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# The boy actors of the Elizabethan period 1558-161

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Boston University

Graduate School

Thesis

The Boy Actors of the Elizabethan Period

1558-1610

by

Dorris Elizabeth Newton

(B. S. in practical Arts and Letters, Boston University 1931)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the re-

quirements for the degree of Master

of Arts

1933

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In regard to the dates limiting the Elizabethan period, I have chosen the date 1558, because that is the date of Elizabeth's accession and also the beginning of the boys' careers as actors; and I have chosen 1610 as the closing date, because it was in that year that the Lord Chamberlain's Men took over the Blackfriar's Theater. This change of the Children of the Chapel to Whitefriars is final proof of the fact that their popularity had waned if not ceased.

## Chapter I

### Origin and Development of the Drama

In order to appreciate fully the important position which the companies of children held in English dramatic life during the reign of Elizabeth, it is necessary first to glance at the history of English drama. As everyone, who has studied the drama at all knows, it originated in the church. The tiny germ first appeared in the form of tropes or interpolated passages, as a part of the service appropriate for special days such as Easter and Christmas. These tropes were nothing more than the chanting of the ritual combined with living tableaux to illustrate the gospel story. (1) Quite naturally, as time went on, these chanted dialogues grew in length until they were long enough to be classed as liturgical plays --- liturgical because they were a part of the regular liturgy of the mass service. But the growth of the drama did not stop at this point. The liturgical plays, in turn, grew so rapidly that soon the church was no longer large enough to accommodate them, and they were forced to overflow into the church yard.

As soon as these plays escaped the confining influence of the church walls, they were taken over by the various trade guilds. This change had largely taken place by 1300. The Bible was still the source for plots; but the Bible is large, and consequently, many plays ranging from the

(1) Hall, A. C. and Hurley, B. B.: Outlines of English Literature  
p. 36

Creation of the World to the final Day of Judgment appeared.

"Approximately four hundred years of gradual development saw them built into vast cycles which were presented at least once a year, especially on the festival of Corpus Christi, in the principal towns of England". (1) No cycle was the work of one author; but was rather of composite authorship and of gradual growth. These plays were usually presented by the united trade guilds, each guild being responsible for the play most suited to its trade. Thus the baker's guild presented The Last Supper; the goldsmith's, The Glorification, etc. They were presented on pageant cars, or two-story wagons, which served as both stage and dressing room, each play having an individual car.

The cycle plays are important, because for the first time the drama appeared in the vernacular, and because the seed of both comedy and tragedy is found here. But their most valuable contribution from the point of view of this thesis is the themes of rebellion against divine law and inevitable punishment which runs through all of their plays. This theme, we find, was very popular with Elizabethan playwrights.

But the development of the drama did not stop with the cycle plays. It soon exhausted the Bible and adopted abstractions for subjects. As a result the morality plays came into existence. These dramatized moral allegories with personified abstractions for characters never appeared in cycles, but only in separate plays. They presented man struggling with the

(1) Ibid., p.36

powers of good and evil in his effort to obtain his salvation. Morality plays were still being presented when Elizabeth became queen; but they were no longer as popular as they had been during the reigns of the other Tudors.

Until the opening of the sixteenth century the primary purpose of the plays had been to teach; but with the appearance of John Heywood (1497-1577), the drama changed radically. He stated that plays were written to be acted and were acted to please the audience. His plays were called interludes and were used either between scenes in longer plays or at banquets and entertainments. (1)

We must not omit the folk plays in this brief survey of the drama, for we shall find their influence as well as that of the more formal drama upon Elizabethan plays. One of the Hock Tuesday plays was revived to be performed before Elizabeth in 1575. Most of these plays were outgrowths of ancient village customs and games. Among these plays were the Morris Dancers, Mummers' Plays, St. George Plays, and Robin Hood plays. The last group is the first example of an expression of national feeling. Robin Hood was a sort of national hero and there grew up around him a very definite patriotic element in the plays. (2)

An ancient characteristic of the English people is their love of much show in pageantry. These pageants were so elaborate that they should be considered as a definite element in the development of the drama. Later the pageant occupies one or two scenes within the plays; but originally the plays

(1) Ibid., p. 44

(2) Ibid., p. 44



were an incidental element in the pageant.

The following quotation is an example of this spectacular display. "Jousts of Honor, February 12, 1511 ..... There followed at night after a banquet to the ambassadors, other entertainments in the richly decorated "hite Hall of the Palace, which was scaffolded and rayed on all partes for the large audience. First there was 'an interlude of the gentlemen of his chapell before his grace and diuers freshe songes' followed by dancing of lords and ladies to music of minstrels in the midst of which was wheeled in a grand pageant called 'ye gollðyn arber of ye arche yerd of pleyser'. It was a huge movable stage in the form of an arbor adorned with purple and gold, having benches wrought of roses, lilies, marigolds, gillyflowers, primroses, cowslips and other kingly flowers, with an orchard of rare fruits all embowered by a silver vine bearing 350 clusters of grapes of gold. It contained thirty persons, and its great weight broke the floor as it moved up the hall. On the sides were eight minstrels with strange instruments and in the top the Children of the Chapele singing." (1)

The development of the drama is interesting, but the phase in which we are particularly interested is the part which the children played in this development.

We have seen that "the first actors were priests; the first play a part of the service; the first audience, worshippers; the first stage, a cathedral. But the priests were not the only actors, for there were the choir boys admirably suited by

(1) Wallace C.W. Evolution of English Drama up to Shakespeare  
p. 42

their voices, training, and figures for particular "parts". One has only to remember the angels at the tomb in the Garden of Joseph of Arimathaea, or the boy Isaac, in the earliest of the cycle plays, to realize that boy actors would be needed. It would be rash, however, to attach too much importance to the participation of the choir-boys during this earliest medieval period; for although they took prominent parts in all the religious services, it must be remembered that, numerically, very few of them could be used in dramatic services, as there were rarely more than three characters in the most primitive plays." (1)

The first definite record which I have found of boys being connected with church services is in 911, when King Conrad I spent Christmas with Bishop Solomon at Constance. They visited the Vespers procession at the monastery of St. Gall which, "was very amusing especially the procession of children, so grave and sedate that even when Conrad bade his train roll apples along the aisle, they did not budge." (2) The famous song-school at the St. Gall monastery played an important part in the elaboration of the church service, in the tenth century, which gave rise to the tropes. The Winchester tropes for the days of St. Stephen, St. John, and Holy Innocents were presented by the deacons, priests, and choir-boys especially. (3)

Thus we find that the children were connected with the very earliest stages of the drama. They were connected with

(1) Motter, Vail T.H. School Drama in England p.3

(2) Chambers, E.K. Mediaeval Stage Vol. I p. 338

(3) Ibid., p.338

the days of revelry especially. The triduum was similar to the Feast of Fools which was finally suppressed, because it was mockery of divine worship and because the revelers did much damage to the church vestments. The boys participated in both of the above celebrations. But the festival which was more popular in England than either of these was that of the Boy Bishop. It was not suppressed, because only the children took part and they could be disciplined; whereas the men and boys acting together in the Feast of the Fools could not be controlled so easily. The Feast of the Boys, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, was in celebration of St. Nicholas' Day. One boy was chosen to be bishop, and from St. Nicholas Day until Holy Innocents Day he was allowed to perform all of the duties of the priest with the exception of the Mass. The other boys paid him the same respect that they paid the real bishop. He was accompanied by a boy cantor and a boy chaplain. During this festival the men holding superior offices assumed the duties of the minor offices and did reverence to the boys with all sincerity. The Boy Bishop of St. Paul's was accustomed to preach a sermon; but, of course, he did not write it himself.

I found no record of boys taking part in liturgical plays. However, Mr. Chambers says, "Miracle-plays, (cycle-plays) must often have been performed in choir schools especially upon the traditional feast days of St. Nicholas, St. Catherine, and Holy Innocents. But there are only two

examples, besides that of St. Paul's in 1378, actually upon record. In 1430 the pueri eleemosynae of Maxtoke acted on Candlemas day in the hall of Lord Clinton's castle; and in 1486 those of St. Swithin's and Hyde abbeys combined to entertain Henry VII with the Harrowing of Hell as he sat at dinner in Winchester."(1)

The boys took part in the late-moralities .The educational morality of Wyt and Science by John Redford was written especially for the Singing Boys at St. Paul's Cathedral.(2) They also played in Heywood's interludes;(3) and they shared the honors with their elders in the presentation of folk plays.(4)

Also we find that the children had their place in pageantry as they had it in all other phases of the drama. This is the only branch in which I have found girls assisting the boys in presentation. But at the coronation of Richard II in 1377, there appeared on the four towers of the elaborate castle erected at the head of Cheapside "four white-robed damsels, who wafted golden leaves in the king's face, dropped gilt models of coin upon him and his steed, and offered him wine from pipes laid on the structure. Between the towers was a Golden Angel which by a mechanical device bent forward and held out a crown as Richard drew near. Similar stages, with a coelicus ordo of singers and boys and maidens offering wine and golden crowns stood in Cheapside when Richard again rode through the city in 1392 in token of reconciliation with

(1) Ibid., p. 121 Vol. II

(2) Adams, J. Q. Chief Pre-Shakespearean Drama p. 325

(3) Ibid., p. 367

the rebellious Londoners." (1)

## Chapter II

### Origin of Court and School Drama

The children with ~~whom~~ this thesis is primarily concerned are those belonging either to Elizabethan schools or royal chapels. But during the period from the tenth to the fifteenth century the boys mentioned as participating in the various types of drama were for the most part, either members of the old monastery religious choir-schools, or as in case of folk plays and pageantry, they were simply members of the village.

The Chapel Royal has nothing to do with the old monasteries where the Feast of Fools and Boy Bishop festivities originated. It belongs to the Royal palace. It consists of a "dean, sub-dean, chaplains, priest-in-ordinary, and a numerous lay choir called gentlemen (and children),<sup>of</sup> the chapel, with a clerk of the closet, deputy-clerks of the closet, and organist. The chaplains share the duties of preaching; the liturgical offices are performed by the dean, sub-deans, and priest-in-ordinary. The establishment is bound to attend the sovereign wherever the Court happens to be; but in fact the services of the chapel are confined to London." (2) During the reign of Elizabeth the lay choir was made up of children only. Throughout this thesis, when I speak of

(1) Ibid., p. 167

(2) Chambers' Encyclopaedia - Vol. III p. 105

the Children of the Chapel Royal, it is to these to whom I refer.

"The origin of the Chapel is lost in unrecorded antiquity, the date of its earliest histrionic efforts is uncertain, and the records of its later activity are woefully incomplete. It was an organization primarily for the celebration of divine service in the royal household and its functions in its earliest years were perhaps limited to this primary purpose." As Mr. Wallace says, "The choir-boys ministered by song to the spiritual well-being of the sovereign and his household." (2) But early in the fifteenth century there were notable unofficial additions made to the duties of the Chapel Children. They frequently took part in pageants, masques, and plays presented at Christmas or on other special occasions.

The first mention of the choir-boys which Mr. Wallace has found is in a commission which Henry V issued in 1420 to a cleric of the chapel giving him permission to enforce boys who could sing to join the Chapel Choir. The first record of them acting does not appear until the reign of Henry VII. However, there is a record of their appearing as mermaids in pageants of pantomime and song on Christmas 1490. (3) Such commissions to impress both men and boys who were noted for their ability to sing were issued again and again from the time of Henry V to Elizabeth.

Although the children selected to membership in the Chapel Royal had no choice in the matter, they received very

(1) Cambridge History of English Literature Vol. VI p.279

(2) Wallace, C.W. Evolution of English Drama up to Shakespeare p.11

(3) Ibid., p.14

good care and I should think they would have felt honored to be among the few chosen to entertain royalty. The Eltham Ordinances show that Henry VIII put aside £56<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>, 13s, 4d each year for ten boys. They were paid 20s for singing the Audivi at All Hallows; 40s for Gloria in Excelsis on Christmas, and 6l, 13s, 4d for Saint Nicholas Busshop on St. Nicholas day. In addition the king gave them each a Christmas gift and rewards throughout the year. Records of Princess Mary's Privy Purse Expenses show that she was accustomed to giving the children money also. (1) Board and lodging were provided for the master and the children.

It is easy to imagine that these eight or ten boys, because of their superior position, were the envy of their play-mates. Perhaps a popular game among sixteenth century <sup>children</sup> was to pretend they were singing for the king. But they were not so fortunate as the young friends that they had left at home thought they were. The children who were not retained after their voices had changed often returned to their families discontented and dissatisfied, because their home environment was not so pleasant as that to which they were accustomed at the Chapel Royal. Nor was their life at the Chapel always pleasant; for if their master did not understand children or did not like them, he could make them very unhappy.

Although there had been children at the Chapel since 1420, they did not have a separate master until about the middle of the reign of Henry VI. Prior to that time, they were

(1) Ibid., p. 84

supervised by the Dean or Sub-Dean. John Plummer took up his duties as the first choir-master, September 29, 1444. (1) The choir which he had to train ranged from eight to twelve children. The office of Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal was considered a place of honor. Not everyone could hope to attain the position, for he had to be both a musician and a poet. He was expected to write the songs, dialogues, dances, and masques for the children "to perform as 'interludia' after a great banquet or as an independent and more ambitious dramatic entertainment." (2)

William Cornish, who was the first important Master of the Chapel, took up his duties in 1509. He was not only a famous poet and composer but an eminent page<sup>a</sup>nter as well. (3) From the time of his taking over his duties as Master of the Chapel Royal until his death, his children presented very elaborate pageants filled with songs and clever dialogues which he wrote. When the king, in 1520, drew up the program for the meeting on the Field of the Cloth of Gold, he turned over to Cornish the entire responsibility for the pageants to be given at the banquet. He "with his ten children and the whole Chapel Royal attended the King, and their divine singing was one of the features of the festivities." (4) Under Cornish's mastership the king's pageants had added acting with dialogue to the series of pantomimes and song. Thus between the years 1509 and 1523 (the date of his death), Cornish was responsible for several definite changes in the

(1) Ibid., p. 22

(2) Ibid., p. 14

(3) Ibid., p. 37

(4) Ibid., p. 56



character of performances which the Children of the Chapel presented.

Upon his death, Crane was appointed Master of the Children; but for several reasons he was unable to meet the high standard which Cornish had set and the "glory of Court entertainment began to deminish." (1)

This circumstance may be explained partially by the fact that it is always very difficult and very embarrassing to be the successor of someone who has been unusually gifted and very popular. In addition to this more personal view of the situation, there were other reasons over which Crane had no control. There was no-one else at Court who could assist Crane by writing plays or composing songs. Besides, Henry was losing his youthful craving for entertainment. He had begun to direct his energies into the channels of state affairs. However, if all the records had been preserved, we would probably find that the boys acted at Court almost every year while Crane was in office. In addition we find that under Crane the outside companies, who had not been invited to Court during Cornish's administration, began to appear again. The earliest record is of a play presented by Dean Colet's School of St. Paul's under the mastership of John Rightwise in 1527. (2)

Neither Crane nor his successor, Richard Bower, has left us any music, poems, or interludes which they wrote unless perhaps, Bower is the R. B. who wrote Appius and Virginia (3)

The most popular playwright during Bower's master-

(1) Ibid., p. 64

(2) Wallace, W. C.: Evolution of English Drama up to Shakespeare p. 66

(3) Ibid., p. 77

ship and the first to fill the literary vacancy left by Cornish was John Heywood. He had grown up in the Chapel, and probably sang and acted in several of Cornish's pieces when Cornish was master. It is <sup>of</sup> passing interest that one of this great Master's own boys should develop sufficient talent to take his place. There is no record of Heywood's writing for or being any way connected with any other children's company than the Children of the Chapel Royal.

The Chapel Choir at St. Paul's existed as far back as the twelfth century. Many authors do not make themselves clear in speaking of this chapel. They speak of both the choir boys and Dean Colet's school-boys as "St. Paul's boys". As a result there has been much confusion about who is meant by St. Paul's boys. But it is generally believed that the "pueri eleemosinari" formed the nucleus of the choir school. The song school met on the south side of St. Paul's and the grammar school on the east.

As early as 1378 the choir boys at St. Paul's (and hereafter when I say St. Paul's boys I mean the choir boys) presented a play on the history of the Old Testament for public entertainment. We know that from that time on they acted in court plays; but for some reason which Mr. Chambers does not explain there is a gap in the recorded dramatic history of St. Paul's choir. (1)

The Chapel Royal at Windsor, which had been in existence as far back as the reign of Henry I was sponsored by

an ecclesiastical college. It consisted of six boy-choristers. These boys were to be "enclined with clear and tuneable" voices and when their voices changed, positions were provided for them as clerks. They lived at the Castle in a room north of the chapel. "The music was usyd after ye order and manner of ye quene's chapell. One of the clerks whose position corresponded to that of Gentleman of the household of Chapel Royal was appointed by the Chapter of the College to act as organist and Master of the Children. The College was privileged like the Chapel Royal itself, to recruit its choir by impressment." (1) It entertained the royal household when they came to Windsor.

There are comparatively few Pre-Elizabethan court plays extant which the boys presented. It has already been pointed out that there are none of Crane's or Bower's. Many of the plays were masques and interludes of so light a character and so closely linked with the period that they did not live beyond the century in which they were created. They lacked the quality of universality which the Elizabethan plays possessed. Heywood is the only man whose plays find a place in a survey of the history of drama. And they are important only because they possess a new feature which has not been found in plays heretofore. They are necessary in tracing the growth of the drama; but they are of little literary importance in themselves.

There is much more data on the origin and

(1) Chambers, E.K. Elizabethan Stage Vol. II p.62

formative years of the English educational institutions than there is on the Chapel Choirs. Oxford and Cambridge Universities were established in the twelfth century as a result of the wave of intellectual awakening which spread through Europe at that time. There were courses in Latin, Greek, Law, Medicine, Philosophy and Theology. (1) Latin was the language of the class room and all of the text books were written in Latin. In addition to this the scholars held long and involved disputations in that language. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries only the most learned scholars attended the Universities; but in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, when a boy who had attended a grammar school became thirteen or fourteen years of age, he was ready to enter the university.

The grammar schools did not appear so early as the universities. They are connected with the humanistic movement of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Many were founded in England during the reigns of Henry VIII and his three children. Those which concern us the most are Westminster, Eton, St. Paul's (Dean Colet's) and Merchant Taylor's; but the Winchester and Shrewsbury schools were also important. These schools exist today as they did in the sixteenth century; but the life of the school boy and the type of education which he received has changed a great deal. The studies which these

(1) Boas, Henrietta: In Shakespeare's England ;p. 71

sixteenth century boys pursued were Latin and Greek with plenty of drill in gram<sup>m</sup>ar, for they had to be able to speak Latin fluently before they were allowed to ~~then~~ enter the university. (1) The schools in which we are particularly interested also included as a part of the curriculum a thorough study of the fundamentals of singing and music. That is why we are interested in them.

Of the above mentioned grammar schools the one at Westminster was the oldest. The first trace of it runs back to the fourteenth century. Prior to that time, the abbey had provided education for the novices. But from 1354 there were almony boys (*pueri eleemosinariae*) who performed in the ludus of the Boy Bishop on St. Nicholas day which has been mentioned before. From 1510 these boys were called *pueri grammatici* to distinguish them from *pueri cantantes* who had a separate teacher. Thus we are led to infer that originally there were two separate schools or at least two different teachers -- the grammar school teacher and the singing school teacher. In 1540 when the abbey was dissolved under Henry VIII, the *pueri grammatici* were re-organized as the college of St. Peter, Westminster, providing for forty scholars. (2)

The King's College of Our Lady at Eton was founded by Henry VI in 1441. The statutes of 1444 provided for a Boy Bishop; but the custom was discontinued before Elizabeth's reign and the Christmas plays which the boys presented took

(1) Boas, Henrietta: In Shakespeare's England p. 60  
 (2) Chambers, E. K: Elizabethan Stage p. 70

their place.

Dean Colet's School at St. Paul's Church was re-founded in 1510 by John Colet, the Dean of the church, upon the advice of Erasmus who urged him to reconstruct the old cathedral school on humanistic lines. (There had been a school at St. Paul's cathedral since Medieval times.) He did this and endowed it with all of his wealth. In the statutes which he had drawn up he stated that the school should give training in new learning and in Christian discipline. By "new learning" he meant that Latin should be taught and used as a living language in contrast to the "monkish Latin" of the mediaeval monasteries. William Lyly who wrote the Latin Grammar was appointed ~~to~~ headmaster. (1)

It should be pointed out at this time that Dean Colet's School at St. Paul's is an entirely separate institution from the Cathedral choir-boy at St. Paul's whose history has already been sketched. Dean Colet's school, situated at the east end of this building, was intended for poor scholars, but as it offered the best school training to be had in England, it was soon attended by the sons of the citizens of the upper class. (2) The choir-boys may have attended this school from time to time when they were not otherwise occupied -- for instance during the period of suppression. Since the purpose of each school was so different, the curriculum and type of training which each gave differed widely also. The one emphasized the study of Latin

(1) Cubberly, E. P.: History of Education p. 275

(2) Bond, R. W. (Complete Works of Lyly Vol. I) note on page 34

and Greek; the other, the study of music and acting.

Plays were acted in both the grammar schools and the universities during this period. Ralph Radclif, (1519-1559) who established a school in the old Carmelite monastery at Hitchin, Hertfordshire, declared that the drama was "a pedagogic means to graceful inunciation and ease of manners in the pupils." (1)

At first the plays given by these boys and those at Eton, St. Paul's, and Westminster were the classic drama of Plautus and Terence due to the strong influence of the Renaissance on education. However, Mr. Wallace points out that, although it has generally been assumed that Plautus and Terence were frequently acted by the boys of the various grammar schools, there is only one case of such a play which is actually known to have been performed prior to the accession of Elizabeth. And that is on January 7, 1528 when the boys of Dean Colet's School at St. Paul's "recited the Phormio of Terence with so much spirit and good acting." (2) at the banquet which Cardinal Wolsey gave in honor of the king and all of the foreign ambassadors in London.

Soon the Masters began to write the plays for their boys to perform. As early as 1535 Master Radclif was writing Latin plays for his boys at Hitchin. He even erected a stage in the old monastery on which they could perform. (3) Many of Radclif's plays show by their titles that they were of biblical origin; some titles show that he used Chaucer as a source

(1) Schelling, F.E. Elizabethan Drama p.35

(2) Wallace, C.W. Evolution of English Drama up to Shakespeare quotation p.89

(3) Ibid., p.88

There is little doubt that his plays were tinged with the religious controversy of the period, for one of them was concerned with the burning of John Huss. (1)

The boys at Eton had given Latin plays at Christmas as early as 1525 and the boys at Dean Colet's school in 1527. (2) The Latin plays were not intended to amuse the scholars of the grammar schools and universities. The primary reason that the Masters, who were devotees of the new learning, had their boys present these plays was to inspire a similar devotion to the classics in them.

In spite of the general belief among the learned that only Latin plays should be presented in the schools, Nicholas Udall, the headmaster at Eton, had sufficient courage to write a comedy in English. He was considered quite a radical for even considering such an unheard of thing, but in spite of the classicists who stuck to the Latin, other masters followed Udall's lead. The date of Ralph Roister Doister is very uncertain, but at present it is generally believed that it was written between 1534-41 while Udall was at Eton. It differs from the Latin classical drama, written up to this time, in little more than language; but it is important because of that difference. (3)

Gammer Gurton's Needle was also an early English comedy. The authorship is unknown, but it is generally believed that it is the same as Diccon the Bedlam which was acted at Christ's College, Cambridge in 1552-53. (4). Although it shows

- (1) Schelling, F.E. Elizabethan Drama Vol. I p.35  
 (2) Wallace, C.W. Evolution of English Drama p. 88  
 (3) Ibid., 96  
 (4) Ibid., p.86



traces of Plautus the drama as represented by this play has become far more anglicized than Ralph Roister Doister. The setting, the characters, and even the plot are definitely of English country life.

Thus we have seen that side by side with the Court drama which was essentially native, there was developing in the schools and universities the Classic drama.

Under King Edward the Court drama had become a display of "ludicrous situations" rather than of intellectual wit. This boy-king naturally preferred long-noses, baboon faces, and such exaggerated performances to the more pleasing artistically aesthetic masques of previous reigns. But when his sister, Mary, came to the throne, she appointed a classicist as Master of the Chapel Royal. Thus it is through Mary that the Court and Classic drama came together, each influencing the other until the new type of drama illustrated by Shakespeare was formed.

Three plays which show this contact are Genus Humanum, a lost morality; Respublica, a classicized and partially naturalized morality; and Ralph Roister Doister, the anglicized and partially naturalized classic drama of which we have already spoken. (1)

Respublica, like Ralph Roister Doister, is believed to have been written by a school master (possibly Udall) for his pupils; but both of these plays were performed at Court also. (2) It is possible that the authors, knowing that the plays were going to be given at court as well as at school,

(1) Wallace, C.W. Evolution of English Drama p.92

(2) Brooke, T. Tudor Drama p.86

were compelled to write in English, for that was the language of the Court. These two plays really are a forced attempt on the part of an humanist to adapt the classic form to the desires of the English Court, rather than an example of the normal development of the germ of the native drama. (1)

Prior to the presentation of Udall's play there had been no five-act court drama; but this is one of the characteristics of classical plays which the Court adopted. Thus their masques, interludes, and light comedies gained a definite form and became more systematic as a result of union with the classic. From this time on, the Latin drama in the schools and colleges and the new five-act English drama also in the schools and on the stage developed side by side.

### Chapter III

#### Children's Companies During The Reign of Elizabeth

One of Elizabeth's favorite diversions was her royal progresses, as they were called. Each summer she, accompanied by her train, visited some of the provincial towns and one or both of the universities. She apparently enjoyed her glimpses of university life, for in one of her Latin orations at Oxford she said, "Ever since I have come to Oxford I have seen much and I have heard much and I have approved all. For everything was discreetly done and elegantly said." (2) She was always greeted at the universities with long orations or disputations

(1) Wallace, C. W.: Evolution of English Drama up to Shakespeare

(2) Boas, Henrietta: In Shakespeare's England p. 72

in Latin by the scholars. She was <sup>also</sup> always entertained with plays in which she delighted. Miss Boas quotes, "On Sunday night Elizabeth heard 'graciouslye and with great patience' two Latin plays 'performed but meanly' in Christ Chapel." (1) A twentieth century interpretation of 'performed but meanly' would not be very complementary; but according to Miss Boas the sixteenth century writer intended it to be a compliment.

Elizabeth did not visit the grammar schools so often. Usually if she wanted to see the school boys perform, she had them come to Court. The remainder of this thesis will cite many instances of Elizabeth's friendly attitude toward the different groups of boy-actors. She not only approved of the acting, but she encouraged them in their work. She even went so far as to give the Masters of the Chapels power to enforce boys to leave their grammar schools and join her group of actors. However, she financed schools for these boys, for she did not want their education to be neglected. In the grammar schools the study of Latin and Greek was of first importance and the acting in plays was secondary. In the Chapel schools under Elizabeth's control the order of importance was vice-versa.

The Puritans disapproved of the impressment of boys into the actor-life; but their complaints went unanswered, for indirectly it was Elizabeth who was impressing them. They were entirely justified, however, in lamenting over the fact that boys belonging to an institution which was originally

(1) Ibid., p. 72

ecclesiastical were acting in immoral plays and were even presenting them in the Chapel on Sunday. The titles of Hunnis' plays indicate that they were not the sort the average mother would want her boy to see, to say nothing of take part in. (1) They were still more justified in their complaints when the boys began to present their plays to the public in the city.

These pious Puritans naturally looked to the Bible for an argument against boy actors and plays in general, and they found several passages which suited their purpose. The one which is most quoted is Deuteronomy 22:5. It reads as follows: "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God." Stephen Gosson and others wrote pamphlets and they preached sermons against boys taking the parts of women for they said it was "abomination of the Lord." They also made much of Exodus 23:13 which says, "And in all things which I have said unto you be circumspect; and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth." (2) They attacked the playwrights and the masters of the children on the basis of this quotation for allowing the children to present plays containing allusions to the classical gods of ancient Greece and Rome. Another of their many objections was to allowing a child to take the part of a demon or a bad man in a play, for they claimed that in order to interpret that part he must have the qualities of a bad man and if he did not, the part would make him cultivate

(1) Although Creizenach makes this statement he does not give an example of titles nor a foot-note telling where they may be found.

(2) Creizenach, W.: English Drama in Age of Shakespeare p. 8-12

them. These attacks upon the sponsors of the boys met with very little immediate success; but combined with the general attacks upon the theaters as a whole they finally succeeded in closing them in 1642.

It is the irony of fate - or perhaps of carefully thought out plans - that these same boys whom the Puritans tried to save from the immoral environment of stage life were made to present plays caricaturing the Puritans in the Marprelate controversy. This controversy arose out of the quarrel of long standing between the fixed ritual and official authority of the Church of England and the independence and simplicity of worship which the dissenters advocated. (1) Between 1585 and 1590 certain Puritans, writing under the pseudonym of Martin Marprelate, directed severe charges against the officials of the church of England. In one of the many pamphlets they attacked the Bishop's manner of living, using quotations from the Bible for all of their arguments. (2) The replies which the Martinists evoked from the supporters of the Church of England were filled with stinging satire. For instance one title-page read as follows: "An Almond for a Parrat or Cutbert Curry knaves fit for the knave Martin, and the rest of those impudent Beggars that cannot be content to stay their stomakes with a Benefice, but they will needes breake their fastes with our Bishops. Remarum sum plenus. Therefore beware (gentle Reader) you catch not the hicket with laughing." (3)

Notwithstanding the attacks of the Puritans, the boys continued to present plays. ~~A brief summary of the history of the grammarschools~~

- (1) Bond, R. H. Complete Works of John Lyly p. 49
- (2) Arber, Edward, Reprints Epistle
- (3) Arber, E. Editor Reprints An Almond for a Parrat

during the reign of Elizabeth will serve best to show the position they held in relation to the boy-actors.

The Children of Westminster presented a play at Court on Christmas 1563 that pleased Elizabeth so much that in 1564 she visited them at their school where she saw them do Heautontimoroumenos by Terence and the Miles Gloriosus by Plautus. In order to show their appreciation of the honor which Elizabeth had conferred upon them, the school presented her with a copy of Plautus. For the next ten years under the mastership of John Taylor these boys appeared at court quite often to perform plays. Taylor died in 1572 and for two years they performed under the instruction of William Elderton; but there are no records after 1574, of their giving plays, until 1606, when they put on three plays probably at the school for the benefit of their parents and friends. (1)

In addition to the grammar schools described in the previous chapter there appeared during Elizabeth's reign the Merchant Taylor's School. This school was founded in 1561 under the headmaster, Richard Mulcaster, or Moncaster as his name is sometimes spelled in the records.

He considered that the five fundamental subjects were reading, writing, drawing, music, and grammar. In regard to music he says in his "Music in the Curriculum" 1582:

"As for music which I have divided into voice<sup>and</sup> instrument, I will keep this current. The training up in music as in all other faculties hath a special eye to these points: the child

(1) Murray J. T.: English Dramatic Companies Vol.I p. 340

itself that is to learn; the matter itself which he is to learn; and the instrument whereon he is to learn. Wherein I will deal so far the first and last, that is for the child and instrument as neither of them shall lack whatsoever is needful either for framing the child's voice or for the righting of his finger; or for the pricking of his lessons or for the tuning of his instrument. For the voice there is a right pitch, that it be neither over nor under strained, but delicately brought to her best ground, both to keep out long and to rise and fall within due compass and to become tuneable with regard to health and pleasant to hear. And in the fingering also there is great regard to be had both that the child strike as he does not shuffle, neither spoil any sound and that his finger run so both sure and sightly as it cumber not itself with entangled delivery.

"For the matter of music which the child is to learn I will set it down how and by what degrees and in what lessons a boy that is to be brought up to sing may and ought to proceed by ordinary ascent from the first terms of art and the first note in sound until he shall be able without any often or any great missing to sing his part in pricksong (music sung from notes) either himself alone, which is his first rudeness or with some company which is his best practice." This thorough training in music served the pupils in good stead later when they began to give entertainments regularly.

They performed plays at Court from 1572 to 1583.

They also played before the Merchant Taylor's Company at Common Halls; but because the audience and the headmaster paid more attention to the boys than to the dignitaries who owned the hall, these pompous gentlemen forbade the boys acting there. In 1583 Mulcaster quarreled with his employer of the Merchant Taylors and resigned from his position as headmaster. The boys did not appear in any plays to amount to anything after that date. (1)

There is only one record of the boys at Eton giving a play before Elizabeth at Court. This was during the Christmas festivities of 1572-3 (2) And there are no records of Dean Colet's school at St. Paul's presenting plays under that name after Elizabeth's accession. This is without a doubt due to the fact that there was a separate school at St. Paul's which trained boys in play acting. There was no need for two actor-schools under the same roof. If by any chance any of the boys in Dean Colet's school wanted training in singing or acting, they had only to run across the court yard to the south side of the Cathedral. There is no reason to doubt that the mediaeval give-and-take between the two schools was not continued through the sixteenth century. In proof of this, Hunder quotes from a manuscript life of Sir Thomas Offley, "This Thomas Offley became a good grammarian under Mr. (William) Lillie and understood the Latin tongue perfectly and because he had a sweet voice he was put to learn prick-song among the choristers of St. Paul's for

(1) Chambers, E. K: Elizabethan Stage p. 75

(2) Murray, J. L: English Dramatic Companies p. 343



that learned Mr. Willie knew full well that knowledge in music was a help and a futherance to all arts.' And on the other hand Dean Nowell instructed Thomas Giles in 1584 to teach the choristers catechism, writing, and music, and then 'suffer them to resort to Paul's school that they may learn the principles of grammar.' " (1)

Thus we find that after the first decades of Elizabeth's reign the grammar school actors fade into the background. Elizabeth enjoyed their plays; she was not unintereseted in their work; but she was more interested in the boys at the Chapel Royal, St. Paul's, and Windsor, as they were definitely connected with the court. She was in closer touch with them than with the boys in the grammar schools and she had a more personal interest in their success.

Records show that one of the first things which Elizabeth did when she became queen in 1558 was to provide the boys of the Chapel Royal with new "apparel, properties, furnishings etc." (2) Richard Bower was their master at the time. The boys did not appear in the Christmas festivities of the first year of her reign. But on the following Christmas (1559), they presented Like Will to Like. The play was so offensive to the queen, because it satirized the extravagances of ladies' dress, that she ordered it stopped and asked for the masques to appear. (3) As a result Bower was dismissed and Richard Edwards was appointed Master of the Children for life. He was given permission to take up as many children as he needed

- (1) Chambers, E.K. Elizabethan Stage Vol. II note on page 16  
 (2) Wallace, C.W. Evolution of English Drama p.105  
 (3) Fleay, F.G. Elizabeth, Croyden, and the Drama p/7

whenever he needed them.

Edward's duties, like those of the other masters, were many and varied "for not only must he have been a Doctor of Music to drill and to lead his choir in church and perhaps accompany them on the organ; but it was likewise his duty to devise new sacred music and also secular songs, to invent pageants and shows, to write plays and to teach his young charges how to act them to the satisfaction of the queen and a critical court." (1) His career was a brilliant one. Through the plays, interludes, and lyrics which he composed for the boys to act before her Majesty, the Chapel Royal became the center of dramatic entertainment. During the first two years of his administration, Edwards and the Children of the Chapel produced plays which were praised by his friend, Barnabe Googe, in a publication of March 1563 as far surpassing Plautus and Terence and not likely to be equalled by any poet in the future. (2) One of these plays was Appius and Virginia, which was designated in the title when it was published as a "new tragical-comedy". (3) When it was presented, it was excused in the prologue as "our first attempt", which would seem to prove that this was the first play the Children of the Chapel gave after Edwards began to write for them during the Christmas season of 1561-62.

During the winter of 1564 the Children of the Chapel Royal produced Damon and Pythias before the queen. Just prior to this time these choir-boys had been formed into a company of

(1) Scheelling, F.E. Elizabethan Drama p.112

(2) Wallace, C.W. Evolution of English Drama p.108

(3) Originally classed as a tragedy. Classification changed a after appearance of Ralph Roister Doister. c.f. p. 30

players by the Queen's license; but the exact date of that license is not given. Warton infers that although the boys had acted before Henry VIII and his successors occasionally and certainly before Elizabeth several times, they had not done so as a company of boy-actors, but simply as the Chapel children. (1)

Edwards' plays met with approval everywhere. On February 2, 1565 following the performance of Damon and Pythias he was given the unusual distinction of having his Chapel Children present a play at Lincoln's Inn, the institution to which he had been elected a member the previous November. And again the following year on Candlemas Day he and the choir boys presented another play at Lincoln's Inn. The Inns of Court unlike the more critical audience at the Queen's Court enjoyed Misogonus, which we are quite certain was one of the plays which ten choir-boys presented. (2)

Edwards had intended to have the children give the play Damon and Pythias at Christmas 1563 but because of the plague it was put off until the next year; this is of importance not only because it is the first tragic-comedy to appear in England, but because it illustrates the refined drama with which the boy-actors were accustomed to entertain the Court. (3) Professor Wallace writes: "This fine old tale of Syracusean history, with its tragic and its comic elements happily mingled in a rising tide of suspense to the climax as presented by Edwards formed the high-water mark of English

(1) Fleay, F.G.: Elizabeth, Croydon and the Drama p. 5

(2) Ibid., p. 110

(3) Adams, J. Q. Representative Pre-Shakespearean Dramas p. 371

drama up to that time." (1) We also find in this play a combination of two different types of humor. The clown, of the native drama is represented by Guni, the Collier, while Carisophus the parasite represents the comic figure of the classical drama. It is an attempt "to graft a plot of classic gravity upon the amorphous stock of the native interlude." (2)

Elizabeth frankly displayed her appreciation of a good entertainment <sup>when</sup> on the second night of Edward's last play (1566) Palaemon and Arcyte Part I and II she gave him a special reward, "and then after a little pause, made him and her retinue standing about her a happy little speech on the love scenes of the play and the characters and the actors that especially charmed her." (3) The fourteen year old boy who played the part of Princess Amelia pleased the queen so much that she gave him eight angels as a reward. She also gave him the royal robes of the recently deceased Queen Mary which he apparently had worn in the play.

After Edward's death in 1566 William Hunnis took his place as Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal. Their next appearance at Court was in 1570. From then until 1583 they appeared before the queen practically every year. Because of the dangers of fire and disease, large crowds were not allowed to assemble in theaters within the walls of London, but on December 24, 1578 the boys are mentioned as allowed to act for the public within the city because they were rehearsing for the queen. (4) The explanation of "rehearsing for the queen"

- (1) Wallace, C. W.: Evolution of English Drama up to Shakespeare  
 (2) Brooke, T.: Tudor Drama p. 206  
 (3) Ibid., p. 114  
 (4) Murray, J. T.: English Dramatic Companies Vol. I p. 331

was often used very conveniently by the masters as the reason for the boys acting before the public. They claimed that the boys were rehearsing the plays. But they allowed the public to attend the rehearsals, charged an admission fee and thus made a good sum of money on the side.

Hunnis wrote all of the plays for the Chapel Children. In 1583 he petitioned to the queen for relief because he said that the salary of £40 was not sufficient "to maintain the expense of twelve children, an usher to manage them, and a woman servant to keep them clean." (1) After 1582 there is no record of performances in London until 1601 although they acted in the provinces occasionally. It is very probable that it was these children, of the Chapel Royal who presented Summer's Last Will and Testament at Croydon in 1592. (2) Other than this instance it is not known where the boys acted between 1583 and 1597,<sup>(3)</sup> when Elizabeth moved them into the Blackfriars; but it is generally believed that for a part of that time they were united with Paul's Boys at the Blackfriars under Lyly.

The Children at St. Paul's were Elizabeth's favorites even before her accession, for among other things she enlisted them to entertain Queen Mary in ~~April~~ 1557 with an "after-supper play" when Mary visited her at Hatfield House. Their first performance after she became queen was at Nonesuch in August 1559 under the mastership of Sebastian Wescott, and she invited them to entertain her at Court every Christmas for the next twenty-five years -- until Wescott's death in

(1) Schelling, F.E.: English Drama p. 115

(2) Murray, J. T.: English Dramatic Companies p. 332

(3) This may be inconsistent or possibly Murray finds no record between 1597-1601. c.f. Wallace's chart p. 54

1582. During that time they presented twenty-nine plays, but only two of them have been identified. They are, Wit and Will which was similar to Wyt and Science, and Effignia a Tragedye which was really a comedy. (1) They probably used the court yard of St. Paul's cathedral for a play house.

In the fall of 1575 one of Paul's boys was kidnapped probably by a rival company, but according to the records, nothing more than the issuing of a letter by the Priory Council was done about it.

On December 24, 1578, according to the Priory Council to the Lord Mayor Paul's Boys were allowed within the city as the Chapel Children had been because they were going to play before the queen at Christmas. Since these boys did not appear at Court in London or in the provinces between 1581-1587 Mr. Murray says that it is very probable that they offended the Court and were suppressed. (2) However, Mr. Wallace gives a more satisfactory explanation of the fact that there are no records of plays under their name during these years. He says that their master Thomas Giles, and John Lyly the manager of the Blackfriars, made some satisfactory financial arrangement by which they could produce plays under the name of the Earl of Oxford's servants.

Thomas Giles was appointed Master of the Children at St. Paul's upon the death of Westcott in 1585. It is generally believed that in addition to managing the Blackfriars his duties probably were to teach the boys Latin and logic. He certainly makes the subjects appear

(1) Wallace, G. W.: Evolution of English Drama up to Shakespeare p. 103

(2) Murray, J. T.: English Dramatic Companies p. 326

as amusing as possible in the plays which he wrote for the boys to act. Another of his duties because of his musical ability was to assist in training the choir. But his chief task was to coach them in acting plays to be given before the queen. These plays were rehearsed in the great hall of the Revels Office at the dissolved Priory of St. John of Jerusalem in Clerkenwell; and they were also given both before and after their appearance at Court in their own singing room at St. Paul's to which the public was admitted on payment. (1)

In addition to training the boys Lyly wrote many plays for them. Mr. Creizenach says that his plays were particularly valuable for acting by boys because of the new charm which they give to the woman and girl characters. (2) It is interesting to notice that there are many more women in the plays which were intended for the boys to produce than in the plays which the adult companies produced. This situation is due, of course, to the fact that it was always the boys who played the part of women in either group. Lyly was the first one to introduce a higher conversational tone into the English drama, and, as he claims according to the prologue of Sapho and Phao, his plays are intended to waken 'soft smiling, not loud laughing'. (3)

The circumstances of these plays being written for boys brought about certain important results for English drama. It advocated the combination of the farcical with the serious or with the ideal-comic elements of drama, it revived the

(1) Bond, R. W.: Complete Works of LYL p. 34

(2) Creizenach, W.: English Drama in Age of Shakespeare p. 56

(3) Ibid., p. 56

Plautine and Terentian type of witty and rascally servant, and it brought about the introduction of songs to show off the boys' voices -- a lyrical element in drama for which we are very thankful. (1)

Lyly's affiliations were solely with the boys of the court and it is of interest to note that while he was writing for St. Paul's Boys and Hunnis was writing for the Chapel Royal there was keen rivalry between the two,

As John Lyly is the most important boy's playwright of the Elizabethan period, he deserves more than the passing comments on his work which have been included in the historical sketch of Court Companies. He was a Kentishman about ten years Shakespeare's senior. After he completed his education at Oxford, he moved to London, where he became connected with the Court almost immediately. (2) In 1580 he was, apparently, secretary to the Earl of Oxford who, it is generally believed, set him up in his dramatic career. According to Mr. Wallace, the Earl established Lyly at the Blackfriars theater where the combined forces of Paul's Boys and the Children of the Chapel Royal presented Campaspe in 1580. He believes that Lyly planned this play and also Sapho and Phao, for the combined companies, because their casts are too large for either company to attempt to produce alone; the former has 18 characters and the latter 17. Sapho and Phao, is an allegory of the unsuccessful suit of D'Alençon for the hand of the queen, followed Campaspe immediately; but then for some reason or other, there

(1) Bond, R.W.: Complete Works of Lyly p. 36

(2) Schelling, F.E.: Elizabethan Drama p. 123



was a lapse of three years before his next play, Gallathea, appeared in 1584. (1)

Lyly achieved the height of his career in 1585, which was while he was with the Children of Paul's. It was at this time that he wrote Endymion. This play like Sapho and Phao was allegory but students of the drama have not been able to analyze the network of allusions satisfactorily. The theme is based on the classical myth of Endymion's sleep on the steeps of Mount Latmos and the awakening kiss of the enamored goddess Selene. All the critics agree that Cynthia is Queen Elizabeth and most of them believe that Lyly intended Endymion to represent the Earl of Leicester; and Tellus, Mary of Scotland. But a knowledge of the details of the allegorical allusions is not necessary to enjoy the poetical mystification, and the fine wit and repartee and the classical lore as conceived in Lyly's imagination. (2)

Other plays which Lyly wrote for the boys to produce before the queen were Midas (1589) and The Woman in The Moon (1591-1593) When the Children at Paul's were inhibited in 1591, Lyly was not only cut off from his income, but he was discouraged from writing at the height of his career. (3) When the boys returned to the stage in 1599 or 1600, Lyly again began to write for them, but the type of drama which the popular theater demanded and changed so in those eight years that his was looked upon as only second rate. The fad of allegory and euphuism had had its run, and personal satire had taken its place.

That St. Paul's Boys were involved in the Mar-Prelate

- (1) Wallace: C. W.: Evolution of English Drama p. 171  
 (2) Schelling, F. E. Elizabethan Drama p. 125  
 (3) Ibid., p. 125

controversy is shown by the following remark in Lyly's pamphlet Pappe-with-an-Hatchet (September 1589). In speaking of the way Martin has been caricatured on the stage he says, 'If it be shewed at Pauls it will cost you foure pence.' And it evidently did cost them for they were suppressed early in the following year. We know definitely that they were suppressed, because the printer of the 1591 edition of Endymion speaks of certain comedies which came into his hands "since the plays at Paul's were dissolved". (1) The general result of the attempt to use the stage as a means to the political abuse contributed without a doubt to the coarsening and degrading of it. This Marprelate controversy is only one example of the downward tendency in the tone of the theater. Paul's boys did not regain favor, after having been stopped on account of the personal satire and scurrility put into their mouths, until 1600 (2), at which time they acted Jack Drum's Entertainment. From this time until 1603 they acted regularly, though not at Court.

In 1601 they presented Dekker's Satiromastix or The Untrussing of the Humorous Poet, the only play presented by a Children's Company which is even remotely of the chronicle-play type. And the purpose of the English setting here is wholly satirical. If it savors of the chronicle play it is only by accident. (3) Satiromastix was also

(1) Murray, J. T.: English Dramatic Companies Vol. I p. 327

(2) Ward, A. W.: History of Dramatic Literature p. 254

(3) Schelling, F. E.: English Chronicle Play p. 55

acted by <sup>Lord</sup> Chamberlain's Company, who seemed to have had some affiliation with the Children of Paul's about that time.

Elizabeth favored the Chapel at Windsor as well as the Chapel Royal and the one at St. Paul's. As it was in a run down condition when she came to the throne, she issued a permit in 1559 for taking up both men and boys for Windsor and prohibiting the removal of any from the Chapel Royal or St. Paul's. The Privy Seal read as follows: "Whereas our Castle of Windsor hath of old been well furnished with singing men and children, we, willing it should not be of less reputation in our stay but rather augmented and increased, declare that no singing men or boys be taken out of the said Chapel by virtue of any commission, not even for our household chapel. And we give power to the bearer of this to take any singing men and boys from any chapel our own household and St. Paul's only excepted. Given at Westminster, this 8th day of March in the second year of our reign." (2)

Preston was the Master of the Children at Windsor at the time; but as ~~then~~ he was not willing to accept the new ecclesiastical arrangements, he had to forfeit his position to Richard Farrant. It is uncertain when the boys began to give plays, but it is certain that the first plays in the history of the Chapel were during Farrant's reign. The first recorded performance was on December 27, 1568. For the next ten years following that date they appeared at Court annually. Professor Feuillerat has shown from the Losely archives that

in 1576 Farrant had leased rooms in a large building in the Blackfriars precinct from Sir William More and had established the first Blackfriars theater. (1) He brought about this transaction through his friend at Windsor, Sir Henry Neville, who was also a friend of William More. James Burbage had leased ground from More in the Blackfriars precinct at the same time on which to build "The Theater". However, since the building which the boys were going to use was already erected, they could move in immediately and they had begun to act before Burbage had "The Theater" ready for Lord Leicester's Men. (2)

As Farrant had explained to More that he was going to use the Blackfriars as a place to teach the children of Windsor, More and the surrounding parish were annoyed when they found that he was using the building as a continual theater. He had even taken it upon himself to remove partitions wherever he saw fit. However, More did not do anything about Farrant's misrepresenting facts. It was generally understood that the Masters had their children present plays to the public under pretext that they were rehearsing them for the Queen. We do not know whether the boys at Windsor continued to take part in the performances after 1578 or not. There is no record of them as actors in the Court accounts. According to Mr. Wallace, their career as actors ceased with Farrant's death in 1578. (3)

The Revel's Account disclosed the information that

- (1) Chambers, E. K.: Elizabethan Stage p. 62  
 (2) Wallace, C.W.: Evolution of English Drama up to Shakespeare p. 130  
 (3) Ibid., p. 151

between 1559 and 1580 these three Court companies of boys, Chapel Royal, St. Paul's and Windsor boys presented about sixty performances. A few of the plays are extant, but the titles of the non-extant plays show that there was considerable variety. Seven or eight 'masques' of foresters, pedlars, knights, Amazons and what not. Six were certainly, from their titles, moralities or possibly (some of them) mere dialogues. Collier classified eighteen as having themes drawn from ancient history or fables. Examples of these are: Narcissus, Iphigenia, Timoclea at the Siege of Thebes, Ajax and Ulysses. In a second class, Collier includes plays based on modern history, romances, and stories of a more general kind. Among them are The King of Scotts, Paris and Vienna, The Solitary Knight, The Irish Knight, The Knight of the Burning Rock, etc. The extant court drama of this period consists of Appius and Virginia by R. B., King Darius, Horestes by Pickering; and Cambises by Preston. Darius has the characteristics of both the miracle play and the morality. Appius and Virginia, though it is classical in theme, contains elements of the morality in its use of abstractions and general didactic tone. Horestes is a popular version of the old Greek myth; but it is also hampered by some characteristics of mediaeval drama. Cambises is by far, the best of this group; but it, too, savors of the old allegorical drama and moral theme." (1)

From 1580 on as we have already seen the Court drama developed in a lighter vein, for although Lyly's plays were

(1) Schelling, F.E.: Elizabethan Drama p. 119-120

allegorical as was Cambises, there is no sign of didactic or moral element in them.

#### Chapter IV

##### Children of the Chapel Royal at Blackfriars

A group of the Dominican or Black Friars Order established themselves at Holborn, London, in 1221. In 1276 they begged a larger and better site on a high embankment north of the Thames and east of old Fleet ditch where they built the famous monastery which they occupied for three centuries. It included the small church of St. Anne, several shops, a chapter house, priory buildings and a large church with enclosed church yard, cloisters, etc. But at the present time nothing remains in "commercialized London" as a relic of its existence except such commemorative names as Blackfriars Road, Blackfriars Bridge, Blackfriars School, etc. (1)

Very soon <sup>after</sup> the Black Friars obtained this new tract of land, they secured permission to tear down that part of the old city wall which crossed their territory and built a new one at the edge of their precinct which served on one side as a protection from outside dangers and on the other side as a means of isolation from the main part of the London. Their will was supreme in this little city within the city. They

(1) Wallace, C. W.: Children of Chapel Royal at Blackfriars p.

were independent and yet they were protected by the government. (1)

The Blackfriars like all of the other monasteries in England was surrendered to the Crown with all of its possessions on November 12, 1538 by Orders of Henry VIII. Its annual income at that time was valued at £ 104, 15s, 4d.

Edward VI gave Thomas Cawarden all of the buildings in the precinct which remained after Henry divided the spoils among his friends in 1538, and he tore down both the little church of St. Annes' and the huge old conventional church. As Masters of the Revels under both Henry VIII and Edward VI he established his headquarters in the Priory House, rehearsing companies of actors in masques and interludes there for Court performances. (2)

Sir William More succeeded Cowarden in the ownership of the site of the old Blackfriars Priory. In dealing with these early leases, inaccurate descriptions in the deeds, etc., one cannot be positive just which part of the priory house the various leases hired, but all that is necessary for us to know is that children under Farrant, Hunnis, and Lyly occupied it at various times for twenty years prior to Elizabeth's establishment of the children of the Chapel there

(1) Ibid., p. 100/9

(2) "The office of Master of Revels may have grown out of the temporary appointment of the Lord of Misrule during the latter part of the fifteenth century. At any rate by a patent issued by Henry VIII in 1545 Cowarden, one of the gentlemen of the priory chamber was appointed to have "permanent control of pastimes of the court under the title of master of revels."

(2) Schelling F.E.: Elizabethan Drama p. 100

in 1597.

James Burbage purchased the priory building from Sir William More in February 1595 and when he died, his son, Richard Burbage, took it over. Soon afterward, he leased the Great Hall to Henry Evans with privilege of private profit from public rehearsals of his plays, but he kept one of the lower rooms for his own use. The other one he fitted out as a "school house" where the Children of the Blackfriars received their grammar school training. Later Evans made another of the rooms into a dining room for the boys-actors, and he built rooms above the Great Hall in which they lived. Thus "the children of the Chapel were boarded, lodged, and instructed by Evans and his wife." (1)

The first three years of Evans' management of the Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars was so successful that he decided ~~to~~ in 1600, when his lease expired, <sup>to</sup> renew it for twenty-one years. He had held the lease in his name for about a year when he got word of the fact that he was going to be charged for illegal impressment of boys. Then he decided everything—lease, household goods, etc., to his son-in-law, Alexander Hawkins. This change took place in 1601. In 1602, as Kirkham, Rastell, and Kendall wished to become sharers in the company, articles of agreement were drawn up between Evans and Hawkins on one side and these three men on the other to form a copartnership in which they would share expenses and profits half and half. This arrangement continued

(1) Wallace, C. W.: Children of Chapel at Blackfriars p. 85 40



as long as the Boys remained at the Blackfrairs. (1)

During the fifty years following Cowarden's occupancy of the Blackfriars that immediate district had become one of the most aristocratic sections of London. The large hall on the second floor of the Priory House had been divided into rooms, and the whole building was changed into an apartment and lodging house. This Blackfriars building, which stood in the center of the group of the private houses, was a stone structure in two sections. The north section was three stories high with two rooms on the second floor and two on the first, the two floors being connected by a heavy winding stone stairway. The south section was two stories high, with a flat roof and a stairway leading to the third floor of the north section. This south section of the Priory House is of most importance from point of view of literary history, for here the Great Hall was located. (2)

This Great Hall became the Blackfriars Theater which the Children of the Chapel Royal occupied from 1597-1610. It differed from the public theaters in many ways. It was rectangular (66 by 46 ft) instead of being in the shape of an octagon; it was enclosed instead of having the pit open to the sky; and there were seats in the pit as well as in the balconies. The stage also differed, through necessity, from that of the public theaters since it had to be built where there was space enough available. There was a permanent balcony at the rear of the stage which extended between the two lower rooms

(1) Wallace, C. W.: Children of Chapel at Blackfriars p. 87  
 (2) Ibid., p. 37

of the tiring house. This balcony was used for certain scenes in some plays; but it was used most commonly by the musicians. The depth could be varied by the use of curtains which extended between the balcony and the front of the stage, and a canopy could be stretched over the front part to form a room or ~~shops~~ the play required. (1) As there was no free space between the walk and the sides of the stage<sup>as</sup> in the public theatre, it must have been set into one end of the room in a manner similar to a modern stage. Thus there was no place for the audience to sit "above" or "over" the stage as at the Globe, the Fortune etc. Instead the most fashionable gallants sat on it, a custom unique in the Blackfriars, but imitated later at the Cockpit and Salisbury Court (two private theatres) and by the theater-goers in France. That portion of the audience which those to sit on the stage was not indecent nor troublesome. Neither did their presence annoy the boys who were acting. On the contrary they were expected to sit there, for the stage was especially adapted, fitted, and reserved for them. But in the course of years this privilege, like all, others, was abused. These gallants amused themselves by playing cards, smoking, joking with the actors and abusing the "groundlings". In the Induction to Cynthia's Revels by Jonson, which the Chapel Children acted at Blackfriars, two boys-actors are represented as "taking off" one of the "better-gathered gallants" who enjoyed the above privileges. (2) The Hall seated between 200 and 300 people.

(1) Wallace, C. W.: Children of Chapel at Blackfriars p. 48  
 (2) Ibid., p. 142

The price of admission was placed so high - from three to four times as much as the managers of the public theaters charged-that the audience of necessity consisted only of the aristocracy. The fact that the queen and her retinue patronized this theater is further proof that the audience must have consisted of only the best of London society.

Because of her passionate fondness for the drama, Queen Elizabeth divided the Chapel Children into two groups according to their functions and maintained one group at the Chapel Royal as choristers and the other at the Blackfriars theater as actors. She extended the duties of the latter group beyond the occasional presentation of a play at Court, for while they occupied Blackfriars as a permanent company, they were required to act a play every week. She maintained both of these groups from 1597 until her death in 1603, for they were intended primarily or ultimately for her service. This functional division of the children is the source of the final complete segregation of the two groups under James I. A secondary purpose in dividing the Chapel Royal into two specialized groups may have been to insure a thorough training in good manners; but her primary purpose was to insure a variety of good entertainment for herself and her court. (1)

The fact that there are very few records of the Chapel Children giving plays at Court between 1597-1603 helps to substantiate the general belief that she attended the plays at the Blackfriars accompanied by her court ladies.

(1) Ibid., p. 4

There is proof that she attended a play there on Tuesday December 29, 1601, for on that date Sir Dudley Carlton wrote to John Chamberlain in a gossipy letter filled with Court news: "The Q. dined this day privately at my Ld. Chamberlain's; I came even now from the Blackfriars where I saw her at the play with all her candidae auditrices." (1) The fact that Carlton merely mentions the queen's presence is proof that it must have been quite a common occurrence to see the queen at the Blackfriars, for if it had been an unusual event, Carlton, who wrote voluminous letters, would have described her appearance in detail. But she had attended so many plays at the Blackfriars that he passes her by with a sentence or two as a mere news item.

Philip Julius, Duke of Stettin - Pomerania; Prussia states that relationship between Elizabeth and these children very clearly in his diary under the date of September 18, 1602. He says: ". . . . But with reference to this Children's Theater, this is the state of affairs. The Queen maintains a number of boys who are required to devote themselves earnestly to the art of singing and to learn to perform on various sorts of musical instruments also at the same time to carry on their studies. These boys have their special preceptors in all the various arts and in particular excellent instructors in music. Now in order that they may practice courtly manners, it is required of them to act a play every week for which purposes indeed the Queen has established for them a special theater

(1) Wallace, C. W.: Children of Chapel at Blackfriars p. 95

and has provided them with a superabundance of rich apparel.

"Whosoever wishes to be a spectator at one of their performances must pay as much as eight shillings of our (Pomeranian) coinage (ca 12 d). And yet there is always present a large audience including many respectable women, because entertaining plot developments and many excellent teachings as we were informed by others, are expected to be present."(1)

Elizabeth provided Nathaniel Gyles, the Master of the Children, and Evans, the manager of the theater, with the money and equipment necessary for training the boys. Their studies in singing included choral, quartette, duet and solo work. The boys at Blackfriars needed this training as well as the Choristers at the Chapel, because the plays which they gave included many lyrics, and the masques were often accompanied with music from "spirit voices of an enchanted chorus." She also insisted that all of the boys become acquainted with the organ, lute, bandora, manolin, violin, bass-viol, 'cello, flute and cornet; for every 16th century gentleman had to be able to play two or three instruments. A great deal of time was devoted to teaching the boys to dance gracefully, for often times the masques were comprised of a series of artistic interpretative dances, very different from the jigs and the Morris dances seen on the public stage. (2) In addition to the training necessary for artistic stage productions Elizabeth also insisted upon the boys receiving the same grammar school training which they had when they lived at the Chapel

(1) Translated in notes of Wallace p. 220-222

(2) Wallace, C.W.: This Children of the Blackfriars p. 114

Royal. Evans provided a school room at the Blackfriars for this purpose, which she financed and equipped. Since the boys presented only one play each week, they had plenty of time in which to acquire an education.

The most notable example of Elizabeth's interest in The Children of the Chapel Royal at Blackfriars is the commission which she granted to Giles to impress boys. This also is an example of her selfishness, because it was her own pleasure which she was looking out for, primarily, and not the good of the boys. This commission was not a new innovation. As we have seen before, both Hunnis and Edwards were given permission to take up children for the Chapel, and they never got into any trouble doing it. However, when they enforced boys to join their ranks, there was no Blackfriars theater. The parents did not object too much to having their sons become choir-boys. The commission stated that only twelve boys could be instructed at the Chapel Royal. However, it said that Giles could move any additional boys, which he had impressed, anywhere he wanted them if he could not make use of them at the Chapel and that he could call them into the Chapel when he saw fit. Thus, when he had more than twelve boys at the Chapel Royal, he turned the extras over to Henry Evans at the Blackfriars, who boarded and lodged them at royal expense. Here they were taught singing, dancing, play-acting and grammar school subjects, as has already been described.

It was this new interpretation of the latter part of the commission to which parents objected. Henry Clifton com-

plained to the Queen that his son Thomas, aged thirteen, was kidnapped in December 1600, while on his way to school. His captors took him to the Blackfriars "to deteyne and compell to exercyse the base trade of a mercynary enterlude player to his utter losse of tyme, ruyne, and disparagment." At the Blackfriars he was "committed to the said playe howse amongste a companie of lewde and dissolute mercenary players purposing in that place (fore noe service of your matie) to use and exercise him the sayd Thomas Clifton in acting parts in base playes and interludes to the mercinary gayne and pryvat comoditie of them the said "Nathaniell Gyles, Henry Evans, James Robinson and other theire said confederates " Clifton continues his complaint by relating the contemptuous manner in which Gyles spoke to him of the queen and the commission which she had given him. He closes by saying, "They did then and there deliver unto his sayd sonne, in most scornfull, disdaynfull and dispightfull manner, a scroll of paper conteyning part of one of their said playes or enterludes" (1) which the boy had to learn or receive a whipping. Within a few days the father obtained a warrant for Sir John Fortescue of the privy Council and the boy was released.

However, Queen Elizabeth continued her whole-hearted support of the Children at the Blackfriars in spite of this opposition, for there are records of her attending their plays after this complaint had been filed, declaring by her presence her staunch support of their projects. (2)

(1) Quoted by Vail Matter School Drama in English p. 17

(2) Wallace, C. W. Children of Chapel at Blackfriar p. 96

We also learn, through Clifton's complaint, who composed the personnel of the Company at the Blackfriars. In the following paragraph Clifton lists those boys who were impressed. "Amongste which numbers see by the persons aforesaid and their agents so uniuſtly taken, used and employed one John Chappell, a gramer ſchole ſcholler of one Mr. Spykes ſchole neere Criplegate, London; John Notteram a gramer ſcholler in the free ſchole at Weſtminſter; Nathan Field a ſcholler of a gramer ſchole in London, kept by one Mr. Monkaster; Avery Truſſell and apprentice to one Thomas Grymes, apprentices to Richard and George Chambers; Salmon Pavy, apprentice to one Pierce; being children in no way able or fitt for ſinging nor by anie the ſayd confederates endeavoured to be taught to ſinge but by them, the ſayde confederates abuſively employed as aforesayd only in plays and interludes." (1) This list goes with the names prefixed to Jonſon's Cynthia's Revels (1600) and the Poetaster (1601) gives us the moſt complete liſt which is extant of the Children of the Chapel at the Blackfriars. Thoſe appearing in the former play were Nathaniel Field, John Underwood, ſalathiel Pavy, Robert Baxter, Thomas Day and John Froſt. In addition to theſe names, there appear in the liſt accompanying the Poetaster the names william Oſtler and thomas Martin." (2)

Records indicate that when Field, Pavy, and Clifton were impressed they were probably about ten years old. Jonſon's poem on the death of ſalathiel Pavy helps to ſubſtantiate this

(1) Ibid., p. 80

(2) Murray, J. L.: English Dramatic Companies p. 534



belief. In that poem he says:

Years he numbered scarce thirteen  
 When fates turned cruel  
 Yet three filled zodiacs had he been  
 The stage's jewel. (1)

This might mean that the portion of the Chapel Royal which was at the Blackfriars was made up of ten-year-olds. Since these boys were acting more than they were singing;—for indeed some of them had no singing voices at all;—they remained members of the Chapel Royal during and after the changing of their voices. No doubt all of the boys were very congenial, for as Clifton's summary shows, in addition to being about the same age, they had previous training in common, for they were all kidnapped either from grammar schools or apprenticeships.

There is some disagreement about the names of some of these boy-actors, Salmon and Salathiel are used interchangeably as the given name of young Pavy. There is evidence for both names being correct. Such errors were very common during the sixteenth century, for printing and spelling were far from perfect. However, Nathaniel and Nathan in referring to the actor-Field, do not apply to the same person. They were two different people. Nathan was the actor-playwright; his brother Nathaniel was a printer. Nathan was the youngest of the family/ (1581) (2)

The Fields, who were all Oxford and Cambridge graduates,

- (1) Baldwin, T.W.: Organization and Personnel of Shakespearan C  
 (2) Brinkley, R.F.: Nathan Field, Actor, Playwright p. 7

were a family of writers, so that it is not a matter of coincidence that the young actor, Nathan, should try his hand at play writing. (1)

By 1572 John Fields, Nathan's father had become a prominent leader in London among those seeking reformation in the Church of England. When he died in 1588, he was an ardent Puritan minister. (2) If he had lived, the stage would have lost one of its best actors and one of the minor writers. Instead of records of the famous actor, Nathan Field<sup>in</sup>, would have records of another complaint such as we have in regard to Thomas Clifton. But John Field did not live to rescue ~~the~~ his son from the sin which he had spent his life preaching against.

Facts about Nathan's private life are very scarce. He was attending Mr. Monkaster's school when he was kidnapped by Nathaniel Gyles in 1600. If Nathan entered school at the normal age, he had received four years' education before he was taken up by Gyles. Although when he left his mother, he left the Puritan influence under which he had lived, he retained many characteristics of the Fields, among others the desire to learn. He was only thirteen when Jonson found him pondering over Latin while the other Chapel children were playing. Jonson took such an interest in the boy that he gave him personal assistance in his studying. Nathan expresses his hero worship toward his benefactor in the verses which he prefixed to Jonson's Volpone. (3)

He was only twenty-two years old (1609) when he

(1) Ibid., p. 2

(2) Ibid., p. 3-5

(3) Ibid., p. 15

decided to write. It took considerable courage for a young man like Field to attempt to write plays when Shakespeare was still writing, Dekker and Heywood were at the height of their careers, and Middleton, Beaumont and Fletcher had begun to write. Though Field's father would have considered his profession wicked, he retained some of the piety which had been instilled in him during his early home life, for whenever he mentions God in his plays, it is always in a reverent tone. In his Woman is a Weathercock, he creates one character who puts trust in God to right the wrong which has been done her. He also speaks in this play of God's just distribution of wealth and wisdom. (1)

Nathan Field was connected with the actor companies for nineteen years, during which time he enjoyed a very pleasant friendship with Ben Jonson; but the boy-actors' association with the playwrights was not always so pleasant as that relation between Field and Jonson. The reader can get some insight into the situation backstage during a performance, from the induction to Cynthia's Revels. When Jonson is asked for, the second child says, "We are not so officiously befriended by him as to have his presence in the tiring house to prompt us aloud, stamp at the book holder, swear for our properties, curse the poor tireman, rail the music out of tune, and sweat for every venial trespass we commit as an author would if he had such fine enghles as we. I would I were whipped instead." (2)

Although we have the names of only thirteen or fourteen

(1) Ibid., p. 16

(2) Ibid., p. 22

boys who played at the Blackfriars, we know that during Elizabeth's reign the company could not have had less than twenty five members, for some of their plays show as many as twenty or twenty-five characters on the stage at one time. All of their plays had from twenty to thirty rôles; but as some of them were minor parts, it is possible that one boy may have doubled. Even then it is impossible to place the minimum below twenty as the following summary of plays presented by Children and Blackfriars will show:

Play	Date	No. of characters in play
Case is Altered	ca. Sept. Oct. 1597	25 plus servants
Cynthia's Revels	ca. April 1600	23
Sir Giles Goosecap	ca. April 1601	25 plus lictor
The Gentleman Usher	ca. summer 1601	31 plus
Monsieur D'Olive	ca. May 1602	21 plus
The Widow's Tears	Sept. 18, 1602	23 plus
The Dutch Courtezan	fall-winter 1602	18 plus
The Malcontent	spring 1603	21
May Day	ca. May 1602	21 plus

\*(No. in cast on stage at once)

In general the plays which the Children of the Chapel Royal presented at Blackfriars included more personal, local, and political allusions than the plays produced by the adult companies. Their tragedies contained more ranting and bombast. Their plays were colored by the courtly, fashionable, and smart

audiences and by the irresponsible nature of the youthful actors. This latter circumstance accounts at least in part for the political indiscretions in Eastward Ho, The Isle of Gulls and the two Byron tragedies. (1)

The masques at Court were an ancient English custom which the Tudors carried out in elaborate detail during the Christmas festivities; but it was not until the establishment of the Chapel Children at Blackfriars that the masque became an integral part of the play. This was an entirely new feature in the development of the drama, and it must have greatly pleased the aristocratic audience. The dances were made up of "nymphs, sylphs, or other airy, mythological or fanciful shapes. The effect was heightened by the special costumes, calculated to lead the eye through the maze of masque into pleasing bewilderment." (2) There is a good example of the masque in Jonson's Cynthia's Revels in which there is a dance by four nymphs and four fairies. They were all dressed to the taste of the Royal Court of Fancy. "The nymphs in citron, green, vari-colored, and white, <sup>to</sup> match their sylvan partners in green and blue, purple empaled with gold, blush color and watchet-tinsel." (3) The whole situation was fantastic, mingling color, movement, and music in harmonious charm. Plays with such elaborate dances as this cost the queen a great deal of money. The scenery and stage properties which they used for the setting of their plays were very simple, but they made up for it in the elaborateness of gorgeous

(1) Ibid., p. 15

(2) Ibid., p. 119

(3) Ibid., p. 119

costuming.

We are able to visualize very clearly a typical entertainment as the Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars presented it to the Queen, through the Diary entry by the Duke of Stettin-Pomerania whom Elizabeth entertained when he was on a tour of the chief states of Europe to complete his education.

"September 18, 1602: We went to the play at the Children's Theater which in its plot deals with a chaste widow. It was a story of a royal widow of England . . . All of their performances are acted by candle-light which produces a fine spectacular effect.

"For a whole hour preceding the play one listens to a delightful musical entertainment on organs, flutes, pandorins, mandolins, violins and lutes, as on the present occasion indeed, when a boy cum voce tremula sang so charmingly to the accompaniment of a bass-viol that unless possibly the nuns at Milan may have excelled him, we have not heard his equal on our journey." (1)

Such a delightful concert of instrumental and vocal music for an hour preceding the play was the customary introduction to the afternoon's entertainment. As it was not a part of the play, we do not find any of the music mentioned in them or printed with them. For that reason there is little of it extant. It is very probable that the Blackfriars popularized the vocal and instrumental concert, for in 1609 special

(1) translated in notes by Wallace p. 220-221

provision was made for concerts as well as plays in the Articles of Agreement by the Children of the King's Revels at Whitefriars. The fact that the earliest known English song books appeared in 1600 may be traced to this combination of music and drama at the Blackfriars theater. (1)

It will be remembered from the previous chapter that, although most of the boy companies had passed the peak of their career by 1600, the boys at St. Paul's were still, commanding large audiences. From 1600 to 1603 there was keen rivalry between the Chapel Children at Blackfriars under Giles and Paul's Boys for popularity. Each tried to attract the attention of the public by presenting novel plays by the best playwrights. Jonson, Lyly, and Chapman wrote for the Children at Blackfriars and Marston, Perry, Dekker and Middleton wrote for Paul's boys. Personal satire figured more than usual in the plays by all of these authors.<sup>2</sup>

Ben Jonson was born in 1573, about ten years after Shakespeare. As his father was dead, his family had to struggle along as best they could. Through the assistance of William Camden, he was able to attend Westminster school; and there is no record of his having attended either university. After having worked at the brick-laying trade for a short time, he went into the army, returned to London in 1592, and soon after married. His career as a playwright began about three years later. (3)

The earliest recorded play at the Blackfriars was

(2) Fleay, F.G.: History of London Stage p. 154

(1) Wallace, C.H.: Note in Children of Chapel at Blackfriars P. 123

(3) Schelling, F.E.: Elizabethan Drama P. 465

his The Case is Altered. His services as Court entertainer began when the Children of the Chapel went to the Blackfriars in 1597, At which time he transferred his affiliations from the Lord Chamberlain Company. It is through this transferring of allegiance that Jonson brought the Children at the Blackfriars into the war of the theaters. He wrote many plays satirizing his fellow playwrights and actors which the boys presented.

Students of Jonson have traced the characters of The Case is Altered like his others to their source. The satire on his fellow playwrights is not so prominent in this play, however, as in some of his later ones. In the eccentric old Court Ferneze we find an example of Jonson's customary<sup>of</sup> preparing the audience for the appearance of a peculiar character through the mouths of the others. He employed this device to the extreme in Cynthia's Revels, for in that play he describes the characters more by the words of their fellow-actors than by their own speeches or actions. He also suggests their characteristics by the names which he give to them; for instance, Morose, the grumbler, and Subtle, the deceiver.<sup>(1)</sup>

His two most famous plays are Cynthia's Revels presented by the Children of the Chapel in 1600, and the Poetaster, presented by them in 1601. Mr. Fleay gives a detailed account of the personal satire behind the fictitious names in Cynthia's Revels. Lodge, Dekker, Marston, Munday, and Daniel all receive their share of Jonson's stinging wit.<sup>(2)</sup>

(1) Fleay, F.G.: Chronicle of English Drama Vol. I p. 362-3

(2) Creizenach, W.: *English Drama in Age of Shakespeare* p. 284



Character so outweighs incident in this play that as far as action is concerned the play is practically stationary. The action is confined to no definite locality. "At one moment we find ourselves in the realm of Fashion's follies and the literary interests of the day, at the next we are transported into an imaginary country of poetic fantasy." (1) The scene of The Poetaster on the other hand is definitely laid in ancient Rome, but the disguise of Roman names is not enough to conceal his meaning. His references to "the actors on the other side of the Tiber" is plainly to Shakespeare's company at the Globe in Southwark. This play represents the "machinations of one Crispinus, brisk Poetaster (plainly Marston) who hires the help of Demetrius, his poor journeyman (as certainly Dekker) to traduce Horace, next to Virgil the poet paragon of the age. Horace is of course Jonson; Virgil has been thought variously to be taken<sup>as</sup> Chapman, which seems likely, or Shakespeare. The object of the whole drama is unmistakably 'to show that what Jonson's enemies regarded to be in him arrogance, conceit, bitterness and deserved poverty, were in reality proper, self esteem, righteous indignation, and neglected virtue.'" (2)

Dekker and Marston used the Children of St. Paul's as a means of replying to Jonson. Satiromastix or The Untrussing of the Humorous Poet is Dekker's answer to Jonson's Poetaster. It was acted in the fall of 1601 privately by Paul's boys and publicly by the Chamberlain's servants. This

(1) Creiznach, W: English Drama in Age of Shakespeare p. 228  
 (2) Schelling, F.E.: Elizabethan Drama p. 484

play is also crowded with personal allusions. Jack Drum's Entertainment by Marston contains a representation of Jonson on the stage. It was acted by Paul's boys in 1600 as a reply to Cynthia's Revels and Every Man out of his Humour.

When James I came to the throne in 1603, he changed the names of both the adult and the children's companies. The Children of the Chapel Royal become the Queen's Revels. The Children at Paul's seem to have retained their old name until 1607, when they disappeared completely and a new company under the title of the King's Revels appeared. However, by 1610 they seem to have been transformed into an adult company under the title of the Duke of York's Revels. (1)

The Children of the Chapel, now the Queen's Revels, continued to act at the Blackfriars until 1610, when they also gave way to the increasingly prominent men's companies. The Blackfriars was closed during the epidemic of the plague in 1603. When they began to play once more, Evans, discouraged by his losses while the theater was closed, tried to transfer the lease to Burbage; but he was unsuccessful. In 1604 Daniel was hired to select the plays for the children to present; but apparently he had very poor taste, for twice, in 1604-5 the plays which he chose gave offense at Court. One was Philatas which referred ~~again~~ to the execution of the Earl of Essex. The other was Eastward Ho, a satire on the Scots by Jonson, Chapman and Marston. As a result of the latter play the authors were imprisoned and the theater was closed for

(1) Schelling, F.E.: Elizabeth Drama p. 495

a short time. (1) However, they were soon allowed to play again, for in 1607 we find them giving Chapman's The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron. But this play did not meet any more approval than the two preceding. The Children at Blackfriars were suppressed again, and this time Evans was so discouraged that he turned the lease over to Burbage (1608). All the theaters were closed because of the plague at the time, when they opened in 1609 Burbage backed the Children of the Queen's Revels at the Blackfriars for another year. But by January 4, 1610 they had been reorganized and moved to Whitefriars. (2)

They had had a long and successful run, but with the death of their beloved queen and benefactor they lost their hold on the public. The new Royal House (Stuarts) introduced new tastes and new fashions. The children still entertained the court from time to time; but they no longer held the center of attention among the theater goers. It was no longer the style for the aristocracy to patronize boy-companies. They had had their day and finally, they had to give place to the better trained, more mature players.

#### Chapter V

##### The Relation Between the Boy Actors and the Men's Companies

The constitution of the most ancient choral body of England provided for twenty-eight to thirty-four men and eight to twelve children who appeared at Court either together or separately to entertain the king or queen as the case might

(1) Murray, J. T: English Dramatic Company p. 355

(2) Ibid., p. 356

be. During the fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth centuries the men were more important than the boys; but after the accession of Mary in 1553, the gentlemen of the Chapel Royal no longer appeared at Court as actors. The last recorded instance of their acting is Genus Humanum, during the Christmas season of 1553. This date marks the beginning of the brilliant career of the boy actors. It is very probable that the histrionic activity of the men began with the early morality plays and pageants and ended when the court amusements began to take on a lighter vein. (1)

When the men enter the picture again, we find that both their position and the drama has changed a great deal. They are no longer connected with the boys, because they are members of the same Royal Chapel, but because they are members of rival professional actor companies. Elizabeth invited companies of men actors under the patronage of some favorite lord to act at court but rarely during the early part of her reign. After 1572 she invited them once each Christmas. It was through this annual appearance at court that they were able finally to take the place of the boys who had monopolized royal favor for about twenty-five years.

The competition for success at court, which meant likewise public success, was between the men's companies, the Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars, and the Children at St. Paul's. Although the children were overmatched by the men, they were able to hold their own, because of the queen's power-

(1) Wallace, C. H. *Evaluation of English Drama* p. 78

ful backing. Of the thirty-seven plays acted at Court between 1577 and 1580 ten of them were produced by boys.

The first fifteen or twenty years of Elizabeth's reign saw the Children at the height of their historionic career. Fanciful masques and pageants were especially suited to their ability. As long as the masque was a separate type of entertainment, the boys were an essential part of the entertaining staff at Court, for the large raw-boned Englishmen could not present masques with anything but farcical interpretation. However, with the incorporation of masques into the plot of the plays, the need for boy-companies diminished. From that time there existed a constant struggle between the boy companies and the men-companies for dominance.

We have already seen in the preceding chapter the rivalry that existed between the Children at St. Paul's and the Children of the Chapel due to the personal enmities of their playwrights. This use of the children as weapons in a battle of wits among the adults was an important factor in the final destruction of the boy-companies. The audience soon grew tired of the witnessing of this "war on the theaters" and no longer attended their plays.

Shakespeare did not take an active part in this "war". He recognized the popularity of the boys and willingly acknowledged their superior position in the queen's favor. There is little doubt but what they influenced his writing greatly(1) for they had set the dramatic tone of the period, and

(1) cf; Lyly's influence on Shakespeare as illustrated in Love's Labor's Lost

in order to command an audience, Shakespeare and the other authors had to create the type of plays which the boy companies dictated as "the fashion".

Shakespeare's only criticism was that the playwrights (Jonson, Dekker, etc.) were setting the boys in opposition to the adult companies which they would join later. (1) He also blames the "nation" for allowing and encouraging such a state of affairs. For a while the controversy was so hot that neither side would produce a play unless the poet took the part of those players and attached the poets and players of the opposite side. (2)

The famous passage in which Shakespeare delivers this reprimand is known as the "aerie of children, little eyases." (Hamlet II ii 315-50) Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are talking together. When Hamlet asks what plays there are in the city, Rosencrantz replies that the men's companies are traveling in the provinces, because the queen has closed all but two theaters and she has laid severe restrictions upon them. In answer to Hamlet's question of the reason for Elizabeth's restrictions, Rosencrantz, replies that it is not because of their inability to play well, but because the queen has thrown all of her support on the side of the "aerie" of "little eyases" (nest of the little eaglets) which are in her favor. The rivalry was not between the inferior children actors and the adult companies, but between the professional boy-companies who were receiving the generous applause of aristocratic London

(1) Brinkley, R. F.: Nathan Field Actor Playwright p. 24

(2) Wallace, C. W.: Children of Chapel at Blackfriars p. 180

and the Shakespeare companies who wanted that applause. Shakespeare was not bitter in his comment. He simply expressed in very mild language his righteous indignation at the super-sedence of mere boys over more mature actors, and the use the majority of the playwrights of the day was making of the established popularity of the boy-companies. (1)

In addition to the competition between the boy companies and the adult companies, we find an entirely different but very important relationship between certain boy actors and the adult companies. Since women were taboo on the stage during the sixteenth century, the female parts had to be taken by males. Boys were employed by the adult companies for these parts almost entirely because of their stature, voice, general fairness and smoothness of skin. The boy companies supplied a body of trained actors from which such actors might be recruited. Nathan Field was especially famous for his performances in women's parts. (2)

It is of interest to note how often the women in the sixteenth century plays, during the development of the plot, are made to disguise themselves as men. It was not an easy task for a boy to take the part of a girl disguised as a boy and make his natural boyish mannerisms appear as though they were only put on for the occasion, as part of the disguise. This situation occurs in five of the Shakespeare plays alone. Portia, Nerissa, and Jessica in The Merchant of Venice;

(1) Schelling, F. E.: Essay An Arey of Children, Little Eyases  
(2) Bond, R. H.: Complete Works of Lyly p. 36

Viola in Twelfth Night; Julia in the Two Gentlemen of Verona; Rosalind in As You Like It, and Imogen in Cymbeline. Boys were also used to create a burlesque situation by presenting a hoax effected by a boy dressed as a girl as in The Taming of the Shrew by Shakespeare, What You will by Marston and Epiccoene by Jonson. (1)

The most lasting relationship between the boy-companies and the men's is the one referred to by Shakespeare. The boys not only transferred their affiliation as actors to the adult companies when they had out-grown the Chapel Royal and the Chapel at Paul's on when "women" were needed, but they also became very efficient managers of the Restoration theaters. There is definite evidence of three boys having joined the Shakespeare's Company when the Children at Blackfriars was dissolved. Philips, Sly, and Fletcher, members of the Shakespearean Company, had died between 1605 and 1608; and we find their places filled by William Ostler and John Underwood. The list of players attached to Epiccoene shows that they had left the children's company before that was presented in 1609. (2) Their only opportunity to join the Shakespearean Company would have been in the autumn of 1608 when the lease of the Blackfriars was given up. When Nathan Field out-grew the Queens's Revels (at Blackfriars and later at Whitefriars), he joined Henslowe's Company, where he remained until Henslowe's death. Then he transferred to the King's Men, where he remained until 1619, the end of his career as an actor. (3)

(1) Ibid., p. 229

(2) Baldwin, T. W.: Organization and Personnel of Shakes. Co. p.

(3) Schelling, F.E.: Elizabethan Drama p. 519



## Importance of Boy-Actors in English Drama

## Chapter VI

The most striking information gleaned from the preceding chapters is the tremendous importance of the boy-actors in the development of the drama. It was because of their musical training that lyrics became popular in the body of the plays; it was through their efforts at Court that the native drama and the classical school of drama were united, each benefiting by the union; it was also due to their specialized training in <sup>that</sup> vocal-instrumental concerts became popular; and it may have been a result of this popularization of concerts that the first English song books appeared at that time.

Aside from the general contributions to the development of drama, it is of particular interest to notice the various types of plays which the boys attempted to produce and the types in which they excelled. The most logical approach to that is through the elimination of those which did not survive. Of the five groups of boy-actors in grammar schools and three royal Chapels, only those in two of the Chapels survived the first twenty-years of Elizabeth's reign. The reason for their failure is apparent. Although Elizabeth was interested in the grammar schools and the welfare of the children, she was not particularly fond of the plays which they presented. Since she patronized only what she enjoyed and since the London public patronized only what had received her

sanction; the grammar school plays never gained the attention of the general public.

The Masters of the schools were not disappointed. They did not train the boys to present plays for entertainment. They used the plays as a means of teaching clear and distinct enunciation, graceful manners, and mastery of the language. They wished to inspire in the pupils the love and appreciation of the classics which they enjoyed. It is no wonder that their plays were not successful commercially. All of their plays were classical and humanistic in character. Many of them were by Plautus and Terence, and the rest were patterned on these Latin authors.

The Chapel at Windsor was approved by Elizabeth, but it never gained the position of influence which the Chapel Royal and St. Paul's did. There are two reasons for their never developing into a commercial company of actors. First, they were situated at Windsor Castle, twenty miles outside of London, and so, out of reach of London theater-goers. And second, they were not blessed with any gifted Masters or playwrights. Their primary function was to entertain the queen from time to time when they were called by ~~the~~ Queen, but she had such a variety of entertainment from which to choose in London that she did not call upon them after Farrant's death.

There remain for consideration only the Children of Chapel Royal and the Children at St. Paul's. Their success can be traced to several causes. First of all they were con-

veniently located, within easy reach of those who enjoyed the drama. In addition they were very fortunate in having on their lists of playwrights such famous authors as John Lyly, John Edwards, Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker, etc. They received the unconditioned approval of the queen, who made attendance at their performances the fashion. And last, but not least, in importance they produced plays for enjoyment, not for pedagogical teaching. The plays were written and were produced with "the eye on the audience". They were also written with "the eye on the ability of the actors."

The last qualification ruled out any chronicle plays. In spite of the fact that plays based on Holinshed's and other historian's accounts of English kings, were popular during the 90's, we do not find the children attempting to produce any of these. They were not mature enough to render dramatic and tragic passages well.

As we have seen, most of these boy-actors were picked up from the street and impressed into the Queen's service when they were on their way to school or to work. They were not selected because of their known dramatic power. Giles took what he thought looked to be a promising subject and endeavored to bring out the latent dramatic ability if there was any. Since the boys were not selected upon the basis of tested ability to act, there was only the chance that 50% of them might possess that inborn mysterious something which distinguishes a great artist from an average actor, known as dramatic power. It might

be defined as a clear, penetrating and persuasive force of mind with strong emotion<sup>l</sup> understanding and sympathy. (1)

Let us apply this definition together with Mrs. Fiske's statement that a "piece of acting is not only a thing of science but a work of art, something to be perfected by the actor according to the ideal within him --- within him." (2) to these boy actors. If we assume that the psychologist's theory in regard to guessing the correct answers in a true-false test will also apply to guessing the dramatic ability of boys, we cannot expect to find more than half of them possessing the feel for acting. With the exception of Nathan Field I have not found any books written on the ability of the individual boys in the individual plays. This is an indication, I believe, that the majority of the boys were not worthy of such special attention. Their commendable acting was due to the high degree of imitative instinct which every child possesses and to the skill of the Master in showing them what and how they were to imitate. Nathan Field and Salathiel Pavy were the exceptions. From the praise which Pavy received from Jonson and from the accounts of Field's acting especially in women's parts, we may justly conclude that they excelled their companions. They entered into to the spirit of the character which they were impersonating. When Field played the part of Cynthia in Endymion (if he did) he was Cynthia in body and soul and character. There was nothing about him suggestive of Nathan Field. Such an ability does not present itself without

(1) Definition of dramatic power by Mrs. Agnes Knox Black

(2) Mrs. Fiske, by Alexander Woolcott p. 93

training, but ~~neither can it be created in one who does not present itself without training,~~ but neither can it be created in one who does not possess genius in his soul.

The general lack of dramatic power in the boys is one explanation for their not attempting such a play as Hamlet or King Lear. Another reason for their not producing the more serious plays is their lack of experience. It is impossible for even a genius to represent deep anguish and suffering if he has never experienced it himself or seen a very close friend suffer.

Then we may assume that the popularity of these companies of boys was not due to the dramatic power which each actor possessed as was the case in adult companies; but to plots, intrigue, dialogue and spectacular display and most important of all, to the fact that the queen had made attendance at these plays the style.

The plays in which they excelled were the light fanciful comedies based for the most part on mythology, containing dances, songs, fairies, magic, etc. These elements would naturally appear in that type of play. Mythological characters such as Cynthia, Endymion, etc., were used in allegory to flatter the queen. Naturally she enjoyed it and if she enjoyed it, then it was natural for her to assist those who praised her to further success. The boys were successful as long as they gave plays whose theme ran in a light pleasing vein, but when their plays began to take on the color of the

time, to use allegory as a means of satirizing contemporary writers instead of praising the queen, they lost her favor. That fact combined with her death and the accession of a new royal house is explanation enough for the end of their period of prosperity.

The conclusion which is of interest to the student of English drama is the exact position which the boys commanded in the scheme of things. There is no doubt that they held a position of extreme importance during the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Shakespeare admits that the competition was keen. The fact that famous playwrights preferred to be affiliated with them rather than with the adult companies shows that they were the more popular. John Lyly, the most outstanding man of the early part of their reign, devoted all of his talent to their work. Ben Jonson, the outstanding poet and playwright of the latter part of their period, did all of his apprentice work with them. In the case of Lyly, the equation works both ways. The fact that Lyly wrote for them not only proves that they were famous but it is one of the outstanding reasons for their being famous. It was he who made fashionable the allegorical play with ancient classical and mythological people for characters in which they excelled. Campaspe, Sappho and Phao, and Endymion were all examples of this. Their share in Elizabethan drama is significant, because they successfully combined comedy and tragedy. They popularized the comedy of manners; they combined music and the drama; they

were seriously involved in the Marprelate controversy and in the "war of the theaters".

### Summary

This thesis has covered about sixty years of history of English drama; 1558-1610; but it went back three hundred years before that to find out where the boy actors originated. The first traces of them were in the miracle plays, followed by their appearance in the monasteries, then in the cathedral choirs and finally in the royal chapels and schools. The early drama which the children presented at Court could hardly be called plays. There was very little plot; they appealed to the audience through the eye instead of through the mind. The boys presented pageants, masques, etc., during the reigns of Elizabeth's Tudor-predecessors. During the same period, the boys in the grammar schools were learning Latin plays, as formal, heavy, and didactic as the court drama was light, gay and amusing. These two types of drama were brought together by Nicholas Udall's, Ralph Roister Doister, a classical play in English and containing touches of English life.

While the drama was developing, the boy-actors were also growing in strength. The Tudors wanted to be entertained and Elizabeth, especially, wanted to be entertained by the Children. Lyly appeared at the crucial moment with a supply of the type of light, gay, amusing plays which the queen enjoyed and which were suited especially to boy-actors. This combination did much to strengthen the popularity of the boys. During the first half of Elizabeth's reign they concentrated their efforts on court performances, but one after another, the masters realized that they could make money on the side by having the children rehearse before an audience. Elizabeth did not disapprove. In fact she sanctioned it to the extent of establishing her own Chapel Children at Blackfriars where they were very popular for about ten years.

By this time (1600) the general tone of their plays had changed since the days of Lyly's best plays. The character of the plays no longer fitted the temperament of the children. The playwrights were taking advantage of the children in the war of the theaters. Their plays were satires, spelled with capital letters. Because of this situation and the death of their main prop, the Queen, the children finally yielded completely their position to the men.

The school drama was very short-lived. Didactic stories, plays, or poems, are never popular. Consequently the grammar schools never developed such highly specialized groups of actors as those of the royal chapels. They presented



plays at Court now and then; but their primary interest was in the classics, and since Elizabeth's was not, they did not appear often enough to be of much importance from the point of view of the boy-actors. Their acting was a part of their lessons. They did it because they had to. The Chapel Royal, St. Paul's and Windsor children acted to entertain. Play acting was the children's work in both cases; but each had such a different motive that they cannot be compared. The school drama was too seriously impeded by classicism, humanism, and pedantry to be able to keep up with the rapidly developing drama of the London Stage.

Outstanding names in connection with the boy-actors are: Lyly and Jonson, playwrights; Nathan Field, actor; Edwards and Hunnis, masters; and Gyles and Evans, theater managers. Of these seven names, three are famous outside of this narrow phase of English drama, a significant item in determining the tremendous importance of the Elizabethan boy-actors. They commanded the attention of the most famous literary men of their times.

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