"You've Read the Book. Now See the Play!" Shakespeare and the London Book Trade

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According to the venerable A. L. Rowse, "Shakespeare's dearest wish was to be, and to be taken for, a poet,"[1] and as a poet-playwright is how we usually think of, and study, Shakespeare. My studies lead me to believe we also should think of him as an actor-entrepreneur, who also wrote damned good plays and a few poetic works. Compared to his contemporary writers, like John Lyly, George Chapman, and Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's literary output is pretty slim if his prime career be that of an author. Indeed, we might thank Ben Jonson for establishing play scripts as literature, else half of Shakespeare's plays (plays not published until the *First Folio*), including the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2013 *King John* and *The Tempest*, might have perished altogether.

Officialdom and the *literati* in London viewed him as an actor. In 1594 his name is included as a payee for court performances. The cryptic *Willobie His Advisa*, dated 1594, alludes to Shakespeare as a player.[2] In 1602, the York Herald complained of the granting of a Coat of Arms to "Shakespear ye Player."[3] In 1603 the poet and writing master John Davies of Hereford (*Microcosmos*) praised Shakespeare and Burbage as actors skilled in their use of voice and realistic portrayals. As late as 1605 the anonymous author of *Ratseis Ghost* refers to Shakespeare as a player. Even our first sure reference to Shakespeare's theatrical career in 1592, Robert Greene's celebrated death bed "Blast," clearly designates Shakespeare as an actor with delusions that he was a poet, and Greene's famous pun—"his Tyger's heart wrapt in a Player's hide"—curiously points as much to a particular role in *3 Henry VI* as to the Henry VI plays themselves.[4]

It was Shakespeare's entry into full partnership as an actor in the newly organized Chamberlain's Men in 1594 that signals the

beginning of his financial success. The usual playwright's fee was £6 to £10 per play, plus a "benefit" performance yielding another £5. At Shakespeare's average 2 or 3 plays per year, his income would be about £45. But Shakespeare's one-eighth share as a partner in the acting company would be about 14 to 17 shillings per performance. At the average of 230 performances per year, his annual income from acting would amount to £160 to £195, equal to ten to thirteen years' wages to the skilled artisan. Table 1 presents his rapid rise to prosperity after he becomes a partner in the Chamberlains's Men. Note how quickly after that he secured a coat-of-arms at a fee of £30, invested £327 (an amount about the same as the income of a country squire) for 120 acres of land in Stratford, bought the second largest house in Stratford at a cost of £60, and bought an eighth share in the Globe theatre at £60.[5] Note also the comparison of these sums to the average annual income of a skilled artisan, £15—an income about the same as paid to a "hired man," an actor who was only an employee of the company.[6]

Table I: Shakespeare's Rise to Riches

YEAR	THEATRE CAREER	PERSONAL LIFE
1578		Father mortgages some lands
1582		Marries Anne Hathaway
1583		Daughter Susanna born
1585		Twins born, Hamnet & Judith
1586		Father removed as alderman
1589	Goes to London (?)	Father sued for debt
1590	Ref, as minor actor	Father sued for debt
1592	Ref. to growing prominence	Father fined as recusant
1594	Partner, Chamberlain's Men	
1596	Partner, Chamberlain's Men	Buys Coat of Arms, £30
1597	Partner, Chamberlain's Men	Buys Stratford land, £327
1598	Partner, Chamberlain's Men	Buys house in Stratford, £60
1599	Partner, Chamberlain's Men	Buys Globe share, £60

Shakespeare continued investing throughout his career. In 1602 he paid another £320 for another 107 acres of farmland and 20 acres of pasture near Stratford. Sometime before his death, he bought The Maidenhead and Swan Inns and adjoining houses in Stratford.[7] His will mentions orchards, gardens, tenements, stables, and barns—always in the plural.[8] He also owned, or controlled,

other properties, from his marriage to Anne Hathaway (we need to remember the young William married a local heiress) and from inheritance from his father, who died in 1601. By the time he retired from the theatre, Shakespeare was the largest property owner in Stratford-upon-Avon.[9] We also know he invested in tithe futures and grain futures. In 1605 he spent £440 for a half interest in the tithes of part of Stratford and two neighboring towns—an investment yielding a net income of £60 per year.[10] In 1608 he added to his one-eighth ownership in the Globe, a one-sixth ownership in the Blackfriars theatre. Finally, in 1613 he invested £140 to buy the gate house at the Blackfriars complex.[11] Estimates of his probable income from all these sources—income from the theatre and his investments—suggest an annual income of about £830, an income close to that of a knight of the shire, and almost fifty-six years' wages for the average artisan. That puts Shakespeare well within the top 5% income bracket of his time. Just the cash bequests in his will total about £378,[12] a sum equaling slightly more than the average yearly income of a "country gentleman," and about twenty-five years' wages to the skilled artisan. Perhaps that is a major cause for his "retirement" from the stage in 1613. His bachelor brother Gilbert, who was his agent in Stratford, died in 1612,[13] and Shakespeare may have returned to Stratford to manage his properties and investments.

Shakespeare's attempts to preserve and increase his holdings reveal a "sharp," and perhaps a bit unscrupulous, businessman. Because of his land investments, Shakespeare shows up in lawsuits over enclosures. Though heading the list of "ancient freeholders" in a document contesting enclosures, Shakespeare seems to have hedged his bets, for he also secured a promise of compensation from the parties seeking the enclosures. We know he sometimes acted as a moneylender; in 1604 and 1608 he took debtors to court.[14] And, as recently touted in the British press, Jayne Archer, lecturer in medieval and Renaissance literature at Aberystwyth University, shows that court records accuse Shakespeare of hoarding grain in a time of famine and of evading taxes.[15] Samuel Schoenbaum writes that London tax records show that Shakespeare was in default of taxes owed there in 1597, 1598, and 1600.[16]

Now what does all this have to do with the book trade? Well, just as the returns yielded an actor-partner-investor like Shakespeare enormous rewards, theatre costs in London also were enormous. From Philip Henslowe's *Diary* (his account book—Henslowe owned the rival Rose and Fortune theatres) and sums listed in civil litigations, we can calculate some of those costs.

Table 2 lists some of those costs, along with estimates of the ticket sales collected at the theatres that covered those costs and made profits for the theatre owners and the actor-partners.[17]

Table 2: Comparison of Selected Theatre-Related Monies to Wages of an Artisan

Item	Pounds Sterling	No. Years' Wages
Construction costs: Burbages "Theatre"	£666	44.4 Years
Construction costs: Henslowes "Rose"	£816	54.4 Years
Construction costs: "The Globe"	£600	40 Years
Construction costs: Henslowe's "Fortune"	£600	40 Years
Averagae construction costs (4 Theatres)	£673	45 Years
Average play productionn costs: Annual	£900	60 Years
Average building maintenance costs: Annual	£100	6.7 Years
Costumes properties: "The Swan"	£300	20 Years
Average daily receipts: "Globe" or "Rose"	£8.5	7 Months
Annual receipts: "Globe" or "Rose"	£1955	130.33 Years

Only those who practiced business skills and who viewed and shaped their artistic talents as if they also were business commodities could meet those costs and derive handsome returns on their labors and investments. So, looking at Shakespeare as an actor-entrepreneur suggests he was probably just as inspired to write plays that would likely bring those pennies through the doors at the Theatre or the Globe as he was by his dramatic and poetic muse. Someone shrewd and cautious enough to hedge his bets in a land dispute probably would be shrewd enough to look for indications of what would likely entice the public to spend their pennies at his theatres' doors.

Not only Henslowe at the Rose, but also his rivals at the Globe seem to have used gate-receipts, not necessarily artistic merit, to determine a play's stage life. From Henslowe's *Diary* we see a popular old war-horse like *Spanish Tragedy* revived, and revived, and revived. However, a play that saw drastic reductions in gate-receipts after its first few performances was removed from the repertory, seldom to be reintroduced. Henslowe backed no "sleepers." In the same fashion *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet* played again and again at Shakespeare's Globe, but other plays, even those by the Globe's premier playwright, such as *Taming of the Shrew*, *Love's Labors' Won*,

and *Cardenio*, became figuratively, and sometimes literally, lost—or perhaps revised and recycled under a new name. From Henslowe, branded by literary critics as a "hardheaded capitalist," we expect such ruthless disposal of plays with limited popularity. Yet it seems that Shakespeare, a partner in the acting company and a partner in the theatre—in other words, a man with a prominent voice in the company's operations—was ruthless with his own creations.[18]

By the same token, popular plays invited imitation. Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, so popular that it went through sixteen printings in just over as many years, contained scenes of "feigned" madness. Even the fastidious Robert Greene copied that device in his *Orlando Furioso*. Shakespeare used it in *Titus Andronicus,* in *Hamlet*, in *Lear*, even in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Blood and gore were another feature of *Spanish Tragedy*, and one certainly finds the plays of Shakespeare and other dramatists littered with corpses and replete with scenes of almost gratuitous violence—beatings, slow, theatrical strangulations, throat-cutting, eye-gouging.[19]

"Box-office" success meant giving the popular audience what it wanted. Literary and dramatic criticism over the years has carefully isolated themes, plots, and dramatic devices tailored to the tastes of artisans and tradesmen and courtiers. Sheer instinct, however, or trial and error could not have been the playwrights' only arbiters of taste, so where did Dekker, Chapman, Shakespeare, and other playwrights learn what was "in"? No good businessman would risk substantial investments to intuitive intangibles. Theatre businessmen—and recent research stresses Shakespeare's hardheadedness as a businessman in the eyes of his own contemporaries—must have done some kind of market research, and the London book trade offered an indication of what was of interest to the various classes of sixteenth-century London.[20]

Many have underestimated literacy among the artisan classes of sixteenth-century England. Sir Thomas More's boast in the first quarter of the sixteenth century that sixty percent of all Londoners were literate should be accepted, perhaps increased for the London of Shakespeare's day. By that time each county in England averaged ten grammar schools, most subsidized by the Gentry, the guilds, or the Church. Proximity and cost kept schooling within the reach of all but the poorest boys. Education was a matter of concern to Elizabethans, as evidenced by a number of treatises written about schooling and the government's periodic check-ups on the quality of schoolmasters through episcopal visitations and written inquiries. Even some servant girls

could read and write. Remember, the joke in *Romeo and Juliet* is that the servant cannot read his list of invitees; but also remember, Father Capulet assumes his servant can read. The emphasis on reading and writing was so strong that each and every guild *required* literacy of anyone admitted to apprenticeship. The sheer number of university and grammar school trained men jostling for patrons in London demonstrates that schools produced more "scholars" than there were jobs for them.[21]

Neither should one assume, as do some scholars, that the popular classes "did not read much." Throughout the last half of the sixteenth century, London supported an average of twenty-five printing establishments. Though the Stationers' Guild limited printing per edition to 1,250 to 1,500 copies, the yearly average of new titles printed was about 200; each printer, therefore, averaged about 9,600 printed copies per year. Hence annually, 200,000 to 240,000 copies of books and pamphlets were printed and available for sale. Such considerable numbers indicate a brisk market. Sales to the aristocracy, to the gentry, to church libraries, and to the provinces could not have amounted to more than one-third of the total output. Writers and their publishers clearly catered to a less well-off and less well-educated clientele. Most books sold in unbound copies, in Black Letter font, costing from 2 to 4 pence, not more than one-third the daily wage of an artisan (12 pence). Grafton's and Stowe's Chronicles competed with one another, thus were periodically reissued in simpler, shorter, cheaper editions. Between 1564 and 1599 there were sixteen separate editions of Grafton and fifteen editions of Stowe. Philamon Holland flatly stated that his translations of Greek and Latin classical literature specifically were designed to make the classics available to "the husbandman, the mason, the carpenter, goldsmith, painter, lapidary, and engraver, with other artificers."[22]

It was simplified English history books like Grafton's and Stowe's *Chronicles*, Greek and Latin classics in translation, and geography and travel books that were among the most popular titles printed for the working classes. As regards playwrights like those working for Henslowe, or like Shakespeare, it seems to have been the appearance and popularity of these simplified history books and the classics in translation that helped trigger their muse. Scholars have identified the sources (and probable sources) of Shakespeare's plots. What is intriguing, as seen in Table 3, is the chronological relationship between the appearance of printed copies of those sources and subsequent productions of Shakespeare's plays drawing upon those sources. Since precise

dating of the plays is the subject of scholarly debate (especially Shakespeare's earlier plays), dates are not meant as absolutes. The table uses the traditional dating system merely as a chronological framework, with a plus or minus variable of a year or so.[23]

Table 3: Chronologies of Sources and Plays

A. English History and Travel Books (No Direct Year-by-year Relationship

History/Travel Books	Pub. Year	History Play	Trad. Dates
Foxe's *Martyrs*	1570	*1 Henry VI*	1589-90
Stowe's *Chronicles*	1580	*2 Henry VI*	1589-90
Anon. *Henry V*	1586	*3 Henry VI*	1590-91
Holingshed's *Chronicles*	1587	*Richard III*	1592-93
Mirror for Magistrates	1587	Collab. on *Thomas More*	1594-95
Anon. *Reign of John*	1591	*King John*	1594-95
rev. Stowes *Chronicles*	1592	*Richard II*	1595
Daniel's *Civil Wars*	1595	*1 Henry IV*	1595
rev. Foxe's *Martyrs*	1595	*2 Henry IV*	1596-97
Stowe's *London*	1598	*Henry V*	1599

B. Greco-Roman Books (No Direct Year-by-year Relationship)

English Translations	Pub. Year	Greco-Roman Play	Trad. Dates
Appian's *Civil Wars*	1578		
Plutarch's *Lives*	1579	*Titus Andronicus*	1593-94
Lefevre's *Troy*	1595		
Homer's *Illiad*	1598		
Tacitus' *Annals*	1598		
Daniel's *Cleopatra*	1599	*Julius Caesar*	1599
Livy's *History*	1600		
rev. Plutarch's *Lives*	1600	*Trolilus & Cressida*	1601-02
Pliny's *History*	1601	*Anthony & Cleopatra*	1606-07
rev. Plutarch's *Lives*	1603	*Coriolanus*	1607-08
Suetonius *Lives*	1606	*Timon of Athens*	1607-08

C. Comedies–Tragedies (Nearer Year-by-year Relationship)

Book	Pub. Year	Play	Trad. Dates
trans. Plautus' *Menaechmi*	1594		
trans. Plautus *Amphitruo*	1594	*Comedy of Errors*	1593-94
trans. *Gesta Romanorum*	1595	*Merchant of Venice*	1596-97
Gerard's *Herbal* (songs)	1597	*Rev. Love's Labors' Lost*	1597
trans. Contarini's *Venice*	1599	*Othello*	1604
Jones' *Songs & Airs*	1600	*Twelfth Night*	1601-02
Hall's *Popish Imposters*	1603		
trans. Montaigne's *Essays*	1603	*King Lear*	1604
Twine's *Painful Adventures*	1607	*Pericles Prince of Tyre*	1607-08
Jourdain's *Bermudas*	1610		
Virginia Council's *Virginia*	1610	*The Tempest*	1611
trans. Cervantes' *"Quixote"*	1612	*Cardenio*	1612-13

Table 3 suggests that Shakespeare may have operated on a principle much like, "You've read the book. Now see the play." The relationship between the publication of a popular work and Shakespeare's subsequent and speedy use of that work seems quite clear in Part C, as, for example, Jones' *Songs and Airs* in 1600 and Shakespeare's use of some of those songs in *Twelfth Night* a little later, or the publication of Jourdain's *Bermuda* in 1610 and the performance of *The Tempest* in 1611, just as the earlier popularity of Brooke's poem *Romeaus and Juliet* with the Inns of Court gallants led to the play *Romeo and Juliet*. Such a close relationship is not as obvious in Parts A and B until the books and plays in each category are examined as groups.

Whether one adopts the traditional dating of Shakespeare's first plays, or the newer view that dates them earlier, the writing of comedy-romances, and to a lesser extent tragedies, is distributed somewhat evenly throughout his theatrical career. Parts A and B, however, illustrate that the writing of English history plays, and the writing of plays on Greco-Roman stories, is concentrated primarily into two separate periods—English histories up to 1599, Greco-Roman plays from 1599 to 1608. In each of these periods the London book trade produced several publications whose genre, content, or theme parallel the same pattern as Shakespeare's plays.

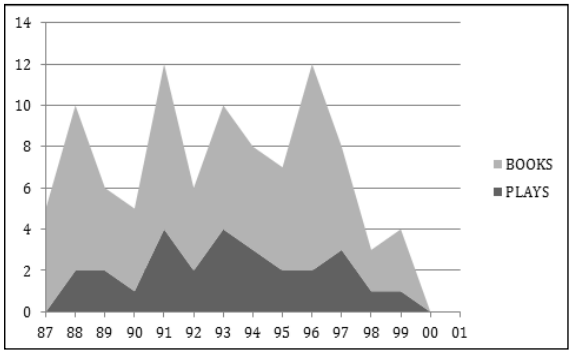
A strong interest in history and geography, especially English history and English landmarks, was prevalent in England during the latter half of the sixteenth century. Between 1550 and 1600 about one hundred and ten travel and history books were published, some, like Holinshed's, Grafton's, and Stowe's *Chronicles*, and *The Mirror for Magistrates*, going through multiple printings. The surge of national concern and feeling produced by the threat of, and "defeat" of, the Spanish Armada quickened that historical interest in the late 1580s and early 1590s, about the time Shakespeare himself went to London. Specifically, in 1587 Holinshed's popular *Chronicles*, as well as the widely read *Mirror for Magistrates*, both used heavily by Shakespeare in his history plays, were revised, expanded, and reprinted. From that date on, until the end of the century, over thirty-nine books dealing with travel or England's history were printed—an average of three new ones per year.[24]

Many scholars have noted how Shakespeare's history plays reflected this surge of English nationalism, becoming, as A. L. Rowse puts it, "the very voice of England in those years. . . . He caught the mood and made himself the mouthpiece; hence his earliest success."[25] Yet reflecting the spirit of the time is insufficient to explain why Shakespeare, who had written nine history plays—an average of one a year—abruptly stopped writing them after 1599. English nationalism did not drop off abruptly in 1599, but the publication of books about English history did. Only three English history books appeared in 1599; *none* were printed in 1600, 1601, or 1602.

Printers now began to issue new kinds of books. Translations of Greco-Roman sources, which, though a few were printed in the late 1570s, but had not frequently appeared in the 1580s and 90s, now gained popularity among the printers rather rapidly. At least twenty-one different translations of works by Livy, Ovid, Sallust, Homer, and other Greco-Roman writers were printed between 1599 and 1610—at least one, sometimes two or more, new editions each year. Shakespeare and his partners seem to have followed the printers' lead. From 1599 until 1607, Shakespeare wrote, and his company staged, plays based on Greco-Roman stories on an average of one every eighteen months. *Julius Caesar* and *Anthony and Cleopatra* read like virtual word-by-word dramatizations, down to the some of the minutest of details, of selected Plutarch's *Lives*. One might attribute Shakespeare's shift away from English history plays around the turn of the seventeenth century to mere coincidence, or boredom, or a change in his and his acting company's artistic tastes, *if* he and his acting company were alone in following the pattern described above. They were not. Graphs 1

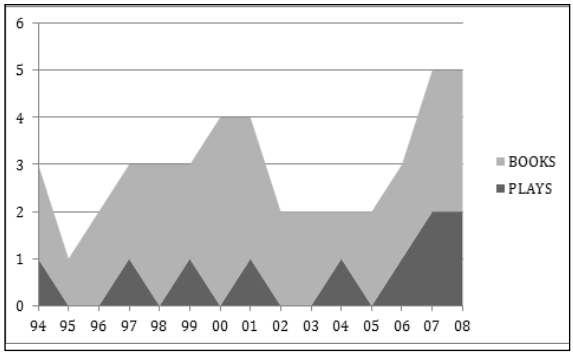
and 2 illustrate that not only the Chamberlain's Men, but also the Admiral's Men, and (after 1599) other London acting companies followed the same pattern. The graphs suggest that the repertories of all the London acting companies paralleled the trends in the book trade.[26]

Graph 1: History books and History plays, 1587-1601



Henslowe's *Diary* and other theatrical records reveal that, like Shakespeare for the Chamberlain's Men, playwrights for the Admiral's Men produced new comedy-romances at a relatively consistent pace, tragedies playing a lesser role in the Admiral's repertory until after 1599. On the other hand, Henslowe's *Diary* shows that new English history plays were added at an average of two per year from the year of the Armada (1588) until 1599. *But* from 1599, and throughout the time Shakespeare continued writing, the Admiral's (later Prince Henry's) Men commissioned few new histories. The same holds true for the newest London acting company, Worcester's (later Queen Anne's) Men.[27]

Graph 2: Greco-Roman books and Greco-Roman plays, 1594-1608



After 1599, however, as Graph 2 suggests, Shakespeare and other playwrights, writing for his company and for its competitors, produced Greco-Roman plays at a similar rate, slightly lower than they had English history plays, but again paralleling the book trade. The fact that none of the companies produced Greco-Roman plays with the same alacrity as they had history plays is not too surprising. The book trade also was far less vigorous in publishing the classics, probably reflecting lower popular demand.[28]

Tragedies also made a comeback in the theatres. Tragedies like Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* were popular in the 1580s and early 1590s, but after 1592 or so few new tragedies appear in Henslowe's *Diary* or in the Stationers' Register, and we need to remember that only two of Shakespeare's tragedies—*Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*—were written and staged before 1599. About 1599-1600, however, tragedies seem to revive on the London stages, and, of course, many of the Greco-Roman plays also can be classified as tragedies. Tragedies now began to be produced by all London companies with a frequency almost matching the previous popularity of English history plays. Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* were performed by the Chamberlain's Men in the Autumn of 1599 or early 1600, contemporary with the staging of Chettle's *Tragedy of Hoffman* and Dekker's (et al.) *Lust's Dominion* by the Admiral's Men, and Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, performed by Paul's Boys.[29]

What accounts for this abrupt change in the output of the printers and the players? Most likely it was fear. Fear first on the part of the government, because of the uneasy political situation about the intentions of the Earl of Essex in 1599, when in April, amid cheers and huzzahs from the London populace, he set off for Ireland heading the largest army Elizabeth's government had ever raised, and then returned, unauthorized, in September from Ireland. Throughout the rest of that year and the following, 1600, Essex supporters brawled in taverns, preached against "corrupt" councilors, and started rumors and libels against his enemies at Court, especially Robert Cecil and the Lord Admiral, Charles Howard. The matter culminated in February, 1601, with Essex's abortive *coup d'état*.[30]

The government's fears about Essex in 1599 led to an act of censorship. Shortly after Essex sailed for Ireland, Sir John Haywood's *History of Henry IV* appeared. The book was dedicated to the Earl of Essex, described Henry Bolingbroke's return to England and his deposition of King Richard II, and contained a long section describing Richard's abdication. As early as 1597 Sir

Walter Raleigh noted Essex's fascination with Bolingbroke, and Privy Council documents mention Essex's frequent attendance at performances of *Richard II*. At Essex's treason trial much was made of his emulating Henry Bolingbroke and how his actions seemed to parallel the deposition of Richard II. Haywood's *Henry IV* was a best-seller, selling out before the end of the month, and was reprinted in May. At that point the Privy Council ordered the Stationers' Guild to confiscate the new printing and turn the entire run over to the Bishop of London. The bishop had all copies burned and ordered that "noe English historyess be printed excepte they bee allowed by some of her maiesties privie Counsell." In July Haywood was imprisoned in the Tower, and his printer and the censor who passed the book were grilled by the Attorney General. Haywood was still in the Tower 18 months later in 1601 when the Essex coup failed.[31]

Other than against Hayward, no other official action was taken against printing and staging English history, but, in view of Hayward's plight and the proscription of the Bishop of London, printers and players must have come to believe that any themes concerning English history were too dangerous to risk. Best to shift to translations of Greco-Roman classics, almanacs, books and plays about long-ago, far-away, and *non-English* history topics. Both the book trade *and* the theatre had recent examples of what the government *could* do if provoked.

Printers (and authors) could look to the example of John Stubbs. In 1579 Stubbs produced a pamphlet opposing the proposed marriage between Elizabeth and the Duke of Anjou, brother of the French King. Stubbs contended, among other things, that at forty-six years old Elizabeth was too old to bear children, and that marriage to the French duke would erode English values, customs, and language. A royal proclamation forbade circulation of the pamphlet, the government sought (unsuccessfully) to gather up all copies, and Stubbs, his printer and his publisher (the book seller) were arrested. All three were tried and convicted of "seditious writing." Elizabeth wanted the *death penalty*, but was persuaded to accept a lesser sentence, the cutting off of their right hands. The printer was pardoned, but the punishment was inflicted on Stubbs and his publisher, and Stubbs also was imprisoned for eighteen months.[32]

Players and theatre owners could look to a more recent example. In 1597 the Privy Council took offence at the production of Thomas Nashe's and Ben Jonson's *The Ile of Dogs* at the Swan Theatre. The Council shut down all the theatres and hunted down

and destroyed every copy of the script. Nashe fled London, but Jonson, along with the two principal actors in the company, spent three months in prison. *All* the London theatres spent three months dark. Though the Chamberlain's Men got off easy in 1601—by pleading that the company had been paid to perform the play by Essex supporters (and probably because of the status of their patron)—Shakespeare and his partners in the Chamberlain's men and the Globe Theatre must have been fearful when they sent Augustine Phillips to answer angry inquires by the Council as to why they staged *Richard II* the day before the Essex uprising.[33]

Such a climate of censorship punched quite a hole in the repertories of the acting companies. Shakespeare's company, for instance, immediately must have dropped *Richard II*. More significant, Shakespeare's very recent *Henry V* became unsafe to perform within a few months of its first staging. Fear of Privy Council objections obviously also would kill the staging of Shakespeare's *1* and *2 Henry IV*, with those plays' constant references to the deposition of Richard II. Also unsafe would be *1*, *2*, and *3 Henry VI*, and *Richard III*, stories of tangled claims to the throne, Yorkist pedigrees superior to the Tudors, uprisings, usurpations, and the killing of kings. Even *King John* could be suspect, with its tale of disputed succession, Prince Arthur's imprisonment and death, the rebellion of the barons against John, and the poisoning of the king. All nine of Shakespeare's English history plays, and that accounts for the works of just one playwright for the Chamberlain's Men, would be deemed unsafe after 1599. The Admiral's Men, as seen by titles listed in Henslowe's *Diary*, faced a similar situation. The company would be forced to drop about 18 to 20 plays from its repertory, and the new (to London) Worcester's Men, forced to drop its new *1* and *2 Edward IV* by Thomas Heywood.[34]

That sudden loss of repertory helps explain the heightened production of Shakespeare between 1599 and 1604, with the revising of *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and the writing of *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Julius Caesar*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *As You Like It*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Othello*, and *Measure for Measure*. A similar flurry of activity occurred within the Admiral's Men. More than seven new plays (all non-history) were added to the repertory, and hurried revivals and revisions were made to old standbys like *The Jew of Malta*, *Faustus*, and *Spanish Tragedy*. For the next decade, other older plays like *Patient Grissell* and *Old Fortunatus*, some of them dating back as much as thirty years, were revised or rewritten. Though we tend to forget the fact, Shakespeare did the

same thing. *Hamlet* and *King Lear* were re-writes of plays dating back to the 1580s or early 1590s.[35]

Many scholars also note "borrowing" taking place among playwrights. Shakespeare may have "borrowed" from Heywood's *Iron Age I*, for *Troilus and Cressida*, Heywood may have "borrowed" from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* for *Iron Age 2*. The success of Heywood's domestic tragedy, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, may have inspired Shakespeare's (sort of) domestic tragedy, *Othello*. The popularity on stage of Dekker's and Chettle's *Patient Grissell* and several printings of novels featuring the long-suffering wife may have inspired Shakespeare's "Grissell," that is, Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well*. The satirical "Cittie comodies" of Jonson, such as *Every Man Out of His Humor*, of Dekker, such as *Shoemaker's Holiday* and *Westward Ho*, perhaps influenced Shakespeare's scripting of *Measure for Measure*. This flurry of activity over a very short time, suggests that all the companies were scrambling to find new additions to their repertories.[36]

A very few plays dealing with English history were scripted after Elizabeth's death, like Dekker's and Webster's *Sir Thomas Wyatt* or Heywood's *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody*, but these new plays dealt not with great political upheavals in English history, but with Protestant martyrs and Popish plots against Elizabeth. Even the so-called "War of the Theatres" among the Boys' Companies, when Jonson, Dekker, and others brought out plays attacking each other's acting companies and playwriting, smacks of haste. What quicker way to get witty, yet seemingly politically innocuous, new plays on the boards than to burlesque theatrical rivals with parodies of each others' acting styles, repertories, and lines? In short, the acting companies had to fill up the holes in their repertories with plays that were politically non-controversial.[37]

The book trade displays a similar scramble to find safe material. Favorites of the 1580s and 90s, like Grafton's and Holinshed's *Chronicles*, saw no new printings. The even more popular Stowe's *Chronicles* and *Survey of London*, saw a hiatus in publishing until 1603 and 1605, in other words until after Elizabeth's death. New history books concentrated on other countries, like Edward Grimstone's histories of France, the Netherlands, Spain and Venice. Almanacs, which declined in printings around 1590, reappeared in larger numbers. Song-books, books on rhetoric, translations of Italian, French, and Spanish romances, stories of Protestant martyrs under Queen Mary, and play scripts—none of which were printed in quantity in the 1590s—saw increased printings. Novels about merchants, artisans, and tradesmen, like the fabled Dick

Whittington, became popular. Books not published for years were reprinted—a treatise on the compass from 1581, a treatise on horsemanship from 1565, a treatise on navigation from 1561, the story of Sir Bevis of Southampton, dating from 1500.[38]

The increase in printing Greco-Roman works, especially English translations of Plutarch's *Lives*, Sallust's and Lucan's *Histories*, Caesar's *Gallic* and *Civil Wars*, may represent the book trade's attempt to satisfy the public with alternatives to the now politically dangerous English histories. These were histories, but of times, places and people long ago and far away, less likely to be visited by Privy Council disapproval.[39] Sir Walter Raleigh, writing his *Historie of the World*, during his confinement in the Tower (1603-1616), observed that it was safer to write ancient history because "whosoever, in writing a modern history, shall follow truth too near the heels, it may haply strike out his teeth."[40]

That same imperative also may explain the theatre's shift to Greco-Roman plays, and tragedies like Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*. These are still chronicle type plays; they still offer the great men, battles and spectacles, grand themes, pathos and bathos that English history plays had offered. Most attractive, no new investment need be made to stage them. Except for some draping about the shoulders of major characters to suggest Greco-Roman costume, plays were staged in (Elizabethan) "modern costume." By utilizing Greco-Roman and other tragedies, all the velvet doublets, robes, gowns, crowns, swords, armor, chariots, and so on, that had been used to good effect to dramatize the Wars of the Roses could be used to dramatize stories of the Trojan War (Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Heywood's *Iron Age*), or the Battles of Philippi (Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*) and Pharsalus (Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey*), or the pageantry of a *Charles Duke of Byron* or a *King Lear* or a *Macbeth*.[41] Yet even these seemingly "safe" plays sometimes felt the weight of government disapproval. In 1603 Ben Jonson was summoned before the Council because of objections to his play *Sejanus*. Either the play summoned up too many possible allusions to the Essex conspiracy or to King James' Court (we're not sure because the original does not survive). In 1604 Samuel Daniels was brought before the Council for his play *Philotus*. Like Jonson's *Sejanus*, it too was a play based on a Greco-Roman story, but it too dealt with conspiracy, and, in the eyes of the Council, perhaps alluded too closely to Essex.[42]

Hence, the seeming synchronized relationship between the printing of popular books and the appearance of Shakespeare's and others' plays paralleling those books, makes sense. Printers

and players were motivated by profit. Both groups sought to sell their products to the public, and neither group wished to incur the wrath of the government and lose buyers or audiences by being shut down. Scholars have remarked on the London theatre's adaptability to changing popular tastes, and its use of topical material in its offerings. Book printings and sales presented theatre entrepreneurs a tangible index of topicality and tastes. As much as Shakespeare's manipulation and adaptation of sources for his plays reveals his artistic genius, it also reflects his and his fellow players' and playwrights' opportunistic genius at cashing-in on sure-fire hits. When a particular literary genre proved popular (and safe), he, along with other writers, duplicated that genre in his plays; when its popularity (or safety) waned, he, along with the others, ceased utilizing that genre. Just as a "docu-drama" on the Civil War or a mini-series based on a best-seller is almost guaranteed strong Nielson ratings today, Shakespeare and other members of the theatre community probably realized that the best-sellers of their day guaranteed many pennies at the doors of the Globe or the Rose. Granted, political reasons influenced the abrupt halt to the publication of English history books and the staging of English history plays, but that story too reveals how closely linked the book trade was to the offerings at the theatres.

Notes

1. A. L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 73.
2. Pertinent passages from *Willobie His Advisa* are reproduced in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1836.
3. Samuel Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 231.
4. Pertinent passages from Greene's *Groats-worth of witte* are reproduced in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 1835.
5. E. J. A. Honigman, *Shakespeare's Impact on His Contemporaries* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 9, 10, 23; Schoenbaum, A Documentary Life, 220-21, 234-36.
6. James H. Forse, *Art Imitates Business: Commercial and Political Influences in Elizabethan Theatre* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 52-53.
7. Schoenbaum, *A Documentary Life*, 245-46.
8. Shakespeare's will is reproduced in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 1832-33.
9. Schoenbaum, *A Documentary Life*, 75-80, 247.
10. Ibid., 246-47.
11. Ibid., 272-74.
12. Shakespeare's Will, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 1832-33.
13. Schoenbaum, *A Documentary Life*, 245.
14. Ibid., 241, 281-83.

15. http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/04/02/study-shakespeare-was-a-ruthless-businessman-hoarded-food/ (accessed 8 August 2013).
16. Schoenbaum, *A Documentary Life*, 220-23.
17. Forse, *Art Imitates Business*, 22-31.
18. Ibid., 30-31.
19. Ibid., 32.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 32-33.
23. Ibid., 33-34.
24. Ibid., 36.
25. Rowse, *Shakespeare*, 61.
26. Forse, *Art Imitates Business*, 37-39.
27. Ibid., 39-40.
28. Ibid., 40-41.
29. Ibid., 205-09.
30. Ibid., 209-18.
31. Ibid., 210-22.
32. *Dictionarry of National Biography*, ed. Sidney Lee, 1st ed., vol. 55, (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1898), 118-19; see also Donald Stump and Susan Felch, *Elizabeth I And Her Age* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2009), 282; Neville Williams, *Elizabeth, Queen of England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), 202.
33. Forse, *Art Imitates Business*, 167-80, 218-22.
34. Ibid., 222-24.
35. Ibid., 224.
36. Ibid., 224-25.
37. Ibid., 225.
38. Ibid., 225-26.
39. Ibid., 225-27.
40. G. E. Hadrow, ed., *Sir Walter Raleigh, Selections from His Historie of the World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), 61.
41. Forse, *Art Imitates Business*, 227.
42. Ibid., 228-29.