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Lucy Munro

**Actors, Plays and Performances in the Indoor Playhouses, 1625-42: Boy Players,
Leading Men and the Caroline Ensemble**

I begin this essay with what must have been a relatively common event in the history of the early modern stage. The scene is the Cockpit playhouse, also known as the Phoenix, one of Caroline London's three indoor commercial theatres, where a young actor is about to take the stage in a play performed by Beeston's Boys. The actor, Ezekiel Fenn, has played female and juvenile roles for some years, but today he is about to take on the role of an adult man for the first time. Henry Glapthorne, who has written at least three plays for Beeston's Boys, has composed him a special prologue, 'For *Ezekiel Fen* at his first Acting a Mans Part'. It requires him to imagine himself as an 'untry'd Vessell' that a merchant doubts is strong enough to set sail in search of the most valuable cargoes. 'Tis so with mee', Fenn declares,

Whose Innocence and timerous Modestie
Does blush at my own shadow, prone to feare
Each Wave a Billow that arises here;
The Company's my Merchant, nor dare they
Expose my weak frame on so rough a Sea,
'Lesse you (their skilfull Pilots) please to steare
By mild direction of your Eye and Ear
Their new rigg'd Bark.¹

The inexperienced – and, potentially, the language implies, still effeminate – actor is especially in need, the prologue suggests, of the supportive backing and guidance of an understanding audience. Yet the metaphor of the untried ship also allows Glapthorne to imagine Fenn negotiating the perils of theatrical performance in a bravura display of masculine prowess:

if you like the North-stars shine,
I like a daring, and adventurous Man,

Seeking new paths i'th' angry Ocean,
 In threatning Tempests [...]
 Will face all perils boldly, to attain
 Harbour in safety; then set forth againe.

The prologue thus ultimately emphasises not Fenn's inexperience but his capacity to overcome that inexperience and to please spectators; in the process, it also underscores his value to the company in which he performs, and to the dramatist who writes for them.

Prologues such as this were not unique to indoor playhouses such as the Cockpit; Thomas Heywood, for example, wrote a prologue and epilogue for a *'young witty lad'* playing Richard III at the Red Bull, published in 1637.² However, more of this kind of material – prologues and epilogues, cast-lists, playhouse manuscripts, elegies and so on – has survived for the Caroline indoor playhouses than any other period or section of the early modern theatre industry. Furthermore, these documents raise issues that apply to both the Caroline theatre in general and the indoor playhouses and their companies. The Fenn prologue, for example, draws not only on the network of collaborations that underpinned early modern theatre in all of its forms, but also on the specific contexts provided by a individual playhouse and playing company. In addition to drawing our attention to the importance of individual actors within a company, and the roles that were designed for them to play, it also registers the impact that their major life-events – ageing, movements between companies, and death in particular – could have on the forms and shapes of early modern drama. Fenn had played roles such as Sophonisba in Thomas Nabbes's *Hannibal and Scipio* and Winifred in a revival of *The Witch of Edmonton* for Queen Henrietta Maria's Men a few years earlier, when that company had occupied the Cockpit playhouse.³ He had a past, and connection with this playhouse that was more established than his allegiance to individual companies.

With such connections in mind, this essay explores the plays performed in the indoor playhouses between 1625 and 1642, focusing on the impact that company structures and actors' careers had on the shape and content of the repertory. Recent scholarship has devoted valuable attention to the role of impresarios such as Christopher Beeston, Richard Gunnell and Richard Heton in the lives of these playhouses and the companies that used them.⁴ This essay, however, follows the line of research on early modern actors developed in recent years by scholars such as John H. Astington, Jeremy Lopez, Paul Menzer and Andrew J. Power on early modern actors, acting and the casting of plays.⁵

After a brief survey of the indoor playhouses and the companies that used them, I focus on four moments: the establishment of a short-lived company of boy actors at the Salisbury Court playhouse in 1629-31; the Blackfriars repertory of the King's Men in the early 1630s, when Richard Sharpe briefly came to prominence as a leading actor; the plays of the King's Revels company at Salisbury Court in the mid-1630s, which are remarkable for their large and demanding female roles; and the new plays and revivals mounted by Beeston's Boys at the Cockpit in the late 1630s. In doing so, I aim to cast new light on the combination of the old and new in the indoor theatre's commercial and dramaturgical strategies. A tendency to combine the novel and the established or, even, the archaic was, in many respects, distinctively Caroline. The sustained success of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage provided companies with a stock of successful plays and dramatists with a stock of successful dramatic modes and conventions. Yet the Caroline theatre was also a space of innovation, as established or neglected materials and structures were adapted to new ends and were placed in fresh contexts that necessitated their reconceptualization or reinvention. While these tendencies can be seen across the theatre industry, their workings can be seen most clearly in relation to the indoor

theatres, in part because of the quality of surviving evidence relating to company structures, casting and repertory composition.

Indoor Playhouses and Players

London's three Caroline indoor playhouses – the Blackfriars (used almost exclusively by the King's Men), the Salisbury Court (used by the Children of the Revels, the King's Revels Company, Prince Charles's Men and Queen Henrietta Maria's Men) and the Cockpit (used by Queen Henrietta Maria's Men and Beeston's Boys) – appear to have had much in common in terms of their basic configuration.⁶ All were small in comparison to the amphitheatres, though the Blackfriars appears to have been larger than the other two; all were lit by candlelight rather than relying on natural light as the amphitheatres did; all appear to have had thrust stages with boxes on each side; and most seem to have had trap-doors and space or balcony above the stage; most, if not all, allowed some spectators to sit on the stage.⁷ There were, however, significant differences in the structures of the companies that used them, differences to which scholarship has not always been alert. In comparison with the King's Men and Queen Henrietta Maria's Men, whose plays rarely feature more than four prominent female or juvenile roles, the King's Revels Company and Prince Charles's Men appear to have used a larger number of boy actors. As Astington has explored in illuminating detail, Shakerley Marmion's *Holland's Leaguer*, performed by Prince Charles's Men at Salisbury Court in December 1631, requires nearly as many juvenile actors as it does adults.⁸ The King's Revels company, which occupied the playhouse in the mid-1630s, appears to have had a similar structure.⁹

The composition of these troupes may be connected with the earlier history of the Salisbury Court. When a group of investors signed a lease in July 1629 for a barn in Salisbury Court, which was to be converted into a playhouse, they had in mind a

company that was in equal parts a novelty and a throw-back.¹⁰ The company, which was repeatedly referred to as the ‘Children of the Revels’, was originally composed of boys aged between around ten and fourteen.¹¹ It thus mimicked the composition of the late Elizabethan children’s companies around the time of their revival in 1599-1600, and its repertory included some of their plays – George Chapman’s *Sir Giles Goosecap* (originally performed by the Children of the Chapel c. 1602) and Francis Beaumont’s *The Woman Hater* (Children of Paul’s, c. 1606) – alongside new plays by Thomas Randolph and, later, Thomas Jordan, Richard Brome and James Shirley.¹² Although patents were issued to at least three children’s companies in the later Jacobean period, such troupes had been absent from London since 1613, when the Children of the Queen’s Revels – whose leading performers were by that time well into their twenties – merged with Lady Elizabeth’s Men.¹³

It is a mistake, however, to suggest that the Children of the Revels was merely a ‘dated anomaly’, as Richard Dutton terms Beeston’s Boys.¹⁴ In a lawsuit brought against company manager Richard Gunnell by an investor, Christopher Babham, both claimant and defendant claim that Gunnell and William Blgrave

did join together as partners in share to erect and build a new Stage playhouse [...] also to train and bring up certain boys in the quality of playing not only with intent to be a supply of able actors to his Majesty’s servants of the Black Friars when there should be occasion [...] but the solace of his Royal Majesty when his Majesty should please to see them and also for the recreation of his Majesty’s loving subjects.¹⁵

The Revels company was not just a nostalgic gesture but an innovation, since it was originally established as a training or nursery theatre for the King’s Men, in a pattern that was to re-emerge in the early 1660s.¹⁶ The Children of the Revels were briefly succeeded at Salisbury Court by Prince Charles’s Men and, shortly afterwards, by the King’s Revels company. The latter included a number of boy actors from the Children of the Revels

and it is possible that this company and, perhaps, Prince Charles's Men, retained some of the training function intended for Salisbury Court in 1629.

The last company to be founded in Caroline London – Beeston's Boys, also known as the King and Queen's Young Company – have also posed questions for theatre historians. Founded in 1637, during a period when the plague closed the London playhouses, Beeston's Boys are repeatedly described in documentary sources as 'boys' or 'young actors'. Henry Herbert, for example, recalling the events of 1637, writes, 'Mr Beeston was commanded to make a company of boyes, and began to play at the Cockpitt with them the same day'.¹⁷ Christopher Beeston (the 'Mr Beeston' mentioned here), his son William and William Davenant – who briefly had control of the company in 1640 – are referred to as the 'governor' and 'instructor' (in the case of the Beestons), formulations that are not found elsewhere.¹⁸ This was not, however, a children's company of the kind revived in the Children of the Revels; actors such as Theophilus Bird were approaching their 30s in 1637, and the majority appear to have been in their late teens or early twenties.¹⁹ The playing companies active at the indoor playhouses between 1625 and 1642 thus explored various different structures and commercial models, and these structures and models in turn inflected their dramatic production.

Boys in the Quality of Playing

The Children of the Revels were both an innovation and a resurrection. Appropriately enough, their plays exploit a similar dynamic relationship between new and old; they display both a pervasive interest in children's company dramaturgy and a playful desire to turn it to new purposes. I focus here on Randolph's *The Muses' Looking Glass*, probably the play that opened the new Salisbury Court theatre in November 1630 following a prolonged closure of the playhouses as plague raged in London.²⁰ Randolph appears to have been the resident dramatist for the Children of the Revels at this time, and both *The*

Muses' Looking Glass and a 'Praeludium' that may have been performed with it exploit the metatheatrical conventions employed by children's companies around 1599-1600, when those troupes were similarly reactivated after a long absence from the London stage.

In the 'Praeludium', a gentleman and a player discuss the recent closure of the playhouses, the former declaring 'I woud not sit on any stage i'th towne this twelve-month, for if they [the actors] gape as wide as they usd to doe, I shoud suspect a further danger there is iust occasion to feare the Actors will devoure the audience'.²¹ A series of comic dramatic types – a *Miles Gloriosus* Captain, a whining Lover and two roaring boys – then appear, displaying in parodic form the abilities of the young actors. Similarly, *The Muses' Looking Glass* stages a metatheatrical defence of theatre that works both to advertise the Children of the Revels and to assert implicitly the place of children's companies in the crowded theatrical market.

Simultaneously, *The Muses' Looking Glass* engages with specifically Caroline controversies over the theatre and, especially, status of boys and women as performers. These issues were crystallised in William Prynne's *Histriomastix*, entered in the Stationers' Register in October 1630, published in late 1632 and dated 1633. The most notorious passage in *Histriomastix* is an index entry added late in the publication process, '*Women-Actors*, notorious whores', to which Prynne appended an extended gloss: 'dare then any Christian women be so more than whorishly impudent, as to act, to speak publicly on a Stage, (perchance in mans apparell, and cut haire, here proved sinfull and abominable) in the presence of sundry men and women?'²² Prynne's comments took on greater force than perhaps even he had intended when their emergence in print coincided with performances by Henrietta Maria and leading women courtiers of Walter Montagu's court pastoral *The Shepherd's Paradise* during the Christmas season of 1632-3. Yet Prynne also attacks the transvestite commercial stage, complaining that boys are brought 'purposely, yea, affectedly, to vnman, vnchristian, vncreate themselves, if I may so

speake, and to make themselves, as it were, neither men nor women, but Monsters' (p. 172). The boy 'actress' disrupted gender categories – some writers even held that performing women's roles could effeminize boys and ungender them – and his performance was to some commentators as threatening as that of a woman.

Intriguingly, Prynne is clearly thinking of *The Muses' Looking Glass* when he criticizes those who argue that only 'Puritans and Precisians' speak against plays, noting in the margin, 'This Obiection as I have heard was much urged in a most scurrilous and prophane manner in the first Play that was acted in the New-erected Play-house: a fit consecration Sermon for that Divels Chappell' (p. 797).

As this comment suggests, Randolph's play anticipates his attack. It does not merely defend the stage but asserts the moral and educative power of drama and, in particular, the power of the most maligned of theatrical genres: comedy. Randolph stages the conversion of Master Bird, a feather salesman, and Mistress Flowerdew, the wife of a haberdasher, characters described in a stage direction as '*two of the sanctified fraternity of Black-friers*', a district that was becoming notorious for the puritan inclinations of its inhabitants.²³ Like Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, the play therefore requires two of its boy actors to impersonate adult spectators. This strategy blurs the boundary between actors and spectators, but it also simultaneously calls into question the convention through which boy actors are accepted as adult men and women when they appear on stage. When the boy actor appears in the audience, or impersonates a spectator, his immature body is unavoidably compared with those of real adults, and his relationship with that audience is forcibly reconfigured.

Despite their misgivings about the theatre, Master Bird and Mistress Flowerdew have come to Salisbury Court to sell their wares, and they are persuaded by the actor Roscius to stay to see the play. Modelled on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,²⁴ *The Muses' Looking Glass* parades before its on-stage spectators twelve pairs of diametrically opposed

characters, referred to as the ‘*Extreams of a vertue*’ (sig. C1^v). For example, a usurer and a prodigal represent the extremes of liberality; the extremes of modesty are a bawd and a bashful scholar. At the end of each sequence the parasite Colax persuades each pair of characters to leave the stage in search of a miraculous looking glass that will cure their distempers. At the end of the play he realizes that the mirror really exists, and bereft of vice to flatter, he decides that he might as well be cured himself. Bird and Mistress Flowerdew are impressed by this process of reformation, and demand that they be allowed to share it. Roscius explains that the glass is only temporary, but that its function will be passed into stage comedy, which also aims to reflect follies and vices. The puritans exit and return, Flowerdew declaring, ‘This ignorance even makes religion sin,’ and Bird saying, ‘Hereafter I will visit Comedies, / And see them oft, they are good exercises!’ (sig. M3^v).

As Jonas Barish suggests, the play ‘carried a sharper sting than we are able to feel with only the printed page before us’.²⁵ In his *Elegy on Randolph’s Finger* (c. 1632) William Heminge depicts Puritans who complain to one another about Randolph’s activities:

And which was worse that lately he did pen
vyle thinges for pigmeyes gaynst the Sonns of men
The Righteous man and the regenerate
being laught to scorne thare by the reprobate.²⁶

In addition to burlesquing Prynne’s outrage, Heminge’s comment intimates that much of the subversive quality of *The Muses’ Looking Glass* derived from its performance by boy actors. Bird and Mistress Flowerdew were comic theatrical caricatures, and the fact that all of the parts were played by children also prevented the puritans from gaining any physical authority over the actors they initially despise.

Working with his young cast, Randolph had the opportunity to play with the effects of juvenile performance and its potential challenge to authority. The children’s

company model begins to look less like a ‘dated anomaly’ and more like the self-conscious revival and reworking of a tradition, a transformation of materials associated with an earlier generation of plays and companies, and a reinvestigation of the intriguingly problematic potential of the boys’ company. The Children of the Revels are an extreme example of Caroline theatre’s paradoxically innovative archaism, but new modes of performance could also be found elsewhere in the indoor playhouses.

The King’s Men and the Leading Man

Unlike the other companies discussed in this essay, the King’s Men had access to two playhouses: the Blackfriars and the Globe, and they therefore used their indoor theatre only during the winter months. However, a number of their Caroline plays appear to have been written specifically with the Blackfriars in mind rather than the Globe. The 1629 title-page of Lodowick Carlell’s *The Deserving Favourite* highlights its performances at court and ‘publikely at the *BLACK-FRIERS*. By his *MAIES[T]IES Seruants*’ and the courtly connections of its author, ‘*LODOWICKE CARLELL, Esquire, Gentle-man of the BOWES, and Groome of the King and Queenes Priuie Chamber*’.²⁷ Similarly, the manuscript of Arthur Wilson’s *The Swisser* states that it was ‘Acted At the Blackfriars 1631’.²⁸ At first glance, these plays look like the product of the kind of amateur playwrighting that was to become a feature of the repertory of Queen Henrietta Maria’s Men at Salisbury Court in the late 1630s.²⁹ However, Carlell appears to have written *Osmond the Great Turke* for the King’s Men as early as 1622, and Wilson, who was secretary to Robert Devereux, third Earl of Essex, wrote at least three plays for them in the early 1630s.³⁰ Moreover, both of these plays appear to capitalise on the abilities of actors such as Joseph Taylor, John Lowin and the rising star Richard Sharpe, displaying what seems to have been a conscious commercial strategy of the King’s Men in the early 1630s.

What appears to be novel for the King's Men in the early 1630s is the development later in the act, when the Duke confronts Lysander. In an extended dialogue between the older and younger man, Lysander first denies then reaffirms his love for Clarinda. Like the exchange between the Duke and Jacomo the scene climaxes in physical violence as the two men fight a duel on the stage and both are required to '*fall*' (F3). Sword-fights are relatively rare in plays written for indoor playhouses, and the sequence must have tested both the verbal and physical control of two expert performers. At the end of the scene the Duke is apparently dead, and he disappears from the action for most of Acts 3 and 4, leaving the stage to Lysander and Jacomo.

Wilson's *The Swisser* takes the interaction between leading actors a step further, and in Act 4 he presents an extended sequence featuring the King (Sharpe), Arioldus (Taylor) and Andrucho (Lowin). Like *The Deserving Favourite*, the plot of *The Swisser* focuses on the rivalry between Sharpe's character and Taylor's, with Lowin in a supporting – albeit prominent – role. Here, the situation is more disturbing and pointed: Arioldus has in his charge Eurinia, a captive who has been raped by the King; Andrucho is really Aribert, a banished nobleman. Act 4 features Arioldus's anguished indecision about whether to challenge the King, a duel between King and subject that is abruptly interrupted by Aribert/Andrucho, and Aribert's revelation that Eurinia is his daughter. Wilson thus appears to build on the example set by Carlell, combining high emotion and physical display, and he exaggerates the impact of the bravura exchange between leading actors yet further.

The Swisser and *The Deserving Favourite* display a new direction for the King's Men in the early 1630s, but it did not last for long. Davenant would capitalise on the display of noble emotional anguish in plays written for the Blackfriars in the mid 1630s, such as *Love and Honour* (1634) and *The Platonic Lovers* (1635), but the three-handed relationship between leading male characters does not appear in these works. The reversion to an

earlier pattern appears not to have been planned: Sharpe died in January 1632, and apparently took with him a set of dramatic structures that could no longer be maintained. It is easy to overlook premature death as a shaping factor in dramatic production, but in the 1630s the King's Men were hit by a succession of such events: Sharpe's death in 1632 was followed by that of John Thompson, a great boy actress of the late 1620s and early 1630s, in 1634; John Honeyman – another former boy actor of apparent promise as an adult lead – and the popular comedian John Shank both lost their lives in 1636.³² The combined impact of these losses must have been considerable, and its effects are yet to be fully explored.

Older Women and the King's Revels Company

It is generally assumed – with good reason – that female and juvenile roles were less tailored to specific performers than adult male ones. Even if a boy actor spent as much as ten years playing female roles – as John Thompson appears to have done – he would have spent some of that time in minor parts; his peak was likely to have lasted at most only six or seven years. In contrast, a shareholder might play a leading role for more than twenty years. This assumption is complicated, however, by a group of plays performed by the King's Revels company at Salisbury Court in the mid 1630s that are structured around complex and prominent female roles.

Sophie Tomlinson has recently argued that the 'increasing cultural visibility' of women as performers and consumers of drama at court and elsewhere during the Caroline period also had an impact on the professional, transvestite stage. The result was 'a manifest concern on the parts of amateur and professional dramatists with issues of liberty and civility that derive from a sympathetic interest in female selfhood'.³³ Yet even within this context, the King's Revels' plays are extraordinary. The female leads in Brome's *The Queen and Concubine* (c. 1635) and Glapthorne's *The Lady Mother* (1635),

Queen Eulalia and Lady Marlove, take the largest roles in their respective plays – Eulalia’s being around a third bigger than the next largest; Lady Nestlecock in Brome’s *The New Academy* (1636) and the title character in Nathanael Richards’ *Messallina* (c. 1634–6) are both the second largest parts. Moreover, *Messallina*’s third largest part is that of Lepida, the villainous empress’s virtuous mother, and the fourth largest part in *The Queen and Concubine* is that of Alinda, the young woman who supplants the queen in her husband’s affections and bed. The size of these roles is not their only remarkable feature: the King’s Revels plays also give a remarkable degree of attention to older women. Eulalia, Lady Marlove, Lady Nestlecock and Lepida are all old enough to have grown-up children, and elsewhere in the repertory Friswood in Brome’s *The Sparagus Garden* (1635) and the Countess of Claridon in *The Wasp* (c. 1636) are also substantial roles.

Older women are often more noticeable by their absence in early modern plays, so such a concentration of roles is both extraordinary and suggestive of a successful formula. One conclusion that we might draw is that the company had access to some extremely talented and well-trained boy actors. A surviving cast-list for *Messallina* includes the names of some of the actors who played female roles: John Barrett as Messallina, Thomas Jordan as Lepida and Mathias Morris as Sylana. We know little about Morris, but Jordan, who was born around 1617, was a member of the Children of the Revels around 1630, when he wrote and performed in *Money is an Ass, or Wealth Outwitted*.³⁴ Barrett was apparently old enough to have a child baptised on 12 November 1637, so he may also have had considerable experience.³⁵ However, we do not know whether these two actors regularly shared the largest female roles, and how roles were allocated if they did. If the largest and most demanding roles automatically went to the most striking performer, we might expect Barrett to have played Messallina, Eulalia, Lady Marlove, Lady Nestlecock, Friswood, Evadne in Thomas Rawlins’ *The Rebeellion* and the Countess of Claridon in *The Wasp*. If, however, roles were assigned on the basis of particular

character traits or – more likely – the specific technical demands of roles, we might expect Barrett to play the showier role of Alinda in *The Queen and Concubine* and Jordan to play Eulalia.³⁶

It is perhaps more enlightening to look at the demands of the roles themselves. While Eulalia in *The Queen and Concubine* appears to have been modelled in part on Shakespeare's Hermione, she does not disappear from the play when she is divorced by her cruel and lustful husband. Instead, she goes into pastoral exile, where she is visited by a Genius and granted miraculous powers of healing and teaching. Although Eulalia's strongest characteristic is loyalty to her tyrannous husband, she is not passive or dramatically inert. Especially striking is the soliloquy that she is given in Act 4, when she mistakenly believes that her followers are planning to assassinate Alinda.³⁷ Initially Eulalia appears willing to allow providence to take its path, and to see 'my foes ruined with mine honour's safety'. Yet she reconsiders her position, acknowledging that she does not 'seek revenge' and that it is Alinda's 'shame to hear of my mishap'; she also fears being labelled an accessory to the younger woman's death. At the crisis point in the speech, Brome includes a half-line, embodying Eulalia's genuine uncertainty before she articulates it, saying, 'Then here's the trembling doubt, which way to take?'. Eventually, she controls both her desire for restitution and her feelings for her followers. The soliloquy thus demonstrates not the former queen's passivity but her ability to suppress her own strongly felt emotions.

In contrast with Eulalia's emotional control, Alinda is increasingly unstable, driven mad by her ambitions and her belief that she has caused the death of her father, General Sforza. In the scene following Eulalia's soliloquy, Alinda berates the King aggressively, addressing him as a 'King of clouts' (4.3; speech 959), a 'shadow of a King' (speech 961) and a 'poor coward King' (speech 965), and attacking both his royal power and his military and sexual prowess:

It now appears
 My father (as 'twas voiced) was all your valour.
 Y' have never a Mars or cuckold-making general
 Now left, and for yourself, you're past it.
 (speech 970)

Both roles make considerable demands on the performer, and both capitalise on spectators' attention, but they are presented in different ways. Eulalia consistently engages with spectators, speaking to them in soliloquy and confiding in them; Alinda, in contrast, compels attention as she berates the King for his own folly in a highly politicised, outwardly directed, form of madness that is only rarely given to women in early modern drama. Thus, Brome both capitalises on and stretches almost to breaking point the new conventions surrounding the presentation of women on the Caroline stage.

Beeston's Boys at the Cockpit: Repertory and Revival

I end this essay where I began it, with Beeston's Boys in the late 1630s. One of the intriguing features of their known repertory is that much of it was taken over from Queen Henrietta Maria's Men, the previous occupants of the Cockpit playhouse. Thus, when the rump of Queen Henrietta Maria's Men regrouped at the Salisbury Court playhouse they were forced to seek a new repertory, while Beeston's Boys were left to adapt themselves to a set of plays originally written for a rather different configuration of actors.

Old plays took on new qualities in these conditions. As noted above, , few, if any, of the actors in Beeston's Boys were older than thirty when they were established in 1637, and the majority were in their late teens and early twenties.³⁸ The oldest were probably Edward Gibbs, first recorded as a shareholder at the Salisbury Court in July

1634, Robert Axen, who had taken adult roles in Queen Henrietta Maria's Men in 1630, and Robert Cox, who may have been the boy of that name baptised in 1604, although he is first recorded as an actor in 1639.³⁹ The youngest actor known to have performed with the company is Fenn, who was born in 1620.⁴⁰

The composition of Beeston's Boys thus appears to have had most in common with the Children of the Queen's Revels around 1612, immediately before their merger with Lady Elizabeth's Men, when actors like Nathan Field were twenty-five years old. Their performances in old Cockpit plays such as Shirley's *Hyde Park*, *The Lady of Pleasure* and *The Traitor*, Massinger's *The Bondman* and *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* or Davenport's *King John and Matilda* must therefore have had a very different appearance and quality from those of Queen Henrietta Maria's Men. Notably, the company would have engaged in what I have elsewhere termed 'age transvestism',⁴¹ as actors in their twenties played the roles of mature and older men, and the fact that the performers were all of a similar age may have had an impact on the gender politics of both comedies and tragedies.

We might look, for example, at Shirley's romantic comedy *The Wedding*, first performed by Queen Henrietta Maria's Men at the Cockpit around 1626. The 1629 quarto includes a cast-list which indicates that Richard Perkins played Sir John Belfare, Michael Bowyer played Beauford, the romantic lead, Hugh Clarke played Gratiana, his betrothed and Sir John's daughter, and John Sumner played Marwood, Beauford's treacherous friend. Leading comic roles were played by William Robins as Rawbone, 'a thin Citizen', William Sherlock as Lodam, 'a fat Gentleman', and John Dobson as Chameleon, Rawbone's emaciated serving-man.⁴² Thanks to recent research by David Mateer, we know that Perkins was contractually bound to his famous predecessor, Edward Alleyn, in late November 1596, when he was seventeen.⁴³ He would therefore have been around 47 when *The Wedding* was performed, old enough to play the patriarch without the aid of prosthetic aids such as a grey wig or beard. Bowyer, who shared lead

roles with Perkins for around a decade, was two decades younger, born in 1599.⁴⁴ Sumner's date of birth is not known, and he only appears in records from the mid-1620s onwards; however, he was clearly of an age to regularly act adult men, playing Mustapha, the Pasha of Aleppo, in Massinger's *The Renegado*, first performed at the Cockpit by Lady Elizabeth's Men in 1624.⁴⁵ Clarke may have been the Hugh Clark baptised at St Andrew, Holborn, in 1609; if so, he was seventeen in 1626, when he played Gratiana.⁴⁶ Robins was active as a company shareholder from the mid-1610s onwards, while Sherlock was employed as keeper of the Cockpit in around 1616; Astington argues that he was probably born in the early 1590s.⁴⁷ Dobson is not recorded elsewhere, and may have been a boy actor.

This summary suggests a rather different profile from that of Beeston's Boys: a greater concentration of actors in their late-twenties and older, a greater range of ages, and greater disparity between the ages of the oldest and youngest members of the company. The performance of *The Wedding* by Queen Henrietta Maria's Men may therefore have emphasised not only the divisions between generations but also the fracturing of the solidarity between members of the younger generation when Marwood is prepared to betray and manipulate his friend. Moreover, Sir John's anguish at the accusations made against his daughter, and his challenge to Beauford, have considerable force and pathos. '[M]ayst thou liue', he tells the inconstant Beauford, 'to haue / Thy heart as ill rewarded, to be a father / At my yeares, haue one daughter, and no more / Belou'd as mine, so mock'd, and then cald Whore' (sig. G3^v). The emotional pressure that the plot puts on the older generation is taken seriously, and it gains weight from Perkins's status within the company and his long-established reputation as a leading man.

In contrast, a London-based comedy written for Beeston's Boys such as Glapthorne's *Wit in a Constable* (1639) is far less interested in the intentions and emotions of its older men, with the exception of the cheerfully manipulative constable of the title,

whose true intentions are concealed until the play's final stages. Instead, it concentrates its attention on the tricks and reversals of wit in which the younger men and women of the play are involved. This perhaps suggests that a performance of *The Wedding* by Beeston's Boys may have seemed in some respects more playful, the gap between the generations being marked by prosthetic aids, and Sir John lacking the weight of Perkins's long-established reputation as a leading player.

Shirley appears to have designed the roles of Rawbone and Chameleon specifically for Robins and Dobson. Robins' comparative youth is suggested in the description of Rawbone as 'the yong vsurer' – perhaps a conscious rejection of a stage tradition in which usurers are usually middle-aged men – and the physical similarity between him and Chameleon is also noted: 'hee has a thingut waytes vpon him, I thinke, one of his bastards, begot vppon a spider' (sig. B1^v). Lodam, in contrast, is figured in terms of his physical girth: 'the barrell at *Heidelberg* was the patterne of his belly' (sig. B1^v). While excess weight could be created through padding, it is harder to make an actor look artificially thin. None of the extant plays written for Beeston's Boys comment on the unnatural thinness of any character. If the company revived *The Wedding*, therefore, they may have been forced to adapt aspects of the play that were designed for another troupe. Rawbone is in many ways the play's comic engine – notably, he is given the epilogue to speak – but his physical appearance, and references to it, may have been forcibly adapted.

In other respects, however, *The Wedding* may have fitted the repertory of Beeston's Boys well. Like Glapthorne's *Wit in a Constable* and *Argalus and Parthenia* (1637), Brome's *A Mad Couple Well Matched* – apparently originally designed for Queen Henrietta Maria's Men at Salisbury Court but eventually premiered at the Cockpit around 1639⁴⁸ – or Robert Chamberlain's *The Swaggering Damsel* (c. 1639-40), it makes prominent use of cross-gender disguise. Further, both *A Mad Couple Well Matched* and *The Wedding* feature plot-lines in which the true sex of a character is concealed until the conclusion of the

play: in both, we are encouraged to believe that an actor is playing a young man, only eventually to find out that the character is really a young woman. Glapthorne perhaps satirises a predilection of Beeston's Boys' dramatists for such narratives: it is noticeable that Valentine's cross-gender disguise in *Wit in a Constable* is short-lived and unsuccessful, and is blown when Knowell '*puls off his periwig*' in a self-conscious dramaturgical echo of earlier plays such as Jonson's *Epicene*.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the more uniform age-range of the company may have facilitated such plots, enabling the immature 'youth' to seem a more integrated part of the production's masculine world before the revelation of the character's true identity. Through a combination of old and new plays, Beeston's Boys were thus able to construct a successful and relatively integrated repertory that exploited the abilities and physical characteristics of the young players.

Conclusion

This essay has focused on the repertories of the Caroline indoor playhouses, aiming in the process to highlight some aspects of company structure and dramaturgy that may have been distinctive to these theatres and their resident companies. In the process, it has demonstrated the need for specificity. Companies using the Blackfriars, Cockpit and Salisbury Court may have performed under similar conditions and shared many, if not all, of their spectators; their structures and composition often varied greatly, however, and their repertories were shaped as much by these differences as the basic similarities. It is equally important, however, not to overstate the differences between indoor and amphitheatre repertories and practices. The Children of the Revels and Prince Charles's Men were apparently able to move between the Salisbury Court and Red Bull playhouses in the early 1630s, while the King's Men successfully maintained indoor and outdoor playhouses for the whole of this period. Scholars have disputed the extent to which the repertories became polarised in the 1630s and early 1640s, often overlooking – as Rory

Loughnane argues – how little information actually survives about the plays performed at the Fortune, Red Bull and even the Globe.⁵⁰

In any event, such distinctions were short-lived. The outbreak of the Civil War did not entirely halt the commercial performance of plays in London, but it broke down the distinctions between companies and repertories, as actors performed when and where they could. The Cockpit, Salisbury Court, Fortune and Red Bull playhouses were all active at different times, but rarely simultaneously and the groups of actors that had occupied them before the Civil War rarely reclaimed their old homes. The repertory scattered to the extent that Fletcher's Jacobean comedy *Wit Without Money*, strongly associated with the Cockpit in the Caroline period, was performed at the Red Bull on 3 February 1648.⁵¹ Pre-war distinctions between the repertories of amphitheatre and private theatre were unsustainable, and were ultimately overwritten by the new structures that Davenant, Thomas Killigrew and others introduced when the commercial theatre industry was re-established in 1660, and ultimately relocated in a new breed of indoor playhouse.

NOTES

¹ *Poëms* (London, 1639), sig. E2^v.

² *Pleasant Dialogues and Dramma's* (London, 1637), sigs. R4^{r-v}.

³ See G. E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*. 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941-68), vii, 433-4.

⁴ See, in particular, Martin Butler, 'Exeunt Fighting: Poets, Players, and Impresarios at the Caroline Hall Theaters', in *Localizing Caroline Drama: Politics and Economics of the Early Modern English Stage, 1625-1642*, ed. by Adam Zucker and Alan B. Farmer (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 97-128, and Christopher Matusiak, 'Christopher Beeston and the Caroline Office of Theatrical "Governor"', *Early Theatre* 11 (2008), 39-56.

⁵ See Astington, *Actors and Acting in Shakespeare's Time: The Art of Stage-Playing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Lopez, 'Imagining the Actor's Body on the Early Modern Stage', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 20 (2007), 187-203; Menzer, 'The Actor's Inhibition: Early Modern Acting and the Rhetoric of Restraint', *Renaissance*

Drama 35 (2006), 83-111; Power, 'Late Shakespeares, Late Players', in *Late Shakespeare, 1608-1613*, ed. by Andrew J. Power and Rory Loughnane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 172-86.

⁶ On the Caroline period's other indoor commercial playhouse, on Werburgh Street in Dublin, and its repertory, see Richard Dutton, 'The St. Werburgh Street Theater, Dublin', in *Localizing Caroline Drama*, pp. 129-155; Lucy Munro, 'Dublin Tragicomedy and London Stages', in *Early Modern Tragicomedy*, ed. by Subha Mukherji and Raphael Lyne (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007), pp. 175-92.

⁷ For useful summaries of the evidence see John Orrell, 'The Theatres', in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 93-112 (pp. 99-102); Herbert Berry, 'Playhouses, 1560-1660', in *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660*, ed. by Glynne Wickham, Herbert Berry and William Ingram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 285-674 (pp. 501, 623-5, 649-50). The maximum size of the Blackfriars was 66 by 46 feet; Berry argues that the Cockpit was in a building measuring around 40 by 40 feet, and the Salisbury Court was probably of a similar size. See 'Playhouses', pp. 501, 623-5, 649.

⁸ See *Actors*, pp. 143-56.

⁹ See Bentley, 'The Theatres and the Actors', in *The Revels History of Drama in English*, vol. 4, ed. by Philip Edwards, Gerald Eades Bentley, Kathleen McLuskie, and Lois Potter (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. 69-124 (pp. 107-8); Butler, 'Exeunt Fighting', 109-10; Lucy Munro, 'Critical Introduction to *The Queen and Concubine*', in *Richard Brome Online*, gen. ed. Richard Allen Cave (Sheffield: Humanities Research Institute), <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/brome>, para. 9 (and notes).

¹⁰ The best accounts of this company are Bentley's 'The Salisbury Court and its Boy Players', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 40 (1977), 129-49, and 'The Theatres and the Actors', pp. 105-8, and Butler's 'Exeunt Fighting', esp. pp. 101-9. When *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage* was published, Bentley was unaware of documents originally discovered by C. W. Wallace and Hulda Wallace and now catalogued as National Archives, Court of Requests, Charles I, Bdl. 524 [13 pt. 1], which make the company's composition and status clear.

¹¹ On the ages of the actors see Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, 'New Light on English Acting Companies in 1646, 1648, and 1660', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 42 (1991), 487-509 (pp. 490, 500 [n. 26]); David Kathman, 'How Old Were Shakespeare's Boy Actors?', *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (2005), 220-46 (p. 239).

¹² See Butler, 'Exeunt Fighting', pp. 103-5.

¹³ John Daniel's Children of the Queen's Chamber of Bristol received their patent in 1615 and were still touring in the 1630s, while two companies were organized by Robert Lee, a member of Queen Anna's Men, in around 1618 and 1622. See John Tucker Murray, *English Dramatic Companies*, 2 vols. (London: Constable, 1910), ii, 193-4; E.K. Chambers and W.W. Greg, eds., 'Dramatic Records from the Patent Rolls. Company Licences', *Malone Society Collections* 1.3 [1909], 260-284, p. 279-80, 284; Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, i, 167-9; Berry, 'Playhouses', pp. 239-41.

¹⁴ Ben Jonson, *Epicene*, ed. Dutton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 97 (n. 14).

¹⁵ *Babham v. Gunnell*, quoted in Bentley, 'Salisbury Court', p. 137, from the Charles W. Wallace transcripts in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, Box 9, Folder 13B.

¹⁶ On the Restoration nurseries see Leslie Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (1928; repr. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), pp. 176-94.

¹⁷ N.W. Bawcutt, ed., *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama: The Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels 1623-73* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 201.

¹⁸ See Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, i, 325, 330-1, 334-5; Matusiak, 'Christopher Beeston'.

¹⁹ For a summary see Astington, *Actors*, p. 95.

²⁰ See Bentley, 'Randolph's "Praeludium" and the Salisbury Court Theatre', in *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies*, ed. by James G. McManaway, Giles E. Dawson, and Edwin E. Willoughby (Washington, DC: Folger Library, 1948), pp. 775-83 (pp. 778-80).

²¹ G. Boreas, 'Randolph's *Praeludium*: An Edited Transcription, Comprising a Short Introductory Note', *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 29 (1986), 53-76 (ll. 28-32).

²² William Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix: The Player's Scourge, or, Actors Tragedy* (London, 1633), sig. 6R4^r (the index is not paginated).

²³ *Poems with the Muses Looking-Glasse: and Amyntas* (London, 1638), sig. A2^r. All references are to this edition.

²⁴ See Joe Lee Davis, *The Sons of Ben: Jonsonian Comedy in Caroline England* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967), pp. 67-70.

²⁵ Jonas Barish, 'Three Caroline "Defences" of the Stage', in *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan: Change and Continuity in the English and European Dramatic Tradition*, ed. by A. R. Braunmuller and J. C. Bulman (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986), pp. 194-214 (p. 205).

²⁶ G. C. Moore Smith, ed., *William Hemminges' Elegy on Randolph's Finger* (Stratford-Upon-Avon: Shakespeare's Head Studies, 1923), ll. 195-8.

²⁷ *The Deserving Favourite* (London, 1629).

²⁸ Linda V. Itzoe, ed., *The Swisser: A Critical Edition* (New York and London: Garland, 1984). The manuscript is British Library Add. MS 36759.

²⁹ See Butler, 'Exeunt Fighting', pp. 116-20.

³⁰ See Bawcutt, *Control*, p. 137; Itzoe, 'Arthur Wilson (1595-1652)', in *Jacobean and Caroline Dramatists*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Detroit: Gale Research, 1987), pp. 303-9.

³¹ See Astington, *Actors*, p. 173.

³² See Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, ii, 569-71; 599-600; 476-8; 562-7, and Astington, *Actors*, Appendix.

³³ *Women on Stage in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 3.

³⁴ See Milhous and Hume, 'New Light', 500 (n. 26); Butler, 'Exeunt Fighting', pp. 104-5.

³⁵ See Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, ii, 359.

³⁶ For further comments on these issues see Munro, 'In lieu of former wrongs', paras. 10-13.

³⁷ *The Queen and Concubine*, ed. Lucy Munro, in *Richard Brome Online*, 4.2; speech 934 (this edition uses speech numbers instead of line numbers).

³⁸ For a summary see Astington, *Actors*, pp. 95-7.

³⁹ See Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, ii, 442, 353, 414-15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ii, 433-4.

⁴¹ See *Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 42-3.

⁴² *The Wedding* (London, 1629), title-page verso.

⁴³ Mateer, 'Edward Alleyn, Richard Perkins and the Rivalry Between the Swan and Rose Playhouses', *Review of English Studies* 60 (2009), 61-77 (Appendix A); see also Astington, *Actors*, pp. 97-8.

⁴⁴ See Astington, *Actors*, p. 90.

⁴⁵ See Bawcutt, *Control*, pp. 151, 125.

⁴⁶ See Astington, *Actors*, 194.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁴⁸ See Matthew Steggle, *Richard Brome: Place and Politics on the Caroline Stage*

(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 119-21; Eleanor Lowe, Critical Introduction to *A Mad Couple Well Matched*, in *Richard Brome Online*, paras. 34-44.

⁴⁹ *Wit in a Constable* (London, 1640), sig. F1^r.

⁵⁰ See Loughnane's essay in this special issue.

⁵¹ See Hotson, *Commonwealth and Restoration Stage*, p. 34.