

Super Troupers; or, Supplemented Playing before 1594

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The generall welcomes Tamburlain receiv'd
When he arrived last upon our stage,
Hath made our Poet pen his second part[.]¹

THEATER HISTORIANS S.P. Cerasano, Siobhan Keenan, Roslyn Knutson, Scott McMillin, and Tiffany Stern have demonstrated that financial success in the Elizabethan theater industry depended upon collaborative strategies. A contentious claim by E. K. Chambers was that whole companies occasionally “amalgamated” or combined in performance. Title pages and joint payment receipts indicate some form of collaboration, but the complex redistributions of company personnel and property have troubled the waters in tracing this collaboration. REED reveals touring entertainers of all stripes—trumpeters, bearwards, tumblers—teaming up with, or at the very least travelling alongside, others. These patterns offer a compelling snapshot of the vast landscape of mobile entertainments available as well as the strategies they might have shared with playing companies. In this essay, I focus on the early Lord Admiral’s players’ repertory, from 1585 to 1594, in order to demonstrate that what I am calling “supplemented playing” was an irregular but recognizable feature of the early theatrical marketplace. I suggest that supplemented playing was made available by the great diversity of companies operating in the 1580s, and sponsored by an entertainment economy in which success was garnered more frequently through strategies of collaboration and duplication rather than through competition and novelty.

Scholarship surrounding Admiral’s later career suggests that it may have prioritized collaboration in the writing process. For example, Charles Cathcart argues that the Admiral’s was a haven

“for inexperienced literary dramatists,” including a young John Marston.² Knutson shows that the company did not invest in revising old playtexts, instead simply reviving or purchasing new.³ Heather Anne Hirschfeld demonstrates that collaboratively written drama represents more than eighty percent of playtexts produced in this period, suggesting collaboration was a core strategy for a sustainable theater company.⁴ This collaborative aspect of the Admiral’s has been hitherto elided in part because the vast majority of the criticism about them focuses on the second half of their career. This frame makes Admiral’s easier to compare to the Lord Chamberlain’s Men and the plays of William Shakespeare in that it problematically assumes the financial priority of competition (rather than collaboration) and individual (rather than group) authorship. The archive suggests, however, that there was room in these “commercial relations,” according to Knutson, “for the role of fellowship among separate destinies.”⁵

In order to address the possibility of collaborative performance by Admiral’s in their early performances, two features of their repertory should be mentioned. First, the company toured several non-Shakespearean plays that have now become canonical, including both parts of *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *The Spanish Tragedy*. This canonicity has to do in part with their repertory’s survival rates; namely, the percentage of extant plays possessed between 1579 and 1594 is better than those between 1595 and 1625. Plays performed by the company before 1594 had a sixty percent higher rate of survival than those performed afterwards. These numbers suggest that Admiral’s pre-1594, pre-“duopoly” repertory is a more reliable indicator of their house style than that of later periods.

A second major feature of Admiral’s repertory is their number of joint performances. Records exist for fifteen discrete performances for which the company collaborated with some members of another company. Six of those instances, not quite half, are explicitly marked as a joint payment (see Table 1). Takings varied greatly, from 3s to £10, so it may be unrepresentative to posit an average by assuming the companies evenly split the payments. (This is to say that to suggest companies evenly divided takings is to assume that whole companies joined forces rather than the possibility of a few supplementing players, as well as to assume that the companies contributed an equal amount of resources *and valued it* as such.) For speculative purposes, however, we might say Admiral’s could

expect to make between 40s and £5 in a one-off collaborative enterprise. (In the early 1590s, a London playhouse performance averaged £1 10s.⁶) While collaborative engagements may have taken more coordination, a company could expect to make upwards of three and a half times more than for an ordinary public performance; the benefit seems to have been worth the risk.

Three of Admiral's early plays provide dramaturgical evidence that they may have been performed jointly: *II Tamburlaine*, *The Wounds of Civil War*, and *The Reign of King Edward III*. The year 1587 provides the first recorded performance of *II Tamburlaine*; Henslowe's *Diary* marks the play as "old" (i.e., without "ne"). The average scene in *II Tamburlaine* requires at least thirteen players. 4.3 requires the greatest number of distinct parts: as many as twenty-four and as few as twenty, ten of which with named parts that could not be doubled. McMillin estimates the average Elizabethan troupe ranged from eleven to eighteen individuals.⁸ Therefore, a performance of *II Tamburlaine* would take the better part (but not necessarily all) of two adult troupes and at least half as many hired players. They would be especially important to supply the number of soldiers necessary for four on-stage battle scenes, nine stage directions calling for the entrance of at least part of an army by "their train," six stage directions denoting an entrance "with others," and six stage directions calling for miscellaneous "lords," "soldiers," or "concubines."⁹ In fact, only six of the play's nineteen scenes require fewer than five players, and all of them are shorter than 110 lines—half of the average length of scenes requiring six players or more. Together, these numbers suggest that in order to meet the casting requirements of *II Tamburlaine*, even when taking doubling opportunities into account, the play required more skilled actors than the average troupe contained *as well as* additional hired men.

What would a troupe have to gain by supplementing their numbers, especially when we know troupes depended on strategies that made much of a few men? For one, *II Tamburlaine*'s large scenes allow for a greater diversity of peoples, albeit conquered, to be on display. It is a core feature of the story of Tamburlaine that he "brings a world of people to the field" (1.1.167). The rulers of Jerusalem, Tremizon (Byzantine-controlled northern Turkey), and Soria (Arab-controlled eastern Spain), each make a point of the geographical variety and scale of their troops brought to stem Tamburlaine's conquering tide. Tremizon suggests that his men, drawn from the

TABLE 1: Joint performances with the Lord Admiral's players, 1578–1594.⁷

Date	Location	Venue	Joint Troupe	Payment
29 Sept 1578 29 Sept 1579	Aldeburgh, Suffolk	Unknown	Lord Robert Dudley's Men	3s
12 June 1585	Dover, Kent	Unknown	Lord Hunsdon's Players	20s (joint pay)
6 Jan 1586	Court	Greenwich Palace, Great Chamber	Lord Hunsdon's Players	£10
29 Sept 1585– 29 Sept 1586	Leicester, Leicestershire	Unknown	Lord Chamberlain's Men	4s
28 Dec 1589	Court	Unknown	Children of Paul's	£10
29 Sept 1589– 28 Sept 1590	Canterbury, Kent	Unknown	Queen's Players/Men	30s (joint pay)
27 Dec 1590	Court	Richmond Palace, Great Chamber	Lord Strange's Men	£10
16 Feb 1591 (Saturday)	Court	Greenwich Palace, Great Chamber	Lord Strange's Men	£10
7 Aug 1592	Ipswich, Suffolk	Unknown	Lord Derby's or Strange's Men	20s
29 Sept 1592– 29 Sept 1593	Ipswich, Suffolk	Unknown	Lord Stafford's Men	20s
1 April 1593– 28 April 1593	York, Yorkshire	Common Hall	Lord Mordaunt's Player/s	40s (joint pay)
1st Week of May 1593	Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle upon Tyne	Merchant's Court	Lord Moraley's Players	30s (joint pay)
1 Aug 1593– 28 Sept 1593	Shrewsbury, Shropshire	Booth Hall	Lord Strange's Men	40s (joint pay)
11 Sept 1593– 31 Oct 1594	Bath, Somerset	Guildhall	Lord Norris' Players	23s 10d (joint pay)
3–13 June 1594	Newington Butts	The Playhouse	Lord Chamberlain's Men	Unknown

borders of the known world, may tend toward disloyalty if the threat of Tamburlaine were not so dire. Soria, on the other hand, suggests that his men are slaves “ta’en” in order to render the tyrant “captive” (3.1.46, 63). Jerusalem signals to the variety of peoples with the “parti-colored” ensigns and flags typically called for with the stage direction “colours,” which could include a flag or standard accompanied by drums and trumpet calls to indicate a “readiness for battle” and “a show of power,” according to Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson.¹⁰ Following *II Tamburlaine’s* stage directions and speeches describing the geography of the soldiers represented on stage, the play thematizes not just volume, but prioritizes the breadth of cultures that the threat of Tamburlaine brings together.

Tamburlaine excels at torturous thought-experiments, and his victories allow him to cage, bridle, chain, burn, and put in front of a firing squad those who refuse his global conquest. Rhetorical and dramaturgical excesses come to a head in 4.3, which also happens to be the scene requiring as many as 24 performers. It opens with a lengthy stage direction requiring at least 15 actors to successfully execute:

[Enter] TAMBURLAINE drawn in his chariot by TREBIZON and SORIA with bits in their mouths, reins in his left hand, in his right hand a whip, with which he scourgeth them. TECHELLES, THERIDAMAS, UMUCA-SANE, AMYRAS, CELEBINUS; [ORCANES, King of] Natolia, and JERUSALEM, led by five or six common soldiers. (4.3.0.1–6)

Scenes in this play swell not with servants or messengers, but with soldiers, concubines, and the already conquered. Tamburlaine mocks Trebizon and Soria, calling them “pampered jades of Asia” for only being able to carry their great “coachman” a mere “twenty miles a day” (4.3.1–40). As the “unconquered arm” (4.3.16) and “scourge of highest Jove” (4.3.24), Tamburlaine prioritizes shows of strength rather than the truce with which the play opened. As Tamburlaine suggests at the end of the act, until his “soul [is] dis-severed from this flesh” (4.3.131), there seems no stopping him. And then, just as suddenly, the play stops. Tamburlaine’s body simply gives out and leaves a power vacuum behind. He and Callapine, his ostensible antagonist, have yet to meet. Perhaps the play was written with a third part in mind, wherein Callapine meets his foils, the two sons of Tamburlaine, Amyras and Celebinus? As it is, while the gods Christian, Roman, or Muslim get retribution for

Tamburlaine's hubris, the sea of the conquered onstage are conscripted yet again, this time to bear his funeral train.

Thomas Lodge's *The Wounds of Civil War or Marius and Scilla*, likely initially performed around 1588, strikes similar notes to that of *II Tamburlaine*. It duplicates props used in *II Tamburlaine* (e.g., heavy chains used to bind noble women, the chariot pulled by four captives) and includes massive scenes that max-out the number of personnel typically available, making it a good candidate for supplemented playing.¹¹ Thematically similar is the epic, retributive display of a conquered party. While in *II Tamburlaine* that foe is othered by the porousness of national borders and a global economy of warfare, in *Wounds*, it is instead a war of an empire against itself: Marius, the Roman consuls, and the aristocracy are pitted against Scilla, the Roman generals, and the army itself in civil war. Detailed stage directions underscore the volume and geography of his triumph:

Enter Scilla in triumph in his chare triumphant of gold, drawn by foure Moores, before the chariot: his colours, his crest, his captaines, his prisoners: Arcathius Mithridates son, Aristion, Archelaus, bearing crownes of gold, and manacled. After the chariot, his souldiers bands, Basillus, Lucretius, Lucullus: besides prisoners of diuers Nations, and sundry disguises. (1003.1–4)

Several dramaturgical cues here echo and expand those in the *Tamburlaine* plays: the capture of the son of the enemy (Callapine, Arcathius), the parti-colored display of military insignia, and the chariot pulled by conquered men. Additionally, the stage direction is divided into two separate actions. The initial entrance includes standard bearers, captains, and prisoners from Mithridates's forces carry crowns in their manacled hands. Likely moving across the stage to emphasize the volume of the tableau, this group anticipates the shocking entrance of Scilla on his Moor-drawn chariot. Scilla's entrance is bookended by his soldiers (not just their leaders), three captured Roman counsellors, and "prisoners of diuers Nations, and sundry disguises." The two halves of Scilla's procession suggest that his prowess yokes the world under one figurehead, with Rome and her counsellors on one side and the Asian forces on the other. The scene calls for seven speaking parts and nine named parts; even if each group, such as the captains and prisoners, were only represented by two individuals, the stage direction requires more

than twenty individuals on stage. Like *II Tamburlaine*, *Wounds*' material excesses thematize questions of political excess.

Superficially, *II Tamburlaine* and *Wounds* have little generically in common with the English history play *The Reign of Edward III*.¹² Yet attending to their dramaturgy reveals that each stages multiple nations at war and places tyrants at their center. Additionally, all three consider the problem of heirs and spares, testing in battle the virtue of Callapine, Tamburlaine's three sons, the son of Marius, and Prince Edward. *Edward III* also describes the army by its parti-colored flags in both dialogue—"Quartred in collours seeming sundy fruits" (1845)—and stage directions—"all with Ensignes spread" (2170.2). It also requires extensive personnel, with the largest scene necessitating twenty-four speaking parts in addition to non-speaking extras.

Unlike *II Tamburlaine* and *Wounds*, however, *Edward III* pastoralizes the would-be tyrant's transition to, rather than his fall from, Fortune's grace. The first half of *Edward III* would suggest this king, consumed by a possible mistress, is on a path similar to Tamburlaine and Scilla—tyrants who see no difference between conquest and destruction. King Edward's heir is tested three times in battle, overcoming odds to the extent that even his fellow lords assume him dead several times. That he survives all three encounters with only the aid of "*a clamor of rauens*" (1997.1) is a measure of King Edward's evolution from tyrant to shepherd-monarch. The Black Prince's successes, later to expand beyond "the territories of France [to] Spain, Turkie, and what countries els" (2466–47), turn the play into a global romance and Prince Edward into an English Tamburlaine, capable of making "a flynt heart Sythian pytifull" (407).

Two prop-driven scenes in *Edward III* make this link between rightful inheritance and monarchical morality an overt topical feature of the Admiral's supplemented performances. In the first, Prince Edward is equipped by his father and peers for his final test: "*Foure Heraldes bringing in a coate of armour, a helmet, a lance, and a shield*" (2426.1) to dress the Prince as the King, the Earl of Derby, Lord Audley, and the Count of Artois invest each with a classical virtue. The King imbues his offspring with his spirit—not unlike Tamburlaine being enthused by Jove—and prays to God, lest his heart wither "like a saples tree" (1465). For this scene, twenty-four individual personnel are needed to represent the speaking parts of the French and English retinue as well as to flesh the Prince for the battle that will bring them under one rule. Included in an

appendix of “*properties for my Lord Admeralles men*” inventory kept in the Rose playhouse’s tiring house are all four items that would have been needed for this staging: “j helmet with a dragon; j shelde, with iii lyons,” “j greve armer,” and “viiij lances.”¹³ The likelihood that these may have been some of the items used for this production increases when one considers the fact that the list—whose 35 entries comprise 139 items—includes “j cage,” “Tamberlyne[’s] brydell,” a “charete,” “iij Imperial crownes; j playne crowne,” and something labeled “Sittie of Rome,” all very possibly from the *Tamburlaine* plays and *Wounds*.¹⁴ The inventory together with the personnel requirements and prop-oriented scenes suggest that these plays were of a piece.

The second and final episode situating *Edward III* among plays that may have been designed to require supplemental personnel in addition to the Admiral’s players is the possible use of a triumphal chariot drawn by conquered lords. A dearth of scholarship and the poor printing history of the play mean that inconsistent and missing stage directions for entrances and exits as well as extraneous speech prefixes for characters already speaking have yet to attract editorial consideration. Stage directions embedded in dialogue become increasingly important to envision the necessary stage actions called for in order to make sense of, in particular, battle scenes. Because of the lack of easily searchable stage directions and the nature of these publication conditions, the inclusion of a chariot has yet to be acknowledged for the last scene of *Edward III*. Pushing a single company to its limit by requiring 12 speaking parts, in this final scene the Prince enters “triumphant” (2413), surprising the English who assumed their Prince has been killed. It is not suggested that he metaphorically “rideth” (2413) but rather that he literally uses a “stirope” (2414) as a “captiue bond” (2416) over the French King and Dauphin, up-cycling the same prop from *II Tamburlaine* and *Wounds*. Prince Edward implies that he gives the reins of this conqueror’s chariot to his father: “receiue the gift” (2426); “I render to your hands / These prisoners” (2431–32). While the chariot prop by itself is not definitive proof that *Edward III* may have worked as a script for amalgamated performances, the suggestion is strengthened by its use of the other indicative staging requirements: namely, extensive speaking personnel, and a thematic investment in staging the limits of global conquest. All three features together suggest that *Edward III* may have been easily fitted to collaborative performance, and may well have been part of the

thematic milieu that drew audiences to Admiral's performances in the late 1580s.

To conclude, dramaturgical and thematic indicators from three cases in the Admiral's early repertory help us to identify instances of supplemented playing. Thematically, they stress the limits of tyranny as framed by transcontinental conquest. Dramaturgically, they call for significantly more skilled personnel than even a large Elizabethan playing company like the Queen's Men had available, typically for two or three tableaux mid-way through the main plot. Assessments of doubling and *ad hoc* hired players, especially without definite sharer records, admittedly beg the question as to what degree of skill was required of a hired player. Stern's scholarship on the rehearsal process and Evelyn Tribble's examinations of historically contingent cognition and memorization techniques are possible paths to an answer. These cases also require a range of specific props to indicate military might, including the unique chariot attached to the Rose. Perhaps the 1580s was a unique period for theater because, due to the large number of companies on tour and in London, it made collaborative performances possible. If Gurr's hypothesis that the theater industry was truncated in 1594 is accepted, having only two adult companies on the market would make super-troupe performances more unlikely. By focusing exclusively on Henslowe's *Diary* and the portion of Admiral's career parallel to that of Shakespeare's, we miss the evidence pointing toward the expansively collaborative practices of the 1580s theatrical marketplace.

Notes

1. Reference to the title page from Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great Who, from a Scythian shepherde, by his rare and woonderfull conquests, became a most puissant and mightye monarque. And (for his tyranny, and terrour in warre) was tearmed, the scourge of God. Deuided into two tragicall discourses, as they were sundrie times showed vpon stages in the citie of London. By the right honorable the Lord Admyrall, his seruauntes* (1590; Early English Books Online, accessed May 10, 2016), [84]. http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99857253. Lineation my own. All other references to *II Tamburlaine* from Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine, Parts One and Two*, ed. Anthony B. Dawson (New York: Methuen Drama, 2014).

2. Charles Cathcart, "Issues in Review: *Romeo* at the Rose in 1598," *Early The-*

atre: *A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama* 13, no. 2 (2010): 156.

3. Roslyn L. Knutson, "Influence of the Repertory System on the Revival and Revision of *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Dr. Faustus*," *English Literary Renaissance* 18 (1988): 257.

4. Heather Anne Hirschfeld, *Joint Enterprises: Collaborative Drama and the Institutionalization of the English Renaissance Theatre*, Massachusetts Studies in Early Modern Culture (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 17.

5. Roslyn L. Knutson, *Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare's Time* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 40.

6. This average is drawn from the 380 individual performances and sixty-six weeks of recorded playing by the Lord Strange's, Sussex's, and Admiral's troupes in Henslowe's *Diary* from its first records in 1592 through December 1594. In this period, the companies averaged £8 7s per week, and together made a total of £551 11s 5d. See Neil Carson, *A Companion to Henslowe's Diary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 85–91, for more legible daily receipt accounts.

7. Data drawn from John H. Astington, *English Court Theatre, 1558–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Terence G. Schoone-Jongen, *Shakespeare's Companies: William Shakespeare's Early Career and the Acting Companies, 1577–1594* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008); Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); and *The Records of Early English Drama* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979–2010).

8. Scott McMillan, *The Elizabethan Theatre and The Book of Sir Thomas More* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 61–3.

9. Battle scenes occur in 2.3, 3.2, 3.3, and 5.1. Calls for the "their train" direction occur in 1.1.0.2, 1.2.0.1, 1.5.0.1, 2.1.0.2, 2.2.0.1, 3.3.0.1, 3.4.33.2, 3.5.0.2, and 3.5.146.1. Calls for the "with others" direction occur in 2.4.9.1, 3.1.0.6, 3.5.57.2, 5.1.133.1–2, and 5.1.62.5. Calls for other militarized bodies occur in 3.1.0.5, 3.3.0.2, 4.1.74.4, 4.3.0.6, 4.3.66.1, and 5.1.48.2.

10. Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580–1642* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 53.

11. For stage directions, all references from Thomas Lodge, *The Wounds of Civil War, Lively Set Forth in the True Tragedies of Marius and Scilla* (1594; Early English Books Online: Text Creation Partnership digital edition, accessed May 10, 2016), [1–80], http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99845283. Lineation my own. References to dialogue are from Thomas Lodge, *The Wounds of Civil War*, ed. Joseph W. Houppert, Regents Renaissance Drama (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969).

12. All references from *The Raigne of King Edvard the Third as It Hath Bin Sundrie Times Plaied about the Citie of London* (1596; Early English Books Online: Text Creation Partnership digital edition, accessed May 10, 2016), [1–74], http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99842015/. Lineation my own.

13. Philip Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R.A. Foakes (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 319–21.

14. Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, 320–21.

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