

Playgoers, Players and Cross-Dressing in Early Modern London: The Bridewell Evidence

The rise of the professional theatre from the 1570s, the most spectacular achievement of the English Renaissance, appeared in a much less positive light to London's magistrates, preachers and pamphleteers. They viewed plays as a threat to public order and morals, and the playhouses themselves, attracting a huge and raucous assembly of men and women of every degree, as an affront to social hierarchy and decorum. Some regarded acting as intrinsically evil, perpetrating a public 'lie' through the deliberate distortion of true identities, a lie exacerbated by the use of boy-actors to play all female roles. While aristocratic patronage afforded the companies a measure of protection and security, the London authorities were still inclined to regard actors as little better than the vagabonds with whom they had been bracketed in a statute of 1572.¹ This article throws new light on contemporary concerns by examining a stream of references to playgoers and players in the minute-books of the London Bridewell. The same records also furnish information on the social practice of cross-dressing, and thus help us to understand the context in which cross-dressing on the stage was judged.

Andrew Gurr has suggested that by 1620 London's six theatres were attracting as many as 25,000 visitors each week. Contemporaries agreed on their immense popularity, while moralists raged that citizens preferred plays to sermons. It has proved notoriously difficult, however, to identify individual playgoers. While most of the two hundred or so painstakingly identified by Gurr were members of London's social elite, he agrees with contemporary observers that most playgoers were drawn from the ranks of tradesmen, artisans, and their families.² Writers complained that playhouses also attracted the poor and disreputable, of both sexes. But both poor and 'middling sort' playgoers have remained frustratingly elusive, except as an anonymous mass.

We will never be able to establish the precise social composition of playhouse audiences. But there is no doubt that several sources remain largely untapped, including the court minute-books of the Bridewell Hospital, on which this article is based. Founded in the mid-sixteenth century, the London

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Bridewell exercised a wide if ill-defined jurisdiction over beggars, rogues, harlots, bawds and vagrants in and around the capital.³ Its records yield a steady trickle of plebeian playgoers, of both sexes, from Elizabeth's reign to the closure of the theatres in 1642, and though inevitably weighted towards the disorderly young, poor and marginal, they throw incidental light too on some better-off playgoers. The information they provide on specific offenders and circumstances enables us to see how closely these paralleled the dire warnings of moralists about the playhouse world as a whole.

Playhouses were most commonly associated with illicit sex, especially prostitution. Moralists warned how easily men could be tempted or hardened in sin by harlots touting for custom there, and the Bridewell governors heard evidence to substantiate such claims. On 21 March 1579 they examined Stephen Coke, cobbler, and Joane Bassett, harlot, 'taken at a barneside nere the Theatar suspiciously'. Joane confessed they had been intending to have sex, and they were both whipped.⁴ On 7 November 1600 the governors sat in judgement on Alice Pinder, gentlewoman, and Robert Welch, gentleman, who 'taking acquaintance of her coming from a playe did send for her . . . to come to him in Smythfeild where he had a cooche redy and tooke her into the cooche with him and carried her to Stratford the Bowe where he had thuse and carnall knowledge of her bodye'. Alice also admitted several other sexual liaisons, including one with the landlord of the lodgings where she lay for the cure of a 'sore leg'. Her story was a worrying reminder that the women corrupted or corrupting at playhouses might come from highly respectable backgrounds. Alice appears to be a high-class prostitute, separated from her husband, underlining the threat that playgoing posed to domestic order.⁵ Katherine Greene, 'taken att a play in Salsburye Courte' and almost certainly another prostitute, escaped a whipping in August 1631 only because she was discovered to be pregnant.⁶

Moralists feared that playhouses posed an equal threat to respectable but vulnerable women and young girls, who might be led astray by the lewd acts they witnessed on stage, or by predatory men (or women) in the audience. Frail women, they warned, could easily graduate from flirtations to adulterous liaisons, and then find themselves abandoned to sink into prostitution. Such dangers threatened both their own moral and physical welfare, and the domestic authority of their husbands. Once more, the Bridewell minutes supplied chapter and verse. Elizabeth Everys described how she had met one Benjamin Gunston early in 1578 at a play at the Bull in Bishopsgate St., one of several inns that had been converted into playhouses. Gunston gave her a piece of gold, telling her to buy gloves to wear for his sake, and their relationship quickly blossomed, for Everys, unhappily married, welcomed his promise to protect her from her unkind husband. Gunston sent her money when she fell sick, and in May he persuaded her to become his mistress, finding lodgings for her with one Elizabeth Bushe. This new arrangement proved less idyllic than she had hoped, however, for Everys found she was lodging

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in a notorious bawdy-house, and had to endure irate neighbours throwing stones and dirt at the windows. Moreover, after five months, Gunston grew tired of her and cast her off, whereupon Everys, desperate and destitute, was driven to become a prostitute.⁷ Her story matched perfectly the paradigm of numerous sermons and tracts. Gunston, clearly a man of some means, may well be the son and namesake of Benjamin Gunston (alias Gonson) senior, Treasurer of the Navy. The younger Gunston was to become Surveyor of the Ships from 1588 to 1600, and if this identification is correct, the family's status would explain why he was not summoned before the governors for questioning.

Though Everys was married, many of the women lured into prostitution were young spinsters, and the playhouse was viewed as threatening parental as well as marital authority. A Bridewell minute of 30 April 1625 described Mary Wene as 'a va[grant] and olde guest [inmate] that followeth and haunteth playhouses and will not be ruled by her mother that is an honest woman'. Wene's mother, a respectable widow, was clearly unable to control her wayward daughter.⁸ Some fathers found their authority similarly flouted. Katherine Speire, whipped in 1629, was a 'lewd young wench [who] will not be ruled by her friends but followeth the company of players and idle company'. The governors signalled their displeasure at this breakdown of domestic discipline by ordering her to be kept at work in Bridewell, at her father's own charge.⁹ Speire was not – yet – a prostitute, but they doubtless viewed this as her almost certain destiny unless she was quickly brought to heel. The governors were also aware how easily younger and more naïve girls might fall victim to calculating bawds. That was the context in which Dorothy Harvey was brought in on 8 December 1632 'for enticing a young maiden unto plaies and into yong fellowes company and for enticing her to lend her money'. Harvey was lucky to escape with a warning, for the governors clearly suspected she was planning to prostitute the girl and fleece her of her money.¹⁰

Moralists focused mainly on the playhouse as a dangerous place where harlots touted for clients. Andrew Gurr has suggested, however, that the playhouses attracted not only 'professional whores looking for custom' but "trulls" or "doxies" accompanying their menfolk for the pleasure of seeing a play.¹¹ The Bridewell evidence confirms his supposition. Thus the ill-named prostitute Godlyfe White, married to a waterman who acted as her pimp, described in 1576 how she had accompanied one Wallys's wife and a tailor named Harry Androes to a play at the Bell in Grace Church Street, after which they proceeded to a house in Newgate Market where the tailor had sex with Wallys's wife in the kitchen.¹² Similarly, in December 1577 the governors heard how Roger Barrett, a barber in Little Old Bailey, had called at the house of John Smyth, weaver, where he drank with Smyth's wife, a man named Savedge, and the wife of a joiner named Reignolds, after which they all went on to a play at the Bell. Smyth's servant subsequently reported Barrett for having sex with Regnold's wife, and denounced the place as a

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bawdy-house.¹³ In both these cases, the prostitute had accompanied an established client to the playhouse, rather than going there to tout for custom. Further instances surface after the opening of the Theatre in 1576 and the Curtain a year later. In June 1579 the governors dealt with Jane Wolmer alias Dover, who had attended a play at the Curtain on Whit Sunday with her landlord John Chambers (a tailor in the Old Exchange), his wife, a Gloucestershire man named Frier, and a servant of the Earl of Leicester. Chambers initially claimed they had all gone to hear a sermon at Paul's Cross, which fits neatly with Peter Lake's thesis of preachers and players competing for the same audience, but his story soon collapsed under interrogation. The hybrid nature of the company was explained as it emerged that Chambers and his wife were running a thriving bawdy-house; this was a social outing for staff and clients. Business and pleasure overlapped, of course, and one deponent commented darkly that 'Chambers himselfe is A resorter of playinge houses', whether to recruit new women or find or entertain male clients.¹⁴ Another suspicious liaison surfaced in March 1618, when the governors examined Thomas Gray, a clerk and notary. Gray denied sexual relations with one Ann Compton, but confessed that 'he had been much in her Company at Playhouses, Tobacco shopps and other suspitious places, and he further sayeth that he had promised her marriage upon condicion she should procure him an Office'. Compton appears to have been part of an upmarket prostitute-ring, and the pair were perhaps considering a marriage of mutual convenience.¹⁵

Not every link between playhouses and illicit sex involved professional prostitutes. The authorities were also suspicious of men attending plays with women other than their wives, companions who might also be, or become, their sexual partners. John Carr, a weaver in Duke's Place, admitted in September 1601 that he kept company with Rachell Dorathridge, but pleaded that 'his wife dealeth not well with him and therefore he hath retained the said Dorathridge to sell his ware after he hath woven it and sayeth that he hath gone to A play with her'. The governors accepted their association was innocent, and discharged him.¹⁶ They had more reason to be suspicious of George Harman, a married bodice-maker in Clerkenwell, detained in March 1634 by the watch between 1 and 2 a.m. in the company of one Anne Griffin. Griffin confessed that 'Harman and she were that evening at a play and after the play was done they went up and downe untill it was that time of night', but she insisted that nothing untoward had occurred. It seems unlikely the governors believed they had spent hours discussing the performance, but neither had been in trouble before and they too were released with a warning.¹⁷ Attending plays with a female companion might arouse suspicions, but the governors required more direct evidence or a confession before assuming any offence had been committed.

Playgoing raised several other worries for London's magistrates. Playhouses were regarded as the haunt of pickpockets as well as prostitutes, and we find a maidservant named Mary Dennis whipped and detained on 29

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April 1626 'for pilfering from young gentlemen at Schose [shows] many things and found with her in her hands and abusing her Mrs wth scandalous words'.¹⁸ The governors probably regarded the two offences as related; Deane had presumably gone to shows without permission, flouting her employer's authority. By luring servants to performances in working-hours, playhouses threatened both work-discipline and domestic authority, and male apprentices were just as likely to offend in this regard. Edward Nightingale, an apprentice, was accused on 1 December 1604 of having 'absented him self from his masters s[er]vice all one after noone being a working day and went to a play and at night came home drunck'. Such matters would normally be resolved privately, but when his master tried to punish him next day, Nightingale stabbed him in the chest with a kitchen-knife.¹⁹ Other apprentices, if less violent, proved equally remiss. Robert Wilson was whipped in 1619 'for a va[grant] lewd Boye that haunteth playhouses and neglecteth his worke'.²⁰ John Gore, another such, was whipped in March 1623 'for a notorious runne away from his dame an honest woman, and frequenting plays and ydlenes & will not bee ruled'.²¹ Employers might find themselves out of pocket in a more literal sense too, for many suspected apprentices of pilfering from them to pay for their admission, or for drink or sex afterwards. Jacob Mogett was kept at work in Bridewell in July 1605 charged that he 'misspends his M[aste]rs goodes in goinge to playes'.²²

Moralists and magistrates looked on the players themselves, as we have seen, with considerable suspicion. While the companies enjoyed protection from royal or aristocratic patrons, several individual players appear in the Bridewell records for various misdemeanours. A few featured more or less accidentally. Henry Cartwright of Westminster, 'a player', was named in 1576 after his maidservant Johane Barnes was made pregnant by a shipwright. Cartwright and his wife had turned her away once they discovered her situation, the usual response of 'respectable' employers, though we note Johane admitting that she and her lover had had sex in the house on numerous occasions.²³ A more serious case was heard a few weeks later, in January 1577, when a witness condemned 'Little Margaret', a servant at the Bell beyond Shoreditch church, as a notorious harlot and added that 'Lawrence Dutton kepes her he is a player'. Margaret was one of several 'harlots' in a circle whose patrons included Sir Owen Hopton's son and a Mr Locke, servant to the earl of Warwick. Dutton was a leading actor, belonging successively to Lincoln's, Warwick's and Oxford's men, and equally notorious for his quarrelsome and immoral life.²⁴ Several other actors were mentioned in equally dubious circumstances. A woman gave details in 1579 about a male bawd in East Smithfield and an unnamed whore, 'a players wife'.²⁵ Another woman testified the same year against her mistress, Amy Mason, a 'brave' young widow, recalling how one John Gibbes, a player at the Cross Keys, had frequented the house, sent out for wine, and stayed overnight. Brought in for questioning, Gibbes testified that Amy had come to a performance at the

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Cross Keys, and had asked another actor, Thomas Rowe, to introduce them. Rowe did so the following Sunday, after another performance, assuring Gibbes that Amy was a single woman worth £400 'and that she bore him good will'.²⁶ Contemporary moralists would have relished this episode, illustrating their familiar motifs of the wanton widow and amoral, opportunist actor, and the playhouse as a breeding ground for vice.

These episodes are overshadowed by a later incident involving Christopher Beeston, one of the leading players of his generation, who made an appropriately dramatic appearance. Beeston had recently moved from the Lord Chamberlain's to the earl of Worcester's men, and had a long career ahead as an actor-manager. His name surfaced on 27 October 1602 through one Margery (or Margaret) White, who was charged with bearing an illegitimate child and living in whoredom. In the course of her examination White also admitted having sexual relations with Christopher Beeston, 'a plaiier', at one Goodwife Winter's house in Star Alley without Bishopsgate, on midsummer's eve. She claimed, moreover, that Beeston had raped her: 'hee did it forcible, for said hee I have lyen wth a hundred wenches in my tyme'. Beeston himself appeared before the Bridewell governors on 3 November, and insisted that the allegations were totally false and 'done of mallice'. He was ordered to attend again on 13 November, when Margery repeated her allegations to his face. The proceedings were then plunged into confusion, however, for Beeston had brought along his friends from the playhouse, and, as the minute records:

the said Beeston and others his confederates plaiiers did very undecentlie demeane themselves to certen governors and much abused the place and yett upon some reports made knowen to this courte [Beeston was] greatelie suspected to have committed the facte.

Outraged that Beeston's friends had dared to abuse them in their own hall, 'contrarie to all good order', the governors unanimously resolved to take legal proceedings against him 'for so great a cryme'.²⁷

The final strand in this article, cross-dressing, links the moral 'threat' of the playhouse with wider contemporary concerns. Critics railed that acting presented a moral danger by its very nature, with low-born players perverting truth by masquerading as kings and noblemen, and boys playing female roles. Playwrights frequently turned the absence of female performers to their advantage by devising plots in which young 'female' characters were required to dress as youths, sometimes arousing the homo-erotic love of male characters. This deliberate gender confusion, which delighted and titillated audiences, understandably alarmed contemporary moralists. We must also see cross-dressing on stage in the context of a medical discourse which presented sexual identity as inherently unstable.²⁸ Equally unsettling were the new fashions of the late Elizabethan and Jacobean period, with prosperous and well-born young women in the capital adopting styles widely condemned as masculine. Some went further, in a few cases adopting male identities as well

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as clothing. The most notorious offender, Mary Frith, alias ‘Moll Cutpurse’, dressed and behaved as a man, and frequented playhouses in male attire. She was prosecuted after attending a performance at the Fortune playhouse in 1611, wearing a sword at her side, and swapping bawdy remarks with men in the audience. Frith’s escapades inspired a play based on her life – in which, paradoxically, the role of a woman masquerading as a man had to be performed by a boy masquerading as a woman.²⁹

Frith had been dispatched to Bridewell, and its records offer us further evidence of cross-dressing and the varied circumstances that could prompt it. At one level cross-dressing might be no more than festive and seasonal merriment, a precursor of modern fancy-dress parties. Samuel Pepys left a vivid account of one such occasion, a Thanksgiving Day party in 1666 when he and his male guests dressed as women, and the womenfolk as men.³⁰ Magistrates did not trouble themselves over such frolics, and were not unduly perturbed even when they spilled on to the street. When Katherine Jones appeared before the Bridewell governors on 3 January 1624, after being arrested in the street by the constable of Fleet Street in men’s apparel, she insisted that ‘she did it in merriment’. The governors accepted it was simply a New Year frolic, and discharged her.³¹

In most other circumstances cross-dressing was viewed far more seriously. A young woman adopting male disguise was generally hoping to pass unnoticed in places or at times when an unaccompanied female was likely to be challenged or molested. Cross-dressing empowered her, extending her freedom of movement and thus her range of options and opportunities. But magistrates and ‘responsible citizens’ believed a woman would only adopt such a disguise in order to breach the conventions of morality, law, or patriarchal authority, and they generally viewed cross-dressing as a cover for prostitutes, runaway servants, and vagrants.

The story told by 22-year-old Mawdlin Gawen in April 1575 offers us an unusually circumstantial narrative of one such ‘offender’. Born in Thame, Oxon., she had worked there as an innkeeper’s servant before moving to work in a tavern at Toddington, Beds.. There she met Thomas Ashwell, a fellow-servant, who persuaded her to run away with him to London. She found a service in the capital, and Ashwell later arranged to meet her at Paul’s Wharf at 4 o’clock one morning, before dawn. Mawdlin slipped out of her house at 2 a.m., disguised in clothes belonging to her master, and reached the rendezvous only to find that her lover had failed to appear. A waterman refused to carry her to safety, telling her it was too early to be on the river, and instead took her back to his house. Increasingly nervous as daylight strengthened, she begged him to crop her hair in a desperate bid to sustain her disguise, but the waterman’s apprentice, despatched ostensibly to borrow some scissors, notified the parish constable, and Mawdlin soon found herself hauled before the Bridewell governors. Confessing to a sexual liaison with her faithless lover, she was sentenced to be whipped.³²

More often cross-dressing women were suspected of using disguise to facilitate their trade as prostitutes. Jane Trosse, one such, was a notorious harlot, regularly whipped and detained at Bridewell, and often whipped again for swearing, assaulting the matron, refusing to work, and attempting to escape. In March 1577 she was arrested once more for wearing 'unsemely' apparel 'more manlyke then woman lyke', as she roamed from tavern to tavern in search of custom. Found to be infected with venereal disease, she escaped a whipping on this occasion, and was dispatched to the hospital for a cure.³³ Helen Bolson, arrested in 1601, was another such. She explained she had dressed as a man at the request of one Mr Taylor's son, lying at Black Lucy's, and had stayed several nights at the Exchequer in Islington. She denied having sex with him there, but the governors remembered her as a notorious whore punished on several previous occasions, and ordered her to be whipped again and detained until the next sessions.³⁴ The Bridewell evidence is thus at variance with the thesis of Rudolf Dekker and Lotte van de Pol, who argue there was virtually no connection between prostitution and cross-dressing.³⁵ If that was true in the Netherlands, things appear to have been different in London.

Other women prosecuted after being found in male attire appear to have been pursuing illicit but long-term relationships. Katherine Cuffe admitted in 1599 that she had had an illegitimate child by one Ambrose Jasper, a cook at the Inner Temple. After the baby was born, Jasper called at her employer's house to resume the liaison, and told her to come privately to his lodgings in 'boyes apparrell . . . lest that she should be espyed'. A witness recalled her coming flamboyantly dressed in doublet and hose, with a cloak and hat, when plain apparel might have offered a better chance of passing unnoticed. Did she think a 'young gentleman' was less likely to be challenged at the Temple? Or was her boyish finery designed in part to excite herself, or her lover?³⁶ Equally ambiguous and far more disturbing was the story of Anne Wyresdale, which unfolded in two lengthy examinations in May 1623. A servant to one Mr Collins, Wyresdale claimed she had fled to the country to escape her mistress's harsh treatment. Collins eventually traced her through a mutual acquaintance, Elizabeth Foster, and persuaded her to return to London and lodge with Foster. But Wyresdale discovered she had been betrayed, for Foster now insisted that she must sleep with Collins. When Collins then tried to force himself on her, Wyresdale was left badly hurt and terrified; she later testified that to reassure her, Foster thereupon had sex with Collins herself, in the girl's presence, and then directed her 'what to do'. Wyresdale was arrested a year later after bearing Collins's child, and told the governors that her master had 'forced her to folly, and that she put on the mans app[ar]ell of purpose to have gone to speak wth him about her child'. The clerk noted that she was 'very deboiste and goeth in mans apparell', but whatever the full story, she would appear to have been more sinned against than sinning. Both women were whipped, while Collins, though summoned for questioning, appears to have escaped.³⁷

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Illicit sex was not the Bridewell governors' sole concern in cases of cross-dressing. Over the period, they focused increasingly on vagrancy rather than sex, and some cross-dressing offenders were punished simply as suspicious vagrants, though the governors probably assumed they would drift into prostitution unless 'corrected' in time. Some appear to have been penniless newcomers, hoping to pass unnoticed until they found somewhere to live. Alice Younge, one recent arrival, was whipped after being taken in man's apparel 'like a roge' in November 1576; Mary Briggs, arrested in Fleet Street one night in January 1631, proved luckier, and was released on giving security to leave the capital.³⁸ Other women appear to have been inhabiting more shadowy worlds. Anne Jenkins, detained in May 1630, said she had adopted a male persona 'to look for her husband who was gone from her and about to take another wife'. Her story was plausible enough, for desertion and bigamy were by no means uncommon, but it failed to convince the Bridewell governors, who had her whipped as a vagrant.³⁹ More puzzling was the case of Elizabeth Winter in February 1643, 'taken in mans apparell in a Taverne in the Whitefriars having beades and a Crucifixe about her'. Winter claimed she was a widow, living with a Dutch jeweller in Falcon Court off Fleet Street, presumably as his servant, and with a father living at Halton in Lincolnshire. It is hardly surprising that her behaviour aroused suspicion. A Catholic woman found disguised as a man at a critical juncture in the civil war, when Londoners were living in fear of imminent royalist assault, would be suspected as an agent or spy. Winter was still in custody three months later, as the authorities continued their efforts to investigate her story.⁴⁰

It is clear that while cross-dressing on the stage was a male phenomenon, cross-dressing on the streets of London was overwhelmingly a female strategy. Men on the run occasionally disguised themselves as women; Sir George Booth contrived to remain at liberty for several days, after the collapse of his rebellion in Cheshire in 1659, as he made his way towards London as 'Mistriss Dorothy'.⁴¹ But male cross-dressing in London appears to have been rare, and generally for fun. Thus in July 1607 we find a young Frenchman confusingly recorded as Lucy [i.e. Louis] Loydall brought before the Bridewell governors after 'being taken in womans apparrell', but on examination it was 'affirmed by his Mris and divers of her honest neighbours that he did yt upon a merrymnt to fetch oysters and wthout any other cause'. Loydall was released unharmed.⁴² The governors were less forgiving when Robert Varnam appeared before them in January 1629 'for counterfieting himselfe a woman and going in womans apparrell fayning himselfe sick and otherwise carrying himselfe lewdly'. This was a variant of the familiar tricks and disguises employed by beggars and rogues, and the governors had no hesitation in ordering him to be whipped.⁴³

How much, then, can the Bridewell material tell us about the world of the Shakespearean theatre? The suspicious playgoers and disorderly players

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recorded in the court minutes recall the warnings voiced by moralists and magistrates, while the connection between female cross-dressing and illicit sex would have reinforced their unease about cross-dressing on stage. It might be argued that the relatively small number of cases recorded in the Bridewell minute-books suggests that contemporaries grossly exaggerated the scale of the problem; but we should remember that except in the first years of the institution, and during the crackdown of 1576–7, the governors followed a relatively low-key approach to illicit sex, reactive rather than proactive, conscious that the scale of the problem far exceeded their very limited resources. It would be more prudent to see the cases reviewed here as the tip of a much larger iceberg. That is not to suggest that *most* playgoers were young and disreputable; the Bridewell evidence is heavily weighted towards these categories, just as most other sources are biased towards the ‘privileged playgoer’.⁴⁴ It is clear that playhouses appealed to a very broad swathe of London’s inhabitants, and Bridewell’s records enable us, for the first time, to attach names and occupations to some of the groundlings: cobbler, weaver, baker, tailor, bodice-maker, joiner, clerk, apprentice, along with their women-folk and maidservants, as well as prostitutes and ‘companions’. Moralists attacked the playhouse partly because it jumbled together men and women of every degree, and the Bridewell evidence shows how its association with illicit sex could dissolve social distinctions still further. The prostitute Jane Wolmer, we recall, had attended the Curtain with a tailor, his wife, and a servant of the earl of Leicester. The world of the London bawdy-house and the world of the playhouse linked Court and city (low-)life all too intimately. Godlyfe White, playgoer and prostitute, later accompanied two colleagues to serve the appetites of three unnamed peers, while Elizabeth Everys, first drawn into sin at the Bell playhouse, counted the earl of Kildare among her subsequent clients.⁴⁵ Elizabethan and Jacobean moralists tried, in vain, to convince respectable citizens that attending playhouses would expose them and their wives to temptation, and damage their good names. In the 1580s the Court successfully blocked pressure to close down the theatres, but once that protection was removed, in the early 1640s, the city fathers had their will.

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Notes

- 1 P. Lake with M. Questier, *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven, Ct, 2002), esp. chapters 11–12; A. Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574–1642* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1980); A. Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1996); Jean E. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London, 1994), esp. chapter 2.

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- 2 Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, chapter 6, esp. p. 196; Gurr, *Playgoing*, esp. chapter 3 and Appendix 1; Lake, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, chapters 11–12; Howard, *Stage and Social Struggle*, chapter 4. For a different view see Ann Jennalie Cook, *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576–1642* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1981), esp. chapter 6.
- 3 On Bridewell and its work see I. Archer, *The Pursuit of Authority: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991); P. Griffiths, *Youth and Authority. Formative Experiences in England, 1540–1640* (Oxford, 1996); P. Griffiths, 'The Structure of Prostitution in Elizabethan London', *Continuity and Change*, 8 (1993), esp. 41–3. Other references to playgoing can be found in the huge body of depositions generated by London's ecclesiastical courts.
- 4 Guildhall Library, London (henceforth GL), MS 33011/3, fol. 379. On the evidence for prostitutes at playhouses see Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 62.
- 5 GL, MS 33011/4, fols 190–1.
- 6 GL, MS 33011/7, fol. 236.
- 7 GL, MS 33011/3, fol. 373–v. On the Gunstons/Gonsons see M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy* (London, 1896; new edn., 1988), pp. 144–5, 149. On the Bull, and other inns converted into playhouses, see E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols (Oxford, 1923), III, 379–83.
- 8 GL, MS 33011/6, fol. 398.
- 9 GL, MS 33011/7, fol. 121.
- 10 GL, MS 33011/7, fol. 306.
- 11 Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 64.
- 12 GL, MS 33011/3, fols 7v, 8, 10v, 31v, 32.
- 13 GL, MS 33011/3, fols 267v–268v. Smyth himself, the householder, was out of town.
- 14 GL, MS 33011/3, 12, 17 and 20 June 1579 (foliation missing). Jane, heavily pregnant, had been installed in her lodgings by a Norfolk gentleman named Yelverton, though several other men were identified as the possible father. Jane also confessed that Chambers' wife had urged her to name a rich stranger as the father, promising so to arrange matters that 'she should be kept like a gentlewoman and goe in her silkes'. Cf. Lake, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, chapter 11, esp. pp. 425–30.
- 15 GL, MS 33011/6, fol. 31–v. Grayton was currently employed by Henry Shelley, a Sussex gentleman. Compton's circle included several gentlemen, including Sir Charles Manners.
- 16 GL, MS 33011/4, fol. 256v.
- 17 GL, MS 33011/7, fols 368v–9.
- 18 GL, MS 33011/6, fol. 425.
- 19 GL, MS 33011/5, fol. 3v.
- 20 GL, MS 33011/6, fol. 155v.
- 21 GL, MS 33011/6, fol. 322v.
- 22 GL, MS 33011/5, fol. 42.
- 23 GL, MS 33011/3, fol. 112v. Cf. the case of John Allen, a player's son, charged with fornication in 1603. Allen lived with his uncle on the Bankside; his mother dwelt in Three Tunnes alley in Bishopgate St: MS 33011/4, fol. 343v.
- 24 GL, MS 33011/3, fols 120v, 122v; on Dutton see E. Nungezer, *A Dictionary of Actors* (New York, 1929; reprinted 1968), pp. 124–6. A reference to two immoral brothers may refer to Dutton and his brother John, also an actor.

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- 25 GL, MS 33011/3, fol. 359v. This circle included the wife of one Baker, a minstrel in Red Cross St., described as a whore and one 'that kepeth a skole' (fol. 360).
- 26 GL, MS 33011/3, fols 364–v, 367. Mason was no rich widow; she told the governors she was living on a yearly allowance of £10 from her brother, who lived near Lyme (Dorset). Gibbes and Rowe, like Cartwright, appear to be hitherto unrecorded actors.
- 27 GL, MS 33011/4, fols 327v, 330, 332. (These depositions have been reprinted in *English Professional Theatre, 1530–1660*, edited by G. Wickham, H. Berry and W. Ingram (Cambridge, 2000), p. 175.) On Beeston's career see Nungezer, *Dictionary*, pp. 36–8. An earlier case in 1578 concerned a 'Mr Beeston' and Edward Dier, who maintained and shared a prostitute named Ursula Hobson, kept by Black Lucy. This Beeston, married with a wife 'in the northe', was too old to be the player, but was possibly kin: MS 33011/3, fol. 285v.
- 28 A. Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500–1800* (New Haven, Ct, 1995), chapter 2.
- 29 Gurr, *Playgoing*, pp. 62–4
- 30 *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, edited by R. C. Latham and W. Matthews, 11 vols (London, 1970–83), VII, 246. For general surveys see R. M. Dekker and L. C. van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 1989), based mainly on Dutch sources, and D. Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 2000), chapter 7, which surveys English dramatic and court material, and both male and female behaviour. See also S. Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley, Ca., 1988), pp. 66–93.
- 31 GL, MS 33011/6, fol. 356. For other incidents in the provinces, treated more seriously, see B. Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 349–50.
- 32 GL, MS 33011/2, fol. 89v.
- 33 GL, MS 33011/3, fol. 183v. On Trosse's lengthy career see also fols 18, 95, 142, 185–v, 187v, 204, 217v, 325–v, 357v, 366v, 368v, 375v, 387v; Griffiths, 'Structure of Prostitution', p. 49. Cf. Howard, *Stage and Social Struggle*, pp. 95–6, for another case.
- 34 GL, MS 33011/4, fol. 263.
- 35 Dekker and van de Pol, *Tradition of Female Transvestism*, pp. 38–9.
- 36 GL, MS 33011/4, fol. 61.
- 37 GL, MS 33011/6, fols 320–2. For the case of Margaret Wackeley, who 'confessed that she had A bastard child & she went in mans apparel' see MS 33011/4, fol. 208 (Jan. 1601).
- 38 GL, MS 33011/3, fol. 85v; MS 33011/7, fols 211v, 212v. In 1578 Jane Trosse (n. 33, above) had refused an offer to restore her confiscated possessions if she would agree to leave the city: MS 33011/3, fol. 351v.
- 39 GL, MS 33011/7, fol. 187v. Cf. Mary Hawley, 1627, provided with women's clothes and set to work (MS 33011/7, fol. 22v); Anne Linsey, detained in Jan. 1630 for wearing men's clothes (MS 33011/7, fol. 164v); Anne Brereton, taken in male apparel, 'of very ill behaviour and suspicious', Sept. 1653 (MS 33011/9), p. 625.
- 40 GL, MS 33011/9, pp. 15, 18.
- 41 *The Diurnal of Thomas Rugg 1659–1661*, edited by W. L. Sachse (Camden Soc., 3rd series, 91, 1961), p. 5. Booth got as far as Newport Pagnel. For a royalist agent

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- in Scotland who eluded Monck in 1656 by dressing as a woman see *The State Papers of John Thurloe*, edited by T. Birch, 7 vols (London, 1742), V, 605. Men quite often disguised themselves as women in provincial bread or enclosure riots.
- 42 GL, MS 33011, fol. 198v; cf. Cressy, *Travesties*, pp. 92–7, 112–14.
- 43 GL, MS 33011/7, fol.106; for beggars' tricks see T. Harman, *A Caveat or Warening for Commen Cursetors* (London, 1567), reprinted in *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, edited by G. Salgado (Harmondsworth, 1972).
- 44 Cook, *Privileged Playgoers*.
- 45 GL, MS 33011/3, fols 7v, 373; see above, nn. 7, 12, 14.

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