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The Seven Deadly Sins and Theatrical Apprenticeship

In his 2007 article 'The Work of Elizabethan Plotters, and 2 *The Seven Deadly Sins*', Andrew Gurr surveyed the evidence concerning the handful of surviving manuscript 'plots' from the Elizabethan theatre, adding some judicious speculation about the 'plotters' who drew up these documents.¹ Such plots are key pieces of evidence for the casting practices of Elizabethan playing companies, since they include the names of specific players alongside the roles they played. Because very little concrete evidence exists about these plots or their plotters, as Gurr rightly notes, any effort to bring together the meagre known facts into a coherent narrative is most welcome. Aside from the room for disagreement with some elements of Gurr's narrative, as is almost inevitable in speculative cases such as this one, the framework Gurr has constructed is a helpful supplement to the pioneering work of W.W. Greg nearly eighty years ago.²

The second half of Gurr's article argues a more specific proposition: that the manuscript plot of *The Second Part of the Seven Deadly Sins*, now Dulwich College MS XIX, was written for a production by Strange's Men around 1591. This assumption was something close to a consensus view until recently, but in a 2004 article, henceforth Kathman (2004), I argued at length that this dating is mistaken, and that the plot actually originated with the Lord Chamberlain's Men around 1597–8.³ In order to defend the earlier date, Gurr necessarily challenges some of the arguments presented in that article, the tacit hypothesis being that if those arguments are invalid, then the traditional date is correct. In particular, Gurr questions the relevance of one of my key pieces of evidence — an apprentice binding record for Thomas Belte in November 1595, a record which seems to suggest strongly that the plot comes from after that date.

On one level, Gurr's critique is welcome, and he has raised some issues meriting further discussion. His challenge to that 2004 article, however, contains unwarranted and questionable assumptions, without which his

argument effectively collapses. In particular, many of his assertions about theatrical apprenticeship are demonstrably wrong, contradicted by significant amounts of documentary evidence. The present article intends to set the record straight by presenting this evidence, most of which has already appeared in print elsewhere, and by addressing the weaknesses of Gurr's other arguments. Before that, however, I will provide a brief overview of the arguments for the traditional dating and the counter-arguments of Kathman (2004). Since Gurr does not really address most of these arguments, someone reading only his article would not realize the extent of the evidence suggesting that the *Seven Deadly Sins* plot originated with the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1597–8.

The *Sins* plot contains the names of twenty players with the roles they played. Two major roles (Gower and King Henry VI) and several smaller ones (including a 'foole') do not have a player's name next to them, probably because they did not need to be doubled. Because the plot resides among the Alleyn-Henslowe papers at Dulwich College, theatre historians have traditionally assumed that it comes from a company in which Edward Alleyn (1566–1626) performed, even though his name does not appear in the document. Because Richard Burbage's name does appear in the *Sins* plot, historians have further assumed that it originated with Strange's Men in the early 1590s, since that is the only time when Alleyn and Burbage are thought to have acted together. (After mid-1594, Burbage was with the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and Alleyn was with the Admiral's Men.)

As I showed in 2004, the assumption that the *Sins* plot came to Dulwich directly from Alleyn is a questionable one, since a variety of evidence suggests that it arrived there much later via William Cartwright the younger, the son of Alleyn's acting colleague William Cartwright. The first recorded notice of the *Sins* plot came in 1780, when Edmond Malone printed a transcription, calling it 'a very curious paper now in my possession', and George Steevens wrote that it had been found at Dulwich College serving as a wrapper for a play manuscript, *The Tell-Tale*. Steevens assumed that the plot 'had remained unnoticed [in the library of Dulwich College] from the time of Alleyn who founded the society', but he did not know that the *Tell-Tale* manuscript is datable to the 1630s, after Alleyn's death, or that it had been prepared for the press in 1658 but never printed.⁴ Cartwright the younger was a bookseller whose one publication, a new edition of Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors*, also came out in 1658. When Cartwright died in 1686, among the materials he bequeathed to Dulwich College in his will were 'about 100 ms

of plaies' along with many early printed plays. These plays were definitely at Dulwich College when John Aubrey wrote in the late seventeenth century, but they were never integrated into the rest of the collection due to a legal dispute over Cartwright's will, and they had mysteriously disappeared from Dulwich by the end of the eighteenth century. The evidence indicates that some of the Cartwright material went to the actor David Garrick, and some went to Edmond Malone, who, as indicated above, admitted to having the *Sins* plot in his possession in 1780. The *Tell-Tale* manuscript and the *Sins* plot showed up together in an 1825 auction of the estate of Malone's literary executor, James Boswell the younger, and on the basis of Steevens's 1780 statement they were returned to Dulwich College.⁵ They were placed among the Henslowe-Alleyn papers, where they remain the only play manuscript and only stage plot.⁶

Taken as a whole, this evidence suggests quite strongly that the *Sins* plot and the *Tell-Tale* manuscript came to Dulwich College in 1686 among Cartwright's play collection; at the very least, it severely undermines the traditional assumption that the plot must have come directly from Alleyn. Even Gurr seems to accept this argument, calling it 'quite persuasive'.⁷ Without the assumption of Alleyn's direct involvement, the players' names in the *Sins* plot collectively point toward an origin with the Chamberlain's Men in the late 1590s. As Kathman (2004) notes, of the eleven adult players whose surnames appear in the plot, eight of them (George Bryan, Thomas Pope, Augustine Phillips, Richard Burbage, William Sly, Richard Cowley, John Duke, and John Sincler) are definitely known to have been with the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1596–8, while the other three (John Holland, Robert Pallant, and Thomas Goodale) can be plausibly placed there, and are not known to have been with any other company at the time. For only three of the eleven (Bryan, Pope, and Goodale) is there documentary evidence of their playing as early as Gurr's proposed date of 1591, and two others (Duke and Pallant) are not documented as players until 1598 and 1602.⁸ The 1597–8 dating is further supported by the likelihood that the plot's boys 'T Belt' and 'Sander' are Thomas Belte and Alexander Cooke, both apprenticed to John Heminges of the Chamberlain's Men, the one on 12 November 1595 and the other on 26 January 1597. Other likely identifications, such as those of 'Kit' and 'Harry' with Christopher Beeston and Henry Condell, are only possible if the plot came from the Chamberlain's Men around 1597–8, given that Beeston and Condell were born in 1580 and 1576 respectively.⁹

Gurr does not really dispute any of the facts outlined above, but he nevertheless argues for the traditional view that the *Sins* plot was written for Strange's Men in 1591. His main positive argument in favour of the earlier date is a supposed correspondence between the *Sins* plot and the six sharers named in a 1593 touring patent for Strange's Men. Three of the players from that 1593 Strange's patent — George Bryan, Thomas Pope, and Augustine Phillips — are the only three players designated as 'Mr' in the *Sins* plot, and Gurr reasonably assumes that they were sharers in that company. He then further assumes that any player without the 'Mr' designation was *not* a sharer, and thus that there were only six sharers in the *Sins* company: Bryan, Pope, Phillips, the two unnamed actors who played Gower and Henry VI, and the unnamed 'foole'.¹⁰ Gurr suggests that these three unnamed men were the three other sharers from the 1593 Strange's patent, namely John Heminges, Edward Alleyn, and Will Kempe. He says that the patent makes it 'easy to fill in the blanks' in the *Sins* plot, and suggests that this ease supports the idea that the plot came from Strange's in 1591.¹¹

The problem here is that any such identification of the three unnamed actors is inherently speculative, and depends on the strength of the accompanying scenario; it cannot itself be used as evidence. In Kathman (2004) I suggested that the unnamed players in the *Sins* plot were John Heminges, Will Kempe, and William Shakespeare — the same as Gurr's suggestion, but with Shakespeare instead of Alleyn.¹² But this suggestion came only after I had deduced, based on the names that actually appear in the plot, that it most likely came from the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1597–8; given that provenance, Heminges, Shakespeare, and Kempe are the most obvious choices to be the unnamed sharers playing Gower, Henry VI, and the fool. Gurr, on the other hand, takes the suggestion that Alleyn was one of the unnamed players in the *Sins* plot and tries to use it (in conjunction with the 1593 Strange's patent) as a primary piece of evidence for dating the plot to Strange's Men in 1591. This comes dangerously close to begging the question. The main reason for assuming Alleyn's involvement in the *Sins* company has always been the plot's presence at Dulwich College, but the evidence that the plot arrived there through William Cartwright the younger severely undercuts that assumption. In theory, Alleyn still might have been one of the unnamed players in the plot, but such a claim would require independent evidence, which Gurr does not provide.

A related but more peripheral issue is Gurr's assumption that the scribe writing the plot was consistent in applying the 'Mr' designation to all sharers,

and thus that the seventeen players not so designated in the plot were all hired men or apprentices. He admits that this assumption of Greg's 'is not fully supported by the evidence of the "plots"', but then adopts it anyway. He does not address the counter-arguments of Kathman (2004), where I point out that other full-sized companies of the 1590s and early 1600s had eight to eleven sharers, that the plot of *Frederick and Basilea* only irregularly designates sharers as 'Mr', and that the same scribe who wrote the *Sins* plot only designated one out of nine players as 'Mr' in the fragmentary *2 Fortune's Tennis* plot, even though others were almost certainly sharers.¹³ Gurr's assumption forces him to claim that Richard Burbage was only a hired man at the time of the *Sins* plot, even though Burbage played two of the leading roles, King Gorboduc and Tereus. I am unaware of any examples of hired men playing such central roles in any of the other surviving cast lists from the period, but this is exactly the type of lead role that Burbage played during his heyday as a sharer with the Chamberlain's/King's Men.

Apart from the business about the sharers, most of Gurr's arguments are negative ones in which he attempts to weaken my redating of the *Sins* plot, and thus (by implication) to strengthen his own dating scenario. Specifically, he raises four main issues which he claims present difficulties if the plot originated with the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1597–8: the handwriting of the plot, the size of the cast, a supposed association of Thomas Goodale with Edward Alleyn, and a supposed law requiring London apprentices to be at least seventeen years old. Let us consider each of these in turn.

The first of Gurr's negative arguments comes in his survey of the handwriting on surviving theatrical plots, which he argues were written out by the company bookkeeper. As he notes, the same person who wrote the *Sins* plot also appears to have written the 'Hand C' additions to the manuscript play *Sir Thomas More*, as well as some notations on Anthony Munday's manuscript play *John a Kent and John a Cumber* (1595?) and the fragmentary manuscript plot for *Fortune's Tennis* (1600–2).¹⁴ According to Gurr, if the *Sins* plot was written for the Chamberlain's Men in 1597–8, Hand C must have moved from the Admiral's in 1595 to the Chamberlain's in 1597–8, and back to the Admiral's in 1600, a sequence that Gurr considers unlikely for such an important employee as the bookkeeper.¹⁵

This chronology crucially assumes that *John a Kent and John a Cumber* can be identified with *The Wise Man of West Chester*, which the Admiral's Men performed 31 times between 1594 and 1597. F.G. Fleay first suggested this identification in the nineteenth century, and others have adopted it since

then, but it remains speculative and is not without its problems, as J.W. Ashton and Roslyn Knutson have pointed out.¹⁶ Among other issues, *John a Kent and John a Cumber* is about two duelling magicians, while the Admiral's play appears to be about one 'wise man', based on the title.¹⁷ If we do not accept *John a Kent and John a Cumber* as an Admiral's play — and at the very least the claim is unproven — then the only possible document placing Hand C with the Admiral's before 1600 is *Sir Thomas More*. But the dating of that manuscript and of its various additions is unsettled, as even Gurr admits; the original play is usually thought to have been written around 1593, but the additions, including Hand C's contributions, have been variously dated to either 1593–4 (before the massive company reshufflings of 1594) or 1603 (after the *Fortune's Tennis* plot).¹⁸ Contrary to Gurr's implication, it is fairly easy to envision a scenario in which the Hand C scribe who wrote the *Sins* plot for the Chamberlain's Men in 1597–8 then wrote the *Fortune's Tennis* plot for the Admiral's a few years later. Gurr has created a speculative narrative and subsequently treated it as though it were hard evidence, but that narrative will not bear the weight he puts on it here.¹⁹

Gurr's next argument against a late date for the *Sins* plot involves the cast size needed for it. Various theatre historians, including Gurr, have argued that numerous plays written in the late 1580s and early 1590s require unusually large casts of twenty or more (depending on how roles are doubled), larger than the requirements for any plays written before then and most plays written afterwards.²⁰ According to Gurr, there are fourteen of these 'large plays', and dating *2 Seven Deadly Sins* to 1597–8 would make it the only one of them to come from after 1594; he claims that this is an 'anomaly' that 'needs explaining if Kathman's theory has any validity'.²¹

This claim does not hold up under scrutiny. For one thing, the very historians that Gurr cites refute the idea that plays requiring large casts were only written between 1588 and 1594, and that *2 Seven Deadly Sins* falls into this category. Scott McMillin counted the number of speaking roles in the first 500 lines of every public-theatre play written between 1580 and 1610, and came up with a list of eleven plays (other than *Sir Thomas More*) having twenty or more speaking roles by that standard. Eight of these are dated 1594 or earlier in the *Annals of English Drama*. Gurr includes these eight among his fourteen 'large plays' from 1588–94, but he ignores the other three having later dates: *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington* (1598), *Sir John Oldcastle* (1598), and *1 If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* (1604).²² Each of these actually has more speaking roles than any of the pre-1595 plays, and

two of them were written at the same time as my proposed dating of the *Sins* plot. Granted, none of these are Chamberlain's/King's Men plays, but Gurr's list of fourteen 'large plays' from 1588–94 includes Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and all three *Henry VI* plays, which surely remained in the repertory of the Chamberlain's/King's Men long after 1594.²³ Although the historians Gurr cites are discussing when these plays were written, the *Sins* plot records a specific performance of a play that may have been (in fact, probably was) written many years earlier.²⁴

In addition, Gurr briefly discusses T.J. King's tables of the number of actors required for various early modern plays, but ignores King's table 13, which shows the number of actors that actually appear in eight cast lists derived from playhouse documents (including the *Sins* plot) dating from the 1590s to the 1630s.²⁵ This table shows that the figure of twenty-two total actors appearing in the *Sins* plot (sixteen adults and six boys) is quite normal; four of the other cast lists have more than twenty-two actors, while three have fewer. Two of these cast lists, from the plots of *Frederick and Basilea* (datable to c1597) and *The Battle of Alcazar* (c1598), are from the same time frame I suggested for the *Sins* plot, and have casts similar in size to the *Sins* cast: seventeen men and four boys for *Frederick*, eighteen men and eight boys for *Alcazar*.²⁶ Granted, both of these are Admiral's Men plays, but four of the later casts are from King's Men plays, ranging in size from nineteen total actors for *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (1611) and *Honest Men's Fortune* (1625) to twenty-six for *Sir John Van Olden Barnavelt* (1619). These numbers show that a total cast of twenty or more actors was nothing unusual for the major London companies over a span of several decades, and refute Gurr's claim that the size of the *Sins* cast is somehow evidence against a date as late as 1597–8.

Gurr's third main argument involves Thomas Goodale, whose name in the *Sins* plot raises a 'substantial issue over whether [it] was composed in 1591 for Strange's or in 1597 for the Chamberlain's'.²⁷ His discussion of Goodale, however, contains several errors and questionable assumptions:

- 1) Gurr correctly points out that Goodale's name appears in the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript, of uncertain date, but he also claims that when Goodale acted in *More*, he 'must have been either a Strange's or Admiral's Man, and certainly in company with Alleyn'.²⁸ Gurr's certainty seems excessive here. While Strange's and the Admiral's have been the most common companies associated with the *More* manuscript, Gary Taylor has argued that the additions (where Goodale's name appears) were written for a revival by the King's Men in 1603–4.²⁹ This

would preclude Alleyn's involvement, but would be consistent with a scenario where Goodale was a hired man with the Chamberlain's Men in 1597–8 and remained with them until they became the King's Men.

- 2) Gurr also claims that Goodale was a signatory on a bond to Edward Alleyn dated 18 May 1593, the same month in which Alleyn was named as a sharer in *Strange's Men*; thus, Goodale 'clearly owed allegiance to Alleyn or at the least had financial and theatrical dealings with him through 1593'.³⁰ Gurr is mistaken here; the bond Goodale signed was not to Edward Alleyn, but to his brother John, or to someone of the same name.³¹ John Alleyn was associated with the Admiral's Men in 1589–90 and provides an indirect connection to his brother, but he had no known association with *Strange's Men*.
- 3) Gurr further asserts that apart from the above two records and one associating him with *Berkeley's Men* in 1581, Goodale 'never reappears in any other record'.³² Gurr is again mistaken here. Goodale had five children christened or buried at Allhallows London Wall from 1584 to 1590, had a son christened at St Leonard Shoreditch in 1591, and appears repeatedly in the registers of St Botolph without Aldgate from 1593 to 1599, where he is referred to as 'a player' and 'a player of Enterludes'.³³ As I noted in Kathman (2004), St Botolph Aldgate is more convenient to the Theatre and the Curtain in Shoreditch than it is to the Rose on Bankside, and this location, along with Goodale's absence from Henslowe's Diary, provides some indirect support for the idea that he was with the Lord Chamberlain's Men in the mid-to-late 1590s, performing at the Theatre and the Curtain. In addition, Goodale gave Chancery depositions in 1598 and 1604, the first of which provides some further connections to the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Testifying on behalf of the widow of Henry Bett, a witness in *Burbage v. Brayne* (an earlier lawsuit over the Theatre), Goodale said in 1598 that he had procured an arrest warrant from the late Lord Chamberlain, 'father of the Lo. Chamberlyn that now is' — from Henry Carey, the first patron of the Chamberlain's Men, who died in 1596.³⁴
- 4) Finally, Gurr notes that Goodale does not appear in the list of twenty-six players in the Shakespeare First Folio, asserting that this absence 'hardly supports the idea that Goodale accompanied the seven other surnamed players from the *Sins* 'plot' to become a Chamberlain's Man in 1594'.³⁵ But the Folio list only includes sharers in the Chamberlain's/King's Men, and nobody has ever claimed that Goodale was a sharer in that company — all the evidence indicates that he was a hired man for his entire career. As noted above, the parish register evidence and

Goodale's 1598 deposition do provide some indirect support for the idea that he was with the Chamberlain's Men in the 1590s.

Gurr's final major argument against the 1597–8 dating of the *Sins* plot involves the boys and young men, who are mostly identified only by first names. Five names are associated with female roles in the *Sins* plot (T. Belt, Saunder, Nick, Ro. Go., and Ned), and a sixth (Will) portrays a child. These are the boys, one of whom (T. Belt) also played a minor male role in addition to his female role. Two actors in the plot played young men, but are also identified only by their first names (Kitt and Harry). The lack of surnames obviously makes it harder to identify these actors, but as I showed in Kathman (2004), the most plausible identifications all dovetail with an origin in 1597–8 with the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Most notably, John Heminges of the Chamberlain's Men bound Thomas Belte as an apprentice in the Grocers' Company on 12 November 1595, and subsequently bound Alexander Cooke on 26 January 1597. The first of these must be the 'T Belt' of the *Sins* plot, strongly suggesting that the plot dates from after Belte's binding in November 1595; the second is the same Alexander Cooke who eventually became a sharer in the King's Men, and who has always been the leading candidate to be the 'Saunder' of the plot.³⁶ The boy 'Nick' has often been thought to be Nicholas Tooley, but this is only plausible if we assume a late date for the plot, given that Tooley was born in 1582–3.³⁷ Similarly, Christopher Beeston and Henry Condell have always been the leading candidates for 'Kitt', who played several minor adult male roles, and 'Harry', who played the young man Ferrex. Given that Beeston and Condell were born in 1580 and 1576 respectively (a fact unknown to Greg and other early commentators), they were far too young to be 'Kitt' and 'Harry' if the plot is from 1591, but were just the right ages if it is from 1597–8, when both are otherwise known to have been with the Chamberlain's Men.

Gurr dismisses such identifications, saying that none of them 'is any more secure than finding the "same" of *Dead Man's Fortune* to be the young Samuel Rowley'.³⁸ This assertion is an oversimplification, at the very least; the *Dead Man's Fortune* plot mentions only three names besides 'samme', whereas the *Sins* plot mentions twenty names, providing a much richer context for identifying doubtful ones.³⁹ Still, single names such as 'Nick' and 'Kitt' necessarily involve more uncertainty than fuller names such as 'Tho. Goodale', leaving more room for reasonable skepticism. Little uncertainty, however, can attach to the plot's boy 'T Belt', whom even Gurr acknowledges to be the Thomas Belte apprenticed by Heminges in November 1595. In order to save his early

dating for the *Sins* plot, Gurr attacks the idea that apprentices bound in livery companies, as Belte and Cooke were, could have been boy-actors on the professional stage. He claims that '[t]he various Statutes of Apprentices were all quite specific in declaring that in London such trades as carpentry and printing required an age range for apprentices of between seventeen and twenty-four' and that 'the laws determining apprenticeship for London, where the players took on their boys, generally only admitted boys who were three or more years older than those in the rest of the country', with a minimum age of seventeen.⁴⁰ Gurr claims that because of the difficulty of finding boys that old with the unbroken voices needed to play women, the boys who played such roles on the professional stage could not have been formally apprenticed, and thus Belte's binding is irrelevant for the *Sins* plot.⁴¹

The testimony of former theatrical apprentices, including one who had been bound to Heminges, directly contradicts this last claim of Gurr's. William Trigge was apprenticed to Heminges in the Grocers' company on 20 December 1625, but in 1631 he told the London mayor's court that he had been apprenticed 'pur apprendre l'arte que le dite John hennings adonc vsait ... l'arte d'une Stageplayer' ('to learn the art that the said Heminges used ... the art of a stageplayer'). Documents establish Trigge as playing at least five female roles for the King's Men between 1626 and 1632.⁴² On 27 November 1629, John Wright was apprenticed in the Goldsmiths' company to Andrew Cane of Prince Charles's Men, and two years later Wright was playing Milliscent, a female role, alongside Cane in Shakerley Marmion's *Holland's Leaguer*. In 1655, Wright testified in a Chancery deposition 'that hee himselfe was bound as an Apprentice to the said partie [Cane] for A certaine number of yeares to Learne the trade of A Goldsmith, And hee sayeth that hee this Deponent Did vsually Acte & play partes in Comidydes & Tragedies in the tyme of his Apprenticeship'.⁴³ These are only the most explicit examples from a wealth of documentary evidence showing that boy-actors on the professional London stage were often bound as apprentices to professional actors who were members of livery companies.⁴⁴

Furthermore, the laws Gurr describes, allegedly requiring apprentices to be at least seventeen years old in London, do not exist. The closest thing to Gurr's 'Statutes of Apprentices' is the law passed by Parliament in 1562 and most commonly known as the Statute of Artificers. Among many other provisions, this statute says that apprentices should not be freed before age twenty-four, and it specifies the minimum length of an apprenticeship at seven years. It says nothing about a minimum age for apprentices, though it

does give a maximum, specifying that apprentices should be under twenty-one at the time of binding.⁴⁵ Gurr's assertion that the situation was different in London is correct, though not in the way he claims. In practice, London livery companies collaborated with the common council and the court of aldermen to regulate apprenticeships in the city, with various customs of London often trumping the provisions of national statutes such as the one described above. In response to complaints by livery companies, the London common council passed an ordinance in 1556 (six years before the national statute) saying that no man should be freed by apprenticeship before age twenty-four, but in practice it remained fairly common for London apprentices to be freed around age twenty-one.⁴⁶ More importantly for our purposes, the customary minimum age for London apprentices was fourteen, not seventeen as Gurr claims. (Both limits were somewhat fuzzy in an age without birth certificates when people were sometimes not even aware of their true age, so that it was not uncommon for London apprentices to be freed at twenty or bound at thirteen.)

One of the most explicit statements of this latter custom came in William Trigge's 1631 petition to the London mayor's court, mentioned above. Trigge told the court that his apprenticeship contract with John Heminges should be void because he was under the age of fourteen at the time, and the court eventually granted his request.⁴⁷

We can confirm this customary minimum by looking at the ages of apprentices at the time of their binding, when this information is available. Gurr tries to do this by citing Steve Rappaport's survey of London carpenters' apprentices between 1572 and 1594, which shows most apprentices being bound in their late teens, with an average age of nearly twenty; he claims that this makes 'an irrefutable argument for apprentices having to be close to seventeen at the youngest before they could be enrolled in London'.⁴⁸ But Gurr's claim is undermined by the very data he cites, which shows that some boys were apprenticed in the Carpenters' Company as young as age twelve, a little under the customary minimum. The fact that most were considerably older is undoubtedly due to the fact that carpentry requires a certain amount of physical strength, and has nothing to do with any laws.⁴⁹

When we look at the ages of apprentices bound to professional actors who were freemen of London livery companies, the most common age is fourteen, with some who were thirteen and some who were a bit older. John Heminges's apprentice William Trigge, as noted above, testified that he was thirteen when bound to Heminges. Of the other apprentices bound by Heminges,

Alexander Cooke and Thomas Holcombe were also thirteen when they were bound; Richard Sharpe and Robert Pallant were fourteen; John Wilson was just short of sixteen; and Thomas Belte (of the *Sins* plot) was sixteen.⁵⁰ John Wright and Arthur Savill were both fourteen when they were bound in the Goldsmiths to Andrew Cane of Prince Charles's Men, and so was William Bartlett when he was bound in the Apothecaries to John Bugge of the Queen of Bohemia's Men. William Allam and Henry Savage were fifteen and thirteen respectively when they were bound in the Merchant Taylors to Francis Walpole of Queen Anne's Men.⁵¹ Gurr makes a point of noting that Belte was sixteen when apprenticed to Heminges, but in fact Belte was unusually old for a theatrical apprentice, as these figures show.⁵²

We can corroborate the figures by looking at the ages of boys known to have played specific female roles on the (adult) professional stage. The lower age limit we find for such boys is roughly thirteen, corresponding closely to the lower age limit for binding apprentices. As we saw above, William Trigge testified that he was thirteen when apprenticed to Heminges, and so was probably at least fourteen when he played Julia in Philip Massinger's *The Roman Actor* (licensed 11 October 1626). When Prince Charles's Men performed *Holland's Leaguer* in December 1631, Arthur Savill (who played Quartilla) was fourteen, and Robert Stratford (who played Triphoena) was thirteen. Several other boys are documented playing female roles when they were thirteen or fourteen, including Richard Robinson in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (1611) and Thomas Holcombe in *Sir John Van Olden Barnavelte* (1619). Alexander Goughe may have been as young as twelve when he played a concubine in *The Roman Actor* alongside Trigge, but he may have been up to three years older. At the other end of the range, some boys played female roles into their early twenties, close to the age at which apprenticeships commonly ended in London, though some transitioned to male roles in their late teens.⁵³

This correspondence undercuts another of Gurr's claims — that boys could act onstage for years before being formally bound as apprentices, a claim that is basically required by his (erroneous) belief that apprentices in London needed to be at least seventeen years old. Gurr asserts that Thomas Belte could have been taken on 'unofficially' by Heminges in 1591, acted in *Sins* for Strange's Men that year, and only later been officially apprenticed by Heminges in November 1595.⁵⁴ One major problem with this scenario is the fact that Belte played a minor male role in *Sins* (a servant) as well as the female role of Panthea. Such male-female doubling was not unknown for

apprentices in their late teens, as Belte was in 1597–8, but is much less plausible for a boy of twelve, as Belte was in 1591.⁵⁵ For one thing, the effective minimum for stage actors (except those playing small children, such as the princes in *Richard III*) was thirteen or fourteen, as noted above; for another, the surviving evidence indicates that boys that young were restricted to female roles. The youngest actor I have found playing a male role is John Honeyman, a former performer of female roles for the King's Men who made his male debut playing Sly the servant at age seventeen.⁵⁶ More broadly, there is no evidence for the type of unofficial pre-apprenticeship envisioned by Gurr, especially not for boy-actors on the professional stage. As we saw earlier, William Trigge and John Wright both testified about acting during their apprenticeships, but neither mentioned any kind of pre-apprenticeship, and the only records of their appearing onstage are from after their binding. I have found dozens of instances of professional players binding apprentices in livery companies, and in none of these cases does any evidence suggest that the apprentice appeared onstage before being bound. In contrast, there are numerous cases of apprentices showing up in the theatrical record soon after being bound, including Trigge and Arthur Savill, who performed in *Holland's Leaguer* within four months of his apprenticeship to Andrew Cane in August 1631.⁵⁷

In general, Gurr tries to sow doubt over our knowledge of boy-actors and apprentices in the Elizabethan theatre, saying that the record of Belte's binding 'helps to open up large questions about the function of the players who enlisted boys as their "apprentices"', and that 'the age of the boys who played the women's parts has been widely debated'.⁵⁸ While it is true that the surviving records are not as complete as we might like, the outlines and many details of the early modern theatrical apprenticeship system are much clearer than Gurr implies. Boys were typically apprenticed to professional players at the age of thirteen or fourteen, sometimes a year or two later, for terms of at least seven years. Many of the players who bound these apprentices, but not all of them, were freemen of London livery companies. The evidence we have suggests that apprentices would start to play minor female roles soon after being bound, eventually graduating to more demanding female roles if they were good enough, and then to male roles in their late teens or early twenties (the timing no doubt depending on each boy's physical development).⁵⁹ Thus, the fact that Thomas Belte was apprenticed to John Heminges in November 1595, combined with his presence in the *Sins* plot, is strong evidence that the plot was written after that date.

But Belte's binding is only one part of a mosaic of evidence pointing towards the plot's origin in 1597–8 with the Lord Chamberlain's Men, as this paper has reaffirmed. Gurr depicts an oversimplified version of this evidence, and his counter-arguments do not hold water. The presence of 'Hand C' in the *Sins* plot is neutral evidence at best, despite Gurr's efforts to make it a problem for the 1597–8 date. The claim that plays with large casts were only written in 1588–94, and that dating the *Sins* plot outside that range would make it an anomaly, turns out to be a chimera not supported by the facts. Gurr's assumption that only sharers were designated 'Mr' in the plot is problematic, and his discussion of Thomas Goodale includes several errors and dubious assumptions. Most importantly, a mass of documentary evidence contradicts his confident assertions about London apprentices and boy-actors, assertions with which he attempts to discredit the Belte binding. The *Seven Deadly Sins* plot is an important document for Elizabethan theatre history, and certainly allows more room for discussion and disagreement over its exact origins and meaning; however, such discussions require high standards of evidence and arguments, which Gurr's article does not provide.

Notes

- 1 Andrew Gurr, 'The Work of Elizabethan Plotters, and 2 *The Seven Deadly Sins*', *Early Theatre* 10.1 (2007), 67–87.
- 2 W.W. Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses: Documents* (Oxford, 1931). Since Gurr's article appeared, Tiffany Stern, in *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2009), 201–31, has provided further discussion of these documents, which she calls 'backstage-plots' to distinguish them from 'plots' that summarized the story of a masque for its audience, and 'author-plots' that formed an outline for playwrights as they wrote a play.
- 3 David Kathman, 'Reconsidering *The Seven Deadly Sins*', *Early Theatre* 7.2 (2004), 13–44.
- 4 The quotations are from Edmond Malone (ed.), *Supplement to the Edition of Shakespeare Published in 1778* (London, 1780), 1.58, 61.
- 5 Stern, *Documents of Performance*, 202–3, suggests that the *Sins* plot came to Boswell through Steevens rather than Malone. The question is not very important for our purposes, since Malone and Steevens worked closely together and shared many documents.

- 6 Much more detail about all this can be found in Kathman, 'Reconsidering', 14–18. Three other manuscript 'plots' (of *Frederick and Basilea*, *The Battle of Alcazar*, and *The Dead Man's Fortune*) also appeared in the same 1825 auction catalogue, but Dulwich was unable to claim them in the absence of explicit evidence such as Steevens's 1780 mention of the *Sins* plot, even though two of the plots contained Edward Alleyn's name. All three are now in the British Library, where they are Add. ms 10, 449.
- 7 Gurr, 'Work', 85n13.
- 8 Kathman, 'Reconsidering', 25–6.
- 9 Ibid, 26–9.
- 10 Gurr, 'Work', 80.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Kathman, 'Reconsidering', 32.
- 13 Ibid, 20–1. Thomas Dekker was paid for *Fortune's Tennis* on 6 September 1600, which would seem to date this plot from after that date. However, Greg dated the *2 Fortune's Tennis* plot to 1597–8 primarily because Charles Massey and Samuel Rowley, whom he accepts as the 'Charles' and 'Sam' who appear in the plot (without a 'Mr' designation), were already sharers in the Admiral's Men by 1600. See R.A. Foakes (ed.), *Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge, 2002), 331.
- 14 There has been some dispute about the date written on the *John a Kent and John a Cumber* manuscript; some scholars have seen it as 1590 or 1596, but most recently Grace Ioppolo has seen it as 1595 in *Dramatists and their Manuscripts in the Age of Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and Heywood: Authorship, Authority, and the Playhouse* (London, 2006), 101. The choice among these dates is not crucial for the present argument.
- 15 Gurr, 'Work', 76.
- 16 J.W. Ashton, 'The Date of *John A Kent and John A Cumber*', *Philological Quarterly* 8 (1929), 225–32; Roslyn Knutson, 'Play Identifications: *The Wise Man of West Chester* and *John a Kent and John a Cumber*; *Longshanks* and *Edward I*', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 47.1 (1984), 1–11. As Knutson notes, competing plays about similar subject matter were common in the 1590s, so any identification of plays based on titles alone must remain speculative. Moreover, in this particular case Gurr exaggerates the alleged similarity in titles, as discussed below.
- 17 In *Shakespeare's Opposites* (Cambridge, 2009), Gurr claims that 'Henslowe's titles, including his occasional plural for the wise men, do fit Munday's play very precisely' (59). Gurr is mistaken here; Henslowe always uses the singular 'wise man' (and its spelling variations) every time he mentions this play in the Diary, as a systematic look through R.A. Foakes's 2002 Cambridge edition reveals.

- 18 G. Harold Metz, *Sources of Four Plays Ascribed to Shakespeare* (Columbia, Missouri, 1989), 162–72; Scott McMillin, *The Elizabethan Theatre and the Book of Sir Thomas More* (Ithaca and London, 1987), 74–95.
- 19 In *Shakespeare's Opposites*, Gurr is initially somewhat less dogmatic about the identification of *John a Kent* with *The Wise Man of West Chester*, merely calling it 'very likely' (58). However, he goes on to assume that it is correct, even listing both plays in the index under the nonexistent title *The Wise Men of West Chester* (317) when, as noted above, the title is always *The Wise Man of West Chester* in Henslowe's Diary.
- 20 Gurr cites his own discussion in *The Shakespearean Playing Companies* (Oxford, 1996), 58–9, where he in turn cites McMillin, *The Elizabethan Theatre and the Book of Sir Thomas More*; David Bradley, *From Text to Performance in the Elizabethan Theatre: Preparing the Play for the Stage* (Cambridge, 1992); and T.J. King, *Casting Shakespeare's Plays: London Actors and Their Roles, 1590–1642* (Cambridge, 1992).
- 21 Gurr, 'Work', 77.
- 22 McMillin, *The Elizabethan Theatre and the Book of Sir Thomas More*, 57. What appears to have happened is that in *The Shakespearean Playing Companies*, Gurr only listed the pre-1595 plays from McMillin's table because that is the period he was discussing, and when writing the *Early Theatre* article he referred to this discussion but forgot that McMillin had also listed post-1594 plays.
- 23 It is possible to reconstruct Gurr's list of fourteen plays from his discussion in *The Shakespearean Playing Companies*, 58–9; they include eight plays listed by Bradley, plus six others listed by McMillin but not Bradley, including *2 Seven Deadly Sins*.
- 24 As I note in Kathman, 'Reconsidering', 13, the play represented in the plot is usually thought to be the same as Richard Tarlton's 'famous play of the seauen Deadly sinnes' mentioned by Thomas Nashe and Gabriel Harvey in 1592, which would date it to before Tarlton's death in 1588.
- 25 King, *Casting Shakespeare's Plays*, 113.
- 26 Only twelve adult actors are named in the *Frederick and Basilea* plot, but King's number includes five unnamed actors playing minor parts, just as his figures for the *Sins* plot include the unnamed actors playing Lydgate and Henry VI. Similarly, King's figure for *The Battle of Alcazar* includes the unnamed actors playing Sebastian (a major role) and Calipolis (a minor role).
- 27 Gurr, 'Work', 80. Gurr also (81–2) discusses John Holland and John Sincler, but merely asserts that their presence in the plot supports a date of 1591, based on no evidence other than speculative reconstructions of their careers.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 80–1.
- 29 Gary Taylor, 'The Date and Auspices of the Additions to Sir Thomas More', in T.H. Howard-Hill (ed.), *'Sir Thomas More': Essays on the Play and its Shakespearean*

- Interest* (Cambridge, 1989), 101–21. See also Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (eds), *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford, 1987), 124–5, and John Jowett (ed), *Sir Thomas More* (London, 2011), 424–33.
- 30 Gurr, ‘Work’, 81.
- 31 Mark Eccles, ‘Elizabethan Actors II: E-J’, *Notes and Queries* 236 (1991), 455. Gurr’s error probably came from W.W. Greg’s edition of *Henslowe’s Diary*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1908), 2.295, which says that the bond was to Edward Alleyn; however, as Eccles notes, Greg later corrected his error in ‘The Evidence of Theatrical Plots for the History of the Elizabethan Stage’, *Review of English Studies* 1 (1925), 269n.
- 32 Gurr, ‘Work’, 81.
- 33 Eccles, ‘Elizabethan Actors II: E-J’, 455.
- 34 *Ibid*, 456, citing C24/264/58 (Bett v. Ware), and C24/312/22 (Crofte v. Turner).
- 35 Gurr, ‘Work’, 81.
- 36 Kathman, ‘Reconsidering’, 28. Many professional players were members of livery companies such as the Grocers and bound apprentices in those companies while training them on the stage, as documented at length in David Kathman, ‘Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers: Freeman and Apprentices in the Elizabethan Theater’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55 (2004), 1–49.
- 37 Tooley would have been eight or nine in 1591, which might seem a possible age for a ‘boy’, but in fact all the evidence indicates that the boys who played female roles on the Elizabethan stage were between thirteen and twenty-one years old, as discussed below.
- 38 Gurr, ‘Work’, 80.
- 39 Gurr oddly asserts that the Darlowe of the *Dead Man’s Fortune* plot ‘cannot be identified’ (73), but in fact he is Richard Darlowe, who lived in St Botolph Bishopsgate and St Botolph Aldgate, travelled to France as a player in late 1598, and died in 1599. See Kathman, ‘Reconsidering’, 21, and Mark Eccles, ‘Elizabethan Actors I: A-D’, *Notes and Queries* 236 (1991), 45.
- 40 Gurr, ‘Work’, 82–3.
- 41 Gurr’s claim that apprentices needed to be at least seventeen in London, and thus that boy-actors could not have been formally apprenticed in livery companies, also found its way into the fourth edition of his *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London* (Cambridge, 2004), 310n27.
- 42 Kathman, ‘Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers’, 10–11.
- 43 *Ibid*, 5–6.
- 44 Much of this evidence is detailed in Kathman, ‘Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers’.
- 45 The text of the statute (5 Eliza.c.4) is in *Statutes of the Realm* (Buffalo NY, 1993), 4.1.414–22, a reprint of the 1810–28 edition; a slightly abridged version is in R.H.

- Tawney and Eileen Power (eds), *Tudor Economic Documents* (London, 1924), 338–50. The provisions that an apprentice should be bound for at least seven years, and that his contract should not expire before he is twenty-four, are in section XIX. The provision that an apprentice should be under twenty-one at the time of binding is in section XXIX. Presumably Gurr got his alleged minimum age of seventeen by taking the minimum age at freedom (twenty-four) and subtracting the minimum length of an apprenticeship (seven years). But this assumes that apprenticeships could only be for seven years, when in fact many (probably most) were for longer periods, sometimes up to a dozen years.
- 46 The 1556 ordinance is described in Steve Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge, 1989), 323. Professional players who were freed between the ages of twenty and twenty-two after serving apprenticeships in livery companies include John Heminges, Ben Jonson, Arthur Savill, and Francis Walpole. See Kathman, ‘Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers’, 7, 31, 36, 41.
- 47 Kathman, ‘Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers’, 10–11; David Kathman, ‘How Old Were Shakespeare’s Boy Actors?’, *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (2005), 220–46, esp. 226. In his petition, written in legal French, Trigge said ‘que le dite vntiesme iour de december il fuist dedans le age de quatorzieme ans c’esta scavoir de l’age de xiii ans et non plus pur quoy Lavant dite Indenture est void’ (‘that the said twentieth day of December he was under the age of fourteen, that is to say, the age of thirteen years and no more, for which reason the abovementioned indenture is void’). Trigge’s petition, formerly in the Corporation of London Record Office, is now in London Metropolitan Archives CLA/024/02/082, m.54.
- 48 Gurr, ‘Work’, 87n28 and n29, citing Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, 295. Gurr also mentions ‘Don McKenzie’s detailed lists of printers’ apprentices’, but he does not cite a source, and I have been unable to trace what he is referring to. The most obvious candidate is D.F. McKenzie, ‘A List of Printers’ Apprentices, 1605–1640’, *Studies in Bibliography* 13 (1960), 110–43, but that list does not give the apprentices’ ages.
- 49 Rappaport’s figures also show apprentices as old as thirty being bound in the Carpenters, contrary to the requirement in the Statute of Apprentices that apprentices be no older than twenty-one when bound. This is further evidence that London enforced its own rules, rather than being bound by the letter of the Statute.
- 50 For Heminges and his apprentices, see Kathman, ‘Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers’, 6–11, and for the birth dates of Cooke, Sharpe, Holcombe, and Pallant, see also Kathman, ‘How Old?’, 230, 233–4. Belte was baptized in Shelton, Norfolk on

- 16 April 1579, the son of Thomas Belte, minstrel; see Lawrence Manley, 'Thomas Belte, Elizabethan Boy Actor', *Notes and Queries* 252 (2007), 310–3.
- 51 For Wright and Savill, see Kathman, 'How Old?', 224. For the others, see Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers', 20, 41, and David Kathman, 'Players, Livery Companies, and Apprentices', in Richard Dutton (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre* (Oxford, 2009), 413–28, esp. 427n15.
- 52 Gurr, 'Work', 87n29.
- 53 For the details of these examples, along with much more discussion, see Kathman, 'How Old?', especially 223–8 and 232–3.
- 54 Gurr, 'Work', 84. Gurr follows up this argument by claiming that Thomas Marbeck appears in the plot of *I Tamar Cam* in 1602 for the Admiral's Men, playing several parts, including a child, at the age of twenty-five. However, Marbeck does not appear in that plot; Gurr is presumably thinking of Thomas Parsons, who does appear in that plot playing both male and female roles, but whose exact age is unknown. See Kathman, 'How Old?', 229.
- 55 Kathman, 'How Old?', 225–6, 228–31.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 226.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 223–4. Other boys discussed in that article who appear in cast lists within eighteen months after being apprenticed include Thomas Holcombe and Stephen Hammerton, and several others, including John Wright, appear in cast lists within two or three years of their binding.
- 58 Gurr, 'Work', 83.
- 59 Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers' and Kathman, 'How Old?' provide many more details of the theatrical apprenticeship system, and Kathman, 'Players, Livery Companies, and Apprentices' summarizes the findings of the other two articles while providing more historical context.