking-Glass would have found such an ointment helpful; larger quantities might have been useful to the actor playing the evil son Radagon in the Looking-Glass when ‘a flame of fire appeareth from beneath, and RADAGON is swallowed’ (3.2.166).
We arrive here at an apparent preoccupation in the Strange’s repertory with human immolation. Like Radagon, another character in a play performed by Strange’s Men was apparently immolated on the stage. I say apparently because in this case we have no text, only the precious and puzzling ‘Platt of the Secounde Parte of the Seuen Deadlie Sinns’, a stage-house document that contains the names of the same actors who identify themselves as Strange’s Men in a letter to the privy council, usually dated to later 1592. *The Second Part of the Seven Deadly Sins* is a three-in-one play that represents the sin of Sloth in the story of the Assyrian prince Sardanapalus. Standard sources for the story may suggest to us the gist of what the plot’s entrances and exits are enacting.

According to *Cooper’s Chronicle* (1560; *STC*: 15219), Sardanapalus was an effeminate sybarite who, defeated by the Mede captain Arbaces, ‘bovrned hym selfe with all his delicacies, (which he esteemed more then all his empire) in a great fyre, onely in that shewyngye hym selfe to be a man’ (33v). George Whetstone’s *English Mirror* (1586; *STC*: 25336) likewise reports that ‘the effeminate Sardanapalus … fired his pallace, and in the same burned himselfe and his concubines’ (211).

In the ‘plat’ itself, the final appearance of Sardanapalus (played by Richard Burbage) is marked by the instruction ‘Enter Arbachus pursing Sardanapalus and the Ladies fly. After Enter Sarda wth as many Jewels robes and Gold as he can cary’? Perhaps in this performance Sardanapalus was merely running with the loot, though Cooper’s claim that ‘he bovrned hym selfe with all his delicacies’ (a 1654 English translation of Justinus has it that ‘he threw himself and his riches into the fire’, sig. B4) provides a clue to the action Burbage may have performed with the ‘Jewels robes and Gold’. That Sardanapalus was not just running toward an off-stage immolation but possibly burning himself on-stage is tantalizingly suggested by Thomas Beard’s account of the story in his *Theatre of Gods Iudgements* (1597; *STC*: 1659). Beard, whose work is late enough to be drawing its account from the play rather than providing the source for it, reports that Sardanapalus ‘returned to a tower in his pallace, which … he set on fire and was consumed therein’ (359–60). In defence of a possible on-stage immolation we might note the possible precedent for such a spectacular scene in the apparent on-stage immolation of Marlowe’s *Dido* by the Children of the Chapel Royal just a few years before. Marlowe became prominent in Strange’s repertory, and we will be encountering him again.

The more interesting and plentiful immolations in the Strange’s repertory – whether enacted or merely threatened – are not the suicides or divine retribu-
tions mentioned so far, but those inflicted by human beings on others in the course of tyranny or treachery. It is here that in playing with fire Strange’s Men were practising dangerously by touching more directly on the spectacular violence of the contemporary Elizabethan world.

I would like to include among my examples the concluding moment of The Jew of Malta, when Ferneze opens the trap door that plunges Barabas into the boiling cauldron. Not immolation, exactly, but certainly a ‘hot death’:

now begins the extremity of heat  
To pinch me with intolerable pangs. (5.5.87–8)

A later list of properties belonging to Henslowe includes “Item, I cauderm for the Jewe.” 8 If Henslowe already possessed a cauldron while Strange’s Men were at the Rose, it would have been well used, and not just because The Jew of Malta was among the company’s most frequently performed plays. The company had a second play, called ‘Bendo and Richardo’, that almost certainly required a cauldron. No known playtext survives, but Greg identified the source as the tale of ‘Bindo and Ricciardo’, a novella translated from Il Pecorone in William Painter’s Palace of Pleasure. 9 In the story, Bindo, a Florentine architect, builds a treasure-house for the duke of Venice, conveniently designing into the plan a secret passageway through which he crawls nightly to steal from the duke. Noting the depletion of his treasure, the duke discovers the passageway by having his men burn straw in the treasure-house and follow the draft of the smoke to the passageway. He then

caused to be brought into the chamber a caldron of pitche, and placed it directly under the hole, commaunding that a fyre should be kept day and night under the caldron, that the same might continually boyle … It came to pass that … remouing the stone, [Bindo] went in as he did before, and fell into the caldron of pitche (which continually was boyling there) vp to the waste. 10

Like the death of Barabas, this again is ‘hot death’ rather than immolation; but our sense of the pyrotechnical possibilities ought to be informed by Butterworth’s account of the use of pyrotechnics and red smoke to simulate boiling cauldrons in plays like the Croxton Play of the Sacrament and the Mondane play of Antichrist. In the latter, the players are instructed in a note to ‘make water boil in the cauldron … and do it with fireworks (“fusées”) without heating the water in the best possible way’ (Butterworth, 51).

With these cauldron deaths, neither self-imposed nor divinely sanctioned but resulting from the tyranny or treachery of rulers, we come closer to the
scenes of real or threatened judicial execution by fire that seem to have figured prominently in Strange’s repertory. In Greene’s *Orlando Furioso*, staged at the Rose in the spring of 1592, Angelica is threatened with immolation:

We will have her punish’d by the laws of France,  
To end her lust in flames of fire …  
[Her] soul shall vanish vp in fire,  
As Semele, when Iuno will’d the trull  
To entertain the glory of her love. (ll. 1451–2, 1470–4)\(^{11}\)

Only the last-minute intervention of Orlando spares her from the stake. A similar situation occurs at the end of *John of Bordeaux*, when Rossaline, the long-suffering wife of the exiled John of Bordeaux, is accused along with Friar Bacon of conjuring against the life of the Emperor and sentenced to death by fire:

you seek my death by spells and maiecke force  
but burning fageets shall inchaunt yo’ lines; (ll. 1029–30)\(^ {12}\)

Only the appearance of a champion can save her from the fire, a point several times reiterated in a protracted execution scene that waits melodramatically upon the last-minute arrival of John of Bordeaux: ‘rossalin prepayer fo’ thou shalt die … yf no one com to patranage her casae [sic] / then let her die’ (ll. 1236, 1305–6). There are no stage directions in either *Orlando* or *John of Bordeaux* calling for stake or flame to be present, but a lighted torch or two would have given urgency to these melodramatic situations, which derive ultimately from works like the *Romans de Claris et Laris*, where Sagramors saves a lady from the stake, or the *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes, where Gawain does the same.\(^ {13}\) A slightly different melodramatic scenario occurs in Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*, when the Portuguese counsellor Alexandro, falsely accused of slaying Prince Balthasar, is brought on-stage under guard and ordered to execution by the Viceroy:

Bring forth that daring fiend  
And let him die for his accursed deed …  
No more, I say! to the tortures! when!  
Bind him, and burn his body in those flames

*They bind him to the stake.*
That shall prefigure those unquenchèd fires
Of Phlegeton preparèd for his soul …

Enter AMBASSADOR.

AMB: Stay, hold a while … (3.1.47–58)

Another cliffhanger, this one explicitly near calamity in the stage directions, which declare, once the ambassador delivers his exonerating news: ‘They unbind him.’

For reasons about which it is interesting to speculate, on-stage judicial executions are not all that common in the period, and judicial executions by fire are even rarer still. It would seem, then, that by the standards of the general norm Strange’s Men were edging right up to, if not past, the limits of acceptability. The unfortunate Pedringano is hanged on-stage in The Spanish Tragedy (the stage direction says, ‘They turn him off’), and so is John Lincoln in The Book of Sir Thomas More, a play which also takes the saint himself right up onto the scaffold and face-to-face with the executioner before the play abruptly ends.

If Strange’s Men were being controversial in their spectacular uses of fire, immolation, and judicial executions, it is fair to ask what the particular valences of stage immolations would have been in the early 1590s. The most vivid association of such scenes would surely have been with the mythical images and narratives of John Foxe’s Actes and Monuments, the foundational account of the dark age of tyranny and religious persecution from which the better days of the Elizabethan reign and church had emerged. In the awesome scenes recorded in Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, a Catholic theatre of punishment and purgation did battle with a Protestant theatre of spiritual commitment. The fiery scenes staged by Strange’s Men may well have recalled specific scenes in Foxe’s book: – Rogers washing his hands in the fire ‘as if it had been colde water’ (1583, f 1037); the persecution of Rose Allin, as the pursuivant Edmund Tyrrel, taking a ‘candle from her, held her wrist and the burning candle under her hand, burning cross-wise over the back thereof, till the very sinews cracked asunder’ (1583, f 206); or the Lollard craftsman who in 1410 was ‘caried into a market place without the city to be included in a pipe or tunne, for so much as Cherillus Bul was not then in ure amongst the bishops’ (1583, f 172). That Shakespeare actually cast his eyes over the gruesome illustrations of these events is evident in Prince Hal’s referring to Falstaff as ‘that roasted Manningtree ox’ (1 Henry IV, 2.4.452). While there is nothing in Foxe’s prose that likens Oldcastle’s execution to the roasting of an ox, the unusual manner of his death as represented in the accompanying illustration
(1583, f 277), as Paul White has suggested, may have given the analogy to Shakespeare.

In the early 1590s such scenes might only have seemed like something from a darker age, or the sort of things that happened in ‘another country’, at the hands of crazed tyrants like Ferneze or the Portuguese viceroy. According to the Elizabethan Act of Supremacy, the anti-Lollard heresy laws were repealed; ‘only those who brought the authority of the crown in question by refusing to accept the royal supremacy were liable to suffer death, and they not as heretics but as traitors, whose punishment did not belong to the church courts.’ Cases of religious deviance were no longer tried under the old heresy laws, but referred to an ecclesiastical court of High Commission, whose powers were only vaguely specified and whose use of penalties only included death as a remote theoretical possibility.

But there were important catches and exceptions. Foxe himself had attempted to intervene with the queen and privy council when five London Anabaptists were condemned to the stake in 1575; his plea that burning heretics was a popish practice and that the heretics might instead be branded, banished, or sent to the gallows failed to prevent the burning of two of them in Smithfield. Four heretics were burned in Norwich between 1579 and 1589; the burning of the last of these, the ‘Arian’ Francis Kett, in January 1589 was recounted in a 1590 treatise detailing how Kett clapped his hands and ‘cried nothing but blessed be God… until the fire had consumed all his neather partes, and untill he was stifled with smoke’. In addition to its continuing use in heresy cases against Anabaptists and anti-Trinitarians, burning also remained the standard punishment for women convicted of a capital offence of treason. It was considered a mitigation of the standard punishment for men, which involved being drawn on a hurdle, hanged, castrated, and disembowelled while still alive, having one’s entrails thrown in the fire, one’s body quartered, and the pieces boiled in a cauldron and hung up on public display. The punishment of death by fire applied as well to women convicted of capital offences of ‘petty treason’, ie, women convicted of killing their husbands, and witches convicted of designs against the lives of men. At least five condemned women were burned alive in London in 1590–4. As it happens, a fire was awaiting a convicted woman during the spring of 1592, when Strange’s Men were playing at the Rose. Anne Brewen, the wife of a London goldsmith, had confessed to conspiring with her lover to poison her husband. After her confession, she was sent ‘into the countrey to be deliuered of her childe’ and was then subsequently returned to London and
sentenced to be burned in Smithfield. The sentence was carried out on 28 June 1592, five days after the closing of the London theatres. The sensational case provoked at least three popular ballads, as well as a pamphlet whose title page made use of a woodcut of the martyrdom of Cecily Orme from the pages of Foxe. On the basis of a handwritten name entered at the end of the pamphlet, F.S. Boas attributed the pamphlet to Thomas Kyd. If Kyd was writing for Strange’s Men when the theatres closed on 23 June, he would have been looking for other ways to use his literary talent.

But perhaps more important than the treatment of crime was the treatment of dissent. In addition to its continuing use of fire against heretics, the Elizabethan regime was quite vigorous in the 1580’s and early 1590s in its pursuit of religious minorities under the capital treason laws. The execution of the Jesuit missionaries that began in the 1580s produced its own spectacular literature of martyrdom, including Richard Verstegan’s *Theatrum Crudelitatem Haereticorum Nostri Temporis* (1587; reissued 1592), where woodcuts showed entrails being burned, and cauldrons boiling down the quartered pieces of the bodies. Stow mentions that executions of seminary priests had actually been staged ‘at the Theater’ and ‘nigh the Theater’ in 1588. Audiences not attending ‘Muly Mulocco’ at the Rose on 20 February 1592 might have instead attended the execution of Robert Pormorte in the west end of Paul’s churchyard.

Catholics, of course, were not the only victims of the authorities, and the pursuit of Puritans under treason law in the 1590s was perhaps the best reason for thinking that the days of Foxe had returned, and that once again the religious enemies of the bishops would become victims of the state. On 28 July 1591, a Protestant fanatic named William Hacket was executed in Cheapside, just two weeks after he had mounted a cart on the same spot and declared himself the Messiah and king of Europe. Earlier in Elizabeth’s reign, self-proclaimed Messiahs like Hacket were usually treated as ‘brainsick and frantic’. But in 1591 the case was different, as fear of the Puritan movement and the triumphs of Martin Marprelate – along with a more general fear of conspiracies and conventicles – had produced an atmosphere of crisis and paranoia; the significance of Hacket’s case was ‘probably inflated by the bishops in an effort to discredit the Puritan movement as a whole’. In the spring months before Hacket’s execution, as the result of an investigation launched in the religious court of High Commission, three of the accused Marprelate conspirators were sentenced to execution; two later recanted and were reprieved, and a third died in prison. That same spring, amid controversy about its potentially abusive powers, the court of High Commission turned over to the Star Chamber its investigation of leading Presbyterians in the hope that they would receive ‘an
exemplary punishment to the terror of others'. When Strange’s Men were performing at the Rose in 1592 and 1593, the fate of the imprisoned Presbyterians, already crushed and cowed, had yet to be determined. The Separatists Henry Barrow and John Greenwood, not so lucky as the Presbyterians (all of whom were eventually released), were executed in April 1593, as was John Penry, the alleged creator of Martin Marprelate and the first Puritan martyr, the following spring. Though created specifically to deal with religious offences, and to demonstrate that the state was not in the business of persecuting religious minorities or applying capital sentences, the court of High Commission, by turning religious cases over to the Star Chamber, may have looked in 1592–3 like the sign of a return to the terrible days recounted in the pages and plates of Foxe.

Without insisting on any single topical reference, I have tried to sketch in general terms an atmosphere of repression and paranoia that was part of what Strange’s Men were living with in the early 1590s—and not just an atmosphere, since the repression appears to have finally reached out and touched two of Strange’s best playwrights, Kyd and Marlowe, quite directly in the spring of 1593. It is possible that the pyrotechnical effects of Strange’s Men were simply the reflection of an older kind of theatre focused on spectacle or that they were the coincidental result of the company’s having a pyrotechnician among its personnel. There are signs that some of the plays I have mentioned—Greene’s Orlando Furioso, The Looking Glass for London, and possibly the Sardanapalus play—had earlier been in the repertory of the Queen’s Men, and there are other plays in the Queen’s Men’s repertory, such as Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, The Old Wise’s Tale, and The Cobbler’s Prophecy that also call for spectacular pyrotechnical effects.

But that Strange’s Men were consciously encouraging reflection on the pyrotechnical features of their repertory is perhaps confirmed in the newer and more daring plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare, where the issue of audience response to spectacles of violence is most explicitly foregrounded. The language of pyromania and the threat of immolation pervades The Jew of Malta, from the prologue’s mention of the brazen bull in which the tyrant Phalaris roasted his victims alive to Barabas’ threat to sacrifice his daughter ‘on a pile of wood’. The first irony of the death of Barabas is that the intended executioner becomes the victim; but a deeper irony follows, as Marlowe catches the audience up short in what must have been their enthusiastic cheers by having the dying Jew address both his on-stage audience and the theatregoers at the Rose: ‘help me, Christians! / Governor, why stand you all so pitiless?’ (5.5.69–70; italics mine).
Shakespeare includes sacrificial immolation as the originary act of cruelty in the endlessly cruel *Titus Andronicus*, a play that the 1594 quarto assigns in the first instance to ‘Derby’s Men’, the new name of Strange’s when Ferdinando Stanley became the fifth earl of Derby in September 1593. But there is a surprising decency in this play’s suppression of spectacle in favour of the grim report: ‘Alarbus’ limbs are loft, / And intrals feede the sacrificing fire, / Whose smoke like incense, doth perfume the sky.’ There is decency too, in the offstage immolation of Shakespeare’s Joan of Arc in *1 Henry VI*, where Shakespeare suppresses the spectacle but gives the audience all the grim detail it needs to know about the gruesome fate of Joan – and about the procedures used in the Marian persecutions – when he has the noble Warwick suggest a mitigation to her penalty:

... hark ye, sirs: because she is a maid,
Spare for no faggots, let there be enow.
Place barrels of pitch upon the fatal stake,
So that her torture may be shortened. (5.4.55–8)

Even as Shakespeare moves Joan’s immolation off the stage, his emphasis on Warwick’s act of mitigation reflects a contemporary ambivalence about the cruel disfigurement of women’s bodies on the scaffold. Joan’s off-stage immolation extends the logic of mitigation that made fire itself a veil drawn over a gruesome deed: ‘for as decency due to the sex forbids the exposing and publicly mangling their bodies, their sentence is to be drawn to the gallows, and there to be burnt alive.’ Yet Warwick’s call for faggots and barrels of pitch is horrid enough, perhaps especially to those who had turned the pages of Foxe; Joan’s plea for mercy on the grounds that she is pregnant wins her no reprieve, and her parting curse on England is a stunning reminder of what the executioners perpetrate upon themselves:

Darkness and the gloomy shade of death
Environ you, till mischief and despair
Drive you to break your necks or hang yourselves! (5.4.89–91; italics mine)

In the innovative work of Marlowe and Shakespeare we see a more deliberate reflection on the barbarities with which Strange’s Men were playing, even as those barbarities were moved off-stage. Marlowe’s *The Massacre at Paris* was a new play when Strange’s Men made what appears to have been their final appearance at the Rose in the winter of 1592-3. The play spares few barbarities in its spectacle of suicidal civil war, martyrdom, and fanatical religious perse-
cution. All manners of torture and death are depicted. But as in *1 Henry VI*,
immolation is a possibility quite specifically averted. Two members of the
Catholic mob debate what to do with the Lord Admiral’s body:

1. Why, let us burn him for a heretic.
2. O no, his body will infect the fire, and the fire the
air, and so we shall be poison’d with him.

A very Marlovian moment, as the purest hatred coincides with the truest
revelation: we breathe the smoke of those we burn. It would appear that
Marlowe and Shakespeare, making the political meaning of fire all the more
apparent while removing it from the stage, were beginning to transform the
spectacular pyrotechnics of Strange’s Men into a different kind of drama, one
at once artistically more subtle and politically more sophisticated.

LAWRENCE MANLEY

Notes

1 Five of the ten ‘principall Comedians’ listed in the 1616 folio edition of
Jonson’s *Every Man in his Humor* as belonging to ‘the then Lord Chamberlain
his Servants’ in 1598 (Kemp, Pope, Heminges, Phillips, and Bryan) are also
named as five of the six members of Lord Strange’s Men (the sixth being
Edward Alleyn) in a privy council minute of 6 May 1593 authorizing the
company to perform outside London (E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*,
vol 4 (Oxford, 1923), 314); four of the six names in the 1593 minute (Kemp,
Pope, Heminges, and Bryan) also appear among the five named payees (the
fifth was Shakespeare) for court performances by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men
1594–9; at least six of those named in the 1616 Jonson folio (Pope, Phillips,
Bryan, Burbage, Duke and Sly) can be found in the plot of *2 Seven Deadly
Sins*, discussed below. See Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol 2, 198, and
Scott McMillin, ‘Building Stories: Greg, Fleay, and the Plot of *2 Seven Deadly


3 Among the obstacles to studies of company repertories is the problem of
attribution that arises from the vagueness of a document like Henslowe’s diary.
Henslowe’s ‘fryer bacvne’ may have been Greene’s *Friar Bacon and Friar
Bungay*, but in view of the 1594 title page attributing that play to the Queen’s
Men, it is perhaps more likely that *John of Bordeaux*, possibly belonging to Strange’s Men and/or to Henslowe, is the play referred to in the diary.


6 Thomas Hyll, *A Briefe and pleasante Treatise, Intituled: Naturall and Artificiall Conclusions* (1586), sig. Dv., quoted in Philip Butterworth, *Theatre of Fire: Special Effects in Early English and Scottish Theatre* (London, 1998), 29. Butterworth also quotes a recipe from *The Book of Secrets of Albertus Magnus* (trans c 1550): ‘When thou wilt that thou seem all inflamed, or set on fire from thy head unto thy feet and not be hurt. Take white Great Mallows or Hollyhock, mix them with the white of eggs; after, anoint thy body with it and let it be until it be dried up, and after anoint thee with Alum, and afterward cast on it small Brimstone beaten unto powder, for the fire is inflamed on it, and hurteth not, and if thou do thus upon the palm of thy hand thou shalt be able to hold the fire without hurt’ (30).


8 *Henslowe’s Diary*, 321.

9 Walter Greg (ed), *Henslowe’s Diary*. Part 2. Commentary (London, 1908), 12; Greg does not address the content of the tale or its possible relation to Henslowe’s ‘caverne’.


14 We know from the evidence of the censor’s hand that *The Booke of Sir Thomas More* was a dangerous play, and there is other evidence that the company courted controversy. At the height of the Marprelate controversy, in November 1589, the lord mayor of London complained to Burghley that when he instructed ‘the L. Admeralles and the L. Straunge’s players … to forbere playinge … the L. Admeralles players very dutifullie obeyed, but the others in very Contemptuous manner departing from me, went to the Crosse keys and played that afternoon, to the greate offence of the better sorte that knewe they were prohibited by order’ (Sir John Harte, lord mayor, to Burghley, 6 Novem-
ber 1589, quoted in Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol 4, 305). McMillin has suggested that after anti-alien riots had led to the closing of the theatres in June 1592, the Rose was kept closed longer than the other theatres and Strange’s Men were deliberately restricted to three performances a week in the distant theatre at Newington Butts. In this he follows Chambers’ inferences from the privy council minute closing all London theaters on 23 June 1592; the petition of Strange’s Men to ‘return to our plaiehowse on Banckside’ c July 1592; a petition of the Watermen of the Bankside from about the same date petitioning that Henslowe ‘have playinge at his saide howse during suche tyme as others have’ (thus possibly implying that other theaters had been allowed to reopen); and the absence of any record of Strange’s Men playing in London until their court appearances in December 1592. See McMillin, *The Elizabethan Theater and ‘The Booke of Sir Thomas More’* (Ithaca, 1987), 68–72, and Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol 4, 310–12.


Pembroke’s Men in 1592–3. Their Repertory and Touring Schedule

Some years ago, during a seminar on theatre history at the annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, someone asked plaintively, ‘What did bad companies play in the provinces?’ and Leeds Barroll quipped, ‘Bad quartos’. The belief behind the joke – that ‘bad’ quartos and failing companies went together – has seemed specifically true of the earl of Pembroke’s players in 1592–3. Pembroke’s Men played in the provinces, and plays later published that advertised their ownership have been assigned to the category of texts known as ‘bad’ quartos. Even so, the company had reasons to be considered ‘good’. They enjoyed the patronage of Henry Herbert, the earl of Pembroke, and gave two of the five performances at court during Christmas, 1592–3 (26 December, 6 January). Their players, though probably young, were talented and committed to the profession: Richard Burbage, who would become a star with the Chamberlain’s/King’s Men, was still acting within a year of his death in 1619; William Sly acted with the Chamberlain’s/King’s Men until his death in 1608; Humphrey Jeffes acted with the Admiral’s/Prince’s/Palsgrave’s Men, 1597–1615; Robert Pallant and Robert Lee, who played with Worcester’s/Queen Anne’s Men, were still active in the 1610s.

Yet something happened to Pembroke’s Men in the summer of 1593 that did not happen to Strange’s Men, who had played at court also the previous winter. In a letter to Edward Alleyn dated 28 September 1593, Philip Henslowe said that Pembroke’s Men were ‘all at home and hauffe ben t<his> v or sixe weackes for they cane not saue ther carges <w>th trauell … & weare fayne to pane the<r> parell for ther carge’.

Theatre historians, taking Henslowe literally, have assumed that Pembroke’s Men could not make enough money on the road to support their operation. In a time when scholars believed that the very act of touring marked a company as financially desperate,