



## **From Sidney to Heywood: the social status of commercial theatre in early modern London**

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**Abstract** Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors* (written c. 1608, published 1612) is one of the only stand-alone, printed defences of the professional theatre to emerge from the early modern period. Even more significantly, it is 'the only contemporary complete text we have – by an early modern actor *about* early modern actors' (Griffith 191). This is rather surprising considering how famous playwrights and drama of that period have become, but it is revealing of attitudes towards the profession and the stage at the turn of the sixteenth century. Religious concerns formed a central part of the heated public debate which contested the social value of professional drama during the early modern era. Claims against the literary status of work produced for the commercial stage were also frequently levelled against the theatre from within the establishment, a prominent example being Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* (written c. 1579, published 1595). Considering Heywood's *Apology* in relation to Sidney's *Defence*, and thinking particularly about the ways these treatises appropriate the classical idea of mimesis and the consequent social value of literature, gives fresh insight into the changing status of drama in Shakespeare's lifetime and how attitudes towards commercial theatre developed between the 1570s and 1610s. The following article explores these ideas within the framework of the London in which Heywood and his acting company lived and worked.

**Keywords** Thomas Heywood, Red Bull Theatre, Apology for Actors, Philip Sidney, Defence

Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors* (written c. 1608, published 1612) is one of the only stand-alone, printed defences of the professional theatre to emerge from the early modern period. Even more significantly, it is 'the only contemporary complete text we have by an early modern actor *about* early modern actors' (Griffith 2013: 191). This is rather surprising considering how famous playwrights and drama of that period have become, but it is revealing of attitudes towards the profession and the stage at the turn of the sixteenth century. Numerous defences of London's public theatres, and their growing presence within the city, were produced in the late-Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, for example, the address to the readers of *Tamburlaine the Great Part I* (1589), or Thomas Dekker's address to his fellow Queen Anne's Men in *If It Be Not Good The Devil Is In It* (1612), but these texts are parts of printed playbooks. Unlike these examples, Heywood's *Apology* does not accompany a dramatic work. It is a discrete treatise, which brings it closer to the printed attacks on London's public theatres, many of which were produced in the late-Elizabethan and early-Jacobean periods, particularly by Puritan ministers such as Stephen Gosson and Philip Stubbes. Religious concerns formed a central part of the heated public debate about the social value of professional drama during the early modern era. Criticism of the literary status of work produced for the commercial stage were also frequently levelled against the theatre from within the establishment, a prominent example being Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* (written c. 1579, published 1595), to which the following discussion will pay particular comparative attention. Considering Heywood's *Apology* in relation to Sidney's *Defence*, and thinking particularly about the ways these treatises appropriate the classical idea of mimesis and the consequent social value of literature, this essay provides insight into the changing status of drama in Shakespeare's lifetime and how attitudes towards commercial theatre developed between the 1570s and 1610s.

Throughout Heywood's *Apology*, theatres and dramatic traditions of the classical world justify the presence of public theatres in seventeenth-century London. In particular, the *Apology* uses classical Rome as an exemplar for Jacobean London: 'Rome was a metropolis, a place with all the nations known under the sun resorted; so is London, and being to receive all estates, all princes, all nations, therefore to afford them all choice of pastimes, sports, and recreations; yet were theatres in all the greatest cities of the world' (C2r). Heywood asserts that the Greeks made the first amphitheatres, they were the first to train up and properly appreciate the social value of actors and use the performing of mysteries to teach people social virtue and civility 'so that all the neighbour Nations drew their patternes of Humanity from them' (C2v – C3). Julius Caesar himself played Hercules on stage, Herod built a great theatre in Jerusalem and so on down to more recent kings, including Edward IV of England who, Heywood writes, was so pleased with the City Actors that he created the Revels office and gave it a home at the former priory of St John's in Clerkenwell. There, plays could be properly rehearsed ahead of court performances (E). Heywood thus puts the theatre of his London in a teleological sequence, which starts in ancient Greece and makes his own world the natural successor of the classical tradition.

## Sidney and the Stage

The first purpose-built, professional playhouse in London, James Burbage's The Theatre, opened in 1576, so it was a relatively new element of city life when Sidney wrote his *Defence* around 1579. Sidney's *Defence* typifies elite views of popular plays as intellectually inferior to their classical counterparts, nevertheless he argues against the most vocal anti-theatricalists of the period, Puritan reformers. Puritans regarded theatres as places of ill repute and immorality, because they dealt in illusion; to speak broadly, Puritan beliefs maintained that any form of illusion threatened the truth of God's word. William Harrison's comment following the establishment of London's first playhouses reflects this: 'It is an evident token of a wicked time when players were so riche that they can build such houses' (1576; cited in Gurr 2009: 7). Sidney's views can be used to highlight positions held by the ruling elite towards public playing, but they are not to be taken as representative for his entire social class: the early modern period was, of course, a time in which the English aristocracy offered patronage to professional acting companies, showing a level of support for public theatre that is absent from Sidney's *Defence*. Dramatic performances were central to festive entertainments at court, within academic institutions and aristocratic households, and the companies who occupied London's theatres were required by law to be sponsored by a member of the nobility. We know that playhouses were frequented by the gentry from details like Philip Henslowe's re-plastering of the lords' room at the Rose playhouse in 1592 (Rutter 1999: 49), but they are more commonly associated with socially mixed, citizen audiences. Sidney's treatise is not concerned with defending London's public theatres or the drama produced for commercial performance. What he defends is the moral value of literature – its composition and its private consumption – which, for the Puritans, was as morally dangerous a pastime as theatre-going. Sidney's *Defence* was published posthumously, in 1595, suggesting that views he put forward about the social value of newly written drama were still relevant to readers in the mid-1590s, when a higher number of public playing venues were in operation in London. His overall purpose is to argue that poetry – understood as fiction of all forms – has the power to motivate those who engage with it to virtuous action; the treatise was written to counter claims made against the study and writing of 'poesie' as a form of recreation and leisure from the Puritan minister Stephen Gosson (Pollard 2004: 147). Sidney regards 'poesie' as 'the discipline of the enlightened intellect, which seeks to overcome earth-bound thoughts and inclinations in an attempt to recover something of the true and perfect knowledge lost since 'the first accursed Fall' (1595: 12). Crucially, for this discussion, although Sidney defends what he sees as literature, he presents a separate set of views towards the type of drama associated with public playhouses.

Someone like Sidney, a member of the very highest level of society, would have been exposed to classical and contemporary drama at court, and also at university and the Inns of Court, institutions where dramatic performance was a regular part of student life. Within academic communities it was fashionable to

translate and rework classical plays, a trend evidenced by the high number of Senecan translations published in the years immediately after Jasper Heywood's *Troas* (1559). In these private places, drama, whether it was read or performed, was heavily influenced by literature of the classical world, which formed the basis of education in the Elizabethan period. Sidney's *Defence* appropriates the work of Greek and Roman writers, from Plato and Aristotle to Cicero and Horace, synthesising their various philosophies to promote his own understanding of the place of poetry in personal and public life (Payne 1990: 245). Aristotle's writings about the didactic and pedagogic nature of theatre are particularly influential to the *Defence*, indeed, there are certain passages which are translated directly from Aristotle's *Poetics* (Lazarus 2015: 204). Aristotle's *Poetics* emphasises the social value of watching a tragedy; the audience judges the ethical motivation behind the characters' choices, and the consequences of these choices arouse fear and pity. This teaches the audience to be empathetic, thus providing a kind of grandiose cautionary tale, warning against the choices made by the characters on-stage. For Sidney, contemporary drama can only achieve the standard of 'poesie' if it obeys Aristotle's unities of place and time (the 'rules' for dramatic action which, according to Aristotle, dictate that all on-stage action must happen in one location within the space of a single day). Sidney describes this type of tragedy as socially valuable: it is 'high and excellent ... [it] openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours; that, with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded' (*Defence*, 45). Clearly, this type of tragedy has a social and moral purpose, which was highly influential to the way the genre was developed by the educated elite in the early-Elizabethan period. As Kevin Dunn has shown through the example of the popular Inns drama, *Gorboduc, the Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex* (1565), tragedies involving the downfall of tyrannical kings were understood by the Elizabethan aristocracy as a way of mediating political advice to the monarch (Dunn 2003: 282). Interestingly, *Gorboduc* is criticised by Sidney's *Defence*; although the tragedy is 'full of stately speeches and well-sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca's style' it is not 'an exact model of all tragedies. For it is faulty both in place and time, the two necessary companions of corporeal actions' (65). For Sidney, drama can only fulfil its Aristotelian function of providing social and moral lessons if it achieves the perfection of true 'poesie'.

Sidney criticises the widespread production of contemporary, public drama even more heavily than the private tragedy *Gorboduc*. The *Defence* is filled with a contempt for plays which appear to ignore Aristotle's dictums by continually changing location, plays 'where you shall have Asia of the one side, and Afric of the other', and which move around so frequently that the players must tell the audience where they are at every new entry (65). Sidney registers a disdain for this type of drama and the contemporary writers who he feels have a total disregard for the decorum promoted by classical exemplars. Plays performed in public theatres are 'gross absurdities, mingling kings and clowns ... with neither decency nor discretion, so as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the

right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragi-comedy obtained' (67). It almost pains Sidney to speak of these new dramas. He writes, 'I have lavished out too many words of this play matter ... so much used in England, and none can be more pitifully abused; which, like an unmannerly daughter showing a bad education, causeth her mother Poesy's honour to be called in question' (69).

The extent of Sidney's contempt for drama produced for the public stage can, perhaps, be explained by considering its newness and its commerciality. Prior to the proliferation of public theatres, Elizabethan drama had been relatively contained within the royal court, private households and academic institutions: the two universities and the London Inns of Court. The type of elevated, intellectual idealism with which Sidney approaches creative literature can, on one level, be seen as the polar opposite of the money-making motives lying behind the establishment of professional theatres and the consequently increasing demand for the production of new plays. Scholars interested in the commercial history of theatre in this period highlight the rapid turnover of repertory and high demand for the production of new material, illustrating a theatrical culture which can be said to prize novelty over morality (Rutter 1999: 27; Knutson 2001: 61). For Heywood, however, it is the appropriation of the classical world, particularly Aristotelian ideas about pedagogical morality, which the public theatres of his day work to promote.

### **Heywood and the Theatres**

Like the first generation of professional dramatists, the University Wits, Heywood was well educated, matriculating from Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1591. He was not, however, a gentleman or member of the social elite, but the son of a Lincolnshire rector. During his lifetime (1573 – 1641), he was a popular and prolific writer, which is confirmed by Francis Meres's mention of him in *Palladis Tamia* (1598) as one of 'the best for Comedy' (320). John Webster's preface to *The White Devil* (1612) also praises 'the right happy and copious industry of M. Shakespeare, M. Dekker and M. Heywood, wishing what I write may be read by their light' (41). After completing his university education, Heywood became a player-poet working in London for various companies and individuals including Philip Henslowe. From 1600 he was a leading member of the Earl of Worcester's Men, who became Queen Anne's Men in 1603 with the royal patronage reshuffle (this is, of course, when Shakespeare's company become the King's Men and the Admiral's Men become Prince Henry's Men). Like Shakespeare, Heywood was a shareholder, resident writer and actor in his company, a mark of success which can be fully appreciated by noting that only a third of professional poets and dramatists ever had regular contracts (Gurr 2009: 30). In 1605 the Queen Anne's Men set up permanent home at the Red Bull theatre, where Heywood earned his reputation as the citizen playwright. The Red Bull was located on the outskirts of London, in Clerkenwell, an area known (then as now) for somewhat anti-establishment, popular entertainment.<sup>1</sup> The Red Bull was on St. John's Street, 'a busy, messy thoroughfare most associated with the traffic of animals' as it led into the meat market of Smithfield (Griffith 2013: 1). The Red Bull's

location has arguably contributed to the literary place of Heywood's plays within the surviving corpus of early modern drama; Clerkenwell's reputation as the 'brothel-infested' (Rowland 2010: 50), epicentre of the livestock trade, a place of the carnal in all senses of the word, appears to have permeated attitudes towards his work. Eva Griffith's recent study of the Queen Anne's Men shows that, as early as 1699, the Red Bull was viewed as culturally inferior to other theatres. John Wright wrote in 1699:

Before the Wars, there were in being all these Play-houses at the same time. The *Blackfriars*, and *Globe* on the *Bankside*, a Winter and Summer House, belonging to the same Company called the King's Servants ...the Fortune near *White-cross-street*, and the *Red Bull* at the upper end of *St John's-street*: The two last were most frequented by Citizens, and the meaner sort of People. All these Companies got Money, and Liv'd in Reputation, especially those of the *Blackfriars*, who were men of grave and sober Behaviour (quoted in Griffith 2013: 20).

A much later account by theatre historian G. E. Bentley generates the same impression of the Bull, describing it as 'the subject of more sneers than any other playhouse of the time' (quoted in Griffith 2013: 14). Richard Rowland traces the stigma of these associations back to before the Civil War, when professional rivalry between London's acting companies manifested itself in 'a shameless advertising campaign ... of which the purveyors of entertainment at the Red Bull were themselves increasingly and amusingly aware' (Rowland 2010: 15). The Bull maintained the entry price of a penny into the seventeenth century (the lowest of any playhouse), and its repertory is thought to have catered particularly to middle class, citizen audiences (Gurr 2009: 24-5). However, its proximity to the various trades of Clerkenwell has perhaps added to the extent to which literary critics have overlooked the dramas produced for performance there.

Heywood's domestic dramas, most famous among them, *A Woman Killed With Kindness* (1603), and adventure romance plays, like *Four Prentices* and the *Ages* plays, spectacular dramatisations of classical myths, do appear to have resonated particularly with middle-class audiences. The *Apology* suggests that Heywood was aware of this association and that it was a valued element of his professional persona. He writes that theatre taught the English public about the feats of glory performed by kings like Edward III and Henry V: 'plays have made the ignorant more apprehensive, taught the unlearned the knowledge of many famous histories, instructed such as cannot read in the discovery of all our English chronicles' (F3). The way Heywood considers the non-literary members of society shows that he is aware of the non-elite demographic who watch his plays. We should, despite this, resist generalisation of early modern audiences by demographic or by playhouse. Audiences in early modern London were socially diverse and the theatres would have shared spectators. This is particularly true for the Jacobean period after 1608, when the King's Men maintained two playhouses, the Globe and the Blackfriars. The outdoor Globe would have been closed for the winter months with the company relocating to the indoor Blackfriars. The smaller size of this theatre, quite apart from its higher ticket prices, would have meant that 'not all of its [the Globe's] audience could have



These lines also confirm the power of writing itself as an imaginative tool, an idea shared by Sidney. The purpose of Sidney's *Defence*, however, is to promote the social virtues and moral value of poetry as a literary form accessible only to privileged members of society. Despite the obvious contrasts to Heywood's aims in the *Apology*, the invocation and appropriation of the classical world, which were seen as the preserve of the social elite, are the cornerstones on which both writers build their arguments. Heywood uses the same foundations as Sidney but creates a structure that defends the very 'play-matter' Sidney discredits. The *Apology* is divided into three sections: 1) Upon Antiquity of actors; 2) upon their ancient dignity; 3) of the true use of their quality. In the first section, Melopmene, 'the buskined muse [of tragedy], / That held in awe the tyrants of the world, / And played their lives in public theatres' (Br) comes to Heywood in a dream, lamenting that far from being in the golden age of the classical world, 'we are in an age of Iron [when] black-mouth'd Curres, | Barke at the vertues of the former world' (B2v). Heywood here plays upon a well-used formula for literary inspiration. The same type of divine intervention in a dream is seen in Jasper Heywood's prefatory poem to *Thyestes*, in which Seneca visits the sleeping Heywood in order to ensure the continued flourishing of his tragedies at the London Inns of Court. Heywood's invocation of Melopmene and the type of drama she represents – tragedies 'That held in awe the tyrants of the word' – recall the socially valuable classical tragedy mentioned in Sidney's *Defence*, the genre which reminds even great kings of the need for moderate behaviour and humane judgement.

## Religion and the Theatres

Here, the *Apology* also comes into conversation with attitudes towards public theatres held by Puritan groups, the predominant anti-theatricalists of the early modern period. As Melopmene states, the ancient institution of the theatre needs defending because it is under such rabid attack. One example of such an attack comes just three years after the publication of Heywood's *Apology*, when a Puritan minister known only as I. G. publishes *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors* (1613). This treatise is an explicit engagement with the *Apology*, as signalled most obviously by the title page's three sections: 1) Heathenish and Diabolicall institution; 2) Their ancient and moderne indignitie; 3) The wonderfull abuse of their impious qualitie, which deliberately invert those used by Heywood. Early on in his *Refutation*, I. G. appears to take particular offence at Heywood's 'fayned dreame of the *Muse Melpomine*' (A4v). He quotes her lines as follows:

*But now's the Iron age, and Blackmouth'd Curres  
Barke at the virtues of the former world. (A4)*

Here, the blackmouth'd curres are identified as (presumably Puritan) preachers. I. G. writes: 'Next, hath the *Muse*, or rather, *M. Actor* [as he refers to Heywood through the treatise], againe incurred his former lycentiousnesse, impiously belching forth blasphemous words, calling reuerend Preachers, *Blackmouth'd Curres*' (A4v). True enough, in the opening of the *Apology*, Heywood sets out to

argue against Puritan ministers, stating that his writing has been motivated by 'the sundry exclamations of many seditious Sectists in this age' (B).

Heywood's arguments in the opening section of the *Apology* are generated partly by outrage that religious speakers 'haue laushly and violently slandered [public theatres], when they themselves fail to understand the social purpose of theatre. For Heywood, these sectists, in 'undertaking to purifie and reforme the sacred bodies of the church and common-weale (in trew use of both which they are altogether ignorant) would ... rather minister pils to pouson the whole body, than cordials to preserve any of the least part' (B). Here, comparisons can be drawn between the *Apology* and the *Defence* despite the social divides inherent to their authors; both treatises refute claims made against the art of creative literature from religious writers. Sidney's treatise, as mentioned above, was written in response to the Puritan minister Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuses* (1579) (Pollard 2004: 147). Tanya Pollard suggests that the printed defences and attacks on theatre made by Elizabethan and Jacobean religious writers and speakers demonstrate just how 'meteoric' the rise of England's commercial theatres was and also what 'a widely debated entity' these 'vast and highly profitable' organisations were (Pollard 2004: x). As Pollard writes, the raging debates about theatre were not only the preserve of the elite and as both the *Defence* and the *Apology* show, these debates occupied a broad range of social spaces from the university, to the pulpit, to the London bookstalls.

The complaint most frequently, and furiously, levelled against Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre was that its dubious portrayal of morality would encourage sin and bad behaviour. For the Puritans, theatre is as morally suspect as other early modern pastimes available in the metropolis of London, like gambling, dicing, whoring, and drinking. In the printed *Apology* there are many claims made in defence of this idea, interestingly, by the actors themselves, in the form of six dedicatory poems. Written by theatre practitioners including John Webster and actors in Heywood's company, such as Richard Perkins, Robert Pallant and Christopher Beeston, these poems complement the *Apology's* firm belief that theatre has social value and are rare examples of actors' voices apparently speaking their own parts. Thus, they offer fascinating insight into how theatre practitioners understood and experienced the place of their profession within contemporary culture.

A.R. Hopton's verse encapsulates the idea of educational mimesis taken from Aristotle, which the *Apology* seeks to claim for London's public theatres:

What profit many may attaine by playes,  
To the most critticke eye this booke displaies,  
Braue men, braue acts, being brauely acted too,  
Makes, as men see things done, desire to do (B2).

Plays are here granted the same status as Sidney's 'poesie', in being able to inspire men to virtuous action. Hopton's verse acknowledges that this is a relatively controversial claim. His poem is headed with the line 'To them that are opposite to this worke', and it opens with an imperative directed at the type of reader, like Gosson, or I. G., whose tongues have sought to discredit and shame actors and playwrights (Bv). Interestingly, Hopton refers to dramatists as poets

(Bv), again asserting a literary status for contemporary drama. We know, of course, that Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists were also poets but it is important to emphasise the social divisions applied to the production and reception of different literary forms. In addressing the educative nature of play-going, Hopton alerts Heywood's readers to one of the *Apology's* central claims, that watching actions can provide templates for morality which, to think idealistically, might be reproduced in the world beyond the theatre.

These ideas are reiterated by Christopher Beeston's dedicatory poem, which addresses the negative side of the imitative properties inherent in dramatic performance. Anti-theatricalists often noted that the sinful behaviour paraded on the London stages would have the effect of encouraging similar behaviour in the city's audiences. In the *Apology*, Heywood asserts that contemporary audiences are able to apply the correct morality and codes of behaviour, and so wish to replicate virtuous rather than sinful actions. Beeston's contribution to the *Apology* confirms this; he claims theatre as something congenial to 'the generous mind' (B3) and repeats the idealised interpretation of watching drama demonstrated in Hopton's poem:

There see I vertues crowne, and sinnes abuse.  
Two houres well spent, and all their pastimes done,  
Whats good I follow, and whats bad I shun. (B3)

The prefatory poems to the *Apology* address another element of the cultural discourse surrounding the questionable morality of Jacobean theatres, the equation of theatres with taverns and places of sinful idleness, like the brothels of Clerkenwell and Bankside. Gosson's *School of Abuses* highlights the antipathy towards idleness typical of zealous Puritans with the example of Hannibal, whose army received more hurt in one day's ease at Capua than in all the conflicts they had at Cannae. For Gosson, the pursuit of leisure represented by the study of poetry, together with piping and play-going, is a sinful abuse of man's God-given faculties of reason and knowledge. Sidney's *Defence* refutes this, claiming the ability to understand and create poetry as evidence of mankind's elevated status in the natural world. The pursuit of the heightened understanding of which humans are uniquely capable is not an idle and morally unprofitable waste of time, rather, as Sidney writes, by 'having this scope: to know, and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body [man can engage in] the enjoying of his own divine essence' (28). The study and creation of 'poesie', Sidney argues, brings man closer to God. The poems in the *Apology* acknowledge the hostility towards leisure in general, but counter the negative claims made against the theatres by presenting play-going as a positive alternative to other forms of urban recreation.

Richard Perkins, a leading actor in Queen Anne's Men who had been with the company since they were under the Earl of Worcester's patronage, begins his commendatory verse with the playful question:

Thou that do'st raile at me for seeing a play,  
How wouldst thou haue me spend my idle houres?  
Wouldst haue me in a Tauerne drinke all day? (B2v)

Perkins, like Beeston, addresses his verse to a conceivably Puritan reader by challenging reformist views, which cast the natural inclination for leisure as sinful idleness. Perkins' poem suggests that he and others like him 'must haue recreation' as a way of refreshing the self. Perkins effectively turns the tables on anti-theatricalists by suggesting that many who speak out against theatres and recreation do so only for the sake of a public image, and, when removed from the public domain, engage in all the things that they have been evangelically criticising everyone else for doing, a hypocrisy which, of course, makes them even worse than those they speak out against. Perkins here addresses the claims made against actors as purveyors of counterfeit and deceit, suggesting that it is the anti-theatricalist figures who are capable of greater deceit in the upholding of their own public image. The poem suggests this teasingly, but its overall message is profound:

I love no publicke soothers, private scornors  
That raile against lechery, yet loue a harlot,  
When I drinke, 'tis in sight, and not in corners:  
I am no open Saint, and secret varlet.

Still when I come to playes, I loue to sit,  
That all may see me in a publicke place:  
Euen in the stages front, and not to git  
Into a nooke, and hood-winke there my face.  
This is the difference, such would haue men deeme,  
Them what they are not: I am what I seeme. (B3)

The poem inverts contemporary preconceptions about actors, giving the reader an idea of what will be explored in the *Apology*. Jacobean print culture is replete with dedicatory poems by poets to their fellow poets, but the *Apology* is unusual in the prominence it offers the actors' voices. These are features of the text that highlight how conscious theatre practitioners were of their contested social status. Conversely, these poems also illustrate that, despite the anti-theatrical sentiment evident in the period, dramatists were able to defend their profession and that there was a market for doing so.

### **Status and the Stage**

The way the *Apology* appropriates the classical world, traditionally seen as the preserve of the privileged elite, is a hallmark of the rapidly changing social status of drama and the 'meteoric growth' of professional theatre. Heywood's *Apology* stresses that dramatic performance is favoured and legally sanctioned by 'the high and mightie princes of this land' (B), and, since it is approved by the ruling classes, he can 'hold it not a misse to lay open some few Antiquities to approue the true vse of [public theatres]' (B). It is important to recognise that the backing of the aristocracy, and the ancient tradition of public theatre, are joined by Heywood, in a way that marks a contrast in attitude to views aired by Sidney's *Defence*. Following Aristotelian thought also adhered to by Sidney, Heywood posits theatre as a type of social medicine and watching actors perform is an education in itself. Probably the most quoted section of the *Apology* is an example of this inspiration

to virtuous action, an anecdote about a woman watching a play in King's Lynn in Norfolk in which a wife murders her husband. This woman is so moved by what she sees that she cries out mid-show and confesses to the murder of her own husband (Gv). Another episode Heywood inserts to promote the social value of public playing is a story from Perrin, in Cornwall, where the sounds of drums and battles created by a play put off some would-be Spanish invaders (G2). The idealised nature of this episode and its questionable veracity is targeted in I. G.'s *Refutation of the Apology*, which singles out the incident and suggests that the positive outcome of the episode be attributed to God's mercy, not to the play (F3).

Regardless of the truth of either of these episodes, they are important to Heywood's project as they promote the Aristotelian idea that it is through *seeing* things that humans learn, which is also a feature of Sidney's treatise. His *Defence* uses the examples of a rhinoceros and a gorgeous palace as things that are unfamiliar or complex, and therefore, hard to explain with plain words. With a painting or a model, however, the viewer 'should straightways grow, without any need of description, to a judicial comprehending of them' (32). Sidney claims that this power of clarity is what the true poet is able to achieve with carefully composed words. The more literal forms of visual learning presented on-stage arguably undermine the heightened level of mental thought that the study and writing of poetry necessitates. In a sense this is true, but Heywood is aiming for an education of a more basic kind, through dramatic poetry in performance and the imitative function of mimesis described in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Heywood writes that Aristotle taught Alexander to be great through watching dramatisations of Achilles' valour at Troy (B3) and that seeing Caesar returning from battle covered with Pompey's blood can teach one more about classical histories than reading them could do (B4). Here, Heywood confirms the presentation of himself as the citizen playwright, committed to the education of London's ever-growing populace.

It is important to see Heywood's citizen audiences as a diverse group. Griffith's study reminds us: 'A citizen ... could stretch from a smelly fishwife with bad breath to a stylish young Goldsmith showing off his 'new' books' (2013: 212). Heywood appears to associate himself with the higher end of London's civic structure, which, on one level appears at odds with the socially egalitarian aims suggested by the prefatory material in the *Apology*. His play, *Four Prentices of London* presents the city in the same way as the *Apology*. In Godfrey's speech near the opening of the play London is praised as

that City which made Princes Trades-men:  
Where that man, noble or ignoble borne,  
That would not practise some mechanicke skill (B2).

In both texts the city is a productive metropolis, a source of national and civic pride. For Heywood, it appears that trade and commercial production connect London's socially diverse inhabitants, from wealthy aldermen to young apprentices. Importantly, however, the four brothers are apprenticed to the most affluent and largest of the city guilds: Godfrey with the Mercers; Guy with the Goldsmiths; Charles with the Haberdashers; Eustace with the Grocers. Heywood's play then can be said to reinforce social hierarchies which structured the city whilst also appearing as a drama of social mobility. Despite their apprentice-status, the brothers are noble born, for their father is the dispossessed Earl of Boulogne,

whose land has been seized by the French crown. This type of reading suggests that however popular in terms of 'popular' culture Heywood's plays may have been they do not challenge or seek to subvert the status quo. This type of reading also reinforces formal conventions that associate certain literary forms and genres with different social groups; *Four Prentices* is exactly the type of drama that readers of Sidney's *Defence* are encouraged to condemn as an unworthy form of unintellectual art which violates the noble aims of 'poesie'.

The play is like a textbook example of the drama to which Sidney objects, most obviously because of the way its action occupies 'severall different corners of the world' (C) from the coast of Ireland to the Holy Land, but also with its mingling of clowns and members of the nobility, and its use of a Presenter who narrates whole chunks of action (a necessary for a drama of this scope, to condense and explain the action). Within the context of the romance genre, the fantastically changing fortunes of the play are permissible and resonated positively with late-Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences. The play's setting in the chivalric, medieval past perhaps explains its popularity and, of course, excuses the extreme leaps in location and required suspensions of disbelief. For example, when the family cross paths on the journey to Jerusalem, they inexplicably fail to recognise each other; when faced with two of her brothers during one of the play's many battle scenes, Bella Franca exclaims: 'How like he is to Charles by shipwreck dead. And he to Eustace perished in the waves!' (D3v). In turn, the brothers all fall in love with their as-yet-unrecognised sister, who luckily falls for Tancred, the Count of Palatine instead. These are features of play-matter which oppose the mental clarity Sidney asserts as the aim of true literature. Interestingly, the publication of *Four Prentices* in 1615 coincided with the revival of militant Protestantism, which occurred as a counter to the pacifism of James I. The figure of Sidney was presented in this discourse as a model for the young Prince Henry, who formed the centre of the revival. Sidney would have no doubt criticised everything about Heywood's *Four Prentices*, but perhaps most especially the way that its publication appears to have capitalised on the trend for militant Protestantism. Francis Beaumont's pointed satire of the play, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, was a failure on the London stages. Evidently these platforms preferred the type of drama offered by *Four Prentices*, a suggestion which does little to develop common assumptions of citizen audiences and confirms the idea of Heywood as a writer who played to the upper echelons of London's civic authorities, despite his awareness of his own reputation as a playwright popular with non-elite audiences.

Indeed, in the *Apology*, Heywood defers to conventional hierarchy: 'Kings and monarchs are by God placed and enthroned *supra nos*, above us, and we are to regard them as the sun from whom we receive the light to live under' (D). This is a reminder of the contested and precarious status of theatre practitioners in the early modern period; despite the growing presence of professional drama within the city of London, actors remained servants to royal and aristocratic patrons and were reliant on the support of the ruling classes. Heywood's *Apology* turns the kings who appear on the London stages into elements of performance which 'hath power to new mold the harts of the spectators and fashion them to the shape of any noble and notable attempt' (G). In the same way that the actors 'present men with the vglinesse of their vices, to make them the more to abhorre them' (G), so

to do the theatrical kings inspire them to greatness. Heywood again draws on Sidney's claims for the social value of 'poesie' but transposes them to stagecraft and contemporary drama. This returns the text to the Aristotelian idea that through seeing physical examples people are able to imbibe social and moral lessons, but it also implies a level of empathetic capability not generally attributed to citizen audiences. A more typical representation of Jacobean audiences is found in Dekker's Prologue to *If It Be Not Good*, first performed at the Red Bull. Dekker's prologue lashes out against idiot audiences who do not attend to the performance but 'sit *Kissing A Muses cheeke*' (A4) and who '(from *Rare silence*) clap their *Brawny hands, T'Applaud*, what their *charmed soule* scare vnderstands' (A4v). This contrast confirms Heywood as a true apologist for the social value of public theatre, and gives him a kind of distinctive altruism recognised by Douglas Brooks as 'the legitimacy or privilege he [Heywood] accords to theatre audiences' (2000: 64).

What is particularly interesting about the unusual level of favour which Heywood extends towards his audiences, which did comprise members of London's wealthy merchant class as well as the city's artisan labourers, is the extent to which it highlights the social position of professional poets in the city in the early-Jacobean period. The type of cultural superiority over their audiences and readers evident in prefatory material produced in the same period by Dekker, Webster and, of course, Ben Jonson, is, in general, absent from first editions of plays dating from the late-Elizabethan era. Indeed, the humble tone of Richard Jones's address in *Tamburlaine*, 'to Gentlemen readers', reflects ideas germane to Sidney's *Defence*, that reading, and watching plays about the ancient world, and the pursuit of leisure through literature is particular to the educated elite. The level of disdain directed by writers towards their commercial patrons in the first years of the seventeenth century, suggests a kind of cultural elitism shared among professional writers. Thinking back to Sidney's earlier *Defence*, and the sense of social superiority reflected in his writing as a member of the aristocracy, the level of intellectual superiority Jacobean writers assert can, perhaps, be taken as a mark of how far professional theatre allowed writers to assume a position of relative authority within the urban literary culture of their day. Heywood is persistently deferent to social distinctions, respectfully writing of Sidney as 'a learned Gentleman' (F4v), but he nevertheless asserts that the morality Sidney locates in poetry is found in the morality performed by actors on public stages. This development was facilitated by the proliferation of commercial theatres in London which began in the 1570s, gaining such momentum that, thirty years later, professional dramatists like Heywood could claim the same classical sources of virtue for commercially produced theatre. Heywood engages directly with Sidney to make his point, noting that 'his Apology for Poetry' contends 'that Tragedies well handled be a most worthy kind of Poesie. Comedies make men see shame at their faults' (F4v), pointing out that Sidney does admit that performance can have a commendable use. The difference is that Sidney refers to private performances, like the first performances of *Gorboduc*, which took place in the Inner Temple and then the Queen's palace at Whitehall. Heywood is claiming the same virtues for public venues, and so by extension, mapping them onto the whole of the theatre-going populace, not only the privileged audiences of private performances.

## Conclusion

I would like to end with a point which encapsulates the curious pattern of influence and aversion generated by comparison of Sidney's *Defence* with Heywood's *Apology* and the wider debates about the social value of early modern theatre; these conflicting, yet intersecting ideas are reflected in the importance of the English language to Sidney, Heywood and their original readers. Sidney is credited with being part of the group of Elizabethan poets, along with Wyatt and Spenser, who made English into a language worthy of poetry. Heywood profits from their endeavour. He writes of the changes that have come to the English tongue 'within these sixty years', but he also shows what the work of the public theatre can do to continue their project: 'now by this secondary means of playing, continually refined, every writer striving in himself to add a new flourish unto it; so that in process, from the most rude and unpolished tongue, it is grown to a most perfect and composed language ... that many nations grow enamored of our tongue (before despised)' (F3). Now, because of public theatre, the English spoken by London's actors can be a source of local and national pride. Maybe Sidney would have been appalled to hear these words, but (any of) our contemporaries who have inherited the rich tradition of public drama from the likes of 'M. Dekker, M. Shakespeare and M. Heywood', would probably agree with Heywood's rather prophetic words in the *Apology*, 'playing is an ornament to the city; which strangers of all nations, repairing hither, report of in their countries, beholding them here with some admiration: for what variety of entertainment can there be in any city of Christendom, more than in London?' (F3).

## Notes

1. Here, I refer to the famous nightclub, Fabric, located in Clerkenwell opposite Smithfield market on Charterhouse Street, which connects with St John's Street, where the Red Bull once stood. The club was forced to close in 2016 following well-documented disputes with Islington Council, but re-opened in January 2017. Tensions between public entertainment venues and civic authorities in London are then a shared feature of Heywood's London and our own.
2. In addition to the previously cited titles by Eva Griffith, *A Jacobean Company and its Playhouse: the Queen's Servants at the Red Bull Theatre c. 1605 – 1619* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) and Richard Rowland, *Thomas Heywood's Theater, 1599 – 1639: Locations, Translations and Conflict* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), see the special edition of *Early Theatre* 9 (2006) by Lucy Munro, Anne Lanchashire, John H. Astington and Marta Straznicky.

## Note on Contributor

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