

*Early Modern  
Literary Studies*

**Stern, Tiffany. *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. xii+362 pp.  
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Gabriel Egan, "Review of Stern, Tiffany. *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England*." [EMLS 15.3 (2011): 6] <http://purl.org/emls/15-3/revstern.htm>

1. In an account of the best books she had read in 2010, Katherine Duncan-Jones gave *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* a remarkable accolade: "Stern, still young, already outstrips the magisterial E. K. Chambers". The parallel is apposite, but not in the way Duncan-Jones means. In a Textual Note at the start of her book (xiii-xiv), Stern explains that because early printings often reproduce texts written over a considerable amount of time, "dates of performance are not generally supplied". This approach has the tendency of making everything seem equally representative of early modern theatrical culture, which was how early-twentieth century scholars did theatre history. In fact, Stern is even more of a generalizer than Chambers, who confined his theatre histories to *The Mediaeval Stage* (1903) and then *The Elizabethan Stage* (1923), leaving the Jacobean and Caroline stages for others to tackle. Stern, however, brings in material from the middle of the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, and treats it all as more-or-less equally illustrative of a singularity her title characterizes as "performance in early modern England".
2. Stern begins by stating her foundational principle that "a play . . . was not a single whole entity" (1). She lists the various bits of plays that scholarship has previously neglected: scenarios (that is, author plots), prologues and epilogues, songs, scrolls (letters and the like), 'arguments' (handed to the audience) and playbills. Of course, none of these is the work of genius that many readers find to be the essence of early modern drama's achievement, its poetic dialogue. Stern believes that dialogue too could have been created patchily, by collaboration, but accepts that on occasion it existed as "something like a unified text". Yet this too was decomposed in the theatre to make parts, casting table, playhouse plot, properties list, and so on (3). The patchy nature of early modern drama is not, she insists, a figment of the modern historical imagination: there was an "early modern distrust of the unity and completion of the playscript" (4). Stern admits the thinness of the evidence, and that she is concerned with "documents not extant". This concern distinguishes her from the mainstream New Textualism that emerged when post-structuralists became interested in early modern textuality (in the materialist sense) in the 1980s and 1990s. Although they share her conviction about the fragmentary nature of plays, New Textualists refuse on principle to discuss documents that are not extant--even ones that must have once

existed, like the author's own manuscript--whereas Stern is happy not only to discuss them but to reconstruct them and their purposes from the slightest of evidence. Almost all of this evidence is unconnected to the London professional stage of 1576-1642, but Stern confidently applies there what she discovers from amateur performances, closet drama, and the Restoration theatre. A taste of the excesses to which this leads her is given early in the book with the extraordinary claim that "playhouse plots "were more valued than the book they protected when not in use, the full 'approved' play" (7). Since one can easily make a new plot from the allowed book, but not vice versa, it is hard to see why early modern theatre companies would have such a topsy-turvy sense of documentary value. Stern offers nothing to support her claim.

3. Stern's first chapter concerns "Plot-Scenarios" (as distinct from the "Backstage-Plots" discussed below), beginning with a survey of some contemporary critical comments (from audiences and dramatists) that seem to treat the plot of a play as something distinct from its language. Stern decides that this happened because "the two were created as, initially, separate documents" (8). That assumption is not safe: readers today speak of a novel's plot as something separate from its language, even when the novelist does not use separate documents to develop the work. Stern cites the scholars who have claimed that there are no surviving author-plots from the period, or only one (and they disagree on which document is it), and she promises the discovery of several previously undiscovered examples. To keep track of such discoveries, the reader has to count them for herself. The first is Ben Jonson's description of the action of the whole of his play *Mortimer* that appears before the fragment of the play in the 1641 *Workes*, where it is noted that the dramatist did not complete it. (11-12). The second is John Milton's writing of a plot of *Paradise Lost* before writing the poem, and at a point when he seems to have conceived of it as a play (12-13). Since Milton could not have expected it to be performed--the Commonwealth being antagonistic to performance--this is not relevant to the early modern stage.<sup>[1]</sup> Stern's third example of a plot-scenario is the amateur dramatist Edward Dering's incomplete plot (acts 1-3 only) for *Philander*, and she tries to tie him to the professional stage by his acquaintance with and interest in the professionals (13-15). Her fourth example is Jonson's insertion of action summaries before each act in his unfinished play *The Sad Shepherd* (also in the 1641 *Workes*), which Stern assumes shows him copying out the relevant part of the plot for each act and then, with that as his guide, composing the appropriate action and dialogue underneath (16). (That is one explanation of what he was up to, but there is nothing to prove it.) Stern's fifth example is another with only "'internal' summaries": Thomas Hughes et al.'s play of 1588 *The Misfortunes of Arthur* for performance at Gray's Inn (16), so again not the professional stage, and her sixth example is Thomas Nabbes's *Hannibal and Scipio* (1635) which also has what Stern calls "inner summaries" (16). The seventh and last example is the Latin play by George Ruggle *The Ignoramus* written for performance at Cambridge which has inner summaries. So, not professional.
4. Stern admits that some of these 'inner' summaries might not be derived from plot-summaries at all but something else. In fact the only ones that are plot-summaries--as opposed to, at best, material copied from plot summaries--are examples one, two, and three, which are, respectively, for a play apparently not written even as far as completing its first scene, for a play never written, and for three acts of a planned amateur play. In short, Stern has no real evidence at all, yet she goes on to work out

how professional plot-scenarios were made, how they looked, and how they were used and preserved. There is a Restoration manuscript poem and a prose anecdote about Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher being overheard plotting *The Maid's Tragedy* and getting arrested because their discussion of killing the king was mistaken for a real conspiracy (17-18). (The event is well-known enough to be parodied in the television comedy *Blackadder*.) Stern claims that the stories show that plotters had to get every detail of a scene straight before moving on to the next, since the two writers are said to disagree on the means of murder and are unwilling to leave it as something to be settled later. This reading requires Stern to insist that the description of the plot as a "draught" means only that "it is a plot, not a whole play". But that is not what the word 'draft' means, which is something still open to revision. Part of Edward Knight's transcript of *Bonduca* is patched (by summary of the action) where the foul papers were incomplete, and Stern reckons that Knight used an author's plot for this, although she admits that a playhouse plot or Knight's memory might also serve (19-20). When Knight writes that "this hath beene transcrib'd from the fowle papers", Stern takes him to mean not 'the whole of this transcript' but just the bit where he summarizes the action for the section missing from his copy text. After all, she reasons, if "this" were the whole thing why not mention that at the beginning or end of his transcript (21)? Because he did not know there was going to be a gap until he hit it, I should think, and he had to explain himself at that point.

5. The evidence we have of play co-authorship--such as Robert Daborne's description of parcelling out work and Thomas Heywood claiming to have "an entire hand or at least a maine finger" in 220 plays--also points toward the usefulness of a plot. Stern thinks that Heywood's "maine finger" suggests a whole act, since a play has five acts and a hand has five fingers (23). I should say that a hand has four fingers, and in any case "hand" cannot mean a whole play since Heywood is clearly using it to mean (as we still do) a substantial part-share, and hence a finger is something smaller still. One bit of evidence running against Stern's claim that all those involved in co-writing a play were given a copy of the plot and worked separately from it is that, called to explain his part in the offensive *The Isle of Dogs*, Thomas Nashe claimed that he did not know what the others were writing about. Stern explains this away by saying that Nashe was lying (24). But if the working practices she sketches were the norm, as she claims, then this lie would be particularly implausible. Stern reads Jonson's account of removing the "second pen" from *Sejanus* as a case of his losing control of the play when his plot was given to someone else to do some of the writing (26). I cannot see any of this in Jonson's account: he just says that he wants the thing to be all his own work, and not that a second person's contribution was forced on him. Stern speculates that the phrasing of some stage directions might come from plots, and maybe a plot used twice by different writers would explain why the anonymous *Troublesome Reign of King John* and Shakespeare's *King John* are so alike in action but unlike in words. Yes, that may be.
6. Stern's second chapter on "Playbills and title-pages" (35-62) is essentially a reprint of an earlier article, which this reviewer has already commented upon. Because there survive no playbills from before 1687, Stern uses evidence from bear-baiting, a hoax 'plot', rope-dancing, puppetry, and foreign practice; from these she speculates about London professional stage practice. Title-pages-as-flyers and playbills both came from the printshops, were posted around the city as adverts and could be mistaken one for the other--she has evidence for this from 1673, no earlier--so Stern finds them

alike in many ways. This is Stern's route into a suggestion that extant play title-pages tell us what the lost playbills looked like. The whole argument is built on guesses. At least for chapter three, "'Arguments' in Playhouse and Book (63-80), there is some surviving evidence, although the few professional theatre plays published with 'arguments' appeared in the Interregnum and the only earlier examples are from masques. Rather like a modern programme, an 'argument'--made after the play was completed--was given to certain members of the audience at certain performances, but not on the professional London stage. Stern gives details of what the 'arguments' show for the masque-within-the-play in John Ford's *The Lover's Melancholy*, James Shirley's *The Constant Maid* and Middleton's *No Wit/Help Like a Woman* and *Women Beware Women*, and then 'arguments' for some actual masques and a puppet-show-within-a-play (67-8). When Stern finally comes to an 'argument' in a play, it is the play-within-the-play in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, which is a court performance. There is an elaborate manuscript at the Houghton Library that gives an account of the action of a St Paul's play, but as Stern admits it is too fancy for us to suppose that many copies were made and given to the audience, which is what she says 'arguments' were for (70).

7. That just leaves Richard Vennar's hoax *England's Joy* (1602), for which Stern's account simply repeats the argument in her 2006 article cited above. The key point is that this cannot be a playbill since it does not mention that women will perform, yet a reference to the hoax at the time, and a later allusion to it by Jonson, refer to the playbill's promise of gentlewomen acting. Thus there must have been a lost playbill as well as the document we have. Stern wonders if the thing was meant to be a "public theatre masque" (71). More importantly, the hoax was so singular an event that it ought not to be taken as evidence for normal open-air amphitheatre practice, so we simply have no 'arguments' from the professional stage. Stern has found a couple of poems and some prose writing that liken life to a theatrical performance and use the word "argument" in ways that might suggest connection to professional theatre (73-4). The links, however, are extremely tenuous. For example, a prose source from 1642 is written as an 'argument' and likens that year's political manoeuvring to a play, calling the Cavaliers the "the Hotspurres of the Times"; this allusion to Shakespeare, Stern argues, may imply that his plays were performed with written 'arguments'. Stern ends with Restoration evidence for 'arguments' being "'presents' for the first-performance audience" (74), which she would like to project back onto the pre-Commonwealth stage, and then evidence from a Latin play apparently performed in Germany, the 'argument' for which Stern reads as directing the audience's responses and making up for any lapses by the actors. Finally she uses a masque performed in French for Charles I in 1635: *Florimene* at Whitehall, for which the 'argument' was published though the masque was not (75-7).
8. Chapter Four is concerned with "Prologues, Epilogues, Interim Entertainments" (81-119). Stern thinks that the Restoration practice of giving the epilogue and prologue of a play only at the first three performances--up to and including the author's third-day benefit--must have been true of the pre-Commonwealth stage. From around 1600 "public theatre" play prologues and epilogues were generally for first performances only and indicated that the play could still be changed (before the benefit), while plays that lacked prologues and epilogues had already been audience-tested and approved. Some prologues and epilogues are clearly occasion-specific and say what the occasion is. There certainly are phrasings that suggest that the prologue or

epilogue was written for the first performance only, most commonly by saying that it is a new, or newly revived, play, which of course it would not be after the first performance. In the case of epilogues, their nervous enquiries about how the play was liked are also suited to the first performance. First performances were special, since the audience paid more (double, according to Samuel Kiechel in 1585) and thereby bought the right to censure, since if they expressed disapproval, the play could be taken off. Stern surveys the scant evidence (all of it late) that plays actually were altered after first performance in response to the audience's reaction, and from this argues that editors who fixate on the script of the first performance (such as those of the 1986 Oxford *Complete Works*) wrongly assume that this was a moment of relative textual stability (89-91).

9. There is some evidence that prologues were read from on-stage documents rather than recalled from memory; they were not necessarily included in the promptbook. Because they floated free from their plays, prologues and epilogues could get printed or copied in manuscripts separately from the play they were written for. Thus plays now printed without prologues and epilogues might once have had them. When printing collections of plays, prologues and epilogues might be attached to the wrong play, or indeed they might have been reused for different plays in performance. In the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio of 1647, a number of the prologues and epilogues are actually ones written for revivals by authors other than Beaumont and Fletcher, as the book readily admits. Choruses too may have existed as separate, detachable (therefore losable) documents, which might explain why the one between the first two acts of *Romeo and Juliet* in Q2 (1599) and the Folio (1623) is absent in Q1 (1597), why Time in the middle of *The Winter's Tale* talks as though he had spoken to the audience before ("remember well | I mentionèd a son o' th' King's"), and why *The Taming of the Shrew* fails to close off the Sly frame. Stern is under the impression that Q2 *Henry 5* (1602) includes the prologue, epilogue, and choruses missing from Q1 (1600), but in fact Q2 is just a reprint of Q1 and also lacks these things: they first appeared in the Folio (108-9).
10. James Bednarz recently argued that Jonson parodied *Henry 5*'s choruses in his *Every Man out of His Humour* (published 1600), so they must have been in the 1599-1600 performances of *Henry 5* rather than being added later, and Stern finds this entirely convincing. (As Richard Dutton recently pointed out in response to Bednarz, the verbal and conceptual links are tenuous in the 1600 quartos of *Every Man Out of his Humour*, and only get strong--get to be real mockery--in the 1616 Folio version (135n.1)). *Henry 5*'s choruses famously offer a quite different perspective from the dialogue of the play, and as a parallel to this Stern offers the misplaced prologue to Richard Farrant's *The Wars of Cyrus, King of Persia* which seems to suggest that it and a missing chorus will "express a different opinion from the play's and speak out 'against' the hero" (109). This claim Stern derives from the prologue's reference to the singing chorus being "against the upstart guise", but 'guise' cannot mean hero, as she supposes: it means "Appointed, usual, or characteristic manner; custom, habit, practice" (OED guise *n.* †2). The prologue is defending the chorus being sung, which is not the practice of the day but one "warranted by graue antiquitie" that this play will "reuiue", which is appropriate, the prologue says, because the story comes from Xenophon.<sup>[2]</sup> The remainder of this chapter summarizes what has long been known about prologues and epilogues as detachable pieces of writing and about the conventions (such as the armed prologue speaker) that governed their performance.

Stern ends with a rather literal interpretation of Robin Goodfellow's offer to "mend" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Epilogue.8) as an offer to revise the play. I should have thought that "mend" is connected to his claim that with good thoughts all is "mended" and that the company will make "amends", that is restitution, with future plays.

11. Stern's fifth chapter, on "Songs and Masques" (119-73), begins with the puzzle that many printed plays omit their songs, even where the authors seem to have taken care over the printing and were the songs' writers. This cannot be explained by the composers acquiring ownership of the words they wrote music for, nor by publishers removing the lyrics before printing the plays. The solution is that song lyrics were held on separate pieces of paper from the play's dialogue, allowing them to be sent off to the composer for setting to music while the playbook was put to other uses. Stern makes a strong case for "Take O take those lips away" (from Shakespeare and Middleton's *Measure for Measure*) having an extra resonance for an audience that recognized it from Fletcher, Jonson, Chapman, and Massinger's *Bloody Brother, or Rollo, Duke of Normandy* where it is addressed to a young woman (134). Is Mariana deliberately appropriating it to address it to Angelo, or is she misreading it because she is distraught? Although Stern's claim about songs circulating on separate pieces of paper is highly plausible, she admits that we have no such extracted song manuscripts for the early modern period. However, there is a set of lyrics set to music by George Jeffreys that has a note saying that the play did not use them, and indeed they are absent from the printed play, Peter Hausted's *The Rival Friends*, so clearly the lyrics went from the dramatist to the musician (135). If the act of setting the words to music required changing the words--and presumably the dramatist would be actively involved in such a case--then the company playbook would not necessarily be altered to reflect these changes, if indeed it recorded the words of the song at all.
12. One more reason for songs being extracted out of plays was to give manuscript copies to interested members of the audience to play or sing for themselves, and one more reason for printed plays lacking the words of songs might be to protect them from too-wide circulation. Stern has a couple of examples of songs circulating apart from their plays, and one--Henry Glapthorne's *The Lady Mother*--dramatizing audience members asking to be given a song from a play and being refused. Stern's hypotheses are so capacious as to defy falsification, since the evidence of songs widely circulating and of their being kept out of circulation both serve her turn. However, she offers salutary cautions about dating plays by their songs, and warns that each song in a printed play may be from authorial papers, even if the rest of the play is printed from a theatrical manuscript, or conversely may be from a composer's papers, after he has added the music and perhaps altered the words, even if the rest of the play is printed from authorial papers (167). Stern reckons she can attribute the playless song "Down, down, be still you seas", set by John Wilson, to a songless play by Fletcher, *The Pilgrim*, because it is so appropriate to the moment (168-9). Since the singer calls herself the seas' "dread mistress" while in the play the male character who sings is hallucinating that he is the male god Neptune, I would not agree that it fits very well. The chapter concludes, rather counter-intuitively, that having his play printed without its song could in fact be a point of pride for a dramatist, since it showed that the song was so popular the theatre company would not let its manuscript out of their possession to be printed, or that its manuscript was with the singer and again this

showed that the play had been a stage success. Thus the literary importance of the printed play was trumped (*pace* Luke Erne) by the theatrical importance.

13. Staying with the literary/theatrical tension, chapter six on "Scrolls" (174-200) begins with the observation that where such documents as letters and proclamations appear in early printed plays their headings and the typographical conventions marking them off from their surrounding dialogue have been taken as signs of literariness, a concern for the reader's experience of the page rather than the actors' needs. In fact, Stern argues, these markers are highly theatrical and the printed texts are either reflecting instructions to the scroll scribe, if the printer's copy was authorial, or reflecting the appearance of the property document itself, if the printer's copy was theatrical. After all, reasons Stern, typographical distinctions cannot actually be spoken. (I would have thought that they might well affect how things are spoken, for example an actor whose script indicates visually that he is about to speak aloud a proclamation or letter might usefully be reminded to cough beforehand to indicate that this is what he is doing.) Because headings such as "The Letter" or "A Paper" are instructions for the making of a property document, editors should not emend them into stage directions (such as "[He reads] the letter"), no more than they should interfere with labels such as "Prologue" and "Epilogue" (177). The evidence of Edward Alleyn's part for the role of Orlando Furioso shows that the roundelays that appear on property documents in the play were not written into the part (180). Where a speech prefix is unnecessarily repeated after a scroll, this was for the convenience of the part scribe (who might well also be the scroll scribe) so that he knows to whom he should attribute the next speech (184-5).
14. When an onstage letter is to be read twice, the surviving script sometimes gives the full text only once and indicates with a stage direction that another character is also to read it aloud. Perhaps, wonders Stern, Helena in *All's Well that Ends Well* is actually meant to read aloud Bertram's earlier letter (with its "shew mee a childe begotten of thy bodie") at the end of the play, rather than read out the loose and incomplete paraphrase of it ("And is by me with childe, &c") that we have in the Folio (192-3). The problem with this idea is that there is a discrepancy between what Bertram asked to be shown--a child--and what Helena manages to show him, her pregnant self. That is, the second, partially completed, reading of the letter sets out conditions that are more accurately fulfilled by the action of the play than the first, completed, reading of it; so re-reading the scroll at the end of the play would actually make the problem worse, by highlighting the fact that Helena has failed to meet Bertram's conditions precisely. Where only a few words followed by "etcetera" appear in a playscript's account of a document's contents, Stern would have us take this as indicating that the actor was to read from the scroll itself, which has not made it into the early printed edition, and not that the actor is being called on to extemporize (194-5), as I must admit I have sometimes assumed.
15. The main evidence for "Backstage-Plots" (chapter seven, 200-31) are the surviving documents for *The Dead Man's Fortune*, *Frederick and Basilea*, *2 Fortune's Tennis*, *Troilus and Cressida* and *The Battle of Alcazar* now in the British Library and *2 Seven Deadly Sins* at Dulwich College, plus the nineteenth-century transcript of the plot for *The First Part of Tamar Cam*, now lost. Stern is under the impression that Dulwich College bought their plot (202) but in fact they reclaimed it as their property when it came up for sale at auction. Just what these plots were used for has been the

subject of extensive debate, but the key physical facts are that they are (or were) mounted on stiff boards (so, made to withstand handling), are very clearly written (using unjoined letters in 2 *Seven Deadly Sins*) as if for people who do not normally read, and that the peg-hole of *Dead Man's Fortune* avoids cutting into the marginal annotation, so it was made after the annotation as if readying the plot for hanging was the last stage in its preparation (pp. 207-9). According to Stern these documents were used by the prompter (synonymous with the bookholder), and she has found two non-Shakespearian dramatic allusions that show that the prompter actually gave actors who dried up (were 'out') their lines. The first is post-1642 and the second is amateur, unfortunately. The most original of Stern's suggestions, arising from post-Restoration practice, is that the plots are 'call-sheets' from consultation of which the prompter would send boys to fetch actors to be ready in time for their entrances (223-30). The obvious problem with this idea is that the tiring-houses of pre-Commonwealth theatres were nowhere near big enough to send boys on errands and there was no Green Room where actors might relax until needed.

16. Stern's final chapter is concerned with "The Approved 'Book' and Actors' Parts" (232-52), and in particular with the limitations of the Master of the Revels' control over what actually got spoken on stage. (Stern's theory that plays existed as many, dispersible fragments requires, of course, that the unique 'allowed' book was not in fact the final word, else it would provide a point of singularity, coherence and completeness.) Stern tells the stories of Lady Elizabeth's men undoing the Master of the Revels' censorship--"to every cross they added stet of their owne" as censor Henry Herbert complained in his office book--and of the players of Jonson's *The Magnetic Lady* speaking passages not in the allowed script. When the latter caused offence they tried at first to blame the author and the censor. Likewise George Chapman blamed the actors of his *Byron* for speaking what the Master of the Revels had crossed out (232-3). Other plays, it seems, were performed without even being first shown to the censor. Moreover, the company practices tended to limit the power of his authority. Daborne's letter to Philip Henslowe about his play *Machiavelli and the Devil* indicates that he has not finished it--so obviously the Master of the Revels had not seen it--yet the actors had it "in parts". (Might not "in parts" just mean some of it?) This means that if the Master of the Revels made cuts the actors might nonetheless speak from memory the censored lines, as Chapman said happened with *Byron*.
17. Stern has one more relevant example--the famous case of Master of the Revels Herbert writing that "The players ought not to study their parts till I have allowed of the booke" and "Purge ther parts, as I have the booke"--and one irrelevant Restoration example. (236-7). Thus, if the parts came from a different manuscript from the allowed promptbook, the editorial hunt for the text as performed would be futile even if we possessed the allowed promptbook. However, as Trevor Howard-Hill pointed out in an essay that Stern tries to co-opt to her view (154n26), when Middleton's *A Game at Chess* got the players into trouble they were made to bring in the book with the Master of the Revels' licence, so there was a general assumption that this was what got spoken. Stern considers the gaps the scribe left in Alleyn's part for the role of Orlando Furioso (243), but neglects the important observation by Adrian Kiernander that the gaps turned out to be the wrong size for the words later inserted, which suggests that the scribe leaving them did not see the illegible words written down--else he would have left gaps of the right size--but rather failed to capture them from oral dictation (248). Alleyn's part is usually considered the only such document in



existence, but Stern's purview brings in amateur and academic performances and so she examines documents of questionable applicability to the professional stage (239-41).

18. In a brief conclusion subtitled "Repatching the Play (253-6), Stern simply summarizes her claim that early modern plays were fragmentary things unamenable to the "nicely divided binaries" (254) by which they have commonly been examined. Most misleading of all is the theatrical/literary binary, since each part of the scripts as we have them--title-pages, prologues and epilogues, songs, spoken letters, stage-directions and dialogue (authorial words, misremembered and extemporized)--might come from a different source. This argument has a certain force if one is prepared to generalize across three centuries of drama (sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth) and to give equal weight to all kinds of material including amateur and academic plays, closet drama, masques and non-dramatic prose writings. When we zoom out to achieve such a 'macroscopic' view, the important centres of authority that regulated the professional stage in the period 1576-1642--most importantly the Revels Office--are lost in the welter of other forces. So long as it is understood that only broad strokes can be drawn when trying to generalize across so many years and varieties of theatre, no harm is done. But Stern's study uses material from far outside the professional London theatre of 1576 to 1642 to make claims about that special place and time. This is a way of proceeding that theatre historians rightly abandoned many years ago.

## Notes

1 Stern alludes to Milton's attempt in *Paradise Lost* to "justify God's ways to man", but of course the line is actually about justifying them "to men", which is daringly specific: not the idealized collective humanity, but the real readers of his book. One would expect Stern, alert to anti-idealism, to seize upon that distinction.

2. Anonymous, *The Warres of Cyrus King of Persia, against Antiochus King of Assyria, with the Tragicall Ende of Panthaea*, STC 6160 BEPD 131A (London: E[dward] A[lld]e for William Blackwall, 1594), C3a.

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