

'All Feats of Activitie, and Motions'
Rethinking Early Modern Boyhoods

A young figure climbs a tree. On the ground, a boy attempts a somersault. Hands in the air with glee, three boys sit atop a fence, riding it as though it were a horse. A cluster of children play a game of blind man's buff. Other groups play at being adults, weaving baskets and setting up 'shop'. Those more physically familiar give one another piggybacks. The more violent pull one another's hair, beat one another with rods, or grapple on the ground. One brave soul dives into the fast-flowing river. Pieter Brueghel the Elder's *Children's Games* (Figure 1), in which all of these pastimes – along with dozens of others – appear, is bursting at the frames with playful, virtuosic, and sometimes violent, youthful activity. Brueghel completed the large oil-on-panel work in mainland Europe in 1560, hundreds of miles and several years away from the first constructions of public stages in London, and, despite the painting's tendency towards the theatrical – mask-wearing, dressing up, and imaginary games such as mock marriages also feature – Brueghel could likely never have imagined his depictions of the entertainments of children – many of them boys – finding their way onto the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century stages that are the focus of this book. Nevertheless, all of those that I have listed certainly did – and, when they found a life on the professional London stage, it was the bodies of boy performers that enlivened them.

Characters played by boys climb trees, poles, ladders, and walls in John Marston's *Parasitaster, or the Fawn* (CQR, 1605) (sig. H3^r; 5.1.0 SD), George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and Marston's *Eastward Ho!* (CQR, 1605) (sig. F2^r; 4.1.6–12), Marston, William Barksted, and Lewis Machin's *The Insatiate Countess* (CQR, 1610) (sig. D4^v; 3.1.42 SD), and John Day's *Humour Out of Breath* (CKR, 1607) (sig. Hr^v)¹ – a play which also calls for a game of blind

¹ Admittedly, climbing is not the sole preserve of the boy company stage: Thomas Heywood's *The Brazen Age* (QAM, 1611), for instance, features a scene in which several adult male characters 'moun[t] the walle[s]' (sig. Hr^r).

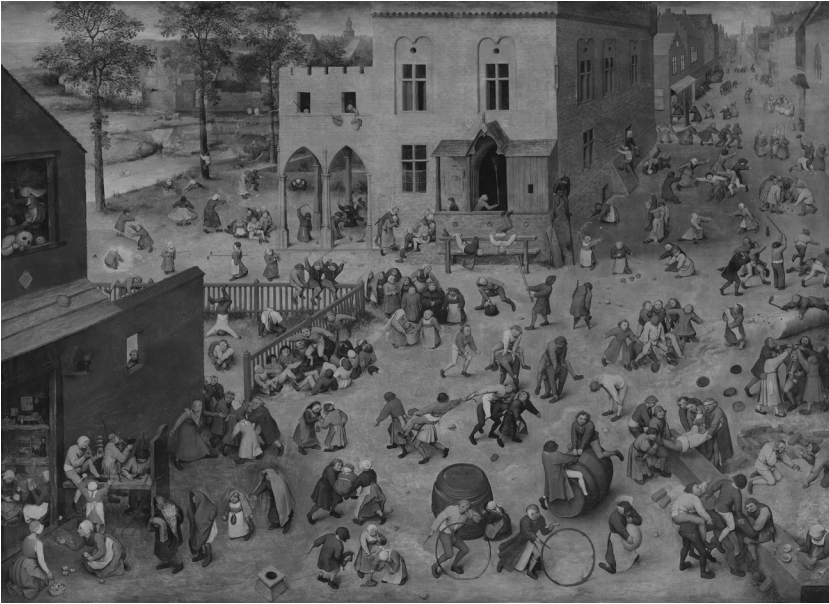


Figure 1 Pieter Breughel the Elder's *Children's Games* (1560). © KHM-Museumsverband. Reproduced with permission.

man's buff to be orchestrated (sig. F3^v–Gr^v). As early as 1583, John Lyly was stipulating that boys in his first play, *Campaspe* (OB, 1583), 'tumble' (sig. E3^v; 5.1.9 SD). Though characters played by boys do not appear to have simulated horseback-riding by straddling a fence, Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk* (CQR, 1611) has a character enter 'on an Ass' (sig. F2^v; 8.10 SD). Work such as weaving, making garlands, sewing, and carrying out shop tasks is performed by boys in a great number of plays, among them Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (AM, 1599) (sig. Crⁱ; 2.1.0 SD), Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* (? , 1610) (sig. H1^v; 4.1.0 SD), and the unattributed *The Wisdom of Doctor Dodypoll* (2CP, 1600) (sig. A3^v; 1.1.0 SD). Something approaching a piggyback is suggested in Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* (RC, 1620), when an adult male character exits with the spritely demon Harpax – plausibly played by a boy actor – 'hugging him' (sig. G3^v; 3.2.124 SD). Hair-pulling and dragging by the hair feature in plays as varied as Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (LEM, 1613) (sig. H4^v; 4.4.21 SD), James Shirley's *The Maid's Revenge* (QHM, 1626) (sig. I3^v; 5.3.29 SD), William Heminges's *The Fatal Contract* (QHM, 1633) (sig. I2^v) and *The Jews' Tragedy* (? , 1629) (sig. H2^v),

and the unattributed *Tom a Lincoln* (?; 1613) (2620). In the unattributed *The Family of Love* (CKR, 1607), once attributed to Middleton but more plausibly by Lording Barry or even Marston,² two characters are duped into 'scourging' one another (sigs E2^r–E3^r), while one character 'bastinadoes' another in Marston's *What You Will* (2CP, 1601) (sig. E2^v; 3.2.1195 SD). Grappling of some kind is called for in the fight between Joan la Pucelle and Charles in William Shakespeare and Thomas Nashe's *1 Henry VI* (LSM, 1592) (sig. k3^v; 1.3.82 SD).³ Joan wins. Even a leap into a river is performed by the Duchess of Burgundy in the unattributed *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall* (OM, 1599) (sig. A3^r; 1.1.0 SD).

These examples of Brueghelian-inflected stagecraft range across a long sweep of early modern theatre history, taking in established all-boy troupes alongside leading mixed companies made up of men and boys and including short-lived and 'fringe' companies along the way. They thus remind us of the value of reading widely across the surviving drama when considering an element of theatrical culture as universal as boy actors' stagecraft. Just as crucially for this chapter, they serve as an example of how depictions of children's physicalities in wider culture – particularly those of boys – can be mapped readily onto early modern stage practice. Such mapping is the chief focus of this chapter, which sketches neglected but important historical and cultural contexts for boy actors' stagecraft through the lens of physicality. The chapter argues that, whatever the passive, economic, or erotic valences of early modern boys fruitfully discussed by the scholarship cited in my Introduction, to understand their value to the early modern stage we must also consider them along more Brueghelian lines – that is, as active, athletic, and often playful participants in many sectors of early modern life. Boys were a part of social structures far larger than the playhouses which comprised the theatrical landscape: in what follows, I seek to reinsert physicality and corporeality into that landscape through a particular focus on the moving, working bodies of early modern boys as articulated in cultural constructions and experienced in lived realities.

As scholars such as Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, Claire M. Busse, and Paula S. Fass have acknowledged, physical labour was central to the lived

² Wiggins and Richardson follow the tradition of attributing the play to Barry (Wiggins and Richardson, vol. 5, p. 367). Charles Cathcart's Marstonian attribution goes as far as to situate the play at Paul's playhouse prior to 1602, but the evidence for this remains inconclusive: see Cathcart, *Marston, Rivalry, Rapprochement, and Jonson* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), p. 89.

³ The play was first printed in the folio of 1623.

experience of a great number of early modern boys and youths.⁴ Yet, as I demonstrate in this chapter, boys did not have to earn a living as labourers in order to be held to certain physical ideals and standards of corporeal activity. To neglect such standards and their physical realisation, I suggest, is to neglect an important facet of boy actor performance. As cultural anthropologists such as Greg Downey and Tim Ingold have demonstrated, cultural attitudes to the body and historically situated modes of physical training 'shape distinctive bodies in a literal sense, forging muscles, crafting tendons, assembling sensory systems and generating physical capabilities'.⁵ For Downey, 'Recognising particular physical patterns of what Tim Ingold ... has termed "enskilment" leads to an appreciation of the diverse ways in which societies raise their children.'⁶ A better understanding of how early modern culture sought to 'enskill' its boys and how such aims physically sculpted the bodies of boys of all stripes – including the bodies of boy actors – is therefore essential to an understanding of corporeal stage performance.

In order to flesh out (so to speak) early modern culture's widespread fascination with the bodily potential and physical activity of early modern boys – including in the world of work – this chapter re-examines a wealth of historical documents – including religious writings, conduct books, memoirs, apprenticeship manuals, and educational tracts – which are typically overlooked in critical discussions of the early modern stage. Taken together, this diverse range of sources bespeaks a shared culture of expectation around the bodies of early modern boys and youths, in which physical movement and productive action is at the forefront. The prevalent interest in boys' moving, working bodies is, I suggest, similarly suggested in writings on the theatre and passing references to boy performers in non-theatrical writings such as correspondence and prose narratives, in addition to the metatheatrical displays of 'real' boy actors I discuss in Chapter 2. By amassing these sources and reading them alongside one another, it is, I suggest, possible to build up a convincing picture of pervasive youthful activity both on and off the early modern stage – a picture which is central to my physically minded discussion of boy actors and the plays they performed throughout this book.

⁴ Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 39–132; Claire M. Busse, 'Profitable Children: Children as Commodities in Early Modern England', in Kari Boyd McBride (ed.), *Domestic Arrangements in Early Modern England* (Susquehanna: Duquesne University Press, 2002), pp. 209–43; Paula S. Fass, 'Introduction', in Paula S. Fass (ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1–14, p. 5.

⁵ Greg Downey, 'Educating the Eyes: Biocultural Anthropology and Physical Education', *Anthropology in Action* 12.2 (2005), 56–71, p. 57. See also Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 36–37, 416–19.

⁶ Downey, 'Educating the Eyes', p. 57.

'Let Young Men then Be Exercised': Ideals of Physical Boyhood

We have, thankfully, come a long way since Philippe Ariès made the damning assessment that, in early modern culture, the child was 'such an unimportant thing, so inadequately involved in life' that those who had not yet entered adulthood were scarcely worth acknowledging.⁷ This flippant remark, inattentive to the vital role children of all genders played in the early modern economy, held sway for decades, most notoriously influencing Lawrence Stone's conception of childhood as a total unknown in early modern culture – a child was a thing so disposable, so devoid of feeling, that its single *raison d'être* was apparently to be brutally beaten by its superiors.⁸ However, as early as 1976, when Keith Thomas stated that 'child labour was thought indispensable' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and certainly since the 1990s, scholars have done much to nuance these reductive evaluations through sustained efforts to de-marginalise the working lives of children and youths.⁹ Despite the difficulty in establishing and quantifying the precise nature of children's work and the distribution of labour across divisions of age and gender in this period, more recent scholarship on the status of the young has argued convincingly for the centrality of this social category's contributions to the world in which they lived.¹⁰ The picture of those caught between pubescence and marriage – widely understood as a ticket to adulthood for those in their mid-to-late twenties – in Ben-Amos's pioneering *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* is ultimately one of key contributors to society-at-large.¹¹ Noting that the expectations of apprenticeship revolved around its mutual benefits – the master relying on the apprentice to deliver as much as the apprentice relied on him for

⁷ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 1962), p. 39.

⁸ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977), pp. 105–77.

⁹ Keith Thomas, 'Age and Authority in Early Modern England', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 62 (1976), 205–48, p. 216.

¹⁰ See Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*; Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England 1560–1640* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹¹ Ben-Amos's study is not restricted to male adolescents, and it is true that a considerable number of female apprentices worked throughout the period. Given this book's focus on boy actors, however, and bearing in mind that girls were not apprenticed as actors on the early modern stage, this chapter restricts its purview to male apprentices. It is also worth noting that the didactic texts surveyed here are often geared explicitly towards young men and boys, predictably using male pronouns throughout their discussion of the archetypal apprentice. On girl apprentices, see Laura Gowing, 'Girls on Forms: Apprenticing Young Women in Seventeenth-Century London', *JBS* 55 (2016), 447–73.

enskilment – she thus presents a more rounded account of youth which keeps both its passivity and its potential in play:

As they grew up, young people were expected to be submissive yet autonomous, passive and disciplined but also capable of making decisions and taking the initiative to find service and obtain skills that would equip them to stand on their own. They were brought up to defer to parents and masters, but at the same time to be capable of earning a living, working hard, and establishing themselves in an increasingly competitive world.¹²

Children in these formulations are a far cry from 'peripheral to, or detached from, the practical adult world'¹³: as working subjects they were vital (in both senses of the word) to the micro- and macrocosms that comprised early modern society.

The ideas regarding boys and youths circulating in early modern England were overwhelmingly inclined towards their natural propensity to self-improvement and hard work – much of it physical. Though a distinct majority of extant works on childhood, youth, education, and labour was written by middle- and upper-class men who had little direct experience of manual exertion, it is striking that so many writers insist on the suitability of *all* young people – and particularly boys and young men – to engage in both contemplative *and* active work. The scriptural exhortation 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread' (Genesis 3.19) seemingly applied to everyone, irrespective of their socioeconomic circumstances.¹⁴ Indeed, the biblical incitement is regularly repeated in didactic literature: the anonymous author(s) of *The Office of Christian Parents* (1616), a work often considered emblematic of early modern social life, for example, use(s) it to reinforce their conception of the universal applicability of labour:

Now let those men or women, who thinke themselves or their children, for wealth or blood to be free from labour, consider what God meant when he said, *In the sweate of thy face shalt thou eate bread*. Is this spoken to poore men and their children onely? and shall not rich men, if they spend their time idly, one day give accompts unto God?¹⁵

For minister William Guilde, it was particularly children, and specifically sons, who were the target of God's order to engage in an honest

¹² Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, p. 239.

¹³ Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 36.

¹⁴ *The Bible: Authorised King James Version* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁵ Anon., *The Office of Christian Parents Shewing How Children Are to Be Governed throughout All Ages and Times of Their Life* (Cambridge, 1616), sig. T4^v.

undertaking – indeed, his *Yong Mans Inquisition or Triall* (1608) explains how God has taken pains to endow each and every man in the making with a specific calling:

[F]rom the Son of the Prince that sitteth on his throne, to the sonne of the poorest begger by the hie way side: to some hee hath given a quicke wit and diverse inclination to divers kindes of learning, ... to others hee hath given of his spirit, in wisdome, understanding, and knowledge to work in all manner of workemanship.¹⁶

Like the author(s) of *The Office of Christian Parents*, for whom the child's learning of classical languages is not incompatible with their pursuing 'some other prettie qualitie or some manuell trade, or art',¹⁷ Guilde does not distinguish between work in the schoolroom and work in, say, the stable or shipyard. The rhetoric of learning and improvement runs through both his descriptions of education – those 'divers kindes of learning' – and 'all manner of workemanship', through which even 'the poorest begger' might come to 'wisdome, understanding, and knowledge'. It is perhaps due to these overlaps in the outcomes of pedagogy and praxis that these authors are at pains to ensure that no young man is excluded from mental and physical labour: 'neither think', Guilde warns the shirking 'Noble or Gentlemans sonne or heire', that 'thou needest not, nor should apply thy minde to vertue, or thy hand to worke'.¹⁸ After all, his argument continues, even Jesus Christ got his hands dirty as a carpenter.

The stresses these authors place on the need to start work early in life came not only from an impetus to improve the self or even to please God, however. Children should begin physically working as soon as possible, a number of texts inform us, simply because their young age makes them most suitable – more suitable, that is, than adults. Doubtless influenced by Bartholomeus Anglicus's vast *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, which was translated into English in 1582 and states that children between the ages of seven and fourteen, being 'softe of fleshe, lythie and plyant of body', and 'able and lyght to moving' are thereby 'wittie to learne',¹⁹ early modern commentators frequently drew attention to the aptness of youth (often exclusively conceived of as male) to labour in body as well as mind. For the author(s) of *The Office of Christian Parents*, the ages between fourteen and

¹⁶ William Guilde, *A Yong Mans Inquisition or Triall* (London, 1608), sigs. M6^v–M7^r.

¹⁷ Anon., *The Office of Christian Parents*, sig. L2^r.

¹⁸ Guilde, *A Yong Mans Inquisition*, sig. N1^r.

¹⁹ Bartholomeus Anglicus, *Batman uppon Bartholome His Booke 'De Proprietatibus Rerum'*, *Newly Corrected, Enlarged and Amended*, trans. Stephen Batman (London, 1582), sig. Oj^r.

twenty-eight were the point at which youths were 'most sensible, full of strength, courage, and activeness'.²⁰ Though works such as the unattributed *Two-Fold Treatise* on youth and old age (1612) were often critical of the period of youth, categorising it as a time spent 'oftentimes more idle then well employed',²¹ authors were, on the whole, positive in their assessment of youth's natural capacity and potential, particularly in comparison with wise old age and often in highly physical terms. Francis Bacon, for example, observes in 'Of Custome and Education' that 'the Joints are more Supple to all Feats of Activitie, and Motions, in Youth then afterwards'.²² Likewise, John Browne's practically minded *Marchants Avizo* (1589) – whose first section offers didactic and practical advice to merchant apprentices – directs the intended reader to '[a]pply thyself unto labour while thou art young, lest in thine old age thy body become full of diseases, and thy ende be in reproach and povertie', a warning repeated almost a hundred years later in Francis Fuller's *Words to Give to the Young-Man Knowledge and Discretion*.²³

This culture of 'lyghtness to moving' and physical productivity carried a distinctly moralistic weight, in which a boy's engagement in 'all Feats of Activitie' was both a religious and national duty. Thomas Jackson, vicar of the Cathedral Church of St Nicholas in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, exhorted his young congregants to

*Remember now thy Creator in the dayes of thy youth. ... Because the prints of Gods creative power are then most fresh in our nature, and might transmit a fairer copy or truer estimate of the Creators goodnesse unto old age, than old age can take any: so young men by often reflecting upon the present comforts of health and strength, upon the activity of body, the quicknesse of sense and spirit, would ingrosse them deeply in their memories.*²⁴

²⁰ Anon., *The Office of Christian Parents*, sig. S4^r.

²¹ Anon., *A Two-Fold Treatise the One Decyphering the Worth of Speculation, and of a Retired Life. The Other Containing a Discoverie of Youth and Old Age* (Oxford, 1612), sig. C6^r.

²² Francis Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall, of Francis Lo. Verulum, Viscount St. Alban. Newly Written* (London, 1625), sig. Hh1^r. See also Bacon's acknowledgement of young men's capacity for action rather than contemplation in 'Of Youth and Old Age' (sigs Ii4^r–Kkr^r). As Clare McManus reminds us, the phrase 'feats of activity' was frequently deployed in theatrical terms when describing entertainments such as rope dancing and tumbling: see McManus, 'Feats of Activity and the Tragic Stage', *Engendering the Stage*, McMaster University, 30 April 2019 (available at <http://engenderingthestage.humanities.mcmaster.ca/2019/04/30/feats-of-activity-and-the-tragic-stage/>, last accessed 11 March 2021).

²³ J[ohn] B[rowne], *The Marchants Avizo* (London, 1589), sig. Iiij^r; Francis Fuller, *Words to Give to the Young-Man Knowledge and Discretion, or, The Law of Kindness in the Tongue of a Father to His Son* (London, 1685), sig. E2^r.

²⁴ Thomas Jackson, *A Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes* (London, 1628), sig. G8^r.

Invoking the teachings of Ecclesiastes, Jackson acknowledges youth as the time in which 'the activity of body' is in fullest flourish, urging those who possess this natural capacity to appreciate and reflect upon it while it lasts – presumably through regular, grateful practice. Elsewhere, clerical figures and particular saints were held up as moral exempla for doing exactly that. In his hagiographic funeral sermon for Thomas Morton, Bishop of Durham, John Barwick favourably compares his superior to St Cuthbert, declaring of the latter that 'even in *his childehood* he had not only an *excellent sharpness of Wit*, but also a *strange activity of Body*, wherein he excelled all his fellowes in sports and games, especially in *leaping, running, and wrestling*'.²⁵ Noting the bishop's aptitude for '*Foot-ball playing*' in particular, Barwick emphasises 'how active this *Reverend Bishop* was therein in his *younger years*, seeing the fame of it continued till his *old age*, and ascended so high as to come to the *Kings Ear*'.²⁶ For Barwick, Morton's saintly predisposal to 'activity of Body' in his youth laid the foundations for his ascendancy to considerable political influence and royal favour.

That physical activity might be politically and nationally productive was more directly emphasised by writers who expressed considerable martial anxiety, resting their hopes for England's defence on the muscular soldiers of the next generation. Historical accounts of martially prodigious youths, such as the three hundred Goths 'excelling in activity of body and corage of minde' who, in St Augustine's account, were instrumental to the sacking of Rome, went hand in hand with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tracts promoting a national investment in fostering home-grown military talent among boys.²⁷ Geoffrey Gates, setting out in the title of his 1579 treatise to prove '*How Necessary the Exercise of Armes is for This Our Age*', writes in admiration of the ancient Lacedaemonians (or Spartans), who

bring up al their youth in harde diet, thinnely clothed, poorely bedded: extrémely holden in the practise of difficult feates, in labour of the bodie, in the feates of activitie, and under the practise and rudimentes of militarie weapons and orders: that in all points they might be perfectly fashioned for the warres.²⁸

²⁵ John Barwick, *Hieronikēs, or, The Fight, Victory, and Triumph of S. Paul Accommodated to the Right Reverend Father in God Thomas, Late L. Bishop of Duresme, ...: Together with the Life of the Said Bishop* (London, 1660), sig. Y2^r.

²⁶ Barwick, *Hieronikēs*, sig. Y2^r.

²⁷ St Augustine, *Of the City of God with the Learned Comments of Jo. Lod. Vives*, trans. John Healey (London, 1610), sigs A5^{r-v}.

²⁸ Geoffrey Gates, *The Defence of Militarie Profession, Wherein Is Eloquently Shewed the Due Commendation of Martiall Prowesse, and Plainly Prooved How Necessary the Exercise of Armes Is for This Our Age* (London, 1579), sig. F4^v.

Maintaining such a stock of youth in England is, for Gates, essential to national security, just as it was for Edward Cooke, who in *The Character of Warre* held classical precedents for the physical training of boys in similarly high regard:

[I]f after the Romane manner you will have young men to muster the time that they must appeare at muster must be so soone as they grow any thing to mans estate: this will be when they are about the age of 14. 15. or 16. yeares: Then not onely more speedily, but also more perfectly all things are learned, the sooner the better ... Let young men then be exercised betimes, for it is readinesse gotten by former practise that maketh a Souldier.²⁹

For Cooke, it was through honing particular youthful bodily qualities – ‘straight necked, broad breasted, ... strong fingers, long armes, a gaunt bellie, slender legges, the calfe and the feet not to full of flesh, but knit fast with hard and strong sinewes’³⁰ – that the nation could preserve its military superiority.

The mantra of ‘the sooner the better’ that Cooke espouses was not only applicable to the martial arena – and, indeed, the soldiers of ‘14. 15. or 16. yeares’ he imagines are rather advanced in years in comparison to boys employed elsewhere. Authors of didactic literature seized upon the natural properties of youth expounded from Bartholomeus onwards in order to illustrate not merely boys’ suitability for ‘labour’ in general, but how this suitability might be applied in specific trades, industries, and educational environments. In their expanded edition of *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government*, Robert Cleaver and John Dod place an emphasis on the duty of parents to aid the ‘little Commonwealth’ of the household (and thereby the commonwealth at large) by keeping their children ‘from idlenesse, the mother of all mischiefes, and bring[ing] them up either in learning, or in some good art or occupation, whereby they may get their living with honestie and truth’.³¹ Though creating a binary between ‘learning’ and ‘occupation’, absent from Guilde and *The Office of Christian Parents*, Cleaver and Dod simultaneously unite the two as allies to combat idleness. In this, they echo writers like Guilde, for whom youth’s aptness to work should be applied, as soon as possible, in the routine and material practices of making a living: in his outline of the three ways in which young men ‘shold take heed according to Gods word’, Guilde lists ‘[t]heir way of particular

²⁹ Edward Cooke, *The Character of Warre, or The Image of Martiall Discipline* (London, 1626), sig. B3^r.

³⁰ Cooke, *The Character of Warre*, sig. B2^r.

³¹ Robert Cleaver and John Dod, *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government for the Ordering of Private Families, According to the Direction of Gods Word* (London, 1612), sig. Q1^r.

and lawful vocatio[n]' first and foremost, setting it above even 'their way of true godlines, the perfectio[n] of all'.³² It was not enough, then, simply to possess the capacity to work through either contemplation or action – for the good of the commonwealth, the household, and the individual, this capacity needed to be put physically into practice.

Society's adherence to these instructions is suggested by comments made by a Venetian official visiting London at the turn of the sixteenth century, for whom '[t]he want of affection in the English ... towards their children' was demonstrated by the fact that

after having kept them at home till they arrive at the age of 7 or 9 years at the utmost, they put them out, both males and females, to hard service in the houses of other people, binding them generally for another 7 or 9 years.³³

We might set aside the author's horrified assumption that setting children to work was evidence of a lack of affection in their parents – as the 1601 *Ease for Overseers of the Poore* reminds us, work was essential to the survival of 'those parents which shall not be thought able to keepe and maintaine' their children.³⁴ Setting a child to work, then, was not necessarily seen as an act of cruelty, but an act of compassion, enabling the child, like the children of those who had the luxury of choosing between 'learning, or ... some good art or occupation', to forge their own way in the world, improving self and society in the process. Regardless of motive or outcome, what should be clear from this survey of didactic literature is that children in early modern England shared one common expectation: irrespective of the exigencies placed upon their particular sector of society, all of them were expected to set their bodies to work.

'All Manner of Drudgeries': Apprenticeship and Embodied Work

Of the 'good arts or occupations' Cleaver and Dod promoted as valid pursuits for boys and young men, among the most prevalent – and certainly the most pertinent to any discussion of the practices of the early modern

³² Guilde, *A Yong Mans Inquisition*, sig. M6^r.

³³ Quoted in Cordelia Beattie, 'Economy', in Sandra Cavallo and Silvia Evangelisti (eds.), *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in the Early Modern Age* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), pp. 49–67, p. 49.

³⁴ Anon., *An Ease for Overseers of the Poore Abstracted from the Statutes, Allowed by Practise, and Now Reduced into Forme, as a Necessarie Directorie for Employing, Releving, and Ordering of the Poore* (Cambridge, 1601), sig. Cr^r.

theatre – was apprenticeship. As Christopher Brooks puts it, apprenticeship was ‘a powerful determinant in the careers and prospects of the boys who undertook it’, providing them with a means to immerse themselves in the adult world of work while also, crucially, allowing the sphere of adult production to profit from the manual labour of adolescent boys.³⁵ Given that, for Anthony Fletcher, the entire purpose of apprenticeship was ‘getting young people into work in an economy that was labour-intensive’ to save them from the hazardous pitfalls of idleness that were a recurring threat throughout didactic writing on childhood and youth, it is hardly surprising that at the outset of the seventeenth century, as much as 8 per cent of London’s population was made up of apprentices.³⁶ Though skewed in favour of the mercantile and gentle classes rather than the poor – whose compulsory employment in often menial tasks was dictated by the Poor Laws of 1598 and 1601³⁷ – apprenticeship, particularly in London, was widespread, as the rigorous work of Mark Thornton Burnett, Joan Lane, Chris Minns, Steven R. Smith, Patrick Wallis, and Cliff Webb has documented.³⁸ *Theatrical* apprenticeship – one of the more institutionally solid connections between theatrical and wider labouring structures – was also pervasive, even in the absence of a formal actors’ guild to which apprentices could be bound. Through years of meticulous and extensive archival research, David Kathman has marshalled a surprisingly ample array of legal and anecdotal records of dozens of boys, typically aged between twelve and twenty-two with an average of sixteen or seventeen, who were apprenticed

³⁵ Christopher Brooks, ‘Apprenticeship, Social Mobility and the Middling Sort, 1550–1800’, in Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550–1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), pp. 52–83, p. 54.

³⁶ Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 211; Patrick Wallis, ‘Apprenticeship in England’, in Maarten Prak and Patrick Wallis (eds.), *Apprenticeship in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 247–81, p. 258.

³⁷ See Wallis, ‘Apprenticeship in England’, pp. 252, 264.

³⁸ Mark Thornton Burnett, *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (London: Macmillan, 1997); Joan Lane, *Apprenticeship in England, 1600–1914* (London: University College London Press, 1996); Chris Minns and Patrick Wallis, ‘Rules and Reality: Quantifying the Practice of Apprenticeship in Early Modern England’, *EHR* 65.2 (2012), 556–79; Chris Minns, Patrick Wallis, and Cliff Webb, ‘Leaving Home and Entering Service: The Age of Apprenticeship in Early Modern London’, *Continuity and Change* 25.3 (2010), 377–404; Steven R. Smith, ‘The Ideal and Reality: Apprentice–Master Relationships in Seventeenth-Century London’, *HEQ* 21.4 (1981), 449–59; Steven R. Smith, ‘The London Apprentices as Seventeenth-Century Adolescents’, *Past & Present* 61 (1973), 149–61; Patrick Wallis, ‘Apprenticeship and Training in Premodern England’, *JEH* 68.3 (2008), 832–36; Patrick Wallis and Cliff Webb, ‘The Education and Training of Gentry Sons in Early Modern England’, *Working Papers: The London School of Economics and Political Science, Department of Economic History* 128/09 (2009), 1–29, p. 17 (available at eprints.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/27958, last accessed 4 December 2020).

to sharers in the adult companies.³⁹ His work is invaluable to the project of recovering the material status and practices of the boy actors, doing much to fill out the picture of the contributions they made to the early modern stage: in short, it would appear that, like youthful labour in general, the labour of the youths who lived and worked within the structures of the early modern theatre was everywhere, and the apprenticeships in which they were engaged closely mirrored the more rigidly structured counterparts in the guilds and trades upon which theatrical apprenticeships were based. Indeed, a surviving court case from as early as 1529 records a young apprentice glazier making 'instant suit and labour' to his master to 'teach [him] in playing of interludes and plays, whereby he might attain and come to be one of the King's players',⁴⁰ and there is evidence of some of the apprentices of the actor Andrew Cane having gone on to work as goldsmiths.⁴¹ Lasting anywhere between six months – as for two adolescents engaged by James Burbage and John Brayne in 1577⁴² – and, as was more common, seven, eight, nine, or even ten years,⁴³ the apprenticeships appear to have centred on an understanding that the boys would be trained, either by their master or a third party.⁴⁴ Despite this meticulous quantification,

³⁹ See works by David Kathman: 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers: Freeman and Apprentices in the Elizabethan Theater', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55.1 (2004), 1–49; 'How Old Were Shakespeare's Boy Actors?', *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (2005), 220–46; 'John Rice and the Boys of the Jacobean King's Men', *Shakespeare Survey* 68 (2015), 247–66; 'Players, Livery Companies, and Apprentices', in Richard Dutton (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 413–28; 'The Seven Deadly Sins and Theatrical Apprenticeship', *Early Theatre* 14.1 (2011), 121–39.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Glynne Wickham, Herbert Berry, and William Ingram (eds.), *English Professional Theatre, 1530–1660* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 274.

⁴¹ Kathman, 'Grocers', pp. 21–2.

⁴² Kathman, 'Players', p. 417. This particular arrangement is discussed in detail by David Mateer, who points out that the recorded weekly wage of 3s. 6d. – around £44 in today's money – was unusually high, even for skilled craftsmen. See Mateer, 'New Light on the Early History of the Theatre in Shoreditch [with texts]', *ELR* 36 (2006), 335–75, pp. 347–8. See also Richard Dutton, *Shakespeare's Theatre: A History* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), pp. 185–6. Modern prices are calculated using the National Archives' online 'Currency Converter' tool, with adjustments for inflation made using the Bank of England's 'Inflation Calculator'. See 'Currency Converter: 1270–2017', *National Archives*, 2017 (available at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result, last accessed 4 December 2020); 'Inflation Calculator', *Bank of England*, 2018 (available at www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator, last accessed 4 December 2020).

⁴³ Kathman, 'Grocers', pp. 9, 20, 33, 41.

⁴⁴ Officially, formal apprenticeships were legally obliged to last for seven years, a point that has led Robert Barrie to question the validity of guild apprenticeship as a model for theatrical apprenticeship: see 'Elizabethan Play-Boys in the Adult London Companies', *SEL* 48.2 (2008), 237–57, pp. 238, 252. However, extensive quantifying research by Minns and Wallis has successfully shown that far from producing carbon copies of seven-year apprentices, 'the rules and reality of apprenticeship in early modern England diverged substantially. Despite the law or guild and civic enforcement, the formal procedures of apprenticeship were frequently and consistently evaded': see 'Rules and Reality', p. 558.

however, relatively little of what went on within apprenticeship's highly formalised and closely guarded structures either inside or outside of the playhouse is discernible from the historical record alone.

Much of what survives by way of evidence for apprenticeship practices takes the form of guild and parish registers which simply list the names of contracted apprentices for any given year, and individual indenture documents.⁴⁵ In England, these documents – drawn up as an agreement between master and apprentice, or often the apprentice's family – were highly formulaic, to the extent that by the seventeenth century they were pre-printed with gaps left for details such as the specific year and the names of the contracted parties. A surviving example from 1683 is typically reticent regarding what exactly it is the apprentice – one William Chaplyn – will do in his capacity as apprentice to the apothecary Thomas Barrow:⁴⁶ it states only that Chaplyn will 'learn' his master's 'Art', and will serve him 'after the manner of an Apprentice'.⁴⁷ The document is, in fact, more concerned with what the apprentice is *not* to do, stating that he must not waste 'the goods of his said Master', 'commit Fornication, nor contract Matrimony', 'play at Cards, Dice, Tables, or any other unlawful Games', or 'haunt Taverns or Play-houses'. Instead,

in all things as a faithful Apprentice he shall behave himself towards his said Master, and all this during the said Term. And the said Master his said Apprentice, in the same Art which he useth, by the best means that he can, shall teach and instruct, or cause to be taught and instructed[.]

Ideals assume precedence over material reality: all we can glean is that day in, day out, the young William is to learn the 'Art' (complete with secrets which must be closely guarded) of his master, either from the master himself or someone else.

⁴⁵ For a recent introduction to the legal, economic, and contractual aspects of apprenticeship in early modern Europe, see Joel Mokyr, 'The Economics of Apprenticeship', in Prak and Wallis (eds.), *Apprenticeship in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 20–43. Urvashi Chakravarty offers a thoughtful analysis of indentures' conventional language of servitude and consent in 'Bound to Serve: Apprenticeship Indentures at the Folger', *The Collation: Research and Exploration at the Folger*, Folger Shakespeare Library, 5 January 2018 (available at <https://collation.folger.edu/2018/01/indentures/>, last accessed 15 March 2021).

⁴⁶ I acknowledge that this date places the indenture outside the flourishing period of the early modern theatre by almost half a century; however, as Lane's book persuasively demonstrates, the structures and expectations of apprenticeship changed little from the sixteenth century to the First World War.

⁴⁷ Anon., 'This Indenture witnesseth, that [William Chaplyn] ... doth put himself apprentice to [Thomas Barrow], citizen and [apothecary] of London, to learn his art: and with him (after the manner of an apprentice) ... anno Dom. 16[83]', Early English Books Tract Supplement Interim Guide/C.18.e.2[31] (available at <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2240903825?accountid=9851>, last accessed 15 March 2021).

The agreement's obliqueness is paralleled in one of the only surviving contemporary references to the specifics of stage apprenticeship – an indenture, dated 1607, which records the binding of the young Abel Cooke to the masters of the Children of the Queen's Revels company for a period of three years. This company had something of a history of recruiting apprentices from other trades: a surviving complaint lodged against the founders of the company – then known as the Children of the Chapel – in 1600 recalls that among the boys 'impressed' into performing at the Blackfriars playhouse were 'Alvery Trussell, an apprentice to one Thomas Gyles; one Philip Pykman, and Thomas Grymes, apprentices to Richard and George Chambers; Salomon Pavey, apprentice to one Peerce'.⁴⁸ Though the terms of Cooke's apprenticeship were not ultimately fulfilled (a subsequent court case reveals that he left the company just six months later), the extent to which his indenture mirrors those of young people working in other industries is striking. Cooke's master, we are told, has been 'nominated ... to ... bring up a convenient number of children, and them to practise and exercise in the quality of playing'.⁴⁹ Cooke's mother, Alice, the indenture states,

hath been an earnest suitor unto the said Thomas Kendall to receive, take, and entertain Abel Cooke her son to be one of the said children of her majesty's Revels, and to be practised and exercised in the said quality of playing, by the name of one of the children of her highness' Revels, for and during the term of three years now next ensuing.

For the next three years, Cooke will

continue, abide with, and serve the said Thomas Kendall, and from time to time during the said term, when and so often as the said Thomas Kendall require or command, the said Abel shall practise and exercise *himself* in the quality of playing, as one of the Queen's majesty's children of her Revels aforesaid, and also shall, to the uttermost of his power and ability, at all times play at the direction and commandment of the said Thomas Kendall or his assigns, and shall not wittingly or willingly, during the said term, depart, absent, or prolong himself from the said service and practice and playing.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Quoted in Wickham, Berry, and Ingram (eds.), *English Professional Theatre*, p. 265. Wickham, Berry, and Ingram identify the 'Thomas Gyles' and 'Peerce' mentioned in the suit as Thomas Giles and Edward Pearce, two successive masters of the choristers and theatre company at Paul's. See also W. Reavely Gair, *The Children of Paul's: The Story of a Theatre Company, 1553–1608* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 64; Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 37–8.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Wickham, Berry, and Ingram (eds.), *English Professional Theatre*, p. 269.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Wickham, Berry, and Ingram (eds.), *English Professional Theatre*, p. 269.

The indenture syntactically tangles the demands of service, physical practice, and stage playing, suggesting an overlap in what is physically required of a boy engaged in any of these activities. It is also worth noting that Cooke is to 'practise and exercise *himself* in this 'quality', a condition which bespeaks an expectation that Cooke will, of his own accord, contribute to the company's performance of plays through labour.

To gain a better understanding of how cultural expectations surrounding the physical work of apprenticeship shaped the stage contributions of boys such as Cooke, it is essential to look beyond oblique and formulaic indentures to a wider range of sources which illuminate the material realities of working as a boy in early modern England. At first blush, cultural depictions of apprentices are scarcely more revealing. In a thorough survey of artistic depictions of artisan workshops from the period, Karel Davids observes that while such images 'frequently show masters and apprentices working close to each other in the same place', 'they hardly give an idea of what skills their work exactly entailed and they rarely represent masters manifestly engaged in the act of teaching, or apprentices visibly engrossed in the act of learning' – perhaps, given its ubiquity, apprenticeship was considered so mundane and recognisable a practice as to need no elaboration.⁵¹ The scarcity of writing on apprenticeship did not go unremarked by early modern commentators: Caleb Trenchfield noted as late as 1671 that though many great men had, by this point, published advice to their sons, 'there's not any (that I know of) hath stooped so low, to give advice to an Apprentice'.⁵² The majority of surviving apprenticeship literature (none of which, sadly but unsurprisingly, relates to apprenticeship in the theatre) mirrors the ideals expressed in surviving indentures, setting out the patterns of behaviour an apprentice is to follow once he takes up residence in the master's home. Many didactic works, including Richard Burton's *The Apprentices Companion* (1681), fail to move beyond the generic 'in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread' formula despite presenting servants and apprentices as the exhortation's particular addressees.⁵³ Even John Stow's *Survey of*

⁵¹ Karel Davids, 'Work, Skill, and Technology', in Bert De Munck and Thomas Max Safley (eds.), *A Cultural History of Work in the Early Modern Age* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), pp. 101–12, p. 101.

⁵² Caleb Trenchfield, *A Cap of Grey Hairs for a Green Head, or, The Fathers Counsel to His Son, an Apprentice in London* (London, 1671), sig. A2^r.

⁵³ Richard Burton, *The Apprentices Companion Containing Plain and Useful Directions for Servants, Especially Apprentices, How to Perform Their Particular Dutys to Their Masters, so as to Please God* (London, 1681), sig. D11^r.

London, whose subsection 'Instructions for the Apprentices in the City of London' seems to promise some elaboration, offers little more than the exhortation to 'doe diligent and faithfull service to your Master'.⁵⁴ As Ben-Amos demonstrates through extensively surveying retrospective accounts of individual apprentices, much of what is set down in didactic literature 'reflected very little of ... the working lives ... of young people, and the autonomy and independence which many a youth had already acquired in his mid- and late teens'.⁵⁵ Consistently absent from these works are accounts of the physical contributions the young made to the industries in which they worked: in even the most detailed of apprenticeship literature the physical, material particulars of the work to be taught and carried out are curiously obfuscated.

Perhaps as a result of the frequent insistences that young workers should 'diligently and honestly guard their masters, and their masters goods' and thus protect the 'secrets' of one's trade in an increasingly competitive marketplace, we are offered little qualification or quantification of what it took and what it meant to be a young worker in this period.⁵⁶ Certain trends do, however, emerge from both the didactic literature and the scant real-life accounts that have come down to us. Both sets of texts place a consistent emphasis on the requirement that work be mutually beneficial, offering something to both apprentice *and* master. Just as importantly, both repeatedly focus on the moving, working body of the young apprentice. Trenchfield's book, with its eye trained on the author's son's potential to become a master himself, sums up this reciprocity thus: 'a Master, ... from whom you will receive dayly examples of the exercise of vertue; and who, as he will expect the duty of a servant from you, in your service of him'.⁵⁷ The sentiment of give and take is common to several surviving accounts – both factual and fictional – of urban apprenticeship in a number of trades. Several of the characters in Richard Johnson's *The Nine Worthies of London* – directed, in part, at 'Prentises' – recount the manual nature of the apprentice's expected output. The character Sir William Sevenoake, for example, who began as a grocer's apprentice, describes how in 'learn[ing] ... to live' and work 'with manuall toole' his eye was continually trained on his master:

⁵⁴ John Stow and A. M., *The Survey of London Contayning the Originall, Increase, Moderne Estate, and Government of that City, Methodically Set Downe* (London, 1633), sig. Nnnr^r.

⁵⁵ Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, p. 38.

⁵⁶ William Vaughan, *The Golden-Grove Moralized in Three Bookes* (London, 1600), sig. O7^r.

⁵⁷ Trenchfield, *A Cap of Grey Hairs for a Green Head*, sig. A7^r.

To please the honest care my master tooke,
 I did refuse no toyle nor drudging payne,
 My handes no labor ever yet forsook
 Whereby I might encrease my masters gayne.⁵⁸

Autobiographical accounts of the lives of youths such as William Lilly and Francis Kirkman similarly feature the master as an omnipresent figure in the realities and objectives of the work they carried out in trades which would 'be not only useful, but profitable' to the labouring youths.⁵⁹ Burton, in fact, goes as far as to depict the master's benefit as the apprentice's ultimate goal, stating that 'both their persons and actions are all their Masters'.⁶⁰ Yet even so didactic a work as Burton's cannot deny the autonomous actions that an apprentice or servant must undertake in order to meet the conditions of his indenture. His depiction of young men 'all day long at plow, which is a very tiresome and laborious employment' before coming home to prepare and serve his master's supper suggests that for him, too, diligence, or even the giving over of one's mind and actions to a superior, comes less from total subjection and more from physical activity.⁶¹

The expectation that apprentices should begin physically contributing to the industry in which they worked virtually from day one should not be surprising. As several scholars have demonstrated, it was rare for even the youngest of apprentices to come to the post with no experience of manual labour: particularly in agrarian environments from which large numbers of urban apprentices were drawn, children as young as ten could expect to undertake the most complex manual tasks.⁶² Thomas Tusser's expanded *Five Hundreth Pointes of Good Husbandry* (1573) – 'the single most popular book of poetry published in sixteenth-century England and one of the fifteen most popular books on any subject in the Elizabethan era'⁶³ – suggests that even the youngest of children can be 'armed with

⁵⁸ Richard Johnson, *The Nine Worthies of London* (London, 1592), sigs C4^{r-v}.

⁵⁹ Francis Kirkman, *The Unlucky Citizen Experimentally Described in the Various Misfortunes of an Unlucky Londoner* (London, 1673), sig. C8^r; William Lilly, *William Lilly's History of His Life and Times from the Year 1602 to 1681* (London, 1822), p. 27.

⁶⁰ Burton, *The Apprentices Companion*, sig. C2^v.

⁶¹ Burton, *The Apprentices Companion*, sig. C6^v.

⁶² See Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, pp. 42–3; Brooks, 'Apprenticeship, Social Mobility and the Middling Sort', p. 55; Joanne M. Ferraro, 'Childhood in Medieval and Early Modern Times', in Fass (ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood*, pp. 61–77, p. 65; Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, p. 123; Colin Heywood, 'Children's Work in Countryside and City', in Fass (ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood*, pp. 125–41, p. 126.

⁶³ Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 36.

sling or with bowe, / to scare away piggen, the rooke and the crowe', 'beate hawes to swine', '[d]rive hog to the wood, / brake rootes', or 'be hired, to lay to their bones, / from fallow as needeth to gather up stones'.⁶⁴ These aptitudes for labour did not only manifest in the fields: Kirkman describes how his own aptitude for apprenticeship rather than learning became apparent in his early years at school,⁶⁵ while Johnson's fictionalised rendering of Sevenoake offers a similar picture of the narrator's early manual aptitude:

[W]hen in my infants time induste more yeares
After some education in the schoole,
And some discretion in myself appears
With labor to be taught with manuall toole.⁶⁶

As economic historians such as Wallis have demonstrated, this perceived inherent aptitude in the young gave way to a markedly expedient mode of training apprentices in which learning and doing were coterminous. For Wallis, the trades that were bolstered by young apprentices relied upon 'a blend of tacit and propositional knowledge', in which tacit knowledge, 'acquired through modeling, imitation, observation, and experience' took primacy over didactic instruction.⁶⁷ '[T]he burden of acquiring a craft', he concludes, 'was put on the apprentice's diligence in observing and *particularly practicing skills*' – or, as the theatrical indenture of Abel Cooke would have it, in the apprentice's ability to *exercise himself*.⁶⁸

The physical onus being placed on the apprentice is articulated by those few former apprentices who recorded their experiences, calling attention to the diverse nature of the manual tasks they were required to perform. Such tasks, while not necessarily directly related to the practices of the trades for which they were preparing, presumably provided them with the opportunity to observe their superiors at work while, crucially, at the same time contributing corporeally to the running of the master's household. Lilly's *History of His Life and Times*, for instance, stresses the physical nature of the work he routinely carried out – perhaps surprising given that his apprenticeship took the form of being an attendant on a wealthy salt merchant:

⁶⁴ Thomas Tusser, *Five Hundreth Pointes of Good Husbandry* (London, 1573), sigs Cj^r, Cvij^t, Fv^r.

⁶⁵ Kirkman, *The Unlucky Citizen*, sig. C8^v.

⁶⁶ Johnson, *The Nine Worthies of London*, sig. C4^r.

⁶⁷ Wallis, 'Apprenticeship and Training', pp. 846–7.

⁶⁸ Wallis, 'Apprenticeship and Training', p. 847, emphasis added. See also Mokyr, 'The Economics of Apprenticeship', pp. 21–4; Smith, 'The London Apprentices', p. 151.

[M]y work was to go before my master to church; to attend my master when he went abroad; to make clean his shoes; sweep the street; help to drive bucks when he washed; fetch water in a tub from the Thames; I have helped to carry eighteen tubs of water in one morning; weed the garden; all manner of drudgeries I willingly performed; scrape trenchers, &c.⁶⁹

Kirkman is more explicit about how such work goes hand in hand with the ultimate aim of one's apprenticeship – in his case, as a scrivener, a trade that would eventually give way to his publishing, and even writing, plays. 'No sooner bound' to his master, 'I was told and shewed by him whom I succeeded [a superior apprentice rather than the master himself] what was my particular work, for *besides my writing I was to do other Petty services*.'⁷⁰ These 'services', akin to Lilly's 'drudgeries', were intensely physical, with 'within doors employes' including, as with Lilly, sweeping and cleaning – including 'the sink (and a long nasty one it was)' – drawing beer, and fetching coals and kettles, and services 'abroad' encompassing carrying out 'all errands' and carrying 'all burthens'.⁷¹ Unlike Lilly, however, and in keeping with the title of his book, Kirkman describes himself as unwillingly performing these tasks: after all, 'he that is an Apprentice at present, in short time he is to be put out of his time, and then he is a companion for his Master, and it may be a better man than he'.⁷² His eye trained on the end result, the young Kirkman fails to see the value of the manual labour he is required to perform. Though he cannot comprehend how such menial work is ever to help him become 'a better man' than even his master, the multifaceted nature of his employ alerts us to the fact that time could not be wasted on his extensive didactic training: if he was to glean any knowledge of his trade, he was to do so against the backdrop of drudgery and manual toil. In the on-the-job model of early modern apprenticeship, that is, knowledge of the 'mysteries' of one's trade came at a price: work – and continuous, hard, manual work at that.

'Stronge or Violent Exercyses': The Learning Body

As should be clear from the syntactic entanglement of work and education in the didactic literature surveyed thus far, the division between the two modes of occupation was not as clear-cut for early modern

⁶⁹ Lilly, *William Lilly's History of His Life and Times*, p. 27.

⁷⁰ Kirkman, *The Unlucky Citizen*, sig. D2^r.

⁷¹ Kirkman, *The Unlucky Citizen*, sigs D2^{r-v}.

⁷² Kirkman, *The Unlucky Citizen*, sig. D3^v.

boys as one might assume. Like apprenticeship, education is of obvious relevance to the early modern stage, in particular the children's playing companies which emerged in London in the 1580s, 1600s, and 1630s and were, as Andrew Gurr among others has noted, born out of 'the educational tradition that exploited playing to improve speech and body language'.⁷³ While scholars have long noted the educative system's transferability to the stage through its promotion of rhetorical sophistication and, more obviously, the literacy required to interpret a play-text,⁷⁴ the place of the active body in the early modern schoolroom has been explored in considerably less detail. Yet, as work such as Rebecca W. Bushnell's *A Culture of Teaching* and Lyn Enterline's *Shakespeare's Schoolroom* remind us, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century classroom was not a place from which physical demands and practices – not least those of performance – were excluded. Rather, as Enterline demonstrates in her thorough historicising of 'the theatricality of everyday life in humanist grammar schools', the physical and the verbal were intimately entwined.⁷⁵ If, as Bushnell persuasively suggests, 'early English humanist pedagogy ... matched the heterogeneity of early modern society and politics', we might expect to find the physical nature of manual work – that mainstay of early modern life – creeping into the classroom.⁷⁶ Early modern education, that is, was not impervious to the kind of attention the world of work and apprenticeship paid to the active, moving body. By extension, the two forms of theatrical training – apprenticeship in mixed companies, more formal education in all-boy troupes – were also overlapping in physical intention, however much scholars such as Gurr have traditionally positioned 'adult' and 'children's' drama at 'extremes' to one another.⁷⁷ Though early modern didacticists such as Cleaver and Dod stated that the duty of parents was to bring their children up 'either in learning, or in some good art or occupation', implicitly ruling out any potential connections between

⁷³ Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 218.

⁷⁴ For detailed overviews of the early modern schoolroom which pay particular attention to the children's companies, see Julie Ackroyd, *Child Actors on the London Stage, circa 1600: Their Education, Recruitment and Theatrical Success* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2017); and Jeanne H. McCarthy, *The Children's Troupes and the Transformations of English Theater 1509–1608: Pedagogue Playwrights, Playbooks, and Play-Boys* (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁷⁵ Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp. 1, 43.

⁷⁶ Rebecca W. Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching: Early Modern Humanism in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 19.

⁷⁷ Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies*, p. 8.

the two life paths, the spheres of labour and learning were often defined by shared systems of youthful physicality.⁷⁸

In his yoking of 'divers kindes of learning' to 'all manner of workmanship', Guilde implicitly suggests that while parents should choose one or the other path to set their sons upon, 'wisdom' and 'knowledge' may be acquired from both practical work and pedagogy. This provides a promising point of departure for bridging the divide between labour and education, and predicts the suggestion made eight years later in *The Office of Christian Parents* that the learning of languages does not exclude the possibility of the child engaging in 'some other prettie qualitie of some manuell trade, or art, or science'.⁷⁹ Indeed, the physical nature of *all* childhood experience, in schoolroom or workplace, is repeatedly stressed throughout the work: 'every age of the child', we are told, 'offereth itself either to new or stronger labour', and there is a need for parents to 'accustome *all* their children to some kind of busines or other'.⁸⁰ The lack of specification as to what 'kind of busines' is being described leaves open the possibility that either work *or* education might provide the essential exercising of body and mind.

More explicit in reconciling children's education and work, irrespective of social status, is Thomas Elyot's *Boke Named The Governour*, first published in 1531. Informed by the commonplace sentiment that 'continuall studye, without somme maner of exercise, shortly exhausteth the spirytes vitall', Elyot advocates crafts such as painting and carving as sound companions to even a noble child's education.⁸¹ Though keen to stress that he does not intend 'to make of a prynce or noble mannes sonne a commune paynter or kerver [carver]', thereby physically soiling him with the dust and dirt those undertakings produce, Elyot, self-taught from the age of twelve, does not dispute that 'a noble chylde, by his owne natural disposition ... , may be induced, to receyve perfect instruction in these sciences'.⁸² Even if they do not produce a fully-fledged practitioner, then, such exercises are considered worthy and beneficial companions to the less overtly physical enterprise of learning. Such sentiment is echoed over a century later in William Petty's published advice to educational reformer Samuel Hartlib, in which the soon-to-be Oxford Fellow proposes the establishment of '*Ergastula Literaria*, Literary work-houses, where Children may be

⁷⁸ Guilde, *A Yong Mans Inquisition*, sig. Q1^r, emphasis added.

⁷⁹ Anon., *The Office of Christian Parents*, sigs L2^{r-v}.

⁸⁰ Anon., *The Office of Christian Parents*, sigs S4^r, Dd3^v, emphases added.

⁸¹ Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named The Governour* (London, 1531), sig. Hij^v.

⁸² Elyot, *The Boke Named The Governour*, sigs Dj^v-Dij^r.

taught as well to doe something towards their living, as to Read and Write'.⁸³ Noting that children as young as seven might perform manual tasks 'as well as elder and abler persons', Petty emphasises the potential of a combination of education and physical labour to 'tend to the health, agility and strength of their bodies', with proposed tasks ranging from the manufacture of mathematical instruments to gardening.⁸⁴

Petty's treatise certainly engages in a flight of fancy in its proposals to restructure the educational systems of early modern England beyond all recognition, but he is by no means alone in relating the practices of the workshop to those of the classroom. Indeed, the work of the schoolroom was frequently classified as a form of labour by its practitioners. Roger Ascham's hugely influential *The Scholemaster* (1570), for example, though principally intended as a guide to the teaching of Latin, places great emphasis on the corporeal, and thus labour-like, nature of learning. Defining the foremost qualities desired in a young scholar to be those found in the body – 'a tong, not stammering ...: a voice, not softe ...: a countenance, not werishe and crabbed'⁸⁵ – Ascham characterises the model charge of the schoolmaster by using the Greek 'Φιλόπονος', translated literally as 'Diligent'.⁸⁶ Reminiscent of the model apprentices sketched in factual works such as Burton's *Apprentices Companion* and fictions such as Johnson's *Nine Worthies*, 'Φιλόπονος ... Is he, that hath a lust to labor, and a will to take paines'.⁸⁷ Being 'painfull', as Ascham describes it, is tantamount to learning, and goes some way towards demonstrating a model of early modern education which, while undeniably constricted by the ever-present birch-wielding schoolmaster, relied upon the diligent – and apparently physical – output of those who were set to work within it.

As in the apprenticeship manuals, discussion of this output took for granted the potential for schoolboys to act autonomously, furthering themselves and the common good in equal measure. Just as Abraham Jackson's addressees in *The Pious Prentice* (1640) were warned not to be idle but to 'be diligent in all your employments, as well when your masters eye is off you, as when he looketh on',⁸⁸ so too do schoolboys

⁸³ William Petty, *The Advice of W. P. to Mr. Samuel Hartlib for the Advancement of Some Particular Parts of Learning* (London, 1647), sigs B2^{r-v}.

⁸⁴ Petty, *The Advice of W. P.*, sigs B2^v, B3^{r-v}.

⁸⁵ Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster or Plaine and Perfite Way of Teaching Children to Understand, Write, and Speake the Latin Tong* (London, 1570), sig. Cj^v.

⁸⁶ Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, sig. Diiij^v.

⁸⁷ Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, sig. Diiij^v, emphases added.

⁸⁸ Abraham Jackson, *The Pious Prentice, or, The Prentices Piety* (London, 1640), sigs D10^v–D11^r.

seem to have been discouraged from relying too much on their masters. William Kempe's *The Education of Children in Learning* (1588), for example, states that while it is the duty of the schoolmaster to 'appoynt unto [the scholars] the time of coming to schoole and going thence' and 'how and wherein they shall spend every houre there', it is up to the young charges to 'exercise *themselves* in translating, writing of theames, verses, and such like studies'.⁸⁹ Kempe's move towards autonomy and student-led learning ('exercising', in fact) finds parallels in the exercises presented in John Brinsley's translation of Mathurin Cordier's *Dialogues* (1614), designed specifically for use in the early modern schoolroom, several of which see schoolboys initiating practice and monitoring progress among themselves: 'Let us say our lessons together', one decides; 'Let us go to a repeate together', suggests another.⁹⁰ Though the young scholars look to their master for instruction and live under the threat of (sometimes brutal) reprimand, the onus of their education is placed on them (success is obtained, Ascham writes, 'by the great towardnes of the Scholer'), just as it is on working apprentices.⁹¹

Nowhere are the shared, and specifically physical, aims of education and work so emphatically brought together as in the work of Richard Mulcaster, High Master of the Merchant Taylors' School between 1561 and 1586 and St Paul's School from 1596 to 1608, whose vast *Positions ... for the Training Up of Children* (1581) constitutes the most sustained treatment of the educative benefits of corporeal practice. As I discuss in Chapter 3, Mulcaster's substantial influence on the early modern professional stage, particularly the late Elizabethan children's companies, has been somewhat overlooked, despite the fact that he taught one of the early seventeenth-century's greatest actors. The complaint lodged against the managers of the Children of the Chapel in 1600 which names several apprentices taken to be actors for the company also recalls that Nathan Field, 'a scholar of a grammar school in London kept by one Mr Mulcaster' was among the boys 'impressed' into performing at the Blackfriars playhouse.⁹² Setting aside for now this more obvious connection to the early modern stage, and the performances Mulcaster's pupils gave at the court of Elizabeth (see Chapter 3), it is worth stressing the extent to which Mulcaster, like

⁸⁹ William Kempe, *The Education of Children in Learning Declared by the Dignitie, Utilitie, and Method Thereof* (London, 1588), sig. Hr^v, emphasis added.

⁹⁰ John Brinsley, *Corderius Dialogues Translated Grammatically for the More Speedy Attaining to the Knowledge of the Latine Tongue, for Writing and Speaking Latine* (London, 1614), sigs C1^r, C2^r.

⁹¹ Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, sig. Bj^v.

⁹² Quoted in Wickham, Berry, and Ingram (eds.), *English Professional Theatre*, p. 265.

Ascham and Kempe, emphasised the importance of the active body to a boy's learning. Echoing the fundamentals of apprenticeship by setting out to 'deal with training' – '[s]ustained instruction and practice (given or received) in an art, profession, occupation, or procedure, with a view to proficiency in it'⁹³ – Mulcaster notes that the majority of educational writing focuses exclusively on the bettering of the mind and thus, to its detriment, neglects the improvement of the body.⁹⁴ Indeed, for Mulcaster, it is the body, rather than the mind, that is essential to learning: 'the strength of witte and hardnes of body' is considered the main criterion for a child's readiness for entering the school given the body's natural capacity to 'bears labour' and thus 'to receive the learning'. Emphasising youth's capacity 'to be hoat and chafe, to puffed and blow', and 'to sweat', Mulcaster posits a model of education in which the body and its labours – and they are often described as such – are afforded primacy over the workings of the mind.⁹⁵

In spite of the prohibitive spatial limitations on a London classroom, Mulcaster envisages an educative system which finds space for a range of physical and recreational activities. Early modern commentators had long stressed the importance of sport and exercise in a boy's formative years: as Alessandro Arcangeli and Gregory M. Colón Semenza have explored, such pursuits were deemed essential to the healthful preservation of the youthful body, the development of the elite body, and the furnishing of the idealised nation-state.⁹⁶ For writers such as Mulcaster, the state itself was a body, whose healthful maintenance depended on the physical health and training of its young subjects:

For the bodie of the commone weale in proportion is like unto a naturall bodie, if any one parte be to great, or to small, besides the eye sore it is mother to some evill by the verie misfourming, wherupon great distemperature must needes follow in time, and disquiet the whole bodie. And in the bodie politike if the like proportion be not kept in all partes, the like disturbance will crepe through out all partes.⁹⁷

⁹³ See 'training, n.', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2021 (available at <https://oed.com/view/Entry/204425?rkey=Q6HOKY&result=3&isAdvanced=false#eid>, last accessed 15 March 2021).

⁹⁴ Richard Mulcaster, *Positions Wherein those Primitive Circumstances Be Examined, Which Are Necessarie for the Training Up of Children, Either for Skill in Their Booke, or Health in Their Bodie* (London, 1581), sigs Bj^r, Cij^r.

⁹⁵ Mulcaster, *Positions*, sigs Cijj^{r-v}, Pijj^r.

⁹⁶ Alessandro Arcangeli, *Recreation in the Renaissance: Attitudes towards Leisure and Pastimes in European Culture, c. 1425–1675* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Gregory M. Colón Semenza, *Sport, Politics and Literature in the English Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003).

⁹⁷ Mulcaster, *Positions*, sig. Riiij^{r-v}.

Mulcaster was not alone in identifying the importance of boys' physical training to the health of the state. Ascham's defence of the English practice of archery, *Toxophilus*, which preceded his *Scholemaster* by twenty-five years, is equally preoccupied with the need to foster the skill in youths for the security of the nation as he is with their particular suitability to the exercise, which 'encreaseth strength, and preserveth health moost, beinge not vehement, but moderate, not overlaying any one part with werysomnesse, but softly exercisyng every parte with equalnesse'.⁹⁸ Expanding the discussions of youthful physicality in his earlier *The Boke Named The Governour*, in *The Castel of Helth* Elyot prefigures Ascham in stating the aptness of youth to exert themselves through sport. In a lengthy section on exercise, Elyot lists a dizzying array of '[s]tronge or violent exercyses' ranging from 'bearyng or susteynyng hevy burdeynes' to 'holding a rope, & clymmyng up therby' alongside '[s]wyfte' activities such as 'throwyng of the balle' and 'trottyng a space of ground forwarde and backwarde', and even those 'vehement' exercises which combine the two qualities, including 'daunsyng of galyardes' and 'footeballe playe'.⁹⁹ For Mulcaster, who promotes many of the same pursuits in *Positions*, these '[s]tronge or violent exercyses' are the preserve of the young: 'for old men must have gentle exercises, children somewhat more stirring, yong men more then they, and yet but in a meane, bycause they are subject to more harme by violence then either children or old men'.¹⁰⁰ A crucial age in which the body is, apparently, particularly susceptible to harm, the intermediate period between childhood and maturity is also the time at which the body is at its strongest and most receptive to 'stirring'. Referring to the wide spectrum of age from 'seven till one and twenty', 'Youth', Mulcaster states, 'will abyde much exercising, very well ... they finde great ease in labour and sweat, and being strong withal, a litle *weari-ness* makes them litle worse'.¹⁰¹ Elyot, too, explicitly states that 'All these kyndes of exercises, and other lyke them, do augmente strengthe, and therefore *they serve onely for yonge men*', among whose ranks the boys of the early modern acting companies would doubtless have been counted – indeed, this suitability is confirmed in the reappearance of several of the exercises in the plays with which this chapter began.

⁹⁸ Roger Ascham, *Toxophilus the Schole of Shootinge Contayned in Two Bookes* (London, 1545), sig. Biiij'.

⁹⁹ Thomas Elyot, *The Castel of Helth* (London, 1539), sigs Gij'–v.

¹⁰⁰ Mulcaster, *Positions*, sig. Oiv'.

¹⁰¹ Mulcaster, *Positions*, sig. Piiij'.

'Not Only by What They Said but Also by What They Did': Staging the Active Body

Whether geared towards the upholding of the labour economy, the furthering of a boy's education, the preservation of a healthful body, or the security and prosperity of the nation, early modern writing on boyhood and youth frequently centred on the active, moving body with an insistence that scholarship has typically overlooked. It stands to reason, then, that a similar attention to boys' capacities for skilled movement and physical action would have been paid in that most public of arenas, the early modern stage. The proliferation of writings on physical, active boyhoods, that is to say, bespeak a pervasive cultural fascination with the corporeal potential of the active boyish body, and suggest that the attention paid to this type of body was, to borrow a term from contemporary cultural studies, 'sportified'. For Ivo Jirásek and Geoffery Zain Kohe, there is a markedly theatrical dimension to such fascination: describing twenty-first-century sporting and cultural practices, they argue that 'the pervasive sportification of cultural practices and experiences is congruent, and to a degree synonymous and harmonious with, an overarching theatricification of social life'.¹⁰² Jirásek and Kohe's charting of 'the quest within sportification for ever-increasing heights of theatricality' fuses the practices of professional sport and theatrical performance to demonstrate how 'the sportsperson (through his/her performing and active physicality) serves as a constant reminder, and powerful public metaphor, for modern society's seduction with spectacle and spectatorship'.¹⁰³ For these authors, it is sport's 'emphasis on the physicality, performativity, and popularisation of the active body' that gives social and cultural practices their theatrical dimension. When it comes to the early modern theatre, we might invert this relationship to consider how the widespread interest in the active and often sporting bodies of young performers shaped the professional stage through 'sportification'. The attention commentators paid to the 'sportified' bodies of apprentices and schoolboys seems also to have translated to the apprentice players and schoolboy performers of the open-air and indoor stages, who, as we have seen, were connected through their personnel to the spheres of labour and education. Ronda Arab is surely correct to assert that the theatre's 'close practical connections to the world of artisanal

¹⁰² Ivo Jirásek and Geoffery Zain Kohe, 'Readjusting Our Sporting Sites/Sight: Sportification and the Theatricality of Social Life', *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 9.3 (2015), 257–70, p. 258.

¹⁰³ Jirásek and Kohe, 'Readjusting Our Sporting Sites/Sight', p. 258.

work made it a particularly important site of discursive negotiation over the meanings and value of labor and laboring bodies'.¹⁰⁴ Boy actors, who existed in parallel to toiling apprentices and hardworking schoolboys, cannot have been exempt from these practices.

The considerable amount of anti-theatrical ink spilled either side of the golden age of early modern dramatic production certainly sought to negate the labouring nature of the bodies on stage. Doubtless bolstered by the 1572 Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds and for the Relief of the Poor and Impotent which several of them quote directly,¹⁰⁵ this increasingly neurotic band of writers – among them Stephen Gosson, John Northbrooke, Philip Stubbes, and William Prynne – waste no time in casting actors as sponges of society rather than the virtuous contributors to the nation advocated in the didactic literature with which this chapter began. Yet, in the eyes of the law – including the very Act these writers extensively discuss or directly reproduce in their condemnation of the stage – the players and companies under consideration here were not eligible for classification as 'masters of vice, teachers of wantonnesse, spurres to impuritie, the Sonnes of idlennesse' since they were, in fact, properly employed.¹⁰⁶ Though the Act includes 'Common Players in Enterludes' among the lengthy roster of undesirable types liable for punishment, it implicitly goes on to clarify that those 'belonging to any Baron of this Realm or towards any other honourable Personage of greater Degree' – those troupes who appeared under names such as 'the Lord Chamberlain's Men', 'the Queen's Men', 'the Children of Her Majesty's Chapel', and 'the Children of the King's Revels' – are protected from the firebrand and the noose.¹⁰⁷ Authors condemning theatrical practice – including the employment of boy players – therefore had to grapple with the fact of acting as manual work. This often gave way to slippages in terminology which unwittingly pointed up the physically arduous (and thus, implicitly, valuable) nature of performance. 'I. G.' defines the pursuits of '*M. Actor*', however indefensible, as a 'Profession',

¹⁰⁴ Ronda Arab, *Manly Mechanicals on the Early Modern English Stage* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2011), p. 27.

¹⁰⁵ The Act is either extensively discussed or directly reproduced in 'I. G.', *A Refutation of 'The Apology for Actors' Divided into Three Briefe Treatises* (London, 1615); John Northbrooke, *A Treatise Wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Playes or Enterluds with Other Idle Pastimes &c. Commonly Used on the Sabbath Day, Are Reproved by the Authoritie of the Word of God and Auntient Writers* (London, 1577); and Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses Contayning a Discoverie, or Briefe Summarie of Such Notable Vices and Imperfections, as Now Raigne in Many Christian Countreys of the Worlde* (London, 1583).

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions Proving That They Are Not to Be Suffred in a Christian Common Weale* (London, 1582), sig. G8^r.

¹⁰⁷ The Act is reproduced in Wickham, Berry, and Ingram (eds.), *English Professional Theatre*, p. 62.

just as Prynne, in his vast *Histrio-mastix* (1633), defines the stage plays of the age as those being 'acted by *hired, and professed Stage-Players*'.¹⁰⁸ Both 'hired' and 'professed', players in Prynne's conception of them are intrinsically linked to the world of work, even as they participate in the '*apprentishipp of sinne*' and '*way or Trade of wickednesse*' he so indefatigably decries.¹⁰⁹

Equally striking are the insistently physical terms in which these 'apprentishipp' and 'trades' are described: a particular focus of Stubbes's ire in *The Anatomie of Abuses*, for instance, is the proliferation of players' 'wanton gestures', 'kissing and bussing', 'clipping and culling', and 'winckinge and glancinge of wanton eyes'.¹¹⁰ The implicit references to boy actors in Stubbes's invective – they are, after all, the most obvious recipients of kisses, busses, and clippings – echo the more direct attack on an earlier group of young performers in the anonymous *The Children of the Chapel Stript and Whipt* (1569), which cries out against the 'pretty upstart youthes' who 'profane the Lord's day by the lascivious writhing of their tender limbs'.¹¹¹ Uncannily parroting the precise youthful quality – being 'lythie and plyant of body' – that Bartholomeus identified as a benefit to learning, such censorious treatments of stage activity actually reinforce – rather than undermine – its status as manual labour and, moreover, play into the early modern fascination with the youthful, moving body.¹¹²

Though, as with the stage's detractors, the defenders of early modern theatre wrote from a position of self-interest, it is worth noting – indeed,

¹⁰⁸ William Prynne, *Histrio-mastix. The Players Scourge, or Actors Tragadie*, (London, 1633), sig. B4^r.

¹⁰⁹ See also Gosson, *Playes Confuted*, sig. G8^v; 'I. G.', *A Refutation*, sigs A2^r, E4^r, G2^r; Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, sig. Mi^r. Though by 'professed' Prynne presumably seeks to question the way in which actors describe themselves, it is worth pointing out that in early modern usage the word could describe one '[that] professes to be duly qualified; professional (as opposed to *amateur*)' and also '[f]ollowed as a profession or vocation'. See 'professed, *adj.* and *n.*', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2020 (available at <https://oed.com/view/Entry/152048?rkey=x12Oly&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid>, last accessed 15 March 2021).

¹¹⁰ Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, sig. Lviii^r. See also 'I. G.', *A Refutation*, sig. Hr^r.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry*, vol. 3 (London: Thomas Tegg, 1840), pp. 240–1. The pamphlet is now lost, and citations today stem only, as here, from Warton, or E. K. Chambers's later *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923). Nevertheless, the passage's focus on movement of the body as site of anxiety finds parallels in pamphlets that have survived in more stable form, hence its inclusion here.

¹¹² It is also worth noting that in addition to Michael Witmore's conception of the term 'pretty' as 'capacity to reproduce, nearly automatically, adult expressions and behaviors in diminutive form', definitions of the term current in early modern usage were 'clever, skilful, able' and 'having all the requisite qualities, etc.; bold, gallant, brave; polite, respectable, etc.; worthy, admirable, splendid'. See Witmore, *Pretty Creatures: Children and Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 6; 'pretty, *adj.*, *n.*, and *int.*', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2021 (available at <https://oed.com/view/Entry/151023?rkey=hHx1OH&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>, last accessed 15 March 2021).

prioritising – their similar insistence on the attractive and skilled nature of performing bodies of all types, including those of boys. The character of ‘An Excellent Actor’, possibly written by John Webster and published in Sir Thomas Overbury’s *The Wife* (1616), for example, presents the performer as fully engaged in, and pivotal to, a system of work and exchange: ‘He [the actor] *addes grace to the Poets labours*: ... All men have been of his *occupation*, and indeed, what he doth fainedly, that doe others essentially.’ The depiction, while undeniably romanticised, provides a defence of the actor’s profession through calling attention to the work he performs, crucially, ‘by a full and significant action of body’.¹¹³ Thomas Gainsford’s *Rich Cabinet*, another compendious work that appeared on London’s book-stalls in the same year, provides more detail in documenting the astounding array of skills (including, as those required of Mulcaster’s schoolboys, ‘ellocution, abilitie of body, memory, vigilancy’) which transform the player into a professional who is defined in emphatically material terms:

Player is like a garment which the Tailor maketh at the direction of the owner: so they *frame their action*, at the disposing of the Poet: so that in truth they are reciprocally helps to one another; for the one writes for money, and the other plaies for money, & the spectator payes his money.¹¹⁴

Gainsford’s depiction of ‘reciprocal’ playhouse exchange, in which the player’s bodily labours are commodified at the behest of the spectator’s money, is worth bearing in mind when considering what early modern audiences saw and appreciated when they watched boy actors perform. Contemporary descriptions, though fleeting and distinctly lacking in number, provide some suggestion that the bodies of boy performers were particularly regarded not so much for how they looked or how well they passed as female, but for what they did. A passage in Mary Wroth’s *The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania*, which has received extensive treatment in discussion of boy players,¹¹⁵ describes the unsuccessful machinations of a would-be seductress in distinctly theatrical terms, in which the recipient of the queen’s advances is ‘no further wrought, then if he had seene a delicate play-boy acte a loving womans part, and knowing him a Boy,

¹¹³ Thomas Overbury, *His Wife. With Addition of Many New Elegies upon His Untimely and Much Lamented Death. As also New Newes, and Divers More Characters, (Never Before Annexed) Written by Himselfe and Other Learned Gentlemen* (London, 1616), sigs M2^r-M3^r, emphases added.

¹¹⁴ T[homas] G[ainsford], *The Rich Cabinet Furnished with Varietie of Excellent Discriptions Exquisite Charracters, Witty Discourses, and Delightfull Histories, Devine and Morall* (London, 1616), sigs Q2^v-Q3^r, emphasis added.

¹¹⁵ See in particular Michael Shapiro, ‘Lady Mary Wroth Describes a “Boy Actress”’, *MRDE* 4 (1989), 187–94.

lik'd onely his action'.¹¹⁶ In the unpublished second part of the voluminous work, a duplicitous female villain is similarly compared to a 'play boy dressed gaudely up to shew a fond loving woemans part': both are 'busy', 'full of taulke, and in such a sett formallity, w[ith] ... many framed lookes, fained smiles, and nods, w[ith] a deceitful downe cast looke ... and with gestures'.¹¹⁷ In both cases, it is not necessarily the boy's ability to convince spectators that he is really 'a fond loving woeman' that is at stake, but his ability to move, gesticulate, and physically *act*.

The comparison here may ultimately be a damning one, but it nevertheless corresponds to the frequently cited observations of performances given by the King's Men at Oxford in 1610 recorded by Henry Jackson. Writing on *Othello*, Jackson comments that 'the celebrated Desdemona, slain in our presence by her husband, although she pleaded her case very effectively throughout, yet moved [us] more after she was dead, when lying on her bed, [and] entreated the pity of the spectators by her very countenance'.¹¹⁸ He thus prioritises the physical aspects of the boy playing Desdemona, relegating the ability to 'plea[d] her case' in the face (quite literally) of the more impressive modifications of 'countenance', or facial expression. It would appear that, for Jackson, the physical aspects of performance were just as important as the words of the play: earlier in the letter, he recalls that during their Oxford performances the King's Men 'moved [the audience] to tears' 'not only by what they said but also by what they did'.¹¹⁹ As Simon Smith puts it in his reappraisal of early modern spectatorly censure, 'Jackson seems to be just as interested in the actorly skill required to evoke aesthetic effects as he is in what those effects might be.'¹²⁰ Actorly skill was certainly the focus by the 'Country-Gentleman' recalled in Thomas May's *Life of a Satyirical Puppy, Called Nim*, who during a production at the Blackfriars was 'so caught with the *natural action* of a Youth (that represented a ravish'd Lady) [that] he swore alowd, he would not sleep until he had killed her ravisher'.¹²¹ Taken together, May's, Jackson's, and Wroth's comments reinforce the primacy

¹¹⁶ Mary Wroth, *The Countesse of Mountgomerie's Urania* (London, 1621), sig. I2^v.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Shapiro, 'Lady Mary Wroth', p. 188.

¹¹⁸ The original Latin text of the letter, as well as the translation reproduced here, appears in G. Blakemore Evans (ed.), *The Riverside Shakespeare* (London: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974), p. 852.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in John R. Elliott Jr, Alan Nelson, Alexandra F. Johnston, and Diana Wyatt (eds.), *Records of Early English Drama: Oxford*, vol. 2 (University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 1037–8.

¹²⁰ Simon Smith, 'Acting Amiss: Towards a History of Actorly Craft and Playhouse Judgement', *Shakespeare Survey* 70 (2017), 188–99, p. 190.

¹²¹ Thomas May, *The Life of a Satyirical Puppy, Called Nim* (London, 1657), sig. H4^v.

of the body – and what it ‘did’ – in the performances of boy actors and subsequent audience response to those performances.

As in the expressions of anxiety over fostering martial prowess in English boys and youths, it is occasionally possible to glimpse a nationalistic bent to contemporary writing on boy performers. That the English stage should employ boy actors to perform roles such as Desdemona at all, after all, was a national peculiarity and, perhaps, a selling point. Those who experienced Continental modes of performance which featured real women occasionally drew comparisons between the physical performances of the two types of actors: Thomas Coryat – who was also captivated by foreign sports on his travels through France and Italy¹²² – is notably physically minded when he reports that in 1608 in Venice he ‘saw women acte, a thing that I never saw before, and though I have heard it hath been sometimes used in London and they performed it with as good a grace, action, gesture, and whatsoever convenient for a Player, as ever I saw any masculine actor’.¹²³ For Coryat, the mark of a ‘masculine actor’ performing women’s roles is appropriate ‘grace’, ‘action’, and ‘gesture’ – an understanding he shares with spectators such as Jackson back on home soil. Youthful physical performance in England also served as a touchstone for writers encountering unfamiliar modes of entertainment. In his immodestly titled *View of the People of the Whole World*, John Bulwer, who had a particular interest in the language of gesture, initially expresses wonder over cultures such as the ‘Iamulians’ and ‘Nairos’ who ‘are prepared to an incredible agility and dexterity’ from ‘their seventh year’, only to lay claim to superior youthful feats at home: ‘they who should see our *Funambuli* and Tumblers, who have been brought up from their youth to their feats of activity, would think as much of them, whom we have seen to twist and winde their bodies very strangely, as if they had no bones’.¹²⁴ Like the producers of didactic literature geared towards labour and education, Coryat and Bulwer express a patriotic investment in home-grown youthful physical talent – much like, to return to Jirásek and Kohe’s concept of ‘sportification’, professional footballers (young, attractive, male) fuel widespread and sometimes troubling nationalistic sentiment today.

¹²² See John McClelland, ‘The Accidental Sports Tourist: Travelling and Spectating in Medieval and Renaissance Europe’, *Journal of Tourism History* 5.1 (2013), 161–71, pp. 167, 170.

¹²³ Thomas Coryat, *Coryats Crudities Hastily Gobled up in Five Moneths Travells in France, Savoy, Italy, Rhetia Co[m]monly Called the Grisons Country, Helvetia aliàs Switzerland, Some Parts of High Germany, and the Netherlands* (London, 1611), sig. T5r.

¹²⁴ John Bulwer, *A View of the People of the Whole World, or, A Short Survey of their Policies, Dispositions, Naturall Departments, Complexions, Ancient and Moderne Customes, Manners, Habits & Fashions* (London, 1654), sigs Qqq3v–Qqq4r.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the interest spectators such as Bulwer, Coryat, and Jackson took in the performing bodies of English boys was shaped by the widespread cultural interest in youthful capacity for action. Contemporary ideologies concerning virtuous youthful labour and self-improvement set down in religious and conduct writing and reflected in, on the one hand, indentures of apprenticeship and real-life accounts of its daily rhythms and, on the other, pedagogical writings has provided an ample backdrop for considering boy performance that goes beyond simply drawing institutional parallels between apprentices and boy performers in the 'adult' companies, and schoolboys and their all-boy-troupe counterparts. In addition to shared structures of labour and education, professional performance and theatrical spectatorship imported wider culture's corporeally minded attitudes to the boys and youths it employed. The employment of boys in the early modern English theatre, that is, was mediated through a pervasive fascination with what boys were physically capable of, and how such capacities could be nurtured and put to productive – and even nationally important – use. The neglected contexts of labour, education, and physical display I have outlined here provide an essential reminder that boy actors' performances were but a part of the corporeal contributions made by the young throughout early modern culture, whether in schoolroom, in shipyard – or on stage.