Tired with a Peacock’s Tail: All Eyes on the Upstart Crow

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Tired with a Peacock’s Tail: All Eyes on the Upstart Crow

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ABSTRACT

It is contended that the warning to three play-writing colleagues in Greene’s Groatsworth of Witte has never been evaluated with the dispassionate objectivity it deserves. This on account of its de facto status as the foundation stone of Shakespeare’s professional biography. While not underestimating the tenacious hold of a 240 year old tradition, this paper examines the evidence for a contrary viewpoint. A fresh investigation of the critical sentence that has been claimed to identify Shakespeare finds the evidence in his support weak. By comparison, a more substantial and coherent alternative case can presented for the actor-impresario Edward Alleyn. Considerable doubts are therefore raised as to whether Greene’s Groatsworth actually constitutes Shakespeare’s first-confirmed appearance as an actor and playwright. A subsequent paper will examine how the theory of Alleyn being the target of attack fits in with the wider context of Greene’s pamphlet.

“We are almost tempted to forget that the wish is father of many a tradition”. Schoenbaum, Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life

No account of Shakespeare’s career is complete without first reciting the almost-liturgical lines from Greene’s Groatsworth of Witte about the “vpstart Crow beautified with our feathers”. In Park Honan’s words, we have here, “The bitterest and nearly the most famous lines ever written of Shakespeare”. The bitterness may be contrary to what some like to imagine of his character, but the fame is not, as these words announce Shakespeare’s arrival on the London scene and close the door on his apparently “lost years”. Furthermore, the context in which they do so tells us that by 1592 Shakespeare was intimately involved with the professional lives of Robert Greene and his play-writing peers. However, for all its canonical status as the starting point of Shakespeare’s visible career, there is some vulnerability in the reference. Bart van Es put it succinctly when he wrote, “A vast edifice of biographical inference rests on a single sentence of just fifty-nine words”. This statement is important as it highlights two key considerations. Firstly, it draws attention to the fact that it is the first piece of documentary evidence relating to Shakespeare’s
professional life, and although it is generally believed that he had been building his career as an actor and writer for several years prior to September 1592, there is no direct evidence for this: it is all inferred. The inference may appear to the orthodox to be judicious, but it remains speculative and in the category of what Lukas Erne refers to as guesswork disguised as well established fact.\(^4\) Aside from Groats-worth, the first piece of tangible evidence connecting Shakespeare to a theatrical career was in March 1595 (new style), when he received payment as one of three servants of the Lord Chamberlain for two plays’s performed at court.\(^5\) The second consideration is that a single sentence provides an uncomfortably small surface to bear the weight of “a vast edifice”. As the foundation upon which this structure rests, we would hope it to be rock solid and patently clear. Unfortunately, it is neither of these.

D.A. Carroll, editor of the most recent edition of Groats-worth, cautions that, “Something ambiguous hovers at the center of Greene’s expression”, and explains furthermore, “Its special kind of vitality is so unsettled and complicated that we have not been able to agree as to its meaning or meanings”.\(^6\) The latter might be regarded as an understatement for a source of interpretative controversy that has set leading Shakespearean scholars at loggerheads since the time of Doctor Johnson and Edmund Malone,\(^7\) and remains unresolved today. An indication of the depth of odium scholasticum it has at times generated was expressed in 1928 by J.S. Smart, who lamented, “This passage from Greene has had such a devastating effect on Shakespearean study that we cannot but wish that it had never been written or never discovered”\(^8\).

However, it is pertinent to note that the scholarly battles have centred almost entirely on the nature of the offence and all but ignored the identification of the offender. It seems to have been accepted as a “slam dunk” reference to Shakespeare. But is this justified? Is the identification of Shakespeare as the “vpstart Crow” so clear while all the rest mysteriously opaque? Or, might it not be the case that faith in the identification of the target devolves more from the need for a foundation for that vast corpus of “assumed biography” than it does from anything intrinsic to the fifty-nine words? In other words, if scholars hadn’t been so anxious to anchor Shakespeare’s first documented sighting, would they have so hastily embraced the contentious passage in Greene’s Groats-worth of Witte?

The begging question is whether there might not be an alternative candidate for the role of “vpstart Crow”: a different actor and Iohannes fac totum who fits the buskin, and resolves the apparent ambiguities of the text, significantly better than Shakespeare does? It the contention of this paper that there is indeed someone who better matches the description of Greene’s nemesis. This is the actor and impresario Edward Alleyn.

The case for Alleyn has been made before, most notably by A.D. Wraight, who, in an undeservedly overlooked study, gave a book-length treatment of the subject, Christopher

\(^4\)Erne, 440.
\(^5\)The long hiatus between the two earliest apparent references to Shakespeare in a theatrical role was sufficiently perplexing to make Chambers ponder a period of retirement or travel in Italy as the possible cause: Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage, 130, 199. See also, Chambers, William Shakespeare, 60–1.
\(^6\)Carroll, “Greene’s ‘Upstart Crow’ Passage,” 111–2.
\(^7\)Malone had used it as the “chief hinge” of his argument in a major disagreement with Johnson over the authorship of the Henry VI plays.
\(^8\)Smart, 196.
This paper builds on Wraight’s work by undertaking a detailed analysis of the extent to which allusions in the critical passage match the contemporary profiles of Shakespeare and Alleyn. A subsequent paper will explore how the wider context of Groats-worth is consonant with the identification of Edward Alleyn as the principal target of attack.

1. Shakespeare versus Alleyn

With its preceding referent, the key sentence in Greene’s warning letter to his colleagues runs:

... those Puppets (I meane) that speake from our mouths, those Anticks garnisht in our colours... Yes, trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Iohannes fac totum, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey.10

1.1. A Puppet or Antick

The first and most obvious point is that the man attacked is primarily identified as an actor or player. He is one of “them”, a Puppet or Antick, garnished with colours and feathers—spoken lines—given to him by playwrights. His cruel and rapacious heart is concealed under a player’s costume. His bombasting of blank verse can be understood as oral delivery on stage, as well as the written production of play texts. Leaving aside puns, a “Shake-scene” literally describes a powerful performer on stage.

In September 1592, Shakespeare was not known as a player. He may have been a player at this time, but the only evidence is post-dated. Two and a half years after this time, he received payment, along with William Kempe and Richard Burbage, for two plays performed “before her maiestie” the preceding Christmas season. This proves that he owned a share in the recently formed Chamberlain’s Men, but it does not specify his precise role in the company.11 While this would presumably have included acting, the first direct evidence that Shakespeare performed on stage comes from the appearance of his name in the cast lists of two Ben Jonson plays, Every Man in His Humor (1598) and Sejanus (1603). He is included as one of eight “principal comedians” in the former and one of ten “principal tragedians” in the latter. Three decades afterwards, he also took pride of place among the “principal actors” in The First Folio of his own plays. Whether that placement indicates, as Katherine Duncan-Jones suggests, that Shakespeare assumed leading parts in all his own plays,12 or whether it was largely an honorific, is not known.13

There is, in fact, no firm information about any roles he acted, his skill in performance, or how frequently he played. Well after his death, there were stories in circulation...
suggesting, in Sir Sidney Lee’s words, he “ordinarily confined his efforts to old men of secondary rank”.\textsuperscript{14} His first biographer Nicholas Rowe searched for anecdotes, but drew something of a blank, “Tho’ I have inquir’d, I could never meet with any further Account of him this way, than that the top of his Performance was the Ghost in his own Hamlet”.\textsuperscript{15} There was also a rumour recycled by the antiquarian William Oldys that Shakespeare had played the frail Adam in \textit{As You Like It}.\textsuperscript{16} More favourable accounts of his acting prowess are generally grounded on the supposed reference in \textit{Greene’s Groats-worth of Witte}. However, if it wasn’t him in \textit{Groats-worth}, the nature of his stage presence can only be guessed at, especially in the early part of the 1590s.

Edward Alleyn certainly was an actor in 1592. He came from a family in which both his step-father John Browne and his elder brother John were actors, and in Thomas Fuller’s words he was, “Bred a stage player”.\textsuperscript{17} By 1583, at the age of sixteen he was listed as a senior member of the Earl of Worcester’s Men touring the provinces.\textsuperscript{18} In 1592, he was the most famous actor of the day. Thomas Nashe wrote in the same year “Not Roscius nor Æsope those admynred tragedians that haue liued eer since before Christ was borne, could euer performe more in action, than famous Ned Allen”.\textsuperscript{19} In fact, Alleyn had been famous throughout Greene’s play-writing career, starting no later than his breakthrough role in \textit{Tamburlaine} around 1587. Susan Cerasano explains, “The Tamburlaine role—perhaps more than any other-shaped Edward Alleyn’s career, elevating him to the status of a celebrity performer”.\textsuperscript{20}

Robert Greene evidently despised the players. Brian Vickers has documented Greene’s “long history of resentment against the acting companies to which the dramatists sold their work, and which had apparently abandoned him”.\textsuperscript{21} He cites examples of Greene’s animus from \textit{The Royal Exchange} (1590), \textit{Francescos Fortunes} (1590), \textit{A Quip for an Upstart Courtier} (1592) and \textit{The Defence of Conny-Catching} (1592). In the latter, Greene was quoted to hold:

There was no more faith to be held with Plaiers, than with them that valued faith at the price of a feather; for as they were Comædians to act, so the actions of their lives were Cameleon like; that they were uncertaine, variable, time pleasers, men that measured honestie by profite, and that regarded their Authors not by desart, but by necessitie of time.\textsuperscript{22}

It is apparent that for the attack on one particular player in \textit{Groats-worth} to be meaningful, the man in question needed to be both prominent on stage and a representative of the players as a group. The over-riding problem for Shakespeare is that there is no certainty he was even on the stage, let alone claiming attention as a leading performer by that time. Chambers pointed out that Shakespeare was in fact conspicuous only by his complete absence from the group of actors in 1591/2 and 1593 who went on to form the Chamberlain’s men in

\textsuperscript{14}Lee, \textit{Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century}, 266.
\textsuperscript{15}Rowe, vi.
\textsuperscript{16}Schoenbaum, 200–2.
\textsuperscript{17}Fuller, \textit{History of the Worthies of England}, 84.
\textsuperscript{18}His name was third on the list—after Robert Browne and James Tunstall—which seems to imply unusual seniority for a boy of sixteen.
\textsuperscript{19}Nashe, \textit{Pierce Pennilesse his Supplication to the Diuell}, F4v.
\textsuperscript{20}Cerasano, “Edward Alleyn, the New Model Actor,” 47.
\textsuperscript{21}Vickers, 244–67.
\textsuperscript{22}Greene (attrib.), \textit{The Defence of Conny-catching}, C3v.
June of 1594. In contrast, Alleyn was the most renowned actor of the day and leader of the two most successful acting troupes, Lord Strange’s and the Lord Admiral’s.

1.2. An Upstart Crow, Beautified with Our Feathers

It seems that the allusion to, “an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers”, instead of pointing literary scholars towards the identity of the target, has led them on a 240 year wild goose chase, where the goose has been a charge of plagiarism, or revisionism, or social climbing, or callous behaviour, or something else—nobody can agree what, and J.S. Smart wished it had never been written. When understood as the writer intended it, primarily as a means of identifying the man under consideration, the contradictions resolve themselves with greater ease.

It has never been claimed, to my knowledge, that the wording of this phrase singles out Shakespeare, except through some elusive offence he may have committed. However, as a pointed reference to Edward Alleyn, it is tailor-made.

Firstly, Edward Alleyn was associated with a crow through the name of his family business. His father, also called Edward, was an inn-keeper, as well as an official porter to Queen Elizabeth. In 1566, the year of Edward junior’s birth, he purchased an inn at Bishopsgate called “The Pie”. Consequently, the actor Edward Alleyn was born and raised, “at the sign of the Pie”. Later, his brother John, on retirement from the stage, took over the running of the inn, and it remained in the family for the next 200 years. It hardly needs be said that the inn was not named for a meat pie, but a magpie, a type of crow. Thus, the Alleyn family were firmly associated with their business, and Edward Alleyn would have been proud that his birth and his family name were both connected to the sign of the Pie.

The reference to a crow “beautified with our feathers” and “garnished with our colours” leads to Aesop’s fable about that dapper little fellow graculus, correctly translated as a jackdaw, but rendered by Caxton in 1484 as a jay, that decked himself in the plumes of a peacock:

Of the Iaye and of the pecok

None ought to were and putte on hym the gowne of other / wherof Esope reheerculth to vs suche a fable Of a Iaye full of vayne glory / whiche took and putte on hym the fethers of a pecok / and with them he aourned / and arayed hym self well / And whanne he was wel dressyd and arayed / by his oultrecuydaunce or ouerwenynge wold haue gone and conuersed amongst the pecoks / and disprayse alle his felawes / And whale the pecoks knewe that he was not of theyr kynd / they anone plucked of alle his fethers / And smote and bete hym by suche maner / where ben thy fayre fethers / whiche thou haddest but late a gone / Hast thou no shame ne vergoyne to come in oure companye / And thenne alle the byrdes came vpon hym / and smote & bete hym / sayenge thus to hym / yf thou haddest be content of thyn owne vestymentes / thou haddest not come to this vylony / Therfor hit appereth that hit is not good to

23Chambers, Elizabethan Stage, vol. 2, 199.
24Fuller, vol. 2, 223.
25Salkeld, 71.
26In Alleyn’s records, there are several references to family property adjoining “Pye Alley” in Bishopsgate. This is labelled “Magpye Alley” in John Strype’s 1720 edition of Stow’s Survey of London (1598). Warner, ed., 122, 150, 167.
27According to Cooper’s Dictionary, “They are much deceyued that haue taken Graculus for a laye.” Cooper, at Graculus.
were another mans gowne / For suche weren fayre gownes and fayr gyrdels of gold that haue theyr teeth cold at home.28

Following Aesop and Caxton, it is apparent that the “vpstart” actor is full of vain glory, overweening pride and outrecuidance. He wears “another man’s gowne” without shame or modesty and should, by all rights be stripped from it, and beaten for his insolence. This is exactly the sentiment Greene portrays in Francesco’s Fortunes (1590) where, through the voice of Tully, he berates the actor Roscius:

Why Roscius, art thou proud with Esop’s Crow, being pranct with the glorie of others feathers? of thy selfe thou canst say nothing, and if the Cobler hath taught thee to say Aue Caesar, disdain not thy tutor, because thou pratest in a Kings chamber: what sentence thou utterest on the stage, flows from the censure of our wittes; and what sentence or conceipte of the inuention the people applaud for excellent, that comes from the secrets of our knowledge. I graunt your action, though it be a kind of mechanical labour; yet wel done tis worthie of praise: but you worthlesse, if for so small a toy you waxe proud.29

The tutor here is the playwright, and it is he who gives the higher-level language, philosophy and classical allusions to the unlearned player. The actor’s merely mechanical skills are nothing to boast and strut about. Clearly the speaker believes the daily applause has gone to the head of the vain actor.

At this point, it should be understood that the name Roscius was repeatedly and specifically connoted with Edward Alleyn. As noted above, Thomas Nashe likened “Ned Allen” to Roscius and Æsop in his Pierce Pennilesse, which was registered for publication just a month before Groats-worth.30 In 1599, John Weever likened Alleyn on the London stage to Roscius on the stage of Rome.31 Ben Jonson again compared Alleyn to both Roscius and Aesopus in his Epigram LXXXIX (1616).32 In Thomas Heywood’s preface to the 1633 printing of Marlowe’s Jew of Malta, he stated that Alleyn was the “best of Actors” and a, “Proteus for shapes, and Roscius for a tongue”.33 A later reference comes from Fuller, who also described Alleyn as, “The Roscius of our age”.34 These lines make plain the contemporary status of Alleyn and his consistent identification with Roscius.

Aside from the parallel reference in Francesco’s Fortunes, there is a very specific reason why Greene would have used Aesop’s crow strutting in peacock feathers to identify Alleyn. Carroll points out that Greene was prone to play upon the names of those he wanted to send up:

Codes for names - that is, near-names - are recognizable throughout this text. “Roberto” is used early on in Groats-worth for Robert Greene; “gracer” for Christopher Marlowe; “St. George” for George Peele; “burres” for the Burbage theatrical family; “strange” for Lord Strange’s Men; “Puppets” for Pope and Phillips; and doubtless others we have missed. Such is how the names of real individuals are represented in the literature of both praise and blame in the period: indirectly, by suggestion.35

28Caxton, lj [Fable xv].
29Greene, Francesco’s Fortunes, B4v-C1.
30In this instance, Aesope refers not to the ancient Greek fable writer, but the actor Aesopus who excelled in acting Tragedies, just as Roscius excelled in Comedies.
31Weever, iv, 23.
32Jonson, 793.
33Heywood, Bv.
34Fuller, vol. 2, 223.
35Carroll, “Reading the 1592 Groatsworth Attack on Shakespeare,” 277.
So how might Greene have signalled the name Alleyn? The most obvious means is to split it in two: All-eyn(e) and hence “All-eyes”.

This is suggestive for it immediately leads to classical mythology and the giant Argus, who was called Πανοπτης (Panoptes)—“All eyes”. Argus, on account of his acute vision, was set by Juno to watch over the nymph Io, who had been transformed into a heifer in order to protect her from the advances of Jove. While performing this role, Argus was entranced and slain by Mercury. In death, something remarkable happened to his many eyes, as we read in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (Golding translation):

> Yet would not Juno suffer so hir Heirdmans eyes decay:
> But in hir painted Peacocks tayle and feathers did them set,
> Where they remayne lyke precious stones and glaring eyes as yet.

Thus, when Aesop’s crow is pranked in peacock tail feathers, he is effectively brandishing the name “All-eyne”. Aesop’s crow therefore constitutes a bespoke reference to Edward Alleyn (Figure 1).

There seems to be confirmation of this link from the pen of Gabriel Harvey. Edward Alleyn owed his fame to playing the magnificent roles that Christopher Marlowe created for him, and the two were very closely associated. Just eight months after *Groats-worth* came out, at the end of May 1593, Marlowe met with his fateful “reckoning” in Deptford. Reflecting on this sensational turn of events, Gabriel Harvey published, *A New Letter of Notable Contents With a straunge sonet, intituled Gorgon* (1593). In the gloss to his sonnet he wrote:

> The graund Dissease disdain’d his to ade Conceit,
> And smiling at his tamberlaine contempt,
> Sternely struck-home the peremptory stroke.
> He that nor feared God, nor dreaded Diu’ll,
> Nor ought admired, but his wondrous selfe:
> Like Iunos gawdy Bird, that prowddly stares
> On glittring fan of his triumphant taile.

Thus, Harvey recognised a direct connection between Marlowe and the many staring eyes on a peacock’s tail. It seems to be a pointed reference, both to the playwright as peacock, and, by association, to the figure of Tamberlaine on stage who sported his plumes, Alleyne.

Furthermore, in the spring and early summer of 1592 there was a play running at the Rose Theatre that Henslowe called “harey the vj” and is generally believed to be *I Henry 36*Although contemporaries more commonly used “Allen”, the actor invariably signed his name “Alleyn”. See, the comment from Greg: *Greg, Henslowe’s Diary*, xxxi. From time to time, Henslowe, John Alleyn and the scribe who wrote for Alleyn’s wife Joan also used this spelling.

37Ovid, lines 901–903.

38The fact that Edward Alleyn was notably tall marks an additional similarity with Argus, who was a giant. See, Cerasano, “Edward Alleyn’s Ring,” 67–8.

39Grosart, 297.
VI. In the middle of the third act, Joan la Pucelle explicitly connects Talbot with the plucked tail of a peacock:

Let frantic Talbot triumph for a while
And like a peacock sweep along his tail;
We’ll pull his plumes and take away his train,

(1 Henry VI, 3.3.5–7)40

A few lines later she reaffirms this peacock allusion, “There goes the Talbot, with his colours spread”. Thomas Nashe, in Pierce Pennilesse (1592), drops a substantial hint that it was Alleyn who played the role of Talbot:41

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40Craig, ed., 517.
41Warren Chernaik writes, “Nashe … singles out as example Alleyn’s performance as the heroic, doomed warrior Talbot”. Chernaik, 193. Chernaik also cites Craig’s opinion that these lines spoken by Joan La Pucelle were likely written by Marlowe. Craig and Kinney, eds., 57–68.
How would it have ioyed braue Talbot (the terror of the French) to thinke that after he had lyne two hundred yeares in his Tombe, hee should triumphe againe on the Stage, and haue his bones newe embalm’d with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least, (at seuerall times) who in the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding. (F3r)

It was just shortly thereafter he paid “due commendation” to the pre-éminent English tragedian of the day, “famous Ned Allen” (see above).

Returning to the passage quoted from Francesco’s Fortunes, the context of “Aesop’s crow” is further honed in the direction of Alleyn, “why Roscius, art thou proud with Esop’s Crow … and if the Cobler hath taught thee to say Aue Caesar, disdain not thy tutor, because thou protest in a Kings chamber”. Although this conceit originated in a classical tale from the days of Roscius, the contemporary twist is that it focussed on Alleyn’s partnership with Marlowe. Marlowe was referred to as “the cobbler” by Greene and others because he was a cobbler’s eldest son, and thus Alleyn, who was taught to say his words, became “the Cobbler’s crow”.

The particular relevance of the Cobbler’s crow coming out with “Aue Caesar” lies, as Fleay first observed, in a line from the play Edward III. At the end of the first scene of that play, which takes place in “A Room of State in the Palace”, and hence “a king’s chamber”, Prince Edward utters those precise words:

As cheerfull sounding to my youthfull spleene,
This tumult is of warres increasing broyles,
As at the Coronation of a king,
The ioyfull clamours of the people are,
When Aue Caesar they pronounce aloud;

(1.160–164)

Edward III is a play of long disputed authorship. The recent Arden edition by Proudfoot and Bennett posits Shakespeare as a reviser in the mid 1590s of an original text written by one or more others. Those others they suggest as Marlowe, Kyd, Nashe and Peele in roughly that order of probability. A.D. Wraight presented a case for Marlowe’s sole authorship of the play with a provocative and yet intriguing thesis that it was commissioned in the autumn of 1588 by the Lord Admiral as part of the Armada victory celebrations. Support for Marlowe’s authorial presence also comes from Merriam’s

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42The most well-known source is, Macrobius, Saturnalia, 2, 4. 29–30. However, an earlier reference comes from Pliny, Natural History, Book 10, lx; see the online version (Bostock and Riley, 1855) at Perseus Tufts: http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:latinLit:phi0978.phi001.perseus-eng1:10.60 [accessed 11 November 2018].
43Nashe makes a similar allusion in Pierce Penniless: “Yet am I not against it, that these men by their mechanicall trades should come to be Sparage Gentlemen (Note: Sparagus a floure that never groweth but throgh a mans dong.), and chuff-headed Burghomasters: but that better places should bee possessed by coystrels, and the Coblers crowe for crying but Aue Coesar, bee more esteemed than rarer birds that haue warbled sweeter notes vnrewarded.” Br.
44Greene alluded to Marlowe by the term “cobbler” in Menaphon. See Riggs, 32.
45Fleay, 258.
46Anon. As Sig. numbers are insufficient in the quarto, the line numbering corresponds to that used in, Proudfoot and Bennett.
47Proudfoot and Bennett, 80.
48Wraight, 65–108.
computational analysis; and, most significantly for the present thesis, Segarra and others recently gave the “Aue Caesar” scene to Marlowe on stylometric grounds. If Marlowe was behind the original creation of the play, it’s a very good bet that Edward Alleyn would have taken a major role in it. If so, he would most likely have taken either the lead of King Edward (745 lines), or the more glamorous role of Prince Edward (278 lines), who rises to outshine his father by the end of the play. Therefore, Greene’s reference to “Aue Caesar” prated by the Cobbler’s crow in a king’s chamber is certainly consonant with Edward Alleyn playing The Black Prince in Edward III. Is there a more coherent explanation?

1.3. A Summary Interlude by Thomas Nashe

For a coetaneous interpretation of the “vpstart Crow” slur, it is necessary to turn to the one person who was close enough to the “coyle” attendant on Henry Chettle’s perilous adventure in print that he found it necessary both to issue a personal denial of involvement and to demand that Chettle exculpate him, too. This was, of course, Thomas Nashe. In the very same month that Greene died and Groats-worth was put to press, he was busy writing an entertainment for the Archbishop of Canterbury called Summers Last Will and Testament. That he might have used this opportunity to comment on the biggest news of the year would not be strange. In fact, far stranger would be any avoidance of an issue about which he seems to have known far more than he was openly admitting.

The story in Summers Last Will and Testament concerns the succession and legacy of Summer, the personification of the dying season. On one level the subtext of the play seems to be about the succession and legacy of Robert Greene. Greene was dying as the play was being written, and he was England’s first ever professional writer of prose—a position that Nashe clearly coveted. In many ways, Nashe was Greene’s natural heir, and at that moment his hopes must have been high because his most ambitious work to date, Pierce Penniless, had been registered at the Stationers’ Office the previous month and would be hitting the book-sellers at Pauls as he wrote the play.

Green is the colour of summer, and so there is an obvious connection between Greene and the personification of Summer in the play. Furthermore, in these lines, written that September, Greene and Summer seem almost interchangeable:

Summer I was, I am not as I was:
Haruest and age haue whit’ned my greene head:
On Autumne now and Winter must I leane.

50 Segarra et al., 250.
51 In his introduction to Greene’s Menaphon, Thomas Nashe may refer to Alleyn’s role in the play when he equates Roscius with a Caesar amongst the actors - leading “a rabble of counterfets”. This passage has particular relevance here as the figure of Roscius is undoubtedly the prototype of the “player-patron” who employs Roberto to write plays in the main story of Groats-worth. Both Prince Edward and King Edward are associated with Caesar in the play: see, Proudfoot and Bennett, n160–4 on 156.
52 McKerrow, 418.
53 That Nashe conceived his own literary career in terms of a progression through the seasons can be seen in Schwyzzer’s observations: Schwyzzer, 583.
54 Shakespeare reminds us of this in his seasonal sonnet XII, “And Sommers greene all girded vp in sheaues”.
Needs must he fall, whom none but foes vphold.
Thus must the happiest man haue his blacke day.

*Omnibus vna manet nox, & calcanda semel via lethi.*

This month haue I layne languishing a bed,
Looking eche hour to yeeld my life, and throne;^55

It should be stressed that this identification remains at the level of a sub-text, and that the character of Summer is not overtly that of Robert Greene. The other green season, Ver (spring), is presented rather more like the stereotypical Greene—as an embodiment of wantonness and prodigality. In this, the character echoes the voice of the grasshopper in *The Ant and the Grasshopper*, which forms the concluding passage in *Groats-worth*.

My wretched end may warne Greene springing youth,
To vse delights as toyes that will deceiue,
And scorne the world before the world them leaue:
For all worlds trust, is ruine without ruth.
Then blest are they that like the toyling Ant,
Prouide in time gainst winters wofull want.^^56

After the appearance of Ver in Nashe’s play, and the minor character of Solstitium, the next to be called before Summer is Sol, a “two-leg’d Sunne”. This is where things become interesting because Sol is described by Autumn as a “Saucie, vpstart Iacke”. If Jack is taken for a jackdaw, the epithet is essentially that of an “vpstart Crow” who supposes far more than he ought. Moreover, this is the specific variety of crow with a proverbial weakness for the tail-feathers of peacocks. Sol thereby qualifies as a mirror of the player attacked in *Groats-worth*.

Before examining the character of Sol more closely, it is necessary first to confirm the Jack/jackdaw connection. That the name Jack could portend a jackdaw is affirmed in the OED, which cites the following lines from a 1651 edition of *Aesop’s Fables*:

I stand the true example of vain pride,
Since I the Jayish nation did despise,
Not only noble Birds will me deride,
But I shall be a scorne to Jacks and Pies”.^57

While this example is later than Nashe’s play, there appear to be earlier instances of the usage. In Marlowe’s *Edward II*, Piers Gaveston is described by Mortimer Junior as a

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^56Greene, *Greenes, Groats-vvorth of Witte*, F3V.

^57Ogilby, 72.
“dapper Jack” and the context makes it almost certain he has Aesop’s proud jackdaw in mind:

But this I scorne, that one so baselie borne,
Should by his soueraignes fauour grow so pert,
And riote it with the treasure of the realme,
While souldiers mutinie for want of paie,
He weares a lords reuenewe on his back,
And Midas like he iets it in the court,
With base outlandish cullions at his heeles,
Whose proud fantastick liueries make such show,
As if that Proteus god of shapes appearde,
I haue not seene a dapper Iack so briske.\textsuperscript{58}

Interestingly, the younger Mortimer goes on to say, “I will not yeeld to any such vpstart”. Thus Piers Gaveston could even form the prototype of our “vpstart Crow”. The term “dapper Jack” had some wider currency in the period. George-a-Greene, in the eponymous play attributed to Robert Greene, calls his enemy Mannering a “proud dapper Jack”.\textsuperscript{59} and, tellingly, Nashe himself uses the expression in \textit{Pierce Pennilessse} when describing “The nature of an vpstart”:

You shall see a dapper Iacke, that hath been but ouer at Deepe [Dieppe], wring his face round about, as a man would stir vp a mustard pot, & talke English through y’ teeth, like \textit{Iaques Scabd-hams, or Monsieur Mingo de Moustrap}: when (poore slaue) he hath but dipt his bread in wilde Boares greace, and come home againe.\textsuperscript{60}

The dapper connection with corvids crops up more explicitly in the well-known, sixteenth century ballad \textit{The Image of Ypocresye} (c.1533), where the author satirises the office of priests, whom he describes, “As dapper as a Crowe, / As perte as any pye”.\textsuperscript{61} Therefore, it seems a reasonable inference to equate the “Saucie, vpstart Iacke” of \textit{Summer’s Last Will and Testament} with the strutting “vpstart Crow” of Greene’s \textit{Groats-worth of Witte}.\textsuperscript{62}

The scenes involving Sol offer some confirmation of the identification. There is conflict between Summer (Greene) and his vassal Sol, and the latter is accused of burning and drying up the land. This parallels the crimes of \textit{Iohannes fac totum}, who usurps the role of the professional playwrights and deprives them of their rightful dues. One accusation that Winter directs against Sol seems to be particularly pointed. He says, “Greene

\textsuperscript{58}Marlowe. \textit{Edward II}, Q 1594, 696–705.
\textsuperscript{59}I, ii, 87, in Churton Collins, ed., 185.
\textsuperscript{60}Nashe, \textit{Pierce Penniless}, Sig. B2.
\textsuperscript{61}Furnivall, ed., 184. Lines 95–6.
\textsuperscript{62}One further reference that seems relevant comes in \textit{The Merrie Conceited Iests of George Peele} (1607, 27–9), where Peele teaches a Tapster “a groats-worth of wit” and mocks that, “the proudest Jacke in England cannot justifie thou art not worth a groat.” It may also be relevant that the Tapster’s inn is located at Pye-corner, and therefore one is tempted to wonder if the name of the inn was being hinted at, or even the name of the inn-keeper.
Iuy-bushes at the Vintners doores / He withers, and deuoureth all their sap”.63 The first line hones in on the image of the infamously carousing Greene, and even of the “Garland of Bayes” with which he was reputedly crowned as he lay dying;64 while the second reflects the accusation in Groats-worth that the player has used him and then, in his hour of need, left him to die. It has to be said, though, that Nashe does allow Sol to defend himself with the words, “I withered no greene boughes”.

As to who Sol represents, a significant clue comes from a study by Per Sivefors, who identifies strong Marlovian influences in the play and frequent allusions to Tamburlaine and Edward II.65 In particular, he writes, “In Summer’s Last Will and Testament it is mainly two characters that seem to be full of Marlovian echoes: Sol and Back-winter”. In his analysis of Sol, Sivefors finds strong connections to the figure of Tamburlaine:

Sol seems to take on the precise attributes of an oriental upstart/conqueror, of Marlowe’s Tamburlaine: ‘He overloads his carre with Orient gemmes, / And reynes his fiery horses with rich pearle’ (494–5). In its suggestion of opulence, Autumnne’s imagery combines the ‘oriental pearls’ that Marlowe invokes in Tamburlaine, Pt. 2 and elsewhere with Saturn’s chariot ‘gilt with fire’ (4.3.126), which Tamburlaine compares his own to. However, while Tamburlaine is frequently likened to the sun in Marlowe’s play, he is seen as a competitor to the sun rather than as the sun itself. From this perspective, it is interesting that in Summer’s Last Will and Testament Sol, besides impersonating the sun-god Apollo, also seems to take on the qualities of Apollo’s son, Phaethon, the overreacher who undertook to drive his father’s chariot but lost control over it and was killed by Jove. . . . Phaethon is of course frequently mentioned by Tamburlaine and other Marlovian overreachers.66

It hardly needs be said that Tamburlaine and other Marlovian overreachers were all brought before the public in the person of a single actor, Edward Alleyn. It was Alleyn who made these characters the stage icons of the day, and therefore it is Alleyn who is most logically figured in the character of Sol.

There are other indications that Alleyn lies behind Sol, too. Autumnn says, “He termes himselfe the god of Poetry, And setteth wanton songs vnto the Lute”.67 In this context, we know that Alleyn was a lutist. In one legal document his name is given as “Edward Allen of London, musicion”,68 and his letters show that he took his lute and lute book with him when he toured with his company.69 His wide musical tastes are indicated by documents in his possession ranging from a hymn written out in his own hand to the copy of the somewhat wanton ballad, The Bonny Wench of Addlington.70 As for writing verse, this is a matter that will be addressed a little later.

Perhaps the clinching argument for identifying Sol with Alleyn comes when Winter says of him, “Let him not talke; for he hath words at will, / And wit to make the baddest matter good”.71 This is an exact paraphrase of Nashe’s description of Alleyn

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63Nashe, A Pleasant Comedie, Sig. D1v.
64Harvey, 172–3. Ivy was both sacred to Bacchus and traditionally used to wreath poets: “Oftyn Poetes were crowned with luye: in token of noble witte & scharpe, for the yuye is alwei grene.” Trevisa, trans., xvii. liii.
65Sivefors, 65–87.
66Ibid., 75–6.
67This may have been something of a sly dig on account of a traditional adage cited by Erasmus, “A jackdaw has no business with a lute”. Erasmus, C3.
69Cerasano, “Alleyn’s Jig,” 69.
71Nashe, A Pleasant Comedie, Sig. D2
just two months later in Strange Newes (1592). He wrote there, “Signior Immeritò [Spencer] … thinking his very name (as the name of Ned Allen on the common stage) was able to make an ill matter good”.72

In September 1592, how many famous actors of Tamburlaine and other Marlovian overreachers could also be cited by Nashe for having, “[the] wit to make the baddest matter good”? The pool is not large.

1.4. An Vpstart

The descriptive term “vpstart” merits its own analysis. As applied to Shakespeare, it has little traction except by reason of circular argument. We cannot, for example, use the assumption that Shakespeare had risen to prominence by this time to assert that Greene’s term “vpstart” would have applied to him, and thence use this label as evidence to prove the correctness of the original assumption. Whilst its centrality to the “Shakespeare legend” is unimpugnable, there is no independent evidence to support it.

The first open acknowledgement of Shakespeare’s fame as a playwright came fully six years after Groats-worth was published, when Francis Meres recognised him as the “most excellent” writer for comedy and tragedy. While this compliment did come with a substantial backlist of twelve noteworthy plays, the length of the list suggests that fame as a dramatic author came rather slowly to him. Therefore, in terms of being a writer for the stage, it is hard to see how Greene could have viewed him as such a potent and notorious threat in the summer of 1592.

It might be objected that Shakespeare was actually well-known prior to Meres’ mention in 1598, although this was in a rather different context. In June of 1593, the long poem Venus and Adonis was published under his name, and it became an instant and enduring hit with a young, well-educated readership. However, this initial work, described by Shakespeare as “the first heire of my invention”, is clearly too late to warrant commentary in Groats-worth, and even if the poem had circulated in manuscript among Shakespeare’s friends a year or two earlier (for which no evidence exists), it would neither have made him famous, nor an object of scorn. A more telling objection is that the author of the risqué, Ovidian epyllion was a witty and sophisticated writer who clearly, in his first published work, stood shoulder to shoulder with Christopher Marlowe at the height of his powers. By contrast, the actor who was mauled in Groats-worth for sticking his nose into the business of professional playwrights is mocked for having presumption in excess of ability.

Greene disdained unpolished writers. The previous year, he had lambasted the author of Faire Em the Miller’s Daughter of Manchester for various (un)literary transgressions:

And he that can not write true Englishe without the helpe of Clearkes of parish Churches, will needes make him selfe the father of interludes. O tis a iollie matter when a man hath a familiar stile and can endite a whole yeare and neuer be beholding to art? but to bring Scripture to proue any thing he sayes, and kill it dead with the text in a trifling subiect of loue, I tell you is no small peece of cunning.73

72Nashe, Strange Newes, Sig. G1.
73Greene, Greenes Farewell to Folly, A3v.
The author of *Faire Em* (1593) was anonymous, but it has been thought to be the work of either Anthony Munday or Robert Wilson. It has also been argued that it was the work of Edward Alleyn. Whoever it was, he seems to be as unqualified to write, in Greene’s estimation, as the overly-confident player of the warning letter. To mistake have-a-go hacks of this ilk with the uncommon genius who created *Venus and Adonis*, not to mention sophisticated plays like *Love’s Labor Lost* or *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, is akin to confusing the rustic piping of Pan with the lyric melodies of Apollo. The Shakespeare of record simply doesn’t fit the mould of the Greene’s blank-verse bodger.

There are firmer grounds for considering Edward Alleyn an upstart. Alleyn’s portrayal of Tamburlaine in 1587 not only shot him to stardom at the young age of twenty-one, it was also a catalytic moment in the history of English theatre. Susan Cerasano put it thus:

> The popularity of trademark roles, such as Tamburlaine the Great, influenced not only the dramatic legacy inherited by the playwrights who succeeded Marlowe. They were central to Alleyn’s rise to prominence, and crucial in his creation of a professional legacy that eventually overshadowed his career, shaping the repertory of the Admiral’s Men throughout the 1590s and beyond.

Aside from his domination of the stage, Cerasano also points to Alleyn’s remarkable business presence:

> Alleyn – like James Burbage, a joiner who owned The Theatre, or Francis Langley, a goldsmith who built the Swan Playhouse – represented the emergent class of ‘new men’ whose aspirations carried them well beyond their origins, to the consternation of many. . . Making their mark without the advantage of a university education or privileged social background, entrepreneurs such as Alleyn were shrewd, aggressive and fiercely competitive. As has often been remarked, Christopher Marlowe’s plays represent pursuits of power and passion. So does Alleyn’s biography.

Alleyn was smart enough to invest the proceeds of his acting, as well as the family money he had inherited, in those parts of the theatre business more profitable than the writing or performing of plays. According to Andrew Gurr, he seems to have personally owned, at various times, the books of all Marlowe’s plays, some of Robert Greene’s best-known works and as many as 65 play books in total. He was a sharer in Worcester’s Men, Lord Strange’s Men and the Lord Admiral’s Men. He split profits with Henslowe at the Rose Theatre and later, in partnership, they built both the Hope and the Fortune. By these means, he rose from carrying his “playing Fardels afootbacke” to great wealth and influence in a very short space of time. To a disgruntled “maister of two universities”, he must have been the very epitome of an “vpstart”.

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74 Logan and Smith, eds., 216–7.
75 Wraight, Ch. 7.
76 With all deference to Muriel Bradbrook, I simply do not find her argument that *Venus and Adonis*, “represents a counter-challenge of nobility by a common player,” credible. How can a common player who patches together some laughably unlearned plays metamorphose in a matter of months into the exquisitely accomplished author of *Venus and Adonis*? Bradbrook, 63.
77 Cerasano, “Edward Alleyn, the New Model Actor,” 55–6.
78 Gurr, “Did Shakespeare Own His Own Playbooks?” 212–5, 219.
80 Alleyn’s wealth far exceeded that of his contemporaries. In 1588, Richard Tarlton left something over £700. Richard Burbage bequeathed around £300 in land in 1619. Shakespeare’s estate isn’t known, but the combination of New Place, his Stratford lands and tithes and his share in the Globe probably totalled no more than £1000. By contrast Alleyn set up The College of God’s Gift at an initial cost of about £10,000 and had other properties able to supply
1.5. A “Tygers Hart Wrapt in a Players Hyde”

It is perfectly clear that this line points to a famous actor, the evidence for which, on Shakespeare’s behalf in 1592, is conspicuously absent. However, as a pointed (mis)quote from Shakespeare’s play 3 Henry VI, it has been taken to supply self-evident affirmation of Shakespeare’s identity as the man under attack. There are, however, two flaws in this otherwise facile interpretation.

The first problem is that the play we know as 3 Henry VI dates from 31 years after the event, when it was published in the First Folio. In 1592, the play with which it was associated was The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York, and it may not have been written by Shakespeare at all. Several, well-regarded scholars of an earlier generation, including Charles Tucker-Brooke, Allison Gaw, John Bakeless and Felix Schelling, believed it was all or mostly Marlowe’s work.81 More recent research with computer and corpus-based stylometry has confirmed Marlowe’s authorial presence in all three of the Henry VI plays. The New Oxford Shakespeare (2016), for example, attributes the plays jointly to Marlowe and Shakespeare.82 Whether this would have involved co-authorship or later revision of Marlowe’s original scripts by Shakespeare isn’t entirely clear, although Thomas Merriam inclines towards the latter view: “Shakespeare’s incorporation and revision of original writing by Marlowe is a possibility which would go some way towards making sense of the evidence at hand.”83 A similar study by Segara and others gave Act I to Marlowe, although in the fourth scene (“Tygers hart”) they could not distinguish Marlowe from Shakespeare. Their overall conclusion was that, “The presence of Marlowe in these plays, however, is undeniable”.84 While the foregoing studies do not prove that the “Tygers hart” line is Marlowe’s, they do replace the prevailing blind certainty of Shakespeare’s penmanship with a large and legitimate question mark.

The second objection concerns the fact that the “Tygers hart” line could only have been chosen because it was well-known to Greene’s readership. However, the play was not printed until 1595, and even then, there was no authorial attribution. Thus, it is unlikely the theatre-going public would have known, or necessarily even have cared, who wrote it. This would be especially true if it was penned by a previously obscure, junior writer, like Shakespeare would have been, or indeed if it was knocked out by a team of company writers, as seems to have been the case with 1 Henry VI.85 In fact, the line would have been very strongly associated with the actor who delivered it. This is a point that Ros Barber has made recently.86 She takes the famous movie line, “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn”, and asks whether we connect it with a stony-hearted Clark Gable, or with its author Sidney Howard—that is if it shouldn’t really be credited to Margaret Mitchell? Similarly, if we hear, “Go ahead, make my day”, do we think of Clint Eastwood playing tough cop Harry Callahan, or do we think of the screenwriter Charles B. Pierce—or perhaps even the team of Sandy Howard, Gary Sherman, Robert Vincent O’Neill and

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82Taylor et al.
84Segarra et al., 246–9.
85See for example, Taylor, 145–205.
86Barber.
Kenneth Peter who wrote the original line that Pierce seems to have borrowed from their movie of the previous year?87 Film stars are famous with audiences while the scriptwriters are all but invisible.

Since Greene substitutes “a Players hyde” for “a woman’s hide”, we may be fairly sure that he intended it, and it was understood by his readers, as a reference to the actor who spoke the line. Moreover, the line itself must have been as memorable in its day as the more recent examples cited above. Allison Gaw described it as, “The opening line of the climactic accusation in perhaps the most powerful speech of invective that had, at that time, ever been heard on the English stage.”88 The role of Richard Plantagenet in The True Tragedy, therefore, demanded an actor capable of delivering a performance of blistering emotional intensity. Edward Alleyn, whose histrionic gifts were second to none, would, arguably, be the most obvious choice to play this part. Whoever the actor was, he must have been the Clark Gable or the Clint Eastwood of his day. Nobody has ever claimed as much for Shakespeare.

There is another indication pointing in the direction of Edward Alleyn. Coming directly after the “vpstart Crow” reference, this line can be seen as a second allusion to the “Argus—Alleyn” association. In the Biblioteca of Apollodorus there is a second story about about Argus: “Agenor had a son Argus, the one who is called the All-seeing. He had eyes in the whole of his body, and being exceedingly strong he killed the bull that ravaged Arcadia and clad himself in its hide.”89 Thus, the mythological character who was “All-eyne” was famed for going about dressed in an animal’s hide. This was the self-same character whose eyes stare out from the peacock feathers appropriated by Aesop’s crow. Two concordant allusions arising from consecutive phrases of Greene’s identifying sentence tend to reinforce confidence in the interpretation.

1.6. Supposes He is As Well Able to Bombast Out a Blanke Verse as the Best of You

While “bombast” initially suggests a bombastic orator, the last five words of the phrase make it clear that the matter under attack is focused more on the activity undertaken by Greene’s quondam acquaintances: the writing of plays. Since Shakespeare was primarily a playwright and Alleyn an actor, this evidence appears to point to the former. Once again, the actual picture is less clear-cut than it at first seems.

As seen above, twelve plays were attributed to Shakespeare by 1598.90 If it is assumed that he was writing at a rate of two plays per year, this would take him back to around 1592. If it was further assumed that he was responsible for other plays, such as the original versions of the Henry VI trilogy and anonymous works like Arden of Faversham, or that he wrote at a slower rate, it would certainly take him back beyond 1592. These perfectly reasonable assumptions mean that the phrase in question could be applied to Shakespeare.

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88Gaw, 157.
89Apollodorus.
90Meres. The list includes, “his Gentlemen of Verona, his Errors, his Love Labours Lost, his Love Labours Won, his Midsummer’s Night Dream, & his Merchant of Venice; for tragedy, his Richard the 2, Richard the 3, Henry the 4, King John, Titus Andronicus, and his Romeo and Juliet".
However, this is not the same thing as saying they could only apply to Shakespeare. There were many other writers following Christopher Marlowe’s exemplum and constructing their comedies and tragedies in blank verse.

Along with the innovative employment of iambic pentameter, another feature of Marlowe’s groundbreaking Tamburlaine is that, through the part of its central character, it took bombastic speech to heights perhaps never before reached. From “Threatning the world with high astounding termes”, promised in the Prologue, to holding “the Fates bound fast in yron chaines, And with my hand turninge Fortunes wheel about”, almost every line spoken by “the scourge of God” is inflated and filled out with rich rhetorical stuffing. It was an effect that Greene himself noted in Perimedes the Blacksmith (1588) when he referred to, “Euerie worde filling the mouth like the faburden of Bo-Bell”. And, while Greene rued that he wasn’t able to make his verses “iet on the stage” like Marlowe’s, it didn’t prevent other writers from emulating the style to greater effect.

Thomas Nashe, in his introduction to Greene’s Menaphon (1589), made pointed, and mocking, commentary on the fashion:

I am not ignorant how eloquent our gowned age is growen of late, so that euerie mœchanicall mate abhorres the english he was borne too, and plucks with a solemnne periphrasis his vt vales from the inkhorne: which I impute not so much to the perfection of arts as to the seruile imitation of vainglorious tragœdians, who contend not so seriouslie to excell in action as to embowell the clowdes in a speach of comparison; thinking themselues more than initiated in poets immortalitie if they but once get Boreas by the beard, and the heauenlie bull by the deaw-lap. But herein I cannot so fully bequeath them to follie, as their idiote art-masters, that intrude themselues to our eares as the alcumists of eloquence, who (mounted on the stage of arrogance) think to outbraue better pens with the swelling bumbast of a bragging blanke verse. Indeed, it may be the ingrafted overflow of some kilcow conceipt, that overcloieth their imagination with a more than drunken resolution, beeing not extemporall in the inuention of anie other meanes to vent their manhood, commits the digestion of their cholerick incumbrances to the spacious volubilitie of a drumming decasillabon.

In this tirade there is explicit reference to the “bombasting of blank verse”, and it would seem more than likely that the author of Groats-worth had this passage in mind when impugning the “vpstart Crow”. Assuming this to be the case, the context of Nashe’s assault is revealing. The “idiote art-masters” outbraving “better pens” are conflated with “mœchanicall mates” who write, and “vainglorious tragœdians” who extemporise, portentous and flatulent language. Since contemporary references to blank verse and bombast radiate out from a common nexus in Tamburlaine, there is a strong association with Christopher Marlowe and the “vainglorious tragœdian” who trumpeted his lines. The conflation raises the question as to whether the “mœchanicall” actor Alleyn might have attempted to outbrave better pens with some bombastic trifles of his own.

On one level, the answer is quite straightforward. In the Alleyn papers at Dulwich College, there is a manuscript version of most of the lines spoken by Orlando in Greene’s Orlando Furioso. This is something of a rarity as it is the only surviving manuscript copy of an actor’s part from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. W.W. Greg, who made a close study of the document, noted that although the part was written out by a

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91Greene, Perimedes the Blacke-smith, A3r.
92Nashe, “To the Gentlemen Students of both Univeristies,” 1.
company scribe, there were additions to it in Alleyn’s hand, “On consideration, therefore, I
incline to believe that all the alterations and corrections in the part which are clearly not by
the original scribe are by Alleyn.” 93 This was clearly the script that Alleyn used to learn his
lines, and it is equally clear that he freely made creative changes, additions and alterations
to the script. While these number just fifteen in total, they do include one full line of blank
verse. 94 In this sense, Alleyn was editing and composing blank verse. What’s more, since
these were Robert Greene’s precious lines, there is at least the potential for hard feelings
and a sensitive scholarly nose put out of joint.

A more substantial instance of Alleyn’s “meddling” may lie in what is believed to be
Greene’s final play, A Knack to Know a Knave, which was in performance at the Rose
in the summer of 1592. Hanspeter Born suggested that the anger expressed in Groats-
worth derived largely from some heavy editing and additions to the play by a second
hand, that he attributed to Shakespeare. 95 These demonstrated, “The dramatic craftsmanship
to keep the audience on tenterhooks, while at the same time making it laugh”, and
therefore suggested a skilled actor/playwright. The problem for Born’s analysis is that,
in his own words, “The verse is rhythmically flat and not of the high quality we associate
with Shakespeare”. Might not the combination of slick stage-craft and limp versification
point to the hand of an experienced actor like Alleyn? This play is almost unique in
that when it was published (January 1593/4), it was credited not to a company under a
patron’s name, but under that of its de-facto leader: “as it hath sundrie tymes bene
played by ED. ALLEN and his Companie”. One is almost tempted to ask what the abbrevi-
ation “ED” might be taken to stand for.

Irritating as it may have been, it is unlikely that Alleyn’s tinkering and patching of
Orlando Furioso and other plays could have been Greene’s sole grievance because there
was nothing unusual about players abridging, supplementing or otherwise altering
plays. The “allowed book” written by the original playwright(s) and approved by the
Master of Revels could seldom, if ever, be taken as a transcript of what appeared on
stage. Andrew Gurr writes, “We now know that companies routinely shortened and
altered their plays for staging, [and] that clown scenes were routinely invented by
clowns” 96 He also observes that the more literary passages replete with classical name-
dropping and extended similes were the first to be pruned. 97 It is apparent the actors them-
selves, and particularly the lead actors rather than the professional playwrights, who would
have been responsible for much of this redrafting.

It is also the case that many of the actors did more than just editing and turned their
hands to writing complete plays. In Chambers’ account, the Queen’s men, “relied largely
on the pens of their own members”. 98 Certainly the two famous clowns of that
company, Richard Tarlton and Robert Wilson, were both serious playwrights, as was
their successor Robert Armin. 99 Correspondingly, no less than seven actors in
Alleyn’s company wrote plays, including Samuel Rowley, Charles Massey, William

93Greg, Two Elizabethan Stage Abridgements, 139. See also Foakes, “The ‘Part’ of Orlando.”
94In this context, we may observe that it is more than we have in autograph from Greene, Marlowe or Shakespeare. Note
that “Hand D” in the Sir Thomas More manuscript cannot be attributed to Shakespeare. See, Hays, 180–203.
95Born, 133–73.
96Gurr, The Shakespearean Stage, 129.
97Ibid., 137.
98Chambers, William Shakespeare, 32.
99Gurr, The Shakespearean Stage, 105.
Borne, John Singer, Robert Shaa and Martin Slater. The seventh of this group was a part-time bricklayer, one “Bengemen Johnson”, who was acting for the Lord Admiral’s Men before he started to write plays on his own account.\textsuperscript{100} If all these men could turn their hands, and their knowledge of stagecraft, to play writing, why wouldn’t their extremely ambitious leader have done the same? It also begs the separate question of why Greene focussed his ire on one particular actor-come-playwright when the practice was ubiquitous.

A.D. Wraight argued the play *Fair Em the Miller’s Daughter of Manchester* was written by Alleyn, and she also put a case for his authorship of *A Knack to Know an Honest Man*.\textsuperscript{101} Both plays fit a pattern of a writer in an adversarial relationship with Robert Greene. We have already seen that in the prologue to his *Farewell to Folly* (1591) Greene had lampooned the author of *Fair Em* on account of some unscholarly biblical gaffs. *A Knack to Know an Honest Man* seems to have been written as a riposte to Greene’s (presumed) *A Knack to Know a Knave*. The play is stylistically very similar to *Fair Em*, and significantly it opened at the Rose Theatre on 22nd October 1594, Alleyn’s second wedding anniversary.\textsuperscript{102} Anniversaries and birthdays were of great importance to Alleyn, as can be seen from a pattern of significant entries in his diary.\textsuperscript{103}

Some more direct evidence comes from Philip Henslowe, who bought a number of play books from Alleyn. Among these, there are at least ten where the authorship is not known. Wraight suggests that some of these belonged to Alleyn for the simple reason that he wrote them.\textsuperscript{104} One example is a play running at the Rose in the early summer of 1592 called *Tamar Cham*. This was a blank verse spin-off of *Tamburlaine*, telling a closely parallel tale of a figure based on Ghengis Khan—inevitably a part played by Alleyn himself. A decade later, Henslowe wrote in his accounts, “pd vnto my sonne Alleyn at th A poynement of the company for his Boocke of tamberca me”.\textsuperscript{105} The wording in this transaction is significant because it is identical to that used a couple of days previously for the purchase of *oserecke* from Thomas Heywood and *medysen for A cvrste wiffe* from Thomas Dekker. With Heywood and Dekker, we know that the wording “his boocke” denotes authorship as well as ownership—so why would this not be true for Alleyn’s play? If this was the case, it would be especially galling for the self-regarding Greene as his own attempt at a *Tamburlaine* clone, *Alphonsus King of Aragon*, had bombed and made him a laughing stock.\textsuperscript{106} In contrast, *Tamar Cham* was commercially successful over a ten-year period.

In summary, the phrase “Supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you”, could apply to Shakespeare or Alleyn. While neither is ruled out, it is, perhaps, noteworthy that the grounds Greene had for resenting Alleyn’s presumptious

\textsuperscript{100}See, Foakes, ed., *Henslowe’s Diary*. Rowley and Borne sold a play called *Judas* to Henslowe 20 December, 1601 (185). Singer sold his *Syngers vallentarey* on 13 January, 1602 (208). Massey sold *malcolm Kynge of scotts* on 18 April, 1602 (199) and *the sedge of doncerke* on 7 March, 1602 (208). Robert Shaa sold *the fower sones of Amon* on 10 December, 1602 (211). Slater was paid by Henslowe variously for two parts of *hercolus, focas, pethagores* and *elyxander & lodicke* on 16 May, 1598 (89). Ben Jonson was listed “player” by Henslowe on 28 July 1597 (238).

\textsuperscript{101}Wraight, Ch. 7.

\textsuperscript{102}There are some grounds for thinking that *Robertoes Tale* in the main body of *Groatsworth* can be seen to mock Alleyn’s planned wedding, which occurred within a month of *Groatsworth’s* publication.

\textsuperscript{103}Wraight, 220–1.

\textsuperscript{104}Ibid., 211–5.

\textsuperscript{105}Foakes, *Henslowe’s Diary*, 217.

\textsuperscript{106}See his introduction to *Perimedes the Blacksmith*. Swinburne called the play, “A feeble and futile essay in hopeless and heartless imitation.” Swinburne, vol. 2, 129.
pen exist to this day as historical artefacts, but there is no known connection between him and Shakespeare.

1.7. An Absolute Iohannes fac totum

Iohannes fac totum is a derogatory label derived from the parallel expressions “Magister factotum” or “Domine factotum”. These refer to an absolute ruler or controller, and so Greene’s variant is usually glossed as a sarcastic reference to a “Jack of all trades” or a “would-be universal genius”. 107

One obvious question concerns the reason why Greene substituted the first word meaning “master” with the name Iohannes. The OED describes “John” as a generic name for an ordinary man, a servant, or a man of lower rank. This would indicate that Greene’s intention here is similar to that of the “vpstart” label: signifying the target is a plebeian or Ἰδιωτής who doesn’t know his station in life and acts as if he were the master—thus a sarcastic put-down. This interpretation ties in well with Carroll’s suggestion that the expression indicates John (or Jack) Cade, the bumptious and misguided revolutionary featured in The Whole Contention / 2 Henry VI. 108 John Cade was otherwise known as “John Mend-all”, an epithet signifying he thought he could do anything—hence fac totum. However, if Cade is the intended reference, it doesn’t necessarily help distinguish Alleyn from Shakespeare as both have a proven connection to the play in question.

The more conventional meaning of a “Jack of all trades” has pointed relevance to Edward Alleyn. He was truly a man with a multitude of strings to his bow. William Young, the original transcriber of his diary, noted him as a musician, an actor, a manager and owner of theatres, Master of the Royal Game, animal breeder, sportsman (hawking and fishing), money-lender, church warden, land-jobber and agent, landowner and patron and dealer in livings, not to mention being the philanthropist who founded The College of God’s Gift (now Dulwich College). 109

Even in 1592 at the age of twenty-one, Alleyn was involved in a wide range of pursuits. He was the leader of both the Lord Admiral’s Men and Lord Strange’s Men. He was co-manager of the Rose Theatre with Philip Henslowe and would have been sole manager for extended periods when Henslowe was attending to his duties at court. 110 He produced plays, acted the leading roles in them and likely wrote them, too. His business skills and family property made him uncommonly wealthy, so he was able to advance money to players who were in debt. He also bought plays from the leading playwrights both for his company and as personal investments. 111 He was socially ascendant: having started out as a boy player travelling the provinces and, as seen above, by the time of Groats-worth was engaged to a wealthy heiress, and step-daughter of a theatre-owning courtier.

One pointed example shows why Robert Greene might have been especially resentful of Alleyn acting in a financial role. In early 1592, the Lord Admiral signed a passport for four of his players to tour on the continent. Before leaving, Richard Jones, who was one of the

107Carroll, “Greene’s ‘Upstart Crow’ Passage,” 114.
109Young, 49.
110Henslowe served as “Groom of the Chamber” to Queen Elizabeth and a “Gentleman Sewer to the Chamber” of King James. Cerasano argues for, “a substantial record of court service,” between 1592 and 1611. Cerasano, “The Geography of Henslowe’s Diary,” 335.
111Gurr, “Did Shakespeare,” 212, 219, etc.
four, wrote a letter to Alleyn thanking him for a loan of money and asking for another to buy back a suit and cloak he had pawned:

Mr Allen, I commend my love and humble duty to you, giving you thankes for your great bounty bestowed upon me in my sicknes, when I was in great want: god blesse you for it. Sir, this it is: I am to go over beyond the seas with Mr browne and the company, but not by his meanes, for he is put to half a shaer, and to stay hear, for they ar all against his going: now, good Sir, as you have ever byne my worthie frend, so helpe me nowe. I have a suit of clothes and a cloke at pane for three pound, and if it shall pleas you to lend me so much to release them, I shall be bound to pray for you so longe as I leve; for if I go over and have no clothes, I shall not be esteemed of...112

The predicament of Richard Jones, who had been sick and “in great want” was exactly that of Robert Greene in the summer of 1592. It is surely logical to suppose that he too would have turned to Alleyn, who was his most obvious source of income, to ask for help.113 The bitter grievance aired in Greene’s Groats-worth centres on the fact that his plea for financial relief had clearly been turned down, and he was dying in abject poverty.

Why might the otherwise charitable Alleyn have had such a Clark Gable moment? Perhaps he had had enough of Greene by that point. Robert Greene was, in almost every way, an opposite of Alleyn. Instead of fiscal responsibility, industry and foresight, he freely confessed to a life that was spendthrift, debauched and dishonest. It seems that he sold The Historie of Orlando Furioso to the Queen’s Men for 20 nobles and a fresh copy of the same to Alleyn at the Lord Admiral’s for somewhat more.114 He probably had a few good nights out on the proceeds and bragged to his tavern cronies of his foists and shifts, but it wouldn’t have endeared him to Edward Alleyn. Alleyn was careful with his money, so why should he lay out more to someone who had not only been traducing him over a period of years, but openly boasted of having defrauded him? There were plenty of more appreciative men like Richard Jones in need of his charity.

William Shakespeare was a playwright, an actor and an investor with a financial stake in the theatre. To this extent he might be considered a “Jack of all trades”. The problem is that by 1592 there is no evidence that he was any of these; nor is there any indication that he had risen to public notice; nor, indeed, that he was in any position to preside over Greene’s fate. We can infer that he might have been, but any more robust claims risk the imputation of wishful thinking.

1.8. In His Owne Conceit the Onely Shake-Scene in a Countrey

In this phrase we have the “ground-zero” of the case for identifying William Shakespeare as Greene’s target. The hyphenated word “Shake-scene” is what caught Thomas Tyrwhitt’s eye in 1778, and it has remained the focal point of the case for Shakespeare ever since. The word looks like the start of Shakespeare’s name with the addition of a theatrical suffix, and

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113With the Queen’s men in a downward spiral since the death of Tarlton in 1588, the next most obvious person to provide funds would have been Philip Henslowe, but by this time Henslowe and Alleyn were like-minded partners.
114Greene, Defence of Conny-catching, C3.
given what Carroll has observed as Greene’s propensity to play with people’s names, it surely must portend William Shakespeare. Must it not?

When viewed through a lens from which the filter of 400 years of “the Shakespeare legend” has been removed, there are, actually, two possibilities. Firstly, it may, as has always been assumed, be a pun on the name Shakespeare. This is self-evident. The second possibility is that Shakespeare was not a name on everyone’s lips at that time; and that “Shake-scene” was therefore a purely descriptive term.

The wordplay interpretation is critically important to the case for Shakespeare as there is nothing else in the whole pamphlet that so plainly specifies it was him. All the other references are either inferential or, in the case of the misquoted line from *The True Tragedy*, ambiguous. As the lynch-pin in the case, it has the weakness of being but the first half of one word amongst 11,000 others. To paraphrase van Es, we might say that, “A vast edifice of biographical inference rests on a single syllable”. It isn’t a large platform.

A second caveat concerns orthography. The capital “S” of “Shake-scene” looks very much like the capital “S” of Shakespeare, but in this pamphlet the compositor used capitalised nouns simply to mark emphasis, while proper nouns are all denoted by the use of italic script. Therefore, it would be a mistake if we were to imagine Mr. Crow or Mr. Anticks named as equal co-defendants in the case presented by the author. A third and more telling consideration is that the rest of the sentence around “Shake-scene” doesn’t particularly apply to Shakespeare in 1592. It is very unlikely, for example, that he would have considered himself the number one playwright or actor in the country at that time. He could only have been at the very outset of his career. What is more, he was never a braggart, and even in later years, when he reached the pinnacle his profession, he kept a low profile.

If, instead of fixating on the capitalised first syllable alone, due consideration is given to both halves of the compound noun “shake-scene”, the implied meaning is that of a powerful actor: someone who grabs the stage and the audience with both hands. The fact that this actor is, “In his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey”, suggests that he firmly believes himself to be the leading actor of the day. In 1592, this could only really point to one person. The Roscius of the day, famed for shaking the timbers of the Rose Theatre with the magniloquent rhetoric of Tamburlaine, Faustus, Barabas, Hieronimo, Orlando and a host of others, was Edward Alleyn.

As a scene-shaker, Alleyn’s reputation is beyond reproach. Satyrists and critics constantly alluded to his bellowing voice and stalking presence on stage. As quoted above, Greene himself spoke of, “euerie worde filling the mouth like the faburden of Bo-Bell, daring God out of heauen with that Atheist Tamburlan”: a concussive and stunning allusion. In 1597 Everard Guilpin wrote the following epigram:

*Clodius* me thinks lookes passing big of late,

*With Dunstons browes, and Allens Cutlacks gate:*

What humours haue possest him so, I wonder,

*His eyes are lightning, and his words are thunder:*

What meanes the Bragart by his alteration?

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115Levin, 51–70.
He knows he’s known too wel, for this fond fashion:
To cause him to be fear’d: what meanes he than?
Belike, because he cannot play the man.
Yet would be awe’d, he keepes this filthy reuell,
Stalking and roaring like to Iobs great deuill.116

Although the only overt reference to Alleyn is through the remarkable gait of Cutlack, the whole epigram would appear to be pointed in his direction. “Iobs great deuill”, for example, would very likely refer to Alleyn’s character Barabas in The Jew of Malta, who is portrayed as a Machiavellian “anti-Job”.117 In his Virgidemarium, six bookes (1597), Joseph Hall also left no doubt about the seismic impact on Alleyn’s audiences:

Or some vpreared, high-aspiring swaine
As it might be the Turkish Tamberlaine.
Then weeneth he his base drink-drowned spright,
Rapt to the threefold loft of heauen hight,
When he conceiues vpon his fained stage
The stalking steps of his greate personage,
Graced with huf-cap termes, and thundring threats,
That his poore hearers hayre quite vpright sets.118

A year later, a certain “E.S.” wrote of a man who, “bent his browes and fetcht his stations vp and downe the rome, with such furious Iesture as if he had beene playing Tamberlane on a stage”.119 Ben Jonson, too, reached for similar language when he reminisced in later life and recalled Alleyn’s signature roles:

And though his [the true artificer’s] language differ from the vulgar somewhat, it shall not fly from all humanity, with the Tamerlanes and Tamer-chains of the late age, which had nothing in them but the scenical strutting and furious vociferation to warrant them to the ignorant gapers.120

While the list could be considerably extended,121 the proverbial nature of Alleyn’s capacity for bombastic acting is perfectly clear, and Jonson’s description of, “scenical strutting and furious vociferation”, is precisely reflected in Greene’s “onely Shake-scene”.

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116Clodius presumably means Clodius Aesopus the famous Roman tragedian and hence alludes to a contemporary tragedian. This may be a veiled attack on Alleyn, as both Thomas Nashe and Ben Jonson likened Alleyn to Aesopus (as well as Roscius). However, it could also mean Alleyn’s replacement, as the epigram was composed just after his first retirement. Guilpin, Epigram 43.
117Hunter, 219.
118Hall, B4v-B5r.
119E. S., C2v.
120Herford, Simpson, and Simpson, 587.
2. Conclusion

In Greene’s tirade against the “vpstart Crow”, the identity of the latter had to fulfil certain definite criteria. That person must have been someone who, by the late summer of 1592:

1. was well known as a player and a representative of the players
2. had risen swiftly and high above his “allotted station”
3. wrote blank verse for the stage with greater ambition than skill
4. was firmly associated with a line from The True Tragedy
5. profited handsomely from the work of professional playwrights
6. had a history of conflict with Greene
7. lent money to actors and writers, but failed to lend to Greene in his hour of need

In that year, there is no certain evidence that Shakespeare met any of these seven requirements, and he seems to be almost disqualified by 2, 5, 6 and 7. On the positive side, it is probable he had begun to write blank verse for the stage, he was certainly responsible for later revising The True Tragedy, and he may have been playing in some capacity, but that’s about all. At the same time, Alleyn met criteria 1, 2, 5 and 6 very well, there are solid arguments for 4 and 7, and 3 is a reasonable inference.

Aside from historical facts, the literary evidence carries weight, too. Through reference back to earlier writing by Nashe, Marlowe and Greene, the precisely contemporary play Summers Last Will and Testament, as well as subsequent commentary by Harvey, Jonson, Hall and others, the carefully-crafted sentence fits Edward Alleyn as snugly as a part written for him by Christopher Marlowe. If it was composed with him in mind by Robert Greene, it should do. By contrast, the match with William Shakespeare appears completely out of the blue and depends on the juxtaposition of a solitary pun and a misquoted line that he may not have written and almost certainly didn’t deliver.

On purely historical grounds, the balance of evidence arising from the critical sentence at the heart of Greene’s Groats-worth of Witte clearly supports the identification of Edward Alleyn far better than it does William Shakespeare. However, in respect of the vast and illustrious body of scholarly conjecture it underpins, any such conclusion will be fiercely resisted.

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