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’.1 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,
it was unnecessary to look further than touring itself to identify the villain in the collapse of Pembroke’s fortunes. However, times have changed. Scholars in the Records of Early English Drama project (REED) have demonstrated unequivocally that touring was a routine aspect of theatrical commerce, that some companies sustained themselves for decades in the provinces solely by touring, and that companies continued to tour even after they had secured a playhouse in London.

What, then, was the cause of Pembroke’s return to London in mid-July 1593, reportedly short of money? If there wasn’t a problem with patronage, or the quality of acting, what might the culpable factor or factors have been? Plausible villains are the repertory and the company’s specific touring circuit, but I suggest that neither was demonstrably a commercial liability. As I will argue below, the four plays generally agreed to belong to Pembroke’s Men in 1592–3—Edward II, The First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of Yorke & Lancaster (1 Contention), The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke (The True Tragedy), and The Taming of A Shrew (A Shrew)—fulfil the commercial and theatrical criteria of a profitable repertory, whether in London or the provinces, as I understand those criteria to be. Furthermore, the payments made by provincial officials in 1592–3 suggest that touring stops by Pembroke’s Men were sufficiently frequent, conventional, and lucrative for them to have supported themselves by playing.

According to Scott McMillin, the ‘sudden appearance [of Pembroke’s Men] in about 1592 resulted from shifts of personnel from other companies’. McMillin proposes that Shakespeare’s Henry VI, parts 2 and 3, ‘were designed for an organization of ample resources and were then abridged into Q form because those resources, in the reorganization of London companies, were somewhat curtailed in all components: fewer principal actors, a leading boy of lesser range, fewer supernumeraries’. He constructs doubling charts for the history quartos and determines that ‘Pembroke’s men seem to have consisted of eleven principal adults, four boys, and approximately five supernumeraries’. David Bevington suggests a similar number for Edward II: ‘ten or so company members, additional hired actors, and two to four boys’. A Shrew, by McMillin’s count, requires only fifteen players. When McMillin speaks of a company ‘somewhat curtailed’, however, he is not thinking necessarily of a touring company. As he points out, the costumes required for twenty players would not be easy to haul around, and the number of supernumeraries remains high. He thus invites consideration of the London phase of the company’s
existence, that is, the months on either side of the performance dates at court in the winter of 1592–3.

As it happens, Philip Henslowe provided a playlist in his book of accounts for Strange’s Men during that very winter. The list is short (twelve play titles over twenty-nine playing dates, 29 December 1592 through 1 February 1593), but perhaps it may provide a commercial context for Pembroke’s Men at that time. There are some bases for comparison. McMillin suggests that Strange’s Men supplied Pembroke’s Men with players. Like Pembroke’s, Strange’s Men appeared at court in the winter of 1592–3; their three shows completed the holiday schedule of performances. Both companies acquired plays by Marlowe and Shakespeare. Conjecturally, then, the offerings of Strange’s Men may suggest patterns in the slim repertory of Pembroke’s Men.

According to Henslowe’s list, Strange’s Men had plays that represented many of the popular generic forms of the times. They had both the heroic and villain kinds of revenge play with *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Jew of Malta*. They had two kinds of English history play: the chronicle history, in *Henry VI*; and the moral play, in *A Knack to Know a Knave*. Also, they had a variety of foreign histories: the classical play, in ‘Titus and Vespasian’; the struggle for Mediterranean empire in part one of ‘Tamar Cham’ and ‘Muly Mollocco’; and the European history, in Marlowe’s newest contribution, *The Massacre at Paris*.

The comedies were equally diverse, including *Friar Bacon*, a magician play; ‘Sir John Mandeville’, a ‘wonders’ narrative; and possibly two romantic stories in ‘The Jealous Comedy’ and ‘The Comedy of Cosmo’. Further, the offerings of Strange’s Men illustrate several commercial strategies that would become standard business practice throughout the 1590s. For example, several of their plays are duplicates in some sense of successful plays in the repertories of other companies: *Friar Bacon*, of *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* in the repertory of the Queen’s Men; and ‘Tamar Cham’, of *Tamburlaine* in the repertory of the Admiral’s Men. *The Spanish Tragedy*, even though its prequel is not in evidence in the 1592–3 winter repertory, nonetheless represents the popular taste for serial drama, as does part one of ‘Tamar Cham’. Likewise the scheduling of *The Jew of Malta*, part one of ‘Tamar Cham’, and ‘Muly Mollocco’ on the consecutive afternoons of 18–20 January suggests that Strange’s Men were exploring the marketing value of performing plays with similar topical appeal as if they were related parts.

On the issues of popular types and commercial strategies, the repertory of Pembroke’s Men looks very competitive. Control of the English throne is the presiding theme of *Edward II, 1 Contention*, and *The True Tragedy*, but the plays have rival plots that expand the definition of the generic chronicle play.
Acts of rebellion imperil the kingdom at every level: a king and his lover (Edward and Gaveston), a queen and hers (Margaret and Suffolk), ambitious barons (Mortimer et al; York et al), a duchess and her flirtation with the spirit world, and treasonous commoners. Revenge increasingly drives characterization, and even children grow up to be revengers. Young Edward, little more than a mute in his early appearances in Edward II, commits his mother to the tower for conspiracy in the final scene and sentences Mortimer to be hanged and quartered. Young Clifford in 1 Contention is a bloodthirsty adult in The True Tragedy; he kills the son of his father’s killer and regrets that he has not more at swordpoint: ‘Had I thy brethren here, their liues and thine / Were not revenge sufficient for me’ (A8).10 A Shrew illustrates the inclination of companies to clone popular materials in the repertories of other companies. Whatever the nature of that duplication, it seems clear that more than one ‘shrew’ play existed, and Pembroke’s Men played one of them.11 Pembroke’s two plays about the Wars of the Roses illustrate as well the commercial appeal of serials. Literally separated from its part one, part two of the sequence was retitled as the first part: The First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of Yorke & Lancaster. Its second part capitalized on another recent fashion in the language of titles when it became known as The ‘True Tragedie’ of Richard Duke of Yorke (quotes added for emphasis). Thus the first part of Pembroke’s serial play advertised itself as a competitor with the Henry VI in the repertory of Strange’s/Derby’s Men, and its second part with The ‘True Tragedie’ of Richard the Third (quotes added for emphasis) in the repertory of the Queen’s Men.

With so few texts as evidence, it is risky to conjecture about the theatrical appeal of plays in the repertory of Pembroke’s Men. Nonetheless, certain stage moments are obvious: for example, the confrontational scenes between the king and his adversaries at court and on the battlefield, scenes of illicit love, the onstage smothering of Duke Humphrey and impalement of Edward II, the conjured spirits, the duchess’s public penance, and the vision of the three suns. In 1 Contention an additional appeal is the number of episodes in which commoners and noblemen are contrasted. The Jack Cade rebellion is the most extended instance, but there is also the exposed con game of the blind man, who is whipped until he can see, then ‘whipt through euery Market Towne til he come at Barwicke where he was borne’ (C2).12 A reversal of this theme is the fight-to-the-death between Peter and his master, the armourer. Drunken supporters of each combatant watch this spectacle, but equally interested on-lookers are King Henry VI, Queen Margaret, Suffol, Buckingham, Card-inal Beauford, York, Salisbury, and Warwick. Unlike the blind man, whose
serendipitous encounter with his betters (Duke Humphrey) is ruinous, Peter, the armourer’s apprentice, succeeds beyond expectation. He delivers a fatal blow to his master, who then confesses his treason; thus doubly exonerated, Peter leaves the stage with the royal party at the invitation of the king himself: ‘Come fellow, follow vs for thy reward’ (D2).

Another theatrical feature of Pembroke’s history plays is the number of heads on pikes. The audience does not see Gaveston’s head but hears of it from Mortimer, who taunts Gaveston that his head will be sent to Edward; Arundel brings the actual report of the murder: ‘Warwick in ambush lay, / … and in a trench / Strake off his head’ (3.2.111–20). Edward promises to ‘have heads and lives’ in revenge (3.2.132). Such a beheading is the fate of Lancaster and Warwick, but it is Mortimer’s head on the order of Edward III that the audience finally sees, part of the funeral decor with the hearse of Edward it attended by the young king in mourning robes as the play ends. In 1 Contention and The True Tragedy the audience sees six heads onstage. While the Cade rebellion rages outside, Queen Margaret carries Suffolk’s head around the castle, to the consternation of the king: ‘How now Madam, still lamenting and mourning for Suffolkes death’ (G). After one battle, Cade’s Men come onstage with a pair of heads, those of Lord Say and Sir James Cromer. Cade’s head is itself soon displayed, and the king relishes a close look: ‘Oh let me see that head … / A visage sterne, cole blacke his curled locks. / Deepe trenched furrowes in his frowning brow’ (H). The True Tragedy has two heads. Crookeback Richard, addressing his fellow Yorkists, holds Somerset’s head aloft and derisively asks it to report his successes in the field: ‘Speake thou for me and tell them what I did’ (A3v). When the audience sees the head of York, it is a ‘piteous spectacle’ on the gates of his own city (B4). The sight of this head is in fact closure to a confrontation between Queen Margaret and the duke of York that has been building since York declared his ambition in a soliloquy at the end of scene 1 of 1 Contention (‘A day will come when Yorke shall claime his owne’ [A4]). York rehearses his ‘right and title’ for Salisbury, Warwick, and the audience in scene 7 (C4), and his eldest and youngest sons enter in scene 22 to add muscle to their father’s cause. But in scene 4 of The True Tragedy Queen Margaret and her troops disarm York in the field. The exchange of insults that follows, the humiliating gestures of the bloody handkerchief and paper crown, and the gang stabbing turn this severed head into something more powerful than gruesome decoration.14

Before and after their court appearances in the winter of 1592–3, Pembroke’s Men gave performances in provincial towns. The chronological order of these visits is unclear, but Sally-Beth MacLean offers a geographical order
that enables the company’s provincial visits to be understood in a given time
frame.\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, with the caveat that the chart below organizes perform-
ances according to MacLean’s circuits but not according to the calendar, I offer
the following as evidence of Pembroke’s business on tour in 1592–3:\textsuperscript{16}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circuit</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Date of Payment</th>
<th>Players’ Reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Anglia</td>
<td>King’s Lynn</td>
<td>1592–3</td>
<td>20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ipswich</td>
<td>1592–3</td>
<td>13s 4d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Rye</td>
<td>July 1593</td>
<td>13s 4d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>Bath</td>
<td>June–Aug, 1592</td>
<td>16s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>Coventry</td>
<td>Nov 1593</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>Ludlow</td>
<td>1592–3</td>
<td>20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shrewsbury</td>
<td>1592–3</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bewdley</td>
<td>1593–4</td>
<td>20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Leicester</td>
<td>1592–3</td>
<td>14s ‘more than was gaythered’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>York</td>
<td>June 1593</td>
<td>40s</td>
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</tbody>
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Configured in this way, the touring stops by Pembroke’s Men reflect several
normative aspects of provincial behaviour. For one, the players were highly
visible in the western region where their patron resided.\textsuperscript{17} A second is the
payments the players received: the sums of 20s or more at performances in the
patron’s area of influence compares favourably with rewards given to compa-
nies with royal patronage, namely the Queen’s Men. A third is evident in a
comparison of Pembroke’s touring with that of Strange’s Men. At some time
during the 1592–3 stretch, both companies visited towns in the circuits of East
Anglia (Ipswich), the southeast (Rye), the southwest (Bath), the Midlands
(Coventry), and West Midlands (Shrewsbury). For the most part, the compa-
nies received the same rewards.\textsuperscript{18} Pembroke’s Men travelled to the north, to
York, while Strange’s Men apparently did not; on the other hand, Strange’s
Men performed at Oxford and Bristol (twice) in the southwest, and at four
towns on the southeastern circuit: Maidstone, Faversham, and Canterbury, in
addition to Rye.\textsuperscript{19} On balance, therefore, nothing is out of the ordinary in the
towns visited or payments received to suggest why Pembroke’s Men might
have run out of money during their 1593 summer tour.\textsuperscript{20}

In discussing the repertory of Pembroke’s Men, I have said very little about
its one known comedy, \textit{The Taming of A Shrew}. The stagecraft of the play is
familiar, even if through the Shakespearean version, and the appeal to audiences of its frame story and taming plot is not in question. Should any be needed, additional evidence of stage-worthiness is the fact that it or the Shakespearean Shrew play was among the first offerings scheduled at Newington in June 1594 when the Admiral’s Men and the Chamberlain’s Men were organizing themselves for what was to become a lifetime of playing. I have also resisted conjectural repertorial lists such as that constructed by Karl P. Wintersdorf, which includes Soliman and Perseda, Arden of Faversham, The Massacre at Paris, Richard III, Titus Andronicus, Doctor Faustus, and Romeo and Juliet.21 But whether the commerce of Pembroke’s Men is considered on the basis of a list of plays certainly theirs in the winter of 1592–3 or a list expanded with plays possibly theirs, the striking feature of either list is the absence of comedies. Elizabethan companies had comedies in abundance. Where are Pembroke’s Men’s comedies? Scott McMillin proposes a title to fill one blank space: ‘The Dead Man’s Fortune’.22 Only the plot survives, and it reveals a story about two pairs of lovers, a magician, wicked rivals to the suitors, a subplot of cuckoldry, multiple disguisings, prison scenes, reported poisonings, a magical looking glass, ‘satires plainge on ther Jnstruments’, a mad scene, a near execution with ‘sworde & blocke’, and dancing ‘antique’ fairies.23 There must have been more comedies in the company’s repertory, probably with some of the plays attributed by Wintersdorf and others; to vindicate the repertory, I would like to know what those comedies were. Nevertheless, the few plays that do survive suggest to me that the repertory of Pembroke’s Men had generic variety, serial drama, their own version of popular stories, and theatrics such as onstage violence, sexually provocative moments, traffic with the supernatural, and challenges to hierarchical structures with which to entertain London and provincial audiences. Their provincial stops took them to towns where their patron was influential, where players had traditionally been welcomed, and where their rewards were the average or higher. Whatever the cause of the company’s reported collapse, then, the fault does not appear to lie with its repertory or touring schedule.

ROSelyn L. Knutson

Notes

2 Scott McMillin, ‘Casting for Pembroke’s Men: the Henry VI Quartos and The Taming of A Shrew’, Shakespeare Quarterly 23 (1972), 154. McMillin is
confuting the belief that the quartos of *Henry VI*, parts 2 and 3, were ‘memorial reconstructions of the corresponding folio texts’, that is, ‘bad’ quartos (141).

6 McMillin, ‘Casting for Pembroke’s Men’, 153 n27.
7 McMillin, ‘Casting for Pembroke’s Men’, 158.
8 I indicate lost plays by quotation marks; extant plays are in italics.
9 Strange’s Men had done some similar scheduling in the spring of 1592: for example, ‘Muly Mollocco’ and *The Jew of Malta* were paired on 17 and 18 March, 17 and 18 April, 30 and 31 May, and 13 and 14 June. Once (3 and 4 April) ‘Machiavel’ was paired with *The Jew of Malta*; and once (29 May) it made a threesome with ‘Muly Mollocco’ and *The Jew of Malta*.
10 Michael J.B. Allen and Kenneth Muir (eds), *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke*, *Shakespeare’s Plays in Quarto* (Berkeley, 1981); all quotations from this play are taken from this edition and citations are given in the text.
11 In the 1998 Malone Society edition of *The Taming of A Shrew* (used here as text), editor Stephen Roy Miller summarizes the scholars’ positions on the duplicate ‘Shrew’ texts: (1) that *A Shrew* is a ‘bad’ quarto of Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*; (2) that *A Shrew* is a descendant of an ‘Ur’ play to which Shakespeare’s play also responds, and (3) that *A Shrew* is something more ‘creative’ than a memorial reconstruction of Shakespeare’s play (xiv).
12 Michael J.B. Allen and Kenneth Muir (eds), *The First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of Yorke & Lancaster*, *Shakespeare’s Plays in Quarto* (Berkeley, 1981); all quotations from this play are taken from this edition and citations are given in the text.
13 Roma Gill (ed), *Edward ii*, *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Oxford, 1971); all quotations from this play are taken from this edition and citations are given in the text.
14 How many heads did Pembroke’s Men need in inventory? The scene with Cromer and Lord Say required two; and the question then becomes whether audiences were expected to recognize a beheaded Suffolk, Cade, or York or whether any head could ‘double’ for theirs. According to the inventory taken by Philip Henslowe in 1598, the Admiral’s Men had four Turks’ heads available. Foakes and Rickert credit Greg with the attribution of the heads to *The Battle of Alcazar* (*Henslowe’s Diary*, 318 n5); Greg does mention the Moor’s limbs, the four janizaries’ gowns, and the Moor’s coat, but I found no
mention of the head (*Two Elizabethan Stage Abridgements* (Oxford, 1922), 91–92, 118).


17 J.A.B. Somerset points out that the earl of Pembroke, as lord president of the Council in the Marches of Wales, spent considerable time at his residence, Ludlow Castle; he points out further that companies attendant on the lords president had customarily spent considerable time in their patron’s home territory (‘The Lords President, Their Activities and Companies: Evidence from Shropshire’, *Elizabethan Theatre X* (Port Credit, 1988), 94, 110). Peter Greenfield argues that companies in general tended to give more performances in their patron’s territories than elsewhere (‘Touring’, *A New History of Early English Drama*, John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds) (New York, 1997), 262–3); see also 256–63 for additional effects of the patron’s influence on touring company business.

18 The companies received identical rewards at Rye (13s 4d) and Shrewsbury (40s); Strange’s Men received 3d more at Bath (16s 3d vs. 16s for Pembroke’s Men), 6s 8d more at Ipswich (20s vs. 13s 4d for Pembroke’s Men), and 10s less at Coventry (two visits, each at 20s vs. one visit at 30s for Pembroke’s Men).

19 The following sources document the touring of Strange’s Men, 1592–3: Bristol, Mark C. Pilkington (ed), *Bristol, REED* (Toronto, 1997), 142; Bath,
In 'The Lords President', Somerset suggests two reasons why Pembroke’s Men might have discontinued their tour: (1) the prevalence of plague in the countryside, as well as in London (102–6), and (2) the possibility that their company was over-large (106–9).


22 Scott McMillin, 'The Plots of *The Dead Man’s Fortune* and 2 Seven Deadly Sins: Inferences for Theatre Historians', *Studies in Bibliography* 26 (1973), 235–43.


**Moving UpMarket: Queen Anne’s Men at the Cockpit in Drury Lane, 1617**

In 1616, in a move designed to emulate the financial prosperity of their better known rivals, the King’s Men, Queen Anne’s Men, under the management of Christopher Beeston, moved theatrical operations from the Red Bull, a large public playhouse in Clerkenwell, to the Cockpit, an indoor private hall theatre on the increasingly fashionable Drury Lane.¹ The success of this move was not, however, immediately apparent. The local apprentices who formed their audience base at the Red Bull took matters into their own hands and rioted to protest the theatrical troupe’s abandonment of the neighbourhood. Narratives of this event tend to characterize the riot either as an indiscriminate episode of civil unrest,² or, more cogently, as demonstrating a specific animosity toward Queen Anne’s Men because they were now playing the Red Bull repertory at