

HOW OLD WERE SHAKESPEARE'S BOY ACTORS?

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Female roles on the pre-Restoration English stage were played not by women but by boys dressed as women. This well-known fact has occasioned much comment in recent years by critics interested in the gender implications of boys playing women who sometimes disguised themselves as boys.¹ Many such critics have implicitly assumed that the 'boys' in question were pre-adolescent children, perhaps eight to twelve years old, whose ability to play the complex female roles of Shakespeare or Webster would be questionable. They have thus suggested that such roles must have been played by adult sharers, much as in modern all-male productions at Shakespeare's Globe and elsewhere.² From a psychosexual perspective, it makes an obvious difference whether Cleopatra was played by a ten-year-old child, a thirty-year-old man, or by a 'boy' of some intermediate age, such as seventeen.

Such discussions have tended to be short on hard evidence, often relying on subjective notions of what would or would not have been plausible for an Elizabethan playing company. It is often assumed that little or no documentary evidence survives about these boys, and that we must rely mostly on guesswork and speculation.³ In fact, a substantial amount of documentary evidence does survive about pre-Restoration boy players, but much of it has remained buried in archives or scattered across various books and articles. When gathered and analysed, this evidence points to a consistent conclusion: until the early 1660s, female roles on the English stage (including the most demanding, complex parts) were played by adolescent

boys, no younger than twelve and no older than twenty-one or twenty-two, with a median of around sixteen or seventeen. Many of these boys were legally apprenticed to adult players who were members of London livery companies such as the Grocers and Goldsmiths. Not coincidentally, the age range in which these boys are found playing women corresponds closely to the typical age range for London apprentices.⁴

This paper focuses on the evidence relating to specific actors known to have played specific female roles, a group which is larger than many people

¹ See, for example, Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines & Female Pages* (Ann Arbor, 1994); Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge, 1996), and Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (London and New York, 2001).

² Such doubts have most notably been expressed by James Forse, *Art Imitates Business* (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1994), pp. 71–99; Carol Chillington Rutter, *Documents of the Rose Playhouse* (Manchester and New York, 1999), pp. 124–5, 224–5; and Marvin Rosenberg, 'The Myth of Shakespeare's Squeaking Boy Actor – Or Who Played Cleopatra?', *Shakespeare Bulletin* 19.2 (2001), 5–6. In opposition to these doubts, Joy Leslie Gibson's *Squeaking Cleopatras: The Elizabethan Boy Player* (2000) argues that female roles were written to accommodate the smaller lung capacity of boys, but Gibson provides no new documentary evidence.

³ For example, Forse asserts that 'there is no evidence regarding the recruitment of boys', whom he assumes must have been 'pre-pubescent' (78).

⁴ I discuss the relationship between livery companies and the professional stage in more detail in David Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers: Freemen and Apprentices in the Elizabethan Theatre', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55 (2004), 1–49.

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might think. In the ideal situation, we would have a cast list showing that a given actor played a given female role in a given production, and we would know both the date of the production and the actor's birthdate. Sometimes we can only approximate the date of a production; in other instances, we don't know the actor's exact birthdate, but we know that he was called a 'boy' or was an apprentice at the time. In theory, we might find a case where an actor played a female role at a time when he was known to be an adult sharer in the company but, with one doubtful exception, such cases do not exist. From the sixteenth century right up to the onset of actresses in the early 1660s, women were played by teenagers or young men no older than about twenty-one.

BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS

The popular literature of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries contains many references to the practice of male actors playing women on stage. Such references occur often in anti-theatrical polemics and the responses to them. For example, in *Playes Confuted in fīue Actions* (1582), Stephen Gosson wrote that it is a lie 'In Stage Playes for a boy to put one the attyre, the gesture, the passions of a woman', and John Rainoldes wrote in *Th'overthrow of stage playes* (1599) that 'you should condemne all stage-playes, wherein young men are trained to play such wemen partes'.⁵ Most notoriously, William Prynne referred repeatedly in his massive polemic *Histrio-Mastix* (1633) to 'Men-women actors' and 'our English Man-women monsters', but also condemned 'this very putting on of womans apparell on Boyes, to act a Play', and discussed whether it is 'more commendable for Boyes to act in womans attyre, then to bring women-Actors on the stage to personate female parts'.⁶ On the pro-theatrical side, Thomas Heywood in *An Apology for Actors* (1612) referred to 'our youths attired in the habit of women', and J. Cocke in *Satyricall Essayes Characters and Others* (1615) referred to a newly married actor who 'mistakes the Woman for the Boy in Womans attyre'.⁷ In her prose romance *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621) and its manuscript

continuation, Lady Mary Wroth alluded to 'a delicate play-boy acte a louing womans part' and 'a play boy dressed gaudely up to shew a fond loving woemans part'.⁸

Such references are helpful, but they have led to some confusion because of differing perceptions of how old a 'boy' may be. As Richard Rastall has noted, many theatre historians have assumed that a 'boy' must refer to a male with an unbroken voice who has not yet reached puberty, and is thus no older than about fourteen; a 'man', in contrast, is assumed to be mature, adult and postpubertal.⁹ This assumption is illustrated by Marvin Rosenberg's statement that he 'could not find a shred of evidence that a child played any of Shakespeare's great adult women'.¹⁰ However, such an assumption is undercut by the references to female roles being played by 'men', 'young men' and 'youths', terms which are sometimes used interchangeably with 'boy' by the same author on the same page, as in Prynne's polemic cited above.

This issue can be partly resolved when we recognize that puberty, and thus the changing of boys' voices, could extend several years later in Shakespeare's time than it typically does today. There are numerous references to fourteen as the traditional starting age of puberty in boys; for example, *The Problemes of Aristotle* (1595) asks, 'Why

⁵ Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in fīue Actions* (London, 1582), p. 197; John Rainoldes, *Th'overthrow of Stage-Playes* (London, 1599), pp. 17–18.

⁶ William Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix, The Players Scourge, or Actors Tragedie* (London, 1633), pp. 187, 188, 212, 214. Rosenberg, 'Myth', p. 5, cites the first of these passages and gives the misleading impression that Prynne refers only to 'men-actors', but in fact he refers to 'boys' just as often, if not more so.

⁷ Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (London, 1612), c3v; John Stevens, *Satyricall Essayes Characters and Others* (London, 1615), p. 248.

⁸ See Michael Shapiro, 'Lady Mary Wroth Describes a "Boy Actress"', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 4 (1989), 187–94.

⁹ Richard Rastall, 'Female Roles in All-Male Casts', *Medieval English Theatre* 7 (1985), 25–50, esp. pp. 25–6.

¹⁰ Rosenberg, 'Myth', p. 5.

are boyes apt to chaunge their voyce about 14. yeares of age?', and *The Office of Christian Parents* (1616) says that childhood extends to age fourteen in boys and twelve in girls, 'because at that yeeres they beginne the flower of youth, preparing it selfe to the state of manhood or marriage'.¹¹ Yet there is also evidence that male puberty commonly lasted into the late teens. Henry Cuffe's *The Differences of the Ages of Man's Life* (1607) says that following infancy and boyhood comes 'our budding and blossoming age, when our cheekes and other hidden parts begin to be clothed with that mossie excrement of haire, which is prorogued vntill the eighteenth year'.¹² Citing the research of David Wulstan and others, Richard Rastall has argued independently that males in sixteenth-century Europe often did not reach puberty until age seventeen or eighteen. While some boys' voices undoubtedly started to break earlier than that, some boys probably retained the ability to sing or speak in a treble voice until the age of twenty.¹³

With this knowledge as background, in the following pages I will discuss every actor known to have played a female role for a professional adult company before 1642 – nearly fifty names in all. Because my focus is on the professional theatre, I will not deal systematically with amateur productions such as the medieval mystery plays put on by guild members. Though it is clear that female roles in such productions were played by male actors, evidence about these performers' ages is scarce, and the little evidence which does exist was ably collected and discussed twenty years ago by Meg Twycross.¹⁴ I will also not examine university dramatic productions at Oxford and Cambridge, even though many cast lists survive. The student population at Oxbridge was all-male and fairly homogeneous in terms of age, so it is not too helpful for our purposes to know that women in university plays were played by teenage boys; essentially all the roles in these plays were played by teenage boys.¹⁵

Similarly, I will not deal in depth with the Elizabethan and Jacobean all-boy companies, even though they deserve a full treatment of their own.

At the peak of the boy company vogue around the turn of the seventeenth century, the evidence suggests that the members of these companies were between ten and fourteen years old, somewhat younger than most of the 'boys' in the adult companies. When Henry Clifton complained in 1601 about his son Thomas being kidnapped to act for the Children of the Chapel by Nathaniel Giles and Henry Evans, he specified that the boy was thirteen years old.¹⁶ Several of the other Chapel boys named in Clifton's complaint can be identified, and all were within a year or two of Clifton in age.

Specifically, John Chappell, 'a grammar school scholar of one Mr. Spyke's school near Cripplegate, London', was later admitted a scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1605, suggesting that he was born around 1590 and about eleven years old

¹¹ *The Problemes of Aristotle, With Other Philosophers and Phisitions* (Edinburgh, 1595), c5v; *The Office of Christian Parents* (Cambridge, 1616), 11r. I am indebted to Lucy Munro for bringing these references to my attention, along with several others cited in this paragraph. See her *Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge, 2005), especially chapter 1.

¹² *The Differences of the Ages of Man's Life* (London, 1607), 13r–v.

¹³ Rastall, 'Female Roles', pp. 28–9. See also David Wulstan, 'Vocal Colour in English Sixteenth-Century Polyphony', *Journal of the Plainsong and Medieval Music Society* 2 (1979), 19–60, esp. 25–7.

¹⁴ Meg Twycross, "'Transvestism" in the Mystery Plays', *Medieval English Theatre* 5 (1983), 123–80.

¹⁵ There were certainly some Oxbridge students in their twenties or older, and some of them performed in plays there. But Alan Nelson, editor of REED Cambridge and co-editor of REED Oxford, informs me that no female role at Oxbridge is known to have been played by anyone older than twenty-one or twenty-two, exactly as we find in the professional theatre.

¹⁶ Glynne Wickham, William Ingram, and Herbert Berry (eds.), *English Professional Theatre, 1530–1660* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 264–7, 510–1. Thomas Clifton went on to matriculate in 1606 as a fellow-commoner from both Trinity and King's Colleges, Cambridge, receive a BA from King's in 1609–10, and enter the Middle Temple in May 1609. His will was proved in 1621, when he was about thirty-four. See John Venn and J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1922), p. 356.

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in 1601. Chappell received several degrees at Cambridge, performed in academic plays there, and probably wrote a Latin comedy, *Susenbrotus*.¹⁷ John Motteram, 'a grammar scholar in the free school at Westminster', was christened on 6 July 1589 at Addlethorpe, Lincolnshire, and thus was about twelve in 1601.¹⁸ Salomon Pavy, 'apprentice to one Peerce', acted in Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* (1600) and *Poetaster* (1601), and Ben Jonson's famous epitaph on Pavy claims that 'years he number'd scarce thirteen / When fates turned cruel'. Actually, Pavy was about twelve when he acted in *Cynthia's Revels*, thirteen at the time of Clifton's complaint, and fourteen when he died. He was baptized at St Dunstan Stepney on 12 May 1588 as 'Salomon sonne of John Pavy baptized from the howse of Mrs Pelson at Milend', and was buried at St Mary Somerset on 25 July 1602 as 'Sollomon Pavy'.¹⁹ Nathan Field, 'a scholar of a grammar school in London kept by one Mr. Mulcaster', was baptized on 17 October 1587, and thus was about thirteen and fourteen when he acted alongside Pavy in *Cynthia's Revels* and *Poetaster*. Field later became a famous actor with the King's Men and a playwright.²⁰

FEMALE ROLES IN TWO CAROLINE CAST-LISTS

The best way to illustrate the casting of female roles on the pre-Restoration professional stage will be to examine in detail two of the surviving cast lists from that era which specify who played women: *Holland's Leaguer* (performed in December 1631 by Prince Charles's Men) and *The Roman Actor* (performed in October 1626 by the King's Men). The actors named in these two cast lists illustrate the full range of ages we find for female roles, as well as the nature of the apprenticeship system which underlay the casting of teenage boys as women.

For our purposes, the cast list in the 1632 quarto of Shakerly Marmion's *Holland's Leaguer* comes close to the ideal situation alluded to earlier. This list specifies the actors who played each role, including female roles. We know when the play was first performed and when several of

the actors playing female roles were born, allowing us to determine their ages when they played these roles. Best of all, we have explicit testimony from one of the actors in question, giving his age and explaining the circumstances under which he performed.

We know with unusual precision when *Holland's Leaguer* was first performed through the office book of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels from 1623 to 1673. Though the book itself is now lost, Edmond Malone (who had access to it) reported that 'the play of Holland's Leaguer was acted six days successively at Salisbury Court, in December, 1631, and yet Sir Henry Herbert received on account of the six representations but *one pound nineteen shillings*, in virtue of the *ninth* share which he possessed as one of the proprietors of that house'.²¹ The play was entered in the Stationers' Register less than two months later, on 26 January 1632, and was printed that year in quarto with a title page saying it had been acted by Prince Charles's servants at Salisbury Court. The quarto also contained a cast list naming sixteen members of the company and specifying the roles they had played. Six of these are female roles. Robert Stratford played Triphoena, wife to Philautus; Richard Godwin played Faustina, sister to Philautus; John Wright played Millicent, daughter to Agurtes; Richard Fouch played Margery, her maid; Arthur Savill played Quartilla,

¹⁷ John C. Coldewey and Brian F. Copenhaver, eds., *Pseudomagia; Euribates Pseudomagus; Susenbrotus, or Fortunia; Zelotypus*, Renaissance Latin Drama in England, Second Series, 14 (Hildesheim, Zurich, New York, 1991), pp. 12–19; John Venn and J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, Part I, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1922), p. 324.

¹⁸ Addlethorpe parish register, Lincolnshire Archives, Lincoln.

¹⁹ St. Dunstan Stepney baptisms 1568–1608 (London Metropolitan Archives x024/066); St. Mary Somerset parish register 1558–1653 (Guildhall Library MS 5710/1), the latter also cited in Gerald Eades Bentley, 'A Good Name Lost: Ben Jonson's Lament for S. P.', *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 May 1942, p. 276.

²⁰ William Peery, *The Plays of Nathan Field* (Austin, 1950), p. 4.

²¹ N. W. Bawcutt, ed., *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama: The Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels 1623–73* (Oxford, 1996), p. 174.

gentlewoman to Triphoena; and Samuell Mannery played a bawd.²²

The first thing worth noting about these six is that none of them was a sharer in the company. The licence which created Prince Charles's Men on 7 December 1631 names ten members: Andrew Keyne (Cane), Ellis Worth, Joseph Moore, Mathew Smith, Richard Ffowler, William Browne, James Sneller, Thomas Bonde, Henry Gradwell and William Hall. In May 1632, all these men except Moore, plus Thomas Plumfield and George Stutville, were sworn Grooms of the Chamber in ordinary 'to attend the Prince his Highnes in y^e quality of players'.²³ Eight of these players (Cane, Worth, Smith, Fowler, Browne, Sneller, Bond and Gradwell) are included in the *Holland's Leaguer* cast list, but none played a female role.

Of the six who did play female roles, four (Mannery, Savill, Wright and Stratford) can be identified with a high degree of certainty. All four were teenagers in December 1631, and at least three of them were apprentices in London livery companies. As I have shown in detail elsewhere, many professional players and musicians were free of livery companies such as the Goldsmiths, and they often bound apprentices who were trained on the stage.²⁴ Samuel Mannery, for example, was bound on 1 August 1629 for a term of nine years to Thomas Goodwin, a professional musician who was free of the Farriers. Mannery married Mary Finch at St Giles in the Fields on 28 October 1638, three months after his apprenticeship ended, and was still acting the following year with the King and Queen's Young Company (Beeston's Boys) at the Cockpit. He was buried in St Giles in the Fields on 1 November 1648.²⁵ We do not know exactly when Mannery was born, but at the time of his binding in 1629 he cannot have been much younger than fourteen, the traditional lower age limit for apprentices in the London livery companies. Thus, he was probably around sixteen or seventeen when he appeared in *Holland's Leaguer*.

The ages of three of the other boys can be determined more precisely. As it turns out, all three have

connections to Andrew Cane, who played Trimalchio alongside them in *Holland's Leaguer*, and who was also a freeman of the Goldsmiths' Company. Robert Stratford was the son of William Stratford, a player in the Prince's/Palsgrave's company; on 30 April 1624, William Stratford signed a bond along with Andrew Cane and four others to act together at the Fortune. Robert Stratford was baptized at St Giles Cripplegate on 6 April 1618, and was thus thirteen years old, going on fourteen, when he played Triphoena.²⁶ Arthur Savill was baptized at St James Clerkenwell on 27 February 1617, the son of Cordaile Savill, gentleman, and was apprenticed to Cane as a Goldsmith for eight years on 5 August 1631; he was thus a few months short of fifteen years old when he played Quattilla.²⁷ John Wright was apprenticed to Cane as a Goldsmith on 27 November 1629 for eight years as the son of John Wright of St Giles Cripplegate, baker. He gave his age as forty in a Chancery deposition on 1 February 1655; thus, when he played Millicent, he was about seventeen years old.²⁸

²² Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 279–81.

²³ N. W. Bawcutt, 'Documents of the Salisbury Court Theatre in the British Library', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 9 (1997), p. 182; G. E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1941), pp. 302–3.

²⁴ Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers'.

²⁵ Farriers' Apprentice Bindings (Guildhall Library MS 5526/1), p. 74; Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, p. 506. Two of Goodwin's apprentices (John Yockney and William Young) eventually became royal musicians, and another (Marmaduke Wright) became a London city wait; all bound multiple apprentices in the Farriers. When Goodwin bound Wright, he promised to give him a treble viol or treble cornet at the end of his apprenticeship ((Guildhall Library MS 5526/1), p. 51).

²⁶ Guildhall Library MS 6419/2. The normally thorough G. E. Bentley unaccountably missed this entry among others referring to William Stratford. Though Stratford is called 'yeoman' in the 1618 entry, he is called both 'yeoman' and 'player' in later entries.

²⁷ William Ingram, 'Arthur Savill, Stage Player', *Theatre Notebook* 37 (1983), 21–2; Goldsmiths' Apprentice Book 1, f. 294v.

²⁸ Goldsmiths' Apprentice Book 1, f. 305r; Public Record Office C24/785/53 (plaintiff's depositions for *De Caine v. Wintershall*).

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Wright later provided further details in the 1655 deposition cited above, part of a lawsuit over the same 1624 bond signed by Cane and William Stratford. Wright testified that it was the usual practice for the 'Masters & Chiefe Actors' of the London companies to bind 'boyes & youthes as Apprentices to themselves or some others that were freemen of some trade or other', and that these boys acted in comedies and tragedies even though they were not technically apprenticed as actors. Wright further testified

that hee himselfe was bound as an Apprentice to the said partie [Cane] for A Certaine number of yeares to Learne the trade of A Goldsmith, And hee sayeth that hee this Deponent Did vsually Acte & play partes in Comidydes & Tragedies in the tyme of his Apprenticeshipp and was afterwards made free of the Trade of A Goldsmith which the said partie vsed²⁹

Wright was indeed freed as a Goldsmith, though not until 1646. As we will see below, quite a few other performers of female roles were formally apprenticed in livery companies. Those whose ages we can determine were between the ages of thirteen and sixteen at the time of binding and it seems reasonable to assume that the others were around the same age.

The *Holland's Leaguer* cast provides a valuable snapshot, but it leaves some important questions unanswered. We do not know any other specific roles played by any of these boys, including Wright, and thus we cannot be sure how long they remained in such roles. Fortunately, the cast list of *The Roman Actor* helps answer these questions. Not only can we determine the ages of most of the boys in the cast, but we can trace their later careers through other King's Men cast lists, providing a good picture of how boys' acting careers developed.

Philip Massinger's *The Roman Actor* was licensed for performance by the King's Men on 11 October 1626 and printed in quarto in 1629. As with *Holland's Leaguer*, sixteen actors and their roles are named in the quarto, but here only four of them correspond to female roles. These are John Tompson, who played Domitia, the wife of Aelius Lamia; John 'Hvnnieman' (Honeyman),

who played Domitilla, cousin germane to Caesar; William Trigge, who played Julia, Titus's daughter; and Alexander Gough, who played Caenis, Vespasian's concubine.³⁰ As with the list from Prince Charles's Men, one thing we can tell right off the bat is that none of these four was a sharer in the King's Men. None of them are among the thirteen men listed in the company patent issued on 24 June 1625 after the accession of Charles I, nor are any of them among the fifteen men named in the livery allowance of 6 May 1629.³¹

However, we do have baptism dates for two of these performers, showing that they were comparable in age to the Prince Charles's boys we saw earlier. Alexander Gough was the son of Robert Gough, a minor player with the King's Men, and was baptized at St Saviour's Southwark on 7 August 1614; he was thus twelve years old when *The Roman Actor* was first performed.³² John Honeyman was christened on 7 February 1613 at St Botolph Bishopsgate, the son of Richard Honeyman; he was thus thirteen years old in late 1626. If the printed cast list refers to a production later than the first one, Gough and Honeyman might have been as old as fifteen and sixteen when they played these roles.

Both of these boys can be traced with the King's Men in later years, and through these later cast lists we can trace their transition from female roles to male ones. In Lodowick Carlell's *The Deserving Favorite*, printed in 1629 and probably performed a year or two earlier, Honeyman played Clarinda, while Gough did not appear. In Massinger's *The Picture*, licensed on 8 June 1629 and printed the following year, Gough played Acanthe, a maid of honour, and Honeyman played Sophia, wife

²⁹ PRO C24/785/53. This transcription expands abbreviations and incorporates deletions and insertions into the text. I discuss the lawsuit in more detail in the paper cited above.

³⁰ Bentley, *Profession of Player*, pp. 250–1.

³¹ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 1, pp. 80–3.

³² Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, pp. 446–7. He was most likely named after King's Man Alexander Cooke, who had been buried in the same parish six months before and had been an apprentice in the company alongside Robert Gough.

to Mathias. In John Clavell's *The Soddered Citizen* (c. 1630) we find Honeyman playing a male role for the first time, namely Sly the servant. Gough played a page, Fewtricks, in the same production. Thereafter, we find Honeyman only in minor male roles: the First Merchant in Massinger's *Believe As You List* (licensed 6 May 1631) and a young factor in Fletcher's *The Wild Goose-Chase* (1632). Gough, however, continued to play female roles: Eurinia in *Believe As You List* and Lillia-Bianca in *The Wild Goose-Chase*.³³ Thus, while Honeyman appears to have transitioned to minor male roles around age seventeen, Gough continued to play women until he was at least eighteen. We know of no further roles for either actor. Honeyman died in 1636 at the tender age of twenty-three, while Gough became a publisher during the Interregnum.

William Trigge appears between Honeyman and Gough in the cast list for *The Roman Actor*, playing Julia, Titus's daughter. Trigge had been apprenticed to John Heminges of the King's Men, who was free of the Grocers, on 20 December 1625 for a term of twelve years.³⁴ After his minor part in *The Roman Actor*, Trigge played other minor female roles in 1628–32 alongside Gough and Honeyman. He was Corsica, Sophia's woman, in *The Picture*; Modestina, an orphan, in *The Soddered Citizen*; Selina, daughter to Clephis, in *The Swisser*; and Rosalura, one of the 'Aerie Daughters of Nantolet', in *The Wild Goose-Chase*.³⁵

Right in the middle of this period, in October 1630, Trigge's master John Heminges died. His apprenticeship contract passed to Heminges's eldest son and heir William, who had earned a BA and an MA at Christ Church, Oxford, but was now leading a profligate lifestyle which eventually landed him in the Marshalsea prison. William Heminges also inherited his father's shares in the Globe and Blackfriars playhouses, but John Shank testified several years later that William had nothing to do with running either theatre but merely collected the income.³⁶ These cannot have been ideal conditions for Trigge and, on 11 August 1631, he addressed a petition to the Mayor's Court of London asking to be released from his indenture of apprenticeship. In this petition, written

on parchment in legal French, Trigge describes himself as the son of Randall Trigge of 'Morte flatte' (Mortlake?), Kent, clerk, and says that he had been apprenticed on 20 December 1625 to John Heminges, citizen and grocer, for a term of twelve years, 'pur appr[en]dre lart que le dite John hennings adonc vsait . . . l'arte d'une Stageplayer' ('to learn the art which the said John Heminges then used . . . the art of a stageplayer').³⁷ Here, as with John Wright, we have an apprentice explicitly testifying that he had been bound in a livery company in order to act.

Somewhat surprisingly, Trigge did not ask to be released from his indenture because his master had died; rather, he claimed that the indenture should be void because, at the time it was signed, he was only thirteen years old rather than the customary minimum of fourteen.³⁸ This was clearly a technicality, for it was not uncommon for boys younger than fourteen to be apprenticed; in fact, John Heminges himself had been only eleven when he was bound.³⁹ It seems probable that the

³³ Bentley, *Profession of Player*, pp. 251–69, transcribes and discusses all these cast lists.

³⁴ Guildhall Library MS 11571/11, f.139v.

³⁵ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, pp. 604–6.

³⁶ G. C. Moore Smith, 'Introduction', *William Hemminge's Elegy on Randolph's Finger* (1923), pp. 1–9.

³⁷ Corporation of London Record Office, Mayor's Court Original Bills, MC1–53, membrane 54. This record was cited inaccurately by Bentley (*Profession of Player*, p. 122), who does not mention the purpose of the petition and mistakenly says that it gives the date of Trigge's apprenticeship as 20 December 1626. The date given in the document is 'Le vnitiesm [sic] iour de december en l'an du reigne Seigneur Charles le Roy d'angleterre le premier' ('the twentieth day of December in the first year of the reign of lord Charles, King of England', i.e. 1625). I am grateful to James Sewell of the Corporation of London Record Office for helping me decipher parts of the petition.

³⁸ He asserted 'que le dite vnitiesme iour de december il fuist dedans le age de quatorziesme ans c'esta scavoir de l'age de xiii ans et non plus pur quoy Lavant dite Indenture est void' ('that the said twentieth of December he was under the age of fourteen, that is to say, the age of xiii years and no more, for which reason the abovementioned indenture is void').

³⁹ He was baptized in Drotwich, Worcestershire, on 25 November 1566, and apprenticed for nine years to James

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real reason for the petition was that Trigge did not want to be bound to William Heminges. Whatever the reason, the petition was eventually successful; Heminges made four defaults by failing to appear before the Mayor's Court, and when he failed to appear on 20 and 21 June 1632, the court discharged Trigge from the residue of the term of his apprenticeship. Three weeks later, on 11 July 1632, William Trigge claimed his freedom in the Grocers by patrimony as the son of Robert Trigge, deceased.⁴⁰

These records provide valuable information about Trigge's age, though not without some complications. If Trigge was under fourteen years old on 20 December 1625, as he claimed, then he must have been born after 20 December 1611. However, this would also mean that when he claimed his freedom in the Grocers he was a few months short of twenty-one, the normal minimum age for sons to claim freedom by patrimony. This is not a major problem, for such age requirements were not always strictly enforced in an age without birth certificates. There is a close parallel to Trigge in Anthony Munday, who was baptized on 13 October 1560 but convinced the Court of Orphans on 12 January 1581 that he was twenty-one in order to receive his portion from his deceased father's estate.⁴¹ If Trigge was born roughly in the course of 1612, as his testimony implies, then he was between fourteen and seventeen when he played Julia in *The Roman Actor*, and around twenty when he played Rosalura in *The Wild Goose-Chase*.

Finally we come to the performer of the most important female role in *The Roman Actor*, namely John Thompson, who played Domitia. Thompson played women for the King's Men over a span of at least eight years, and possibly more. The 1679 Beaumont and Fletcher folio lists him in the cast of *The Pilgrim*, performed at court on New Year's Day 1622, though no role is given.⁴² His earliest definite female role is the Cardinal's mistress in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, printed in 1623 and performed some time in the previous two or three years. On 3 December 1623, Sir Edward Dering paid 6s to see a play, plus another 2s 6d 'Given to little Thomsons there'.⁴³ Presumably this was John

Thompson, and the appellation 'little' suggests that he was still quite young. In addition to the Cardinal's mistress in *Duchess* and Domitia in *The Roman Actor*, Thompson played numerous other important female roles: Cleonarda in *The Deserving Favorite* (c. 1628), Miniona in *The Soddered Citizen* (c. 1629), Queen Honoria in *The Picture* (1629), and finally Panopia, the King's sister, in *The Swisser* (1631).⁴⁴ He died in 1634.

We do not know exactly when or where Thompson was born (the name is exceedingly common), but he was apparently bound as an apprentice to King's Man John Shank, who was free of the Weavers. In the 'Sharers' Papers' of 1635, Shank wrote that he 'hath still of his owne purse supplied the company for the service of his Ma^{ty} wth boyes as Thomas Pollard, Iohn Thompson deceased (for whome Hee payd 40^{li}) yo^r supplt hauing payd his part of 200^{li} for other boyes since his coming to ye Company, Iohn Honiman, Thomas Holcome and diuerse others & at this time maintaines 3 more for the sayd service'.⁴⁵ Shank explicitly calls Thompson a 'boy', which presumably has the same meaning we have seen in other theatrical contexts, i.e. 'male teenager' and/or 'apprentice'.

Collins, Grocer, on 25 May 1578. J. M. Nosworthy, 'A Note on John Heminge', *The Library*, 5th Series, 3 (1949), 287–8; Guildhall Library MS 11571/6, f. 473v.

⁴⁰ Guildhall Library MS 11571/11, f.406r. Robert Trigge had been freed as a Grocer in 1596. One might question whether this is the same William Trigge from the Mayor's Court petition, who claimed to be the son of Randall Trigge. Given the closeness of the dates, I am inclined to think that both records refer to the same William Trigge, and that Randall was a legal guardian, perhaps an uncle. Such discrepancies are not at all uncommon in the records of the time.

⁴¹ Mark Eccles, 'Anthony Munday', in *Studies in the English Renaissance Drama*, edited by Josephine Bennett, Oscar Cargill, and Vernon Hall, Jr (New York, 1959), pp. 95–105.

⁴² Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 3, p. 391.

⁴³ James M. Gibson, ed., *Records of Early English Drama: Kent: Diocese of Canterbury*, vol. 2 (Toronto, 2002), p. 920.

⁴⁴ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, pp. 599–600.

⁴⁵ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, p. 566. The apprenticeship records of the Weavers are unfortunately lost for this period, or we might be able to confirm whether Pollard and/or Thompson was formally apprenticed to Shank in that company.

However, the eight-year span of Thompson's service in female roles suggests that he may have been in his very early twenties when he played the last of these. If so, he could have been around thirteen when Dering called him 'little', and sixteen when he played the demanding role of Domitia. The eight-year-plus span of Thompson's career playing women corresponds almost exactly to the range of ages we have just seen for these King's Men boys in female roles – from twelve years old (Gough) to twenty (Trigge).

Collectively, all this evidence demonstrates convincingly that female roles in the early Caroline period (1626–31) were played by teenage boys, no younger than twelve and no older than twenty-one. However, a sceptic might argue that it does not prove that women had always been played by boys of that age, as opposed to adult men or small children. While the evidence from other periods is generally not as explicit as what we have just seen, it is complete and consistent enough to make it clear that these Caroline casts were not an isolated phenomenon. In order to demonstrate this, the rest of this paper will systematically go through every person known to have played a specific female role on the English stage before the onset of actresses in the early 1660s, and will outline what is known about that person's age. This evidence ranges in time from the late sixteenth century to the Restoration, and it shows boys in their teens or very early twenties playing women throughout that whole time.

EVIDENCE FROM ELIZABETHAN STAGE PLOTS

The earliest professional cast lists to pair actors with the roles they played date from the last few years of Queen Elizabeth's reign.⁴⁶ These lists derive from a handful of manuscript 'plots', or documents which were hung backstage at playhouses to help the actors keep track of the entrances and exits for each scene. Most of the seven surviving Elizabethan plots originated with the Lord Admiral's Men, the main company associated with Philip Henslowe during the period in question, and thus

can often be co-ordinated with the information in Henslowe's Diary and related documents. This information shows that the main male roles in the plots were played by adults, usually sharers, but that female roles were invariably played by non-sharers who were sometimes explicitly identified as boys. Several of these 'boys' doubled youthful male roles, suggesting that they must have been teenagers or young men rather than prepubescent children.

Two of the plots, *The Dead Man's Fortune* and *2 Fortune's Tennis*, have little that is relevant for our purposes – each contains only a few actors' names, none of which clearly corresponds to a female role. One of the others, *Troilus and Cressida*, survives only in a fragment from a production in spring 1599, but this fragment does contain some relevant evidence. At one point Cressida enters with 'a waighting maid wth a light', and the actor playing the maid is given as 'mr Jones his boy'. Later Cressida enters with some beggars, who are identified as 'pigg, Stephen, mr Jones his boy & mutes'.⁴⁷ This boy was apparently attached to Richard Jones, one of the principal Admiral's Men, and was young enough to play a maid but old enough to play a beggar. We cannot identify him with certainty, but his name may have been James, for on 17 November 1599, about six months after the date of the plot, Henslowe lent 'mr Jonnes player' 40 shillings 'wch is boye Jemes feched'.⁴⁸

Looking at the other surviving plots, we encounter similar evidence. *Frederick and Basilea* dates from June 1597, and identifies the actors for three female roles. The minor role of Athanasia was played by 'Griffen', who does not appear elsewhere

⁴⁶ There are earlier cast lists from academic plays performed at Oxford and Cambridge, but these are not relevant for our purposes because the actors were all university students. See Frederick S. Boas, *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (Oxford, 1914), and Alan Nelson, ed., *Records of Early English Drama: Cambridge* (Toronto, 1989), pp. 942–62.

⁴⁷ W. W. Greg, ed., *Henslowe Papers, Being Documents Supplementary to Henslowe's Diary* (London, 1907), p. 142.

⁴⁸ R. A. Foakes, ed., *Henslowe's Diary*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2002), p. 32. It is possible, but not likely, that Jones's boy was James Bristow, whom Henslowe bought from William Augustine as discussed below.

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in the plots or in Henslowe's Diary. The similarly minor role of Leonora was played by 'Will', who Greg suggested was the 'little will Barne' who later appeared as a pygmy in 1 *Tamar Cam*.⁴⁹ Whatever their precise identities, neither 'Griffen' nor 'Will' was a sharer in the company, or otherwise identifiable as an adult. The lead female role of Basilea was played by 'Dick', who is distinguished from a 'Black Dick' who played several minor male roles. At one point, Philipo and Basilea enter together, and the actors are identified as 'E Dutton his boye'. Since 'Dutton' is elsewhere identified as playing Philipo, 'his boye' must refer to the actor playing Basilea, i.e. 'Dick'.⁵⁰

The plot for *The Battle of Alcazar*, dating to either 1598 or 1600, identifies an unusual number of boys, though only two of them played female roles.⁵¹ 'Dab' and 'Harry' played young brothers of the Moor who later appear as ghosts, and Dab also played another child. Two moorish pages were played by 'm^r Allens boy' and 'm^r Townes boy'. While we can't be sure who these two were, pages were typically teenagers or young men rather than small children. The actor playing the lead female role of Calipolis is not identified, but the female roles of Abdula Rais and Ruben Arches were played by 'Dick Jubie' and 'Jeames' respectively. Dick Jubie is probably the boy 'Dick' who had played Basilea in *Alcazar*, and in this play he also played the youthful courtier Christophero de Tavolo, a male role appropriate for an older teenager. James may be Richard Jones's boy who had played both female and male roles in *Troilus*, and in this production he also played a page. Thus, each of these actors played both female roles and youthful male roles in the same production, strongly suggesting that they were teenagers.

The final plot associated with the Admiral's Men is 1 *Tamar Cam*, datable to 1602–3.⁵² Here Dick Jubie reappears but playing only male roles, namely the chorus and several smaller parts. Furthermore, Jubie had a son baptized at St Saviour's Southwark on 1 May 1602, around the time of this plot. All this is consistent with a young man in his early twenties, as Jubie would be if he had been in his late teens in 1597–8. Among the major female roles in 1 *Tamar*

Cam, no actor is specified for Tarmia, but Jack Jones appears to have played Palmeda. Jones later appears in the registers of St. Botolph Aldgate from 1607 to 1615, but he is nowhere to be found in Henslowe's Diary; thus he was almost certainly not an adult member of the company in 1602. If we turn to lesser female roles, Thomas Parsons played a nurse and a hermaphrodite, as well as several minor male parts. Parsons had played the androgynous role of a fury in *The Battle of Alcazar*, and had been identified by Henslowe in 1599 as Thomas Downton's 'boy'; now, three years later, he was playing both female and male roles, just as Dick Jubie and James had done. A 'James' also appears here, playing a hermaphrodite. This may be the same James from either of the other plots noted above, or it could also be Philip Henslowe's boy James Bristow, whom Henslowe had bought from William Augustine on 18 December 1598.⁵³

Before we leave Henslowe and the Admiral's Men, there is one more (apparent) player of female parts to consider, namely John Pig. He appears in two of the plots we have looked at, playing minor male roles: Andreo, a youth, in *Frederick and Basilea* (June 1597) and a beggar in *Troilus and Cressida* (1599). However, on 8 December 1597, Henslowe lent the Admiral's 6s 7d. 'for makyng & a payer of yeare sleavse of the bodeyes of pyges gowne', and an inventory of apparel belonging to the company, taken in March 1598, includes both male and female items of clothing specified as Pig's. There is 'j red sewte of cloth for pyge, layed with whitt lace'; 'Pyges damask gowne', 'j harcoller tafitie sewte of pygges', 'j white tafitie sewte of pygges', and 'j littell

⁴⁹ On 1 December 1597, Henslowe lent Robert Shaa money 'to bye tensell for bornes womones gowne', and presumably this gown belonged to 'little will Barne', as opposed to the adult player William Borne/Bird. Greg, *Henslowe Papers*, p. 136; W. W. Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouse: Commentary* (Oxford, 1931), p. 66; Foakes, *Henslowe's Diary*, 72.

⁵⁰ Greg, *Henslowe Papers*, p. 137.

⁵¹ Greg, *Henslowe Papers*, pp. 138–41, provides a transcript.

⁵² Greg, *Henslowe Papers*, pp. 145–8, provides a transcript.

⁵³ Greg, *Dramatic Documents*, p. 56 and pp. 66–7, discusses the possibilities.

gacket for Pygge'.⁵⁴ It appears that Pig was playing some substantial female roles, or had recently done so, around the same time that he was playing minor male roles. His exact age is uncertain, but he seems to have been an apprentice like the others we have seen. There survives a playful letter, undated but apparently from the 1593 tour of *Strange's Men*, in which Pig refers to 'my good master hinsley' [Henslowe] and also alludes to Edward Alleyn as his master. On 27 March 1598, Pig witnessed a loan along with 'Jemes', presumably the Admirals' boy of that name.⁵⁵

The final plot surviving from around this time, *The Second Part of the Seven Deadly Sins*, did not originate with the Admirals' Men. It is usually assumed to have been written for *Strange's Men* in the early 1590s, but I have shown elsewhere that it almost certainly represents the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare's company, around 1597–8.⁵⁶ This plot identifies five actors with specific female roles: 'T Belt' played Panthea; 'Saunder' played Queen Videna and Procne; 'Nick' played a lady and Pompeia; 'Ro Go' played Aspatia and Philomela; and 'Ned' played Rodope. There was also a boy 'Will' who played Itis, a child, but since this is not a female role we will not worry about it here.

The lack of surnames makes some speculation inevitable in identifying these boys, but 'T Belt' can now be identified with a fair amount of certainty. He was Thomas Belte, who was bound as an apprentice on 12 November 1595 to John Heminges of the the Lord Chamberlain's Men, who, as we saw earlier, was a freeman of the Company of Grocers.⁵⁷ Heminges was among the most prominent of the many professional players who were free of London livery companies, and Belte is the earliest of the boys apprenticed to these freemen-players whose presence on stage can be documented.⁵⁸ Belte may have been the son of Thomas Belte, a Norwich city wait who was expelled from the city along with his wife and children on 16 November 1594, almost exactly a year before Heminges bound the apprentice of that name.⁵⁹

The 'Saunder' and 'Nick' of the *2 Seven Deadly Sins* plot are most likely Alexander Cooke and

Nicholas Tooley, both of whom eventually became sharers in the King's Men. Cooke was bound as Heminges's second apprentice on 26 January 1597, and Tooley refers in his will to 'my late Mr [i.e. master] Richard Burbage', suggesting that he had been apprenticed to Burbage.⁶⁰ Cooke is probably the Alexander Cooke who was baptized at Sandwich, Kent on 15 December 1583, along with a twin sister Anna, and Mary Edmond has made a good case that Tooley was born in 1582–3 in Antwerp, the son of a wealthy merchant-adventurer and freeman of the Leathersellers who died when Nicholas was an infant.⁶¹ If these identifications are correct, then Cooke and Tooley were about fourteen and fifteen years old respectively when they played the lead female roles in *2 Seven Deadly Sins*. Though we are dealing with several levels of uncertainty here, these ages are entirely consistent with what we saw earlier with the Caroline cast lists.

The other two performers to play female roles in *2 Seven Deadly Sins* were 'Ro Go' and 'Ned'. The first of these was probably Robert Gough, who first shows up with the King's Men in 1603 when he married Augustine Phillips's sister and was a legatee in the will of Thomas Pope. Some have speculated that he was Pope's apprentice, but in any case he

⁵⁴ Foakes, *Henslowe's Diary*, pp. 73, 318, 321, 323.

⁵⁵ Foakes, *Henslowe's Diary*, pp. 119, 282–3.

⁵⁶ David Kathman, 'Reconsidering *The Seven Deadly Sins*', *Early Theatre* 7.1 (2004), 13–44.

⁵⁷ Guildhall Library MS 11571/8, f.508r.

⁵⁸ This is mainly due to the fact that no professional cast lists exist before the late 1590s, and livery company apprenticeship records are more scanty. On 14 October 1584, Richard Haywarde was apprenticed as a Vintner to the famous clown Richard Tarlton (Guildhall Library MS 15211/1, f.171v), but we have no proof that Haywarde appeared on stage.

⁵⁹ David Galloway, ed., *Records of Early English Drama: Norwich, 1540–1642* (Toronto, 1984), 107.

⁶⁰ Guildhall Library MS 11571/8, f.545v (Cooke's binding); E. A. J. Honigmann and Susan Brock, *Playhouse Wills 1558–1642* (Manchester and New York, 1993), 125 (Tooley's will). My paper on *2 Seven Deadly Sins*, cited above, has more detail on the evidence for identifying these boys as Cooke and Tooley.

⁶¹ Mary Edmond, 'Yeomen, Citizens, Gentlemen, and Players: The Burbages and Their Connections', *Elizabethan Theatre: Essays in Honor of Samuel Schoenbaum* (Delaware, 1996), 36–9.

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must have been with the company for some time before 1603 (as a non-sharer) in order to form such close bonds. The 'Ned' of the plot is tougher to identify, but one intriguing hypothesis is that he was Edmund Shakespeare, William Shakespeare's younger brother. Edmund was a player at the time of his death in 1607, and it is reasonable to think that he had experience before that. He was baptized on 3 May 1580, and thus was seventeen or eighteen years old when the plot was made. This age was, as we have seen, an age at which a boy might play either female or (minor) male roles. However, the name 'Edward/Edmund' is common enough that this identification must remain an interesting conjecture.⁶²

To sum up: the evidence in these Elizabethan plots, taken as a whole, paints a picture that is virtually identical to what we saw earlier for the 1620s and 1630s. No person identifiable as an adult, let alone a sharer, is ever shown playing a female role, whereas several people specifically identified as 'boys' are shown playing such roles. Several of these 'boys' doubled small male roles, suggesting that they were in their late teens at the time. At least one and probably two of the performers who took female roles (Thomas Belte and Alexander Cooke) were formally apprenticed to an adult player at the time, indicating that they were between their early teens and their early twenties.

JACOBEAN EVIDENCE

When we move into the Jacobean era (1603–25), the evidence about players of female roles becomes more diffuse. There are no more theatrical 'plots', but there are a few play manuscripts, and one printed folio, with some of the actors' names written in. Toward the end of this period, we also find the first printed cast list to pair up actors with specific roles, anticipating the many such lists from the Caroline period. As it happens, all the relevant evidence from this period comes from the King's Men, whose roster of apprentices can be reconstructed with surprising thoroughness. To the extent that we can identify the players behind the names, the evidence is all consistent with what we saw for the

earlier period: female roles were played by teenage apprentices and never (as far as we can tell) by adults.

The first name to consider is John Rice, who, like most of the other boys we will encounter, eventually became an adult player. On 16 July 1607, the Company of Merchant Taylors put on an entertainment in their hall for King James, including 'a very proper Child, well spoken, being clothed like an angel of gladness' who delivered an eighteen-line speech written by Ben Jonson. The Merchant Taylors paid forty shillings to John Heminges of the King's Men 'for his direction of his boy that made the speech to his Maiestie', and five shillings 'to John Rise the speaker'.⁶³ On 31 May 1610, in a city pageant honoring Henry's creation as Prince of Wales, Rice played Corinea of Cornwall, 'a very fayre and beautifull Nimphe . . . with a Coronet of Pearles and Cockle Shelles on her head', alongside Richard Burbage's Amphion, 'a graue and iudicious Prophet-like personage'.⁶⁴ The 'angel of gladness' might have been androgynous, but here Rice's character is explicitly female. Given that he was chosen for these two special performances, it is reasonable to believe that Rice was one of the King's Men's leading performers of female roles around this time.

Although Rice was identified in 1607 as Heminges's 'boy', there is no record of his being apprenticed to Heminges as a Grocer, as Belte and Cooke were. It is possible that he was formally apprenticed to some third party and Heminges was only his master within the acting company, a situation similar to what we will see below in connection with Stephen Hammerton. We do not know for sure how old Rice was, but we can make a good guess. Although he had been called a 'boy' in 1607, he signed a bond as one of twelve sharers in the newly formed Lady Elizabeth's Men on 29 August 1611, fifteen months after his appearance

⁶² I discuss 'Ro Go' and 'Ned' more fully in the 2 *Seven Deadly Sins* paper cited above.

⁶³ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 2, p. 213n1.

⁶⁴ T. W. Baldwin, *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company* (Princeton, 1927), p. 423.

as Corinea in the water pageant. This was a young company; one of the other sharers, Giles Gary, had performed with the Children of the Queen's Revels in 1609, and two others, William Barkstead and William Ecclestone, were both twenty or twenty-one years old.⁶⁵ It is not unreasonable to think that Rice was about the same age. Of the numerous John Rices baptized in England around the appropriate time, perhaps the most promising is the one christened in St. Bride's Fleet Street on 22 September 1591; he would have been fifteen at the time of the 1607 entertainment, eighteen in the 1610 pageant, and a few weeks short of twenty for the 1611 bond.⁶⁶ Regardless of whether this is the right John Rice, the player of that name was most likely in his mid-to-late teens in 1607–10.

Next we have Richard Robinson, another boy who later graduated to adult roles and sharer status. Robinson first appears with the King's Men in 1611 in two different plays: in the Folio cast list of Jonson's *Catiline*, where his role is not specified, and in the manuscript play *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, where a stage direction indicates that he played the substantial part of the Lady.⁶⁷ In Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*, written and performed in 1616, Merecraft expresses a desire for 'a witty boy' to impersonate a lady, and Engine suggests getting one of the players, some of whom 'are very honest lads'. He specifically recommends 'Dick Robinson, / A very pretty fellow, and comes often / To a gentleman's chamber, a friend's of mine'. Engine tells how the gentleman had brought Robinson to a feast dressed as a lawyer's wife and fooled everybody, whereupon Merecraft exclaims, 'They say he's an ingenious youth!'⁶⁸ Robinson is directly or indirectly called a 'boy', 'lad', 'fellow' and 'youth', terms which collectively are most consistent with a boy in his late teens. Though the name is quite common, he may be the 'Richard Robenson', son of Richard, baptized at St. Leonard Shoreditch on 15 February 1598; that was the home parish of Richard Burbage, to whom Robinson was probably apprenticed, and Robinson definitely lived there as an adult.⁶⁹ If so, he was thirteen at the time of *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* and eighteen when he was praised by Jonson. Robinson was a sharer in the King's

Men by 27 March 1619, when he is named in the company's new patent. Baldwin plausibly suggests that Robinson had taken the place of Richard Cowley, who had just been buried on 12 March.⁷⁰

Our next piece of evidence is a copy of the 1616 Ben Jonson folio in which a contemporary hand has annotated the character lists for two of Jonson's plays, indicating which actors played which roles in revivals by the King's Men dating from 1616–19.⁷¹ These cast lists are of great interest for theatre historians but for our purposes the most interesting notations are those indicating that 'Richard Birch' played the major female roles of Fine Madam Would-Bee in *Völpone* and Doll Common in *The Alchemist*. No player of that name is known, but the King's Men did have a boy named George Birch, who was apprenticed to John Heminges for

⁶⁵ There are actually two surviving versions of the 1611 bond, transcribed by Greg, *Henslowe Papers*, 18, 111. For Gary, see Edwin Nungezer, *A Dictionary of Actors* (New Haven, 1929), p. 85; for Barkstead, Mark Eccles, 'Brief Lives: Tudor and Stuart Authors', *Studies in Philology*, 79.4 (1982), 10; for Ecclestone, Mark Eccles, "Elizabethan Actors II: E–J", *Notes & Queries* 236 (1991), 454.

⁶⁶ St. Bride's Fleet Street baptisms, 1587/8–1653 (Guildhall Library MS 6536). There was also a John Rice baptized at St Martin in the Fields on 1 September 1594, but he was seventeen at the time of the 1611 bond, which seems a bit young.

⁶⁷ Nungezer, *Dictionary of Actors*, p. 300.

⁶⁸ Peter Happé (ed.), *The Devil is an Ass* (Manchester and New York, 1994), 2.7.57–75.

⁶⁹ St Leonard Shoreditch baptisms and marriages, 1558–1653 (Guildhall Library MS 7493). The register also shows the baptism of this Richard Robinson's two younger brothers: Daniel (20 April 1600) and Ralph (14 May 1601). For Robinson's probable apprenticeship to Burbage, see Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, p. 550. A Richard Robinson was apprenticed as a Draper to William Risby on 2 May 1610 (Drapers' MS +287/F.B. 1), but the name is common enough that we cannot assume this to be the player, absent any evidence connecting Risby with the King's Men.

⁷⁰ Baldwin, *Organization*, p. 51.

⁷¹ James A. Riddell, 'Some Actors in Ben Jonson's Plays', *Shakespeare Studies*, 5 (1969), 285–98. The same hand also wrote character names next to two of the actors' names in the cast list for *The Silent Woman*, performed by the Children of the Queen's Revels, and similarly annotated the cast list for *The Alchemist*.

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eight years on 4 July 1610 (as 'George Burgh') and was an adult member of the company from 1619 until his death in 1625.⁷² Riddell suggested that the annotator meant George Birch but misremembered his first name, a suggestion that seems eminently plausible. Adding to the plausibility is the fact that the company had another boy at the time named Richard (Sharpe), as noted below.

In August 1619, the King's Men performed a topical play called *Sir John Van Olden Barnavelt*, about the Dutch patriot of that name. A manuscript of this play survives as British Library MS Add. 18653, mostly written by Ralph Crane but with the names of several minor players added by a prompter.⁷³ Among the roles paired with players' names are two female ones: 'T Holc' played the Provost's wife, and 'Nick' played Barnavelt's wife. The first of these must be Thomas Holcombe, who was apprenticed to Heminges on 22 April 1618 for a term of eight years. This apprentice may be the 'Thomas Hollocomb' who was baptized in Shobrooke, Devonshire, on 7 April 1605, in which case he would have been fourteen in August 1619.⁷⁴ In any case, he cannot be much younger, for 'George sonne of Thomas Holcome Plaier' was christened at St Giles Cripplegate on 24 July 1624, and Holcombe was buried there on 1 September 1625.⁷⁵ The 'Nick' of *Barnavelt* is most likely Nicholas Crosse, who was apprenticed to Heminges on 25 May 1614. Bentley suggested that Nick was Nicholas Underhill, but Underhill was not apprenticed in the company (to Ambrose Beeland, as a Draper) until 13 October 1620.⁷⁶

Now we come to the cast list in the 1623 quarto of John Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, the first printed cast list in English to give the names both of actors and of the roles they played. There are actually two names given for three of the roles, and from our knowledge of these players' biographies it is clear that these must refer to separate productions, one from 1613 to 1614 and one from between 1620 and 1623.⁷⁷ Three female roles are assigned: 'R. Sharpe' played the Duchess, 'I. Tomson' played the Cardinal's mistress, and 'R. Pallant' played Cariola.⁷⁸ 'I. Tomson' is John Thompson, whom we saw earlier in the King's cast list for *The Roman Actor*. The other

two names belong to boys who were apprenticed to John Heminges.

Richard Sharpe, who played the lead female role in this production, was apprenticed as a Grocer to Heminges on 21 February 1616 for eight years. He had been baptized at St. Leonard Shoreditch on 18 October 1601 as the son of Peter Sharpe, so he was fourteen at the time of his binding.⁷⁹ The cast lists in the 1679 Beaumont and Fletcher folio show him acting in many plays with the King's Men between 1616 and 1623, though without roles specified; his role as the Duchess came during the second half of his apprenticeship, when he was between seventeen and twenty-one years old. By 1626 he was playing male roles for the King's Men, and he continued to do so until his death in 1632.⁸⁰

Robert Pallant was also apprenticed to Heminges, for eight years beginning 9 February 1620. He was the son of the minor player Robert Pallant Sr, and had been christened at St Saviour's Southwark on 28 September 1605; thus, he was

⁷² Guildhall Library MS 11571/9, f. 344r (Birch's binding); Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, p. 377 (Birch's later career).

⁷³ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 3, pp. 415–17.

⁷⁴ Shobrooke parish register, Devon Record Office, Exeter. I am grateful to Eliza Newton of the Devon Record Office for copying the record of Holcomb's baptism record for me.

⁷⁵ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, p. 475.

⁷⁶ Guildhall Library MS 11571/10, f. 111v (Crosse's binding); Drapers' MS +288/f.B. 2 (Underhill's binding).

⁷⁷ The actors listed for Ferdinand are Richard Burbage, who died in 1619, and Joseph Taylor, who replaced him in the company; those listed for Antonio are William Ostler, who died in 1614, and Robert Benfield, who does not appear in the company until 1619. The list is reproduced in E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1930), p. 76.

⁷⁸ The quarto actually brackets Pallant's name with 'The Doctor' and 'Court officers' as well as Cariola, but since it would have been physically impossible to play all these roles, someone in the printing house probably added the bracket by mistake.

⁷⁹ Guildhall Library MS 11571/10, f. 198v (Sharpe's binding); Guildhall Library MS 7493 (Sharpe's baptism). The St. Leonard Shoreditch register of burials 1558–1654 (Guildhall Library MS 7499/1) shows that Sharpe's father, Peter, was buried there on 24 August 1603, at the height of that year's plague outbreak.

⁸⁰ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, pp. 569–71.

between fourteen and eighteen years old when he played Cariola. No other specific roles are recorded for him, but in 1624 he was listed among those ‘employed by the Kinges Maiesties servantes in their quallity of Playinge as Musitions and other necessary attendantes.’⁸¹

CAROLINE EVIDENCE

The Caroline period (1625–42) provides us with the most complete record by far of the actors who took female roles on the pre-Restoration professional stage, with a corresponding increase in biographical data. We already saw much of this evidence in the cast lists for *Holland’s Leaguer* and *The Roman Actor*, and the Elizabethan and Jacobean evidence has added to the picture without changing it in any significant way. The remaining Caroline evidence provides further details, though it also includes a few puzzling bits of information which have to be taken into account.

KING’S MEN

As we saw in our earlier discussion, seven cast lists pairing actors with roles survive for the King’s Men from 1626–32: Massinger’s *The Roman Actor* (licensed 1626, printed 1629), Carlell’s *The Deserving Favourite* (printed 1629), Massinger’s *The Picture* (licensed 1629, printed 1630), Clavell’s *The Soderred Citizen* (MS c. 1630), Arthur Wilson’s *The Swisser* (MS 1631), Massinger’s *Believe As You List* (licensed 1631), and Fletcher’s *The Wild Goose Chase* (performed 1632, printed 1652). The four boys named in the cast of *The Roman Actor* – John Thompson, William Trigge, Alexander Gough, and John Honeyman – played the bulk of the female roles in all of these plays, but a few others also made appearances.

The 1629 quarto of *The Deserving Favourite* says that the minor part of Mariana was played by Edward Horton. Very little is known of Horton outside this cast list and the name was a fairly common one, making it impossible to pin down his birth date with any confidence. However, his name does also appear in the 1647 Beaumont and Fletcher

folio. A stage direction in *The Mad Lover* says ‘Enter Stremon and his Boy Ed. Hor.’, after which Horton’s character is addressed as ‘small Tom Treble’, and later in the play he apparently sings a song. As Bentley points out, the manuscript underlying the printed text presumably dates from a known revival of the play in 1630, just a year after the *Deserving Favourite* quarto.⁸² If Horton was ‘small’ and a ‘boy’ in 1630, then obviously he must have also been a boy in 1628–9 when he played Mariana.

Two of the remaining King’s female roles have connections to John Shank. According to the MS of *The Soderred Citizen* (c. 1629–30), the part of Miniona’s maid was played by ‘John: Shanks Boy’. Though the boy’s name is not given, the fact that he is identified as a boy is enough for our purposes. He was presumably an apprentice of Shank, who played Hodge in the same production, and might even have been Shanks’s son John, later known to have been an actor.⁸³ In the printed cast list for the 1632 revival of *The Wild-Goose Chase*, a line near the bottom reads ‘Petella, their waiting-woman. Their Servant Mr. *Shanck*’. (‘Their’ refers to Rosalura and Lillia-Bianca, the two main female characters of the play.) Bentley, following Baldwin, took this to mean that Shank had played Petella, which would be a virtually unique example of a sharer playing a woman.⁸⁴ However, it is more likely that ‘Petella, their waiting-woman’ and ‘Their servant’ are two distinct roles, with Shank taking only the second one. Petella appears in only one scene (Act 2, Scene 2) and speaks no lines. Later (Act 5, Scene 4), Rosalura and Lillia appear along with a male servant who makes humorous, bawdy remarks. This scene-stealing servant inherently seems a much more likely role to be identified in a cast list than a mute such as Petella. Given that the role is entirely in keeping with the clowns typically played by

⁸¹ Guildhall Library MS 11571/10, f.381v; Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, pp. 519–20.

⁸² Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, p. 479; vol. 3, p. 375.

⁸³ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, p. 566.

⁸⁴ Bentley, *Profession of Player*, pp. 114 note 1 and 257–8; Baldwin, *Organization*, p. 176.

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Shank, I think we can say with some confidence that Shank was 'Their Servant', and that the actor playing Petella is unidentified.

The final female role in the King's casts is Oriana, a relatively small but important part in *The Wild Goose-Chase*, which was played by Stephen Hammerton. In 1699, James Wright wrote that Hammerton 'was at first a most noted and beautiful Woman Actor, but afterwards he acted with equal Grace and Applause, a Young Lover's Part'. Wright's statement is ambiguous about Hammerton's age, but in fact we know that he was an apprentice in 1632, and quite a bit of information about the circumstances of his apprenticeship emerges from a lawsuit filed in that year.

On 12 June 1632, William Blgrave, deputy Master of the Revels and co-financier of the new Salisbury Court playhouse, filed suit in the Court of Requests against Christopher Babham, previously an investor in Salisbury Court but now associated with the King's Men at the Blackfriars.⁸⁵ Blgrave claimed that Hammerton had been apprenticed to William Perry, a freeman of the Drapers who led a series of playing companies, and that Perry had turned over Hammerton to Blgrave for the remaining nine years of his apprenticeship by a deed dated 15 October 1629. Blgrave charged that around November 1631, Babham had stolen both the deed and Hammerton, whom he was now using for his own 'great gain and advantage'. Babham denied this, claiming that Hammerton was actually apprenticed to William Waverly, citizen and merchant taylor of London. The Merchant Taylors' records back up Babham's statement by revealing that on 5 December 1631, Stephen Hammerton, son of Richard Hammerton of Hellifield, Yorkshire, gentleman, was apprenticed to William Waverly of the Strand, Merchant Taylor, for a term of eight years.⁸⁶ The Drapers' records show no trace of Hammerton, but he had probably been bound to Perry in a less formal capacity, which was trumped by Waverly binding him in a livery company.

We cannot determine Hammerton's exact age, because the registers for the parish of Long Preston, Yorkshire (which includes Hellifield) are missing between 1608 and 1622, when we would expect

to find his baptism.⁸⁷ But he was probably about sixteen when he was apprenticed to Waverly, since apprenticeships were often timed to end around age twenty-four. He was called a 'boy' numerous times in the court documents and, in November 1632, Blgrave again called him a 'boy' when he complained to the Lord Chamberlain that Hammerton was still with Babham and 'by him employed at the Blackfriars playhouse'.⁸⁸ Hammerton never returned to Salisbury Court, going on to a successful career as a young leading man with the King's Men.

QUEEN HENRIETTA'S MEN

After the King's Men, the second most prestigious Caroline acting company was Queen Henrietta's Men, who played under Christopher Beeston at the Cockpit. This company generated several cast lists specifying who played women, and enough is known about these players to provide us with some more evidence about ages. Unfortunately, this evidence is not as clear as we might hope, because the exact dates of some of the lists are uncertain. These lists also include the only apparent example of a sharer playing a woman but this example is not without its problems.

Fortunately, no such problems are presented by the last of these cast lists, for Thomas Nabbes's *Hannibal and Scipio*. The play was printed in quarto in 1637, and the title page helpfully tells us that it was 'Acted in the year 1635. by the Queenes Majesties Servants, at their Private house in *Drury*

⁸⁵ The following description is based on G. E. Bentley, 'The Salisbury Court Theatre and Its Boy Players', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 40 (1977), 129–49. I discuss the case more fully in Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers'. The original bill and answer of the suit are now Public Record Office REQ-2-681.

⁸⁶ Merchant Taylors' Apprentice Binding Books, 1629–1635 (Guildhall Library MS 34038/10), p. 180, and Presentment Books, 1629–37 (Guildhall Library MS 34018/2).

⁸⁷ I am grateful to Mrs Judith A. Smeaton, Acting County Archivist of North Yorkshire, for undertaking a search of the surviving archives on my behalf.

⁸⁸ Bentley, 'The Salisbury Court Theatre', 143.

Lane.⁸⁹ Twelve different actors are named, but only one in a female role: Ezekiel Fenn, who played the female lead, Sophonisba. Fenn was baptized at St Martin in the Fields on 9 April 1620, so he was about fifteen years old when he played the important role of Sophonisba. He apparently also played the female lead Winifred in a revival of Dekker and Rowley's *The Witch of Edmonton*, since the 1658 quarto of that play includes an epilogue spoken by that character and signed 'Phen'. The exact date of this revival is not known, but it is not likely to have been after 1637, when Fenn was listed among the leaders of Beeston's Boys at the Cockpit. The 1639 quarto of Henry Glaphorne's *Poems* includes a poem entitled 'For Ezekial Fen at his first Acting a Mans Part', in the form of a prologue to be spoken by Fenn.⁹⁰ Thus the timeline for Fenn's career is unusually clear: he was playing a demanding female role at the age of fifteen, and another when he was no older than seventeen, but by the age of nineteen he had started playing men.

Several of the actors playing male roles alongside Fenn in that 1635 production of *Hannibal and Scipio* had earlier played women for the company. The best-known of these is Theophilus Bird, alias Borne, who played Sophonisba's lover, Massanissa. Bird was baptized as 'Theophilus Borne' on 7 December 1608 at St. Leonard's Shoreditch in London, the son of the actor William Bird (alias Borne). On 6 December 1623, Sir Edward Dering paid 1s 6d to see a play, and gave a further 2s 6d 'to little Borne ye boy there'.⁹¹ No other theatrical boy named Borne is known, so it seems probable that this was Theophilus, one day short of his fifteenth birthday; in fact, Dering's money may have been a birthday gift. The 1630 quarto of Massinger's *The Renegado* reveals that 'Theo. Bourne' played Paulina, sister to Vitelli, and the 1631 quarto of Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West, Part II* (printed along with Part I) reveals that 'Theophilus Bourne' played Toota, Queen of Fesse and wife of Mullisheg. Both cast lists apparently refer to performances some time before the publication dates, but exactly how far before is uncertain.

The Renegado was licensed for performance at the Cockpit on 17 April 1624, at which time Bird was fifteen and Lady Elizabeth's Men occupied the Cockpit. The quarto says that the play 'hath beene often played by the Queenes Maiesties seruants, at the priuate house in *Drurye-Lane*' (i.e. the Cockpit). This led Bentley to argue that the cast list refers not to the first performance, but to one by Queen Henrietta's Men in 1625–6, when Bird was seventeen.⁹² I think the 1624 date is more likely, though the difference is not large.⁹³

The quarto containing both parts of *The Fair Maid of the West* says that the play 'was lately acted before the King and Queen, with approved liking. By the Queens Majesties Comedians'. The prologue and epilogue were reprinted in Heywood's *Pleasant Dialogues and Dramas* (1637) with the further specification 'Spoken to their two Majesties at Hampton Court'. Bentley took this to mean that both parts had been performed together at Court between 10 October 1630 and 20 February 1631, when Queen Henrietta's are known to have performed three plays at Hampton Court.⁹⁴ This would make Bird about twenty-two when he played Toota, at the very upper end of the age range we have seen for actors playing women. However, this dating is far from certain; Queen Henrietta's also played at Court in the 1629–30 Christmas season, and most plays were printed at least two or three years after the first performance. About the best we can say is that Bird might have been as old as twenty-two when he played Toota but he may have been somewhat younger. The fact that his name does not have

⁸⁹ Bentley, *Profession of Player*, p. 278.

⁹⁰ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, pp. 433–4. In vol. 1, p. 251 and vol. 3, pp. 271–2, Bentley discusses the date of the *Witch of Edmonton* revival. See also W. B. Streebt, 'The Durability of Boy Actors', *Notes & Queries* 218 (1973), pp. 461–5.

⁹¹ Gibson, *REED Kent*, vol. 2, p. 921.

⁹² Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 4, pp. 812–14; vol. 1, pp. 220–2.

⁹³ The evidence for the earlier date is summarized by Bill Lloyd in an unpublished paper.

⁹⁴ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 1, p. 249.

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the honorific 'Mr' in the cast list suggests that he was not a sharer.⁹⁵

Hugh Clarke played the medium-sized (male) role of Syphax and the smaller role of Nuntius in the 1635 production of *Hannibal and Scipio*, but some years earlier he had been the company's most important player of women's roles. In Shirley's *The Wedding* (acted probably in 1626 and printed in 1629), he played Gratiana and in *The Fair Maid of the West, Part I* (printed in 1631, as noted above) he played Bess Bridges.⁹⁶ These are the lead female roles, both requiring quite a bit of skill. We do not know Clarke's precise age, but on 6 May 1627, he married 'Judith Brown alias Robins' at St Giles in the Fields. Bentley doubted that the Hugh Clarke in this record was the actor, but Judith Brown alias Robins was the daughter of Robert Browne, a longtime traveling player in Europe, and the step-daughter of William Robins, a leading member of Queen Henrietta's Men.⁹⁷ If this is the right Hugh Clarke, he played Gratiana just a year before his wedding, and was very probably married when he played Bess Bridges. This is not as implausible as it might seem at first; if he got married at eighteen, Clarke would have been seventeen when he played Gratiana and about twenty or twenty-one when he played Bess. Early marriages were not uncommon in the London theatrical community. William Shakespeare got married at eighteen (albeit not in London), and so did Edward Kynaston; Henry Condell was married at twenty, and John Heminges at twenty-one; Thomas Holcombe had a child at nineteen; Alexander Cooke was probably married at nineteen and a father at twenty-one.⁹⁸ It would not be surprising for an older 'boy' of twenty-one or twenty-two to play Bess Bridges, for the character is a heroic woman who becomes a sea captain at the end of part 1. In any case, Clarke does not appear to have been a sharer at the time, for his name, like Bird/Bourne's, lacks the designation 'Mr' in the cast list.

After Ezekiel Fenn, Theophilus Bird/Bourne, and Hugh Clarke, information about the Queen Henrietta's boys becomes scantier, but there are some clues. Timothy Reade played Cardona in

The Wedding (c. 1626), was one of the leaders at Salisbury Court by 1634, and become a well-known clown.⁹⁹ He may be the Timothy Reade, son of John, baptized at St. Mary Whitechapel on 2 November 1606, since there was a player named John Reade living in neighboring St. Botolph Aldgate in 1600.¹⁰⁰ This would make Reade nineteen when he acted in *The Wedding*, an appropriate age, though the evidence is not conclusive enough for certainty. John Page played Jane, Justice Landby's daughter (the second-largest female role) in *The Wedding* (c. 1626) and went on to play the minor male role of Lelius in *Hannibal and Scipio* (1635) and perform with Beeston's Boys at the Cockpit in 1639.¹⁰¹ Bentley speculates that he might be the John Page baptized at St. James Clerkenwell in 1615 and buried there in 1641, but admits that the name is extremely common, even just in that parish. Edward Rogers played Donusa, niece to Amurath, in *The Renegado* (c. 1624–6), and Millicent, Carolina's daughter, in *The Wedding*

⁹⁵ Bentley, *Profession of Player*, pp. 272–5, discusses the numerous oddities of the *Fair Maid* cast lists. Bentley unaccountably dates the production to 1626 in this book, though he had earlier dated it 1629–30 in *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*. I do not know what evidence, if any, caused Bentley's change of mind.

⁹⁶ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, pp. 406–7.

⁹⁷ See June Schlueter, 'English Actors in Kassel, Germany, during Shakespeare's Time', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 10 (1998), pp. 238–61, the appendix to which prints the will of Judith's brother Robert and disentangles the families of the two theatrical Robert Brownes who were active around the same time.

⁹⁸ Condell was baptized on 5 September 1576 in Norwich and married Elizabeth Smart on 24 October 1596 at St. Lawrence Pountney; see David Honneyman, 'The Family Origins of Henry Condell', *Notes and Queries* 230 (1985), 467, and Mark Eccles, 'Elizabethan Actors I: A–D', *Notes and Queries*, 236 (1991), 44. For Heminges, see Eccles, 'Elizabethan Actors II', 457. For Holcombe and Cooke, see the discussion in the present paper, plus Nungezer, *Dictionary of Actors*, p. 102.

⁹⁹ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, pp. 540–1.

¹⁰⁰ St. Mary Whitechapel parish register 1558–1645 (London Metropolitan Archive x024/090); Nungezer, *Dictionary of Actors*, p. 291.

¹⁰¹ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, p. 518.

(c. 1626). Nothing else is known of him, and the name is far too common to guess at an identification in the absence of further evidence.

One other printed play besides those noted above contains a cast list for Queen Henrietta's Men: Robert Davenport's *King John and Matilda*, printed in 1655 with a cast list which must date from before 1634.¹⁰² Ten actors are listed alongside their roles, but unfortunately, none of them are female roles. However, the publisher of the quarto, Andrew Pennyucicke, says in his dedication to the Earl of Lindsey that '*It past the Stage with generall Applause (my selfe being the last that that [sic] Acted Matilda in it)*'.¹⁰³ It is difficult to say whether Pennyucicke's claim is accurate; he does not appear in any theatrical record from the 1630s, but he did have theatrical friends, including Theophilus Bird of Queen Henrietta's and Beeston's Boys. If he did play Matilda, Pennyucicke's statement implies that he did not do so in the original production. Regardless of which production he performed in, he could not have been older than twenty-one at the time; he was baptized on 1 October 1620, and the theatres were closed in early September 1642, a month before his twenty-second birthday.¹⁰⁴ This is consistent with the upper age limit we have seen for boys playing women.

Finally, there is one other person who appears to have played a female role for Queen Henrietta's Men, and he presents an apparent counterexample to the idea that sharers never played women. The cast list in the 1631 quarto of *The Fair Maid of the West, Part I* indicates that 'Mr Anthony Furner' played 'a kitching Maid', a very minor role consisting of only three short speeches containing a total of thirty-five words. This must be a misprint for Anthony Turner, who was a sharer with Lady Elizabeth's Men as early as 1622 and with Queen Henrietta's Men from at least 1626 to 1641. It is a bit curious to see an actor's name attached to such a small role, especially since actors are only named for eleven of thirty-one roles in Part I. Furthermore, Turner is listed as playing Bashaw Alcade in Part II, a part which had been taken by William Wilbraham in Part I. Bentley lists numerous other oddities about these cast lists, including the seemingly

random ordering of the roles and the inconsistent use of 'Mr' to indicate a sharer.¹⁰⁵ These oddities raise the possibility that there was some sort of mistake in the printing, but, like Bentley, I am reluctant to dismiss the evidence outright. If the list is accurate, it suggests that sharers may have occasionally taken very minor female roles of a non-sexual nature, perhaps for comic effect. The existence of just this one example out of all the evidence we have seen suggests that the practice was not widespread, though, and there are still no examples of leading women – or even significant supporting roles – being played by sharers.

KING'S REVELS

The other Caroline playing company with cast lists relevant for our purposes is the King's Revels. This company was originally established at Salisbury Court in 1629 as an all-boy company designed as a sort of training ground for the King's Men at Blackfriars but that arrangement had started to unravel by 1632, when the two companies got into a dispute over the boy Stephen Hammerton, as described above. By 1634 the King's Revels had become an adult company, though perhaps one with a larger number of boys than usual. Of the two full King's Revels cast lists which survive, one (*Money is an Ass*) belongs to the earlier period and consists entirely of boys, while the other one (*Messalina*) belongs to the later period and includes both adults and boys. There also exists a manuscript play (*The Wasp*) containing the names of several King's Revels players from the later period.¹⁰⁶

Money is an Ass was written by Thomas Jordan and brought to the press by him in 1668. Though the title page give no date or company ascription,

¹⁰² Bentley, *Profession of Player*, pp. 276–8.

¹⁰³ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 3, p. 233.

¹⁰⁴ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, pp. 524–5.

¹⁰⁵ Bentley, *Profession of Player*, pp. 272–6.

¹⁰⁶ Bentley, *Profession of Player*, pp. 281–6, discusses all three lists, though he was unaware of some of the evidence I present below. Information in the following paragraphs without a citation comes from these pages.

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Jordan's dedicatory epistle says that 'This Play was writ by *Me* & pleas'd the Stage, / When I was not full fifteen Years of Age', and the play's prologue implies that it was originally performed by an all-boy cast. In a Chancery deposition in 1665, Jordan gave his age as forty-eight, meaning he was born about 1617.¹⁰⁷ If his claim in the epistle is correct, this would mean that the play was performed in about 1631–2, rather than in 1635 as Bentley speculated. The accompanying cast list contains eight names, including Jordan himself, who played Captain Penniless. Six of these eight, including Jordan, appear in a lengthy list of King's Revels players presented at Norwich on 10 March 1635.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the *Money is an Ass* cast list appears to represent a performance by the King's Revels company during the period before 1634 when it was still a boy company at Salisbury Court.

Even though this cast is all boys, it is still tangentially relevant for our inquiry because these boys were being bred to act women's roles potentially at the Blackfriars and at least one of their fellows (Hammerton) actually did so. As noted above, Thomas Jordan was born around 1617 and stated that he was 'not full fifteen Years of Age' at the time of the performance. Thomas Loveday, who played Clutch, went on to act on the Continent and in London in the 1640s and was a member of the King's Company after the Restoration. He gave his age as forty-nine in the same set of 1665 depositions in which Jordan testified, meaning he was a year older than Jordan (and thus born around 1616) and was fifteen or sixteen years old when *Money is an Ass* was performed.¹⁰⁹

The other six boys in the cast were 'Wal. Williams', who played Mr. Featherbrain; 'Tho. Lovell', who played Money; 'Nich. Lowe', who played Credit; 'Tho. Sandes', who played Calumny; 'Amb. Matchit', who played Felixina; and 'Wil. Cherrington', who played Feminina. I have not found plausible baptismal records for Nicholas Lowe or Ambrose Matchit, but excellent candidates for the other four can be found in London parish registers. Walter Williams, son of John Williams, shoemaker, and his wife Alice, was baptized on 19 September 1619 at St Andrew Holborn, adjacent to

the Salisbury Court playhouse; Thomas Lovell, son of John Lovell, shoemaker, and his wife Alice, was baptized on 23 August 1620 in the same parish; Thomas Sandes, son of Henry, was baptized on 24 March 1616 at St Margaret, Westminster; and William Charrington, son of Anthony, was baptized on 18 May 1617 at St Olave Hart Street.¹¹⁰ These were all reasonably common names, but in each case there was only one boy of that name baptized in London during the relevant ten-year period, and the baptisms of Williams and Lovell in the parish next to Salisbury Court is surely no coincidence. These four boys would have been between eleven and fifteen when *Money is an Ass* was produced; this is a bit younger than most of the boys we have seen in the adult companies, but right in line with the other all-boy companies such as the Children of the Chapel. The only one of the four known to have acted elsewhere is Thomas Lovell, who acted after the Restoration for the Duke's Company.¹¹¹

The second full cast list for the King's Revels appears in the 1640 quarto of Nathaniel Richards's *The Tragedy of Messalina, the Roman Empress*. Here the male parts are played by adult actors and, based on their other known company affiliations, Bentley showed that this cast must date from between July 1634 and the plague closing of May 1636, which caused the dissolution of the company. Of the three

¹⁰⁷ PRO C24/903, cited by Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, 'New Light on English Acting Companies in 1646, 1648, and 1660', *Review of English Studies* New Series 42 (1991), p. 500, note 26.

¹⁰⁸ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 1, pp. 286–9, reproduces and discusses this list, which contains names at the end which may not be King's Revels players.

¹⁰⁹ Philip H. Highfill, Jr, Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800*, vol. 9 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois, 1984), p. 365; Milhous and Hume, 'New Light', p. 490.

¹¹⁰ St. Andrew Holborn baptisms, 1558–1623 (Guildhall Library MS 6667/1); St. Olave Hart Street baptisms, marriages, and burials, 1563–1631/3 (Guildhall Library MS 28867); Arthur Meredyth Burke, *Memorials of St Margaret's Church* (1914), p. 92.

¹¹¹ Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 9, p. 368.

actors named for female roles, Matthias Morris, who played Sylvana, wife to Silvius, cannot be reasonably identified. Lepida, mother to Messalina, was played by Thomas Jordan. Since we saw above that Jordan was born about 1617, he was between seventeen and nineteen when he played Lepida. The lead female role of Messalina was played by John Barrett, who does not appear in the *Money is an Ass* cast list but does appear in the 1635 Norwich list. Barrett must have been at least in his mid-to-late teens when he played Messalina, for he had sons baptized at St. Giles Cripplegate (as of 'John Barrett, Player') on 12 November 1637, 11 November 1638, and 31 January 1640, and was himself buried there on 31 March 1640.¹¹² There are too many John Barretts to identify his baptism with certainty, but the most plausible candidate is the John Barrett, son of Thomas Barrett, fishmonger, baptized on 16 October 1616 at St Giles Cripplegate, the same parish where the player's children were later baptized.¹¹³ This would make him between seventeen and nineteen when he played Messalina, twenty-one when his first child was baptized, and twenty-four at his death.

RESTORATION EVIDENCE

The last batch of evidence we have to consider comes from after the Restoration. Some of this evidence deals with female roles before 1642, while some of it has to do with such roles in the early 1660s, as the English stage was making the transition from boys to actresses. Restoration theatrical practice did not necessarily correspond to pre-1642 practice, of course, and in some ways it demonstrably differed. Still, there was enough continuity that evidence of the transition can be instructive.

The first category of evidence consists mainly of a paragraph in James Wright's *Historia Histrionica* (1699), describing how various Restoration actors had been boy-actors before the civil war and had played women on the professional stage. This paragraph is part of a longer discourse on the history of English theatre, one which is fairly accurate to the extent that we can check its claims. The paragraph is worth quoting in full:

'Tis very true, *Hart* and *Clun*, were bred up Boys at the *Blackfriars*; and Acted Womens Parts, *Hart* was *Robinson's* Boy or Apprentice: He Acted the Dutchess in the Tragedy of *the Cardinal*, which was the first Part that gave him Reputation. *Cartwright*, and *Wintershal* belong'd to the private House in *Salisbury-Court*, *Burt* was a Boy first under *Shank* at the *Black-friers*, then under *Beeston* at the *Cockpit*; and *Mohun*, and *Shatterel* were in the same Condition with him, at the last Place. There *Burt* used to Play the principal Women's Parts, in particular *Clariana* in *Love's Cruelty*; and at the same time *Mohun* Acted *Bel-lamente*, which Part he retain'd after the Restauration.¹¹⁴

Some of these claims can be checked against contemporary evidence from the 1630s and early 1640s, and all of them can be put into the context of the era's theatrical history. Doing so suggests that Wright's account is largely accurate, and that it is consistent with the evidence we have already seen about the ages of boy actors.

Wright's first claim, that '*Hart* and *Clun*, were bred up Boys at the *Blackfriars*; and Acted Womens Parts', is supported by a piece of evidence brought to light by David George in 1974.¹¹⁵ It is a list of characters from the 1634 quarto of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster*, annotated in a contemporary hand by the names of actors who were with the King's Men in the early 1640s. 'Clarke' and 'Bird' are listed as playing *Philaster* and *Thrasaline*, but Hugh Clarke and Theophilus Bird were with other companies until at least 1635–7, and do not certainly appear with the King's Men until 1641.¹¹⁶ Four female roles are identified: 'Wat' played *Arethusa*, the king's daughter; 'White' played *Gallatea*, a wise modest lady attending the princess; 'Thomas' played *Megra*, a lascivious lady;

¹¹² Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, p. 359.

¹¹³ St. Giles Cripplegate parish register, 1606/7–34 (Guildhall Library MS 6419/2).

¹¹⁴ [James Wright], *Historia Histrionica: An Historical Account of the English Stage, Shewing The ancient Use, Improvement, and Perfection, of Dramatick Representations, in this Nation. In a Dialogue, of Plays and Players* (London, 1699), p. 3. I have normalized long s in the transcription.

¹¹⁵ David George, 'Early Cast Lists for Two Beaumont and Fletcher Plays', *Theatre Notebook*, 38 (1974), 9–11.

¹¹⁶ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, pp. 377–9, 406–7.

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and 'Charles' played the lead role of Euphrasia, daughter of Dion, who disguises herself as a page named Bellario for most of the play. The identities of White and Thomas are uncertain, but 'Wat' and 'Charles' are most likely Walter Clun and Charles Hart, the Restoration actors mentioned by Wright. These were not especially common names, and the chance of different boys named Walter and Charles appearing together in a King's cast list at the appropriate time would seem to be rather small.

I have not been able to determine Clun's birth-date, but Hart's can be identified with a high degree of certainty. He was baptized at St. Giles Cripplegate on 11 December 1625, the son of William Hart, weaver.¹¹⁷ 'Winifred dau. of William Harte, Weaver als Player' was baptized in the same parish on 29 July 1638, and buried there on 19 July 1639 as 'Winifred dauger of William Harte weaver', with 'als Player' added in the margin. Four months later, on 23 November 1639, 'Mary dauger of William Harte Player' was buried in the same parish. Collectively, these entries identify this William Hart with the actor of that name who was with the traveling King's Revels company in 1635 and with the King's Men in 1636–7.¹¹⁸ Both Charles and William Hart (as well as Walter Clun) were among ten actor-sharers who signed a contract on 27 December 1648 with financier Robert Conway, a contract which became useless less than a week later when the Puritan authorities arrested all the players in a crackdown on illegal playing.¹¹⁹ William Hart was buried in St Giles Cripplegate on 9 November 1650 as 'Willi Hart Player from the hospitall'.¹²⁰

Thus, it appears that Charles Hart was a boy with the King's Men at the same time that his father was a hired man with the same company, and that father and son were still acting together in the late 1640s when plays were illegal. Wright tells us that Charles Hart was Richard Robinson's 'Boy or Apprentice', and we have no reason to doubt this, though further documentary evidence is lacking. Wright also tells us that Hart 'Acted the Dutchess in the Tragedy of the *Cardinal*, which was the first Part that gave him Reputation'. James Shirley's *The Cardinal* was licensed by Sir Henry Herbert on 25 November 1641, and the theatres were closed in September

1642, giving us a ten-month window when the play could have been performed.¹²¹ If Wright's assertion is correct, Hart was sixteen years old when he played the important role of the Duchess – an age which fits comfortably with all the other evidence we have seen for boy actors in general.

Wright next tells us that 'Cartwright, and *Wintershal* belong'd to the private House in *Salisbury-Court*', referring to the Restoration actors William Cartwright junior and William Wintershall. However, he does not say that they were boy actors, and Cartwright, at least, was about twenty-three years old when the Salisbury Court playhouse opened in 1629.¹²² It is entirely possible that Cartwright and/or Wintershall were boy actors at some point, but Wright provides no good evidence on the matter. Wright was simply going through all the major Restoration players who had been active before 1642, and he referred to these two even though they had not been boys in the 1630s like the others.

Wright does explicitly say that Nicholas Burt had been a boy, 'first under *Shank* at the *Black-friers*, then under *Beeston* at the *Cockpit*'. He further specifies that '*Mohun*, and *Shatterel* were in the same condition with him, at the last place' [i.e. the Cockpit], and that 'There *Burt* used to Play the principal Women's Parts, in particular *Clariana* in *Love's Cruelty*; and at the same time *Mohun* Acted *Bellamente*, which Part he retain'd after the Restoration'. These details provide some valuable clues to the possible timing of the events described, though they are not without ambiguities.

¹¹⁷ Guildhall Library MS 6419/2. I am grateful to Martin Devereaux of the Guildhall Library staff for consulting the original register to confirm my reading of William Hart's occupation as 'Weaver'.

¹¹⁸ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, pp. 463–4. Bentley missed the 1625 christening record of Charles Hart, so he did not make the connection between the players Charles and William Hart.

¹¹⁹ Milhous and Hume, 'New Light', p. 496.

¹²⁰ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, p. 464. For more on Charles Hart, see my article on him in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

¹²¹ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 5, pp. 1084–7.

¹²² Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, pp. 404–5.

Since John Shank died in January 1636, Bentley suggested that Burt was originally apprenticed to Shank in the mid 1630s and transferred to Beeston's Boys at the Cockpit after Shank's death and the plague closure of 1636–7. James Shirley's play *Love's Cruelty* was originally licensed in 1631 but it was in the repertory of Beeston's Boys in 1639 and was published in 1640; thus, Burt could have played Clariana for that company at some point between 1637 and 1640.¹²³ Wright says that Mohun played Bellamente (the principal male part) in the same production; in fact, Mohun is known to have been one of the principal members of Beeston's Boys in the late 1630s.¹²⁴ Wright implies that Mohun had been a boy with Burt at the Cockpit while simultaneously attributing a male role to him, but this conundrum can be solved by assuming that Mohun had recently graduated to male roles and was only a 'boy' in the sense of being a member of 'Beeston's Boys', a company made up mostly of former apprentices. Mohun's exact age is unknown, but there was a Nicholas 'Bert', son of John Bert, christened at St Stephen, Norwich on 27 May 1621. This boy would have been between sixteen and nineteen in the late 1630s, right in line with the other performers of female roles that we have seen.

There is, however, a second possible scenario to consider. Wright says that both Mohun and 'Shatterel' were boys with Burt at the Cockpit. There were actually two brothers named Shatterell, Edward and Robert, who both acted with the King's Company after the Restoration. Robert was baptized on 10 November 1616 at St Botolph Aldgate, son of Robert and Emme, while Edward was baptized on 3 April 1620 at St. Andrew Holborn, the son of Robert Shatterell, cook, and Emma, 'out of Clement Neumans house in Cocke yard near Holborne Bridge'.¹²⁵ Edward played only minor roles and died before 1665, while Robert was a prominent member of the company for two decades. Furthermore, Robert was definitely a player in the 1630s, for on 1 March 1636 he received a licence to marry Jane Brett, widow, describing himself as of St Giles in the Fields, 'player' and age twenty-one, even though he was

actually only nineteen at the time.¹²⁶ Significantly, St Giles in the Fields was the parish of the Cockpit. Given all this, it seems likely that Wright is referring to Robert Shatterell rather than Edward, especially since the other actors named by Wright were all famous in the Restoration. But Robert Shatterell was almost twenty-one by the time the theatres reopened after the plague and Beeston's Boys were organized in 1637, so he was no longer a boy in the ordinary sense. He was probably around the same age as Mohun, who was an adult by this time.

These difficulties might be eliminated if Burt, Mohun and Shatterell were all boys at the Cockpit in the early, rather than late, 1630s, and the performance of *Love's Cruelty* described by Wright was the original production in 1631 or soon after. This would imply that Burt was at the Blackfriars in the late 1620s, and that he moved to the Cockpit for reasons unrelated to Shank's death. A Nicholas Burt, son of Robert Burt, butcher, was baptized on 4 December 1614 at St Andrew Holborn, the same parish where Robert Shatterell was baptized two years later.¹²⁷ This boy would have been sixteen or seventeen in 1631, an appropriate age to play Clariana. Robert Shatterell was fourteen or fifteen at the time, certainly a boy. The main fly in the ointment is Michael Mohun's statement in a 1682 petition to Charles II that he had faithfully served the king and his father '48 yeares in ye quality of an Actor', implying that his career had begun in 1634.¹²⁸ Also, the absence of Mohun from any of the printed Queen Henrietta's cast lists of the early 1630s makes it seem unlikely that he would have played a lead role such as Bellamente during that time. It is possible that Mohun was a few years off

¹²³ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 5, pp. 1129–32.

¹²⁴ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, pp. 511–12.

¹²⁵ St Botolph Aldgate, baptisms and marriages 1558–1625 (Guildhall Library MS 9220); St. Andrew Holborn, baptisms 1558–1623 (Guildhall Library MS 6667/1).

¹²⁶ Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 13, pp. 287–9.

¹²⁷ St. Andrew Holborn, baptisms 1558–1623 (Guildhall Library MS 6667/1).

¹²⁸ Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 10, p. 276.

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in his recollection, or that Wright was confusing Robert and Edward Shatterell, but I am inclined to think that this second scenario is less likely than the first one. Whichever scenario is correct (if in fact either is correct), both involve Burt playing Clariana in his mid-to-late teens.

The evidence provided by Wright has to do with the period before plays were outlawed in 1642, but boys continued to play women right up until the introduction of actresses in 1660–1 and even a bit beyond. At least one of these can be identified from the eighteen-year period when plays were only acted surreptitiously in England. On 1 January 1649, Parliamentary soldiers simultaneously raided illegal performances at four London playhouses and arrested the players. A newsletter account of the raid described how the players arrested at Salisbury Court were paraded through the streets in their costumes: 'Abraham had a black Satten gown on, and before he came into the durt, he was very neat in his white lace pumps. The people not expecting such a pageant looked and laughed at all the rest, and not knowing who he was, they asked, what had that Lady done?'¹²⁹ This must have been Abraham Ivory, a Restoration actor who was said in 1704 to have 'formerly been a considerable Actor of Womens Parts' before deteriorating into alcoholism. If so, he cannot have been younger than his mid to late teens in 1649, for Ivory's first child, William, was christened at St. James Clerkenwell on 1 May 1652. Ivory and his wife had four more children christened in the same parish, and Ivory himself was buried there on 15 February 1680. Unfortunately, we cannot determine an upper limit for Ivory's age in 1649, but this evidence is consistent with what we have seen for other actors (such as John Barrett) who fathered children within a few years of playing women on stage.

When we come to the open re-establishment of the adult playing companies at the Restoration, we are on firmer ground. John Downes's *Roscianus Anglicanus* (1708) lists several actors who played women's parts in 1659–61, and since Downes had been a prompter since the early 1660s, his testimony deserves to be trusted. In his account of the company formed by John Rhodes in 1659–60, he lists

six players who 'commonly acted women's parts': William Betterton, Edward Kynaston, Edward Angell, James Nokes, Mr Floid and Mr Moseley.¹³⁰ The ages of the latter three are uncertain, but good information survives about Betterton, Kynaston and Angell. William Betterton, brother of the famous actor Thomas Betterton, was baptized on 4 September 1644 as the son of Matthew Betterton, and thus was about fifteen in 1659–60.¹³¹ Kynaston and Angell were both apprenticed to Rhodes in the Drapers' Company, of which he was a freeman; Kynaston was bound on 5 July 1654 as the son of Thomas Kynaston of Oswestry, Shropshire, and Angell was bound on 15 October 1656 as the son of John Angell of St Martin in the Fields, Westminster.¹³² Angell's exact age is not known, but Kynaston was born on 20 April 1643 in Oswestry, and thus was sixteen or seventeen in 1659–60.¹³³ He continued to act female roles until at least 7 January 1661, when Samuel Pepys saw him play the cross-dressing title role in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*, being both 'the prettiest woman in the whole house' and 'the handsomest man in the house'.¹³⁴ Kynaston was seventeen years, eight

¹²⁹ Milhous and Hume, 'New Light', p. 495.

¹³⁰ John Downes, *Roscianus Anglicanus* (London, 1708), p. 18.

¹³¹ Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 2, pp. 101–2.

¹³² Drapers' Apprentice Bindings 1634–55 (Drapers' MS +289/F.B. 2) and Apprentice Bindings 1655–89 (Drapers' MS +290/F.B. 4), both unpaginated.

¹³³ Oswestry parish register, Shropshire Records and Research Centre MS P214/A/1/1. The register contains a genealogy of the family of Thomas Kynaston, mercer, and Sara Micklewright, written in a different hand from the other entries. This genealogy lists birth dates for the couple's eleven children between 1638 and 1656, including Edward on 20 April 1643. There were a surprising number of Edward Kynastons in Shropshire, but the record of Kynaston's binding to Rhodes allows us to identify the correct one. This identification confirms the birth date given by a note in the Burnley collection; see Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 9, p. 79. I am grateful to Alison Healey of the Shropshire Records and Research Centre for so thoroughly answering my queries about the entry of Kynaston's birth.

¹³⁴ Robert Latham and William Matthews, eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. 2 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971), p. 7.

months, and eighteen days old when Pepys saw him play Epicoene. He may have played a few more female roles after that, but he was married at St Giles in the Fields on 27 February 1662, just short of his nineteenth birthday, and thereafter became a well-known adult actor.¹³⁵

In the early eighteenth century, Colley Cibber related an anecdote wherein Kynaston was scheduled to play the female lead in a tragedy before Charles II, but the performance was delayed because ‘the Queen was not *shav’d* yet’. Some critics have pounced on this story as supposed evidence that women were played by adults rather than boys; however, as we have just seen, Kynaston was in his late teens when he played such roles, an age when he had presumably started to shave already.¹³⁶ Another piece of evidence often cited by these critics is a poetical prologue written by Thomas Jordan to introduce the first play to use actresses rather than boys, a production of *Othello* in late 1660. This prologue, which was printed in 1664 in Jordan’s *Royal Arbor of Loyal Poesie*, reads in part:

But to the point: In this reforming age
 We have intents to civilize the stage.
 Our women are defective, and so siz’d
 You’d think they were some of the guard disguis’d:
 For (to speak truth) men act, that are between
 Forty and fifty, Wenches of Fifteen;
 With bone so large and nerve so in compliant,
 When you call Desdemona, enter Giant.¹³⁷

First of all, note that in context, it is clear that Jordan is talking about present (i.e. Restoration) practice, not what happened before 1642. As we saw earlier, Jordan had been a boy actor himself in the 1630s, and had played female roles while in his late teens, a typical age. As we have just seen, the late teens was also a typical age to play women in 1660, based on the limited evidence we have. But talented boys were no doubt scarcer than they had been before the Civil War, and it is not difficult to imagine that adults sometimes played female roles in those early days of re-establishing the professional theatre. In fact, there is some documentary evidence for such a practice. One of the Halliwell-Phillipps scrapbooks

at the Folger Shakespeare Library includes a title page of the sixth quarto of Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Maid’s Tragedy*, dated 1650 but probably printed in 1660. In the dramatis personae, an early hand has written ‘Hart’ opposite Amintor, ‘Wintersal’ opposite Evadne (Amintor’s wife), and ‘Cartwrite’ opposite Calianax. William Wintershall had acted at Salisbury Court before 1642, and must have been at least 40 in 1660; in fact, he played the King in *The Maid’s Tragedy* for the King’s Company just a few years later.¹³⁸ If the anonymous annotator is correct, this is an example of a clear adult, probably a sharer, playing a lead female role shortly after the Restoration.

While Jordan’s poem and the *Maid’s Tragedy* quarto suggest that adult men sometimes played female roles in the brief period between the re-introduction of legal theatre and the introduction of actresses, they do not suggest that adult men *always* played such roles nor do they suggest that they had done so with any regularity before 1642. To the contrary, the evidence from Downes points to such roles being ordinarily played by adolescent boys, and the situation described by Jordan would have been a notable (and comic) exception.

SUMMING UP

With all the evidence before us, it might be useful to summarize the facts. Of the forty-plus named actors known to have played female roles for adult companies, those whose age we can determine were all between twelve and twenty-two years old, with the normal range being roughly thirteen to twenty-one. If the printed cast list for *The*

¹³⁵ Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 9, pp. 79–85.

¹³⁶ Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 9, p. 80. For citations of this anecdote by critics, see Forse, *Art Imitates Business*, p. 91, and Rosenberg, ‘Shakespeare’s Squeaking Boy Actor’, p. 5.

¹³⁷ Thomas Jordan, ‘A Prologue to introduce the first Woman that came to Act on the Stage in the Tragedy, call’d the Moor of Venice’, in *A Royal Arbor of Loyal Poesie* (London, 1664), p. 21.

¹³⁸ George, ‘Early Cast Lists’, 10.

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Roman Actor represents the first performance in October 1626, then Alexander Goughe was twelve when he played Canis and John Honeyman was thirteen. Robert Stratford was certainly thirteen when he played Triphoena in *Holland's Leaguer*, and William Trigge explicitly testified that he had been apprenticed to John Heminges at the age of thirteen. On the high end, Theophilus Bird may have been as old as twenty-two when he played Toota in *The Fair Maid of the West*, though he may well have been a bit younger. William Trigge was almost certainly twenty when he played Rosalura in *The Wild Goose-Chase*, and Richard Sharpe was between seventeen and twenty-one when he played the Duchess in *The Duchess of Malfi*. John Thompson and Hugh Clarke were probably in their very early twenties when they played Panopia and Bess Bridges respectively, though neither boy's age can be determined for certain. Clarke was probably married when he played Bess Bridges, the only known example of a married man playing a woman on stage.

The very youngest boys seem to have played only minor parts, but boys across the entire rest of the age range can be found playing demanding lead female roles. Alexander Cooke and Nicholas Tooley were probably fourteen and fifteen when they played the lead female roles in *2 Seven Deadly Sins*; Ezekiel Fenn was fifteen when he played Sophonisba in *Hannibal and Scipio*; Charles Hart was sixteen when he played the Duchess in *The Cardinal*. John Thompson was in the middle of his apprenticeship, and thus probably around seventeen, when he played the key role of Domitia in *The Roman Actor*. As noted above, Richard Sharpe was between seventeen and twenty-one when he played the even more demanding role of the Duchess of Malfi, and Hugh Clarke was probably in his very early twenties when he played Bess Bridges. The one apparent example of a female role being taken by a sharer, namely Anthony Turner in *The Fair Maid of the West, Part I*, involves a minor bit part of only a few lines.

It is also interesting to break down where these boys came from, when that information is known. Several of them were sons of professional play-

ers, a group which includes Robert Stratford, Alexander Goughe, Robert Pallant Jr, Theophilus Bird, (probably) Timothy Reade, and Charles Hart. More generally, they tended to come from London parishes with a high concentration of players, whatever their father's occupation. Thus, Stratford, John Wright, Charles Hart, and possibly John Barrett were from St Giles Cripplegate, one of the most theatrical parishes in London. Goughe and Pallant were both christened in St Saviour's Southwark, where many players for the Bankside playhouses lived.¹³⁹ Arthur Savill and possibly John Page were from St James Clerkenwell; Theophilus Bird, Richard Sharpe and possibly Richard Robinson were from St Leonard Shoreditch; John Honeyman was from St Botolph Bishopsgate; Robert Shatterell was from St Botolph Aldgate; Ezekiel Fenn was from St Martin in the Fields; and (probably) Timothy Reade was from St Mary Whitechapel. All of these parishes had significant concentrations of professional players.¹⁴⁰ Later, Walter Williams, Thomas Lovell, Edward Shatterell and possibly Nicholas Burt were all baptized in St Andrew Holborn, the parish next to the Salisbury Court playhouse and one which had a high concentration of players later in the seventeenth century.

Some boy actors came from outside London: Thomas Belte (probably) from Norwich, Alexander Cooke and William Trigge (probably) from Kent, Nicholas Tooley from Belgium via Warwickshire, Thomas Holcombe from Devonshire, Stephen Hammerton from Yorkshire, Edward Kynaston from Shropshire. Most of these boys were formally apprenticed to masters in livery companies, and all of them performed with the King's Men (save Kynaston, who came later). This latter

¹³⁹ See G. E. Bentley, 'Records of Players in the Parish of St Giles, Cripplegate', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 44 (1929), 789–826, and 'Shakespeare's Fellows', *Times Literary Supplement* (15 November 1928), p. 856.

¹⁴⁰ Bentley's *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 2, provides numerous examples of players living in these parishes. See also Roslyn Knutson, *Playing Companies and Company Commerce in Shakespeare's Time* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 29–35, focusing on St Saviour's Southwark, St Botolph Aldgate, St Leonard Shoreditch, St James Clerkenwell and St Giles Cripplegate.

fact is significant, since all of the boys for other companies whose origins we can trace were born in London. This does not mean that no boys from outside London ever performed with companies other than the King's Men – at least some of Andrew Cane's non-London apprentices probably appeared on stage – but it does suggest that such boys were much more likely to gravitate toward the premier playing company, leaving native London boys for the other companies.¹⁴¹ As the case of Stephen Hammerton illustrates, the King's Men were powerful enough to appropriate just about any boy who showed promise, whatever his origins.

There are no doubt more facts waiting to be uncovered by further research, but I hope to have shown that the facts we do have about boy actors and pre-Restoration female roles show some clear and consistent patterns. No significant evidence

supports the idea that such roles were played by adult sharers but a wealth of specific evidence demonstrates that they were played by adolescent boys no older than about twenty-one. These boys came from both London and the countryside, and many (perhaps most) were formally apprenticed in livery companies. As our knowledge about boy actors continues to grow, these essential facts should form the basis of any future discussions about the sexual and gender implications of boys playing women in Shakespeare's time.

¹⁴¹ Cane's non-London apprentices included John Hilton from Fulham, Middlesex; Hugh Pusey of Pusey, Berkshire; and Thomas Gibbins of Hurley, Berkshire. None of them can be shown to have acted, but it seems highly likely that at least some of them, if not all, did perform on stage. See Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers'.