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## Childhood in contemporary performance of Shakespeare

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# *CHILDHOOD IN CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE OF SHAKESPEARE*

By Gemma Miller  
Thesis submitted to King's College London  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English  
August 2017

## Abstract

In this thesis I analyse the performance of childhood in contemporary staged and filmed productions of four Shakespearean plays. I adopt an interdisciplinary approach that ranges across the mediums of theatre, film, television and the livecast and primarily focuses upon the past three decades, with some analysis of seminal productions from the 1970s and 1980s as a point of comparison and departure. The four plays I have chosen span the three decades of Shakespeare's writing career and include examples from the genres of tragedy, history and tragicomedy. Through a close analysis of the manifestations of childhood in these plays – both in the text and in performance – my thesis illuminates the particular way in which the temporally disruptive children of Shakespeare's plays intersect with the child (or surrogate) in performance, and what that point of intersection reveals about our understanding of Shakespeare's children and our attitudes towards childhood.

I begin with a chapter on three productions of *Richard III* and look at the way in which the pageboy, one of the most overlooked of Shakespeare's child characters, has been manifested on stage as a miniature facsimile of Richard. I then consider two of the most well-known of Shakespeare's child characters, Prince Edward and Richard, Duke of York, and argue that there has been a move towards the de-idealisation of childhood through innovative stagings of these young boys in performance. In the second chapter I consider a broad range of productions of *Macbeth* and demonstrate how modern adaptations have exploited textual ambiguities to interrogate narratives of childhood. I look in particular at the means by which they have moved away from depicting the child as object of fetishisation and guardian of futurity by exploring the darker side of childhood innocence. Next I pick up the theme of the child as emblem of futurity and analyse how three productions of *Titus Andronicus* have attempted to account for the two children and their indeterminate futures, revealing a more general shift in attitudes towards childhood. In the final chapter I address the question of what childhood scholars call 'the disappearance of childhood' through an analysis of three productions of *The Winter's Tale*. I look in particular at Mamillius and

the ways in which directors account for his absence in the final scene of reconciliation and redemption. The representation of Mamilius in these productions is, I argue, symptomatic of a wider societal problem and one which recurs throughout this thesis: the elision of the boundary between adulthood and childhood and the prospect of a childhood that is disappearing altogether.

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## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to thank Lucy Munro, my supervisor, whose support over the past three years has been invaluable. She has helped me to develop my ideas into a focused study and provided guidance and encouragement throughout, never allowing me to lose faith in the value of my project. I am also grateful to Gordon McMullan, my second supervisor, whose timely interventions at key stages in my research have been vital to keeping my thesis on track.

I am extremely grateful to my MA supervisor at Birkbeck, Gillian Woods, for encouraging me to undertake this project and giving me the confidence to apply for funding. Without the generous grant from the London Arts and Humanities Partnership I would not have been able to dedicate the past three years to this project. Many thanks to Valeria Faruggia, Stephen Colvin and everybody at LAHP for their support and encouragement.

Many others have generously given feedback on my thesis and suggested ways in which I might develop my ideas. These include Sonia Massai, Bethany Packard, Nicole Fayard, Jennifer Higginbotham, Mark Johnston, Peter Kirwan, John Wyver, Urvashi Chakravarty and Richard Wilson. A special thanks also to my friend and colleague, Amanda Ford, who kindly gave up her time to proof-read my work for me. Her friendship and support over the past three years has been greatly appreciated.

I am grateful to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, The National Theatre archives, the Glasgow University Archives and the Victoria and Albert Theatre and Performance archives for allowing me to access their material, which has been essential for my research. I am also extremely grateful to Michael Boyd, Edward Stambollouian, Stuart Delves, Nick Morrison and Maya Kleczewska for generously taking the time to respond to my emails with insights into the artistic process behind their productions.

Finally, many thanks to my friends and family, particularly my father and Kate, who have read my work and listened to my various conference papers with admirable patience. I am also grateful to my husband, without whom I would not have been able to start, let alone finish, this thesis.

## Notes on the Text

The footnotes list all references in full in the first instance and are then subsequently abbreviated to author and title or just title if the name of the author is cited in the body of the text. For repeat references immediately following a source already cited and footnoted, the page number is stated in parentheses in the text. All early modern primary sources can be found on *Early English Books Online (EEBO)* unless otherwise stated. Early modern titles are shortened and only place and date of publication is given for texts published before 1880. Full citations for all sources are to be found in the Bibliography.

Theatre reviews and newspaper articles are all listed under secondary sources in the bibliography.

All references to Shakespeare's plays and sonnets are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare: Essential Plays, The Sonnets*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt and others, 3rd edn (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016) unless otherwise stated.

All internet sources which are also available in print form or which are accessible via the British Library, King's College library or Senate House library databases are not given a URL. Where the source is available in online format only and not in a journal that is accessible via the aforementioned library databases, I have cited the URL. In this instance, I have given the accessed date in the footnotes but not in the bibliography.



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## List of Abbreviations

|                 |                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>DoS</i>      | John O'Connor and Katharine Goodland, <i>A Directory of Shakespeare in Performance: 1970-2005</i> (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) |
| <i>EEBO</i>     | <i>Early English Books Online</i>                                                                                                         |
| <i>LTR</i>      | <i>London Theatre Record</i>                                                                                                              |
| <i>OED</i>      | <i>Oxford English Dictionary Online</i>                                                                                                   |
| <i>RSC</i>      | Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon                                                                                            |
| <i>SB</i>       | <i>Shakespeare Bulletin</i>                                                                                                               |
| <i>SBT</i>      | Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon                                                                                         |
| <i>SQ</i>       | <i>Shakespeare Quarterly</i>                                                                                                              |
| <i>SS</i>       | <i>Shakespeare Survey</i>                                                                                                                 |
| <i>TD&amp;T</i> | <i>Theatre Design and Technology</i>                                                                                                      |
| <i>TJ</i>       | <i>Theatre Journal</i>                                                                                                                    |
| <i>TR</i>       | <i>Theatre Record</i>                                                                                                                     |

‘[T]he staged infant is a site where we can read shifting adult investments in fantasies of childhood[.]’<sup>1</sup>

‘For reasons which are probably both historical and dramatic, there are very few children in Shakespeare’s plays. Those who do appear are both pert and malapert, disconcertingly solemn and prematurely adult [...] These are not, by and large, successful dramatic characters; their disquieting adulthood strikes the audience with its oddness, and we are relieved when these terrible infants leave the stage.’<sup>2</sup>

‘In the second half of the twentieth century it was the sense of an erosion or even disappearance of childhood which dominated discussion[.]’<sup>3</sup>

‘[I]nnocence is a faculty needed not at all by the child but very badly by the adult who put it there in the first place.’<sup>4</sup>

‘A Child is [...] a man in a small letter, yet the best copy of Adam before he tasted of Eve or the apple.’<sup>5</sup>

‘The child that nature has given you is nothing but a shapeless lump, but the material is still pliable, capable of assuming any form, and you must so mould it that it takes on the best possible character. If you are negligent, you will rear an animal; but if you apply yourself, you will fashion, if I may use such a bold term, a godlike creature.’<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Chedgzoy, ‘Introduction: “What, are they children?”’, in *Shakespeare and Childhood*, ed. by Kate Chedgzoy, Suzanne Greenhalgh and Robert Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-11 (p. 22).

<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, [1995] 2005), p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> John Earle, *Micro-cosmographie. Or, A peece of the world discouered in essayes and characters* (London, 1628).

<sup>6</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, ‘A Declamation on the Subject of Early Liberal Education for children’, in *Collected Works of Erasmus: Literary and Educational Writings*, 4, ed by J. K. Sowards (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 305.

# Introduction

## 1. Simulacrum and Surrogation: The Children of Christopher Wheeldon's *The Winter's Tale* (2014/16)<sup>1</sup>

When the statue was unveiled in the final act of Christopher Wheeldon's balletic adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, it was revealed to be a double statue: both Hermione and Mamillius had apparently been immortalised in stone. However, the double statue did not equal a double resurrection. Almost immediately Hermione began to descend from the plinth, leaving Mamillius frozen in time, his right arm bent stiffly across his body and his face fixed in a wide-eyed expression of horror. It was a disconcertingly un-lifelike representation that did not appear designed to evoke the face of the young dancer, Joe Parker, who had played Mamillius in the first act. Hermione and Leontes danced their final pas de deux in front of the statue, their passionate and soberly joyful movements throwing his rigid, lifeless pose into high relief. At one point, Leontes returned to the statue and reached out his hand but was gently led away by Paulina. There was to be no second miracle in Wheeldon's bleak interpretation of Shakespeare's notoriously ambiguous ending. As the reunited family embraced, Mamillius's statue loomed over them like a spectral interloper, his conspicuous absence from the text turned into a conspicuous and over-determined presence in petrified form. In her insightful analysis of Wheeldon's ballet, Judith Buchanan argues that by bringing the boy's statue on stage in this way, Wheeldon flirted with the possible resurrection of Mamillius and deepened the tragedy by '[t]oying with, and then decisively eschewing, this possibility'.<sup>2</sup> However, the statue of Mamillius was so self-evidently *not* human that there could be no question of its animation. And this was the point: the replacement of the boy

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, choreographer and dir. Christopher Wheeldon (Royal Opera House, London, 2014/2016).

<sup>2</sup> Judith Buchanan, 'The Winter's Tale's Spectral Endings: Death, Dance and Doubling', in *Shakespeare on Screen: The Tempest and Late Romances*, ed. by Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 110-132 (p. 127).

Mamillius with a statuary surrogate drew attention to his absence by the manifest failure of that very surrogation. The statue's stiffly formal stance, grey death-like pallor and rigid, horror-stricken expression left the audience in no doubt of its artificiality (see Figure 1). It was a simulacrum that seemed designed to evoke memories of what it was so clearly failing to simulate – the face and body of a lively and vibrant young boy.



Figure 1: Lauren Cuthbertson (Hermione) and the statue of Mamillius in Christopher Wheeldon's *The Winter's Tale* (2014)

Wheeldon's production of *The Winter's Tale* was significant for a number of reasons. It was the first ever full-length balletic adaptation of the play and the first Shakespearean ballet to premiere at the Royal Opera House in 50 years.<sup>3</sup> It was hailed as 'the finest and most important, new full-evening ballet in recent memory' by the *Telegraph* dance reviewer and was revived in April 2016 for a ten-week run.<sup>4</sup> It was also staged by the National Ballet of Canada in Toronto in December

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth MacMillan's version of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1965 was the last full-length Shakespearean adaptation to premiere at the Royal Opera House.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Monahan, 'The Winter's Tale is a Classic of Modern Ballet - Review', *Telegraph*, 14 April 2016.

2016 and premiered in Australia in 2017. The performance was broadcast by live relay into over 1000 cinemas worldwide on 28 April 2014 followed by 250 ‘encore’ screenings and a DVD released in early 2015. It was a commercial and critical success, praised in particular for its ‘clarity of intention and shape’, ‘depth of context’ and ‘brightly athletic choreography’, and ‘extraordinarily inventive and resonant designs’.<sup>5</sup> I saw this ballet live during its revival in 2016 and subsequently at an ‘encore’ cinematic screening and on DVD. What struck me as particularly significant about Wheeldon’s adaptation, however, was less the choreography, music and design (although these were, to my untutored eyes, rightly hailed as breathtaking) than the striking and unconventional resurrection of Mamillius in the form of a horror-stricken statue.

In the opening sequence of this ballet, the dancer playing Mamillius briefly appeared as a young version of Leontes playing with his boyhood friend Polixenes. The two children then disappeared into the crowd and their adult selves emerged, danced by Edward Watson (Leontes) and Federico Bonelli (Polixenes) who were dressed in the same costumes as their miniature doubles. When Leontes looked at Mamillius, he was thus not merely seeing his likeness, but his own childhood brought back to haunt him, and the statue represented not only the death of his son, but also of his own infantile self. Mamillius’s statuary surrogate was not the only eerily anti-illusionistic representation of childhood on display in this production. The animatronic baby Perdita, abandoned on the shores of Bohemia in her bassinet at the end of the first act, was also self-evidently artificial. As with the waxy pallor and fixed, terrified glare of Mamillius’s statue, the jerky robotic movements of the mechanical baby seemed designed to foreground rather than conceal its uncanny, un-human and decidedly un-lifelike qualities. The close camera shots in the livecast and DVD recording made this artificiality even more apparent, as can be seen in Figure 2. What might have seemed momentarily ‘real’, and therefore slightly disconcerting, for the theatre audience was

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<sup>5</sup> S. Crompton, ‘Review of *The Winter’s Tale*’, *Telegraph*, 11 April 2014; Zoe Anderson, ‘Review of *The Winter’s Tale*’, *Independent*, 11 April 2014; Neil Norman, ‘The Royal Ballet’s *The Winter’s Tale* Review – Outstanding’, *The Stage* online, 13 April 2016 <<https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/2016/the-royal-ballets-the-winters-tale-review-outstanding/>> [accessed 24 July 2017].

manifestly not so for those watching in the cinema. For a production whose sumptuous set, designed by Bob Crowley, suggested that no expense had been spared, it was particularly striking that the two children should be represented in such crude and unrealistic forms. By drawing attention to Mamillius's statue and the robotic baby in this way, Wheeldon seemed to be deliberately subverting the child as object of the gaze and bringing the ontology of childhood itself into question.

As I argue throughout this thesis, the manifestation of childhood in Wheeldon's production was symptomatic of a move in contemporary performance of Shakespeare towards a de-idealisation and demystification of ideas about childhood. The reincarnation of Mamillius as a statue was a novel way of staging the return of the dead child. However, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four, it was just one technique among many that directors have employed in recent years to remind audiences that at the end of *The Winter's Tale*, in the words of Stanley Cavell, 'a dead five- or six-year-old boy remains unaccounted for'.<sup>6</sup> Wheeldon's double statue not only problematised the happy ending but also brought into focus questions about the nature of childhood and its relation to authority, agency, temporality and the gaze. Moreover, the substitution of the body of the child for an artificial surrogate also foregrounded, as I argue in Chapter Four, what childhood scholars have identified as a peculiarly postmodern crisis: the crisis of 'disappearing childhood'. I expand upon these tropes throughout my thesis as I demonstrate, through the close analysis of a range of contemporary Shakespearean productions, how the dramatisation of his children in recent years – on the stage, on film, in television adaptations and in livecast and 'encore' screenings – has provided a lens through which to view changing ideas about childhood and the rhetoric surrounding it more generally. Shakespeare's children have quite simply become increasingly central to our understanding of his plays in performance.

---

<sup>6</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 193.



Figure 2: Bennett Gartside (Antigonus) and the animatronic baby Perdita in Christopher Wheeldon's *The Winter's Tale* (2014)

Child characters feature more numerous and prominently in the Shakespearean canon than in that of any other early modern playwright; how they are reflected, refracted and reinterpreted in performance thus provides valuable insights into modern concerns about how we see not only our pasts, but also, and perhaps more importantly, our futures.<sup>7</sup> As a group, Shakespeare's children have all-too-frequently been treated as supernumeraries, with little dramatic function beyond that of foil for the adult protagonists. Marjorie Garber, for whom Shakespeare's 'pert and malapert' children are a source of disquiet, has commented that 'we are relieved when these terrible infants leave the stage'.<sup>8</sup> Her dismissive treatment of the child roles in Shakespeare is characteristic of a homogenising approach that denies the nuanced, individuated and often contradictory nature of these characters and their thematic and dramatic centrality. Moreover, it fails to account for the affective power of the child in performance, whose stage presence (and absence) invariably exceeds

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Campana, 'Shakespeare's Children', *Literature Compass*, 8 (2011), 1–14 (p. 1). This claim ought to be qualified with an acknowledgement that only a fraction of early modern playtexts remains in circulation today.

<sup>8</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Coming of Age in Shakespeare*, p. 30.



his/her textual significance – a phenomenon which is increasingly evident in contemporary productions. Far from rushing ‘these terrible infants’ off the stage, directors are increasingly foregrounding the children of Shakespeare’s plays through interpolated frame sequences, strategic doubling of roles, substitutions and ghostly reincarnations. I argue that this is no coincidence, but is rather a response to a conspicuous change in attitudes towards childhood and the ways in which society defines, controls and responds to its children.

Childhood scholars, historians, sociologists and media commentators have identified the past three decades as a time of seismic change in attitudes towards childhood in Western society. The Wheeldon ballet synthesised many of the dramatic devices that have become increasingly commonplace in representations of the Shakespearean child, both on stage and on screen, and is axiomatic of the ways in which perceptions about and manifestations of childhood have shifted over that period. Shakespeare’s plays continue to be performed more widely around the globe than those of any other playwright, and thus as a barometer of social anxieties, his plays in performance can provide vital historical information about the pressing concerns of each generation. The plays avoid overly specific topicality in their treatment of trans-historical themes such as ageing, the life-course and intergenerational relationships, and, unlike the restrictive style of realist drama, they are both generically and stylistically fluid and replete with inconsistencies, making them particularly suited to adaptation to later contexts and tastes and to reflect, refract and contribute to contemporary debates. To quote Marjorie Garber again, ‘Shakespeare is not only modern but postmodern: a simulacrum, a replicant, a montage’.<sup>9</sup> As Shakespeare frequently looked to classical antiquity for a paradigm to reflect early modern society, the current generation of directors is increasingly turning to Shakespeare to reflect current social concerns, particularly relating to conceptualisations of childhood and futurity.

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<sup>9</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2008), p. xvii.

The children of Shakespeare, as I argue throughout this thesis, are particularly ambiguous characters. They are frequently on stage for extended periods and the details of their disappearance are often either unexplained, relayed in brief second-hand reports or entirely elided. The plays therefore invite directors to place their own particular interpretation on these characters, an invitation that they have accepted with increasing inventiveness in recent years. It is all the more surprising, therefore, that this is a subject that is yet to receive sustained critical attention and remains, as Robert Shaughnessy has identified, an ‘underdeveloped area of scholarly investigation’.<sup>10</sup> Through an interdisciplinary synthesis, this thesis provides an important contribution to research not only in the fields of Shakespeare and performance, but also of childhood more generally – a subject area of increasing prominence in Europe and North America. By analysing the performance of Shakespeare’s children in the context of what experts have identified as a postmodern crisis in childhood, I argue that the ‘terrible infants’ of Shakespeare are far from mere supernumeraries, but rather key to unlocking the meanings of the plays and, through their manifestation in performance, vital indicators of social concerns. By focusing my analysis on these children, I provide a fuller understanding of that very crisis and at the same time, a fuller insight into the dramatic and symbolic significance of Shakespeare’s children.

## **2. How Many Children? Setting the Parameters and the Existing Critical Field**

The child in performance is more than merely ‘an act of memory and ... creation’.<sup>11</sup> It is a performative act of nostalgia, hope, fear and desire – a performance, in short, overburdened with signification. Childhood is a concept inextricably linked to concepts of time: the past, the future and the passing of time from the one to the other, and is thus a concept in which society has a strong political and financial investment. Although parent-child relations underlie the central narrative and

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Shaughnessy, ‘Introduction’ in *Shakespeare and Childhood*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> William Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 64.

symbolic structure in many of Shakespeare's plays, my study limits the definition of 'child' to a life-stage ('childhood' in opposition and contradistinction to 'adulthood') rather than a position in the family ('child' in relation to 'parent') and incorporates not just the child characters but memories of and nostalgia for childhood, as manifested in the adult characters, and metaphors of childhood. Issues related to maternity, pregnancy and birthing; the gendering, eroticisation and queering of childhood; substitution, surrogation and doubling; and cross-gender/cross-generational casting are all aspects I explore in my analyses. The 'child', for the purposes of this study, is not constrained by specific age parameters and includes babies and infants, as well as lost, dead, remembered, and imagined children. As my thesis makes evident, childhood is far from a stable concept and there are multiple and varied interpretations and manifestations of childhood in the productions I discuss.

The play texts are often unspecific about the age of the children. Moreover, the definition of childhood and its parameters in the early modern period is also inherently unstable and ambiguous because of the contrasting ideals, descriptions and boundaries applied thereto. The comparatively young ages of majority, 14 for males and 12 for females, and of discretion, between 14 and 16 for both sexes, and the extended periods of apprenticeship to the mid 20s, worked to simultaneously truncate and to prolong the period of childhood.<sup>12</sup> The early modern child was a species that was in many ways as 'alien' to adult understanding as the postmodern child and there is still no universally acknowledged period of childhood with a defined beginning and end. Inconsistencies between and changes to the laws related to what constitutes the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood are symptomatic of this ambivalence.<sup>13</sup> The age of majority is now 18 in the United Kingdom but a

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<sup>12</sup> See Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 1-17.

<sup>13</sup> The age of majority was reduced from 21 to 18 in the United Kingdom in 1970 following acceptance of the Latey Committee's recommendation. See John Latey, 'Report of the Committee on the Age of Majority' (London, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1967) <<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/collections1/parliament-and-the-1960s/latey-age-of-majority-report/>> [accessed 24 July 2017].

child may marry or join the army at the age of 16, yet cannot purchase alcohol or tobacco before the age of 18 (although consumption of alcohol and tobacco on private properties is not illegal at any age). Children may work full time and pay income tax and national insurance from the age of 16, yet they are not entitled to receive the minimum wage if they are still studying, and cannot vote until the age of 18. The minimum age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales is 10 and children up until the age of 18 are conventionally tried in a juvenile court. However, if a crime is deemed too serious to be dealt with in the children's justice system, as was the case in the murder of James Bulger by two juveniles in 1993, the child may be tried in an open adult court. Given these inconsistencies, how then are we to determine what childhood is at any given time or place?

James R. Kincaid has controversially asserted that '[a] child is, not in itself, anything. Any image, body, or being we can hollow out, purify, exalt, abuse, and locate sneakily in a field of desire will do for us as a "child"'.<sup>14</sup> This is an argument which certainly resonates with my own critical approach and provides a theoretical framework for analysing particular representations of childhood both in performance and in the texts and contexts of the plays. However, it is too narrow for the wider purposes of this study. I do not concentrate specifically on the child as a 'field of desire', but rather as a blank canvas onto which multiple social, cultural and historical concerns are projected, whether those concerns reflect desires, fears, anxieties or hopes. I argue that each child in each play and in each performance – literal and metaphorical; living and dead; real, imagined, remembered and forgotten – is an amalgam of various ideas about childhood. My thesis explores how these ideas interrelate and what that point of intersection tells us about the society and context it reflects. The question I set out to address can therefore be summarised as follows: what do these children, as symbols of our past, our present and our future, tell us about the contexts in which they are performed and, conversely, what can those performances teach us about the significance of Shakespeare's children?

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<sup>14</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 5.

Over the past decade, ground-breaking work on childhood in Shakespeare has been produced by scholars including Carol Chillington Rutter; Kate Chedgzoy, Suzanne Greenhalgh and Robert Shaughnessy; Jennifer Higginbotham; Deanne Williams; Michael Witmore; and Katie Knowles.<sup>15</sup> However, although some attention has been given to the place of the child characters on the contemporary stage, particularly in the work of Rutter and Knowles, the primary focus of this body of work has been historicist in nature, concentrating on conceptualisations of childhood and how they were dramatised in the early modern period. Rutter, Higginbotham, Knowles and Williams focus specifically on the gendering of childhood, while Witmore's study explores the role of the child in fiction-making. Chedgzoy, Greenhalgh and Shaughnessy's edited collection *Shakespeare and Childhood* pays more attention to performance, but it adopts a wide-ranging and diachronic approach, tracking the afterlives of Shakespeare's children through the centuries rather than concentrating on contemporary adaptations, which is my specific area of study.

In order to address this gap within the arena of Shakespeare and childhood, my thesis adopts an inter-disciplinary approach that incorporates close reading, historicist literary criticism, childhood studies, queer theory and performance studies in order to explore the ways in which performing childhood in Shakespeare's plays can reveal often uncomfortable truths about conceptualisations of childhood, both in the early modern period and today. Where contemporary productions evoke different historical periods, such as Julie Taymor's references to 1930s fascism in *Titus* and Kenneth Branagh/Rob Ashford's Victorianised *The Winter's Tale*, a complex form of cultural and temporal palimpsest occurs. In these instances I explore the particular effects such practices have

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<sup>15</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play: Performing Lost Boys on Stage and Screen* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007); *Shakespeare and Childhood*, ed. by Chedgzoy, Greenhalgh and Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jennifer Higginbotham, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Sisters: Gender, Transgression, Adolescence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Deanne Williams, *Shakespeare and the Performance of Girlhood* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Michael Witmore, *Pretty Creatures: Children and Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Katie Knowles, *Shakespeare's Boys: A Cultural History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

upon the images of childhood they produce and reflect. My analysis ranges across the different mediums of film (including livecasts, ‘encore’ screenings and DVD releases), television and theatre, and incorporates both independent and publicly-funded productions, in order to provide a study that is not overly reliant on one medium, methodology or ideological perspective. I focus primarily on productions in English, staged in the UK and Ireland, although I also consider material drawn from outside this frame, such as American films and foreign-language productions. Where possible, I draw on my own viewing experience, incorporating what Clifford Geertz calls ‘thick descriptions’ based on semiotic and phenomenological approaches.<sup>16</sup> These descriptions are supported by analyses of sources including promptbooks, director and actor accounts, critical reviews and academic discourse in order to provide a multi-perspectival reading that is more multifaceted and less narrowly subjective than one single spectator’s impression. I limit my analysis primarily to productions staged in the United Kingdom. This is partly for pragmatic reasons of availability and accessibility of materials. However I also felt that, were I to extend the scope to incorporate other cultures, the range would be too broad to permit close analysis within the parameters of this thesis. Most of the productions were filmed or staged in the past three decades. Where I do discuss earlier examples, these are included because they either significantly changed the direction of the plays’ performance history, such as Roman Polanski’s *Macbeth* (1971) or Deborah Warner’s *Titus Andronicus* (1987), or because they provide a useful point of contrast for more recent adaptations.

While focusing my investigation principally on recent trends in performing childhood, I also draw on primary sources such as sixteenth-century religious and educational writing, diaries and anti-exorcist tracts. These texts not only provide a discursive framework for studying the

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<sup>16</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 9. My appropriation of Geertz’s phraseology here is based on his definition of ‘thick description’ as ‘sorting out the structures of signification [...] and determining their social ground and import’ (p. 9). I am using it as a means of differentiating from ‘thin description’, being description without interpretation, and a more context-based interpretation which seeks to place what I see in performance within a cultural and intertextual frame of reference.

polysemous manifestations of childhood in Shakespeare's plays, but also help to locate modern concerns about childhood within a larger historical context. I incorporate analyses of the child as an embodied presence, a rhetorical construct, and a symbol of idealised pasts and projected futures. I explore the semiotic and phenomenological effects of both the child actor (or child surrogate) and the child character, and the slippage between the two categories, and the disjunction between words and embodied presence. I consider how directors re-write the inherited text through the re-ordering of temporal sequence, the doubling of key characters, the enlarging or effacement of the role of the child and the multiple ways in which they literalise metaphors of childhood. And I argue that analysing the performance of childhood in Shakespeare, in its varied and diverse forms, not only facilitates fresh insights into the plays themselves, but also enables an appreciation of wider sociological concerns.

In my analyses of the performance of childhood I draw upon a broad range of theoretical studies from multiple disciplines. Performance theorists such as Bert O. States and Nicholas Ridout have produced important works on the phenomenology of theatre, and, while they have acknowledged to some extent what Ridout terms the 'affecting surplus' of the child-on-stage, the child has not formed a central part of either scholar's thesis. As Ridout himself observes, the subject of childhood in performance 'is a topic in its own right, and awaits a full study'.<sup>17</sup> I take their interpretive paradigms (and Ridout's critical challenge) as a starting point and, referring to theorisations of gender, sexuality and subjectivity by writers such as Lee Edelman, Kathryn Bond Stockton, Laura Mulvey, James R. Kincaid, Anne Higonnet, and Judith Halberstam, I explore the performing child as it relates to the 'gaze' of the adult spectator and the fetishistic nature of viewing.<sup>18</sup> The work of

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<sup>17</sup> Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 168, 98-99. See also Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and The Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16.3 (1975), 6-18. Mulvey's polemical essay has been challenged since its first publication for adopting a narrow feminist

these scholars provides a useful critical entry point into exploring representations of childhood, especially in relation to the darker side of childhood innocence and what Kincaid calls the ‘alluring child’: a complex and self-contradictory amalgam of innocence, precocity, and eroticism that, although originating in the Victorian period, is also a curiously postmodern imposition.<sup>19</sup> This ‘alluring child’ is still evident in some adaptations of Shakespeare, as I discuss in relation to *Richard III*, *Macbeth* and *Titus Andronicus*.

Three key writers who have made significant contributions to childhood studies, and who provide crucial critical frameworks for my work throughout this thesis, are James R. Kincaid, Lee Edelman and Kathryn Bond Stockton. According to Kincaid, whose work on the sexualisation of children in postmodern Western culture broke new critical ground, the ‘construct’ of the child as both corrupted and innocent, desirable and outside the bounds of desire, is repeated endlessly through popular discourse to the extent that it has become a firmly-entrenched cultural myth. Maintaining the idea of childhood as a discrete temporal state separate from adulthood is central to maintaining this very myth. He explains as follows:

We see children as, among other things, sweet, innocent, vacant, smooth-skinned, spontaneous, and mischievous. We construct the desirable as, among other things, sweet, innocent, vacant, smooth-skinned, spontaneous, and mischievous [...] To the extent that we learn to see ‘the child’ and ‘the erotic’ as coincident, we are in trouble. So are the children.<sup>20</sup>

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perspective that assumes a white, heterosexual, masculine ‘gaze’ as the dominant ideological structure of narrative cinema. These limitations notwithstanding, her analysis of ‘the voyeuristic-scopophilic look’ is a useful perspective from which to consider the Shakespearean child as object of the gaze in stage and film productions; Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998); James R. Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998); and *Child-Loving*; Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence*, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence*, p. 14.



Kincaid traces the origins of childhood innocence – a fantasy created by adults that both relies upon and sustains its obverse, the erotico-fetishisation of childhood – back to the Victorians via Rousseau, Wordsworth ‘and a thousand lesser writers, interior decorators, and producers of greeting cards’.<sup>21</sup> However, the extent to which ideals about childhood innocence dominated Victorian attitudes, he maintains, has been vastly over-stated and actually reveals more about twentieth-century needs and anxieties than it does about the Victorians themselves. The result, he claims, is the ‘modern child’, which he describes as a ‘tempting vacancy answering to a host of needs we are as anxious to exercise as we are to hide, needs that include not just sappy nostalgia or egotistical projection but darker needs of desire and exploitation.’<sup>22</sup> Alongside nineteenth-century notions of ‘the sentimentally fixed, “innocent” child’, Kincaid explains, there were the realities of high levels of infant mortality, child labour, mass exportation of indentured children to the colonies and child prostitution, to name but a few.<sup>23</sup> It is telling that, in spite of the introduction of numerous laws designed to protect the individual during this period, the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was not founded until 1884 (60 years after the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) and not granted its royal charter until 1895. Moreover, the categorising of children as beasts rather than fully human, an idea as will be seen which was widespread in the early modern period, continued to pertain in some circles. Sexologist Havelock Ellis, for instantly, expressing attitudes towards Darwinism and degeneration that were symptomatic of a fin-de-siècle malaise, famously asserted in 1892 that ‘[t]he child is [...] nearer to the animal, to the savage, to the criminal, than the adult.’<sup>24</sup> While these facts do not erase the Victorian fetishisation of childhood ‘innocence’, as is evident in the literature and art of the period, they do nonetheless provide an instructive corrective. What has entered into popular discourse, then, is a partial snapshot of Victorian culture. The fetishisation of the child is, as Kincaid argues, a peculiarly postmodern

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<sup>21</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 72.

<sup>22</sup> James R. Kincaid, ‘Dickens and the Construction of the Child’, in Wendy S. Jacobson, *Dickens and the Children of Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 29-42 (p. 36).

<sup>23</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 77.

<sup>24</sup> Havelock Ellis, *The Criminal* (London: Walter Scott, 1892), p. 212.

phenomenon that relies on selective historical memory – a fragmentary and imperfect field through which to interpret the present – in order to perpetuate its own mythology of childhood as at once innocent, desirable and ‘other’, and to fuel and sustain the narrative of a childhood in ‘crisis’. Although there has been a discernable shift away from fetishising childhood innocence in performance, as will be seen in my discussion of the representation of the child in, among others, Julie Taymor’s *Titus*, Roman Polanski’s *Macbeth* and Kenneth Branagh/Rob Ashford’s *The Winter’s Tale*, the fetishisation, objectification and exploitation of the child continues to dominate some productions of Shakespeare’s plays, even today.

Lee Edelman’s polemical 2004 study of what he terms ‘reproductive futurism’ also explores the fetishisation of childhood, drawing, like Kincaid, upon nineteenth-century constructions of childhood as exemplars and precursors of postmodern child-worship.<sup>25</sup> However, where Kincaid considers the child as object of adult desire, Edelman’s focus turns towards the child as an emblem of futurity, albeit one in which the child ‘must never grow up’ (p. 21), and thus must forever retain its symbolic innocence. Approaching the subject through the lens of queer theory, he argues that representating the child as a means of preserving the present by securing the future is a commonplace so unquestioned as to have become morally unquestionable. ‘That Child’, he argues, ‘remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmic beneficiary of every political intervention’, and thus excludes nonreproductive eros from its formulation (p. 3).<sup>26</sup> As the antithesis of the future-preserving ‘Child’, the queer (and queerness) is the only form of resistance, for, as he argues, ‘*queerness* names the side [...] outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism’ (p. 3). For Edelman, then, the ‘Child’ is an instrumental symbol of the future in the present and therefore embedded in conservative, heteronormative ideologies. Queerness, as a deviance from this ideal, represents a threat to the

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<sup>25</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> Edelman uses a capital ‘C’ when referring to the child throughout his study to underscore its figurative status and to differentiate it from the real lived experiences of children.

future functioning of society and is thus marginalised as a social deviant. His response is a challenge to political orthodoxies through a queer resistance in the form of what he has termed the ‘*Sinthomosexual*’ – a figure who rejects ‘the rhetoric of compassion, futurity, and life’ (p. 75) to embrace a ‘surplus of jouissance’ (p. 74). Edelman’s is a bleak and nihilistic anti-utopianism which inevitably results in ‘the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, of life itself’ (p. 13). As a consequence, he has been criticised by fellow queer theorists such as Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz for failing to offer a viable alternative that, as Halberstam argues, ‘might cycle around into the dominant’.<sup>27</sup> I argue, moreover, that by proposing a rejection of rather than an alternative to the orthodoxy of ‘reproductive futurism’, Edelman accepts and thus perpetuates the ‘cult of the Child’. Rather than suggesting a reconfiguration of attitudes towards childhood, he quite simply accepts them as an inevitability, reinforcing the very heteronormative paradigms he critiques (p. 19). In Chapter One, I demonstrate how directors such as Sean Holmes, Thomas Ostermeier and Sam Mendes have rejected the concept of ‘reproductive futurism’ that Edelman reinscribes through their subversive representations of the child in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. By manifesting the child on stage in non-conventional ways, like the children of Wheeldon’s *The Winter’s Tale*, I argue that they undermined the cult of fetishising childhood and brought into question the figural associations of childhood and futurity.

Building upon the work of Kincaid and Edelman, Kathryn Bond Stockton’s 2009 monograph, *The Queer Child or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, explores cultural and literary representations of childhood that do not conform to ideals of continuance and teleological development. She calls this phenomenon ‘sideways growth’, something ‘related but not reducible to the death drive; something that locates energy, pleasure, vitality, and (e)motion in the back-and-

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<sup>27</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher S. Nealon, Tan Hoang Nguyen, ‘Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 13.2-3 (2007), 177-195 (p. 194); José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 11.

forth of connections and extensions that are not reproductive.’<sup>28</sup> Stockton observes that ‘[t]he child is precisely who we are not and, in fact, never were. It is the act of adults looking back, it is a ghostly, unreachable fancy’ (p. 5). By constructing a retrospective narrative of childhood as a linear progression from one state of being to the next, while simultaneously ‘delaying a temporal approach to a time it is not (namely, adulthood)’, Stockton argues that we fetishise childhood and thus enact ‘violence’ on both adults and children (p. 15). In order to ‘prick (deflate, or just delay) the vertical forward-motion metaphor of growing up’ (p. 11), Stockton concentrates on twentieth-century texts, thus differentiating her study from the nineteenth-century-focused work of her predecessors. Like Kincaid, however, Stockton rejects the idealised image of childhood as a state of imperilled ‘innocence’. Instead, she argues that, like the ‘ghostly gay child’ (‘emblem and icon of children’s “queerness”’, the inner child of a ‘gay’ adult whose development is discontinued at the point of homosexual self-identification or of the ‘straight person’s “death”’), all children experience ‘pain, closets, emotional labors, sexual motives, and sideways movements’ (p. 3). To truly understand childhood, she concludes, we must disavow childhood ‘innocence’ and acknowledge instead ‘the darkness of the child’ (p. 3). Stockton’s work helps to frame my analyses of representations of children that disrupt the narrative of ‘straight’ temporal development, such as the woman-boy princes in Sam Mendes’ *Richard III*, who were, I argue, the embodiment of Stockton’s queer child.

The writings of the scholars discussed above have been key to framing current debates about childhood, Shakespeare, and the theatre, and inform my own critical methodologies throughout this thesis. The key concern which connects these scholars in their various approaches to childhood is the question of temporality – a question to which I return again and again throughout this thesis. Of course, the ‘polychronicity’ of Shakespeare’s plays is a well-rehearsed topic, particularly in works

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<sup>28</sup> Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 13.

by, for example, Jonathan Gil Harris, Matthew Wagner and Phyllis Rackin.<sup>29</sup> What my thesis illuminates, however, is the particular way in which the temporally disruptive children of Shakespeare's plays intersect with the child (or surrogate) in performance, and what that point of intersection reveals about our understanding of Shakespeare's children and our attitudes towards childhood. Before I lay out the parameters of my research and analyses, a brief historiography of childhood and childhood studies is necessary. This summary will help to situate the current critical field within a larger historical context and demonstrate how modern attitudes such as those expressed by Cunningham about the 'alien' nature of childhood are, in many ways (and fittingly, in the context of my interest in non-linear temporalities) far less 'modern' than they may first appear.

### **3. A Creature Set Apart: A Brief Historiography of Childhood**

Philippe Ariès was one of the first writers to categorise childhood as a culturally and historically conditioned concept rather than a pre-existing state. In his seminal book, *Centuries of Childhood*, he identifies a changing attitude to childhood that began in the early modern period.<sup>30</sup> According to Ariès, this was the first time that children had been depicted as beings distinct from adults, rather than miniaturized versions whose worlds had not yet separated. Unlike their medieval counterparts, these children had identifiable child-like features, were posed in typically childish scenes, dressed in infants' clothing and provided the focal point of family portraiture. Ariès's evidence is based upon iconographic material drawn primarily from French culture and the nature of the evidence reflects the attitudes and ideas of particular (privileged) social groups in a particular society at a particular time. Although his stance was taken up by other historians, most notably Lawrence Stone,

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<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 16; Matthew Wagner, *Shakespeare, Theatre, and Time*, Routledge Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies Series (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Phyllis Rackin, 'Temporality, Anachronism, and Presence in Shakespeare's English Histories', *Renaissance Drama*, 17 (1986), 101-123.

<sup>30</sup> Ariès's book was first published by Jonathan Cape, London in 1962, translated from the French *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1960).

later historians have critiqued the narrow social scope and almost exclusively pictorial focus of his study and robustly refuted his conclusions that the idea of childhood did not exist before the seventeenth century.<sup>31</sup> However, his thesis that childhood is historically and culturally constructed – what Kincaid calls ‘a difference formed by a culture and inscribed within categories of the perceivable’ – is both persuasive and formative.<sup>32</sup> It has provided an enduring theoretical model for childhood studies and remains an important point of reference in Western academic circles today. It also forms the basis of my analysis throughout this thesis.

During the early modern period, the idea of the family as a ‘prototype of the state’ and the child within that prototype as the ‘key to the future of the state’ began to emerge.<sup>33</sup> This idea was fuelled by the rise in humanist values, which placed emphasis on education, virtue and parental responsibility. It was also accelerated by the arrival of the print press, which permitted wider dissemination of conduct books, catechisms and child-rearing advice manuals. Although the age at which childhood ended and adulthood began was far from constant in the early modern consciousness, as indeed is still the case today, there was a prevailing notion of childhood as a period of lack: lack of reason, lack of restraint, lack of prudence and lack of a fully developed humanity.<sup>34</sup> Emphasis was thus placed heavily on the need for education and civilisation, and

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<sup>31</sup> See Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977); Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (London: Random House, 1996), p. 125. For arguments countering Ariès’s claims, for instance, Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1982); Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1984); Keith Thomas, ‘Children in Early Modern England’, in *Children and Their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*, ed. by Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 45-78; Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up In Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child Loving*, p. 65.

<sup>33</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, [1995] 2005), p. 42.

<sup>34</sup> Keith Thomas takes the ages of between 6 and 12 for girls and 6 and 14 for boys as a widely-accepted categorisation of early modern childhood for the parameters of his study. ‘Children in Early Modern England’, in *Children and Their Books*, ed. by Gillian Avery and Julie Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 45-78 (p. 50).

writers from Desiderius Erasmus onwards drew upon metaphors of moulding and shaping in their pedagogical tracts to articulate this need:

The child that nature has given you is nothing but a shapeless lump, but the material is still pliable, capable of assuming any form, and you must so mould it that it takes on the best possible character. If you are negligent, you will rear an animal; but if you apply yourself, you will fashion, if I may use such a bold term, a godlike creature.<sup>35</sup>

Analogies between the ‘shapeless’ child and animals recur frequently in early modern writing by, for example, John Dod and Lewis Bayly, revealing anxieties about the precarious developmental stage of childhood.<sup>36</sup> As Erica Fudge notes, ‘[t]he dangers of this failure to be truly human [...] are clear, and are more troubling than would seem possible from the simple assertion that humans are born human, that they possess that thing that makes them human at birth.’<sup>37</sup> The transition from ‘animal’ to ‘godlike creature’ was thus one that was deemed to require careful handling and was far from assured. Less a biological and temporal process than a controlled system of acculturation and education, the boundaries between childhood and adulthood were thought to require a complete transformation in order to be successfully traversed. Fudge refers to this process as a ‘sense not of development but of metamorphosis, of becoming a new species’ (p. 49). Her language here has echoes of childhood scholar Hugh Cunningham’s analysis of the postmodern child as an ‘alien creature’, and there is certainly a sense that attitudes towards childhood have, in many respects, come full circle since their early modern conception.<sup>38</sup> The extent to which the child is still conceived of as an imperfect adult, or even ‘other’ than human, will be significant for my thesis, as discussed already in relation to the Wheeldon ballet.

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<sup>35</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, ‘A Declamation on the Subject of Early Liberal Education for Children’, in *Collected Works of Erasmus: Literary and Educational Writings*, 4, ed by J. K. Sowards (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 307.

<sup>36</sup> See for example John Dod, *The Bright Star Which Leadeth Wise Men* (London, 1603); William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties, Eight Treatises* (London, 1622); and Lewis Bayly, *The Practice Of Pietie Directing A Christian How To Walk That He May Please God / Amplified By The Author* (London, 1631).

<sup>37</sup> Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals Rationality and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 47.

<sup>38</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 187.

Although the question of when to locate the genesis of postmodern conceptions of childhood as a category entirely separate from adults remains a contested issue (whether that be in the seventeenth century, as Ariès contends, or earlier, as argued by his detractors), most historians and sociologists agree that ‘the glorification of the child’ as a category to be celebrated rather than feared, as in the early modern and postmodern periods, reached its apogee in the nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup> The foundations for this idealisation of childhood were laid in the previous century, when ideas about child-rearing and pedagogy were dominated by the Lockean and Rousseauian schools of thought. Locke believed that children were a *tabula rasa* upon which virtue and reason could be inscribed. He argued in the *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* that children ought to be trained to use the power of reason to overcome their natural selfishness and become virtuous citizens, claiming that ‘[t]he Principle of all Vertue and Excellency lies in a power of denying our selves the satisfaction of our own Desires, where Reason does not authorize them’.<sup>40</sup> He recommended inculcating a strong sense of self-discipline and self-denial in order to facilitate the child’s progression into a rational, useful and responsible member of society. For Jean-Jacques Rousseau, on the other hand, children were innately innocent and only susceptible to corruption through experience of society. In *Émile, or On Education* (1762), an invented account of an experiment in raising a boy naturally, Rousseau illustrates how children can be educated into becoming ideal citizens by example rather than by precept.<sup>41</sup> Both Locke and Rousseau conceived of children as pliable, educable beings with potential for both good and evil, a belief that ran counter to the calvinist belief that children were inherently sinful. Where they differed most fundamentally was in the relative value they placed on the state of childhood. Locke saw childhood as a morally and

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<sup>39</sup> C. John Somerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1982), pp. 120-135.

<sup>40</sup> John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (London, 1693). This was the most popular child-rearing manual of its time. There were at least 26 editions before 1800 and it was translated into French, Dutch Swedish, German and Spanish. See C. John Somerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood*, p. 121.

<sup>41</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile, or On Education* was first published in English in 1763, translated from the French original, *Émile, ou De l’éducation* (Paris, 1762).



intellectually neutral state and the purpose of education as a means to ‘produce an adult’ through the inculcation of a capacity for ratiocination.<sup>42</sup> He recommended a ‘toughening program’ for the child that involved physical punishment coupled with shaming as a means of internalising the morals of his teachers.<sup>43</sup> For Rousseau, on the other hand, the child should be allowed to progress in accordance with nature, retaining childish characteristics – ‘its games, its pleasures, its amiable instinct’ – for as long as possible before accession into adulthood and its attendant dangers and immoralities became inevitable.<sup>44</sup> Rather than imposing a strict pedagogical regimen, Rousseau’s method purported to rely on nature as the ultimate teacher and the child as discoverer rather than imitator. However, behind this libertarian approach lay a more sinister desire to control and manipulate. Although he outwardly eschewed an educational method that relied on authority, Rousseau repeatedly rejoiced in describing the child’s suffering at the hands of nature and summarised his beliefs as follows: ‘There is no subjection so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom. Thus the will itself is made captive’ (p. 257). What seemed to be a child-led approach to learning was thus authority disguised as libertarianism and his educational program was far removed from the realities of child-rearing in eighteenth-century Europe.

Although Rousseau had little real impact on education, his influence on conceptions of childhood, on the Romantic turn from civilisation towards nature in the poems of Wordsworth and his contemporaries, and on the child in the Victorian novel, was profound. However, the nineteenth century was a period of enormous paradox: it was a time when ‘the greatest exploitation of children coincided with the greatest glorification of childhood’ and the gulf between depictions of the literary child and the real experiences of children was at its greatest.<sup>45</sup> Child labour, workhouses, inadequate education, child sexualisation and high infant mortality rates were some of the real

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<sup>42</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 61.

<sup>43</sup> C. John Somerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood*, p. 122.

<sup>44</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile: or, On Education* ed. and trans. by Christopher Kelly and Allan Bloom (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), p. 202.

<sup>45</sup> C. John Somerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood*, p. 160.

issues facing children during this period of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. On the one hand there was the ‘romantic child’, a Wordsworthian ideal embodying innocence, purity and wonderment. This ‘child’, with its origins in Rousseau, had a vital after-life in the works of many Victorian novelists, particularly those of Charles Dickens, as I discuss in more detail in relation to Kenneth Branagh/Rob Ashford’s Victorianised *The Winter’s Tale* in Chapter Four. The ‘romantic child’ was, as Joanne Faulkner has observed, less a state of proto-adulthood and more an ‘idealized production of adult memory and reverie’.<sup>46</sup> But the very act of producing this image of childhood simultaneously signalled its inevitable demise. It was a version of childhood that could only sustain itself as long as it remained distinct from the corrupting state of adulthood and insulated from the realities of societal change. Thus the Romantic child was an anomalous and unrealistic ideal: at once a symbol of innocence, hope and salvation and a symbol of death, destined to live and die within the bounds of literary fiction and the ‘idealized production of adult memory’ (p. 132).

Set against this romantic concept of childhood was the harsh reality of life experienced by many children growing up in industrial Britain, for whom long working days in dark and dangerous conditions and extreme poverty were commonplace. By the mid-1830s, philanthropists, ‘shock[ed] at the distance between the actuality and ideals of childhood’, were actively engaged in programs of child protection, opening up areas for greater state intervention in working-class life.<sup>47</sup> However, although legislation such as the 1833 Factory Act and the 1867 Workshops Act aimed to regulate and reduce child labour, and the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act raised the age of consent for girls from 12 to 16, reform was slow and gradual. As Marah Gubar argues, ‘many Victorians remained unconvinced of the separateness and sanctity of childhood’.<sup>48</sup> The gulf between reality and fiction, ideals and actualities, it seemed, was slow to close. Perhaps the greatest impact upon the

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<sup>46</sup> Joanne Faulkner, ‘Vulnerability of “Virtual” Subjects: Childhood, Memory, and Crisis in the Cultural Value of Innocence’, *SubStance*, 42.3 (2013), 127-147 (p. 132).

<sup>47</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, pp. 139-140.

<sup>48</sup> Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children’s Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 152.

lives of children in the nineteenth century was brought about by the educational reforms of the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s, which abolished school fees and made attendance compulsory from the ages of five to ten. The proportion of children aged five to fourteen who attended school in England and Wales rose from 24% in 1870 to 70% in 1900, marking ‘the shift from a situation where children were thought of as members of the labour force to one where they were schoolchildren’.<sup>49</sup> While progress was clearly being made towards the protection of the child towards the end of the century, for some, however, it was neither fast nor far-reaching enough.

In 1900, Swedish writer Ellen Key published a book titled *The Century of the Child* which became a worldwide bestseller and gave scholars, journalists and social reformers a term with which to categorise and interrogate what it meant to be a child in the twentieth century.<sup>50</sup> Her book was both a reflection of legislative changes in the latter half of the nineteenth century and a *cri de coeur* for more positive and extensive interventions. The influence of Rousseau on Key’s attitudes towards a natural and libertarian educational system are evident, but there is also an emphasis on eugenics, responsible parenting, a greater understanding of ‘the real nature of children’ and the necessity for robust social and welfare support for mothers.<sup>51</sup> Rather than constraining children within the adult-imposed ethical and moral frameworks of the church and a rigid, homogenised State educational system, Key advocated instead that adults learn their humanity from observing children. She ends her chapter on religious instruction as follows: ‘Without becoming as little children, men cannot enter into the Third Kingdom of the Holy Ghost, the Kingdom of the human spirit.’ (p. 315). *The Century of the Child* thus set out to establish and preserve the territory of childhood as not only distinct from but also superior to adulthood. Underlying all of Key’s recommendations is a focus on the child as an individual with responsibilities, rights and an

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<sup>49</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 158.

<sup>50</sup> Key’s book was first published in Stockholm by Albert Bonniers FÖRLAG in 1900 under the title *Barnets århundrade* and was translated into English in 1909. As Kathryn Bond Stockton notes, ‘[n]early every major history of Anglo-American childhood mentions Key’s book or her phrase’ (*The Queer Child*, n.16, p. 246).

<sup>51</sup> Ellen Key, *The Century of the Child* (London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1909), p. 190.

intrinsic non-economic value of his/her own, and in this respect her book presaged a major shift in attitudes towards childhood. This shift – one which Hugh Cunningham declares was ‘one of the most important changes in the history of childhood’ – gained momentum in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War across Europe and America.<sup>52</sup>

Although the UK government did not adopt explicit pro-natalist policies such as those seen in Germany, France, Belgium and Italy, the war concentrated attention on the vulnerability not only of children but of whole nations, and the value of the child as a repository of futurity came sharply into focus.<sup>53</sup> The effects of mass evacuation, which saw 826,959 unaccompanied children sent away from their homes in the United Kingdom in 1939 alone, resulted in an increased emphasis on child welfare in social policies.<sup>54</sup> As a result, the rights of children to be children – a financial, social and ideological category distinct from adults – became more formally codified and legislated for than ever before. There were a number of factors that converged to bring about what Viviana A. Zelizer, in her influential work *Pricing the Priceless Child*, called the “‘sacralization’ of children’s lives’ in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>55</sup> Zelizer glosses the term ‘sacralization’ as: ‘the sense of objects being invested with sentimental or religious meaning’, and argues how ‘[p]roperly loved children, regardless of social class, belonged in a domesticated, nonproductive world of lessons, games, and token money’ (pp. 11-12). What had been considered an economic asset to family life had thus become a financial dependent, and the sentimentalisation of children, formerly the preserve of the middle and upper classes, was now extending to working-class families as well. Falling birth and mortality rates, the removal of the child from the labour market, better working rights for women, the creation of the welfare state and compulsory education were all factors that

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<sup>52</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood*, p. 214.

<sup>53</sup> See Jan Van Bavel and David S. Reher, ‘The Baby Boom and Its Causes: What We Know and What We Need To Know’, *Population and Development Review*, 39.2 (2013), 257-288.

<sup>54</sup> Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880 - 1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 53-57.

<sup>55</sup> Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 11.

helped to create the ‘economically “useless” but emotionally “priceless” child’ (p. 21). Rather than contributing to the family economy, children had been transformed into net consumers – of goods, of services and, more recently, of media and information technology.

Surveys carried out in the US, China and Europe since 2010 concluded that children spend typically between a third and a half of their waking hours engaged with media, often unsupervised, making them a target market not only for predatory paedophiles, but for advertisers.<sup>56</sup> As Joanne Faulkner observes, ‘the concept of “childhood” is always in dialogue – or more pointedly, in a dialectical relation – with its “adversaries”: sexuality and capitalism.’<sup>57</sup> The ‘sacralization’ of childhood and the rise of the media-engaged child thus combined to create a figure which was both powerful and vulnerable: powerful because of its access to knowledge, information and improved rights and vulnerable because of its increased susceptibility to both commercial and sexual exploitation. ‘Had the child lost its economic value’, Zelizer asked, ‘only to become another commercial commodity?’ (pp. 210-11). Although Ellen Key would have undoubtedly approved of the newly emergent ‘sacralization’ of childhood, it came at a price that she could not have foreseen and of which she would not have approved: the rise of the consumer child, an increased desire on the parts of children to exercise their newly established rights and the potential disappearance of childhood altogether. Cunningham summarises this phenomenon as follows:

In the second half of the twentieth century it was the sense of an erosion or even disappearance of childhood which dominated discussion: children began to claim and be given rights which enabled them to break out of the garden [of protected ‘innocence’]; some of them, like the killers of James Bulger in Britain, failed spectacularly to live up to the innocence supposedly innate in all children; many more, perhaps all, seemed to be losing their childhood early under the pressures of the twin forces of the media and of mass consumption.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Children, Adolescents and the Media*, ed. by Victor C. Strasburger, Barbara J. Wilson and Amy B. Jordan, 3rd edn (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 8-9.

<sup>57</sup> Joanne Faulkner, ‘The Innocence Fetish: The Commodification and Sexualisation of Children in the Media and Popular Culture’, *Media International Australia*, 135 (2010), 106-117 (p. 110)

<sup>58</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 172.

The coincidence of these events signalled the end of the so-called ‘century of the child’ and brought the very ontology of childhood as a concept into question. While, on the one hand, the ‘garden’ of childhood was being prolonged by the delayed accession of the child from education into the work place and the concomitant shift from net producer to net consumer, an increase in their rights was also giving them the voice and agency to break free from that very ‘garden’ of protection.

Sociologists and childhood scholars agree that the conviction of two ten-year-old boys for the torture and murder of toddler James Bulger case was a particularly significant landmark in terms of changing perceptions of childhood. It not only led to legislative change (discussed in more detail below), but it attracted unprecedented scrutiny across multiple global platforms and provided a touchstone for redefining childhood and its putative innocence. It was also used as an example, however spurious, of the pernicious effects of media, in this case the ‘video nasty’ horror films, upon the vulnerable infantile mind (although, somewhat ironically, it was the frenzied intervention of the print media, from *The Economist* to *The Sun*, that triggered this ‘immediate and ferocious moral panic’ and fuelled the ensuing change in public opinion).<sup>59</sup>

The postmodern sense of a ‘childhood in crisis’ is thus best considered as not so much a reflection of reality than as a reaction to changes in the agency afforded to and enjoyed by children towards the end of the twentieth century. Having granted children more rights to self-determination and self-expression, are adults now creating a ‘crisis’ in order to regain some of the power they have ceded by holding children up to an ‘innocent’ ideal that never actually existed? In this thesis, I address this question, among others, by exploring the impact of recent changes in perceptions of childhood and the paradoxes they reflect and reinscribe on stage and film productions of four key Shakespeare’s plays: *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, *Titus Andronicus* and *The Winter’s Tale*. Although

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<sup>59</sup> Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. viii-x.

often overlooked by academics, I argue that the children in these plays have a figural and dramatic significance that exceeds the sum of their spoken lines, and that directors are beginning to realise this in multiple and various ways. I look at the ways in which the role of the child has been adapted, occluded, substituted and exploited in performance. I examine what these performances reveal about the children in the plays themselves and how they have contributed to the wider debate. As we shall see, experimental directors such as Thomas Ostermeier, Sean Holmes and Edward Hall have begun to explicitly interrogate the concept of the 'innocent' ideal, while others, such as Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford have sought to reinforce it through deliberate obfuscation, often with unintended consequences. Whether questioning or evasive, radical or conservative, recent productions have increasingly taken the child as their central dramatic focus, not merely reflecting but actively contributing to the debate about childhood and what it means in a postmodern era of uncertainty and change. In the next section I outline in more detail the social events that converged to bring about this sense of a 'childhood in crisis'. I look in particular at the impact of the technological revolution and the case of James Bulger – a case that generated what Stanley Cohen terms a 'moral panic' on an unprecedented scale and has been identified as the defining moment when public attitudes changed and the 'century of the child' came to an end.<sup>60</sup> As Bob Franklin has argued, it represented a 'crucial watershed in the press reporting of children', and became a touchstone for debates about the nature of childhood ever since.<sup>61</sup>

#### **4. A Postmodern Crisis: Disappearing Childhood and Shakespeare**

Journalist Libby Brooks observes that childhood remains now, as it has throughout history, 'a disputed territory of memory and meaning'.<sup>62</sup> It is a state, moreover, in which adults believe they

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<sup>60</sup> Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*.

<sup>61</sup> Bob Franklin, 'Children's Rights and Media Wrongs: Changing Representations of Children and the Developing Rights Agenda', in *The New Handbook of Children's Rights: Comparative Policy and Practice*, ed. by Bob Franklin, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 15-42 (p. 33).

<sup>62</sup> Libby Brooks, *The Story of Childhood: Growing up in Modern Britain* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, 2006), p. 4.

have a privileged insight, having once been children themselves. However, the disjunction between the often-idealised memories of a childhood past and the varied lived experiences of a current generation of children means that reality and expectation rarely converge. Thus, childhood inevitably becomes ‘a story grown-ups tell themselves’ – a story, according to Brooks, that functions to ‘explain away personal frailties and to position collective anxieties’ (p. 5). These collective anxieties came into sharper focus in the last few decades of the twentieth century; as historian Hugh Cunningham argues, ‘people [...] began to doubt that it was possible to preserve in any integrity the territory mapped out as childhood’. The result, he gloomily concludes, is that ‘children themselves become alien creatures, a threat to civilisation rather than its hope and potential salvation.’<sup>63</sup> Childhood, a life-stage and a concept which, during the nineteenth century and the first few decades of the twentieth century, was largely reified, idealised, exalted and protected – albeit shadowed, as scholars such as James R. Kincaid and Christine Roth have demonstrated, by a desire to eroticise and objectify – became somehow ‘alien’ or ‘other’ than human.<sup>64</sup> Its status as a period of transition from the Lockean and Rousseauian ‘innocent’ to responsible adult suddenly seemed far less secure.

The role of children as bearers of a bright and optimistic future has become gradually less sharply defined over the past few decades, and scholars have begun to look for reasons to explain this trend. What emerged was a remarkable coincidence of events that shaped the critical arena for decades to follow: the release of Neil Postman’s *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982/1994), the murder of James Bulger (1993), and the rise of childhood studies as an academic discipline.<sup>65</sup> Postman’s book was the first major study about the pernicious effects of technological innovations

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<sup>63</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, [1995] 2005), p. 187.

<sup>64</sup> See James R. Kincaid, *Child Loving*; Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan: Or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 3-4; and Christine Roth, ‘Looking through the Spyglass: Lewis Carroll, James Barrie, and the Empire of Childhood’, in *Alice Beyond Wonderland: Essays for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. by Christopher Hollingsworth (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2009), pp. 23-36.

<sup>65</sup> Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Delacort Press, 1982; repr. with new preface, New York: Vintage Books, 1994).



upon children, arguing that television was the catalyst for the disappearance of childhood through the removal of barriers to adult knowledge and experience. Following arguments posited in Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood*, Postman argues that childhood is a social construction rather than an intrinsic or timeless biological state and that its emergence and disappearance can be linked to specific cultural phenomena. The basis of Postman's thesis is that the rise in childhood coincided with the arrival of a print culture in the seventeenth century, and its decline with the invention of electronic media, specifically the television, in the twentieth century. For Postman, the crucial aspect separating childhood and adulthood is the existence of secrets: 'secrets about sexual relations, but also about money, violence, about illness, about death, about social relations' (p. 49). He argues that access to technology has resulted in an erosion in the dividing line between childhood and adulthood and that, as a result, childhood as an identifiable life stage between infancy and adulthood (for Postman, this is specifically the age between seven and seventeen) is 'difficult to sustain and, in fact, irrelevant' (p. xiii). 'If', he asks, 'the children know the mysteries and the secrets, how shall we tell them apart from anyone else?' (p. 88). This question, as I demonstrate in the four chapters of this thesis, is one which directors have been addressing with increasing frequency and urgency in their depiction of the Shakespearean child in performance.

Although critics such as David Elkind, Marie Winn, Patricia Holland and Hugh Cunningham have taken up Postman's argument, predicting a return to an earlier time when 'childhood' as a concept was yet to be formally conceptualised, there have also been challenges to his thesis.<sup>66</sup> David Buckingham, for instance, refutes the idea that the modern concept of childhood emerged with the arrival of the printing press and declined with the invention of television. He dismisses it as

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<sup>66</sup> David Elkind, *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* (Massachusetts: Addison Welsey, 1981); Marie Winn, *Children Without Childhood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984); Patricia Holland, 'Children, Childishness and the Media in the Ruins of the Twentieth Century, in *Thatcher's Children: Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s* ed. by Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg (London: Falmer Press, 1996), pp. 155-171; Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood and Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*.

‘technological determinism’ – an over-simplification that fails to take account of other influences such as theological, pedagogical and ideological changes and different individual and national contexts’.<sup>67</sup> Stephen Kline, on the other hand, agrees with Postman’s analysis of the centrality of television in shaping culture but questions his conclusions. He asserts that ‘Postman’s assumed homogeneity of television as a “mass medium” leads him to ignore historical audience segmentation patterns’, citing the proliferation of child-centred programming and marketing that has been a key feature of the American market (and indeed is also observable in the UK market) since the 1950s.<sup>68</sup> He also takes issue with the direct correlation drawn by Postman and others between media images and adult-like behavioural patterns in children, cautioning against reductive judgements until empirical evidence has emerged.<sup>69</sup> This is a caution, moreover, that is supported by digital technology experts such as Don Tapscott who argues that the digital revolution, in the hands of the Net-Generation, can be a positive ‘force for social transformation’.<sup>70</sup> Far from destroying childhood, he argues that the agency afforded by the internet gives children back the childhood that television eroded, asserting that

‘[t]he television robbed children of hours of play each day. The digital media is restoring this precious time [...] By necessity, cyberspace has become a N-Gen playground and hangout. It is a place where they play and have fun. It is a place where kids can be kids’ (p. 8).

However, in promoting the positive aspects of media technology, Tapscott’s argument becomes as reductive and generalised as that posited by Postman. More significantly, it has less popular appeal

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<sup>67</sup> David Buckingham, *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), pp. 19-21; David Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood: Growing up in the age of Electronic Media* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), pp. 35-39.

<sup>68</sup> Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys and Children's Culture in the Age of T.V. Marketing* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 70-73.

<sup>69</sup> Stephen Kline, ‘Media Effects: Redux or Reductive?’, in *Particip@tions*, 1 (2003) <[http://www.participations.org/volume%201/issue%201/1\\_01\\_kline\\_reply.htm](http://www.participations.org/volume%201/issue%201/1_01_kline_reply.htm)> [accessed 11 August 2017].

<sup>70</sup> *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1998), p. 2. See also *International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture*, ed. by Sonia Livingstone and Kirsten Drotner (London: SAGE, 2006), and *Beyond the Century of the Child: Cultural History and Developmental Psychology*, ed. by Willem Kooops and Michael Zuckerman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), pp. 10-13 for analysis of the effects of new media on children and public perception of the risks.

than the alarmist message sent out by Postman and his followers and which has been endlessly rehearsed and disseminated in the popular press. When looking for answers to the changing shape of childhood – its knowingness, its precociousness, its loss of ‘innocence’ – sociologists, childhood scholars and media commentators tend to look for scapegoats, and the digital revolution provides a convenient target.

Where Postman opened up the debate about disappearing childhood and its connection to technological innovations, the Bulger case provided the case study that fuelled it, and the emergence of childhood studies over the past three decades provided a new critical discourse within which to theorise and debate the subject.<sup>71</sup> Commentators from across the disciplines – including theatre scholars Katie Knowles and Carol Chillington Rutter, playwright Mark Ravenhill, and childhood scholars Barry Goldson, Marina Warner, Howard Davis and Mark Bourhill and Chris Jenks – all cite the case of James Bulger as the point at which attitudes in the United Kingdom changed towards children.<sup>72</sup> What made the emotive force of this case so particularly potent was not merely the fact that the victim of this horrific crime was a two-year-old child, but that the perpetrators (Robert Thompson and Jon Venables) were themselves, as ten-year-old boys, also children. A paradoxical conflation of evil and innocence rendered the crime incomprehensible for a society accustomed to a dualistic tradition of crime reportage. Sentimentalised images of childhood purity were both reinforced and challenged, as public sympathy for the young victim ran parallel to

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<sup>71</sup> According to the website [whatuni.com](http://www.whatuni.com), there are currently 59 universities offering 189 degree courses in Childhood Studies in the United Kingdom <<https://www.whatuni.com/degree-courses/search?q=childhood-studies>> [accessed 9 August 2017]. A landmark book in the development and recognition of Childhood Studies within universities was Allison James and Alan Prout, eds, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>72</sup> Katie Knowles, *Shakespeare's Boys*, p. 176; Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, pp. 173-4, 190-101; Mark Ravenhill, 'A Tear in the Fabric: The James Bulger Murder and New Theatre Writing in the Nineties', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 20.4 (2004), 305-14; Barry Goldson, "'Childhood': An Introduction to Historical and Theoretical Analyses", in *Childhood in Crisis?*, ed. by Phil Scraton (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1-27; Marina Warner, *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time - The 1994 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage Books, 1994), pp. xxi, 45-48; Howard Davis and Mark Bourhill, 'The Demonisation of Children and Young People', in Phil Scraton, pp. 28-57; Chris Jenks, *Childhood*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 119-121.

public vitriol towards the young killers. Headlines such as the *Daily Mail*'s 'The Evil and the Innocent' was paradigmatic of a media response struggling to contain the uncontainable within its carefully-policed boundaries of good and evil, right and wrong.<sup>73</sup>

This case undoubtedly represented a turning point in terms of public perceptions of children, particularly in, but not limited to, the United Kingdom. The young killers were above the age of criminal responsibility, which in England and Wales remains at the time of writing fixed at ten, so they were tried in an open adult court and therefore subject to the scrutiny of the world's press.<sup>74</sup> Both the print and press media and mediatised images played a crucial role, not only in terms of how details about the crime were disseminated, but also in the powerful visual content of these details. Security camera images of James Bulger being led out of the shopping centre by the older boys were relayed across the world, often featuring alongside a photograph of James giggling into the camera or an official shot of his parents clutching his photograph, their faces pale and drawn, his mother clutching her heavily pregnant stomach. The incongruous juxtaposition of the grainy CCTV footage and the innocent face of the two-year-old child, which were re-printed numerous times leading up to, during and after the trial, provided a powerful visual message. It was, as Marina Warner has observed, 'the most haunting image of present horrors and social failure'.<sup>75</sup> Not only did these images prompt questions about the 'failure' of a society that could raise these two child-

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<sup>73</sup> Anon, 'The Evil and the Innocent', *Daily Mail*, 25 November 1993.

<sup>74</sup> The minimum age of criminal responsibility recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is 12. England and Wales currently maintain a minimum age of 10, in spite of lobbying from different interest groups to increase it to 12. It is standard practice for children in England and Wales to be tried in a juvenile court, unless a case is made that the crime is too serious to be dealt with in the children's justice system. This decision was taken in the case of John Venables and Robert Thompson. The trial of the two boys was thus held in an open court and attracted media interest from across the globe. For further information on the trial see *The Media: An Introduction*, ed. by Adam Briggs and Paul Cobley (Harlow: Longman, 1998), pp. 265-7; Blake Morrison, *As If* (London: Granta Publications, 1997); Howard Davis and Mark Bourhill, pp. 46-9; Colin Hay, 'Mobilization Through Interpellation: James Bulger, Juvenile Crime and the Construction of a Moral Panic', *Social and Legal Studies*, 4.2 (1995), 197-223.

<sup>75</sup> Marina Warner, *Six Myths of Our Time*, p. 45.

murderers, but also about the innate capacity for evil in children everywhere.<sup>76</sup> The murder of James Bulger ‘struck resonances with the public that revealed how deeply children represent ideals and how this destruction mirrored a general failure.’<sup>77</sup> The ‘haunting’ image of James Bulger quite simply came to represent a re-definition of what it means to be a child in modern Britain. For childhood scholar Phil Scraton, the high-profile nature of the case led to a ‘refocus [...] on childhood more generally’, while Rutter claims that ‘[f]rom this instant, childhood was tainted, children, evil’.<sup>78</sup>

It is almost impossible to draw definitive conclusions about whether the hysterical reaction to the Bulger case was symptomatic of a general shift in perception, or whether the case itself was the catalyst for a change in attitudes, as Scraton and Rutter have argued. Although exceptional in the sense that it was one of only 27 recorded cases of child-on-child murder in England and Wales in the past 250 years, it was certainly not the first to attract the attention of the press. The double-infanticide by twelve-year-old Mary Bell in 1968 provides one high-profile and widely reported example in recent history. If we go back further to France in 1834, an eleven-year-old girl, Honorine Pellois, received a twenty-year sentence in a house of correction for drowning two young children in a well.<sup>79</sup> Both of these cases elicited outraged responses from media commentators, but what was particularly noteworthy in the case of James Bulger, in contrast to these earlier examples,

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<sup>76</sup> The headline in *France Soir*, for instance, wrote of the boy’s juvenile killers, ‘These two monsters could have been your children’ (25 November 1993). The case was also covered in *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, *El Pais*, the *South China Morning Post*, *La Stampa* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. See Alison Young, *Imagining Crime: Textual Outlaws and Criminal Conversations* (London: SAGE, 2009); and Bob Franklin and Julian Petley, ‘Killing The Age Of Innocence: Newspaper Reporting Of The Death Of James Bulger’, in Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg, eds., *Thatcher’s Children: Politics, Childhood And Society In The 1980s And 1990s* (London: Falmer Press, 1996), pp. 134-54.

<sup>77</sup> *Six Myths of Our Time*, p. 13.

<sup>78</sup> Phil Scraton, *Childhood in Crisis?*, p. x.; Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child’s Play*, p. 174.

<sup>79</sup> A journalist is cited as saying that watching Honorine’s trial led him to believe that ‘the human species contains undefinable beings who seem to find instinctual pleasure in evil, and who are almost predestined to become the terror of other men’, cited in Cat Nilan, ‘Hapless Innocence and Precocious Perversity in the Courtroom Melodrama: Representations of the Child Criminal in a Paris Legal Journal, 1830 – 1848’, *Journal of Family History*, 22 (1997), 251-285 (p. 274).

was the magnitude of the public reaction and the way in which the case functioned as a catalyst for broader debates about the nature of childhood. This reaction was fuelled by extensive and almost instantaneous media coverage across television networks and the print press, accompanied by strong visual images. It was front-page headline news in every national newspaper in the United Kingdom, and the *Daily Mail* alone allocated 3,765 square inches of editorial to the story between 25 and 27 November 1993 following the trial verdict. Coverage was not restricted to tabloid papers. The *Telegraph*, for instance, published twenty-three articles and two editorials across the same period.<sup>80</sup> As Chris Jenks observes, the collective response to this case amounted to a concern not merely for the death of one child, but for the ‘strange death of “childhood” itself’.<sup>81</sup> Child-on-child murder was dismissed as an inexplicable and unseemly anomaly in the case of Mary Bell. Press coverage was ‘restrained’, emphasising ‘how she could rehabilitated’ rather than focusing on how she ought to be punished, and journalists reportedly refused to buy the story from Bell’s parents, finding it too distasteful for public consumption.<sup>82</sup> In contrast, the case of Robert Thompson and Jon Venables was turned into fodder for a clamorous public who were simultaneously horrified and fascinated by its details. In the process, it became a metaphor for a general moral decline that, it was widely felt, threatened to destroy the very fabric of society. A crucial legislative effect of the debate around the Bulger killers and criminal responsibility was the passing of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act in England and Wales. This Act granted local authorities more responsibilities for reducing crime and disorder and abolished rebuttable presumption of *doli incapax*, the presumption that a child between the years of ten and fourteen is incapable of committing a crime. Although the Act was passed five years after the killing of James Bulger it came ‘out of the process of

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<sup>80</sup> Bob Franklin and Julian Petley, ‘Killing The Age Of Innocence’, p. 136.

<sup>81</sup> Chris Jenks, *Childhood*, p. 126.

<sup>82</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood*, (London: BBC Books, 2006), p. 243. A journalist for the *Sun* and the *People* is reported to have responded to the Bells’ account of Mary’s murder with the following words: ‘I’ve never been so sickened in all my life. I rang through to the office in London afterwards and told them. They said they wouldn’t touch it with a ten foot pole’, cited in Bob Franklin and Julian Petley, ‘Killing The Age Of Innocence’, p. 135.

demonisation and the sensationalism created around [it]' and there is still, in 2017, 'little appetite to change' while the case remains in the public consciousness.<sup>83</sup>

My concern here is not to suggest any direct connection between this particular case and specific Shakespearean productions. Its significance lies in the extent to which it both reflected and shaped public debate about the nature of childhood. What is particularly noteworthy, and what differentiates it from earlier cases such as Mary Bell, is the way in which it was perceived by many to be the catalyst for a change in attitudes towards the inherent nature of children more generally: no longer merely vulnerable or 'alien', a figure of hope or one of despair, children began to be seen as a potentially terrifying combination of both extremes at one and the same time.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, as childhood scholar Michael Wyness has observed, it precipitated a shift in the popular press from the demonisation of 'the troublesome delinquent teenager' to an emphasis on the capacity for depravity in much younger children.<sup>85</sup> Whether a symptom or a cause, it came to represent a watershed in a crisis of classification – adult and child, evil and innocence – that continues into the twenty-first century and shows no signs of abating. The Bulger case also coincided with and was facilitated by innovations in technology and the impact of visual media on popular discourse. It quite simply offered journalists and social commentators a new definition of childhood; 'innocent angels' co-existing with 'little demons', or even more worryingly, 'little demons' masquerading as 'innocent angels'.<sup>86</sup>

Of course, the idea of the child as an ambiguous blend of innocence and evil has its roots far deeper in history. One of the earliest inscriptions dating back over 2000 years was discovered in

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<sup>83</sup> Phil Scraton cited in Kathryn Torney, 'The Case Which Changed The Face of Youth Justice', *thedetail* online, 8 May 2011 <<http://www.thedetail.tv/articles/the-case-which-changed-the-face-of-youth-justice>> [accessed 22 March 2017]; Felicity Gerry, 'Should England and Wales Bring Back Doli Incapax?', *Criminal Law and Justice Weekly*, 181.12 (2017).

<sup>84</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 187.

<sup>85</sup> Michael Wyness, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 109.

<sup>86</sup> Bob Franklin and Julian Petley, 'Killing The Age Of Innocence', p. 134.

Mesopotamia, the birthplace of Western civilisation, lamenting that '[c]hildren no longer obey their parents', and that, consequently, '[t]he end of the world is evidently approaching.'<sup>87</sup> It is a complaint familiar to every generation from the beginning of time and still features regularly in the pages of the popular press. However, there is a particular resonance between early modern ambivalence towards childhood and the present moment that merits further consideration. Although, as we have seen, historians have established that there was indeed a clear concept of childhood in early modern England, high mortality rates meant that there was not the level of investment in the child as bearer of futurity that we see today, at least not in the terms argued by Edelman. Children were often depicted 'as vulnerable and in peril', but they were also, particularly in Puritan texts, symbolic of 'a backward look to the sin-filled origin of humankind.'<sup>88</sup> Much as we now see children as both angels and demons, threatening to escape from the garden of innocence within which we have metaphorically imprisoned them, early modern anti-exorcist texts reveal a dichotomous attitude to childhood that resonates with modern journalistic discourse – a phenomenon particularly notable in the aftermath of the Bulger murder.

In her 2013 doctoral thesis, for instance, Harman Bhogal documents two contrasting manifestations of the child in early modern records of demonic possession. On the one hand, the child is a manifestation of divine intervention, as evidenced in the case of Margaret Cooper of Somerset who claimed to have seen a snail carrying fire, a headless bear, and the devil. A pamphlet printed in 1614 under the name of 'T. I.', describes how Cooper was eventually dispossessed by 'a thing like unto a little child, with a very bright shinning countenance, casting a great light in the Chamber'.<sup>89</sup> On the other hand, far from being divine messenger, the child herself is recorded as the receptacle for demonic activity, as in the highly publicised case of the five Throckmorton

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<sup>87</sup> C. John Somerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood*, p. 21.

<sup>88</sup> Valerie Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 322-3.

<sup>89</sup> T. I. *A Miracle, of Miracles* (London, 1614).



children.<sup>90</sup> The girls, born to a wealthy landowner in Warboys, Essex, were diagnosed with bewitchment by two doctors after they experienced convulsive fits. Their repeated accusations of witchcraft against an elderly neighbour, Alice Samuel, resulted in death by hanging of Samuel and her entire family in 1593.<sup>91</sup> Although Bhogal proffers no hypothesis about the meanings or implications of these contradictions, the dialectically opposed positioning of children in witchcraft narratives reveals wider social anxieties about understanding and controlling childhood that has echoes in much media discourse today.<sup>92</sup> Whether apotheosising or demonising children, both sets of narratives (the early modern and the postmodern; the child as divine messenger and the child as demonic receptacle) conceptualise childhood in terms of hyperbole and excess, serving to reinforce its ‘otherness’ in order to delimit and patrol its boundaries.

Michael Witmore provides a more focused emphasis on the role of the child in witchcraft trials, concentrating specifically on their dual and contradictory functions as both ‘the ultimate audience’ and ‘the ultimate actor’. For Witmore, this apparently conflicting narrative of the child-as-witness/actor and the child-as-victim can be understood in terms of early modern anxieties about children as ‘a reproductive medium’, susceptible to the absorption and repetition of the ‘fictions of others’ (as witness) but also, more dangerously, capable of ‘coining spontaneous fictions of their own’ (as actor). This capacity of the child for ‘nearly automatic, reflexlike action’ made them particularly susceptible to both absorbing and propagating demonic fictions in a self-perpetuating cycle of what Witmore terms ‘recursion’.<sup>93</sup> One example of the child as ‘the ultimate actor’ in displaying demonic possession can be seen in the notorious case of ‘The Boy of Bilson’. The boy in

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<sup>90</sup> Anon, *Dreadfull Discourse*, p. 9-10.

<sup>91</sup> Details of the case can be found in the anonymously penned *The most strange and admirable discoverie of the three witches of Warboys*. See also Walker, *Unclean Spirits*, pp. 49-52; Philip C. Almond, *The Witches of Warboys: An Extraordinary Story of Sorcery, Sadism and Satanic Possession* (London, I.B. Tauris & Co., 2008); and Rosemary Ellen Guiley, ‘Throckmorton Possessions’, in *The Encyclopedia of Demons and Demonology* (New York: Checkmark Publishing, 2009), pp. 257-8.

<sup>92</sup> Harman Bhogal, ‘Rethinking Demonic Possession: The Impact Of The Debates About The John Darrel Case On Later Demonological Thought, With Particular Reference To John Deacon And John Walker’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Birkbeck College, 2013), pp. 89-91.

<sup>93</sup> Michael Witmore, *Pretty Creatures*, pp. 171-211, 174-5, 9, 18.

question was the twelve-year old William Perry who claimed he had been cursed by a witch and would fall into fits upon hearing the opening verse from St. John's Gospel. The boy was handed over to the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry so that the efficacy of his claims could be investigated. Eventually, Perry confessed to feigning his possession and the accused witch, Joan Clark, was proclaimed innocent. The Bishop branded the boy an 'execrable wretch, who playest the divels part' and an account of the incident published in 1622 described Perry as a 'most docible, subtle, and expert young Boy'.<sup>94</sup> However, as we have seen in the case of Margaret Cooper, early modern beliefs about the spiritual status of children were by no means straightforward. In her analysis of demonic possession, prophecy and children in early modern England, Anna French explains how the child was 'at one and the same time believed to have the simultaneous potential to be close both to God and to the Devil'.<sup>95</sup> Alongside accounts of child demonic possession, she also cites instances of children bearing witness to divine apparitions. One such example is contained in the 1614 pamphlet 'A Miracles, of Miracles', which relates how a 14-year old girl returned from the dead and described visions of angels 'shining like the beams of the sun'.<sup>96</sup> Children were also, as 'nondeliberating creatures', represented as having a preternatural capacity to, as Witmore explains, 'tell the truth or to discover it for adults, precisely because they have not been corrupted by sophistication or learning'.<sup>97</sup> In some religious texts, for instance, the wise child, a precursor of the romantic *puer senex*, was represented as possessing a superior capacity for spiritual awareness, while adults reverted to childishness in the presence of God.<sup>98</sup> To be a child was thus to be lacking the self-control and rationality required to be an adult, and contradictory accounts interpreted this as

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<sup>94</sup> R. B., *The Boy of Bilson*. (London, 1622). See also Anna French, *Children of Wrath: Possession, Prophecy and the Young in Early Modern England* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 98-103.

<sup>95</sup> Anna French, *Children of Wrath*, p. 3

<sup>96</sup> T. I., *A Miracle, of Miracles*.

<sup>97</sup> Michael Witmore, *Pretty Creatures*, p. 37.

<sup>98</sup> For accounts of the wise child see, for instance, Jacobus de Voragine, *Here begynneth the legende named in latyn legenda aurea, that is to say in englyshe the golden legende*, trans. by William Caxton (London, 1483). For accounts of the childish adult see, for instance, Luis de Granada, *Of Prayer, and Meditation*, trans by Richard Hopkins (Paris, 1582).

a reflection of both their super- and sub-human status and an indication of their proximity to either the divine or to the demonic.

Taken together, these early modern sources reveal a discourse surrounding the early modern child, spirituality and witchcraft that was deeply conflicted, affording them a spiritual status that was, as French asserts, ‘difficult, dualistic and paradoxical’.<sup>99</sup> Both divine and demonic, the child represented an ‘other’ that was at once cipher and agent, malleable object and dissimulating subject, witness and participant, rendering it epistemologically nebulous and therefore potentially threatening to adult hegemony. The discourse also betrays, through its lexicon and the anxieties contained therein, a correlative preoccupation with the corruptibility of the child in the early modern theatre. This ambivalent attitude to the agency of childhood has echoes in the media reaction to the murder of an ‘innocent angel’ by ‘demonic boys’ in the James Bulger case some four hundred years later, with newspapers querying the pernicious influence of horror films in much the same way that early modern pamphleteers questioned the corruptible nature of witchcraft and the theatre. What seems like a crisis peculiar to the current time thus bears remarkable similarities to its early modern precursor and Shakespeare’s plays have proved to be the ideal vehicles for bridging the gap.

As bearers of such complex and contradictory symbolic weight, it is not surprising that children feature prominently in modern productions of *Macbeth*, as I discuss in Chapter Two, and as both witness and actor in productions of *Titus Andronicus* and *The Winter’s Tale*, as I discuss in Chapters Three and Four. Although by no means the only ways through which to access social attitudes to childhood, the witchcraft trials and the Bulger case (both high-profile, well-documented and socially prominent cases) offer substantive contexts with notable circumstantial overlaps for a comparative historical analysis. As these examples demonstrate, although the contexts for

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<sup>99</sup> Anna French, *Children of Wrath*, p. 3.

understanding childhood have shifted over time, fundamental epistemological concerns underpinning the rhetoric of the child as ‘other’ are remarkably similar, and their manifestations in contemporary Shakespearean adaptations are testament to this conceptual coincidence. What is peculiar to the current discourse surrounding childhood, not least because of the intervention of mass media with its capacity to drive public opinion through emotive images and partial reporting, is the extent to which it has permeated all aspects of society, creating a ‘moral panic’ on an unprecedented scale. The result, as I demonstrate, is an increased focus upon the ambiguous and multifarious children of Shakespeare, both in critical discourse and also in performance.

Through a close analysis of specific examples from four key plays with their own particular investments in childhood, I explore how these dichotomous attitudes to childhood are manifested in performance. I analyse how the child is presented, what that representation means for our understanding of the plays and how that reflects, illuminates and contributes to this unique era of uncertainty. Each chapter concentrates on one Shakespearean play and compares a number of different productions across the mediums of film, television and theatre. I have chosen to restrict my analysis to just four plays to provide depth of analysis rather than a broad (and shallow) overview of a greater number of plays. The plays I have chosen span the three decades of Shakespeare’s writing career and include two tragedies, a history play and a tragicomedy. I demonstrate, through this inclusive approach, that Shakespeare’s child characters are a key aspect of his dramaturgy and vital to our understanding of his plays, their afterlives, and our own particular crisis of childhood.

## **5. Chapter Summary**

The first chapter addresses the play with the largest number of speaking roles for children with singularly unique and vital afterlives. ‘From the Facsimile Page to the Plastic Princes: Disrupted

Temporalities and The Effacement of Childhood in *Richard III* considers three stage productions of *Richard III* that are all symptomatic of a trend towards de-idealising childhood in performance. In Sean Holmes's 2003 production, the young pageboy, who was styled as a miniature facsimile of Richard, was knowing, precocious and the antithesis of Edelman's future-preserving child. Far from a guardian of futurity, this young boy began as a dramatic manifestation of the child as a 'reproductive medium' and developed into an infanticidal agent with political aspirations of his own.<sup>100</sup> Both Sam Mendes (1992) and Thomas Ostermeier (2015) undermined the romanticised idealisation of childhood through their unconventional casting choices. Mendes's two young princes were played by female adult actors who doubled as Lady Anne and Princess Elizabeth, while Ostermeier replaced his boy-princes with puppets. Refusing to put the body of the child on display, both directors exposed and rejected sentimentalised images of children and highlighted the way in which 'childhood' is appropriated and propagated as an emblem of both purity and futurity. By using *Richard III* as a means to interrogate received notions about childhood in this way, Holmes, Mendes and Ostermeier broke with a long performance tradition of fetishising childhood innocence to establish new ways of thinking about the child in performance.

Chapter Two, "'Fair is foul and foul is fair": The Janus-Faced Child in *Macbeth*', looks at the ways in which the multiple and diverse manifestations of childhood in *Macbeth* have been represented in performance over the past four decades. Beginning with the question of the Macbeth baby, I analyse two productions by Jamie Lloyd (2013) and Maya Kleczewska (2012), whose dystopian adaptations placed childlessness at their centre. For these two directors, the mysterious Macbeth baby was not just symbolic of the 'rooted sorrow' (5.3.41) of one couple, but the tragic emblem of a whole society facing an existential crisis. Next I consider three productions by Michael Boyd (1985, 1993 and 2011) which all featured child actors doubling as the Macduff children and the weird sisters. I look in particular at questions of ontological indeterminacy and temporal

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<sup>100</sup> Michael Witmore, *Pretty Creatures*, p. 174

disruption arising from the conflation of the human with the supernatural in the figure of the child. Finally, I compare two filmed productions of *Macbeth* by Roman Polanski (1971) and Justin Kurzel (2015) and explore how their contrasting attitudes towards the child reflect a more general shift in thinking about childhood over the four decades between their respective release dates. Although, as we shall see, these seven productions take different approaches to staging the children of *Macbeth*, they demonstrate their powerful dramatic potential for turning a mirror on society and showing us our reflection – a reflection that is, in all seven cases, barren, bleak and devoid of all hope.

Chapter Three, “Behold the child”: Death, Salvation and the Burden of Futurity in *Titus Andronicus*, picks up the theme of the child as emblem of futurity and considers how three productions have attempted to resolve the play’s ambiguous ending and account for the two children in performance. First I consider Deborah Warner’s 1987 stage production which cast a young adult actor in the part of Young Lucius and subsumed him into his grandfather’s narrative of revenge. Although questions about childhood and agency were raised by Warner’s use of a self-evidently artificial baby (as stand-in for Aaron’s son), these were questions that the production avoided addressing directly. Unlike Wheeldon’s statue of Mamilius, which was particularly striking because it contrasted with an earlier manifestation of the boy as a vibrant young dancer, Warner’s prop-baby had no such point of comparison. Her *Titus Andronicus* was a star vehicle for the actor Brian Cox who played Titus, and the ‘children’, who were ineffectual and inconsequential supporting roles, were kept firmly in the margins. I use Warner’s production as a point of contrast for two filmed adaptations by Jane Howell and Julie Taymor. Far from marginalising the child, both directors chose to present their films through the eyes of Young Lucius. However the 15 years between the release of these films was an important period in terms of shifting attitudes towards childhood, as discussed above, and the different ways in which these directors interpreted what and how the child sees was symptomatic of this shift. Both Taymor and Howell attempted to resolve the play’s ambiguities by gesturing towards a future in their closing sequences. However, in spite of

their different ideological and aesthetic approaches, I argue that the ultimate effects of these two films' endings, particularly in terms of how they relate to questions of childhood and futurity, are far more similar than initially appears, or were apparently intended. The future they gestured towards in their final moments was one doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. Where they differed from Warner was the centrality of the child in that bleak picture. Warner avoided addressing the fetishisation of the child as icon of futurity by denying the child any kind of realist representation on her stage. Howell and Taymor, on the other hand, foregrounded the child but interrogated the capacity of that child to bear the burden of the future.

Chapter Four, “‘No age’: Disappearing Childhood in *The Winter's Tale*” considers the question of childhood – and its disappearance – in relation to the character of Mamillius. How productions account for the death of this young boy and his absence from the final scene of reconciliation and redemption has profound implications for the overall tone of the play in performance, as we have already seen. The first two productions I consider, by Nicholas Hytner (2001) and Edward Hall (2005/12), both foregrounded the death of Mamillius and turned his absence into an overdetermined presence that problematised the redemption of Leontes and his happy ending. Like the lifeless statue in Wheeldon's ballet, their Mamilliuses haunted the play throughout, ensuring that their audiences could not forget that, in Shakespeare's text at least, ‘a dead five- or six-year-old boy remains unaccounted for’.<sup>101</sup> Finally I consider Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford's 2015/6 production which reimagined Mamillius as a sentimentalised Victorian ‘wise child’ created to save his sister and reverse the moral degeneration of his father. For Branagh and Ashford, the tragedy of Mamillius was obviated by locating the tale in a Victorian setting and thus enabling a representation of childhood that was reactionary, nostalgic, and, on the surface at least, an evasion of twenty-first-century cultural and social realities. However, I argue that, beneath the surface of their romanticised

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<sup>101</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, p. 193.

interpretation lay a submerged tale of loss whose silence spoke volumes not only about the ‘dead five- or six-year-old boy’, but about a society facing a crisis.

Like the janus-faced children of *Macbeth*, the doomed young princes and precocious page in *Richard III*, and the ambiguous children of *Titus Andronicus*, Mamillius is a character who disrupts notions of the child as emblem of futurity. His death presides over the final scene of reconciliation like Banquo at the feast, threatening to disrupt the ‘happy ending’ with his conspicuous absence. The different ways in which Hytner, Hall and Branagh/Ashford managed this final sequence were axiomatic of the anxieties and debates about childhood that I address in the first three chapters. The child in Shakespeare, as I argue throughout this thesis, is a site of conflicting hopes, desires, fears, and doubts. The ways in which directors have approached the question of how to represent the child in performance reveals as much about these under-analysed characters in Shakespeare’s plays as it does about the contexts in which they are performed and received. In the past three decades, that context has, as Postman, Cunningham, Rutter and many others have argued, been one of increasing uncertainty. The children of Shakespeare have the capacity to not only reflect but contribute to the debate about what childhood represents for a postmodern audience, as directors are realising through increasingly innovative means. This thesis illuminates how these children have been manifested in performance and what those performances tell us about the children of Shakespeare and, perhaps more importantly, what they tell us about how we conceptualise childhood today.



## Chapter One

### From the Facsimile Page to the Plastic Princes: Disrupted Temporalities and The Effacement of Childhood in *Richard III*

*Richard III* features more speaking roles for children than any other Shakespeare play: Prince Edward; Richard Duke of York; Boy and Daughter, children of George, Duke of Clarence; and Page. However, it is common practice for directors to cut the roles of Clarence's children and the page or turn the page into an adult messenger or aide, thus focusing dramatic attention exclusively on Edward and Richard. Such is the impact of these two young princes that they have provided inspiration for numerous manifestations, adaptations and reinterpretations in the genres of art, theatre and film across the centuries. In terms of cultural purchase, they are arguably as iconic an image of Shakespeare's dramaturgy as Richard himself. However, although Shakespeare's representation of the two boys is nuanced and ambiguous, juxtaposing the precocity and verbosity of the princes with the idealised rhetoric of the adults who mourn their deaths, the tendency in visual, theatrical and cinematic representation has been towards smoothing over such ambiguities to present them as icons of innocence and vulnerability. This tendency was particularly prevalent in the nineteenth century, when artists such as James Northcote and intellectuals like William Hazlitt immortalised these two boys as what William Moelwyn Merchant has termed 'mawkishly sentimental' symbols of pathos.<sup>1</sup> Colley Cibber's adaptation was still in common use during this period, and his depiction of the two princes as vulnerable innocents reflected an ongoing desire within nineteenth-century culture to draw boundaries around childhood and preserve its privileged status as a time of innocent charm.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Moelwyn Merchant, *Shakespeare and the Artist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> *The Tragical History of King Richard III as it is Acted at the Theatre Royal* (London, 1700). See Ann Blake, 'Shakespeare's Roles for Children: A Stage History', *Theatre Notebook* 48 (1994), 122-37 (pp. 124-5) and Katie Knowles, *Shakespeare's Boys*, pp. 146-7 for an analysis of Cibber's changes to the children's roles.

In both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was common practice for the parts of Shakespeare's boys, particularly the two princes of *Richard III*, to be played by women. This was in part due to reasons of pragmatism. As part of the process of protecting and extending the rights of children outlined in the introduction, legislation affecting the employment of child performers had become increasingly restrictive during the nineteenth century, resulting in more adult performers taking the parts of children on stage. However, even when a child actor was employed, it was just as likely that a young girl would play the role as a young boy, as my analysis of a selection of playbills from Drury Lane Theatre, London and Theatre Royal, Newcastle revealed.<sup>3</sup> Gender, it seems, was as much a factor influencing casting choices as age. Although it can be argued that it is easier for an audience to accept a woman than a man impersonating a child due to her smaller frame, higher-pitched voice, and smoother skin, the substitution of women for boys was more than just a question of interchangeable physicality. 'In an era of increasing sentimentality', Laurence Senelick explains, '[girls] were better than boys at evoking pathos. More tears might be shed over a waif portrayed by a woman (a victim by definition) than over a gangling youth, and the pathetic element was a satisfactory substitute for verisimilitude in male impersonation'.<sup>4</sup> The substitution worked, in other words, because of the coincidence between the political, social and literary constructions of women and children as subordinated groups. The dominant representation of childhood during the nineteenth century, as Carolyn Steedman has argued, was feminine, or at least endowed with 'a feminised set of qualities'.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, this practice of gendering early childhood feminine was commonplace in the early modern period, where 'child' was often synonymous with 'girl'.<sup>6</sup> With the move from sentimentalism to a more realist style of theatre in the twentieth century, the parts

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<sup>3</sup> See p. 90, n. 68.

<sup>4</sup> Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 267-8.

<sup>5</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780-1930* (London: Virago, 1995), p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> I discuss the gendering of early modern children in more detail in Chapter Four in relation to *The Winter's Tale*.

have routinely been played by young prepubescent boys. But the emphasis on sentimentality still prevails in many quarters and far from casting Senelick's 'gangling youth[s]' to play the princes, directors have routinely used young boys to evoke pathos and to stage what Bridget Escolme has termed 'the political dramaturgy of grief'.<sup>7</sup>

According to Escolme, demonstrations of grief in Shakespeare's plays can be disempowering and are often both posited against action and gendered female. But, as she explains, these demonstrations of grief can also be politically empowering, as in the mourning women in *Richard III* who intercept Richard and precipitate his tragic downfall (p. 190). The power of collective grieving, specifically in relation to iconic images of dead or doomed children, has been particularly compelling in recent years. The case of James Bulger and the poignant CCTV images is one such example of public demonstrations of grief leading to legislative change, as I discussed in the introduction. More recent examples include the photograph of the dead three-year-old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, washed up on the beach of Turkey in 2015. The public response to this image resulted in the Canadian government removing some of the legal obstacles to obtaining asylum and significantly increasing their quota of Syrian refugees.<sup>8</sup> And in 2017, there was the case of Charlie Gard, the terminally ill baby whose parents fought a legal battle with Great Ormond Street Hospital for the right to take their son to America for experimental treatment. Media reporting of the plight of the parents, accompanied by emotive images of the baby attached to a ventilator, prompted interventions from Donald Trump and the Pope and resulted in mass demonstrations across the United Kingdom. Staff at the hospital even received death threats from outraged members of the

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<sup>7</sup> Bridget Escolme, *Emotional Excess On the Shakespearean Stage: Passion's Slaves* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 184.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Jessica Elgot, 'Family of Syrian Boy Washed Up On Beach Were Trying To Reach Canada', *Guardian*, 3 September 2015; and Patrick Kingsley and Safak Timur, 'Stories of 2015: How Alan Kurdi's Death Changed The World', *Guardian*, 31 December 2015.

public.<sup>9</sup> The efficacy of the ‘political dramaturgy of grief’ can still be seen in modern productions of *Richard III*, where the bodies of the dead princes are displayed (and exploited) in order to turn audience sympathy away from Richard. As recently as the second half of the twentieth century and the opening decades of the twenty-first century, films by Laurence Olivier (London Films, 1955) and Richard Loncraine (United Artists, 1995) and stage productions by Roxana Silbert (The Swan Theatre, 2012), Tim Carroll (Shakespeare’s Globe, 2012), and Jamie Lloyd (Trafalgar Studios, 2014) have portrayed the two princes as helpless victims of Richard’s tyranny. By foregrounding the prepubescent bodies of the actors, they maximize the impact of the boys’ vulnerability by turning them into emotive visual signs of the ‘precariousness’ and ‘grievability’ of life, manipulating audience empathy away from Richard and, more significantly, ensuring that the boys remain idealised icons of innocence and pathos.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of an ongoing tendency towards reifying and aestheticising the two boys in this way, however, there has been a small but growing counter-cultural movement towards a de-idealisation of the young princes, signalling a cultural shift away from the so-called ‘century of the child’ towards a postmodern crisis of ‘disappearing childhood’. In this chapter, I analyse the way in which three productions that are symptomatic of this trend, those of Sam Mendes (1992), Sean Holmes (2003), and Thomas Ostermeier (2015), have effaced or undermined romanticised images of childhood.<sup>11</sup> Each of these productions was staged as a stand-alone play rather than part of the first tetralogy (or adaptation thereof). As a result, they were all productions that were not shaped by the teleology of a historical cycle; instead, they focused on Richard as the starring character in his own

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<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Will Gore, ‘Now Charlie Gard’s parents have ended their court case, we should ask why his case became the media circus it did’, *Independent*, 24 July 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Judith Butler, *Frames Of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 1-33. For a full analysis of the representation of the children in Olivier’s and Loncraine’s films, see Lucy Munro, “‘Little apes and tender babes’: Children in Three Film Versions of *Richard III*”, in, *Shakespeare On Screen: Richard III*, ed. by Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerin (Rouen: Publications de l’Universite de Rouen, 2005), pp. 161-177.

<sup>11</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, [1995] 2005), p. 172.

historical tragedy, rather than a cog in the wheel of a political history.<sup>12</sup> Their focus on Richard is particularly significant in terms of my analysis of the children in this play. The portrayal of Richard played an integral part in framing the representation of childhood – or more specifically, the effacement of childhood – in each of these productions. In Holmes’s *Richard III*, a ‘childish-foolish’ Richard (1.3.142), played by Henry Goodman, was shadowed and eventually superseded by a precociously knowing infanticidal child in the form of the young pageboy played by David Jowett. The effect was a blurring of boundaries separating adulthood and childhood and a dismantling of the phantasmic ideal of the future-bearing child. In Mendes’s production, Simon Russell Beale’s camp Richard provided the context for the queering of childhood in the form of cross-dressing adult female actors who doubled the roles with those of Elizabeth and Anne. In a production that was otherwise (aside from Beale’s camp Richard) unremarkably ‘straight’, the cross-cast princes presented a queer performance that transgressed boundaries of age and gender to foreground the artifice of childhood as a social and political construct and undermine conceptualisations of childhood as a discrete state within a narrative of straight temporal progression. For Ostermeier, the princes, played by life-sized puppets in an otherwise ‘human’ production, were counterbalanced by an insistently corporeal (and at times fully naked) Richard, who spat, cried, dribbled and sweated throughout. However, when he removed his clothes he revealed that his ‘disabilities’, constructed from a cushion and a surgical boot, were just as much an illusion as the puppet princes themselves. Unlike Holmes’s revival, where the page gradually transformed himself into a miniature facsimile of Richard, blurring the boundaries between adulthood and childhood, Ostermeier’s production ended with Richard’s metamorphosis from human to puppet, his body hanging lifelessly from the end of a cord like a discarded marionette.

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<sup>12</sup> Although *Richard III* was included among the histories in the First Folio, all title pages (Quartos 1-6 and Folio – see bibliography for full references) classify the play as a tragedy. See Kristian Smidt’s parallel edition of the texts, *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third: Parallel Texts of the First Quarto and the First Folio with Variants of the Early Quartos* (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), pp. 28-29.

Like Mendes's cross-cast princes, the puppet-princes of Ostermeier's adaptation drew attention to the ways in which postmodern idealisations of childhood are a rhetorical construct divorced from the embodied realities of children in all their multiple manifestations. The tragic princes of Shakespeare's play were revealed, through the dramaturgical choices of both Mendes and Ostermeier, to be less the dramatic representation of the 'real' princes and, more significantly, of 'real' *children*, than a dramatic distillation of entrenched ideas about what childhood should mean. In all three instances, the performance of childhood drew attention to – even as it dismantled – widely accepted narratives of children as idealised and fetishised guardians of futurity. These are narratives that Edelman has aptly termed 'the cult of the Child', and which I explore in greater detail below.<sup>13</sup>

### **1a. Emerging from the Shadows: The Page as the Future-Killing Anti-Child in Sean Holmes's *Richard III* (2003)**

Breaking with a long-established convention of cutting, doubling or adapting the child roles in *Richard III*, Holmes's production featured five separate child actors to play the roles of Clarence's son and daughter, the Duke of York, Prince Edward, and the pageboy.<sup>14</sup> It was an adaptation that was heavily invested in childhood: as a symbol, a psychological state, and an embodied presence. Where many productions, from Cibber's 1700 adaptation through to twenty-first-century revivals, have either cut the page entirely, cast an adult actor in the role, or doubled it with another role such as Catesby, Holmes decided to give his young page centre stage as Richard's miniaturized doppelgänger, dressed in a matching outfit and dragging his leg behind him in an imitation of

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<sup>13</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future*, p. 19 and *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> In Cibber's adaptation, it is Catesby who introduces Richard to Tyrrel in the absence of the page character. It is common practice in modern productions to cut both Clarence's children and the page (Mendes [1992 and 2011]; Silbert [2012]; Carroll [2012]; Lloyd [2014]; Ostermeier [2015]; Goold [2016]). In Shakespeare's theatre, it was likely that the same child actors would have played both the princes and Clarence's children and the page. See below for further explanation.

Richard's limping gait. Not only did this often-overlooked figure provide a dramatic counterpoint to the other children, but, as Richard's diminutive alter ego, he also problematised hegemonic ideals of the child as a symbol of futurity. In Act 4, Scene 2, the page introduces Richard to James Tyrrel who organises the execution of the two young princes. In his role as facilitator of infanticide and emblem of Richard's enduring legacy of tyranny, he was thus the antithesis of Edelman's 'future-preserving child'. Initially appearing as nothing more than a manifestation of Richard's interiorized 'child', Richard's page gradually emerged from the shadows to assert his own autonomy. When he dispassionately removed the sword from the grip of his dead master and presented it to Richmond in the final scene, it was as though we were being given a glimpse into a future that was potentially more terrifying than the reign of Richard himself.

Just as he is often excised from performance or re-imagined as an adult, the page is often overlooked in critical analyses of the children in *Richard III*. Carol Chillington Rutter refers to him as 'the extra' and does not elaborate further on the significance of his role.<sup>15</sup> Katie Knowles dedicates a chapter to the 'Pages and Schoolboys' of Shakespeare's plays, but does not include Richard's page in her analysis, choosing to focus almost exclusively on Moth and Falstaff's page.<sup>16</sup> Marjorie Garber's notoriously short and oft-cited summary of Shakespearean child characters makes no reference to any of the pageboys, concentrating instead on the two princes in *Richard III*, Macduff's and Coriolanus's sons, and Mamillius.<sup>17</sup> Although Catherine Belsey acknowledges Richard's page in her account of Shakespearean child characters, she does not elaborate on his dramatic or symbolic function.<sup>18</sup> That he does not appear to merit the same attention as the pages in *Love's Labours Lost* or *1 and 2 Henry IV*, or in fact the other four child characters in *Richard III*, is almost certainly a consequence of his relatively small speaking role. Compared to the Duke of

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<sup>15</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, p. xiii.

<sup>16</sup> Katie Knowles, *Shakespeare's Boys*, pp. 90-122

<sup>17</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 30.

<sup>18</sup> Catherine Belsey, 'Little Princes: Shakespeare's Royal Children', in *Shakespeare and Childhood*, pp. 32-48.

York's 46 lines, young Prince Edward's 43 lines, and the 26 combined lines of Clarence's two children, the page has a paltry total of only six lines (4.2.33, 36-39, 40). To dismiss him as unworthy of consideration because of the size of his spoken contribution, however, is to underestimate his important dramatic function within the overall representation of childhood in this play. The only childhood scholar to recognise the significance of the pageboy's role is Mark Lawhorn, who observes that, as 'the go-between who brings Richard and Tyrrel together', the page qualifies assumptions about childish innocence and 'raises the vexing question of what structurally, thematically or culturally significant purpose the boy figure might be serving.' The 'vexing question' to which he refers, however, remains tantalisingly unanswered in his analysis.<sup>19</sup> It is a question to which Holmes's 2003 production may provide an answer.

The marginalisation of the page is not restricted to the academy, but finds its corollary in the theatre, where his role is often cut entirely, as in Mendes (1992) and Ostermeier (2015). In the original Elizabethan production, as Bethany Packard notes, the part of the page 'would likely have been doubled by a child actor playing one of the princes'.<sup>20</sup> Richard Madelaine has similarly argued that '[b]oy actors seem to have done a little doubling, usually minor female parts with minor male parts such as pages, and these doubled parts were almost certainly given to the less-experienced boys', while Anthony Hammond surmises that 'the smallest member of the company [played] the pert Duke of York, Clarence's daughter, and the Page'.<sup>21</sup> Evelyn Tribble has also argued that young apprentice boy-actors would have been trained in 'scaffolded' or 'shepherded' roles before they were able to progress onto more complex parts.<sup>22</sup> Even taking this into account, the page could

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<sup>19</sup> Mark Lawhorn, Appendix 1: 'Children in Shakespeare's Plays: An Annotated Checklist', in *Shakespeare and Childhood*, pp. 233-249 (p. 239).

<sup>20</sup> Bethany Packard, 'Richard III's Baby Teeth', *Renaissance Drama*, 41 (2013), 107- 129 (p. 125).

<sup>21</sup> Richard Madelaine, 'Material Boys: Apprenticeship and the Boy Actors' Shakespearean Roles', in *Shakespeare Matters: History, Teaching, Performance*, ed. by Lloyd Davis (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), pp. 225-232 (p. 232). William Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, Arden Shakespeare Second Series, ed. by Anthony Hammond (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1981), p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> Evelyn Tribble defines a 'scaffolded' role as 'a restricted role' with an inbuilt framework and structure that 'prompts the novice actor's activity'. A 'shepherded' role is one in which the 'boy actor is led onto stage and



easily be doubled with Clarence's son or daughter, whose lines and appearances are minimal. From a staging point of view, therefore, there is no practical necessity to cast a separate actor to play the page. His appearance does not overlap with any of the other children and his age is unspecified, making him suitable for doubling with any of the other child characters. From a dramatic perspective, doubling the page with one of the other four children (who are, unlike the page, all victims of Richard's tyranny) would problematise a simplistic representation of childhood as a state of vulnerability and innocence. As intermediary between Richard and Tyrrel, the page is an enabler to the murder of the two princes, and therefore an important corrective to the rhetoric of childhood purity that is rehearsed by the female characters in Act 4, Scene 4 and reinforced in Tyrrel's famous soliloquy in Act 4, Scene 3. Given that he has such dramatic potential and that there are minimal practical staging and casting obstacles, it is noteworthy, therefore, that he has been cut from many modern productions. In order to understand why this might be, I will consider the dramatic, structural and ideological effects of choosing to *include* the pageboy, beginning by exploring his early modern conception.

Shakespeare's page has his origin in the 'secrete page' of Richard as documented by Edward Hall in *The Union of the Two Noble ... Famelies of Lancastre and Yorks* (1548). The brief passage in which he appears is worth quoting in full because it provides some insight into the way in which Shakespeare re-interpreted the role and the resultant dramatic effects:

he sayde to a secrete page of his: Ah, whom shal a man truste: they that I have brought up my selfe, they that I went woulde mave moost surely served me, even those fayle me, and at my commaundement wyll do nothyng for me. Syr, quod the page, there lieth one in the palet chamber with out that I dare wel say, to do your grace pleasure the thing were right hard that he would refuse, meaning this by James Tirel, which was a man of goodly personage, and for the giftes of nature worthy to have served a much better prince, yf he had well served God, and by grace obeyed to have as much trueth and good

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directed by a more experienced actor playing a parental/guardian role.' See 'Marlowe's Boy Actor', *SB*, 27.1 (2009), 5-17 (p. 7).

wyll, as he had strength and wytt. The man had an high harte and sore longed upward ... which thyng the page had well marked and knowen : wherefore this occasion offered of very speciall friendship spied his tyme to set him forwards, and such wyse to do him good, that all the enemies that he had (except the devil) could never have done him so much hurte and shame.<sup>23</sup>

What becomes apparent when comparing Hall's account of the page and Shakespeare's version is the extent to which the page in *Richard III* is aware of and complicit in the murder of the princes. In Hall's version, Richard does not make explicit the task that he has in mind for Tyrrel, whereas in Shakespeare's text, his murderous intention is quite clear when he asks the page, 'Know'st thou not any whom corrupting gold / Would tempt unto a close exploit of death?' (4.2.33-4).

It is not obvious whether Shakespeare intended for the page to overhear Richard's prior dialogue with Buckingham, in which case he would be in no doubt as to the proposed victims of the 'close exploit of death'. In this short exchange with Buckingham, Richard makes three references to 'Young Edward' ('Young Edward lives' [4.2.9]; 'but Edward lives' [4.2.13]; 'that Edward still should live' [4.2.15]), and at one point explicitly states 'I wish the bastards dead' (4.2.17). Neither Quarto nor Folio texts note the point at which the page enters, although it is conventional in modern editions to have him enter with Richard at the beginning of the scene, which is when he entered in Holmes's production.<sup>24</sup> Whether he overhears Richard and Buckingham's discussion or not, however, the page's description of Tyrrel as a 'discontented gentleman' for whom '[g]old were as good as twenty orators' to 'tempt him to anything' (4.2.35-38), confirms that he understands the mission to be less than honourable and is thus complicit, albeit by proxy, in the murder of the two princes. This is a notable departure from Hall's page, who recommends Tyrrel in good faith as a loyal servant with 'an high harte', ignorant of Richard's intent and the 'hurte and shame' it would

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<sup>23</sup> Edward Hall, 'From the Union of the Two Noble ... Families of Lancastre and Yorke' (1548), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol 3, ed. by Geoffrey Bullough (London: Routledge, 1960), pp. 249-300 (p. 278).

<sup>24</sup> Both Oxford single edition and complete works, Norton Shakespeare, Arden Shakespeare and RSC Shakespeare all follow this convention.

cause. This subtle but deliberate reinterpretation of the role of the page provides a potent counterpoint to the repeated associations of the two murdered princes with purity that resonate throughout the play, particularly in the idealised rhetoric of the adults who mourn their loss. By the time the page appears on stage in Act 4, Scene 2, the play has already introduced a tension between this narrative of childhood innocence and the embodied reality of the living child in the figure of the precocious, disrespectful and ‘perilous’ (2.4.35) Duke of York. Shakespeare’s reinterpreted role of the page is therefore not an anomaly but a further complicating factor, whose presence reinforces and expands upon the multiple and contradictory versions of childhood on display in this play. To overlook this character and the significance of his brief appearance is, therefore, to obtain only a partial understanding of *Richard III*’s nuanced and multi-faceted representations of childhood. Moreover, to choose to exclude him from productions is to present a skewed impression of childhood that does not allow for the darker side that is embodied in the page.

Although the over-determined presence of Holmes’s page can be seen as an extension of Shakespeare’s original intention, he also has much in common with the page in the anonymous 1594 play, *The True Tragedie of Richard the Third*. In *The True Tragedie*, the page has a total of 103 lines compared with the six allocated to the page in Shakespeare’s play.<sup>25</sup> He fulfils multiple dramatic functions: a choric figure who addresses the audience directly; a witness for the allegorical figure, Report; and a faithful servant to Richard who, like Holmes’s page, has a ‘very speciall friendship’ with his master. In Shakespeare’s version, however, he appears in only one scene (Act 4, Scene 2) and his role is limited to that of serving boy, a role which Holmes expanded with considerable consequences for his particular interpretation of both Richard’s and the pageboy’s characters. In his account of playing Richard, Henry Goodman notes that it was his, not Holmes’s, idea to expand the stage presence of Richard’s page from his one appearance in the text to a total of

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<sup>25</sup> Anon., *The True Tragedie of Richard the Third* (London, 1594). I calculated the total line length by counting each line as it appears on *EEBO*.

seven scenes.<sup>26</sup> The page's role, moreover, was adapted to include a further, symbolic function as the manifestation of Richard as an 'adult-child', to use Postman's terminology.<sup>27</sup> Goodman describes him as 'a young boy in [Richard's] own image', whose 'frequent, silent presence' as his 'only companion' symbolised not only his isolation but also the traumatic childhood experiences that shaped his character.<sup>28</sup> Goodman's account is written from his own personal perspective and therefore inevitably considers only the ways in which the young pageboy impacted upon *his* role as Richard. What he does not take into account is the additional function of the boy's expanded role as a counterpoint to the other four child-victims represented in this production. From this point of view, the pageboy's foregrounded presence as constant companion to and miniature replica of Richard gave his role a disproportionately large significance within the overall dramatic structure. The boy's complicity in his master's '[p]lots' and 'inductions dangerous' (1.1.32) hinted at in Shakespeare's text thus became the prevailing image of, rather than merely another perspective on childhood, to counterbalance and problematise the other representations on display: the 'perilous' and 'shrewd' Duke of York (2.4.35), the loyal children of Clarence, the intellectually precocious Prince Edward, and the vulnerable innocents of the adults' imaginings. The impact of Clarence's children and the two young princes as emblems of imperiled innocence was diluted by the overwhelming presence of the young page, and as a result, the play's ambivalent presentation of childhood as simultaneously vulnerable *and* threatening became disproportionately skewed towards the latter.

Apart from the silent presence of the page in Act 1, Scenes 1 and 3, the first children to appear on stage in this production, in accordance with Shakespeare's Quarto and Folio texts, were

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<sup>26</sup> The scenes in which the pageboy appeared were Act 1, Scenes 1 and 3; Act 4, Scenes 2 and 4; Act 5, Scenes 3, 4 and 5.

<sup>27</sup> Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, pp. 98-119. See introduction for review of Postman's thesis.

<sup>28</sup> Henry Goodman, 'King Richard III', in *Players of Shakespeare 6: Essays in the Performance of Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. by Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 198-218 (pp. 200, 214).

Clarence's son and daughter in Act 2, Scene 2. The lights went up at the beginning of the scene to the pure, soaring melody of a single flute – a refrain that was to be repeated in Act 4, Scene 3 before Tyrrel's elegiac account of the murder of the princes. The two children were playing with a large Edwardian rocking horse, framed within the beams of light shining down through the latticed windows above. These signifiers of the nursery evoked idealised images of childhood play, and the centre-stage positioning of the rocking-horse coloured the whole scene with a patina of nostalgia. This impression of childhood as a temporally discrete state, whose passing is accompanied with regret and whose recollection is imbued with sentimentality, was intensified by the disjunction between actor and role in the character of Clarence's son. From his physical appearance and his strained attempt at falsetto, it was immediately evident that he was no longer a child. In fact, the cast list in the programme confirmed that the actor playing Clarence's son was an adult man, Rob Wynn, who was also doubling as the keeper and as Surrey. Watching this fully-grown man push his young sister (played by Daisy Hughes and Isabella James, who were both minors at the time) on the rocking horse and speak in a self-conscious approximation of a child-like pitch was touching rather than comical. It was not a consciously metatheatrical performance of childhood, like the transvestic cross-cast princes of Mendes's production, discussed in detail below, but a performance that invited the audience to enter into the illusion. Framed within the Merchant Ivory aesthetic of the Edwardian nursery, it was almost as though he were trying to recapture a sense of his own youth by assuming the behaviour and acquiring the accoutrements of this child role. As the adults commenced their choric-style rhetoric of grief, he stood silently by his sister, his hands resting protectively on her shoulders. The children's recriminations ('Good aunt, you wept not for our father's death' [2.2.61]) were omitted along with their part in the ritualised rhetorical outpouring of grief, reducing their roles to helpless and almost entirely voiceless witnesses. Like the wooden rocking horse, they were little more than props. Their presence was less a strident defence of their father's memory and more a synecdoche for the lost children of the lamenting mothers.

The lines of the two young princes were similarly reduced and their individuated characters flattened out to appear two-dimensional and colourless. This had even greater consequence to the overall balance of the play than the cuts applied to Clarence's children. Although the Young Duke of York's repetition of Gloucester's comment that '[s]mall herbs have grace, gross weeds grow apace' (2.4.13) was retained, the ensuing dialogue with the Duchess of York (2.4.23-37) was removed. These lines are significant for a number of reasons and their excision had profound implications for the representation of childhood in this production. Firstly, in both Quarto and Folio texts, the Young Duke says that, should he have remembered that his uncle had been '[s]o long a-growing and so leisurely' (2.4.19), he would have given his 'uncle's grace a flout' (2.4.24) with a 'biting jest' (2.4.30), revealing a precocity and subversive tendency that might prove problematic for Gloucester's authority. Secondly, when challenged by his grandmother to reveal the source of his story, he is revealed to be a liar, problematising any simplistic representation of the two princes as innocent emblems of purity. And thirdly, the queen intervenes and rebukes him for being 'perilous' and 'shrewd' (2.4.35). Both of these adjectives are associated with cunning and artfulness, the very opposite of the image of idealised childhood innocence the play is later to present in Tyrrel's soliloquy.<sup>29</sup> As Bethany Packard observes, 'York turns Richard's words against him and appropriates his uncle's sharp baby teeth for his own use'.<sup>30</sup> Removing these lines thus significantly reduced the sharpness of the Young Duke's bite.

Thus, where Shakespeare's texts carefully individualize the two princes, Holmes's production consistently homogenised them. This strategy was particularly apparent in the following scene (Act 3, Scene 1) where the two princes appear on stage together for the only time as living characters. Although Holmes retained the Prince's initial questions about the building of the Tower and the

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<sup>29</sup> 'Perilous' and 'shrewd' are defined in the *OED* as follows: 'perilous, *adj.* **1a.** Dangerous, hazardous, fraught with peril; causing or resulting in danger; risky. In early use also: spiritually dangerous; **2.** Causing fear; to be feared or avoided; dreadful, terrible; formidable; and 'shrewd, *adj.* **1a.** 'Of persons, their qualities, actions, etc.: Depraved, wicked; evil-disposed, malignant. Passing into a weaker sense: Malicious, mischievous. *dial.*'

<sup>30</sup> Bethany Packard, 'Richard III's Baby Teeth', p. 117.

difference between recorded and reported history (3.1.68-78), he excised his eulogy to the martial bravery of Julius Caesar (3.1.84-89). This second speech, although only six lines long, is central to the individual characterisation of Prince Edward and his function in the drama as a rhetorical and intellectual sparring partner for Richard. In this scene, he has returned to London and is to be incarcerated in the tower by Richard with his younger brother. Here Shakespeare draws upon topical issues relating to historiography, specifically the contested subject of Julius Caesar's role in building the Tower of London. Contemporary historical chronicler, John Stow, questioned in 1598 the security of documented sources which cite Julius Caesar as the tower's architect, noting that, in spite of contemporary accounts to this effect, 'Cesar remayned not heere so long, nor had hee in his head any such matter'.<sup>31</sup> The child thus becomes a mouthpiece for topical concerns about documentary accuracy and historical distortions, both of which are germane to Shakespeare's treatment of Richard and the princes in his play. But, more importantly, the prince here demonstrates a precocious capacity for reasoning, logic, and debate – all qualities that would prove problematic for Richard should he live long enough to challenge his authority. The removal of this speech thus neutralises the threat that Edward poses to Richard and reduces the character, like his brother and the Clarence children, to little more than a cipher. In the end, in this production, it is Holmes's page, and his capacity for self-serving and unsentimental political pragmatism, that proves to be the greatest threat of all, both to Richard and to futurity more generally.

The significance of the page in Holmes's production became apparent very early on when Henry Goodman's Richard interrupted his opening soliloquy to summon the boy on stage. Having initially appeared dressed in frock coat and top hat like an Edwardian music hall entertainer (see Figure 3), Goodman began removing his outer clothing at '[b]ut I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks' (1.1.14) to reveal a twisted and deformed body held together with orthopaedic straps and built-up boots and dressed in a red military-style shirt and black trousers. He paused after 'so

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<sup>31</sup> John Stow, *A Suruay of London* (London, 1598), p. 38.

lamely' to shout 'Boy!', before continuing 'and unfashionable' (1.1.22), at which point a pageboy appeared through the back curtain and began gathering up Richard's discarded clothing. The boy froze as Richard jabbed viciously with his stick at a barking dog just out of sight behind the up-stage left curtain at 'dogs bark at me as I halt by them' (1.1.23). The boy was then dismissed with a curt, 'go on', and Richard resumed his soliloquy while the boy disappeared back behind the curtain. It was a brief appearance but quickly established the power-relations between the two characters. Silent, acquiescent, and, in Richard's mind at least, associated with dogs that need beating into submission, his first appearance gave the impression that this page was Richard's whipping-boy. Like his master, he was dressed in a red shirt and black trousers, and walked with a discernible limp. In the recording in the RSC archive, the page is played by eleven-year-old David Jowett, whose diminutive stature, blonde hair and angelic looks created an outward image of a vulnerable and innocent child. Moreover, the way in which Richard summoned his page – 'So lamely – Boy! – and unfashionable' – was no accident. In spite of the small pause before 'Boy!', it was clear that the young page was associated in his master's mind with the modifier 'lamely' ('lamely Boy', rather than 'lamely – Boy'). What this 'lamely boy' symbolised was thus Richard's own shadowy doppelgänger: the 'deformed, unfinished' child-Richard 'sent before [his] time' (1.1.20) and the displaced object of his own self-loathing. If, however, he was to be seen as Richard's whipping-boy, it quickly became evident that the whipping was more a metaphorical form of self-flagellation.



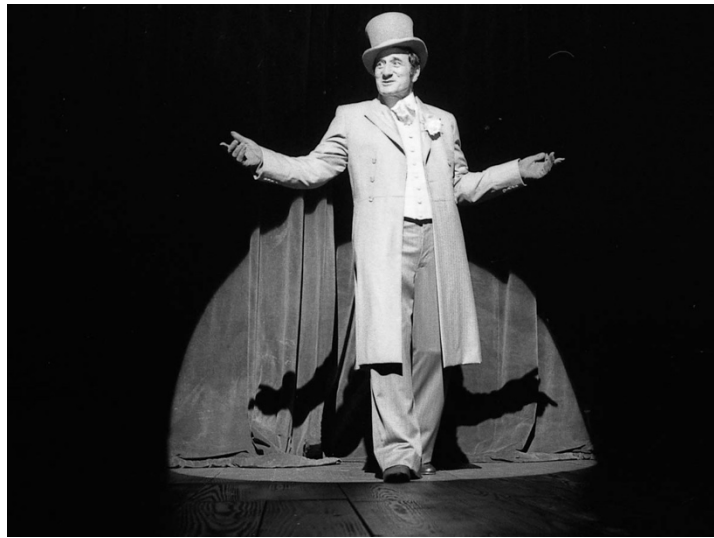


Figure 3: Henry Goodman (Richard) in Sean Holmes's *Richard III* (2003)

In his essay 'The Uncanny', Sigmund Freud describes the process by which the doppelgänger, which represents the source of narcissism in childhood, is later manifested in adulthood as an uncanny double that calls forth suppressed memories.<sup>32</sup> Drawing on Freud's theories, Barbara L. Estrin provides a reading of *Richard III* that, although not cited by either Goodman or Holmes as an influence, provides an illuminating insight into the function of the page in this production. Expanding upon the metaphorical 'amorous looking glass' (1.1.15) and 'shadow' (1.1.26) of Richard's opening soliloquy, Estrin comments as follows: '[h]is shadow becomes a child for him, a separate creation he designs for his own purpose. His shadow is his first follower [...] It reacts totally to his whim, reflecting only the image he wants to project.'<sup>33</sup> This certainly seems to echo Goodman's comments on the page being the embodiment of Richard's child self: 'a young boy in [his] own image'.<sup>34</sup> Estrin further describes Richard as 'the scorned child of nature', whose abandonment in childhood represents 'a coveted innocence'.<sup>35</sup> She argues that, ultimately, Richard emerges the 'pitiful child' of his own self-fashioning (p. 111). This psychoanalytic reading of what

<sup>32</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 141-3.

<sup>33</sup> Barbara L. Estrin, *The Raven and the Lark: Lost Children in Literature of the English Renaissance* (London: Associated University Presses, 1985), p. 111.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Goodman, in *Players of Shakespeare*, p. 200.

<sup>35</sup> Barbara L. Estrin, *The Raven and the Lark*, p. 108.

Postman has termed the 'adult-child' characterisation of Richard finds its corollary in performance in the adult-like knowingness of Holmes's doppelgänger pageboy. Where Holmes's presentation of the 'shadow' child diverges from Estrin's reading, however, is in the final scene where the pageboy took Richard's sword and handed it to Richmond. Like his dead master, this boy was an opportunist who was, one can only presume, positioning himself to follow in his footsteps. For Estrin, the focus is entirely on Richard and his regression into a second childhood as he 'absorbs the alienation of the foundling moment and emerges the pitiful child he pretended to be' (p. 116). However, in Holmes's interpretation, it was the adult-like child who came to claim the spotlight, emerging from the shadows to shape his own destiny, while gesturing towards a future that was to be a repetition of the past. This pageboy was, in every sense, the very antithesis of Edelman's redemptive child.

The pageboy's presence gradually took on greater significance as the play progressed. In Act 1, Scene 3, for instance, he entered as Richard launched into his soliloquy (1.3.320-335), handed him a shot glass, and waited while his master downed it in one swift movement. Unlike his first appearance, where he entered in answer to a summons from Richard, this time he entered of his own volition. His departure, moreover, almost overlapped with the arrival of Clarence's murderers. This laid the groundwork, however subliminally, for his introduction of Tyrrel in Act 4. By the time of the coronation (Act 4, Scene 2), he was a central figure in Richard's retinue and his physical appearance, including an exaggerated limp that grew more pronounced as the play progressed, had become like a mirror-image of Richard himself. When called upon to recommend a suitable assassin for the young princes, he limped towards Richard, dragging his left leg behind him in an uncanny imitation of his master. He spoke with a bold and confident voice, until asked to reveal the name of the gentleman 'whom corrupting gold / Would tempt unto a close exploit of death' (4.2.33-34). At this point he lowered his voice, leant in conspiratorially towards Richard and said '[h]is name, my lord, is Tyrrel' (4.2.39). This change in vocal register indicated that the young boy was fully cognisant of the import of this exchange. Far from the picture of innocence his diminutive

size, crippled body and golden blonde hair suggested, he was the epitome of what Anne Higonnet calls the 'knowing child', the child who 'underst[ands] rather more about adults' motives and foibles than their belief in [his]/her innocence allow[s] them to guess'.<sup>36</sup> As though to underscore the complicity of this 'knowing' pageboy in the killing of the princes, he re-entered with Tyrrel in Act 4, Scene 2 and hovered in the background as Richard delivered his murderous instructions. His presence, both in this scene and throughout the play, was a symbol of the self-serving duplicity (the 'motives and foibles') writ large in Richard but also prevalent throughout all four plays in the first tetralogy.

Building up to the final moment, the page was almost a constant presence at Richard's side for the remainder of the play: galloping gamely after the king's chariot, delivering written reports of traitorous nobles, and observing his battle preparations. However, it was the final scene that was to prove his ultimate unmasking. After Richmond's closing speech in Act 5, Scene 5, the boy limped from the shadows into the spotlight, bent down to retrieve the sword where it had fallen from Richard's lifeless hand, and handed it to Richmond without so much as a backwards glance at his old master's dead body.<sup>37</sup> The lights dropped on this frozen image and the audience was left to interpret its significance. On the surface, it was a symbolic representation of regime change, with the sword representing the transfer of political power and the boy's act a silent commentary on the fickleness of public allegiance. To this extent, it was not a particularly innovative or unusual image with which to indicate the rise and fall of political fortunes. One need only consider the penultimate scene in Roman Polanski's *Macbeth*, where Ross, the ultimate symbol of political opportunism, hands the crown to a victorious Macduff and Donalbain is shown visiting the witches in the final

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<sup>36</sup> Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), p. 207.

<sup>37</sup> In Russell Jackson's account of this final scene, the page 'hamstrung Richard (at least in some early performances) as he lay on the battle field and then handed his sword to Richmond'. ('Discussion', cited in Lucy Munro, "Little Apes", p. 176). The archival recording I viewed in the SBT, Stratford-upon-Avon only showed the page taking the sword. There was no indication that he had 'hamstrung' Richard, although this would be consistent with the way in which his character was developed in this production.

moments.<sup>38</sup> The trope was reproduced in Justin Kurzel's 2015 film, *Macbeth* (discussed in Chapter Two), in which a vengeful young Fleance returns to claim the throne from a newly-crowned Malcolm. However, within Holmes's overall conception of childhood, the very fact that this symbolic moment was enacted by the pageboy imbued it with even greater significance. Inextricably connected with Richard from the opening scene, this 'lamely – Boy!' came also to symbolise all that Richard stood for. In his analysis of the uncanny, Freud connects the double in literature with 'a defence against annihilation' and 'an insurance against the extinction of the self'.<sup>39</sup> It is a symbol, in other words, of a futurity that is co-extensive with, rather than discrete from, the past and the present. As Richard's doppelgänger, therefore, the page embodied the perpetuation of tyranny into a future that transcended Richmond's victory speech. His final prayer for peace, 'Now civil wounds are stopped, peace lives again. / That she may long live here, God say "Amen"' (5.5.40-1), rang hollow as the spirit of Richard returned – alive and well in the figure of the pageboy.

So, to return to Mark Lawhorn's unanswered question – 'the vexing question of what structurally, thematically or culturally significant purpose the boy figure might be serving' – I will close this section by summarising the 'significant purpose' of the pageboy and the ways in which Holmes's interpretation of the role informed the overall representation of childhood in his production.<sup>40</sup> I dispute John W. Draper's observation that '[t]he pages in Shakespeare's earliest plays [...] are so lightly sketched as to constitute mere background.'<sup>41</sup> It is true that the page in *Richard III* is given no context, no history, and no character development, and as such, in common with many other supporting characters in this play, is indeed 'lightly sketched'. His only appearance is in Act 4, Scene 2, and it is reasonable to conjecture that the boy actor in Shakespeare's company doubled the role with one of the princes or Clarence's children. The brevity of his appearance may

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<sup>38</sup> *Macbeth*, dir. Roman Polanski (Colombia Pictures, 1971).

<sup>39</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 142.

<sup>40</sup> Mark Lawhorn, in *Shakespeare and Childhood*, p. 239.

<sup>41</sup> John W. Draper, 'Falstaff's Robin and Other Pages', *Studies in Philology*, 36 (1939), 476-90 (p. 477).

then be attributed to pragmatic reasons related to the experience and capability of the actors available to play the part. However, this does not mean that the page in *Richard III* ‘constitute[‘s] mere background’. There is no dramatic necessity to involve the page as a go-between with Tyrrel. Richard had already hired murderers to dispatch Clarence, and Macbeth, for instance, requires no such introduction to the two assassins hired for the murder of Banquo and Fleance.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, although the page is present in Hall’s chronicles, as I have outlined above, Shakespeare omitted or adapted many elements documented in this work.<sup>43</sup> His decision to retain the page and make him into a ‘knowing child’, therefore, must surely have been no accident. As the adult-like counterpoint to the ‘childish-foolish’ (1.3.141) Richard, and the ‘knowing’ counterpoint to the silenced child-victims, the page fulfils several functions in this play. Structurally, his role as intermediary between Tyrrel and Richard triggers a sequence of events that signal Richard’s ultimate demise; thematically and culturally, his precocious ‘knowingness’ contributes to the ambiguous and multi-faceted representations of childhood in this play – representations that, as Michael Witmore and Erica Fudge have observed, reflect an early modern cultural ambivalence towards childhood. Holmes’s decision to close his production with this ambiguous child character, however, was not merely a commentary on conceptualisations of childhood, early modern or contemporary, but a portentous symbol of an ambiguous future. As Ian Frederick Moulton notes, Richmond promises his followers a vision of ‘a stable world’ based on ‘familial bonds of masculine duty and feminine and filial loyalty’ when he says, ‘If you do free your children from the sword, / Your children’s children quits it in your age’ (5.3.259-60).<sup>44</sup> By appropriating Richard’s sword and handing it to Richmond, Holmes’s precocious young pageboy brought into question not only the integrity of Richmond’s promise of peace, but also the very notion of children as the guardians of the future. The page may have looked like the epitome of angelic innocence, but he was in fact the embodiment of Postman’s

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<sup>42</sup> *Macbeth*, 3.1.73-140.

<sup>43</sup> In particular, Shakespeare omitted the following elements: the numerous references to Jane Shore, the Archbishop’s persuasion of the Queen to give up the Duke of York, and, most significantly, the depiction of the princes’ murder. For further details see Edward Hall, ‘From the Union of the Two Noble ...’, p. 241.

<sup>44</sup> Ian Frederick Moulton, “‘A Monster Great Deformed’: The Unruly Masculinity of *Richard III*”, *SQ*, 47.3 (1996), 251-268 (p. 268).

disappeared child in a post-digital age of information overload and blurred child/adult boundaries. This concept of disappearing childhood was also a major factor of Mendes's 1992 production for the RSC. However, instead of presenting, only to subvert, an iconic image of child-like innocence like Holmes's page, he removed the body of the child entirely and replaced it with a cross-gendered adult-child hybrid. Where Holmes's page was a child actor playing an adult role, the 'children' of Mendes's production were in fact adult actors playing child-princes in a performance which transgressed multiple boundaries of age, gender, genre and temporality.

### **1b. The Future-Killing Queer and the Future-Negating Child: Camping it Up and Destabilising Boundaries in Sam Mendes's *Richard III* (1992)**

Sam Mendes's 1992 production, which opened at Stratford-upon-Avon's The Other Place before embarking on a national and international tour, was a critical and popular success. This was largely attributable to the charismatic central performance by Simon Russell Beale. From the opening sequence, it was evident that this was going to be a portrayal of Richard as the consummate show-man: witty, sneering, self-aware and flamboyant. He was variously described by critics as 'a depraved blend of Mr. Punch and A. A. Milne's Piglet'; 'an accomplished *foppiste*'; 'a mixture of Mr. Punch and Dickens's Magwitch, with a bit of Frankie Howerd thrown in'; and 'the unhappy result of a one night stand between Pere Ubu and Gertrude Stein'.<sup>45</sup> Although drawing on a wide and disparate range of characters, both fictional and real, these reviews share a common thread in their attempts to capture the essence of Beale's performance: his ludic and ironic sense of camp. The question of how to define 'camp' remains a contested issue within the critical arena. In a groundbreaking article from 1963, Susan Sontag defined camp as a sensibility that sees everything

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<sup>45</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'Review of *Richard III*'; *The Times*; Andrew St. George, 'Review of *Richard III*', *Financial Times*; Michael Billington, 'Review of *Richard III*', *Guardian*; Paul Taylor, 'Review of *Richard III*', *Independent*, in *TR*, 12.16 (1992), 964–966.

‘in quotation marks’: To understand camp, she argues, ‘is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role’.<sup>46</sup> David Bergman further elaborates that ‘camp is a style [...] that favours exaggeration, artifice, and extremity and that exists outside the cultural mainstream’.<sup>47</sup> Through its sheer theatrical exuberance, sense of irony, and gender-bending playfulness, then, camp exists on the margins, demystifying the illusion of a fixed gendered and sexual self by laying bare its performative qualities. It was this very stylised and exaggerated idea of camp that best summarises Beale’s Richard. Blurring boundaries of gender and sexuality, his performance had a frisson of heterodoxy that is, as Bergman notes, the natural corollary to the camp aesthetic and provided the interpretive framework through which to read the gender and age-ambiguous ‘children’ within Mendes’s production.

In his analysis of cross-gender performances, Cary M. Mazer draws analogies between the camp aesthetic and ‘queerness’. Camp, he explains ‘is unquestionably queer, not only in its celebrations of the margins, but in the multiple levels of awareness of its performances of categories of gender and sexuality’.<sup>48</sup> As a dramatic counterpoint to Richard and his ‘unquestionably queer’ camp performance, the cross-cast princes of Mendes’s production presented a ‘queer’ performance of childhood that transgressed boundaries of age and gender to foreground the artifice of childhood as a social and political construct. I use the term ‘queer’ here and throughout this analysis to refer to a subversion of heteronormative assumptions. A ‘queer’ performance of childhood is thus a version of childhood that challenges or defamiliarises the adult fantasy of the innocent child and, in accordance with a definition put forward by Bruhm and Hurley, ‘doesn’t quite conform to the

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<sup>46</sup> Susan Sontag, ‘Notes on “Camp”’ (1964), in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. by Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 53-65, (p. 56). Although Sontag’s article has since been challenged for disassociating camp from issues of sexuality and thus purging it of its political import, many of her observations are still pertinent and continue to influence the critical debate. Her analysis of ‘camp’ as a series of performative acts is particularly relevant to Beale’s portrayal of Richard.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Introduction’, in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. by David Bergman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1993), pp. 1-6 (pp. 4-5).

<sup>48</sup> Cary M. Mazer, ‘Rosalind’s Breast’, in *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*, ed. by James Bulman (Cranbury, New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corp, 2008), pp. 96-115 (p. 99).

wished-for way that children are supposed to be in terms of gender and sexual roles'.<sup>49</sup> Both infantilised by the sartorial and gestural signifiers of youth and adultified and feminised by the bodies of the actresses playing them, the children of Mendes's production, I argue, not only queered the adult fantasy of childhood innocence, but also disrupted what Lee Edelman has termed 'the pervasive invocation of the Child as the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value'.<sup>50</sup> If Richard was the future-killing queer, then the two cross-cast princes were the epitome of the 'queer' child and thus presented perverted manifestations of, and challenges to, Lee Edelman's 'reproductive futurism' – what I will term the 'future-negating child'.

The performance opened to the spectacle of a single lightbulb hanging over an empty blacked-out stage and the sound of a walking stick tap-tap-tapping along the floor. Richard emerged from the shadows at the back of the stage, stopped underneath the light, and paused to contemplate the audience as his shadow loomed comically behind him. His opening soliloquy was a masterful display of clipped consonants, raised eyebrows and camp archness. Careful and precise in his enunciation, he revelled in each rhetorical flourish, conveying the impression of an urbane and disenchanted cabaret performer, devoid of his costume and make-up, but nonetheless reluctant to relinquish the act. The wide-ranging critical analogies aligning Beale's Richard with other flamboyant characters, both fictional and real, are indicative of the extent to which his performance relied on citation, quotation and self-reflexivity. In the theoretical language of Judith Butler, his was a performance that was quintessentially 'performative'.<sup>51</sup> Through the highly theatrical aesthetics

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<sup>49</sup> Stephen Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, 'Introduction', in *Curioser: On The Queerness of Children*, ed. by Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. x. I acknowledge that there are multiple definitions and applications of queerness and that queer studies is a broad field incorporating diverse and disparate ideas. For the purposes of this thesis and my focus on representations of childhood in predominantly Anglo-American Shakespearean productions over the past 25 years, my definition is necessarily narrow and does not specifically address issues such as class and race differences.

<sup>50</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>51</sup> In considering the performative nature of camp I am drawing on Judith Butler and her theory of gender as a performative act in which 'the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self'. Quotation taken from *Gender Trouble: Feminism*



and conventions of camp, Beale's Richard blurred boundaries of gender and sexuality with an arch knowingness that invited the audience's complicity. As Marjorie Garber has observed, scholars have long argued that 'virtually all of Shakespeare's great characters, from Richard III to Cleopatra, are "suspended between male and female"'.<sup>52</sup> By foregrounding the performative and imitative nature of behaviour, Beale exploited the innate gender liminality of his character ('suspended between male and female') and established the (meta)theatrical context for the 'performative' presentation of childhood that was to follow.

In accordance with the self-reflexive nature of the camp aesthetic, the wooing of Lady Anne in Act 1, Scene 2 lacked any sense of underlying danger or eroticism. Even taking into account his exaggerated hunch-back, Beale's Richard stood several inches shorter than Anne, instantly creating a comical physical discrepancy that undermined the credibility of Richard's seductive charm and Anne's subsequent capitulation. At one point he crawled around the stage on all fours, looking like he had wandered in from an Alan Ayckbourn farce. When he offered his sword to Anne, he threw his arms and head back in a melodramatic gesture that both appropriated and queered the pose of the Crucified Christ. However, his gesture was revealed to be no more than mere posturing. As Anne held the sword against his chest, his breathing became more laboured and his head bobbed comically up and down, as he checked to see whether she would take him at his word and 'dispatch' him (1.2.167). His relief as she eventually (and inexplicably, given his overtly cynical performance) lowered the sword was written all over his face. By the close of the scene it was becoming apparent that this Richard was not a physically or sexually imposing figure (like Kevin Spacey), nor was he a vengeful man-child, emasculated by physical deformity (like Henry Goodman), but a cynical, camp outsider, marginalised by his queerness in a world where lineage, legitimacy, life and death are

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*and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1990), p. 191. See also *Bodies That Matter* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests*, pp. 38-9.

dependent on maintaining heteronormative values and reproductive imperatives.<sup>53</sup> He was the theatrical embodiment of Lee Edelman's '*Sintheomosexual*': the figure who rejects 'the rhetoric of compassion, futurity, and life' to embrace a 'surplus of jouissance'.<sup>54</sup> While his rejection of 'futurity and life' was most evident in his barely concealed antipathy towards the young princes (who were themselves, as forty-something women, a denial of the child as emblem of futurity), his embrace of 'jouissance' manifested itself in his waspish asides, childish giggles, and exaggeratedly camp gestures.

Although many reviewers commented on the theatricality and effeminate flamboyance of Beale's performance, as we have seen, its homoerotic undercurrents were largely ignored by those same reviewers. There were in fact, for instance, a number of subtle insinuations of a same-sex relationship with Buckingham, which first became noticeable at the end of Act 2, Scene 2. As Richard began to leave the stage with the Queen and the Duchess, he was called back by Buckingham. Eagerly spinning round at the sound of his name, Richard ran the length of the stage from upstage left to downstage centre, arms flapping and face glowing like a parody of an over-eager lover. He listened in rapture as Buckingham outlined his plans and, breathlessly intoning '[m]y other self' (2.2.120), he reached out and touched Buckingham tenderly on the cheek. Gazing longingly into his eyes, he simpered, 'I, like a child, will go by thy direction' (2.2.122). As Buckingham marched off, having brushed off his barely-concealed homoerotic advances, Richard turned his back on the audience in a gesture of despair. After a beat, he then spun back around, flapped his cape, tossed his head and petulantly minced off the stage, his camp confidence well and truly restored.

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<sup>53</sup> *Richard III*, dir. Sam Mendes (The Old Vic, London, 2011).

<sup>54</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future*, pp. 74-5.

The scene immediately following this one was an amalgamation of Act 2, Scene 3, a short scene between three citizens, and Act 2, Scene 4, featuring the first appearance of the young Duke of York with his mother and grandmother. The three citizens were standing in alcoves above the stage in the back wall, while the Queen, the Duchess and the Duke of York were at the front of the apron. Short bursts of dialogue from each scene interrupted one another, while spotlights picked out each section in cinematic-style cross-cutting. At '[w]oe to the land that's governed by a child' (2.3.11), for instance, the lights came up on the main stage to reveal the Duke of York lying on his front reading a book, his face temporarily obscured by the peak of a baseball cap. Then, at '[p]itchers have ears' (2.4.37), the scene switched back to the citizens, imbuing the metaphor with a feeling of real and present danger. However, any sense of danger that was created through the interweaving of the two scenes was shattered when the young Duke eventually showed his face to reveal that he was in fact being played by a middle-aged woman, Annabel Apsion, who also doubled as Lady Anne. It became clear at this point that bringing the entry of the Duke of York forward by removing Act 2, Scene 3 thus performed another important function in Mendes's production: it enabled the audience to draw direct connections between the overtly camp and homoerotic performance of Richard in Act 2, Scene 2 and this transvestic, cross-generational, 'queer' performance of boyhood that immediately followed.

Dressed in the generic school-boy uniform of long trousers, white shirt and tie that, as Gillian Day has observed, 'invited a [...] representational reading', Apsion adopted performative strategies that resulted in a presentation rather than an imitation of childishness.<sup>55</sup> The actor's style of performance in the part of the Duke of York, moreover, contrasted markedly with her performance as Lady Anne. While the latter was an essentially mimetic performance imbued with Stanislavskian emotional and biographical realism, the former was a self-conscious, anti-mimetic performance of

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<sup>55</sup> Gillian Day, *King Richard III*, Shakespeare at Stratford Series (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002), p. 158.

character type.<sup>56</sup> Violating multiple boundaries of age, gender and styles in this way was, to borrow a phrase from Marjorie Garber, ‘not passing but trespassing’.<sup>57</sup> It was, in other words, self-aware, transparent, and transgressive. The result was a performance that was neither erotic, in the tradition of Victorian female-male transvestism, nor child-like, in the Stanislavskian sense. The actor was not particularly short nor slightly built; her features were conventionally feminine rather than androgynous; and no attempt had been made to transform her face with make-up or prosthetics. She spoke in a higher register than might be expected from an adult woman, but it was an unnatural style of speaking that seemed designed to ‘present’ rather than imitate childishness. This ‘child’, in other words, was not a child at all, but a child already ‘queered’ by the cross-gender and cross-generational casting. If Beale’s Richard was the future-killing queer, then the woman-boy Duke of York was the future-negating child – a queer subversion of Edelman’s phantasmic emblem of futurity. The absence of a real child thus complicated the citizens’ warning, ‘woe to the land that’s governed by a child’ (2.3.11). Once the Duke of York sat up and started talking, it became apparent that the ‘child’ was merely an illusion. The adult-child presented in the form of Annabelle Apsion was tantamount to a disavowal of childhood as a discrete temporal state, and more specifically, of the idealised iconicity of childhood that has shadowed this play for so many generations.

This presentation of childhood as an abstracted concept stripped of any direct association with the embodied presence of real children was continued and extended in Act 3, Scene 1. Richard entered to a burst of carnivalesque music carrying two red balloons on strings. For most of this scene Edward, who was played by Kate Duchêne doubling as Queen Elizabeth, remained seated on a bench, one of the balloons clasped uncomfortably in his left hand. His stiff and immobile stance stood out in stark contrast to Richard, who shuttled to and fro with exaggerated campness,

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<sup>56</sup> I use ‘Stanislavskian’ here to indicate a mode of actor training rather than a strict adherence to Stanislavski practices. As Bridget Escolme has noted, ‘[e]ven schools that have no explicit allegiance to the teachings of Stanislavski tend to work on characters as if they have a fully rounded psychological life’. See Bridget Escolme, ‘Shakespeare and Our Contemporaries’, in *New Directions in Renaissance Drama and Performance Studies*, ed. by Sarah Werner (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 162-177 (p. 168).

<sup>57</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interest: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 367.

alternating between faux laughter, obsequious grovelling and acerbic asides. The only time he was momentarily still was when he stood directly behind the bench, forcing the prince to twist his body round to face him in a blatant attempt at intimidation. However, his threatening posturing was undermined by the two balloons bobbing incongruously from side to side as though they had a life of their own. When Edward launched into his interrogation about the Tower with '[d]id Julius Caesar build that place, my lord?' (3.1.69), Buckingham and Richard sat either side of him like a queer parody of a family portrait (see Figure 4). Richard spoke his proverbial cliché '[s]o wise so young, they say, do never live long' (3.1.79) while still seated cheek-by-jowl with his nephew on the bench. He began the line as an aside to the audience, then gradually turned towards the prince so that their faces were inches apart. He took great delight in drawing out the word 'young' as though to highlight the disjunction between his words and the embodied reality of the adult female actor. His brazen refusal to even pretend that this veiled threat was intended to pass unnoticed by the prince was consistent with the overtly pantomimic nature of this scene. From the jolly background music to the bouncing balloons and comic set-pieces, this scene was evidently intended to underscore the function of performance in this play: performance of camp, performance of gender, and performance of childhood.



Figure 4: Stephen Boxer (Buckingham), Kate Duchêne (Prince of Wales), Simon Russell Beale (Richard) In Sam Mendes's *Richard III* (1992)

When the young Duke of York entered later in this scene, his red satchel draped across one shoulder as though he had just come from school rather than been forcibly removed from sanctuary, Richard's performance reached a new, heightened level of camp. Shuttling across the stage to greet his young nephew, he grovelled deferentially as he handed the boy the balloon, his cold, narrowed eyes betraying the insincerity of his exaggerated smile. Then, in an unnatural-sounding high-pitched register he asked '[h]ow does our cousin, noble lord of York?' (3.1.101), with an upwards inflection on 'cousin' and 'York' in his best attempt at a 'baby voice'. This faux bonhomie not only exposed Richard as an adept performer, adopting different personas according to his shifting identities, but also drew attention to the performance of the adult female actor playing the young Duke of York. By infantilising the young duke with his patronizing, belittling tone of voice, Beale's Richard highlighted the disjunction between the body of the actor and the (imagined) body of the character. As though to further underscore the artificially constructed nature of childhood as a vulnerable and innocent ideal, Apsion's young Duke was in fact assertive, precocious, and more than a match for Beale's double-dealing Richard. Apsion spoke in a high-pitched imitation of a childish vocal register, puffing out her chest with the overconfident swagger of youth. Unlike his older brother, the Duke of York (the character rather than the actor, although there was inevitable slippage between

the two) moved assertively about the stage, approaching Richard with a cheeky and provocative manner as he demanded ‘I pray you, uncle, give me your [*sic*] dagger’ (3.1.110). The amendment of the deictic qualifier ‘*this*’ to the possessive pronoun ‘*your*’ turned the young Duke’s request into a personal challenge as he squared up to Richard, their comparable heights allowing him to look his uncle him straight in the eye.<sup>58</sup> He giggled cheekily at ‘[l]ittle’ (3.1.125), again emphasising the lack of disparity in height, and at ‘[h]e thinks that you should bear me on your shoulders’ (3.1.131) he ran a full circle around Richard, before stopping inches from his face. There was a pregnant pause as he stared defiantly into Richard’s eyes before Beale roughly grabbed him by his collar and pulled him menacingly towards him. It was a moment that both recalled and parodied Laurence Olivier’s performance in his 1955 film adaptation, wherein the icy glare with which Olivier fixed the young Duke was loaded with murderous intent. Beale’s adversary, however, unlike Olivier’s counterpart, did not flinch, but returned his look with a defiance that belied his youth and precarious situation, forcing Richard to eventually release him with exaggerated peals of camp laughter. Far from the vulnerable victim, this ‘child’ was both physically and intellectually superior to his aggressor.

In her analysis of this scene, Gillian Day observes that the size of the adult actors ‘implied that they had long outgrown balloons, which they hold on to rather self-consciously’. It was, she explains, ‘the first sign of Richard’s misjudgement’ (pp. 163-4).<sup>59</sup> Lucy Munro agrees, arguing that the symbolic function of prop and costume ‘suggested that the princes were more mature than their elders believed’.<sup>60</sup> While I concur to some extent with these observations that the dissonance between actor and role threw into question the idealised rhetoric of childhood innocence elsewhere in the play, I believe that the arch campness with which Richard treated the princes suggested that

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<sup>58</sup> In the promptbook it was printed as ‘this dagger’, in accordance with Shakespeare’s text. The amendment to ‘your dagger’ may have been an unconscious slip of the tongue on the part of the actor. However, the effect of the change, conscious or not, was significant. Promptbook held in SBT, Stratford-upon-Avon

<sup>59</sup> Gillian Day, *King Richard III*, Shakespeare at Stratford Series, pp. 163-4.

<sup>60</sup> Lucy Munro, “‘Little Apes’”, p. 168.

he at least was knowingly playing along with the artifice. Moreover, the incongruity of the outward signifiers of youth and the adult bodies of the actors had consequences beyond the fiction of the play. Along with the other behavioural and sartorial semiotics of childhood on display – the school uniforms, peaked caps, high-pitched voices, and mischievous giggles – the balloons served to highlight childhood as a social construct rather than a lived experience. Like the ‘queerness’ of Richard’s camp performance, the ‘queerness’ of the cross-gendered, cross-generational boys destabilised not only the signs of sex and gender, but of childhood and adulthood. By creating fantasy boy-children who were neither boys nor children, Mendes not only denaturalised the boundaries between man and woman, youth and age, but also presented two young princes as children who were never going to grow into men to challenge Richard’s authority. They were the epitome, in other words, of Stockton’s ‘queer child’. Trapped in a temporal vacuum from which they were destined by history never to progress, they disavowed a linear progression from childhood to adulthood while simultaneously reinforcing and embodying the idea of the ‘gay child’s “backward birth” – a temporal queering, which the doubling of Prince Edward with Elizabeth (his mother) made particularly legible.<sup>61</sup>

For Stockton, the queer child can only be defined retrospectively in a form of ‘future retroaction’ which, I would argue, is precisely what Shakespeare dramatises in the narrative of the two princes and which was so effectively encapsulated in the cross-cast children of Mendes’s production.<sup>62</sup> In the text, the idealisation of the princes as icons of innocence lost occurs only *after* their incarceration in the tower, and therefore *after* their final appearance as living characters. In life, their precocious rhetoric and covert challenges to authority serve to reinforce the contrived nature of their retrospective re-characterisation as ‘tender babes’, ‘unborn flowers’ ‘new-appearing sweets’ and ‘gentle lambs’ (4.4.9-17). Shakespeare’s juxtapositioning of ‘perilous’, ‘shrewd’

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<sup>61</sup> Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child*, p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> Kathryn Bond Stockton, ‘Feeling Like Killing? Queer Temporalities of Murderous Motives among Queer Children’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 13.2-3 (2007), 301-325 (p. 304).



children in Act 2, Scene 4 and Act 3, Scene 1 with the sentimentalised language of Tyrrel in Act 4, Scene 3 and the lamenting chorus of women in Act 4, Scene 4 thus works to reinforce the gap between rhetoric and reality and complicate monolithic narratives of childhood innocence. By casting adults in the roles of these children, Mendes literalised and foregrounded this disjunction in the ultimate theatrical manifestation of the queer child.

In addition to highlighting the artifice of cultural constructions of childhood innocence, the cross-boundary casting (or, to take Garber's terminology, 'trespassing') performed another important function in this production. The decision to reject the spectacle of the child's body in favour of a hybridised woman-child (in the case of Edward cross-cast with Elizabeth, this was also a queerly incestuous 'mother-child') amounted to a renunciation of what Kincaid terms 'erotic innocence': the eroticisation of childhood that relies on maintaining an image of unsullied purity. This is not the 'darkness of the child' that Stockton advocates we embrace, but rather a darkness that is coeval with the erotico-fetishisation of the child by the adult. The casting of women in the role of the children in this production de-eroticised the child by replacing the 'desirable' body of the child with a body that was neither erotic nor child-like. It was not, moreover, an eroticised androgyny that has, as Kate Chedgzoy notes, been a feature of Shakespearean cross-dressing comedies in recent years, 'resulting in the theatrical display of the disguised boy as a polymorphous object of perverse desires.'<sup>63</sup> These women problematised such a performance of polymorphousness by laying bare its very performativity. This performance of childhood thus granted the audience the right to look at the child (as a series of signs) without actually looking at a child (as an embodied presence). The young princes were quite simply future-negating children, queered by their hybridity and stripped of the 'erotic'.

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<sup>63</sup> Kate Chedgzoy, *Shakespeare's Queer Children: Sexual Politics and Contemporary Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 71.

Although there is a tradition of female-male transvestism that draws attention to and fetishises the female form, the cross-gendered performances in Mendes's production subverted this practice.<sup>64</sup> This is not to say that the voyeuristic-scopophilic potential of casting women as young boys has not been, and does not continue to be, exploited on the stage. Jacqueline Rose, for instance, writes about how the practice of casting women in the role of Peter Pan (a practice originating in the Edwardian period but still visible today) enables and legitimises a voyeuristic interest in the child by combining 'fairy, purity, and [female] flesh'. According to Rose's analysis, the combination of the spectacle of the erotic female body and the fiction of the child's body permits a transference of desire onto an imagined child who is 'always innocent and yet sexualised'.<sup>65</sup> Juliet Dusinberre makes a similar argument in relation to the Victorian cross-dressing heroines of Shakespeare's plays:

Dressing as a boy emphasised womanhood to a delighted audience. The femininity of the actress was enhanced by her assumed masculine attire, and this became particularly seductive during the mid-nineteenth century period of Victorian prudishness, when a doublet-and-hose outlined the female body, notably female legs, usually hidden under huge crinolines.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the widespread practice and titillating appeal of these popular Shakespearean 'breeches' roles, however, there is no critical consensus on whether the casting of adult women in the roles of the children had a similarly erotic effect. Although it has been widely accepted that it was common practice to cast women in the roles of the princes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 79.

<sup>65</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan: Or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1993), p. 98.

<sup>66</sup> Juliet Dusinberre, 'Boys becoming women in Shakespeare's plays', *Shakespeare Studies* (Tokyo), 36 (1998), 1-28 (p. 3).

<sup>67</sup> See, for instance, Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room*, p. 270; Munro, "Little apes", pp. 167-8; John Jowett, 'Introduction', in *Richard III*, Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 1-132 (p. 53).

this was not in fact exclusively the case. Young boys and girls regularly played one or both of the parts, often alongside an adult female actor.<sup>68</sup> In the context of the Victorian pantomimic tradition of what Michael R. Booth calls a ‘mass transvestism’ and a ‘sexual, pictorial and spectacular combination of ideal purity and handsome flesh’, it is not wholly fanciful to conjecture that the pairing of a young child with an adult female actor may well have elicited the transference of desire that Rose has described.<sup>69</sup> As Roberta Barker notes, this practice is particularly pertinent to the performance of Shakespearean texts, where a parallel between theatrical conventions such as transvestism in different historical contexts can result in a form of what she has called ‘cultural drag’. She glosses this term as follows: ‘[c]ultural drag occurs when anyone – actor or actress, reader or spectator – tries to put on and explore the gender norms of another culture’.<sup>70</sup> In other words, ‘cultural drag’ can be employed to denaturalise and interrogate the practices it employs.

Cary M. Mazer elaborates further on the phenomenon of ‘cultural drag’: ‘[e]ffective theatre based on canonical scripts’, he explains, ‘depends upon a consonance of the theatrical idiom of contemporary performance and the aesthetics and conventions of the earlier period’. In other words, contemporary performance practices of drag and camp, when applied to performances of Shakespeare, ‘appear to be in consonance with the theatrical and sexual energies of cross-dressing in early modern scripts’ because both practices are, in essence, citational.<sup>71</sup> They rely upon the audience’s acknowledgement of a disjuncture between the sex of the actor and the gender of the characters they portray. If we apply this theory to Mendes’s production, the consonance of Beale’s

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<sup>68</sup> A review of a selection of playbills from Drury Lane Theatre, London and Theatre Royal, Newcastle in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reveal that the two princes were played by a combination of married women, single women and boys. Playbills held at the British Library. See also Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, pp. 159-163 for a comparison of the reception of child actors playing alongside adult performers with the reception of all-child companies.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 79.

<sup>70</sup> Roberta Barker, *Early Modern Tragedy: Gender and Performance, 1584-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 192.

<sup>71</sup> Cary M. Mazer, ‘Rosalind’s Breast’, in *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*, ed. by James Bulman (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont, 2008), pp. 96-115 (p. 100).

camp performance and the age and gender cross-casting of the two young princes with the (homo)sexual energy generated by the early modern cross-dressed actor works to reinscribe the connections between spectatorship and desire that was, as Lisa Jardine, Valerie Traub and others maintain, a feature of the early modern boy actor.<sup>72</sup> However, the citation and ‘consonance’ of theatrical idioms need not necessarily equate to an equivalence in effect. As Judith Butler notes in *Bodies That Matter*, ‘an occupation or reterritorialization of a term that has been used to abject a population can become the site of resistance’ (p. 231). Although she is referring specifically here to transvestism as it relates to normative constructions of gender, her analysis can equally be applied to the disruptive effects of adult-child cross-casting on cultural constructions of childhood. With this in mind, I would suggest that the encounter between contemporary performance, Victorian female-male stage transvestism and the Shakespearean text resulted, in the case of Mendes’s *Richard III*, in a theatrical experience that was subversive on multiple levels. By turning early modern cross-casting on its head (adult women playing young boys instead of young boys playing adult women), and by de-eroticising Victorian female-male transvestism, the production engaged with earlier theatrical idioms in order to subvert, rather than inscribe, the erotics of spectating. Although they presented simultaneously as both women and children, the actors playing the young princes nonetheless obscured the bodily traits of both categories, denying the audience a stable, Lacanian ‘Other’ on which to fix the gaze.<sup>73</sup> The result was simultaneously a citation of and a deconstruction of a theatrical tradition of fetishising both women *and* children. As has been noted by Lucy Munro, John Jowett, Gillian Day, Richard Madelaine and Bridget Escolme, the precocious

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<sup>72</sup> See for instance, Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Our Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Worcester: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1983); Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge, 1992); Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room*; Stephen Orgel, “‘Nobody’s perfect’; or, Why did the English Stage Take Boys for Women?’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88.1 (1989), 7-29.

<sup>73</sup> Lacan’s theories of psychosemiotics and the Symbolic have been applied by film critics to analyse the representation of women as a construct of male desire in narrative cinema. See for instance Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Screen*, 16.3, 1975, 6-18. and E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (London: Routledge, 1986) I am applying this model to analyse theatrical fetishisations of women and children.

children in *Richard III* form part of a collective, dominated by women, whose conjoined voices form a powerful and ultimately overwhelming adversarial force for Richard.<sup>74</sup> In Act 4, Scene 4 the words of the mourning women who intercept him in his ‘expedition’ (4.4.130) literally enact their revenge: ‘[w]ords of grief turn bitter; women’s metaphors for words turn from those of wind and air (pp. 126-30) to a breath which smothers’ and, as Bridget Escolme argues, ‘[b]loody Richard is, as the Duchess curses, and bloody is his end’.<sup>75</sup>

In Mendes’s production, the doubling of the princes with Lady Anne and Queen Elizabeth not only reinforced the idea of a collective of marginalised voices gaining strength in numbers, but also brought into alignment questions of gender, youth and temporality. This doubling of the parts was not simply a reflection of the conflation of child and woman in the cultural imaginary. Rather, Mendes seemed to be drawing attention not only to the fluidity of gendered identities, a fluidity supported by the gender-bending performativity of Beale’s camp Richard, but also to the arbitrariness and unreliability of youth/adulthood binaries. It functioned, more specifically, as a temporal disruption of the narrative of childhood as a linear progression toward adulthood by blurring boundaries of child and woman as distinct and separate embodied identities. In refusing to put the bodies of children on display for sacrifice in this way, Mendes’s production rejected the sentimentalised images of children interrogated by Edelman, Stockton and Kincaid, and highlighted the way in which ‘childhood’ is appropriated and propagated as an emblem of both purity and futurity. Refusing to perpetuate this myth, he not only exposed it as a myth, but also drew attention to the function of cultural myth-making more generally. This was particularly pertinent for a play that questions, even while it has itself been appropriated in the services of, historical and cultural myth-making.

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<sup>74</sup> Lucy Munro, “‘Little Apes’”, p. 168; Jowett, ‘Introduction’, in *Richard III*, Oxford Shakespeare, p. 54; Day, Gillian Day, *King Richard III*, Shakespeare at Stratford Series, p. 161; Richard Madelaine, “‘Who Intercepts me in my Expeditions?’: The Structural Function of the Boy-Actors’ Roles in *Richard III*”, *QWERTY* 9 (1999), 25-31 (p. 25); Bridget Escolme, *Emotional Excess*, p. 190.

<sup>75</sup> Bridget Escolme, *Emotional Excess*, p. 190.

In terms of providing inspiration for this phenomenon of cultural ‘myth-making’, one of the most enduring and influential set-pieces from this play is Tyrrel’s soliloquy in Act 4, Scene 3, recounting the remorse of the assassins and the idealised image of the sleeping princes. In film versions of the play, the words are invariably spoken as a voice-over or replaced with a visual image of the two boys, ‘girdling one another / Within their innocent alabaster arms’ (4.3.10-11). In Benson’s silent film released in 1911, for instance, the caption ‘The most arch deed of piteous massacre / That ever yet this land was guilty of’ (4.3.2-3) announces a sequence showing the princes just after they have been smothered, still embracing one another even in death. In the Loncraine film, although much of the speech is cut, we see an image of the two entwined boys as Tyrrel applies a red silk cloth to the face of the sleeping Duke of York. Olivier’s film retains the speech in its entirety, while the murder of the two sleeping boys is played out as a flashback sequence accompanied by the soaring orchestral score of William Walton. In contrast to these examples of maximising the pathos, Mendes appeared to deliberately set out to undermine the impact of Tyrrel’s soliloquy by having the actor, Michael Packer, speak in a monotonous, perfunctory and emotionless manner while slouched nonchalantly in the throne recently vacated by Queen Anne. His voice remained flat and dispassionate throughout, reciting the speech as though it were a mere catalogue of historical facts rather than the emotive poetry of Tyrrel’s elegy to lost innocence.

By breaking with tradition in this way, Mendes was asking his audience to interrogate rather than unthinkingly accept the idealised representation of childhood as a discrete state of Edenic purity. Just like the disjunction between actor and role in the case of the two young princes, the dissonance between content and delivery in Tyrrel’s soliloquy was in keeping with the overall aesthetic and dramatic style of this production. By maximising the ambiguities in Shakespeare’s text, Mendes’s metatheatrical production thus ensured that nothing was taken at face value, as his

gender- and age-defying children exemplified. Edelman argues that the child functions as an emblem of the future (icon of ‘reproductive futurism’); and the queer, its radical negation.<sup>76</sup> If Richard was the epitome of Edelman’s future-killing queer, then the two cross-cast princes were the embodiments of what I have termed the future-negating child – a subversion of and challenge to ‘reproductive futurism’ and a queer manifestation of childhood deconstructed.<sup>77</sup> This was an approach that, as I will discuss in the third part of this chapter, Thomas Ostermeier took to even greater extremes with his puppet-princes for his 2015 Avignon Festival production. Picking up where I conclude this section, I will begin my analysis with a consideration of Ostermeier’s treatment of Tyrrel’s soliloquy, before moving on to analyse the puppet-princes and their powerful dramatic impact. Not content merely to interrogate boundaries of age, gender, and temporality, like Mendes’s adult-child princes, Ostermeier’s fantoccini, as I will explain further in the next section, brought into question the very ontology of childhood itself.

### **1c. De-Humanising the Child, Subverting the Voyeuristic-Scopophilic Gaze and Deconstructing the Innocent Ideal: The ‘Fantoccini’ Princes of Thomas Ostermeier’s *Richard III* (2015)**

Writing about Tyrrel’s sentimentalised description of the deaths of the two princes in Act 4, Scene 3 of *Richard III*, William Hazlitt made the following observations:

These are some of those wonderful bursts of feeling, done to the life, to the very height of fancy and nature, which our Shakespeare alone could give. We do not insist on the repetition of these last passages as proper for the stage: we should indeed be loth to trust them in the mouth of almost any actor: but we should wish them to be retained in preference at least to the fantoccini exhibition of the young princes.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future*, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Fantoccini is defined in the *OED* as follows: ‘fantoccini, *pl.* puppets made to go through certain evolutions by means of concealed strings or wires’. William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays*, (London, 1817), quotation taken from 3rd edn. (London, 1838), p. 220.

Hazlitt was echoing the attitudes of many of his contemporaries when he suggested that the ‘proper’ place for Shakespeare’s words was on the page and in the mind of the reader, rather than on the stage. Moreover, his dismissive reference to the ‘fantoccini princes’ is, as we have already seen, consistent with the literary concept of the ‘romantic child’: a symbol of innocence, purity and nature far removed from the embodied reality of a flesh-and-blood child. The other passage Hazlitt singled out for particular praise was ‘the farewell apostrophe of the queen to the tower, where her children are shut up from her’ (p. 219) in Act 4, Scene 4. As with Tyrrel’s soliloquy, Queen Elizabeth’s speech apotheosises the princes, calling them ‘tender babes’ (4.4.9) and ‘gentle lambs’ (4.1.17), but again the description is divorced from the physical embodiment of the children. In both instances, the ‘fantoccini princes’ are conspicuous by their absence, at least in any corporeal sense. At first glance, one could be forgiven for thinking that Thomas Ostermeier had taken artistic inspiration from Hazlitt’s sentiments in his 2015 German-language production for the Avignon Festival. Not only did he cut Tyrrel’s elegy to innocence lost in its entirety, but he avoided the ‘fantoccini exhibition’ of child actors by replacing them with *actual* fantoccini stand-ins. His princes were, in other words, not children but puppets. However, the effects of these radical moves were not, as Hazlitt intended, to maintain an image of ineffable childhood purity, but to deconstruct and subvert it. Ostermeier’s fantoccini princes were in fact life-size puppets, whose wax-like pallor, fixed facial expressions and stiff-limbed movements appeared, in ways that recalled Wheeldon’s statue of Mamilius, uncannily corpse-like (see Figure 5). The ‘wonderful bursts of feeling’ that Hazlitt so admired in the language of Tyrrel’s soliloquy, moreover, were replaced with a dumb-show in which the princes’ bodies were laid unceremoniously on the floor, their limbs twisted and distorted like victims of some horrific torture. What Hazlitt deemed too sublime to be represented beyond the page was literalised in the most brutal and uncompromising manner on Ostermeier’s stage.





Figure 5: Laurenz Laufenberg (Rivers and puppeteer), Christoph Gawenda (Clarence, Dorset, Stanley and puppeteer), Jenny König (Lady Anne and puppeteer), Eva Meckbach (Elizabeth and puppeteer), Lars Eidinger (Richard), and Thomas Bading (The Lord Mayor of London) in Thomas Ostermeier's *Richard III*, (2015)

Ostermeier's reinterpretation of Shakespeare's young princes was in fact the very opposite of Hazlitt's sentimentalised ideas about children as symbols of 'grievability'.<sup>79</sup> The absence of an embodied theatrical presence reduced the children to a series of signifiers rather than the 'wonderful bursts of feeling' expressed in Tyrrel's linguistic 'height[s] of fancy and nature' and, as the only characters not played by human actors (and the only children not cut from the original text), Ostermeier's puppet-princes raised questions relating to subjectivity, agency, alterity and the theatrical exchange more generally. Were they semiotic signifiers of childhood as an abstracted idea that could only be constructed, controlled and maintained by adults? Was their disembodied performance a nihilistic denial of the child as a symbol of futurity? Or was the absence of a body, like the absence of Richard's deformity (symbolised as explained earlier, by a removable cushion and surgical boot), a deliberate challenge to the voyeuristic-scopophilic gaze that has become a crucial part of the theatrical pleasure of this play? Through an analysis of the role of the children

<sup>79</sup> See Judith Butler, *Frames Of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), esp. p. 45, for considerations of the child as a 'grievable' victim.

within the overall context of Ostermeier's deconstructionist aesthetic, I argue that their present/absent, human/not-human, animate/inanimate qualities resulted in an ontological indeterminacy that raised important questions about power, ontology and the theatrical gaze. I will demonstrate, moreover, that the de-corporealised children were counterbalanced in this production by an insistently corporeal Richard, whose disabilities were demonstrated to be just as much a figment of rhetoric as the pervasive narrative of childhood innocence. In her analysis of puppet theatre, Meike Wagner has argued that the juxtaposition of the 'alienating, othering body of the puppet' and the live body of the human actor results in an ontological blurring in which 'all appearances are transformed into cyborgs – half mediatized technological objects'.<sup>80</sup> This is a particularly useful analysis to apply to Ostermeier's production, which also employed microphones and video projections as a means of problematising the distinction between the live and the mediated and the human and the technological. However, I argue that the juxtaposition of the puppet-princes with the artificially constructed 'disabled' body of Richard did something far more specific here. It brought into question the literary, historical and ideological constructions of identity and, in particular, the constructions of childhood that have, as James R. Kincaid has argued, focused on the erotic innocence (and concomitant appeal) of the child's body.

Ostermeier is a director known for his distinctive style. Influenced early in his career by the 'in-your-face' theatre of Mark Ravenhill and Sarah Kane, he developed a radical approach that is confrontational, challenging and highly metatheatrical.<sup>81</sup> Originally opening in the Schaubühne theatre, Berlin, in February 2015, his production of *Richard III* became one of the most anticipated and heavily-marketed events of the sixty-ninth Avignon Festival in France, before a European tour

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<sup>80</sup> Meike Wagner, 'Of Other Bodies: The Intermedial Gaze in the Theatre', in *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*, ed. by Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 125-136 (p. 126).

<sup>81</sup> Joyce McMillan, 'Richard III Performance is a Study in Evil', *scotsman* online, 18 August 2016 <<http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/culture/edinburgh-festivals/richard-iii-performance-is-a-study-in-evil-1-4206232>> [accessed 9 August 2017]; Katrin Ullman, 'Richard, le loup en nous', *Arte.TV* website, 20 July 2015 <http://concert.arte.tv/fr/livestories/richard-le-loup-en-nous> [accessed 9 August 2017]; Andrew Dickson, 'Thomas Ostermeier: "Hamlet"? The play's a mess', *Guardian*, 13 November 2011.

that included performances in Edinburgh and London. It was, moreover, the only performance to be broadcast as a livecast which remained on the Arte TV website for several months after the festival closed. My analysis is based on this livecast performance which included subtitles in French. True to his reputation for combining disparate theatrical styles, Ostermeier produced a hybridised blend of expressionism with psychological realism, traditionalism with postmodernism, and comedy with tragedy. The stage of the 700-seat capacity Opera Grand Theatre was bare apart from a backdrop that had clearly been designed to replicate an Elizabethan theatre design. In the centre of the back wall was a tiring-house-style entrance covered by a curtain, in front of which stood a crude scaffold structure with a metal staircase leading up to a gantry extending the full width of the stage. Between scenes, a cyclorama of moving images flickered across the entire back wall and stage floor, intermittently transforming this neo-Elizabethan backdrop into a twenty-first-century projector screen. Above the centre of the stage hung a 1950s microphone with an inbuilt light and camera. Whenever the actors spoke into the microphone, their faces were bathed in a harsh and unforgiving white light, while their images were magnified and projected onto the back wall. The fusion of different historical references – Elizabethan; 1950s; twenty-first century – established an atemporal context, while the use of the digitised image created a symbolic framework of substitution, replication and duplication. This intermedial interplay of technology and live theatre is a technique frequently employed by The Wooster Group, notably in their production of *Hamlet*, and has been usefully termed ‘cyborg theatre’.<sup>82</sup> In the case of Ostermeier’s *Richard III*, the double image of live and mediated performance emphasised the semi-cyborg quality of his puppet-children as they hovered uncannily between the human and the not-quite-human. The camera built into the microphone, moreover, emphasised the role of the audience in the actor-spectator relationship, highlighting the act of voyeurism that was central to Ostermeier’s treatment of both Richard’s deformed body and the bodies of the two children. Less a presentation than an effacement of

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<sup>82</sup> Jennifer Parker-Starbuck ‘Framing the Fragments: The Wooster Group’s Use of Technology’, in *The Wooster Group and its Traditions*, ed. by Johan Callens (Brussels: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004), pp. 215-231 (p. 221).

childhood, these bodies were in fact merely artificial distortions of their originals, evading the voyeuristic theatrical gaze even while drawing attention to it.

The performance opened with distorted synthesizer sounds overlaid with live percussion heralding the arrival of the victorious and celebratory Yorkist courtiers. Actors in black suits and cocktail dresses began pouring in from the back of the auditorium. They were ostentatiously firing glitter cannons and swigging from champagne bottles as they traversed the stage. At the back limped Richard, a reticent and self-conscious loner who looked round in bewilderment at the audience as he passed through. He was wearing black trousers with makeshift braces, and a white t-shirt, beneath which a cushion could be seen strapped to his back to signify his ‘bunch-backed’ hump (1.3.242). Bridget Escolme has noted that early modern theatrical conventions meant that ‘clothes were put into theatrical quotation marks in such a way as to emphasise the playfulness and fragility of identity itself’. In this instance, I suggest that Richard’s clothing was certainly a form of ‘theatrical quotation marks’ more in keeping with early modern practices than ‘the stage costume of modern production, made for theatrical convenience or to fit a particular design aesthetic’.<sup>83</sup> But Richard’s self-conscious display of disability was not merely designed to emphasise ‘the playfulness and fragility of identity’, although this was certainly a factor, but also to foreground the artificiality of historically and mythically constructed identity. Richard’s disability was, in Ostermeier’s adaptation, quite literally and self-consciously ‘constructed’. He tried to enter into the celebrations, shaking hands awkwardly with his fellow party-goers, but was largely ignored. This was a Richard who epitomized the 2015 Avignon Festival’s theme of ‘otherness’.<sup>84</sup> Grasping the suspended microphone, he began speaking the opening soliloquy in a partial whisper. First in German, then repeated in English (this was the only time the German version was translated back into the original Shakespearean text), he itemized his deformities while tears poured down his face

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<sup>83</sup> Bridget Escolme, ‘Costume, Disguise, and Self-Display’, in *Shakespeare’s Theatres and the Effects of Performance*, ed. by Farah Karim-Cooper and Tiffany Stern (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 118-140 (p. 120).

<sup>84</sup> Laura Cappelle, ‘Avignon’s nude direction for Shakespeare’, *Financial Times*, 17 July 2015.

and fell in droplets off his chin. Unlike Simon Russell Beale's gleefully camp showman or Kevin Spacey's menacing megalomaniac, Eidinger's Richard was a genuinely tortured social outcast, bustling in the world in the only way he knew to survive. In his account of the early stages of preparation for this production, Ostermeier wrote that he envisaged Richard as a 'very likeable and appealing character' who should never 'lose his credit with the audience'.<sup>85</sup> Even as he morphed from social 'other' into merciless killer, Eidinger's Richard never lost the capacity to reach out to the spectators. By stripping back the props that he used to fashion his identity, he revealed the vulnerable human beneath the disguise and implied, in doing so, that we were not only complicit in the constructedness and artificiality of *his* identity, but in our own as well.

The first turning point in his character development came with his successful wooing of Lady Anne in the second scene. Bewildered and hurt at her vitriol, he stripped naked, except for his cushion-hump, to place his 'unaccommodated' vulnerability at her mercy. As she pushed the tip of the sword into his chest, he thrust his arms out and flung his head back in a parody of the crucifixion. Unlike Beale's empty offer of martyrdom, it was clear that this Richard was genuinely prepared to fall on his sword. She hesitated, before eventually capitulating. Evidently surprised at the sudden and auspicious turn of events, he began to visibly grow in stature as he realised the transformative effects of rhetoric, not only on Anne, but on his audience as well. 'Was ever woman in this humor wooed? / Was ever woman in this humor won?' (1.2.214-5) was delivered with a sense of both disbelief and delight, his words directed for the first time out into the auditorium rather than mumbled in an apologetic undertone. By the time he re-appeared in the third scene, dressed in a black suit and white shirt, he was a newly confident and self-aware Richard, ready to grasp any opportunity for advancement that presented itself. However, in order for this metamorphosis to take place, it was first necessary to strip Richard of all his outward trappings of

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<sup>85</sup> Peter M. Boenisch and Thomas Ostermeier, *The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 198.

character – the signifiers of his deformity and his concomitant mythological status as a villain defined by those very deformities.

Richard's nakedness was central to Ostermeier's deconstruction of historical myth-making and cultural constructs, and provided an interpretive context for the disembodied puppet-children. Just as the corporeal reality of Richard's unimpaired body disavowed the rhetoric of disability and somatic monstrosity by evoking and enacting its artificiality, the dehumanised puppet-princes functioned as a medium to undermine the rhetoric of childhood innocence – a rhetoric that, as Kincaid reminds us, is shadowed by titillation, eroticism and violence.<sup>86</sup> For Kenneth Gross, writing about the inherently uncanny nature of puppets, the 'alien-homely instincts animated by the "living doll"' connect us to our infantile selves, activating fantasies of 'our own lost, *unfallen* knowledge of ourselves and our bodies.' Echoing the words of Kincaid, Higonnet and others, Gross asserts that puppets are 'entities that seek to reorient our ideas of innocence, and thus our ideas of childhood. Their innocence', he concludes, 'becomes more uncanny, and increasingly paradoxical, often haunted by its apparent opposite.'<sup>87</sup> Ostermeier reinforced the connection with the 'infantile selves' that Gross describes by limiting his use of puppets to the two child characters in this production, all other parts being played by adult actors. The juxtaposition of puppet with human in this way was both alienating and familiar. As Gross explains, 'the word [puppet] derives from the Latin *pupa*, for little girl or doll'.<sup>88</sup> Although its meaning has changed over time, from its usage in Elizabethan rhetoric as both a term of endearment and of deprecation, to its current application as a term almost exclusively used to denote a manipulable model, the associations of puppet-theatre with childhood continue to be maintained.<sup>89</sup> However, when placed in interaction and dialogue with the human

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<sup>86</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence*, p. 14.

<sup>87</sup> Kenneth Gross, 'Introduction', in *On Dolls*, ed. by Kenneth Gross (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2012), pp. ix-xxii (pp. xiv-xv).

<sup>88</sup> Kenneth Gross, *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> Puppet is defined in the *OED* as follows: 'puppet, **1.** An image of a human being or a person or thing resembling one; **1a** *depreciative*. An idolatrous image, an idol; any material object that is worshipped; **b.** A

characters, the un-human essence of these particular puppets took on a more alienating aspect. Mieke Wagner makes a similar argument to Gross: '[t]he puppet is very close to human beings; its features are familiar to ours. However, this familiarity is fragile and endangered – after all the puppet does bear the potential of radical alienation and othering'.<sup>90</sup> This sense of 'radical alienation' was consistent with the deconstruction of Richard's disabled body and the use of digitised images in the production design. Where the children foregrounded the artifice of cultural constructions of childhood with their alienating properties, Richard wore the deformities of his disabled body like a prop, and the juxtaposition of the mediated and the live created an anti-illusionist aesthetic that foregrounded and subverted the voyeuristic gaze. In the same way that he denied the audience the pleasure of viewing Richard's deformities by presenting a fit, lithe and blatantly 'able' body in its full nakedness, Ostermeier also denied the spectacle of the children's bodies, opting instead to replace them with a simulacrum, or what Gross calls 'substitution, revision, replacement', that was as artificial and as far removed from real children as Richard's constructed disability was from a real disabled body.<sup>91</sup>

With the emergence of disability studies as a distinct theoretical school over the past two decades, attention has begun to focus on disassociating the rhetoric of disability from the disabled body.<sup>92</sup> While these analyses have focused largely on the textual manifestation of Richard's deformed body, Geoffrey Johns combines disability studies with performance studies to consider

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(typically small) figure representing a human being; a child's doll. Cf. Poppet; **2a**. A model of a person or animal that can be manipulated to mimic natural movement; (originally) a figure with jointed limbs moved from above by strings or wires, a marionette; (subsequently also) a figure supported and moved from below by rods, or a figure made to be fitted over and moved by the hand, finger, etc.; **2b**. A person who impersonates another; an actor, *esp.* an inferior one; **3**. *derogatory*. A person, *esp.* a woman, whose (*esp.* gaudy) dress or manner is thought to suggest a lack of substance or individuality'.

<sup>90</sup> Mieke Wagner, 'Of Other Bodies', p. 132.

<sup>91</sup> Kenneth Gross, *Puppet: An Essay*, p. 95.

<sup>92</sup> See, for instance, Allison P. Hobgood, 'Teeth Before Eyes: Impairment and Invisibility in Shakespeare's *Richard III*', in *Disability, Health and Happiness in the Shakespearean Body*, ed. by Suyata Iyengar (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 23-40 and Katherine Schaap Williams, 'Enabling Richard: The Rhetoric of Disability in *Richard III*', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 29.4 (2009).

the ways in which Richard's 'amorphous body' – amorphous because of the multiple and contradictory ways in which it is defined within the play – 'might be conveyed, logistically and otherwise, to a live playhouse audience'.<sup>93</sup> Johns's approach to performing disability in the theatre is of particular interest here, especially as it relates to the performance of identity and alterity generally, and to the corresponding performance of childhood more specifically. Over the past few decades, celebrated performances by star actors from Laurence Olivier to Kevin Spacey have incorporated tics, limps and strapped-up limbs in order to provide the audience with a clear manifestation of Richard's physical deformity. However, as Johns and Williams have argued, to tie Richard down to one specific disability in this way is to elide the inconsistencies that abound in the play as characters try, in a 'frenzy of interpretive fervor', to find meaning in his deformities.<sup>94</sup> Ostermeier's solution was to address the issue of a vanishing, amorphous, and ambiguous disabled body by literally separating the body from its disability. His Richard brazenly displayed his deformity as a combination of metatheatrical signifiers which seemed to indicate a physical disability while simultaneously revealing it to be nothing more than a rhetorical, theatrical and historical artefact. His arm, a 'blasted sapling withered up' (3.4.74), was indicated merely by a plaster around the middle finger of his right hand. A cushion strapped to his back gestured towards a 'bunch-backed' hump (1.3.242), while a black leather head-band tied under his chin, a surgical boot on his right foot, and train-track braces across his top row of teeth suggested more generalised physical impairments (see Figure 6).

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<sup>93</sup> Geoffrey, A. Johns, 'A "Grievous Burthen": *Richard III* and the Legacy of Monstrous Birth', in *Disability, Health and Happiness*, pp. 41-57 (p. 41).

<sup>94</sup> Katherine Schaap Williams, para.1 of 24.





Figure 6: Lars Eidinger (Richard) in Thomas Ostermeier's *Richard III* (2015)

Eidinger's performance was not merely a performance of Richard, but a performance of disability that he was to use to his advantage at key moments in the play and was apparently able to turn on and off at will. It quickly became apparent that his Richard was not defined by his physical appearance but by his complex and, at times, extremely affecting psychological make-up. In this respect, unlike many Richards who have come before him, he frustrated any simplistic attempt to establish a causal link between physical deformity and moral depravity that is, as Garber has noted, 'transmitted not genetically but generically through both historiography and dramaturgy'.<sup>95</sup> In an interview with Joseph Pearson, Ostermeier said that he wanted his production to pose the following questions: 'Have you never wanted to do what Richard is doing? Have you never wanted to commit morally reprehensible acts?'<sup>96</sup> By humanising his protagonist in this way, Ostermeier challenged audience preconceptions about theatrical tradition and historical precedent and created a Richard in

<sup>95</sup> Marjorie Garber, 'Descanting on Deformity: *Richard III* and the Shape of History', in *Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. by R. J. C. Watt (London: Pearson, 2002), pp. 62-75 (p. 69).

<sup>96</sup> Joseph Pearson, 'Celebrating Evil: *Richard III* at the Schaubühne: A Conversation with Thomas Ostermeier', *Schaubühne* website, 29 January 2015 <<http://www.schaubuehne.de/en/blog/celebrating-evil-richard-iii-at-the-schaubuehne.html>> [accessed 9 August 2015].

whom his audience might see themselves reflected. In this context of deconstructing what Hans Robert Jauss has termed the audience's 'horizon of expectations', the presentation of the de-humanised puppet-princes and the accompanying ontological uncertainty they engendered seemed less of an interpretive leap.<sup>97</sup>

The first appearance of any children on the stage was Act 3, Scene 1, as Ostermeier had not only removed Clarence's children and the pageboy, but also cut the earlier appearance of the Duke of York with his mother and grandmother in Act 2, Scene 4. It was therefore somewhat of a delayed *coup-de-théâtre* when the children were revealed, mid-way through the performance, as two life-sized puppets with jointed limbs, who were both manipulated and voiced by actors from the troupe. Images of these puppet-children featured prominently in pre-publicity photographs released to the press and on the festival and Arte TV websites. They were marketed as a distinguishing feature of this production and its livecast and would therefore have undoubtedly been present in the minds of the audience members as they watched the play. Deferring their entrance in this way thus raised spectator expectations, ensuring that their eventual appearance achieved maximal impact. Removing the other children also had the effect of focusing attention exclusively on the two princes. As discussed in Part One of this chapter, the page plays a pivotal role in complicating the representation of children in this play as naïve innocents. Similarly, the dissenting voices of the Clarence children in Act 2, Scene 2 and the 'perilous' chatter of the Duke of York in Act 2, Scene 4 all contribute to a multiple and heterogeneous portrayal of childhood that is at once antagonistic, complicit, knowing and vulnerable. Ostermeier pared back the play's multiple representations of childhood to just the two princes, thus removing any complicating ambiguities. He also significantly cut the two boys' lines and removed Tyrrel's soliloquy in Act 4, Scene 3 so that the

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<sup>97</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982).

physical presence of these de-corporealised children took on a greater theatrical significance than the rhetoric surrounding them.

Ostermeier was clear from the early stages of his work on this production that he would not exploit the bodies of real children for theatrical effect. In his account of the rehearsal process he makes the following assertion:

The children will be played by puppets that are animated by the actors, who will also lend them their voices. Every single production of *Richard III* has this dreadful moment in it, when real, innocent children are pushed on stage by the director because she or he is unable to express and represent Richard's brutality otherwise. It is my ambition to convey his monstrosity through the means of theatre and *mise en scène*, and not through casting.<sup>98</sup>

Although Ostermeier's use of the epithet 'real, innocent children' is problematical in itself – it reinforces the narrative of childhood innocence that writers such as Kincaid and Stockton have worked to successfully debunk – the effect of replacing the children with puppets was nonetheless dramatically subversive. By stripping back the language and focusing on the bodies, and by replacing these bodies with inanimate puppets, Ostermeier emptied them of their fetishistic appeal and disrupted the voyeuristic-scopophilic gaze. The exploitation of 'real, innocent children' was thus neatly side-stepped. Anne Higonnet notes in her analysis of images of childhood through history that the ideal of childhood innocence is not a function of language, but 'an attribute of the child's body'.<sup>99</sup> This bodily ideal, as Kincaid has argued, is shadowed by a darker impulse to objectify, commodify and corrupt. 'By insisting so loudly on the innocence, purity, and asexuality of the child', he explains, 'we have created a subversive echo: experience, corruption, eroticism'.<sup>100</sup> It is the very physical attributes of childish innocence – the undeveloped presexual body, the

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<sup>98</sup> Peter M. Boenisch and Thomas Ostermeier, *The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier*, p. 201.

<sup>99</sup> Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence*, p. 8.

<sup>100</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, pp. 4-5.

androgynous features, the absence of bodily self-consciousness – that invoke a desire in adults to fetishise and eroticise children. When the body of the child is re-imagined not as a moving, talking individual, but as a puppet, this impulse to fetishise is frustrated in a way that is both phenomenologically unsettling and dramatically disruptive.

In a manner comparable to the cross-cast child characters of Mendes's production, these puppet-princes wore the outward signifiers of childhood, but lacked the corporeal presentness of the child's body. What could be 'read' according to the semiotic conventions of theatre, could not be correlated with their phenomenological effects. Although children do not form the central focus of his study, as discussed in the introduction, Bert O. States does make a brief, but nonetheless telling and useful reference to the phenomenological effects of child actors. According to States's analysis, stage images such as clocks, water and children do not always surrender their extra-theatrical nature to the sign/image function, but retain a high degree of self-givenness (what States calls '*en soi*') that debunks the theatrical illusion.<sup>101</sup> Interestingly, by categorising children along with inanimate objects that merely *appear* to have a life of their own through mechanised motion or the force of gravity, but in fact have no real capacity for self-determination or ratiocination (like flowing water and ticking clocks), States perhaps inadvertently contributes to the narrative that would deny children any agency of their own. Nicholas Ridout agrees with States's argument about the unassimilability of children to the 'world of the professional actor' but he approaches this from a Marxist perspective, focusing more on the ways in which the child draws attention to the exploitation of actors in the 'bourgeois commercial theatre'.<sup>102</sup> He does not go as far as States in aligning children with insentient objects such as clocks, but he does refer to them (along with animals) as 'minor forms of human adult'(p. 149) – a way of thinking about childhood that is, as we have seen, not far removed from early modern writers such as John Dod, William Gouge and Lewis

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<sup>101</sup> Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings*, pp. 29-32.

<sup>102</sup> Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright*, p. 45.

Bayly.<sup>103</sup> Ridout argues that the child on stage, by dint of his/her very unassimilability, creates a heightened awareness in the audience of the division of labour in the theatre.<sup>104</sup> Like the animal on stage who ‘means nothing by what it does’ because it is not aware that it is in fact performing in a play, the child exposes ‘the alienation of the actor and [...] the economic conditions of her presence on the stage’ (p. 101). The alien presence of the child thus, according to Ridout’s thesis, points to the alienated state of the performing labour force more generally.

Ridout was not, of course, the first writer to consider the role of the actor within the theatre, particularly as it relates to hierarchies of power. Writing as far back as 1911, Edward Gordon Craig was acutely sensitive to live theatre as a medium for replicating and magnifying the inequities of labour-relations. But unlike Ridout, his objections were not aimed at the exploitation of the actors (by the directors and the audience) but at the revolting actors themselves. As a young director/designer himself, he became frustrated by the ways in which the egoism and unpredictability of actors could take them beyond directorial control and thus threaten the artistic integrity of the production, as he saw it. He proposed a solution to the actor ‘problem’ that seems as iconoclastic now as it was in the early twentieth century: to replace all live actors with ‘the Über-marionette’.<sup>105</sup> Like Hazlitt before him, Craig did not trust the live actor to provide a pure performance of the author’s intent. However, this was not because, as Hazlitt contends, they could not possibly do justice to Shakespeare’s ‘wonderful bursts of feeling’, but because the body of the actor provides an obstacle due to its very materiality. Craig explains how ‘the nature in man will

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<sup>103</sup> John Dod, *The Bright Star Which Leadeth Wise Men* (London, 1603); William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties, Eight Treatises* (London, 1622); and Lewis Bayly, *The Practice Of Pietie Directing A Christian How To Walk That He May Please God / Amplified By The Author* (London, 1631). These are discussed in the Introduction to this thesis (see n. 36).

<sup>104</sup> Nicholas, Ridout, *Stage Fright*, pp. 99, 127.

<sup>105</sup> For a full analysis of Craig’s ‘Über-marionette’ see James Fisher, “‘An Idealist’: The Legacy of Edward Gordon Craig’s Formative Productions, 1900-1903”, *Theatre Arts Journal* online, 1.1 (2009) <<https://www.taj.tau.ac.il/index.php/current-issue/2-issues/1-2009/5-an-idealist-the-legacy-of-edward-g-craigs-formative-productions-1900-1903>> [accessed 14 August 2017]; and James R. Taylor, ‘The Shadow Puppets of Elsinore: Edward Gorgon Craig and the Cranach Press Hamlet’, *TD&T*, 50.3 (2014), 40-55.

fight for freedom, and will revolt against being made a slave or medium for the expression of another's thoughts'. As a result, he concludes that the actor is 'by nature utterly useless as a material for an art'.<sup>106</sup> His 'Über-marionette', on the other hand, conveys a 'death-like beauty' that does not 'compete with life' but rather 'go[es] beyond it' (p. 40). Human actors are thus, according to Craig's critical perspective, an impediment to artistic integrity *because* of the qualities that make them human – qualities that mean they will fight against subordination and, by extension, mortality itself. There is some irony in the fact that not only was Craig a successful actor himself, starting out as a child actor at the age of twelve in Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre, but that his mother Ellen Terry was an internationally renowned actor who performed from the age of five until her death at the age of 81. Craig's radical proposal for a dehumanisation and mechanisation of the medium of theatre was intended to be applied wholesale, not merely to child characters. By choosing to replace *only* the children with puppets, Ostermeier's production seemed to be making an observation about subjectivity and agency that not only highlighted and disturbed the voyeuristic-scopophilic nature of theatre, but raised a number of further troubling questions that were specific to children.

Reading Ridout's and Craig's arguments in the context of the potentially exploitative nature of the theatre exchange, it could be argued that Ostermeier's decision to substitute children for puppets was tantamount to refusing to expose the child-actor to the 'slavery' of the labour market. This a position taken by W. B. Worthen, who makes the case for the use of puppets to create an unmediated relationship with the audience that circumvents the commodification of the actor in the 'social and theatrical exchange'.<sup>107</sup> Ostermeier's comments about directors pushing 'real, innocent children' on stage certainly seems to suggest that this was a factor in his decision-making process. However, the fact that they were not only openly operated by adults (with no attempt at hiding the puppet-masters

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<sup>106</sup> Edward Gordon Craig, 'The Actor and the Über-Marionette', in *On The Art of Theatre* (1911; London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 27-48 (p. 30).

<sup>107</sup> W. B. Worthen, 'Of Actors and Automata: Hieroglyphics of Modernism', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, (1994), 3-19 (p. 4). See also John Gray, *The Soul of the Marionette: A Short Enquiry into Human Freedom* (London: Penguin, 2015).

behind the puppets) but also that they were the only characters represented in this way, meant that the effect was in fact very different from that originally intended. At one point, Ostermeier had also considered using puppets to represent both King Edward and the messenger, as he explained in his rehearsal notes: 'Potentially, King Edward will be a puppet, too. We are currently experimenting with a gigantic body for him, with only the head of an actor sticking out on top. For the role of the messenger, if it remains in the play at all, we envisage using a stick puppet the actors will hold up whenever new messages come in.'<sup>108</sup> These puppets did not make it to the final production and Ostermeier does not explain why they, but not the puppet-princes, were rejected during rehearsals. However, although his refusal to put real children on display appears to be a refusal to exploit their bodies for cynical theatrical gain, replacing them with puppets actually had the opposite effect because it denied the real child (the potential child actor) any agency whatsoever. Rather than liberating the children from the bonds of theatrical servitude, the very visibility of the puppet-masters reinforced their bonded status, suggesting that children are vulnerable to being enfranchized, shaped, moulded and manipulated by the adults that 'protect' them, both in the theatre and beyond. In other words, Ostermeier's desire to protect the 'real, innocent children' actually had the effect of reinforcing the adult fantasy of childhood as an imperilled and vulnerable state. Secondly, the very fact that these puppets were being voiced by actors doubling as Clarence, Dorset and Rivers, characters who had already been committed to death by Richard, gave the fate of these particular children an uncanny sense of preternatural predestination. Their faces, moreover, were made from shiny, wax-like plastic that created a distinctly deathly pallor and their mouths, permanently fixed in a perfectly round 'o' shape, reinforced the sense that they were already, metaphorically at least, the walking dead. The 'death-like beauty' of Craig's Über-marionette took on a particularly sinister meaning when it was applied exclusively to the children in this play. Like the non-diachronic narrative of Richard's birth, these puppet-children disrupted the linear temporality of official history, revealing it to be a fiction created and sustained by its chroniclers.

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<sup>108</sup> Peter M. Boenisch and Thomas Ostermeier, *The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier*, p. 201.

As Marjorie Garber has noted in her monograph on uncanny causality in Shakespeare, ‘the fiction of historical accuracy or “objectivity”’ is a ‘self-delusive and far from benign assumption that the past can be recaptured without contamination from the present.’<sup>109</sup> By presenting children who were de-corporealised shells rather than flesh-and-blood children, Ostermeier dramatised this contamination of the present in the past and rejected the linear, cause-and-effect narrative of deterministic historiography.

The puppet-children of the two princes further problematised Craig’s ideal of a transcendent ‘death-like beauty’ in their second appearance in Act 4, Scene 2. When the children’s assassin, in this case played by Ratcliffe rather than Tyrrel, returned to report on their deaths, he did not deliver the oft-cited elegy to ‘tender babes [...] girdling one another / Within their innocent alabaster arms’ (4.3.9-11), but instead carried their inert bodies onto the stage wrapped in a blanket. He then laid them unceremoniously on the floor and removed the blanket, standing back with a flourish as though he had just pulled off a particularly gruesome magic trick. As Ana Sanchez-Colberg and Helen Freshwater have noted, a ‘devaluation of language and a move towards a nonverbal idiom’ can be socially subversive, disrupting cultural norms and posing a threat to authoritarian control.<sup>110</sup> In this instance, the image of the distorted puppet ‘corpses’, and their disassociation from the bodies of real children, functioned as a ‘devaluation’ of the overblown rhetoric of Tyrrel’s eulogy and a challenge to the very notion of childhood innocence that his soliloquy apotheosises. The ‘dead’ puppets also problematised Ostermeier’s declared desire not to exploit ‘real, innocent children’ on the stage by removing, and thus exposing, the puppet-masters that pull their strings. He may not have used ‘real’ children, but his representation of childhood revealed a desire to reinforce their bonded status. Moreover, as Meike Wagner argues, although the puppet’s features are familiar

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<sup>109</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 62.

<sup>110</sup> Ana Sanchez-Colberg, ‘Altered States and Subliminal Spaces: Charting the Road Towards a Physical Theatre’, *Performance Research*, 1.2 (1996) 40–56 (pp. 41-2); Helen Freshwater, ‘Billy Elliot The Musical and the Performing Child’, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 36.2 (2012), 154-173 (p. 158).



to those of the human, the familiarity is ‘fragile and endangered’ because the puppet maintains a potential for ‘radical alienation and othering’ and, by dint of its artificiality, becomes an implicit symbol of death – a subversion, in other words, of the ‘reproductive futurism’ that Edelman both rejects and sustains.<sup>111</sup> Ostermeier’s distorted puppet-princes thus not only undermined Tyrrel’s eulogy to childhood innocence but gestured towards a fragility that subverted commonplace notions of childhood and futurity.

The final scenes of Ostermeier’s production were played almost entirely as the product of an uneasy mind. As Richard lay down for his final night of sleep before the Battle of Bosworth, the ghosts appeared at the head of his makeshift bed and spoke their lines into the microphone, their faces projected against the backdrop like disembodied ghoulish visitations. When it came to the turn of two princes, still played by the puppets but now re-connected with their human manipulators, Richard twisted and turned, his face screwed up as though in physical pain. After the ghosts departed, he took the microphone and gave his ‘conscience’ soliloquy (5.3.175-204) *sotto voce* while still lying curled up, foetus-like, in his bed. Then, taking his cue from the line ‘What do I fear? Myself? There’s none else by’ (5.3.180), he leapt up and began fighting invisible adversaries, furiously thrusting and jabbing at the air with his sword. Eventually exhausted at his efforts, he climbed back onto his bed, hooked his left foot into the loop at the bottom of the microphone cord, and was hoisted up into the air. The lights dropped on the pitiful sight of his half-naked body, slowly rotating as he hung like an abandoned marionette. No Richmond arrived to claim victory. No cheering citizens celebrated the arrival of a new era of stability and peace. Just like the fantoccini princes he had destroyed, Richard turned himself, literally and metaphorically, into a state of suspended animation.

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<sup>111</sup> Meike Wagner, ‘Of Other Bodies: The Intermedial Gaze in the Theatre’, in *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*, ed. by Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 125-136 (p. 132); Edelman, *No Future*, p. 132.

In his philosophical study into puppetry and free will, John Gray observes that, according to the scientific materialists, ‘human beings *are* marionettes: puppets on genetic strings, which by an accident of evolution have become self-aware’.<sup>112</sup> According to this analysis, there is no such thing as free will, merely an awareness of human limitations and a hope that science will eventually free the human mind from those limitations. The final image of Richard’s de-animated body seemed to signify a rejection of such hope, not only for himself but for the whole of mankind. As this final image of Richard’s suspended body made apparent, Ostermeier’s puppets were thus not merely a commentary on the bondedness of childhood, but were symbols of the bonded state of humanity in general. Bleak, uncompromising and utterly nihilistic, the puppet-children of Ostermeier’s *Richard III* were not substitutions for the ‘fantoccini exhibition’ of precocity against which Hazlitt inveighed, nor were they manifestations of Craig’s transcendent ‘death-like beauty’, but an outright rejection of futurity itself.

## Conclusion

As this analysis of the children of *Richard III* has demonstrated, Ostermeier’s future-denying fantoccini children represent the culmination in a recent, counter-hegemonic trend towards demystifying idealised narratives of childhood and interrogating boundaries of age, gender and temporality. All of the three productions I have considered in this section have taken and expanded upon what Matthew D. Wagner has termed the ‘dissonance and thickness of time’ that forms such a significant part of *Richard III*.<sup>113</sup> The play’s recursive structure and disruptive temporalities undermine fixed adult/child binaries and the multiple and contradictory manifestations of childhood deny a stable and definitive interpretive stance. Although Holmes, Mendes and Ostermeier have each focused on one particular aspect of the child, using different theatrical devices to present or

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<sup>112</sup> John Gray, *The Soul of the Marionette: A Short Enquiry into Human Freedom* (London: Penguin, 2015), p. 10.

<sup>113</sup> Matthew D. Wagner, *Shakespeare, Theatre, and Time*, Routledge Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies Series (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 8.

efface childhood, they all share a common interrogatory approach that rejects romantic notions of childhood innocence and raises questions about agency, authority, identity and futurity. By reinterpreting the page as a miniature facsimile of Richard, Holmes deconstructed boundaries of childhood and adulthood and brought into question ideas about temporality and teleology. His page, whom I have called the future-killing anti-child, posed a theatrical challenge to Edelman and others who continue to perpetuate, even while they reject, entrenched adult fantasies of children as guardians of the future. Mendes and Ostermeier raised similar questions about idealised fantasies of childhood innocence by refusing to put the bodies of children on the stage and thus disrupting the scopophilic gaze. Mendes's queer cross-cast children and Ostermeier's fantoccini puppets not only negated notions of 'the Child as the emblem of futurity' but also brought the ontology of childhood itself into question.<sup>114</sup> By foregrounding the artifice of childhood in this way, they revealed it to be a rhetorical and social construct – a construct that the multiple afterlives of Shakespeare's play, and its doomed young princes, have traditionally functioned to perpetuate.

In the next chapter I will be moving from the effacement of childhood to look at the over-determined presence of the child – alive, dead and hovering indeterminately in-between – in contemporary film and stage versions of *Macbeth*. While pre-1990 productions largely emphasised the innocence and vulnerability of the children, as we will see, later adaptations adopted a more ambivalent approach, portraying childhood as unknowable, unmanageable, and disturbingly 'other'.

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<sup>114</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future*, p. 4

## Chapter Two

### **‘Fair is foul and foul is fair’: The Janus-Faced Child in *Macbeth***

The all-pervasive trope of the child in *Macbeth* has always offered the potential for directors to blur the boundaries between innocence and malevolence as the images of ‘a naked new-born babe / Striding the blast’ (1.7.21-22) or ‘heaven’s cherubim, horsed / Upon the sightless couriers of the air’ (1.7.22-23) suggest. A play centrally concerned with the image of the child, *Macbeth* therefore provides a particularly apposite discursive framework for interrogating developing narratives of childhood, while simultaneously revealing the tensions inherent therein. With these tensions in mind, this chapter will explore the ways in which modern productions of *Macbeth* have exploited textual ambiguities to construct the child ‘other’, both literally and figuratively. By comparing a number of film and stage adaptations of *Macbeth*, I chart these changes in attitudes to childhood through the final decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. The conclusion I draw is that, as Cunningham and other notable childhood scholars have contended, the current generation’s concern for its children and their future derives from an inescapable sense of the ambiguous and alien nature of childhood itself.

In the first section, I consider the question of the Macbeth baby, a particularly ambiguous representation of childhood that has garnered much critical commentary and debate over the past eighty years. Beginning with a brief history of the academic and theatrical treatment of this elusive child, I then focus on two twenty-first-century theatre directors, Maya Kleczewska (2012) and Jamie Lloyd (2013), whose interpretations are particularly illuminating in terms of what they reveal about anxieties relating to childlessness, childhood and futurity in modern society. As my analyses will demonstrate, the question ‘How many children has Lady Macbeth?’ is of increasing concern in revivals of this play, and the mysterious Macbeth baby has come to symbolise not just the ‘rooted sorrow’ (5.3.41) of one couple, but the tragedy of a whole society on the verge of an existential

crisis. The loss of the Macbeth baby symbolises, in these two productions, the disappearance of childhood and the consequent disintegration of society. In the second section, I examine the effects of doubling the Macduff children with the weird sisters through an analysis of Michael Boyd's three stage productions of *Macbeth* (1985, 1993, 2011). I consider in particular questions of ontological indeterminacy and temporal disruption that arise from the conflation of the supernatural with the human in the figure of the child. It was a trope to which Boyd returned again and again, and one which seemed to both intrigue and baffle his reviewers, rendering them, in many instances, uncharacteristically inarticulate. In the final section I compare two landmark English-language films of *Macbeth* by Roman Polanski (1971) and Justin Kurzel (2015), to explore how the different representations of childhood in these films – from fetishistic objects to agents of doom – both illuminate and are reflective of changing ideas about children in Western society more generally.

Carol Chillington Rutter has argued that, '[a]s the 1980s moved into the 1990s, *Macbeth* emerged as the Shakespeare play which the British theatre was going to use to think through the nation's current and ongoing cultural crisis in "childness"'.<sup>1</sup> My comparison of these two films demonstrates the extent to which Rutter's statement continues to pertain. 'Childness', a word coined by Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale* (1.2.169), is at the heart of *Macbeth* and the different ways in which Polanski and Kurzel chose to represent 'childness' and childlessness are, I argue, illustrative of far larger social and cultural shifts. The ambitious scope of this chapter, which incorporates theatre and film, hypothetical and actual productions, English and foreign-language adaptations, and a broad range of critical writing, illustrates how the children of *Macbeth* have become a source of fascination and objects of scrutiny across the centuries. Children, both real and metaphorical, actual and imagined, are woven through the fabric of this play and the appetite in directors, writers and

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play: Performing Lost Boys on Stage and Screen* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 172.

audiences for exploring their diverse manifestations to, as Rutter observes, ‘think through the nation’s current and ongoing cultural crisis in “childness”’ shows no signs of diminishing.

## **2.a ‘How Many Children had Lady Macbeth?’: Childlessness and Existentialism in Jamie Lloyd’s *Macbeth* (2013) and Maya Kleczewska’s *Makbet* (2012)**

‘Just as *Hamlet* deals with the relation of a son to his parents, so *Macbeth* [...] is concerned with the subject of childlessness’<sup>2</sup>

Sigmund Freud was one of the first writers to explicitly state that *Macbeth* is about childlessness and it is a concern that has preoccupied scholars, directors and actors ever since. The riddle of the Macbeths’ child in particular has been the source of lively critical debate for almost a century. Indeed, the question ‘How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?’ has become rhetorical shorthand for the perceived opposition between close textual reading and character or performance-based analysis.<sup>3</sup> L.C. Knights first opened up the debate in 1932 with a polemical essay dismissing the then-current Bradleyan character-based approach to Shakespeare as ‘the most fruitful of irrelevancies’.<sup>4</sup> Where Bradley focused his analysis on interrogating motivation behind the action of the characters, arguing that prime narrative interest derived ‘in action issuing from character, or in character issuing in action’, his detractors, notably Knights, F.R. Leavis and G. Wilson Knight, countered that the Shakespearean text should be read as ‘a dramatic poem’ or ‘an expanded metaphor’, arguing that, their theatrical origins notwithstanding, the plays ought to be considered

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<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1955-74), iv. p. 266.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Michael Bristol, ‘How Many Children Did She Have?’, in *Philosophical Shakespeares*, ed. by John J. Joughin (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 18-33; Carol Chillington Rutter, ‘Remind Me: How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?’, *SS*, 57 (2004), 38-53.

<sup>4</sup> L. C. Knights, ‘How Many Children had Lady Macbeth? An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism’, in *Explorations: Essays in Criticism Mainly On the Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), pp. 1-39; A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*, 4th edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988).

first and foremost as literary texts.<sup>5</sup> Coinciding with the proliferation and diversification of critical approaches over the past forty years, the question of character analysis has re-emerged as a nexus for critical debate. Moreover, the emergence of childhood studies has further focused attention on this issue, as scholars have argued that along with the ‘discovery’ of childhood, the notion of motherhood was also invented.<sup>6</sup> Directors have thus begun to question the significance of the Macbeth’s missing baby and how it can be translated for a modern audience with its own particular concerns about procreation, childlessness and what it means to be a mother in a post-feminist society. Bradley’s once discredited consideration of motive and intent has become a legitimate mode of analysis, and ‘How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?’ – far from being an irrelevancy – has proved to be a question worth asking.

One corollary of this expansion in the critical field has been an increasing recognition of the different ways in which actors and scholars approach textual ambiguities. Cleanth Brooks was one of the first writers to identify the child as the ‘most powerful symbol’ in the play, encompassing the ‘larger themes’ in a complex interplay of metaphor and character.<sup>7</sup> Although Brooks focused on the metaphorical import of the Macbeths’ missing child, writers such as Carol Rutter and Michael Bristol have more recently begun to give serious consideration to its narrative and dramatic significance – a significance that has also come to form the central focus for many theatre practitioners. Adrian Noble’s 1986 production for the RSC was probably the first large-scale stage production in which the absence of a Macbeth heir was foregrounded as the interpretive crux around which the whole tragedy was constructed. Many subsequent productions have since

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<sup>5</sup> Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 6; Knights, ‘How Many’, p. xxxviii; G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 14; F.R. Leavis, ‘The Literary Mind’, *Scrutiny*, 1 (1932), 20-32.

<sup>6</sup> See *Connecting Spheres: Women in the Western World to the Present*, ed. by Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 37 and Dymphna Callaghan, ‘Wicked Women in *Macbeth*: A Study of Power, Ideology, and the Production of Motherhood’, in *Reconsidering the Renaissance: Papers from the Twenty-First Conference*, ed. by Mario A. Di Cesare (New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), pp. 355-69 (p. 369).

<sup>7</sup> Cleanth Brooks, ‘The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness’, in *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1947), pp. 21-46 (p. 37).

followed suit, a tradition that has culminated most resonantly in Jamie Lloyd's 2013 production for the Trafalgar Transformed season.

In an interview for Rutter's *Clamorous Voices*, Sinead Cusack, who played Lady Macbeth in Noble's production, describes the 'beautiful logic' behind the idea that the Macbeths had had a child and subsequently lost it: '[t]hat sort of loss, the loss of a child, is so huge, so massive, that [...] it can turn the need for a child into an obsessive need for something else'.<sup>8</sup> Like Francesca Annis in Roman Polanski's 1971 film, Cusack was a young Lady Macbeth who subverted stereotypes of the evil, domineering wife. However, the motivating factor behind the impassioned incitement of her husband to murder was not, in contrast to Annis's interpretation, the over-reaching ambition of a 'starry-eyed youth', but the self-destructive existentialism of a grieving mother.<sup>9</sup> The loss of the Macbeth baby thus became the focal point for this production and images of children dominated its aesthetic. From the monstrous patchwork baby on the poster to the witches' child-apparitions playing blindman's bluff with Macbeth, children confronted the Macbeths at every turn, mocking their barrenness with their ubiquitous presence.

Noble's *Macbeth* proved to be a landmark production in terms of the impact it made on both the academic and theatrical communities. Its influence in terms of its focus on the childlessness of the Macbeths can be seen in a number of stage productions that followed. They are too numerous to list in full here, but some notable productions include Philip Franks's 1995 production at the Sheffield Crucible, which featured witches pushing an empty old-fashioned pram that remained on stage as 'a brooding incarnation of a tragedy of childlessness';<sup>10</sup> Gregory Doran's 1999 production for The Swan Theatre, featuring Harriet Walter and Anthony Sher, which I discuss in more detail below; Jude Kelly's 1999 production for the West Yorkshire Playhouse, in which 'Mairead McKinley's

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<sup>8</sup> Carol Rutter, *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare's Women Today* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> Deanne Williams, 'Mick Jagger *Macbeth*', *SS*, 57 (2004), 145-158, (p. 147).

<sup>10</sup> John O'Connor and Katharine Goodland, *DoS*, p. 710.



young, grief-stricken Lady Macbeth was shown bitterly cutting up baby clothes’;<sup>11</sup> Andrew Hilton’s 2004 production at the Bristol Tobacco Factory, where Lady Macbeth sleepwalked in a room with a ‘shrouded cradle and rocking horse’;<sup>12</sup> Gemma Bodinetz’s 2011 production for the Liverpool Everyman Theatre in which Lady Macbeth’s ‘incantatory call to be “unsex’d” sound[ed] less like a diabolical ploy than the expression of a despairing hope that an empty throne might compensate for a barren womb’;<sup>13</sup> and Daniel Evans’s 2012 production for the Sheffield Crucible, which featured a grieving Macbeth rescuing Macduff’s baby from the clutches of the murderers and refusing to hand him over until he himself was surrounded by the English forces.

Much critical commentary has been dedicated to analysing the multiple ways in which Noble’s production instigated a theatrical obsession with materialising both the real and the symbolic children of Shakespeare’s text. Of particular note is the detailed and extensive analysis by Carol Chillington Rutter, who argues that Noble’s *Macbeth* ‘took a long look at desecrated childhood, perverse parenting, assembling fragments from culture at large into a form that, resonating against the Shakespeare text, interrogated the present’.<sup>14</sup> I will therefore not go over well-trodden territory here, but concentrate instead on two more recent interpretations by Jamie Lloyd and Maya Kleczewska. What made these particular productions so noteworthy was the ways in which they adapted Noble’s narrative of childlessness and placed it squarely in a post-millennial context. Where the barrenness of Noble’s *Macbeths* went some way towards providing, in the words of reviewer Stanley Wells, ‘a psychological explanation for their evil’, the failure to produce an heir was, for Lloyd’s and Kleczewska’s tragic protagonists, a symptom of a far wider social malaise.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kate Bassett, ‘Lost child of Lady Macbeth’, *Telegraph*, 20 October 1999.

<sup>12</sup> John O’Connor and Katharine Goodland, *DoS*, p. 747.

<sup>13</sup> Alfred Hickling, ‘Macbeth - Review’, *Guardian*, 13 May 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child’s Play*, p. 174. Both Jonathan Pryce and Sinead Cusack have also provided illuminating insights into their inspirations for the backstory of bereavement that informed their performances as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth respectively. For Cusack, see Carol Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, pp. 53-72; for Jonathan Pryce see Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child’s Play*, pp. 175-6.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley Wells, ‘Shakespeare Performances in London and Stratford-upon-Avon, 1986-7’, *SS*, 41 (1989), 159-182 (pp. 170-1).

Quite simply, the inability of the Macbeths to produce an heir signalled the end of the line for not merely one family, but for a whole generation. The child, the embodiment of Edelman's politics of 'reproductive futurism', was, in these dystopian productions, dying before he/she had even been born.

Jamie Lloyd set his war-ravaged *Macbeth* in a post-apocalyptic Scotland, whose visual aesthetic depicted a country 'sink[ing] beneath the yoke' (4.3.39) of ecological, economic and political collapse. The theatre had been reconfigured in the round to create an intimate, almost immersive experience, and Soutra Gilmour's stark, post-industrial set comprised of steel trapdoors, concrete flooring, a lone standpipe and a dirty toilet. Lloyd's aim, he declared, was to create a social world that would 'resonate with the here and now' and tap into 'the psychology of our age', a world of the dispossessed struggling to survive in a society 'regressed to its most base animal instincts'. 'What if', he asked, 'all the major fears of our age actually happen?'<sup>16</sup> The answer he provided was bleak: the children would completely disappear, taking all hope for the future with them. Expanding upon Shakespeare's metaphorical baby, Lloyd turned one couple's childlessness into a metonym for the sterility of a whole society. On a familial level, the infertility of Lady Macbeth represented the tragedy of a woman denied the maternal role with which her identity was so inextricably linked. On a macro-social level, it signified the loss of futurity itself – a futurity in which Lloyd's desolate Scotland most desperately needed to believe.

From her first entrance, Claire Foy's Lady Macbeth conveyed the brittle fragility and manic restlessness of a psychologically disturbed young woman. Her hair unkempt, her waifish figure clad in shapeless clothing, she strode across the floor in her heavy boots like a child who had raided the dressing-up box (see Figure 7). For some reviewers, her relentless pacing and jagged speech conveyed the impression of a nagging and emasculating wife. Using pejorative descriptors such as

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Edward Stambollouian, 'Tethered to the Text', in the *Macbeth* programme notes.

‘manipulative’, ‘bossy’ and ‘morally blind’, they mistook her brash exterior for the self-centred rantings of what one called a ‘teenage virago’.<sup>17</sup> However, detailed business between the couple



Figure 7: James Mcavoy (Macbeth) and Claire Foy (Lady Macbeth) in Jamie Lloyd's *Macbeth* (2013)

made it clear that her initial spikiness masked the despair of a grieving mother. This Lady Macbeth was not a ‘fiend-like queen’ (5.7.99), but a young wife ‘driven’, in the words of the associate director, ‘by a feeling of frustration, rage, jealousy and bitterness for the loss of her child’.<sup>18</sup> In their first meeting, Macbeth, played by James McAvoy, spread his hand across her stomach. They exchanged a look, and, removing his glove, he repeated the action with his bare hand. However, her stomach was, as one reviewer noted, ‘reproachfully flat’.<sup>19</sup> At this realisation, Macbeth’s expression turned to one of despair and she staggered forward towards him. Before she could fall into his arms, however, he took a step back, coldly announcing: ‘We will speak further’ (1.5.69). As though steeling herself against his rejection, Lady Macbeth gathered herself with a ramrod-like purpose. Again, their eyes met and his hand stretched out as though to touch her stomach. But this time he paused, pulled it back to his side, and walked purposefully off the stage. As the lights fell, her

<sup>17</sup> John Nathan, ‘Review of *Macbeth*’, *Jewish Chronicle*; Charles Spencer, ‘Review of *Macbeth*’, *Telegraph*; Libby Purves, ‘Review of *Macbeth*’, *The Times*, in *TR*, 33.4 (2013), 139-140.

<sup>18</sup> Email from Edward Stambollouian to the author, 26 June 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Georgina Brown, ‘Review of *Macbeth*’, *Mail on Sunday*, in *TR*, 33.4 (2013), 143.

steeliness gave way to despair and her body crumpled like an abandoned ragdoll. The sight of her utter physical and psychological dejection perfectly mirrored the devastated wasteland of her surroundings. This was not merely the story of one couple driven to desperation through grief. The Macbeths' tragedy was clearly, in the world of Lloyd's apocalyptic vision, a symptom of a far greater catastrophic decline.

A later, gruesomely ironic replay of this scene brought a reversal in roles for the Macbeths. Lady Macbeth was seated on the edge of a table, alternately comforting and hectoring her agitated husband who had just returned from the scene of Duncan's murder. Standing between her legs, he cried 'Cawdor / Shall sleep no more! Macbeth shall sleep no more!' (2.2.45-6) and placed a blood-soaked hand across her stomach, turning her dress into a dripping mass of red. This gesture, which had earlier conveyed a sense of mutual but divisive emotional pain, now created a terrible parody of a miscarriage. The multiple textual manifestations of blood and babies seemed distilled into, and emblematised by, this one horrifying simulation of miscarried pregnancy.

Children, it seemed, were reluctant to be born into the world of Jamie Lloyd's *Macbeth*. Even the 'bloody child' emanating from the witches' cauldron in Act 4, Scene 1 was not manifested on stage as a child, but was represented instead by Macbeth ventriloquising the apparition's words. Moreover, the unfortunate children who were already alive were being terrorised back into the womb to die, as the scene at the Macduff castle was to symbolically suggest. At the entrance of the murderers, Macduff's young 'fry' (4.2.79) – who was played alternately by a girl and a boy actor in different performances, suggesting that, in Lloyd's conception of the play, neither sex was privileged or protected – was pushed by her/his mother into a large chest to hide. Lady Macduff was then pinned down on top of this chest by the three murderers and garrotted with a rope. As the murderers left, Macbeth entered alone. Checking Lady Macduff was no longer breathing, he turned to leave, muttering '[h]e's a traitor' (4.2.77). At this, a childish voice cried out '[t]hou liest' (4.2.78)

from inside the chest. Slowly and deliberately, Macbeth turned, unsheathed his sword, placed his ear to the chest and, after pausing for a beat, thrust his sword deep into its side. The metaphor was clear: Macbeth was killing Macduff's issue, ensconced in her/his womb-like hiding place, as retribution for his own loss. The source of Macbeth's 'rooted sorrow', in this heavily symbolic production, was his childless marriage; the murders, in the words of the *Independent* reviewer, were a 'hideously doomed and eroticised groping for compensatory intimacy'; and Jamie Lloyd's question – 'What if all the major fears of our age actually happen?' – had received its nihilistic answer.<sup>20</sup> The death of childhood quite simply represented the death of society itself.

Like Lloyd, Maya Kleczewska set her Polish-language *Makbet* for the Globe-to-Globe Festival in 2012 in a dystopian nightmare. However, where Lloyd's was a vision of environmental, economic and civil collapse, Kleczewska's was one of moral degeneration and political anarchy. Set in a brutal underworld of debauchery, poverty and homophobic/misogynistic violence, Kleczewska's *Makbet* presented a society ruled by white, male 'gang culture'. Although, in accordance with the requirements of the Globe-to-Globe Festival, it was performed entirely in Polish with English surtitles that were more often than not out of sync with the action and beleaguered with spelling and grammatical errors, pop culture references gave it a pan-European quality that made it feel disturbingly familiar. Dominic Dromgoole, artistic director at the Globe from 2005 to 2016, asked those theatre companies invited to perform at the festival to 'play raw, human and dirty' with Shakespeare's texts, and the Polish production of *Makbet* certainly fitted the brief.<sup>21</sup> Unable to rely upon the familiarity of Shakespeare's language, non-Polish speaking spectators had to interpret a visual and musical rhetoric that seemed to deny the production any national or historical specificity.

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Taylor, *Independent*, in *TR*, 33.4 (2013), 138.

<sup>21</sup> Susan Bennett and Christie Carson, 'Introduction: Shakespeare Beyond English', in *Shakespeare Beyond English: A Global Experiment*, ed. by Susan Bennett and Christie Carson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-11, p. 4.

The prevailing aesthetic was one of postmodern eclecticism and pastiche, incorporating a rich musical and filmic intertextuality with contemporary allusions to drag performance and the mafia sub-culture. For Paul Edmondson, the style was unmistakably ‘EuroShakespearean’, which he summarises as a blend of:

transvestitism, simulated sex, binge boozing, karaoke, ghettoblasters, grubby furniture, tracksuits, flip-flops, unexciting underpants, leather jackets, sunglasses, sexual violence, techno-techno-techno, narcosis, nudity and, for a finale, some more karaoke.<sup>22</sup>

Although Edmondson’s description is an evocative and largely accurate summary of Kleczewska’s design, as I saw it, the slightly tongue-in-cheek tone fails to capture the particularly menacing atmosphere that lay beneath the tacky, ‘Eurotrash’ exterior. It was a brutal regime of intimidation that violated its women, terrorised its children, and in its self-destructive ethos of retributive violence, obliterated any hopes for a future beyond the here-and-now of the degenerative world it depicted.

Originally staged in Poland in 2004, *Makbet*’s transposition to London for the 2012 Globe-to-Globe festival was received with mixed reviews. The play opened with four weird sisters (two male transvestites/transsexuals and two women) styled to fit the stereotype of the sexual temptress in tight low-cut tops, elaborate wigs, high heels and short skirts. They flirted provocatively with the audience, mingling freely with the groundlings in the pit and handing out shots of vodka. 1980s pop music was blaring out of the speakers. One of the transvestite/transsexual sisters asked a groundling to lift her onto the stage, and then pulled her skirt up to reveal bare buttocks to a rather stunned audience. While on the one hand, the effect was a presentation of gender that privileged performativity over biology and celebrated sexual liberation in all its non-conformist guises, the

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Review of *Macbeth*’, in *A Year Of Shakespeare: Re-Living the World Shakespeare Festival*, ed. by Paul Edmondson, Paul Prescott and Erin Sullivan (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2013), pp. 115-8 (p. 116).

very fact that the sisters were reduced to anonymous sexual objects gave the whole performance a sense of depravity with which the audience, in the broad daylight of the Globe theatre, was all-too-clearly complicit. Being confronted with our own voyeurism in this way made the line between sexual liberation and sleazy titillation particularly hard to discern. To add to this uncomfortable atmosphere, we were confronted with two men dressed in cheap tracksuits who were slumped in seats facing out towards the audience. One, his arm in a sling and his face bruised and battered, was listlessly typing into his mobile phone, while the other grasped at the 'sisters' as they performed their cabaret-style act. As they began speaking the words of the play, it became clear that these two sink-estate stereotypes were Banquo and Macbeth, played by Przemyslaw Kozlowski and Michal Majnicz. Far from the noble warriors of Shakespeare's text, they were the archetypes of a low-order criminal underworld: brutal, grubby, and deeply misogynistic. The sisters, in the words of Robert Ormsby, were their 'bullied sexual playthings'.<sup>23</sup>

Into this seedy underworld entered Lady Macbeth, played by Judyta Paradzinska. She appeared upstage left and walked listlessly to an unmade bed, apparently oblivious to the scene unfolding on the other side of the stage. Then, curling up into the foetal position, she held her stomach and screwed up her face, her features contorted in a silent scream. For spectators familiar with the play, her demeanour suggested the agony of a woman recovering from the loss of a child. Indeed, the director later confirmed to me that her behaviour was intended to convey 'depression, melancholy, life without aim', following 'the traumatic unexpressed experience of child-loss'.<sup>24</sup> Her simple, girlish clothing created a strong visual contrast with the sexually objectified 'sisters' being manhandled by her abusive husband. The message conveyed in the juxtaposition of these two scenes was clear: sex in the dystopian underworld of Kleczewska's *Makbet* was less a procreative act than a weapon used to subjugate and intimidate.

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<sup>23</sup> 'Locating *Makbet*/Locating the Spectator', in *Shakespeare Beyond English*, ed. by Bennett and Carson, pp. 150-3 (p. 150).

<sup>24</sup> Email from Maya Kleczewska to the author, 17 May 2014.

*Makbet* portrayed a society that traded in sex and violence. The costumes were modern in design, and the style and fabric were suggestive of both poverty and sexual profligacy. The sole signifiers of office were King Duncan's white suit and ostentatious gold jewellery, and a pair of mirror-studded trainers that passed from Macbeth to Malcolm as a metonymic signifier of the transfer of power. The lack of clear social hierarchies was reinforced by an all-pervading moral turpitude that crossed gender, age and office. This problematised any audience attempt to discern who might offer hope for the futurity of this underworld of apparently gratuitous debauchery. Notably, the only characters not complicit in the cycle of violence were Macduff's children. They were represented by a baby in a pram, who remained concealed from view, and two pre-pubescent girls, who spent much of the first half of the play chasing around the stage firing soap bubbles at one another (see Figure 8).

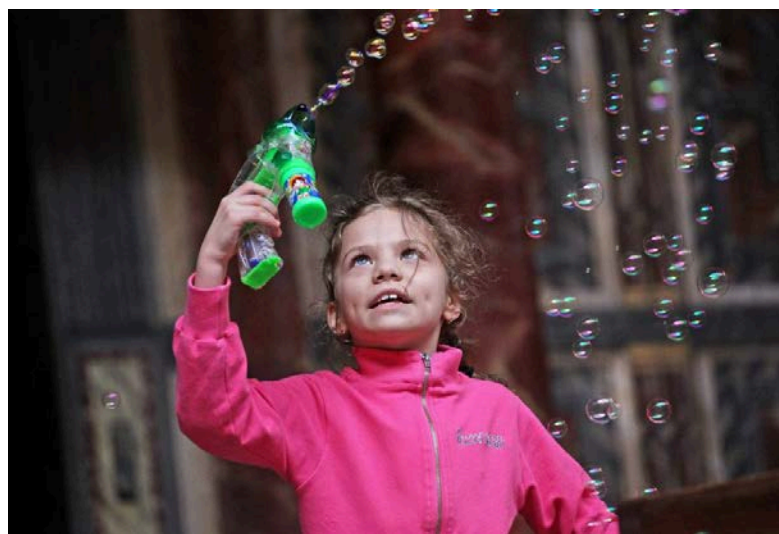


Figure 8: Sara Pluzek (Macduff's Child) in Maya Kleczewska's *Makbet* (2012)

When the cabaret atmosphere erupted into violence, as happened with unerring regularity, the two older girls cowered beneath a table which doubled as a drinks cabinet and an impromptu dance podium. At one point they were hiding in terror while their drink- and drugs-addled mother danced



provocatively above them, the pram abandoned at the side of the stage. As with the hiding-place sought out by Macduff's child in Jamie Lloyd's *Macbeth*, their sanctuary had a womb-like quality; however, its effectiveness proved to be, like the young Macduff's chest, merely an illusion. The brutal murder of the children was a truly shocking moment that felt gratuitously sadistic. The two girls were forcibly carried off stage, their screams echoing around the enclosed walls of the tiring room, and the baby was strangled as it lay helpless in its pram. This was the only moment in the play where innocence and depravity were being clearly polarised. In Kleczewska's interpretation, children alone were morally untainted, and their existence was perilously under threat.

The rape and murder of Lady Macduff made for distinctly uncomfortable viewing for very different reasons. She was dressed in a tight mini-skirt, with a cigarette hanging from her mouth and no shoes on her stained feet. In spite of the production's origins in Poland in 2004, she seemed to embody a figure that was depressingly familiar to British spectators: the media-driven icon of the urban underclass. Her listless movements and glazed eyes suggested that she was either under the influence of drugs or suffering the comedown from the night before. Her fitness as a mother was clearly being called into question. However, when a sexually suggestive embrace with Ross turned into a brutal and graphic anal rape at the front of the thrust stage (an act that, in keeping with the overall tone of this production, divorces sex from procreation) spectators were forced to confront and interrogate their class and gender prejudices. A palpable sense of discomfort was intensified by the spatial and proxemic relationships inherent in the Globe's architectural configuration. This mother was a product of her environment, and in the unforgiving shared light of the afternoon sun, it felt particularly close to home.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The performance I saw was a matinée on 10 August 2012. The evening performances, which were scheduled to begin at 7.30pm and conclude by 9.30pm, would also have been performed in daylight.

The violence that pervaded this production extended to the Macbeths, whose relationship fluctuated between passion and abuse. During Act 1, Scene 5, while Macbeth lay in a foetal position with his thumb in his mouth, Lady Macbeth repeatedly kicked and berated him, only to subsequently leap into his arms and joyfully wrap her legs around his waist when he capitulated to her demands to proceed with the murder of Duncan. Later, during the banquet scene, Macbeth violently forced one of the transvestite sisters to fellate him in full view of his wife, who was wearing a tight-fitting cocktail dress that emphasised (unexpectedly and without any prior indications) a heavily pregnant belly. By the time she re-appeared in the sleepwalking scene she was no longer pregnant, suggesting that she had in fact miscarried. Whether this was a result of an overdose on drink and drugs, violence at the hands of her husband, or natural causes was left to the spectators to conjecture for themselves.

This failed pregnancy proved to be a point of contention for commentators. For Michael Billington, ‘it seemed to undercut Macbeth’s obsession with lineal succession’, while Harriet Walter argued that it undermined the narrative of childlessness: ‘Why, please, is Lady Macbeth pregnant and then suddenly not pregnant? The whole point’, she argued, ‘is this is a barren couple who are very paranoid and jealous and about a man for whom it has been prophesied that his progeny will be kings’.<sup>26</sup> I think they are both missing the point. Staging the couple’s fruitless attempts to produce an heir in this way not only reinforced the urgency of Macbeth’s ‘obsession’, but also confirmed the centrality of the Macbeths’ barrenness to the production’s overall sense of hopelessness. The ‘whole point’ was that the ‘fruitless’ Macbeth marriage was a symptom of a wider moral turpitude. Sex, in the world of this particular production of *Makbet*, had become commodified. What ought to have been life-affirming was now life-denying and Edelman’s ‘future-preserving child’ was exposed as a fallacy. It was no coincidence, therefore, that the interpolated

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Billington, ‘Review of *Macbeth*’, *Guardian*, 9 May 2012; Harriet Walter, “‘Who Dares Receive It Other?’: Conversation with Harriet Walter (9 May 2012) Following a Performance of *Makbet*”, in *Shakespeare Beyond English*, ed. by Bennett and Carson, pp. 154-6, p. 154.

image of a miscarried pregnancy was followed closely by the massacre of the Macduff children and Lady Macbeth's suicide by overdose. There was a terrible irony in the depiction of Lady Macbeth's desperate need to procreate in a world that placed so little value on life. That the miscarried pregnancy functioned as a domestic symbol of a much wider social decline was somehow lost in translation reveals more about the cultural and generic expectations of an Anglo-centric tradition of Shakespearean criticism – one which valorizes '[s]ubtlety, sub-text, psychology, [and] thematic and linguistic complexity' – than the production itself.<sup>27</sup>

Harriet Walter, who has written and spoken extensively about her own portrayal of Lady Macbeth in Doran's 1999 production, made the following assessment of the performance:

[W]hile I tried to hold back judgement and tell myself that I am in another world and this is a Polish response to the play, I ended up thinking that if you do that play without any kind of psychological journey, then I'm not interested.<sup>28</sup>

Walter's critique is illuminating for two reasons: what it reveals about the way in which she, and many others in the second half of the twentieth century, approached the role; and what it says more generally about audience/critical reception and understanding of Kleczewska's production. While preparing to play Lady Macbeth, Walter worked with Gregory Doran and Anthony Sher (who played Macbeth) to create a backstory of multiple stillbirths, because, she reasoned, 'surely then [Lady Macbeth] would feel truly blighted and perhaps vengeful against the world'.<sup>29</sup> Watching the two actors perform, the unspoken but palpable sense of shared loss was clearly conveyed through detailed stage business. When Lady Macbeth described 'dash[ing] the brains out' (1.7.58) of her beloved child, Macbeth rushed towards her, stopping her mouth with his hand as though preventing her from articulating further the source of their unspeakable pain. They exchanged a look, and as he

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Prescott, 'Inheriting the Globe', in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. by Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), pp. 359-375 (p. 371).

<sup>28</sup> Harriet Walter, 'Who Dares Receive It Other?', p. 154.

<sup>29</sup> Harriet Walter, *Actors on Shakespeare: Macbeth* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 32.

comforted his weeping wife, Macbeth's warrior-like resistance visibly crumbled. Sher has described this moment as a turning point for Macbeth, the point at which he realised he 'needed to be on her side whatever the cost'.<sup>30</sup> By the time he urged her to '[b]ring forth men-children only' (1.7.72), the mood between the couple had changed from emotional detachment to a shared sense of illicit excitement. He ran his hand down to her stomach and grasped her hand. This time their embrace was erotically loaded, and they left the stage as a couple united in what Walter describes as a 'new-found purpose'.<sup>31</sup> According to this interpretation, Lady Macbeth had redefined her role within her marriage – a role that would restore her sense of lost agency and relieve his sense of guilt.

Reading both actors' accounts of the rehearsal process, it was evident that they strove above all for a naturalistic style of acting that conveyed psychological interiority. Drawing on interviews with murderers and criminal psychologists, and using the photograph of a dead baby as a visual prompt for their grief, the actors repackaged Shakespeare's ambiguous and equivocating text into a coherent narrative of a childless couple's psychological journey for a twentieth-century audience. For an actress accustomed to working with the 'inspired simplicity', linear teleology and cohesive dramatic structure of Doran's directorial style, it is perhaps not surprising that Walter likened Kleczewska's *Makbet* to 'a degenerate cabaret', lacking in 'connections, character, language, [...] momentum and [...] coherence'.<sup>32</sup> However, the very elements of *Makbet* to which Walter, and other reviewers such as Michael Billington and Paul Edmondson objected – the cabaret-style performance, the gangster sub-culture setting, the disjointed temporalities and the aesthetic hybridity – were the factors that made what was presented as a narrative of a childless couple by both Cusack and Pryce in 1986 and Walter and Sher in 1999, into a much bigger social commentary. The gap between directorial intent and critical reception notwithstanding, Kleczewska's *Makbet* revealed a dramatic concern with exploring the Macbeth's missing child that

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<sup>30</sup> Anthony Sher, *Beside Myself: An Actor's Life* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. 343.

<sup>31</sup> Harriet Walter, *Actors on Shakespeare*, p. 33

<sup>32</sup> Harriet Walter, 'Who Dares Receive It Other?', p. 155-6.

extended beyond linguistic and national boundaries, providing further evidence that, to quote Rutter, ‘counting heads in Scotland’s nurseries [is] not some “pseudo-critical investigation” but utterly to the point’.<sup>33</sup> The point, according to Kleczewska’s interpretation, was that the missing baby literalised Postman’s concept of the disappearing child and its implications for a society facing both a loss of hope and a loss of futurity itself.

One writer who saw the point of the missing baby over a decade before the Adrian Noble production and the ensuing spate of childless-themed *Macbeths* was Marvin Rosenberg. In an essay titled ‘Lady Macbeth’s Indispensable Child’, he hypothesized about what it might mean to feature a Macbeth baby on stage.<sup>34</sup> For Rosenberg, the only riddle surrounding the Macbeths’ child was that its existence should be in doubt: ‘Of course Lady Macbeth has at least one child’, he confidently asserts, ‘Shakespeare begins with a loving pair, and tells us unequivocally – in a play full of equivocation – that they have had a child’ (p. 14). He then describes in vivid detail how he envisages the presence of the baby would work on stage as a literalised motivation for the actions of the protagonists. The baby first appears in Act 1, Scene 5, where he imagines Lady Macbeth reading the letter from her husband while gently rocking her baby in his cot. The presence of the baby would, he suggests, momentarily provide a ‘touching domesticity’ that emphasises the ‘softer’ side of Lady Macbeth. Then he describes what happens next as the implications of her husband’s news sink in:

The cradle’s rocking stops; her terrible prayer to be unsexed, to give up her mother’s milk for the juice of anger, shocks the more because voiced in the presence of the babe. And now may be sensed the first sounds of the child, sounds that can orchestrate with the play’s scattered animal cries of cat, toad, owl, cricket, and of the child-apparitions in the witches’ cave, the ravaged child in Macduff’s castle. (p. 15)

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<sup>33</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, ‘Remind Me’, 39.

<sup>34</sup> Marvin Rosenberg, *Educational Theatre Journal*, 26 (1974), 14-19.

In Rosenberg's imagined production the 'sounds of the child' provide a constant stimulus to action for Macbeth. They would be a 'tug to his conscience' (p. 15) when he prevaricates over murdering Duncan as well as an incitement to infanticide when he looks at Fleance, 'whose life', Rosenberg argues, 'seems to threaten the very existence as well as the succession of his child' (p. 16). Finally, when all hope of securing the crown for his son slips away from him, Macbeth faces his fate, and 'the unmothered, futureless manchild' is abandoned. In the final moments, Rosenberg imagines Macbeth's demise accompanied by the sounds that have dogged him throughout the play: 'A little cry, a final little cry, may herald Macbeth's death knell' (p. 19).

Although there is no reason why this theoretical production might not work in practice, it is problematic for a number of reasons.<sup>35</sup> Not only does Rosenberg gloss over the equivocation and ambiguities of Shakespeare's text (features he lauded in *The Masks of Macbeth*, to which his essay was subsequently appended), but by literalising the Macbeth baby he overdetermines the issues of lineage and succession, diminishes the influence of the supernatural, oversimplifies the complex and shifting relationship of the Macbeths and demonises Lady Macbeth, transforming her into the 'anti-mother' who would 'dash [...] the brains out' (1.7.58) of a living (not hypothetical) child.<sup>36</sup> The result would be a version of Shakespeare's play that is neither domestic tragedy, as was the case for Noble and Doran, or social commentary, like the more recent productions by Lloyd and Kleczewska. In Rosenberg's conception of the play, moreover, all ambiguities and character nuances are removed as Macbeth's actions are entirely justified by the need to protect his vulnerable young son whose life depends on the removal of potential threats. Unlike the narrative of the childless couple, a living heir provides Macbeth with a real and unequivocal motive for killing Fleance. An audience might well empathise with the murderous actions of this Macbeth. A

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<sup>35</sup> An appended note to Rosenberg's essay states: 'If Marvin Rosenberg's interpretation is used in performance, he would like to know how it went' (p. 19). To my knowledge, no professional production of Rosenberg's *Macbeth* has been staged in the United Kingdom.

<sup>36</sup> Rosenberg writes of the 'polyphony', 'multiplicity' and 'many, varied, even contrary strains' in *The Masks of Macbeth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. x and *passim*.

father protecting the life of his son is a very different proposition from a man driven to murder by a multitude of potential reasons: an emasculating wife, equivocating spirits, post-traumatic stress disorder, grief and '[v]aulting ambition' (1.7.27), to name but a few. By maintaining an element of ambiguity, Shakespeare complicates his characters and denies his audience a simplistic response. Rosenberg, on the other hand, portrays Macbeth as a heroic martyr sacrificing himself for the life of his son. In doing so, he smoothes over what he himself calls the 'many, varied, even contrary strains' of the protagonist of Shakespeare's text, and demonises Lady Macbeth as the stereotype of evil absolute.<sup>37</sup>

Emma Smith has argued that the propensity of modern productions to subsume Lady Macbeth's behaviour into a digestible narrative of childlessness and bereavement mitigates the ruthless actions of a woman 'that might otherwise be designated transgressively unfeminine'.<sup>38</sup> Rosenberg's Lady Macbeth is not merely 'transgressively unfeminine', she is a villain without any psychological depth. The grieving mother, on the other hand, offers directors an opportunity to provide Lady Macbeth with a psychologically plausible back-story. The effectiveness of the Lloyd and Kleczewska productions lay in their capacity to incorporate that narrative of childlessness into a much wider socio-economic context. Rather than merely the emotional centre of a domestic tragedy, like many of the productions that had come before them, the sterility of the Macbeth marriage in these two productions was a symptom of and metonym for the moral, economic and environmental decline of a whole generation. Where Lloyd relied on a clearly defined concept in his post-apocalyptic Scotland, Kleczewska's production played with generic hybridity and intertextuality to create her dystopian world. The result was an exciting development in the treatment of the absent Macbeth baby and the wider implications that had for the other children in the play: the murdered Macduff children, the 'birth-strangled babe' (4.1.30) of the witches'

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<sup>37</sup> Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Macbeth*, p.x.

<sup>38</sup> Emma Smith, *Macbeth: Language and Writing* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 156.

cauldron and Fleance, who vanishes without trace. It symbolised, in other words, the widespread eradication of children more generally in a production that, while not to everybody's taste, nonetheless provoked lively critical debate and broke the mould of almost 30 years of domesticated, naturalistic *Macbeths*.

In the next section I consider the work of Michael Boyd, for whom the missing Macbeth child was far less of a concern than the butchered Macduff children and the association of the child with the demonic. Rather than exploring the bleak implications of childhood on the verge of extinction, he turned the child-victim in *Macbeth* into an avenging, time-distorting revenant. In his three stage productions of *Macbeth* between 1985 and 2011, Boyd questioned what it means to be a child by doubling the Macduff children, helpless victims of Macbeth's tyranny, with the three weird sisters, equivocating agents of the devil himself. The result was a manifestation of childhood that defied taxonomy, recalled early modern (and modern) depiction of children as 'other' or 'alien', and left reviewers uncharacteristically tongue-tied.

## **2b. Ripped out of time: Defying Mortality in Michael Boyd's *Macbeths* (1985, 1993 and 2011)**

Michael Boyd's 2011 production at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre was his third professional experience of directing *Macbeth*. His first two productions were staged at the Tron Theatre in Glasgow during his tenure as the theatre's first artistic director. I am not able to base my analysis of these productions on first-hand spectator experience as I was not present at the original performances and recordings were not made. Documentary evidence and secondary accounts/reviews are also extremely limited.<sup>39</sup> To avoid straying into the territory of the conjectural

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<sup>39</sup> Archival materials for the 1985 and 1993 Tron Theatre productions of *Macbeth* consist of a programme for the 1993 production, a flier for the 1985 production, provided courtesy of Glasgow University Archives, and limited secondary accounts. Information on the theatre was taken from the official website <[http://www.tron.co.uk/docs/059\\_303\\_historyleaflet2015largeprint\\_1425563706.pdf](http://www.tron.co.uk/docs/059_303_historyleaflet2015largeprint_1425563706.pdf)> [accessed 26 January 2016].



and the fanciful, I am not, therefore, attempting a detailed study of these performances. However, through an exploration of the material and artistic circumstances of their production and a consideration of some contemporary critical reviews, I aim to provide an interpretive context for my analysis of the 2011 RSC production, which was clearly heavily influenced by choices made in Glasgow two and three decades earlier. The religious iconography, disjointed historical references and revenant, malevolent/innocent children were particularly distinctive aspects of Boyd's original production designs that were to be revisited and further defined for the later RSC revival. The archival evidence I have analysed suggests that these crucial artistic choices were closely related to, if not born out of a response to, the history and architectural design of the Tron theatre itself. The overall effect that seems to have transported across three decades, and several counties, is one of atemporality: a world thrust out of time into disorder and disarray, in which the past is an intrusive presence and the future an unthinkable prospect. The single unifying principle that symbolised and embodied this sense of disruption was the shape-shifting child.

The Tron was originally built as a Catholic church in the early sixteenth century. It was subsequently reincarnated as a Protestant Kirk when Catholicism was outlawed in Scotland in 1560, and then used as a place of execution, a police meeting house and a workshop before it was eventually converted into a 230-seat theatre in 1980. The theatre website and publicity material emphasise the unique history of this building. Stories of ghostly visitations, buried corpses and strange conflagrations create a menacing atmosphere that would have provided a fitting context for *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's most thorough exploration of the supernatural. The 1985 *Macbeth* was performed in repertory and cross-cast with *Macbeth Possessed*, a modern play by Stuart Delves which took disrupted temporalities and historical revisions as its central interpretive crux.<sup>40</sup> This play opened with a royal command performance of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* for James VI, Queen Anna and her brother, Christian IV of Denmark. The performance was unexpectedly interrupted at

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<sup>40</sup> Playscript of Stuart Delves, *Macbeth Possessed* provided by Glasgow University Library Archives.

the beginning of Act 2, Scene 3 when the figure knocking at the gate turned out not to be Macduff, but the disgruntled ghosts of 'King Macbeth' and 'Queen Gruoch' come back from the dead to 'lash back at the Bard's propaganda piece' with their own revisionary version of history.<sup>41</sup> The three children, who appeared in Boyd's play doubling as the Macduff children and the witches, had a similarly dual function in Delves's highly metatheatrical drama. They were both terrified 'child actors', whose performance of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* had been interrupted by the ghostly visitation of characters from the past, and supernatural agents of truth in the reclaimed play-within-a-play, sent to show James the 'real' history of his usurping and regicidal ancestors and successors. At one point they entered with the heads of Mary Stuart and Charles I and presented them to a terrified, stammering James. They were followed by 'a line of other children wearing face masks of various Anglican monarchs, the last a mask of Charles III with jug ears'.<sup>42</sup> On paper, *Macbeth Possessed* reads like a light-hearted reflection on the nature of theatre and a gentle anti-Jacobean satire. However, its concern with history, temporality and the spirit world would have resonated with Boyd's particularly supernatural interpretation of *Macbeth*. What is striking about these two productions playing in repertory, stylistic and generic differences notwithstanding, is the way in which they both used the child-figure as the central agent of dramatic disorder and temporal revisions. Of course, it is impossible to say with certainty where the original idea originated. What can be deduced, however, is that either Boyd was influenced by Delves's dual-faced children or that Boyd inspired Delves to borrow this conceit. Either way, it was clearly considered central enough to Boyd's dramatic design to be repeated twice more, in 1993 and 2011.

Boyd doubled his Macduff children with the three witches to create a janus-faced image of childhood that seemed to foreshadow the real juxtaposition of evil and innocence seen in the mediated James Bulger footage in 1993. I asked him what motivated him to keep returning to the

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<sup>41</sup> Stuart Delves, *Macbeth Possessed* programme, provided by Glasgow University Library Archives.

<sup>42</sup> Stuart Delves, *Macbeth Possessed*, p. 36.

trope of the innocent/malevolent child in his three productions of *Macbeth*, and he responded as follows:

In the 1985 production, it began as a pragmatic matter of cost, that the witches doubled as the Macduff children, but from the first rehearsals we quickly became convinced that we could make more of this by making the witches in fact the murdered Macduff children ripped not only out of life but of time, and returning to retell their fate and Macbeth's. The audience saw the children simply as dead child victims of war, until they saw them appear in pristine versions of their filthy and bloody costumes as the living children of Lady Macduff, which of course lent that scene even more weight of foreboding than usual. The 1985 and 1993 productions were both staged in the converted church that was the Tron Theatre, and the children were buried under a thin layer of earth and then burst out of their graves to confront Macbeth and Banquo. I had always wanted the children to be more graphically victims of terrible violence, but it was not until the RSC production [of 2011] that I could afford the means to hang them from butchers hooks, and have them slowly descend, singing the Agnus Dei.<sup>43</sup>

What is particularly noteworthy about Boyd's response is his focus on the victimhood of his children. Although he talks of 'foreboding', it is a reference to the future fate of the Macduff children rather than their incarnation as witches. For the audience, however, the conceit of doubling the witches with Macduff's 'pretty chickens' (4.3.218) was far more ontologically disturbing and resistant to definition than Boyd intended, and the 'weight of foreboding' was created by the children-as-witches rather than the 'living children of Lady Macduff', as the critical reviews attest. Writing about Boyd's 1985 production, for instance, O'Connor and Goodland observe that his use of children added 'something indefinably sinister', and *Financial Times* reviewer, Martin Hoyle, describes them as 'basilisk-eyed children', 'malevolent household gods', and 'birds of ill omen'.<sup>44</sup> Analyses of the 1993 production are similarly unspecific. Joyce McMillan, writing for *The Guardian*, for instance, twice uses the adjective 'chilling', while the *Sunday Times* reviewer

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<sup>43</sup> Email from Michael Boyd to the author, 27 August 2014.

<sup>44</sup> John O'Connor and Katharine Goodland, *DoS*, p. 674; Martin Hoyle, 'Review of *Macbeth*', *Financial Times*, 22 April 1985.

describes them as a manifestation of ‘amoral innocence’, the very distillation of the angel and the demon in one ambiguous figure.<sup>45</sup> Using a similar vocabulary of hyperbole and antithesis, O’Connor and Goodland describe how the Macduff children ‘innocently counterpoint [...] evil’ with a ‘chilling’ game of blind man’s bluff (p. 699).<sup>46</sup>

Although Boyd’s 1993 production differed in some key ways from the 1985 staging of *Macbeth* (it was not performed in repertory with *Macbeth Possessed*, for instance, but as a joint production with Dundee Repertory Theatre), the changes were developments of rather than reversals of the devices used in the earlier production. One noteworthy amendment was the decision to have Duncan re-emerge from the dead ‘as a grotesque doll with innards spewing’, making the association between children and witchcraft more definite.<sup>47</sup> It also prefigured the use of dolls as props for the children-as-witches in the 2011 production, which I discuss in more detail below. What is evident from reading reviews of these two productions is that spectators were particularly disturbed by the doubleness of these revenant children who had been, as Boyd described, ‘ripped [...] out of time’. Not only were they apparently able to defy mortality and disrupt temporal teleology, but they also presented an incomprehensible blend of innocence and evil. Reviewers were quite simply struggling to articulate the phenomenological effect of these children. These were themes that Boyd continued to explore when he returned to *Macbeth* in 2011 as artistic director at the RSC. Unlike the Tron productions, this revival is well-documented and I watched a performance live in the theatre and on a DVD archival recording. Drawing on my first-hand experience, I will provide an interpretive framework for comprehending and articulating what seems to have eluded the Tron reviewers quoted above.

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<sup>45</sup> Joyce McMillan, ‘Review of *Macbeth*’, *Guardian*, in *TR*, 13.10 (1993), 574; John Peter, ‘Review of *Macbeth*’, *Sunday Times*, in *TR*, 13.10 (1993), 573.

<sup>46</sup> Adrian Noble’s 1986 production also featured the three children playing blind man’s bluff with Macbeth. For Rutter, this was one particularly noteworthy instance of the way in which Noble ‘made children equivocal, saturated signs of the equivocations the *Macbeth* text everywhere produces’ (Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child’s Play*, p. 179).

<sup>47</sup> John O’Connor and Katharine Goodland, *DoS*, p. 699.

As the inaugural production in the newly-refurbished Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Boyd's 2011 *Macbeth* was a fitting blend of the new with the old. Set in a post-Reformation church with desecrated Catholic iconography and crumbling walls, the dominant visual aesthetic was early modern in design. It is surely not overly fanciful to presume that this design choice was influenced by Boyd's earlier experiences of staging *Macbeth* at the Tron Theatre. However, in this instance, the sixteenth-century setting was juxtaposed with a plethora of contemporary references – modern costumes, colour-blind casting and a semtex-carrying porter – giving the overall production a sense of temporal disjunction. Three female cellists were seated in the shadows of a balcony, their dark forms picked out by the light creeping through the shattered stained-glass windows behind them, and the discordant notes of the anachronistic instruments providing an aural corollary to the visual devastation. Into this iconoclastic atmosphere dropped the three 'weird children'. This time, instead of 'burst[ing] out of their graves', they descended like 'spectral dead puppet[s]' from the flies across the front of the thrust stage.<sup>48</sup> They hung suspended from meat-hooks for several seconds before being lowered to the ground and unhitching themselves. For the brief time that they were hanging, silent and immobile, it was difficult to discern whether they were actors or, as in Ostermeier's *Richard III* and Wheeldon's *The Winter's Tale*, merely surrogates. When they began moving, the disturbing sense of ontological indeterminacy intensified even further. Already at odds with the traditional representation of *Macbeth*'s witches as old hags, the styling of the children struck an additional note of dissonance that reinforced the sense that they had indeed been 'ripped [...] out of time'. Their Jacobean costumes contrasted with the modern dress of the adult characters; their pure voices, raised in a soaring rendition of 'Agnus Dei', battled with the plangent sounds of the cellos; and their faces were covered in white make-up with a cross branded across their foreheads (see Figure 9).

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<sup>48</sup> Libby Purves, 'Review of *Macbeth*', *The Times*, in *TR*, 31.9 (2011), 470.

For many reviewers these children-as-witches could only be described in phenomenological terminology: ‘startling and harrowing’, ‘eerie’, ‘horrifyingly disturbing’, and, for Charles Spencer ‘a truly shocking moment that ma[de] the skin crawl’.<sup>49</sup> It was an image that evoked both ‘foul’ and ‘fair’ (1.1.11), child and not-quite-child: a moment of ontological uncertainty that encapsulated not only the epistemological ambiguities of *Macbeth*, but also the contradictions of a postmodern world that, as Cunningham has observed, is both fearful of and fearful for its children. From the emotive language used by critics, it is clear that, like the Tron reviewers, they responded to these ‘weird children’ in a visceral manner. One way of understanding what made this



Figure 9: witch-child (actress unknown) with doll in Michael Boyd’s *Macbeth* (2011)

ontologically unstable image particularly disturbing can be found in Freud’s notion of the ‘uncanny’ – the unhomely’ (das Unheimlich) within ‘the homely’ (das Heimlich). For Freud, the ‘Unheimlich’ is not simply unnatural, but something ‘intended to remain secret’ that has ‘come into the open’.

When confronted with this paradoxical conflation of the familiar and the unfamiliar, we experience

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<sup>49</sup> Coen Heijes, ‘Review of *Macbeth*’, in *TJ*, 64 (2012), 102-5 (p. 104); Christopher Hart, ‘Review of *Macbeth*’, *Sunday Times*, in *TR*, 31.9 (2011), 472; Carol Chillington Rutter, ‘Shakespeare Performances in England (and Wales) 2011’, *SS*, 65 (2012), 445-483 (p. 479); Charles Spencer, ‘Review of *Macbeth*’, *Telegraph*, in *TR*, 31.9 (2011), 470.

an inexpressible fear that is ordinarily repressed, or ‘locked away’, one that Freud associates with the pre-rational world of childhood itself and that resonates with early modern ideas about the child as not-quite-human.<sup>50</sup> Applying Freud’s theories on the ‘uncanny’ to the weird children of Boyd’s *Macbeth*, it becomes clearer to see why the various critics struggled to rationalize their responses beyond vague descriptives such as ‘chilling’, ‘sinister’ and ‘eerie’.

The tensions between the familiar and the unfamiliar (child-like innocence and demonic evil) were further sharpened when it was eventually revealed in Act 4, Scene 2 that the ‘weird children’ were the same actors playing Macduff’s ‘pretty chickens’ (4.3.218). This decision to double the parts was not, however, driven by reasons of pragmatism, as with the smaller-budget Glasgow productions, but a central aspect of Boyd’s dramatic design, as is clear from his correspondence with me. The scene at the Macduff castle opened with what appeared to be a picture of domesticity with the three children seated at their mother’s feet playing with toys. However, these toys were not conventional signifiers of childhood play, but reminders of the duality of the children’s roles, as they were in fact the same dolls summoned as apparitions by the three ‘weird children’ during the cauldron scene and looked disturbingly like voodoo dolls. Voodoo dolls had, of course, been used in this scene before. Trevor Nunn’s acclaimed production for the RSC in 1976 featured the witches giving voodoo dolls to a hallucinating Macbeth, and Orson Welles’s 1936 stage production and 1948 film adaptation famously featured voodoo dolls that were manipulated by the witches.<sup>51</sup> However, the witches in Nunn’s and Welles’s *Macbeths* were adult women, not children. By having the ‘weird children’ in control of these dolls, Boyd was hinting at a society in which children might be capable of killing children, a notion which the Bulger case had made horrifyingly real. Moreover, by having the same children play Macduff’s children *and* the witches, the children-killing-children motif symbolised both a drive towards self-destruction and a perversion of

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<sup>50</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 132-4.

<sup>51</sup> *Macbeth*, dir. Orson Welles (Republic Pictures, 1948)

Edelman's ideology of reproductive futurism. As with the miscarried children of Lloyd's and Kleczewska's productions, the fair and foul children of Boyd's 2011 revival seemed designed to indicate a society in which the children were reluctant to exist.

In her review for *Shakespeare Survey*, Rutter was nonplussed by Boyd's janus-faced children. On their reincarnation as Macduff's 'spotlessly innocent infants' she commented as follows: 'hang on, how did becoming victims make them evil-ones? Were they "bad", getting themselves murdered? And how did they get "good" again, at the end [...]?'<sup>52</sup> Although intended as a criticism of the inconsistencies in this production, Rutter's analysis of the shape-shifting child characters of Boyd's *Macbeth* was particularly telling as it unwittingly reflected the contradictory media rhetoric exemplified in the James Bulger case and recalled the dichotomous attitudes to childhood manifested in early modern writings on witchcraft. In other words, the child, who 'should' be an image of victimhood, is simultaneously a symbol of evil, as seen in newspaper headlines such as the *Daily Mail*'s 'The Evil and the Innocent'.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, although Rutter's analysis construed the ambiguities of Boyd's *Macbeth* as a dramaturgical failing, I believe that it was an important element of the production's overall design, even if Boyd did not intend it in this way, as his correspondence with me intimates.

In a final twist in the interplay between victim and agent, Boyd's two murdered Macduff boys, having lain inert for several moments, stood up and walked off stage. It was a theatrical moment that seemed to invest the bodies of the children with two simultaneous identities that defied simple taxonomy: as Macduff's children, their spirits were entering another world and as the witches, they were defying death via supernatural regeneration. The boys were to re-emerge in the final scene to linger over the body of Macbeth as he lay inert and broken. The sun shone through the restored

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<sup>52</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, *SS*, 65 (2012), 445-483 (p. 479)

<sup>53</sup> Anon, 'The Evil and the Innocent', *Daily Mail*, 25 November 1993.



stained-glass windows, and the cellists struck their first harmonious chords of the evening. Boyd's children, who had been 'ripped [...] out of time', returned to dismantle linear chronology altogether by reversing the Reformation, as indicated in the restoration of the windows. Order was restored, but it was an order shadowed by the destabilising presence of the three uncanny children. Having played the roles of both victim and agent, the 'innocent flower' and 'the serpent' (1.5.63-4), they were now the symbolic embodiment of Scotland's future – a future that, as Coen Heijes noted, promised 'an endlessly repeating cycle of violence, vengeance and murder'.<sup>54</sup> The embodiment of both the past and the future, the victim and the perpetrator, the living and the dead, Boyd's three janus-faced children encapsulated the dichotomous attitude to childhood that has permeated modern media and popular discourse. Ambiguous to the end, they subverted teleological narratives of progress and dismantled conventional notions of the child as bearer of futurity. If they are our hope for the future, Boyd seemed to be saying, it is a future that threatens to be as chaotic, destructive and self-annihilating as our past.

Boyd's 2011 production was not to be the last word on this subject. A large-scale cinematic version of *Macbeth* had not been released since Roman Polanski's 1971 film and Kurzel was ready to meet the challenge with his 2015 adaptation. In the third and final section of this chapter I draw comparisons between the two films to illustrate how the treatment of the children of *Macbeth* has altered in the cinema over the past four decades. Whereas Boyd took his dualistic portrayal of children through the doubling of roles to its natural and most shocking conclusion in his 2011 production, Kurzel approached the subject of childhood in *Macbeth* in a far more comprehensive and holistic manner. The result, as will be demonstrated below, was a vision of childhood that is not only as far from Polanski's vulnerable innocents as can possibly be imagined, but was even more ambivalent, and therefore disturbing, than Boyd's death-defying revenants.

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<sup>54</sup> Coen Heijes, 'Review of *Macbeth*', in *TJ*, 64 (2012), 102-5 (p. 105).

## 2c. ‘Innocent angels’ and ‘little demons’: The Two Faces of Childhood in the Films of Polanski (1971) and Kurzel (2015)<sup>55</sup>

In spite of a gap of 44 years between their respective release dates, there are, at first glance, remarkable similarities between Roman Polanski’s 1971 film and the most recent cinematic adaptation of *Macbeth* by Justin Kurzel, released in 2015.<sup>56</sup> They both take eleventh-century Scotland as their historical setting, although the issues they explore are firmly grounded in the Anglo-American socio-cultural context of the 1970s and 2010s respectively. They each have a multi-national cast and crew, giving the films a sense of universality that transcends national borders but is nonetheless committed to reflecting a certain kind of historical realism (in each case the multi-nationality did not extend to multi-ethnicity). The brutal realities of war form a constant visual backdrop, locating Macbeth’s bloodthirsty reign within a wider context of unremitting violence and self-serving political duplicities. Both directors problematise a Manichean reading of the play as the ultimate triumph of good over evil by casting attractive, sympathetic actors to play the ‘butcher’ and ‘his fiend-like queen’ (5.7.99), with particularly fragile Lady Macbeths in the figures of Francesca Annis (1971) and Marion Cotillard (2015). They portray the Macbeths, initially at least, as a loving married couple with visual indications of emotional and physical intimacy that exceed the parameters of Shakespeare’s text. Each film features a chilling coda, moreover, that suggests a continuation of the cycle of violence extending beyond the ending of the play’s narrative, and certainly beyond the deaths of the protagonists. It is in these codas, however, together with the addition of an opening frame-sequence featuring the burial of the Macbeth baby in Kurzel’s adaptation, that the most fundamental ideological difference between the two films is most clearly defined. It is also the point of departure that informs my argument that the representation of the child in Kurzel’s *Macbeth* is symptomatic of a major cultural shift in attitudes towards

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<sup>55</sup> Bob Franklin and Julian Petley, ‘Killing The Age Of Innocence’, p. 134.

<sup>56</sup> *Macbeth*, dir. Roman Polanski (Columbia Pictures, 1971); *Macbeth*, dir. Justin Kurzel (StudioCanal, 2015)

childhood as we move beyond the century of the child into far more disputed and uncertain territory.

Although both films end with the re-appearance of a child, Polanski's 'child', Donalbain, is in fact a child only in the generational definition of the word – Duncan's son but clearly no longer a young boy (the actor, Paul Shelley, was in fact 29 when he played Donalbain). When we see him disappearing into the lair of the weird sisters in the final moments of the film, we are left in no doubt that by returning to challenge his brother Malcolm for his murdered father's title, he will set in motion a continuation of the cycle of bloodshed and unrest first instigated by Macbeth. Kurzel's returning child, however, is not an adult, but Banquo's equally ambitious and embittered pre-pubescent son, Fleance, who, through a sequence of parallel scenes created through editing, is shown returning to challenge Macbeth's successor in a far more overtly hostile manner than the pageboy of Holmes's *Richard III*. Emerging from the blood-red smoke of the battle-field, the boy walks past Macbeth's motionless body and draws a sword from its position where it has been embedded, Excalibur-like, in the rocks. The sequence then cuts to show Malcolm alone and unguarded in his castle. His sword is sheathed, his crown is lying in its case, and his contented smile suggests that he is blissfully unaware of the impending danger. The final shot features Fleance running from the battlefield, sword held high above his head, mouth set in grim determination, the sound of his feet pounding rhythmically in time with his breathing. He is back, so this montage suggests, to fulfil the witches' prophecy and seize the crown by as violent and bloody means as Macbeth himself.

Although Kurzel seems to have followed Polanski in eschewing dramatic closure with this nihilistic glimpse into the future, he makes a significant change which has strong implications for the final message of his film. By replacing an adult Donalbain with a young Fleance he raises provocative questions about childhood and political agency, as well as foregrounding the role of

children as ambiguous bearers of futurity, both in this film and in the twenty-first-century environment of its release. Far from being the uncomplicated vulnerable innocents of Polanski's dramatic conception, the children in Kurzel's *Macbeth* are polysemous and multivalent. Both victims and perpetrators, slaughtered innocents and death-defying revenants, they are the janus-faced epitome of the 'foul' behind the 'fair' (1.1.11) that haunts this play and that were such a central feature of Boyd's three productions. This ambiguity is further complicated by Kurzel's opening frame-sequence, which shows the grieving Macbeths burning the body of their dead baby upon a funeral pyre. Unlike Polanski's youthful protagonists, for whom the question of securing the future is less urgent than enjoying the 'ignorant present' (1.5.55), Kurzel's Macbeths are in their late thirties/early forties, and time for securing their future, a future realised in the symbol of the child, is clearly running out.

This movement from representing the child in *Macbeth* as a one-dimensional fetishised object of pathos to a complex and contradictory nexus of hopes, fears and anxieties raises intriguing questions about shifting conceptualisations of childhood more widely. The figure of the child in all its various and multifarious manifestations has taken on an ever greater significance in productions of *Macbeth* since the release of Polanski's film in 1971. That Kurzel has made the child his central organising principle is therefore the culmination of a trend that has been gathering pace for several decades, as we saw in the first section of this chapter. The result is a complex and contradictory representation of childhood that parallels an increasingly conflicted attitude towards children in society more widely, and represents a general trend away from a sentimentalised depiction of childhood towards one which is, at best, ambivalent, and at worst, depressingly nihilistic.

Polanski's film was released in the immediate aftermath of the swinging sixties, reflecting a decade in which, as Deanne Williams observes, 'the dark side of the combination of boundless individualism and a powerful sense of collective purpose [...] characterized the youth culture' on

both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>57</sup> '[T]he sourness of the end of the Free Love era', as one reviewer observed, 'hangs over every scene like the smell of burnt flesh.'<sup>58</sup> In addition to capturing the 'dark side' of a period which saw the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the 1968 race riots and the horrors of the Vietnam war, Polanski's film bears disturbing traces of his own personal tragedy of 1969, when three female followers of Charles Manson broke into his house and brutally murdered Sharon Tate, the director's partner. She was eight months pregnant with his child at the time, giving the wording used to describe the Macduff's caesarean birth – 'from his mother's womb / Untimely ripped' (5.7.45-6) – a whole new and gruesome meaning. Against this backdrop of horror, it is not surprising that Polanski took the child in *Macbeth* and turned him into an emblem of victimhood. From Fleance, played by a thirteen-year-old Keith Chegwin, to the precocious son of Macduff and his slaughtered siblings, the children in this film are all fair, fragile and vulnerable – the epitome of what James R. Kincaid has dubbed the 'alluring child'. As is further explored in Chapter Three, this child, which Kincaid describes as 'bleached, bourgeois and androgynous', is a ubiquitous figure in Hollywood mainstream cinema.<sup>59</sup> Unthreatening and one-dimensional, the 'alluring child' is fetishised and idealised for the scopophilic pleasures of its audience. In fact, looking at the film from a twenty-first-century perspective, whose audiences are all-too-familiar with the consequences of sexualising children, it is striking just how fetishistic the portrayal of childhood is in Polanski's *Macbeth*.<sup>60</sup>

Polanski's Fleance is never presented as a threat to Macbeth and his crown, in spite of the witches' promise to Banquo. We first see him at the feast held in Duncan's honour at the Macbeth

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<sup>57</sup> 'Mick Jagger *Macbeth*', p. 146.

<sup>58</sup> Robbie Collin, 'Review of *Macbeth*', *Telegraph*, 19 Oct. 2015.

<sup>59</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence*, p. 20.

<sup>60</sup> Roman Polanski himself was detained and pleaded guilty to charges of unlawful sexual intercourse with a 13-year-old girl in 1977. He fled to Europe, where he remains, following a decision to refuse an extradition request by the United States legal authorities. For more details see Kate Harding, 'Reminder: Roman Polanski raped a child', *Salon*, 28 Sep. 2009 <[http://www.salon.com/2009/09/28/polanski\\_arrest/](http://www.salon.com/2009/09/28/polanski_arrest/)> [Accessed 7 August 2017]; and Kate Connolly, 'Roman Polanski freed from house arrest', *Guardian*, 12 July 2010.

castle. Child-like and charming, he drinks a cheeky sip of wine before cowering in fear when a sudden gust of wind blows the curtains. He then sings a courtly love song to entertain the diners, his sweet, unbroken voice soaring with the purity and piety of an angelic choirboy, while Duncan and his courtiers smile indulgently. From his fair hair, which hangs endearingly across his eyes and curls at his neck, to his under-developed body and open, questioning face, he is the image of childish guilelessness. Always shown by the side of his father, he appears younger than his thirteen years, and, unlike Kurzel's Fleance, is maintained as an uncomplicated symbol of childhood innocence throughout Polanski's film.

A comparison of the different ways in which the two directors treat the scene after the banquet at Macbeth's castle provides a clear exemplification of their contrasting approaches to representing Fleance. The scene (Act 2, Scene 1) begins with just Banquo and Fleance on stage. Shakespeare immediately establishes both the time of day and the fact that it is unusually dark in their opening dialogue:

|          |                                                                                                      |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| BANQUO:  | How goes the night, boy?                                                                             |
| FLEANCE: | The moon is down; I have not heard the clock.                                                        |
| BANQUO:  | And she goes down at twelve.                                                                         |
| FLEANCE: | I take 'tis later, sir.                                                                              |
| BANQUO:  | Hold, take my sword. There's husbandry in heaven;<br>Their candles are all out. Take thee that, too. |

(2.1.1-5)

Both Polanski and Kurzel represent this opening dialogue as a straightforward conversation between father and son, following the implied stage directions for the setting. It is what happens next that differentiates the two films most starkly, and is particularly significant for our understanding of the role of Fleance. In Polanski's film, Banquo switches from spoken speech to voiceover after line five, so that the next four lines are heard by the audience but, and this is crucial, *not* by Fleance:

A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,  
And yet I would not sleep. Merciful powers,  
Restrain in me the cursèd thoughts that nature  
Gives way to in repose.

(2.1.6-9)

Although it is not made explicit exactly what Banquo means when he mentions ‘heavy summons’ (2.1.6) and ‘cursèd thoughts’ (2.1.8), editors have tended to gloss these lines as a reference to his own guilty thoughts.<sup>61</sup> However, the sudden appearance of Macbeth at this point in Polanski’s film suggests a direct association between Banquo’s insomnia-inducing anxieties and the implied guilt of his host. This is further reinforced when Banquo describes Duncan’s ‘great largesse’ (2.1.14) towards both Macbeth’s servants and his wife, to whom he sends, via Banquo, a diamond as acknowledgement of her role as a ‘most kind hostess’ (2.1.16). It is a moment of dramatic irony that connects Banquo’s ‘cursèd thoughts’ with the murderous plans of the Macbeths. His own guiltlessness, in implied contrast to that of Macbeth, is emphasised some twenty lines later when he pointedly insists that he keeps his ‘bosom franchised and allegiance clear’ (2.1.28). The import of the Banquo-Macbeth exchange in this scene, with its simmering subtext of recriminations and threats, can only be fully appreciated in the context of Banquo’s earlier speech, particularly lines 6-9 quoted above. That Polanski chose to film these lines in voiceover suggests that he wanted to keep Fleance ignorant of Banquo’s suspicions. Indeed, during the subsequent exchange between Banquo and Macbeth, the boy looks blissfully unaware of the underlying tensions. His purity unsullied, Polanski’s Fleance can thus be presented as an innocent victim of Macbeth’s tyranny and a symbol of pity amid a world of self-serving adults.

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<sup>61</sup> Arden Shakespeare Third Series ed. by Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015) glosses ‘cursèd’ as ‘the guilt Banquo feels in recalling the Witches’ prophecies for him, or to the prophecies themselves’ (p. 172); Penguin Books edition ed. by George Hunter (London: Penguin, 1967; repr. with new ‘General Introduction and Chronology’, ‘Introduction’, ‘The Play in Performance’ and ‘Further Reading’, 2005) notes: ‘Just before the fatal deed Banquo is reintroduced beside Macbeth to highlight the central distinction between a moral will and a moralizing imagination’ (p. 118).

Although Kurzel, like Polanski, suggests in this exchange that Banquo's intentions are honourable, he makes a significant change to Banquo's 'heavy summons' speech that is fundamental to our understanding of the role of Fleance in his version of *Macbeth*. In contrast to Polanski's boy, whose vulnerability and innocence remains unchanged, Kurzel's Fleance undergoes a transformation from young boy to bloodthirsty avenger, and the first signs of this metamorphosis can be seen in this crucial scene. Rather than presenting Banquo's speech in voiceover, Kurzel films it as a direct exchange between father and son. That this is not an artistic but rather a dramatic choice is clear when we consider the extensive use of voiceover elsewhere in Kurzel's film. Many of Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's soliloquies, for instance, are spoken in voiceover. What Kurzel seems to be intending to convey in this exchange by filming it as a conversation is a level of understanding between father and son and an increasingly adult sense of 'knowingness' in the young Fleance. This is in stark contrast to Polanski's film, where the boy is deliberately kept in the dark. As Kurzel's Banquo articulates his 'heavy summons' and 'cursèd thoughts', the camera closes in on the face of Fleance. His expression is inscrutable, but the close-shot focus on his eyes intently watching his father suggests that he is absorbing and processing the import of Banquo's words. Rather than choosing to protect the innocence of his son, Kurzel's Banquo makes this speech tantamount to a warning against the 'cursèd thoughts' of a murderous Macbeth. The extent of Fleance's transformation does not become completely clear until the coda when he returns to challenge the throne. However, watching the film with this final scene in mind, it is clear that the seeds of change are sown in this short but crucial exchange.

I have argued that, in contrast to Kurzel's boy, Polanski's Fleance retains his innocence throughout the film. As noted by Katie Knowles, however, Polanski does appear, at first glance, to complicate this image of purity with a dream-sequence showing Fleance stealing the crown from a sleeping Macbeth.<sup>62</sup> This scene occurs directly after Macbeth has watched Banquo and his son leave

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<sup>62</sup> Katie Knowles, *Shakespeare's Boys*, p. 199.



on their riding expedition, and then given his hired assassins clear instructions to ensure that they do not return. Once the murderers have been dispatched, the camera follows Macbeth as he enters his chamber. He drains his goblet of wine, then walks unsteadily towards the bed, where he takes off his crown and lies down for a sleep. No sooner has he closed his eyes than a gust of wind blows the curtains (a reference to the banqueting scene where a similar gust saw Fleance cowering in fear), and the flame of the fire flickers ominously. Fleance then appears from below the foot of the bed dressed in hunting garb and, knocking away Macbeth's outstretched hand, places the crown on his own head while a smiling Banquo looks on approvingly. Fleance then straddles Macbeth's prone body and takes an arrow from a quiver slung across his back. He points the arrow suggestively at a terrified-looking Macbeth, and Banquo places a hand over his mouth. As Macbeth emerges from his nightmare, the hand over his mouth morphs into Lady Macbeth's hand, as she tries to stifle his screams of terror. For Knowles, the image of Fleance, 'the golden-headed child', parodying Macbeth's murder of Duncan in this manner epitomises Polanski's practice of problematising 'conventional assumptions about innocence and guilt, good and evil'. It is quite simply, she argues, the point at which we see 'innocence turning into evil' (199). Although I agree that it is probably intended to show Fleance as a threat, it is an hallucination originating from the same 'heat-oppressed brain' (2.1.39) that had earlier conjured up the imaginary dagger, and therefore says more about Macbeth's drink-addled and guilt-ridden mind than it does about Fleance himself. The threat, in other words, is a perception made manifest by Macbeth's over-active imagination rather than a reflection of reality.

Far more disturbing than Macbeth's nightmares of a would-be regicidal Fleance is the way in which the image of the child is made the object of a homoerotic dream-sequence. The only way in which this episode complicates the idea of children as symbols of purity is by showing how that symbol can be manipulated and sullied by the adults that control it. It is, I would contend, a highly eroticised scene that is more sexual than sinister – what James R. Kincaid terms a manifestation of

the child as a ‘field of desire’— as a closer analysis of the scene reveals.<sup>63</sup> As Fleance straddles Macbeth, the camera closes in upon his bouncing knees before moving up to his face as he raises one arm to retrieve an arrow from his quiver, his back arching suggestively as he does so. Dressed in an archer’s outfit with his golden locks curling at his neck, he looks like the human embodiment of Cupid. The camera then follows the point of the arrow – the source of erotic power in familiar iconography of Cupid – as he places it against Macbeth’s naked chest and uses it to pull the bedclothes down towards his groin.<sup>64</sup> It is at this point that Banquo’s restraining hand turns into that of Lady Macbeth and the two apparitions disappear. To further reinforce the sexual connotations of this scene, Lady Macbeth gently strokes Macbeth’s perspiring face and their lips almost touch as she admonishes him that ‘[t]hings without all remedy / Should be without regard’ (3.2.11-2). Less a premonition of regicide than an erotic dream-sequence, the homoerotic, if not paedophilic, overtones make for uncomfortable viewing. Fleance is less an agent of ‘innocence turning into evil’, as Knowles has argued, and more an object of the film-maker’s tendency towards scopophilia in this particularly sexualised version of *Macbeth*.

Many commentators have noted the overall voyeuristic texture of Polanski’s film, with its concentration of ritualistic violence, dismembered body parts, female nudity and bloody corpses.<sup>65</sup> Much of what has been written focuses on the sexualised nature of Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking scene, with writers repeatedly conflating the vision of a naked and vulnerable Francesca Annis with the erotic image of the film’s *Playboy* backers. Deanne Williams, for instance, remarks that her Lady Macbeth ‘would be as at home at a party at the Playboy Mansion as she would at a nudist

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<sup>63</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child Loving*, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> In famous artistic representations of Cupid, such as Raphael’s ‘The Triumph of Galatea’ (1512), or Caravaggio’s ‘Amor Vincit Omnia’ (1601-2) and ‘Sleeping Cupid’ (1608), the boy is naked with his genitalia on display. While Polanski’s Fleance is fully dressed, first in hunting costume and then in full armour (the change occurs between his appearance at the foot of the bed and the shot of him climbing onto the bed), the associations with these famous paintings are clear to see.

<sup>65</sup> See in particular Sara M. Deats, ‘Polanski’s *Macbeth*: A Contemporary Tragedy’, *Popular Culture Association in the South*, 9.1 (1986), 84-93; and Deanne Williams, ‘Mick Jagger *Macbeth*’.

beach' (p. 153), while one American film critic describes her as 'a spot-crazy Playboy bunny'.<sup>66</sup> However, the scopophilic attention to the body of the child, particularly in the scene of murder at Macduff's castle, has largely passed without remark. One notable exception is Kenneth Rothwell, who, writing in 1973, commented with remarkable *sang froid* that 'pederasts can feast on the naked body of MacDuff's young son' and that the sequence in totality is 'Polanski, or more accurately Shakespeare, at his best'.<sup>67</sup> From a twenty-first-century perspective, Rothwell's remarks seem inappropriately blithe. However, they reflect a reality that is all-too-clear in this sequence. What Polanski has created is in fact a far more bloody and gruesome spectacle than Shakespeare's text suggests, with the body of the child at its very centre. And as Rothwell's comments highlight, it is a body that epitomises Kincaid's erotico-fetishised child.

The scene opens with a shot of Macduff's son standing naked in a tin bath, wriggling from side to side as his mother pours water over his head. She then wraps him in a white towel and he sits by a blazing fire, the noise of children's voices playing somewhere in the distance. As the two murderers enter the room, the boy jumps up and shelters behind his mother, and the sound of giggling children is ominously replaced with heart-rending screams. The boy runs at one of the men and knees him in the groin. As he turns back to face Lady Macduff, he is stabbed in the back. He then staggers towards his mother, his face twisted in pain as he stutters 'He has killed me, mother' (4.2.80). A piercing scream sounds from another room in the castle. In the back of the shot, the second murderer can be seen slouching in a chair, watching with voyeuristic glee as the boy is wrenched from his mother's arms, and she flies from the room. The camera then follows her as she runs through the corridors of the castle, cutting between point-of-view shots and close shots of her horrified face as she registers the fire and carnage unfolding in each room. We see a maid being raped, a crucifix being burned, and hear the sounds of terrified screams rising above the plangent

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<sup>66</sup> Cited in Roman Polanski, *Roman* (London: Heinemann, 1984), p. 297.

<sup>67</sup> Kenneth Rothwell, 'Roman Polanski's *Macbeth*: Golgotha Triumphant', *Literature / Film Quarterly* 1 (1973), 71-5 (p. 74).

discords of the Third Ear Band soundtrack. Then the camera closes in on two of Lady Macduff's butchered children. Bloodied and naked, they lie abandoned, their heads flung back and their small bodies twisted and contorted like broken dolls.

In his autobiography, the director reports how a female member of one of the independent film rating committees objected to the violence of this scene, commenting that it was 'intolerable that "that nice little boy" should have been "savagely murdered"'.<sup>68</sup> In Polanski's defence, it is one of the only instances in Shakespeare where a child's death is dramatised on stage. In *Henry V*, *Richard III* and *The Winter's Tale*, for example, the deaths of the children are reported after the event, often in elevated language that is detached from the grim realities depicted in this scene at the Macduff castle. However, in his desire to make the violence 'realistic', declaring defiantly that he 'never believed in cop-outs', Polanski turned the body of the child into an object of the voyeuristic cinematic gaze (297). The children in this scene, in all their naked frailty, are defenceless and vulnerable. They are the 'naked newborn babe[s]' (1.7.21) who emblemise 'pity' but have no power to '[s]trid[e] the blast' (1.7.22) or 'blow the horrid deed in every eye' (1.7.24). As Bernice Kliman notes in her analysis of this scene, 'Polanski not only keeps the murder of the innocents in view but embellishes them'.<sup>69</sup> Shakespeare's bloodiest play, it seems, was not bloody enough for a man who was crafting a cinematic riposte to the horrors – personal and political – of the previous decade. And the figure of the child provided him with the ideal icon of pathos. From Fleance to the murdered Macduff babes, the children in Polanski's *Macbeth* are controlled and manipulated to become depersonalized objects of the cinematic gaze which at times borders on the disturbingly voyeuristic-scopophilic.

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<sup>68</sup> Roman Polanski, *Roman*, p. 297.

<sup>69</sup> Bernice Kliman, *Shakespeare in Performance: Macbeth* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 120-1.

The latest big-budget film of *Macbeth* directed by Justin Kurzel, released forty-four years after Polanski's film, takes a strikingly different approach to representing the child. From the opening frame-sequence to the closing montage, Kurzel's film is saturated with children – dead, alive, human and supernatural. He takes the all-pervasive trope of childhood in *Macbeth* and turns it into a visual image that permeates the landscape of his film. Not satisfied with merely doubling his three child actors to reflect the lighter and darker sides of childhood, like Boyd, he creates four new child characters that are not present in Shakespeare's text. These include the ghost of the Macbeth child, two companions to the witches and the figure of the damaged child-soldier who will haunt Macbeth to his death. Filmed on location in the bleak highlands of rural Scotland, the film's costumes, battle sequences and set-design meticulously capture the eleventh-century setting of the play. Yet without in any way compromising the overall feel of period authenticity, it is ideologically and psychologically a *Macbeth* for the twenty-first century, particularly in the multiple and contradictory ways in which it mobilises the symbol of the child.



Figure 10: dead baby in opening scene of Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015)

The film opens with a close-up on the body of a baby boy lying stiffly on his back, the blue-grey tinge of his skin indicating that he has been dead for some time (see Figure 10). The camera pulls back to reveal a crowd of mourners, their faces turned against the bitter winds blowing across the

barren landscape. A woman (Lady Macbeth) places a sprig of heather in his chubby fingers and a man (Macbeth) lays tiny rocks across his eyelids, before setting fire to the pyre upon which he has been laid. As the mourners gather to watch the flames flicker into life, the camera pans round and fixes on three women watching motionless from a distance. They loom into focus, and begin speaking the opening lines of Act 1, Scene 1 – ‘When shall we three meet again?’ (1.1.1) – and it becomes instantly clear that these eerie but real, flesh-and-blood women are in fact the three weird sisters. However, they are not alone: a baby lies sleeping in the arms of one of them, as though mocking the loss of the mourners they are silently observing, and a young pre-teen girl stands by their side, her face inscrutable as she watches the burning funeral pyre.

Russ McDonald describes *Macbeth* as having a ‘reiterative poetic texture’ that reverberates ‘not just immediately, but memorably, across several scenes’.<sup>70</sup> Although some reviewers have criticised the extensive excisions to the original text – Peter Kirwan, for instance notes that the textual decimation ‘removes much of the complexity and equivocation from the narrative’, while Philip Cu Unjieng observes that it is as ‘much about spectacle as it is about language and verse’ and thus ‘it would be incorrect to even call this a cinematic staging of the original play’ – Kurzel’s film takes this ‘reiterative poetic texture’ and turns it into a reiterative *visual* texture that is constructed entirely around a cluster of child-related symbols.<sup>71</sup> The ritualised slaughter of the Macduff family, for instance, recalls the opening frame-sequence as the mother and three children are tied to stakes and set alight on the heath in front of a watching crowd, including Lady Macbeth. Both the dead Macbeth child and the slain boy-soldier return as ghostly memories – ‘false creation[s], / Proceeding from the heat-oppressèd brain’ (2.1.38-9) – that haunt the Macbeths to their deaths. Macbeth’s ‘Is this a dagger’ soliloquy (2.1.33-64) is a response to a ghostly visitation from the dead

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<sup>70</sup> Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare’s Late Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 44, 47.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Kirwan, ‘*Macbeth* @ Hyde Park Cinema, Leeds’, *Bardathon* online, 5 October 2015 <<http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/bardathon/2015/10/05/macbeth-hyde-park-cinema-leeds/>> [accessed 2 August 2017]; Philip Cu Unjieng, ‘Shakespeare’s masterpiece by another name’, *The Philippine Star*, 25 January 2016 <<http://www.philstar.com/entertainment/2016/01/25/1545928/shakespeares-masterpiece-another-name>> [accessed 2 August 2017].

boy-soldier who holds the dagger just out of Macbeth's reach. The boy also re-appears in Act 4, Scene 1 in the guise of the weird sisters' apparition, telling Macbeth to '[b]e bloody, bold, and resolute' (4.1.78), and then again in the final sword-fight between Macduff and Macbeth as a silent observer. Like Jon Finch's Macbeth in Polanski's film, Fassbender's Macbeth is haunted by hallucinatory visions of children. However, there is one fundamental difference: Kurzel does not fetishise his children. They are silent witnesses, inscrutable observers and unsentimentalised symbols of loss and despair.

Perhaps one of Kurzel's greatest child-related innovations is realised in the sleep-walking



Figure 11: Marion Cotillard (Lady Macbeth) in Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015)

scene, which features Lady Macbeth seated on the floor of the chapel under a flurry of snowflakes, speaking the lines to a point just beyond the camera (see Figure 11). The scene is shot in close-up with an almost entirely static camera focused on the face of Lady Macbeth, whose head is draped, Virgin Mary-like, in a cloth head-dress. The reference to hagiographic images of Mary, such as the

1476 painting 'L'Annunciata' by Antonella Da Messina (see Figure 12), is clear to see. As though to further reinforce the analogy of the grieving mother whose dead child miraculously rises from the dead, the camera switches to a point-of-view shot at '[t]o bed, to bed, to bed' (5.1.61), and we finally see who she has been addressing throughout: it is the ghost of her dead child. He is sitting upright and looking alert, but his face and neck are covered in ominous-looking red spots which may be suggestive of typhus. There was, as René Weis explains, an epidemic of typhoid fever during the early decades of the seventeenth century, particularly in the Midlands, and it was thus possible that Kurznel was making this connection here. One reviewer has suggested that the spots on the child link him with Lady Macbeth's 'trauma' and her obsessive cleaning (in the sleep-walking scene she rubs her hands, trying to remove the spots of blood), and thus, he argues, indicts her for 'passivity in the face of fate'.<sup>72</sup> While I concur that a connection is being made here between the spots of Lady Macbeth and the spots on the child, I argue that it is less an indictment of her behaviour than an attempt to justify it. Just like the childless Lady Macbeths of Lloyd's and Kleczewska's productions, Cotillard's guilt is complicated with a backstory of maternal loss that both humanises and justifies her actions.

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<sup>72</sup> Tom Ue, 'Review of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*', *Shakespeare*, 12.4 (2016), 468-9 (p. 469).





Figure 12: 'L'Annunciata' by Antonella Da Messina (c. 1476)

While Lady Macbeth is haunted by memories of her dead baby, Macbeth is tortured by memories of warfare, made manifest in the figure of the ghostly boy-soldier. The battle scene begins with a shot of Macbeth tying a sword to the wrist of a young boy, played by a fourteen-year-old Scot Greenan, who looks like he is barely strong enough to lift it off the ground, let alone raise it in battle. Macbeth then daubs the boy's face in black war-paint and sends him off to face the enemy in a scene which, as Robbie Collin, writing in the *Telegraph*, remarks, 'is as gut-churning as anything in Polanski, with limbs severed and throats slit in transfixing slow motion'.<sup>73</sup> What Collin fails to mention, however, is that one of the slit throats belongs to this young soldier, and the full horrors are captured in agonizing slow-motion as the camera lingers voyeuristically on his face contorted in a silent scream. At the end of the 'hurly-burly' (1.1.3) of the battle, we see Macbeth lift

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<sup>73</sup> Robbie Collin, 'Review of *Macbeth*', *Telegraph*, 19 Oct. 2015.

the body of the boy and carry him over his shoulder. It is a sequence that recalls the moment in Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V* when Branagh carries the body of the pageboy across the battlefield to a rousing chorus of Patrick Doyle's 'Non Nobis' (1989).<sup>74</sup> However, there is no soaring musical accompaniment to Kurzel's citation of this scene, just the squelch of Macbeth's boots in the mud and the dull thump of the boy's body as it is dropped onto a mound of corpses. Later, as the 'Two truths are told' soliloquy (1.3.129-144) is spoken in voiceover, Macbeth is shown placing stones over the eyes of the boy-soldier, in an iteration of the opening scene. The loss of this boy-soldier is thus visually allied with the death of the Macbeths' child. However, there is one significant difference: there are no mourners at his funeral. He will, we can only presume, be buried in an anonymous mass grave or burned amid a pile of corpses. This new manifestation of childhood is an addition to Shakespeare's text but nonetheless consistent with the film's overall investment in deglamorising violence, and with its persistent mobilisation of the child-figure as a symbol for the larger themes of the film: loss, hopelessness and a past that will not stay buried.

By far the most ambiguous child in this film is Fleance, played by a young Lochlann Harris, who originally auditioned as an extra. One can only assume that this inexperienced actor was cast as Fleance for his natural guilelessness in front of the camera. He has the pretty features of Polanski's Fleance, but lacks his drama-school polish. He is, in other words, 'every child', and all the more worrying for it. He first appears in Act one, Scene Four to greet a war-weary Banquo, who envelops him in a loving embrace. Then, like the Fleance in Polanski's film, he is constantly featured at the side of his father, their obviously affectionate father-son relationship constantly mocking the barrenness of the Macbeths. The first sign that this boy might not be a simple portrayal of Shakespeare's Fleance, who does not re-appear after Act 3, Scene 3, comes when he is fleeing from his father's murderers. As he runs sobbing through the trees, the murderers hot on his heels, he reaches a small clearing and stops short. In front of him is the young girl-companion to the weird

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<sup>74</sup> *Henry V*, dir. Kenneth Branagh (Curzon Film Distributors, 1989).

sisters. The shot then switches to the murderers, who arrive at the clearing, pause, and look around in puzzlement. Both the boy and the girl have disappeared, '[m]elted as breath into the wind' (1.3.83).

Fleance re-appears in the final sequence with the hardened look of a soldier. He is no longer the charming and vulnerable young child, but an embittered avenger. As Rutter has argued, the return of Fleance is very much a recent innovation in productions of *Macbeth*, featuring in Gregory Doran's 1999 RSC production, Dominic Cooke's 2004 RSC revival, and John Caird's 2005 production for The Almeida Theatre. '[I]n today's *Macbeth*, *Macbeth* performed at the turn of the century that has "supped full with horrors"' (5.5.13), Rutter observes, 'the child who *survives* – the child Fleance – may be even more disturbing than the children who die'.<sup>75</sup> What was particularly disquieting about Kurzel's Fleance was the disjunction between the innocent young boy of the first half of the film and the proto-assassin who returns in the final scene. That a child could have the potential to be both innately innocent and innately evil seemed to run counter to all received ideas about the nature of children. Like the young pre-adolescent killers of James Bulger, this boy presents us with a paradox: that those most in need of our protection might also be those from whom protection is most required.

## Conclusion

As this analysis of recent adaptations of *Macbeth* has demonstrated, whether doubling as both innocent victims and demonic witches, functioning as emblems of victimhood, or metamorphosing from symbol of pity to avenging revenant, the children of *Macbeth* have been turned from textual ambiguities and a 'reiterative poetic texture' into a visual paradox that is both pitiful and terrifying.<sup>76</sup> Together, they reflect a dichotomous attitude to children that continues a trend dating

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<sup>75</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, p. 195.

<sup>76</sup> Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare's Late Style*, p. 44.

back at least as far as early modern discourse. However, in a modern, multimedia world dominated by soundbites and striking imagery, the narrative of a ‘childhood in crisis’ is embedded into social consciousness on such an unprecedented scale that, as Cunningham and many of his contemporaries claim, it feels like a narrative particular to modernity.<sup>77</sup> With his vision of the ubiquitous and polysemous children of *Macbeth*, Kurzel’s 2015 film seemed to confirm that the ‘century of the child’ is well and truly over and that we are entering into a new and uncertain era. If the children are, as we are constantly being told, our future, then in Kurzel’s world view it is a future dogged by uncertainty and fear, and Edelman’s politics of ‘reproductive futurism’ is already beginning to seem outdated.

Where both Kurzel and Boyd presented the child as the source of epistemological and ontological uncertainty – both innocent and evil, alien and familiar – Roman Polanski’s representations of childhood are, as we have seen, far less nuanced. A product of his time, and no doubt influenced by his own personal experiences, Polanski exploited associations of childhood with innocence to turn his children into icons of vulnerability and objects of the voyeuristic-scopophilic gaze. Although both Jamie Lloyd’s and Maya Kleczewska’s children were also, like Polanski’s, emblematic of hopelessness and despair, their productions avoided putting the body of the child on display by suggesting, rather than explicitly showing, the violence meted out to them. In line with Freud’s assertion that ‘*Macbeth* [...] is concerned with the subject of childlessness’, Lloyd and Kleczewska took the barrenness of the Macbeths and turned it into a commentary on a far wider social malaise.<sup>78</sup> The ‘disappearing’ children of their urban dystopias were symptomatic of a society facing an existential crisis, and their violent deaths signaled not just the end of Macbeth’s rule, but the end of society as we know it. Although widely varying in their approaches, then, these seven productions demonstrate the powerful dramatic potential of the children of

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<sup>77</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood*, p. 4.

<sup>78</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 266.

*Macbeth*. They have a combined speaking part of just twenty lines (in the character of Macduff's son), but the living, dead, metaphorical and hypothetical children of this play have the power to turn a mirror on society and show us our reflection – a reflection that is, in all seven cases, uncompromisingly bleak. For Polanski, Lloyd and Kleczewska, the children represent a future that is perilously under threat by a society ripped apart by violence, debauchery and neglect, while for Boyd and Kurzel, the message is far more complex and far more terrifying. Not only do they show us a society on the verge of self-destruction, but their children, far from being the guardians of the future, are in fact the agents of its annihilation.

The next chapter expands upon the theme of the child as emblem of futurity through an analysis of recent productions of *Titus Andronicus*. This is a play in which, unlike the ill-fated Macduff children of *Macbeth*, Mamilius in *The Winter's Tale*, the young princes in *Richard III* and Arthur in *King John*, to name but a few, the children do in fact survive. However, theirs is a future that is by no means clear and they are, in ways that recall the metaphoric and absent children of *Macbeth*, ambiguous and polysemous signifiers. How directors account for these children reflects a shift in attitudes towards childhood, its sustainability and its presumed innocence – a presumption that, as we will see, becomes harder to convincingly sustain as we reach the end of the twentieth century.

## Chapter Three

### **‘Behold the child’: Death, Salvation and the Burden of Futurity in *Titus Andronicus***

*Titus Andronicus* is replete with ambiguities. Paradoxical semantics, disjunctive generic juxtapositions and unresolved questions surrounding authorship and sources make this play notoriously difficult to categorise.<sup>1</sup> Even the closing speeches lack conviction. Marcus rhetorically constructs Rome as a body, whose ‘broken limbs’ can be healed and made ‘into one’ (5.3.71), yet he is surrounded by mutilated corpses that seem to mock his metaphor of bodily unity with their vivid corporeal presence. Lucius’s final couplet, with its repetition of ‘pity’, moreover, is a rejection rather than an appeal for this cathartic emotion when he says of Tamora: ‘[h]er life was beastly and devoid of pity, / And, being dead, let birds on her take pity’ (5.3.198-99). That a recently published collection of essays is titled *Titus out of Joint* is symptomatic of a critical move towards recognizing and celebrating what the editors call the ‘inherently dissonant’ nature of the play.<sup>2</sup> Yet while this volume explores *Titus Andronicus* as a ‘fragmented text’ from a range of different perspectives, exploring, among other topics, the maimed male body and religious iconoclasm, it fails to acknowledge the most ambiguous and polysemous signifier in this play: the child and his function as a (problematic) icon of futurity (p. 5). Of course, many aspects of this play’s dissonances can be attributed to the influence of Seneca, Thomas Kyd and the revival of the revenge genre in the 1580/90s. Mutilations, feigned insanity, injustice, corruption, multiple deaths, a sense of futility and an unsatisfactory resolution are all characteristics of this genre. However, the ways in which Shakespeare mobilises the figure of the child as a way of highlighting the genre’s inherent contradictions is particularly unique and

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<sup>1</sup> For a full analysis of the authorial debate and discussion of sources and influences see Jonathan Bate, ‘Introduction’, in *Titus Andronicus*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series ed. by Jonathan Bate, (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2003), pp. 79-92 and William W. Weber, ‘Shakespeare After All?: The Authorship Of *Titus Andronicus* 4.1 Reconsidered’, *SS*, 67 (2014), 69-84.

<sup>2</sup> Liberty Stanavage and Paxton Hehmeyer, ‘Introduction’, in *Titus out of Joint: Reading the Fragmented Titus Andronicus*, ed. by Liberty Stanavage and Paxton Hehmeyer (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), p. 5.

worthy of closer attention. From symbolic associations of the womb with malevolent maternity and cannibalistic consumption to the ‘light-bearing’ Young Lucius and the bastard issue of an ‘irreligious Moor’ (5.3.120), childhood as a regenerative force is continually invoked only to be undermined in an insistent counter-narrative of doubt and obfuscation.

In the final scene, Aaron’s baby is held aloft for public display by Marcus, who invites the watching Goths and Romans to ‘[b]ehold the child’ (5.3.118). This is the last reference to the infant, whose existence to this point has been the subject of a series of barter and exchanges, and his fate remains ultimately unresolved. The last appearance of Young Lucius sees him sobbing over his dead grandfather, Titus, choked by tears and unable to speak ‘for weeping’ (5.3.173). Instructed by Marcus to ‘[b]id him farewell. Commit him to the grave’ (5.3.169), the boy instead wills his own death in exchange for the life of his grandfather with the words ‘[w]ould I were dead, so you did live again!’ (5.3.172). These are sentiments normally associated with grieving parents not grieving children and are symptomatic of the play’s subversion of ‘natural’ orders, both in the social and private realms. As successor to the empery and the only surviving Andronicus grandchild, Young Lucius is thus at best a problematic symbol of Rome’s future.

Taking these ambiguities as a prism through which to analyse childhood and futurity in *Titus Andronicus*, this chapter will explore different directorial attempts at resolving, or further complicating, these unresolved issues in performance. In order to acknowledge the generically unstable and contextually diverse responses to this play, I concentrate on three productions across the mediums of stage, film and television. The chapter is divided into two subsections organised by genre. In the first section I consider Deborah Warner’s 1987 stage production for the RSC, which was the first recorded full-text performance of this play in the twentieth century and was staged with minimal set and stage properties in the intimate space of the newly built

Swan Theatre.<sup>3</sup> I argue that, although Warner did not shy away from displaying the excesses of violence and black humour in the play, hers was a strongly patriarchal representation of Roman society and her marginalised characters (principally Lavinia and Young Lucius) were kept firmly in the margins. The putative ‘innocence’ of the child in this version was preserved by simply avoiding the question altogether. Not only was her Young Lucius a minor character on the periphery of the action, but he was played by an adolescent male actor rather than a child, while Aaron’s son was a self-evident prop rather than a real or simulated baby. Staged before the debate about the changing nature of childhood had fully taken hold, the question of a childhood in crisis was clearly not a question that Warner felt needed to be addressed.

Next I explore two filmed productions of the play: Jane Howell’s 1984 BBC Television Shakespeare production and Julie Taymor’s 1999 cinematic adaptation, *Titus*. Both directors chose to film the play as though through the eyes of the child. However, the 15 years between the release of these versions was a key period in terms of shifting attitudes towards childhood, as we have seen, and the different ways in which the two directors interpret what and how the child sees are symptomatic of this shift. Howell foregrounds the character of Young Lucius, but makes him an unwitting observer of the horrors. By framing the narrative through the eyes of this young witness, I argue that Howell provides a stark warning about the self-destructive nature of revenge while preserving childhood as a blameless, albeit irrevocably tainted, state. The ‘innocence’ of Young Lucius – a given rather than a question in Howell’s interpretation – is only tainted by what he *sees* not by what he *does*. Julie Taymor’s *Titus* also uses Young Lucius as a witness with an interpolated opening and closing frame and a considerable enlargement of his role. However, far from being a horrified witness and proxy for the audience, as in Howell’s version, this child is implicated in the violence from the start. Filmed at a time when the debate about the future of

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<sup>3</sup> The only amendment Warner made was to translate ‘Terras Astraea reliquit’ (4.3.4) into English. See Alan C. Dessen, *Titus Andronicus: Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 58.



childhood had already attained widespread cultural and political purchase, Taymor's adaptation addresses the question head on, but is frustratingly noncommittal in its conclusions. Drawing upon multi-media filming techniques and intertextual allusions, Taymor's *Young Lucius* is presented as a child already corrupted by exposure to the very videocentric technology she employs and thus a highly questionable symbol of salvation. The ending seems to suggest that the boy has attained enlightenment as he walks from the horrors of the Colosseum into a bright sunset, bearing the child of Aaron in his arms. However, it is unclear whether this in fact heralds a new dawn for civilisation or a mere continuation of the play's unremitting cycle of violence. Although far less overtly pessimistic than the ending of Kurzel's film of *Macbeth*, which shows the child as an unequivocal sign of destruction in the figure of an avenging Fleance, Taymor's *Titus* betrays a pessimism that, as we shall see, the director herself tried but failed to completely resist. Taken together, these stage and film productions demonstrate the ambiguity of the child in the text and the difficulties directors face in resolving those ambiguities in performance. While Warner avoided the issue by casting a young man in the part of Young Lucius and replacing Aaron's baby with a doll, Howell and Taymor turned the ambiguities into a means by which to frame and present their adaptations. The different results reveal a shift in attitudes towards childhood during the fifteen years separating these films: from a residual belief in the innocence of the child towards an ambivalence bordering on despair.

### **3a. Where Are All The Children? Avoiding the Issue in Deborah Warner's *Titus Andronicus* (1987)**

Of the three mediums under consideration, theatre, film and television, it is widely believed that theatre provides the greatest platform for radical interventions.<sup>4</sup> Although theatre's exclusive claim to interventionism has been refuted by, among others, Philip Auslander, this still remains a critical

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<sup>4</sup> See for instance Peggie Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993) and, less emphatically, Susan Sontag, 'Film and Theatre', *The Tulane Drama Review* 11.1 (1966), 24-37.

commonplace.<sup>5</sup> It is true that theatre is a form that has traditionally been used to hold prejudices and preconceptions up for analysis, questioning normative hegemonic paradigms and fostering anti-establishment feeling. However, in the case of *Titus Andronicus*, a play that was not staged without extensive adaptation for 300 years, theatre's experimental status is less certain.<sup>6</sup> Howell's BBC Television adaptation, for instance, filmed two years before Warner's stage production, offers a more subversive account than Warner's. Yet, the very fact of staging *Titus Andronicus* at this time and in this context can be seen as a bold and radical move in itself, particularly as, unlike Howell, Warner's production was not part of a larger project. It is perhaps no coincidence that it was part of the same season as Di Trevis's revival of Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, also staged in the Swan Theatre to critical acclaim. Like Warner, Trevis was lauded for capturing the 'nasty and hilarious' elements of the revenge tragedy genre, setting the tone for a rush of revivals of this previously neglected play.<sup>7</sup>

When later directors such as Lucy Bailey (2006) and Michael Fentiman (2014) came to stage their productions of *Titus Andronicus*, revenge tragedy, with its bloodthirsty excesses and emphasis on the macabre, had already become established as a relevant and vital form for a twenty-first-century audience. Moreover, the rise of playwrights such as Mark Ravenhill and Sarah Kane and 'in-yr-face theatre' in the 1990s had gone some way towards normalising the staging of shocking and confrontational material. The success of films such as Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*, *True Romance* and *Kill Bill*, not to mention Taymor's *Titus*, had also created an appetite for stylised

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<sup>5</sup> See Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Brook's seminal production in 1955 for the RSC marked the re-launch of this play for the modern audience. It was a pared-back production (a total of 650 lines were cut) with stylised violence and a ritualistic aesthetic.

<sup>7</sup> John Peter, 'Taming the Text with Intelligence', *Sunday Times*, 13 September 1987. After a hiatus following Trevor Nunn's 1966 production of *The Revenger's Tragedy* for the RSC, Di Trevis's 1987 RSC revival was followed by four productions in the 1990s, and three since 2010. Following Deborah Warner's revival of *Titus Andronicus*, there were two further productions at the RSC: a production directed by Bill Alexander in 2003 and Yukio Ninagawa's touring production in 2006.

violence and black humour in the cinema that was crossing over into the theatre. Within this larger cultural context of aestheticising violence while simultaneously maintaining its capacity to shock, the excesses of *Titus Andronicus* did not seem so out of place on the Globe and RSC stages.<sup>8</sup> As a result, it no longer ranks among the more neglected of Shakespeare's plays and has lost its stigma as a risky venture for a director, although reviewers still sometimes treat it as such.

Undoubtedly, one of the main reasons for *Titus Andronicus*'s relatively sparse stage history is a formal and generic structure that resists easy translation into modern theatrical practices as they pertain to 'classic' texts. Steeped in the revenge tradition of the 1590s, the play veers from the tragic to the comic, the grotesque to the poetic, juxtaposing moments of Senecan sensationalism with elevated Ovidian rhetoric. To a modern audience unfamiliar with the mythological allusions and the overt generic instability of *Titus Andronicus*, both of which are, as Jonathan Bate demonstrates, attributable to the play's Ovidianism, the extremes of tragedy and comedy risk inviting inappropriate and unwelcome laughter.<sup>9</sup> Warner managed the tragi-comic elements by emphasising and revelling in their dramatic excesses. Pre-empting inappropriate laughter with slapstick or absurdly grotesque stage business, she permitted viewers, like Titus himself when confronted with the heads of his two dead sons, to laugh in the face of tragedy.<sup>10</sup> This is underscored in the play when Marcus responds to Titus's inappropriate outburst of hysterics with: 'Why dost thou laugh? It fits not with this hour' (3.1.264). At this point, Warner's Brian Cox laughed maniacally for a full ten seconds, prompting reflexive laughter from the audience.<sup>11</sup> An invitation to laugh at 'the supposedly pitiful and wretched' in this way, as Bridget Escolme

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<sup>8</sup> Quentin Tarantino, *Reservoir Dogs*, dir. Quentin Tarantino (Miramax Films, 1992); *True Romance*, dir. Tony Scott (Warner Bros Pictures, 1993); *Kill Bill Vols 1 and 2*, dir. Quentin Tarantino (Miramax Films, 2003, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 172.

<sup>10</sup> One notable instance of this grotesquerie was Brian Cox's Titus entering in Act 5 dressed in a chef's outfit to a chorus whistling 'Heigh-ho' from the 1937 animated Disney film of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, dir. David Hand and others (RKO Radio Pictures, 1937).

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Bate makes this observation in *Titus Andronicus*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series, p. 204, n. 265. In the recording I viewed in the archives, I can confirm that Cox did indeed laugh for a full ten seconds.

explains, underscores the role of the audience in the theatrical exchange by creating what she terms ‘communities of laughter.’<sup>12</sup> It is a dramatic device that announces itself *as* a device, deliberately drawing attention to the artifice of the theatrical experience through exaggeration and excess. But many reviewers were sceptical about the extreme tonal changes. They were almost unanimous in their denunciation of the sanitised display of ‘monotonously casual’ murder and ‘Hammer horror’-style absurdity which, they argued, precluded any empathic emotional response.<sup>13</sup> The *Independent*’s Andrew Rissik, for instance, remarked that ‘we do not laugh, but we do not cry either’.<sup>14</sup> The use of the inclusive ‘we’ indicates that Rissik’s response to what Cox called the ‘get people to laugh, and then kick them’ approach was, in Rissik’s judgement at least, shared by his fellow audience members.<sup>15</sup> The effect of this abrupt change in tone seemed to create, and then deconstruct, what Escolme calls the ‘communities of laughter’. Warner’s production asked its audiences to empathise with Cox’s Titus, but his performance did not invite an uncomplicated sympathetic response, particularly in its female members.

For Warner, dramatic focus was clearly centred on Titus and his tragic trajectory, with all other characters, particularly the women and children, relegated to the margins. In *Shakespeare’s Violated Bodies*, Pascale Aebischer uses *Titus Andronicus* and the textual aestheticisation of Lavinia’s dismembered body as a touchstone for exploring stage and film representations of marginalised characters in a number of Shakespeare’s plays. In relation to Warner’s production, she observes that, in spite of Sonia Ritter’s ‘powerfully assertive performance’ of Lavinia and her ‘ongoing resistance to attempts to limit her self-expression’, the story of her violated body was nonetheless subsumed into the larger narrative of Titus and *his* mental and physical suffering.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bridget Escolme, *Emotional Excess*, pp. 58-78.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Hurren, ‘Review of *Titus Andronicus*’, *Mail on Sunday*, in *LTR*, 7.10 (1987), 635.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Rissik, *Independent*, ‘Review of *Titus Andronicus*’, in *LTR*, 7.10 (1987), 635.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Cox, ‘*Titus Andronicus*’, in *Players of Shakespeare 3*, ed. by Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 174-188 (p. 188).

<sup>16</sup> Pascale Aebischer, *Shakespeare’s Violated Bodies: Stage and Screen Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 45.

Reading Brian Cox's self-referential account of his performance in *Players of Shakespeare*, it is difficult to counter Aebischer's assertion that he saw Lavinia as a 'supporting character [...] whose main function was to buttress his own performance of mental and physical pain' (p. 46). Writing of his decision to kill Lavinia while she is seated on his lap in a position of infantilised vulnerability (he talks of Lavinia throughout this account in terms of her defencelessness, likening her to 'a little child' and 'a little animal'), Cox describes her death as an instance of 'man's ludicrous journey through life'.<sup>17</sup> He is not writing here of 'man' in the universal, humanist sense, but, as becomes clear from reading the whole piece, he is referring specifically to one man, the only character who really mattered in this production – Titus himself. This attitude was reflected in many of the critical reviews. Charles Osborne, for instance, placed Brian Cox's 'uncannily [...] moving and funny' performance squarely at the centre of his article, remarking that '[t]he younger members [of the cast ...] are lucky to be engaged by a professional theatre company as prestigious as the RSC'.<sup>18</sup> His critical marginalisation of the 'younger' actors here colludes with and reinforces their equivalent marginalisation in performance. Other reviews exonerated Titus the tragic hero from any responsibility in the deaths of his own children. One such example is Michael Billington's comment that 'you [...] sense he is a concerned father'.<sup>19</sup> His use of the second-person pronoun here presumes a uniform response that takes no account for audience individuation, least of all for the many women who might have been watching alongside him or reading his review. Michael Coveney of the *Financial Times* was even more provocative, remarking that Lavinia's death was 'the merciful release of a young girl who has lived too long'.<sup>20</sup> Merciful for Titus, perhaps, but less so for the hapless Lavinia. Seduced by Cox's portrayal of Titus as a man 'more sinned against than sinning', these critics were instrumental in perpetuating the narrative of *Titus Andronicus* as the tragedy of one man. The result was a subordination of all other characters, particularly Lavinia and the two children, to the tragic trajectory of the eponymous hero.

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<sup>17</sup> Brian Cox, *Players of Shakespeare*, p. 177.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Osborne, 'Review of *Titus Andronicus*', *Telegraph*, in *LTR*, 7.10 (1987), 636.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Billington, 'Review of *Titus Andronicus*', *Guardian*, in *LTR*, 7.10 (1987), 637.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Coveney, 'Review of *Titus Andronicus*', *Financial Times*, in *LTR*, 7.10 (1987), 636.

There is some justification for Warner's decision to focus dramatic attention on Titus. From a purely textual point of view, Young Lucius and the bastard child are, like Lavinia, marginalised and manipulated by the adult characters. They are commodified: Aaron's baby is passed from Tamora to Aaron via the nurse, before being taken into captivity by a Goth. He is then passed to Lucius, threatened with hanging, and then held aloft by Marcus. They are, moreover spoken of in possessive terms. Aaron calls his son a 'black slave' (4.2.119), 'my flesh and blood' (4.2.83) and 'the vigor and the picture of my youth' (4.2.107), while both Lucius and Titus refer to Young Lucius as 'my boy' (4.1.110, 114). They are idealised: Young Lucius is variously referred to as 'tender' (3.2.48 and 50), 'loving' (5.3.166) and 'sweet' (5.3.169) and is instructed to 'melt in showers' (5.3.160) at the sight of his dead grandfather, while Lucius constructs an idyllic history of grandfather and son that is at odds with the play's dramatisation of their relationship: 'Thy grandsire loved thee well. / Many a time he danced thee on his knee, / Sung thee asleep, his loving breast thy pillow' (5.3.160-2).<sup>21</sup> Aaron, in turn, refers to his baby as a 'beauteous blossom' (4.2.72) and a 'treasure' (4.2.172), offering to lay down his own life to preserve the future of his son. However, in tension with this idealisation of childhood innocence is a desire to mould the two boys into miniature warriors: Young Lucius is ordered to carry arms to the court (4.1.113-117) and instructed how to shoot arrows (4.3.64-5), while Aaron vows to turn his son into an avenging soldier with the words 'I'll [...] bring you up / To be a warrior and command a camp' (4.2.178-9). Both bargaining tools and objects of affection, vulnerable children and warriors-in-training, symbols of futurity and emblems of an idealised past, Young Lucius and the baby are an amalgam of the shifting and contradictory anxieties, fantasies, fears and desires of the adult characters in this play.

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<sup>21</sup> Act Three, Scene Two refers here to the fly-killing scene which appears in the Folio but not the Quarto texts. *The Norton Shakespeare* respects the integrity of the Quarto text and therefore omits this scene. For citation purposes, when I refer to this scene I use *Titus Andronicus*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series.

The fly-killing episode in Act 3, Scene 2 is a key moment in the play that provides instructive insights into the various productions' investment in the figure of the child and the correlative issue of futurity. Absent from the earlier Quarto editions, this scene made its first appearance in the 1623 First Folio, leading some scholars to question its provenance.<sup>22</sup> In addition to scholarly debate about the origins of this interpolated scene as a whole, there is editorial discrepancy in the interpretation of the line: 'But? How: if that Flie had a father and mother?' Some modern editions – notably the Oxford texts, both single edition and *Complete Works* – have emended it to read: 'How if that fly had a father, brother?'<sup>23</sup> Changing the wording from 'and mother' to 'brother' makes clearer sense of the following lines: 'How would he hang his slender gilded wings / And buzz lamenting doings in the air' (3.2.62-3). As Jonathan Bate remarks in his textual notes, '[w]ho is "he"? Not the fly which has been swatted, but the father, who is Titus's surrogate.'<sup>24</sup> Two out of the three productions under consideration here follow the more widely accepted 'father and mother' – indeed, Howell cites this as a 'key and crucial line', 'a lynchpin' for her interpretation of the whole play – but none emend the singular pronoun 'he' of the following line to read 'they'.<sup>25</sup> Howell does not elaborate upon why she found the line so 'key and crucial', but I assume it is because the swatting of the fly is emblematic of the arbitrariness of the violence that permeates this play. In referencing the imagined laments of the dead fly's 'father and mother', Titus not only anthropomorphises the fly, but also implicitly humanises the ritualistic and cold-blooded violence inflicted on sons, daughters, sisters and brothers throughout *Titus Andronicus*. Given the importance of this line to Howell's understanding of the play, then, it is all the more surprising that she did not change 'he' to 'they'. The disjunction between the plural 'father and mother' of line 61 and the singular pronoun 'he' of

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<sup>22</sup> 'First Folio' refers here and throughout to *Mr. VVilliam Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London, 1623). See bibliography for full *Richard III* quarto 1-3 references. Bate, 'Introduction', in *Titus Andronicus*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series, pp. 117-121.

<sup>23</sup> *Titus Andronicus*, Oxford Shakespeare, ed. by Eugene M. Waith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by John Jowett and others, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Bate, 'Introduction', in *Titus Andronicus*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series, p. 120.

<sup>25</sup> Jane Howell cited in Henry Fenwick, 'The Production', in *Titus Andronicus: The BBC TV Shakespeare*, (London: British Broadcasting House, 1986), pp. 17-27 (p. 17).

line 62 retrospectively removes the maternal subject from the imaginary fly family altogether. It is notable that, of all the productions, it was Warner who chose to emend 'and mother' to 'brother', thereby denying any acknowledgement of the role of maternity in Titus's (and Warner's) androcentric conceptualisation of the family. It is a small matter, perhaps, but this textual anomaly is symptomatic of a play that recalls only to dismiss, and finally destroy, not just this mother but *all* mothers (Tamora, the anti-mother who orders the death of her own baby; the midwife and the nurse, the surrogate mothers; and Lavinia, the potential mother) within the family paradigm.

Textual debates notwithstanding, this scene has become an important moment of revelation in performance, displaying in microcosm the play's precarious balance of pity and cruelty, terror and humour, madness and clear-headed sanity. In Shakespeare's text, it is Marcus who explodes in this sudden and unexpected act of aggression. A strong visual and visceral reaction, it throws into high relief his earlier, aestheticised and, for modern audiences at least, alienating Petrarchan response to Lavinia's dismemberment, complicating his characterisation as a conciliatory counterbalance to Titus's impetuous excitability. It also acts as dramatic contrast to the exchange between Titus and Young Lucius immediately preceding this, which sees the grandfather exhorting his weeping grandson to desist from self-destructive displays of pity with the words: 'Peace, tender sapling, thou art made of tears, / And tears will quickly melt thy life away' (3.2.50-1). Of the three productions under consideration here, Warner and Howell remained faithful to the text and left these lines to be spoken by Marcus, while Taymor re-assigned them to Young Lucius with significant consequences. The identity of the fly-killer is of central significance not least because it proleptically links the perpetrator to Aaron, who declares, '[b]ut I have done a thousand dreadful things / As willingly as one would kill a fly' (5.1.141-2), and thus dismantles binary oppositions of race, colour and morality. It has also proved in production to be an important precursor of the final scene, both in terms of the play's overall attitude towards childhood and futurity, and its movement towards (or away from) dramatic closure.



In Warner's production, this scene was clearly designed to give Brian Cox the opportunity to showcase his masterful comic timing as the impetuous and mercurial Titus, with Young Lucius and Lavinia taking subordinated roles. Although it was in fact Marcus who first stabbed the fly, in accordance with the text, he too was relegated to the margins in this scene. Maximising the tragicomic absurdity of the situation, Brian Cox's Titus displayed what Stanley Wells called an instance of 'masterly acting' as he demonstrated the full gamut of emotions from moralistic outrage to manic ferocity.<sup>26</sup> Stuffing bread into his mouth as though to forcibly repress a verbal outpouring of emotion, he leapt across the table, scattering food and cutlery, and viciously stabbed repeatedly at the dead fly with his one good hand. It was a moment of unadulterated rage that, while comedic in its sheer excessiveness, was nonetheless poignant and pathos-ridden. As Billington noted in his review for the *Guardian*, the combination of 'quirky, senescent humour' and 'tremendous bottled danger' demonstrated in this scene was symptomatic of a production that provoked laughter in the midst of terror.<sup>27</sup> Young Lucius and Lavinia, in contrast, functioned as merely silent observers. Seated on either side of the table and flanking Titus, they looked on as he lamented and cowered as he raged, while Marcus stepped back from the table in horror at the reaction he had provoked in his brother. When Titus leapt across the table, all three characters threw themselves out of his way, like comic stooges to his slapstick routine. That they should be subordinated to Titus's performance in this way was consistent with the production's overall marginalisation of the secondary characters, all of whom were destined to be subsumed into the larger narrative of the tragic hero.

Perhaps to avoid the distracting presence of a child on the stage and thus keep focus clearly on her central character, Warner cast an eighteen-year-old actor, Jeremy Gilley, in the role of Young Lucius (presumably one of those 'younger members [...] lucky to be engaged by a professional

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<sup>26</sup> Stanley Wells, 'Shakespeare Performances in London and Stratford-upon-Avon, 1986-7', *SS*, 41 (1989), 159-182 (p. 180).

<sup>27</sup> Michael Billington, 'Review of *Titus Andronicus*', *Guardian*, in *LTR*, 7.10 (1987), 637.

theatre company as prestigious as the RSC’).<sup>28</sup> Gilley was already an established member of the RSC repertory players and not particularly child-like in his appearance or demeanour (see Figure 13 below). Although scholars such as David Kathman have argued that the boy-characters in the early modern playing companies were almost certainly played by adolescent apprentices ‘no younger than twelve and no older than twenty-one or twenty-two, with a median of around sixteen or seventeen’, acting styles and audience expectations were very different to today.<sup>29</sup> As Catherine Belsey explains, presentation was valued over mimeticism and the child characters were ‘not inevitably childish in the modern sense of the term’.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the disjunction between the age of the actor and the age of the character would not have been as unsettling for an early modern audience as it would be today.



Figure 13: Jeremy Gilley (Young Lucius) in Deborah Warner’s *Titus Andronicus* (1987)

<sup>28</sup> Charles Osborne, ‘Review of *Titus Andronicus*’, 636.

<sup>29</sup> David Kathman, ‘How Old were Shakespeare’s Boy Actors?’, *SS*, 58 (2005), 220-246 (p. 240). See also Catherine Belsey: ‘[n]o evidence exists of any apprentices in the adult companies under 11 or 12 years old, though it is possible that little boys acted on stage before they were bound’, ‘Shakespeare’s Little Boys: Theatrical Apprenticeship and the Construction of Childhood’, in *Rematerializing Shakespeare: Authority and Representation on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. by Brian Reynolds and William N. West (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 53-72 (p. 61).

<sup>30</sup> Catherine Belsey, ‘Shakespeare’s Little Boys: Theatrical Apprenticeship and the Construction of Childhood’, in *Rematerializing Shakespeare: Authority and Representation on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. by Brian Reynolds and William N. West (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 53-72, (p. 63). As he is given the title of ‘Boy’, Young Lucius the character is unlikely to be older than fourteen, which was often considered the beginning of adolescence. See Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queen’s Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 39-40.

Underplaying the childishness of Young Lucius in this way was a particularly interesting decision in the light of the RSC's 1986 production of *Macbeth* directed by Adrian Noble which made the young Macduff children central to the dramatic action as discussed in Chapter Two. The exploration of the darker side of childhood in this production of *Macbeth* was far closer to Taymor's dramatic vision than Warner's, whose Young Lucius might have been more appropriately renamed 'Lucius Junior'. He was not set apart from the other actors by marked age difference indicated by an unbroken voice, childish dress, or youthful demeanour, but appeared to be of a similar age to the late-adolescent Chiron and Demetrius and Lavinia. As a result, his presence on-stage was far less phenomenologically disruptive, as argued by Ridout and States, than if he had been a young child. When lined up with the other archers in Act 4, Scene 3 he blended seamlessly in with the adults, his deep voice, close-shaved head and manly stance marking him out as a warrior-in-waiting rather than an impressionable child. Unlike Taymor, Warner did not re-assign the fly-killing episode from Marcus to Young Lucius, preferring instead to keep the boy's presence in this pivotal scene marginal. In fact, the failure of major reviewers to mention either Young Lucius or Aaron's bastard son in their analyses of this production is testament to just how unremarkable the two characters were in Warner's dramatic vision of the play.

Although Warner's promptbook states that, when Lucius gestures for his son to approach Titus's corpse at 'Come hither, boy' (5.3.159), Young Lucius 'goes to kiss Titus then draws away', he did not in fact recoil (at least not in the archive recording I watched) but silently acquiesced.<sup>31</sup> It is impossible to determine whether this change in stage business was a conscious decision by the director or something that the actor himself adopted, or indeed whether it happened on every performance or merely on the one recorded for the archives. However, what it does show is that *somebody* decided at some point that it was more in keeping with the characterisation of Young Lucius to obediently follow rather than undermine the Andronicus revenge ethic. More akin to

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<sup>31</sup> *Titus Andronicus* (1987), promptbook held in SBT, Stratford-upon-Avon.

Young Martius (the ‘martial’ son of Coriolanus) than the ‘light’-bearing Young Lucius, this adolescent soldier did not symbolise an idealistic vision of futurity but rather a future doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. Indeed, when viewed from a 2017 perspective, Warner’s Young Lucius was uncannily proleptic. Watching him on the archival recording, I was struck by the similarities with contemporary media images of Jihadi youths posing alongside their Islamic State warrior fathers. Depressingly prophetic though this man-boy proved to be, however, he did not disturb the central focus of this production. On the contrary, he was seamlessly assimilated into a family dynasty of butchers – bloodthirsty, merciless and blindly self-serving.

A different, but no less marginalising device was used to portray the bastard child of Aaron. Where Warner eschewed the problematics of casting a young child in the part of Young Lucius by presenting him as a young adult, she sidestepped the potentially disruptive issue of the baby and his ambiguous presence in the final scene by self-consciously displaying him as a generic doll. Although the baby is a mute presence on the stage, Shakespeare’s deictic language ensures that the audience’s attention is constantly drawn towards him (*‘this myself’* [4.2.106], *‘This [...] do I prefer, / This [...] will I keep safe’* [4.2.108-9], *‘here’s the base fruit of his burning lust’* [5.1.43]) (emphases added)). The baby is, moreover, defined almost entirely in terms of the physical attributes of his race and paternity: ‘black’ (4.2.119), ‘thick-lipped’ (4.2.174), ‘tawny’ (5.1.27) ‘the picture of my youth’ (4.2.107), ‘the [...] issue of a Moor’ (5.3.120). However, in spite of this repeated linguistic insistence on his gendered and racialised presence, Warner’s production did not attempt to assimilate the baby into her otherwise illusionistic aesthetic, but rather foregrounded his artificiality with deliberate stage business. Nor did she give her baby a gendered or racialised identity. Before killing the nurse, for instance, Aaron placed the baby, which was wrapped in a blanket with its generic, pink-tinged, plastic face clearly on display, at the front of the apron stage. This very deliberate and self-consciously metatheatrical gesture was later repeated when the second

Goth brought the captured baby to Marcus in Act 5, Scene 1 (the promptbook here notes ‘Goth puts baby down and unwraps, places centre stage’).

As Marcus said ‘[b]ehold the child’ (5.3.118), Lucius raised the doll above his head, synthetic face on full display, then lowered his arm and casually held the baby in one hand as he completed his speech.<sup>32</sup> Even when he walked off stage, he made no attempt to pretend that he was carrying a real baby. In her analysis of Shakespeare’s girl-characters, Jennifer Higginbotham notes that there is no evidence that early modern playing companies used real infants on stage. They were represented by ‘bundles of blankets or dolls’ and anthropomorphised by the actions and words of the players (as in the gendering and racialising descriptors quoted above).<sup>33</sup> As she explains, within a theatrical and social environment where costume and props were regularly used to indicate social status, age and gender, these ‘inanimate bundles’ (p. 105) would almost certainly not have struck the audience as odd.<sup>34</sup> However, although a blanket baby might have been readily assimilated into the theatrical world of a society in which gender, age and social class were a performance marked by outward signifiers, amid the psychological realism of Deborah Warner’s production the prop-baby, which was so self-evidently a prop, was an anomaly.<sup>35</sup>

The text is frustratingly unclear about the future of Aaron’s infant son. Amid the bloodbath of the final scene, he is merely displayed as evidence of the transgressive relationship of Tamora and Aaron: the bastard issue of an ‘irreligious Moor’ (5.3.120) and his ‘ravenous’ Goth lover (5.3.194).

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<sup>32</sup> In her film, Taymor re-assigned this speech to Lucius.

<sup>33</sup> Jennifer Higginbotham, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Sisters*, p. 104.

<sup>34</sup> Both Robert Weimann and Catherine Belsey have written about the early modern theatre being a turning point for acting styles, with medieval practices of ‘presentation’ giving way to the burgeoning genre of ‘impersonation’. Within this period of change, the convention of prosthetic babies would still have been widely used and accepted. See Robert Weimann, *Author’s Pen and Actor’s Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare’s Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Catherine Belsey ‘Shakespeare’s Little Boys’.

<sup>35</sup> For analysis of the ways in which material items were used to establish early modern gender, see Will Fisher, *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Lucius's earlier command to 'hang the child' (5.1.51) hovers as an unspoken threat over the life of the infant. For a play that revels in its display of violence and horror, it seems deliberately evasive about the fate of this child. Scholars have read in this ambiguity a subtextual message about the threat of miscegenation and racial contamination. Francesca T. Royster, for instance, comments as follows:

'Aaron has preserved his baby's life and, though he will not live to bring his boy up as a soldier and potential invader, the engendering and birth of Aaron and Tamora's baby raises the possibility that populations with non-Roman "hues" will invade and inhabit Roman geographic and cultural space'.<sup>36</sup>

For Warner, such an open-ended conclusion would be inconsistent with her teleological narrative of revenge and retribution. Although, in many ways, the obvious artificiality of the baby bears some similarity to the animatronic baby and the statuary reincarnation of Mamillius in Wheeldon's *The Winter's Tale*, the effects were very different. The eerily unrealistic baby and petrified statue of Mamillius in Wheeldon's ballet were all the more disconcerting because they were set against a vibrant and animated young boy playing Mamillius in Act One. Moreover, far from being almost incidental to the main action, as was the case with Warner's children, Wheeldon's two incarnations of Mamillius – as a child and as a statue – were central to his adaptation of the play, as we have already seen. Reducing the baby to a manipulable stand-in so evidently lacking in agency was symptomatic of Warner's overall ideological approach to the text. The Rome of her production was one dominated by patriarchal values: Lavinia was infantilised by a domineering Titus, Young Lucius was re-imagined as a young adult warrior, and Aaron's baby was reduced to a prop – an object without agency that 'must physically move or alter in some way as a result of the actor's physical intervention'.<sup>37</sup> By drawing attention to the child as a lifeless toy tethered to the actors in this way, Warner not only elided any textual ambiguities about the future of this baby, but also

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<sup>36</sup> Francesca T. Royster, 'White-Limed Walls: Whiteness and Gothic Extremism in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*', *SQ*, 51.4 (2000), 432-457 (p. 434); see also Ian Smith, '*Titus Andronicus*: A Time for Race and Revenge', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: The Tragedies*, ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 284-302 (pp. 296-7).

<sup>37</sup> Andrew Sofer, *Stage Life*, p. 12.

neutralised the threats it might pose to her actors, her production, and the autonomy of the adult male more generally.

Warner's production avoided the necessity of taking a definite position about the baby and its role in futurity by displaying it as a false icon from its first appearance. Self-evidently plastic and lifeless, it functioned as an empty signifier in which audiences were not encouraged to invest any empathy. Therefore, although her failure to account for the fate of the baby in the final scene might have left some room for indeterminacy had it been presented as though it were a real baby, the fact of its artificiality precluded this as a dramatic necessity. In combination with her presentation of Young Lucius as an adolescent and already a convincing young warrior, rather than an impressionable child, Warner's overall effect was a bleak and deterministic vision of a future in which the past mistakes of her tragic hero were doomed to repetition through his genealogical line. But the question of childhood and its place within this overall narrative of historical determinism was quite simply avoided altogether. In the next section I consider two filmed productions that, far from avoiding the question of how to account for the ambiguous children of this play, expand upon the role the child and frame the story through his eyes, making Shakespeare's play into a tale both *by* and *about* a young boy. The ways in which they conceive of his role in the projected future beyond the world of the play, however, are strikingly different.

### **3b. 'Child as spectacle, child as subject': Two Approaches to Filming *Titus Andronicus***<sup>38</sup>

There were four English-language filmed productions of *Titus Andronicus* in the years 1996 to 2000 alone, making it one of the most popular choices for film adaptation at the turn of the century.<sup>39</sup> As

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<sup>38</sup> Vicky Lebeau *Childhood and Cinema*, p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> *Titus Andronicus: The Movie* dir. Lorn Richey (Lorne Richey Productions, 1996); *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Christopher Dunne (Joe Redner Film & Productions, 1999); *Titus*, dir. Julie Taymor (Fox Searchlight/Clear Blue Sky Productions, 1999); *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Richard Griffin (South Main Street Productions, 2000). See Kenneth Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 328-266 for full filmography.

a play that engages with themes of family breakdown, racial violence, female mutilation and sectarian conflict, it is not difficult to see why it was a popular vehicle for reflecting upon the modern geo-political landscape. The two films I have chosen to compare in this chapter were released fifteen years apart, before and after the debate surrounding the ‘crisis of childhood’ had taken hold in popular and academic discourse. Of all of the filmed versions of the play, they are, to borrow Pascale Aebischer’s terminology, the most ‘straight’ adaptations among a series of ‘slasher-film versions and parodies’.<sup>40</sup> However, they also make for a particularly instructive comparative analysis because they both use the child as a lens through which to view the action, but take fundamentally different approaches in terms of ideology and aesthetics.

Jane Howell’s film was part of an ambitious project to adapt all thirty seven of Shakespeare’s plays for the BBC.<sup>41</sup> It was hailed as ‘gloriously British, gloriously BBC’ by the journalist Henry Fenwick, but it was in fact joint-funded by the American companies Morgan Guaranty Trust and Exxon.<sup>42</sup> The plays in their entirety were screened both on the BBC and the American Public Broadcasting Service (‘PBS’) between 1978 and 1985. The brief for the BBC project was to maintain textual fidelity in order to provide a ‘complete and unabridged’ audio-visual version of the entire Shakespearean canon for as wide an audience as possible.<sup>43</sup> While there are remarkable similarities between Howell’s BBC-friendly production and Taymor’s highly abridged, surrealist and generically diverse adaptation of the play, particularly in relation to the way the child is used to draw attention to the role of witness, which, as Lori Schroeder has observed, is a central motif in this play, the two directors take vastly different aesthetic and artistic approaches to achieve this

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<sup>40</sup> Pascale Aebischer, ‘Women filming rape in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*: Jane Howell and Julie Taymor’, *Études Anglaises*, 55.2 (2002), 136-147 (p. 138).

<sup>41</sup> *The Two Noble Kinsmen* was omitted from the series because it was decided that it was predominantly John Fletcher’s work.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Fenwick, ‘Transatlantic Row Breaks over the BBC’s Most Ambitious Drama Series’, *Telegraph Sunday Magazine*, 24 September 1978, pp. 22-31 (p. 25).

<sup>43</sup> Michèle Willems, ‘Verbal-Visual, Verbal-Pictorial or Textual-Televisual? Reflections on the BBC Shakespeare Series’, *SS*, 39 (1987), 91-111 (p. 94).



framing effect.<sup>44</sup> Howell's use of extended single-take shots, wide-angle lens, and sparse, monotonal *mise-en-scènes* all contribute to an overall sense of theatrical artistry. Taymor, in contrast, constructs a postmodernist bricolage of generic hybridity, intertextuality and parodic pastiche, drawing on multiple sources to create a palimpsestic effect that foregrounds not only the constructedness, but also the citational aspects of performance. The treatment of the boy-witness and his role as both dramatic and metadramatic character also differs in fundamental ways. Having foregrounded the image of the child through a stylised opening sequence, Howell then subsumes him into the play as a character within the narrative frame. Expanding upon the role of the Young Lucius of Shakespeare's text, who does not appear until Act 3 and has a total of only forty four lines, Howell's boy features throughout as an observer, his largely silent presence functioning as proxy for the audience at home. This is a technique particularly suited to television, which not only privileges the close-up shots, but also, as Neil Taylor has observed, emphasises the 'casual, domestic, and familial' and thus seems to reflect the viewers' own reality back at them.<sup>45</sup> To this extent, television can be considered a less overtly self-aware medium than film. Projecting directly into the viewer's home, the images on the small screen offer what Margaret Morse calls 'simulations of discourse and fictions of presence that attempt to virtually engage the viewer-auditor with the set'.<sup>46</sup> Taymor's boy, in contrast, plays a more liminal role, slipping between the subject positions of author and object of the gaze throughout the film. It is a far more distancing experience for the viewer, 'inviting our identification' with the boy while simultaneously reinforcing 'a sense of safety or distance in time and space from [...] the events on screen'.<sup>47</sup> As Vicky Lebeau observes, the image of the child as both the subject and the medium of viewing –

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<sup>44</sup> Lori Schroeder, 'The Only Witness a Tongueless Child: Hearing and Reading the Silent Babes of *Titus Andronicus* and *The Winter's Tale*', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 27 (2014), 1-42.

<sup>45</sup> Neil Taylor, 'Two Types of Television Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare and the Moving Image: The Plays on Film and Television*, ed. by Andrew Davies and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 86-98 (p. 87).

<sup>46</sup> Margaret Morse, *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cyberculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

‘[c]hild as object of the gaze; child as voyeur’ – is a trope that has long been familiar to the world of cinema.<sup>48</sup> While Howell focuses on the latter, directing her audience to see *through* the eyes of Young Lucius, Taymor demands a more complex negotiation between the two modes of viewing. Howell’s approach asks the audience to understand the effects of the violence upon the child, while Taymor’s Young Lucius observes then becomes involved in the violence himself.

In addition to their contrasting aesthetic and formal properties, the two films also differ in terms of ideology. Howell foregrounds a deterministic version of history as a cyclical process in which mankind is doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. As she has explained in an interview, her own son had ‘terrible nightmares when he was the age of Lucius’, and her aim was to re-create that childish ‘landscape of a dream’ through deployment of techniques such as split screens and dissolves.<sup>49</sup> Yet this was not to be the fictitious re-creation of a child’s overactive imagination, but the child’s way of processing what he had already witnessed through the mediums of books and television. Howell explains further:

I suddenly thought if a child watched a TV news bulletin with its catalogue of violence and war, read a book about the fall of Rome to the Goths and then went to bed and dreamed, he would have dreamed a play like this. It is not done as a dream play, because that would wrench the structure, but the boy is palpably there all the time so that, if two people are arguing, he is to be seen behind them watching. You have to find a hook for yourself and, in this case, the viewer is constantly forced to think – what are we doing to the children?<sup>50</sup>

This is Postman’s thesis writ large. The ‘secrets’ that the 17th-century print culture had precluded the child from accessing, at least until they were able to read, have now become available to all. The literate 20th-century child can not only read from a much earlier age than the 16th-century child,

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<sup>48</sup> Vicky Lebeau, *Childhood and Cinema*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> Jane Howell cited in Michèle Willems, ‘Entretien avec Jane Howell, réalisatrice de la première Tétralogie, de *The Winter’s Tale* et de *Titus Andronicus*’, in *Shakespeare à la télévision* (Rouen: Publications de L’Université de Rouen, 1987), pp. 79-90 (p. 83).

<sup>50</sup> Jane Howell cited in Michael Billington, ‘Shaping a Gory Classic for TV’, *New York Times*, 14 April 1985, p. 29.

but has access to a multitude of visual mediums, including television. Using this very medium to present the child's dream, Howell thus provides her viewers with a means, however tenuous, of escaping a deterministic vision of history and futurity by confronting them with the uncomfortable question: 'what are we doing to the children?'

Taymor, on the other hand, presents a far more ambiguous vision of futurity and a far less *intentionally* provocative ending. Although her film closes with what she describes as the culmination of the boy's (Young Lucius's) 'journey [...] to knowledge, wisdom, compassion and choice', I shall argue that 'the promise of daylight' depicted in the film's closing image disavows, even as it appears to endorse, a vision of childhood as a recuperative force.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, aesthetic and ideological differences notwithstanding, the ultimate effect in these two films of the depiction of childhood, and its function as a cultural repository for anxieties, hopes and desires, is less different than it may initially appear. Although Howell's production might offer a more overtly pessimistic prophecy for the future, she does offer a glimmer of hope if only her audience choose to see it. In the case of Taymor's *Titus*, however, the fact that the 'promise of daylight' depicted in the final sequence collapses under its own generic and aesthetic instabilities is arguably an even more disturbing prospect for childhood and the burden of futurity. If Howell's nihilistic vision is depressing, it is at least a nihilism that she self-consciously parades and self-consciously questions. After all, framing the action through the eyes of the child, as theatre critic John J. O'Connor observes, 'allows Shakespeare to have his violence while openly questioning it, too.'<sup>52</sup> By unapologetically confronting the viewers with her bleak ending, she challenges them not only to look *like* a child, but to take action *for* the child and for futurity itself. Taymor's ambiguous ending, on the other hand, represents a failure to convincingly portray the 'promise' she so evidently wanted, calling into question the viability of ever presenting the child as a positive symbol of

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<sup>51</sup> Julie Taymor, 'Director's Notes' in Julie Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2000), p. 185.

<sup>52</sup> John J. O'Connor, 'TV Weekend; *Titus Andronicus* in Shakespeare Series' *New York Times*, 19 April 1985, p. 30.

futurity. In her final sequence, we no longer see through the eyes of the child. Her Young Lucius has already become at that point a character within the film and an agent with his own ambiguous agenda. Watching him walk out of the Colosseum cradling the child of Aaron is less a provocation to action and more an idealistic attempt to portray the impossible.<sup>53</sup>

### **3c. Witnessing the Horrors: Childhood Tainted in Jane Howell's *Titus Andronicus* (1984)**

In spite of the similarity in effect (if not in intent) of their closing sequences, which I discuss in more detail below, the opening frames of these two films promise two widely contrasting treatments of the subjectivity of the child. Laura Mulvey notes in her classic essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', that 'the voyeuristic-scopophilic look [...] is a crucial part of traditional filmic pleasure', a pleasure that Polanski exploited in his film of *Macbeth* as we have already seen.<sup>54</sup> There are, of course, obvious analogies to draw with the boy actor in the early modern playing companies in this respect. As Edel Lamb and other scholars have noted, 'the child is often a focal point of erotic desire, and the physical manifestation of the child on stage is not entirely absent from this fantasy'.<sup>55</sup> Central to Mulvey's critical argument is the Lacanian concept of the controlling and fetishistic male gaze and its dominance in Western visual culture, particularly mainstream cinema. The critical paradigm she promotes for analysing the mechanisms of voyeurism and cinematic pleasure is both valid and illuminating as a tool for studying Howell's and Taymor's different approaches to the iconography of the child, notably in the opening sequences of their films. Mulvey identifies a paradox in the premise of mainstream narrative film fiction: 'the female image' she

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<sup>53</sup> Taymor's 1995 stage production ended, like Howell's film, with Young Lucius staring in horror at the coffin containing the body of Aaron's baby. See David McCandless, 'A Tale of Two *Tituses*: Julie Taymor's Vision on Stage and Screen', *SQ*, 53.4 (2002), 487-511 (p. 509) for full description.

<sup>54</sup> 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', p. 17.

<sup>55</sup> Edel Lamb, *Performing Childhood in the Early Modern Theatre: The Children's Playing Companies, 1599–1613* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 51. See also Mary Bly, *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queens on the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

argues, constantly endangers the unity of the diegesis by piercing the cinematic illusion as ‘an intrusive, static, one-dimensional fetish’. In order to disavow the mediating presence of the camera and maintain the cinematic illusion, she argues that the audience is presented with an eroticised image of the female object that ‘freezes the look, fixates the spectator and prevents him from achieving any distance from the image in front of him’ (p. 18). It is this very practice of ‘fixat[ing] the spectator’ through a fetishised image (in this case, the image of the child rather than ‘the female image’) that differentiates Taymor’s voyeuristic frame-sequence from Howell’s more television-friendly ‘static, one-dimensional’ and self-consciously artistic opening montage.

As the credits fade in Howell’s *Titus Andronicus*, mist clears to reveal a side-on image of a grinning skull facing to the left. The image then dissolves and reforms as a close-up face-on shot of the same skull, and then dissolves again to a split-screen. This time the skull is on the left of the screen and a frontal close-up of a boy’s face appears on the right-hand side. The skull is turned to face the child, as though confronting him with his own mortality (see Figure 14). The skull fades, the camera pulls out, and the child is absorbed into the opening scene of the play, which has been re-arranged to begin with the arrival of Titus into Rome with the bodies of his sons. Throughout this long scene, the child is a silent observer, occasionally assisting, such as when he lights the candles to the memory of the dead Andronici or hands his grandfather a bowl of water to wash his hands, but always watching, always observing. The camera draws attention to the act of viewing by shooting the opening few seconds of the scene from a position directly behind the boy’s head, as though the audience is peering over his shoulder, then pulls out to show the child standing silently as witness to the unfolding action. This opening sequence is a reversal of Mulvey’s model inasmuch as Howell deliberately presents the child as an ‘intrusive, static, one-dimensional fetish’, highlighting rather than disavowing the ‘mediating presence of the camera’ and encouraging an interrogatory mode of viewing in her audience. Rather than ‘fixat[ing] the spectator’ with a pleasurable image, the juxtaposition of the skull (the icon of death) and the child (the signifier of

life) creates a cognitive dissonance that is distancing rather than absorbing. The skull is a highly denotative and connotative sign, one that, as Andrew Sofer observes, ‘fascinate[s] because of its sheer uncanniness’.<sup>56</sup> On the one hand it is a metonym for mortality, ‘charging man’ as Carol Chillington Rutter notes, ‘to know his end by gazing on his future’.<sup>57</sup> In this respect it undermines futurity by insisting on the inevitability of death. The skull is also an iconographic emblem of the theatre, replicated to the point of parody in countless photographic and publicity-related images of both *The Revenger’s Tragedy* and of *Hamlet*. In Howell’s opening sequence, however, it has yet further connotations. By presenting the skull alongside the image of the child, Howell not only foregrounds her theatrical aesthetic through intertextual citation of these early modern revenge tragedies, but also undermines the fetishisation and idealisation of childhood by associating it with a *memento mori* – a reminder of death – that denies the child’s role as icon of the future, and, by extension, denies the existence of futurity itself.



Figure 14: Paul Davies Prowles (Young Lucius), in Jane Howell’s *Titus Andronicus* (1985)

The denial of futurity in this way is, for Lee Edelman, writing from a queer critical perspective, tantamount to an act of political subversion because it is a rejection of dominant ideological

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 90.

<sup>57</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare’s Stage* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), p. 8.

narratives of compulsory reproduction. Edelman's vision of futurity is as nihilistic as it is subversive. Howell's association of the child with death is comparable in terms of its radical nihilism, but her approach is wider-ranging and more far-reaching in terms of its effect. Unlike Edelman, whose writing is framed through the lens of queer theory, Howell does not speak on behalf of a specific marginalised group. Her production of *Titus Andronicus* is neither overtly feminist nor ideologically allied to a particular political agenda. It is, rather, a stark commentary on the self-defeating nature of what Sir Francis Bacon called the 'wild justice' of *lex talionis* – a lawless pursuit of retaliatory violence as relevant today as it was to the Elizabethans.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Howell herself has drawn analogies between the classical setting and both Federico Fellini's 1930s fascist Rome and Northern Ireland in the 1980s.<sup>59</sup> She holds the mirror up to a society that is intent on self-destruction by revealing a glimpse of the future through the eyes of a helpless child. In the final instance, both children in Howell's film are sacrificed at the altar of the self-destructive revenge ethic. The baby is brought on in a coffin and displayed to the gathered Goths and Romans like a sacrificial lamb, while a repetition of the opening sequence featuring Young Lucius and the image of skull closes the film. However, this time Young Lucius's picture morphs into a second skull, and we are left with a split-screen mirror image of the skull both looking at itself and out into the camera, as though mocking viewers with their own mortality. Like Edelman, Howell offers no palliative, no romantic *deus ex machina* to resolve this crisis. However, unlike Edelman, she does not disavow the possibility of searching for an alternative vision by advocating a retreat into a passive oppositional stance. While offering no solution herself, she uses the medium of television – a medium she herself describes as 'incredibly responsible' – as a means to confront her audience in the intimacy of their own homes with the life-destroying futility of war, and to force her viewers into a personal examination of their own consciences, both as participants and as silent observers (p. 89).

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<sup>58</sup> Francis Bacon, 'Of Revenge', in Francis Bacon, *The Essays*, ed. by John Pitcher (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp. 72-3.

<sup>59</sup> Jane Howell cited in Michèle Willems, 'Entretien avec Jane Howell', p. 83.

The role of Young Lucius as the audience's proxy is a key element of the fly-killing scene. Although she remains faithful to her overall commitment to textual fidelity by leaving the killing of the fly in the hands of Marcus, Howell alternates close-up reaction shots with shots from Young Lucius's perspective to underscore visually the boy's dual role as witness and actor in the play more generally. In the heated exchange between Titus and Marcus immediately following the line 'What dost thou strike at, Marcus, with thy knife?' (3.2.52), the camera closes in on the two brothers, adopting a shot/reverse-shot perspective that emphasises their antagonistic positions. At Marcus's 'Pardon me, sir, it was a black ill-flavoured fly' (3.2.68), the camera pulls out to a position behind Young Lucius, so that we as spectators are aligned with his point of view. Although we cannot see his features, his reaction is suggestively reflected in the silent terror sketched on the face of Lavinia, who is seated opposite the boy and therefore face-on to the camera. Her open-mouthed horror is thrown into relief by the three guards standing behind her on the edge of the frame. Their faces are covered in masks which, according to Howell, were designed to convey 'a dignity' on the 'passive onlookers' to the unfolding tragic events.<sup>60</sup> However, lacking both eye and mouth holes, these do not merely represent what Howell calls the 'blank faces' of the witnesses, but also function as doubles for Lavinia, the 'speechless complainer' (3.2.39), and Young Lucius, the impotent witness.

Howell's Titus, played by Trevor Peacock, addresses 'Give me thy knife' (3.2.72) not to Marcus, as is the conventional interpretation, but to the boy. As he does so, the camera closes in on Titus's face, moving directly behind Young Lucius's left shoulder as though to reinforce further the alignment of our optical perspective with that of the boy. However, Young Lucius is not merely an anonymous observer. He becomes an active, albeit reluctant, participant in this scene when Titus forcefully wrests his knife from his hands and waves it threateningly towards him. As the boy turns

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<sup>60</sup> Jane Howell cited in Henry Fenwick, 'The Production', in *Titus Andronicus: The BBC TV Shakespeare*, p. 19.



his head to the left, we catch a brief close-up of his features screwed up in anguish. Temporarily chastened by the child's distress, Titus lowers the knife and, for the first time, the camera cuts to a close-up of Young Lucius, his distraught face registering the fear and horror that we as spectators have been subtly manipulated to imagine thus far. It is, moreover, a face that draws attention to the very act of viewing itself. For this Young Lucius is wearing anachronistic, metal-rimmed spectacles (see Figure 14 above). Like the camera, the spectacles are mediating devices that manipulate vision, foregrounding not only the unreliability and impotence of the human eye, but also the videocentric nature of the film medium itself. This short interaction, albeit lasting merely two minutes, thus demonstrates in microcosm Howell's artistic methodology throughout this production. The spatial configuration of the actors, the positioning of the camera, the theatrical use of props as semiotic devices are all part of an overall design to draw attention to the voyeuristic nature of film. This is particularly pertinent in the case of television which is more intimate and immediate in form than the feature film, as demonstrated in Julie Taymor's *Titus*. By drawing attention to the act of voyeurism in this way, Howell's adaptation forces the spectators to confront their own complicity in the violence on display. In Howell's *Titus Andronicus*, the presence of Young Lucius is metonymic of the innocence of childhood itself, which, while providing a morally instructive subject position for the audience, is nonetheless ill-equipped to shoulder the burden of futurity within the social world of the play. It is a world which is intent on self-destruction and in which the ideology of reproductive futurism is markedly absent.

By emphasising the role of the boy as both impotent witness and reluctant participant, the fly-killing scene also foreshadows the bleak closing sequence. Jane Howell ends her film with a nihilistic vision that is arguably much closer to the self-destructive drive of the revenge tragedy genre and of *Titus Andronicus* in particular than Taymor's more ambivalent ending. Bleak and uncompromising, Howell's closing sequence leaves the viewer in no doubt as to how he or she is supposed to read this interpretation of the play. Her Young Lucius is a tearful observer throughout

the film, silently directing the audience to see the senseless violence through his innocent eyes. He is not, in contrast to Taymor's Young Lucius, infected by the Andronici's brutal gene, but remains a horrified but impotent witness to the very end. Howell's child makes two failed interventions during the film that are not in Shakespeare's original text. When Titus sacrifices Alarbus in Act 1, Scene 1, he silently kneels beside a pleading Tamora and then when Lucius stabs Saturninus in Act 5, Scene 3 he leaps at his father's neck, begging him to stop. For a film that is otherwise remarkably faithful to the original text, these are significant amendments that work to underscore the impotence, vulnerability and violated 'innocence' of the child. Howell's most radical directorial innovation, however, comes in the final sequence, where the ambivalence of Shakespeare's text is eschewed in favour of clarity and finality. Her presentation of Act 5, Scene 3 consolidates many of the themes introduced earlier in the play. The guards, for instance, bear staffs with effigies of skulls carved into their tips, recalling the image of the skull in the opening frame-sequence. Silent observers wear the blank masks of the impotent witness that were so prominent in the fly-killing scene. The mood is sombre, and the tragicomic extremes are contained within a bleak but naturalistic aesthetic. The camera alternates between tracking shots that move like a roving eye around and amongst the action, and close-ups on the face of Young Lucius.

At '[b]ehold the child' (5.3.118), Marcus takes a black box from Publius and holds it aloft. He opens the lid for the gathered crowd to see, but it remains tantalisingly obscured to the television audience's view. However, a close-shot of the horrified face of Young Lucius confirms our worst fears. Howell's baby is already dead. As Alan Dessen observes, the impact of the baby's death is all the more powerful because Howell (like Taymor after her but in stark contrast to Warner's use of the generic doll) chose to employ a real baby for the earlier scenes.<sup>61</sup> The death of this formerly vital baby goes some way towards vindicating the malevolence of Aaron's final words, which he

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<sup>61</sup> Jane Howell, 'notes' to the text, in *Titus Andronicus: Shakespeare in Performance* (London: The British Broadcasting Corporation, 1986), p. 105.

delivers in the knowledge that his baby has already been murdered. It also confronts the audience with the stark realities of the Andronici's merciless brutality. During Lucius's final speech the camera begins with a shot over the shoulder of Young Lucius, who is looking into the open box, the body of the dead baby on full display. It then cuts to Marcus and tracks him as he walks towards the boy and closes the lid. As we hear Lucius's final denunciation of pity, the camera pauses on a close-shot of the boy's weeping face. The final stage direction (written by Jane Howell) in the printed edition of this film script is 'Young Lucius stares into space'.<sup>62</sup> This gesture of hopelessness is then re-affirmed by Howell's closing sequence of shots. In a visual montage that recalls the opening sequence, the shot of Young Lucius 'star[ing] into space' fades and a split-screen image of two skulls appears. This time there is no counter-image of the boy, just the skull looking at, and being confronted by its own image.

In his provocative work on the function of the skull on the Renaissance stage, Sofer explores what he calls the anamorphic 'either/or-ness' of this stage property in performance.<sup>63</sup> According to this analysis, the skull is simultaneously a literalisation of the *memento mori* metaphor and an anthropomorphisation as character – a character that refuses to be 'reified into a dead thing' and insists 'on turning others into its props' (p. 94). By closing her film with a still shot of two skulls in this way, Howell creates what Sofer calls 'a moment of unmetaphoring', whereby the skull threatens to overwhelm Young Lucius by turning the boy into its prop and thus extinguishing life and all hope for futurity (p. 98). However within the ambiguity of this slightly surreal moment lies a glimmer of hope. Although the fate of Aaron's baby is sealed – his tiny body lies motionless inside a coffin, *rigor mortis* having turned his limbs to stiff appendages – the fate of Young Lucius, this ending seems to suggest, lies with the audience. What Howell's symbolic sequence of images in

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<sup>62</sup> Jane Howell, *Titus Andronicus: The BBC TV Shakespeare*, p. 88.

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Sofer, *Stage Life*, p. 95.

fact equates to is a direct and unequivocal appeal: look *at* the child; look *like* the child; but most importantly, look at what are we doing *to* the child.

### **3d. A False Dawn: Fetishising Childhood, Fascist Ideology and Questionable Redemptions in Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999)**

Where Howell's film is a 'nightmare' framed through the eyes of the child with some rare moments of (failed) interventions, Taymor's veers between taking the child's point of view and fixing the camera's gaze on the child, and between distancing the audience by drawing attention to the illusory nature of cinema and using the image of the child like Mulvey's 'eroticised female' in a manner designed to maintain rather than pierce the cinematic illusion. Her Young Lucius in the opening frame sequence is the embodiment of Kincaid's fetishised child: a complex and self-contradictory amalgam of innocence, precocity, and eroticism.<sup>64</sup> He is also a child immersed in the television culture that, according to Postman and his followers, was responsible for destroying childhood in modern society. Thus both object of and consumer of videocentric media, Taymor's child is a fascinating case study in the interconnected worlds of the child and the moving image and a key figure in terms of understanding how to interpret Taymor's film.

The first few seconds of the opening frame sequence is momentarily disorientating. An extreme close-up of piercing blue eyes pulls out to reveal a young white-skinned boy's face. It is tantalisingly obscured by a brown paper bag with makeshift holes cut out for the eyes and mouth. A fork with a hotdog sausage appears from the bottom of the frame and the boy takes a bite, his greasy lips protruding through the mouth-hole as he chews vigourously, his gaze fixed upon the television in front of him. The shot then cuts to show the boy standing on a chair at a kitchen table. Plastic toy soldiers, artillery and remote-control vehicles are scattered amidst half-eaten food as he begins squirting milk and ketchup across the table and enacting violent encounters with his toys in time to

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<sup>64</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence*, p. 20.

the frantic soundtrack of a cartoon playing in the background. The scene is, as Peter S. Donaldson observes, a ‘well-known dystopia stereotype[...] of the case against children’s television watching’.<sup>65</sup> Later in the film, a hyper-stimulated Chiron and Demetrius are shown playing video games. They are, as Lehmann, Reynolds and Starks observe, ‘boys whose digital mastery of virtual beings is inseparable from their desire to decimate, even as they inseminate, real bodies’.<sup>66</sup> As in the opening sequence, the film here makes the implicit connection between virtual violence and actual violence and the blurred boundaries between the two. Taymor herself has been critical about the effects of technology on children’s imagination, stating in an interview that ‘[s]itting in a chair in front of an ugly box when you could be running around in an open space seems regressive’.<sup>67</sup> In the light of this alliance of technology with regression, it is noteworthy that the opening scene is set in a 1950s kitchen and not in a contemporary (1990s) setting. According to Postman’s thesis, the 1950s is the very decade in which television began to erode childhood, marking what he calls, in typically apocalyptic terms, ‘The Beginning of the End’.<sup>68</sup> That Taymor should set the opening scene in the 1950s rather than in the 1990s when she shot the film may be a coincidence, but it is symbolic nonetheless.

As though mimicking the rapidly changing frames of the cartoon flickering at the edge of the shot, the camera cuts rapidly from shot to shot, with close-ups of the boy’s face and hands switching to long shots of his whole body as he gets more excited and gradually more aggressive. The walls then begin shaking and an explosion rips through the windows. A large man wearing motorcycle goggles and a World War I helmet (‘The Clown’ in Taymor’s Screenplay) bursts in,

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<sup>65</sup> Peter S. Donaldson, ‘Game Space/Tragic Space: Julie Taymor’s *Titus*’, in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. by Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), pp. 457-477 (p. 459).

<sup>66</sup> Courtney Lehmann, Bryan Reynolds and Lisa Starks, ‘The Spectacle of Suffering in Taymor’s *Titus*’, in *Performing Transversally: Reimagining Shakespeare and the Critical Future*, ed. by Bryan Reynolds (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 215-243 (p. 225).

<sup>67</sup> Douglas Eby, ‘Julie Taymor on making “Titus”’, *TalentDevelop* online <<https://talentdevelop.com/interviews/jtaymor.html>> [accessed 2 March 2017].

<sup>68</sup> Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, pp. 67-80.

drags the crying child out from under the table and pulls off his paper-bag mask.<sup>69</sup> The child is then forcibly removed from the 1950s ‘television-saturated world of the middle class’, to a Roman amphitheater and an invisible baying crowd.<sup>70</sup> For Donaldson, the mask ‘works to align [the child] with tragic theatre’ (p. 459), while for Rutter it both ‘tropes masks military and theatrical’.<sup>71</sup> These are both valid readings but I think they miss the most crucial symbolic significance of the mask in this scene: it emblematises the precarious protected world of childhood and the fine line between childhood play and adult violence.<sup>72</sup> With his unmasking, the child, who is gradually revealed to be Young Lucius, graduates from the contained world of imaginary violence to the adult world of real violence. Flung helplessly over the shoulder of the Clown, he is transported, like Alice in Wonderland down a rabbit hole, into the Roman Colosseum, the ‘archetypal theatre of cruelty, where violence as entertainment reached its apex’.<sup>73</sup> Here, violent play morphs into violent reality; child’s play transforms into adult experience; and Postman’s prediction of children unmasked and ‘adultified’ through exposure to media is played out in front of our eyes.

After entering the Colosseum, the boy is held aloft by The Clown (see Figure 15) for the cheering crowd in a gesture that anticipates the same Clown holding up Aaron’s caged baby in the final scene. The camera moves down and closes in upon the boy. As the Clown turns in a circular motion, displaying Young Lucius like a human prize, the camera rotates in the opposite direction, its focus fixed upon the bewildered face of the child. The boy is then gently set down, the Clown recedes and the crowd is abruptly silenced. What follows is shot as though through the eyes of Young Lucius. He reaches down into the dirt floor of the Colosseum and picks up one of his toy soldiers (see Figure 16). Hearing a sound, he turns and is faced with an army of returning soldiers, their faces and bodies covered in dirt, their uniforms an adult-sized replica of the toy version he

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<sup>69</sup> Julie Taymor, *Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> Peter S. Donaldson, ‘Game Space/Tragic Space’, p. 460.

<sup>71</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, ‘Looking Like a Child – or – *Titus*: The Comedy’, *SS*, 56 (2007), 1-26 (p. 11).

<sup>72</sup> For an analysis of child’s play as it relates to violence see Joanne Faulkner, *The Importance of Being Innocent: Why We Worry About Children* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) pp. 34-43.

<sup>73</sup> Julie Taymor, *Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 178.

holds in his hand. A drum strikes up a beat and the soldiers begin marching in time with the rhythm. Their movements are mechanical and stilted as they make their slow progression from all sides of the Colosseum towards the boy at the centre of the arena. The opening credits play out to the sound of their pounding feet. The boy's head whips round and sees, entering from the other side of the auditorium, soldiers bearing the dead bodies of the Andronici sons. He turns again as a cavalcade of 1930s motorcycles advances towards him, followed closely by Titus at the helm of a horse-drawn carriage. The Goth captives are in a wagon behind him and their captured armour and weapons, on display in a plexiglass case mounted on a motorised vehicle, follow closely behind.



Figures 15 And 16: Osheen Jones (Young Lucius) and Dario D'ambrosi (Clown), in Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999)

The scene is a clash of historical times and places, and there are multiple ways in which it can be read. Rutter is right when she asserts that this scene is 'a temporal palimpsest' that shows 'the ancient world [...] surviving in our own.'<sup>74</sup> But what becomes clearer as the film develops is that Taymor's citation of the 'ancient world' is not merely a direct analogy to 'our own' world, but one refracted through the ideology and iconography of 1930s Fascism. Amid the eclectic mix of Roman and contemporary aesthetics, via the 1950s-inspired kitchen of the opening sequence, there are also multiple references to fascism throughout the film. From the SS-inspired uniforms to the political

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<sup>74</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Looking Like a Child', p. 14.

rallies, ritualised violence and Riefenstahl-inspired military marches, the analogies are clear to see. Indeed, Taymor herself has openly cited the rise of fascism and the Holocaust as her inspiration. In the 'Director's Notes' to the book *Titus*, for instance, she comments that the setting of Saturninus's and Bassianus's campaign speeches was intended to be a visual evocation of the 'Rome of E.U.R' (Esposizione Universale Roma), and in interviews, she more generally equates the excesses of the play with the rise of the far right in 1930s Europe.<sup>75</sup> When asked whether audiences today struggle to 'understand' the play, she is quoted as saying: 'when people think this is "over the top" they're absolutely wrong. What could be more "over the top" than the Holocaust?'<sup>76</sup>

The groundwork for this evocation of the worst horrors of Nazism is clearly laid in the opening frame-sequence. The Colosseum into which the young boy is transported recalls the forty arenas (*Thingplätze* or *Thingstätten*) built during the Weimar Republic to stage the then newly conceived drama, the *Thingspiele*.<sup>77</sup> These outdoor theatres accommodated thousands of people and came to stand for Nazi ideals of order, creativity and collective consciousness. At the opening ceremony for the 8000-seat Heidelberg *Thingplatz* in 1934, Joseph Goebbels spoke of 'National Socialism in Stone', a 'living, tangible and monumental expression' to 'our concept of life' and compared the new theatres to the ambitious network of Autobahns conceived and built under Hitler in the 1930s.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Julie Taymor, 'Director's Notes', p. 182. The campaign speeches appear in Act 1, Scene 1 in Quarto and Folio editions of Shakespeare's play, but are placed directly after the interpolated opening sequence in the film. The area south of the city centre was originally chosen in the 1930s as the site for the planned 1942 Universal Exposition of Rome to celebrate twenty years of Fascism. The government building in this square was modelled on the Roman Colosseum and is described as 'the prime example of fascist modernism'. The exposition never materialised due to the second world war. See Stephen Gundle, '10 of the best 20th-century landmarks in Rome', *Independent*, 13 July 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2011/jul/13/top-10-historical-landmarks-rome>> [accessed 3 August 2017].

<sup>76</sup> Maria de Luca and Mary Lindroth, 'Mayhem, Madness, Method An Interview with Julie Taymor', *Cineaste*, 25.3 (2000), 28-31 (p. 31). See also the making of the film documentary on the DVD *Titus: Special Edition* (1999).

<sup>77</sup> *Thingspiele* were plays designed during the Weimar Republic to imitate the ancient Nordic-Germanic practice of collective decision-making, thus giving the audience a sense of community, agency and nationhood. For more details see William Niven, 'The Birth of Nazi Drama? *Thing Plays*', in *Theatre under the Nazis*, ed. by John London (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 54-95 and Gerwin Strobl, *The Swastika and the Stage: German Theatre and Society, 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 36-88.

<sup>78</sup> Joseph Goebbels cited in William Niven, in *Theatre under the Nazis*, p. 56.



The *Thing* plays were intended to be a form of community theatre that involved the audience. Spectators were not only supposed to feel like participators in the drama through their proximity to the stage, but also were to see themselves, as a nation, reflected in the plays themselves. A similar movement was under way in Italy, inspired by Mussolini's proposal for 'a theatre of masses'.<sup>79</sup> Yet, Taymor's reference to these *völkish* theatres is not straightforward. By giving the Colosseum audience voice but no body (in the final scene she reverses this practice by filling the auditorium seating with people but silences and freeze-frames them, as I discuss in more detail below) she deconstructs the very ideology of crowd consciousness and participation. Moreover, the actual location of the Colosseum shoot – the Roman Colosseum in Pula, Croatia, the 'best-preserved of all imperial Roman amphitheatres' – and the fact that the silent crowd in the final scene are 'of many nationalities, races, ages', brings the ancient location into dialogue with twentieth-century incidents of ethnic cleansing and complicates the concept of crowd complicity.<sup>80</sup> The problematical Fascist references are not merely present in the architecture and its present/absent crowd, but in the presentation of characters as well. The mechanical, synchronised movements of the marching soldiers recall both the all-too-familiar goose-stepping soldiers of the Nazi parades and the on-stage marching groups that were a regular feature of the *Thing* plays.<sup>81</sup> However, far from being youthful exempla of the Nazi ideal, Taymor's soldiers are battle-weary, covered in dust and zombie-like in their expressions. In addition, while the entry of Titus on a horse-drawn carriage appears to recreate

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<sup>79</sup> The theatre of masses movement culminated in a remarkable single performance of a piece entitled *18 BL* (1934), which featured a truck-protagonist which Mussolini described as a symbol of 'the fascist everyman and everywoman, a humble and heroic soldier'. See Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18 BL And The Theater of Masses For Masses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 33.

<sup>80</sup> Peter S. Donaldson, 'Game Space/Tragic Space', p. 461. Julie Taymor, *Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 166. More recently, ISIS targeted the Roman amphitheatre of Palmyra in Syria, carrying out mass executions of Syrian civilians between 2015 and 2017 in its ruins. Although these executions were performed in front of baying crowds of men and children, many of them were also recorded and distributed as propaganda tools, ensuring that they reached a far wider audience of both supporters and detractors of the ISIS cause, thus bringing the concept of audience complicity into even further question. For reports of these incidents see Beth McKernan, 'Isis destroys more of Palmyra including Roman amphitheatre, say Syrian authorities', *Independent*, 20 Jan 2017; and Imogen Calderwood, 'Slaughter in the Roman amphitheatre: Horrific moment ISIS child executioners brutally shoot dead 25 Syrian regime soldiers in front of bloodthirsty crowds at ancient Palmyra ruin', *Daily Mail*, 4 July 2015.

<sup>81</sup> The marching was designed to 'represent the German people synecdochically'. See William Niven, in *Theatre under the Nazis*, pp. 67-9.

iconic images of Hitler entering Rome during his historic visit in 1938 (see Figures 17 and 18), it too raises some difficult questions.<sup>82</sup>



Figure 17. Album 'Il Viaggio Del Fuhrer In Italia' (The Fuhrer's Tour of Italy): King Victor Emmanuel III and Adolf Hitler travel down a street of Rome in a horse-drawn carriage. (3 May 1938)



Figure 18. Titus entering the Colosseum, in Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999)

If Titus represents fascism, then how does this reconcile with the SS-inspired uniform worn by Saturninus, nemesis of the Andronici? If Titus and Saturninus are on opposing sides, then who represents the anti-Fascist stance? There are no simple binaries in Taymor's film and, taking inspiration from the ambiguous moralities in Shakespeare's text, she indicts almost everybody in her bleak portrayal of patriarchy, violence and the far right, both historical and contemporary. However, the most complex and flawed symbol of all in this highly referential and multi-layered film is the character of Young Lucius. Taymor herself seems undecided about how this character is to be interpreted. On the one hand she talks about the trajectory of Young Lucius's narrative as a 'counterpoint to Shakespeare's dark tale of vengeance', departing on his own journey towards 'knowledge, wisdom, compassion and choice' and 'the promise of daylight'.<sup>83</sup> On the other hand

<sup>82</sup> For details of the visit see Paul Baxa, *Roads and Ruins: The Symbolic Landscape of Fascist Rome* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 135-154.

<sup>83</sup> Julie Taymor, *Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 185.

she also claims that she filmed the ending ‘without [...] giving an answer or going into horrific, pathetic cliché.’ Yet, she continues, in a non-committal, elliptical and circumlocutionary explanation, that ‘after such a dark story’, she liked ‘the idea of this child getting towards the exit, moving out of this coliseum towards a bleak and barren landscape (oh, some water in the distance, potentially) [...] towards, maybe, a sunrise – maybe ...’.<sup>84</sup> It is this very ambivalence that problematises Taymor’s conception of Young Lucius as a ‘counterpoint’ to the ‘dark tale of vengeance’, and further complicates the already-ambiguous Fascist references in this film. The director, it seems, is conflicted about how she wants the child and his narrative journey to be received, and scholars are similarly divided in their response.

For Richard Burt, Young Lucius represents both a ‘child-centred anti-Fascism’ and the ‘Fascist romanticisation of the child’ and thus undermines any attempt at a coherent anti-Fascist message.<sup>85</sup> There is certainly some merit to this argument. The ‘abduction’ of Young Lucius in the opening sequence, his removal to the Colosseum and his triumphant presentation to the cheering crowd invite comparisons with the ‘Fascist romanticisation of the child’. Osheen Jones, moreover, with his fair hair, blue eyes and pale skin, certainly appears to typify the Aryan ideal. As Helen Brocklehurst explains, the racially pure ‘constructed’ child was as an ‘embodiment of the [German] state’s security needs’ and ‘a germ-cell of the nation’.<sup>86</sup> These were not, in the words of Joseph Goebbels, ‘children at any cost’, but ‘racially worthy, physically and mentally unaffected children of German families’.<sup>87</sup> As a metaphor for the future of Nazism, and emblems of Edelman’s ‘reproductive

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<sup>84</sup> Julie Taymor, ‘Director’s Commentary’, *Titus*, DVD.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Burt, ‘Shakespeare and the Holocaust: Julie Taymor’s *Titus* Is Beautiful, or Shakesploi Meets the Camp’, *Colby Quarterly*, 37 (2001), 78-106 (p. 98 and p. 83).

<sup>86</sup> Helen Brocklehurst, *Who’s Afraid of Children? Children, Conflict and International Relations* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006), p. 57.

<sup>87</sup> Joseph Goebbels cited in Gisela Bock, ‘Antinatalism, maternity and paternity in National Socialist racism’, in *Nazism and German Society 1933-1945*, ed. by David F. Crew (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 110-140 (p. 120).

futurism', children featured frequently and prominently in political addresses as exemplified in Hitler's speech to the Nationalist Socialist Women's Organization in 1934:

[T]he programme of our National Socialist movement has in reality but one single point, and that point is the child, that tiny creature which must be born and grow strong and which alone gives meaning to the whole life struggle.<sup>88</sup>

Although Hitler publicly reified the role of the mother, his statements came with careful caveats, such as 'children belong to their mothers as at the same moment they belong to me'.<sup>89</sup> There were multiple incidents of Aryan children being forcibly removed from non-complying German mothers and up to 200,000 'blond and blue-eyed children' were abducted from the occupied territories. The child was the property of the state, a political tool and a resource to be 'propagandized, nationalised and socialized'.<sup>90</sup> And the putative 'cult of motherhood' was in reality, like in the androcentric world of *Titus Andronicus*, 'a cult of fatherhood and masculinity'.<sup>91</sup> The abduction of the 'Aryan' child in the opening sequence of Taymor's *Titus* thus inevitably elicits comparisons with Fascist appropriation of 'racially worthy' children within a masculinist social structure. But as Taymor herself indicates in her stilted attempts to describe Young Lucius's role, this analogy is not as simple as it first appears. Not only does the ambiguous closing sequence problematise a straightforward anti-Fascist reading, as I explain further below; similarly, to reduce the full significance of Young Lucius to one single symbol, the embodiment of the eugenic ideal, is to overlook the multiple ways in which he works as a signifier in this film.

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<sup>88</sup> Adolf Hitler speech to the Nationalist Socialist Frauenschaft in 1934, cited in *Nazism: 1919-1945, State, Economy and Society 1933-1939*, 3 vols, ed. by J. Noakes and G. Pridham (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1984), vol. 2, p. 450.

<sup>89</sup> Adolf Hitler cited in Joachim C. Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich: Portraits of Nazi Leadership*, trans. by Michael Bullock (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 269.

<sup>90</sup> Helen Brocklehurst, *Who's Afraid of Children?*, pp. 66-7.

<sup>91</sup> Gisela Bock, 'Antinatalism, maternity and paternity', p. 129.

While the opening frame-sequence lasts less than 120 seconds, it has generated more critical analysis than perhaps any other aspect of Taymor's production.<sup>92</sup> It is surprising therefore, that more attention has not been focused on the erotic nature of its various images: the sausage and the squirting milk; the atomisation of body parts; the burly adult abductor; the boy commodified and exposed to the objectifying gaze of the Colosseum audience. Moreover, although commentators have identified the actor as Osheen Jones, the same boy who played the child-observer in Adrian Noble's 1996 film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, nobody to my knowledge has commented on his remarkable likeness to a figure with far wider cultural purchase than Jones himself: Macaulay Culkin.<sup>93</sup> In the 1990s, Culkin was a media phenomenon and icon of idealised childhood.<sup>94</sup> Like Jones, and the young Keith Chegwin of Polanski's *Macbeth*, he had floppy hair, a skinny body and, to borrow a term from Kincaid, a 'kissy-lipped' androgynous face.<sup>95</sup> There are also parallels between *Titus* and Culkin's work. For instance, Michael Jackson's *Black or White* video features Culkin in a two-minute framing narrative that has remarkable similarities to the opening frame-sequence of *Titus*.<sup>96</sup> It begins with a hyperactive Culkin jumping around his bedroom, playing air-guitar to loud rock music. Make-believe then morphs into reality as he drags some over-sized amplifiers into his parents' living room and produces a real guitar. The camera, meanwhile, in a manner remarkably similar to Taymor's *Titus*, cuts rapidly between close shots of his hands and face and full-body shots. When he plugs the guitar into the amplifier, the windows explode and, in a reversal of the adult-child paradigm of *Titus*, it is the male *adult* (his father) who is violently removed via an ejector-style seat that sends him through the roof of the house. Flying through the

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<sup>92</sup> See for instance Richard Burt, 'Shakespeare and the Holocaust'; David McCandless, 'A Tale of Two *Tituses*'; Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Looking Like a Child'; and Peter S. Donaldson, 'Game Space/Tragic Space'.

<sup>93</sup> *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, dir. Adrian Noble (FilmFour, 1996). See Rutter, 'Looking Like a Child'; and Courtney Lehmann, 'Apocalyptic Paternalism, Family Values, and the Warner of the Cinemas; or, How Shakespeare Became Posthuman', in *Apocalyptic Shakespeare: Essays on Visions of Chaos and Revelation in Recent Film Adaptations*, ed. by Melissa Croteau and Carolyn Jess-Cooke (Jefferson and London: McFarland, 2009), pp. 47-69.

<sup>94</sup> According to Kincaid, such was the popularity of Culkin that the film, *Home Alone*, made more than \$500 million in 1990: see James R. Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence*, p. 116.

<sup>95</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 369.

<sup>96</sup> Michael Jackson, *Black or White* (Epic Records, 1991).

air, he eventually lands in a parallel universe. What greets him, however, is not the grim adult version of childhood fantasy play (as in *Titus*), but the fantasy land of Culkin and the adult-child Michael Jackson.

Whether consciously or not, Taymor seems to have appropriated the iconography of this short film while reversing the trajectory of its narrative. For, where the child in Michael Jackson's video foregrounds what Ruth M. Goldstein and Edith Zornow have termed the filmic trope of the 'omnipotent tot' who 'saves' the adults through his precocious child-like wisdom, Young Lucius in Taymor's film is educated out of childishness via the television into to the brutal adult world of mutilations, rape and murder.<sup>97</sup> Yet what endures in *Titus*'s intertextual homage to Macaulay Culkin is the fetishised image of Kincaid's 'alluring child'. A ubiquitous figure in the Hollywood mainstream, this child is an unthreatening, pre-sexual icon of childhood: 'bleached, bourgeois and androgynous'.<sup>98</sup> He is, in other words, an alternative embodiment – the young, androgynous boy equivalent – of Mulvey's female 'erotic spectacle'. Taymor states in her 'Director's Notes' that she wanted to 'allow the adrenaline to rush while the heart and mind are challenged'.<sup>99</sup> Yet, what she in fact created, or recreated, in her highly citational production is a boy so familiar an icon of American cinematic childhood as to appear almost entirely unworthy of note.

As the film progresses and Young Lucius is assimilated further and further into the action, he becomes less of an homage to Culkin and more of a Culkin anti-type who absorbs and reproduces the adult violence he witnesses. Central to this metamorphosis is the fly-killing scene, in which the violent play of the opening scene is actualised in reality. Through careful editing, Taymor places him at the centre of the action, tracking in a few short shots a shift from child-like artlessness to one of devious and manipulative guile. He morphs, in short, from Kincaid's 'alluring child' (the angelic

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<sup>97</sup> Ruth M. Goldstein and Edith Zornow, *The Screen Image of Youth: Movies about Children and Adolescents* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1980), p. xiv.

<sup>98</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence*, p. 20.

<sup>99</sup> Julie Taymor, *Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 183.

Fleance in Polanski's *Macbeth*) into Anne Higonnet's 'knowing child' (more akin to the complicit page in Holmes's *Richard III*). For a play that repeatedly insists on the innocence of childhood, where adults refer to Young Lucius as 'tender' (3.2.48, 50), 'sweet' (5.3.168), and 'made of tears' (3.2.250), this is a significant shift in characterisation by Taymor. It is worth noting here that Taymor does not, unlike both Howell and Warner, depict Young Lucius weeping over the body of his grandfather in Act 5, Scene 3, and his four lines from 'O grandsire, grandsire' to 'My tears will choke me if I ope my mouth' (5.3.171-5) are completely excised. This change is further evidence of how the Young Lucius of this film develops as a character and in doing so how far he diverges from the Young Lucius of Shakespeare's text.

From a narrative perspective, the killing of the fly is the point at which the boy's function as almost exclusively extra-diegetic observer morphs into that of intra-diegetic actor in Taymor's film. No longer the liminal subject hovering on the margins of the action – hiding behind pillars, peeking round doors, peering through windows – Young Lucius becomes, through his participation in the fly-killing scene, fully complicit in his grandfather's narrative of revenge. The setting of the fly-killing scene recalls the opening sequence, where the location of the boy's violent play is also, as in this scene, a kitchen table. However, whereas in the former the boy is bathed in the flickering light of the television, his agitated movements accompanied by the frenetic sounds of a cartoon, in the latter scene he is framed between Titus and Lavinia, his sudden attack on the fly erupting into their tender exchange with unexpected ferocity. It is the first time within the film (aside from the violent play of the frame sequence) that Young Lucius has enacted the violence he has, thus far, been merely observing. Far from the tearful boy on the periphery, this Young Lucius takes centre stage, testing the boundaries of his own agency. A tracking shot follows Titus as he rises angrily from his seat. A shot/reverse-shot sequence takes in the face of the crest-fallen boy, before closing in on a low-angle close-up of Titus's face, aligning us, the spectators, with the boy as his grandfather looms threateningly over him (this shot recalls a similar adult/child exchange in the *Black or White* video

when George Wendt, playing Macaulay Culkin's father, bears angrily down on the young boy). Again, the camera pauses on the broken expression of the boy before there is another remarkable transformation. After a beat, he raises his chin with a new-found confidence, smirks knowingly, and announces with conspiratorial relish: 'it was a black ill-favour'd fly / Like to the empress' Moor; therefore I killed him' (3.2.68-9). He giggles as Titus's mood changes from fury to glee, the moment of tension successfully dissipated. But it is not, as Rutter has argued, a 'collapse into childness', where innocence educates evil and playfulness prevails.<sup>100</sup> The crafty, knowing look on Young Lucius's face denies such an idealistic reading. Unlike the Young Lucius of the opening sequence where, snot and tears pouring down his face, he is forcibly removed from the kitchen and held aloft as a powerless prize for the cheering Colosseum crowds (see Figure 15 above), this newly empowered child is a killer in the making, honed in the arts of deceit and dissimulation. The reassignment of the fly-killing episode from Marcus to Young Lucius has profound implications for the final scene and the film's representation of childhood as a problematic emblem of futurity and the subject of lively critical debate.

In the final scene of Shakespeare's text, the fate of the children is a blank to be filled, elided or foregrounded in performance. Marcus orders the gathered Romans and Goths to '[b]ehold the child' (5.3.118), as he or one of his followers holds aloft '[t]he 'issue of an irreligious Moor' (5.3.120) but the ultimate fate of the baby, and of Young Lucius, is unexplained. At this point in Taymor's film it is the Clown who lifts up Aaron's baby who is in a small cage. It is a conscious repetition of the opening sequence when he holds Young Lucius aloft for the invisible, cheering crowds. This time, however, the Colosseum crowds are present but eerily silent. After Lucius's closing speech, the sound of a crying baby interrupts the silence and the camera closes in on Aaron's infant, lying helpless in his cage. The door of the cage begins to open, and as the camera pulls out, a wide-eyed Young Lucius is slowly revealed. He looks up to the skies, as the sound of one crying baby merges

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<sup>100</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Looking Like a Child', p. 19.



into countless other crying babies. The shot freezes for a moment before switching to a shot of the boy's back as he walks in slow motion away from the camera towards the archway leading out of the Colosseum, cradling the baby across his shoulder and. For a full two minutes, he continues his slow journey towards the outside world, the sound of crying infants having transformed into the more soothing and joyful sound of church bells. As he reaches the archway, the camera begins to follow him out of the Colosseum and finally freezes, the silhouette of the two children bathed in the garishly bright colours of a pixelated and self-evidently artificial sunrise. For Lisa S. Starks, this final coda functions as a re-gendering of the slasher movie's 'Final Girl' narrative, and signifies, however tentatively, the possibility of release and redemption.<sup>101</sup> Drawing on Carol Clover's analysis of gender and the horror genre, Starks asserts that Taymor's Young Lucius inverts the conventional paradigm of the surviving female, an androgynous figure standing in as 'congenial double for the adolescent male' in the horror film's male coming-of-age narrative, to take on the maternal, nurturing role himself.<sup>102</sup> According to this reading, a reading re-affirmed by Courtney Lehmann, Taymor's film replaces the *phallicised* Final Girl of the slasher film with a *maternalised* male adolescent who is at once 'Other, mother, and "Final Boy"'.<sup>103</sup>

Despite Starks's and Lehmann's optimistic reading of Taymor's *Titus*, it is by no means the only way to read this coda. David McCandless compares the ending of Taymor's 1994 off-Broadway stage production with her 1999 film, arguing that the revised ending (in the stage version Young Lucius stared with horror at the tiny coffin of Aaron's baby, as has been noted above) creates a 'wish-fulfilment fantasy' that sanctions violence and retribution by releasing the audience from trauma through a Hollywood-style happy ending.<sup>104</sup> Kenneth Rothwell agrees that '[o]ne

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<sup>101</sup> Lisa S. Starks, 'Cinema of Cruelty: Powers of Horror in Julie Taymor's *Titus*', in *The Reel Shakespeare: Alternative Cinema and Theory*, ed. by Lisa S. Starks and Courtney Lehmann (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), pp. 121-141 (p. 136).

<sup>102</sup> See Carol J. Clover, 'Her Body Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film', in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. by Barry Grant (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1996), pp. 66-116, esp. p. 97.

<sup>103</sup> Courtney Lehmann, 'Apocalyptic Paternalism', p. 58.

<sup>104</sup> David McCandless, 'A Tale of Two *Tituses*', p. 510.

leaves the movie theatre with a sense of relief, where otherwise such calamities might inflict permanent trauma', but also hints at a cynicism inherent in this 'feel-good' movie ending when he states that 'it relieves not only the director but also her audience from facing the pitiless horrors of a holocaust' (he uses a small 'h' here but the analogy is implicit).<sup>105</sup> When considered within the Nazi-inspired context of Taymor's setting, the image of the Aryan child leading the biracial baby into the future raises troubling questions of its own. For Catherine Silverstone, the hopeful ending 'works to elide the problematical racial politics of [Young Lucius's] paternalistic gesture'.<sup>106</sup> However, I argue that the racial politics are not elided but foregrounded through the fascist imagery that pervades this film. In this context, the Aryan appearance of Young Lucius, and thus the future for the biracial baby, seem far from secure. Although the ending has attracted multiple interpretations, for many, such as Jonathan Bate, Kim Fedderson and J. Michael Richardson, and Carol Chillington Rutter, it has been taken at face value for its recuperative and redemptive qualities.<sup>107</sup> In contrast, I believe that what Burt terms the final 'schlocky' shot of Young Lucius walking out of the Colosseum with the baby in his arms *appears* to offer hope of a new dawn in the hands of this androgynous Final Girl inversion, but its apparent closure is undermined by the ambiguous role of Young Lucius in this adaptation and by the constant presence of what Taymor herself has called a 'ghastly, ghostly history' of racial and sectarian violence.<sup>108</sup> What has been seen by many as a 'paternalistic' gesture is thus undermined by the racial implications of the fascistic references, the ambivalent role of the witness, the garishly artificial sunrise, and Young Lucius's complicity in the violence he appears to be fleeing. As symbols of 'reproductive futurism', then,

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<sup>105</sup> Kenneth Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, p. 272.

<sup>106</sup> Catherine Silverstone, *Shakespeare, Trauma and Contemporary Performance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 5.

<sup>107</sup> Jonathan Bate, 'Introduction', in *Titus Andronicus*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series; Kim Fedderson and J. Michael Richardson, 'Liberty's Taken, or How "captive women may be cleansed and used": Julie Taymor's *Titus* and 9/11', in *Apocalyptic Shakespeare: Essays on Visions of Chaos and Revelation in Recent Film Adaptations*, ed. by Melissa Croteau and Carolyn Jess-Cooke (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009), pp. 70-89; Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Looking Like a Child', p. 26.

<sup>108</sup> Richard Burt, 'Shakespeare and the Holocaust', p. 94. Eileen Blumenthal, Julie Taymor, Antonio Monda, *Playing With Fire*, 3rd edn. (New York: Abrams, 2007), p. 229.

Taymor's children offer us a glimpse of a future that is at best questionable, and at worst, as grimly nihilistic as that depicted in Howell's unequivocal ending.

## Conclusion

That Taymor's *Titus* fails to offer a definitive sense of closure is symptomatic of a film that constantly interrogates the role of the audience in the cinematic illusion, demanding that the viewer accepts nothing at face value. Like Shakespeare's play, it toys with blurred boundaries – of gender, genre, race and form – and deconstructs fixed binaries of fiction and reality, good and evil, witness and participant. To ask viewers to invest in a happy ending and accept without question the politics of 'reproductive futurism' is tantamount to asking that they reject the interrogatory mode of viewing the film has been promoting throughout. Although, of the three productions under consideration, Taymor's *Titus* departs furthest from Shakespeare's play in terms of textual emendations, it also, somewhat paradoxically, most closely dramatises its ambiguities and indeterminacies. Shakespeare asks us to '[b]ehold the child' (5.3.118), but the child is an imperfect signifier. For Marcus, the child (Aaron's son) represents the wrongs inflicted on the Andronici by the 'irreligious' Moor, '[c]hief architect and plotter of these woes' (5.3.120-1). Yet this fails to account for Titus's behaviour in the opening act, where a lack of compassion towards not only Tamora but also his own son, Mutius, establishes him as a flawed hero. The multiple fascistic references that Taymor employs, as we have seen, do not clearly distinguish victim from perpetrator. Like the oxymoronic 'irreligious piety' (1.1.133), villain and hero are distinctions that collapse under close scrutiny. That the fate of the two children remains ultimately unresolved is thus characteristic of a play that denies its audience an unproblematic viewing experience. If the burden of futurity lies in the hands of Young Lucius and Aaron's baby, then we are left by Taymor with the inevitable conclusion that it is a burden almost impossible to bear, despite the best efforts of her revisionary, if highly questionable, 'happy ending'.

Warner and Howell smoothed over the ambiguities in the play's depiction of the children and their questionable futures with vastly different results. For Warner, Young Lucius and Aaron's baby were marginalised characters who existed merely to support Titus and his patriarchal narrative of revenge. Their lack of agency and authority was reinforced by the fact that they were both self-evidently *not* children. By manifesting Young Lucius as an adolescent soldier and the baby as a lifeless toy, Warner neutralised their power to disrupt the brutal regime of the Andronici and her narrative of revenge tragedy. Unlike the puppet-princes of Ostermeier's *Richard III* and the statuary reincarnation of Mamillius in Wheeldon's ballet, both of whose disruptive presence subverted ideas about teleology, ontology, and futurity, the children of Warner's production functioned to reinforce rather than subvert the patriarchal hegemony of the play world. To portray the children as potential conduits out of that world would have diminished the tragic stature of Brian Cox's Titus and destroyed the very foundations upon which Warner built her production. It would, moreover, have raised questions about the agency of the children that she was evidently not concerned with pursuing. Howell's adaptation used the child as the 'hook' for accessing the 'catalogue of violence' that enfolds in the play by filming its excesses through his eyes.<sup>109</sup> Like Warner, she does not suggest that Young Lucius and Aaron's baby might offer an alternative future, choosing instead to confront her audience with the life-destroying futility of war in a frame-sequence that was bleakly nihilistic. The questions that Shakespeare's text leaves unresolved are addressed by Howell with unequivocal finality: Aaron's baby is dead; Young Lucius weeps helplessly over his body; and the skull re-appears to confirm the death not only of childhood, but of futurity itself. Taymor offers a tentative glimmer of hope in her final sequence but her 'hero' is an ambiguous character – a fetishised Aryan child within a fascistic frame of reference who is capable of acts of unprovoked violence and manipulative guile. To empower him with the ability to direct the future seems a burden he is ill-equipped to bear. It is a future, moreover, signified by an artificial sunrise that

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<sup>109</sup> Jane Howell cited in Michael Billington, 'Shaping a Gory Classic for TV', *New York Times*, 14 April 1985, p. 29.

appears to be no more than a mirage. The power to act in Howell's film, on the other hand, lies not with Young Lucius but with the viewers themselves. The future for Young Lucius and Aaron's baby is beyond redemption. By confronting viewers with this uncomfortable truth, Howell forces them to look at themselves and ask, in her own words, 'what are we doing to the children?'<sup>110</sup>

In the final chapter I consider *The Winter's Tale*, a play with an equally problematical ending that has, like *Titus Andronicus*, received renewed attention in recent years following a relatively sparse performance history. Recent productions have tended to foreground the ambiguities of Shakespeare's text by focusing on the absent/present role of the child, as in the stage revivals by Nicholas Hytner and Edward Hall. Like Howell and Taymor, these directors took the role of Mamillius and turned him into the audience's proxy by filtering the action through his eyes. Breaking with convention, however, Branagh and Ashford tried to impose a 'happy ending' which, like Taymor's *Titus*, ultimately posed more questions than it answered.

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<sup>110</sup> Jane Howell, *ibid.*

## Chapter Four

### ‘No age’: Disappearing Childhood in *The Winter's Tale*

*The Winter's Tale* is undergoing a remarkable revival. A brief glance at the five years between 2012 and 2017 reveals an almost uninterrupted run of productions across the major theatre companies of the United Kingdom. Notable examples include Edward Hall's 2012 revival of his 2005 production for Propeller; Lucy Bailey's 2013 production for the RSC; Conrad Nelson's 2015 modern-dress production for Northern Broadsides; the Kenneth Branagh Company's 2015/2016 production at the Garrick Theatre; Michael Longhurst's 2015/16 production for Shakespeare's Globe at the Sam Wanamaker Theatre; and Cheek by Jowl's 2016/17 touring production directed by Declan Donnellan. Interest in the play has also crossed artistic genres, with three ground-breaking adaptations in the fields of dance, fiction and opera. In 2014, Christopher Wheeldon premiered the first ever ballet version of *The Winter's Tale* at the Royal Opera House, as has already been discussed. In 2015, Jeanette Winterson published her own 'cover version' of the play in novel form set in the money markets of modern London under the title: *The Gap of Time: The Winter's Tale Retold*.<sup>1</sup> It was the first in a series of Shakespearean novels commissioned by Hogarth Press to commemorate the 400-year anniversary of Shakespeare's death. A new three-act opera version written by Ryan Wigglesworth was debuted at the London Coliseum in March 2017.<sup>2</sup> It was set in a contemporary, militarised, right-wing political state which featured the return of the dead child Mamillius. He ended the production by blowing out his candle in a coup de théâtre that echoed the closing scene of Propeller's two stage revivals, as we shall see. For a play that has often been overlooked by directors and adaptors in the past, it is a remarkable surge of interest that raises the following question: why has *The Winter's Tale* emerged from the periphery to become one of the most revived, adapted and celebrated Shakespearean plays in recent years? One answer, as I argue in this chapter, lies in the character of Mamillius: in his sudden and premature death; and in the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Cover version' was the term used by Winterson herself in the preface to the book.

<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, composer Ryan Wigglesworth, dir. Rory Kinnear (London Coliseum, 2017).

ways in which that resonates with twenty-first-century audiences facing their own particular crisis of what Neil Postman termed ‘disappearing childhood’.

The last early modern recorded performance of *The Winter’s Tale* was in 1634 and revivals during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries appear to have been spasmodic and irregular with numerous cuts, revisions and adaptations.<sup>3</sup> Two ballads, hybrid versions of Robert Greene’s romance *Pandosto; The Triumph of Time*, a source for the play, and Shakespeare’s play, were printed during the restoration by pro-Royalist writers, Thomas Jordan and S. S. Gent (later attributed to Samuel Sheppard).<sup>4</sup> However, as Lori Humphrey Newcomb notes, the material was adapted ‘so freely that neither work can be claimed as its primary source.’<sup>5</sup> The play in its original form only began to grow in popularity during the second half of the twentieth century, and the past thirty-five years in particular have seen a slow increase in new productions at the major theatres of the United Kingdom.<sup>6</sup> Although this change in fortune can be partly attributed to audiences’ willingness to embrace non-realist theatre, I would like to suggest another explanation that speaks

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<sup>3</sup> As far as can be ascertained, the play was not staged for over a century after the last recorded court performance in 1634. It was adapted by David Garrick in 1756 under the title *Florizel and Perdita, a Dramatic Pastoral* and later published in London in 1758 under the title: *Florizel And Perdita : A Dramatic Pastoral, In Three Acts. Alter'd From The Winter's Tale Of Shakespear. By David Garrick. As It Is Performed At The Theatre Royal In Drury-Lane*. It was based on the last two acts of Shakespeare’s play alone. It was revived frequently in this form until the end of the eighteenth century. The play was staged in a form closer to the original text at the major theatres intermittently throughout the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. However, it suffered from numerous cuts and revisions designed to make sense of the generic inconsistencies. See John Pitcher, ‘Introduction’, in *The Winter’s Tale*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series, ed. by John Pitcher (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010), pp. 102-115 and Jonathan Bate, ‘*The Winter’s Tale* in Performance: The RSC and Beyond’, in *The Winter’s Tale*, RSC Shakespeare (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2009), pp. 132-144.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Jordan, ‘The Jealous Duke, And The Injured Dutchess: A Story’ (London, 1663); S. S. Gent, *Fortunes Tennis-Ball* (London, 1672).

<sup>5</sup> Lori Humphrey Newcomb *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 143. See Lori Humphrey Newcomb pp. 143-146 for full discussion of debates about authorship.

<sup>6</sup> According to John O’Connor and Katharine Goodland, *DoS*, there were two professional productions in the 1970s, eight in the 1980s, eight in the 1990s, and seven between 2000 and 2005. For a full analysis of the play in production see Dennis Bartholomeusz, ‘*The Winter’s Tale*’ in *Performance in England and America 1611-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); *Shakespeare in Performance: The Winter's Tale* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), ed. by Judith Dunbar; and Patricia E. Tatspaugh, *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare at Stratford Series (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002).

to a wider social concern about childhood<sup>7</sup>. As discussed in Chapter Two, *Macbeth* was a play to which late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century directors turned to explore society's conflicted attitude towards children as a contradictory symbol of the vulnerable innocent and the threatening 'other': a figure of hope but also of one of despair. I argued that *Macbeth*, with its ambiguous and multi-faceted portrayal of childhood, provided the ideal vehicle for exploring changing ideas about what it means to be a child in a society facing an increasingly acute crisis of classification. *The Winter's Tale*, on the other hand, is notable for its absence of children. No young boys remain at the end as a silent threat to the play's sense of closure, like Aaron's baby and Young Lucius in *Titus Andronicus*, Fleance in *Macbeth* or Prince Gonzalo, the equivalent of Mamillius in Richard Brome's 1630s reinterpretation of *The Winter's Tale*, *The Queen and Concubine*.<sup>8</sup> There is also a distinct lack of 'perilous' or precocious children, like the pageboy and the two young princes in *Richard III* or Macduff's 'young fry' in *Macbeth*. Childhood has, by the end of *The Winter's Tale*, quite simply disappeared.

Although the play opens with a young boy, Mamillius, and his heavily pregnant mother, Hermione, when the choric figure of Time enters in Act 4, Scene 1 and 'slide[s] / O'er' (4.1.5-6) sixteen years, he creates a temporal blank.<sup>9</sup> No 'child' between the ages of 5 and 21 – a crucial developmental stage between infancy and adulthood and a slightly elongated version of Neil Postman's definition of childhood – appears in this play.<sup>10</sup> Mamillius has already died while still in petticoats; Florizel, whose birth 'was not full a month' (5.1.117) apart from that of Mamillius, is by now a twenty-one-year-old man; and Perdita, last seen as a baby at the end of Act Three, reappears aged sixteen. Anxieties related to this 'disappeared' age of childhood are echoed throughout the

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Bate, 'The Winter's Tale in Performance', p. 140.

<sup>8</sup> *The Queen and Concubine*, ed. by Lucy Munro, in *Richard Brome* online, gen. ed. Richard Cave (Royal Holloway University of London/HRI Sheffield, 2010)  
<https://www.hrionline.ac.uk/brome/viewOriginal.jsp?play=QC&type=CRIT> [accessed 8 August 2017].

<sup>9</sup> *The Winter's Tale*, ed. by John Pitcher.

<sup>10</sup> For Postman, this is specifically the age between seven and seventeen. See Introduction to this thesis for full analysis of Postman's argument.



play. Polixenes reminisces about being ‘boy eternal’ (1.2.65); Leontes wistfully imagines he ‘did recoil / Twenty-three years’ (1.2.154-5) when looking at his son's face; and Antigonus threatens to neuter his own three daughters before they reach adulthood, vowing ‘[b]y mine honor, / I’ll geld ’em all’ (2.1.147-8). At the beginning of Act Three, the Old Shepherd expresses fears about the precocious sexuality and anti-social behaviour of children when he says: ‘I would there were no age between ten and three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting’ (3.3.58-61). What Time actualises in the sixteen-year lacuna at the centre of the play is almost an exact fulfilment of this wish. The age of childhood – the very age over which both Florizel and Perdita ‘slide’ directly to adulthood; before which Leontes and Polixenes fantasise about returning; and beyond which Mamillius does not survive – becomes the ‘no age’ of the Old Shepherd’s whimsical musing.

One of the reasons for *The Winter’s Tale*’s irregular performance history through the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries is its stylistic and formal heterogeneity and spatio-temporal dislocations. It is listed under the ‘comedies’ in the 1623 First Folio, yet the classification of this late play has long confounded commentators. It is a generic hybrid replete with anachronisms, plot reversals, duplications and linguistic complexity. Shakespeare was not averse to setting his action in one place that plays out in real time and conforms to the Aristotelian three unities as *The Tempest*, which may have been written and performed in the same year as *The Winter’s Tale*, attests. The reason for *The Winter’s Tale*’s temporal lacunae and disjunctions is quite simply a question of form reflecting matter. ‘[T]he carelessness’ as Bartholomeusz has observed, ‘is quite careful, the disorganisation apparently deliberate.’<sup>11</sup> Time is not merely a crucial element in the play’s narrative. It is, as commentators have noted, its fundamental structuring principle and central thematic concern.

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<sup>11</sup> Dennis Bartholomeusz, *The Winter’s Tale* in *Performance*, p. 6.

Inga-Stina Ewbank's essay, "'The Triumph of Time' in *The Winter's Tale*" was one of the earliest papers to apply temporal theory to *The Winters Tale*, and remains a seminal work in this field.<sup>12</sup> For Ewbank, the ambivalent representation of Time as both 'Destroyer' and 'Revealer' in the early modern consciousness is pivotal to understanding the play's thematic and structural design. According to this reading, time is a depoliticised and essentialised force under which human agency is subordinated to teleology. *The Winter's Tale*, she asserts, is all about 'what time means and does to man' (p. 114), and the sacrifice of Mamillius is a crucial, if regrettable, stage in the play's overarching atonement-redemption structure. Taking a similar critical perspective that draws on mythopoetic and theurgic emblems to inform his reading of the play, William E. Engel argues that the key to understanding the function of time in *The Winter's Tale* lies in the classical concepts of *Kairos* and *Kronos* and in the early modern commonplace *Temporis filia veritas* ('Truth is the daughter of Time').<sup>13</sup> *Kairos* is a qualitative form of time that signifies an opportune or propitious moment, and, according to Engel, is manifested in the figure of Paulina, who 'patiently manipulates the conditions for actualizing the possibilities of transformative and redemptive art.' *Kronos*, on the other hand, is a quantitative concept of time associated with sequentiality and mortality. It is thus traditionally represented as an old man wielding a scythe. Engel argues that the choric figure of Time that appears in Act 4, Scene 1 and 'collapses the sixteen years of Perdita's childhood' is a benign version of *Kronos*, but that ultimately 'it is the influence of *Kairos* that crowns the restoration and renewal of time with which [the] play concludes'. Through its pattern of death, atonement and renewal, the play enacts in dramatic form the motto *Temporis filia veritas*, and thus, Engel argues, 'truth comes to light in the end'.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Inga-Stina Ewbank, 'The Triumph of Time in *The Winter's Tale*', in *Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale*, A Casebook, ed. by Kenneth Muir (London: Macmillan, 1968; repr. 1983), pp. 98–115.

<sup>13</sup> '*Temporis filia veritas*' is quoted on the title page of Shakespeare's principal source material, Robert Greene, *Pandosto; The Triumph of Time*.

<sup>14</sup> William E. Engel, '*The Winter's Tale*: Kinetic Emblems and Memory Images in *The Winter's Tale*', in *Late Shakespeare 1608-1613*, ed. by Andrew J. Power and Rory Loughnane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 71-87.

Although these readings provide an illuminating insight into the overall formal and narrative design of the play, they underestimate a key point famously made by Stanley Cavell: that ‘a dead five- or six-year-old boy remains unaccounted for’.<sup>15</sup> In doing so, they overlook a fundamental function of time as a classifier of life stages. At the centre of the play is a young boy who whispers his winter’s tale to his mother. However, he dies in Act Three before his tale has had chance to unfold. Although his age is never explicitly stated, it can be deduced from oblique references in the text. When Leontes meets Florizel in the final act, for instance, he exclaims: ‘Were I but twenty-one, / Your father’s image is so hit in you, / His very air, that I should call you brother’ (5.1.125-7). Taking into account the sixteen-year gap, this suggests that Mamillius, who was the same age as Florizel, would have been five when he died. It is widely agreed among early modern scholars that the progression from boyhood to manhood was conceptualised as a continuum in which the two states were unstable, fluid and inter-dependent. As Gina Bloom explains, ‘boys are always-already in the process of becoming men and men, by implication, are merely grown-up boys’.<sup>16</sup> Although the boundary between boyhood and manhood was fluid, however, the progression from infancy to boyhood (or from infancy to the ‘no age’ of childhood) was far more clearly demarcated through the social practice of breeching.

Up until around the age of seven, both genders were dressed in petticoats and spent their time almost exclusively with women, and the word ‘child’ was a generic classification that signified an ‘early modern perception of all children as feminised’, as has already been discussed in Chapter One.<sup>17</sup> The Old Shepherd’s musings about whether the baby Perdita is a ‘boy or a child’ (3.3.68)

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<sup>15</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 193.

<sup>16</sup> Gina Bloom, “‘Boy Eternal’: Aging, Games, and Masculinity in *The Winter’s Tale*”, *English Literary Renaissance* (2010), 329-356 (p. 333); see also Katie Knowles, *Shakespeare’s Boys*, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Elyot’s observation ‘[a]fter that a child is come to seven years of age, I hold it expedient that he be taken from the company of women’, is typical of early modern attitudes in this regard. Taken from *The Book Named the Governor* (London, 1531; repr. London: J.M. Dent and Co., 1962), p. 19. See also Jennifer Higginbotham, pp. 11-12.

certainly seems to suggest that Shakespeare considered this pre-breeched period to be gendered feminine. At some point between the ages of five and seven, boys were removed from the female sphere, dressed in breeches, and prepared for manhood.<sup>18</sup> At the time of his death, Mamillius thus stands at the cusp of the transition from the unbreeched infant to the breeched boy-child. Childhood is curtailed at the very point at which it becomes gendered and individuated, and the whole period between infancy and adulthood is elided. As we have already seen, this is also a crucial developmental stage in terms of the ‘childhood in crisis’ debate. With unmediated access to information technology, adults are no longer able to monitor, control and protect their children to the same extent as previous generations. It can surely be no coincidence, then, that the Shakespearean play that most closely enacts the crisis outlined by Postman in 1982 and further defined and debated by childhood scholars in the intervening years – the crisis of ‘disappearing childhood’ – is enjoying an unprecedented revival.

In this chapter, I consider the different ways in which productions from the past fifteen years have responded to this crisis through their treatment of the death of Mamillius and the sixteen-year temporal vacuum in performance. In the first section, I consider the 2001 production by Nicholas Hytner, whose childish adults and precociously adult Mamillius seemed to encapsulate in dramatic form the crisis outlined by Postman, Holland and others. Using the single-sex public school as a modern-day context for the childhood friendship of the two princes, Hytner provided a framework for understanding and pathologising Leontes’s regressive behaviour, turning Mamillius into an embodied metaphor for Leontes’s ‘inner child’, the *puer aeternus*, who must be destroyed in order to achieve closure, however equivocal that turned out to be. Next, I consider a production by Edward Hall (2005/2012) who presented his play through the eyes of the child. I argue that, by transforming Shakespeare’s *Tale* into Mamillius’s ‘sad tale’ he created a theatrical response to a

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<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the early modern practice of breeching, particularly as it relates to maternity in *The Winter’s Tale*, see Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare’s Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), p. 7 and p. 228.

very modern crisis facing our society at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Through a metatheatrical approach to doubling, twinning, substitution and haunting, he ensured that the absence of Mamillius became a presence that problematised the final scenes of redemption and reconciliation and foregrounded anxieties about the ‘no age’ of disappearing childhood that he represents. In the final section, I analyse the 2015/2016 production by Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford in which Mamillius was reimagined as a sentimentalised Victorian ‘wise child’ created to save his sister and reverse the moral degeneration of his father. In this reading of the play, his death was presented as less a tragic byproduct of Leontes’s jealousy and more an act of divine intervention – the Shakespearean equivalent of the Dickensian ‘dying child’ sent ‘to indict the adult world’ with his death.<sup>19</sup> Capitalising as it does on the late-twentieth-/early-twenty-first-century trend for cultural and literary Victoriana, I argue that Branagh/Ashford’s *Tale* evoked nostalgia for a mythologised past and what Victorian scholar Kathleen Tillotson calls the ‘mysterious simplicities of fairy-tale’ in order to secure not only the survival of Perdita, but of futurity itself. The crisis of ‘disappearing childhood’ was at the heart of each of these three productions.<sup>20</sup> However, the extent to which they foregrounded or occluded this crisis as a crisis had contrasting implications for the final reconciliation scene and therefore the overall tone of their plays. From ambiguous irresolution in Hytner to imperfect surrogation in Hall and redemptive sentimentality in Branagh/Ashford, their focus on the ‘disappearing’ of childhood had profound repercussions for the message conveyed by their respective *Tales* and goes some way to explaining why this long-neglected play is suddenly attaining widespread attention.

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<sup>19</sup> David Grylls, *Guardians and Angels: Parents and Children in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p. 137.

<sup>20</sup> Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954; repr. with corrections, 1956), p. 174.

#### 4a. Healing the 'Inner Child' in Nicholas Hytner's *The Winter's Tale* (2001)<sup>21</sup>

Nicholas Hytner's 2001 production for the National Theatre approached the 'no age' of childhood from two opposing but inter-connected perspectives: the premature child whose accelerated maturation queers the normative child-to-adult telos; and the regressive adult, whose stunted growth, pathologised within a post-Freudian psychological framework, threatens heterosexuality, 'reproductive futurism' and, as a consequence, the very existence of futurity itself.<sup>22</sup> In the first act of the play, Polixenes reminisces about his childhood relationship with Leontes, describing an Edenic time of carefree innocence before the fall into sexual knowledge and, by implication, corruption:

We were as twinned lambs that did frisk i'th' sun  
And bleat the one at th'other. What we changed  
Was innocence for innocence. We knew not  
The doctrine of ill-doing nor dreamed  
That any did. Had we pursued that life,  
And our weak spirits ne'er been higher reared  
With stronger blood, we should have answered heaven  
Boldly, 'Not guilty,' the imposition cleared  
Hereditary ours.

(1.2.67-74)

The age of innocence for which Polixenes yearns is one that predates breeching and thus also predates heterosexualisation and its perceived dangers. As an emblem of childhood innocence, his boyhood friendship with Leontes is eulogised as the epitome of mutual affection and their wives depicted as satanic temptresses. The imagery is biblical, specifically referencing the Garden of Eden myth in Genesis, which, as W. Thomas MacCrary notes, projects a 'strange nostalgia men have for a time before women, when they were intimate with their male god and knew no difference, no

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<sup>21</sup> This is a psychological term taken from the theories of psychiatrist Eric Berne, discussed in detail below.

<sup>22</sup> See Lee Edelman, *No Future*, p. 4 and *passim*.

need, no guilt'.<sup>23</sup> However, Shakespeare's is a queer version of the Fall that is adapted from its Christian context to incorporate ideals of virtuous male friendship as defined in key classical and renaissance discourses such as Cicero's *De Amicitia* and Michel de Montaigne's 'On Friendship'.<sup>24</sup> There are two men in Polixenes's reimagined version of the Garden of Eden, and Satan comes in the form of a woman. Hermione reiterates this female-Satan analogy in mock horror, accusing Polixenes of suggesting that she and his wife are devils and challenging him to pursue it further. It is a challenge which Polixenes declines to meet, yet the accusation is left hanging, with no denial forthcoming from either man:

Grace to boot!  
Of this make no conclusion, lest you say  
Your queen and I are devils. Yet go on.  
Th'offenses we have made you do we'll answer –  
If you first sinned with us, and that with us  
You did continue fault, and that you slipped not  
With any but with us.

(1.2.80-86)

Although Polixenes is the first to frame the boyhood friendship in biblical language, it is presented in a playful exchange with Hermione and, as John Pitcher observes, his 'temporary slipping back to childhood has no consequences for him'.<sup>25</sup> For Leontes, however, the metaphor takes hold in a dangerous and ultimately destructive way. In his fertile imagination, the temptress does not merely corrupt him with sexual knowledge, thereby forcing his separation from his friend and his ejection from his Edenic world of male-male bonding, but she also corrupts his friend, driving a near-deadly wedge between husband and wife that is only saved from tragedy in the final moments.

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<sup>23</sup> W. Thomas MacCrary, *Friends and Lovers: The Phenomenology of Desire in Shakespearean Comedy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 203.

<sup>24</sup> Cicero, *De Amicitia*, ed. by H. E. Gould and J. L. Whiteley (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1941; repr. Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2004); Michel de Montaigne, 'Of Friendship', in *The essayes or morall, politike and millitarie discourses of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne* (London, 1603). Quotation taken from 'On affectionate relationships' in *Michel de Montaigne: The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003) pp. 205-19.

<sup>25</sup> John Pitcher, 'Introduction', in *The Winter's Tale*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series, p. 34.

Scholars have long debated the extent to which Polixenes's and Leontes's boyhood friendship is based upon a homoerotic attraction and whether Leontes ever succeeds in fully relinquishing childhood ties.<sup>26</sup> Although there are advocates of both sides of the argument, the majority of commentators occupy the middle ground, which can probably be best summarised in Stephen Guy-Bray's analysis that 'Leontes is jealous of his wife because he thinks she has sex with his friend and of his friend because he thinks he has sex with his wife'.<sup>27</sup> I agree that Leontes's jealousy is directed towards both Polixenes and Hermione, but Guy-Bray's analysis suggests a symmetry in the relationships that the text belies. When Leontes articulates his suspicions of infidelity, he places responsibility almost entirely with his wife rather than with his friend. He begins by accusing them both of 'paddling palms and pinching fingers' (1.2.115), but then more explicitly states that it is Hermione who is '[s]till virginaling / Upon his palm' (1.2.125-6). He accuses her of 'hold[ing] up the neb, the bill, to him' (1.2.182), and linking arms 'with the boldness of a wife' (1.2.183). As his language becomes more sexually explicit, it is the penetrated not the penetrator who is the object of his disgust: 'be it concluded, / No barricado for a belly. Know't; / It will let in and out the enemy / With bag and baggage' (1.2.201-3).

A comparable vocabulary of misogynistic rancour is employed in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, particularly Sonnet 144, where the Polixenes/Leontes/Hermione relationship is dramatised in

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<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Brian Gibbons, 'Doubles and likenesses-with-a-difference: *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Winter's Tale*', *Connotations*, 6 (1996/7), 19-40; Nora Johnson, 'Ganymedes and Kings: Staging Male Homosexual Desire in *The Winter's Tale*', *SS*, 26 (1998), 187-217; Kathryn Bond Stockton, 'Lost, or "Exit, Pursued by a Bear": Causing Queer Children on Shakespeare's TV', in *Shakespeare: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. by Madhavi Menon (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 421-8. Other early modern scholars have argued that to view the early modern discourse of male-male love as necessarily sexual is to misinterpret the classical discourse of same-sex emotional intimacy (or *amicitia*), that can be homoerotic without necessarily being sexual. See, for instance Gina Bloom, "'Boy Eternal'", esp. pp. 338-341; Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); Will Tosh, *Male Friendship and Testimonies of Love in Shakespeare's England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 3-6.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Guy-Bray, *Homoerotic Space: Poetics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. 206.



compressed form. Here Shakespeare juxtaposes antitheses of evil and purity to place his male (angel) love in opposition to his female (devil) love:

Two loves I have, of comfort and despair,  
Which like two spirits do suggest me still:  
The better angel is a man right fair,  
The worser spirit a woman colored ill  
To win me soon to hell my female evil  
Tempteth my better angel from my side,  
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,  
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.  
And whether that my angel be turned fiend  
Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;  
But being both from me, both to each friend,  
I guess one angel in another's hell.  
Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,  
Till my bad angel fire my good one out.<sup>28</sup>

Miltonic language is employed to describe the female temptress, who is here imagined as the fallen angel Satan, seducing the friend and causing his fall from grace. Like Leontes, the speaker uses plosive alliteration, in, for example, 'purity [...] pride' and 'both [...] both', to convey his disgust. If we compare Shakespeare's treatment of Leontes's jealousy with his source material, the prose narrative *Pandosto; The Triumph of Time* by Robert Greene, it becomes clear to see how he reconfigures the directions of triangulated desire between the three main characters to reproduce the miniature drama of Sonnet 144.<sup>29</sup> In Greene's narrative, the boyhood relationship is given only passing mention. He describes how, upon meeting at the entrance to the city, Pandosto and his boyhood friend travel by horseback, 'devising and recounting how, being children, they had passed their youth in friendly pastimes.' The language of a prelapsarian homosocial idyll contaminated by female sexuality, all spoken in the presence of the young Mamillius, is entirely Shakespeare's invention. Greene, moreover, is far more unequivocal in his account of the burgeoning intimacy

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<sup>28</sup> For a bisexual reading of the erotic conflict depicted in this sonnet see Kate Chedgzoy, "'Two Loves I have": Shakespeare and Bisexuality', in *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity and Desire*, ed. by Phoebe Davidson and others (London: Cassel, 1997), pp. 106-119.

<sup>29</sup> All quotations taken from Robert Greene, *Pandosto; The Triumph of Time* (London, 1588).

between Bellaria (Shakespeare's Hermione) and Egistus (Polixenes). He describes 'a secret uniting of their affections' and 'a too private familiarity' that meant 'the one could not well be without the company of the other'. Shakespeare's Leontes, on the other hand, is given no such apparent cause for jealousy. Instead, Shakespeare rearranges his source material to give visual manifestation to Leontes's sexual anxieties: a young boy on the cusp of gendered individuation to remind him of his separation from Polixenes, and a pregnant wife to remind him of his fall into (hetero)sexual knowledge. In Hytner's production, it was the destruction of this peculiarly insular and exclusively male domain, the intimations of a same-sex erotic relationship, and the submission to heteronormative temporality that were literally and metaphorically given centre stage.

Set in what designer Ashley Martin-Davis called a 'euro-modern world' at the turn of the twenty-first century, Hytner's *The Winter's Tale* was a contemporary-dress production in a sophisticated urban setting.<sup>30</sup> The Sicilian court was re-imagined as the private apartment of a modern, informal monarch, while Bohemia became a Glastonbury-style music festival. The lights came up on the first act to reveal a chic penthouse apartment with floor-to-ceiling windows looking out onto a hazy city view. Memorabilia from Leontes's and Polixenes's schooldays were scattered among its sleek, monochromatic furniture, the old and the ultra-modern commingling in an inharmonious mismatch. To the right of the window was an over-sized sepia-tinted photograph of the two kings as young schoolboys of a similar age to Mamillius. Tousle-haired and dirty-kneed, the boys were dressed in matching sports kits and holding a rugby ball. Silver-framed photographs of schoolboys also adorned the top of a baby grand piano. A large display cabinet was filled, not with bottles of spirits or expensive-looking glassware as might be expected, but with an assortment of what the promptbook describes as 'mementos of childhood'.<sup>31</sup> They included sporting trophies and shields, rugby balls, more framed photographs, cricket bats, school caps, a toy drum and a teddy

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<sup>30</sup> 'Interview with designer Ashley Martin-Davis', National Theatre Education Workpack, pp. 6-7 (p. 7).

<sup>31</sup> Promptbook held at the archives of the National Theatre at NT Studio, London.

bear. Childhood in this Sicilian court was clearly a phase to be eternalised and memorialised, while the young boy Mamillius behaved less like a child than a ‘pint-sized, hot-housed “performer”’ who played Schumann, read books and recited poetry.<sup>32</sup>

Servants hovered discreetly in the shadows carrying trays of drinks and hors d’oeuvres, and a group of dark-suited courtiers stood around a coffee table, looking, as one reviewer described, ‘something like mafiosi, something like public schoolboys’.<sup>33</sup> Leontes was set apart from the group, sitting cross-legged on the floor in an outfit of meticulously pressed stone linen trousers and a preppy v-neck blue sweater. Standing upon the coffee table in the spotlight was Mamillius, dressed as a miniature Father Time in a black cloak complete with white wings and a scythe. He was reciting Sonnet 12:

When I do count the clock that tells the time,  
And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;  
When I behold the violet past prime,  
And sable curls all silver’d o’er with white;  
When lofty trees I see barren of leaves  
Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,  
And summer’s green all girded up in sheaves  
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard,  
Then of thy beauty do I question make,  
That thou among the wastes of time must go,  
Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake  
And die as fast as they see others grow;  
And nothing ‘gainst Time’s scythe can make defence  
Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.

The words were eerily prophetic. This little boy was destined never to survive the ‘wastes of time’ to look back with nostalgia at his own infantile self. There was also a grim irony in his exhortations to breed as a defence against the depredations of time when his own father was to be the cause of

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<sup>32</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, “‘A world ransomed, or one destroyed’: English *Tales* at the Millennium’, in *Shakespeare in Performance: The Winter’s Tale*, ed. by Judith Dunbar (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 213-242 (p. 219).

<sup>33</sup> Susannah Clapp, ‘Review of *The Winter’s Tale*’, *Observer*, in *TR*, 12.11 (2001), 675.

his only son's untimely death. This was without doubt a particularly apt choice of sonnet in view of the play's preoccupation with the ravages of time and the two men's nostalgic memories of their boyhood friendship (the sonnet is, after all, addressed to a young man and dedicated to the mysterious 'onlie begetter ... Mr. W. H').<sup>34</sup> However, there was an oddly disconcerting disjunction between the content and the delivery. Although he was dressed as a miniature Father Time, Mamillius was quite clearly a little boy (the actors who alternated the role of Mamillius, Liam Hess and Thomas Brown-Lowe, were aged around nine at the time of the performance), and the dark, enveloping folds of the costume drew attention to rather than masked the youthfulness of the boy underneath. The wistful sense of yearning and regret conveyed in the words of the sonnet, moreover, felt uncomfortably inappropriate in the high-pitched, stilted voice of a child. This was more than merely childish precociousness. It was as though Mamillius had been unnaturally fast-tracked through his childhood to achieve an impression of maturity in terms of behaviour, dress and intellect that was at odds with his immature physical development. It was, in fact, a dramatic manifestation of Leontes's own psychic 'inner child' and his compensatory 'adultifying' attitude towards his son. This is made clear when he says: 'How like, methought, I then was to this kernel / This squash, this gentleman' (1.2.159-60). In the space of one sentence, through the three metaphors, 'kernel', 'squash' and 'gentleman', he imaginatively constructs an accelerated growth from infancy to adulthood for his young son. Indeed, the last words Leontes speaks directly to Mamillius in the play are 'thou'rt an honest man' (1.2.208). The Mamillius of Hytner's play, like the Mamillius of Leontes's imagination, was a prematurely developed child whose precocious talent

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<sup>34</sup> This is the dedication on the title-page of the 1609 Quarto. See bibliography for full reference. For discussion of the possible identity of 'W.H' see 'Introduction' to *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series, rev. edn., ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Methuen, 2010), pp. 63-69. For criticism that assumes the homoeroticism of the sonnets see Joseph Pequigney, *Such is My Love: Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1987); Robert Matz, 'The Scandal of Shakespeare's Sonnets', *ELH*, 77.2 (2010), 447-508; Daniel Juan Gil, *Before Intimacy: Asocial Sexuality in Early Modern England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). For a bisexual reading of the sonnets see Dymphna Callaghan, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) and Kate Chedgoy, "'Two Loves I have'".

and uncannily adult demeanour disrupted normative teleological child-to-adult development and threatened what queer theorist Judith Halberstam calls the 'logic of reproductive temporality'.<sup>35</sup>

When Mamillius solemnly bowed and climbed off the table to the applause of his politely appreciative audience, a large hourglass was revealed in the place where he had been standing. The hourglass is a paradoxical symbol of time. Time passes, denoted by the sand trickling through the narrow bottle-neck, but it is the same sand that is constantly recycled. The contradictory aspects of the hourglass – a symbol of both movement and stasis – captured perfectly Hytner's dual approach to childhood in this play. On the one hand, the boy Mamillius would die while still an undeveloped infant. On the other hand, he was already a mature performer, or perhaps more accurately, a performer of maturity, comporting himself with the calm possession of a young man who had left his childhood behind. For Leontes and Polixenes, in contrast, childhood represented a time before separation and sexual pollution – a time which, although memorialised in photos and memorabilia, could never in fact be reclaimed. The age separating infancy and adulthood, that crucial period of development, maturation, control and protection, was quite simply a yawning chasm.

As the lights went up on Act 1, Scene 2, Mamillius had changed out of his Father Time costume and was wearing a green sweater and white trousers like a miniature 'copy' (1.2.122) of his casually attired father. He was seated at the grand piano, playing a rendition of the opening movement of Schumann's *Kinderszenen* (Scenes from Childhood) Op. 15. This was another telling choice of performance piece that reflected the yearning for lost childhood from the perspective of an adult and yet was performed by a disquietingly adult-like child. Written in 1838, the series of 30 short movements was inspired, so Schumann told his wife Clara in a letter, by her comment that he sometimes seemed 'like a child'.<sup>36</sup> They were thus a musical expression of the composer's own

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<sup>35</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Eric Frederick Jensen, *Schumann* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 162.

childish self – a desire to recapture what he can only ever be *like* but will never actually *be* again. When the performance ended, the courtiers clapped politely and smiled indulgently. Mamillius bowed stiffly, walked downstage right and sat down next to a little wagon full of toys. Leontes galloped boyishly across the stage and sat on the floor next to him. The remarkable similarity between the two – the boy dressed like a miniature adult and the man behaving like an playful child – can be seen in Figure 19. After a brief spell of father-son bonding, Leontes picked up a rugby ball from Mamillius's wagon and threw it playfully at Polixenes. They tossed the ball backwards and forwards between them like overgrown schoolboys while Mamillius sat quietly, engrossed in his own world of childish play. He answered his father's questions with a distracted air and was apparently oblivious to the tension building around him. At 'Go play, Mamillius' (1.2.209), his mother tapped him on his shoulder and he obediently loaded his toys into his trolley and wheeled it off stage. This Mamillius was almost automaton-like in his movements – distant, unemotional and self-contained. In other words, he was a prematurely 'adultified' child to counterbalance the regressively 'childified' behaviour of his father.

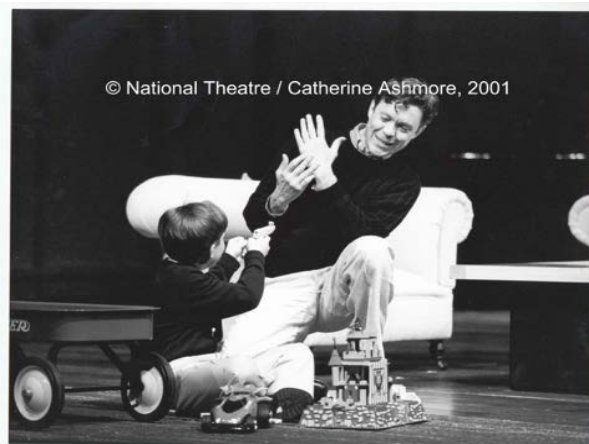


Figure 19: Alex Jennings (Leontes) and Liam Hess (Mamillius) in Nicholas Hytner's *The Winter's Tale* (2001)

Act Two was set in an adult games room with a full-size table-tennis table and darts board. A portion of the stage had been sectioned off with sliding walls to create a room that doubled as

Hermione's bedchamber in Act 2, Scene 2 and Mamillius's sickroom in Act 2, Scene 3. Panels opened and closed to offer glimpses of the action within, and when it became Mamillius's sickroom in the following act, lights illuminated the closed-off interior to reveal Leontes at his bedside through the semi-translucent screens. The outer rooms of Martin-Davis's set were dominated with childhood memorabilia that were signifiers of a very specific masculine childhood environment: the English public school. Hytner's multiple rugby balls – a visual synecdoche for a game famously codified in the nineteenth century at Rugby School, one of the first independent schools in Britain – was a particularly evocative signifier of this environment.<sup>37</sup> The traditional single-sex public schools such as Eton, Harrow, Sherborne, Radley and Winchester (five of the original 'Clarendon nine') are among only a few remaining areas in social life in which gender differentiation and masculine privilege still obtain.<sup>38</sup> As psychotherapist Nick Duffell observes in his study of the history, social function and psychological effects of the boarding school system, 'these schools were conceived out of fear of the feminine, and specifically to educate young gentlemen away from the influence of females'.<sup>39</sup> In this respect, they are probably the closest modern equivalent to the all-male socialization of boys and young men practised in the schools, universities and Inns of Court of early modern England. Boys are often separated from their mothers and sent away to board at preparatory school from the age of seven in a manner analogous with the early modern practice of breeching. The pedagogical ethos and curriculums of these schools are, like the early modern education system, originally based on the precepts of classical learning and to some extent this

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<sup>37</sup> Rugby School was founded in 1567 and is one of the original seven English public schools defined by the Public Schools Act 1868. It became co-educational in 1975. In 1845, three Rugby School pupils produced the first written rules of the 'Rugby style of game'. See 'Rugby School' in D. C. Gilman, H. T. Thurston, F. M. Colby, eds., *New International Encyclopedia*, 1st edn. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1905) and Anon., 'Six ways the town of Rugby helped change the world', 1 Feb. 2014, *BBC online* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-25946757>> [accessed 7 August 2017].

<sup>38</sup> There are nine schools that make up what is called 'the Clarendon nine', the first schools to be named 'public schools' under the 1868 Education Reform Act. More than half of these schools are now either partially or fully co-educational. At the time of writing, Eton, Harrow, Sherborne, Radley and Winchester are still single-sex schools.

<sup>39</sup> Nick Duffell, *The Making of Them: The British Attitude to Children and the Boarding School System* (London: Lone Arrow Press, 2000; repr. 2015), p. 108. Duffell runs weekend 'boarding school survivor' therapy courses.

continues today. The teaching of Latin and Greek for instance, what Bruce R. Smith calls ‘a code-language that initiated boys into manhood’ in early modern England, remains largely the exclusive preserve of private schools and rugby continues to dominate the playing fields.<sup>40</sup>

Promoted in the nineteenth century as bastions of fair play, social privilege, empire and sporting prowess, they have a reputation for fostering an environment of all-male homosocial, if not homoerotic, bonding. One of the natural results of separating boys from the ‘influence of females’ at such a key stage in their sexual and personal development is, according to Duffell, a propensity for same-sex experimentation. He explains as follows:

It is not surprising [...] that English boarders find themselves in some difficulty with regard to their sexual education and their self-expression as sexual, loving, relational beings. But the libido is not easy to completely repress, thank God. Boarders often have little option but to turn to themselves, or to their own gender – ‘blokes resorting to little boys’ – for their first experience of sexual contact, as well as for some affectionate physicality.<sup>41</sup>

This reputation for homoerotic experimentation has been dramatised and further reinforced in the public psyche through plays such as Julian Mitchell’s *Another Country*; films including *If* and *Dead Poets Society*; and novels such as John Le Carré’s *Our Game*.<sup>42</sup> Yet there is a darker side to these institutions, hinted at in Duffell’s parenthetical ‘blokes resorting to little boys’, that has recently come to the fore through personal testaments of bullying, loneliness, and both physical and sexual abuse. There are firmly established accounts of whippings and floggings at both Eton and

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<sup>40</sup> Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 83. For a history of the teaching of classical languages and literature and its role in adolescent rites of passage in all-male educational establishments, see Walter J. Ong, *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); and Walter, J. Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), esp. pp. 113-141.

<sup>41</sup> Nick Duffell, *The Making of Them*, p. 164.

<sup>42</sup> Julian Mitchell, *Another Country* (Oxford: Amber Lane Press Ltd, 1982); David Sherwin, *If*, dir. Lindsay Anderson (Paramount British Pictures, 1968); Tom Schulman, *Dead Poets Society*, dir. Peter Weir (Buena Vista, 1989); John Le Carré, *Our Game* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995).



Westminster which, as James R. Kincaid has surmised, ‘are weak versions of what came later, in terms of severity and sadistic terror’.<sup>43</sup> Similar accounts of physical punishment and education through ‘sadistic terror’ can be found in early modern writing. John Evelyn, for example, recalls in a diary entry in 1692 how he would not go to Eton because he was ‘unreasonably terrified with the report of the severe discipline there’.<sup>44</sup> More disturbingly, an anonymous 1669 pamphlet accuses schoolmasters of a ‘vile way of castigation, wherein our secret parts, which are by nature shameful and not to be uncovered, must be exposed to the immodest eye and filthy blows of the smiter’.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, as Keith Thomas notes, schooling more generally in the early modern period was likely to be ‘a repressive regime, governed autocratically, sustained by corporal punishment and tempered only by the master’s mildness, incapacity, or financial dependence upon his pupils.’<sup>46</sup> But what was almost accepted as a commonplace in these earlier texts became a subject of close scrutiny in the late twentieth century, as the work of Nick Duffell demonstrates.

Duffell is probably the most high-profile figure currently involved in organising support for adults traumatized by their boarding school experiences. However, his initiatives would not have been made possible without a considerable body of work to support him. Extensive research has been conducted in the past few decades into the long-term psychological damage of separating children from their families and educating them in single-sex environments at such a young age – a practice that author-activist Robert Bly, speaking for many detractors of these schools, has provocatively termed ‘institutionalized child abandonment’.<sup>47</sup> The issues related to boarding have

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<sup>43</sup> See Anon, *Boys and Their Ways: A Book for Boys and About Boys; By One Who Knows Them* (London: John Hogg, 1880), pp. 52-54; and John Chandos, *Boys Together: English Public Schools, 1800-1864* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 221. James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 253.

<sup>44</sup> *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. by William Bray (London: M. Walter Dunne, 1901)

<sup>45</sup> Anon., *The Children’s Petition* (London, 1669), p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> Keith Thomas, *Rule and Misrule in the Schools of Early Modern England* (Reading: University of Reading, 1976), pp. 66-67.

<sup>47</sup> See for instance Nick Duffell, ‘Gender Difference and the Boarding School’, *Self and Society*, 28.3 (2000), 29-33; Annie Power ‘Discussion of Trauma at the Threshold: The Impact of Boarding School on Attachment in Young Children, *Attachment: New Directions in Psychotherapy and Relational Psychoanalysis*, 1 (2007), 313–320; Joy Schaverien, ‘Boarding School: The Trauma of the “Privileged” Child’, *Journal of Analytical*

become so widely recognised that a specialist rhetorical shorthand has emerged to describe its effects, which include terms such as ‘boarding school survivors’, ‘boarding school syndrome’ and ‘the board generation’.<sup>48</sup> One psychological condition associated with ‘boarding-school survivors’ that has obvious parallels with remembrances of childhood in Hytner’s *Winter’s Tale* is the conflict between the so-called ‘Inner Parent’ and the ‘Inner Child’. This condition was first identified and named by psychiatrist Eric Berne to describe a psychic split between a responsibility to conform to socially expected behavioural norms (the ‘inner parent’) and a desire to regress to a childish world of dependency and innocence (the ‘inner child’).<sup>49</sup> It is a battle that is often won by the ‘inner child’, resulting in a developmental impasse whereby the subject is trapped in a psychic state of eternal childhood.

Although her reading is informed by queer theory rather than psychoanalysis, Kathryn Bond Stockton makes a similar observation about arrested development in her reading of *The Winter’s Tale* when she says that ‘Leontes’s childhood wish to arrest the clock on his love with Polixenes to live inside that state, to curl up in it, adumbrates a pattern that would emerge as “gay” child suspensions centuries later’.<sup>50</sup> For Stockton, the ‘no age’ of lost childhood in *The Winter’s Tale* is a form of hibernation in which time is suspended, and childhood advances ‘in stopped motion’ (p. 423). She identifies this as a precursor to the phenomenon of the ‘ghostly gay child’ – the inner child of a ‘gay’ adult whose development is discontinued at the point of homosexual self-

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*Psychology*, 49 (2004), 683–705; Joy Schaverien, ‘Boarding School Syndrome: Broken Attachments A Hidden Trauma’, *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 27 (2011), 138–155; Alex Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip: Secrets Crimes and the Schooling of a Ruling Class* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2017); Colin Luke, *Forty Minutes: The Making of Them* (London: Mosaic Pictures for the BBC, 1994). Robert Bly’s review of Duffell’s *The Making of Them* is cited in the jacket sleeve.

<sup>48</sup> There are multiple websites dedicated to ‘boarding school syndrome’. These range from forums for discussing the issues, to those offering advice for seeking therapy, compensation and for political lobbying. See of instance [www.boardingschoolsurvivors.co.uk](http://www.boardingschoolsurvivors.co.uk), [www.boardingrecovery.com](http://www.boardingrecovery.com), [www.boardingconcern.org.uk](http://www.boardingconcern.org.uk), [boardingschoolaction.wordpress.com](http://boardingschoolaction.wordpress.com).

<sup>49</sup> Eric Berne, *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy: A Systematic Individual and Social Psychiatry* (London: Souvenir Press, 1961).

<sup>50</sup> Kathryn Bond Stockton, ‘Lost, or “Exit, Pursued by a Bear”’, p. 425.

identification or of the ‘straight person’s “death”’. In other words, a child who has grown sideways rather than in a straight (both ‘unswerving’ and ‘heterosexual’) progression.<sup>51</sup> Although Hytner’s interpretation of *The Winter’s Tale* was not as overtly homoerotic as Stockton’s reading of the play, his use of the public-school trope was a particularly effective way of placing the two kings’ relationship within a modern context that operated on many levels. It not only drew parallels with the homosocial, classical education of the early modern boy, but it also hinted at a sexual aspect to the boys’ friendship and it gave Leontes’s regressive behaviour a psycho-pathological framework, thus making the play resonate for a society which has become increasingly sensitive to the long-term effects of childhood trauma.

Although both men speak about their boyhood friendship in terms that suggest a desire to regress to their ‘inner child’, it is in fact only Leontes who manifests this desire in his behaviour. As Stockton explains, he ‘unconsciously project[s] his feelings for Polixenes onto Hermione - making his own heat for Polixenes supposedly hers’.<sup>52</sup> However, I contend that it is not, as Stockton asserts, so much a “man crush” (with its roots in boyhood), as a reciprocal relationship (Polixenes describes them as ‘twinning lambs that did frisk i’ th’ sun / And bleat the one at th’ other’ [1.2.66-7]) that, for Hytner’s Leontes at least, is kept alive through his ‘inner child.’<sup>53</sup> The feelings he has for Polixenes, and displaces onto Hermione, are thus feelings related to his childish past rather than to his adult present. And his ‘inner child’, which he projects onto Mamillius, can only be metaphorically destroyed through the actual death of his young son. Polixenes’s behaviour towards Florizel, on the other hand, is much closer to the typical behavioural patterns of the ‘inner parent’ in Berne’s psychological model. As Duffell explains, the ‘inner parent’ is ‘a distortion of adulthood [...] which is in itself a reaction to the repressed inner child’. It operates ‘as a criticising and repressive force’ that must ‘be repressed or projected out on some other children’.<sup>54</sup> In accordance

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<sup>51</sup> Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child*, p. 17. See Introduction for a full discussion of Stockton’s thesis.

<sup>52</sup> Kathryn Bond Stockton, ‘Lost, or “Exit, Pursued by a Bear”’, p. 424.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Nick Duffell, *The Making of Them*, pp. 203 and 199-200.

with this analysis, Polixenes projects his 'inner parent' onto his son when he demands that he divorce Perdita or be disinherited:

If I may ever know thou dost but sigh  
That thou no more shalt see this knack, as never  
I mean thou shalt, we'll bar thee from succession,  
Not hold thee of our blood, no, not our kin,  
Far than Deucalion off. Mark thou my words.  
(4.4.432-5)

In Stockton's queer reading of the play, it is Perdita, not Florizel, who is the main casualty of the two kings' lost boyhood friendship. She is, Stockton concludes, 'love-lostness, from [Leontes's] childhood, *as his child*' and her pairing with Florizel is doomed to repeat the "blocked connection" of their fathers' love'.<sup>55</sup> However, Florizel rebels against his father and thus breaks the cycle of the repressed child/oppressive parent dyad, enabling a full reconciliation between father and son in the final act. I suggest that, rather than Florizel or Perdita, the real casualties of what Stockton calls the 'love-lostness' between the two men are in fact Mamillius and Leontes, as the final scenes of Hytner's production made clear.

The boy playing Mamillius returned at the beginning of the second half after the interval as the choric character of Time. Yet this was more than a mere case of doubling, as he was wearing the same Father Time costume he had worn when reciting the sonnet in the opening frame-sequence. This boy-as-Time was the ghost of Mamillius, returning to represent the destruction of not only Leontes's child, but also, and more crucially, of Leontes's 'inner child'. When the action returned from Bohemia to Sicilia in the final act, Leontes was a far more subdued, sombre and mature version of his earlier self. In the place of the schoolboy photograph of Leontes and Polixenes hung a large black and white portrait of an earnest-looking Mamillius, dressed in his school uniform with slicked-down hair and an unsmiling face. His image reminded us of the fate of a little boy who had

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<sup>55</sup> Kathryn Bond Stockton, 'Lost, or "Exit, Pursued by a Bear"', p. 427.

always been old before his time but from whom time had also been cruelly stolen. In the centre of the stage was a large tomb with writing across the black marble covering, detailing, in accordance with the instructions of Leontes in Act Three, Scene Two, his father's implication in Mamillius's curtailed childhood. As the lights fell on the final scene, Florizel and Polixenes walked off arm in arm, Hermione and Perdita clung together in an emotional embrace, and Leontes was left to depart on his own. He had finally been able to break the psychic bonds of his 'inner child', but the costs were clear to see. The Leontes at the end of Hytner's *Tale* was a tragic figure brought down by a childhood trauma that destroyed his son, his marriage and his friendship. In a conversation with Royal Ballet choreographer Christopher Wheeldon, Hytner described *The Winter's Tale* as a 'fairly jumbled' play, suggesting that Shakespeare had got 'a little bit lazy' when he came to write it in 1611.<sup>56</sup> By taking the trope of the child and locating it within a context that was legible to a twenty-first-century audience, Hytner not only made sense of the play's 'fairly jumbled' spatiotemporal dislocations, as he saw it, but accounted for the disappearance of Mamillius in a way that spoke to a society increasingly preoccupied with resurrecting the ghosts of childhood trauma, and the emotional, social and familial costs involved in confronting and eventually laying them to rest. In the next section I consider a production by Edward Hall that was even more unequivocal in terms of laying bare the costs of Leontes's behaviour. In Hall's case, however, the focus was less on the psycho-pathology of the regressive adult and more on the tragedy of Mamillius, the boy whose childhood is prematurely 'disappeared', but whose presence is keenly felt to the very end.

#### **4b. Exposing the Surrogation Fallacy in Edward Hall's *The Winter's Tale* (2005/12)<sup>57</sup>**

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<sup>56</sup> Mark Monahan, 'A Tale of Two Kingdoms', an interview with Christopher Wheeldon in *The Winter's Tale* programme.

<sup>57</sup> The use of the term 'surrogation' in this section refers to Joseph Roach's analysis of the doubling of Mamillius and Perdita as a 'seamlessly perfect surrogation' in "'Unpath'd waters, undream'd shores": Herbert Blau, Performing Doubles, and the Makeup of Memory in *The Winter's Tale*', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 70.1 (2009), 117-131 (p. 131). The term 'surrogation' in relation to performance is defined by

Unlike Hytner, whose uncannily mature Mamillius both counterbalanced and compensated for the arrested development of his father, functioning more as a symbol than as a character in his own right, Hall placed his Mamillius centre stage as the audience's conduit into the play. By framing his production in this way, he gave the child the dual roles of witness and participant, making him both proxy for and object of the audience's gaze. As we have seen, using the child as a framing mechanism for presenting adaptations of Shakespeare's plays is a device that television and film directors have been employing for several decades. *The Winter's Tale*, however, is the only play that implicitly invites *staging* the narrative as a child's story. At the beginning of Act 2, Scene 1, Hermione calls Mamillius to her and asks him to tell her a story:

|           |                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| HERMIONE  | Pray you sit by us<br>And tell's a tale.                                                                                            |
| MAMILLIUS | Merry or sad shall't be?                                                                                                            |
| HERMIONE  | As merry as you will.                                                                                                               |
| MAMILLIUS | A sad tale's best for winter. I have one<br>Of sprites and goblins                                                                  |
| HERMIONE  | Let's have that, good sir<br>Come on, sit down; come on, and do your best<br>To fright me with your sprites. You're powerful at it. |
| MAMILLIUS | There was a man –                                                                                                                   |
| HERMIONE  | Nay, come, sit down; then on.                                                                                                       |
| MAMILLIUS | Dwelt by a churchyard – I will tell it softly;<br>Yond crickets shall not hear it.                                                  |
| HERMIONE  | Come on, then, and give't me in mine ear.<br>(2.1.22-32)                                                                            |

For Hall to present the play as Mamillius' 'sad tale' – a tale both *about* and *by* a boy – is thus not an overly fanciful reinterpretation of Shakespeare's text, but a natural progression from page to stage.

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Roach as follows: the 'attempt to fit satisfactory alternates' into 'the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure'. See Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 2. This concept is discussed in more detail below. The play was first staged in 2005 before being revived in 2011/12 with a largely different cast (although Tony Bell revived his performance of Autolycus) but a similar production design. My analysis is based on the 2011/12 revival.

The significance of Mamillius as the play's story-teller has been explored from various perspectives by a number of important critics. Michael Witmore, for example, locates *The Winter's Tale* within the context of Shakespeare's other 'late plays', which he describes as fantasies originating from 'the ontological wilderness of a child's mind'.<sup>58</sup> He explores the dual function of Mamillius as both the source of the dramatic action and the victim of its vicissitudes. With his death, he argues, Mamillius is transformed from story-teller into the 'absent centre of the play's universe' who casts 'a note of deliberate dissonance' over the finale (pp. 154-5). Lori Schroeder takes a new historicist approach that reads the role of Mamillius in conjunction with accounts of child-witnesses in early modern pamphlets. She identifies an analogous tension throughout these two texts between an impulse to doubt and silence the child and to 'ventriloquise the child's testimony'.<sup>59</sup> This tension, she argues, places the audience in the ambivalent position of 'both seeing through the eyes of [Mamillius] and playing the role of jury' (p. 33). Barbara L. Estrin takes a more sanguine approach, identifying Mamillius's whispered tale as just one of many fictions propagated in *The Winter's Tale*. According to Estrin, these work together to create a dramatic environment in which the audience is more likely to accept and believe the mythical narrative of 'natural continuity' that defines its ending.<sup>60</sup> In a similar reading that emphasises the fantastical nature of the play, Simon Palfrey observes that it is a 'redemptive journey [...] of nature and grace [...] dream-sewn, hierophantic, celestial'.<sup>61</sup> For Palfrey, Mamillius is the audience's 'narrative medium', whose death enables 'the ubiquitous verbal telepathy of the story' to become a 'communal seance' (p. 110). According to Palfrey's analysis, Mamillius functions less as a character than as a mythical figure within the overall providential narrative of loss and recuperation.

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<sup>58</sup> Michael Witmore, *Pretty Creatures*, p. 155.

<sup>59</sup> Lori Schroeder, 'The Only Witness a Tongueless Child', 1-42 (pp. 8 and 42).

<sup>60</sup> Barbara L. Estrin, *The Raven and the Lark: Lost Children in Literature of the English Renaissance* (London: Associated University Presses, 1985), p. 190.

<sup>61</sup> Simon Palfrey, *Late Shakespeare: A New World of Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 1.

Although these readings of Mamillius as the originator of the ‘sad tale’ are illuminating in terms of our understanding of his narrative function within the play’s overall structural design, they do not consider the following practical issues: how this might be manifested in performance; what difficulties need to be overcome in reconciling Mamillius’s roles as narrator and character; and what that might mean in terms of the presentation of childhood on the stage. Not long after whispering his tale to Hermione (a tale the audience does not hear), Mamillius is forcibly removed from his mother by Leontes, who hands him to his Lords and orders them to ‘[b]ear the boy hence’ (2.1.60). Then, ‘with mere conceit and fear’ (3.2.141) of his mother’s besmirched reputation, Mamillius rapidly falls sick and dies offstage. His death is the turning point that precipitates the long road to recovery and reconciliation that will eventually see rifts healed, families reunited and dynastic unions sealed. However, unlike Hermione, who is brought back to life in the form of a living statue, Mamillius experiences no miraculous resurrection, as we have already seen in Wheeldon’s stark interpretation. The healed rifts, reunited families and sealed unions are quite simply contingent on his death, and to bring him back to life with Hermione would be to stabilise the tragicomic instabilities of Shakespeare’s play.

In order to extend the conceit of framing his *Tale* as Mamillius’ ‘sad tale’, Hall had to account somehow for the boy’s disappearance as character while simultaneously maintaining his presence as narrator. He achieved this through a combination of haunting, doubling and what Joseph Roach calls ‘surrogation’. As Rutter has observed, *The Winter’s Tale* ‘keeps proposing twins and body doubles (actual, symbolic, the copied self) that arrive in the wake of those “twinn’d lambs”’.<sup>62</sup> Hall extended this trope of the ‘twinn’d lambs’ further by doubling the parts of Mamillius and Perdita. However, in keeping with Propeller’s metatheatrical style of theatre, he did not attempt to disguise the doubling but chose instead to stage the transformation from Mamillius to Perdita. Lifting the metaphorical curtain on the theatrical illusion in this way, I argue, both drew attention to and

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<sup>62</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child’s Play*, p. 143.



complicated the act of doubling. Not only did the metamorphosis from Mamillius to Perdita take place on stage (Hall's stage direction reads as follows: 'Putting on a floral head-dress, he transforms himself into PERDITA'), but there was a further mutation back from Perdita to Mamillius in the final scene (the stage direction here reads: 'PERDITA changes back to MAMILLIUS. He approaches LEONTES, and blows out the candle on the last note of the music. Blackout').<sup>63</sup> The metatheatrical nature of the doubling thus ensured that Mamillius' absence was never entirely complete. Always visible beneath Perdita, her presence thus reinforced, rather than compensated for, his absence.

Hall was not the first to double the role of Mamillius with another character. Indeed, in many stagings of the play, the actor playing Mamillius *does* return in various guises. This may be in ghostly form, as in Declan Donnellan's highly celebrated 1999 collaboration with the Maly Theatre of St. Petersburg in which Mamillius emerged from the frozen tableau of courtiers in the final seconds of the play before being 'ushered gently but firmly away by the figure of Time'.<sup>64</sup> The most common method of reviving Mamillius, however, has been through doubling with another part such as Perdita (Doran, 1998/99; Mendes, 2009) or Time (Kahn, 1987; Hytner, 2001) and in Theatre de Complicité's 1992 adaptation, with Paulina, Time and the Old Shepherd.<sup>65</sup> From what early modern theatre scholars know of the doubling of parts in *The King's Men*, it is possible that the roles of Mamillius and Perdita were played by one actor, as Simon Palfrey, Tiffany Stern and Lynn Enterline have surmised.<sup>66</sup> Joseph Roach posits one explanation in support of this hypothesis,

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<sup>63</sup> *The Winter's Tale*, Propeller Shakespeare, ed. by Edward Hall and Roger Warren (London: Oberon Books, 2012), pp. 68 and 114.

<sup>64</sup> Lyn Gardner, 'Ghosts in the Works', *Guardian*, 8 May 1999.

<sup>65</sup> *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Gregory Doran (Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, transferring to the Barbican, London, 1998/99); dir. Sam Mendes (The Old Vic, London, then international tour, 2009); dir. Michael Kahn (The Shakespeare Theatre, Washington, 1987); dir. Annabel Arden (Lyric Hammersmith, London, 1992).

<sup>66</sup> Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 53; Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom*, p. 151.

particularly as it relates to *The Winter's Tale*, that is useful for understanding the effects of Hall's casting and production choices:

The absence of Mamillius in the final stage picture of atonement, reconciliation, and restoration is one of those subtle but powerful empty places in Shakespeare's final tableaux [...]: such vacancies might be explained away by doubling patterns, but they prompt reflection about attrition nonetheless. It could be argued that Shakespeare's doubling of the boy actor as Mamillius and Perdita fills in this empty place in memory – a seamlessly perfect surrogation. But it might just as well heighten the absence: the presence of one fresh face insisting on the memory of another that is now unrecoverable forever, one 'twinn'd lamb' but not the other.<sup>67</sup>

However, not everybody agrees with Roach and Palfrey and Stern about doubling practices in The King's Men. John Pitcher, for instance suggests that 'the boy playing Mamillius was probably too young to double other roles'.<sup>68</sup> It is reasonable to assume that Mamillius would have been considered one of what Evelyn Tribble calls 'scaffolded' or 'shepherded' roles, as discussed in Chapter One, and intended to be played by a novice with little experience in memorising lines, while Perdita would have been played by a more experienced boy actor.<sup>69</sup> However, even if the King's Men did not double the parts, as recent research suggests, there is a symbolic doubling of the children in the 'surrogation' that Roach describes. Such 'surrogation' can be seen elsewhere in Shakespeare's plays where the substitution of one character for another appears seamless to the other characters on stage, even when the doubling of parts was not possible for practical staging reasons. The twins in *Twelfth Night* are a good example of this. That Hall decided to literalise and foreground the symbolic doubling of the siblings by casting a young adult male actor to play both Mamillius and Perdita is therefore particularly significant. In order to 'heighten the absence' of his Mamillius, the actor did not attempt a seamless surrogation of prepubescent boy for teenage girl. He

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<sup>67</sup> Joseph Roach, "'Unpath'd waters, undream'd shores'", pp. 130-1.

<sup>68</sup> John Pitcher, 'Introduction', in *The Winter's Tale*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series, pp. 116-7.

<sup>69</sup> Tribble defines a 'scaffolded' role as 'a restricted role' with an inbuilt framework and structure that 'prompts the novice actor's activity'. A 'shepherded' role is one in which the 'boy actor is led onto stage and directed by a more experienced actor playing a parental/guardian role.' See Evelyn Tribble 'Marlowe's Boy Actor', *SB*, 27.1 (2009), 5-17 (p. 7).

simply pulled on a floral head-dress and ‘became’ Perdita. By drawing attention to the fallacy of the ‘seamlessly perfect surrogation’, a fallacy other productions had either smoothed over or only obliquely suggested, Hall thus underlined the absence of Mamillius and accentuated the feeling of ‘attrition’ that such a conspicuous absence prompts.<sup>70</sup>

This sense of attrition was signposted from the very beginning of Hall’s production. The audience entered to see a sparse, monochrome, historically unspecific set lit by candles. The stage was enveloped on three sides by tall, grey, glassy panels which captured and reflected the flickering candlelight, creating an eerie effect. Onto the back wall was projected the image of a full moon which gradually waned to a total eclipse as the first three acts unfolded. The tinkling sounds of a music-box rang out, its tick-tock rhythm marking the passing seconds. A stream of sand caught in an ice-blue spotlight cascaded from above like a cosmic hourglass into a child’s red wagon that was positioned centre stage. A smaller, more conventional hourglass was placed on the floor, downstage of the streaming sand, and miniature mannequins were scattered around and inside the wagon (see Figure 20). The paradox of the hourglass, a device symbolising both passage and stasis, was reinforced in this production by having a one-directional stream of sand juxtaposed with the rotatable hourglass, a mechanism which continually recycles the same sand. As was to become evident with the return of Mamillius’s ghost and with the transformation of Mamillius into Perdita

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<sup>70</sup> In Sam Mendes’s 2009 production for The Old Vic, London, for instance, the parts of Mamillius and Perdita were played by American actress Morven Christie. However, the transformation from young boy to young woman was so ‘seamless’ that reviewer Carol Chillington Rutter reported having to double-check her programme to confirm that the parts were actually played by the same actor. See Carol Chillington Rutter, ‘Shakespeare Performances in England 2009’, *SS*, 63 (2010), 338-375 (p. 351).

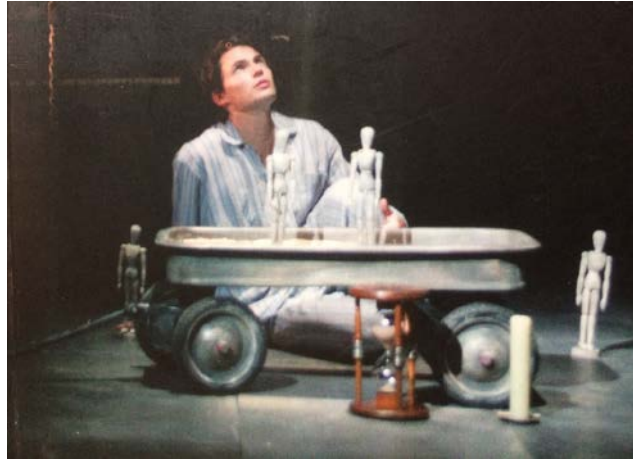


Figure 20: Tam Williams (Mamillius) in Edward Hall's *The Winter's Tale* (2005)

and back again, time for the children of Hall's *Tale* not only passed and stood still, but was also capable of being reversed in both directions. It passed backwards and forwards across the sixteen-year hiatus with a simple change of costume. However, for the adults of this play, the reversal of time and the recovery of 'boy eternal' was, as Leontes was to discover, an impossibility. Time for Leontes was, as symbolically foreshadowed by the burning candles, the ticking musical refrain, and the cosmic hourglass, one-directional, irreversible, and unrecoverable.

Onto the stark, dimly lit, time-symbolic set walked Mamillius, dressed in pale white and blue pyjamas. Both Tam Williams, who played Mamillius in 2005 and Ben Allen, who replaced him in 2012, had androgynous features, but neither actor was particularly short or slightly built. It seems at first glance, therefore, even more remarkable that none of the major reviewers questioned the casting of a man in the role of a child. Paul Taylor, for instance, described Williams's Mamillius as a 'small pyjama-clad boy', while other reviewers called him 'small', 'pale', and a 'young boy'.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Sarah Hemming, writing in 2012, referred to Ben Allen's Mamillius as a 'little boy'.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Review of *The Winter's Tale*', *Independent*, 4 February 2005; Sam Taylor, 'Review of *The Winter's Tale*', *The Times*, 28 January 2005; John Peter, 'Review of *The Winter's Tale*', *Sunday Times*, 6 February 2005.

<sup>72</sup> Sarah Hemming, 'Review of *The Winter's Tale*', *Financial Times*, 10 July 2012.

The reason for the lack of cynicism on the part of the reviewers in relation to the cross-generational casting becomes clearer when we consider the ethos behind Propeller's performance practices. Propeller is an all-male theatre company that has a reputation for revelling in its own performativity. As a touring company, it tends to favour small performances spaces with close stage/auditorium proximity.<sup>73</sup> The actors often mingle with the audience during the interval and there is a strong sense of ensemble to their performances. In many instances, actors remain on-stage even when they are not actively in a scene, either singing, moving scenery, playing instruments or making ambient background noise. They also tend to play many parts in any one production. In *The Winter's Tale*, for instance, the parts of Hermione and Dorcas were doubled, as were Emilia and Mopsa and the mariner and Florizel. The 2012 revival, moreover, was doubled with a new production of *Henry V* that featured the same cast. This repertory style not only helps to establish and maintain a democratic 'ensemble' feel within the group, but is also in keeping with their self-consciously theatrical and presentational style of performance. The boundaries between actor and character and actor and audience are fluid, creating a strong sense of self-awareness that worked particularly well for a play as overtly theatrical as *The Winter's Tale*. It was also the ideal framework for laying bare the fallacy of the 'seamlessly perfect surrogation' of Perdita for Mamillius that Roach describes. Unlike the doubling of the two princes with Elizabeth and Anne in Mendes's *Richard III*, where the actors adopted different acting styles for the different roles, both Tam Williams and Ben Allen maintained the same artless performance as both Mamillius and Perdita.

The transformation from young boy to young woman was signified by a simple floral garland that the pyjama-clad Mamillius, in his reincarnation as Time, placed upon his head. When he re-appeared as Perdita in the second half, he was dressed as the goddess Flora in a diaphanous dress, but he had made no attempt to change his hair, disguise his face or to create a feminine silhouette.

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<sup>73</sup> The theatre in which I saw the 2012 production was the 328-seater Hampstead Theatre, London.

Costume was, in this instance, the sole signifier of age, gender and character. In her analysis of the function of the stage costume, Aoife Monks offers the following definition: '[c]ostume is that which is perceptually indistinct from the actor's body, and yet something that can be removed. Costume is a body that can be taken off'.<sup>74</sup> In the case of Propeller's *Tale*, the removability of the costume was crucial to understanding its function as a signifier of character. When the actors put on their Perdita costumes, the body of the actor and the body of Mamillius were still visible to the audience. The costume – and its removability – precluded full immersion by spectators into the theatrical illusion. As Rutter explains in her analysis of the 2005 production,

there was no 'wonder' in the replacement, no artfulness in the representation, and no metamorphosis. Williams, in a dress, made no attempt to conceal his masculinity. His Perdita never erased Mamillius; rather, harrowingly, showed the brother beneath, the lost in the found, refused permission for the dead child to be restored in the living sister – or forgotten.<sup>75</sup>

By exposing the 'surrogation' for what it was – a symbolic but imperfect substitution – Hall thus ensured that his Mamillius would be a highly conspicuous absence that haunted the second half of the play through his imperfect twin. This not only guaranteed that the loss of the little boy was not forgotten amid the final scenes of reconciliation, but also enabled Hall to follow through on his conceit of framing the *Tale* through the eyes of the child. Shakespeare's Mamillius was dead, but Hall's Mamillius – Mamillius the ghost, Mamillius-as-Time, Mamillius beneath the surrogate sister – continued to make his presence strongly felt.

As he entered onto the stage for the interpolated frame sequence, Mamillius walked to the little red wagon and sat looking up at the falling stream of sand. He then picked up two toy-sized wooden

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<sup>74</sup> Aoife Monks, *The Actor in Costume* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 11.

<sup>75</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, p. 147.

mannequins and began manipulating their arms and legs as though acting out a silent dialogue. Jane Collins remarked that these mannequins ‘raised the idea of people as playthings, easily moved, easily broken’.<sup>76</sup> Rather than symbolising a general concept of ‘people as playthings’ in a theological deterministic sense, I contend they were designed to signify something rather more specific. They were characters in the ‘sad tale’ of Mamillius, archetype of the twenty-first-century disappearing child. They were, moreover, one of many examples of the ways in which this production made use of surrogates. Mamillius’s story-telling function was suggested in the opening sequence when the courtiers began entering in the half-light behind him. As voices emerged, speaking the lines of Camillo and Archidamus (each line in this scene was voiced by a different person, identified in the script as ‘voice 1’, ‘voice 2’ etc), Mamillius pointed to ‘Sicilia’ (Leontes) and ‘Bohemia’ (Polixenes).<sup>77</sup> Not only was he acting out in miniature the scene unfolding behind him with the mannequins, but he was also functioning as a guide for the audience by directing attention to the characters being referenced. What might have seemed like a sinister child manipulating his human ‘playthings’, however, was offset by his guileless enthusiasm and gangly awkwardness. Dressed in his striped pyjamas with his bare feet sticking out from the over-sized bottoms, he presented a strikingly child-like innocence. The sinister sound made by the courtiers running their fingers around the rims of their brandy glasses from the half-shadows behind him only added to the sense of his vulnerability to an as-yet-unidentifiable danger.

Mamillius remained on-stage for most of the first five scenes. At first he was playful, running among the courtiers with childish enthusiasm. However, the mood changed suddenly in Act 1, Scene 2 from jocular to sinister with Leontes’s jealous outburst of ‘[t]oo hot, too hot’ (1.2.108). Mamillius’s expression provided once again the audience’s guide and touchstone. He switched from playful to fearful in a beat, looking increasingly anguished as his father lapsed into a jealous and, at

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<sup>76</sup> Jane Collins, ‘*The Winter’s Tale* Review’, *SB*, 24.2 (2006), 116-120 (p. 117).

<sup>77</sup> *The Winter’s Tale*, ed. by Hall and Warren, p. 23.

times, violent rage. Leontes's 'immodest hatred' (3.2.100) towards Hermione reached its apotheosis in Act 2, Scene 1, which was set in Mamillius's nursery. At one point Leontes, played by Robert Hands, kicked and spat upon Hermione, played by Richard Dempsey, before lifting her up from the bottom of her belly and then dropping her heavily onto her feet. Mamillius clung terrified to his mother in a frozen tableau as Leontes addressed the audience directly with the words:

There may be in the cup  
A spider steeped, and one may drink, depart,  
And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge  
Is not infected. But if one present  
Th'abhorred ingredient to his eye, make known  
How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides,  
With violent hefts. I have drunk, and seen the spider.  
(2.1.40-46)

He then roughly grabbed his son from Hermione, saying '[g]ive me the boy' (2.1.57), and held him closely to him in a tight embrace. The boy grew more and more visibly distressed at his father's wild and unprovoked rage, prompting two lords to intervene, extricate the child and remove him to safety. At the end of the scene, a sober-looking Mamillius re-entered to the refrain of the tick-tock music-box theme and knelt at the front of the stage. The lights then dropped and the stage was plunged momentarily into darkness. He later re-emerged in Act 2, Scene 3 as a silent and invisible observer (the stage directions at this point state 'Enter LEONTES, dishevelled and barefoot, watched in agony by MAMILLIUS').<sup>78</sup> There was a moment of remarkable metatheatricality when we were confronted with Mamillius, in the role of observer/story-teller, watching from a galley above the stage as Leontes and the servant discussed his (Mamillius the character's) sudden sickness:

|          |                                        |
|----------|----------------------------------------|
| LEONTES: | How does the boy?                      |
| SERVANT: | He took good rest tonight.             |
|          | 'Tis hoped his sickness is discharged. |
|          | (2.3.10-11)                            |

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<sup>78</sup> *The Winter's Tale*, ed. by Hall and Warren, p. 48.



Both witness and subject, Mamillius's roles had begun to multiply even before his transformation into Perdita, adding yet more layers of metatheatricality. He remained in this elevated position throughout most of the trial scene, silently observing his mother's indictment with growing anguish. Unlike Hytner's Mamillius, who was detached, dispassionate, and apparently oblivious to the tensions around him, this Mamillius was acutely sensitive to the catastrophic turn of events. He eventually walked off stage before the servant, heralded by a foreboding crash of thunder, entered to report his death. The message was clear: this little boy had seen too much of his own 'sad tale' to endure, and the knowledge had quite simply killed him.

However, it was not the last we were to see of Mamillius. His haunting figure, still dressed in his striped pyjamas, continued to provide a narrator-style function (after his death, the stage directions refer to him as 'the ghost of MAMILLIUS').<sup>79</sup> He reappeared at the beginning of the Act 3, Scene 3 carrying a toy-sized version of a ship. With a single strike of the little bell on its bow, he initiated the storm that preceded the arrival of Antigonus in Bohemia. He then took the baby Perdita from Antigonus and tenderly laid her down at the front of the stage. A few seconds later, he produced a teddy bear and one of the mannequins that had featured in the prologue. At the sound of a deafening roar off stage, he acted out in crude, childish fashion the mauling of Antigonus with the mannequin and his teddy bear. It was not the first time Mamillius had been linked with the bear. In Act 1, he ran on-stage with a bear rug over his head, eliciting shocked gasps from the audience who presumably thought that the savage bear had arrived an act early. When Mamillius removed the rug and spread it on the floor, revealing it to be nothing more than a childish game, there was a palpable sigh of relief. However, as one reviewer observed, the incident was momentarily 'shocking', 'uncanny' and 'disorientating'.<sup>80</sup> It was, moreover, not merely a playful parody of Shakespeare's

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<sup>79</sup> *The Winter's Tale*, ed. by Hall and Warren, pp. 63, 64, and 68.

<sup>80</sup> Frank I. Swannack, Hobbinol's Blog <<https://hobbinol.wordpress.com/2012/02/18/review-the-winters-tale-by-william-shakespeare-performed-by-propellor-dir-edward-hall-at-the-lowry-theatre-salford-quays/>> [accessed 11 August 2017].

most notorious stage direction – ‘*Exit, pursued by a bear.*’ (3.3.57) – but, as we were to find out, a proleptic enactment of Antigonus’s death and another instance of Mamillius’s shifting identities. The bear rug functioned as a further instance of costume denoting an imperfect transformation from one being to another.

As Andrew Sofer explains in his analysis of the phenomenology of stage props, material objects in performance carry several layers of referential, psychological, practical and ideological meanings. They are, he explains, a form of ‘visual shorthand’ which ‘cement their identity through both metonymy and metaphor’.<sup>81</sup> The way in which the bear functioned as ‘both metonymy and metaphor’ in Hall’s *Tale* – as a rug doubling as a child’s plaything, then as a child’s plaything standing in for a real bear – reverberated with associations on a number of levels that shifted and changed with each passing moment. In his exhaustive study of the multiple symbolic valences of the bear in early modern England, Michael Bristol identifies a tension between the tragic and the comic that goes some way to explaining Shakespeare’s decision to include this scene in his stage adaptation of Greene’s prose romance. Bristol explains how, in addition to its function as a symbolic marker of winter, the bear was widely accepted as not only a symbol of ‘exceptional ferocity and violence’ but also of ‘nurture and creativity’.<sup>82</sup> In addition, according to Edward Topsell writing in 1607, the female bear gives birth during the winter hibernation period and ‘huggles’ the amorphous cubs ‘to her breast’ inside the shelter of her den until they are ready to emerge in the springtime.<sup>83</sup> At this point, she licks the cubs into shape from a formless mass, giving rise to the proverbial expression ‘licking a child into shape’.<sup>84</sup> The bear was, moreover, as Jonathan

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<sup>81</sup> Andrew Sofer, *Stage Life*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Bristol, ‘In Search of the Bear: Spatiotemporal Form and the Heterogeneity of Economies in *The Winter’s Tale*’, *SQ*, 42.4 (1991), 145-167 (pp. 159-60).

<sup>83</sup> Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (London, 1607), p. 43. See also Louise G. Clubb, ‘The Tragicomic Bear’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 9.1, Special Issue in Honor of Maurice J. Valency (1972), 17-30; and Dennis Biggins, “‘Exit pursued by a Beare’: A Problem in *The Winter’s Tale*”, *SQ*, 13.1 (1962), 3-13.

<sup>84</sup> Andrew Gurr, ‘The Bear, The Statue, and Hysteria in *The Winter’s Tale*’, *SQ*, 34.4 (1983), 420-5 (p. 423).

Bate explains, an important Ovidian symbol of maternity and metamorphosis demonstrated in the myth of Callisto and Arcas, where Jove transforms mother and son into the Great and Little Bear star constellations.<sup>85</sup> This association of the bear with life and death, destruction, creation and transformation had particularly strong resonances with Hall's Mamillius and his shifting roles and metamorphoses. It is impossible to fully comprehend the extent to which these multiple layers of meaning would have been legible to an early modern audience, and even less possible to recreate them for a modern audience. However, they provide an instructive parallel to the way in which Hall used the bear, in much the same way as he used other props, costumes, and actors' bodies, as both a symbol and a surrogate to convey conflicting meanings and associations, specifically in terms of ideas about metamorphosis.<sup>86</sup>

The second half of the play began, like the first half, with a prologue that featured a metamorphosised Mamillius (this time appearing as a ghost) alone on stage. The tick-tock music-box refrain sounded out and he lured first a sheep and then Polixenes and Camillo onto the stage. They stood swaying to the metronomic rhythm of the music while he checked their costumes and adjusted their hair. He then began speaking the words of Time while still dressed in the pyjamas of Mamillius (stage directions here state 'MAMILLIUS [as TIME]').<sup>87</sup> He paused momentarily at '[t]o speak of Perdita, now grown in grace' (4.1.24) to place a floral garland on his head. With this simple gesture, he was transformed from Mamillius into Perdita, but it was far from a simple case of doubling. Actors, characters and performances converged at this point in a 'temporality of

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<sup>85</sup> Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, pp. 224-5.

<sup>86</sup> A glance through the book Mirko Ilić and Steven Heller, *Presenting Shakespeare: 1,100 Posters from Around the World* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2015) shows that Hall was not alone in foregrounding the bear as an ambiguous symbol in this play. Three posters (out of a total of eighteen displayed) have the bear as its poster motif. One that has particular resonances for the Mendes production is the 2011 performance at the University of Rochester International Theatre's 2011, which features a photograph of a child's teddy bear with drawn-on devil's ears and claws (p. 270). The University theatre website also makes specific reference to early modern ideas about the association of bears with rebirth and transformation, stating that 'cubs were believed to be born dead and then licked into shape by their mothers.' <<https://www.sas.rochester.edu/theatre/productions/past/2011/winters-tale/resources.html>>

<sup>87</sup> *The Winter's Tale*, ed. by Hall and Warren, p. 68.

conjunction' that had multiple palimpsestic layers.<sup>88</sup> Ben Allen, playing Mamillius, became first Time then Perdita; 'MAMILLIUS (as TIME)' became Perdita as Time; the narrator of the 'sad tale', Mamillius, became the character in the 'sad tale', Perdita; and the ghost of the dead child, Mamillius, frozen in time as 'boy eternal' (1.2.65), was resurrected and projected forward sixteen years in time to become his adult younger sister, Perdita. And for those audience members who had seen the 2005 production, Ben Allen was also ghosted by the earlier incarnation of Mamillius in Propeller's *Winter's Tale*, Tam Williams.

The self-conscious metatheatrical nature of this scene denied the audience any sense of time as a triumphant, redemptive or linear force, as described by temporal theorists Ewbank and Engel, but heralded a further continuation of temporal elongation and collapse which was more akin to Gil Harris's concept of 'polychronicity'.<sup>89</sup> The timeless setting of Sicilia was transformed into a Bohemian music festival which Hall called a 'mini-Glastonbury', but which in fact transcended historical boundaries to include musical references to both the 1960s (the on-stage 'Bleatles' rock band, complete with drum kit and backing singers dressed as sheep, was a rustic parody of early Beatles music) and to the 2000s (a performance of Beyoncé's 'Single Ladies' in the 2012 revival was a particularly lively example).<sup>90</sup> This queer, syncopated temporality reached its climax in the statue scene, where loss supplanted reconciliation as Perdita faded away and the ghost of Mamillius returned to haunt the final few moments. When an ecstatic Leontes reached out to Hermione, she stepped down from her podium, turned her back on him and knelt to embrace her daughter. Paulina then handed her candle to Leontes and everybody retreated into the shadows, leaving Leontes alone.

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<sup>88</sup> Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 16.

<sup>89</sup> For Inga-Stina Ewbank and William E. Engel, see notes 12 and 14 above. Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter*, p. 16.

<sup>90</sup> 'Edward Hall on Propeller's *Henry V* and *The Winter's Tale*', *whatsonstage* online, 8 Jan 2012 <<http://www.whatsonstage.com/bath-theatre/news/01-2012/edward-hall-on-propellers-henry-v-and-the-winters-5789.html>> [accessed 11 August 2017]. See also stage direction, 'The sheep-shearing festival becomes a mini-Glastonbury', in *The Winter's Tale*, ed. by Hall and Warren, p. 76; Christopher 'Tricky' Stewart, Terius 'The-Dream' Nash, Thaddis Harrell, Beyoncé Knowles, 'Single Ladies' (Columbia Records, 2008).

The theatre lights gradually faded until the stage was almost entirely dark. Leontes remained centre stage, a solitary figure illuminated by the flickering light of his candle. Mamillius, dressed once more in his pyjamas, his teddy bear clutched in his hand, suddenly emerged out of the darkness. Leaning forward as though to embrace his father, he blew out the candle and plunged the stage into darkness, extinguishing any hope of what Roach called ‘atonement, reconciliation, and restoration’ for this particular ‘sad tale’.

In her analysis of this production, Rutter observes that ‘[Hall’s] was a *Winter’s Tale* that would be seen through the eyes of the child, a story all about a boy’.<sup>91</sup> However, I view it as less a story about one particular child than a ‘sad tale’ about a particularly modern crisis created by and perpetuated by adults – the crisis of ‘disappearing childhood’. The Mamillius of this production was not merely a character in a play, or a framing mechanism. His ubiquitous presence both within and outside of the tale as well as his presentational rather than mimetic style of performance gave him a quasi-allegorical status. In his introduction to the text published to accompany this production, designer Michael Pavelka describes his design aesthetic for *The Winter’s Tale* as ‘magical realism’ – a play world that is not ‘real’ but ‘instantly recognisable’.<sup>92</sup> He took the same symbolic approach to the costumes. Their simple designs signified character types that were ‘conspicuously a facade for the actor, hopefully instantly recognisable, but just a whisker away from cliché or pastiche – literally a character you may have encountered in a story you may have been told in a childhood fable’.<sup>93</sup> Within this context, it was entirely believable that the actor playing Mamillius, who was not consciously ‘aging down’, was nonetheless being presented to the audience as a young boy. It was, moreover, an indication that he was not a particular boy in a particular tale, but rather an archetypal figure in what Pavelka calls a ‘childhood fable’, or more specifically, a fable *about* childhood in the twenty-first century. Although time appeared to pass across the ‘no age’ sixteen-

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<sup>91</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, “‘A world ransomed, or one destroyed’: English *Tales* at the Millennium”, in Dunbar, p. 219.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Pavelka, ‘Designing *The Winter’s Tale*’, in *The Winter’s Tale*, ed. by Hall and Warren, p. 14.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

year hiatus of childhood with a simple change of costume, Mamillius was in fact eternally trapped as the ghost of ‘boy eternal’, while for Leontes time was, like the burning candles or the cosmic hourglass, one-directional, irreversible, and unrecoverable.

In his essay on tragedy and childhood, Peter Hollindale differentiates between tragic and sub-tragic children.<sup>94</sup> The former, he argues, are characters with agency while the latter are ‘mere ancillary possessions of adult figures’ (p. 177), much like the children of Deborah Warner’s *Titus Andronicus*. By making Mamillius into a ubiquitous figure who hovers at the boundaries of the play world, Hall transformed him into a fully tragic figure with agency and subverted the ‘Shakespearean pattern [...] of sub-tragic children’ (pp. 180-1). In the final section I consider a production by Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford which kept Mamillius firmly within the bounds of the ‘sub-tragic’ child. Not only did they attempt to erase the memory of Mamillius, but they took the crisis of ‘disappearing childhood’ – both in Shakespeare’s *Tale* and in society more generally – and made the crisis itself disappear. On the surface, it was an effective theatrical sleight of hand that smoothed over temporal and dramatic dislocations. However, beneath their comic *Tale* of reconciliation and redemption lay a submerged tale of loss whose silence spoke volumes about a society in crisis.

#### **4c. A Fairytale for the Twenty-First Century; Or Legitimising Child Sacrifice in Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford’s *The Winter’s Tale* (2015/6)**

‘The surrogate victim dies so that the entire community [...] can be reborn [...] Understanding this process, we can also understand why death should be regarded as the elder sister, not to say the mother and ultimate source, of life itself.’<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Peter Hollindale, ‘Tragedy and Childhood’, in *Tragedy in Transition*, ed. by Sarah Annes Brown and Catherine Silverstone, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 174-191.

<sup>95</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 293.

Where Edward Hall foregrounded the tragic aspects of Shakespeare's play through his absent/present shape-shifting Mamillius, Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford drew upon a combination of cultural nostalgia and intertextual associations to present their *Tale* as a redemptive narrative with a comic resolution. In their reimagining of the Sicilian setting as a Victorian domestic drama, Mamillius was presented less as a tragic victim than as a Dickensian 'wise child' – a creature of 'deeper wisdom, finer aesthetic sensitivity, and a more profound awareness of enduring moral truths' – upon whose martyr-like death the moral regeneration of his father and the reconciliation of his family depended.<sup>96</sup> Unlike Hytner's Mamillius, who, in his queer prematurity, was disengaged from and seemingly oblivious to the world around him, the Mamillius of this production was a seer-like moral touchstone whose death guaranteed Edelman's 'reproductive futurism' by restoring Perdita to the family fold. Capitalising on the twenty-first-century fashion for Victoriana, I argue that Branagh/Ashford drew upon a literary tradition of sacrificial children – the 'surrogate victim' of Girard's quotation above – to contain the potential for tragedy by perpetuating the fallacy of the 'seamlessly perfect surrogation' that Hall's production had foregrounded and undermined.

As writers such as Kaplan, Heilmann and Llewellyn, Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, and Poore have observed, the trend for Victoriana has been gathering momentum over the past four decades and is now evident in many aspects of twenty-first-century Britain, from popular culture in the form of television serialisations, novels, films, exhibitions and stage adaptations to the academic arena of

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<sup>96</sup> The term 'wise child' is taken from the chapter of that name in Steven Marcus, *Dickens from Pickwick to Dombey* (New York: Chatto and Windus, 1965), pp. 54-91. Marcus uses *Oliver Twist* as the archetype of the Dickensian 'wise child', describing him as 'the incarnation of a moral quality', whose '[d]isposition and moral character are so unlike everything he has known, so apart from all external influence, that it seems as if he [...] might have come from another world.' (p. 80). Susan Zieger calls this Dickensian type the 'aged child' ('Dickens's Queer Children', *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 20.1-2 [2009], 141-157 [144] and David Grylls uses the term 'old-fashioned child' to refer to the same phenomenon, which he describes as '[q]uaint, broody, closer to God, sedate and usually ailing' (David Grylls, *Guardians and Angels*, pp. 35-6). Angela Carter takes the Dickensian 'wise children' and applies it in ironic fashion in her novel *Wise Children* (London: Vintage, 1992). The 'children' of the novel are in fact celebrating their 75th birthday in the opening chapter.

dedicated journals, conferences and publications.<sup>97</sup> Although the terms ‘Victoriana’ and ‘neo-Victorianism’ encompass a wide range of literary and cultural responses to Victorian themes, Heilmann and Llewellyn have identified two ‘prototypical preoccupations’: ‘[l]oss, mourning, and regeneration’ and ‘[c]hildren and the idea of children’s stories’.<sup>98</sup> Within the field of childhood studies, moreover, the Victorian period is widely accepted as the period during which, according to John R. Gillis, the ‘iconization, ritualization, and mythologization’ of childhood originated: ‘[t]he Victorians were the first to make the child a presence in the absence of real children. They supplied Western culture with a plethora of beloved child figures – innocent, pure, timeless.’<sup>99</sup> Framing the Sicilian scenes as a Victorian winter wonderland seen through the eyes of the child thus seemed a remarkably apposite setting for a twenty-first-century *Tale*. It not only participated in and benefitted

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<sup>97</sup> The term ‘Victoriana’ was first used by Ezra Pound in 1918 as a pejorative term. More recently, it has been taken up by literary scholars to describe the late-twentieth-/early-twenty-first phenomenon of Victorian literary and artistic recreations, imitations and revisions. Cora Kaplan was one of the first to use the term in this way and defines it thus: ‘Today, “Victoriana” might usefully embrace the whole phenomenon, the astonishing range of representations and reproductions for which the Victorian – whether as the origin of late twentieth century modernity, its antithesis, or both at once – is the common referent [...] a kind of conceptual nomad, not so much lost as permanently restless and unsettled.’ See *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 3. In the last few years, particularly since the establishment of the online journal *Neo-Victorian Studies* in 2008, ‘Neo-Victorian’ has become the more widely-accepted term within academia (See ‘Neo-Victorianism’, [oxfordbibliographies.com](http://oxfordbibliographies.com)). See also Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations*, ed. by Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss (London: Routledge, 2014); Benjamin Poore, *Heritage, Nostalgia and Modern British Theatre: Staging the Victorians* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Simon Joyce, *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2007). Among the many television adaptations in the past decade, the BBC’s serializations of Heidi Thomas’s adaptation of *Cranford*, dir. Simon Curtis and Steve Hudson in 2007 and Andrew Davies’s adaptation of *Little Dorrit*, dir. Adam Smith, Dearbhla Walsh and Diarmuid Lawrence in 2008 are particularly notable for their global reach (see *British Television Drama Past Present and Future*, ed. by Jonathan Bignell and Stephen Lacey (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and *Upstairs and Downstairs: British Costume Drama Television from the Forsyte Saga to Downton Abbey*, ed. by James Leggatt and Julie Taddeo (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); for novels see, for instance, A. S. Byatt, *Possession: A Romance* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990) which was a New York Times bestseller and recipient of both the Man Booker Prize and the Irish Times-Aer Lingus International Fiction Prize; films include Michael Robert Johnson, Andrew Peckham and Simon Kinberg’s *Holmes*, dir. Guy Ritchie (Warner Bros, 2009), which grossed \$524,000,000 worldwide; the exhibition ‘Victoriana: The Art of Revival’ was held at the Guildhall Gallery, London (2013) and the Victorian ‘whodunnit’ exhibition, *The Game’s Afoot*, was staged at the Madame Tussaud’s Theatre in 2016. See, for instance, peer-reviewed online journal, *Neo-Victorian Studies*; a conference titled ‘Neo-Victorian Cultures: The Victorians Today’ was held at Centre of English and Cultural History, Liverpool John Moores University in July 2013.

<sup>98</sup> Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism*, p. 34.

<sup>99</sup> John R. Gillis, ‘The Birth of the Virtual Child: A Victorian Progeny’, in *Beyond the Century of the Child*, pp. 82-95 (pp. 92, 84)



from a widespread and current cultural phenomenon, but also resonated with its dominant themes of loss, regeneration and childhood. In *The Heritage Industry*, Robert Hewison argues that the ‘nostalgic impulse is an important agency in adjustment to crisis’.<sup>100</sup> In their evocation of the literary Victorian child, the death of Mamillius thus became, for Branagh and Ashford, an act of ‘seamlessly perfect surrogation’ that revealed anxieties about the status of childhood and its relation to futurity that were perhaps even more telling than the more direct approach of many of their predecessors.

Although Branagh/Ashford’s *Tale* opened, like Hall’s production, with an interpolated frame-sequence featuring the boy Mamillius, the tone and context were very different. Where Hall’s Sicilian stage was dark, sombre, and sparsely decorated, and Pavelka’s ‘magic realism’ design for Propeller tended towards the fantastical, Christopher Oram’s set for the Branagh/Ashford production was a warm, festive, aestheticised and unironic vision of Victoriana. The curtains rose to reveal a plush, opulent room with heavy crimson drapes enveloping marble columns and receding proscenium arches. This not only gave the stage a feeling of depth, but also created a visual frame within which a child’s tale might imaginatively unfold. The nineteenth-century architecture of the recently restored Garrick Theatre, with its pale-veined marble, cream and scarlet fabrics and gold-coloured fittings, contributed to the sumptuous Victorian ambience. It provided, moreover a further frame for the *Tale*, giving a sense of a tale-within-a-tale which was particularly suited to this picture-book interpretation of the play. The Christmas setting was symbolically laden with cultural and historical meanings. As a religious festival, it recalled the ultimate Christian symbol of sacrifice and thus prefigured the dramatic sacrifice of the ‘surrogate victim’ Mamillius. In its more secularised manifestation, with its origins in the nineteenth century, it provided a theatrical sign-system that reinforced the Victoriana theme. As Gillis explains, during the nineteenth century, ‘[t]he

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<sup>100</sup> Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 47.

newly invented, secularized family Christmas was thought of [...] as a moment when adults could reconnect not only with children but also with their own childhoods'.<sup>101</sup> Ever since Saint Nicholas had been reinvented as the avuncular grandfatherly figure of Santa Claus in Clement Clark Moore's 'The Night Before Christmas' (first printed as 'A Visit from St Nicholas'), Victorian fathers had begun dressing up as Santas, allowing them to 'enter fully into the world of their children'.<sup>102</sup> It remains to this day a festival with a strong element of sentimentality which began with the Victorians. As Golby and Purdue explain: 'the Victorians installed the belief that Christmas is a time for the celebration of families and for the indulgence of children, and perhaps most interestingly of all, they also built into the festival a nostalgia for Christmas past'.<sup>103</sup> Designing the Sicilian scenes as a picture-book image of Christmas domesticity was thus particularly apposite for a play and a production that was so heavily invested in the symbol of the child and, through its Victorian setting, in exploiting the current vogue for nostalgia. Moreover, the decision to open with Mamillius rather than with the dialogue between Archidamus and Camillo was a natural extension of this child-centric focus.

The frame-sequence was staged as a dialogue between Paulina, played by Judi Dench as a compassionate, wise old sage, and Mamillius, a part rotated between the actors Pierre Atri and Rudi Goodman, aged thirteen and eleven respectively. They first appeared as two faces peering round a curtain at a glittering Christmas tree set in a toboggan-shaped base and surrounded with colourfully wrapped presents. Then, sitting down upon a bench next to the tree, Paulina handed Mamillius a present from the towering pile. As he excitedly tore off the wrapping, the tinkling sound of nursery bells rang out and a single spotlight revealed an adult Perdita singing a sentimental anthem to lost

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<sup>101</sup> John R. Gillis, 'The Birth of the Virtual Child', p. 92.

<sup>102</sup> First printed as 'A Visit from St Nicholas' on 23 December 1823 in the *Troy Sentinel*, New York, this poem was subsequently published with illustrations by Thomas Nast in the 1860s. These illustrations featured images of Santa Claus in his present form. See John Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Making of Modern Christmas* (Stroud: The History Press Ltd, 2000), pp. 73-5. John. R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 103.

<sup>103</sup> J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Making of Modern Christmas*, p. 12.

childhood. She was standing on a small round platform upstage right, directing her song downstage towards Mamillius. He was nestled in the crook of Paulina's arm, oblivious to the haunting presence of the sister he would never grow up to meet. Dressed in a pale diaphanous dress, her hair a mass of bouncing curls framing her face, Perdita appeared like an ethereal angel hovering over the set. Paulina turned to Mamillius as the song finished and, preempting the words attributed to Hermione in Act 2, Scene 1, said: 'Come, sir, now / I am for you again. Pray you sit by us / And tell's a tale' (2.1.22-4). The young boy then raised an old cine film reel and announced 'A sad tale's best for winter' (2.1.26).<sup>104</sup> As Paulina closed this interpolated opening frame sequence with 'give't me in mine ear' (2.1.33) the lights dropped on the stage, allowing Perdita, Mamillius and Paulina to fade away like ghostly apparitions. The members of Leonte's court began advancing towards the stage through the two aisles either side of the auditorium seating, singing a rousing version of 'deck the halls with boughs of holly' and scattering fake snow over the audience. Then, having mounted the stage, they held a curtain around the platform where Perdita had been standing and dropped it to reveal Polixenes, Hermione and Leontes in a three-way embrace. We were back in the Victorian present (as opposed to the prologue's temporal convergence of present and future), and the transition from frame to play proper was executed with a deft sleight of hand. The whole opening sequence was an idealised image of Victorian antiquarianism, stage pictorialism and a sensory overload of music, lights and festive cheer that could have come straight from a Hollywood movie (see Figure 21).

As Branagh revealed in an interview with the *Telegraph*, the decision to stage this play was

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<sup>104</sup> The footage, which was played in the opening scene, was a mix of original material featuring child actors and real footage of Alexei Romanov, the only son of Russian Tsar Nicholas II and great-grandson of Queen Victoria. The montage of images was designed to depict Polixenes, Leontes and Hermione as young children, however analogies between Mamillius and the Romanov child were impossible to ignore. Like Mamillius, this royal heir was doomed to die young, massacred by the Bolshevik guards in 1918 at the age of fourteen. However, unlike the Tsarevich, whose death signified the end of the Romanov rule in Russia, Mamillius's death functioned as a dramatic means of safeguarding the Sicilian royal line. This information was provided in an email from Nick Morrison of Fiery Angel to the author, 19 September 2016. Fiery Angel is the production company who produced Branagh/Ashford's plays at the Garrick Theatre.



Figure 21: Kenneth Branagh And Rob Ashford's *The Winter's Tale* (2015/6)

inspired by his experience directing the 2015 film *Cinderella* for Disney Studios, which employed some of the same creative consultants as *The Winter's Tale*.<sup>105</sup> Kenneth Rothwell has observed that 'Branagh's gift is in knowing how to combine the theatrical with the filmic', and it was clear to see from its sumptuous staging that the idea of a film version of *The Winter's Tale* in the future was, as Branagh himself confirmed, 'very much in his thoughts' when he began working on this production.<sup>106</sup> '[T]here is a sense of a cinema-like widescreen view from both the stalls and the circles', he observed, 'a beautiful horizontal view that chimes perfectly with the 2:35:1 cinema ratio. As a result our minds were always playing in widescreen.'<sup>107</sup> His awareness of the widescreen aesthetics of this production was not merely related to future plans for a film version of the play, but linked to a more pressing concern: the first ever live theatrical broadcast from the Garrick Theatre and Branagh's first venture into the world of the 'simulcast'. On 26 November 2015, the evening performance of *The Winter's Tale* was broadcast live to 520 cinemas in the United Kingdom, taking

<sup>105</sup> Chris Weitz, *Cinderella*, dir. Kenneth Branagh (Walt Disney Studios, 2015). The creative consultants included wigs, hair and make-up consultant Carol Hemming, composer and music director Patrick Doyle and director and choreographer Rob Ashford.

<sup>106</sup> Kenneth Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 235. John Hiscock, 'Kenneth Branagh: Cinderella Made Me Weep', *Telegraph*, 27 March 2015.

<sup>107</sup> Kate Lollar, 'Interview with Kenneth Branagh', *Bender/Helper Impact*, November 2015 <[http://www.branaghcompendium.com/kb\\_wt\\_interview\\_november2015.html](http://www.branaghcompendium.com/kb_wt_interview_november2015.html)> [accessed 5 August 2017].

£1.1 million and surpassing *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2* in terms of gross revenue.<sup>108</sup> It was simultaneously screened in more than 100 cinemas across Europe, with a delayed broadcast to the United States, Australia, Hong Kong, South Africa, China and Japan. The live feed was captured by seven cameras and featured pre-show interviews, documentaries and a voice-over introduction from Branagh himself. That a production so invested in nostalgia should employ the latest digital technology to broadcast in this way seems at first glance a paradox. However, as I have already noted, *The Winter's Tale* is a play whose plot is predicated upon spatio-temporal dislocations and thus, from this perspective at least, seems a natural fit for the 'live' and 'not-quite-live' experience of the mediated broadcast. Moreover, framing the narrative through the eyes of the child is a peculiarly cinematic device as we have seen in films such as Julie Taymor's *Titus* and Adrian Noble's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Although Branagh/Ashford's production appeared to be following recent conventions with its opening frame-sequence, it had very different effects. Unlike Hall's prologue, which signposted the ravaging effects of time with the candles, hourglass and tick-tock music-box refrain, and Hytner's frame-sequence, which foregrounded the absent 'no age' of childhood in the figure of the prematurely aged infant Mamillius dressed as Father Time, Branagh/Ashford used their prologue to collapse temporal difference and signal a comic/romantic resolution. By introducing Perdita at this point, they prefigured the atonement and rebirth of the final scenes and smoothed over the temporal lacuna, mitigating the deficit to be left by the death of Mamillius with a proleptic glimpse of his surrogate (his sister). The three prologues thus established a clear generic divergence in their interpretations: tragedy for the Hall and Hytner *Tales* and comedy for the Branagh/Ashford production. By bringing both children onstage for the interpolated prologue, the directors of this Victorian *Tale* visually synthesised the two halves of the play and elided the sixteen-year 'no age'

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<sup>108</sup> Peter Craig and Danny Strong, *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2*, dir. Francis Lawrence (Lionsgate Films, 2015). Leo Barraclough, 'Kenneth Branagh's Production of "Winter's Tale" Tops U.K. Movie Box Office', *Variety* online, 27 November 2015 <<http://variety.com/2015/film/global/kenneth-branagh-winters-tale-u-k-movie-box-office-1201649357/>> [accessed 5 August 2017].

hiatus at its centre. By surrogating one child for another, as the prologue made so apparent, Leontes not only secured but extended his succession through the marriage of his daughter, Perdita, with Florizel, the son of his childhood friend and the King of Bohemia, Polixenes. More significantly, the on-stage appearance of both Perdita and Mamillius seemed designed to reassure the audience that, in spite of the tragedy to unfold in the first half of the play, the ‘innocent babe’ (3.2.131-2) of the Delphic Oracle’s prophecy would be found, the surrogation of one child for another would be seamless and comic order would be ultimately restored. The elegiac tone of Perdita’s song thus simultaneously prefigured the death of Mamillius and anticipated her reunion with the family, drawing a direct correlation between the two events. One was, as this prologue made clear, dependent upon and compensation for the other.

Presenting the death of Mamillius as a spiritually and emotionally edifying experience was consistent with a Victorian literary culture in which, as Victorianist David Grylls explains, ‘[t]he spectacle of a child dying, it seems, was so relished by those who were fond of children that enjoyment of it was even assumed in the potential participants’.<sup>109</sup> Lee Edelman also turns to the Victorians for a narrative paradigm to illuminate his theory of ‘reproductive futurism’. Taking the example of Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, Edelman explains that Tim, the young son of Bob Cratchit who the reader is led to believe has died, actually ‘survives at our expense in a culture that always sustains itself on the threat that he might die’.<sup>110</sup> For Edelman, Tiny Tim represents the ‘promise of futurity’ (p. 47), an ideology which is reinforced and sustained by the threat of its destruction. Although Shakespeare’s Mamillius does, unlike Tiny Tim, in fact die, a similar process to that described by Edelman could be seen playing out in Branagh/Ashford’s staging of this play, which recalled an earlier Dickens novel – *Dombey and Son* (1846-8). In this admonitory tale of paternal cruelty, Dombey Senior invests all his hopes and ambitions for the continuation of his

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<sup>109</sup> David Grylls, *Guardians and Angels*, p. 40.

<sup>110</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future*, p. 48.

commercial enterprise in his young son Paul, whose development into ‘a grown man – the “Son” of the Firm’, he attempts to accelerate, while neglecting his older daughter, Florence (‘What was a girl’ asks the ironic voice of the narrator, ‘to Dombey and Son!’ [p. 3]).<sup>111</sup> Paul, however, dies while still in his infancy and after a long period of intense and self-absorbed mourning during which Dombey Senior cruelly rejects his daughter’s tentative advances, his shipping business falls into financial ruin and Florence returns to seek a reconciliation. Like Perdita, Florence is by this time a young woman of marriageable age and Dombey finally sees what he has been blind to all this time: that his daughter’s children could continue the family business, and that, in the words of Miss Tox, ‘Dombey and Son should be a Daughter after all’ (p. 241).<sup>112</sup> Crucially, in Branagh/Ashford’s *Tale* and Dickens’s novel, the death of the boy, which in both texts is tantamount to what Peter Coveney terms ‘the psychic murder of a son by his father’, is recompensed by the survival of his sister.<sup>113</sup> And the ‘promise of futurity’, as in *A Christmas Carol*, eventually emerges unimpaired.

The influence of Shakespeare on Dickens’s writing has been well documented, and scholars have drawn parallels in the treatment of the father-daughter relationship in *Dombey and Son* and *King Lear*.<sup>114</sup> However, the similarities between *Dombey and Son* and *The Winter’s Tale* have been largely overlooked.<sup>115</sup> Yet, when watching Branagh/Ashford’s sentimentalised Victorian re-

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<sup>111</sup> Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 97.

<sup>112</sup> The conceit of one child dying to allow another child to live was also explored in Dickens’s 1837 novel, *Oliver Twist*, with the death of the workhouse child in chapter 51. For a full analysis of the treatment of childhood and in particular child deaths in Dickens’ novels see David Grylls, *Guardians and Angels*, pp. 132-152 and Peter Coveney, *Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature* (London: Rockliff, 1957), pp. 71-119.

<sup>113</sup> Peter Coveney, *The Image of Childhood* (London: Peregrine, 1967), p. 140. Coveney is referring exclusively to *Dombey and Son* in this description but I argue that it can equally be applied to the death of Mamillius in *The Winter’s Tale*.

<sup>114</sup> See, for instance, Alexander Welsh, *From Copyright to Copperfield: The Identity of Dickens* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 88, 104 and Paul Schlicke, ‘Dickens and Shakespeare’, *The Japan Branch of the Dickens Fellowship* (2004), 84-98 (p. 94).

<sup>115</sup> Valerie L. Gager draws some analogies between *Dombey and Son* and *The Winter’s Tale* but these are cursory and under-developed. See Valerie L. Gager, *Shakespeare and Dickens: The Dynamics of Influence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 13-4. David Lee Miller identifies the similarities in the use of the *puer senex* motif but does not explore the similarities in the daughter/son surrogation. See David Lee Miller, *Dreams of the Burning Child: Sacrificial Sons and the Father’s Witness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 10-22.

imagining of Shakespeare's *Tale*, the correspondences between these two texts – a father blinded by his own selfishness who can only achieve enlightenment through the death of one child and the reconciliation with another, the restoration of patriarchal order through the daughter's marriage, and the substitution of one child for another – were impossible to ignore. Both texts even feature a personification of Time that queers teleology by prematurely ageing the child to create the *puer senex* (boy/old-man) motif.<sup>116</sup> Little Paul Dombey, moreover, has an otherworldly quality that enables him to see beyond earthly materialities, a quality also brought out in the Branagh/Ashford prologue with the ghostly presence of Perdita, the temporal collision of present and future, and the uncannily seer-like narrator-style function of Mamillius. He was the *puer senex* to Leontes's *puer aeternus*,<sup>117</sup> and, like Paul Dombey Junior, he invited the audience to see the narrative through his eyes. The similarity between Dickens' novel and this particular *Tale* that was most striking, however, was the apparently seamless surrogation of one child for another. Instead of indulging what Edelman calls the 'pleasurable fantasy of survival' through the *threat* of a child's death, like *A Christmas Carol*, Branagh/Ashford's *The Winter's Tale* achieved the same 'pleasurable fantasy' by compensating for the actual death of one child with the survival of another.<sup>118</sup> By fashioning Mamillius as a Dickensian 'wise child', then, whose death is required to ensure the moral regeneration of his father and, crucially, the survival of his sister, Branagh/Ashford indulged Victorian (and 'neo-Victorian') fantasies of the ideal child – the child who never grows up – without rejecting or negating futurity itself.<sup>119</sup> Thus Branagh/Ashford's Mamillius died while still in his infancy, Perdita was restored to the patriarchal order as a young adult, and the process of

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<sup>116</sup> 'Beneath the watching and attentive eyes of Time [...] he passed from babyhood to childhood, and became a talking, walking, wondering Dombey', *Dombey and Son*, p. 95.

<sup>117</sup> See Peter Hollindale, 'Tragedy and Childhood'.

<sup>118</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future*, p. 45.

<sup>119</sup> Peter Coveney describes this as follows: 'the positive assertion of life became a negative assertion of death. The conflict between innocence and experience was considered lost before it began; its only resolution lay in the defeat of death itself. After Dickens, the romantic child of innocence exists very close indeed to the fact of early death. Children no longer grow up and develop into the maturities of Wordsworth's *Prelude*. The child dies, as Smeke and Paul Dombey die.' See Peter Coveney, *Poor Monkey*, pp. 148-9.



‘growing up’ from infant to adult was elided with a Dickensian sleight of hand without compromising Edelman’s ‘fantasy of survival’.

One further threat to the ideology of ‘reproductive futurism’ that was introduced only to be deftly averted was the suggestion of a same-sex eroticism to the friendship of Polixenes and Leontes. One critic observed that the production gestured towards, but didn’t ‘quite have the courage of its homoerotic hints’.<sup>120</sup> However, I contend that it was less a case of lack of courage than one of deliberate intent. The opening image of Leontes, Polixenes and Hermione locked in a three-way embrace certainly suggested a complex sexual relationship like the one dramatised in Sonnet 144 (see above). However, any impression of homoeroticism (or indeed heteroeroticism) was almost immediately neutralised by the decidedly asexual, ‘sterile’ and ‘buttoned-up’ performance of Branagh as the jealous king, Leontes.<sup>121</sup> Even when descending into a barely articulate rage, he maintained tight-lipped control throughout, spitting out the sexually loaded words ‘sluiced’ (1.2.193) and ‘slippery’ (1.2.273), ‘bag and baggage’ (1.2.205), ‘paddling palms and pinching fingers’ (1.2.115) with a puritanical horror. This performance of childish regression, moreover, was thrown into high relief by the erotically charged counter-cultural Bohemian scenes. In an extended song-and-dance routine that was more reminiscent of Rodgers and Hammerstein than Dickens, perky shepherdesses wrapped their legs around the waists of ‘strapping bare-chested shepherds’, and Perdita glowed with rustic sensuality and ‘erotic fervour’.<sup>122</sup> The marked change in tone made the asexual Victorian asceticism of the Sicilian scenes even more significant. For instance, when Leontes eventually reached his jealous climax in Act 1 and curled into a tight foetal position at the front of the stage, Polixenes and a heavily pregnant Hermione were shown skating innocently across a frozen lake in the background. This juxtaposition of madness and serenity was

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<sup>120</sup> Maxie Szalwinska, ‘Review of *The Winter’s Tale*’, *Sunday Times*, in *TR*, 35.23 (2015), 1142.

<sup>121</sup> Henry Hitchings, ‘Review of *The Winter’s Tale*’, *Evening Standard*, in *TR*, 35.23 (2015), 1139; Sarah Hemming, ‘Review of *The Winter’s Tale*’, *Financial Times*, in *TR*, 35.23 (2015), 1140.

<sup>122</sup> Maxie Szalwinska, ‘Review of *The Winter’s Tale*’, *Sunday Times*, in *TR*, 35.23 (2015), 1142; Michael Billington, ‘Review of *The Winter’s Tale*’, *Guardian*, in *TR*, 35.23 (2015), 1139.

unequivocal in its intention: to show Leontes's sickness to be an infection of the mind rather than a suspicion based in any reality. His was less a performance of sexual jealousy than a desperation to regress to an infantile state of helplessness and to reclaim an unattainable pre-sexual childhood idyll. This was entirely consistent with the idealised Victorian setting, as Dickensian scholar Amberyl Malkovich explains:

The romanticized notions of the Victorian child set children apart from adults and childhood became something to be protected and preserved. Such children were presented as innocent, loving, religious, and, above all, *untouched by human misery and knowledge*. They were examples of mankind before Eve plucked her sinful apple, *and thus a status to which culture and society could never return or attain*.<sup>123</sup>

Unlike the public-school setting of Hytner's production, which evoked literary and cultural associations with the homoerotic, the Victorian framework for Branagh's performance capitalised upon a collective cultural nostalgia for domesticity and family values that was firmly rooted in heteronormative, albeit de-eroticised, foundations: heteronormative in terms of a desire to connect with the child and de-eroticised because of a paradoxical desire to connect with one's own childhood. This was a paradox which, as Gillis has observed, had its roots firmly in the Victorian period.<sup>124</sup> It was only after the announcement of the death of his son that Branagh's Leontes finally broke free from his regressive behaviour (the desire to connect with his own childhood) and began to behave with the dignity and self-possession that was to signal the onset of enlightenment and atonement (through the ultimate connection with his daughter). The death of Mamillius, like the death of the virtuous Dickensian child, was 'almost indispensable as a moral preservative' for this Victorianised version of Shakespeare's *Tale*.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Amberyl Malkovich, *Charles Dickens and the Victorian Child: Romanticising and Socializing the Imperfect Child* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 89 (my emphasis).

<sup>124</sup> John R. Gillis, 'The Birth of the Virtual Child', pp. 102-3.

<sup>125</sup> David Grylls, *Guardians and Angels*, p. 136.

Branagh remarked in an interview that he saw *The Winter's Tale* 'very much as a fairytale', and in keeping with the mid-Victorian trend for the socially responsible and ethically edifying fairytale, he gave his own *Tale* a moral touchstone (in addition to but closely associated with the 'wise child' Mamillius as the opening scenes made clear) in the figure of Judi Dench (see Figure 22).<sup>126</sup> Dench's long and successful stage, television and film career has earned her the admiration and affection of the public and press alike, with epithets such as 'national treasure' and cultural icon' regularly applied to her name. Her face, while unremarkable in terms of conventional ideals of beauty, is capable of expressing subtle changes of emotion; her voice has a distinctive husky quality with a tendency to break or catch at key moments; and her acting style conveys an authenticity and generosity of spirit that transmits to both stage and screen audiences. Stanley Wells describes her as 'the best loved English actress since Ellen Terry', explaining that 'her success on stage, like Ellen Terry's, is indivisible from the personality that enables it'.<sup>127</sup> Michael L. Quinn explains this phenomenon of perceived indivisibility of celebrity and role as follows:

Celebrities, almost by definition, substitute this 'someone' that we seem to know apart from the play. They bring something to the role other than a harmonious blend of features, an overdetermined quality that exceeds the needs of the fiction, and keeps them from disappearing entirely into the acting figure of the drama. Rather, their contribution to the performance is often a kind of collision with the role, sometimes hard to accept, but sometimes, too, loaded with the spectacular energy that an explosive crash can release.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>126</sup> See Jack Zipes, *Victorian Fairy Tales: The Revolt of the Fairies and Elves* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1989), pp. xix-xx.

<sup>127</sup> Stanley Wells, 'Judi Dench', in *The Routledge Companion to Actors' Shakespeare*, ed. by John Russell Brown (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 27-39 (p. 37).

<sup>128</sup> Michael L. Quinn, 'Celebrity and the Semiotics of Acting', *NLQ*, 6 (1990), 154-161 (p. 155).



Figure 22: Judi Dench (Paulina) and Kenneth Branagh (Leontes) in Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford's *The Winter's Tale* (2015/6).

In the case of Judi Dench, the 'collision' released the sympathetic rather than the shrewish aspects of the role of Paulina, conveying a sensitivity that softened the overall tragic aspects of this play, and gave the production a patina of authority and authenticity. The directors capitalised upon this 'collision' by expanding and doubling her role so that she was an almost constant feature throughout the Sicilia scenes. As well as opening the play with the interpolated prologue by the Christmas tree, she also closed the first half comforting a devastated Leontes as he limped off the set. She then re-appeared in the second half as the character Time, announcing in her reassuringly 'distinctive vocal husk' the sixteen-year temporal 'slide' (4.1.5) and the geographical shift from Sicilia to 'fair Bohemia' (4.1.21).<sup>129</sup> Casting Dench in the dual roles of Paulina and Time enabled the directors to further reinforce the causal connection between the two distinct parts of the play, smoothing over the spatiotemporal disjunctions and seamlessly transferring focus, and the associated promise of futurity, from Mamillius to Perdita. When the action returned to Sicilia after the sensuous festivities of the Bohemian scenes (even the conflict with Polixenes did not significantly threaten the light-hearted tone of this sensuous bucolic interlude), the set had been

<sup>129</sup> Matt Wolf, 'Review of *The Winter's Tale*', *International New York Times*, in *TR*, 35.23 (2015), 1142.

transformed into an ice-encrusted palace and Leontes into a grey-haired old man, still being supported by Dench's indomitable but compassionate Paulina.

To complement the reassuring presence of Paulina, there was also a visual symmetry to the opening and close of the play that reinforced the sense of continuity and causality. The ending was, in the words of Michael Billington, 'unfashionably [...] unequivocal' in its romantic/comic sense of closure.<sup>130</sup> Camillo embraced Paulina, Florizel hugged Perdita, and in an evocation of the opening sequence, Leontes held one arm around Polixenes and the other around Hermione, clutching them both to him in a tight embrace. There was no place for Mamillius in this final tableau, whether in sober pictorial form like the Hytner revival or as a ghostly visitation like the Edward Hall production. The surrogation of one child for another had been almost perfectly seamless, offering what Poore calls a 'satisfying [...] Dickensian ending' which secured the future through an evocation of the past.<sup>131</sup> In an essay by Russell Jackson printed in the programme for this production, the death of Mamillius is described as 'the collateral damage that accompanies many happy endings'.<sup>132</sup> For Jackson, as for Branagh and Ashford, the death of Mamillius was clearly a necessary, if regrettable, casualty in Leontes's path towards redemption. Jackson's essay gave their production choices academic authority, and Victoriana provided a literary context of loss, regeneration and the 'wise child' that legitimised the 'collateral damage' represented in the death of Mamillius.

In his book-length study, *Violence and the Sacred*, from which the epigraph quoted at the beginning of this section is taken, René Girard coins the term 'sacrificeable victims'. These are, he explains, the victims upon whom society 'seek[s] to deflect [...] the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect'.<sup>133</sup> In order to qualify as

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<sup>130</sup> Michael Billington, 'Review of *The Winter's Tale*', *Guardian*, in *TR*, 35.23 (2015), 1139.

<sup>131</sup> Benjamin Poore, *Heritage, Nostalgia and Modern British Theatre*, p. 96.

<sup>132</sup> Russell Jackson, 'It is required you do awake your faith ...', in *The Winter's Tale* programme.

<sup>133</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 4.

‘sacrificeable’, they must not only be indispensable, but, and this is crucial for understanding the process of sacrifice played out in this production, they must ‘bear a *resemblance* to the object they replace’ (p. 12). In Shakespeare’s text, Leontes looks for resemblance in his son’s face: when he says: ‘Looking on the lines / Of my boy’s face, me thoughts I did recoil / Twenty-three years, and saw myself unbreeched’ (1.2.153-5). In tracing his son’s features Leontes sees traces of his own childhood self, a ‘copy’ stamped from his own facial mould. In this respect, his son stands in as a ‘surrogate victim’, sacrificed in order that Leontes can be released from his childish attachments. However, Branagh/Ashford took this concept of surrogacy and substitution one step further by adding a further dimension of ‘resemblance’. Their interpolated frame sequence drew direct correlations between Mamillius and Perdita which, as in the case of Dombey Junior and Florence, created an apparently seamless sibling surrogation. Not only did this Mamillius function as a symbolic substitution for the child-self of Leontes’s past, but he also provided a ‘sacrificeable’ surrogate for Perdita, thus securing the union of the two kingdoms and the future succession of Leontes’s reign. However, somewhat ironically, in the process of securing and sustaining ideologies of Edelman’s ‘reproductive futurism’, the directors not only legitimised the sacrifice of a child, but in doing so, smoothed over the ‘no age’ of disappearing childhood represented by his absence.

In addition to the multiple cultural and literary associations evoked by the Victorian setting, there were other crucial contextual and intertextual factors that seemed designed to influence audience expectation, reception and understanding of this production. The first of these was the decision to stage the *Tale* in repertory with a double-bill of Terence Rattigan plays, *All on her Own* (1968) and *Harlequinade* (1948). In his study of theatre as a memory machine, Marvin Carlson describes this practice as a form of theatrical ghosting which ‘encourag[es] audiences to allow one play or production to enrich the experience of another’. This is achieved by ‘gradually building up a structure of interlocking memories as audiences experience each new element of the work haunted

by the experience of previous elements.’<sup>134</sup> Branagh and Ashford maximised the potential for theatrical haunting in this way by using an almost identical ensemble cast in both productions. The only major replacement was the veteran celebrity actor: Judi Dench as Paulina in *The Winter’s Tale* with Zoe Wanamaker as Rosemary Hodge in the dramatic monologue *All on Her Own* and the tipsy theatrical old-timer Dame Maude in *Harlequinade*. Like Dench, Wanamaker has a long and eclectic stage and television history. She has, moreover, close ties with Shakespeare in the cultural imaginary through the endeavours of her late father, Sam Wanamaker, in reconstructing Shakespeare’s Globe on the Bankside. Although some fifteen years younger than Dench, she is held in comparable high esteem and affection by theatre audiences and thus was an apposite substitution in the two partner plays.

The Rattigan plays are linked thematically, both to each other and to *The Winter’s Tale*, through their central focus on time, loss and nostalgia and in their metatheatrical self-awareness. While *All on Her Own* is a bittersweet elegy, *Harlequinade* is a slap-stick burlesque that celebrates, while also affectionately making fun of, the mechanics of theatre. Branagh exploited his reputation as an over-earnest thespian by playing *Harlequinade*’s actor-manager Gosport as a flamboyant, pretentious and self-aggrandising thespian. While rehearsing his ageing Romeo opposite a much younger Juliet, for instance, he donned an absurdly ill-fitting wig and jumped skittishly across the stage, posturing and gesticulating like an eighteenth-century tragedian. He was, in short, playing up to the ‘hammy’ reputation he has acquired among the critics over his career. Where Dench’s celebrity reputation coincided rather than collided with the role of Paulina to emphasise the softer aspects of her character, Branagh’s rather more complex celebrity status lent his performance as Gosport a patina of self-parody. This, in turn, gave audience reception of his Leontes a sympathetic and comic context, which de-emphasised the tragic aspects of this generically unstable play.

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<sup>134</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Michigan, The University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 104.

Kenneth Branagh the celebrity is a complex blend of antagonistic qualities. Both mainstream and anti-establishment, conservative and radical, idol and scapegoat, his reputation has fluctuated back and forth throughout his career. How spectators negotiate between these binaries depends upon their own experience and interpretation of Branagh the man and Branagh the actor, and the extent to which they have been influenced by the vast and contradictory press coverage. Over his long career as a Shakespearean actor/director of stage and screen, his private life has been scrutinised and his professional accomplishments, initially greeted with accolades, have later met with opprobrium. This practice is so well-established that it is commonly termed ‘Branagh-bashing’, and is neatly summarised by Paul Taylor writing in the *Independent*:

‘Branagh-bashing’ had long been a national sport in newspapers, as dependable an activity as those annual bouts of over-hyping Tim Henman. Our cultural preference for self-deprecation and good losers was affronted by this working-class Belfast-born boy from Reading who, having gone through RADA and the RSC, had the temerity to found his own Renaissance Theatre Company at the grand old age of 26, then dare to court comparison with Laurence Olivier by directing and starring in his own movie version of *Henry V* (1989) and then add insult to injury by mounting a charm offensive on Hollywood.<sup>135</sup>

In the past few years, there has been a general trend towards a more moderate response to Branagh’s life and work, evidenced in the largely positive media reaction to his knighthood in 2012 and to his central role in the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony.<sup>136</sup> However, some critics still indulge in ‘Branagh-bashing’, as the review by Quentin Letts of Branagh’s performance as Leontes exemplifies: ‘Sir Ken, with inky whiskers, is thespily mannered, elongating certain syllables,

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<sup>135</sup> Paul Taylor, ‘The man who would be king: Kenneth Branagh makes a long-awaited return to Shakespeare’, *Independent*, 26 June 2013. See also Mark White, *Kenneth Branagh* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), esp. Chapter Four ‘Backlash’.

<sup>136</sup> He replaced Mark Rylance who withdrew for personal reasons just three weeks before the ceremony. Branagh played the part of the Victorian architect Isambard Kingdom Brunel reciting Caliban’s ‘The isle is full of noises’ speech from *The Tempest* to the accompaniment of Edward Elgar.



skating over others. Maybe a little irritating’.<sup>137</sup> Ann Treneman, writing in *The Times*, takes a similarly disdainful tone, remarking that ‘Branagh’s performance is mystifyingly OTT. Did he mean to writhe in so much agony, howl in so much pain, that I felt like calling the emergency services and reporting a severe case of over-acting?’<sup>138</sup> Marianka Swain asked whether Branagh ‘deliberately programme[d] a critique of luvvie foibles as a commentary on his own overwrought “Winter’s Tale”’?<sup>139</sup> This misses the point. That he should have chosen to stage *The Winter’s Tale* in repertory with a play that parodied his reputation for ‘thespily mannered’ overacting can be seen as a (meta)theatrical riposte to his more severe critics. ‘He reminds us’, remarked Dominic Cavendish writing in the *Telegraph*, ‘that he has a sense of humour’.<sup>140</sup> But his performance went even further than this. It also reminded us that theatre is a place of make-believe and a medium for telling a story. Branagh is evidently an extremely self-reflective director, and demonstrates immense self-awareness and thoughtfulness when discussing his artistic methodology. In an interview with *The Stage* online, he made the following comments: ‘I’ve always been interested, I hope not in a self-indulgent way, in performance. In a way, that is partly why writers like Shakespeare and Rattigan in this case also use theatre and performance so regularly as a metaphor for examining what is real in people’s lives’.<sup>141</sup> This attunement to performance as metaphor in theatre was crucial to understanding his production of *The Winter’s Tale*. In this context of metaphor and fairytale, Mamillius’s death was all-too-easily glozed over. It was the ‘collateral damage’ necessary for and compensated by the reconciliations and, crucially, for the preservation of ‘reproductive futurism’ at the heart of his redemptive *Tale*.

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<sup>137</sup> Quentin Letts, ‘Review of *The Winter’s Tale*’, *Daily Mail*, in *TR*, 35.23 (2015), 1140.

<sup>138</sup> Ann Treneman, ‘Review of *The Winter’s Tale*’, *The Times*, in *TR*, 35.23 (2015), 1139.

<sup>139</sup> Marianka Swain, ‘*The Winter’s Tale*, Garrick Theatre, review: “Ripe with operatic excess”’, *Ham&High* online, 13 November 2015

<[http://www.hamhigh.co.uk/etcetera/theatre/the\\_winter\\_s\\_tale\\_garrick\\_theatre\\_review\\_ripe\\_with\\_operatic\\_excess\\_1\\_4308776](http://www.hamhigh.co.uk/etcetera/theatre/the_winter_s_tale_garrick_theatre_review_ripe_with_operatic_excess_1_4308776)> [accessed 5 August 2017].

<sup>140</sup> Dominic Cavendish, ‘Review of *The Winter’s Tale*’, *Telegraph*, in *TR*, 35.23 (2015), 1144.

<sup>141</sup> Mark Shenton, ‘I have unfinished business with Romeo and Juliet’, *The Stage* online, 1 November 2015 <<https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/interviews/2015/kenneth-branagh-i-have-unfinished-business-with-romeo-and-juliet/>> [accessed 5 August 2017].

Although not all of the audience members would have seen both plays (the Shakespeare and the Rattigan double-bill), one set of publicity material, including the programme, was produced for the two productions, making it less easy to extricate the joyful, self-parodying, highly metatheatrical mood of the Rattigan plays from their experience of *The Winter's Tale*.<sup>142</sup> The concurrent staging of the two productions seemed in fact to be a deliberate invitation to see them as a whole. In an interview printed at the front of the edited version of the *The Winter's Tale* script, Branagh is quoted as saying that '[w]hen you do several plays together, I think there is a particular interchange of ideas and support'.<sup>143</sup> While *The Winter's Tale* was inevitably tinged with a degree of sadness, the Rattigan plays emphasised the comedic and fantastical elements of Shakespeare's play. The discovery by Gosport of a grown-up daughter and grandchild, moreover, drew further attention to the comedy (the discovery of Perdita) rather than the tragedy (the loss of Mamillius) of his *Tale*. This was further reinforced when Gosport was depicted holding auditions for his own upcoming production of *The Winter's Tale*. Mistaking his stage-manager's fiancée for an auditionee, he gives what he thinks is an aspiring Perdita a brief synopsis of the plot:

|        |                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| JACK   | Oh, Mr. Gosport.                                                                                                                                        |
| ARTHUR | Yes.                                                                                                                                                    |
| JACK   | Could I introduce Miss Langland?                                                                                                                        |
| ARTHUR | Oh. How do you do? Have you read <i>The Winter's Tale</i> ?                                                                                             |
| JOYCE  | Er – no. I'm afraid I haven't.                                                                                                                          |
| ARTHUR | Well it's not a difficult part. It's about a girl who's abandoned by her father when she's a baby, and then many years later they meet – <sup>144</sup> |

<sup>142</sup> This was not the case for *Romeo and Juliet*, which was the sixth, and penultimate, production in the Garrick residency. It did not play in repertory with another production and thus a separate set of publicity material was produced exclusively for this play. That Branagh chose to pair *The Winter's Tale* with the Rattigan double-bill can be interpreted as a conscious decision based on dramatic rather than pragmatic imperatives.

<sup>143</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, Plays at the Garrick, ed. by Kenneth Branagh (London: Nick Hern Books, 2015), p. xv.

<sup>144</sup> Terence Rattigan, *Harlequinade/All on Her Own*, Plays at the Garrick, ed. by Kenneth Branagh (London: Nick Hern Books, 2015), p. 30.

Although this is intended to provide an ironic reflection of Gosport's own 'abandoned' daughter, the way in which it glosses over the death of Mamillius and focuses entirely on the father-daughter relationship is also a remarkably apposite reflection of the Branagh/Ashford production of *The Winter's Tale*. Seeing this unusual pairing as a repertory in dialogue – an 'interchange of ideas', in Branagh's own words – thus inevitably diluted, even if it did not entirely eradicate, the absence of Mamillius and the tragic undertones of Shakespeare's play.

There was one further layer of intertextuality which illuminated the intention and effects of pairing the Rattigan/Shakespeare plays in this way. In 1995 Branagh wrote and directed a feature film, *A Midwinter's Tale* (produced and released in the United Kingdom and outside of the United States under the title *In the Bleak Midwinter*).<sup>145</sup> Like *Harlequinade*, it is a burlesque comedy about an ill-fated provincial Shakespearean production, in this case *Hamlet*. It is clear to see the thematic overlaps between *Harlequinade* and *A Midwinter's Tale*. However, what is more revealing is the way in which Branagh brought this film into dialogue with his very own film version of *Hamlet* (1996), and what that reveals about his approach to the repertory pairing of the Rattigan/Shakespeare plays. Emma Smith has argued that *A Midwinter's Tale* functioned as 'a scapegoat, diverging what is potentially ridiculous and laughable about the play itself, siphoning off *Hamlet*'s dangerous proximity to comedy, and leaving the film of *Hamlet* as generically pure and serious high art.'<sup>146</sup> Watching the two films side-by-side it is clear to see that the earlier release did indeed function as a comic counterpoint to the latter, purging it of its parodic potential and pre-empting any criticisms of bathetic over-earnestness or self-importance that it might attract. Where Branagh emphasised the *difference* between these two films (different casts, budgets, lengths, genres, shooting styles etc), the pairing of *Harlequinade* with *The Winter's Tale* seemed designed to

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<sup>145</sup> Kenneth Branagh, *In The Bleak Midwinter*, dir. Kenneth Branagh (Sony Pictures Classics, 1995). For a full analysis of this film see Lisa Hopkins, *Relocating Shakespeare and Austen on Screen* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 79-104.

<sup>146</sup> Emma Smith, 'Branagh's *In the Bleak Midwinter* and *Hamlet*', in *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 137-146 (p. 137). See also Sarah Hatchuel, *Shakespeare from Stage to Screen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 74-5.

draw attention to their similarities. Moreover, although, as Smith suggests, there are moments in *Hamlet* that veer dangerously into comedic territory, the ending is unequivocally tragic. *The Winter's Tale*, on the other hand, is far more generically unstable and therefore open to interpretation. What the Rattigan plays provided was a comic context for his *Tale* of redemption, and the 'collateral damage' of Mamillius's untimely death, within this context, seemed a relatively small price to pay.

## Conclusion

For Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford, then, the tragedy of Mamillius was obviated by locating the tale in a Victorian setting and thus enabling a representation of childhood that, like the more general trend for Victoriana, was reactionary, nostalgic, and an evasion of twenty-first-century cultural and social realities. Like Dickens's Little Nell or Paul Dombey Junior, Mamillius had to be sacrificed before he lost his idealised innocence. It was a production that emphasised the fairytale aspects of Shakespeare's play, and their Mamillius was a fundamental and instrumental element of the narrative process, subsumed in his own *Tale* through the 'seamless surrogation' with Perdita. For Hytner, the 'no age' of childhood was recontextualised within a post-boarding-school world of arrested development and regressive psycho-pathological behaviours. Mamillius was less a fully rounded character than the projected 'inner child' of his father, unnaturally 'adultified' yet simultaneously memorialised as the 'boy eternal' of his fantasies. For Hall, on the other hand, the death of Mamillius was a shadow that, like the ghost of Hamlet's father, haunted the play to the very end. By doubling the parts of Mamillius and Perdita, Hall provided a constant visual reminder that the discovery of one child merely heightens the absence of the other, despite the play's tentative movement towards redemption and reconciliation. The different ways in which these productions treated Mamillius was, at its most fundamental, a divergence in approaches to the theatrical experience and its function as a mirror on society. For Branagh/Ashford, the theatre was presented as a platform for indulging feelings of nostalgia, sentimentality and childhood fantasies

while simultaneously glossing over the modern crisis facing childhood and its sustainability. For Hall and Hytner, it was a harsh lesson in the dangers of indulging regressive childish fantasies and reifying nostalgic ideals of childhood innocence and, in the process, of erasing the crucial developmental stage between infancy and adulthood – the ‘no age’ of childhood itself. Although the directors approached the play from seemingly irreconcilably different positions, they were in fact reflecting the same issues, albeit through different lenses. What these three productions revealed was a society intent on indulging in nostalgia, an ‘incurable modern condition’ which is, as Svetlana Boym suggests, ‘a sentiment of loss and displacement’ and ‘a romance with one’s own fantasy’.<sup>147</sup> *The Winter’s Tale* has proved to be a particularly popular vehicle in the past few years for expressing this peculiarly ‘modern condition’ with Mamillius, the child at the centre of the narrative, as an apposite symbol of ‘loss’, ‘displacement’ and adult fantasies. However, far from reflecting a utopian ‘dream of freedom’ that is not merely ‘retrospective but also prospective’ – the definition of nostalgia proposed in Boym’s analysis – the staging of nostalgia in these three productions was both regressive and debilitating (p. xvi). If the century of the child symbolised hope for the future, then, as these recent productions of *The Winter’s Tale* have demonstrated, its demise brought with it fears and anxieties and a reflexive turn to an unrecoverable past.

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<sup>147</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xiii.

## Conclusion: The Century of the Child, Shakespeare and Beyond

What Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford tried to evade in their adaptation of *The Winter's Tale*, Christopher Wheeldon, like Edward Hall and Nicholas Hytner before him, made unequivocally apparent: that in the final scene of reconciliation and redemption 'a dead five- or six-year-old boy remain[ed] unaccounted for'.<sup>1</sup> There was to be no miraculous resurrection for Mamillius, the 'collateral damage' of Leontes's actions and a tragic symbol of loss, displacement and nostalgia for an unrecoverable past. The children of Shakespeare's plays are all, in their various forms, symbols of loss. Mamillius represents the ravages of time and the futility of indulging nostalgic fantasies; the children of *Titus Andronicus* are helpless tools of their fathers' self-destructive revenge narratives and symbols of a future doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past; and the dead, imagined and mourned babes of *Richard III* and *Macbeth* symbolise death and destruction on a catastrophic national scale.

In the past few decades, as I have argued throughout this thesis, Shakespeare's children have been mobilised in performance to signify another type of loss that speaks to a peculiarly modern crisis – the loss of childhood itself. Although attitudes towards childhood have fluctuated over history, what makes this present crisis particularly significant is a remarkable convergence of thinking across institutional structures. The technological revolution not only created anxieties about children gaining access to adult knowledge, as argued by Postman, but also exposed them to dangers and temptations beyond the control of their parents in the form of predatory paedophiles, marketing campaigns and cyber bullying. At the same time, advances in technology gave rise to the instantaneous broadcasting of mediated images of children across multiple media platforms, creating emotive visual narratives, emblematised in the Bulger footage, that emphasised both their

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 193.

vulnerability and their potential for evil and, perhaps more crucially, the impossibility of distinguishing between the two. Recent legislative changes have also contributed to this sense of crisis by both extending the rights and responsibilities of children, while simultaneously extending the age of dependency. The emergence of childhood studies as an academic discipline has provided a critical framework within which to debate these various and conflicting concerns, and while there are differing attitudes within this field, there is one point upon which there is almost universal consensus: that the century of the child has come to an end.

There is a vast body of scholarship addressing the historiography of childhood and what it means to be a child in this era of seismic ideological, technological, legal and attitudinal change. I am certainly not the first to suggest that there is a correlation between technological advances and a widespread ‘moral panic’ regarding our children. However, while some important work has been done on the Shakespearean child in performance, my thesis is the first consolidated study to consider the performance of childhood specifically in relation to this remarkable set of circumstances. Perhaps inevitably, my research has generated more questions than it has answered and there are areas that are underrepresented in this thesis. While I did not intentionally set out to write exclusively about male children, for instance, the main focus of my research has been the boy characters. One key area for further scholarship that I would like to explore is the role of the girls, particularly in relation to their fathers or father-figures. Research by Jennifer Higginbotham and Deanne Williams has recently expanded our understanding of the significance of Shakespeare’s girls in their early modern context. I would like to explore what contemporary manifestations of these characters might reveal about recent trends in attitudes towards gender and childhood. I am thinking principally of Perdita and Leontes in *The Winter’s Tale*, Antiochus and his daughter in *Pericles*, Princess Elizabeth and King Richard in *Richard III* and Prospero and Miranda in *The Tempest*. I believe that there is a study to be written on how questions of chastity, reproduction and

incest inform these relationships and how these issues have been represented in productions through history.

There is also an obvious bias towards Shakespeare in my project. In recent years, the expansion of scholarship into the work of other early modern playwrights such as John Webster, John Ford, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Middleton and Ben Jonson has been accompanied by a growing performance history, both on stage and screen. Although scholars such as Pascale Aebischer, Roberta Barker and Sarah Werner have produced important scholarship that engages with the ways in which these contemporaries of Shakespeare are given a contemporary relevance in modern productions, there is still work to be done on the significance of the child in relation to the current crisis.<sup>2</sup> Three plays that immediately stand out in this regard are John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil* and Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*. Who can forget the ending to Derek Jarman's film adaptation of *Edward II*? The closing shot of 11-year-old Jody Graber as Edward III, dressed in his mother's earrings and heels and dancing to Tchaikovsky's 'Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy' on top of a cage containing Isabella and Mortimer, is one that certainly invites closer analysis.<sup>3</sup>

Although I have limited my research to four key plays, I have demonstrated how contemporary concerns about childhood are not only reflected in the manifestation of the Shakespearean child in performance, but that the performances themselves have actively contributed to the debate, even if unintentionally or through deliberate evasion. As I have shown, in the work of some directors, notably Roman Polanski, Deborah Warner, Julie Taymor and more recently, Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford, the fetishisation of the child is still evident, and at times this has resulted in a

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Pascale Aebischer, *Violated Bodies; Screening Early Modern Drama; Performing Early Modern Drama Today*; Roberta Barker, *Early Modern Tragedy: Gender and Performance, 1584-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); *New Directions in Renaissance Drama and Performance Studies*, ed. by Sarah Werner (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Sarah Werner, *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance: Ideology on Stage* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, dir. Derek Jarman (Working Title Films, 1991)



manifestation of its more sinister, eroticised shadow. Other productions have subverted idealised images of childhood by substituting the child in performance with surrogates, as in the case of Sam Mendes's and Thomas Ostermeier's productions of *Richard III* and Christopher Wheeldon's *The Winter's Tale*, or by juxtaposing 'evil' and 'innocence', as in Michael Boyd's and Justin Kurzel's *Macbeths*. In stagings by Jamie Lloyd, Maya Kleczewska, Edward Hall and Nicholas Hytner, the death of the child has been mobilised as a symbol for a wider social malaise, bringing into question Edelman's assumptions of the child as emblem of futurity and the very idea of the future as progress. Marjorie Garber's assertion in 1997 that 'there are very few children in Shakespeare's plays' and that they 'are not, by and large, successful characters', has been dramatically disproved by these examples.<sup>4</sup> If success can be determined by their capacity to signify beyond the sum of their spoken lines, then all of the children I have studied are, I argue, extremely 'successful' characters that carry considerable figural weight. By focusing my analysis on these particular children, I make an important contribution to current Shakespearean scholarship by providing a fuller understanding of the current crisis and at the same time, a fuller insight into the dramatic significance of Shakespeare's children. I also provide a critical framework and methodology for further exploring how the oft-overlooked and underestimated child characters of Shakespeare and his contemporaries have reflected and informed debates about what it means to be a child in this current climate of doubt and uncertainty and beyond.

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<sup>4</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Coming of Age*, p. 30.

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Craig, Peter and Danny Strong, *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2*, dir. Francis Lawrence (Lionsgate Films, 2015)

Davies, Andrew, *Little Dorrit*, dir. Adam Smith, Dearbhla Walsh and Diarmuid Lawrence (BBC, 2008)

Delves, Stuart, *Macbeth Possessed*, dir. Stuart Delves (Tron Theatre, Glasgow, 1985)

Johnson, Michael Robert, Andrew Peckham and Simon Kinberg, *Holmes*, dir. Guy Ritchie (Warner Bros, 2009)

Marlowe, Christopher, *Edward II*, dir. Derek Jarman (Working Title Films, 1991)

Middleton, Thomas, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, dir. Trevor Nunn (Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1966)



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Rattigan, Terence, *All on her Own*, dir. Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford (Garrick Theatre, London, 2015/2016)

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Schulman, Tom, *Dead Poets Society*, dir. Peter Weir (Buena Vista, 1989)

Sears, Ted and others, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, dir. David Hand and others (RKO Radio Pictures, 1937)

Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, dir. Kenneth Branagh (Columbia Pictures, 1996)

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---, *Macbeth*, dir. Dominic Cooke (Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 2004)

---, *Macbeth*, dir. Gregory Doran (Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1999)

---, *Macbeth*, dir. Daniel Evans (Crucible, Sheffield, 2012)

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---, *Macbeth*, dir. Justin Kurzel (StudioCanal, 2015)

---, *Macbeth*, dir. Jamie Lloyd (Trafalgar Studios, London, 2013)

---, *Macbeth*, dir. Adrian Noble (Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1986)

---, *Macbeth*, dir. Roman Polanski (Columbia Pictures, 1971)

---, *Macbeth*, dir. Orson Welles (Republic Pictures, 1948)

---, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, dir. Adrian Noble (FilmFour, 1996)

---, *Richard III*, dir. Tim Carroll (Shakespeare's Globe, London, 2012)

---, *Richard III*, dir. Sean Holmes (Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 2003)

---, *Richard III*, dir. Jamie Lloyd (Trafalgar Studios, London, 2014)

---, *Richard III*, dir. Richard Loncraine (United Artists, 1995)

- , *Richard III*, dir. Sam Mendes (The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1992)
- , *Richard III*, dir. Sam Mendes (The Old Vic, London 2011)
- , *Richard III*, dir. Laurence Olivier (London Films, 1955)
- , *Richard III*, dir. Thomas Ostermeier (Avignon Festival, Avignon, France, 2015)
- , *Richard III*, dir. Roxana Silbert (Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 2012)
- , *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford (Garrick Theatre, London, 2016)
- , *Titus*, dir. Julie Taymor (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 1999)
- , *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Bill Alexander (Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 2003)
- , *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Lucy Bailey (Shakespeare's Globe, London, 2006 and 2014)
- , *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Peter Brook (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1955)
- , *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Christopher Dunne (Joe Redner Film & Productions, 1999)
- , *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Gale Edwards (Lansburgh Theatre, Washington, 2007)
- , *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Michael Fentiman, (Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon 2013)
- , *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Richard Griffin (South Main Street Productions, 2000)
- , *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Jane Howell (BBC, 1985)
- , *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Xavier Leret (Edinburgh and on tour, 2001-2)
- , *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Yukio Ninagawa (Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 2006)
- , *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Deborah Warner (Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1987)
- , *Titus Andronicus: The Movie*, dir. Lorn Richey (Lorne Richey Productions, 1996)
- , *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Annabel Arden (Lyric Hammersmith, London, 1992)
- , *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Lucy Bailey (Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 2013)
- , *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford (Garrick Theatre, London, 2015/2016)
- , *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Declan Donnellan (Barbican Theatre and touring, 2016/2017)

---, *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Gregory Doran (Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, transferring to the Barbican, London, 1998/99)

---, *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Edward Hall (Hampstead Theatre and touring, 2005/2012)

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---, *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Michael Longhurst (Sam Wanamaker Theatre, London, 2015/2016)

---, *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Michael Kahn (The Shakespeare Theatre, Washington, 1987)

---, *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Sam Mendes (The Old Vic, London, then international tour, 2009)

---, *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Conrad Nelson (Viaduct Theatre, Halifax, 2015)

---, *The Winter's Tale*, choreographer and dir. Christopher Wheeldon (Royal Opera House, London, 2014/2016)

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Sherwin, David, *If*, dir. Lindsay Anderson (Paramount British Pictures, 1968)

Tally, Ted, *The Silence of the Lambs*, dir. Jonathan Demme (Orion Pictures, 1991)

Tarantino, Quentin, *Kill Bill Vols 1 and 2*, dir. Quentin Tarantino (Miramax Films, 2003, 2004)

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Thomas, Heidi, *Cranford*, dir. Simon Curtis and Steve Hudson (BBC, 2007)

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## Music and Artwork

Caravaggio, 'Amor Vincit Omnia' (1601-2)

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Jackson, Michael, *Black or White* (Epic Records, 1991)

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Schumann, Robert, *Kinderszenen* (Scenes from Childhood) Op. 15

Stewart, Christopher 'Tricky', Terius 'The-Dream' Nash, Thaddis Harrell, Beyoncé Knowles, 'Single Ladies' (Columbia Records, 2008)

## **Exhibitions and Conferences**

‘Neo-Victorian Cultures: The Victorians Today’, Centre of English and Cultural History, Liverpool John Moores University (July 2013)

‘The Game’s Afoot’, Madame Tussaud’s Theatre (2016)

‘Victoriana: The Art of Revival’, the Guildhall Gallery, London (2013)