

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and tables 1–3

In recent years, scholars have offered many valuable studies of the Globe and other playhouses where the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries were first acted. As yet, however, there has been little systematic investigation of important questions about casting procedures for the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King's Men, the repertory company for which Shakespeare wrote his plays. For example: how many men and boys are required as actors for the earliest text of each play by Shakespeare? How many actors are required for the variant texts of these same plays? Which actors in Shakespeare's company usually play the principal male roles, and which play the principal female roles? Which actors play minor parts and mute supernumeraries? Which of these actors double in two or more roles? When actors double, how much time is usually allowed for each change of costume? To answer these and other questions about casting for Shakespeare's company, the present study closely examines eight manuscripts from performances at Elizabethan playhouses, fifteen pre-Restoration plays that identify the men and boys who play principal roles, and authoritative texts of all thirty-eight plays ascribed wholly or in part to Shakespeare. This evidence shows for the first time how the size and composition of Shakespeare's casts of characters were determined by common theatrical practices at London playhouses between 1590, about the time that the author began his work as a playwright, and 1642, when the theatres were closed by order of Parliament.¹ These findings will interest producers and directors of Shakespeare as well as theatre historians.

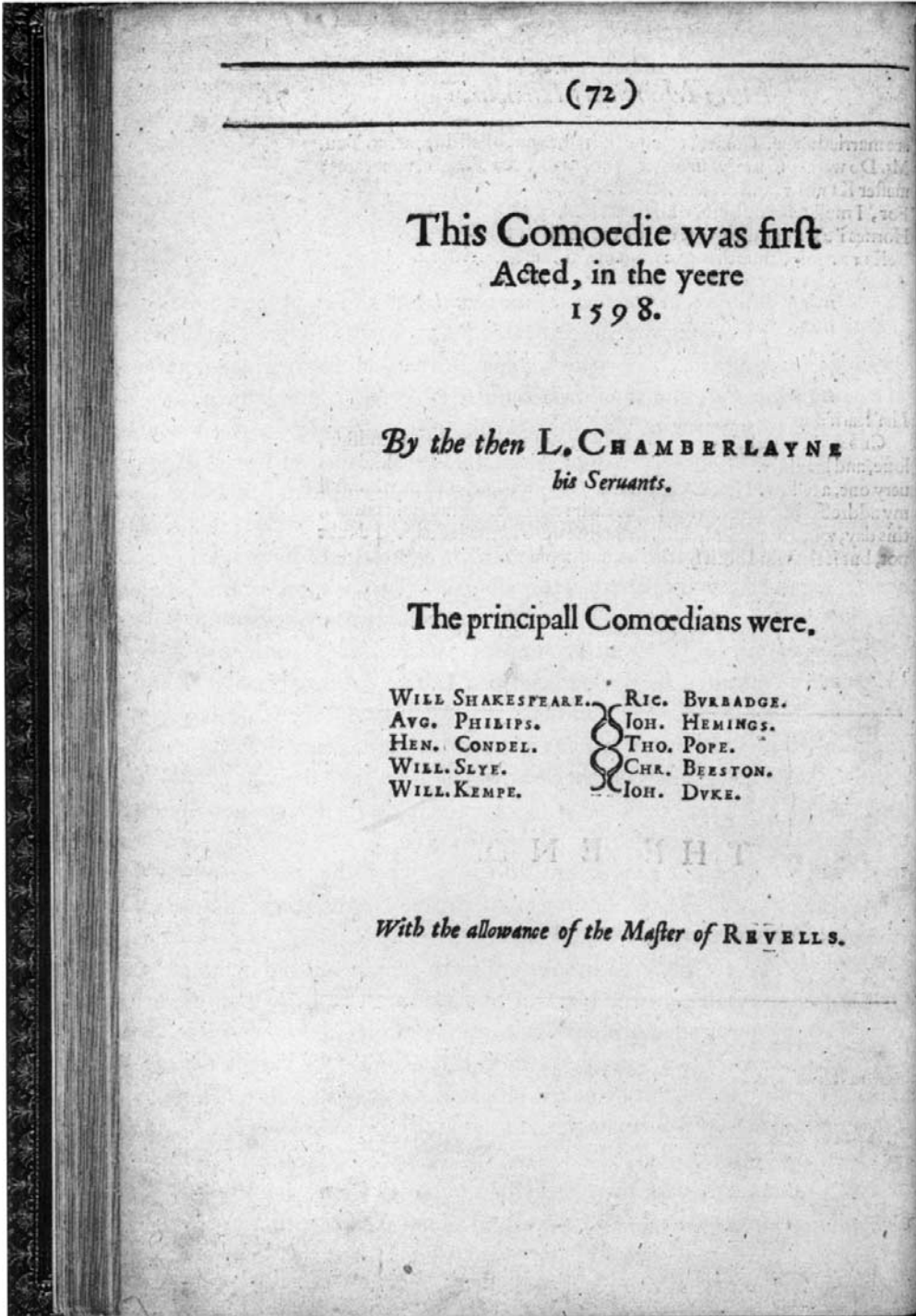
Although there is a wide range in the number of actors required in minor parts and as mute supernumeraries in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the number of actors required in principal roles remains fairly constant: an average of ten men in principal male roles – defined empirically as those who speak twenty-five or more lines – and four boys in principal female roles – those who speak ten or more lines. My use of the term 'principal' to designate the actors who play leading roles follows Ben Jonson, who in his *Workes* (1616) lists Shakespeare as one of ten 'principall Comœdians' with the Lord Chamberlain's Men when they acted *Every Man in his Humour* in 1598 (Illustration 1) and as one of eight 'principall Tragoedians' with the King's Men when they acted *Sejanus* in 1603 (Illustration 2). The significance of the term 'principal' is also evident in the front matter of the Shakespeare First Folio (F), where the author and twenty-five other men are listed as 'the Principall Actors in all these Playes' (Illustration 3). Here it should be noted that in Elizabethan acting companies the sharers – the men who jointly own the assets of

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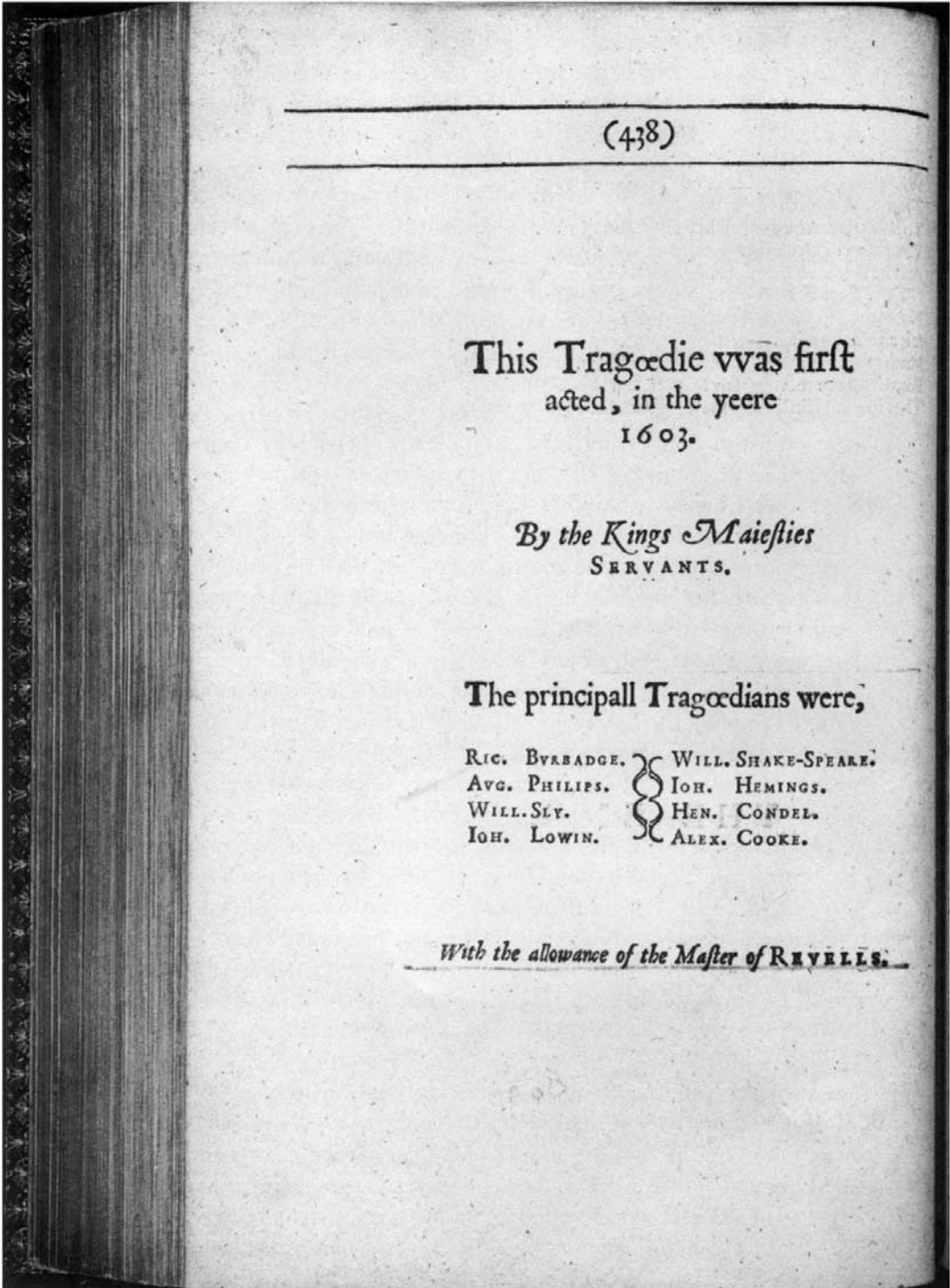
¹ Ben Jonson, *Workes* (1616), p. 72, lists ten 'principall Comœdians' when the Lord Chamberlain's Men acted *Every Man in his Humour* in 1598.

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² Ben Jonson, *Workes* (1616), p. 438, lists eight 'principall Tragœdians' when the King's Men acted *Sejanus* in 1603.

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the company and who share in its profits – usually play the principal roles. However, as will be shown, not all actors in principal roles are sharers, nor do all the available sharers appear in each of the plays that the company performs. My analysis of casting requirements therefore describes the leading actors as ‘principals’ rather than as ‘sharers’.²

G. E. Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time* (Princeton 1984) provides a comprehensive study of customary playhouse practice, and he describes the documents that identify actors in principal roles. However, Bentley does not from this evidence draw inferences about the casting requirements for Shakespeare's plays. Instead, he cites a valuable introduction to this subject by William Ringler, Jr, ‘The Number of Actors in Shakespeare's Early Plays’, in *The Seventeenth Century Stage*, ed. G. E. Bentley (Chicago and London 1968), pp. 110–34. In his review of previous scholarship, Ringler cites T. W. Baldwin, *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company* (Princeton 1927), who attempts to describe the personal characteristics that define the ‘line of parts’ played by each principal actor in Shakespeare's company. Baldwin then assigns one of these actors to each role in Shakespeare's plays when they were first performed.³ However, as Ringler points out, Baldwin's theories do not take into account the wide variety of roles the actors in Shakespeare's company are known to have played. For example, Baldwin suggests that Richard Robinson is ‘nearly always’ one of the minor principal players who ‘ranks as about first dignified handyman, of good presence and oratorical ability’.⁴ But, as the present study observes, Robinson is identified in two decidedly dissimilar roles: in 1611 as a boy actor he plays the leading female role in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (*SMT*), the Lady who kills herself rather than yield to the lustful Tyrant; about 1619 in *The Duchess of Malfi* (*DM*), Robinson plays the evil Cardinal who murders his mistress, Julia, by having her kiss a poisoned Bible. Each of these roles differs significantly from what Baldwin describes as ‘first dignified handyman’.

Furthermore, as Ringler observes, Baldwin does not take into account the well-established practice of doubling. For example, Baldwin observes that in *Believe as you List* (*BAYL*) William Penn plays the Jailer, whom Baldwin describes as ‘both sympathetic and a bit whimsically humorous, though not broadly comic’.⁵ However, Baldwin evidently overlooks the fact that in *BAYL*, Penn not only plays the Jailer (30 lines), he also doubles as the nondescript 2 Merchant (49 lines). Ringler notes an important exploratory article, W. J. Lawrence, ‘The Practice of Doubling and its Influence on Early Dramaturgy’, in *Pre-Restoration Stage Studies* (Cambridge, Mass. 1927), pp. 43–78 and a significant study by David M. Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe* (Cambridge, Mass. 1962), who shows ‘the effect of troupe structure upon the creation and development of a popular dramatic structure’.⁶

Although Bevington does not extend his study to include the plays of Shakespeare, my own investigation owes much to his analysis of a group of approximately twenty plays dating from the 1530s through the 1570s, which are ‘offered for acting’, that is printed with casting lists to indicate how many actors are required to perform the play. For example, *Like Will to Like* (1568), a moral interlude by Ulpian Fulwell, shows how five actors ‘may easily play’ sixteen roles.⁷ *Horestes* (1567), a moral

interlude by John Pickering, shows how six actors can play twenty-seven roles. Here Bevington notes that in this play for the first time ‘an author distinguishes between “bit” parts assigned to a trained player and those relegated to the extras’.⁸ For *Clyomon and Clamydes* (1570), an heroic romance perhaps by Thomas Preston, six actors can play twenty-one roles. However, in this play the number of available supernumeraries is evidently variable: ‘Enter King Alexander the Great, as valiantly set forth as may be, and as many souldiers as can.’⁹ My estimates about the casting requirements for Shakespeare’s plays correspond closely to Bevington’s estimates about the requirements for Marlowe’s plays: *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One* (1587) ‘could be performed easily by eleven men and four boys’;¹⁰ *Tamburlaine the Great, Part Two* (1588) ‘could be handled easily by thirteen players, together with one or two boys’;¹¹ *The Jew of Malta* (1589) ‘requires at least seven experienced actors and three boys’;¹² *Edward II* (1592) requires ‘ten or so company members, additional hired actors, and two to four boys’;¹³ *Doctor Faustus* (1604 edition) ‘could be performed by nine actors, one or two boys . . . and seven extras’.¹⁴

Ringler also observes that J. Englelen, ‘Die Schauspieler-Ökonomie in Shakespeares Dramen’, in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 62 (1926), 36–97 and 63 (1927), 75–158 and M. Sack, *Darstellerzahl und Rollenverteilung bei Shakespeare* (Leipzig 1928), have made preliminary studies of doubling in Shakespeare’s plays, but Ringler finds ‘their results are inconclusive because they concentrate on the major speaking parts and pay inadequate attention to the entire company, which must also include the mutes’.¹⁵ However, Ringler does not take into account a brief but valuable study by Arthur Colby Sprague, *The Doubling of Parts in Shakespeare’s Plays* (London 1966), who examines evidence about doubling in performance records of English professional acting companies. For example, Sprague lists fifty-five performances of *Hamlet* between 20 April 1730 (Goodman’s Fields) and 30 April 1914 (Stratford-upon-Avon) in which the actor who plays Polonius doubles as First Gravedigger.¹⁶

Ringler defines the purpose of his own study: ‘I do not wish at this time to guess which actors played what parts. I wish to ask only one question: “how many actors were available to Shakespeare for his earlier plays?”’¹⁷ Ringler lists the ten ‘principall Comœdians’ who acted Ben Jonson’s *Every Man in his Humour* in 1598: William Shakespeare, Augustine Phillips, Henry Condell, William Sly, William Kempe, Richard Burbage, John Heminges, Thomas Pope, Christopher Beeston, and John Duke (see Illustration 1). Ringler notes: ‘The first eight of these ten names reappear either as shareholders in the Globe lease of 21 February 1599 or as members of the company when it received its patent as the King’s Men in 1603.’¹⁸ Ringler further asserts: ‘Beeston and Duke were probably hirelings, and the other hirelings in 1598 were probably Richard Cowley . . . and John Sinklo (or Sincler) . . . These were the twelve adult actors of the company in 1598.’ His analysis then equates these twelve men with the number of adult actors required to perform the plays. However, as already suggested here, all the principal actors of the company – most of whom are named in the royal patents and in livery lists – do not appear together in any one of the King’s Men plays that identify actors in principal parts. For example, the royal patent dated 24 June 1625 names thirteen King’s Men,¹⁹ but only eight of these are

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identified in the cast of seventeen men required for *The Roman Actor (RA)*, licensed for performance on 11 October 1626.²⁰ Presumably the other nine male roles are played by unidentified hired men or playhouse attendants. Thus the number of principal actors available does not necessarily determine the number of actors who perform any given play.²¹

Nevertheless, Ringler contends: 'Between 1594 and 1599, Shakespeare *never* wrote a play for more than 16 actors including mutes, [and] the composition of his company during that period appears to have remained stable with 12 adults and 4 boys.'²² He illustrates his argument with a Doubling Chart (Figure 4) for *A Midsummer Night's Dream (MND)* showing how it is possible for twelve men and four boys to act this play, but some of his suggestions about doubling are questionable. For example, Ringler's chart suggests that the actor who plays Theseus, the largest male role (218 lines in Q1), doubles as the Faerie (25 lines) who speaks with Puck in 2.1. However, in the King's Men plays that identify actors in principal parts, the actors who play the largest roles do *not* double. Furthermore, Ringler's chart suggests that the actors who play the adult male roles of Flute, Starveling, Snout, and Snug double as Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed, roles that most scholars assign to boy actors of the period.²³ However, evidence from eight Elizabethan playhouse documents shows that the boy actors with these companies do *not* play adult male roles, nor do adult actors play female roles. It is hoped that the present study – based on evidence from these documents and fifteen other pre-Restoration texts that identify actors and the roles they play – will provide reliable answers to some important questions that Ringler and other scholars have raised about the casting requirements for Shakespeare's plays.

As will be shown, authors of the period carefully planned the number of actors required for each play in a plot or outline listing the characters who appear in each scene, and this plot was submitted to the acting company for its approval before the author wrote dialogue for a given play. In most of the plays considered here, including those of Shakespeare, the men and boys who play the principal characters speak over 90% of the lines. This large share of lines spoken by principal roles makes it possible for the leading actors to rehearse the play without the supporting cast until shortly before the first public performance, at which time the company can enlist the hired men, playhouse attendants, and boys needed for minor parts. This procedure is indicated in seven playhouse manuscripts of the period – and in seven early texts of Shakespeare – where almost every actor's name entered in the margin or in a stage direction is that of a hired man who plays a minor part and who probably joined the cast late in the rehearsal period (see Appendix B). Flexibility in the number of mute supernumeraries is shown in *Titus Andronicus (Tit. Q1-1594)* where the direction for the triumphal entrance of Titus with Tamora, the Queen of the Goths, calls for 'others as many as can be' (1.1.69).

My second chapter considers the casting requirements for eight playhouse documents used to regulate rehearsals and performances: four prompt books from the repertory of Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, and four playhouse plots – scene-by-scene outlines posted backstage to remind the actors about which parts

they play – from the repertoires of Lord Strange's Men and the Lord Admiral's Men. As will be shown, the actors who first performed Shakespeare's plays probably followed casting procedures similar to those followed by the other London companies of his day. Some actors moved from one company to another just as acting companies moved from one playhouse to another, so it seems likely that the theatrical practices and stage equipment used by these companies did not differ significantly.

Valuable evidence about Elizabethan theatrical practice is found in the records of Philip Henslowe, the financial manager and money-lender for several Elizabethan and Jacobean acting companies. This evidence is assembled in Henslowe's *Diary* and a collection known as the *Henslowe Papers*. In order to show the theatrical significance of these playhouse documents, it may be helpful here to review seven important steps taken when actors who worked with Henslowe acquired plays and prepared them for performance.

1. Henslowe – at the request of one or more of the actors – advanced 'earnest' money to an author or authors after the acting company had given its approval of a 'plot' that the author had prepared showing the outline of his proposed new play. The plot indicates the scene-by-scene order in which characters enter, and in this way the author shows the actors that the casting requirements for his new play are suitable for their company. Henslowe paid the author in instalments as he wrote the play, and Henslowe paid him in full when he delivered 'fair copy' of the 'book of the play'. When and if the play was performed, the actors repaid Henslowe from playhouse receipts.²⁴

In two entries of his *Diary*, Henslowe mentions a plot or plots that Ben Jonson showed to the Admiral's Men:

lent unto Bengemen Johnson the 3 of desembr 1597 }
 upon a boocke w^{ch} he showed the plotte unto the }
 company w^{ch} he promysed to dd unto the company } xxs
 at cryssmas next the some of . . .²⁵

There is no record of Jonson having completed this unidentified play, but almost a year later Henslowe notes payment to Robert Shaw and Edward Juby for two acts of what may be another play based on a plot by Jonson:

Lent unto Robart shawe & Jewbey the 23 of octobr }
 1598 to lend unto mr Chapmane one his playe }
 boocke & ii ectes of A tragedie of bengemens plotte } xxx li
 the some of . . .²⁶

'Bengemens plotte' was probably a list of scenes with the characters appearing in each, such as we find in the fragment of a plot for the now lost *The Second Part of Henry Richmond* (2HR) by the actor-author Robert Wilson. This list of the characters, but not the actors, who appear in each of the first five scenes is in the hand of Shaw, who served as negotiator between the author and Henslowe:

1. Sce. Wm Wor: & Ansell & to them ye plowghmen
 Q & Eliza:
2. Sce: Richard / Catesbie, Lovell, Rice ap Tho: Blunt, Banester

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3. Sce: Ansell Davye Denys Hen: Oxf: Courtney Bou'chier & Grace to them Rice ap Tho:
& his Soldiors
4. Sce: Mitton Ban: his wyfe & children
5. Sce: King Rich: Catesb: Lovell. Norf: Northumb: Percy²⁷

This fragment is probably a scrap from a plot that Shaw had prepared with Wilson's assistance when Wilson first proposed the play. When Wilson wrote the play, he probably followed this plot – or a copy of it – as his plan for the sequence of scenes. On the back is a note, also in Shaw's hand, dated 8 November 1599 requesting that Henslowe pay Wilson for the completed book:

mr Henslowe we have heard their booke and lyke yt
their pryce is eight pounds, wch I pray pay now to mr
wilson according to our promysse . . .
yours Robt Shaa²⁸

Also on 8 November 1599, Henslowe's *Diary* records a note from Wilson acknowledging receipt of eight pounds as payment in full:

Receeaved of mr. Ph: Hinchlow by a note under the hand of mr Rob: Shaw in full payment for the second pt of Henrye Richmond sold to him & his Companye the some of eight powndss Current moneye the viiit daye of November 1599 By me R Wilson ²⁹	}	viii li
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Two other authors mention plots in their notes to Henslowe, and in each case the author refers to the plot as a necessary guide for writing the play. The first author is John Day, who with William Haughton received forty shillings as 'earnest' money for *The Conquest of the West Indies*:

Lent unto John daye & wm hawghton the 4 of aprell 1601 in earnest of playe called the conqweste of the weste enges at the apoyntment of Samwell Rowlye the some of . . . ³⁰	}	xxxx s
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Day, or Haughton, or both, received subsequent payments for this play, and in Day's note to Henslowe, which Greg dates 4 June 1601 (?), Day refers to having absent-mindedly left with Henslowe the plot that he had prepared for this play, on which he was apparently still at work:

I have occasion to be absent about the plott of the
Indyes therfre pray delyver it to will Hamton sadler
by me John Daye³¹

Henslowe made further payments to the authors for this play, and what was probably the last partial payment was made on 1 September:

Lent unto the company the 1 of september to Lend John daye in pt of payment of A Boocke called the weaste enges the some of . . . ³²	}	x s
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The company may have begun rehearsals shortly after this last recorded payment to the author and given the first performance of the play about a month later, or shortly after 31 September [*sic*], when Henslowe lent ten pounds and ten shillings to the company 'to bye divers thinges and sewttes & stockenes for the playe of the weaste inges'.³³ However, as will be shown, some other plays probably had shorter rehearsal periods.

A plot for another play (not identified) is described in a note to Henslowe from the actor-author Nathan Field; Greg suggests a date at the end of June 1613, at which time Field was one of the leading actors for Lady Elizabeth's Men:

Mr. Hinchlow

Mr. Dawborne and I have spent a great deale of time in conference about this plott, wch will make as beneficiall a play as hath Come these seaven years. It is out of his love he detaines it for us, onely [ten pounds] is desir'd in hand, for wch wee will be bound to bring you in the play finish'd upon the first day of August . . . Pray let us know when wee shall speake wth you; Till when and Ever I rest Yor loving and obedient Son: Nat: Field³⁴

2. After the company approved the plot and the players made initial payment, the author or authors wrote the dialogue for the play, which followed the sequence of scenes that one or more authors had outlined in the plot. The anonymous *The Dead Man's Fortune* (*DMF*, see Appendix A) is an example of a plot that lists the names of the characters who appear in each scene, but not the names of the actors who play the principal roles. The only actors identified – Burbage, Robert Lee, Darlowe and a boy (?) called Sam – are assigned to minor parts, and in some cases it is uncertain which part each actor plays.³⁵ The plot also indicates that a 'tyre man' plays an Attendant. One possible explanation for the state of *DMF* is that the actors used it at rehearsal when they assigned minor roles. Presumably, before the actors performed the play publicly, the playhouse scribe prepared another, complete plot that identified each of the actors and the part or parts he played. Four playhouse plots that identify most of the actors are discussed below and transcribed in Appendix A.

3. As noted, before the acting company or Henslowe made final payment, they expected to receive 'fair copy', that is, a text free from the tangles and confusions usually associated with 'foul papers'. For example, on 17 April 1613, Henslowe agrees to pay Daborne twenty pounds for a tragedy, *Machiavel and the Devil*. In the next few weeks, Henslowe makes partial payments to Daborne as he sends to the players sheets 'fayr written'. On 25 June, Daborne writes: 'I have took extraordinary payns with the end & altered one other scean in the third act which they have now in parts.'³⁶ Here the playhouse scribe apparently began to prepare the actors' parts even before the author had finished writing the play.

4. The only extant Elizabethan actor's part is the one a playhouse scribe prepared for the title role of Robert Greene's *Orlando Furioso*. This was probably performed at the Rose on 21 or 22 February 1592 by Edward Alleyn, an Admiral's Man, who was then acting with Lord Strange's Men.³⁷ Although the part is mutilated and defective in many places, it preserves about 530 lines of cues and speeches for Orlando written on strips of paper six inches wide and varying from ten to sixteen inches in length. When Alleyn used this part, the strips were pasted together to form a long roll (hence

the French *rôle*). These strips have now been separated and bound as leaves in a volume preserved among Alleyn's papers at Dulwich College where it now forms MS. 1, Item 138. The cues for Orlando usually consist of two or three words to the right of a line drawn across the strip. For example, on strip 5 the phrase 'on his neck' is the cue for Orlando, who 'enters with a mans legg' and says:

villayns provide me straight a lions skyne
for I thou seest/ I am mighty Hercules
see whers my massy clubb upon my neck
I must to hell to fight with Cerberus.³⁸

Most of the part is in a secretary hand, that of the playhouse scribe. He was apparently unable to read all of the text from which he copied the part, and he leaves blank spaces into which the actor can insert the appropriate words at rehearsal. For example, towards the bottom of strip 8 the scribe leaves a space into which another hand, which Greg identifies as Alleyn's, inserts an entire line of iambic pentameter probably derived from the prompt book: 'Inconstant base injurious & untrue'.³⁹

5. At rehearsals, a very important member of the company was the book-keeper, a term defined by John Higgins, *Nomenclator* (1585), as 'he that telleth the players their part when they are out and have forgotten, the prompter or book-holder'.⁴⁰ Thus in Elizabethan usage the terms 'book-keeper', 'book-holder', and 'prompter' are virtually synonymous, and hereafter I refer to this person as the book-keeper. Rehearsals were usually held in the morning with a public performance of another play in the afternoon. This work schedule is indicated by articles of agreement drawn up between Robert Dawes, an actor, and Philip Henslowe and Jacob Meade, dated 7 April 1614. They require that Dawes

will and at all tymes during the said terme [of three years] duly attend all suche rehearsall which shall the night before the rehearsal be given publicly out . . . and [on] every daie whereon any play is or ought to be played be ready apparlled to begin the play at the hower of three of the clock in the afternoon.⁴¹

The four manuscript prompt books examined here are prepared for performance by the King's Men: *SMT* probably by Thomas Middleton (1611), *Sir John van Olden Barnavelt* (*Barn.*) probably by John Fletcher and Philip Massinger (1619), *The Honest Man's Fortune* (*HMF*) by Nathan Field probably with help from Fletcher and Massinger (1625), and *BAYL* in the autograph of Massinger (1631). In each of these manuscripts, the book-keeper notes changes in the text, adds the names of a few minor actors, and adds cues for some, but not all, of the required properties and effects. Added at the end of *BAYL* is a list of properties that identifies indirectly the principal roles played by six leading actors of the company (Illustration 11). This list is in the hand of Edward Knight, book-keeper for the King's Men, who is also the scribe for the manuscript prompt book for *HMF* and the manuscript of *The Soddered Citizen* (*SC*). Knight's name appears first in the list of 'musicians and other necessary attendants' whom Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, protects from arrest 'during the Time of the Revels' in his order of 27 December 1624 (see Appendix C).