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The University of Southern Mississippi

SHAKESPEARE AND BOYHOOD:
EARLY MODERN REPRESENTATIONS
AND CONTEMPORARY APPROPRIATIONS

by

Marvin Tyler Sasser

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

ABSTRACT

SHAKESPEARE AND BOYHOOD:
EARLY MODERN REPRESENTATIONS
AND CONTEMPORARY APPROPRIATIONS

by Marvin Tyler Sasser

May 2015

This dissertation demonstrates that Shakespearean boyhood, both in early modern plays and contemporary reimaginings for young readers, critiques patriarchal and hegemonic ideals through the rhetoric and behavior of boy characters. Although critics have called Shakespeare's boy characters *indistinguishable*, I find that they provide Shakespeare a unique resource to offer persuasive skepticism about heroic conventions, education, and political instability. This project begins by examining the lexical network of *boy* in order to chart its uses in early modern England. The subsequent three chapters establish how Shakespeare uses boys to comment on a range of ideal manhoods, such as the chivalrous knight, the Herculean hero, the humanist man of moderation, and several dramatic representations of the monarchy. Having established the diverse ways Shakespeare uses boy characters to negotiate masculine gender ideals, this project then investigates how Shakespearean boyhood is appropriated in contemporary children's literature. I discover that the gender features regarding Shakespeare's boys noted in previous chapters find expression in these later adaptations, and that the gender complexities that exist in Tudor-Stuart drama and culture appear in these boy books and point to a more fluid notion of gender identity than critics have hitherto considered.

Methodologically, this project draws on masculinity studies, childhood studies, and social histories of the family, as well as gender and adaptation theories to account for the boy's analogous function in early-modern plays and contemporary novels. The larger significance of the project is in how it enhances our understanding of how Shakespeare conceived of boyhood in his plays and how such plays have been reconceived in contemporary boy books. By analyzing both the early modern representations and contemporary appropriations of Shakespearean boyhood, I first demonstrate how the playwright's complex use of boyhood critically engages with some of the most pressing issues regarding early modern masculinity and offers compelling skepticism about conventional ideals of early modern manhood. Then, I establish how Shakespearean boyhood resurfaces in these adaptations when children's authors likewise depict varied and complicated boys equally in dialogue with contemporary gender debates about boyhood.

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A Dissertation
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DEDICATION

Thank you to the Warders, Sassers, Wiggins, Daltons, Lawrences, and entire Hardy clan for your support. I especially am grateful to the compassionate individuals in these families who stoically refrained from asking “How much longer?” Thank you for understanding.

I am blessed to have parents who championed my educational goals since kindergarten, often at the expense of their own aspirations. I am grateful for their never saying “no” when I needed money for the book fair or demanded that we visit the Franklin Memorial Library. More specifically, I am grateful to my mother, Cheryl Warder, for her dedication to teaching and travel and for keeping an old copy of *Don Quixote* on her bookshelf. I am grateful to my father, Franklin Sasser, for teaching and encouraging me to question and to think, lessons that continue to guide my professional life.

Finally, I am blessed to have been able to spend my graduate studies with my spouse and best friend, Jessica Sasser. We began our life together by studying and traveling, and your companionship has been a lot of fun. Thank you also for enduring my many digressions about Shakespeare and boyhood.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, for the root; to Jessica, for the sunshine; and to Jameela, for the blossom.

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Foremost, I am grateful for the privilege of having studied under Jameela Lares, who has challenged and supported me throughout this process. To her I owe much of the success of this dissertation; from Hattiesburg to London, she has been a benevolent mentor. I also am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with an exceptionally dedicated, diverse, and cooperative committee. The encouragement and expertise Eric L. Tribunella, E. Kay Harris, Mark Dahlquist, and Joseph Navitsky have given to me through comments and conversation is vast. The intellectual community they provided in the classroom and throughout this project has made the process a delight, and I am profoundly grateful for the enthusiasm they have shown for my work. I am moved especially by Joseph Navitsky's continued commitment.

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Librarians are a scholar's best friends, and while I benefited from interacting with several of the librarians at the Cook and McCain libraries, Ellen Ruffin, Nadine Philips, Paul McCarver, Jennifer Brannock, and Durlless Lumpkin have in various ways been exceptionally kind, gracious, and helpful in diligently responding to my many requests.

I have heard that influential teachers are often the last people to slip from a person's memory. If so, I am fortunate to have had a lifetime of strong teachers. I am indebted to Melba Todd, Francis Creech, Dana Durden, Ann Youmans, Martha Ward, and Judy McWhorter for teaching me how to read and do book reports; to David Lamb for teaching me how to conjugate verbs and diagram sentences; and to Sally Grover for teaching me how to debate. Most importantly, though, I am indebted to Sally Grover for introducing me to Shakespeare. Thank you.

My experiences in Willingham Hall and Knight Hall at Mercer University are among the most significant of my life. In those halls, I learned from a number of brilliant faculty, and though some of the most influential experiences were with professors whom I may no longer remember me, these individuals remain vital to my life. I am grateful to Charlotte Thomas and Tom Trimble for refining my abilities to question; to Andrew Silver and Mary Alice Morgan for introducing me to gender theory; and to John Stege and Diana Stege for fanning my desires to study early modern literature. I discovered that I was a teacher, however, because of Anya Krugovoy Silver and Stephen Bluestone, whose beautiful teaching suggests that all teachers should be poets.

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CHAPTER I

“Enter the Boy:”

AN INTRODUCTION

What have we here? Mercy on’s, a barne!

A very pretty barne. A boy or a child, I wonder?

The Old Shepherd, *The Winter’s Tale* (3.3.69-71)

Ben Jonson’s famous conjecture in the 1623 Folio that William Shakespeare “was not of an age” (43) is a legendary sentiment. Sewn onto t-shirts and tote bags, sprawled across playbills and repeated in liberal arts buildings, it is a rallying cry for critics, teachers, readers, and theatregoers alike. The possessive sense of the word “of”—as in, “not *of* an age”—means belonging to or written for a specific period, in this case late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England. According to Jonson, Shakespeare’s poetry and drama are not exclusively written for early modern people and instead universally belong to everyone and across all generations. Such is the conclusion generally drawn from Jonson’s dedicatory poem. However, “of” also means “concerning” or “about,” and “age” might equally mean a period in an individual’s life, which is to say Shakespeare’s writings do not concern or are not about only one age. This project is concerned with this latter idea, that Shakespeare transcends time periods as well as ages.

In what follows, I explore the intersection between Shakespeare and boyhood in terms not only of the historical origins and contexts of early modern boys and boyhoods as represented in Shakespeare’s dramatic canon, but also of their continuing history of cultural reinvention and appropriation in children’s literature. To do so, I first concentrate on boy characters in several of Shakespeare’s plays. These boys are too often relegated to

the academic dustbin for being flat and unimportant. Instead, as I hope show, they are not only richly diverse, but they dramatically influence our understanding of a play and its performance. In this project, I also address socio-cultural interests in the relationship between Shakespeare and boyhood as reflected in contemporary children's literature. Today there exist dozens of boy books, ranging from historical non-fiction and time-slip novels to prose retellings of Shakespeare's plays, depicting young male protagonists living with Shakespeare or within Shakespeare's dramas. Hence, for the purposes of this project, I define *Shakespeare* not only as a historical playwright of texts, but also, a cultural signifier that is recycled across time, genre, and, most importantly for my purposes, age. Such interconnectedness, as Douglas Lanier maintains, "contributes to Shakespeare's status as a widely shared touchstone and thus sustains his cultural life and power, albeit in forms and with meanings that stand well outside of 'proper' Shakespeare" (*Shakespeare* 19). Ultimately, this dissertation enhances our understanding of how Shakespeare conceived of boyhood in his plays and how such plays have been reconceived in contemporary boy books.

Boy Characters in Shakespeare

Scholarship has long neglected Shakespeare's boy characters partly because social historians have also overlooked their historical, real-life counterparts. I join the critics reconsidering claims of Philippe Ariès, Lawrence Stone, and, to some degree, Marjorie Garber that early modern children were not understood as being different from adults. According to Stone, "childhood" as a distinct part of life was unknown in early modern European culture, since "parents were affectionless" because "the very high infant and child mortality rates made it folly to invest too much emotional capital in such

ephemeral beings” (105, 116). Ariès calls them “little animals, . . . smelly and unformed . . . toys to divert the mind” who were “an unimportant thing, so inadequately involved in life” (39). Concerning Shakespeare’s child characters specifically, Garber suggests that “there are very few children in Shakespeare’s plays,” that these “few children” are but “terrible infants,” the reader is “relieved when they leave stage,” and that it is “no accident that almost all go to their deaths” (30).

Garber’s “few” children in Shakespeare include Young Macduff in *Macbeth*, Mamillius in *The Winter’s Tale*, and Martius in *Coriolanus*, but she overlooks dozens of other important child characters. By Mark Lawhorn’s count, there are “about forty-five” child characters in the canon, and this, still, is a conservative estimate (“Children” 233). While Lawhorn’s number includes the princes, pages, singers, sons, daughters, and servants discussed below, there are some definitions of “children” excluded from his list of 45. Lawhorn does not count the choristers in *Henry VIII*, the children playing fairies in the Herne’s Oak scene in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the children inside expecting mothers such as Jaquenetta in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Julietta in *Measure for Measure*, Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale*, and Helena (allegedly) in *All’s Well That Ends Well*, the symbolic or spirit-like children such as the bloody babe in *Macbeth*, and the characters, like the Fool in *King Lear* and numerous pages and servants, who might be identified as children, though not easily (233).¹ Hence, the number of children in Shakespeare’s plays is high, however one chooses to count and define those children. For some critics, such as reviewer Anthony B. Dawson, Lawhorn’s list of child characters “comes as a revelation”

¹ Before providing his own estimation of the number of child characters in Shakespeare’s plays, Mark Lawhorn calls attention to T.A. Pendleton’s assertion that “‘by the most liberal definition, there are only about thirty child characters in the . . . canon,’ and Mark Heberle’s larger count finds ‘altogether thirty-nine child characters in the canon’” (“Children” 233).

to Shakespeare studies, since most scholars have “not thought much about the children who people the plays, nor . . . thought there were so many” (89). Such neglect is surprising, perhaps most of all because, as Benedick remarks in *Much Ado about Nothing*, “the world must be peopled” (2.3.242), and it seems natural that child characters would appear in any large body of fiction.²

Another probable reason why these child characters are overlooked is simply that many of them have very few lines. Yet such is not to say that Shakespeare did not pen a significant number of lines for children. There are approximately 750 lines, roughly 1/3 the length of an average play, in Shakespeare’s dramatic canon spoken by children. Collectively, these lines are about as much, or more, than the number of lines spoken individually by such major characters as Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Rosalind, Romeo, Juliet, Othello, Horatio, Ophelia, Antony, Brutus, Viola, or Portia, to name but a few. While most of the child characters that this dissertation discusses speak fewer than 30 lines, some of the characters have much more to say. At 159 lines, Moth in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is the lengthiest child’s role in Shakespeare, followed by Arthur in *King John* with 121 lines—who, with 100 lines in 4.1, has the largest speaking scene of any child in Shakespeare—and the Boy page in *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* with 89. Each of these three characters have roughly 1/3 the number of lines of Shylock and more than Ophelia or Emilia, though they have not garnered nearly as much critical attention. Further, there are at least 14 boy characters (such as Lucius, Rutland, Edward

² Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare* (2nd ed.). This edition prints a single, conflated text for plays that appear in both quarto and folio publications, a practice frowned upon by some editors. For the purposes of this project, however, the differences between quarto and folio are not particularly significant. I also have corrected silently obvious typographical errors and anomalies.

Plantagenet, Prince Edward, Mamillius, Young Macduff, William Page, and others) who individually speak more lines than Barnardine in *Measure for Measure* or the grave digger in *Hamlet*, both of whom have considerably interested both scholars and audiences.

Indeed, even boy characters with relatively few lines maintain dramatically important roles in Shakespeare. As post-colonial studies confirm, the silenced—and perhaps unseen—Indian boy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Tamora and Aaron's son in *Titus Andronicus* can radically alter how we understand both the dynamics of a play and the construction of boyhood. Likewise, one can profitably question the implications of Richard III's asking a boy to recommend an assassin, or what the play suggests by specifically calling on a child to be the go-between who brings Tyrell to Richard. Or we might rethink how we read or watch *2 Henry IV* after recognizing that Falstaff's boy appears in seven of the play's seventeen scenes, and that approximately one-third of the play's lines are delivered in his presence.

Similarly, we can draw inferences about Shakespeare's construction of childhood in *Titus Andronicus* once we realize that Young Lucius is on stage in five of the final nine scenes, speaking in four of them.³ This child's quiet, observational presence in such a violent play influences how we read, stage, and teach *Titus Andronicus*, especially the dinner table scene where he watches Tamora cannibalize her sons, his grandfather kill his aunt, Saturninus kill his grandfather, and his father kill Saturninus. Indeed, recognizing that a brief time on stage does not necessarily mean that a character is unimportant, A. C. Bradley concludes about Cordelia that though she appears in only four scenes in *King*

³ Young Lucius appears late in the play, not making an appearance until 4.1 in the Quarto.

Lear and speaks scarcely more than 100 lines, “no character in Shakespeare is more absolutely individual or more ineffaceably stamped on the memory of his readers” (240). Shakespeare has long been lauded for his ability to create memorable characters who speak very few lines or appear in little of the drama. Thus, in the same way that critics have discussed the Indian boy, Aaron’s son, and Cordelia, so do I suggest that the presence of a child, despite the number of lines spoken, alters how we might read or watch Shakespeare.

While the number alone of lines spoken by these boys is reason enough to study the presence and impact of boyhood in Shakespeare, their actions are equally significant, as well as how they die and what that death accomplishes. Young boys gruesomely die in *Henry V*, *King John*, *Richard III*, and *Macbeth*, suggesting not an innocent childhood, but one filled with destruction and violence. In *The Winter’s Tale*, Mamillius dies of grief after his father wrongly imprisons his mother. While the fate of Aaron’s son in *Titus Andronicus* is ambiguous, Jane Howell’s BBC production (1985) depicts Young Lucius gazing upon the baby’s corpse in a small coffin. Jonathan Bate interprets this scene as Lucius’s being forced to face “violent male public rituals” (63). Though, as mentioned above, Marjorie Garber suggests that it is “no accident that almost all [of these boys] go to their deaths” (30), one of the goals of this project is to (re)consider these “[non-]“accidents” in a way that illuminates undercriticized aspects of Shakespearean boyhood.

Despite a critical tradition of dismissing these boy characters, the post-millennial boom in childhood studies includes two seminal studies for this project that both appeared in 2007: Carol Chilling Rutter’s *Shakespeare and Child’s Play: Performing Lost Boys on Stage and Screen* and Kate Chedgzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh, and Robert

Shaughnessy's *Shakespeare and Childhood*. Rutter's focuses on the textual, theatrical, and cinematic representations of Shakespeare's children that she identifies as "constitutive of adult projects" (xiv). Though she does spend ample time with *Titus Andronicus*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Macbeth*, Rutter's primary focus is on modern representations of the child characters on stage and screen. Chedgzoy, Greenhalgh, and Shaughnessy's *Shakespeare and Childhood* is an admirably diverse collection of 14 essays, though only three of the essays focus on early modern children or literary representations of early modern children, while the other eleven essays discuss Victorian literature and periodicals, Ellen Terry, modern literature, popular culture, and children's literature. *Performing Childhood in the Early Modern Theatre* (2009), Edel Lamb's important revisionary work, provides the first book-length study of the children's playing companies in early modern London since Michael Shapiro's *Children of the Revels* (1977). Lamb's discussion on how the theatre and these playing companies helped to define childhood provides useful information regarding historical boy players and, thus, boyhood in this era.

This dissertation intervenes critically into this discussion by focusing on literary representations of boyhood, and, in turn, how Shakespeare uses his boy characters to engage with topical gender issues, and how Shakespearean boyhood is reimagined in contemporary children's literature. Therefore, though an early modern understanding of boys, boyhood, and manhood is crucial to this project, I also am invested in analyzing these characters as literary representations of boyhood. Hence, this project contributes to the recent reassessment of child characters in Shakespeare by exploring literary

constructions of the pre-adolescent child. Adrienne E. Gavin helpfully articulates the literary merit of child characters:

[T]he fictional child is an artefact that expresses memories or intuitive understandings of childhood or symbolically pictures the child as innocent, victim, blank slate, born sinner, infant tyrant, visionary, or signifier of nostalgia, hope despair, or loss. Literary children often carry substantial weight in texts, and, in envisioning the child, writers have constructed images and characters that serve various functions: instruction, allegory, pathos, escapism, satire, identification, demonization, or idealization. (2)

Gavin's summation of the different roles children historically have played in literature further confirms this project's importance, since Shakespeare's children, I argue, reveal and reflect cultural concerns about politics, education, and gender. Thus, unlike child-in-Shakespeare scholars who consider these boys to be merely generic children, I offer a sustained analysis of multiple individual boy characters in order to focus on the dramatic representations of their boyhoods and to discuss specifically these boys as boys. There is an overwhelming tendency in gender and age studies in Shakespeare to privilege Rosalind's gender appraisal in *As You Like It* that "boys and women are for the most part cattle of this color" (3.2.414-15). Invoked at the start of numerous essays and books that study medieval and early modern childhood, Rosalind's ironic and humorous claim has obtained a sort of totemic power.⁴ Made while she is disguised as Ganymede, the

⁴ See, for instance, Lisa Jardín's *Still Harping on Daughters* (1983), 9-36; Stephen Orgel's *Impersonations* (1996), 51; Marta Cerezo Moreno's *Critical Approaches to Shakespeare* (2005), 153; and Pamela Allen Brown's "'cattle of this color': Boying the Diva in *As You Like It*" (2012), n.p., among others.

statement is a playful jest made to a lover by a boy player costumed as a woman. Hilda L. Smith reads Rosalind's advice as Shakespeare's "conflation of children and youths with *all women*" (36, my emphasis). More often than not, critics like Smith who interpret this line as equating the gender identities of early modern boys and women do so at the expense of the Old Shepherd in *The Winter's Tale* who asks, when he first sees the infant Perdita, "What have we here? Mercy on's, a barne! A very pretty barne. A boy or a child, I wonder?" (3.3.69-71). The Shepherd's use of the word *child* in his question suggests that child is a rather different, though equal, thing than *boy*. Moreover, as I will demonstrate throughout this project, boys and women in Shakespeare do not share a common temperament, and to suggest otherwise limits how we think about and understand both boys and women in Shakespeare.

Shakespeare, Masculinity, and Manhood

I approach these boy characters in Shakespeare as young males in the process of developing gender identities and becoming men.⁵ To do this, I have situated much of my work at the intersection of Shakespeare and gender studies, especially masculinity studies. Since the 1970s, feminist critics have cast light successfully on previously shadowed issues of gender in Shakespeare.⁶ This body of work, as Ann Thompson rightly sees it, was the most influential and productive body of work in Shakespeare studies

⁵ I follow Karen Coats in defining "identity" as a "goal or achievement . . . usually thought of as developmental, and . . . entirely dependent on the influence of variables such as race, culture, religion, family, ideology, and embodiment," to which I would also add *age* (109). Thus, "identity" in this project pertains to the more subjective experience of one's gender, especially in such a way that broadens and even disrupts reified categories of childhood, manhood, and masculinity.

⁶ See, for instance, Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975), Carol Thomas Neely's "Women and Men in *Othello*" (1977), Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely's *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (1980), Janet Adelman's *Suffocating Mothers* (1992), Irene Dash's *Wooing, Wedding, and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays* (1981), Linda Bamber's *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (1982), and Peter Erickson's *Patriarchal Structure in Shakespeare's Drama* (1985), among many others.

during the 1970s and 1980s (74). Since then, a veritable canon of studies of masculinity and manhood in early modern literature and Shakespeare has been generated from feminist criticism. Collectively, scholarship on the representations of masculinity and manhood in Shakespeare explore the plurality of men's experience not only by exposing patriarchy within early modern literature and culture but also by challenging preexisting ideas on the supposed essentialism of masculinity, especially as it pertains to heteronormativity.

The earliest scholars to study early modern masculinity and manhood formulated their arguments in feminist, psychoanalytic, or materialist theories. For instance, Coppélia Kahn's *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (1981) considers how "the dilemmas of masculine selfhood" are not, as Freud believes, castration, "but engulfment by the mother[,] and [the male's] critical task in establishing his masculinity is not an oedipal one but a pre-oedipal one of 'dis-identifying' from his mother and 'counter-identifying' with his father" (11). In *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (1996), Mark Breitenberg identifies anxiety as synonymous with masculinity, suggesting that masculine "subjectivity constructed and sustained by a patriarchal culture—infused with patriarchal assumptions about power, privilege, sexual desire, the body—inevitably engenders varying degrees of anxiety in its male members" (1). For materialist critics, the dynamics of gender construction are found in prosthetic markers, such as hair, beards, codpieces, voices, and costumes. In *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatrically and Effeminization, 1579-1642* (1994), Laura Levine explores what she perceives as the paranoia regarding the theatre's power to effeminize and adulterate men via men wearing women's clothing. The chapters in Andrew P. Williams's edited

collection *The Image of Manhood in Early Modern Literature: Viewing the Male* (1999) collectively demonstrate various ways people viewed and gazed upon idealized images of early modern manhood. Will Fischer, in *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (2006), focuses on gendered features or “parts,” such as codpieces and beards, and their role in forming masculine and feminine identities” (3)

Instead of using post-Freudian psychoanalysis or materialist methodologies to uncover the process by which men are constructed in early modern culture and literature, my approach to understanding manhood and boyhood during this time is more akin to the social historians who have identified gender ideals that existed in Shakespeare’s England. I agree with Alexandra Shepard, who in *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (2003) explores how manhood was defined in prescriptive literature, such as advice books and conduct books, and argues that manhood was a distinct phase in a male’s life cycle that represented attainment of physical maturity, in contrast to youth and old age, and was equated with temperance and reason. Bruce R. Smith, in *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (2000) argues for a “coalescence” of understanding the male body, masculine ideals, rites and passages, and relationship to *others* as the way to understand early modern masculinity. Similarly, I find Robin Headlam Wells’s discussion of masculinity as a political issue, whereby “For the Renaissance the heroic idea is essentially masculine [since the] qualities it evokes—courage, physical strength, prowess in battle, manly honour—may be summed up in a word [virtue] whose Latin root [vir] means ‘a man’” to

be of particular importance for my study since these ideals are among a range of standards that I argue these boys critique (2).⁷

Therefore, unlike Shepard, Smith, and Wells, I demonstrate how many of the boy characters—none of whom are addressed by Smith and very few by Shepard and Wells—not only exemplify the ideals discussed by these critics, but challenge and expose them as well. As one example, the refusal of the Boy in *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* to follow in Falstaff's company can be understood either as cowardice or independence; the former would make him less manly while the latter would make him more manly. Hence, throughout this dissertation, I will turn to theories of masculinity and manhood in Shakespeare to consider specific scenes where there is a boy on stage. Critics of these scenes overlook the observant boys, who, in the *Henriad* and other plays as well, speak or act in a way that often challenges and subverts, but rarely confirms, such summations of early modern masculinity as discussed by Shepard, Smith, and Wells.

As should be evident by now, I disagree with the sweeping, putative notions that these boy characters are flat or indistinguishable and that they share the same gender category as women, men, or girls. Rather, they are round, diverse, and separate from adult genders. As I discuss in Chapter I, *boy* as a linguistic category in early modern English is especially polysemous, defined by age, class, behavior, action, and social function. At times *boy* is used to insult, as in *Antony and Cleopatra* when Caesar claims Antony “calls [him] a boy, and chides,” and in *Romeo and Juliet* when Tybalt calls Romeo a “wretched boy” as they fight (4.1.1; 3.1.129). *Boy* can be used as a term of endearment when spoken by a parent of a child at any age, as Volumnia in *Coriolanus*

⁷ In addition to Wells, Coppélia Kahn (1997) and Warren Chernaik (2011) also note that the masculine ideal of virtue is specifically martial and etymologically rooted in *vir*, Latin for *man*.

remarks when her warrior son enters: “Honorable Meneius, my boy Martius approaches” (2.1.100-01). Such diversity, however, does not take away from how commonly Shakespeare uses *boy* as an age marker for early modern male children. Hence, I explore not only the etymology of *boy* and other linguistically relevant terms but also I consider how early modern males negotiated life changes between infancy, boyhood, and adolescence by discussing a few typologies concerning how boyhood and manhood was achieved, performed, and maintained. Ultimately, this project defines *boy* mostly in terms of age to mean a young, male child approximately between seven and fourteen years of age, and, as I will demonstrate, all of the young characters I discuss fall approximately within these ages.

Shakespeare and Children’s Literature

Recognizing both the diversity of boys and boyhoods in Shakespeare as well as their crucial importance to gender debates regarding manhood and masculinity helps me to bridge the two parts of this project: early modern representations of Shakespeare and boyhood and their adaptation in contemporary boy books. As this project shifts from the early modern stage to the contemporary page, I continue to consider how depictions of Shakespeare-inspired boyhoods provide a similarly unique resource for interrogating and otherwise engaging with boyhood and constructions of masculinity in a way that extends Shakespeare’s own use of boy characters. In the case of these contemporary children’s books, Shakespeare surfaces as a complex signifier amidst crucial debates, identified as the *boy crisis*, concerning various expressions of masculinity. Therefore, my interrelated reasons for weaving together the early modern with the contemporary are fourfold.

First, the multifaceted portrayals of boys and boyhood in Shakespeare's drama point to a variety of ways in which boys and boyhoods have been reimagined by contemporary children's authors, and they simultaneously illuminate how those authors likewise use boys and boyhood to question patriarchal ideals. These two subfields within Shakespeare and childhood studies, "Shakespeare and Early Modern Childhood" and "Shakespeare and Children's Literature," have similarly suffered from overgeneralization. On the one hand, critics such as Patricia Fumerton have cited "the 'mereness' of the child" in early modern culture, suggesting that Elizabethans and Jacobean generically understood all children to be "trivial" and "ornamental" (218). On the other hand, children's literature critics such as Erica Hateley view the genre of Shakespeare-for-children as "firmly . . . demonstrat[ing] an emphatic commitment to patriarchal models of normative gendered subjectivity" (*Shakespeare* 187). In both cases, we recognize a tendency to overstate and oversimplify the plurality of both early modern children and novelistic adaptations of Shakespeare for contemporary children.⁸ I hope to complicate these simplifications by discussing the variety of boys and boyhoods in Shakespeare and adaptations of Shakespeare and then explaining how they similarly function in the literature. By first recognizing the multiplicity of boys and their uses in Shakespeare, we can then better understand how a similar diversity appears in contemporary children's literature. Thus, this project helps satisfy the need for a broader

⁸ Probably one reason for this generalization is the relatively recent acceptance of childhood studies and children's literature as areas of academic scholarship. Understandably, early contributions to emerging areas of scholarship often retrospectively appear general once a field becomes increasingly specialized and theorized, and I believe this may be the case with Erica Hateley's *Shakespeare in Children's Literature*, as it is the first and only book-length study to date of contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare for children. I do not mean to take anything away from this groundbreaking work on Shakespeare and childhood. Rather, I wish to use it as a steppingstone to help us to better recognize the diversity in Shakespearean boyhood, both in its early modern representation and its contemporary representation in children's literature.

historical study of boyhood in Shakespeare by uncovering and discussing this diversity of boyhood in Shakespeare.

Second, this project uniquely recognizes and defines *Shakespeare* as not only to include the drama and poetry ascribed to the Stratfordian playwright but also, as Douglas Lanier writes, “an adjective, a tool potentially for reshaping the associations of objects that become linked with his name” (“ShakespeareTM” 93). Analyzing adaptations of Shakespeare contributes to the history of “Shakespeare,” and as Richard Burt confirms, “the production of a new Shakespeare version or citation tends to imagine itself as breaking with the old, with tradition, it also always creates an archive of making it continuous with past versions” (20). Today, “Shakespeare” represents an abstract concept as much as a historical playwright, and as Michel Foucault explains in “What is an Author?” it is important that we consider the “author function” without privileging the author as sole Romantic source of meaning, an idea that allows for “groupings” of works:

Discourse that possesses an author’s name is . . . regulated by the culture in which it circulates [,and the] function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society. . . . The “author function” is tied to the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourses; . . . it does not refer, purely and simply, to an actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions. (123, 24, 31)

Foucault’s idea of an “author function” offers a useful taxonomy for understanding the two parts of my project since it allows me to discuss the discursive authority of

Shakespeare. Hence, in my final three chapters, I turn to the relationship between Shakespeare and boyhood in contemporary children's literature in order to address how similar gender concerns as discussed in my first four chapters appear in these contemporary texts. Dozens of boy books, ranging from historical non-fiction and time slip novels to adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare's plays, depict male protagonists living with Shakespeare or within Shakespeare's plays at school or in the theatre. Thus, Foucault's notions of author function and discursive authority are deployed in this project, since I wish to demonstrate not only how Shakespeare conceived of and used boyhood in his plays but also how such plays have been reconceived for contemporary boy readers.

Third, adaptation theory provides a way of considering the intertextual space between Shakespeare and children's literature and is particularly effective in helping us to recognize, define, and understand Shakespearean work. A purpose-led process, adaptation is the amalgamation of what one (i.e., author, director, painter, etc.) decides to maintain, supplement, compress, or enhance in order to create a new product that, in varying degrees, shapes how the consumer understands and interprets the source text, or what we might also identify as the *original* or *adapted* text. Recognizing what is maintained and supplemented, compressed and enhanced when Shakespeare is adapted for young readers not only provides an interpretative continuum of Shakespeare from within children's culture, but it also sheds light on what the adapters (authors, marketers, parents, educators) think young readers need from Shakespeare. As Paul Prescott helpfully explains, "To observe the historical fluctuations of Shakespeare's value is to be reminded of the contingency of our *own* readings of the texts," and, as I maintain, this

observation appears especially true when gender is a central concern for adapters (271). Indeed, adaptation theory, is a particularly effective way of thinking about unconventional gender identities because adaptation itself, as Linda Hutcheon sees it, disrupts authority by invading it and then creating something new while simultaneously upholding the comforts of recognition (172-77).⁹ Adaptation is inherently subversive in that it destabilizes its own authoritative text (177). Studying the adaptation of Shakespeare for children leads therefore to complex questions concerning authorship, ownership, and fidelity as well as the opportunity to consider the pedagogical, ideological, and capitalistic goals of adaptation for children. Put simply, *to adapt* suggests that there is something that needs to be changed or altered, and I am interested in what is changed or altered as regards boyhood and gender identities.

Fourth, despite the critical attention given to the range of media (i.e., stage, film, television, opera) in which Shakespeare is prevalently recirculated, children's literature as a site of cultural dissemination is significantly underdiscussed and undertheorized. Methodological innovations of the 1980s and 1990s saw the expansion and redefinition of *literary scholarship*, thereby introducing new areas of interdisciplinary research. During this time, Shakespeare and popular culture transitioned from the periphery to the forefront as critics worked to uncover how the meaning of Shakespeare changed across generation, popular media, and social group, since so doing, as Robert Shaughnessy explains, permitted "an increasingly significant contribution to our understanding of how

⁹ According to Linda Hutcheon, "each adaptation must also stand on its own, separate from the palimpsestic pleasures of doubled experience, . . . [Adaptation] is not a copy in any mode or reproduction, mechanical or otherwise, It is repetition but without replication, bringing together the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight of surprise and novelty. As *adaptation*, it involves both memory and change, persistence and variation" (173).

Shakespeare's works came into being, and how and why they continue to exercise the imaginations of readers, theatergoers, viewers and scholars worldwide" (1). However, while Shakespeare and performance and particularly Shakespeare and film have long been reputable concerns of scholarship and pedagogy, the adaptation of Shakespeare as children's literature until quite recently has gone almost entirely uncontested. Thus, this project also uses its discussion of Shakespeare and boyhood as an avenue to understand more clearly the complexities of Shakespeare-as-children's literature, particularly as it concerns gender. Douglas Lanier's assessment that "Shakespeare's special status in the literary canon springs from a complex history of appropriation and reappropriation, through which his image and works have been repeatedly recast to speak to the purposes, fantasies, and anxieties of various historical moments" helps me to arrive at a place of understanding why so many of these Shakespeare boy books concerned with gender have emerged, as I will discuss in Chapter VI, during what is known as a *boy crisis* amongst contemporary young males (*Shakespeare* 21). Just as the boys in Shakespeare's playtext maintain engagement with social, domestic, political, and gender-related issues of their period, so do these boy books position the boy to perform a similar sort of cultural work.

Chapter Synopsis

The boy characters in both the plays and novels I examine are noteworthy precisely because of their engagement in gender issues relating to boyhood and manhood. Therefore, the next four chapters focus primarily on some of the most engaging and complicated boys in Shakespeare: Falstaff's Boy, William Page, Moth, Rutland, Mamillius, the princes Edward and Richard, and Arthur. These chapters trace how Shakespeare's boys engage with questions pertaining to changing ideals of masculinity as

the rise of humanism confronted late medieval ideas of chivalric manhood. Thus, I begin with two of Shakespeare's medieval history plays that depict a boy who listens and responds to soldiers' competing definitions of manhood. I then move to the schoolroom in order to understand how Shakespeare's schoolboys engage with what historians of pedagogy identify as a place for masculine formation. The fifth chapter brings together a common event frequently found in many of the plays that include a noble boy character: his violent death and its aftermath. The final three chapters turn to contemporary adaptations of boyhood in children's literature in order to demonstrate how authors appropriate Shakespearean boyhood in order to perform a similar kind of cultural work.

More specifically, my opening chapter asks the question, "What constitutes an early modern boy?" and proceeds to answer this question by segregating the actual boys, with which this project is concerned, from the young marriageable men, adolescent males, and youngish female heroes in Shakespeare. I then turn to the etymology of *boy* and its lexical network in order to chart the ways childhood became increasingly split into boyhood and girlhood through the early modern period. I consider a number of terms—such as *imp*, *lad*, *stripling*, and *heir*—that help me define different categories of youth. Doing so helps us to understand more fully Philippe Ariès's important notion that "boys were the first specialized children" (58). Along the way, I turn to dictionaries, midwifery manuals, conduct books, textbooks, letters, and journals in order to recognize how the boys discussed in my project exist broadly in the early modern imagination and in Shakespeare more specifically. I also delineate my working definition of early modern boyhood, which regards young males approximately between the ages of seven and

fourteen who exist within a time of transition. Most are breeched and attending school or working as an apprentice.

In the two subsequent chapters, I explore how two groups of boys in Shakespeare—the page or apprentice and the schoolboy—participate in crucial debates regarding masculinity by voicing skepticism about various popular early modern ideals of manhood. Chapter III focuses on heroic manhood and masculine qualities such as courage, strength, and honor. In early modern English, the adjective *masculine* often denoted martial and heroic qualities. For instance, when Lady Macbeth remonstrates against her husband’s cowardice, Macbeth responds, “Prithee peace! / I dare do all that may become a man. / Who dares do more is none” (1.7.45-47). Similarly, in *1 Henry VI*, the Duke of Burgundy asks of Joan de Pucelle (Joan of Arc), “what’s that Pucelle whom they term so pure?” and Talbot replies, “A maid, they say” (2.1.20, 21). Bedford interjects, “A maid? And be so martial?” to which Burgundy responds, “Pray God show prove not masculine ere long” (22). Such expressions in Shakespeare’s plays have caused critics to understand this ideal in a military manner. In *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor* (1960), Curtis Brown Watson explains how “Manhood or manliness was in the Renaissance a popular synonym for valor” (245). In *Shakespeare on Masculinity* (2000), Robin Headlam Wells helpfully identifies a politically motivated “chivalric revival” in the late 1590s when “courage-masculine” and “manly virtue” were politically coded phrases for Elizabeth’s court (35, 6). “Originating in the Middle Ages as the code of values of a military aristocracy,” Wells explains, “chivalry placed paramount emphasis on the masculine virtues of physical courage and military prowess as the guarantors of justice and honour” (11). I agree with Wells’s sentiments here about the

Henry IV and *Henry V* plays, but I believe also that the pageboy engages with this debate by constantly deflating these ideals of chivalry: virtue, honor, and courage. He enters 2 *Henry IV* as Falstaff's Page just as Hal is transitioning from the taverns to the court. Shakespeare, I argue, positions the boy as Hal's replacement, and just as Hal learns to reject the subversive life of Eastcheap in exchange for chivalric honor, so does this boy also participate in a similar sort of reformation. Furthermore, unlike the Prince/King Henry V, the Boy also questions and ultimately repudiates the competing depictions of manhood exhibited by both Falstaff and the military court. By first writing the boy as a symbolic replacement of Hal, Shakespeare positions him so that he can move between the battlefield and the tavern and then uniquely comment upon the similar type of men in these two places, thus toppling the ideal of a valorous martial manhood.

Chapter IV examines how the formation of manhood on the battlefield slips during the growth of Renaissance humanism. Instead of championing manly ideals such as a military courage, virtue, and honor, humanist education advocates a different ideal of manhood, one that is forged not on the battlefield but in the classroom, where humanist ideals pertaining to language and education were promoted. Thus, after I briefly review schoolroom practices and the idea that Latin training was a kind of "male puberty rite," as Walter Ong suggests, I turn to Shakespeare's most telling depiction of a schoolboy, Moth in *Love's Labour's Lost* (117). The play opens with the major male characters establishing Navarre as a model university for learning. Like the classroom, the Navarre kingdom becomes an all-male institution that segregates men from women to facilitate gender appropriate lessons. For instance, as Lynn Enterline notes in her brilliant study of the rhetorical influences of sixteenth-century pedagogy on Shakespeare's poetry,

“Establishing a socially significant opposition between English and Latin, maternal and paternal spheres of language and influence, schools self-consciously sought to intervene . . . in the reproduction of normative gender categories” (15). While critics have studied *Love’s Labour’s Lost’s* interest in wit, wordplay, and rhetoric as a satirical attempt to outwit the University Wits, Moth is as routinely left out of those critical discussions as he is often cut from modern performances. Thus, I hope to explain how Moth is instead deeply imbued with this tradition and uses his pedagogical strengths and unmatched wit to subvert many of the adult male characters who depict such ideals in the play, such as in Armado the chivalrous knight and Holofernes the humanist man of learning.

Chapter V considers monarchical boys, which is to say, those boys who are destined to become a duke or a king. These heirs contain dynastical aspects of their identities in that they are defined as both *boy* and *heir*, and I turn to a dramatic pattern that occurs whenever Shakespeare depicts monarchical boyhood. Each of the plays discussed in this chapter—*3 Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *King John*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter’s Tale*—include the death of one or more of these type boys. Their deaths are a result of their disrupting the masculine, adult, and royal world ruled by each play’s patriarch. These royal boys represent a threat, and their presence creates both unease and anxiety for the men. Unlike Falstaff’s Boy and Moth, however, these boys have not been entirely overlooked in scholarship. In the 1990s, Ann Blake published two articles that curtly addressed these deaths. In one she “attempt[ed] to define the dramatic significance in Shakespeare’s tragic world of these scenes of children and their suffering,” and concluded that these “children are tender-hearted and loyal, brave, and idealistic. Moreover, they are free from adult vices, and emphatically innocent” (“Children” 293).

My reading of these boys, however, does not comport with Blake's sentimental approach to many of the same characters. Instead, in light of my discussion of Falstaff's Boy, of William Page, and of Moth's proclivity for rowdy behavior, sexual punning, and sharp wit, we can recognize that Shakespeare does not simply depict innocent, tender-hearted children. Indeed, I am not convinced that Shakespeare only pens pathos-ridden boys, just as I do not agree that any of these boy characters are "uniformly pathetic figures," as Blake elsewhere speaks of the princes in *Richard III* ("Shakespeare's Roles" 123). Thus, in this chapter I consider each murdered boy's uniqueness. I begin with the first and last boy deaths Shakespeare staged in his career, Rutland in *3 Henry VI* and Mamillius in *The Winter's Tale* respectively, and then proceed to discuss chronologically the other three plays. I argue that these doomed heirs, all of which die because of their patrilineal birthright, raise important questions of monarchical succession, and in so doing, subvert false ideals of masculine nobility and expose an element of anti-rationalism that is at the heart of monarchical succession.

Having established the diverse ways Shakespeare uses boy characters to negotiate and critique early modern ideals of manhood, I wish to consider in my final chapters how a similar phenomenon occurs when contemporary authors appropriate Shakespeare in children's literature, especially boy books. The boys in Shakespeare maintain domestic, political, emotional, aesthetical, cultural, and gendered importance in the plays, and I find it important also to consider how our own culture "writes" Shakespearean boyhoods and how we similarly position the child to perform cultural work in contemporary children's literature. Investigating this intersection between Shakespeare and boy books is an especially timely inquiry. Although Shakespeare has informed children's literature at

least since Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), there has been almost no criticism on the genre of Shakespeare-for-children. Writing in 2004, Ruth Morse sums up this critical silence:

Shakespeare for children is, if not exactly undiscovered country, certainly an outlying province in the cartography of Shakespeare scholarship . . . unlisted in Shakespeare bibliographies, ignored in Shakespeare Studies and, with the honorable exception of the Lambs, largely unknown even in the annals of children's literature. Children's Shakespeare is equally absent from the burgeoning field of children's literature. (194)

Though I would also include Mary Cowden Clarke's *Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1850-51) and Edith Nesbit's *The Children's Shakespeare* (1897) as similarly *honorable exceptions*, Morse helpfully summarizes the general critical neglect of Shakespeare-for-children throughout the twentieth century. However, there has been a sort of post-millennial boom in the scholarship of this field, and in recent years there has arisen a canon of scholarship addressing adaptations of Shakespeare for children.

For instance, Charles H. Frey's appropriately entitled "A Brief History of Shakespeare as Children's Literature" (2001) lists important Shakespeare-themed children's texts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first book-length studies on this topic are Velma Bourgeois Richmond's *Shakespeare as Children's Literature: Edwardian Retellings in Words and Pictures* (2008), which discusses nearly all early (1807-1912) adaptations, and Megan Lynn Isaac's *Heir to Shakespeare: Reinventing the Bard in Young Adult Literature* (2000), which discusses more contemporary texts. A survey text intended for classroom teachers, Isaac's collection addresses pedagogical

concerns with texts commonly found in the American classroom—*Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*—while also mentioning several children’s and young adult books that include the plays in some way. Naomi Miller’s edited collection *Reimagining Shakespeare for Children and Young Adults* (2003) maintains a much broader audience and includes chapter contributions from literary critics, authors, and educational theorists. Many of the chapters conclude with the Romantic notion that after engaging with such appropriations, readers will then turn to Shakespeare proper. While both Isaac and Miller make important contributions to the classroom, neither critic really engages with any children’s literature scholarship, though admittedly such is somewhat beyond their respective purposes.

The strongest critical book on this subject is Erica Hateley’s theoretically astute *Shakespeare in Children’s Literature: Gender and Cultural Capital* (2009). Hateley begins with the Lambs and Nesbit, but it is her argument concerning adaptations of *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and *The Tempest* that is most important for my purposes:

It is my overarching contention that Shakespearean capital operates within a patriarchal model in contemporary children’s fiction, and does so in order to privilege masculine cultural subjectivity and delimit feminine cultural subjectivity. . . . I am interested in the inscription of children as the gendered future-bearers of cultural capital within their literature. . . . I am further arguing that intertextual appropriations of Shakespeare for children serve to discursively reflect and produce normative behaviors.

(*Shakespeare* 12)

While I find many of Hateley's arguments about specific children's books convincing, I do wish to offer a counterpoint to her suggestions of how frequently "the complexities of Shakespeare's playtexts are simplified in the service of cultural politics" and that "Shakespeare' has become the vehicle of naturalized and authorized discourses of normative gender and behavior" (18). Instead, I argue that rather than conforming to the traditional and normative gender identities Hateley ubiquitously finds in adaptations of other plays, many Shakespeare boy books construct their protagonists as introverted, confused, passive, and anxious boys frequently bullied by both classmates and fathers. The adaptations I discuss present diverse models of Shakespeare-inspired boyhood. Hence, after I have demonstrated how Shakespearean boyhood critiques and deflates many early modern ideals of masculinity, I use my final three chapters to consider how something similar occurs when Shakespeare is given to contemporary boys. Thus, my final chapters consider boyhood as depicted in "Shakespeare," not the early modern playwright from Stratford but as a discursive formation used by contemporary children's authors to confront hegemonic masculinity.

In Chapter VI, I contextualize the emergence of Shakespeare-for-children, with emphasis particularly given to the phenomenon of the Shakespearean boy book that has become increasingly popular within the last 10-15 years, in order to understand how Shakespeare has been used to depict unconventional boyhood. In the midst of what is often referred to as the *boy crisis*—a term embodying both the concern for the decrease in academic performance by post-millennial boys and the fear that boys are being overlooked in the wake of feminism—numerous adaptations of Shakespeare have appeared that seek to offer a version of Shakespeare's playtexts that is at once more

accessible and relevant to the conventional boy. Erica Hateley believes that children's authors often call upon the "fictional presence of Williams Shakespeare as character" in order to legitimize conservative values (18). I disagree. In fact, I find that Shakespeare-inspired fiction offers a way for authors to construct characters that might otherwise be termed unconventional. Therefore, after considering the educational and entertainment motivations of such adaptations, as well as how these books operate as a form of cultural capital, I turn to a group of texts that depict more unconventional boys and boyhoods. In so doing, I am able to interrogate how these contemporary texts interrogate or otherwise engage boyhood in a way that extends Shakespeare's own use of boy characters.

Chapter VII focuses on the subgenre of Shakespeare historical boys fiction.

According to Carrie Hintz and Eric L. Tribunella, historical novels, works of fiction set in a time period preceding the one in which they are published, have been popular in the world of children's literature since at least the 1840s (235-36). Knowing that the historical periods and events prescribed in primary school curricula generally influence the historical novels that are written and published, it is not surprising that Shakespeare and Shakespeare's England are such a popular sub-genre of historical fiction (239). The sub-genre of Shakespeare historical fiction finds precedent for this narrative in Geoffrey Trease's classic *Cue for Treason* (1940), perhaps the earliest piece of historical fiction to depict two runaway boys who become players in London and befriend William Shakespeare. As initiated by *Cue for Treason* and resurfacing in novels such as J. B. Cheaney's *The Playmaker* (2000) and *The True Prince* (2002), Gary Blackwood's *The Shakespeare Stealer* (1998), and Susan Cooper's *King of Shadows* (1999), these novels generally follow a narrative pattern where recently orphaned boys

find their way into London's theatre circuit and the homosocial theatre becomes their new surrogate family. Often including elements of an adventure novel, these books situate coming of age as an early modern boy within the context of performing as boy players. More precisely, their growth occurs specifically via their convincing abilities to perform as women. Furthermore, often the protagonists are pitted against a senior boy player whom we might consider a bully of sorts who embodies aggressive heteronormativity. Instead of successfully coming of age by performing as a woman, these antagonists fail at playing adult male characters. Therefore, I argue that not only do these historical novels present the opportunity for the boy heroes to recognize their preference for and then choose an alternative social family (the acting company) over their biological ones, but they also employ the early modern convention of boy players performing women characters in order to embrace unconventional gender identities. These novels embrace the stage practice of crossdressing as a way to provide a unique opportunity for these boys to recognize and be comfortable with unconventional boyhoods. Moreover, these novels feature complex and unconventional relationships between the boy protagonist and William Shakespeare that blur conventional social boundaries such as parent and child, master and servant, and lover and beloved, and in so doing they continue to disrupt heteronormative and patriarchal representations of masculinity.

I conclude this project in Chapter VIII by considering how the major arguments of this dissertation—that Shakespeare and adaptations of Shakespeare similarly use boyhood to confront, challenge, and critique patriarchal ideals of manhood associated with hegemonic masculinity—culminate in recent versions of *Hamlet*. Thus, my final

chapter serves as a sort of case study as I continue to explore how Shakespeare's plays are not always simplified in the service of cultural and gender politics. Indeed, I suggest that rather than conforming to traditional gendered identities, *Hamlet* specifically offers the opportunity for recent novels such as Matt Haig's *The Dead Fathers Club* (2006), Alan M. Gratz's *Something Rotten* (2007), Gary D. Schmidt's *The Wednesday Wars* (2007), and John Marsden's *Hamlet, A Novel* (2009) to construct alternative, non-heteronormative boyhoods for readers. I end this study by examining how just as Shakespeare's boy characters critique the ideal manhoods of their early modern worlds, contemporary boy-Hamlets likewise challenge their own modern, patriarchal cultures. These novels depict their protagonists as introverted, confused, passive, and anxious boys frequently bullied by physically aggressive, hyper-masculine classmates and fathers, and just as Shakespeare's boy characters frequently subvert early modern ideals of manhood, so do these recent *Hamlet* adaptations create a space for non-normative and non-patriarchal identities.

Ultimately, Shakespeare's plays demonstrate that the boy characters, long neglected by scholarship, in turn appear in a much wider range of roles and serve a variety of functions. Most importantly, we will see that their existence is central to understanding the playwright's engagement with a range of early modern masculine ideals. Indeed, so essential are these boys to understanding how Shakespeare engages with these ideals that when taken as a group, we will recognize that they provide the playwright with a unique resource to offer compelling skepticism about heroic conventions (such as martial ideals and manly honor), educational status, employment, uses of rhetoric, legitimacy, political instability, and even when risks are at their highest,

the question of monarchical succession and the authority of monarchy itself. These boys frequently provide subtle, and sometimes not-so-subtle, criticism for a range of early modern ideals that appear in Shakespeare, such as the Chivalrous Knight, the Herculean Hero, and the Humanist Man of Moderation. In the end, by studying these complex and varied depictions of boyhood in Shakespeare, we observe the first complex literary construction of boyhood on the English stage, witness how this variety emerges somewhat concurrently with an early modern understanding of the boy as a unique gender category, recognize a unique way of engaging with some of the most pressing issues regarding early modern masculinity, and discover that these boys participate in crucial early modern gender debates, a phenomenon that we finally learn also appears when Shakespeare is adapted for contemporary boy readers.

CHAPTER II

DEFINING EARLY MODERN BOYHOOD:

PERFORMING AGE AND GENDER

“As a squash is before ’tis a peascod or a codling when ’tis almost an apple: ’tis with him in standing water, between boy and man.” Malvolio, *Twelfth Night* (1.5.115)

The first step in this project is to identify what constitutes an early modern *child* and then to distinguish boys from girls as both sex and gender categories in Shakespeare and Shakespeare’s England. As we will see, there exist a number of categories of youth in early modern England that appear in Shakespeare. I therefore consider boyhood at the level of language in order to recognize how the vocabulary of early modern childhood emerged together with these separate categories of youth. During the late medieval and early modern period in England, *boy* came to be defined as the male age and gender category for which it generally remains known for today. This development helps us to recognize boyhood as a state of transition that was more often than not initiated by breeching, or when a boy first began to wear breeches or trousers and was segregated from feminine spaces such as the home. Moreover, as numerous midwifery manuals and journals help to confirm, male and female children were differentiated as young children, if not sometimes even as infants, even while an established vocabulary for separate gender identities had not yet fully emerged. Indeed, whereas within this patriarchal culture most early modern females moved between various submissive positions (girl, servant, midwife, wife), males were seen as existing within various states of transitioning or becoming. Finally, I identify a number of early modern models for the ages of men,

most of which uphold the then common categorization based on multiples of seven years. In the end, this chapter answers the question, “What does it mean to be an early modern boy?” so that I may then proceed to discuss the multifunctioning perspectives of boys and boyhood in Shakespeare and how boy characters actively participate in some of early modern England’s most pressing issues concerning masculinity and manhood.

Males, Men, Youth, and Boys in Shakespeare

Since Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” gender theorists have recognized the central importance of *becoming* in regards to gender formation (301). Indeed, a founding belief of gender studies is that gender is neither natural nor biological, but rather local and socially constructed. In 1975, Gayle Rubin conceived of a “sex/gender system” as a way to understand the “set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity” (157). Thus, whereas *sex* is used to categorize anatomical differences (i.e., female, male, and intersexed), *gender* regards culturally constructed differences, whereby characteristics commonly associated with femininity and masculinity can be understood as culturally varied. Gender is also understood as a product of expectations, performances, and stereotypes created and regulated by repeated acts, and for this project, I further define *gender* to include the characteristics and identities generally associated with girls and boys, women and men, femininity and masculinity.

Following de Beauvoir, critics today recognize how just as one is not born a woman, one is similarly not born a boy or girl. Childhood, like gender, is socially constructed and admits as many variations. Indeed, since Philippe Ariès identified childhood as a product of modernity, childhood studies, as Susan Honeyman explains,

has argued for “recognizing that state of prolonged protection (and sometimes fetishization) generally ascribed to Western youth as relatively constructed, class bound, and historically varied” (“Trans[cending]gender” 167). Thus, while boys and men may both be male, the expectations, performances, and stereotypes of boyhood often differ significantly from those of manhood. For instance, Carrie Hintz and Eric L. Tribunella helpfully explain how contemporary boys and men fall into different gender categories:

By virtue of their youth, children have roles expected of them that differ from those of adults of the same sex. For example, while manhood might be associated with being responsible and providing for others, boyhood is frequently associated with pranks and irresponsibility, as suggested by the phrase “Boys will be boys” as an excuse for troublesome behavior. Men are expected to wield authority, but this can be difficult or impossible for boys who are subject to the authority of adults, including women. Boys who appear to claim power and authority might be branded as behavior problems and punished, indicating that boys are not regarded simply as miniature men. (392)

As I discuss in more detail below, we can similarly observe how the expectations and performances differed across the gendered lives of early modern boys and men. For example, in Chapter III we will recognize how for a boy such as Falstaff’s page, the combination of his boyhood status and adult male ambition proves fatal. His decision to leave his employers, a sort of determination for independence that might be praised for adult men, works contrarily for the boy. Moreover, we observe throughout Shakespeare’s

canon how *boy* sometimes functions as an insult, and by suggesting that one is not a man, there is an implied assumption of a change in kind, not just degree.

Part of understanding how early modern boys existed as a unique gender category involves first recognizing how they differ from other young characters in Shakespeare. Sex distinction among child characters in Shakespeare is easy. Virtually all of the child characters in Shakespeare are male. Margaret Plantagenet, Clarence's daughter in *Richard III*, has the distinction of being in Shakespeare the only speaking *girl*—what today we might call a pre-adolescent who functions predominately as a child. All other girls, such as the infants Perdita (*The Winter's Tale*), Elizabeth (*Henry VIII*), and Marina (*Pericles*), were probably only represented by stage props, a phenomenon in Shakespeare recently interrogated by Jennifer Higginbotham.¹ Shakespeare's other young female characters traditionally have been defined and categorized according to their (hetero)sexual and marital statuses.² Female characters such as Juliet, Miranda, Jessica, and the Jailer's daughter inhabit a gender category clearly separate from both Margaret and these female infants in that they are figured almost entirely in terms of their marital status, similarly to how Romeo, Ferdinand, Lorenzo, and the Wooer are as well.

While such distinctions between males and females are perhaps somewhat obvious, gender differences also exist within individual sexes. As Elsa Barkley Brown

¹ In *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Sisters: Gender, Transgression, Adolescence* (2013), Higginbotham not only explores the ways girlhood functioned as a gender category but also focuses on dramatic representations of female childhood, in Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Her third chapter, "Female Infants and the Engendering of Humanity," considers female characters-as-props in Shakespeare.

² The linear marital progression of "maid," "wife," and "widow" has been the subject of several feminist projects that object to such a limited categorization. For recent scholarship on single women in the early modern period, see Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford's *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720* (1998), Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide's *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800* (1999), and Laurel Amtower and Dorothea Kehler's *The Single Woman in Medieval and Early Modern England: Her Life and Representation* (2003).

argues, we must “recognize that all women do not have the same gender” (88).

Conversely, a number of critics have not only recognized a similar gender variation within men, but also that there exists a plurality of gender experiences across ages within the same sex.³ As Alexandra Shepard insists, “To discern the full complexity of the workings of gender in any society we need to be as aware of the gender differences *within* each sex as of those *between* them” (2). Therefore, I want briefly to mention how this project builds on the work of gender critics such as Naomi J. Miller, Naomi Yavneh, Alexandra Shepard, Jennifer Higginbotham, and Carol Chillington Rutter in recognizing gender difference within males, especially regarding disparate transitional, performative, and expectational aspects of gender across and within boyhood and manhood.

In remembering the importance of expectation and performance regarding gender formation discussed above, we can recognize how early modern boyhood functions as a different gender category in at least three ways. First, a male’s life was often categorized in multiples of seven, and whereas manhood might be understood as completion or achievement, boyhood was a time of transition. Indeed, man’s age, or man’s estate, helps us to begin to recognize the gendered difference within early modern males, and later in this chapter, I consider a number of manuals and tracts that “approached manhood as an

³ For instance, Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh recognize how “Children have served as objects of display: son as heir, daughter grouped with ducats as a possession” and it is important to consider “children as subjects with lived experience that is gendered” (7). Specifically regarding gender differences within males, Carol Chillington Rutter suggests that the “grammar of emotion,” especially a boy crying, reveals a difference in gender expectations between men and boys since it “is not an alternative to adult masculinity; it’s constitutive of it” (68). Similarly, Will Fisher observes that “masculinity was not only constructed in contrast to femininity but also in contrast to boyhood; as a result, we can say that men and boys were quite literally two distinct genders” (87). Jennifer Higginbotham likewise explains how “boys were very carefully defined in opposition to men” (33), and regarding female children, she posits that they “occupied a crucial and contested position in the early modern sex-gender system [as] ‘girls’, ‘maids’, ‘damsels’ and ‘wenches’” and that we have been wrong to subsume “all female characters into the category of ‘women’” (1).

ideal to which young men should aspire and from which old men would decay” (Shepard 9).

Second, the performance of boyhood significantly differed from the performance of manhood, so much so that it is possible to recognize a boy performing manhood. Consider, for instance, the following letter written in 1678 by a grandmother in Suffolk to her son, while he was away from the home, about the day of his son’s breeching:

You cannot believe the great concern that was in the whole family here last Wednesday, it being the day that the tailor was to help to dress little Frank in his breeches. . . . Never had any bride that was to be dressed upon her wedding night more hands about her, some the legs and some the arms, the tailor buttoning and others putting on the sword, and so many lookers on that had I not had a finger amongst them I could not have seen him. When he was quite dressed he acted his part as well as any of them, for he desired he might go down . . . and speak to the men to tell the gentleman when he came from school that here was a gallant with very fine clothes and a sword to have waited upon him. (qtd. in Gowing 91)

This description of little Frank’s breeching ceremony reveals not only the transitional nature of the event, but also the performativity of gender. According to the grandmother, after the boy finished dressing, he “acted his part” through his interaction with other males as well as acting gallantly. While I discuss the transitional aspects of breeching in much more detail below, here we can begin to see a gender difference between boy and man via little Frank’s performance.

Third, the expectations of boys and men significantly differed. Whereas men were expected to marry, reproduce, maintain employment, and govern the household, boys were expected to observe such behaviors and learn through observation. As family historian Keith Wrightson explains, “Obedience was regarded as the principal duty of a child, instilled by precept and catechism, and enforced by both emotional pressure and, on occasion, physical punishment” (123). Hence, apprenticeships were a common part of a boy’s life since they offered the opportunity to mimic or practice the gender behaviors of men. However, as we will see, Shakespeare routinely includes an obedient boy on stage quietly observing those around and often critiquing what he sees. Further, boys were understood as needy and weak, and this too is an expectation Shakespeare at once confirms and subverts throughout his career.

These transitions from a boy to a youth or man were such an important aspect of the gendered lives of early modern males that it is possible to recognize how boys differed from young males and adolescents in addition to older men. Characters such as Romeo and Ferdinand occupy a different space from the boys that are my focus. Marriage was seen as a “transformation,” a ritual as explained by David Cressy that “marked the passage from one state to another” (285, 286). Marriage “assigned new privileges, advantages, and obligations,” so much so that it “redefined social and sexual roles, rearranged patriarchal obligations, and conferred new duties of status, authority, and dependency. . . . It made lads into masters [and] signified a passage into adulthood” (287-88). Thus, the Romeos and Ferdinands of Shakespeare are notably different from the boys I consider in that the speech, actions, and descriptions of these boys establish both that they are well beyond infancy and not yet men or concerned with marriage.

Moreover, some of the young male characters in Shakespeare are not interested or associated with marriage but still are beyond this project's concentration on childhood. For instance, in many regards, Chiron and Demetrius of *Titus Andronicus* exemplify part of the transition from boyhood to manhood and appear to inhabit what Anthony Fletcher calls "early modern adolescence as a liminal time," whereby they are physically mature but not socially so (89). The following exchange concerning the pending capture and rape of Lavinia demonstrates *males in transition* as the brothers attempt to establish their manhood and simultaneously distance themselves from their boyhood identities:

DEMETRIUS. Chiron, thy years wants wit, thy wits wants edge,
 And manners, to intrude where I am grac'd,
 And may, for aught though knowest, affected be.

CHIRON. Demetrius, thou dost overween in all,
 And so in this, to bear me down with braves.
 'Tis not the difference of a year or two
 Makes me less gracious, or thee more fortunate;
 I am as able and as fit as thou
 To serve, and to deserve my mistress' grace,
 And that my sword upon thee shall approve,
 And plead my passions for Lavinia's love.

.....

DEMETRIUS. Why, boy, although our mother, unadvis'd,
 Gave you a dancing-rapier by your side,
 Are you so desperate grown to threat your friends?

Go to; have your lath glued within your sheath,
Till you know better how to handle it.

CHIRON. Mean while, sir, with the little skill I have,
Full well shalt thou perceive how much I dare.

DEMETRIUS. Ay, boy, grow ye so brave? *They draw (2.1.26-36,*
38-45)

While Chiron and Demetrius's exact ages are unknown, we get a sense in this exchange that they are neither boys nor necessarily men when they turn to violence and sex as opportunities to demonstrate manhood. When Demetrius insults his brother by calling him "boy," Chiron is quick to respond that he is only slightly younger than Demetrius, and that his sword, possibly a phallic symbol, is superior to his older brother's, who likewise admonishes Chiron that he would not be able to remove his own sword from its sheath and would certainly not understand how to handle it. Such an exchange as this one never occurs amongst the boy characters I discuss. Certainly one reason is that characters such as Mamillius, Young Macduff, and Moth simply are not as malevolent as Chiron and Demetrius, but also, as young boys, they do not yet feel or recognize the need, or social pressure, to prove their sexual prowess. Indeed, Chiron and Demetrius fall under the categories of *adolescence*, which Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos defines as "the years around puberty, in the early and mid-teens," and *youth*, or "people in their mid-teens and upwards" (9).⁴ By comparison, the Shakespeare boy characters I discuss are neither like Chiron or Demetrius, nor are they similar to the Romeos and Ferdinands.

⁴ According to Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, "The term 'adolescencia' was well known to early modern writers and commentators, but on the whole it was less frequently used [than 'youth'], although 'youth'

Boys, Imps, Striplings, Lads, and Heirs: The Etymology of Boyhood

Having established the gender difference between boys, youth, and men, I wish now to consider the range of characteristics, mores, expectations, stereotypes, and performances within early modern boys themselves. Whereas in contemporary children's culture there are a number of monikers that help to identify gender variance across the boyhood spectrum, such as the sissy boy, the bad or mischievous boy, the feral boy, the compassionate boy, and the unconventional boy, to which I will return in Chapter VI, it is difficult to know if a comparable taxonomy existed in early modern England. As we will see, the vocabulary of childhood only began to emerge, more or less, in the century before Shakespeare's life. Words such as *boy* and *boyhood* themselves were relatively contemporary to Shakespeare. However, there were a number of terms for boys, and their etymology helps us to recognize further how boys and boyhoods first emerged in the early modern imagination. Indeed, there are a number of epithets and terms of endearment throughout Shakespeare's texts that reveal some gender variances of boyhood, and throughout this project, I consider phrases such the *tender juvenal* (*Love's Labour's Lost*), the *whining schoolboy* (*As You Like It*), the *little villain* (*2 Henry IV*), the *brat* (*3 Henry VI*), and the noble heirs and imps throughout the histories.

Indeed, childhood in late medieval and early modern England became increasingly less associated with femininity and split into boyhood and girlhood, thus producing at least two types of gender categories rooted in sex and age. While words indicating sex differences, such as *daughter* and *son*, existed in Old English centuries before the early modern period, the vocabulary of childhood that emerged during this

itself was sometimes divided into distinct stages or sub-categories" (9). For more on the sociological definitions of these words, see Ben-Amos's *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (1994).

shift created a semantic network that also worked to separate and define these age categories based on gender. Indeed, the linguistic history of the words *girl*, *boy*, *girlhood*, and *boyhood* is complex and at times contradictory, and as Carol Chillington Rutter says, childhood “was an elastic concept for Shakespeare’s contemporaries” (xiv). The words *boyhood* and *girlhood*, regarding the state of being a boy or a girl respectively, never appear in Shakespeare. Whereas *girlhood* did not appear in the English language before the eighteenth century, *boyhood* did exist in early modern England.⁵ However, it was not commonly used, and *boyhood*, denoting the state of being a boy child, is rare before the early eighteenth century, though the *OED* lists clergyman John Northbrooke’s *Spiritus est Vicarius Christi* (c. 1577) as the earliest reported reference: “All the life (to be ydle) in thy childehoode, in thy boyehoode, in thy youth, in thy age.”⁶

Of these four gender terms, the oldest reported are *boy* used pejoratively and *girl* used generally to mean *child*. Indeed, as linguistic categories, *boy* and *girl* in early modern English are especially polysemous, defined by age, behavior, action, and social function. According to the *OED*, *boy* first appears in Scottish English during the early 1300s to denote a male servant, slave, or assistant, and even into the 1400s and 1500s the word was synonymous with shackles or chains. Gilbert Hay writes in *Booke Law of Armys* (c. 1456) that the “quhilk fand all thir maneris or jrnis cheynes fettris and boys to prisoun men withal,” and the anonymous author of the *Acts of Parliament of Scotland* (1124-1707) similarly explains how a thief is to be “put in boys or in fetteris.” Likewise, the subtitle of Hugh Rhodes’s book on manners and reprimands, *The Boke of Nurture, or*

⁵ According to the *OED*, *girlhood* is first cited in Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1747-48).

⁶ Though not a corpus of the language, the *OED* is generally considered the best source for information on the history of the English language.

Schoole of Good Manners: for Men, Servants and Children (1577), suggests that at least in terms of punishment, a man's servants and children are interchangeable. As these examples propose, to be *boyed* is to be confined or restrained with limited or no agency, and such an understanding further reveals how boys and men existed as separate gender categories in that men were expected to be independent and have agency. Further, as I previously discussed regarding the exchange between Chiron and Demetrius, *boy* is often used to affront. Boy-as-insult, explains Alexandra Sheppard, "implied that a man had no claim to competence or authority"; he was instead trapped in an inferior state (174). As a result of this understanding, the word is often used disparagingly in Shakespeare to insult, as in *Antony and Cleopatra* when Caesar angrily claims Antony "calls [him] a boy, and chides," and in *Romeo and Juliet* when Tybalt calls Romeo a "wretched boy" before their clash (4.1.1; 3.1.129). As previously mentioned, this understanding of the word also creates a space where the word might be used ironically or as a term of endearment when spoken by a parent about a child of any age, as Volumnia in *Coriolanus* remarks when her warrior son enters: "Honorable Meneius, my boy Martius approaches" (2.1.100-01).

However, such uses do not take away from how *boy* is also commonly used as an age marker for early modern male children in an effort to separate them from females of similar age. Often appearing pluralized, *girl* initially was used in Middle English to refer to children of both sexes, unless it was preceded by *gay*, as seen in Geoffrey Chaucer's reference to "som gay gerl" in *The Miller's Tale* (Curzan 148-49). The first recorded use of *girl* in the *OED* is a hagiographical quotation attributed to Thomas Becket (c. 1118-1170): "Þe Amiraless douȝter was In þe strete þare-oute, And suyþe gret prece of gurles and Men comen hire al-a-boute." In this dichotomy, "gurles" is the younger category set

against adult “Men.” By the late 1300s, however, *girl* became exclusively associated with the female sex, not only regarding female children, but also women of any age and female servants or slaves (Higginbotham 20-27). John Palsgrave’s 1530 French-English dictionary contains the earliest documented use of *girl* to mean exclusively a female child as opposed to a child of either sex (22). By setting *garçon* (boy) against *garçe* (girl), Palsgrave’s dictionary stands as the earliest known source of the word *girl* to describe a female child set in opposition to a male child, and by the time Samuel Johnson would compile his authoritative dictionary in the 1700s, *girl* had officially become the default term for a female child (30). Therefore, though *boy* is nearly the same age as *girl* (both appearing in the 1300s), *boy* did not come to mean explicitly a male child for about 150 years after *girl* came to be associated with female children. Not until the 1400s did the word *boy* begin to regard a male child. The *OED* lists the English fairy tale *Friar and Boy* (c. 1475) as one of the earliest examples of this particular use, citing the narrator’s remark, “To the fylde schalle go the child . . . Further than went the lytelle boy.”

Children of both sexes were socially disadvantaged within an early modern patriarchal system where adult men were privileged and exercised the most power. Thus, the word *boy*, in relation to the word *child*, functions as what Roman Jakobson calls a *marked term* (134). According to Jakobson, binaries generally employ marked and unmarked terms, where the default or natural term is unmarked and the other term is marked, the most obvious example being our tendency, at least until quite recently, to consider *man* the generic unmarked or natural term for people set against *woman*, a marked term especially for adult females (134-40; also qtd. in Higginbotham 33). According to Jennifer Higginbotham, the default sex of children was reversed: “If ‘child’

was the universal term, ‘boy’ was the special term, functioning as a linguistic device that enabled male children to pass into a liminal stage between the female world of childhood and adult manhood” (33). Hence, in early modern English, the umbrella term *child* often was gendered female, such as when the Old Shepherd in *The Winter’s Tale* discovers the infant Perdita on a Bohemian seacoast and asks, “A boy or a child, I wonder?” (3.3.68). The character asks a central question for this project and one to which I will return throughout this project. Nonetheless, recognizing *boy*’s eventual emergence as an unmarked term causes Philippe Ariès to identify boys as “the first specialized children” in that they were fashioned into a separate sociocultural sphere (i.e., the classroom and apprenticeships) where they were uniquely dressed, were often isolated from adult cares, and were prepared for future lives as men (58).

Midwifery manuals also provide an opportunity to understand how male and female children were differentiated, even as infants and toddlers. Such manuals suggest that even if an entirely separate gender category did not yet exist for infants or even the unborn, gender expectations were often already in place. For instance, in what is often considered the earliest midwifery manual published in England, Richard Jonas’s translation of Eucharius Rösslin’s *The Byrth of Mankynde* (1540), female infants, male infants, and older children are all referred to by terms such as “man child” and “woman child,” if not simply “woman” and “man,” in order to guess and later discuss the biological sex of the child:

But if ye be desirous to knowe whether the conception be man or woman:
then lete a droppe of [the mother’s] mylke or twayne be mylken on a
smothe glass or a bright knife other ells on the nayle of one of her fingers

and yf the mylke flewe and spredde abrode vpon it by and by then is it a woman chyle: but yf the droppe of mylke continue and stande styll vpon that the which it is miked on then is it sygne of a man chyld. (LXXXIIIv-LXXXVr; also qtd. in Higginbotham 40)

Likewise, in the translation of Jacques Guillemeau's *Child-birth, or The Happy Deliverie of Women* (1612), *wench* is consistently used in replace of *boy* in order to locate, if not create, a distinction. This boy/wench dichotomy can be seen not only in the title of the second chapter, "The Signes Whereby To Know Whether a Woman Be with Child of a Boy or a Wench," but throughout that entire chapter boys are set against wenches, or female children (A4v; also qtd. in Higginbotham 40). Charmian's question to the soothsayer in the first act of *Antony and Cleopatra* further confirms this early modern distinction: "Prithee, how many boys and wenches must I have" (1.2.32). By the late seventeenth century, this variance was known to exist, sometimes even before conception. In Jane Sharp's *The Midwives Book* (1671), for instance, Sharp discusses these differences as they exist even before the womb, and she consistently describes the gendering of *boys* and *girls* distinctly. She explains, "it is generally maintained, that Boyes are begotten from the right stone, but Girles with the left" (19). As these manuals show, a distinction between the sexes of children could be said to exist in infancy and among toddlers, if not as early as conception. Of course, sex and gender are not synonymous, but these manuals do indicate that unique expectations of boys did start rather early.

Part of the specialization identified by Ariès further exists in the rich and varied vocabulary of male children, including the plurality of terms such as *imps*, *striplings*, and

lads. Some of these words emerged simultaneously with *boy*, and all of them concern meanings that are important for this project. For instance, according to the *OED*, in late medieval England, *imp* generally was used as a noun for a sapling, shoot, or slip used in grafting, but by Shakespeare's time the word had come to be used to describe the offspring of a noble family. Jean Wilson begins her discussion of upper-class children in English Renaissance literature and art by analyzing the tomb of the four-year old son of Robert, Earl of Leicester who died in 1584. She argues that the tomb celebrates "the child's rank and his childishness, his barony and babyhood," when it describes the boy as "a noble imp" (361, 362). Other meanings also were beginning to emerge as the term came to mean a "child of the devil, or of hell," as first expressed by William Bonde in *Pylgrimage of Perfection* (1526): "Suche appereth as angelles, but in very dede they be ymps of serpents." The first recorded use of *imp* to mean a "young man, a youth; fellow, man, lad, boy" appears in John Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wyt* (1578): "This is . . . to admonish all young Impes and nouises in loue." Eventually these two definitions—"child of the devil" and "lad, boy"—combined to denote, as the *OED* explains, a "mischievous child (having a little of the 'the devil' in him); a young urchin: often used playfully," the first usage recorded in 1642 to describe six disobedient and unruly children who physically had attacked an adult. The word *imp* appears four times in Shakespeare, once in *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* and twice in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and in all four instances, Shakespeare's use of the word denotes both that of a noble birth and also a devilish or mischievous boy.

Though some critics consider *stripling* a substitute for *boy*, Shakespeare's infrequent use of it suggests something much more specific, at least within the context of

his writing.⁷ Appearing only twice, Shakespeare reserves *stripling* for characters a bit older than those with which this project is concerned. According to the *OED* definition, during Shakespeare's lifetime *stripling* was reserved for a "youth, one just passing from boyhood to manhood," in other words, an older, adolescent male who is at or nearing marriageable age. The first record of such usage appears at the end of the fifteenth century, in John Trevisa's *Bartholomew de Glanville's De Proprietatibus Rerum* (1495): "Adolescencia the aege of a yonge stryplynge duryth the thyrd vii yere." The third seven-year multiple suggests that a stripling was anywhere between 14 and 21, an understanding that appears also in Thomas Fuller's *A Pisgah-sight of Palestine and the Confines Thereof* (1650): "From a child he starts up a youth, and becomes a stripling." In this case, Fuller seems to distance further *stripling* from boyhood by inserting another period in between the two.⁸ We see this distinction, for instance, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, when Petruccio's servant Grumio first sees Lucentio (hoping to court Bianca by disguising as a tutor) and his servant Gremio and remarks, "A proper stripling, and an amorous!" ironically alluding to Gremio, whom he believes is the handsome young man attempting to woo Bianca (1.2.143). Likewise, in *Richard III*, Richard charges that Elizabeth hopes Edward will die soon so she will be free to remarry "a king, / A bachelor, and a handsome stripling too" (1.3.99-100). In both cases *stripling* is used within the context of marriage and courtship, a topic not yet on the minds of the boys discussed in this dissertation.

⁷ According to Jennifer Higginbotham, "'boy' had multiple synonyms, such as 'lad' and 'stripling'" (33).

⁸ For more information on the multiple potential categories to exist within *youth*, see R. G. Braungart's essay "Youth Movements" in *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* (1980).

If we wish to find an early modern synonym for *boy*, the term *lad* may be a more probable candidate, as *lad* is used frequently to refer to young male children. However, *lad* both buttresses and dissolves the boy/man dichotomy and hierarchy and is itself an exceptionally slippery term, almost completely resisting categorization. *Lad* and its plural appears more than four dozen times in Shakespeare, and though it regularly is used as a synonym for *boy*, it more often than not is reserved as a term of endearment. Hence, *lad* shares with *boy* a somewhat similar origin and transition. Like *boy*, in Middle English *lad* refers to a “serving-man, attendant; man of low birth and position.” The *OED* gives Langland’s *Piers Plowman* (1377) as one of the earliest examples of such usage. Also like *boy*, *lad* quickly adopted the meaning of a young, male person, such as when, also according to the *OED*, Hugh Latimer says in a 1552 sermon, “First he is a childe; afterward he becommeth a ladde; then a yong man, and after that a perfect man.” Latimer identifies a second chronological stage in a young male’s life when he speaks of a “ladde.” Such a use appears in *King John*, when Hubert calls to Arthur, “Young lad, come forth (4.1.8). Arthur is neither infant nor young man. However, Shakespeare also uses *lad* to refer to a male infant, such as when Puck in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* refers to Cupid as a “knavish lad” (3.2.440), and Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* looks at his newborn son and says proudly, “Here’s a young lad framed of another leer” (4.2.119). Much more frequently, though, Shakespeare reserves *lad* for a term of endearment between older males. When Hamlet first sees his friends from university, for instance, he affectionately says “How dost though, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do ye both? (2.2.224-26), and after a night of revelry, Falstaff awakes to ask Hal, “what time of day is it, lad?” (1.2.1).

Thus, we see in these examples how, as the *OED* states, *lad* might be used “(sometimes ironically) [to refer] to a male person of any age.” In the same passage as quoted above that Aaron holds his infant son, he goes on to say, “Look how the black slave smiles upon the father, / As who should say, ‘Old lad, I am thine own’” (119-21). In this passage, boy and man appear almost to possess a solidarity that blurs the hierarchal boundaries of young and old. Such amity is particularly relevant considering first, Titus’s murder of his son—a “villain boy”—in 1.1 for rebelling against the Roman general and second, Chiron and Demetrius’s quarrel over who is the boy and who is man. For Aaron, in this passage at least, *lad* works mutually to counterbalance this relationship between man and boy.

The gender category of noble boys, or *heirs*, which is to say those that are destined to become king or duke, competes with and contains dynastical aspects of their identities. Though these boys were similar in some aspects to those of lower classes, such as in their participation in breeching, noble and gentry boys are defined uniquely by and exist within the plays as both *boy* and *heir*. As Desiderius Erasmus famously explains in *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1532), “In the case of private individuals, some concession is granted to youth and to old age: the former may make a mistake now and then; the latter is allowed leisure and a cessation of toils. But the man who undertakes the duties of the prince . . . is not free to be either a young man or an old one” (155). Erasmus partly constructs noble boys by removing error and leisure from these young “private individuals,” thus altering the performance of noble boyhood to exclude these otherwise constant features (155). Moreover, in recent years, social historians have analyzed the correspondences exchanged between Anne Cottreel Dormer and her sister during the

1680s in an attempt to understand the domestic concerns of gentry household, especially those concerns relating to childhood. The detailed pictures of these children's lives, at least according to the adult letter writers, suggest how, as Sara Mendelson sees it, "In preparation for adult life, [gentry children] were defined by their elders as figures on a group trajectory rather than as autonomous individuals" (126). Thus, boy princes in Shakespeare, such as Richard, Edward, Young Macduff, Mamillius, and Arthur, are defined both as *boy* and as *heir*, and my fifth chapter is concerned with this dual gender category and the emotional, physical, psychological, and political conflicts associated with it. As we will see, Shakespeare follows a pattern throughout much of his career, from *3 Henry VI* to *The Winter's Tale*, where boy heirs are often slain because of their dual political and gender identity, despite their poignant and affecting attempts not only to establish their subjective identities as individuals but also to separate themselves from their heirship.

Becoming a Boy in Early Modern England

The development of this vocabulary of childhood coincides with the emergence of a number of early modern passages, life-stages, and typologies for understanding how gender identities were achieved and maintained. According Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh,

Growing up was a matter not just of education and recreation, but of cultural imprinting, where early modern children were commonly expected to adopt adult customs as well as clothing at a defined stage of development, and often were expected to leave the world of childhood

behind and be incorporated directly into the social, professional, and even political responsibilities of their family. (5)

As Miller and Yavneh explain and I have already discussed briefly, recent scholars have argued for infancy, adolescence, and youth as gender categories separate from both childhood and adulthood, thus enabling more attention to the temporary stages of growing up in early modern England (5).⁹ Kate Chedgzoj observes, “adolescence is a site where the gendering of childhood comes into particularly clear focus, revealing that not only the experience of childhood but the stages of life themselves may be different for boys and girls” (“Introduction” 23). In any case, early modern boys were subjects with lived experiences that were gendered differently from those of girls and infants as well as those of adolescents and men. Such gendering occurred at particular stages in a boy’s life, and while the calibrated experiences of time may differ across these various sequences of ages, we do get a sense of a general pattern by more closely considering the time in a young male’s life between infancy and adolescents.

Philippe Ariès has written of the medieval era in Europe that seven ages of human life were a generally accepted concept, originating in sixth century Byzantium (x). The first stage, *infants*, was categorized as from birth to the age of seven, followed by the second period of life, *pueritia* (boyhood), the primary concern of this project (18-20).¹⁰ While such divisions shifted slightly during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth

⁹ For more information on the different gender categories of early modern children and early modern adolescence, see Illan Krasuman Ben-Amos’s *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (1994) and Paul Griffiths’s *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England 1560-1640* (1996)

¹⁰ *Pueritia* was followed by the third age, “adolescence,” which lasted somewhere between 21 and 35, according to the various writers that Ariès discusses. The fourth age, “youth,” then followed, and did not end until 45 or 50. The fifth age was, “senectitude” or “gravity,” followed lastly by the sixth age, “old age,” which ended in “senies” and death. For more on these medieval ages, see Ariès’s *Centuries of Childhood*, especially 18-22.

centuries, virtually all early modern intellectuals exceptionally describe as *boyhood* the time approximately between seven and fourteen since, as Ralph Houlbrooke explains, “The seventh year was held to be a milestone in physical and mental development. It was then that the second set of teeth began to emerge, then, it was believed, that the child could tell right from wrong and became capable of mortal sin and crime” (*English Family* 150).

One common pattern across several educational texts is the approach to ageing based on multiples of seven, what William Vaughan and Thomas Cogan call the “climacterical” years (21-28, 193). Texts such as William Vaughan’s *Directions for Health, both Naturall and Artificial* (1617), Levinus Lemnius’s *The Touchstone of Complexions Expedient and Profitable for All Such as be Desirous and Carefull of their Bodily Health* (1633), James Hart’s *KAINIKH; or, The Diet of the Diseased* (1633), and Thomas Cogan’s *Haven of Health* (1636) all identify boyhood as existing within this second multiple, the years between seven and fourteen or fifteen years of age. Models such as these famously influence the structure of the seven stages of life that Jaques identifies in *As You Like It*, such as the second stage of “the whining schoolboy, with his satchel / And shining morning face, creeping like snail / Unwillingly to school” (2.7.145-47). Other early modern writers, however, recognize the second stage in a young male’s life as starting slightly earlier and lasting slightly longer. Alexandra Shepard describes this variety as follows: “Medical accounts of the ages of man drew upon astrological and moral traditions as well as humoral theory, and varied in their structure and complexity. They ranged from simple tripartite divisions into childhood, manhood, and old age to systems detailing up to twelve stages” (54). As already mentioned in my introduction, Henry Cuffe, in his philosophical tract *The Differences of the Ages of Man’s Life* (1607)

maintained that boyhood lasted until ten, followed by a “budding and blossoming age” of an indefinite number of years (90). While Jaques’s seven stages often remind readers of the early modern custom of dividing life by multiples of seven, another famous moment in Shakespeare brings to mind this variety that Shepard identifies. Indeed, Feste’s song that concludes *Twelfth Night* divides the life of a male into four passages of time, “a little tine boy,” “man’s estate,” “to wive,” and “unto [his death] beds” (5.1.389, 93, 97, 405).

It certainly would have varied whether families identified three, four, seven, or twelve life stages in their lives and the lives of their children . However, virtually all families would have participated in a custom that marked their sons’ arrival into childhood. The act of breeching—the replacing of a boy’s petticoats with hose and doublet—sartorially reflects the diverse schemes by which the life of an early modern male might be measured, and it is generally recognized as one of the most common events that marked the entrance into masculine boyhood. Although the degree and range of this separation varied across various class structures, breeching was a custom that occurred at virtually all levels of early modern society. Throughout early childhood, the majority of girls and boys (i.e., those who did not live in extreme poverty and were not members of the gentry or aristocracy) usually were raised together, engaged in similar activities, and wore similar clothes that were essentially smaller versions of women’s clothes (Amussen 91). When they were six or seven, though, boys adopted adult dress. In so doing, as Anthony Fletcher explains, “manhood was thrust upon boys. The ceremonial breeching represented their release from the nursery into the male world” (87). Breeching helped to mark the transition of a very young child, what we might today call a *toddler*, into a new stage. Before a male child was breeched and in the domestic care of women,

boys wore the same unisex skirts as girls. The sartorial change from [petti]coats and skirts to breeches marked their gendering as male. As Susan Snyder explains, “Among the upper classes in early modern England the breeching of boys was a marked event, a formal transition to the next stage of childhood, often coinciding with a shift from the nursery and women’s care to male tutors and attendants” (“Mamillius” 2). Anthony Fletcher accurately acknowledges that this rite of passage was but one step: “From boyhood to manhood, from mother’s milk to youthful parade in public as a codpiece wearer, was a fraught journey” (98). Indeed, this event also issued in a more radical change, as breeching signaled when better-off boys would be handed over to masters in order to be trained as apprentices and pages, the focus of my second chapter, while other boys were handed over to the care of schools or tutors, the focus of my third chapter.

According to Ralph Houlbrooke’s diary anthology, *English Family Life, 1576-1716: An Anthology from Diaries*, parental opinions varied regarding *the* right age for a boy to be breeched. Jack Greene was younger than six when he was put into breeches, but Sir Henry Slingsby thought his son Thomas was too young, “being but five years old” (150, 147). Ferdinando Isham was almost nine when he was breeched (164). In *The Book Named the Governor* (1537), Thomas Elyot demanded that all men, other than physicians, be kept from his son until he began studying at seven: “I hold it expedient that he be taken from the company of women: sauynge that he may haue, one yere, or two at the most, an auncient and sad matrone, attendynge on hym in his chamber” (19). Breeching appears also to have been of particular significance for upper class boys in early modern England. It was a time associated with rewards and new privileges. Edward VI remembers such an experience as he describes the moment in third person:

[He was] brought up, 'til he came to six yeres old, among the wemen. At the sixt yere of his age, he was brought up in learning by Mr. Doctour Cox, who was after his amner, and Jhon Chieke, Mr or Art, tow wel learned men, who sought to bring him up in learning of toungues, of the scriptures, of philosophie, and all learned sciences. (2. 209-10)

Likewise, Francis North's excitement for his breeching is catalogued in the letter his grandmother sent to his absent father, Lord Chief Justice North in 1679. "Young Frank" paraded around the room in his breeches and sword, playing as a man, and celebrating, according to the grandmother, the opportunity "to throw off the coats and write man" (216). Finally, according to Susan Snyder, "No one was more eager than the son of Henri IV of France . . . who would become Louis XIII. Before he was six he was impatient to be wearing '*chausses*,' though his *gouvernante* told him he had to wait until he was eight" ("Mamillius" 3). However, within a few months, "he formally took on breeches and sword" and "Separation from his *gouvernante* and the nursery followed shortly after" the boy's seventh birthday (3).

While for many boys breeching served as a rite of passage that symbolically inaugurated the beginning of a male child's transitioning from the more feminine realm of infancy and early childhood into the more masculine realm of boyhood and eventually manhood, other material markers also serve as identifiers of boyhood as a unique gender category separate from both infancy and manhood. As Will Fisher's work on "gendered features or 'parts—handkerchiefs, codpieces, beards, and hair" proves, there are a variety of material items that "played fundamental roles in forming masculine and feminine identities," even at a young age (3). The addition, removal, and reformation of these

prosthetics variously rendered a boy's gender intelligible and helped to form ideas about a boy's body that related to ideologies concerning boyhood and his future masculinity (32-33). As Fisher explains, "masculinity was not only constructed in contrast to femininity, but also in contrast to boyhood; as a result we can say that men and boys were quite literally two distinct genders" (87). Likewise, in her discussion of children's playing companies, Edel Lamb suggests that "aged parts, like gendered roles, were performed [from] using various staging properties, including costumes, wigs, beards, [to] descriptions of behavioral traits and through language" (*Performing* 21). When Follywit in Thomas Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters* uses a prosthetic beard to disguise himself as a courtier, she further explains, "the beardless youth is presented as both childish and effeminate when Sir Bounteous mocks Follywit's youth by calling him '*Imberbis juvenis*' [beardless youth], his chin has not more prickles than a midwife's" (21-22). Thus, a boy's lack of a beard and the necessity that a child player must don a beard in order convincingly to perform as a man both demonstrate how early modern culture understood boys and men as separate gender categories, and this project is mostly concerned with the boy characters in Shakespeare who have been breeched but do not yet have beards.

From Boys to Men

Early modern boyhood is a process and is never static. It is a time when young males are removed from the more feminine and domestic realm of infancy and inaugurated into the masculine realm of manhood. We recall characters such Chiron and Demetrius, the two young brothers in *Titus Andronicus* who first begin to establish their manhood by distancing themselves from their boyhood identifies, as well as the young

men such as Romeo, Ferdinand, and Orlando who display profound concerns and interests with marriage. We recognize a number of instances in the lives of these characters that signal the transition for an early modern male into early manhood, a life stage occurring sometime after boyhood, the budding age, adolescence, and youth. Certainly, puberty signaled an important physical change, but the boys' exit from service, entry into independent labor, and attending university are all important moments of transition for early modern males. Marriage, however, especially marked the beginning of early manhood and appears as the most important criterion for entry into manhood (Ben-Amos 5-6; Cressy 288; Wrightson 75-78; Amussen, "The Family" 86). Though members of the gentry or nobility would have married a few years earlier, the mean marrying age for males is 28, a time that often marks the completion of apprenticeship or service when males probably had accumulated enough income to establish their own home (Cressy 285; Smith 78). Legally males could marry once they turned 14, and the much higher mean suggests that males spent this time establishing an autonomous household, assuming various levels of responsibility, and exercising rule or dominance over others, rather it be children, a wife, or fellow citizens. The Elizabethan diplomat Thomas Smith defined the importance of marriage for the yeoman in *De Republica Anglorum: The Maner of Gouvernement or Policie of the Realme of England* (1583): "commonly wee doe not call any a yeoman till he be married, and have children, and as it were have some authorise among his neighbours" (45; also qtd. in Amussen, "The Family" 86).

In this chapter, we have considered early modern boyhood as a time of transition, where young males negotiated life changes, from infancy, to boyhood, adolescence, manhood, and old age. In so doing, we have started to recognize and understand how the

formation of masculinity began in boyhood and continued through early manhood. This transitioning implies that there exists an end goal, or a set of ideals for which a boy should aspire to develop, and in the next three chapters, I turn to Shakespeare's depictions of boys and boyhood in order to argue that these boys frequently participate in crucial debates about some of the social issues concerning the formation of manhood. The plethora of books printed during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that address ideal masculine behavior evidence the range of ideals that early modern men should work to achieve: Baldasar Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528; English translation 1588), Giovanni della Casa's *Galateo . . . Or Rather a Treatise of the Maners and Behaviours It Behoveth a Man to Use and Eshew in His Familiar Conversation* (1558; English translation 1581), Stephano Guazzo's *De Civili Conversatione* (1574; English translation 1581), Robert Cleaver's *Haven of Pleasure: Containing a Freeman's Felicity and a True Direction of How to Live Well* (1596) and *A Godly Form of Household Government* (1598), Pierre de la Primaudaye's *The French Academic* (1622), William Gouge's *Of Domestical Duties* (1622), Henry Peacham's *The Complete Gentleman* (1622), and Richard Brathwait's *The English Gentleman* (1630) (39-42). Rather as students, pages, servants, sons, or heirs, early modern boys would have spent much of their boyhoods in a prime position of observing the masculine ideals that they were encouraged to mimic, and in what follows, we witness their frequent denunciation of such ideals.

CHAPTER III

“the boy that I gave Falstaff:”

THE PAGE IN 2 *HENRY IV* AND *HENRY V*

Much of the feminist literary scholarship on Shakespeare and early modern literature since the 1970s encourages readers and audiences to (re)consider whether the heroic conventions and ideals in such literature were to be admired or repudiated.¹ Recognizing how often in Shakespeare the heroic status of male protagonists such as Bolingbroke/Henry IV, Henry V, Troilus, Hector, Antony, Palamon, Arcite, and Prospero inspire awe and even at times empathy, some critics believe that Shakespeare sympathizes with such heroic values and urges audiences to draw inspiration from them. Other scholars, however, have begun to question the patriarchal and hegemonic ideas that accompany such heroic conventions, since throughout Shakespeare’s plays, men of exceptional idealism and courage routinely surface, yet more often than not they maintain varying degrees of misogyny and oppression. Jonathan Dollimore’s aggregation of this important body of feminist scholarship asks the following question: “Do these plays endorse the conservative and, to us, oppressive views of gender which prevailed in their society, or do they challenge them?” (416).

In this chapter, I argue that the boy character in two of the most overtly masculinist plays— *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* —participates in the interrogation of heroic masculinity as a dangerous ideal, not only through his verbal condemnation of this ideal and the men around him who embody it but also by his own annihilation at the hands of

¹ See especially Juliet Dusinberre’s *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975), Janet Adelman’s *Suffocating Mothers* (1992), and Elaine Showalter’s “Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism” (1994).

soldiers. Falstaff's anonymous page boy—identified as “Page” in *2 Henry IV*, “Boy” in *Henry V*, and henceforth “the Boy” or “Falstaff's page” in this project—denunciates the political idea of chivalric manhood by evincing a skeptical view of the kind of heroic masculinity championed, as we will see, by the Earl of Essex. In his discussion of masculinity as a political issue in Shakespeare, Robin Headlam Wells lists a number of important questions that he believes Shakespeare's plays ask, but never directly answer, about martial manhood: “[T]o what extent are governments or individuals justified in using violent methods to defeat barbarism? Are martial values necessary to preserve peace at times of national insecurity? If a beleaguered society needs strong military leaders, how do you ensure that the sort of heroic qualities that make for effective leadership in time of war do not undermine the very values that you are defending?” (24). Falstaff's page likewise exposes some of the ambivalence with which Shakespeare depicts such heroic qualities exemplified, in this case, by Hotspur, Henry IV, and eventually Hal/Henry. In so doing, the Boy critically participates in the toppling of what Theodor Meron identifies as “empty versions of honour” in Shakespeare that depict “sarcasm for vain and excessive chivalry and exaggerated and dangerous notions of honour” (8).

I situate my discussion of Falstaff's page within the framework of Robin Headlam Wells's socio-historical understanding of masculine honor as a political issue, where “the conflicting political positions signaled by such coded phrases as ‘courage-masculine’ and ‘manly virtue’” define what it means to be an ideal early modern man (6). In these two history plays, Shakespeare positions the Boy in an ideal location to observe such ideals, but rather than conforming to martial and honorable manhood he adds to Shakespeare's

ambivalence concerning this chivalric construction of manhood. Reading the Boy in this way offers an opportunity to recognize how the chivalric honor championed on the battlefield may not, at least according to this tetralogy, altogether differ from the tavern shenanigans that constitute the subplot. Eventually, the Boy is unable to distinguish between what he hears and observes on the battlefield and what he hears and observes in the Boar's Head Tavern. Furthermore, like Falstaff in *1 Henry IV* he at once identifies the follies of honor, but he also expresses skepticism for the Falstaffian substitute for manly honor, championed in *Henry V* also by Pistol, Bardolf, and Nim. Thus, after exploring how martial manhood was understood in Shakespeare's England, I will argue that Shakespeare symbolically positions the Boy as a *second Hal*, and that by allowing us to follow him across battlefields and into taverns, we witness how his actions and speech work to disrupt the manly ideals he observes. Further, we recognize how the Boy functions to reveal the anachronistic aesthetic of martial manhood and in turn also reveals the dangers of charismatic heroes.

Chivalric Honor, Manly Virtue, and Martial Manhood

The Boy in *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* is an important addition to Shakespeare's retelling of England's medieval royal history. He never appears in *Holinshed's Chronicles*, and Shakespeare includes this boy character in order to consider the relationship between boys and manhood.² After all, these plays take place in a rigorously masculine and adult world. They are the places of war and politics where the playwright explores the assumptions and repercussions of identities—those of the individual and the

² As I explain in my fifth chapter, Shakespeare does something similar when he depicts Arthur in *King John*. Of course, Shakespeare does not create Arthur I, Duke of Brittany, but he does significantly alter the Prince's age and makes him younger for aesthetic and dramatic purposes.

state—as defined especially through patrilineal relationships. Shakespeare’s history plays explore the emotional, familial, and fraternal kinship amongst men almost to the complete exclusion of women. Yet it is this world of supposed masculine ideals that Falstaff’s page must engage.

The two parts of *Henry IV* are concerned essentially with various domestic and national troubles as they relate to the Lancaster family. But these middle plays of the second tetralogy reveal as much or more concern with family as with royalty. After all, *Henry IV* is the earliest play in the Shakespeare canon with a sustained examination of the relationship between a reigning king and his heir.³ At the center of the plays, then, is the father and son relationship between King Henry IV and Hal, and it is one of the great ironies of *Henry IV* that part one begins with the King's lamenting jealousy for his enemy Lord Northumberland’s son, also a “Hal:”

Yea, there thou mak’st me sad, and mak’st me sin

In envy that my Lord Northumberland

Should be the father of so blest a son—

A son who is the theme of honor’s tongue,

.....

Whilst I, by looking on the praise of him,

See riot and dishonor stain the brow

Of my young Harry. (1.1.78-81, 84-86)

³ There are two possible exceptions. The scenes between Edward III and the Black Prince in *Edward III* (registered 1 December 1595) could represent Shakespeare’s first dramatization of a king and his heir, but these scenes are rarely attributed to Shakespeare. Prince Edward and King Henry VI interact at some length in *3 Henry VI* (1595), but the prince dies early enough in the play that we hardly see anything like an intimate portrait of father and son.

King Henry juxtaposes his son with Northumberland's in terms of heroic manhood—the honor of Northumberland's son and the dishonor of his own. As we will see, Shakespeare explores his topic of father and son from many directions. Here we see Northumberland and Hotspur (Hal), but the play not only includes other literal father/son relationships, such as King Henry and his sons Hal and John, but also symbolic ones between Falstaff and Hal and, as I believe, Falstaff and the Boy. In all cases, honor figures significantly in the identity of these soldiers.

This construction of manhood proliferates in Shakespeare, especially in his military focused dramas. For instance, in the final moments of *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare presents a string of words synonymous with one construction of manhood: noble, honest, gentle, virtuous, and honorable. Knowing that doom is imminent and believing Caesar never will rest peacefully if he does not end his own life, Brutus elects to impale himself in the closing moments of the play. When Octavius and Antony arrive, they stand before Brutus's body and famously call him “the noblest Roman of them all” as Anthony first praises his life:

All the conspirators, save only he,
 Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;
 He, only in a general honest thought
 And common good to all, made one of them.
 His life was gentle, and the elements
 So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up
 And say to all the world, “This was a man!”
 OCTAVIUS. According to his virtue let us use him,

With all respect and rites of burial.

Within my tent his bones to-night shall lie,

Most like a soldier, ordered honorably. (5.5.69-79)

In the world of *Julius Caesar* and throughout *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, qualities such as nobility, virtue, and honor are what make a man a man. Such masculine qualities, so charismatically articulated by this loyal republican, have been theorized as early modern ideals of honor and heroism. For instance, Robin Headlam Wells explains how, for the Renaissance, the heroic ideal was essentially masculine and suggested qualities such as courage, strength, and honor (2). Indeed, this honor was embedded in the early modern male psyche. In 1562, Gerald Legh in *The Accedens of Armory* articulated that “martial prowess [is] the chief advancer of the gentry” and that virtue and honor are “glory got by courage of manhood” (22). In 1626, William Gouge preached on chivalry before the Artillery Company of London, and in his sermon, he regrets that the English language, unlike Latin, does not have a way to distinguish *man* as the personification of virtue from any other male: “Our English is herein penurious: it wanteth fit words to express this difference. We call all, whether mighty or mean *men*, yet sometimes this word *men* in our tongue hath this emphasis” (5). Likewise, in *The Idea of Honour in the English Drama 1591-1700* (1957), C.L. Barber discusses no fewer than 200 plays where playwrights position honor as an important and desirable trait, and Curtis Watson’s study of honor as an early modern philosophy specifically in Shakespeare concludes that contemporary men were “intoxicated” with the concept of honor (7). For military men, honor was a most vital component of a man’s identity, and Shakespeare’s military patriarchs frequently express this ideal. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the titular man expresses such a

concern when he speaks to his wife, “If I lose mine honor, / I lose myself; better I were not yours / Than [yours] so branchless,” the arboreal reference implying the odious state of having one’s honor cut off or removed (3.4.22-22-24). To lose the honorable part of one’s selfhood, as Cassio in *Othello* sees it, is to lose one’s reputation, “the immortal part” of a man’s identity and “reputation” (2.3.263). Without an honorable reputation, all that remains of a man “is bestial” (264).

Reminiscent of Brutus, Antony, and Cassio, Hotspur epitomizes the old fashioned virtues of honor and courage. His serious and heroic “no-nonsense” attitude directly contrasts the rollicking and youthful behavior of Prince Harry while recalling an ideology that was understood as outdated by the turn of the sixteenth century. Indeed, the rise of Humanism incited a decline in medieval martial values. Erasmus called for a peaceful Europe, More satirized chivalric attitudes by having his Utopians reject the notion of battled-tested honor, Cervantes’s picaresque novel parodied the foolish actions of the hidalgo Alonso Quijano turned Don Quixote, and Milton assigned such military ideals to Satan. Hotspur is generally understood likewise to represent these outdated ideals. James C. Bulman calls Henry Percy’s eldest son “impulsive and valiant,” embodying “all that is glorious about feudal chivalry—its code of honour, its passion for heroic achievement in arms” (159). Alan Dessen describes Hotspur as “outspoken, courageous, witty, and domineering in conversation. Above all, he is a disciple of manliness” (70). As discussed in my introduction, this sort of “nostalgia for chivalric ideals led paradoxically to a cult of medievalism in Elizabeth’s court” (Bulman 159). As previously mentioned, an assertive, martial honor code that, as Mervyn James explains, legitimized the “politics of violence” was an attitude in the court (309).

In the same way that Shakespeare establishes Hotspur as an alternative son for the King, so does he provide an alternative father for Prince Hal. As is generally accepted, Falstaff becomes a surrogate father for Hal, a paternal rival for authority. Hence, much of the Falstaff/Hal subplot serves as dramatic opposition to the Henry IV/Hal focus, as Shakespeare positions biological father against surrogate father, court against tavern, king against mock king, and chivalric Hotspur against unruly Hal. Indeed, as Robin Headlam Wells sees it, the subplots of *Henry IV* and later *Henry V* look very much like a parody of the play's heroic plot in that the "characters are pilferers, foils, and braggarts motivated by self-interest and an absurd sense of pride in the dignity of the 'manly heart'" (32). Such is true of all the characters who follow Falstaff, save one who is usually overlooked: Falstaff's page.

Falstaff's Page: The Boy as a Second Hal

The Boy is absent from Wells's description of the characters in the subplot. Yet this Boy not only undergoes a pale reflection of Hal's maturation, but he also reflects much of the dramatic characterization of Hotspur when he, too, is compared to the Prince. Though he does not appear in *I Henry IV*, probably because he has either not been born or not been breeched, his introduction in part two signals an important shift in the familial and masculine dynamics of the play. After illustrating how this Boy is symbolically a younger Hal, I will demonstrate how and why his fate differs from that of both of the Hals. If throughout the final two plays of the tetralogy Shakespeare works to associate King Henry with martial ideals of early modern manhood such as the heroic notion of virtue and honor, then the boy, as a child symbol of Prince Henry, illustrates the limitations and dangers of such ideals.

One way Shakespeare symbolically identifies the Boy as a younger Hal is through the similar introduction of each the characters into the world of *Henry IV*. As is common throughout these plays, Falstaff and company frequently interrupt the political scenes concerned with the rise of the royal House of Lancaster. For instance, *1 Henry IV* begins with the King speaking to counselors about the recent civil wars and his pressing desire to join the Crusades. In the subsequent scene, Shakespeare takes us to Eastcheap where we first witness the relationship between Hal, Falstaff, and their friends as they plan to participate in a robbery at Gad's Hill. Likewise, *2 Henry IV* begins with Northumberland's receiving news that his rebel forces have been defeated and his son killed, and in the following scene the Lord Chief Justice confronts Falstaff about his involvement with the Gad's Hill robbery. However, the major dissimilarity between these two scenes concerns Prince Hal's noteworthy absence in part two. By this point Hal spends considerably less time with Falstaff and only twice in *2 Henry IV* shares the stage with the old knight. Instead, Shakespeare introduces another son-like character for Falstaff, as he becomes a surrogate father to the pageboy.

The first words spoken by Hal in *1 Henry IV* and by the Page in *2 Henry IV* are similar in that Shakespeare introduces both characters through their aptitude for insulting Falstaff. Responding to Falstaff's question ("What time of the day is it, lad?"), Hal remarks that since the knight spends all of his time drinking, eating, and sleeping there is "no reason why [he] shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of the day" (1.2.11-12). Likewise, readers first encounter the Page when he reveals through insult the results of Falstaff's recent doctor's visit. Just as the second scene in part one begins with Falstaff asking a question, so does the second scene in part two: "Sirrah, you giant, what says the

doctor to my water?" (1.2.1-2).⁴ Like Hal, the Boy uses this simple question as an opportunity to reveal the doctor's diagnosis through insult: "He said the water itself was a good healthy water, but for the party that ow'd it, he might have moe diseases than he knew for" (1.2.3-5). The witty give-and-take banter that runs throughout *1 Henry IV* will continue in part two, but instead of a prince to jar with, Falstaff has this young page.

The Boy's announcement of Falstaff's diseased, probably syphilitic, urine is an interesting prologue for the Boy, since it juxtaposes Falstaff's promiscuous experiences against the young page's supposed innocence. The page is an unwanted gift from Hal, and the old knight is agitated by his presence: "If the Prince put thee into my service for any other reason than to set me off, why then I have no judgment" (1.2.12-13). But as the play progresses, the Boy participates in many of the same foolish transgressions we observed between Falstaff and the Prince in part one. Indeed, the more removed Hal becomes from the seedy inhabitants of the Boar's Head Tavern, the more trapped the Boy appears. Albeit unwanted, he becomes Falstaff's *other son*. Falstaff explains to the Boy how he walks before him "like a sow that hath overwhelm'd all her litter but one" (1.2.11-12). Like it or not, Falstaff knows the Boy is a new addition to his litter, and immediately he begins to associate the boy with Hal by juxtaposing their young ages and comparing the beardless boy with the still mostly beardless Hal, whose "chin is not yet fledge" (1.2).

⁴ Another parallel between the Falstaff/Hal relationship in part one and the Falstaff/Boy relationship in part two is that Falstaff refers to both characters in childlike terms. He calls Hal, "lad," and the Boy, "Sirrah" and "giant." Calling the Boy "giant" is ironic given the Boy's diminutive size, especially when standing next to Falstaff. Often in productions, such as the Globe Theatre's *2 Henry IV* (dir. Dominic Dromgoole, 2010), the humor of Falstaff calling the Boy "giant" is emphasized by blocking the knight's large body with the child's much smaller one.

Falstaff's calling attention to Hal's and the Boy's similar beardlessness is significant, since it in part establishes the relationship between the Boy and possible manhood. The beard, as Will Fisher demonstrates, was an important gender difference between boys and men and understood as the major "distinction between boys and men [that] was ultimately materialized" in early modern culture (88).⁵ In Randal Holme's *Academy of Armory* (1688), for instance, Holme explains how beard growth alone was a major disparity between boys and men, where the "child" is "smooth and [has] little hair," the "youth" has "hair on the head, but none on the face," and the "Man" is recognized as "having a beard." While the play does not explicitly reveal the Boy's age, he is certainly several years younger than the prince, who, according to Falstaff, has not yet started shaving.⁶ Falstaff's insulting Hal in this line juxtaposes the Prince with the Boy. Moreover, the Boy is much smaller than Falstaff, to which the old knight repeatedly calls attention: "thou art fitter to be worn in my cap than to wait at my heels. I was never mann'd with an agot till now" (1.2.14-16).⁷ Presumably the Boy was in Hal's, and now Falstaff's, care because he has been breeched, and it is time for the Boy to enter into the masculine sphere. Whatever his background as an infant, his appearance in *2 Henry IV* marks his introduction into a masculine sphere of labor.

⁵ While Fisher's interests are distinctly in the early modern, particularly regarding early modern boy players who at will could add and remove a prosthetic beard from their faces, the beard as a gender and age marker of boys and men goes farther back than the early modern period. For instance, the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* insultingly says of Arthur's knights, "No, I seek no battle, I assure you truly, / Those about me in this hall are buy beardless children" (279-80). I am thankful to E. Kay Harris for calling my attention to this reference in the romance.

⁶ Historically, Prince Harry is sixteen at the Battle of Shrewsbury (21 July 1403). For dramatic purposes, Shakespeare obviously makes him a bit older in *Henry IV* since he and Hotspur appear to be the same age, although historically Hotspur (1364–1403) was a generation older than the Prince (1386-1422). Nevertheless, in no way does Shakespeare ever suggest that the Boy and Hal are near the same age. Falstaff, of course, is probably exaggerating when he says that Hal's chin is smoother than the Boy's since the Prince is certainly old enough to have a beard. The Knight's comment is mostly an insult.

⁷ According to the *Riverside* editors, "agot," or "agate," is a small, carved figurine of agate stone

The Boy as Apprentice

Recognizing the Boy's age as appropriate for apprenticeship further benefits our understanding of why Shakespeare positions him in Falstaff's company and prepares him for a particular kind of lesson in gender. The average age of a child entering apprenticeship would vary greatly depending on a number of issues, local customs and needs, one's economic class, and the needs of the family among the most influential of factors. According to Ralph A. Houlbrooke, the average age, though always fluctuating, rose considerably across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

Twelve may have been the commonest age of entry into service in early Tudor Coventry, but seventeenth-century urban censuses reveal few servants that young. One result of efforts to restrict numbers coming into crafts was perhaps to raise the age of entry into apprenticeship as well as departure from it. But long apprenticeships and an early age of entry were common in poorer crafts. The mid-teens were probably the years in which the largest numbers of adolescents entered service in husbandry. At Ealing (1599) the proportions in service were highest in the age-group 15-19 (72%) and 20-24 (78%). But as many as 15 per cent of the 10-14-year-olds were in service, a far higher percentage than in communities covered by seventeenth-century census. (*The English Family* 175)

Houlbrook's findings most nearly support the idea that the age of Falstaff's Boy is probably somewhere between ten and fourteen in that Shakespeare writes the second tetralogy during the 1590s, when, according to Houlbrooke, the average age an apprentice starting work was much lower than it would be a century later, and is

depicting an even earlier time in English history. Nevertheless, other critics find the average working age of a child to be much younger. J.H. Plumb, for instance, believes that child labor was widespread and began “as soon as children could walk” (87). Social historians, such as Margaret Spufford, generally accepts the standard working age for pre-modern and early modern children as seven or eight (411).⁸ Susan Dwyer Amussen’s average is also “about the age of seven” for those who did not attend school (*The Family* 91). Nevertheless, the age at which most children were engaged in some work, if not altogether supplying supplemental incomes, appears to be between ten and fourteen.

Several autobiographies from this period confirm as much. For instance, Thomas Tryon claims that by the age of fourteen, after two or three years of working as a shepherd, he “was accounted one o[f] the best shepherds in the country,” shortly thereafter “becoming responsible for his own flock” (qtd. in Ben-Amos 43). Similarly, a 10-year-old boy from Lancashire testified in court in the 1630s that during the past year his mother had taught him the craft of spinning wool, and Josiah Langdale said that he started plowing at age nine and proudly could handle “four houses alone by the time he was 13” (Ben-Amos 43, 44). Susan Dwyer Amussen also notes that by “the age of fifteen, boys employed on the Stiffkey estate in Norfolk earned close to adult wages” (*The Family* 92). Child players, such as the one who would have originally played the Boy, were, according to Edel Lamb, “prepubescent boys ranging from as young as six or seven years old to their early teenage years” (*Performing* 3). For instance, in 1599 Thomas Ravenscroft and John Tompkins were both listed as members of the Players at

⁸ For more on child work narratives, see Margaret Spufford’s “First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-century Autobiographers” (1979) and David Levine’s *Reproducing Families: The Political Economy of English Populations History* (1987).

Paul's before their eighth birthday, and probably the most famous child player in London, Nathan Field, was 13 when he joined the Children of the Chapel.⁹

Such apprenticeships were designed to teach boys certain talents or skills they would need as adults. According to Philippe Ariès, an apprenticed boy would have the opportunity to acquire empirical knowledge about a particular skill as he practiced service alongside adults: "It was by means of domestic service that the master transmitted to a child, and not his child but another man's, the knowledge, practical experience, and human worth which he was supposed to possess" (354). The responsibilities and rewards, or lack thereof, of apprenticeships differed across class systems. Such disparateness makes it particularly difficult to contextualize the Boy's service with Falstaff; the boy begins service with English royalty, as he is a gift from Prince Hal, but most of his time is spent with a knight who, in turn, spends his time in Eastcheap taverns with citizens of a lower class. Nevertheless, at its most basic, an apprenticeship was the opportunity, as Colin Heywood explains, for boys to absorb the "skills, knowledge, and values that would carry them through adult life" (159).

However, an early modern apprenticeship was more than an opportunity to learn a particular skill or service. It also was the time when a boy would grow into manhood. As discussed in Chapter II, "breeching boys," or the act of putting a boy into hose and doublet, usually occurred at around seven or eight years of age. This moment of accoutrement marked a gendered distinction between girls and boys, in that the boy would be removed from the feminine domestic sphere and sent to school or work as an

⁹ For more on these child players, see Roberta Florence Brinkley's *Nathan Field: The Actor-Playwright* (1928), G. E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, Vol II (1941), pp. 434-6, and Edel Lamb's *Performing Childhood in Early Modern Theatre* (2009), pp. 118-42.

apprentice. At age nine or ten, when apprenticeships and school certainly would have been soon to come, the boy would come to what Henry Cuffe calls in *The Differences in the Ages of Man's Life* (1607) the “budding and blossoming age” (90), and the Boy of 2 *Henry IV* and *Henry V* takes company with Falstaff's at this age.

Therefore, the Boy's service with Falstaff and company should be understood as his gendered lesson in becoming a man or at least developing a potential for manhood. As Elizabeth Foyster explains, “childhood and youth were essential periods of a man's life for acquiring reason and strength, and learning how to exercise self-control and control over women. For many, it was probably by observing the behavior of their elders and peers, and their own trials and errors, rather than by reading conduct books, that young men learnt the most pertinent lessons of manhood” (39). Such understanding explains why Falstaff's reference to the Boy as a “piglet” following its parent and to the Boy's future beard establish how the subplot of the play will focus, in one regard, on defining masculinity in terms of age or development. Indeed, as Diane Purkiss argues, early modern representations of boys imply that masculinity was something that “had to be coaxed into formation” (16). Therefore, in a history play concerned with identity and gender formation, particularly in relationship to family and state, it is not surprising that Shakespeare elects to introduce a young person. After all, the vigor, liveliness, and youth of *1 Henry IV* has been replaced with disease and fatigue in *2 Henry IV*. In addition to Falstaff's returning, as mentioned earlier, to the stage disease-ridden, Hal's first words reveal his own exhaustion, as he states, “Before God, I am exceeding weary” (2.2.1). Moreover, the King is but a shadow of the man who confronts Richard II and fights

Douglas at Shrewsbury. According to stage directions, readers first see him in *2 Henry IV*, “*in his night-gown, alone*” (3.1.1).

In a pair of plays where a worn-out king perishes, a youthful prince becomes his successor, and an old Falstaff is rejected and will shortly die, the Boy adds a youthful component. All of these major characters transition to new life stages, and together the plays depict how one generation replaces another. Indeed, childhood is also fundamental to Shakespeare’s earlier tetralogy. Carol Chillington Rutter has interpreted the three *Henry VI* plays as “all about a child: a tragic meditation on wasted childhood played out across three plays and seventy-nine scenes, a tragedy framed by episodes where history ‘means’ through children” (8). Just so, *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* concern the physical and socio-political transitions surrounding monarchical succession. Following this formula, *2 Henry* puts forth a page who, like the prince of *1 Henry IV*, seems trapped in a social community of theft, dishonesty, and vagrancy. Indeed, just as the Prince in *1 Henry IV* explains in soliloquy how he plans to “imitate the sun / Who doth permit the base contagious clouds / To smother up his beauty from the world” (1.2.197-99), so can we understand the Boy’s experience with Falstaff as simply buying time before he, as the Prince says, can “this loose behavior . . . throw off” (208).

To recognize that the Boy’s time with Falstaff is an apprenticeship, and, in part, educational, answers the question of why he appears so often on stage. He is in fact on stage during seven of the seventeen scenes in *2 Henry IV*, and while he only speaks 29 lines in four of those scenes (1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.4), he hears at least one-third of the play’s entire dialogue. When he is silent (5.1, 5.3, 5.5) he listens to those men around him, closely observing Falstaff’s relationship with women, men, politicians, police officers,

and perhaps most importantly, his royal other, the Prince. During this time, the Boy's relationship with Falstaff and Falstaff's circle of friends constantly mirrors Hal's relationship with them in *1 Henry IV*. Most importantly, though, during this time the Boy, as an apprentice, receives an education in gender in that he is expected to become like the men he observes. Like Hal, the Boy is an apprentice, and Shakespeare establishes that Falstaff serves as the instructor.

Observing, Mimicking, and Rejecting Falstaff's Manhood

Embodying more than one "type" of manhood permits the diverse and complicated Falstaff to be in a position where he can model both ideal and flawed codes of manhood. Falstaff, of course, is at once in the position of ideal manhood in that he is a soldier and a knight. The consummate courtier, according to Castiglione's *Count Ludovico*, is primarily a warrior: "I judge the principal and true profession of a Courtier ought to be in feats of arms, the which above all I will have him practise lively, and to be known among other of his hardiness, for his achieving of enterprises, and for his fidelity toward him whom he serveth" (160). Falstaff, according to his title, should join the ranks of other knightly-type heroes in Shakespeare's canon, such as Hector, Troilus, Pericles, Brutus, Palamon, and Arcite, since as Bruce R. Smith notes, all of these characters "embody virtue, honour, honesty, nobility, and gentleness to a superlative degree" (47). Yet Falstaff does not appear to be on the same chivalric level as these other Shakespearean heroes. Despite being in a position to showcase ideal manhood, Falstaff also embodies the antithesis of what is suggested by his title, as neither his time at the Boar's Head or on the battlefield exemplify ideals such as honor, nobility, and virtue.

Regardless, Falstaff remains a sort of role model for the young page. The page follows Falstaff onto the battlefield and into the taverns. He carries the knight's sword and also helps to defend him when the Lord Chief Justice confronts Falstaff about a robbery. In these ways, the boy and Falstaff's relationships exemplify how many boys first observed manhood as it existed outside of their families. As Elizabeth A. Foyster suggests, "it was probably by observing the behavior of their elders and peers, and their own trials and errors, rather than reading conduct books, that young men learnt the most pertinent lessons of manhood" (39). Moreover, Foyster explains how "boys were not segregated from adults as they grew up, but were often witnesses to the adult world around them. From this, boys could learn the essentials of the gender codes, and how relationships could be most effectively negotiated and managed" (40). More specifically, though, as Anthony Fletcher clarifies, "to establish himself as a man" in early modern England, a boy was required to engage fully in a "youth culture where manhood was learned by drinking, fighting, and sex" (92). This last component, sexual prowess, was, according to Fletcher, "the most telling test of manhood" (93). Thus, the Boy's time with Falstaff, as was the case with Hal's time with the knight, can be recognized as an education on how to become a man, and if, as Fletcher argues, it was through observation that boys learned this particular "test of manhood," then this page certainly found both the perfect teacher and the perfect schoolroom. Eastcheap, we remember, was replete with theatres, taverns, and brothels, and one might imagine that an apprentice did not spend all of his time in the workshop. Such is the situation in which the Page finds himself.

Despite not fulfilling the chivalric ideal suggested by his title, Falstaff nevertheless maintains his own construction of ideal manhood, and Shakespeare juxtaposes these two ideas in order to equalize the lofty heroic ideals of military honor with Falstaff's own version of manhood, one partly a function of body chemistry but mostly of wit and sack. In 4.2 of *2 Henry IV*, Falstaff meets Colvile, a rebel commander who immediately surrenders to the knight. After Falstaff turns him over to Prince John and Westmoreland, the knight claims that John's "cold" nature derives from insufficient drinking, a fault from which his brother Hal is entirely free, before famously soliloquizing about the benefits of drinking sack. During this lengthy monologue, however, Falstaff criticizes John and his fellow soldiers' manhood, claiming,

There's never none of these demure boys come to any proffer, for thin drink doth so over-cool their blood, and making many fish-meals, that they fall into a kind of male green-sickness, and then when they marry, they get wench. They are generally fools and cowards, which some of us should be too, but for inflammation. (4.3.90-94)

Falstaff turns to humoral psychology in order to express his own ideas of ideal manhood. Galenic theories of physiology proposed that maleness—the condition of being biologically male—was based on the two higher elements, air and fire, and that the two hotter humours, blood and choler, were compounded by those elements. Published in London in 1615, Helkiah Crooke's *Microcosmographia* explains why men's bodies are hotter than women's: "It behoved therefore that man should be hotter, because his body was made to endure labour and travail, as also that his mind should be stout and invincible to undergo dangers, the only hearing whereof will drive a woman as we say

out of her little wits” (646). Therefore, since “a man’s body gradually warms through childhood, then cools with age,” explains Smith, “blood is particularly suasive in youth” (21). Falstaff believes that too many fish dinners and not enough alcohol has made boys of these young men and resulted in a “kind of male green-sickness,” which, according to the *Riverside* editor, is a reference to “an anemic condition supposed to affect unmarried girls” (954).¹⁰ This green-sickness, in turn, will cause these soldiers only to beget girls since they do not have what it takes to produce sons.

For Falstaff, sack makes the man. Non-drinkers are fools and cowards or, put simply, unmanly, and his apologia for sack confirms the importance of drinking for this knight. He further explains how a “good sherries-sack hath a twofold inflammation” (4.3.96-97). It rises to the brain, evaporates all the foolishness that gathers there, and makes the brain “quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery, and delectable shapes,” or, to say it another way, sack engenders wit (98). It also warms the blood and liver—the organ of passion—and instead of producing cowardice and faint-heartedness, sack makes one warm and passionate while it “illumine[s] the face” (107). The speech concludes with Falstaff asserting that “learning,” or education, “is a “mere hoard of gold kept by a devil till sack commences it and sets it in act and use” (116). Thus, Falstaff believes at the moment that Hal “is valiant” (117) because of his affinity for heavy drinking despite the “cold blood he did naturally inherit from his father” (118). Falstaff, not the King, is responsible for making Hal valiant, brave, and witty; the old knight has taught Hal these important lessons in manhood.

¹⁰ Helen King explains that green sickness was commonly referenced in early modern English writing, literature, and medical texts as a common condition for women. Thus, Falstaff offers a gendered insult by claiming that men who do not drink become sickly women. For more on the “green sickness,” see King’s *The Disease of Virgins: Green Sickness, Chlorosis, and the Problems of Puberty* (2004).

If Falstaff believes that he is responsible for Hal's education on maturing as a man and that Hal's valor and wit are a result of his teaching, then we can expect that his new apprentice can anticipate the same sort of education. After all, Falstaff concludes his monologue on the benefits of a sack-inspired instruction by insisting how "If [he] had a thousand sons, the first humane principle [he] would teach them should be, to forswear thin potations and to addict themselves to sack" (4.3.122-25). Despite Falstaff's eloquent justification for heavy drinking, unscrupulous acts seem to follow significant time spent in taverns, all of which the Boy witnesses. For instance, in the first scene with his new master, moments after reporting that Falstaff suffers from syphilis, the Boy observes his master extemporaneously, and successfully, saving himself from imprisonment. Indeed, it is one of the major overarching assumptions of this project that knowing that there is a silent boy on stage in particular scenes in Shakespeare can dramatically influence how we read or watch such a scene. In this moment, the Lord Chief Justice confronts Falstaff with criminal charges regarding the robbery at Gads Hill, and Falstaff immediately asks the Boy to "tell him [he's] deaf" (1.2.66). The Boy witnesses Falstaff's aptness for flattery as the knight sycophantically refers to the Chief Justice as "your lordship" on eight instances over the course of less than 50 lines. A couple of scenes later, the Page witnesses Falstaff's abusive treatment of Mistress Quickly and other law officials when the hostess insisted that the two officers arrest Falstaff for failing to pay his bill. Falstaff responds to the allegations: "Away, varlets! Draw, Bardolph, cut me off the villain's head, throw the quean in the channel" (2.1.46-47). Throughout this episode, the Boy sees Falstaff, his mentor, engaging in flattery, dishonesty, manipulation, misogyny, and domestic violence.

The Boy's reaction to his master's arrest and Quickly's accusation in 2.1 confirms he has been watching closely how his master conducts business. Though Falstaff commands "Keep them off, Bardolf" (2.1.53) as the officers approach him and after the Hostess shouts, "Good people, bring a rescue or two" (2.1.56), it is the Boy who attempts to help his surrogate father. According to stage direction—"The Page attacks her"—the Boy physically assaults Quickly when she calls for help. Furthermore, his verbal abuses to the women during the altercation certainly sound Falstaffian: "Away, you scullion! you rampallian! You fustilarian! I'll tickle your catastrophe" (2.1.59-60).¹¹ The Boy's misogynistic insult, that Quickly is a lowly kitchen maid, ruffian, and unkempt slut, reflects the sort of lesson he is receiving from Falstaff. He reacts to this situation in much the same way as the archetypal boy imagined by the anonymous author of the 1616 tract *The Office of Christian Parents*, who adamantly advises parents against allowing their sons to partake in valiant and violent actions: "This they take to be the honour and reputation of a man, and namely of a gentleman, that the least touch or word, which seemeth to carry any disgrace, they be ready to stab or to challenge into the field" (178). Aggressive overreactions are stigmatized as "childish bravery" (178). When the Boy verbally and physically attacks—or is too eager to "stab or to challenge into the field"—he inacts the "childish bravery" that *The Office of Christian Parents* finds counter to ideal manhood. Likewise, even more acerbic and witty are his comments about Bardolph's red face. When in 2.2, the Boy and Bardolph enter, Poins immediately says of Bardolph, "Wherefore blush you now? What a maidenly man-at-arms are you become! Is't such a

¹¹ We might recall, as the Boy certainly does, the stream of witty insults Falstaff yells in 1.2 when he discovers that a haberdasher has refused his order because of his poor credit: "Let him be damn'd like the glutton! . . . A whoreson Architophel! a [rascally] yea-forsooth knave [whose] whoreson smoothy-pates do now wear nothing but high shoes" (1.2.34, 35-36, 37-38). The Boy has been listening to his teacher.

matter to get a pottle-pot's maidenhead," and without hesitation, the Boy insultingly compares Bardolph's face to the underneath of a whore's dress: "'A calls me [e'en now], my lord, through a red lattice, and I could discern no part of his face from the window. At last I spied his eyes, and methought he had two holes in the ale-wive's petticoat and so peep'd though" (2.2.79-83). Prince Hal, noticing the Boy's change since becoming a part of Falstaff's company, responds waggishly, "Has not the boy profited?" (2.2.84).

Recognizing Falstaff's influence on the Boy causes some of the men to express concern over his future. Poins, marking the Boy's potential, says remorsefully to the Prince, "O that this blossom could be kept from cankers," presumably referring to Falstaff and his company (2.2.94-95). Poins recognizes the inevitable and apparently mourns the impossibility that the Boy will be removed from such an unhealthy environment. Bardolf likewise understands the Boy's probable future: "And you do not make him hang'd among you, the gallows shall have wrong" (96-97).¹² Later, Hal confronts Falstaff about this conversation when he asks his old friend about the iniquity of both Quickly and the Boy: "is thine hostess here of the wicked? or is thy boy of the wicked?" (2.4.329-30). Falstaff replies, "For the boy, there is a good angel about him, but the devil blinds him too" (332-36). Falstaff most likely suggests that a third-party devil is responsible for the boy's corruption, but there is also subtle irony in this declaration as Falstaff also acknowledges, intentionally or not, his own negative influence on the Boy by likening himself to a devil.¹³

¹² Mistress Quickly makes a similar remark later in *Henry V* when she tells Bardolf that the Boy will "yield the crow a pudding one of these days," which is to say that the crows will peck out the Boy's eyes as he hangs from the gallows (2.1.87-88).

¹³ Indeed, this may be the first or two instances where Falstaff refers to himself as "devil." Later, during his monologue on the manly importance of drinking sack, he says, "learning [is] a mere hoard of gold kept by a

This difficult environment in which the Boy appears trapped leads some critics to read his inclusion in these history plays as commentary on the social problems of child vagrancy in London during the late 1590s. Mark H. Lawhorn believes that the “sight of the boy’s association with scoundrels . . . does not suggest a future of social advancement [since from] his first appearance, Falstaff’s page prompt[s] dramatic tension associated with societal concerns regarding youth and vagrancy” (“Falstaff’s Page” 150). For Lawhorn, “the tension over what will become of the youth” lends itself to a Marxist reading of the play, in which the Boy’s death at the end of *Henry V* comments on the social injustices in the world of the play and Shakespeare’s London: “We might consider King Henry as an emblem of privilege, of state power and control and the boy as simply a boy struggling against the vagaries of a society that might better serve its youth” (156). Indeed, the Boy’s death certainly would suggest as much, particularly when compared to the other boy character in *2 Henry IV*, King Henry’s much more quiet and passive servant who briefly appears on stage at the beginning of 3.1 and enjoys a more comfortable and privileged apprenticeship (156).¹⁴

Importantly, as *Henry V* continues, the Boy gains an increasing awareness of his social predicament. He begins to recognize the negative influence of Falstaff’s company and arrives at a point where he chooses to reject the models of manhood that have been thrust upon him. Before his death in *Henry V*, he twice soliloquizes over the social positions that he ultimately rejects, and the way he describes the worlds he rejects—both

devil, till sack commences it and sets it in act and use” (4.3.113-14). Falstaff suggests that receiving an education is like idle gold in a devil’s hands until sack is able to put it to good use.

¹⁴ I might even suggest that this page and Falstaff’s page are brothers and that Hal left one brother in the King’s court and delivered one to Falstaff. There is no way to know if the two page boys are related, but such would confirm another parallel between the Falstaff/Hal and Henry IV/Prince relationships.

Falstaff's dishonest one and King Henry's violent militant one—engages with many of the topical concerns of early modern masculinity. In what I call the Boy's *rejection scenes*, Shakespeare continues to depict the Page acknowledging the *manly* world he is expected to grow into and electing instead to reject it.

These scenes offer the most significant parallels between the Boy and Prince Hal, since they show his turning away from a disreputable future to secure a more respectable one. As we recall, *2 Henry IV* famously ends when the Prince, now King Henry V, rejects Falstaff, thus symbolically stepping away from his vagrant youth and the shenanigans that characterize his place within Falstaff's circle of miscreants. As the newly crowned King and his train pass Falstaff, Shallow, Pistol, and Bardolf, the old knight looks toward "King Hal" (5.5.41), exclaiming, "God save thee, my sweet boy!" (44). Henry memorably responds, "I know thee not, old man," thus fulfilling his own prophesy from *1 Henry IV* of finding a "Redeeming time when men think least I will" to reject his youthful vagrancy (1.2.217). This rejection of Hal's previous carefree adolescence marks his move to responsible adulthood that he foretold in *1 Henry IV*: "For God doth know, so shalle the world percevive, / That I have turned away my former self; / So will I those that kept me company" (5.5.55-57).

Readers are reminded of Henry's abnegation when Falstaff's "other son" mirrors this masculine right of passage. After Falstaff's death is reported early in *Henry V*, the Boy becomes masterless. He moves throughout the rest of the play with Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph, traveling with them to France in order to act, as Pistol says, "like horse-leeches" and "suck, the very blood" of French soldiers and citizens (2.3.43, 44). It appears the Boy's future is set—he will become part of these rogues, since Hal is gone,

and continue their tradition of pilfering and carousing. Yet the Boy's ambiguous reply to Pistol's proposition about horses becomes the first instance where readers observe the beginning of his resistance: "And that's but unwholesome food, they say" (2.3.57). Perhaps the Boy literally, and not only in jest, finds the equine blood of the French unhealthy, and he is participating in the sort of jingoistic jokes that frequently surface throughout all of Shakespeare's history plays. On one level, the Boy jokes that if the scoundrels literally were to suck the blood of the French, they would find it unwholesome, since the French are themselves unwholesome. However, if we also recognize this moment as the first where the Boy begins to critique his travel companions, then this line can be understood as subtle criticism of the selfish lives characterized by these English soldiers as they invade France. Their actions as supposedly honorable English soldiers are what the Boy describes as "but unwholesome food," not their figurative drinking of French blood.

The Boy's much more direct commentary on the actions of these drunken soldiers buttresses this interpretation. In Henry's inspirational "Once more unto the breach" speech, the King stirs the English troops specifically by juxtaposing their manhood with a call for violence on behalf of the state: "when the blast of war blows in our ears, / Then imitate the action of the tiger" (3.1.3-6). Not altogether unlike Lady Macbeth's own challenging Macbeth's manhood to inspire him to act—"When you durst do it, then you were a man" (1.7.49)—Henry evokes early modern ideas of martial manhood throughout his speech. He calls for the "noblest English" (17) soldiers in his command to "Dishonor not" (22) their families and instead "Be copy now to [men] of grosser blood, / And teach them how to war" (24-25) since "there is none [who] so mean and base / That hath not

noble luster” (29-30). In this speech, Henry advocates martial manhood by urging his soldiers to exemplify this manhood for lesser men, be it the enemy or the yeoman to whom he refers in the following line. Nevertheless, despite the inspirational rhetoric, Nym, Bardolf, and Pistol are skeptical of their King’s construction of manhood, and they care little about his challenging their masculinity as soldiers. Though both stage and film productions of this scene frequently present these lines as rousing, patriotic rhetoric, Shakespeare never includes such reactions in the text. Though the English do go on to defeat the French, after Henry cries “God for Henry, England, and Saint George!” there is only a single stage direction—*Alarum, and chambers go off*—before the next scene begins and we witness the only recorded reactions by soldiers (3.1.34). Not at all inspired, Nym, Bardolph, Pistol and the Boy scoff at the King’s call for noble, virtuous, and honorable masculinity. “On, on, on, on, on! To the breach, to the breach!” scoffs Bardolf (3.2.1-2). “God’s vassals drop and die,” mocks Pistol, “And sword and shield / In bloody field / Doth win immortal fame” (3.2.8, 9-11).¹⁵

The Boy, like Bardolf and Pistol, also appears to mock this kingly call for honor on the battlefield by responding with his own preference to be “in an alehouse in London,” (3.2.12), and he certainly resembles, if not echoes, his former master when he sings of trading all his “fame for a pot of ale and safety” (13). However, the Boy hides his emotions from his company, waiting until they leave to expose in soliloquy how he differs from these men:

As young as I am, I have observ’d these three swashers. I am boy to them
all three, but all they three, though they would serve me, could not be man

¹⁵ “God’s vassals” most nearly means “God’s men” or “God’s soldiers.”

to me; for indeed three such antics do not amount to a man. For Bardolph, he is white-liver'd and red-fac'd; by the means whereof 'a faces it out, but fights not. For Pistol, he hath a killing tongue and a quiet sword; by the means whereof 'a breaks words, and keeps whole weapons. For Nym, he hath heard that men of few words are the best men, and therefore he scorns to say his prayers, lest 'a should be thought a coward; but his few bad words are match'd with as few good deeds; for 'a never broke any man's head but his own, and that was against a post when he was drunk. They will steal any thing, and call it purchase. Bardolph stole a lute-case, bore it twelve leagues, and sold it for three half-pence. Nym and Bardolph are sworn brothers in filching, and in Callice they stole a fire-shovel. I knew by that piece of service that men would carry coals. They would have me as familiar with men's pockets as their gloves or their handkerchers; which makes much against my manhood, if I should take from another's pocket to put into mine; for it is plain pocketing up wrongs. I must leave them, and seek some better service. Their villainy goes against my weak stomach, and therefore I must cast it up. *Exit (27-53)*

This speech strikingly differs from anything else thus far observed by the Boy. He has developed greatly since boorishly vilifying the Hostess: "Away, you scullion! you rampallian! You fustilarian! I'll tickle your catastrophe." When the Boy critiques these soldiers, we remember Hal's own future rejection of this group early in *I Henry IV*, "I will imitate the sun, / . . . By breaking through the foul and ugly mists / Of vapors that did seem to strangle him" (1.2.197, 302-03). The Boy recognizes that though the men are

older, and thus supposedly manlier, such is not the case (1.2.197, 202-03). Bardolph cannot be “man to” the Boy, because he is “white-liver’d,” which according to humoral psychology means he is a drunken coward whose liver lacks blood; Pistol, because he “breaks words,” or is dishonest, while “keep[ing] whole weapons” or refusing to fight; Nym, because despite knowing that “men of few words are the best men,” which is to say bravest men speak least, he nevertheless speaks poorly and once fell on his head because he was drunk.¹⁶ The Boy concludes his monologue by providing a final reason for his leaving the men—because they are the worst kinds of thieves, those who will steal even the most insignificant of items. King Henry calls for his soldiers to act with honor and nobility, but Shakespeare counters this speech with a Boy's talking about soldiers stealing lute-cases and shovels. Ultimately, the Boy rejects all that he considers unmanly while in the process confirming his own definition of what it means to be a man. According to the Boy, cowardice, irritability, drunkenness, dishonesty, hypocrisy, chatter, and larcenies are unwanted, and it is that sort of masculinity that he chooses to “cast up,” or, more literally, to “vomit.”

Moreover, the Boy's castigation becomes even more poignant and telling when compared to a passage from Roger Ascham's influential treatise on teaching, *The Scholemaster* (1570). In this passage, Ascham warns against worldly dangers and urges

¹⁶ The use of the proverbial phrase “Men of few words are the best men” is also telling as it recalls an earlier moment in the play. In 2.1, Nym and Pistol exchange insults since Pistol recently married Quickly despite her original engagement to Nym. As he prepares to attack Nym, Pistol shouts, “I have, and I will hold, the quondam Quickly / For the only she; and—*pauca*, there's enough too!” (78-79). It is at this moment that the Boy, according to stage direction, first appears—“*Enter the Boy*”—in *Henry V* and overhears Pistol's remark that Quickly is a “*pauca*” or “paragon” of a woman who uses few words. The Boy remembers hearing Pistol's remark that Quickly exemplifies how a woman should speak very little, and now the Boy compares Pistol to Pistol's own misogynistic view of an exemplary woman.

communities to continue to look after young men, even if those young men are no longer are children:

For, if ye suffer the eye of a yong Ientleman, once to be entangled with vaine fightes, and the eare to be corrupted with fond or filthie taulke, the mynde shall quicklie fall seick, and sone vomit and cast vp, all the holesome doctrine, that he receiued in childhood, though he were neuer so well brought vp before. . . . And the parentes for all their great cost and charge, reape onelie in the end, the fru[i]te of grief and care. (50-51)

Throughout the Boy's apprenticeship in *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*, he is "entangled with vain sightes," and more than once we certainly observe where he might have been "corrupted with . . . filthie taulke" (50, 51). Nevertheless, his mind never appears to have fallen sick by these experiences, and we instead see that he "vomit[s] and cast[s] vp" the unwholesome behaviors he has experienced and witnessed (51). In so doing, he first demonstrates his indepedance, and we recognize the complexity of a boy who has observed the behaviors and ideals of a range of men and begins rejecting them.

Yet despite the similarities, Shakespeare draws between the Boy's childhood and Hal's youth with these rogues, it is far easier for a wealthy king to abandon his social group than it is for an apprentice. Hence, it is not surprising that when the Boy next appears on stage he is still carousing with Pistol. In the scene immediately following the most famous moment in the play—the King's speech on St. Crispian's Day—the Boy becomes a translator for Pistol who has detained a French soldier. The placement of this scene is similar to that of 3.2, where, as abovementioned, Bardolf, Nym, and Pistol mocked Henry's "once more unto the breach" speech. In this instance, the King has

called for another “once more” and attempts again to provoke the soldiers’ chivalric manhood to battle. Acknowledging their shrinking numbers, he elucidates how with “fewer men” comes “the greater share of honor” (4.3.22). He further explains that “if it is a sin to covet honor” (28), then he is “the most offending soul alive” (29). Compared to those fighting with the King on this day, others will be forced to “hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks / That fought with us upon Saint Crispin’s day” (66-67). And as he tells Montjoy, “those that leave their valiant bones in France, / Dying like men, . . . / shall be fam’d; for there the sun shall greet them, / And draw their honors reeking up to heaven / . . . Mark then abounding valor in our English” (98-99, 100-101, 104).

However, the text again subverts the King’s exultation of manly honor and valor when after all this grand rhetoric we encounter not a brave English soldier but Pistol pillaging and harassing a French captive. All we see of the great battle and the supposedly inspired troops is this ridiculous Englishman selfishly using a boy to help him fill his pockets. The Boy, who somehow has found the time to learn French, acts as an interpreter for Pistol and the French soldier.¹⁷ After a series of comical misinterpretations—all of which offer a steady critique of the great honor the King called for moments earlier—Pistol exits with the French soldier.

In the Boy’s final monologue that also marks his exit from the play, he bluntly expresses his disdain for the constructions of manhood he has observed:

¹⁷ In the following chapter I will discuss how the rhetoric used by several schoolboys in Shakespeare’s canon participates in constructions of early modern manhood, but it is interesting to note here the extraordinary range in this Boy’s rhetoric. During the eight scenes where the page speaks in *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*, he wittily banters with Falstaff, delivers two eloquent monologues, and serves as a French translator. As I will demonstrate throughout this project, Shakespeare understands childhood in terms of great diversity and capability, incorporating such throughout his drama.

I did never know so full a voice issue from so empty a heart, but the saying is true, "The empty vessel makes the greatest sound." Bardolph and Nym had ten times more valor than this roaring devil i' th' old play, that every one may pare his nails with a wooden dagger, and they are both hang'd, and so would this be, if he durst steal anything adventurously. I may stay with the lackeys with the luggage of our camp. The French might have a good prey of us, if he knew of it, for there is none to guard it but boys. *Exit* (4.4.66-77)

The Boy criticizes Pistol's heart for being void of courage. He remarks that both Bardolph and Nym were more courageous than Pistol, but courage did not keep them from the gallows. This observation is all the more ironic once we recall Bardolph's belief in *2 Henry IV* that it was the Boy who, as a result of being surrounded by these men, would inevitably find his way to the gallows (2.2.96-97). Yet it is the Boy, not Bardolph, who has survived up to this point. However, the Boy's selfless act to assist other young servants, or "lackeys," results in his own demise.

On one level, the Boy's final speech and presumed death, as well as the massacre of all the other boys, buttresses one of the common reactions to *Henry V*, which Karl P. Wentersdorf summarizes as follows: "[Henry V] is a Machiavellian militarist who professes Christianity but whose deeds reveal both hypocrisy and ruthlessness" (256). Certainly, these boys' deaths can be understood as consequential to Henry's decision to invade France, but on another level, their deaths make an important thematic connection between the end of the second tetralogy and the beginning of the first one. Indeed, the final chorus of *Henry V* carries us to a historical future already in the Shakespeare's

literary past. Katherine is not a “soldier breeder” and instead, “Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crown’d King of France and England, did this king succeed” (9-10). In reminding us that the peace between France and England is short-lived, that Henry V dies fairly young, and that the Wars of the Roses continue the bloodshed, Shakespeare appears to suggest, as Robin Headlam Wells believes, that “Neo-chivalry idealism [has] been revealed as an empty sham,” as these plays “satirize the false ideals of masculine chivalry” (51). The Boy’s presence heightens this idea not only through his final decision to reject these ideals but also his symbolic association with Prince Hal. As this chapter has demonstrated, the Boy probes and exposes these ideals, and by drawing this thematic parallel between the Boy and Hal, we begin to recognize how Shakespeare compellingly uses boys and boyhoods to offer skepticism of early modern ideals of manhood.

CHAPTER IV

“The pedant, the braggart, the hedge-priest, the fool, and the boy:”

THE SCHOOLBOY TEACHES THE MAN

I now leave the battlefield and enter the classroom in order to consider Shakespeare’s schoolboys and their engagement with gender ideals relating to education and manhood. While most early modern children did make some sort of economic contribution to their families, around age six or seven, many children were sent to a local school where they would learn basic skills such as reading and writing often taught at parishes or dioceses (Amussen, “The Family” 91; Wrightson 192-99). Yet since this age was when gender distinctions became more prominent, only boys continued with significant formal education beyond these early years (Fletcher 364-75; Higginbotham 66-75). Of course, the availability of schools varied from town to town as well as fluctuated across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Nevertheless, during Shakespeare’s life, England experienced a significant expansion in the number of licensed schoolmasters in villages across England, though this number would decline in the years during and after the civil wars (Wrightson 194-95; O’Day 35-37). Those boys who did not immediately enter into experiential work as an apprentice or servant, entered schooling, and in so doing, they were often separated from parents and boarded at the school, a process known as *tabling out*, as they continued their early education. As I further uncover the diversity Shakespeare assigns to his boy characters and illustrate how such diversity offers a broad glimpse in the playwright’s thoughts about boys and their gender relationship with early modern constructions of ideal manhood, I wish now to turn characters such as William Page in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and especially Moth in

Love's Labour's Lost in order to consider how their depictions of witty schoolboys explore and expose various educational practices available to the early modern boy and engage in the debate about how education makes the man.

In the previous chapter, I focused on Falstaff's page in *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* and his critique of ideals such as martial or chivalric manhood. I did not address, however, one of the most noteworthy aspects of the Boy, his rhetorical diversity. Throughout the two plays, the Boy's rhetoric oscillates between insulting, shallow, and at times misogynistic criticism to lengthy elegiac monologues. He also demonstrates a familiarity with French. Shakespeare's depiction of a boy who is also rhetorically skilled in the company of soldiers is not as unbelievable as it may seem at first since, as Jim Casey explains, "regardless of social station, . . . Elizabethan martial preparation . . . accompanied a young's man's formal academic education [as boys] were taught to be men not only through organized study but also through a process of sociocultural indoctrination that readied them for the rigors of war" (87). Shakespeare's boys often reflect the balance that Casey identifies. The playwright does not separate the Boy's educational life from his martial one but instead offers moments that combine what he has learned in school with this apprenticeship in arms.

If we accept the description of schoolboys made by several adult male characters in Shakespeare, we would conclude that the playwright found them not only to be bratty and irritating but also a convenient insulting epithet. For instance, in *Julius Caesar*, Cassius insults Octavius by calling him a "peevish schoolboy, worthless of . . . honor" (5.1.61), and according to Jaques in *As You Like It*, this is the stage in a male's life when he becomes a "whining schoolboy, with his satchel / And shining morning face, creeping

like snail / Unwillingly to school” (2.7.145-47). Likewise, early in *Coriolanus*, Volumnia observes of her grandson, Young Martius, that the boy “would rather see the swords and hear a drum than look upon his schoolmaster” (1.3.52-53). According to these adults, schoolboys are undignified, reluctant, and indignant. However, whenever Shakespeare does put a schoolboy on stage, he is quite different from the characterization given by Cassius, Jaques, and Volumnia.

I wish to consider Moth in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* as representative of Jaques’s second stage of a male’s life, a schoolboy. To do so, I first explore the classroom as a gendered site of education exclusively for boys. The pedagogical experiences in the classroom were almost exclusively intended for transforming boys into men, so much so that one Renaissance humanist refers to classroom as the “laboratory for the formation of men” (Vives 10). Indeed, in the wake of humanism, early modern England believed that education made a boy a man. A boy’s segregated experience outside of the domestic sphere, the books he encountered, his acquisition of Latin, and his learned aptitude for wit all played significant parts in his developing early modern manhood. Thus, after reviewing how scholars of early modern pedagogy explain how such masculine values and ideals were promoted in the classroom and throughout educational treatises, I will consider depictions of these ideals in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and Moth’s critical engagement with those ideals.

Contemporary criticism on Moth, though it seldom appears, is often delegated exclusively to discussions on the spelling and pronunciation of his name and whether the boy is to be associated with *moth*, an insect, or *mote*, a speck of dust. Therefore, I suggest that for those hearing, rather than reading, the play, the boy’s name operates as a pun on

both insect and dust, a conclusion supported by his own proclivity for punning. Yet nominal discussions of Moth's relevance are not the only instance where he is diminished by critics. Carla Mazzio calls the boy simply a "sequel" to Armado, an attitude that partly explains why he is often removed from modern productions (203). And even the more varied interpretations distance Moth from being an individual schoolboy character. William C. Carroll explains how the play's "reference to Moth as 'tender juvenal' (1.2.6-7) may echo contemporary allusions to [Thomas] Nashe as a contemporary Juvenal, and the play's puns on "person', 'pierce one', and 'pierced . . . one' (4.2.73-74) may echo the same puns Nashe employed in his *Pierce Penniless His Supplication to the Divell* (London, 1592)" (32). Nevertheless, I propose that the boy exemplifies many of the ideals associated with the humanist man of moderation to argue that Shakespeare constructs and uses Moth's pedagogically gendered lessons to subvert the supposed ideal gender positions of the chivalrous knight and Herculean hero.

Early Modern Pedagogy As the "Laboratory for the Formation of Men"

As discussed in chapter two, many early modern masculine ideals remained informed by the military prowess that characterized medieval masculinity. However, as gunpowder increasingly becomes the weapon of choice in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, these chivalric ideas quickly became archaic, and in the wake of humanism, masculinity became increasingly associated with academic achievement and intellectual accomplishment. In *The Complete Gentleman* (1622), Henry Peachman remarks that "Learning . . . is an essential part of Nobilitie, as unto which we are beholden, for whatsoever dependeth on the culture of the mind; it followeth, that who is nobly borne, and a Scholler withal, deserveth double Honour" (18). As a result of this cultural idea,

education clearly differentiated boys and girls. Wendy Wall explains how “Renaissance humanists . . . sought to gender young children through pedagogy” (61). Beginning in the home, informal education would provide children with the knowledge and skills they were expected to need as they became adult men and women, and this education was based on the assumed socio-cultural, intellectual, and emotional differences thought to exist between the sexes.

Traditionally, at about age seven, boys who did not live in utter poverty or belong to the gentry or aristocracy often attended grammar school and received lessons on the classics, Latin, logic, rhetoric, and mathematics. According to Darryll Grantley, “the government pursued a sustained policy of educational expansion throughout the century from the 1530s, so that writing in 1577, William Harrison remarked: ‘there are not many corporate towns now under the Queen’s dominion that have not one grammar school at least’” (15).¹ Boys trained to take on various social and economic positions while girls typically prepared for domestic and limited religious responsibilities. As Danielle Clarke describes, gender specific education “inculcated social values, acculturated the individual, and provided the learning deemed appropriate to the social status held by the pupil,” whereby boys would be moved toward vocation and girls toward a “discourse of containment” (19). Furthermore, as Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson write in their introduction to *Performing Pedagogy in Early Modern England*, “Education, for both boys and girls, produced and reinforced their gender roles. Men

¹ For more information on the history of education in late medieval and early modern England and the introduction of humanist learning, see Helen M. Jewell’s *Education in Early Modern England* (1998), Nicholas Orme’s *Education in Early Tudor England* (1998), and Ursula Potter’s “To School or Not to School: Tudor Views on Education in Drama and Literature” (2008).

prepared to be leaders in social world [*sic*] and governors in their households; women prepared to be helpmates, mothers, and domestic managers” (4).

Ultimately, then, education was to make a boy a man, and according to sixteenth-century English scholar and tutor Roger Ascham (1515-1568), already mentioned above, this gender transformation was the essential goal of grammar school education. In his posthumously published *The Scholemaster* (1570), Ascham offers a treatise of sorts on teaching Latin, not only in schools but also in the home as part of a boy’s preparation and training to become a gentleman:

But Nobilitie, gouerned by learning and wisdom, is in deede, most like a faire shippe, hauyng tide and winde at will, vnder the reule of a skilfull master: whan contrarie wise, a shippe, caried, yea with the hiest tide & greatest winde, lacking a skilfull master, most commonlie, doth either, sinck it selfe vpon sandes, or breake it selfe vpon rockes. And euen so, how manie haue bene, either drowned in vaine pleasure, or ouerwhelmed by stout wilfulnesse, stoute wilfulnesse the histories of England be able to affourde ouer many examples vnto vs. Therefore, ye great and greatest noble mens children, if ye will haue rightfullie that praise, and surelie that place, which your fathers haue, and elders had, and left vnto you, ye must kepe it, as they gat it, and that is, by the onelie waie, of vertue, wisdom, and worthinesse. (14)

Using nautical language, Ascham distinguishes between educated and uneducated noblemen, explaining how all men are like ships, and that learning Latin in the home before the schoolroom prepares a boy’s future as a gentleman. One reason why early

education was understood as a gendered enterprise, as Ascham also discusses, is because of its homosocial environment. The first step in transforming a boy into man via this education was to remove him from his mother and the domestic sphere. Humanist scholar Juan Luis Vives (1493-1540), who lived for a period in England, begins his *De Tradendis Disciplinis* (1531; English 1913) with this moment of sex segregation.² Dialogically structured, the book depicts—at least in its English translation—the typical life of a Tudor schoolboy and the importance of learning Latin. In one of the earliest dialogues, a father decides to escort his son to school when he believes it is time for him to leave the house. The following passage from the section “Consultation as to a Teacher” dramatizes what might have occurred on the morning of an early modern boy’s first day of school, walking with his father and meeting the teacher:

FATHER. Son, this is, as it were, the laboratory for the formation of men, and he is the artist-educator. Christ be with you, master! Uncover your head, my boy, and bow your right knee, as you have been taught. Now, stand up!

PHILOPONUS. May your coming be a blessing to us all! What may be your business?

FATHER. I bring you this boy of mine for you to make of him a man from the beast.

² Foster Watson calls Erasmus (1466-1536), Budé (1467-1540), and Vives (1492-1540) a “triumvirate of Renaissance thinkers” (vi). While Erasmus survives as the most well known of the three philosophers, he famously reveals in one his letters his conviction that Vives would be the longest remembered. In the introduction to his translation of the dialogues of Vives, entitled *Tudor School-Boy Life*, Watson states, “No doubt Erasmus was the greatest propagandist of Renaissance ideas and the Renaissance spirit. No doubt Budé . . . established himself as the greatest Greek scholar of the age, Equally, without doubt, it would appear to those who have studied the educational writings of Erasmus, Budé, and Vives, the claim might reasonably be entered for J. L. Vives that his *De Tradendis Disciplinis* placed him first of the three as a writer on educational theory and practice” (vii).

PHILOPONUS. This shall be my earnest endeavor. He shall become a man from a beast, a fruitful and good creature out of a useless one. Of that have no doubt.

FATHER. What is the charge for your instruction?

PHILOPONUS. If the boy makes good progress, it will be little; if not, a good deal.

FATHER. That is acutely and wisely said, as is all you say. We share the responsibility then; you, to instruct zealously, I to recompense your labour richly. (10)

According to this exchange, without education, the son remains bestial. It is the job of the schoolmaster, the “artist-educator,” to metamorphose the child into human, into a man. This responsibility, shared by both parent and educator, suggests that the community had a quasi-social responsibility to ensure a boy’s education, thus further emphasizing its importance. Though it is virtually impossible to know if Shakespeare’s own experience as a child reflects the one recorded by Vives, we do know that Stratford promoted education, as Stephen Greenblatt explains: “Stratford was serious about the education of its children: after the free grammar school there were special scholarships to enable promising students of limited means to attend university” (25). In any case, the boy in Vives’ dialogue is put into a position where he can transcend his boyhood and obtain manhood.

But there was more to a boy’s education than this gender transformation, since manhood was acquired not only in the homosocial environment of the classroom but also in the subjects and lessons schoolboys learned. Latin was important to this process and

when, where, and how a boy first heard Latin was especially so. Dean John Colet, writing in 1510 of his new school at St. Paul's, explained that there were two things he would teach his boys: to be "learned in Laten tung but also instructe & informed in vertuouse condicions." Similarly, English diplomat and scholar Sir Thomas Elyot explained in his *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531), a treatise dedicated to Henry VIII and concerning the role of education, that humanist instruction and education replaced the early sphere of feminine and domestic space:

hit shall be expedient that a noble mannes sonne, in his infancie, haue with hym continually onely suche as may accustome hym by litle and litle to speake pure and elegant latin. Semblably the nourises and other women aboute hym, if it be possible, to do the same: or, at the leste way, that they speke none englisse but that which is cleane, polite, perfectly and articulately pronounced, omittinge no lettre or sillable, as folisshe women often times do of a wantonnesse, wherby diuers noble men and gentilmennes chyl dren, (as I do at this daye knowe), haue attained corrupte and foule pronuntiation."

According to Elyot, it is preferable that a boy hear Latin during the first years of his life, but if he must hear women speaking English, he insists that it only be perfectly and articulately pronounced. Likewise, Roger Ascham even more succinctly states, "All men covet to have their children speak Latin" (3). We observe how Colet, Elyot, and Ascham collectively describe the importance of learning Latin in specifically gender marked language as Latin also acquires a maturational context for early modern schoolboys.

Recognizing this humanistic propensity for understanding Latin and pedagogy in terms of gender, many historians of education have discussed this relationship as it pertains to boyhood and maturation. Walter Ong, an influential scholar of early modern pedagogy, famously identified the “Renaissance teaching of Latin” in England with “what anthropologists . . . call puberty rites” (104). For Ong, Latin helped establish an early distinction between female and male language and behavior in children, and in the wake of psychoanalytic literary criticism, William Kerrigan elaborated on Ong’s suggestion about the relationship between an early modern education in Latin and the male puberty rite, calling the school a “place for the articulation of a male ego” (269). Kerrigan explains, “most boys . . . coming to a male teacher of the male tongue at seven or eight . . . had already completed the identification with their fathers that normally resolves the Oedipus complex” (270). Moreover, social historians similarly recognize how schooling, and the elite acquisition of Latin, helped provide the foundation for English patriarchy. According to Anthony Fletcher, “Latin, between 1600-1800, became firmly installed as the male elite’s secret language, a language all of its own, a language that could be displayed as a mark of learning, of superiority, of class and gender differences at the dinner table, on the quarter session bench and in those final bastions of male privilege the House of Lords and Commons” (302). While more recent critics have begun to challenge this view of gender construction, it remains safe to say that Latin, as a subject reserved almost exclusively for male students in a male classroom, would participate in some degree in gender construction.³ Whatever the case, the all-male

³ For examples of recent revisionist attempts at reading against Ong and Kerrigan, see Alan Stewart’s *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (1997) and Lynn Enterline’s *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom* (2012).

environment of schooling in addition to Latin played an integral part in the construction of a boy's gender identity.

Moreover, for many critics, the expansion of print culture in early modern England also influenced pedagogical culture, particularly as it related to schoolboys. William Caxton set up the first English press at Westminster in 1476, and by 1600 there were more than a hundred active publishers and at least nineteen printers (Maguire 434-35). As one might expect, with the growth of the printing press came also a substantial increase in the number of texts printed for children (i.e., hornbooks, primers, ABC books, and education manuals), and since boys probably were the primary consumers and receivers of such educational material, we can further understand the intersection between boyhood and pedagogy.⁴ According to Ann Moss, "the commonplace-book was part of the initial intellectual experience of every schoolboy" (viii). More specifically, in a discussion of John Brinsley's translation of Ewaldus Gallus's *Pueriles Confabulationum*, or, *Children's Dialogues, Little Conferences, or Talkings Together, or Little Speeches Together, or Dialogues Fit for Children* (1617), Edel Lamb demonstrates how Brinsley's dialogues not only "offer narratives of schoolboy experiences," but also "shed significant light on the fundamental aims and assumptions of early modern educational culture" ("Children" 73).⁵ Collectively, one of the

⁴ See, for instance, Francis Seader's *The Schoole of Vertue and Booke of Good Nurture* (1557), Hugh Rhodes's *The Boke of Nurture, or Schoole of Good Manners* (1577), Sir Hugh Plat's *A Jewell House of Art and Nature* (1594), D. Ortunez de Calaharra's *The Mirrour of Princely Deedes and Knighthood* (1578), and countless hornbooks and ABC books, such as *An A.B.C. for Children* (1561).

⁵ According to Edel Lamb, "This is one of only three extant editions printed in early to mid-seventeenth-century England of this widely recommended grammar school text, the others being *Children's Talke: Claused and Drawne into Lessons* (1627) by the linguist Joseph Webbe and Charles Hoole's *Children's Talk, English & Latine Divided into Several Clauses* (1659)" (73). For more on these publications, and the larger relationship between education, language, and early modern culture, see Helen Jewell's *Education in*

assumptions most clearly revealed in the dissemination of these books is the function of school to cultivate “among its schoolboy users of a scholarly manhood appropriate to the educated classes” (73-74).

Perhaps more important than the male-centered status and purpose of these books are the particular skills the schoolboys would learn, particularly the acquisition of wit. On the title page of the first English translation of Johann Amos Comenius’s *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (Latin and German 1658; English 1659) is the following description of its contents: “a picture and nomenclature of all the chief things that are in the world, and of Men’s Employments therein.”⁶ Indeed, despite Comenius’s “progressive plans for educational reform,” as Linda Mitchell explains in *Grammar Wars* that he nevertheless “assumed that a woman’s proper social role was to serve in a male-dominated world,” hence the “pictures and language” in this text are “male dominated” (145). Indeed, schoolmaster Charles Hoole translates the book’s purpose, as stated in the preface, to be “To entice witty children,” since he himself as a teacher has found “it most agreeable to the best witted Children” to learn with pictures such as those included in this book (A4r). *The Book o[f] Merrie Riddles* (1617), for instance, included, as noted on its title page, riddles alongside “*proper questions, and witty proverbs to make pleasant pastime*” and in subsequent editions added a note that it was “*No lesse usefull then behoovefull for any yong man or child, to know if he be quickwitted, or no.*” This book, as Lamb has shown, and others such as *Youth’s Treasury, or, A Storehouse of Wit and Mirth* (1688) and *Sports and Pastimes: or, Sport for the City and Pastime for the Country . . . Fitted for the*

Early Modern England (1998), Linda C. Mitchell’s *Grammar Wars* (2002), Peter Mack’s *Elizabethan Rhetoric* (2002), and Ian Green’s *Humanism and Protestantism in Early Modern English Education* (2009).

⁶ In addition to the first English edition in 1659, this sentence also appears on the title page of the 1664, 1672, 1685, 1689, and 1700 editions.

Delight and Recreation of Youth (1676), an adaptation of *Hocus Pocus Junior* (1634) and *Wit's Interpreter* (1655), confirms what *Merrie Riddles* author "J.M." believes as the purpose of these books being "for the recreation of Youth, especially School-boys, whose wits are generally sharpened on such Whetstones" (A3r; also qtd. in Lamb, "Children" 71).

Such is not to say, of course, that early modern females were not, or could not be, witty, but when witty women are put on stage, they almost always are criticized or ridiculed for demonstrating their wit. For example, one of the most famous, witty, and sexually charged, exchanges in Shakespeare occurs when Katherina and Petruccio first meet in *The Taming of the Shrew*:

PETRUCCIO. Come, come, you wasp, i' faith you are too angry.

KATHERINA. If I be waspish, best beware my sting.

PETRUCCIO. My remedy is then to pluck it out.

KATHERINA. Ay, if the fool could find it where it lies.

PETRUCCIO. Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting?

In his tail.

KATHERINA. In his tongue.

PETRUCCIO. Whose tongue.

KATHERINA. Yours, if you talk of tales, and so farewell. (2.1.208-17)

As we know, the play follows Petruccio's taming of this shrew, and her witty bantering continuously causes her both embarrassment and abuse. Such could also be said of Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*, where her quick wit is frowned upon by the men around her. As Leonato warns his niece, "By my troth, . . . thou wilt never get thee a

husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue” (2.1.18-20). Indeed, plays such as *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Much Ado about Nothing* suggest, at least on one level, that a woman must learn to compromise or control her wittiness if she wishes to marry. Importantly, however, in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, the women’s wit is never broken, and at the end of the play they famously have remained single. Wit may not have been expected to be a part of their gender performance, but such cannot be said about Moth. Rather, he functions in many ways as a quintessential schoolboy who along the way exposes a number of early modern ideals of manhood.

Love’s Labour’s Lost:

Hercules (the Hero), Solomon (the Wise), and Moth (the Boy)

Though critics often have discussed the importance of language, wordplay, and rhetoric in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, few have engaged the play in terms of pedagogy.⁷ However, the above discussion of the gender implications of the school experience for boys suggests that a play so intimately concerned with education and one that also features the lengthiest role Shakespeare assigns to a boy character must have something to say about pedagogy. In fact, the drama first engages such issues in the opening scene, as the characters literally transform Navarre into a school by discussing the founding of their “little academe” (1.1.13). The play thus evokes Pierre de la Primaudaye’s *L’Académie française* (1577). Thomas Bowes’s English translation, *The French Academy* (1586) was a popular text in Shakespeare’s England, subsequent editions appearing in

⁷ Mark Breitenberg identifies the play’s “attention to linguistic confusion/misprision and its concern with heterosexual love and courtship” as the two features most commonly addressed in scholarship (434). See also William C. Carroll’s *The Great Feast of Language in Love’s Labour’s Lost* (1976), C. L. Barber’s *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy* (1959), and Frances Yates’s *A Study of ‘Love’s Labour’s Lost’* (1936).

1589 and 1594.⁸ La Primaudaye constructs his tome as a dialogue between four men from Anjou who have withdrawn from their world in order to devote themselves completely to study. Even though there is not a clear source for the plot of *Love's Labour's Lost*, any more than for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, its occasional parallels to *L'Académie française* suggest that Shakespeare knew Primaudaye's text. Under the guidance of a scholar, the four men in both texts are committed to education, they practice various chivalric exercises, and they go hunting.

In this way, then, each of the main male characters—Ferdinand, Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine—can be understood as students, or old schoolboys. The opening lines evoke the martial manhood discussed in Chapter III, as Ferdinand's speech radiates with a sort of noble idealism that causes us to expect a heroic ideal:

Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
 Live regist' red upon our brazen tombs,
 And then grace us in the disgrace of death;
 When spite of cormorant devouring Time,
 Th' endeavor of this present breath may but
 That honor which shall bate his scythe's keen edge,
 And make us heirs of all eternity.
 Therefore, brave conquerors—for so you are,
 That war against your own affections
 And the huge army of the world's desires—

⁸ For discussions on the influence of Primaudaye on England's political culture, see J. H. M. Salmon's *The French Wars in English Political Thought* (1959) and Frances A. Yates's *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (1947).

Our late edict shall strongly stand in force:

Navarre shall be the wonder of the world;

Our court shall be a little academe,

Still and contemplative in living art.

.....

Your oaths are pass'd, and now subscribe your names,

That his own hand may strike his honor down

That violates the smallest branch herein. (1.1.1-14, 19-21)

Ferdinand's imagery predicts that the play will concern how "honor" blunts death's "keen edge" and thereby makes the men "heirs of all eternity." He calls his companions "brave conquerors" who will wage a "war against [their] own affections" or feelings. Their masculine allegiance to reason and classical education, commemorated by their oaths, will allow them to be strong enough to face "the huge army of the world's desires" and their loyalty and oaths forever will represent their "honor." Thus, Ferdinand, Berowne, Longville, and Dumaine conceptualize manhood as a coalescence of intelligence, strength, and fame. Rather than achieving these ideals on the battlefield, as we remember Henry V encouraging his followers to do when he offers a "greater share of honor" for those who fight instead of those who sleep at home "hold[ing] their manhoods cheap," these ideals must instead be obtained as they relate to education (4.3.22, 66). According to Felicia Hardison Londré, "we are looking at a world [in *Love's Labour's Lost*] where people across the social spectrum are attempting, albeit sometimes misguidedly, to better themselves, not materially or politically, but in terms of their innate potential as human beings" (3). Yet I want to suggest more specifically that at this point the men believe that

they can only achieve honor and fame in a homosocial environment and that such an academic achievement must remain segregated from romantic relationships, which they find emasculating. Thus, this first speech establishes the masculine traits that these men are to acquire through study. The opening lines of *Love's Labour's Lost* establish that the play supposedly will address, in part, common ideals of manhood, such as a combination of chivalry, Herculean heroics, and humanism. While these four men project an amalgamation of these ideals, or at least attempt to do so, we will see that others in the play more succinctly illustrate each ideal separately, and at times satirically, with Don Adriano de Armado as the chivalrous knight and Holofernese as a humanist man of letters.

Yet despite this noble opening and military-like commitment to triennial learning, the play quickly shifts away from a devotion to idealized manhood to a critique of that ideal. In a similar pattern as found in *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*, where a subplot concerning a boy page frequently interrupts and disrupts the main plot by subverting or critiquing the drama's major themes, so do the opening scenes in *Love's Labour's Lost* permit Moth to challenge the ideals espoused by many of the men in the play. Shakespeare constructs Moth as a quintessential schoolboy who throughout the play engages such concerns as education, paternity, pregnancy, and love. More specifically, though, it is the boy's complexity of language, one that leads Harold Bloom to call him "a child genius of rhetoric," that engages with the questions and definitions of manhood that circulate throughout the play (131). His wit and rhetoric fully exemplify how a boy's early modern education can expose the ideals of Armado as a knight and Holofernese as a

humanist educator as questionable, if not altogether false, thus causing us to take seriously how the boy functions in the comedy.

The first masculine ideal that Moth critiques is the chivalrous knight as embodied by Armado, a knight introduced by Ferdinand as a “high-born” and “refined traveler of Spain” (1.1.172, 163). In addition to literally meaning “armed,” the spelling of this knight’s name plays on “Armada,” the Spanish fleet defeated in 1588 during its attempted attack on England, and alerts us to the name’s military association.⁹ But in addition to Armado’s name, his poetic quest for a woman further associates him with traditional chivalric ideals.¹⁰ Though he is in love, he admits to the boy that he believes such love to be unmanly, explaining that

it is base for a soldier to love, so am I in love with a base wench. If drawing my sword against the humor of affection would deliver me from the reprobate thought of it, I would take Desire prisoner, and ransom him to any French courtier for a new-devis’d cur’sy. (1.2.58-63)

Armado, of course, is in part a parody of a courtly lover, who vies with the clown, Costard, for the love of Jaquenetta. In this passage, he expresses his desire to be more like a soldier and ignore his carnal desire. However, with Cynthia Lewis, we see through Armado’s grandiloquence, recognizing the man as “without doubt, a buffoon,” and it is important that in a play deeply invested in achieving ideal manhood, the man Armado is

⁹ Editor William C. Carroll’s writes in a footnote to the *New Cambridge Love’s Labour’s Lost* that when Armado’s name is first mentioned in the text—Ferdinand announces the arrival of a letter from “the magnificent Armado” (1.1.187)—that the Spanish Armada “had commonly been referred to as the ‘magnificent’ Armada” (70).

¹⁰ I will not suggest that Miguel de Cervantes is at all thinking about Shakespeare’s Armado when he pens the first part of *Don Quixote*, but like the good knight from La Mancha, Armado’s chivalric ideals and romantic quest for a lady are anachronistic in the 1590s of England or France.

humiliated at every turn by his supposedly socially and intellectually inferior schoolboy (186).

We first encounter Moth in 1.2, when Armado calls on the young page as an authority on great men who have been in love. Armado asks, “Boy, what sign is it when a man of great spirit grows melancholy?” (1.2.1-2). This association between love and melancholy was well known in the sixteenth-century. As William C. Carroll explains, “the answer to Armado’s question, known to most schoolboys, is ‘this man is in love’—from Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*” (*Love’s* 74). Thus, Armado probably already knows the answer to his own question and simply wants the boy to confirm it. Yet as we first learn in this scene, Moth does not always give the expected reply, choosing, instead, to respond tautologically: “A great sign, sir, that he will look sad” (1.2.3). “Why, sadness is one and the self-same thing, dear imp,” Armado retorts before Moth completely derails the conversation (4-5). Indeed, Armado’s question prompts a sexually charged persiflage between boy and master:

MOTH. No, no, O Lord, sir, no.

ARMADO. How canst thou part sadness and melancholy, my tender juvenal?

MOTH. By a familiar demonstration of the working, my tough signior.

ARMADO. Why tough signior? Why tough signior?

MOTH. Why tender juvenal? Why tender juvenal?

ARMADO. I spoke it tender juvenal as a congruent epitheton appertaining to thy young days, which we may nominate tender.

MOTH. And I tough signior as an appertinent title to your old time, which we may name tough.

ARMADO. Pretty and apt.

MOTH. How mean you, sir? I pretty, and my saying apt? or I apt, and my saying pretty?

ARMADO. Thou pretty, because little.

MOTH. Little pretty, because little. Wherefore apt?

ARMADO. And therefore apt, because quick.

MOTH. Speak you this in my praise, master?

ARMADO. In thy condign praise.

MOTH. I will praise an eel with the same praise.

ARMADO. What? that an eel is ingenious?

MOTH. That an eel is quick.

ARMADO. I do say thou art quick in answers. (1.2.6-29)

This scene when we first encounter Moth is the first of a number of scenes in *Love's Labour's Lost* where the boy criticizes various ideal manhoods—in this case that of the chivalrous knight as parodied by Armado—through his aptitude for a pedagogically trained, verbal wit. The sexually charged rhetoric, Moth's brand of satire that he will use throughout the play, disheartens the pompous knight by deflating his idealized chivalric manhood. This conversation, that began with Armado's innocent question about great men who have been in love, becomes an opportunity for the boy to mock. The sexual undertones of the scene begins with Armado's opening question, "Boy, what sign is it when a man of great spirit grows melancholy?" (1.2.1). Armado refers to his "spirit"

throughout this scene, and in early modern England, “spirit” was generally understood as either a person’s spirit or a pun on semen, as most famously remembered from the opening line of Sonnet 129: “Th’ expense of spirit in a waste of shame / Is lust in action” (1-2). Later Armado will tell the boy, “I am ill at reck’ning, it fitteth the spirit of a tapster,” and then again mourn over Jaquenetta by asking “Sing, boy, my spirit grows heavy in love” (1.2.40,122). Likewise, the scene ends with another phallic image, an eel, with which Moth identifies: “I will praise an eel with the same praise.” Like an eel, Moth’s wit is slippery and difficult to grasp, thus making his eel superior to Armado’s spirit, or his wit more masculine than the knight’s emotions.¹¹ Of this same line, editor H. R. Woudhuysen suggests that like Erasmus in *The Praise of Folly*, “Moth is proposing the paradoxical praise of a worthless thing,” which I argue is Armado’s chivalric manhood (133). In addition to this bawdy potential, Keir Elam similarly considers the emblematic nature of the joke, remarking that Moth’s “reversal of the Erasmian symbolism is clearly intended as an oblique dig at his master’s intellectual retardation” (155).¹² Insulting both Armado’s sexual prowess and intelligence, Moth works to disillusion and deflate Armado’s lofty description of his manhood.

Despite recognizing and acknowledging Moth’s sharp wit, the Spanish knight still turns to the boy for further advice—“What great men have been in love?”—and Moth uses the question to affront yet again his master’s manhood (65). Moth first responds,

¹¹ Moth’s name is another animal image that, like his wit, is quick and lively as it flutters.

¹² Elam’s complete explanation is as follows: “The joke here . . . appears to lie in a further burlesque allusion to the slow-haste iconography, that is to the emblem devised by Erasmus himself for the ‘mystery’, showing an eel or echeneis entwined about an arrow (the device was borrowed by Alciati . . . , whose emblem was in turn Englished by Whitney, 1586: 188). In the devise, or course, the eel (one of Horapollo’s hieroglyphic beasts . . . , or remora, represents *lentitudo*, restraining the swiftness of the arrow (see Whitney’s moral: ‘Aboute the arrowe swifte ECHENEIS slowe doth fouled: / which, bides us in our actions haste, no more then reason woulde’; the motto is ‘Maturandum’). Moth’s reversal of the Erasmian symbolism is clearly intended as an oblique dig at his master’s intellectual retardation” (155).

“Hercules, master” (66), and when Armado presses the boy for more “men of good repute and carriage,” the boy offers another name, “Sampson” (66, 70). Despite Moth’s seemingly ludic behavior, his examples of great men who have been in love are crushingly ironic, since Hercules and Samson may be “great men,” yet they were both humiliated by and captured as a result of their relationships with women, Hercules by the Amazon Omphale and Samson by Delilah. Moth’s answers work to topple Armado’s idealized image of a warrior-in-love. As mentioned above, Armado either believes it to be unmanly for men, especially chivalrous men, to be melancholy and in love, or he believes that such lovesickness is compulsory for the chivalrous knight. Either way, he hopes Moth will be able to name other heroic and honorable men who also loved, but rather than offering reassurance to the knight, the boy exposes the hypocrisy and perhaps inanity of this ideal.

This scene ends with Armado’s soliloquy in which he attempts to understand the dilemma over his chivalric duty and his love for Jaquenetta by comparing said dilemma to how great men have loved, thus revealing the early influence of Moth on the man. He muses over the two men Moth mentioned—Hercules and Sampson—but he also introduces another famous man of antiquity:

I shall be forsworn (which is a great argument of falsehood) if I love. And how can that be true love, which is falsely attempted? Love is a familiar; Love is a devil; there is no evil angel but Love. Yet was Sampson so tempted, and he had an excellent strength; yet was Salomon seduced, and he had a very good wit. Cupid’s butt-shaft is too hard for Hercules’ club, and therefore too much odds for a Spaniard’s rapier. The first and second

cause will serve my turn; the passado he respects not, the duello he regards not: his disgrace is to be called boy, but his glory is to subdue men.

Adieu, valor, rust, rapier, be still, drum, for your manager is in love; yea, he loveth. Assist me, some extemporal god of rhyme, for I am sure I shall turn sonnet. Devise, wit, write, pen, for I am for whole volumes in folio.

(1.2.169-85)

As discussed above, Armado's comparison to Sampson and Hercules stems from their being heroic, strong men who forfeited their honor because of a woman. The knight is suspicious of love and its personification via Cupid because of its ability to conquer such great men. However, when Armado mentions "Salomon," he juxtaposes wit and wisdom with love as well as with strength since, according to the author of 1 Kings, "all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart" (10: 24) and he "loved many strange women . . . And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart" (11:1, 3). This reference to Solomon is the first of only two in all of Shakespeare, both of which occur in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and will shortly be discussed in more detail.¹³

However, the first heroic reference, the one to Hercules, warrants more attention, since the Greek hero surfaces frequently in *Love's Labour's Lost*, almost always in association with Moth, and helps us to recognize further the relationship between the boy

¹³ By comparison, "Hercules" appears at least 36 times in fifteen different plays in the Shakespeare canon. "Samson" occurs less frequently, but still more than "Solomon" as "Sampson" appears twice in two different plays, and "Samson" six times in two other plays, albeit Shakespeare is not always referring to the biblical Samson, as when he names one of the characters in *Romeo and Juliet* "Sampson."

and another ideal type of manhood.¹⁴ His reference to Hercules in 1.2, the first of 11 in the play to the hero, introduces this hero into the play. The demigod's popularity in Renaissance art was exceptional, as was his reputation on the stage.¹⁵ For instance, the emperor Bajazeth recounts for Tamburlain the story of "Hercules, that in his infancy / Did pash the jaws of serpents venomous, / Whose hands are made to grip a warlike lance" in part one of Christopher Marlow's *Tamburlaine the Great* (c. 1587-90) (3.3.104-06), and Thomas Heywood uses the popularity of Hercules to defend the moral potential of theatres in his *An Apology for Actors* (1612):

To see as I have seene, Hercules in his owne shape hunting the Boare,
knocking downe the Bulle, taming the Hart, fighting with Hydra,
murdering Gerion, slaughtering Diomed, wounding the Stimphalides,
killing the Centaurs, pashing the Lion, squeezing the Dragon, dragging
Cerberus in Chaines, and lastly, on his high Pyramides writing *Nilultra*,
Oh these were sights to make an Alexander. (21)

Discussing this same quotation, William C. Carroll explains how Heywood lists the famous "Twelve Labors of Hercules," three of which Shakespeare references in *Love's Labour's Lost*: "the first, conquering the Nemean lion . . . ; the eleventh, defeating the dragon that guarded the golden apples of the Hesperides . . . ; and the twelfth, killing the hell-hound Cerberus" (178). In fact, these references have caused some editors to

¹⁴ "Hercules" appears eleven times in *Love's Labour's Lost*, by far more than in any other Shakespeare play. Nine of the appearances with the word regard Moth in some way. There are only four references to the god in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the play with the second most references.

¹⁵ For more on the popularity of Hercules in Renaissance art, see Eugene M. Waith's *The Herculean Hero* (1962) and William C. Carroll's *The Great Feast of Languages in Love's Labour's Lost* (1976).

interpret the play's title as an allusion to such labors which would further enhance Moth's own essential place in the play since he is the one who performs Hercules' labors.¹⁶

While editors of the play, such as H. R. Woudhuysen and William C. Carroll, generally note the importance of Herculean labor myths in *Love's Labour's Lost*, few critics have been concerned with the ironic relationship Moth has with Hercules intermittently throughout the play. In the play's final scene, Holofernes, Nathaniel, and Armado plan to put on a show of the Nine Worthies based on the king's request for the men to "present the Princess . . . with some delightful ostentation, or show, or pageant, or antic, or firework" (5.1.111-13). When Nathaniel asks Holofernes, "Where will you find men worthy enough to present them?" the pedant responds,

Joshua, yourself; myself; and this gallant gentleman, Judas Machabeus; this swain (because his great limb joint) shall pass Pompey the Great; the page, Hercules.

ARMADO. Pardon, sir, error: he is not quantity enough for that Worthy's thumb, he is not so big as the end of his club.

HOLOFERNES. Shall I have audience? He shall present Hercules in minority; his enter and exit shall be strangling a snake; and I will have an apology for that purpose.

MOTH. An excellent device! so if any of the audience hiss, you may cry, "Well done, Hercules, now thou crushest the snake!" That is the way to make an offense gracious, though few have the grace to do it. (5.1.126-41)

¹⁶ H. R. Woudhuysen, for instance, believes of the play's title that "'Love' suggests Cupid, who as Oxf[ord] points out is mentioned more often in this than in any other play by Shakespeare. 'Labours' suggests the twelve labours of Hercules" (111).

Recognizing that a small boy may not convincingly play the Greek hero, Holofernes suggests that Moth depict an episode from Hercules's infancy, the myth of his strangling two snakes while in his crib. Juxtaposing the boy with Hercules in such a way thus elevates the importance of Moth to *Love's Labour's Lost* in that now the schoolboy is to perform the Greek hero frequently referenced in the play and possibly even alluded to in the play's title.

Moth-as-Hercules is a compelling decision by Holofernes—and by Shakespeare. Moth might just have easily played a young Joshua or Pompey, but by having Moth perform Hercules Shakespeare calls symbolic attention to boy-as-hero, more specifically, one of the heroes idealized by Armado early in the first act.¹⁷ Such is even more important when one considers that including a Hercules in a pageant of the Nine Worthies is an exception, not a convention. “The Nine Worthies,” explains William C. Carroll, “were exemplars of the heroic, active life. . . . In countless poems, paintings, and tapestries over several centuries, the Nine Worthies represented the summit of heroism and chivalry, associated with ‘worth’ and praise” (*Love's* 179). The traditional grouping of the Nine Worthies were three Gentiles (Arthur, Charlemagne, Godfrey of Bouillon), three Jews (Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabeus), and three pagans (Hector, Alexander, and Caesar). Heroic substitutions, though unusual, were not exceedingly rare, thus the inclusion of Pompey and Hercules.¹⁸ However, *Love's Labour's Lost* is the first recorded appearance of Hercules in the Nine Worthies, thus making the hero's inclusion all the more intriguing. According to William C. Carroll, in early modern England, “Hercules

¹⁷ As previously discussed, early in 1.2 Armado says to Moth, “Comfort me, boy; what great men have been in love?” to which the boy replies, “Hercules” (1.2.64-65, 66).

¹⁸ It should be noted that only five Worthies—Pompey, Alexander, Judas, Hercules, and Hector—appear before the proposed duel between Armado and Costard and the interruption by Marcade.

was known above all as an exemplar of the active life, making Navarre's initial plan of retreat from 'the huge army of the world's desires . . .' even less palatable" (178). At the same time, Carroll also explains that "Hercules was also known . . . for his eloquence and rhetorical power, and for his wisdom and knowledge," as well as his anger (178). Some writers, such as Sir Walter Raleigh in *History of the World* (c. 1569), christianized the hero as a result of this infant myth, writing that "the prophecies, that Christ should break the serpent's head, and conquer the power of hell, occasioned the fables of Hercules killing the serpent of Hesperides, and descending into hell, and captivating Cerberus" (167; also qtd. in Carroll, *Love's* 179). Thus, recognizing the importance of Hercules helps us to arrive at a clearer understanding of why Moth is associated with him.

After removing their masks and revealing their identities, the women tell the men that they wish for the Worthies to begin the show. First, Costard performs as Pompey, followed by Nathaniel as Alexander. Then, Holofernes dressed as Judas appears with Moth as the infant Hercules:

"Great Hercules is presented by this imp,
Whose club kill'd Cereberus, that three-head *canus*;
And when he was a babe, a child, a shrimp,
Thus, did he strangle serpents in his *manus*.
Quoniam he seemeth in minority,
Ergo I come wit this apology."
[*Aside*] Keep some state in thy exit, and vanish.

[*Moth retires*] (5.2.588-94)

Moth performs the earliest recorded episode from the mythology of Hercules's life. This story of Hercules strangling a snake in his crib comes from Pindar in the fifth century B.C.E. and Theocritus in the third.¹⁹ Hera, angry that Zeus has fathered Hercules with Amphitryon's wife Alcmena, sends two snakes to the infant Hercules's crib, both of which he strangles. Holofernes juxtaposes this earliest event in Hercules's life with his final labor, his descending into Hades, freeing Theseus, and removing Cerberus (the famous three-headed dog) from Hades. Holofernes's apologia of boy-as-Hercules is expected. Yet rather intentionally or accidentally, within the context of the show of Nine Worthies, Holofernes's defense simultaneously becomes commentary on the men of Navarre. They are shrimps compared to the masculine ideals better depicted, even by a boy. They are the juvenile and empty heroes for whom an apology is needed, and their only hope for improvement will come after their own failures and rejection and, consequently, taking up the responsibilities that will come with their new oaths.

Such a realization becomes particularly clear once we compare Moth-as-Hercules with the heckling that the men receive. Moth, convincingly accepted as a young Hercules, is the only player the audience does not taunt. The three men—the braggart (Costard), the priest (Nathaniel) and the pedant (Holofernes)—are heckled throughout their short performances, especially Holofernes, so much so that Moth's performance becomes all the more superior:

¹⁹ Edith Hamilton helpfully summarizes this myth: "But at the darkest midnight when all was silent in the house two great snakes came crawling into the nursery. There was a light in the room and as the two reared up above the crib, with weaving heads and flickering tongues, the children woke. Iphicles [Hercules's half-brother] screamed and tried to get out of bed, but Hercules sat up and grasped the deadly creatures by the throat. They turned and twisted and wound their coils around his body, but he held them fast. The mother heard Iphicles' screams and, calling to her husband, rushed to the nursery. There sat Hercules laughing, in each hand a long limp body. He gave them gleefully to Amphitryon. They were dead. All knew that the child was destined to great things" (228).

HOLOFERNES. “Judas I am”—

DUMAINE. A Judas!

HOLOFERNES. Not Iscarot, sir.

“Judas I am, ycliped Machabeus.”

DUMAINE. Judas Machabeus clipt is plain Judas.

BEROWNE. A kissing traitor. How are thou prov’d Judas?

HOLOFERNES. “Judas I am”—

DUMAINE. The more shame for you, Judas.

HOLOFERNES. What mean you, sir?

BOYET. To make Judas hang himself.

HOLOFERNES. Begin, sir, you are my elder.

BEROWNE. Well follow’d: Judas was hang’d on an elder.

HOLOFERNES. I will not be put out of countenance.

BEROWNE. Because thou hast no face.

HOLOFERNES. What is this?

BOYET. A cittern-head.

DUMAINE. The head of a bodkin.

BEROWNE. A death’s face in a ring.

LONGAVILLE. The face of an old Roman coin, scarce seen.

BOYET. The pommel of Caesar’s falchion.

DUMAINE. The carv’d-bone face on a flask.

BEROWNE. Saint George’s half-cheek in a brooch.

DUMAINE. Ay, and in a brooch of lead.

BEROWNE. Ay, and worn in the cap of a tooth-drawer. And now forward, for we have put thee in countenance.

HOLOFERNES. You have put me out of countenance.

BEROWNE. False, we have given thee faces.

HOLOFERNES. But you have out-face'd them all.

BEROWNE. And thou wert a lion, we would do so.

BOYET. Therefore as he is, an ass, let him go. And so adieu, sweet Jude!

Nay, why dost thou stay?

DUMAINE. For the latter end of his name.

BEROWNE. For the ass to the Jude; give it him. Jud-as, away!

HOLOFERNES. This is not generous, not gentle, not humble.

BOYET. A light for Monsieur Judas! It grows dark, he may stumble.

[Holofernes retires]

PRINCESS. Alas, poor Machabeus, how hath he been baited! (5.2.595-631)

Though, as seen here, it is generally Boyet, Dumaine, and Berowne who heckle Holofernes, Costard, and Nathaniel, the Princess does manage to slip in a few insults throughout the show, seen here when she also laughs at Holofernes' taunting. A few lines earlier it is certainly the women who insult the men in costume as the Princess, Maria, Katherine, and Rosaline laugh at the men in their Russian Muscovite costumes. Thus, there is something ironic in the two groups of men's decision to dress in costume yet again and interact with the women, especially considering their recent humiliating debacle as Russians. Regarding the show of the Nine Worthies, it is important to note that

the men are attempting to demonstrate for the women *worthy* men when, in a few moments, none of the Navarre patriarchs will prove worthy of the Princess and her entourage. By the end of the play, the men will have broken their oaths—unless we are convinced by Berowne’s rhetorical triumph and narcissistic self-convincing that they have succeeded—forsaken their allegiance to education, failed as lovers, and failed also as players who unconvincingly perform heroic manhood.²⁰ In this way, the play brands them “unworthy” and in no way similar to the early modern gender ideals exemplified by Hercules, Alexander, Hector, Pompey, and Solomon.

Shakespeare’s juxtaposition of Moth with the play’s interest in classical allusion surfaces not only through his association with and critique of chivalrous knights and Herculean heroes, but also through his implicit association with another idealized man of antiquity, the wise Solomon. We recall, from the first exchange between Armado and Moth, that as a result of Moth’s causing Armado to muse over great men who have loved, the knight draws attention to Solomon’s wit: “yet was Solomon seduced, and he had a very good wit” (1.2.174-75). This metaphorical and thematic relationship between Solomon’s and Moth’s wit surfaces more powerfully in 4.3, when the King and all the men realize that they are each in love. Berowne, who has been eavesdropping on the other three men, turns to rhyming couplets as he begins hypocritically to reprimand them for breaking their oath:

But are you not asham’d? Nay, are you not,

All three of you, to be thus much o’ershot?

²⁰ By “Berowne’s rhetorical triumph and narcissistic self-convincing,” I refer to his famous “Have at you then” speech where he cleverly and humorously convinces himself and the other men that they have not sacrificed their education since “when ourselves we see in ladies’ eyes, With ourselves, / Do we not likewise see our learning there?” (4.3.311-13).

You found his mote, the King your mote did see;
 But I a beam do find in each of three. O, what a scene of fool'ry have I
 seen,
 Of sighs, of groans, of sorrow, and of teen!
 O me, with what strict patience have I sat,
 To see a king transformed to a gnat!
 To see great Hercules whipping a gig,
 And profound Salomon to tune a jig,
 And Nestor play at push-pin with the boys,
 And critic Timon laugh at idle toys! (4.3.157-68)

There are a number of allusions to Moth in this quotation even if the boy has little to do with the narrative at this moment. First, the allusion to a young Hercules's whipping a gig is yet another reference to Hercules as made apparent when later Holofernes likewise tells Moth that he "disputest like an infant" and should "go whip [his] gig" (5.1.66-67). There also appear the names of some of the "worthy" men previously discussed.

However, the two uses of "mote" could allude to the boy. In Elizabethan English, where spelling is not at all standardized, "mote" and "moth" are interchangeable, and one of the major questions for every editor of *Love's Labour's Lost* is how to spell and pronounce the boy's name. "Moth," as it appears in both Quarto and Folio, is the traditional spelling of the boy's name. However, John Kerrigan believes that "Modern actors should pronounce the name as they would 'mote,' although Shakespeare's players probably said something like 'mott'" (161). Thus, "Mote" is the spelling adopted in the *Penguin* (Kerrigan) and Oxford (Wells and Taylor). George Hibbard, on the other hand,

spells the boy's name *Moth*, citing Costard's calling the him "a most Pathetical nit," which according to the *OED* most nearly means "gnat, or small fly" (245-46). Hibbard believes that the boy "has an insect-like capacity for making a nuisance of himself," and his youthful, growing nature is more akin to a living thing, instead of an inanimate dust, thus concluding that *Moth* is "a far more appropriate name" than *Mote* (246). Since Shakespeare's players, probably, would have pronounced "Moth" something like "mote" or "mott," some editors, such as Ann Barton for *Riverside*, choose to modernize the spelling so that it reflects the probable pronunciation. These two critical sides, thus, have conflicting feelings regarding with what the boy should be associated, a speck of dust or an insect. Yet I maintain that merely setting insect against dust greatly diminishes the opportunity to recognize how the boy topples several of the ideals of early modern masculinity depicted in the comedy. More importantly, this scene presents the opportunity for both associations if we consider the biblical allusion to a "mote in one's eye" in 4.3.160 and the reference to transforming a great king into a gnat.²¹ Unlike editors, an audience would not be interested in the spelling of the boy's name. What is important for an audience, though, would be the pronunciation, and if pronounced "mote" or "mott," then audiences would hear in this moment the association with the boy. Also, considering the French setting, this "mote" or "Moth" may be a reference to the French governor of Gravelines in 1578, known in England as la Motte, La Mote, and la Mothe (Mary Ellen Lamb, "Nature" 52).

²¹ The biblical allusion in 4.3.159-60 is to the caution in Matthew 7: 3-5 against judging others: "Any why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behod, a beam *is* in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shal thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

Therefore, in addition to linking Moth to the dramatic structure of the play, Shakespeare also links the boy to the play's classical allusions, not only as Hercules, but also in this scene where he is referenced simultaneously with the wise Solomon.²² We recognize that by juxtaposing these ideals with the juvenal Moth, much more so than the men of Navarre, the play begins to reveal how these ideals can be reduced to the level of rhetoric, whereby performing them becomes nothing more than a matter of discourse, and in the final section of this chapter, I explain how Shakespeare likewise uses Moth to criticize other ideals, such as the humanist man of moderation, the academic, and the schoolmaster, whom early modern culture idealized through Solomon and is parodied in the play by Holofernes.²³

Schoolboys, Schoolteachers, and Rhetoric

Much has been written about *Love's Labour's Lost's* obsession with rhetoric, language, wit, and eloquence as well as its astute attention to love and courtship.²⁴ Importantly, however, the play's vivid engagement with pedagogy and its implications for childhood, particularly boyhood and gender, are mostly overlooked. Even Lynn Enterline, in her superb work on rhetoric and Shakespeare's classroom, underestimates

²² The first reference to Salomon, in 1.2., occurs when Armado, having been deflated by Moth, mentions Sampson, Salomon, Cupid, and Hercules within the same lines, thus confirming how Moth has caused the knight to worry about great men who have been seduced. In 4.3., when Berowne mentions Salomon, he does so not only within the context of the puns on Moth/Mote's name but also in reference to Hercules as a boy and Salomon, like a child, playing with toys. My point is that the wise Moth is associated with these two references to Salomon.

²³ According to Emily C. Francomano, "The biblical Books of Solomon . . . exerted a heavy influence on medieval and Early Modern discourses of wisdom" (1-2). King James, in his own book *Basilikon Doron*, often references Solomon, and according to Steven Marx, "His favourite biblical model was King Solomon" (4). Francis Bacon discusses Solomon in essays such as "Of Riches," "Of Ceremonies and Respect," "Of Praise," and "Of Revenge," among many others.

²⁴ See, for example, William C. Carroll's *The Great Feast of Language in Love's Labour's Lost* (1976), Keir Elam's *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse: Language Games in the Comedies* (1984), Mary Beth Rose's *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Drama* (1988), and Karen Newman's, *Shakespeare's Rhetoric of Comic Character: Dramatic Convention in Classical and Renaissance Comedy* (1985).

Love's Labour's Lost's engagement with early modern pedagogy, barely mentioning the play in relation to her thesis. Yet *Love's Labour's Lost*, perhaps more than any other play in the Shakespeare canon, maintains a close connection to early modern pedagogy. For example, the first encounter between Moth and Holofernes near the end of the play is a scene that positions the quintessential schoolboy against the quintessential schoolmaster. Holofernes, as the stock character of the pedant, reflects the traditions of *commedia dell'arte*, though some critics have suggested real-life originals, such as John Florio, Richard Mulcaster, or Thomas Hunt. This scene begins with Holofernes and Nathaniel pedantically mocking Armado's inferior intelligence and propensity for mispronunciation. How much of this conversation Moth has heard during the 29 lines preceding the stage direction, "*Enter Braggart [Armado], Boy [Moth, and Costard],*" would vary based on performance, but Moth's first lines suggest that some eavesdropping occurred: "They have been at a great feast of languages, and stol'n the scraps" (5.1.36). This "feast" is a pun on the banquet from which the men have just returned, but Moth also humorously opines that at the great banquet of languages, Holofernes enjoys but the scraps. In a sense, he prepares Costard for the foolishness he is about to hear when they begin speaking to Holofernes and Nathaniel. Thus, just as the curate and schoolmaster lampoon Armado, so does the boy make fun of Holofernes' and Nathaniel's inferior linguistic abilities, thus suggesting that Moth has observed, and not only in this moment but throughout his time in the court, this schoolmaster's lack of sophisticated linguistic skills.

Moth's metaphorical critique is based on how frequently Holofernes bumbles over his Latin. As established at the start of this chapter, there are numerous gender

implications about a schoolboy's acquisition of Latin, and a poor knowledge of Latin very much implied a poor manhood. Such a phenomenon intensifies after considering Holofernes's academic position as schoolmaster. For instance, act five begins with Holofernes's assessment in Latin that "*Satis quid sufficit*," or, "Enough is as good as a feast" (5.1.1). Despite his supposed higher learning, though, Holofernese misspeaks "quid" for "quod." Editors are divided on whether or not the pedant's faulty Latin is a result of a printer's mistake or the satirical intention of the playwright.²⁵ However, the frequency with which Holofernese misspeaks suggests Shakespeare's comedic attempt to laugh at early modern schoolmasters and classrooms awash with Latin phrases. Earlier, for instance, when Jaquenetta asks Holofernese to read the letter Costard has delivered, the pedant remarks, "*Facile, precor gelida quando [pecus omne] sub umbra ruminat*," or, "Faustus, I beg, while all the cattle chew their cud in the cool shade" (4.2. 93-94). Here Holofernes quotes the first eclogue of Mantuan, an Italian pastoral writer whose works were read in Elizabethan schools. "*Facile*," however, is an error for "Fauste," or the vocative case for "Faustus." And again, a few lines later as Holofernes attempts to speak Italian, he mistakenly exclaims, "*Venechia, Veneshia, / Che non te [vede], che non te [prechia]*" instead of the correct "pretia" (4.2.97-98).²⁶ Such errors may be compositorial, but the rhetorical humor exclusively, ironically, and solely at Holofernes's expense seems more than just coincidence, thus making Moth's observation that Holofernes only speaks the scraps of language all the more humorously accurate. Indeed,

²⁵ Surprisingly, H. R. Woudhuysen, editor for the Arden *Love's Labour's Lost*, corrects the line to "quod" without mentioning the potential misspelling in the Quarto and Folio; William C. Carroll also makes the change for *The New Cambridge Shakespeare*, but does note the original spelling; the *Riverside* maintains the misspelling and provides the correct "quod" in footnote.

²⁶ These misspellings and mispronunciations are often noted in critical editions of the play, and this summary amalgamates how Woudhuysen, Carroll, and Barten edit these lines. All three note the error(s) and respond based on their individual editing practices.

when editors *correct* Holofernes's Latin and directors abbreviate Moth or remove the boy altogether from the play—both of which happen with great frequency—we not only lose much of pedagogical commentary their relationship provides, but we also miss the opportunity to observe the boy outwitting the man.

Moreover, Moth's direct criticism of the pedant's poor Latin directly illumines the comedic potential of the time he shares with the schoolmaster on stage. In addition to his comment about Holofernes's scrappy knowledge of languages, Moth tricks Holofernes into reciting a typical early modern lesson in order to transform this lesson into insult. According to Kathryn M. Moncrief, "Memorization and accurate recall were foundational techniques in early modern pedagogy; both catechisms and classroom instruction used memory exercises and repetition to solidify acquisition of knowledge" (116). Moth uses this standard technique of rote memorization and recall to supply a string of (anti)pedagogical insults that humiliate his schoolmaster:

MOTH. Peace, the peal begins.

ARMADO. [*To Holofernes*] Monsieur, are you not lett' red?

MOTH. Yes, yes, he teaches boys the hornbook. What is *a, b*, spell'd backward, with the horn on his head?

HOLOFERNES. Ba, *pueritia*, with a horn added.

MOTH. *Ba*, most silly sheep, with a horn. You hear his learning.

HOLOFERNES. *Quis, quis*, thou consonant?

MOTH. The last of the five vowels, if "you" repeat them; of the fift, if I.

HOLOFERNES. I will repeat them—*a, e, I*—

MOTH. The sheep: the other two concludes it—*o, U*.

ARMADO. Now by the salt [wave] of the Mediterraneum, a sweet touch,
a quick venue of wit—snip, snap, quick and home. It rejoiceth my
intellect. True wit!

MOTH. Offer'd by a child to an old man: which is wit-old.

HOLOFERNES. What is the figure? What is the figure?

MOTH. Horns.

HOLOFERNES. Thou disputes like an infant; go whip thy gig.

MOTH. Lend me your horn to make one, and I will whip about your
infamy, [*manu*] *cita*—a gig of a cuckold's horn. (5.1.44-70)

When Moth remarks, “the peal begins,” he insultingly anticipates how Armado and Holofernes’s pretentious conversation will resemble a cacophony of babbling of sounds, which is to say nothing but nonsense. He demonstrates as much by interrupting Armado’s question and enticing Holofernes to repeat the vowels as he would while reading from a hornbook in class. The boy uses this run-of-the-mill task to insult the schoolmaster, as he also does when he finishes Holofernes’s sentence “*a, e, I*” by adding “The sheep,” ultimately causing Holofernes to call himself, “I, the sheep.” Moth capitalizes on another opportunity for insult, since the final vowels “o” and “u” should be read as the boy calling Holofernes a female sheep: “Oh, you,” or “Oh, ewe.” Even the dullard Armado understands the affront, calling it a “sweet touch, a quick venue of wit,” to which Moth responds by saying that it is the child, then, who teaches the man, “which is wit-old.” Once more, the boy berates his schoolmaster by punning Holofernes’s “wit-old,” or “old wit,” with “wittol,” or a contented or complacent cuckold. When Holofernes twice asks, “What is the figure?” he is inquiring about what figure of speech the boy uses, and

Moth's reply, "Horns," brings the dialogue full-circle, as "horns" not only alludes to the "U" or sheep and the physical representation of a cuckolded man, but it also puns on the hornbook which served as the origin of this lesson.

The play's somewhat ambiguous ending—immortalized by Berowne's famous remark, "Our wooing doth not end like an old play. / Jack hath not Jill. These ladies' courtesy / Might well have made our sport a comedy"—departs from the dramatic tradition of comedies ending with engagement but should not really come as much of a surprise if we have been listening to Moth (5.2.851-53). Early in the first act, the boy discussed great men whose love life did not end happily, and throughout the play Shakespeare has used the boy to critique ideals such as the chivalrous knight and the humanist man of moderation. Moth, who is the rhetorically strongest and wisest male in Navarre, further warned the men when he explained how "easy it is to put 'years' to the word 'three, and study three years in two words," thus suggesting that true education, and as it turns out, true manhood, does not merely come from using words in creative and empty ways (1.2.52).

Hence, Moth participates in what feminist scholars have long argued about the play, that it is deeply embedded in reversals. Hercules does not get Omphale, Samson does not get Delilah, Jack does not get Jill, nor the Navarre men the women. Similarly, I argue, there is an age reversal in the play, where the boy becomes both Hercules and the teacher. Thus, through his rhetorical power and the complexity of his language, Moth exemplifies the thematic importance of boys in Shakespeare's canon. Such complexity extends far beyond whether to call him Mote, Mott, or Moth as he both flutters across many of the thematic concerns of the play—language, education, gender, cuckoldry, and

classical allusions—and also is a tiny *thing* that will not go away. Instead of demeaningly thinking of the boy as an annoying moth, I propose that it is more helpful to think of Moth as a Platonic gadfly, whose presence and speech continuously disrupts and deflates the gender ideals and identities found in the play. To change Moth into an adult character or to eliminate him altogether not only removes the opportunity to see him as Shakespeare’s most interesting schoolboy but also to consider the relationship between early modern pedagogy and *Love’s Labour’s Lost*.

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that Moth’s relevance to *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is better understood in terms of the relationship between pedagogy and early modern gender ideals than in terms of the pronunciation or original spelling of his name, by far the focus of most criticism of the boy’s place in the play. Once we identify how Shakespeare establishes Navarre as an ideal educational site for masculine formation, we find that Moth explores the relationship between early modern educational practices and gender. Through his association with these ideals, Moth effectively reduces these ideals to the level of rhetoric, whereby the men in this play and the ideals that they seek, can easily be inhabited and performed by a seemingly far less experienced boy. As Darryl Grantley says of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, “The satire here is not education itself, but rather its social misuse by those who are propelled through their own eccentricity or the uncertainty of their social background into an overly zealous embrace of it” (188). Moth, I believe, participates in this kind of satire. In a play where the transformative powers of language are constantly at work—language transforms a court into an academy, men into schoolboys, and various ideals of manhood simply into discourse—Moth’s witty presence becomes all the more crucial. Just as the Boy in *Henry IV* and *Henry V* exposes

the destructiveness and cruelty of martial manhood, this schoolboy operates within the pedagogical discourse of, and ultimately exposes the social misuse of the mens' pedagogical and gender project.

CHAPTER V

“O, ‘tis a parlous boy:”

THE DANGERS OF NOBLE BOYHOOD

Each of the boys thus far discussed probably occupy the same broad social class as did the majority of English children in that they do not live in abject poverty nor are they a part of the nobility. While we may not always explicitly know the social background of each boy in Shakespeare, as apprentices and schoolboys they presumably belong to families who were merchants or yeomans and laborers, those who lived in the rural workforce of the farm or market. In this chapter, however, I turn to the group of boys who appear with the most frequency in Shakespeare, the noble boy or prince, to address the dangers that accompany these boys’ dual identities. As we recall from Chapter II, a boy *heir* is defined by both his political and gender category, and that duality often threatens the play’s patriarch, either appearing as a threat to his monarchical succession or serving as a reminder of his own lost boyhood, an issue of particular concern in *The Winter’s Tale*. In what follows, I focus on the boy heirs in Shakespeare and their resulting affliction and death.

Indeed, Cleanth Brooks’s famous summation that *Macbeth* depicts a “war on children” should not be understood solely as a phenomenon of the Scottish play (42). Excluding Falstaff’s page and the other boys reportedly killed after the Battle of Agincourt, six specifically named noble boys die in Shakespeare’s canon: Rutland in 3 *Henry VI*, Prince Edward and York in *Richard III*, Arthur in *King John*, Young Macduff in *Macbeth*, and Mamillius in *The Winter’s Tale*. Mario DiGangi’s assertion in 2008 that “the death of a child” is a “rare occurrence in Shakespeare’s plays” admittedly rests upon

the subjective and adjectival use of “rare,” but a boy dies on average once every six plays (“Death” 222). In all cases, political conflicts are a consequence of both their existence and their demise. As we will see, a boy’s presence, his body and what it represents, disrupts the masculine, adult, and royal world until it becomes necessary, as Gloucester—the future boy killer Richard III—explains in *3 Henry VI*, to set a “murth’ring knife unto the root / From whence that tender spray did sweetly spring” (2.6.49-50).

Through the dramatic depiction of noble boyhood, Shakespeare’s drama encourages us to recognize that while lineage and royal blood may automatically entitle a child to wealth and security, such privilege might also generate physical harm. In each play, we recognize how a male protagonist’s anxieties over boyhood and the threat therein represented results in a boy’s suffering and death. As I will demonstrate, when critics discuss anxiety in Shakespeare they generally consider how the emotion relates to the emasculating suspicion of cuckoldry, or, as confirmed by the citizen in *Richard III* who warns, “Woe to that land that’s govern’d by a child,” they consider how anxiety influences matters of the state (2.3.11). I add to such arguments by exploring how these emotions can be understood further through the juxtaposition of age and boyhood. Anxiety often arises in Shakespeare’s adult-male characters when their manhood is challenged either by smarter and wittier boys or by the lives of boys who force them to (re)see and (re)think their nostalgic and sentimental understanding of boyhood. These challenges and threats occur in a variety of manners, such as through slander, the exposure of boyhood innocence as illusionary, the threat of monarchical succession, and the dread of one’s sterility.

This chapter separately discusses these five plays in order to uncover the uniqueness of each boy before drawing connections about how boyhood functions across all five. Rutland's appearance in *3 Henry VI* represents the first moment in Shakespeare where we observe the political issues relating to noble boyhood and the fears subsequently evoked. We see in Rutland the threat that arises from his dual identity as both boy and noble when, declaring his individualism, he rejects his patrilineal relationship. We also note how the events surrounding this first boy death establishes a pattern of what is called, uniquely in Shakespeare, *child-killing*. Mamillius's presence in *The Winter's Tale* is associated with the two patriarchs' wistful discussion of their boyhood innocence, and his death replaces their imagined primacy of boyhood with their anxieties over the illusoriness of such boyhood. This boy's death serves as a threatening reminder of the disappointment that generates anxiety for male characters, or what Polixines uniquely calls *childness*. Edward and York in *Richard III*, known communally as the Princes in the Tower, offer the first extensive look at noble boyhood in the canon, and they are the only boys murdered offstage. With them, we observe how Shakespeare depicts the brothers as individuals, Edward a more stoic and reflective boy and York a more aggressively witty, though equally clever, boy. Their verbal and physical affront to Richard reveals that the two boys may be the only people in the court who recognize Richard's motivations, undermines Richard's manhood since they disregard the hierarchy built into patriarchy and use their social position as boys to incite the man, and implies that their insults may remind Richard of his own boyhood experiences. Arthur's insistence in *King John* that he should not be held accountable for this father's actions reminds us of Rutland's own self-defense, but unlike Rutland, Arthur's clever and

persuasive rhetoric saves his life, at least momentarily. Shakespeare decreases Arthur's age and adds almost an entire act about the boy to the play in order to use boyhood as a way of emphasizing John's pettiness. Young Macduff's demise in *Macbeth* is the only death to occur in a domestic space, and he is the only murdered boy not related to the monarchy. His presence and the violence against him that ensues emphasizes Macbeth's anxiety regarding his not having sired a child of his own, a notion further emphasized by the multiple boys, symbolic boys, and boy images that flood the play. Ultimately, then, I want to consider the relationship between the boys and the men in the plays where adult males wage wars on boys and to better identify certain thematic patterns as they emerge across Shakespeare's dramatic canon. Doing so then will allow us, most importantly, to appreciate the vital differences between these royal boys and see them as individuals, and studying them in such a manner, in the end, helps us to learn about how noble boyhood functions throughout Shakespeare's canon.

Beginnings and Endings:

3 Henry VI and The Winter's Tale

"Be thou reveng'd on men, and let me live:" The First Murdered Boy in Shakespeare

Shakespeare, acutely aware of the place of child-murder and monarchical succession in medieval English history and its violent and dramatic potential, began depicting such events immediately upon arriving in London. His earliest plays, the first history tetralogy, are deeply invested in childhood and its relation to the English monarchy. The three parts of *Henry VI* (c. 1589-91), according to Carol Chillington Rutter, are "all about a child" (8). With their emphasis on lineage, the plays are a "tragic meditation on wasted childhood played out across three plays and seventy-nine scenes, a

tragedy framed by episodes where history ‘means’ through children” (8). *1 Henry VI* opens with the funeral procession of Henry V. His infant son who, at nine months of age, is soon to become King Henry VI, is the youngest boy ever to succeed to the English throne. In many ways, the plays are a coming of age story akin to the Hal/Henry V narrative in the second tetralogy, as part one depicts the first sixteen years of the young king’s reign, during which England battles France, a country led by another young person, Joan la Pucelle. The first play establishes that the boy Henry VI has too much family, as uncles and cousins attempt to position themselves to become England’s next monarch. We watch the young king grow in *2 Henry VI* while Edward, the Duke of York, mounts a rebellion against the Lancastrians and wins the first battle of the War of Roses. *3 Henry VI* sees Edward depose Henry VI and become Edward IV, thus setting the scene for Gloucester, the future Richard III, to begin plotting against him. Put another way, *1 Henry VI* begins with an infant who is about to become king and *3 Henry VI* ends with a baby, the future Edward V, son of Edward IV, brought onstage in swaddling clothes. He is an optimistic sign of future peace, hopefully representing an end to the civil war between the houses of Lancaster and York, and we see then how Shakespeare puts young boy-kings at the heart of his first tetralogy to investigate the political issues, fears, and threats surrounding a royal boy’s body, thus making the first child-death in these history plays all the more important. Child-death will be an event the playwright returns to throughout his career.¹

¹ Though I do not wish to argue or search for Shakespeare’s biography in his plays, I do find some relevance that in 1589, when Shakespeare was writing his first tetralogy, he would have been father to Susanna (age six) and twins Hamnet and Judith (age four). It is possible that this emphasis on children might have some root in the young father’s biography.

Early in *3 Henry VI*, Shakespeare stages the first of six royal child murders, allowing us to observe how he appropriates these particular historical events for dramatic purposes. York's youngest son, Rutland, becomes a victim when he, accompanied by his tutor, encounters "bloody Clifford" after the Battle of Wakefield (1.3.2). Historically, Rutland is seventeen at the time of his death and certainly, according to his culture, old enough to be fighting and risking death.² Moreover, contemporary accounts of Clifford's and Rutland's deaths are not as poignant or affective as Shakespeare's retelling. In Gregory's Chronicle, a mature Rutland is described as "one of the best disposed lords of this land." A newsletter dated 9 January 1461 explains that "[soldiers] routed them, slaying the duke and his younger son the earl of Rutland, Warwick's father, and many others" (qtd. in Dockray 98), and the *Annales Rerum Anglicarum* also blandly states, "And in the fight after the battle, Lord Clifford killed Edmund Earl of Rutland, son of the Duke of York, on the bridge at Wakefield" (qtd. in Myers 281). With one extant exception, as discussed below, Rutland's death is never described as a particularly horrendous phenomenon. Many chronicles do not even mention his death, and when others do, they list him with other men who died in the battle. For instance, John Leland's *Itinerary* (c.1535-43) mentions Rutland's death and even calls Clifford "the Butcher" because of all the "Men" he killed, yet this epithet is not connected to Rutland's death:

There was a sore Batell faught in the south Feeldes by this Bridge. And yn the flite of the Duke of Yorkes Parte, other the Duke hymself, or his Suntherle of Ruthelana, was slayne a litle above the Barres beyond the Bridge

² Lots of young royalty are known to have fought during the Hundred Years' War and the Wars of the Roses. For instance, Edward, the Black Prince is 16 at the Battle of Crécy (1346) and Edward of Lancaster, Prince of Wales, is 17 when he fights at the Battle of Tewkesbury (1471).

going up into the Toune of Wakefeld that standith ful fairely upon a clyving Ground. At this Place is set up a Crosse in rei memoriam. The commune saying is there, that the Erle wold have taken ther a poore Woman's House for socour, and she for fere shet the Dore and strait the Erle was killid. The Lord Clifford for killing of Men at this Batail was caullid the Boucher. (45)

When Shakespeare writes Rutland's death, however, he provides a markedly different characterization of the two individuals involved. He heightens the relevance of Rutland's death by not only devoting an entire scene to the episode, but also by making the young boy completely divorced from all adult malevolence. No longer an adult soldier on the battlefield, Rutland is a boy who, arm and arm with his tutor, attempts to avoid conflict.

Shakespeare's source for this scene is Edward Hall's *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre & Yorke* (1548), which provides an account altogether unlike what we find in contemporary historians' description. Hall claims that Rutland is "scace of y age of .xii. yeres," and calls him a "faire getlema, and a maydenlike person" (255). Instead of being killed during battle, this Rutland "secretly convueyed therle out of y felde," and he was walking "toward the towne" when "he was by the sayd lord Clifford espied" (255). Hall also provides new details of the event, explaining that Rutland "kneled on his knees imploryng mercy, and desiryng grace, both with holding up his hades [sic] and making dolorous countenance, for his speache was gone for feare" (255). Nevertheless, the "cruell Clifforde, deadly bloudsupper" kills the young boy, thus changing a heroic prince dying during battle into an innocent boy fearfully pleading for mercy. Finally, Hall also claims that Clifford was "not content with this homicide, or

chyldkillyng,” thus removing any patriotic potential of Rutland’s dying nobly while fighting for the House of York. Instead, Halls transforms Rutland’s death into something else markedly different from just a casualty of war (256).

Shakespeare’s depiction is much more akin to Hall’s account, particularly in his characterization of the boy Rutland. After ordering soldiers to remove the tutor so that he can be alone with the boy, Clifford notices that Rutland closes his eyes in fear: “How now? is he dead already? Or is it fear / That makes him close his eyes? I’ll open them” (1.3.10-11). The man forces Rutland to look at his killer eye-to eye, and the boy responds:

So looks the pent-up lion o’er the wretch
 That trembles under his devouring paws;
 And so he walks, insulting o’er his prey,
 And so he comes, to rend his limbs asunder.
 Ah, gentle Clifford, kill me with thy sword
 And not with such cruel threat’ning look.
 Sweet Clifford, hear me speak before I die:
 I am too mean a subject for thy wrath,
 Be thou reveng’d on men, and let me live. (1.3.12-20)

Rutland emphasizes his position as “innocent child,” as his tutor called him a few lines earlier, by associating himself with trembling prey and distancing himself from the “men” who should be subject to Clifford’s revenge (1.3.8, 20). When the man refuses to show pity, Rutland asks, “I never did thee harm; why wilt thou slay me?” Clifford

explains that he will do so because Rutland's father, York, killed his father.³ Rutland replies desperately, telling Clifford that his father "is a man, . . . cope with him," especially since Rutland was not even born when his father killed Clifford's:

But 'twas ere I was born.⁴
 Thou hast one son, for his sake pity me,
 Lest in revenge thereof, sith God is just,
 He be as miserably slain as I.
 Ah, let me live in prison all my days,
 And when I give occasion of offense,
 Then let me die, for now thou hast no cause. (39-45)

With Rutland unarmed, helpless, and pleading for mercy, Clifford stabs the boy while declaring, "No cause? / Thy father slew my father; therefore die" (1.3.46-47).

Historically, Clifford kills a seventeen-year-old Rutland during battle, but Shakespeare not only makes Rutland several years younger, 12 according to Hall, but he also stages the death after the battle, with the boy in his tutor's company. Doing so heightens Rutland's innocence as well as changes his death from a casualty of war to the murder of an innocent boy. Later, Richard describes Clifford to Northumberland, calling him a "cruel child-killer" (2.2.112). So horrible is Clifford's deed in Shakespeare that the playwright only uses the phrase "child-killer" this once, and Rutland dies reciting from Ovid's *Heroides*: "*Dii faciant laudis summa sit ista tuae!*," or "The gods grant that this be the summit of your glory!" (1.3.48). His words are fitting, not only in the immediate

³ Shakespeare dramatizes this scene in *2 Henry VI*.

⁴ Historically, Rutland is York's second son and is twelve years old when his father, York, kills the elder Clifford in 1455. In *3 Henry VI*, Shakespeare makes Rutland the youngest of York's sons after Edward (King Edward IV), George, and Richard (King Richard III).

context, but also for all the child-killers that Shakespeare would write throughout his career, since, as we will see, every man that kills a boy in Shakespeare does so at the height of his power, thus inaugurating his own demise. Rutland curses the adult for committing this first, and worst, atrocity in Shakespeare—child-killing.

Two important events follow Rutland's murder and establish a pattern that Shakespeare repeats throughout all of his dramatic murders of monarchical boys. First, the adult characters construct the murdered boys in ways that either contradict what we saw before the murder or, in the case of Rutland, altogether create a new depiction of the boy. Since Rutland's death scene is the only instance in the play where the boy appears on stage, we perhaps are more likely to continue focusing on Clifford, whom along with his father we have been following throughout the last couple of plays. Everything else we know of Rutland comes from the descriptions of him issued by adults after his death. Moreover, Shakespeare not only assigns a substantial amount of pathos to the deaths of his boy characters, but does likewise with the aftermath of the boys' deaths, and we can begin to learn more about how these royal boys function within the plays based on how the adults discuss them after their death.

For instance, before killing York, Queen Margaret and Clifford force Rutland's father to endure tremendous emotional torture concerning his recently murdered son. Margaret offers the bound-up York a token to remember his boy, a handkerchief soaked with the blood of his "darling Rutland" (1.4.73). Telling York that should his "eyes . . . water for [Rutland's] death," here is cloth soaked with the blood of his son to "dry [his] cheeks withal" (1.4.82, 83). And before York dies, we get a sense, albeit perhaps emotionally altered based on the particular situation, from the father of what Rutland was

like before his was murdered. A few lines before he is stabbed, York curses his son's murderers, specifically describing Margaret

as opposite to every good

As the antipodes are unto us,

Or as the south to the septentrion.

O tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide!

How couldst thou drain the life-blood of the child,

To bid the father wipe his eyes withal,

And yet be seen to wear a woman's face?

.....

These tears are my sweet Rutland's obsequies,

And every drop cries vengeance for his death.

.....

That face of his the hungry cannibals

Would not have touch'd, would not have stain'd with blood;

But you are more inhuman, more inexorable,

O ten times more, than tigers of Hyrcania. (1.4.134-40, 147-48, 152-55)

Obviously, Rutland's death creates impassioned expressions of grief for his father. Not only do York's final words characterize the horrors of child-killing for Shakespeare, but they also provide a sense of how York remembers his son through very odd comparisons, emphasizing the boy's "sweetness" to a degree that would even avert cannibalism. Later in the play, we witness how other adults react to Clifford's death, often citing the boy's murder as inspiration for battle. When a messenger informs Richard and Edward about

the details of their father's (York) and young brother's (Rutland) death—"The ruthless Queen gave him to dry his cheeks / A napkin steeped in the harmless blood / Of sweet young Rutland"—Richard replies, "I cannot weep; for all my body's moisture / Scarce serves to quench my furnace-burning heart. . . Tears then for babes; blows and revenge for me" (2.1.79-80, 86). And even when her fortune turns and Margaret endures the death of her own, slightly older, child, Prince Edward,⁵ she remembers and describes her son similarly as York and Richard described Rutland:

O, traitors, murtherers!

They that stabb'd Caesar shed no blood at all,

Did not offend, nor were not worthy blame,

If this foul deed were by to equal it.

He was a man; this, in respect, a child,

And men ne'er spend their fury on a child. (5.5.52-57)

Despite Prince Edward dying like a soldier on a battlefield, his mother calls those who killed her child—Edward, Gloucester (Richard), and Clarence—murderers and assassins who, in killing her child, become unmanly. Margaret then brands them, as York branded her earlier, "Butchers and villains! bloody cannibals!" who are "worse than murtherer[s]" (5.4.61, 58). Her son is no longer a soldier, but in death transformed into a "sweet young prince!" and a "sweet plant" that has been "untimely cropp'd!" (5.4.62). Therefore, we recognize the first instance in Shakespeare of adults remembering and constructing these boys in ways that differ from what we observe when they are on stage.

⁵ As mentioned earlier, historically Prince Edward is seventeen when he dies, thus a bit older than Shakespeare's depiction of Rutland.

Remembering Rutland's curse to Clifford—"Dii faciant laudis summa sit ista tuae!"—we see the second event that often follows the murder of a royal boy is severe punishment, as Shakespeare preserves some of his more violent and bloody deaths for child-killers. During the Battle of Ferrybridge, a mere two scenes after Rutland's death, Clifford enters the stage "*wounded [with an arrow in his neck]*," exclaiming "Here burns my candle out; ay, here it dies" (2.6.1). He realizes that just as he ignored Rutland's desperate plea, "sweet Clifford, pity me! . . . Thou has one son, for his sake pity me," so too will his enemies after his death "not pity; / For at their hands I have deserv'd no pity" (2.6.25-26). Indeed, when Edward, Warwick, Richard, and other soldiers discover his body, they alternate mocking the remains:

RICHARD. Clifford, ask mercy and obtain no grace.

EDWARD. Clifford, repent in bootless penitence.

WARWICK. Clifford, devise excuses for thy faults.

GEORGE. While we devise fell tortures for thy faults.

.....

EDWARD. Thou pitiedst Rutland, I will pity thee. (2.6.69-72, 74)

Eventually, they remove Clifford's head and place it atop the town wall at Yorkshire. In this way, Shakespeare establishes a narrative and thematic pattern in which he will return throughout his career whenever he depicts the murder of a royal boy. "Child-killing," as he brands it at the start of his career, is the most brutal, pitiless, callous, and unmanly violence one can commit, and after a man kills a boy, his fortune plummets. Thus, Rutland's Ovidian curse on Clifford that he issues with his last breath, that "this be the summit of one's glory," serves as a warning for the future Shakespeare child-killers.

“*And to be boy eternal:*” *The Final Murdered Boy in Shakespeare*

Whereas we might identify *3 Henry VI* as Shakespeare’s prologue to discussing and dramatizing boyhood, by the time he wrote *The Winter’s Tale* two decades later Shakespeare had created dozens of boy characters. Thus, we might understand much of *The Winter’s Tale* as a capstone to Shakespeare’s comments on boyhood, as both Mamillius and the lengthy confabulation about boyhood at the start of the play contain much of what Shakespeare suggests about boyhood throughout his career.⁶ In this way, Shakespeare’s oeuvre of boy deaths concludes with a play in which the first three acts are imbued with images and discussions of innocent childhood, or what is also in this play uniquely called *childness*. As discussed in more detail below, *innocence* operates in this play to recognize boyhood as a time existing outside of guilt, including but not limited to, original sin, and as we will see, the anxiety that arises in the men of this play, especially from within Leontes, is in part a result of their coming face-to-face with lost childhood. Thus, within this context, I argue that Mamillius’s death is troublesome because, like all the other boys of monarchs, his death challenges notions of childhood innocence discussed by the two patriarchs at the start of the play by subverting the supposed primacy of boyhood.

By depicting alternating discussions about matters of the state and laudatory praises about boyhood, the first act of *The Winter’s Tale* begins with two separate exchanges between two different pairs of men, both of whom nostalgically recall

⁶ I recognize that *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (c. 1613) begins with a boy singing, and Shakespeare is generally understood to have written the first scene, but I find little in this play as adding to our understanding of Shakespeare’s interest in boyhood. I also recognize that *Henry VIII* (c. 1612-13) ends with a girl, the future Queen Elizabeth, on stage, but considerations of girlhood in Shakespeare are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

boyhood. In 1.1., Archidamus and Camillo discuss Bohemia, Sicilia, and the crown prince Mamillius; in 1.2, Polixenes and Leontes also discuss their countries and their sons, Florizel and Mamillius. More specifically, though, the play commences with two exchanges pertaining to the young Mamillius. The two lords, Camillo and Archidamus, consider the striking differences between their two kingdoms and their two rulers, Leontes and Polixenes respectively. While they first praise how Leontes and Polixenes “were train’d together in childhoods,” they particularly extol Mamillius, whom Archidamus calls the “greatest promise” and Camillo calls a “gallant child” (1.1.22-23, 36, 38). Though the play never specifies the young prince’s age, he appears very much to be a little boy, no older than seven or eight and still unbreeched.

This immediate focus on childhood intensifies in the following scene when in diverse ways Shakespeare brings childhood onto the stage: the two kings discuss their boyhoods together; the boy Mamillius is present on stage; and the Queen is nine months pregnant.⁷ However, this crucial foregrounding of *The Winter’s Tale* emerges from the famous declaration by Polixenes concerning his shared boyhood with Leontes:

We were, fair queen,
 Two lads that thought there was no more behind
 But such a day to-morrow as to-day,
 And to be boy eternal.

 We were as twinn’d lambs that did frisk i’ th’ sun,
 And bleat the one at th’ other. What we chang’d

⁷ As often noted, Polixenes probably alludes to Queen Hermione’s pregnancy in the scene’s opening lines: “Nine changes of the wat’ry star hath been / The shepherd’s note since we have left our throne” (1.2.1-2).

Was innocence for innocence; we knew not
 The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream'd
 That any did. Had we pursu'd that life,
 And our weak spirits ne'er been higher rear'd
 With stronger blood, we should have answer'd heaven
 Boldly, "Not guilty"; the imposition clear'd,
 Hereditary ours. (1.2.63-66, 69-77)

Polixenes' rhapsody on his boyhood with Leontes as being akin to two innocent lambs frolicking in the sun, raises important issues about childhood for the play, such as the impossibility of returning to a state that may never have even existed. He believes that as boys, they inhabited an Edenic state, where they were pleasantly ignorant of evil and immune to guilt. In essence, the two men exemplify what Susan Honeyman terms "elusive childhood" and the impossibility of its representation (*Elusive* 4). "Childhood," she writes, "is whatever adults have lost and maybe never had. How can any adult writer convincingly present such an inconsistent and imaginary position with any sense of authority?" (4). When Polixenes remembers his boyhood for the Sicilian court, he participates in creating an imaginary state that he believes he and Leontes, like their sons now, once inhabited. Moreover, as we shortly will see, such pastoral recollections of frolicking lambs entirely mischaracterize the boyhoods in Shakespeare that we actually observe, not only Mamillius's and Rutland's life but all the other royal boys as well, despite supposedly privileged positions as royal boys.

Thus, it is appropriate that in a scene so focused on boyhood and on the recollection of boyhood, that Shakespeare would use particular words and phrases to

clarify these characters' construction of this time in their lives. Moreover, this exchange between Leontes and Polixenes helps us to understand more clearly the lives and deaths of many other boys found in Shakespeare. When Leontes asks Polixenes if he is as "fond of [his] young prince as [they] / Do seem of [theirs]," the Bohemian king replies,

If at home, sir,

He's all my exercise, my mirth, my matter;

Now my sworn friend, and then mine enemy;

My parasite, my soldier, statesman, all.

He makes a July's day short as December,

And with his varying childness cures in me

Thoughts that would thicken my blood.

LEONTES. So stands this squire

Offic'd with me. (1.2.165-73)

Polixenes and Leontes appear as proud fathers in this exchange, each seeming to revel in their boys' qualities. Specifically, "childness" is a word Polixenes invents, Leontes understands, and no one else in Shakespeare ever uses.⁸ It is what the royal citizens in *The Winter's Tale* discuss throughout much of the first act. Therefore, though often glossed superficially as "childish ways" (1620), as Hallett Smith does in the *Riverside*, or "childlike ways" (34) as David Bevington notes in his edition, "childness" takes on a more local and specific meaning. "Childness," especially in *The Winter's Tale* but

⁸ I recognize that for many post-Barthesian and post-Foucauldian critics of early modern drama that to place such emphasis on one word is potentially risky. While I do not disregard early modern practices of printing and authorship, and I generally accept the likelihood of errors made by copy editors, for the purposes of this project—the study of boyhood in Shakespeare's canon and Shakespeare-themed fiction—the singularity of this word is important for understanding childhood as it exists in the work ascribed to Shakespeare.

throughout much of Shakespeare as well, becomes more often than not a threatening reminder of disappointment that frequently generates anxiety for male characters. I agree with Carol Chillington Rutter who suggests how Leontes is “suddenly infected, overwhelmed with sick thought, ‘diseas’d opinion’ . . . And that disease is ‘childness’” (112). Thus, this scene, while appearing to praise boyhood—the past boyhoods of Leontes and Polixenes and the present boyhoods of their sons—uses the word “childness” in order to accomplish the following: construct childhood, and more specifically, boyhood; talk about it; reveal adult expectations of it; and reveal manhood fears about it.

Because of the profound nostalgia that paternally looms over the first act of *The Winter’s Tale*, a complication concerning boyhood soon arises. Leontes and Polixenes are faced with the boyhoods to which they can never return, not only literally through their boys (Mamillius and Florizel) but also through the innocent boyhoods they create. Polixenes’ account of how they exchanged “innocence for innocence” and the “imposition clear’d, / Hereditary ours” is often explained by editors, such as David Bevington, as their “being freed from original sin itself . . . or, excepting of course the original sin that is the common condition of all mortals” (30). Hence, Polixenes suggests that the innocence shared between himself and Leontes was “not guilty” of Adam’s sin, or what Christianity would insist as their sin. According to Polixenes, they genuinely though naïvely believe that they could have been “boy[s] eternal” and forever innocent had they pursued that life. However, their “Fall” occurred when as adult men they married. As Hermione playfully suggests, “If you first sinn’d with us . . . lest you say / Your queen and I are devils” (1.2.84, 81-82). Thus, the play juxtaposes “boy eternal,” or imagined innocence, with the sexual sin of consummation between the men and their

wives. As innocent lambs playing together in the son, they “knew not / the doctrine of ill doing, nor dream’d / That any did” (69-71). Moreover, Polixenes’ “boldly” declaring that they were “Not guilty” certainly sounds like a theological statement, and cathecting this belief system into their invention of “childness” will shortly prove tormenting, for Leontes especially. Therefore, by recognizing this juxtaposition, we can begin to understand Leontes’ particular anxiety, his being suddenly infected and overwhelmed with a “diseas’d opinion” as it relates to these particular terms of *boy eternal* and *childness*.

Leontes’ resulting jealousy differs from the sort of sexual jealousy elsewhere in Shakespeare, because it not only involves fear of cuckoldry but includes also a jealousy of his son, who represents the innocence Leontes and Polixenes believe they once possessed and the innocence they believe their sons still possess. For instance, Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* never expresses a concern similar to Leontes’ that William or Anne Page are bastards. Othello’s violent jealousy, too, is only linked to Desdemona. Hence, I argue that Leontes’ and Polixenes’ anxieties about boyhood and about childness threaten to emasculate them. Feminist critics such as Janet Adelman find such anxieties in Leontes and other of Shakespeare’s men to stem from their paranoia over dependence on women.⁹ Such readings imply that Mamillius causes the anxiety because he still embodies the feminine sphere that Leontes wants to reject. However, I want to shift attention from gender to age and suggest, with Gina Bloom, that “Leontes’ and Polixenes’s anxieties stem from their failure to place themselves comfortably within the

⁹ See Janet Adelman’s *Suffocating Mothers* (1991), Susan Snyder’s *Shakespeare: A Wayward Journey* (2002), and Mary Ellen Lamb’s “Engendering the Narrative Act: Old Wives’ Tales in *The Winter’s Tale*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*” (1998).

developmental narrative of manhood” (332). And while I concur with Stephen Orgel, who explains that Leontes’ mental instability surfaces because of his desire to “return to childhood” and thereby “retreat from sexuality and the dangers of manhood,” I wish also to add that this belief that boyhood is safe is something Shakespeare actually undermines in the first part of *The Winter’s Tale* and, indeed, throughout his career (*The Winter’s Tale* 23). In this way, then, I differ from the aforementioned scholars—Rutter, Bloom, Adelman, and Orgel—in that I read Mamillius’s death as troublesome because, like the deaths of all royal boy peers in Shakespeare, it deflates the secure and created notions of childhood innocence and subverts the primacy of boyhood evoked by Polixines. Instead of a time of innocent, bleating lambs, boyhood is a time of slaughter, a time when, as Rutland’s death first illustrated, a boy suffers because of his father.

I wish to build on this feminist understanding of *anxiety* by explaining further what I mean by “anxiety” and considering an alternative source for it among these patriarchs. The *OED* defines the term as the “quality or state of being anxious; uneasiness or trouble of mind about some uncertain event,” and lists More’s *Quatuor Nouissimis* (1557) as the earliest reference: “There dyed he without grudge, without anxietie.” Also listed is a line from John Donne’s *Sermons* (1623): “Temporall prosperity comes always accompanied with so much anxiety.” Though neither reference regards sexuality or gender, psychoanalytic critics, such as Mark Breitenberg, often associate this feeling as inevitably manifesting in a man’s obsession with female chastity (*Anxious* 1-34). Indeed, though Shakespeare never uses the term *anxiety*, he does often describe its symptoms, but I wish to suggest that anxiety often surfaces as it relates to the relationship between men and boys.

The final episodes in *The Winter's Tale* that confirm a pattern regarding the death of royal boys in Shakespeare is the lack of consistency between how adult characters talk about the boy, how the boy acts when he is on stage, and how adults talk about him after his death. As mentioned above, in the first two acts Mamillius is described as “gallant” and the country’s “greatest promise,” so much so that, as Camillo explains, citizens who were “on crutches [when] he was born desire yet their life to see him a man” (1.1.39-41). And when asked if these elder citizens would “else be content to die,” Camillo replies simply, “Yes” (42, 43). Likewise, Polixenes agrees with Leontes that Mamillius shares all the great attributes Polixenes finds in his own son.

These initial praises contradict the Mamillius we encounter in the second act where the boy’s mother, Hermione, finds him literally intolerable. The final scene with Mamillius—and also the third consecutive scene in the play to begin with a focus on boyhood—commences with his mother complaining to her maidservant, “Take the boy to you; he so troubles me, / ’Tis past enduring” (2.1.1-2). As soon as she attempts to take the boy away, he proceeds to insult her:

Your brows are blacker, yet black brows they say
 Become some women best, so that there be not
 Too much hair there, but in a semicircle,
 Or a half-moon made with a pen.

2 LADY. Who taught’ this?

MAMILLIUS. I learn’d it out of women’s faces. (2.1.8-13)

Mamillius’s affront is probably one of cosmetics; he insults the poor job the Lady did penciling on her eyebrows. Yet the Lady’s question, “Who taught you about women’s

cosmetics?” could be understood more sharply as “Where did you pick up such low talk?” since, as John Pitcher explains, “eyebrows were said to show much pubic hair a woman had” (187). Either way, Mamillius’s insulting the women questions the idea of a noble-minded and kingly young boy. Additionally, his thoughts further challenge the innocence assigned to him when asked by the women to tell them a story, and the boy famously begins a story about death, “A sad tale . . . Of sprites and goblins” and a “man [who] Dwelt by a churchyard” (2.1. 25-26, 29). More than of childish dalliance, Mamillius’s topics of conversation reveal much about his complexity.

Nevertheless, despite Mamillius’s insults and understanding of mortality, after his death the adults around him will react similarly as those adults in *3 Henry VI* do after the death of Rutland. The oracle calls Mamillius an “innocent babe,” and Leontes and Hermione’s reactions are memorable:

SERVANT. O sir, I shall be hated to report it!

The Prince, your son, with mere conceit and fear

Of the Queen’s speed, is gone.

LEONTES. How? gone?

SERVANT. Is dead.

LEONTES. Apollo’s angry, and the heavens themselves

Do strike at my injustice. [*Hermione swoons*] How

now there?

PAULINA. This news is mortal to the Queen. Look down

And see what death is doing. (3.2.143-49)

Though Leontes' fortune is restored to him after a long redemptive process and several of the problems in *The Winter's Tale* do find a happy resolution, the first three acts leave the Sicilian king suffering immensely, and Time tells us that even after 16 years of tragedy Leontes continues to mourn. Even after magic reunites Leontes with Perdita and Hermione, we are nevertheless reminded of Rutland's curse by recognizing how Leontes' political and emotional summit occurs before Mamillius's death.

Rutland's death and its aftermath in *3 Henry VI* establishes a narrative and emotional pattern repeated throughout Shakespeare, concluding with Mamillius. In the child deaths that bookend the canon, as well as all of those in the middle, we recognize a few basic commonalities that emerge when Shakespeare dramatizes royal boyhood: 1) there is a discrepancy between boyhood observed and how adults remember or talk about boyhood; 2) the boys possess strong rhetorical talents of persuasion and sexual punning; 3) they are described as innocent even if their actions and speech suggests otherwise; 4) their presence challenges adult male's masculinity, thus producing anxiety; and 5) their deaths occur when the man who is responsible is at the summit of his power, in turn instigating an inevitable downfall. Recognizing this pattern thus allows us to become more alert to the nuanced differences that occur between each episode, in turn further confirming the diversity Shakespeare assigns to these boys despite their at times similar dramatic functions.

The remainder of this chapter explores how this pattern is repeated in the monarchical boyhoods between Rutland and Mamillius, such as those encountered in *Richard III*, *King John*, and *Macbeth*. Whereas Rutland's death is a result of revenge and Mamillius's because of cruelties heaped upon him and his mother by a jealous and

anxious father, the deaths of Edward, York, Arthur, and Young Macduff are largely a result of the threat, real or perceived, that they represent not only to Richard, John, and Macbeth's monarchy but also to these kings' manhoods. I do not wish to suggest that there is some sort of evolution in these boys' lives and the depictions of their deaths. Instead, I am convinced by A.D. Nuttall that Shakespeare's "thought is never still. No sooner has one identified a philosophical 'position' than one is forced, by the succeeding play, to modify or extend one's account" (24). Though not a philosophical position in the strictest sense, how these royal boys and their deaths are constructed across Shakespeare's career, how they, like many of Shakespeare's thoughts, "form and re-form in successive plays" will be my focus, as I continue to discuss the variety of noble boyhoods in Shakespeare (24).

"So cunning and so young is wonderful:"

Richard III and the Princes in the Tower

In *3 Henry VI*, Rutland only appears in his death scene and our understanding of the boy mostly comes from this scene and one in which adults mourn his death. In *The Winter's Tale*, we see Mamillius twice before a servant reports his death; thus, though we observe the immediate reactions of his family, we are not privy to the actual event. Shakespeare continues to explore this pattern of a parlous boy whose presence subverts adult masculinity and death prompts the collapse of each play's patriarch, as *Richard III*, *King John*, and *Macbeth* all include scenes with their respective royal boys, a death scene or description of their death that serves as a catalyst for the remainder of the play, and dialogue about the boys' lives and behavior that often contradicts the behavior and intelligence we observed before their death.

For instance, unlike *3 Henry VI* but similarly to *The Winter's Tale*, *Richard III* depicts a more rounded portrayal of its royal boys. Whereas what little we know of Rutland depends almost entirely on what the adults say about him after his murder, such is not the case with King Edward IV's sons, Prince Edward of Wales and Richard, Duke of York, better known as the Prince and York or the princes in the Tower. In *Richard III*, Shakespeare introduces his monarchical boys before they are killed, thus providing us with the first opportunity more fully to witness royal boyhood on stage. The playwright includes two scenes with the princes that not only allow us to differentiate the Prince and York, but also to observe these children first hand before their death. By so doing, we obtain a clearer understanding of why Richard wants to assassinate these boys in addition to the obvious and pragmatic complications their lives cause Richard's quest for the throne.

Two months before his death, Prince Edward becomes heir to the throne at age twelve. He makes a single brief appearance approximately midway through the play. Act three begins as the Prince arrives in London with his retinue, immediately to be greeted by Richard. Later in the play, he and his brother York are sentimentalized by the surviving adults who will remember, if not altogether create, his innocence. Hardly innocent or naïve, though, Prince Edward is immediately suspicious of his Uncle Richard. He demonstrates his intelligence by parrying Richard's flattering language with his own witty double entendres. For instance, when Richard first meets his nephew, he welcomes him and remarks how "the weary way hath made you melancholy," to which Edward replies, "No, uncle, but our crosses on the way / Have made it tedious, wearisome, and heavy. / I want more uncles here to welcome me" (3.1.4-6). The

“crosses” regard the unfortunate events the Prince encountered during his trip, particularly the arrests of his maternal uncles—Rivers, Dorset, and Gray. He knows Uncle Richard is dangerous, and he would much prefer the presence of any other uncle. Richard, responding with his own word play, condescendingly remarks that because of the Prince’s young age, he is too innocent and naïve even to recognize dangerous uncles when they are near:

Sweet Prince, the untainted virtue of your years
 Hath not yet div’d into the world’s deceit;
 Nor more can you distinguish of a man
 That of his outward show, which, God he knows,
 Seldom or never jumpeth with the heart.
 Those uncles which you want were dangerous;
 Your Grace attended to their sug’red words
 But look’d not on the poison of their hearts.
 God keep you from them, and from such false friends. (3.1.7-15)

In this moment, the impetuous Richard carelessly slips when he warns his nephew of dangerous uncles. The Prince recognizes the danger of being in his uncle’s company but knows it is unsafe to confront him. His veiled response is both an appeal to Richard’s help, but also a declaration that Rivers, Dorset, and Gray are not the dangerous uncles whom he should fear: “God keep me from false friends!—but *they* were none” (3.1.16; my emphasis).

The Prince continues to display his wit and awareness of impending danger during the subsequent exchange with Richard. An Elizabethan audience, certainly

familiar with the story of the princes in the Tower, would recognize the dramatic irony during this short conversation:

PRINCE. Say, uncle Gloucester, if our brother come,
Where shall we sojourn till our coronation?

.....

GLOUCESTER. Your Highness shall repose you at the Tower;
Then where you please, and shall be though most fit
For your best health and recreation.

PRINCE. I do not like the Tower, of any place.
Did Julius Caesar build that place, my lord?

BUCKINGHAM. He did, my gracious lord, begin that place,
Which, since, succeeding ages have re-edified.

PRINCE. Is it upon record, or else reported
Successively from age to age, he built it?

BUCKINGHAM. Upon record, my gracious lord.

PRINCE. But say, my lord, it were not regist' red,
Methinks the truth should live from age to age,
As 'twere retail'd to all posterity,
Even to the general all-ending-day.

.....

That Julius Caesar was a famous man;
With what his valor did enrich his wit,
His wit set down to make his valure [*sic*] live.

Death makes not conquest of this conqueror,

For now he lives in fame though not in life. (3.1.61-62, 65-78, 84-88)

The Prince, in remembering Julius Caesar, punningly relates his life to that of the assassinated Caesar. Quoting these same lines, Catherine Belsey reminds us that the Prince's "words would carry considerable irony for the audience: the prince's deaths were not attributed to their uncle in writing until long after the event; they had no tomb and thus no epitaph" ("Little" 44).¹⁰ Richard's aside to his nephew's comments on history and famous leaders confirms that the Prince is not unknowingly ironic: "So wise so young, they say, do never live young" (3.1.79). The Prince and Richard's conversation is interrupted when his younger brother expresses concern about staying in the tower with their "uncle Clarence' angry ghost," but Edward acknowledges the true avuncular threat:

PRINCE. I fear no uncles dead.

GLOUCESTER. Nor none that live, I hope.

PRINCE. And if they live, I hope I need not fear.

But come, my lord; with a heavy heart,

Thinking of them, go I unto the Tower. (3.1.144, 146-50)

These are the last lines spoken by Prince Edward in the play. Fittingly, they not only allude to the tragedy the audience knows is imminent, but they also serve as a final demonstration of the Prince's perceptual and intellectual prowess. While virtually none of the adults in the first acts of *Richard III* seem to express any sort of concern or suspicion about Richard's plan, the Prince reveals in this scene that he alone recognizes Richard's proclivity for corruption and manipulation.

¹⁰ Tyrell reports to Richard what happened to the two princes after they were murdered: "The chaplain of the Tower hath buried them, / But where (to say the truth) I do not know" (4.3.29-30).

Whereas Prince Edward uses his intelligence to attack Richard indirectly with word play, his nine-year old brother is much more direct with his berating. As with many of the boys discussed in this chapter, when we first encounter York he is conversing with the women in his family. In 2.4, York talks with his mother, Queen Elizabeth, and paternal grandmother, the Duchess of York, about how fast he has grown relative to his brother. He tells the Duchess that Richard once told him that “Small herbs have grace, great weeds do grow apace,” and now he hopes “not [to] grow so fast, / Because sweet flow’rs are slow and weeds make haste” (2.4.13, 14-15). The Duchess replies that such was not the case when Richard was a boy: “He was the wretched’st thing when he was young” (18). Pleased by this detail, York responds, “if I had been rememb’red, / I could have given my uncle’s Grace a flout, / To touch his growth nearer than he touch’d mine,” and he explains how he will use this new information to insult his uncle:

Marry (they say) my uncle grew so fast

That he could gnaw a crust at two hours old;

’Twas full two years ere I could get a tooth.

Grandam, this would have been a biting jest. (2.3.23-25, 27-30)

The Queen, recognizing the boy’s intentions, states, “A parlous boy! Go to, you are too shrewd” (2.4.35). “Parlous,” or as some editors modernize it, “perilous,” suggests both clever and mischievous traits of the boy, but more specifically it means dangerously cunning.¹¹ Before his death, this description is how adults characterize York, a *parlous boy*. The new detail about his uncle fuels York’s insults during the next scene. After

¹¹ The *OED* cites this line from the 1597 quarto of *Richard III* as the first recorded use of “parlous,” though the 1616 Folio uses “perilous,” a word found in *Pistel of Swete Susan* (1390).

briefly talking to his brother, Richard asks the boy, “How fare our cousin, noble Lord of York?” and the boy initiates a contest of wit

YORK. I thank you, gentle uncle. O my lord,

You said that idle weeds are fast in growth:

The Prince my brother hath outgrown me far.

GLOUCESTER. He hath, my lord.

YORK. And therefore is he idle?

GLOUCESTER. O my fair cousin, I must not say so.

YORK. Then he is more beholding to you than I. (3.1.101, 102-07)

In these few lines, York takes Richard’s weed metaphor and quickly turns it against the man, stating that according to his own reasoning, since the Prince has outgrown York, he must be idle, or useless. When Richard, attempts to clarify, York simply replies that Edward, thus, must have more power over Richard than himself, and in so doing, we recognize how these two brothers differ, though so often concertedly referred to as “The Princes in the Tower.”

Shakespeare’s first sustained depiction of noble boyhood becomes increasingly complex as this interaction between Richard and York continues. We recognize in the following exchange between boy and man that not only do the princes represent a monarchical threat for Richard (they are after all the heirs to the throne) but also that their bravura, as demonstrated by their superior wit and intelligence, confirms that they possess manly qualities superior to Richard’s. Throughout 3.1, we witness Edward’s stoicism and York’s wit as the two boys demonstrate their superiority and authority and humiliatingly reveal Richard to be incompetent. Speaking on the “potent meanings” of

insults for early modern manhood, Alexandra Shepard articulates how the debasements such as the ones we witness between the boys and Richard “achieved its impact either by denying men’s claims to patriarchal dividends or by positing competing conceptions of the social scale in ways which disregarded hierarchies of patriarchal privilege” (182). Though their slandering may appear as the superficial and obnoxious riposte of young boys, their devaluation of their uncle ultimately questions his authority, especially since the source of the insults comes from boys, who are understood as belonging to a subordinate social position.

Hence, having established his brother’s monarchical superiority while simultaneously deconstructing and outsmarting the usually sharp Richard, York’s persiflage turns to insult as he addresses his uncle’s physical deformities. He asks Richard for his dagger, only to call it a child’s “toy” (3.1.114). Perhaps these lines, as Pauline Kiernan believes, pertain to Richard’s phallus and possible impotence,¹² but I am more inclined to follow Catherine Belsey, who suggests York draws attention to his uncle’s “nervous mannerism recorded in the sources, which made Richard repeatedly finger his dagger” (“Little” 45). Either way, York taunts his uncle, not unlike the schoolboys discussed in the previous chapter, and Richard’s feigned eagerness to give the boy his dagger is certainly a threat: “My dagger, little cousin? with all my heart” (3.1.111). However, when Richard condescendingly calls the boy “little lord,” both brothers work together to humiliate their uncle:

GLOUCESTER. What, would you have my weapon, little lord?

YORK. I would, that I might thank you as you call me.

¹² For more on the possibility of Richard’s potential impotence and genital deformity see Pauline Kiernan’s *Filthy Shakespeare: Shakespeare’s Most Outrageous Sexual Puns* (2008).

GLOUCESTER. How?

YORK. Little.

PRINCE. My Lord of York will still be cross in talk.

Uncle, your Grace knows how to bear with him.

YORK. You mean, to bear me, not to bear with me.

Uncle, my brother mocks both you and me:

Because that I am little, like an ape,

He thinks that you should bear me on your shoulders. (128-31)

The Prince recognizes how his brother is “cross in talk,” querulously twisting Richard’s words, and he tells his uncle to “bear” with him. York then puns “bear” in order to abash his uncle. As part of popular entertainments, bears were often trained to carry court jesters or monkeys on their shoulders. As Martin Marprelate’s narrator in *Plaine Percevall* claims, “thinking belike to ride vpon my Crupshoulders: I am no Ape Carrier” (12). Thus, knowing the humiliating association between ape-bearing and hunchbacks, York jumps onto his uncle’s back,¹³ while Buckingham, in an aside to Hastings, remarks,

With what a sharp-provided wit he reasons!

To mitigate and scorn he gives his uncle,

He prettily and aptly taunts himself:

So cunning and so young is wonderful. (3.1.132-35)

No doubt the presence of so many men—Buckingham, Bouchier, Catesby, the Mayor of London, Hastings, the Cardinal—exacerbates Richard’s humiliation. He does not, or

¹³ In a 1992-93 Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Richard III*, director Sam Mendes had York (Annabelle Apsion) jump on the back of Richard (Simon Russell Beale) in order to humiliate the adult even further.

perhaps is unable to, respond this time to his young nephew, instead simply remarking, “My lord, will’t please you pass along?” before sending the princes to the Tower (136).

Richard may have personal reasons as well for not being easily to brush aside York’s insults. If we imagine, with Harold Goddard, “the taunts and insults Richard Crookback must have submitted to as a child and boy because of his broken body,” then we can understand how York’s wisecracks fuel something other than political ambition in Richard (36). An angry and vindictive nerve lives in Richard, perhaps originating in his boyhood. According to Richard’s mother, his “school-days” were “frightful, desperate, wild and furious” (4.4.170). As we recall with Moth, schoolboys in Shakespeare certainly are capable of offense, and one wonders if York’s insults about his uncle’s deformity remind Richard of similar verbal abuse of his childhood. If so, we recognize Richard’s impending desire to kill his nephews through not only a thirst for political gain but also a sense of threat from their being boys. Judith H. Anderson rightly notes how Richard’s failure to respond to York’s final and most harsh criticism, the reference to his uncle’s back and shoulders, suggests a “vulnerability” as well as a “contempt that he neither initiates nor directs,” but I would also add that the speaker of these criticisms—a boy—increases tremendously their potency (115). No longer mordacious, York’s comments strike at the heart of and challenge Richard’s manhood.

This scene with the Prince and York not only establishes important differences between the two princes but it also reveals their intellectual and even overall political adeptness over the men around them. With the exception of Elizabeth and perhaps Richard’s mother and some of the lower class citizens, almost everyone in the court is in some way duped or outsmarted by Richard, or at least hesitant to act. These boys,

however, outdo and humiliate Richard in wordplay, during which we see that the boys recognize Richard's scheme and in their own way are confronting their uncle more than most of the men in play. Though Richard and Richard's three hired assassins ultimately defeat the physically weaker boys, Shakespeare suggests in these scenes that if they had lived, they would have been able to overpower their uncle. Richard believes his nephew when he says, "if I live until I be a man, / I'll win our ancient right in France again, / Or die a soldier as I liv'd a king" (3.1.91-93).

Richard III provides the first detailed look at the emotional, psychological, and narratological events leading up to the death of a royal boy in Shakespeare. One phenomenon in all of the boy murders in Shakespeare is that, with the exception of Clifford, all the men hire assassins to commit the murder: Tyrell in *Richard III*, Hubert in *King John*, and the anonymous murderers in *Macbeth*. When Richard confronts his main collaborator, Buckingham, he encounters hesitancy:

KING RICHARD. Why, Buckingham, I say I would be king.

BUCKINGHAM. Why, so you are, my thrice-renowned lord.

KING RICHARD. Ha? am I king? 'Tis so—but Edward lives.

BUCKINGHAM. True, noble prince.

KING RICHARD. O bitter consequence,

That Edward still should live true noble prince!

Cousin, thou wast not wont to be so dull.

Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead,

And I would have it suddenly perform'd.

What say'st thou now? Speak suddenly, be brief.

BUCKINGHAM. Your Grace may do your pleasure.

KING RICHARD. Tut, tut, thou art all ice, thy kindness freezes.

Say, have I thy consent that they shall die?

BUCKINGHAM. Give me some little breath, some pause, dear lord,

Before I positively speak in this.

I will resolve you herein presently.

Exit Buckingham.

(4.2.12-26)

Remembering what we learned about child-killing from *3 Henry VI*, there are two important matters to notice in this exchange. First, “I wish the bastards dead” is memorable as being Richard’s first order as king, and with it we recall Rutland’s Ovidian curse: *Dii faciant laudis summa sit ista tuae!* (1.3.48). His first command compromises this summital accomplishment and marks the beginning of his downfall. Second, whereas fratricide was acceptable for Buckingham—never once appearing at all disconcerted by Richard’s decision to murder his brother—child-killing, as introduced in *3 Henry VI*, is something else entirely. Requesting time to deliberate on Richard’s request, Buckingham exits while Catesby voices an observation: “The King is angry, see, he gnaws his lip” (4.2.27). Perhaps angry at Buckingham’s hesitancy, Richard is also anxious. Unwilling to commit the murder himself, he calls for the assistance of another, and in so doing Shakespeare introduces a record fifth boy-character to a single play:

KING RICHARD. I will converse with iron-witted fools

And unrespective boys; none are for me

That look into me with considerate eyes.

High-reaching Buckingham grows circumspect.

Boy!

PAGE. My lord?

KING RICHARD. Know'st thou not any whom corrupting gold

Will tempt unto a close exploit of death?

PAGE. I know a discontented gentleman

Whose humble means match not his haughty spirit.

Gold were as good as twenty orators,

And will, no doubt, tempt him to any thing.

KING RICHARD. What is his name?

PAGE. His name, my lord, is Tyrrel.

KING RICHARD. I partly know the man; go call him hither, boy. *Exit*

[Page] (4.2.28-41)

Shakespeare again demonstrates the importance of seemingly minor boy characters in his drama. Richard's assumption that the boy will know the name of a murderer willing to kill two boy princes, an act apparently below even Richard's villainy, suggests that some early modern boys, even those living in or around the court, do not maintain innocent lives, instead interacting with the world represented by Tyrrel. This Page represents another important contrast to the nostalgic and innocent boys that will later be constructed after the news of the two princes' death emerges.

One of the great peculiarities of *Richard III* is that it contains the only royal child killed offstage in Shakespeare.¹⁴ Rutland and Young Macduff are stabbed to death in

¹⁴ Mamillius is an exception, but *The Winter's Tale* is not a history play. Moreover, though Leontes is probably responsible for his son's death, Mamillius dies because of mourning and is not murdered in the same way as Rutland, these princes, or Young Macduff.

front of the audience; Arthur, having escaped prison, leaps to his death. Yet the most famous of all these child deaths and the most well-known and the most dramatic of all Richard's crimes, the event that gave the Tower its reputation for centuries, occurs offstage. Such uniqueness seems all the more strange after we consider just how popular the Princes's death were in the Elizabethan imagination. According to A.J. Pollard's book-length study on the princes in the tower, "The earliest best known and dominant story [of the historical Richard III] is that of the cruel tyrant who murdered his innocent nephews in the Tower" (3). Thus, one can imagine a disappointed audience who would have followed the irony in the abovementioned scene where Richard and his nephews discuss the history of the Tower and the Prince's great understatement, "I do not like the Tower" (3.1.68). But instead of the violence and action surrounding the death of these royal boys, Shakespeare instead offers something markedly different. Since we do not witness the death of the boys, we can only listen to Tyrell's description of the event in soliloquy:

The tyrannous and bloody act is done,
 The most arch deed of piteous massacre
 That ever yet this land was guilty of.
 Dighton and Forrest, who I did suborn
 To do this piece of [ruthless] butchery,
 Albeit they were flesh'd villains, bloody dogs,
 Melted with tenderness and [kind] compassion,
 Wept like [two] children in their deaths' sad story.
 "O, thus," quoth Dighton, "lay the gentle babes."

“Thus, thus,” quoth Forrest, “girdling one another
 Within their alablaster innocent arms.
 Their lips were four red roses on a stalk,
 [Which] in their summer beauty kiss’d each other.
 A book of prayers on their pillow lay,
 Which [once], quoth Forrest, “almost chang’d my mind;
 But O! the devils”—there the villain stopp’d;
 When Dighton thus told on, “We smothered
 The most replenished sweet work of Nature
 That from the prime creation e’er she framed.”
 Hence both are gone with conscience and remorse
 They could not speak; and so I left them both,
 To bear this tidings to the bloody King. (4.3.1-22)

In recalling these final moments, Tyrell laments over two boys described entirely differently from the precocious ones we witness humiliate and banter with Richard. Tyrell’s presence at the death is even in question as he recites what Dighton and Forrest, the two men who actually committed the deed, reported to him. Shakespeare thus places a significant amount of distance between the audience and these deaths. In later plays, Shakespeare includes death scenes that occur on stage and are more akin to Rutland’s murder. However, by having us learn about the detailed events in the Tower in this particular manner, Shakespeare not only recreates much of the historical mystery and uncertainty surrounding the deaths of Edward and York, but he is also able to fill this distance with a death bed scene that works as a story retold instead of a dramatic scene on

stage. Tyrell's description of the princes' death strangely resembles the popular Romanticized child deathbed scenes of the long nineteenth century through its memorable infusion of sentimentality, innocence, and eroticism. Shakespeare makes the horrific even more so by depicting the brothers in such a unique way. The boys embraced each other with their "alabaster innocent arms" and "kiss'd each" with the lips the color of roses (11, 13). These physicalities, in addition to the book of prayers lying near their pillow, transformed the murderers as they "Melted with tenderness and [kind] compassion" at the "most replenished sweet work of Nature / That from the prime creation e'er she framed" (7, 18-19).

The phallic insults made by the boys about Richard's deformities are forgotten as other adults in the play remember the princes similarly as Tyrell. Queen Elizabeth, who earlier called York "too shrewd" a "parlous boy," now sees her sons as "tender babes," "unblown flowers, new-appearing sweets!" whose "gentle souls fly in the air" like "gentle lambs" (4.4.9-10, 11, 22). Likewise, the Duchess, who was witness to York's precocity, now refers to the boys as "innocent blood" (4.4.30). Of course, these are the emotions, despite Phillipe Ariès's arguments, that might be expected from a grieving mother.¹⁵ However, when paired with Tyrell's similar description of tender, gentle, praying boys, we see how differently the adults remember the princes' boyhood compared to what we witness on stage.

A "little abstract," an "innocent prate:"

Arthur and *King John*

¹⁵ For his argument that pre-modern parents did not mourn the death of their children, see Phillipe Ariès's, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (1960), published in English as *Centuries of Childhood* (1962).

In 1951, Harold Goddard characterized *King John* as follows: “*King John* has generally been relegated to a place among Shakespeare’s relatively minor works. It is a mere chronicle, it is said, just an inconsequence of events. It lacks the organized unity of a work of art. It is a play at which the author ‘perhaps pegged away’ . . . ‘when he did not feel in the right mood’ for *Richard II*” (140). Thus begins Goddard’s analysis of one of Shakespeare’s least read or performed dramas. Perhaps as a result of this outlook, one that has not dissipated since Goddard’s mid-twentieth-century summation, readers and directors alike remain reluctant to tackle this early history. A popular play in its day, now *King John* is too often branded, to borrow Maurice Charney’s label, as “Bad Shakespeare.”

But *King John* is a strangely remarkable play. It is the only Elizabethan history not part of Shakespeare’s double tetralogy.¹⁶ According to the order of Shakespeare’s composition, the play is sandwiched between, though lacking any narrative connection to, the dramas concerning the houses of Lancaster and York.¹⁷ The play is noteworthy for narrating the life and death of King John but failing to acknowledge the most significant event of that king’s reign, the baronial revolt that resulted in the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215. Moreover, as Donna Hamilton observes, the play “merely by virtue of its narrating an archetypal story of a king’s struggle with the pope, situates itself in the midst of [anti-catholic] discourse,” despite Shakespeare’s eliminating “from it the far more blatantly anti-catholic rhetoric of its presumed source play, the anonymous *Troublesome Reign of King John*” (31). Put simply, *King John* is a curious play.

¹⁶ The coauthored *Edward III* (1595) may be an exception.

¹⁷ 161 years intervened between the reign of John (1199-1216) and that of Richard II (1377-1399).

Probably composed between 1593-1594, *King John* is a product of one of Shakespeare's most prolific years. The play details the shaky right to the monarchy of King John (1167-1216), whose kingship according to primogeniture should have gone to John's older brother's son, his nephew Arthur, Duke of Brittany. Written immediately after *Richard III*, *King John* maintains a thematic relationship with its predecessor.¹⁸ Both John W. Blanpied and Phyllis Rackin argue that *King John* emerges from Shakespeare's dissatisfaction with *Richard III*. Blanpied believes that Shakespeare "finds he needs . . . a strongly centered play that, paradoxically, does not refuse to relinquish control" (100). Similarly, according to Phyllis Rackin, "*Richard III* has remained a popular play on the stage but its neat structure probably did not satisfy Shakespeare; for all the issues so comfortably resolved in the end of that play are opened up again in *King John*" (*Stages* 65-66). And one of those issues to which Rackin perhaps alludes, I suggest, is Shakespeare's use of a boy prince.

Thus, not only does *King John* follow *Richard III* by amply addressing questions about the divine right of kings and issues of royal succession, but the play also returns to some of the concerns *Richard III* broaches regarding royal boyhood: a parlous and witty boy, his perceived threat both to a king's manhood and the crown, a violent child death, and the remembering of the boy as inspiringly innocent. To do so, Shakespeare first drastically modifies history in order to emphasize Arthur's young age and to consider the influence of such young age on King John. Arthur's presence disrupts his uncle's plans, as both the plot and entire moral ethos of the play are centered on the young boy's

¹⁸ Though some of Shakespeare's plays are much easier to date than others, critics generally agree that *Richard III* was written in 1592-93 and *King John* in 1594-96. Other works probably written in 1593 and 1594 include *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Venus and Adonis*, *The Comedy of Errors*, the *Sonnets*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*.

legitimate claim to the crown. As Mark A. Heberle explains, “John opposes [this claim] by warfare in the first two acts; frustrates it through a dynastic marriage with the French in act 3; tries to eliminate it by destroying Arthur in captivity after war breaks out again; and is ultimately consumed by it even after the child’s death” (34). Yet despite Arthur having the second most number of words of any boy character in Shakespeare, modern directors tend to silence the boy if not remove him altogether from modern productions.

The scholarly consensus surrounding Arthur is as universal as it is one-dimensional, much more so than of any other Shakespearean character. With very few exceptions, when critics, such as Morris Henry Partee, turn to Arthur, they discuss so-called “childlike qualities” such as his “consistent sweetness and gentleness” (69). Katie Knowles believes he is “Far from being a parlous boy” and instead “an extremely timid and mild example of the Shakespearean child” (44). Catherine Belsey similarly finds in Arthur a “helpless” and “powerless . . . little boy” whose “vulnerability” is emphasized continuously throughout the play (“Shakespeare’s Little Boys” 58). While I also identify, to a degree, some of these same attributes in Arthur, I think it amiss either to conclude that he is entirely helpless and naïve or to suggest that such timidity and defenselessness is the appropriate criteria for determining what constitutes a Shakespearean “child” in *King John* or elsewhere. Thus, I also argue that so-called “adult” characteristics, such as reason, intelligence, and persuasion, exist in the boy and that by contrast, John’s demeanor and behavior often instead buttress this interpretation of Arthur’s childness.

For instance, Shakespeare accentuates a strong maternal dependence in both John and Arthur. In the opening scene, Robert Falconbridge and his older brother Philip, the Bastard, request that King John resolve their conflict regarding who should receive their

father's estate, the older bastard or the younger legitimate son. As John rules in Philip the Bastard's favor, his mother intervenes to offer an alternative. Blatantly ignoring her son's decision, she asks the Bastard, "Whether hadst thou rather be a Falconbridge, / And like thy brother, to enjoy thy land; / Or the reputed son of Cordelion, / Lord of thy presence and no land beside?" (1.1.134-37). When John refuses to accept King Philip's declaration that John is not the legitimate king of England, he references his "strong possession" of England as giving him the "right" to rule, and his mother again undermines him in an aside: "Your strong possession much more than your right, / Or else it must go wrong with you and me; / So much my conscience whispers in your ear" (40-42). In this early scene, and throughout the first act, John is spurred into action by his mother. When he learns of the large French army approaching, he wonders why his mother failed to warn him about the mobilization of the French, and sounding like the lost child he laments, "Where is my mother's care, / That such an army could be drawn in France, / And she not hear of?" (4.2.117-19). He pitifully calls out, "What, my Mother dead" (127) and again, "My mother dead!" (182). In my introduction, I cite Coppélia Kahn's explanation of how "engulfment by the mother" and "dis-identifying from [the] mother" were considered two significant maturational obstacles for early modern boy (11). According to the terms of this threat in the play, we can compare John's boylike dependence on this mother with Arthur's man-like independence from his mother and recognize how these two roles have symbolically been reversed.

Yet Shakespeare unquestionably constructs his Arthur as a young boy, probably no older than thirteen. We recognize this difference by juxtaposing the boy with the older, historical Arthur. After Richard I's death, it was uncertain who should succeed. He

had begotten no legitimate children, but he did have two brothers: Geoffrey, who was trampled to death at a tournament before Richard I died, and John, who at age 32 became the only surviving son of Henry II. However, before his fatal accident, Geoffrey had begotten Arthur through his marriage with Constance. Arthur was twelve years old when Richard I died, and the central question of Shakespeare's *King John* thus becomes, "Who should be the next king of England, the youngest adult brother of the previous king or the child-nephew by way of an intermediate brother?" As Peter Saccio explains, such issues concerning royal succession were deeply perplexing in England at the turn of the twelfth century; formal laws to answer this question did not exist (1187-95).¹⁹ The conflict split England's royals and, as dramatized in Shakespeare's play, permitted King Philip Augustus of France the opportunity to invade. Though, historically, Arthur did rule briefly under the temporary Treaty of Le Goulet, he spent his teen years traveling between England and France amongst rulers who either wanted to use him as a pawn or to dispose of him. At the battle of Angiers, in 1202, Arthur was imprisoned at Falaise, under the supervision of Hubert de Burgh, before he was transferred to the castle at Rouen, where he died probably sometime in April 1203 at age sixteen. As with Prince Edward and York in *Richard III*, the exact events surrounding Arthur's demise are not certain, thus making Shakespeare's inclusion of these events all the more relevant to the play and to my project, since Shakespeare's depictions of these boys' deaths help us to

¹⁹ Of the historical John and Arthur, Peter Saccio states, "No formal rule existed by which to answer this question [of lawful succession]. . . . [T]he matter of the royal succession was sufficiently vexatious in the fifteenth century, when primogeniture was a better established custom in England. In the twelfth century, procedures in this matter were almost entirely ad hoc. Before the Norman Conquest, English kingship had been elective, although the candidates usually had to have the royal blood. . . . The real or supposed wishes of the dying king the preferences of the leading magnates, the strength and celerity of the various heirs, and sheer luck were all potentially powerful elements in the highly fluid situation created by a demise of the crown" (190).

continue to understand how these boy characters function in his canon. According to one chronicle, John ordered that Arthur be blinded and castrated, a fate escaped through Hubert de Burgh's intervention. Another account posits that Arthur, in an attempt to escape prison, fell into the Seine River and drowned. A third story claims that King John, while under the influence of both alcohol and a devil, murdered Arthur himself, and then tied the boy's body to a stone that he then threw into the Seine.²⁰

Shakespeare mostly dramatizes the first two sources when he pens the life and death of young Arthur. Shakespeare's Arthur never reigns as king, never goes to war, and never is betrothed to Marie of France. However, the most significant changes Shakespeare makes to his historical sources are to imagine Arthur as a younger boy and to dedicate the entire fourth act to the mysterious events surrounding his death. Therefore, I want to suggest that depicting Arthur as a young boy rather than the historically accurate teenager nearer to the age of the Bastard Philip Falconbridge actually makes his threat to John more acute.²¹ Not only does Arthur's boyhood serve as a point of tension for John since the boy has a legitimate claim to the throne, but his boyhood undercuts John's will to patriarchal power in that Arthur's death functions as an indictment of John's ambitions. Unlike kings such as Henry IV and Henry V, John rarely frets over his questionable legitimacy, and not surprisingly, Shakespeare depicts John as his pettiest and least glorious monarch, whose greatest achievement is the removal of Arthur from the court.

²⁰ I take my summary of these historical events from Peter Saccio's *Shakespeare's English Kings* (1977), A. J. Piesse's "*King John: Changing Perspectives*" (2002), and the brief *Riverside* introduction to the play.

²¹ Historically, Philip Falconbridge, or Philip the Bastard, is 19 when Arthur dies at age 16. Nothing in the play suggests that these two characters are that close in age.

Nevertheless, John seems a bit more reluctant to kill Arthur compared to the willingness of Richard in *Richard III*, who is quite direct when asking Buckingham to kill the boys: “Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead, / And I would have it suddenly perform’d” (17-18). King John, by contrast, is more hesitant when he approaches Hubert with a similar request. In Shakespeare’s dramatic source, *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* (1591), only three ambiguous lines address this command: “Hubert keep [Arthur] safe, / For on his life doth hang thy Soveraignes crowne, / But in his death consists thy Soveraignes blisse” (1.1119-21). At first coy, Shakespeare’s John waits several lines before being direct. The Bastard and John meet in a plain near Angiers, the Bastard with Austria’s decapitated head and John with Arthur. John entrusts Hubert to keep the boy, but first Elinore takes Arthur aside so that John can flatter Hubert before feigning hesitancy to remember that he “had a thing to say:”

KING JOHN. Hubert, throw thine eye
On yon young boy. I'll tell thee what, my friend,
He is a very serpent in my way,
And wheresoe'er this foot of mine doth tread,
He lies before me. Dost thou understand me?
Thou art his keeper.

HUBERT. And I'll keep him so,
That he shall not offend your Majesty.

KING JOHN. Death.

HUBERT. My lord?

KING JOHN. A grave.

One reason why Arthur receives so little critical attention is due to his frequently being removed whenever *King John* is produced, a decision that not only overlooks the play's concern with boyhood but especially alters the prison scene. For instance, in the BBC/Time-Life Royal Shakespeare Company production of the play, more than eighty of Arthur's lines are cut, and his final nine lines in the torture chamber are removed entirely. Such alteration results in Hubert, not Arthur, becoming the dominant and more compelling figure on screen. However, we recall that the prison scene is an important addition by Shakespeare to Arthur's history, and the boy maintains a strong textual presence in the scene. In order to emphasize the boy's supposedly innocent and defenseless state, Hubert consistently refers to Arthur as a child, calling him a "Young lad," "little prince," "innocent prate," "young boy," "pretty child," and "boy" throughout the scene, and in so doing Shakespeare repeatedly emphasizes Arthur's boyhood.

Also imagined in Shakespeare's depiction of Arthur is his being as sharp-witted as the other boys I have discussed. As mentioned, critics often label Shakespeare's boys as naïve and innocent despite most of them instead maintaining an aptitude for verbal irony and wit. Arthur continues this rhetorical tradition. When Arthur first appears on stage, Hubert immediately calls attention to the boy's size: "Good morrow, little prince" (4.1.9). Arthur replies, "As little prince, having so great a title / To be more prince, as may be. You are sad." (10-11). Arthur uses far more sophisticated rhetoric than his few critics have acknowledged. As we remember with Prince Edward, Arthur recognizes his dangerous circumstance, and despite seeming otherwise he uses Hubert's demeaning salutation of "little prince"—a comment on his diminutive stature that anticipates the attention Falstaff will call on his boy's similar size—as an opportunity to remind the

would-be assassin of his legitimate right to the crown. The boy's response is ironic; he communicates that considering his legitimate right to be a greater prince, he is as little a one as possible. Hubert replies to Arthur's feigned and delayed observation—"You are sad"—by lamenting, "Indeed, I have been merrier," and Arthur retorts with another pun: "*Mercy on me! / Methinks nobody should be sad but I*" (13-14, my emphasis). Despite danger having not yet blatantly presented itself, the boy persuasively pleads for mercy. Hardly naïve, Arthur recognizes his threat to John.

Just as *3 Henry VI* proves with the death of Rutland that royal boys often suffer perforce of their father's sins, so does *King John* suggest something similar in this scene. When Rutland asks why Clifford must kill him, the man replies that it is because of the harm caused by his father. Arthur offers an equally logical sentiment when he tells Hubert, "Is it my fault that I was Geoffrey's son? / No indeed is't not" (4.1.22-23). The boy's rhetorical question illustrates his ability logically and reasonably to persuade Hubert to spare his life, despite the man's having not yet clearly revealed such a threat. One important distinction between Arthur's reply and Rutland's is that the prince reasonably and convincingly explains that despite his not being responsible for his royal birth, he is still the legitimate king. Thus, Arthur uses simple, supposedly childish rhetoric somewhat to belie his argument, and in doing so, Arthur crafts a clever defense that reveals a very important repercussion for Hubert: killing this boy is regicide.

The political and divine ramifications of killing a king aside, Arthur's particular defense hints at another possible explanation as to why, unlike all the other royal boys in Shakespeare, Hubert elects to release him. Another part of their relationship might shed light on the confrontation between boy and man. As Sigurd Burkhardt observes,

Arthur never once employs the argument of higher authority and more terrible sanctions. The pathos of his pleading may strike us as somewhat forced and studied; but there is no question that it is directed entirely at Hubert the man, designed to awaken in him that sense of compassion which, once admitted, will render him incapable of the cruel act. (137)

Though I differ from Burkhardt by believing that Arthur does employ “the argument of higher authority” when he distinctly reminds Hubert that he is Geoffrey’s son—the impetus behind all the action in *King John*—I also believe that Burkhardt hints at another possible conflict between John, Hubert, and Arthur. In the same speech in which Arthur reminds Hubert of his royal lineage, the boy makes another important point:

Yet I remember, when I was in France,
 Young gentlemen would be as sad as night,
 Only for wantonness. By my Christendom,
 So I were out of prison and kept sheep,
 I should be as merry as the day is long;
 And so I would be here, but that I doubt
 My uncle practices more harm to me.
 He is afraid of me and I of him.
 Is it my fault that I was Geffrey’s son?
 No indeed isn’t not; and I would to heaven
 I were your son, so you would love me, Hubert. (4.1.14-24)

Morris Henry Partee believes that Arthur “naïvely” speaks these lines and they merely exemplify “childhood simplicity” (72). Yet I find these equivocal lines, particularly the

concluding tercet, a calculated and sophisticated defense. In this moment, Arthur simultaneously appeals to Hubert's compassion and reminds him of the legal and moral ramifications of killing a king's son. Arthur tenderly wishes he were a shepherd, and affectatiously creates a pastoral boyhood much like the one nostalgically recalled by Polixines and Leontes in the opening act of *The Winter's Tale*. Arthur also uses empathy, claiming that he wishes he was Hubert's son and would continue to receive the man's love. Moreover, Arthur's saying "Hubert," throughout this scene but especially in this moment, sounds rather personal, particularly when compared to his address for his mother, a much more general and less personal "madam." Simply by his use of these names, it would appear that Arthur maintains a more intimate and loving relationship with Hubert than with his own mother. Hubert is clearly moved; he breathes in an aside, "His words do take possession of my bosom" (4.1.32). Arthur then pleads directly with Hubert, attempting to persuade him away from torture:

ARTHUR. Must you with hot irons burn out both mine eyes?

HUBERT. Young boy, I must.

ARTHUR. And will you?

HUBERT. And I will.

ARTHUR. Have you the heart? (4.1.39-40).

Hubert similarly shares the pentameter with Arthur as he did earlier with John. In the former, Hubert at first misunderstands John's request, perhaps because of disbelief, but quickly accepts John's demand. Now, however, Hubert does not seem at all hesitant to confirm for the boy the plans he must execute.

But Hubert's diffidence quickly changes when Arthur reminds him of a noticeably tender, if not altogether erotic, moment from their past:

Have you the heart? When your head did but ache,
 I knit my handkercher about your brows
 (The best I had, a princess wrought it me)
 And I did never ask it you again;
 And with my hand at midnight held your head;
 And like the watchful minutes to the hour,
 Still and anon cheer'd up the heavy time,
 Saying, "What lack you?" and "Where lies your grief?"
 Or "What good love may I perform for you?"
 Many a poor man's son would have lien still,
 And ne'er have spoke a loving word to you;
 But you at your sick service had a prince.
 Nay, you may think my love was crafty love,
 And call it cunning. Do, and if you will;
 If heaven be pleas'd that you must use me ill,
 Why then you must. Will you put out mine eyes,
 These eyes that never did nor never shall
 So much as frown on you? (4.1.41-57)

Though Arthur first attempted to appeal to Hubert by reminding the would-be-assassin of his royal position, the boy now inculcates the man with a much more personal appeal, the memory of their intimate history. As A. J. Piesse points out, Hubert "is about to act not in

terms consistent with their hitherto close friendship, but rather as a public servant on the King's orders," and when directors remove Arthur from this scene, the boy becomes nothing more than plot device as Hubert takes center stage ("Character" 74-75). Without Arthur, Hubert's hesitation is due to his reluctance to kill, as opposed to his reluctance specifically to kill Arthur, the boy whom has shared these tender and personal moments. Furthermore, we might infer from Arthur's reminding Hubert of "When [his] head did but ache, / I knit my handkercher about your brows," that their cross-generational relationship extends beyond the prison walls. Thus, it is when Arthur ruminates over this tender moment from their personal life that Hubert willingly releases the boy.

Though Arthur receives Hubert's blessing—"pretty child, sleep doubtless and secure / That Hubert, for the wealth of all the world, / Will not offend thee"—and receives temporary reprieve, his good fortune is brief (4.1.129-31). At the start of 4.3, Arthur speaks in soliloquy before intentionally leaping to his death:

The wall is high, and yet will I leap down.
 Good ground, be pitiful and hurt me not!
 There's few or none do know me; if they did,
 This ship-boy's semblance hath disguis'd me quite.
 I am afraid, and yet I'll venture it.
 If I get down, and do not break my limbs,
 I'll find a thousand shifts to get away.
 As good to die and go, as die and stay. (4.3.1-7)

In this final moment, Arthur appears much more courageous, as he did when he told Hubert he would not move while tortured, than his critics have granted him. He

recognizes that the wall is fatally high and that his chances for survival are slim.

However, his thoughts follow a calm and logical pattern of justification. He is fully aware of the pending torture and death that await him should he remain at the prison, so if he jumps, perhaps he will be able to escape disguised.²³ After this soliloquy, he leaps to his death, and on the ground he laments, “O me, my uncle’s spirit is in these stones. / Heaven take my soul, and England keep my bones!” (4.3.8-9). However, unlike Rutland, unlike Edward, unlike York, and as we will see, unlike Young Macduff, Arthur alone escapes his garrotter and dies attempting to escape.

As already observed in *3 Henry VI*, *Richard III*, and *The Winter’s Tale*, a series of dramatic events ensue after a royal boy dies in Shakespeare: those who are responsible suffer as they fall from their political peak, the dead boy is described sentimentally, and child killing is branded a most atrocious crime. This narrative pattern again surfaces in *King John*. After the Bastard informs King John that “They found [Arthur] dead and cast into the streets, / An empty casket, where the jewel of life / By some damn’d hand was robb’d and ta’en away,” the king physically falters (5.1.39-41). The Bastard observes, “But wherefore do you droop? why look you sad? / Be great in act, as you have been in thought. / Let not the world see fear and sad distrust / Govern the motion of a kingly eye” (44-47). Sad and drooping, King John’s own fall begins four lines after discovering that Arthur is dead and ends two scenes later when he is poisoned by a monk. When others in the kingdom learn the news of Arthur’s death, they nostalgically remember Arthur as innocent and pure, just as we saw previously with Rutland, Mamillius, and the princes. For instance, when Pembroke sees the boy’s body outside the castle walls, he remarks,

²³ For a fascinating discussion concerning how this scene may have been staged in the sixteenth century and how different modern directors have staged it, see Alan Armstrong’s “Arthur’s Fall” (2006).

“O death, made proud with pure and princely beauty!” before insisting that no sin exceeds the murder of a beautiful and innocent boy:

All murders past do stand excus'd in this;
 And this, so sole and so unmatchable
 Shall give a holiness, a purity,
 To the yet begotten sin of times;
 And prove a deadly bloodshed but a jest,
 Exemplified by this heinous spectacle. (4.3.35, 51-56)

The Bastard speaks similarly when he suspects Hubert's involvement with Arthur's murder, asserting “Thou'rt damn'd as black—nay, nothing is so black— / Thou art more deep damn'd than Prince Lucifer. / There is not yet so ugly a fiend of hell / As though shalt be, if thou didst kill this child” (4.3.121-24). Indeed, much as do Arthur's modern critics, these characters find Arthur to be simple and innocent.

King John concludes with the ascension of the also very young Prince Henry (b. 1207) after the death of King John (d. 1216). As Mark A. Heberle describes the play's final scene, “John's nobles became Henry's, pledging their royalty to a mourning child whom Shakespeare's audiences knew as the longest-ruling monarch in English history (1216-1272)” (40). Moreover, the Bastard's stated devotion to Prince Henry—“To whom with all submission, on my knee, / I do bequeath my faithful services / And true subjection everlastingly”—reverses from what it was at the beginning of the play (5.8.103-05). In 1.1, he overlooks the boy Arthur and swears allegiance to King John, but he now commits to the boy King Henry III. Catherine Beasley calls this final scene the “central one in the play,” and argues that Shakespeare rewrote his sources in order “to

focus John's problem's on Arthur" ("Shakespeare's Little Boys" 58). Focusing on Arthur then provides the opportunity to reconsider the boy character in Shakespeare that is too frequently passed over as the most naïve, innocent, and helpless of all of Shakespeare characters. Moreover, the boy player for Arthur would likely have doubled for Prince Henry/King Henry III. Thus, while the fourth act ends with men standing over and inspired by Arthur's dead body, the fifth act ends with the same group of men kneeling before a boy king with the same face as Arthur, and such parallelism signifies the power and influence of these boys.

"Poor prattler, how thou talk'st!"

The Domestic Death of Young Macduff in *Macbeth*

L. C. Knight probably first critically or publicly addressed *Macbeth's* intense preoccupation with childhood. His famous lecture "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" (1932) sparked this interest, but Knight's question focused more on the state of literary criticism than it did childhood in *Macbeth*.²⁴ However, Cleanth Brooks's chapter "The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness," from his seminal *A Well Wrought Urn* (1947), attempted to answer Knight by arguing that the child in *Macbeth* is "perhaps the most powerful symbol in the tragedy" (31).

Indeed, children are everywhere present in *Macbeth*. As young sons, they appear as Young Macduff and Fleance. As visions and apparitions, they are conjured by the witches, a "*bloody Child*" who symbolizes a man born by a cesarean section and a "*Child*

²⁴ Nothing in Knight's essay actually concerns Lady Macbeth's children. His title was intended to satirize what he, in 1933, considered the unfortunate state of Shakespeare criticism, its "assumption that Shakespeare was pre-eminently a great 'creator of characters'" (15). Knight believed that Shakespeare scholars should move past fruitless questions such as, "How many children had Lady Macbeth?" and instead accept, as he did, that "the only profitable approach to Shakespeare is a consideration of his plays as dramatic poems, of his use of language to obtain a total complex emotional response" (20). Rest in peace, Professor Knight.

crowned, with a tree in his hand,” who symbolizes Birnam wood (4.1.77, 87).

Shakespeare uses the child metaphorically when Macbeth explains to Duncan how “duties . . . are to your throne and state children and servants” (1.4.24-25), and the child is a simile when Macbeth soliloquizes about how “pity [is] like a naked new-born babe, / Striding the blast, or heaven’s cherubin, hors’d / Upon the sightless couriers of the air” (1.7.21-23). Pieces of children are found in the witches’s cauldron, such as the “Finger of birth-strangled babe” (4.1.30). Finally, child images are ubiquitous: “seeds,” chicks,” “posterity,” “firstlings.” Put simply, children and images of childhood are found throughout *Macbeth*. They, as Katie Knowles explains, “encroach upon every aspect of the play” (47). Thus, as suspected by Brooks and confirmed by Knowles, *Macbeth* has been noted more so than any other play in Shakespeare’s canon for its interest in childhood, and such an emphasis, as Cleanth Brooks observed, suggests that the play is about a man who wages “war on children” (42).²⁵

This *war* mostly regards Macbeth’s attempt to have Fleance killed and his successful murder of all of Macduff’s children. Of these, the death we witness on stage is that of Young Macduff, and his death is unique from those discussed earlier in this chapter. *Macbeth* stands apart from *Richard III*, *King John*, and *The Winter’s Tale* in that the boy who dies is not related to the sitting king, but appears nevertheless to be the most genealogically threatening. Young Macduff is murdered not because of the sins of his father or because as the rightful heir to the throne he blocks Macbeth’s path to the

²⁵ Identifying a “war on children” at first seems overstated since we only see one child, Young Macduff, actually die on stage. Yet as we have observed, child images and metaphors are common in *Macbeth*, so common that when Macduff receives the news from Malcolm about the murder of his family, his question “What, all my pretty chickens, . . . / At one fell swoop?” indicates that Macbeth’s child-killing extends both metaphorically and literally beyond the death of one boy (4.3.218, 219).

monarchy. Instead, his premature death occurs because of the anxiety his life causes Macbeth. Young Macduff serves as both a reminder of Macbeth's own barrenness and the new king's future, a future for which Macbeth's own lineage does not exist. Thus, despite the prophesy that "none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth," Macbeth nevertheless decides to "make assurance double sure" and murder Macduff nonetheless (80-81, 83). We cannot conclude simply that Macbeth is overtly cautious, since when Lennox informs him that "Macduff is fled to England," he still elects to invade Macduff's castle:

From this moment
 The very firstlings of my heart shall be
 The firstlings of my hand. And even now,
 To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done:
 The castle of Macduff I will surprise,
 Seize upon Fife, give to th' edge o' the sword
 His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
 That trace him in his line. (146-53)

Certainly Macbeth is stubborn in claiming that he will follow through with any action that first enters his mind, and Macbeth is generally understood as rampant and *Macbeth* a tragedy of ambition.

However, as I have been discussing, children often generate extraordinary emotions and anxieties for kings, and Macbeth feels threatened by the Witches' decree of his destiny. According to Sigmund Freud, Macbeth "wants to found a dynasty—not to have murdered for the benefit of strangers" (32). "It is clear that Macbeth cannot live for

ever,” Freud continues, “and thus there is but one way for him to invalidate the part of the prophecy that oppresses him—namely, to have children himself who can succeed him” (32). Whereas Richard and John arrange the deaths of Edward, York, and Arthur respectively because of the present threat the boys represent to the kings, Macbeth finds Fleance and Young Macduff’s association with lineage and posterity to be threatening. Freud glosses Macduff’s “shattering cry” that Macbeth “has no children” with “There is no doubt that this means: ‘Only because he is himself childless could he murder my children’” (32). I find convincing Freud’s identifying Macbeth’s childlessness as his motive for murder. So must have Carol Chillington Rutter, who after referencing Macbeth’s well-known contemplation, “If it were done, when ‘tis done, then, ‘twere well / It were done quickly. If th’ assassination / Could trammel up the consequence and catch / Wit his surcease, success,” notes that it is “not ‘surcease’ that delivers ‘success’; it’s *succession*, succession that fails him. ‘He has no children’” (165). “Tyranny is not the motive force,” she continues, “tyranny is merely the accessory. The motive is barrenness” (165). Without heirs and without children, Macbeth is without a future, and such a realization explains why Macbeth seeks to destroy what Banquo declares are “the seeds of time,” which is to say, children (1.3.58).

Of course, some of the most remembered lines from the play address Macbeth’s sterility, such as when he contemplates how his royalty will end:

Upon my head they plac’d a fruitless crown,
 And put a barren scepter in my gripe,
 Thence to be wrench’d with an unlineal hand,
 No son of mine succeeding. If’t be so,

For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind,
 For them the gracious Duncan have I murther'd,
 Put rancors in the vessel of my peace
 Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
 Given to the common enemy of man,
 To make them kings – the seeds of Banquo kings!
 Rather than so, come fate into the list,
 And champion me to th' utterance! (3.1.60-71)

Macbeth worries here about his phallic “barren scepter” and the threat of Banquo's sons becoming the future kings (3.1.161). The rumor of Macbeth's barrenness exists outside of the Macbeths' bedroom. Indeed, upon discovering that Macbeth is responsible for slaughtering his babes, Macduff reminds the audience that the new king “had no children” (4.1.216). The play's increasing anxiety regarding the threat of the child escalates throughout the play, culminating with the murder of Young Macduff because of his genealogical threat. As we did with the other child murders in Shakespeare, we again remember Rutland's Ovidian curse in *3 Henry VI*: “*Dii faciant laudis summa sit ista tuae!*” (1.3.48). Macbeth's power and control culminates in the moments leading up to the murder of Young Macduff but only his downfall follows.

The murder of Young Macduff is further unique because of its location. Gone are the battlefields, towers, and prisons. Instead, Shakespeare places the murder in a domestic context; Young Macduff is stabbed in front of his mother at his home. The scene begins with Lady Macduff's frustration over her husband's abandonment. Young Macduff is present in the room, and as we saw in *Henry IV* and *The Winter's Tale*, eavesdropping on

adults comes natural to Shakespeare's boys. Lady Macduff tells Ross, "His flight was madness. When our actions do not, / Our fears do make us *traitors*" (4.2.3-4; my emphasis).²⁶ Though Ross attempts to defend Macduff, explaining that they "know not / Whether it was his wisdom or his fear" that caused him to flee (4-5), Lady Macduff refuses to call such selfishness wise:

He loves us not,
 He wants the natural touch; for the poor wren,
 The most diminutive of birds, will fight,
 Her young ones in her nest, against the owl.
 All is the fear, and nothing is the love;
 As little is the wisdom, where the flight
 So runs against all reason. (8-13)

Ross responds by attempting, once more, to defend Macduff, explaining how "cruel are the times when we are *traitors*, / And do not know ourselves" before exiting (18-19; my emphasis). As abovementioned, Young Macduff silently listens to this exchange, and boys in Shakespeare regularly repeat or respond to adult conversations, often dozens of lines later. Believing that Macduff never will return, she tells her son, "Sirrah, you father's dead, / And what will you do now? How will you live?" (30-31). The boy's smart reply, "As birds do, mother," confirms that he both heard and understood his mother's previous avian metaphor (32).

Young Macduff, thus, is another witty boy, capable of lively and varied conversation with an adult. As we observed in all plays following *3 Henry VI*,

²⁶ I have modernized the spelling of "Rosse," here and throughout this project; the Folio and *Riverside* have *Rosse*.

Shakespeare often juxtaposes the actions and rhetoric of his royal boys with how adults remember and reconstruct them after their death. In *Macbeth*, we are only privy to approximately 55 lines of dialogue between the boy and other characters, 20 lines of which are spoken by Young Macduff. In the brief moment that the boy is on stage before his death, we see not only a boy's proclivity for eavesdropping but also that he, too, often replies with words full of meaning. Having heard his mother describe his father to Ross as a traitor, Young Macduff's only lengthy exchange in the play is an attempt to challenge his mother's conclusion:

SON. Was my father a traitor, mother?

LADY MACDUFF. Ay, that he was.

SON. What is a traitor?

LADY MACDUFF. Why, one that swears and lies.

SON. And be all traitors that do so?

LADY MACDUFF. Every one that does so is a traitor, and must be hang'd.

SON. And must they all be hang'd that swear and lie?

LADY MACDUFF. Every one.

SON. Who must hang them?

LADY MACDUFF. Why, the honest men.

SON. Then the liars and swearers are fools; for there are liars and swearers enow to beat the honest men and hang up them.

LADY MACDUFF. Now God help thee, poor monkey! But how wilt thou do for a father?

SON. If he were dead, you'd weep for him; if you would not, it were a good sign that I should quickly have a new father.

LADY MACDUFF. Poor prattler, how thou talk'st! (4.2.44-64)

I see something different in this scene than does Mark Lawhorn, who summarizes this scene before the murderers enter as the “boy’s witty attempts to get a smile from his mother, who remains put out with her absent husband,” thereby offering “a dynamic portrait of a child’s astute sensitivity to a mother’s moods and to her sense of humour” (“Children” 245). I find Young Macduff’s banter more disputatious. His recognition that there are more liars and traitors than “honest hangmen” suggests more life experiences than we give him credit for, or that he has overheard many adult conversations concerning matters of the state. Moreover, when the first murderer calls Macduff “a traitor,” the boy quickly responds, “Thou li’st,” again confirming Shakespeare’s recognition of a boy’s proclivity for overhearing and remembering what he hears (82, 83).

According to Ann Blake, Young Macduff’s death scene had been omitted by directors for almost 200 years, not having been staged until 1909 (“Children” 295). However, five years previously, A. C. Bradley argued for the “great importance” of this boy’s death scene, identifying as its “Chief function. . . . to touch the heart with a sense of beauty and pathos, to open the springs of love and tears” (218). The murderers killing Young Macduff when his father is away is the inverse of their previous attempt at childkilling. In 3.3, the murderers kill the father (Banquo) but it is the boy (Fleance) who escapes. As I have been discussing, Macbeth’s masculinity is threatened by boys, and Fleance, described at once as “Banquo’s issue” and also one of “the seeds of Banquo,”

evokes more anxiety than Macduff's (3.1.60, 71). Fleance seems much older than Young Macduff; he is certainly breached. With only two short lines in the play, Fleance never vocally reveals his relationship to or thoughts concerning Macbeth, and it is the future he represents that burdens Macbeth. However, the Royal Shakespeare Company's 1996 production of the play recognized the same threatening potential as does Macbeth. According to Robert Smallwood's review, in 2.1, the witches forced Macbeth, with his arm around the young Fleance, to confront "seven look-alike Fleances," thus "torturing him with their boyishness" (209). As this directorial decision confirms, for many of the monarchical patriarchs in Shakespeare, noble boyhood is sometimes terrifying.

Throughout his career, from his earliest history plays to one of his final Romances, Shakespeare would inveterately depict murdered boys in his canon. Indeed, six named boys die in his plays: Rutland in *3 Henry VI*, Prince Edward and York in *Richard III*, Arthur in *King John*, Young Macduff in *Macbeth*, and Mamillius in *The Winter's Tale*. In all cases, these boys symbolize a threat to the patriarchs in their plays, either as a challenge to the throne or as potential evidence for their mothers' unfaithfulness. As we have seen, though, there exists a cumulative narrative pattern in Shakespeare's depiction of these murdered boys. In this pattern, parlous boys oftentimes are first depicted through their demonstration of their witty intelligence, which in various ways causes them to become a threat to the respective patriarchs. Their behaviors and mere existence becomes inimical to each patriarch's manhood, and such threats lead to their violent murder. Finally, their death becomes an impetus not only for the surviving adult characters nostalgically to characterize the boys' lives contrary to what we actually

saw depicted, but their deaths always occur as the murderer reaches his political peak, and the boys' death bring about his downfall.

CHAPTER VI

DEFINING CONTEMPORARY BOYHOOD:

ADAPTATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE AND THE UNCONVENTIONAL BOY

[Shakespeare's] work has become deeply constitutive of all of us for whom the world is (to a greater or lesser degree) shaped by the English language. . . . Through four hundred years of imperializing history our Anglophone cultures have become so saturated with Shakespeare that our ways of thinking about such basic issues as nationality, gender and racial difference are inescapably inflected by his writing.

--Michael Neil (184)

A major goal of this project is to consider how our own culture *writes* Shakespearean boyhood and how we position boy characters to perform a similar sort of cultural work in contemporary fiction for boys. Thus, my focus now shifts to discussing the conflicts that arise between the contemporary desire to adapt Shakespeare for boy readers in order either to conform to normative representations of patriarchy or, as we witnessed with Shakespeare himself, use boys and boyhood as a way to repudiate certain ideals associated with hegemonic masculinity. These final chapters selectively address the cultural history of the relationship between Shakespeare and boyhood by considering what Shakespeare's plays and characters are made to mean when contemporary authors adapt them as boy books.

Children's writers have appropriated Shakespeare for more than two centuries, and by recognizing this activity, we can begin to consider the ideological purposes of Shakespeare-as-children's literature. As with John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, who

first suggested in their study of what provokes the retelling of stories as literature for children, I recognize the significance of considering the political, social, cultural, and, in my case specifically, gender underpinnings of this genre:

Novelistic and prose retellings . . . of Shakespeare's texts for children have three main interrelated cultural functions. First, they have a role in making Shakespeare accessible and popular. Second, they are instrumental in the continued and cultural canonization of Shakespeares, and simultaneously, in the construction of a canon of Shakespeare's texts told for children . . . And third, reversions of Shakespeare's texts perform a key role in the transmission of the culture's central values and assumptions to children. The central assumption that underlies and links these three functions is that Shakespeare is cultural capital. (*Retelling* 255-56; also qtd. in Hateley, *Shakespeare* 7-8)

Stephens and McCallum's acute assessment of Shakespeare's texts in children's literature is useful because it sheds light on the cultural and political nature of adaptation, not only in children's literature generally but in Shakespeare more specifically. As I hope to demonstrate in what follows, the turn of the twentieth century witnessed the phenomenon of what has come to be called the *boy crisis*, whereby public concern for the education of young males created a market for numerous educational manuals and pop-psychology books claiming to address ways for parents and teachers to address this alarm. At the same time, there has been a post-millennial boom in the genre of Shakespeare-for-children, and increasingly more of these chapter books have been aimed at boy readers. Since the scope of my project restricts me from covering all genres of Shakespeare

adaptation (picture books, graphic novels, comics, films, animations, stage productions, etcetera), as well as all eras or periods (Victorian, Edwardian, Modern, Post-Modern) in which it has thrived, my decision to focus on contemporary prose narratives results from this genre's being the most common genre inside and outside the classroom.¹

Furthermore, focusing only on contemporary novels, which is to say, prose novels published near or since the turn of the millennium, also helps me to interrogate how these particular boy books emerged during the boy crisis. In the end, I hope to explain how in many ways the gender discourse that ensues, however implicitly, within these adaptations participates in the conversation about how contemporary boys might perform masculinity.

Therefore, by juxtaposing these contemporary boy books with the boy characters in Shakespeare's plays, this project continues by evincing one of the ways Shakespeare persists within the changing cultures of childhood, gender, and masculinity. Children's literature, as we will see, has long maintained instruction as one of its primary functions. With its roots in didacticism, this literature often perpetuates a particular culture's traditions and ideologies, and in so doing, reveals the values and beliefs of that culture.² Therefore, in the final chapters of this project, I examine what happens in contemporary boy books when authors recognize Shakespeare as essential for young male readers and subsequently call upon him to uphold, if not advance, ideologies. First, I briefly address how the educational and entertainment value of Shakespeare became a staple in the

¹ Of course there is valuable work to be done on other genres of Shakespeare adaptation, and Naomi J. Miller's *Reimagining Shakespeare for Children and Young Adults* (2003), Jennifer Hulbert, Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., and Robert L. York's *Shakespeare and Youth Culture* (2006), and Abigail Rokison's *Shakespeare for Young People: Productions, Versions, and Adaptations* (2013) catalogue adaptations of Shakespeare across an enormous range of genres.

² As John Stephens puts it, children's literature tends to uphold rigidly a "standard or pattern of social behavior that is accepted in or expected of a group" (*Language* 3).

modern classroom and why his ideas remain relevant to the education of boys. I particularly argue that Shakespeare as a medium for literacy training as well as character building made him an ideal candidate for appropriation into children's literature. Then, more importantly, I turn to gender issues. In order to explain how these Shakespeare boy books confront hegemonic masculinity, I briefly consider how beliefs and conceptions such as conventional masculinity, conventional boyhood, hegemonic masculinity, and heteronormativity relate to contemporary definitions of boys and boyhood. I specifically situate this discussion within the context of the *boy crisis* in order partially to understand how authors, parents, and educators use Shakespeare and Shakespeare boy books to address this alarm. In so doing, I conclude this chapter by demonstrating how my discussions of Shakespeare boy books—particularly the homosociality of the Elizabethan playhouse, the cross dressing phenomenon depicted in historical fiction, and the effeminate characteristics of Hamlet and his friendship with Horatio—respond to normative and hegemonic boyhoods and masculinities by depicting unconventional boys and boyhoods.

Why Shakespeare?

Education, Entertainment, and Children's Literature

While a comprehensive survey of the ways in which Shakespeare's drama has been adapted into children's stories is well beyond the parameters of this project, a brief overview of why Shakespeare has been so remarkably popular as children's literature is in order.³ As Elizabeth Rose Gruner explains, with Latin roots in both *educere* (to lead

³ Bibliographies of Shakespeare in children's books, both fiction and nonfiction, can be found as an appendix in Kate Chedzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh, and Robert Shaughnesy's *Shakespeare and Childhood*

forth) and *educare* (to bring up), *education* appears in the *OED* primarily as an action that adults do to and for children (70). Hence, children's literature, itself a literary product created by adults for children, traditionally serves both of these senses of education by offering "a medium for literacy training" and providing "'morals' or lessons in citizenship and life" (70, 71). Though children's literature "arises out of an increasingly formalized educational system," it also traditionally has served as entertainment for young readers (71). Recognizing how publishers, educators, parents, and authors accept this developmental function of children's literature to educate and to entertain, critics such as Naomi J. Miller, Erica Hateley, Velma Bourgeois Richmond, Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., Robert L. York, Jennifer Hulbert, Charles H. Frey, John Stephens, and Robyn McCallum all recognize how Shakespeare aptly merges these dual interests in education and entertainment. Erica Hateley, for instance, explains how "The competition between entertainment and education in children's literature becomes a complex cooperation when Shakespeare is deployed, as he is perceived by 'adult culture' as serving both needs" (*Shakespeare* 3). Indeed Shakespeare, both the man and the works, has long been intimately connected with both education and literary art, and his introduction into common curriculum coincides with how he became children's literature.

Historically, Shakespeare has been used for moral and national character building, especially the characters of the young. The landmark year for the introduction of Shakespeare to children is 1807, when Charles and Mary Lamb and Henrietta Bowdler published the first two major texts in the genre of Shakespeare-for-children, *Tales from*

(2007). A critical survey by Naomi J. Miller of children's Shakespeare, entitled "Play's the Thing: Agency in Children's Shakespeare," can be found in that same collection.

Shakespeare and *Family Shakespeare* respectively.⁴ Thus began a series of publications throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which helped to establish Shakespeare, as Charles H. Frey explains, as “a primary gentling and civilizing influence for children” (147). Early classics, such as *Tales from Shakespeare* and later E. Nesbit’s *The Children’s Shakespeare* (1897), have never been out of print, and in an appendix to the collection of essays *Shakespeare and Childhood* (2007), the editors list no fewer than 146 prose and illustrated “retellings” of Shakespeare’s plays published between 1807 and 2007. They also list approximately 108 children’s novels that appropriate Shakespeare’s plays in some way. Most of these novels have been published during the last 30-40 years, though early examples of appropriation include Sara Hawks Sterling’s *Shakespeare’s Sweetheart* (1905) and Rudyard Kipling’s *Puck of Pook’s Hill* (1906). Approximately 75 appropriations of Shakespeare have been published since 1998, the date of the earliest novel in my discussion, but despite such popularity, relatively few of these books would be listed under what we might call *boy books*, which perhaps further confirms that girls make up a more significant percentage of the children’s reading public. Nearly all of the books examined below are both popular and critically acclaimed. Of the eight novels I primarily discuss, four are part of a series, most have appeared on the American Library Association’s (ALA) best book lists, and all are written by award winning authors, including two Newbery authors. By maintaining centuries-long popularity, drawing the interests of award winning authors, and existing as a series, these novels suggest how popular Shakespeare adaptations are and remain.

⁴ In 2006, Georgianna Ziegler published an essay entitled “Introducing Shakespeare: The Earliest Version for Children,” which considers a number of pre-Lambs and pre-Bowdler texts that adapted Shakespeare for children, though none of them were as popular as these two texts.

These adaptations, old and new, work to acquaint young readers with Shakespeare's texts with the intention of establishing some level of comfort and knowledge with the Bard for them to build upon later as adult readers. Early familiarity was important for parents because, as Gary Taylor explains, "Shakespeare was expected of every educated person; the sooner aspirant middle-class children could acquire such knowledge, the better," and as a result of such expectations, "Shakespeare was . . . forcibly transformed into a children's author" (207). Indeed, the Education Act of 1870 reformed Victorian elementary education, in part, by requiring that all children in the United Kingdom between the ages of five and 13 be able to complete six standards of reading. In 1882, Standard VI was amended and Standard VII was added, resulting in Shakespeare becoming legislatively required reading: "VI. Read a passage from one of Shakespeare's historical plays or from some other standard author, or from a history of England. VII. Read a passage from Shakespeare or Milton, or from some other standard author, or from a history of England" (Owen 528; also qtd. in Richmond 20). In the United States, Shakespeare's entrance into the curriculum could be said to have its origins in the McGuffey Eclectic Readers, which consisted of extracts from then contemporary writers as well as established authors, such as Shakespeare. They were used as oratory manuals and introduced students to passages of Shakespeare with the intention of helping them to practice acting, speaking, and memorization. Published between 1830 and 1920, approximately 122 million copies of the McGuffey readers were sold in the US, thus helping to establish knowledge of Shakespeare as part of the norm in American education (Greenhalgh 125).

More often than not, these early Shakespeare books, such as *Tales*, adapted the play's plot into prose, altogether removing the dramatic language and with it the characters' depth.⁵ Interestingly, what is generally labeled as Shakespeare's genius—or the answer to the question “What makes Shakespeare, Shakespeare?”—precisely is what authors remove from their adaptations: the aesthetic language and the characters' ambiguity. Therefore, as John Stephens and Robyn McCallum explain, “Shakespeare's plays present peculiar problems for prose retellings partly because of the complexity of the plots and partly because of the semantic density of the language—the tangible features of the cultural capital which is ‘Shakespeare’” (*Retelling* 259). For example, Edith Nesbit, one of the most recognizable names in Shakespeare adaptation because of her *The Children's Shakespeare* (1897), says that “the stories are the least part of Shakespeare,” despite her volume being almost entirely composed of plot-based reproductions of the plays (5). This tradition merely of retelling the narratives is prevalent in this genre in that rarely is Shakespeare's language ever reproduced, especially language of any length. Thus, according to Janet Bottoms, “The plots, previously criticized by scholars as Shakespeare's weakest point have come to be seen as valuable in themselves because they are his,” which, as we know, is not even the case, as Shakespeare is a notorious adapter himself (17). Several questions arise from what would appear two irreconcilable beliefs, that children need Shakespeare but that what makes Shakespeare Shakespeare must first be altered. Why adapt Shakespeare for children if that which is uniquely Shakespeare is precisely what is removed? What else do prose

⁵ Sometimes authors do include word-for-word short passages from Shakespeare, particularly in the case of the McGuffey readers and other oratory manuals and textbooks. Nevertheless, prose retellings were the overwhelming preference.

versions of Shakespeare provide? How can reimaginings of Shakespeare maintain the complexities found in his plays? What else in these books do writers, teachers, parents, and readers find valuable, implicitly or explicitly? These are some the questions I explore in the remaining chapters of this project, and in what follows I argue that the cultural capital of Shakespeare has created a space for appropriations of Shakespeare to engage with complexities found in the original playtexts, particularly complexities relating to gender.

Shakespeare as Cultural Capital

Understanding how Shakespeare has figured so prominently in American and British education makes it easier for us to recognize how the politics of adaptation may exist in these boy books, particularly regarding how the playwright and his plays figure as cultural capital. Whether or not children care about cultural capital, act on its ability to privilege, or question its potential benefits, they certainly are subject to it throughout childhood. In his discussion of the variety of forms that Shakespeare's works have taken throughout the history of popular culture, Robert Shaughnessy reminds us that "Shakespeare's enduring high-cultural status has coexisted with a multiplicity of other Shakespeares, recycled in stage performance and cinematic adaptation, political discourse, literary and theatrical burlesque, parody, musical quotation, visual iconography, popular romance, tourist itineraries, national myth, and everyday speech" (1). Recognizing the implications of such popularity for the young, Ishrat Lindblad explains how "Shakespeare has been established as a cultural icon for several hundred years, so it is clearly an advantage, even if only in terms of 'cultural capital,' to have met him at an early age" (133-34; also qtd. in Hateley, *Shakespeare* 19). No longer merely a

historical playwright, Shakespeare is the Bard of Stratford, timeless holder of universal truths, highbrow extraordinaire. His is the elite realm of theaters, classrooms, and universities that serves, according to Douglas Lanier, “as one marker of a newly emergent ‘high’ cultural strata, the college-educated intelligentsia that came of age in America and Europe after World War II” (“Shakespeare” 98).

According to Pierre Bourdieu’s influential theory of capital in *La Distinction* (1979; *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* [1984]), there are essentially four types of capital available to an individual: social capital, symbolic capital, cultural capital, and economic capital (Fowler 31). Obviously, I am most interested in cultural capital, which Bourdieu summarizes as follows: “a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success . . . to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes” (“Forms” 243). Thus for Bourdieu, cultural capital manifests in a person’s ability to identify Shakespeare’s language or appreciate a performance, theatrical or cinematic, and I would add that this same sort of cultural capital also appears in a person’s ability to recognize Shakespeare in other media as well, including fiction. Nevertheless, we recognize how and why Shakespeare is such a staple in education, in that Shakespeare-as-cultural capital preserves a system of social hierarchy based on cultural distinction and that appropriating Shakespeare’s works lends *gravitas* or credence to these children’s books by implicitly arguing that what is contained in the work is *Shakespeare approved*.

Studying adaptations of Shakespeare partly in terms of cultural capital also helps me to contextualize the gender component of these final chapters. Since Bourdieu

proposed his theory of cultural capital, a number of sociologists and cultural critics have expanded the concept to include its dialogic relationship with gender, whereby both mainstream culture and cultural capital vies with gender discourse. Critics such as Susan A. Dumais, for example, demonstrate how cultural capital generates different benefits based on both economic class and sex, and in the opening paragraph of the preface to the English edition of *La Domination Masculine* (1998), Bourdieu directly responds to the question that is obsessively raised by most commentators (and most of [his] critics)—that of (observed or desired) permanence or change in the sexual order. . . . It is, indeed, the importation and imposition of this naïve and naively normative opposition that leads people, against all the evidence, to see the conclusion reached as to the relative constancy of sexual structures and the schemes through which they are perceived as a way . . . of denying and condemning those changes. (vii) ⁶

Recognizing how sex and gender drastically influence the potential power and status that come with cultural knowledge, Bourdieu examines how gender and sexuality operate within and across social mechanisms and institutions, such as the state, education, and family. “Possession of strong cultural capital,” he explains, “is not enough in itself to give a woman access to the conditions of real economic and cultural autonomy with respect to men” (107). Recognizing the social function of such capital further helps us to realize Shakespeare’s cultural capital, identify how it relates to gender, and understand its own unique social function when disseminated to young readers.

⁶ See R.V. Robinson and M.A. Garnier’s “Class Reproduction among Men and Women in France: Reproduction Theory on Its Home Ground” (1985) and Susan A. Dumais’s “Cultural, Gender, and School Success: The Role of Habitus” (2002).

Children's literature, of course, has always played a significant role in the social education and gendering of children, and one of my goals in this project is to identify the presence of Shakespearean cultural capital in children's literature and to understand how the construction and exchange of subjective gendered identities often supplements cultural capital. Toril Moi's feminist appropriation of Bourdieu is helpfully similar to my purposes:

To produce a gender habitus requires an extremely elaborate social process of education or *Bildung*. For Bourdieu, an important aspect of this process is the inscription of social power relations on the body. . . [E]ven such basic activities as teaching children how to move, dress, and eat are thoroughly political, in that they impose on them an unspoken understanding of legitimate ways to (re)present their body to themselves and others. (1030-31; also qtd. in Hateley 14)

Indeed, children's culture routinely impresses onto children ways of existing, perhaps especially regarding cultural issues such as class, race, and gender. Adaptations and appropriations of adult or classic literature for young readers becomes an ideal site for this sort of instruction since, as John Stephens explains, "narrative representations of ideology and power can . . . be explored in texts which exist in explicit dialogue with other texts, especially re-versions and sequels" (*Language* 45). Thus, concerning Shakespeare and appropriations of Shakespeare, and between past and present texts, I argue that gender emerges as a crucial component of these texts, and while I agree with Hateley that "children's literature is instrumental in the production of gender, and constructs it as central to agency and authority," I do not think that "binary models of

normative masculinity and femininity, which are ascribed to the plays, and then re-circulated as ‘Shakespeare’” are as prevalent as Hateley believes (*Shakespeare* 14). Rather, in light of my discussion of boyhood in Shakespeare’s plays, I argue that these contemporary authors find in Shakespeare’s cultural capital the opportunity to explore a similar sort of gender plurality inherent in Shakespeare’s pretext.

Boyhood and Gender

Conventional Masculinity and Conventional Boyhood

According to Leah Marcus, “If we are to explore the subject of childhood in literature in a previous era, we must first divest ourselves of our own cultural prejudices about what children should be like” (4). Thus far in this project, I have attempted to do just that: divest myself from my own culture’s definitions and ideologies of boys and boyhood in order to explore how early modern boyhood exists in Shakespeare and how he uses it to comment on those aspects of manhood that boys would be expected to experience before they themselves became men. Now I turn to our own cultural prejudices regarding how contemporary boys and boyhoods should exist and consider what constitutes a boy and his performance. Discussing this process of gender performance allows me then to discuss how appropriations of Shakespeare for boys enter into the conversation of contemporary boyhood, depict the pluralities of boyhood and masculinity inherent in Shakespeare’s plays, and critique essentialist constructions of hegemonic masculinity.

Since what might be considered as normative gendered identities fluctuate across socio-historical contexts, and since what is considered feminine and masculine, womanly and manly, and girlish and boyish vary depending on the expectations and customs of

time and place, I first offer a summary of normative gender, subjectivity, and behavior, particularly as it most often relates to males. After establishing how hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity find expression in mainstream culture and children's literature, I turn to more unconventional performances of boyhood and consider also how such unconventionality finds expression in some children's literature. In so doing, I am able to focus more specifically on how several contemporary children's authors are able to use Shakespeare—particularly the cross-dressing phenomenon of the early modern stage and Hamlet's unconventional representation of masculinity—to depict unconventional boys who do not perform normative masculinity. However, I first situate my discussion of boy books that appropriate Shakespeare within the context of a current phenomenon in contemporary culture often referred to as the *boy crisis*, that is on the one hand an expressed concern for boys' decrease in academic achievement and on the other hand a backlash against various women's movements. Recognizing how most of the contemporary Shakespeare boy books have flourished allows me to consider how these books are in conversation with the concern that contemporary culture is perhaps harming boys.

The Boy Crisis

The cultural phenomenon effectively known as *the boy crisis* appears to have first entered the American psyche during the closing years of the twentieth century. Kenneth Kidd specifically identifies two key moments in 1998 as likely candidates for the first instances in which the phrase *boy crisis* was uttered, a NPR interview with Michael Gurian on *The Merrow Report* and the May 11th issue of *Newsweek* (*Making* 167). Barbara Kantrowitz and Claudia Kalb's editorial in *Newsweek* entitled "Boys Will Be

Boys” was one of the first printed works to address what has come to be identified as the *boy crisis*, and numerous competing book-length studies followed soon after.⁷ Nevertheless, all of these texts acknowledge that at the turn of the twentieth century, boys were much more likely than girls to be diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders and learning disabilities, be placed in remedial courses, quit high school, not graduate from college, and end up in a detention facility or jail. Most relevant to my purposes, however, are the studies citing declining levels of literacy for boys and the statistics suggesting that boys are reading far less than they have in the past. The statistics reported in texts such as Thomas Newkirk’s *Misreading Masculinity: Boys, Literacy, and Popular Culture* (2002), Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm’s “*Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys: Literacy in the Lives of Young Men*” (2002), and Bruce Pirie’s *Teenage Boys and High School English* (2002) collectively convey how less likely boys are than girls to read or be successful in their English classes.

Discussing these texts, and others, Annette Wannamaker has pointed out how often “public discourse makes its way into the texts we write for our children and also affects the ways we read and understand those texts” (3), and I argue that one ancillary effect of the boy crisis phenomenon has been the proliferation of Shakespeare-for-children texts that have appeared during the last 15-20 years. We will recall how Shakespeare-for-children is not an entirely new phenomenon, but that many of the

⁷ For example, Michael Gurian’s *The Wonder of Boys: What Parents, Mentors, and Educators Can Do to Shape Boys into Exceptional Men* (1996) and *The Minds of Boys: Saving Our Sons from Falling Behind in School and Life* (2007), William Pollack’s *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood* (1998), Peg Tyre’s *The Trouble with Boys: A Surprising Report Card on Our Sons, Their Problems at School, and What Parents and Educators Must Do* (2009), James Garbarino’s *Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them* (1999), and Leonard Sax’s *Boys Adrift: The Five Factors Driving the Growing Epidemic of Unmotivated Boys and Underachieving Young Men* (2009).

earliest adaptations were not explicitly written for boys. As Velma Bourgeois Richmond has shown, the extraordinary success of Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807) and the multiple children's versions that followed in its aftermath confirm the popularity of Shakespeare-for-children throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in the preface to *Tales*, Charles Lamb explains the primary reason behind the prose-retellings:

For young ladies . . . it has been the intention chiefly to write; because boys being generally permitted the use of their fathers' libraries at a much earlier age than girls are, they frequently have the best scenes of Shakespeare by heart, before their sisters are permitted to look into this manly book; and, therefore, instead of recommending these Tales to the perusal of young gentlemen who can read them so much better in the originals, their kind assistance is rather requested in explaining to their sisters such parts as are hardest for them to understand. (4)

Undoubtedly, Charles Lamb would be surprised by statistics confirming the current sex reversal regarding children's reading habits, of Shakespeare or any other author. Indeed, based on the statistics that girls outperform boys in secondary and higher education, in addition to their being statistically stronger and more devoted readers, it would appear obvious that retellings for children might now attempt to cater to boys' reading habits.

Such impressions, at least, are what may be driving, consciously or not, many authors of Shakespeare boy books to appropriate the Bard for males. For instance, Avi's irreverent *Romeo and Juliet: Together (and Alive!) at Last* (1987) transforms the Elizabethan tragedy frequently taught and performed in schools into a humorous, goofy,

and generally off-color crush story about the pressures surrounding eighth-grade heterosexual romance. In *MacB* (1999), Neil Arksey modernizes *Macbeth* into a British football story since, according to the front cover, “Football can be deadly.” The novel opens with two young friends, MacB (Macbeth) and Banksie (Banquo) who dislike their captain, Duncan King (King Duncan). A travelling fortune teller tells the two youths that one day they will become captain and co-captain, and with the help of MacB’s mother, Mrs. MacBride (Lady Macbeth), a series of violent, sports-themed, events transpire. Norma Howe’s *Blue Avenger: Cracks the Code* (2000) is an adventure novel that follows the exciting escapades of David Schumacher, who becomes the Blue Avenger superhero when his English teacher inspires him to “crack the code” of the Oxfordian theory of authorship. In *Hamlet II: Ophelia’s Revenge* (2003), David Bergantino turns *Hamlet* into half murder mystery and half ghost story, as popular quarterback Cameron (Hamlet) must come to terms with the possibility that his mother and aunt may have murdered his father and in the process awakened Ophelia’s ghost, who vows to kill Cameron and his friends gruesomely in order to seek revenge on Hamlet. Together, the emphases on heterosexual crushes, adventure, mystery, ghosts, violence, sports, and crude humor suggest how Shakespeare is often contemporarily appropriated for young male readers. The authors’ strategy is apparent: if young males will not read Shakespeare, perhaps they will read a version of Shakespeare that supposedly appeals to normative masculinity, as typified by the violent, hegemonic, and heteronormative focus of these four novels.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Heteronormativity: Men and Boys

Coming from the Greek word for *to lead*, *hegemony* in cultural studies has come to suggest the dominance and often aggressive influence over another group, economic

class, or possibly an individual. In literary criticism more specifically, the term expresses ideological or cultural manipulation and control. Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci is often credited as coining the term *cultural hegemony*, whereby a particular group or social structure manipulates and dominates the beliefs, mores, and values of another group to the extent that the perceived reality of those in power shapes how entire groups of people think, act, and interpret reality (Murfin and Ray 221). As a way specifically of describing the dominant and mainstream form of masculinity within a culture, *hegemonic masculinity* was first popularized by sociologist R. W. Connell in his groundbreaking study of the nature of masculine identity, *Masculinities* (1995). He expounds the phrase as follows: “Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (77). Thus, as with Gramsci’s concept of *cultural hegemony*, *hegemonic masculinity* has come to define how we think about social organization, particularly as it relates to gender and power relations. Connell’s theories of masculinity, like those of the gender critics who have followed, are rooted in feminist theories of patriarchy, which since the late 1970s have worked to expose patriarchal social structures that promote hegemonic masculinity in order to maintain positions of cultural, political, and economical power.

One common assumption about hegemonic masculinity that is of particular importance to this project is the belief that social sites (i.e., locker rooms, fraternities, schools, military establishments) are often identified with hegemonic masculinity, where heterosexuality is rigorously presumed and preserved, in part, by vilifying

homosexuality.⁸ Michael Warner may have first popularized the term *heteronormativity* in his *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (1993) by using it to discuss the hetero/homo sexual code that in presupposing one another assumes a hierarchical form (129-32). Warner's concept, however, is rooted not only in Gayle Rubin's notion of a "sex/gender system" that refers to a "set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity" (159) but also in Adrienne Rich's view of "compulsory heterosexuality," whereby heterosexuality is institutionally and culturally forced on the individual, thus becoming a mandatory gender and sexual identity that is presumably free of critique while homosexual experiences are "perceived on a scale from deviant to abhorrent or simply rendered invisible" (229).⁹ Thus, *heteronormativity* has come to be understood as an essentialist belief that people are born into distinct, complimentary binaries (female/male, girl/boy, feminine/masculine) and that pro-marital and pro-child heterosexuality is synonymous with normative sexual orientation, against which all other sexualities are measured. Since heterosexuality is considered normative and essential, parents, popular culture, and

⁸ In my attempt to answer questions such as "What is normative and hegemonic masculinity and boyhood?," "How do they work?," and "How do unconventional masculinities respond to them?," I want to be careful not to suggest that hegemonic masculinity is universally excluded from LGBTTTQIA communities. For more information on the crossroads of hegemonic masculinity, unconventional gender, and the existence of homonormativity, see Eric Anderson's "Openly Gay Athletes: Contesting Hegemonic Masculinity in a Homophobic Environment" (2002) and "Gay Athletes, Straight Teams, and Coming Out in Educationally Based Sports Teams" (2011), King-To Yeung, Mindy Stompler, and René Wharton's "Making Men in Gay Fraternities: Resisting and Reproducing Multiple Dimensions of Hegemonic Masculinity" (2006), Michelle Wolkowicz's "Making Heteronormative Reconciliations: The Story of Romantic Love, Sexuality, and Gender in Mixed-Orientation Marriages" (2009), and Dana Rosenfeld's "Heteronormativity and Homonormativity as a Practical and Moral Resources: The Case of Lesbian and Gay Elders" (2009), all located in the journal *Gender & Society*, the official journal of Sociologists for Women in Society.

⁹ In using Rich's phrase "compulsory heterosexuality" to arrive at an understanding of how the phrase is most often used today in contrast to all nonnormative gender and sexual identities, I have admittedly taken some liberties with Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." Writing in 1980, Rich originally uses the phrase *compulsory heterosexuality* specifically to challenge heterosexual feminists not to erase lesbian existence by purely focusing on patriarchy's negative impact on heterosexual communities.

education systems generally incorporate it into the gendering of children. For example, compulsory heteronormative gendering is immediately recognizable during a schoolchild's recess period when teachers give girls a jump rope and teach them to recite marital rhymes while coaches teach boys how to play ball on a field. Run-of-the-mill activities, such as jumping rope and playing ball, confirm the standard of heteronormativity in children's culture and how the performance of heterosexuality is overtly present in that culture.

Normative Boyhood

This discourse of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity extends beyond a contemporary understanding of adult males and adult masculinity also to include how normative boyhood is similarly understood and constructed. Indeed, both Kenneth Kidd and Annette Wannamaker recognize how frequently popular, and generally well-intended, pseudo-psychology texts, educational books, and child rearing manuals often present an essential and natural boyhood. For example, in the *New York Times* best selling *The Wonder of Boys* (1996), Michael Gurian explains why boys act as they do. "A boy is in large part hard-wired to be who he is," Gurian explains matter-of-factly, "We cannot, in large part, change who he is" (5). Gurian later clarifies this robotic metaphor by expounding the behavioral effects of "their dominance by the hormone testosterone" (60). Likewise, Stephen James and David S. Thomas's *Wild Things: The Art of Nurturing Boys* evoke Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* in order to address the assumed inherent *wildness* of boys, which is to say the organic aggressiveness of young males. Of course, the attitude expressed in such books recall the phrase "boys will be

boys,” a colloquial response to and excuse of the perceived exuberant, often aggressive, physical behavior of presumably all boys.

If boy culture inculcates the manifesto of “boys will be boys,” many boys may often feel restrained from expressing their emotions for fear of being branded a wimp or sissy, since such sensitivities are often gendered feminine. William Pollack, in *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood* (1998), explains the built-in obligations and pressures of adhering to “boy code:”

Even very young boys reported that they felt they must “keep a stiff upper lip,” “not show their feelings,” “act real tough,” “not too nice,” “be cool,” “just laugh and brush it off when someone punches you.” These boys were not referring to subtle suggestions about how they “might” comport themselves. Rather, they were invoking strict rules they had absorbed about how they “must” behave, rules that most of them seemed to genuinely fear breaking. (23; also qtd. in Wannamaker 140)

Michael Gurian’s trust in the essentialism of boyhood also surfaces in the list of books and films he created for teachers and educators to introduce to boys. Coauthored with Terry Trueman, *What Stories Does My Son Need? A Guide to Books and Movies That Build Character in Boys* (2000) provides a list of two hundred “ethical” books and films that, the authors believe, both will appeal to the heteronormativity of boyhood and its oftentimes hegemonic existence while also offering ideal role models for boys to imitate (3). Gurian and Trueman maintain that such models are important, because left to their own testosterone-driven anatomical urges, boys “gravitate toward fast-moving images, aggressive stimuli, flagrant sexual possibilities, and role-model males who use aggressive

force” (5). By maintaining that activities such as hunting, killing, and procreating are “built into” contemporary boys, just as such activities have been since the beginning of time “a thousand years ago,” Gurian and Trueman advocate the essentialism of a hegemonic and heteronormative boyhood (6). Further, these authors articulate how one of the goals of their book is “right some of the ills that result from such hormonal aggression” (5). *What Stories Does My Son Need?* assumes that the ills that emerge from popular culture too often offer poor models. The message is clear: a boy’s aggression and violence is a natural and understandable part of his character; therefore, it is vital that he find appropriate and ethical models of imitation. Thus, films such as *High Noon* (1952), *The Bridge Over the River Kwai* (1957), *Rocky* (1976), *Unforgiven* (1992), and *Braveheart* (1995) teach boys that hegemonic masculinity—“hunting and killing”—is acceptable, so long as the right people are getting beat up (or killed) and for the right reasons. The possibility that the origin of such “ills” result from the assumption in which their book and *research* is situated, that boys naturally gravitate to physical aggression, goes uninterrogated.

This attitude of the essentialism of boyhood, whereby a boy’s hegemonic and heteronormative ethos is organically hardwired into his physical state, surfaces frequently in child rearing manuals and educational books. Christina Hoff Sommers argues in *The War against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men* (2005) that “American boys face genuine problems that cannot be addressed by constructing new versions of manhood. They do not need to be ‘rescued’ from their masculinity” (15; also qtd. in Wannamaker 2). Sommers assumes there exists one particular kind of masculinity, and she urges readers not to liberate boys from this traditional and essential one in favor

of newly constructed alternatives. Speaking more progressively on the issue, child psychologists Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson consider in *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* (1999) how mainstream constructions of hegemonic boyhood and manhood damage a boy's emotional health. They suggest that rather than encouraging boys to be stoic and unemotional, parents and educators should encourage them to become "emotionally literate" and embrace the "potential for a full range of emotional experience[s]" with which people are born (7, 10). While these two books represent competing ideologies, with one comparing hegemonic boyhood with the biblical and feral Cain and the other hoping to rescue it from feminist educators, both acknowledge that there is a normative kind of boyhood masculinity, existing either essentially or as a social construction. This debate also surfaces in mainstream newspapers and politics. For instance, according to the 2005 *Washington Post* article, "Why Johnny Won't Read,"

boys prefer adventure tales, war, sports and historical nonfiction, while girls prefer stories about personal relationships and fantasy. Moreover, when given choices, boys do not choose stories that feature girls. . . .

Unfortunately, the textbooks and literature assigned in the elementary grades do not reflect the dispositions of male students. Few strong and active male role models can be found as lead characters. Gone are the inspiring biographies of the most important American presidents, inventors, scientists and entrepreneurs. No military valor, no high adventure. (Bauerline and Stotsky)

The goal of this column is to encourage teachers and parents to recognize the decrease in boys' reading and find ways to help them become lifelong readers and learners, and while that goal is admirable, the article raises two ideas pertinent to my project. First, the writers assume most boys are attracted to inspiring biographies of American patriarchs and action-filled adventure stories. Second, they believe that the decrease in reading results from the decrease in school assignments connected to such genres. Yet the article does not consider that *normal* boys today may simply prefer to find their adventures and war stories in video games than in historical fiction, and thus that the issue is related to medium more than to genre.

Nevertheless, the article again highlights how normative boyhood is understood to exist, and a similar statement from the British Secretary of State for Education suggests similar thinking about normative boyhood in the United Kingdom. According to Alan Johnson, "Boys like books which depict them in a powerful role, often as sporting, spying or fighting heroes" (qtd. in Simons 154). Responding to Secretary Johnson in her study of gender roles in children's fiction, Judy Simmons ultimately expresses this concern: Johnson's view "may well reflect political circumstances of [his] time, but [he] implicitly harken[s] back to an earlier age, when, supposedly, boys' books had more straightforwardly masculine agenda, with the implication that this agenda has somehow become compromised" (154).

Conventional and Unconventional Boyhood in Children's Literature

After recognizing how so-called *normative boyhood* is constructed and maintained across educational manuals, popular newspapers, and pseudo-psychology books, we can similarly understand how the ideologies of heteronormative and

hegemonic masculinity are deeply imbued in children's and young adult literature. As Erica Hateley helpfully summarizes,

From its eighteenth-century inception, children's literature addressed itself through particular narrative strategies as male *or* female, and, in doing so, enacted an entangling of bodies and words in the sources and objects of gendered understandings. Within the liberal-humanist project of socialization through literature, works for children affirmed values of consciousness and experience as distinctly masculine or feminine. Reading not only created literate citizens, it also located them in a gendered social order. ("Gender" 87)

Indeed, a number of important critics have explored how the relationship between gender and mainstream culture finds expression in boy books. Kenneth Kidd finds that since the late nineteenth century, the myth of the "feral tale," whereby an animal-boy protagonist is raised independent of civilization, has been central to the construction of conventional American boyhood (*Making* 3). The lesson that surfaces throughout the variety of folkloric narratives concerned with the feral boy ultimately, explains Kidd, are "about the white, middle-class male's perilous passage from nature to culture, from bestiality to humanity, from homosocial pack life to individual self-reliance and heterosexual prowess" (7). Tami Bereska likewise concludes in her study of 30 popular novels published between 1940 and 1997 that the world of boys

is supposed to be a heterosexual world, comprised of active male bodies, where no sissies are permitted entry. It is characterized by particular types and degrees of emotional expression, naturalized aggression, male hang-

out groups, hierarchies within those groups, competition, athleticism, adventure, and sound moral character. (161)

Annette Wannamaker similarly attempts “to understand one of the ways hegemonic masculinity has been and continues to be defined in the United States” by specifically considering how the circulation of the Tarzan narrative in children’s literature and popular culture further establishes the idea of a hegemonic and normative boyhood (33). She concludes that “various incarnations of Tarzan have embodied and continue to embody ideal (hegemonic) masculinity in the United States” and “this ideal is defined through the abjection of the feminine, the child, the non-Western, the nonwhite, and the colonized” (33). Wannamaker further explains how studying Tarzan “allows us to mark some of the categories of hegemonic masculinity that often go unmarked—whiteness, class privilege, heterosexuality, and the American individuality” (33). Put more simply, as Judy Simmons does, “physical ability, pluck, [and] self-assurance [are] the major constituents of boyhood heroism” (154).

Despite the overwhelming popularity of these conventional models of boyhood—exemplified often by robust, adventurous, unemotional, feral, middle-class, bad, and physically aggressive or active male children—not all boys in children’s literature exemplify normative boyhood. For instance, Thomas Hughes describes Tom as nurturing and then weeping for the physically weak and fragile young Arthur in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857), L. Frank Baum describes the Lion as exuberant, sensitive, and tearful in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), Munro Leaf depicts Ferdinand the bull as preferring to smell flowers than fight in a bullring in *The Story of Ferdinand* (1936), Katherine Paterson writes Jesse as demure and artistic in *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977),

Tomie dePaula tells the story of *sissy* book-worm Oliver in *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* (1979), Charlotte Zolotow shows William's preference for playing with dolls in *William's Doll* (1985), and Helga Bansch separates Robert from the other ravens through her depiction of his happiness resulting from his crossdressing in brightly colored outfits in *Odd Bird Out* (2007). Further, since Jane Severance's *Lots of Mommies* (1983), Lesléa Newman's *Heather Has Two Mommies* (1989), and Michael Willhoite's *Daddy's Roommate* (1991), there has been some increase in the number of children's books that positively depict same-sex parents, and according to Carrie Hintz and Eric L. Tribunella, in addition to portrayals of lesbian and gay parents, "books for young readers have begun to embrace representations of gender-variant children who do not perform masculinity or femininity in conventional or normative ways" (411). John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* (1969), David Rees's *The Exeter Blitz* (1978), Aidan Chambers's *Dance on My Grave* (1982), Ellen Wittlinger's *Hard Love* (1999), Bil Wright's *Sunday You Learn How to Box* (2000), David Levithan's *Boy Meets Boy* (2003), Julie Anne Peter's *Luna* (2004), Ellen Wittlinger's *Parrotfish* (2007), Abigail Tartelin's *Golden Boy* (2013), and Tim Federle's *Better Nate Than Ever* (2014) are among the first and most popular YA novels to feature LGBTTQIA protagonists (410-13). Traditional masculinity is also acculturated in texts such as Lesléa Newman's *The Boy Who Cried Fabulous* (2004), which depicts a quirky and talkative boy, and Harvey Fierstein's *The Sissy Duckling* (2002), which embraces positively the term *sissy* to describe its protagonist. Likewise, Colin, in John Green's *An Abundance of Katherines* (2006), might be viewed as less masculine because of his intellectual prowess, just as Tom in Frank Portman's *King Dork* (2006) recognizes his lack of hegemonic masculinity when he

introduces himself to reader by explaining, “I suppose I fit the traditional mold of the brainy, freaky, oddball kid who reads too much” (5).

These features are among the varieties of positively depicted unconventional boyhoods that are the focus of my remaining chapters. More often than not, authors construct these boy characters with more traditionally feminine qualities. They are depicted as compassionate and generous, frequently taking care of other young boys with whom they empathize. They exhibit characteristics—such as timidity, physical weakness, and hesitancy—generally associated with sissies or wimps, often resulting in physical and emotional bullying from physically stronger boys. The boys in historical fictions speak out against the great pleasures other boys receive in tormenting animals, such as occurs at bear baitings, thus exposing a more sympathetic side of their boyhood. They are deeply troubled by such cruelty and often become tearful. They prefer reading and acting to more physical activities, such as sports. They are often depicted as more cerebral than robust or athletic because of their interests in unmasculine activities, and while all of the boys I discuss can be characterized as hesitant or passive, at least at the start of the narrative, the Hamlet-inspired boys are exceptionally so. These final chapters, therefore, turn to appropriations of Shakespeare for boy readers that complicate hegemonic masculinity by depicting unconventional boys who critique the normative and patriarchal masculinities surrounding them. This critique, we will observe, exists diversely. While some novels valorize unconventional characteristics, such as compassion and sympathy, others depict more traditional behaviors, such as physical aggression, as abhorrent. Further, these novels routinely imbue their antagonists with conventional models of boyhood and simultaneously include a narrative arch whereby the protagonists, though in

the beginning sometimes tearful, passive, and afraid, in the end are lauded as heroic precisely because of their unconventionality.

Final Chapters:

Crossdressing, Homosociality, and Hamlet

As mentioned in my introduction, I aim to expand the ways in which critics think about gender in adaptations of Shakespeare for children. Therefore, I wish to counter key arguments from Erica Hateley's *Shakespeare in Children's Literature*, the only book-length study of modern adaptations of Shakespeare's plays for children. Indeed, I wish to address three of her interrelated arguments: first, that "Shakespearean capital operates within a patriarchal model in contemporary children's fiction . . . in order to privilege masculine cultural subjectivity and delimit feminine cultural subjectivity" (12); second, that "'Shakespeare' has become the vehicle of naturalised, historicised and authorised discourses of normative gender, subjectivity and behavior" (19); third, that contemporary children's authors fail to offer "*any* suggestion that Elizabethan theatrical culture is linked with *any* sexual identity or behaviors other than herterosexual" (53; my emphases). While I believe that children's literature in general is often "the vehicle of naturalised, historicised and authorised discourses of normative gender, subjectivity and behavior," with or without the help of Shakespeare, I do find that many of the gender features regarding boys and boyhoods noted in my previous chapters do find expression in these later adaptations, and that the gender complexities that existed on the Elizabethan stage and across early modern culture as a whole do appear in these boy books and point to a more fluid and less patriarchal notion of identity. Indeed, more recently even Hateley's research has begun to acknowledge the sort of diversity I discuss. In a

discussion of *Hamlet*-themed romance books for girls that Hateley published four years after *Shakespeare in Children's Literature*, she notes that even “as normative romance plots are legible in contemporary young adult novels, in the context of a broader cultural romance of engaging with Shakespeare in general, and *Hamlet* in particular, these same texts articulate feminine power” (“Sink” 437). Hateley references another critic who “constructs ‘Shakespeare’ and ‘patriarchy’ as synonymous” before addressing the texts she calls “significant exceptions” (436). With that spirit in mind, in the following chapters I too wish to consider significant exceptions by offering new readings of two of the texts Hateley analyzes—*The Shakespeare Stealer* and *King of Shadows*—and by introducing six new texts into this discussion in order to challenge the notion that Shakespeare-influenced novels merely represent and reinforce traditional boyhood.

In order to understand how these books promote a fluid notion of boyhood, I find it helpful to employ queer theory in order to help us to recognize how these novels in various ways advance a queer sensibility through their depiction of a more multiple notion gender identity. That is to say, queer theory, like adaptation theory, is a particularly effective way of understanding how normative models of gender and maturation are unsettled, since the word *queer* is itself so often linked with various political and social liberation movements. While the word originally described something as unusual and then came to be used pejoratively, queer now, as Jonathan Gill Harris explains, “has been appropriated by queer theory in order to shake up certainties of sexuality and gender” (124). Thus, queerness “has been increasingly uncoupled from sexual acts and linked to other phenomena such as aberrations within signification and temporality” (125). Moreover, as Lee Edelman elucidates, “queerness can never define an

identity; it can only ever disturb one” (17), and as Tison Pugh and David L. Wallace similarly see it, “As a foe of ideological normalcy, queerness subverts that which cultures uphold as normative societal values” (261). Therefore, since queer theory takes the injunction to interrogate how definitions of normality are created and rigorously upheld, I find it a helpful way to emphasize and understand the unconventional performance of identity in these contemporary novels. Thus, I offer a working definition of *queer* as follows: a fluid and unconventional gender identity, sensibility, or process of obtaining and understanding said identity and sensibility; a queer identity and sensibility may, or may not, be linked to sexual acts (Harris), but it always disrupts normative gender identities (Edelman), in turn promoting a more liberating and inclusive identity that challenges, disrupts, and perhaps even dismantles normative values, systems, and identities (Pugh and Wallace).

Admittedly, embracing a somewhat capacious definition of an already substantially defined term to discuss each of these children’s texts is a double-edged sword, providing a helpful but rather vast volume of material for discussion. However, my goal is to consider how some of the features discussed in my early chapters—such as early modern gender ideals and literary functions of the boy in Shakespeare—inform these later adaptations. I want to suggest that Shakespeare’s complex use of boyhood to engage critically with some of the most pressing issues regarding early modern masculinity and to offer compelling skepticism about conventional ideals of early modern manhood resurfaces in these adaptations when authors likewise depict varied and complicated boys equally in dialogue with contemporary gender debates about boyhood.

Therefore, these final chapters consider the diverse ways Shakespeare-for-children advances a queer sensibility. Through the disruption of essentialist boyhood—via crossdressing, esteeming a nurturing community over a restrictive biological family, an intimate cross-age relationship with Shakespeare-as-character, a repudiation of patriarchy, an affectionate homosocial relationship—these novels create a composite portrait, comprised of unconventional boys, boyhoods, and more inclusive notions of gender. Since the project proposes to fill a gap in critical discussions about Shakespeare and early modern boys and adaptations of Shakespeare that depict unconventional boys, I find it important to include the range of unconventionality in these contemporary texts. Thus, I provide an overview of the unconventional aspects that exist within this genre, drawing particular attention to adaptations that I find represent particularly important, diverse, and complicated visions of boyhood.

With that in mind, Chapter VII considers a number of boy characters who develop a domestic partnership while living within an early modern homosocial theatre and working as players. On the early modern stage, the success and livelihood of boy players was customarily measured by their ability to perform as women. Recognizing how discussions of crossdressing on the early modern English stage have importantly considered the possibilities of transgressing or subverting that system, I add to these discussions by demonstrating how the appropriation of this phenomenon creates a space for contemporary authors to modify, critique, and oppose patriarchal constructions of hegemonic boyhood. Furthermore, though negating the feminine is often a crucial part of a boy's masculine construction, I will consider how this maturational progress is reversed in historical fiction and time-slip novels that appropriate Shakespeare.

Moving chronologically from the past to the present, the *Hamlet* boy-books I discuss in Chapter VIII use the Hamlet frequently theorized and performed as traditionally feminine in order to depict unconventional boy characters.¹⁰ Much more so than Fortinbras, it is the “delicate and tender” Prince Hamlet who is notoriously plagued by inaction (as opposed to the aggressive action taken by the more traditionally masculine characters in the play), suffering from madness (a disease traditionally associated with femininity, as feminist scholarship on Ophelia exemplifies), and devoted to the reading, writing, and other cerebral aspects that contemporary children’s authors turn to in order to depict unconventional boys. These authors juxtapose their sensitive, timid, compassionate, and generally more effeminate boys with the more traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity represented by their various versions of King Hamlet, Claudius, Laertes, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern characters. Moreover, whereas the historical fiction elects as its setting early modern public stages and playhouses in order to explore the homosocial and crossdressing practices of these sites, these *Hamlet* books focus more on the private, and at times intimate, relationships between the protagonist and his father and the Horatio-character.

There is no monolithic *boy*, literary or living, in part because gender is a layered, constantly shifting, and subjective term. Thus, not all of the protagonists I discuss in Chapter VII and Chapter VIII represent *the* unconventional boy, and I do not pretend to be exhaustive in my discussion of Shakespearean boy books. Likewise, neither do I propose that these books match one-for-one with every convention of *the* conventional boy. Indeed, all of the boys I discuss represent a type of masculinity that exists within a

¹⁰ See, for instance, Nicole Garret’s “Drama and Dyscrasia in Denmark: Hamlet as Female Prince” (2010).

white, contemporary, Anglo-American, middle- and upper-class milieu. However, as Tami Bereska reminds us, dissimilarities in masculinity are permitted by that milieu:

Variations and contradictions are permissible only within a larger context of No Sissy Stuff. That is, a male can deviate from the idea of one, or even a few contradictions of manhood, as long as he lives up to most of the ideals. If he deviates from too many of the ideals, then he runs the risk of being a sissy. (164)

We see such variations and contradictions in a variety of appropriations of Shakespeare for children and young adults. For instance, the leading couples in both Julius Lester's *Othello: A Novel* (1995) and Sharon M. Draper's *Romiette and Julio* (1999) are people of color, but the novels also rigidly observe heteronormativity. Likewise, Shyam Selvadurai's *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* (2005) uses *Othello* as its context and follows a fourteen-year-old boy in Sri Lanka who falls in love with his Canadian cousin. Winner of a Lambda Literary Award, *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* does depict an unconventional boy and his sexuality, but the athletic protagonist also lives in a distinctly middle- to upper-class neighborhood, where he attends private school and frequents his family's country club. Therefore, while some of the appropriations I discuss may depict boys who demonstrate and perform both conventional and unconventional representations of gender, these texts nevertheless contest categories of gender subjectivity. My purpose is not to suggest that these novels consistently occupy the same levels of unconventionality or progressiveness as texts such as *Boy Meets Boy*, *Parrotfish*, or *Golden Boy*. Rather, I wish to argue that instead of naturalizing or essentializing patriarchal and normative values, these appropriations use Shakespeare's

playtexts to admit the pluralities in Shakespearean boyhood by critiquing hegemonic masculinity.

CHAPTER VII

“no one queens it like himself:”

BOYS PLAYING WOMEN IN SHAKESPEAREAN HISTORICAL FICTION

ANTONIO: I a voice to play a lady! I shall ne'er do it. . . Ay but when use hath taught me action to hit the right point of a lady's part I shall grow ignorant, when I must turn young prince again, how but to truss my hose.

-- John Marston – *Antonio and Mellida* (c. 1599)

The Company may keep him in skirts forever, since no one queens it like himself.

-- Gregory about Kit – *The True Prince* (2002)

These moments from the “Induction” of John Marston’s *Antonio and Mellida* and J. B. Cheaney’s *The True Prince* reveal behaviors of age and gender representation, first on the early modern stage and then in a contemporary adaptation of that stage. Both quotations are intended to be humorous, the former because the boy player performing Antonio is likely himself experiencing the same anxiety as the character he vocalizes and the latter because it fictionalizes such anxiety. Yet despite this humor, both moments in their own way also record the experience of an early modern player faced with the inevitable prospect of never again being able to perform as a boy or as a man. In this chapter, I trace the legacies of Shakespeare and boyhood by turning to a group of historical novels that fictionalize the experiences of early modern boy players working for the Chamberlain’s Men. By employing an early modern setting, novels such as Gary Blackman’s *The Shakespeare Stealer* (1998), Susan Cooper’s *King of Shadows* (1999), and J.B. Cheaney’s *The Playmaker* (2000) and *The True Prince* (2000) reveal how

contemporary children's authors use Shakespeare's canon and Shakespeare as a historical person to address issues relating to boyhood and gender. Ultimately, these authors induce the maturation of their heroes through their successful performance of women characters, thereby positively depicting unconventional gender roles for boys and expanding the range of gender identities depicted in adaptations of Shakespeare. In order to orchestrate one's identity performance and in turn promote a fluid notion of gender, these historical novels turn to the early modern tradition of boy players performing women characters in order to embrace alternative gendered identities and models of growth. Not only does the theatre and acting company become an alternative family that these boys choose over their biological ones, but these novels also feature complex relationships between the boy protagonist and William Shakespeare that altogether blurs the social boundaries between parent and child, master and servant, lover and beloved, and friend and friend.

The Genre of the Shakespearean Historical Novel

In all the children's historical and time-slip fiction I have read that includes William Shakespeare as a character, authors tend to follow a specific narrative pattern. Generally, these novels depict an orphaned boy who, after the death of his parents, travels to London hoping to secure employment or find work as an apprentice. After ensconcing in the playhouse, the boy identifies the homosocial theatre as a surrogate family. Further, his rapport with Shakespeare, often in addition to an intimate connection with one of Shakespeare's dramatic characters, helps the boy cope with the trauma surrounding his parents' death and other feelings of inadequacy and confusion. The relationship between Shakespeare and the orphan might be described as pseudo-filial, with the playwright

acting in a paternal role of sorts, but, as I argue, often their cross-age relationship cannot be categorized that simply.

Two stock characters frequently surface. The first is an opposite-sexed friend who helps the protagonist face whatever conflicts he encounters. Though she is always a part of the acting company in some way, she routinely appears as a boy player for much of the novel, only accidentally revealing her true sex late in the story. By dressing and behaving as a boy and performing as a boy performing womanhood, her presence further complicates the gender issues already associated with boy players performing as women characters. The second standard character is the same-sex antagonist. Always a few years older than the hero, he occupies an uncertain place between boy and man, and his struggles convincingly to perform adult, male characters often fashion the novel's conflict. These Shakespearean historical novels generally maintain the recurrent plot motifs Jerry Griswold finds common in children's literature: an orphan, poverty and neglect, a physical and emotional journey, adoption by surrogate parents, opposite-sex helpers or outsiders, and a same-sex antagonist (5-9).

This narrative paradigm in Shakespeare-influenced historical fiction most likely first appears in *Cue for Treason* (1940) by the prolific British author Geoffrey Trease.¹¹ A children's novel set in England near the end of the sixteenth century, *Cue for Treason* portrays two runaway boys, Peter and Kit, as they become players in London, befriend William Shakespeare, and mature while working for Shakespeare's theatre and in Shakespeare's presence. The book also includes an important subplot: the boys discover an attempt at treason against Queen Elizabeth and save her life. As their escapades carry

¹¹ Geoffrey Trease (1909-1998) published well over 100 novels during his lifetime. Kate Chedgzoy also identifies *Cue for Treason* as the first Shakespearean historical novel ("Shakespeare" 189).

them across England, through the streets of London, and into the Tower of London and Globe Theatre, this political adventure novel follows the growth of Peter and Kit, which culminates with the discovery that Kit is actually Katherine Russell, a disguised girl who ran away with Peter in order to avoid an arranged marriage. Thus, Katherine's learning how to perform as Kit, who in turn learns how to play female roles, and Peter's learning how to play female roles are responsible for their maturation. Peter and Kit/Katherine's autonomous life away from their parents, their relationship with Shakespeare as a surrogate and panacean father, and the gendered complexities in the relationship between the two children establish a pattern replicated in later children's fiction that employs an Elizabethan theatrical setting.¹²

Crossdressing and Coming of Age in Shakespearean Historical Fiction

"Coming of age, a prevalent theme in children's literature," explains Laura Apol, "is characterized by a rite of passage that transforms boys into men, girls into women, often in highly stereotyped gender-specific ways" (61). However, rather than depicting boy protagonists who successfully come of age as conventional men, these novels involve a boy being compelled to come of age within the unique context of the early modern phenomenon in England of crossdressing, and I argue that we can trace the salient dimensions of these boys' unconventional gendered identities by considering these boy player's performances of women on Shakespeare's stage.

Since the 1980s, Renaissance scholars have recognized crossdressing on the early modern English stage as a revealing manner in which to address the early-modern gender

¹² Historical fictions of Elizabethan theatre life include Marchette Chute's *The Wonderful Winter* (1954), Antonia Forest's *The Player's Boy* (1970) and *The Players and the Rebels* (1971), Pamela Melnikoff's *Plots and Players* (1988), and Gweneth Lilly's *Scaffold High* (1993).

system, in general and regarding whatever transgressive potential crossdressing may contain. In her discussion of the “homoerotics of Shakespeare’s Elizabethan comedies,” Julie Crawford helpfully summarizes how early modern critics during the 1980s specifically turned to the complexity of the crossdressing boy player in an attempt to understand both how the audience might have reacted to a boy-as-woman character as well as to how early modern people understood gender on and off the stage:

For Phyllis Rackin, the boy heroine was an androgyne, a fusion of both sexes; for Michael Shapiro, she/he was a “figure of unfused, discretely layered gender identities—play-boy, female character, male persona” which were differently highlighted at different moments in the play (a reading which conventional gender distinctions are preserved in their discrete layers [Shapiro 1994:3]); and for Marjorie Garber (1991), the transvestite figure suggested a new gender category all its own. . . . For Jonathan Dollimore, crossdressing is more accurately described not as transcendence of gender norms but as “transgressive reinscription” of the existing order, “an anti-essentialist, transgressive agency” which intensifies the instabilities in any normative system and reveals it as contestable (Dollimore 1991: 33, 298). (141-42)

Despite such multiplicity of interpretations, these critical parsings of crossdressing on the early modern stage present a way of theorizing how a boy’s performance of *woman* works as a catalyst for maturation in these historical novels in that they collectively demonstrate the unconventionality of these characters. By evoking the homosocial and crossdressing culture of the early modern playhouse, these novels incorporate gendered

codes of behavior that we might expect otherwise to be contested or dismissed merely as comical when performed by a boy in a contemporary novel.¹³ Yet these novels mandate and valorize such behavior by demonstrating how the boys' successful performance of women characters helps them to recognize their own unique artistic talents as players and thereby gain acceptance within the homosocial theatre company. In so doing, we recognize how such averment and support leads to each boys' achieving his identity goals. As Karen Coats tells us, it is through "a series of identifications and dis-identifications, . . . most of which involve some sort of performance, complete with costume, and almost all of which are mediated through feedback from others" that the "establishment of a sense of identity" is often realized and achieved (110-11). In these novels, we will see, the early modern stage becomes an ideal place for these characters literally to *try on* various gender identities and receive positive feedback from the community.

These novels depict a queer inducement of maturation for their protagonists in that they include mastering a particular kind of performance, one that promotes a more fluid notion of identity and contrasts an unreflective and traditional masculine gender. At the start of each novel, the author depicts the protagonists as shy, passive, and diffident orphans, plagued by social awkwardness. However, once they find shelter within an acting company and begin acting as women characters, they can perform, and essentially try on, a variety of gender-coded behaviors. Instead of receiving derision, the boys are accepted and commended for their successful performances as women. The novels thus

¹³ As I will discuss shortly in more detail, more often than not when boys dress as women in contemporary fiction it is for comedic effect. The boy crossdresses against his will, he finds the experience humiliating, not liberating, and he is glad when the experience ends, as is the case in novels such as Anne Fine's *Bill's New Frock* (1989) and Louis Sachar's *Marvin Redpost: Is He a Girl?* (1993).

valorize traditional feminine behavior not only as legitimate and positive but as crucial for acceptance into this community. As these performances become transformative for the boys, the novels suggest that their maturation begins by their learning how to be sympathetic, poised, understanding, graceful, kind, and nurturing, manners also shown to the boys by the adult players in the company. Such successful performances result in the boys' empowerment and acceptance into this community, and the experiences are also altogether pleasant, particularly when affirmed via the audience's applause.

While on one level these novels appear to rely on, if not preserve, traditional stereotypes of femininity and masculinity in order to depict unconventional boys and boyhood, it is the specific inclusion of crossdressing, especially within the context of other Shakespearean boy books and the boy crisis, as the means of expressing these behaviors and sentiments that makes the novels progressive in their representation of gender identities. Indeed, these novels resist such conformity in at least two ways. First, by specially employing the early modern phenomenon of boys, these novels can be seen to contain the gender complexity theorists find in early modern boy players. According to Catherine Belsey, the "subversive reinscription of conventional gender roles" in early modern comedies, whereby a boy performs as a woman, frustrates, rather than confirms, gender roles by revealing how a boy can perform them ("Disrupting" 188). Second, the novels do not present cross-dressing as something short-lived for the boy protagonists, but rather a vital part of their maturation and identity. The boys never suffer or are humiliated. They are equal, not inferior to, the rest of the theatre.

Further, these texts also culminate with two major events. First, each novel ends with the boys' confrontation with a figure from their past. This figure is usually a

member of the boy's biological family but may also be a father figure of sorts. The returning figure represents some sort of emotional harm from the boy's past and demands that the boy return to his pre-performing self. However, the boy asserts his preference for his new family, pronounces his love for his newly found art, and vows to continue acting. Second, the boys must face their same-sex antagonist, a confrontation aided by the assistance of other members of the company. In both cases, crossdressing and performing becomes a way to confront and challenge the hegemonic masculinity embodied by the same-sex antagonists and other villains who depict traditional normative models of boyhood and manhood. Moreover, while the novels follow the protagonist's developments in such a way—from diffidence to inducement of maturation, valorization, empowerment, confrontation, and assertion of his preference for his theatre family and art—they also follow the movement of the same-sex antagonists, who fail to learn these gender lessons and thus initiate a chain of events that ultimately results in law breaking or other activities that jeopardize the company. By contrast, the protagonists' commitment to their community is enhanced, and their obtaining lengthier and more complicated female roles signals their acceptance into this community. While these novels do not depict adult versions of these heroes, the result of these performances are boys who obtain agency within this community and recognize their art.

Since I am interested in how questions of the character's gender, sexual, and aged identities are at stake, I approach these characters under the influence especially of Catherin Belsey and Phyllis Rackin, who recognize how crossdressing on the early modern stage exposes the fluidity and plurality of gender, at times collapsing essentialist ideas of binarism that tend to brand women, children, and femininity as inferior. As

Rackin astutely observes, in early modern England, “gender was still defined according to the old, medieval associations of masculinity with spirits and femininity with body. . . . But on the stage, the boy actress’s body was male, while the character he portrayed was female. Thus inverting the offstage association, stage illusion radically subverted the gender divisions of the Elizabethan world” (“Androgyny” 38), and as Belsey explains, “transvestism challenges [patriarchy] by unsettling the categories which legitimate it” (“Disrupting” 180). Therefore, I argue that the Elizabethan playhouse in these historical novels offers a unique place whereby the authors treat feminine traits and symbols as vital components of growth that the boys must learn, embody, and execute if they wish to continue working and living with their social families in the playhouse. Such traits become powerful and enabling for the boys, generating both praise and happiness. Indeed, the early modern stage is an ideal site for depicting the “stylized repetition of acts” that, as Judith Butler argues, verifies how gender is illusory and performative (*Gender Trouble* 179). *Womanhood*, for these boy actors, is a role to be played, and throughout the novels, it is a group of behaviors to be reproduced. These historical fictions suggest that maturation for these boys occurs by learning how to be sympathetic, poised, understanding, nurturing, graceful, and kind. Crossdressing thus becomes a way to confront and challenge the hegemonic masculinity embodied by the same-sex antagonists and other villains who depict traditional and normative models of boyhood and manhood. In so doing, we recall key arguments from the boyhood crisis debate concerning, especially, as child psychologists Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson explain, the notion not only that mainstream constructions of hegemonic boyhood and manhood damage a boy’s emotional health but also that parents and educators should

instead assist boys with learning how to “honor and value their emotional lives” by broadening the range of masculinities they might achieve (20).

In saying that these novels appropriate the early modern practice of theatrical crossdressing in order to induce unconventional maturation, I do not wish to equate historical boy players and early modern drama with fictional boy characters and contemporary prose, nor do I suggest that theories of early modern gender work universally across century and genre. I recognize that novels depicting an English phenomenon that ended when the theaters were closed in 1642 may not concern the same historical events as those depicted in a contemporary novel set in the time period. Hence, on one level, this chapter addresses the issue of genre in that all the novels I discuss can be categorized as children’s historical or time-slip novels. As Perry Nodelman tells us, “history is always about the present. . . . As is the case in other kinds of narrative, the stories’ history tells reveal as much or more about the events of current history and the values of the historian as of the historical subject” (“History” 71). Believing as much, I find that the sort of gender work occurring in these contemporary novels that depict early modern crossdressing do challenge many of the prevailing notions of normative masculinity and essentialist binaries in a way similar to what critics have said of early modern boy players.

These novels offer an alternative, and much more positive, representation of male-to-female crossdressing than we often find in children’s literature. As Victoria Flanagan explains in *Into the Closet: Cross-Dressing and the Gendered Body in Children’s Literature and Film* (2008), the only book length study of crossdressing in children’s fiction,

Male cross-dressing is presented as comic, trivial, and humiliating for the masculine subject. . . . [I]t reinforces socially prescribed gender categories rather than interrogating or challenging them The incapacity of male cross-dressers to discard . . . the behaviors and attributes they have internalized as socially appropriate indicators of masculinity . . . makes a pointed statement about the powerful status of hegemonic masculinity, revealing the obvious unwillingness of masculine subjects to relinquish their traditional gender dominance by exploring any aspect of (obviously inferior) femininity. . . . Instead of critically questioning the notion of gender to make a progressive statement about its application to individuals, male-to-female cross-dressing narratives seem unable to construct cross-dressing as anything other than a short-lived, often stilly, comic gesture, preferring to use it as a means through which to reinforce oppositional gender relations. (133, 134)

These Shakespeare-inspired historical novels, however, are an exception. Rather than constructing crossdressing as a “comic gesture which is used to reinforce the superiority of patriarchal masculinity,” these books, I suggest, use the narrative of crossdressing to induce a maturation into an unconventional boyhood that contrasts hegemonic and patriarchal masculinity by permitting the boy players to embrace feminine codes of behavior, ultimately leading to valorization, not disapproval (xvii). The resonance and utility of this pattern helps us further to recognize the socio-cultural workings of gender in children’s fiction and how it works as a catalyst for maturation. These novels position more feminine and unconventional boys as being worthy of imitation. Thus, by

positioning coming of age in the context of early modern's crossdressing theatre practices and exposing gender identity in flux, these historical novels confront hegemonic and patriarchal masculinity through their simultaneous depiction and affirmation of unconventional boyhoods to which the boy characters, and presumably boy readers, might aspire.

That crossdressing induces this unique sort of maturation, whereby the end subject—a sensitive, confident, and artistic boy successfully able to confront and overcome the hegemonic masculinity embodied by other male characters—results from the experience of performing as female characters, implicitly suggests that this inducement does not occur via performances as men. Indeed, the reasons that *The Playmaker*, *The True Prince*, and *The Shakespeare Stealer* do not depict any sort of maturation for these boys via their performance as adult male characters appear to be threefold. First, and most obviously, is the issue of authenticity. If the authors wish to maintain historical accuracy, they are accurate in prohibiting the boys from performing characters reserved for adult players, such as the historically based Richard Burbage and William Kempe.

Second, and more importantly, their exclusive performance as women expands the opportunities for understanding and embodying identities beyond a traditional male/masculine framework, an expansion that is enabling and ultimately leads to their procurement of agency. These novels present enlightened models of growth, whereby the boys learn how to become happy and self-fulfilled through the acquisition of traditionally gendered feminine behaviors, and in so doing, they challenge the notion that boyhood must prepare boys for the sort of traditional or hegemonic manhood discussed in my

previous chapter. I do not wish to suggest that before the boys begin working in the theatres that they are hegemonic and that their performances change or alter that behavior. Rather, these novels use crossdressing as a way of constructing and depicting a more sensitive and sympathetic identity. As if responding to psychologists Daniel James Kindlon and Michael Thompson's assessment that "Stereotypical notions of masculine toughness deny a boy his emotions and rob him of the chance to develop the full range of emotional responses" (4), these novels turn to the early modern phenomenon of crossdressing as a way of obtaining more progressive versions of boyhood.

Third, the authors' decision to induce maturation for these boys through their performance as female characters also works on the narrative level by offering the opportunity to juxtapose the failed maturation of the boy villains with the successful maturation of the boy heroes. As we observe, the boys who do not learn to be nurturing, kind, and sympathetic instead jeopardize the playhouse community's safety and livelihood by their continued penchant for aggression, violence, and egotism, thereby diminishing their appeal. Moreover, that these novels also include a tomboy character, or "a girl who behaves like a spirited or boisterous boy," further demonstrates the variety of gender behavior offered to the novels' protagonists (Abate 220). These girls disguise themselves as boys-playing-women (and in one case a girl disguised as a boy who is playing a woman who is playing a man) and also experience happiness and accolade through their art, so much so that they move to Continental Europe in order to continue acting. Collectively, these novels suggest that boys can find happiness and productivity by embodying traditionally feminine behaviors and that girls likewise find happiness and pleasure through similar gender bending activities. By not purely reiterating traditional

adult masculinity and manhood for the boy heroes, these novels take advantage of the opportunity to depict gender as entirely malleable and to offer affirming depictions of unconventional boyhood.

Reframing Masculinity as an Early Modern Boy Players

J. B. Cheaney's *The Playmaker* (2000) and sequel *The True Prince* (2002) depict two years in the life of fourteen-year-old Richard Malory. Four years after the disappearance of his father and only a few days after the death of his mother, Richard travels alone to London to search for attorney Martin Feather from whom he hopes to gain employment. Though primarily historical novels, Cheaney's Richard Malory books also exhibit many qualities of a boy's adventure novel as they attempt, through the eyes of a child, to depict a historically realistic and exciting Elizabethan London, though sometimes this depiction seems somewhat exaggerated. The novel is set against the backdrop of several topical events and concerns of late sixteenth-century Europe, particularly the Protestant Reformation. The prologue to *The Playmaker* explains how Queen Elizabeth's older sister's "violent attempt to restore Catholicism" resulted in many Protestants fearing that "unscrupulous Catholics might maneuver some 'closet papist' to the throne," and that "[t]hat fear . . . borders on paranoia" (n.p.). The blurb on the back cover advertises how the "severed heads of Catholic insurgents are impaled on the Tower's gates" while the first sentences depict Protestants who "were burned by the dozens on stakes . . . just outside the walls of London" (1). Indeed, the boy anticipates this London. "From childhood I had devoured Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*," Richard explains, "with its bloody tales of the tortures inflicted on Protestants in this very place—I expected it to be grim or solemn" (1). His initial experiences live up to those exciting

expectations. Within a week of arriving in London, he is beaten, robbed, and threatened at knifepoint. The novel also develops a subplot concerning a mysterious stranger who wants Richard to leave London. Such images and events create a sense of trepidation, generally a key ingredient for a boy's adventure story.

Having identified London's urbanity as a threat for young Richard, Cheaney then constructs the theatre as a safe alternative to the streets and docks, in the latter of which Richard finds temporary employment. While the inclusion of a safe place is common in children's literature, Richard's decision to seek refuge in a theatre is doubly ironic.¹⁴ Not only is the theatre a public space, but throughout Richard's Puritanical childhood he was taught always to avoid it. He remembers hearing his mother explain that plays were a "school for vice, a seedbed of rebellion, and a thief of the laborer's time, which could be better spent elsewhere" (27). Thus, when his friend Ralph Downing invites him to visit the Rose, Richard is quick to retort, "Plays are of the devil. I'll none of them" (27). However, when an unknown person, later revealed to be Richard's father, follows the boy around London, he reasons that the theatre would be a "place where [he] could fit immediately into a set or trade and go about in company—unnoticed, perhaps even disguised" and also a "place where no one watching for [him] would ever think to look" (61). This disobedience is the first step towards Richard's maturation, and when he procures a job as an apprentice with the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the theatre soon becomes for Richard what Eve Sedgwick theorizes as "a male place in which it is relatively safe for men to explore the crucial terrain of homosociality" (*Between* 198).

¹⁴ Incorporation of a safe place is a common trope in modern children's literature, as is perhaps most famously depicted in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911). For more on the convention of the safe place in children's literature, see Sue Misheff's "Beneath the Web and Over the Stream: The Search for Safe Places in *Charlotte's Web* and *Bridge to Terabithia*" (1998).

Indeed, the theatre becomes not only a place where Richard can hide but also the site for the inducement of his own maturation. When the novel begins, Richard, like all protagonists discussed in this chapter, is a troubled boy plagued by self-doubt. His father abandoned him when he was an infant, and his mother has been dead just over a week. Sir John Hawthorne, his mother's employee, has sent him to London to find a position as a clerk's assistant. Though he "received the best education [his] village in Lincolnshire could supply," when he begins talking with people in London he finds that even the "lowliest apprentice" would give to him "that unmistakable look that a superior being bestows upon a . . . country oaf" (10). In the beginning of the novel, Richard also stutters uncontrollably, asking a merchant "H-how m-m-much?" for a string of beads and then telling her she can "k-k-keep" the change (5, 6). At his most self-deprecating, he relates his own circumstances to Antonio's state of melancholy in *The Merchant of Venice*, remembering the merchant's brooding, "Such a want-wit sadness makes of me that I have much ado to know myself" (93). He also remembers, from one of his earliest rehearsals, Burbage bringing Shylock to life in a way that "stretch[ed] [the audience's] minds and hearts to fill a greater world," thus causing Richard to "doubt more than ever [his] ability" to act (88).

However, as Richard continues apprenticing at the theatre, a growing confidence slowly replaces his timidity and insecurity, and the opportunity to become female characters particularly sparks this growth. This transformation begins when he receives his first speaking role outside of minor roles as a page or soldier, Nerissa from *The Merchant of Venice*. For three weeks he practices "Walking and talking like a female" before finally "learn[ing] enough about walking and curtsying to be trotted out in a

corset and gown, as a lady of the court” (79). Richard finds appearing as a woman an almost effortless task:

The dresser hurries to lace us into corsets, very tight at the waist but looser near the top . . . Stage apprentices generally do not stuff themselves in the bosom. Real ladies of the court, in fact, aspire to a shape much like our natural one, with a smooth front tapering down to a very long waist. (88)

Even more than Nerissa it is the role of Constance in *King John* in which Richard begins to feel intimately connected to the female characters whom he depicts. Again intimidated initially by the role, Richard explains, “Rage and grief may be easy to play, but . . . one can go too far with it and fall into parody. Audiences have been known to laugh at an over-tragical interpretation of the lover betrayed or warrior expiring. That is what I feared would happen to me” as Constance (107).¹⁵ Nevertheless, once Richard begins “remembering a recent scene in [his] own life that seemed to have some bearing on this play,” his attitude about acting shifts from timidity to quintessence (109). Constance’s dramatic exposition on grief—“My grief’s so great that no support but the huge firm earth can hold it up. Here is my throne; let kings come to it!”—helps him more clearly understand his sister’s grief on the day of their mother’s funeral and her particular feelings of despair (111).

Judith Butler’s theory in *Gender Trouble* (1990), that gender is constructed through one’s repetitive performance, points to a way of considering how the multiple and increasingly convincing performances of women influences Richard’s gendered maturation, as well as that of the other boys I discuss in this chapter. According to Butler,

¹⁵ In *King John*, Constance champions Arthur’s right to the throne and secures French support. In 4.2, we discover she has died as a result of her young son’s capture.

“gender is a stylized repetition of acts . . . which are internally discontinuous . . . [so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (*Gender* 145). She goes on to explain how gender is also dependent on an individual being “hailed” by others (145).

Butler’s description of gender surfaces in these novels when boys, such as Richard, receive multiple opportunities to perform a variety of feminized genders, embodied in this case by a variety of female characters such as Nerissa (Portia’s lady-in-waiting and confidante), Constance (a suffering mother who dies when her son is taken from her), and, as I discuss below, Perdita (a lovely, marriageable young woman). These historical novels not only literalize Butler’s theory of performance, but they also literalize the opportunities these boy players have to receive positive feedback in that the ovation from the playgoers and the praise from the other men in the company confirm the success and believability of the performance. Thus, by adapting the crossdressing phenomenon into these children’s books, the novels depict their own version of *gender trouble* by presenting unconventional, non-normative possibilities and in the process problematizing essentialist male/female and gender binaries. Moreover, understanding how to perform as these characters, both on and off stage, is a key aspect of these characters’ coming of age.

As much as becoming Nerissa and Constance positively influences Richard, it is not until he embodies and performs Perdita in *The Winter’s Tale* that the boy comes of age by playing a woman. Upon first receiving the part, he explains how he

felt a deep sympathy with Perdita, ‘the lost one’: raised in the country among rustics, separated from her mother by death, from her father by his

own mad impulse. Some part of me knew that I could play this part well, or better than well. But I was almost afraid to play it. The line was so fragile here that I felt a risk of losing myself somehow. (177-78)

This initial reaction to being cast as Perdita reveals the transformative power of the female character for Richard, in part because of how much his reactions differ from the other boys who are assigned key female roles from the play. The impetus of Richard's maturation is indifference for the other boys. Compared to Richard's, their reactions to the casting decisions are mostly unenthusiastic. Robin is merely in a "buoyant mood"; he gets to play Paulina and cares only for the "several opportunities for displaying fine disdain and righteous outrage" (177). Kit is disappointed with being assigned the role of Hermione, having hoped instead to have been assigned Florizel. By comparison, Richard calls Perdita his "greatest challenge yet," and the rhetoric he uses to describe this opportunity reflects the transformative aspects of his performance: "the play threatened to rearrange me, setting deep roots that pushed up the settled soil and disturbed old longings" (202).

So similar does Richard consider Perdita's situation to his own plight that he finds himself increasingly connected to the abandoned-infant-turned-princess. Moreover, on opening night, Richard's emotional connection to the play culminates in his transformation:

Most actors can recall performances in which the play becomes so real, in speech and deed, that they could be acting their own lives. . . . [T]he edge dissolves; the player and character drift into one skin and become so joined they cannot tell each other apart.

This happened to me. (203)

When Richard takes the stage as Perdita he immediately fears “Perdita’s lines would fly away, as Nerissa’s had done on that first occasion”; however, Richard knows he “had changed since then” (208). Instead, unlike his previous performances, he is remarkable at playing Perdita. He had “walked into Perdita,” he explains, and by the end of the play he had “become” Perdita (211).

Though *The Playmaker* follows Richard’s maturation by way of his increasing ability to understand and relate to the female characters he depicts and their familial plights, culminating in his portrayal of Perdita, its sequel, *The True Prince* (2002), details a major conflict that arises in the family of these boy players, the physical, emotional, and economical difficulty of becoming a man. When in *The Playmaker* we first meet Christopher “Kit” Glover, the senior-boy in the company, he is described entirely in terms of his talents. Kit’s friend Robin explains to Richard “that Kit was approaching sixteen, an age when most apprentices had either quit the stage or moved on to male roles. But young Master Glover remained unsurpassed in playing imperious queens and duchesses” (72). His senior status as the most talented, experienced, and important boy player in the company often separates him from the other apprentices. “Kit steers his own ship,” Richard explains, “and the Lord Chamberlain’s Men take care not to jog his sails; that is his humor, and everyone works around it” (90). Though *The Playmaker* does briefly set Richard against Kit as he becomes “the only one who stands to rival him,” they are not really placed in opposition until the sequel (268).

Indeed, *The True Prince* opens with a physical fight between Richard and Kit that initiates the struggle between the two boy players. Though they are training with their

fencing master for an upcoming production, Kit uses sparring as an opportunity to “once again . . . prove he could beat [Richard] any time he set his mind to it,” and, indeed, the physically stronger boy wins (2). Thus, Cheaney positions Kit similarly to what Jerry Griswold identifies as the “same-sex antagonist” fundamental to American children’s literature (7). Yet despite this antagonism, Cheaney constructs Kit’s bellicosity in fairly erotic terms. Richard tells his friend Star, “He speaks to me as if I was a fortress and he a warrior laying siege. He comes to conquer,” and later Richard explains, “Then we circled for a while, coming to know each other dreadfully as the world narrowed: just him, just me, each seeking out the other’s weakness in the same way . . . that lovers tease out each other’s charms” (26, 74). This depiction of Richard and Kit’s combative relationship, especially as expressed through fencing, is akin to what Jennifer A. Low theorizes as an expression of a young male’s masculinity in early modern duels. She explains how “Although dueling was more widely practiced by young men than by men of mature years, a duelist’s victor construed the winner as a man, the loser a boy” (72). The conquered body in fencing became the leaking body, thus effeminized, and “one’s manhood was often linked to the derogation of another man’s” (71). Although Low, of course, refers to historical fencing matches in early modern England, as opposed to fencing classes depicted in these contemporary children’s novels, this combative, give-and-take between the two boys while fencing, in rehearsal and during performance, is sustained throughout the novel and becomes a test of manhood for these young players.

Another reason for their combativeness is due to the company’s acquisition of David “Davy” Morgan, “an orphan, not yet eleven,” and the rift precipitated by his arrival and especially his age (6). Davy replaces Dick Worthing, whom the company

removed a month earlier immediately after his voice cracked, and Cheaney uses this replacement to fictionalize what would have been a source of great anxiety for early modern boy players. For instance, Master Condell's description of Dick's physical change—a boy player's "plung[ing] into the 'abyss from which no boy returns'"—vividly communicates the anxiety experienced by many of these apprentices (7). As W. Reavley Gair has shown, the greatest value of these boy players was in their voice, and when their voices began to change, or crack, their value decreased substantially (76-79). Or, as Hamlet warns of the Children of the Queen's Revels in an oft-quoted Q2 passage,

Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing? Will they not say afterward, if they should grow themselves to common players (as it is [most like], if their means are [no] better), their writers do them wrong, to make them exclaim their own succession? (2.2.345-51)

Hamlet questions how boys, like the ones depicted in *The Playmaker* and *The True Prince*, will survive once younger voices and younger bodies replace them. Such apprehension is also depicted by the boys' reactions to the appearance of a beard. When Gregory playfully observes of Robin how "those little hairs from [his] chin are the most lovely—," the boy completely loses his composure: "'What!' Robin clapped a hand to his jaw and felt around it anxiously" (12). Cheaney successfully captures the terror that would have likely existed for the many boy players, such as Richard, who found safety and hermitage in both playhouse and company.¹⁶ Indeed, Cheaney's description of the young Davy differs from her description of Dick and Robin: "The boy was beautiful—his

¹⁶ According to G. E. Bentley, a majority of the boys working with the Children's of Paul's, Children's of the Queen's Revels, and Children of the King did not continue working in the theatre as men (*Profession* xiii).

face . . . cherubic and rosy. A cap of dark, curly hair set off eyes or so intense a blue that the color, even at a distance, made me think of calm summer skies” (13-14). These physical features are noted in terms of their significance. Richard clearly articulates how “Looks matter on the stage—none of the apprentices were ugly and each had some particular appeal that suited him for certain roles . . . But the ‘quality’ shining from this curly-headed boy was pure innocence, as if an angel in child’s form stood in our midst” (14). The other boy players, especially Kit, recognize the realities they face.

Thus, when Master Condell explains to the apprentices how the company has quickly and easily replaced one boy player with another, Cheaney, in a way, broaches recent critical discussions concerning the extent to which this commodification of children helped to shape and define early modern boyhood. According to Edel Lamb’s study of children’s playing companies, “The child player is successful within the theatrical marketplace . . . because of his distinctiveness and the novelty of his company,” a distinction once maintained by Kit, though it is now slipping from his hands (*Performing* 44). “The [boy] player is constructed variously as an eroticised commodity and skilled performer,” Lamb further explains, and “he is marketed in diverse ways in terms of his youthful and inferior status and his talents as a player in the performative and commercial space” (44). The boys’ appeal in *The True Prince* is likewise located in their bodies, particularly their unbroken voices and beardless faces, and after those physiological changes, as Hamlet implies and Lamb confirms, they lose their value and marketability. Thus, Cheaney fictionalizes the anxiety that emerges from an early modern boy player’s need to transition to adult, male roles through the juxtaposition of seventeen-year-old Kit with ten-year-old Davy. In the first chapter of *The True Prince*, Richard,

Robin, and Gregory discuss how Kit will probably make his debut as an adult, male character in the company's next production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Robin wants the part himself but knows that he will not "conquer Romeo's part . . . before *he* does," and Gregory suggests that the "Company may keep [Kit] in skirts forever, since no one queens it like himself" (8).

Davy is not the only one who represents a threat or challenge to Kit and his maturation, as Cheaney also juxtaposes Richard with the popular and successful senior boy player and compares one boy's growth with another's decline. Indeed, the novel follows two major thematic story lines: Kit's failure to achieve the maturation represented by playing adult, male characters and Richard's successful maturation by playing adult, female characters. Kit "finally gets to play the man" when he is cast as Adrian in *The House of Maximus*, probably a play invented by the novel's author.¹⁷ Adrian is the play's lover who is eventually poisoned. Richard, on the other hand, is cast as the lady whom Kit's character loves. Though the "Juliet parts" usually go to Robin, "anyone who looked closely at him of late notices that he had grown taller and bulkier and less pretty" (21). Richard worries over this casting decision, explaining how he and Kit "were usually cast as rivals because the company liked the bite that worked its way into our stage quarrels" (21). Instead, for the next two weeks, Kit and Richard struggle to display convincingly their characters' love, and on opening night only one boy successfully portrays his adult character. All afternoon, Kit "seemed strangely off balance," culminating in an unsuccessful performance:

¹⁷ Alternatively, the play may reference Beaumont and Fletcher's *Valentinian*, a revenge tragedy that dramatizes the Roman emperor Valentinian III, though that Jacobean drama is generally dated between 1610-1614, more than decade after the events depicted in *The True Prince*.

During the courtship scene, as Kit professed his undying love, the groundlings became more and more restless until someone called out, “Enough, lad—you’ll talk her to death!” In the brutal laugh that followed, an orange peel landed on the stage. Kit threw his shoulders back and set his feet wide apart and spoke louder—but faster, to speed the scene. (27)

Kit’s performance only worsens after this early scene. He loses his footing during a duel scene and falls “smack on his behind,” garnering much laughter from the groundlings, and after the final lines of his death scene, a voice from the floor cried out, “Here’s a smack from sweet Silvia, to hurry it up!” as a “rotten apple bounced off Kit’s shoulder, followed by a hail of nutshells” (30). After the show, Richard remarks that Kit “carr[ies] himself more and more like a girl putting on mannish ways, and the next day, an angry Kit now complains that despite “Everybody know[ing] [he is] the best boy player in London,” the Company cares “nothing for me—they pretend not to notice I’m no longer a *boy*. They’d stuff me in skirts until I was thirty, if they could get away with it” (53). Richard’s response further angers Kit: “I thought it was a man’s role you played yesterday,” and he then thinks to himself, “Even though you ended up playing it like a girl” (53).

Richard’s successful ability to perform as a woman and Kit’s inability to perform as a man continue throughout the season. Once the production of *The House of Maximus* ends, the Company begins rehearsing Shakespeare’s newest play, *Henry IV*, and the novel loosely adumbrates the Falstaff/Hal narrative of the history in order to follow

further the maturation of Kit compared to Richard.¹⁸ Indeed, much of the rest of the novel questions whether or not Kit, and to some extent Richard as well, will be able to turn away from so-called *childish* ways and become adults. The novel offers two ways for the boys to achieve such masculine maturation, Kit by way of performing adult male roles and Richard by performing adult female ones. Picking-up where he left off as Adrian in *The House of Maximus*, Kit continues struggling in his new role. The audience “barely notice[s] him” as Ned Poins in *1 Henry IV* (99). Recognizing the obvious struggles, Robin, Kit’s closest friend, confides to Richard that “Something’s happened to [Kit]. He’s come to a river he can’t cross” (103). In so doing, Robin reminds us that Kit has already had an unusually long career on the stage, overcoming many obstacles along the way:

“He’s leapt across all obstacles so far. He was singing in St. Paul Chapel when he was seven. . . . And he was acting in their Company at eight, and playing lead roles by ten, and the Lord Chamberlain’s Men started borrowing him when he was eleven. He’s mastered everything, everything. But not this.” (104).

Richard believes “Perhaps he’s queened it so long he can’t come off his lofty perch,” thus suggesting Kit’s inability to transcend his long-term status as a boy by playing adult, male characters (104). Indeed, despite Kit’s previously long and successful career as a boy player, Richard confirms “in playing a man he had lost the knack” (121). Kit, whom the narrator describes throughout both books as the strongest and most aggressive boy in

¹⁸ The title of the novel is of course from the famous scene in *1 Henry IV* when Falstaff claims he knew all along it was the “true prince” who robbed him at Gad’s Hill (2.4.270).

the company, fails at both his attempt to perform as a man and his own personal maturation.

By contrast, Richard's maturation directly results from his becoming increasingly successful and convincing as a woman, and his subsequent identification of the theatre with his home. Whereas throughout *The Playmaker* Richard is plagued with multiple feelings of self-doubt, in *The True Prince*, he becomes increasingly comfortable and self-assured as he takes on larger, more significant roles. Thus, as Kit fails to convince the audience that he is Adrian the lover in *The House of Maximus*, Richard flourishes as the beloved Silvia. He describes the climax of his character when she commits suicide:

By then I fully sympathized with her despair and pulled the knife from its scabbard with such passion the audience fell silent. When the blade plunged and sheep's blood spurted from a concealed bladder in my gown, ladies in the surrounding galleries made a collective gasp. Robin and Gregory, as a pair of twittering maids, followed as my body was carried off the stage. Something else followed as well—a spatter of applause. (28)

To be sure that the novel marks Richard's unique success, Gregory confirms that Richard is "the only one" to receive such a reaction from the audience (29). Such success, in *The House of Maximus* and several other plays as well, leads Richard to interpret the theatre as his "own home" and the company as his family (10). When Richard's twin sister, Susanna, visits him, he characterizes his time with the Company as one of growth and maturity. Susanna represents Richard's puritanical childhood past. She disapproves of her brother wearing "—a wig and a painted face, and spouting all manner of nonsense," but Richard tells his sister: "I knew where I belonged" (142). When she asks, "How can you

be so sure you've found your place?" Richard replies, "I seem to be rather good at it" (142). Richard even divinely understands his life in the theatre: "Look—I came into the theatre by God's provision. Doubt it if you must, but I know it's true. I've learned a lot and come to understand things better—about people, about life, about myself"(142). Still not convinced, Susanna mockingly replies, "You've learned about *yourself* by putting on a dress and playing *women*? Truly I fear for you, Richard. . . ." (142-43). Yet by the end of the play, Richard seems to be the only boy player to have matured, and this path is the one that guided his success.

We recognize that what motivates Susanna's scorn of her younger brother is for her, and presumably others, the shocking veracity that a boy could possibly grow or mature while undergoing such an unconventional process, the performance of feminine behaviors and of women. Nevertheless, Richard's ability to find himself, grow more confident, and become more comfortable with his identity is the result his crossdressing experiences in the theatre. What marks this development as unconventional is, in part, the queer process. Negating the feminine is often part of a boy's conventional masculine construction, whereby normative maturation involves negotiating and then conforming to stereotypical aspects of normative manhood. As Michael Kimmel reminds us,

Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological makeup; it is created in culture. . . . We come to know what it means to be a man in our culture by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of "others"—racial minorities, sexual minorities, and above all, women. (119)

However, when depicted in contemporary children's literature, the early modern practice of crossdressing offers a unique opportunity to overturn this process. The stage becomes a unique location whereby maturation for boys comes not from negating the feminine, but instead embracing feminine traits and behaviors. Moreover, it is significant that this process occurs within the gaze of an audience and also of the boy players' peers, thus toppling another key aspect of hegemonic masculinity. As Kimmel further explains, "We are under the constant careful scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood" (125). In this case, however, the acceptance is not into normative manhood, but into a more subjective and unconventional gender identity praised in the novel. By successfully and convincingly performing feminine characteristics in front of other males, characteristics which we are repeatedly told by author and narrator that the boys identify with, these boys become increasingly more comfortable with their unconventional identities.

The Shakespeare Stealer (1998) employs the same basic narrative pattern used by Cheaney: an orphaned, timid, emotional, and feeble protagonist travels alone to London to work in Shakespeare's Company and mature in his presence. As Widge plainly states in the opening sentence, "I never knew my mother or my father," and the boy spends the first seven years of his life in a Yorkshire orphanage (Blackwood 1). The first chapters concern Dr. Timothy Bright's acquisition of Widge as an apprentice. Having recently published *Characterie: An Arte of Short, Swift, and Secret Writing* (1588), Bright is looking for an apprentice to copy the sermons of other rectors that he will later use for

personal gain.¹⁹ Widge learns the “abbreviated language of Dr. Bright’s own devising . . . by the which one may transcribe the spoken word as rapidly as it issues from the tongue” (5). Because of acquiring this skill, Simon Bass of Leicester purchases Widge from Bright for an explicit purpose. As he explains to the boy, “When you go to London, you will attend a performance of a play called *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. You will copy it in Dr. Bright’s ‘charactery’ and you will deliver it to me” (31). Thus, Widge’s story carries him to London in order to steal *Hamlet* for a company of players owned by Bass. In the process, Widge transitions from being merely obedient to being able to question the ethical principles of this command while simultaneously developing an aptitude for acting.

Compared to the orphanage and to Widge’s apprenticeship with Bass, the theatre and the Lord Chamberlain’s Men become an affirming sanctuary for him. Early on, the novel anticipates the liberating and extricating potential of the theatre when, as a seven year-old at the orphanage, Widge explained how “It was the dream of each child within those dreary walls that someday a real family would come and claim him. Preferably . . . his true parents” (4). For Widge, the theatre becomes his family and Shakespeare his true parent. He first receives the opportunity to join the company when, after losing his pirated copy of *Hamlet*, he returns to the theatre to search for the book and is mistaken as one of the new boy players. He feigns his desire to be a player, at first simply trying to find an opportunity to steal a copy of the play, though he quickly develops a relationship

¹⁹ Bright is based on the historical writer of *Characterie* and the more commonly known *A Treatise on Melancholie* (1586), though this history is never mentioned in the novel and is of little importance to the narrative. However, Blackwood cites these texts as inspiration in “Shakespeare Speaks: Getting the Language Right” (2003), a short chapter on the author’s impetus for writing this trilogy. A relationship between Bright and Shakespeare, as personified by the fictional Widge in Blackwood’s trilogy, has been theorized by some critics as possible. See Mary Isabelle O’Sullivan’s “Hamlet and Dr. Timothy Bright” (1926).

with many of the players in the company. For instance, the morning after Widge accidentally locks himself all night in the costume closet after looking for a copy of *Hamlet*, Mr. Pope, an adult player and mentor for the boy, expresses deep concern for his welfare. As Widge's friend Sander explains, "He takes the welfare of his boys very seriously," and Widge's reaction reveals how he is beginning to understand the company:

I was accustomed to being called someone's "boy." Like the term "his man," it can mean you are the servant, or chattel, of that person. But the way Sander used the word, it implied something more, something better—that I was not merely part of a household, but part of a family.
(138)

Blackwood's vaguely sexual rhetoric reminds us of the origins of the word *boy* to mean *to chain* or *imprison*. Likewise, the final words of the novel bring this idea full circle when Widge reflects on words he "had heard before and never understood their import—words such as honesty and trust, loyalty and friendship. And family. And home" (216). By establishing how the acting company and playhouse serve as an alternative, all-male family for Widge, the novel exemplifies some of the concepts of homosocial relationships and desire that Eve Sedgwick famously defines in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985). The master/servant language Widge uses to distinguish his alternative family as being "something more" from the conventional ones he, and the other boys at the orphanage, dreamed of exemplifies how the categories of "homosociality" and "homosexuality," as Sedgwick suggests, are not separate but instead continually overlap (*Between* 1-15). Thus, much of Widge's maturation into a comfortable and unconventional identity occurs against the backdrop of a homoerotic

desire that is potentially present within the playhouses' socially sanctioned male-to-male relationships.

As with *The Playmaker* and *The True Prince*, *The Shakespeare Stealer* catalogues the collapse of a boy player's psyche and economic value as he physically matures as a male and attempts to play leading male roles. When the company first decides to hire Widge, one of the shareholders explains, "we could use another b-boy. Nick's golden voice threatens to turn b-bass any day now, and his b-beard to betray him" (72). This concern regarding Nick's physical growth appears ubiquitously throughout the novel. For instance, in the company's current production of *Hamlet*, Julian plays Ophelia and Nick plays Gertrude because the former is "far better suited to playing girls' parts than the swaggering Nick, who seemed too husky in voice and in build to portray anything but older women" (83). During rehearsal, Widge cannot help laughing at Nick because "His voice was so much at odds with his feminine appearance," and at the last moment another boy fills in as Gertrude because Nick's "got a bit of a beard" (89, 111). Frustrated, Nick confronts a shareholder demanding the opportunity to play a man:

"I'm not a child!" Nick was saying. "When will you stop treating me as one?"

"When you stop behaving as one! Drinking and gaming until all hours is not the mark of a man!"

"Neither is wearing skirts and prancing about the stage like a woman!"

"Ah, that's it, is it? You feel you're ready for men's roles, do you?"

“Well I—” Nick hesitated. “I’m sick of playing a girl, that’s all.”

He rubbed at the stubble on his cheeks. “And I’m sick of being thought a callow boy wherever I go, because I’m forced to shave my beard.”

“So you feel you’re ready to move from prentice to hired man.”

(138-39)

As we remember with Kit in *The True Prince*, when Nick does receive the opportunity to play a man, he fails, and his failure is described beyond his theatrical performance to include also his performance as a man off the stage. As Widge explains, “It was as though he had taken on a role he was not prepared to play, not only on stage but in life” (154). Thus, as with Kit, Nick’s inability to “play the man” also reflects his overall inability to mature via the roles he receives. When Sander explains that Nick’s “been a prentice for six or seven years, and now he’ll have to begin playing a man’s part,” Widge asks, “On the stage, or in life?” and Sander replies, “Both, I suppose” (88). By consolidating the performance of a man on stage with the performance of a man off stage, Blackwood explores the gendered importance of performing these dramatic characters. The importance is more than merely theatrical for these boys, and the message is clear: within the context of *The Shakespeare Stealer*, the performance on stage, rather successful or a failure, reflects the boy’s gendered maturation and growth, or lack thereof.

Another important gender-related incident that opens the opportunity for Widge to perform as a female is the surprising discovery that the boy player Julian is actually Julia, a girl pretending to be a boy playing Ophelia and other female roles. The discovery of Julia’s sex occurs when she is stabbed during fencing exercises, and Mr. Armin opens her doublet to stop the bleeding, in the process discovering a “cloth . . . wound tightly about

his chest” (159). For three years, Julia performed as a boy performing women’s roles, thereby adding to the gender complexity inherent in the novel by admitting the pluralities of gender and further demonstrating the opportunity of these Shakespearean historical fictions to depict unconventional gender roles. Julian/Julia’s female-to-male crossdressing occurs because of her desire to escape a patriarchal society that keeps her from pursuing her love of performing on stage. Crossdressing allows her to inhabit the male world of the playhouse and experience privileges otherwise denied to her. Simply put, crossdressing is liberating—and fun.

Moreover, this revelation further enhances the gender ambiguity and cross-dressing themes situated at the heart of these historical novels by introducing a character whom we might recognize as *tomboy*. According to Lynne Yamaguchi and Karen Barber, *tomboy* connotes “a virtually uniform picture of a girl who—by whatever standards society has dictated—acts like a boy” (10). Blackwood blurs these boy/girl and man/woman boundaries when Julia explains to Widge how, “In truth, [she] wore skirts and bodices regularly only after [she] began masquerading as a boy” (173). Julian/Julia’s new sex continues to subvert already complex gender identities associated with the text as throughout the novel all the boy players continuously forget whether she is a boy or girl. As Widge confesses, “I had to remind myself that this was no boy made up to resemble a girl, but the actual thing,” a sentiment when compared to his own gender bending and crossdressing, where he sometimes forgets he is a boy playing a woman, further reveals the fluidity of gender (172).

These two events—Nick’s opportunity to play the man and the removal of Julian/Julia from the stage—pave the way for Widge to play Ophelia in the upcoming

production of *Hamlet*. Already, the text has alluded to the transformative and maturational potential of performing as a Shakespearean woman character when Widge watches *Hamlet* for the first time as he attempts to copy the play for Bass:

I was caught up in the action of the play. I began to think of these people not as players mouthing speeches but as actual persons, living out part of their lives before me. . . . I no longer noticed the press of the crowd, nor its unwashed smell for I was no longer there among them, but in a castle in Denmark. (49-50)

When one of the players confronts Widge about watching the play from backstage, the boy lies about what he is doing, causing the player to reply, “Ho, quite the actor, aren’t you? Perhaps you belong *on* the stage and not behind it, eh?” (68). Widge repeats these words to himself and begins to turn to them as encouragement, convincing himself that “Perhaps my salvation lay that way” (68). This salvation leads to the opportunity to play Ophelia, and performing as an important female character takes on developmental aspects. For instance, at first hesitant, Widge asks Mr. Heminges, “Do you really think I’m ready to play so important a role?” (174). And Mr. Heminges replies, “Whether or n-no you have the ability is not the question, but whether or n-not you have the c-courage” (174).²⁰ Ultimately, Widge decides that “if Julian could be a boy for three years, [he] can be a girl for an hour or two” (175).

The language Blackwood uses to depict Widge’s preparation for Ophelia signifies the boy’s growth and acceptance of his identity. For several days Julia helps Widge become Ophelia until he finally becomes the woman: “Through some miraculous

²⁰ According to one tradition, Heminges spoke with a stutter.

process, I ceased to be Widge and became Ophelia, except for some small part of myself that seemed to hover overhead, observing my transformation with amazement” (180). In addition to this physical transformation, the boundary between Widge’s speech and Ophelia’s lines is also blurred: “The lines flowed from me as though they had just occurred to my brain and not been penned by Mr. Shakespeare a year earlier” (180). When Widge walks onto the stage, the language he uses to describe his experience amalgamates his childhood, maturation, emotional growth, and performance as a female:

So in the end it was not courage that got me through; it was a trick of the mind. As I had survived my orphanage days by pretending I was someone else, someone whose parents still lived and were great and wealthy and would someday come for him, so I survived my hour or so upon the stage by pretending I was a wistful Danish girl, driven mad by love. . . . In the space of a few hours, I had done more than transform temporarily into Ophelia. I had undergone a more dramatic change, from a shabby imposter, a thief and orphan who had been given a task far beyond his abilities, into a reliable, valued member of an acting company who performed daily at the center of the universe. (181-83)

Blackwood repeats this narrative pattern in *Shakespeare’s Scribe* (2000), the sequel to *The Shakespeare Stealer*. In this novel, Widge identifies with Helena from *All’s Well That Ends Well*: “I felt a kind of kinship with her. Like me, she was an orphan; like me, she had been taught the rudiments of medicine; like me, she had offered her loyalty . . . and been rejected” (*Scribe* 255).

Though the actual playtext and the Ophelia character are primarily responsible for Widge's maturation, Shakespeare is also a surrogate parent who assists with Widge's transformation. Shakespeare plays a more prominent part in *The Shakespeare Stealer* than in Cheaney's two novels. He is a playwright, actor, part-owner of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and surrogate father for Widge. However, he is spoken about more than he actually speaks, thus creating a sense of mystery and awe around the character. Blackwood explains Shakespeare's general absence in the novel as follows: "Probably the most intimidating task I faced was that of making Shakespeare himself speak. I copped out a bit in the first book, by keeping his appearances to a minimum. But in the sequel it was crucial for the reader to see him and hear him at some length—and not just in everyday conversation, either, but in the throes of creating a new play" ("Speaks" 78). *Hamlet*, however, is a perfect backdrop for a novel that will depict Shakespeare as a surrogate father for Widge.²¹ Blackwood first alludes to Shakespeare as a paternal figure in the novel's opening pages when the orphan Widge, dreams "for some savior to come by and . . . take [him] away" (7). Indeed, Blackwood asserts the cultural capital of Shakespeare (the playwright and canon) by constructing Shakespeare (the character) as not only Widge's savior, but also a private, sagacious man embodying genius. When Widge first arrives at the company, another apprentice tells him that he "won't see much of Mr. Shakespeare. He's a private man, and a very busy one" (79). An adult player reflects that, "in his younger days, he was a good companion—and he still can be on occasion. But much of the time he's withdrawn and pensive" because of his "touch of genius" (116).

²¹ See Eric Rasmussen's "Fathers and Sons in *Hamlet*" (1995) and Fred B. Tromly's *Fathers and Sons in Shakespeare: The Debt Never Promised* (2010).

With Shakespeare symbolizing the omniscient parent that Widge never knew, *The Shakespeare Stealer* clearly privileges the social family over the biological one. Not only does Widge accept the acting company as his family and Shakespeare as a surrogate father, but even Shakespeare's decision to remain in London instead of returning to Stratford confirms the priority of their relationship and of the theatrical family over the Shakespeares-of-Stratford. The second installment of the trilogy, *Shakespeare's Scribe* (2000), confirms this preference for the social family over the biological one when a thief appears claiming to be Widge's father, forcing Widge to decide between his biological and social fathers:

After living most of my life without family or friends, I had only lately begun to learn about loyalty, so I did not yet know all it entailed. I wished to be faithful to my father, but if he had committed a crime I was not sure I still owed him any loyalty. Besides, what about my obligation to the Chamberlain's Men? In the hierarchy of loyalties, which one came first—family or friends? (*Scribe* 217)

Widge symbolically compares his decision either to follow his biological father or return to the company “to a fork in the road,” a decision on “which route to choose” (216). Thus, believing that one has the freedom to choose her/his own family, ultimately Widge decides to remain loyal to his alternative social family. Shortly thereafter, the novel awards him for making this decision when in an audition he defeats a boy from a competing company and is awarded the role of the orphan Helena in *All's Well that Ends Well*. In the final sentences of the novel, a senior member of the company affirms Widge, telling the boy, “You know . . . when an actor truly shines in a role for the first time, we

say that he's found himself. Well, it seems to me that you've found yourself" (*Scribe* 265). Thus, the novels emphatically establish that for Widge, his growth encompasses a combination of identifying with an adult, female character, successfully performing that character, choosing to remain with his social family, and understanding Shakespeare as his surrogate father.

Susan Cooper's *King of Shadows* (1999) follows this narrative pattern in Shakespeare-inspired historical novels whereby an orphaned protagonist who is struggling with the death of his parents comes of age as an unconventional boy while performing in Shakespeare's Company. Unlike the Cheaney and Blackwood novels, Cooper employs time-travel fiction in order to provide a way for her protagonist to escape his reality and find comfort in Elizabethan England. As Anne Balay explains, time-slip narratives are a "genre of fantasy fiction in which time travel happens accidentally, without the traveler's consent or control" (131). Cooper's novel thus begins at a modern-day theatre in Massachusetts. Nat, a boy from Greenville, South Carolina, finds acting a refuge from the emotional turmoil surrounding his home life. He is selected to join the American Company of Boys and travel to the newly rebuilt Globe in London where they will perform *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Cooper first emphasizes the unconventionality of Nat and the other boy actors by explaining how their life in the theatre differs from the lives of other boys. Nat describes broadly their American Company of Boys:

We had one other thing in common, too. Most of us were pretty weird. When you think about it, a normal kid wants to watch TV or movies, videos or computer games: there's something odd about him if

instead he's more interested in the stage. And we were all crazy about it.

(5)

Unlike the historical novels thus far discussed, where authors fictionalize the mostly common experience of apprenticing for an early modern theatre company, Cooper's setting *King of Shadows* in contemporary America permits her to create her characters against the so-called typical behaviors and activities of contemporary boys. For instance, during one rehearsal Nat remarks that Eric is "meek" and "shy," while Gil, the boy playing Titania, is "amazing looking," with "an ageless, perfect face that might have made you think him a real sissy" (25). In addition to their supposed "weirdness" and difference from "normal kids," the novel also includes an outside viewpoint that positions the boys' attraction to theatre as deviant. As one boy remarks, "My mom thinks theatre's dangerous. . . . She's religious," and another boy responds, "She thought her beautiful little boy'd get attacked by nasty molesters!" (12). *King of Shadows* vigorously works to set so-called *normative boyhood*, where boys enjoy video games, watch television, and play sports, against these actors' lives in the theatre. In so doing, Cooper reminds us of normative constructions of boyhood and masculinity imagined by the many child rearing manuals and pop-psychology texts previously discussed in Chapter VI.

Compared to other children's novels that concern Shakespeare and the contemporary American theatre, *King of Shadows* is much less concerned with a conservative gender depiction. For instance, in saccharine novels such as Avi's *Romeo and Juliet Together (and Alive!) at Last* (1987) and Suzanne Harper's *The Juliet Club* (2008), the theatre is constructed as a place that buttresses heterosexual romance. In Avi's novel, Ed Sitrow volunteers to direct an eighth-grade production of *Romeo and*

Juliet in order to help his friends, Saltz and Stackpoole “get together,” “talk love to each other,” and maybe even “kiss” (16). Meanwhile, Hamilton, the bully of South Orange River School, complains that the drama club focuses too much on “love muck,” and he threatens to wreck the production when he is cast as Tybalt, the only important part in the play because of all the “fighting” (22). In Harper’s novel, Kate Sanders wins an essay contest that allows her to spend a summer abroad in Italy studying Shakespeare and drama with other gifted American and Italian teenagers. At first, Kate is delighted to escape from a recent bad break up and focus on European art and her favorite author, but the novel soon abandons Kate’s opportunity for intellectual growth and instead focuses on her budding romance with the local Italian hunk, Giacomo. But whereas the theatre figures as a site for heterosexual romance in these novels, *King of Shadows* replaces teenage, heteronormative bliss with a more complex, subjective identity and relationship based on theatre life.

Indeed, Nat is not a Romeo; he is neither romantic nor athletic. Instead, as with Richard and Widge, Nat is positioned as an outsider set against a hegemonic masculinity. Cooper depicts him as scared, introspective, tearful, and easily intimidated. When he first wakes up in Elizabethan London, the early modern boys say that his “oddness was the result of [his] background,” believing that his behavior results from his childhood outside of London (69). Perhaps the actions they find alien are because of his late twentieth-century, American speech and behavior, but their bullying certainly sounds contemporary. Cooper juxtaposes Nat with Roper, the aggressive, same-sex antagonist of *King of Shadows*. At first, Roper calls him a “softie” and a “girl,” but his insults become

more acerbic after observing Nat's responses to bear baiting. Roper describes his reactions to the gore:

“So the bear pulls the guts out of Ned Ashley's dog. . . and the little lass looks a bit green, she closes her eyes. Then she *really* has a fainting fit when Quayle's terrier has its head smashed open. ‘No!’ she calls out’—he put on a high, ridiculous falsetto—‘No!’—and she runs away with her petticoats all abuzz—” (70).

Nat's disgust for and denunciation of animal abuse invites derision from the other boys, particularly Roper who, with the motive of insult, for the rest of the novel refers to the effeminate Nat as a “little lass,” “she,” and “her” (70). In addition to Nat's antipathy for bear baiting, his gymnastic talents coupled with his ability to speak French provoke further insults. “Trust the little lass from St. Paul's to have some girlish talent to brag about,” says Roper (88). Thus, gymnastics, language, and disavowal of violence are all gendered feminine in *King of Shadows*, though such attitudes are probably anachronistic since early modern boy players with these abilities would have been coveted.²² Indeed, possessing both lingual and acrobatic talents would have been desired among early modern boy players. Nevertheless, the contemporary Nat is bullied because of his traditionally feminine talents.

As a time-slip novel, *King of Shadows* seizes two opportunities to construct the theatre and acting companies in familial terms akin to Cheaney and Blackwood's novels.

²² Given the Renaissance love of physical grace and eloquence, these first two feminine genderings—gymnastic abilities and language—are probably anachronistic. For more on the sort of Renaissance activities that excited early modern boys, see C.S. Lewis's *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (1954; pp 61-63). For an introduction into the Renaissance love of linguistic ability, see Hannah H. Gray's “Renaissance Humanist: The Pursuit of Eloquence” (1963).

First, the novel is bookended by rehearsals and performances by the contemporary Company of Boys, a motley male crew assembled from across the country by director Richard “Arby” Babbage. According to Arby, this “company is a family, a big family. . . Always remember that . . . we shall be absolutely dependent on one another, we must each by *totally* trustworthy” (2). In order to establish such trust, Arby requires that each young actor participate in a trust fall, and when one of the boys jokingly decides not to take seriously the activity, Arby dismisses him from the company, explaining to everyone else that “*Nothing* is more important than the company, *nothing* is more important than the play” (4). The boys demonstrate their agreement with Arby when Gil asserts likewise that “This company is a family,” and Nat compares working in the company with “the feeling of giving yourself to other people” as he recalls similarly how “safe [his mother] made [him] feel” (12, 3). Likewise, as soon as Nat arrives in 1599 London, William Shakespeare echoes Arby when the famous playwright explains to Nat that this company too “is a family, close and closeted” (73). Because of Shakespeare, his “wonderful voice, clear and warm,” Nat soon begins to feel “safe in the small family world of the theatre” (95).

Although Nat’s immediate affection for Shakespeare represents only a portion of the comfort provided by the familial framework discussed above, the Nat/Shakespeare relationship is unquestionably the key relationship and focus of *King of Shadows*. Much more than any other Shakespeare-character discussed in this chapter, the Shakespeare of Cooper’s novel is the most well developed. Whereas Cheaney and Blackwood chose to portray the playwright as mysterious and hermitic, Cooper creates an approachable Shakespeare who is much warmer and friendlier. Her Shakespeare also is the most

relevant to the novel's action and protagonist. For instance, the Company's immediate need to find a boy to play Puck in their upcoming production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* occasions Nat and Shakespeare's introduction to one another.²³ But when Nat first sees the playwright, he feels an immediate emotional connection to the man, remarking how "more than anything [he] wanted be closer to him" (47). When Shakespeare starts to leave, Nat thinks to himself, "*Don't go, please don't go*. It wasn't because he was William Shakespeare. I just knew that I liked being with him, more than with anyone I knew" (50). Thus, Cooper immediately clarifies that this relationship and Nat's love for Shakespeare is not based on mere celebration but instead a unique bond, and their relationship is all the more heightened once Shakespeare announces, "We shall rehearse together soon, Puck. . . . I am to play thine Oberon" (50).

King of Shadows is perhaps the most critically discussed contemporary adaptation of Shakespeare. The complexity of Nat and Shakespeare's relationship, especially within the context of their performance of Puck and Oberon, is often the root of such discussions. Erica Hateley, for instance, finds that "Shakespeare becomes an idealised paternal figure, and the relationship with the playwright enables Nat to resolve the trauma associated with his own father's suicide" (*Shakespeare* 121). For Hateley, this relationship again exemplifies how contemporary authors of Shakespeare-for-children construct the playwright "explicitly as paternalistic" and "a character who takes up the role of mentor-father" (18). Kate Chedgzoy, however, finds a more erotic subtext in the relationship between boy and man, arguing that Cooper "evokes the homoerotic potential of the relationship" by centralizing "Sonnet 116" as the pivotal aspect of their

²³ The Lord Chamberlain's Men in the novel believe that the American Nat Field is the historical boy player Nathan Field on loan from the Children of Paul's.

relationship (“Shakespeare” 195). After a lengthy discussion about Nat’s biological father, Shakespeare provides Nat with a personal copy of “Let me not to the marriage of true minds,” and as Nat dresses for bed, Shakespeare kneels at the boy’s bedside and quietly recites the poem by candlelight before explaining how true love is permanent and kissing Nat’s forehead (105).²⁴

I wish to suggest another possibility that both contains and redefines these readings. While both Hateley and Chedgzoy provide convincing close readings of passages to support their respective ideas regarding the father/son parallel for Hateley and the erotic potential for Chedgzoy, I wish to suggest that Nat and Shakespeare’s unique relationship blurs both of these social boundaries. By having Shakespeare and Nat together perform as Oberon and Puck, Cooper invites the opportunity for us to understand Shakespeare and Nat’s intergenerational relationship as father/son, lover/loved, adult/child, and master/servant, thereby depicting a companionship that exists outside any normative ideology that suggests the possibility of a singular truth about an affectionate relationship.

Recognizing how gender theorists dispute rigid binary systems of gender helps us to make sense of how these different relationships co-exist within the same pair of individuals. Bonnie Zimmerman’s postulation of a “shifting matrix of behaviors, choices, subjectivities, textualities, and self-representations” that helps her to explain what she calls a “metaphorical lesbian” likewise helps us to understand how the choices, performed actions, and attitudes of Shakespeare and Nat display a similar “matrix of

²⁴ We also understand how this intimate sharing of true minds can be understood within the context of Eve Sedgwick’s argument that the “asymmetry of gender assignment [is] startlingly crisp” in Shakespeare’s sonnets (*Between* 29).

behaviors” that can be recognized as rejecting hegemonic masculinity in the place of an unconventional and more supportive relationship with Will (4). Likewise, Nat and Will’s cross-special disguises, whereby they mask their personhood by performing as non-human fairies, presents the opportunity also to recognize the blurring of gender boundaries. The boy-as-fairy and man-as-fairy exemplify what Marjorie Garber identifies as “problematizing the binary” of conventional relationships and instead permits readers to understand the relationship in a new light (335). Concerning the master/servant relationship between Oberon and Puck more specifically, Mario DiGangi has explored “the homoerotic potentiality within the master-servant power structure” in early modern drama (*Homoerotics* 65). Indeed, employing an intergenerational master servant relationship makes this relationship all the more unconventional.

Therefore, the emotional climax of the novel occurs when Nat-as-Puck explains how for him, Shakespeare-as-Oberon is “King of Fairyland and of the whole world, as far as I was concerned . . . he had an eerie authority that made me, as Puck, totally his devoted servant” (Cooper 120). So inspired by his charismatic master, that Shakespeare-as-Oberon “put spring into [his] cartwheeling exit” (120). As we saw with *The Shakespeare Stealer*, by evoking the early etymology of *boy* and using the language of bondage and servitude, Cooper’s rhetoric to describe this unconventional relationship is elusively sexual. In the end, we recognize in Will and Nat’s progressive relationship the representation and promotion of intense affectional bonds that transcend conventional understanding.

Certainly Cooper includes a parent/child narrative in her novel, but Shakespeare is not always depicted as a conventional father. Indeed, the playwright comforts Nat during

one of the novel's most intimate moments, and the boy describes Shakespeare's cradling him in his arms as "like a mother to a very small child" whispering "There. There now" (74). In another scene, Shakespeare refers to Nat somewhat like a child when he "look[s] down at [Nat] with an odd smile," and remarks, "My small magician" (99). But at the end of their first performance as fairy master and servant, Nat explains how "Will Shakespeare reached out as he passed and grabbed my hand, holding it hard, pulling me with him, and we bowed together. . . . Will Shakespeare and I in our glimmer and glitter and fantasy paint" (136). Also, when Nat returns to the present day he reads "Sonnet 116" and instead of thinking about his biological father, whom he has not mentioned in quite sometime, Nat remembers Will. Despite Will's being dead for four centuries, Nat nevertheless concludes that "loving doesn't change just because someone isn't there, or because time gets in the way, or even death. It's always with you, keeping you, safe, it won't ever leave you" (175). The tone and tenor of these final moments suggest that Shakespeare's words now serve to remind Nat of his friend, master, and partner, Will Shakespeare, more so than his biological father. Will, not a parent, becomes the "*ever-fixed mark*" for the boy (175). Indeed, their relationship mixes and blurs the boundaries of parent/child, master/servant, author/performer, savior/saved, lover/beloved, adult/child, parent/son and friend.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a particularly effective drama to appropriate in order to depict the nonnormative gender relations existing between Will and Nat. Whereas in the novels thus far discussed, authors use a boy's performance of femininity to develop his confidence in his nonnormative boyhood, *King of Shadows* finds in the complicated Oberon/Puck relationship an opportunity to explore Nat and Will's

unconventionality. For many gender and queer theorists, Puck is *the* “queer hero” in Shakespeare “because his pleasures work against or at least challenge ideological constraints:” “Puck is not only a vehicle for queering *Dream*, but he represents the possibility of queering Shakespeare, the English Renaissance canon, and the culture of the theaters and classrooms in which these high humanist works are daily revived” (Kehler 48). In addition to recognizing the queer potential of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, it is also important to note how frequently this particular play is adapted for children. While the fantastic and comedic elements are amenable to young readers, the play’s explicit concern with maturation seems especially appealing for children’s authors. As Louis Adrian Montrose explains,

A Midsummer Night’s Dream focuses upon different crucial transitions in the male and female life cycles: the fairy plot, upon taking “a little changeling boy” from childhood into youth, from the world of the mother into the world of the father; the Athenian plot, upon taking a maiden from youth into maturity, from the world of the ather into the world of the husband. (108)

Not surprising, then, *King of Shadows* builds on both the opportunity presented by *Dream* to focus on themes such as unconventional gender and maturation. The court of Oberon and Titania, in which Puck also exists, makes up the fairy plot of *Dream* whereby these characters exist within a fantasy realm often associated with nature, sexuality, and changeability. The filial pair of Oberon and Puck are the only characters who interact with all the play’s subplots: the young Athenians in the play are victim to Puck’s potion and Titania falls in love with Bottom once he turns into an ass, both of which influence

Theseus and Hippolyta's feast. Thus, Oberon and Puck represent how the fantastic and the unlikely are made real.

The conclusion of the novel uses Shakespeare and Nat to exemplify another complicated multi-variant relationship. Throughout their time together in early modern London, Shakespeare routinely refers to the "magic" in the relationship and often calls Nat his "sprite," explaining to him that "Th'art a sprite, an aerial sprite, born of the air. One day I shall write thee an airier Robin Goodfellow—unless thou leave me, or grow old" (Cooper 86). Nat responds, "He grinned at me, and for a moment I glowed all over wanted to say: *I'll never leave you, I want to act with you forever.*" (86). Indeed, Nat recalls this moment in the final paragraphs of the novel when Richard "Arby" Babbage, who himself is a time traveler of sorts and is understood to be a reincarnation of Richard Burbage, explains to Nat, "You have not lost him. . . . You will never lose him, never:" "Next summer, the Company of Boys will do a production of *The Tempest*,' he said. 'And you'll play Ariel'. . . Arby looked at me with a half-smile [and] said, 'At the end of *The Tempest* Prospero lets Ariel go free. *I shall miss thee,*' he says, '*but still thou shalt have freedom.*' Go free Nat, Nat—free of grieving. And your two poets will go with you always'" (186). Thus, the novel ends with the promise of another opportunity to continue this unconventional, fantastic, and affirming relationship.

The novels I have discussed in this chapter offer a variety of subjective gender identities for their boy protagonists. Rather than promoting naturalized gendered identities, these historical novels utilize the cross-dressing practices of the early modern stage in order to create a space for these boys to come of age, not heteronormatively, but against the same sort of hegemonic and patriarchal ideals discussed in my first four

chapters: in *The Playmaker* and *The True Prince*, Richard convincingly performs as Nerissa, Constance, and Perdita while antagonist Kit fails to grow into the male roles he receives; in *The Shakespeare Stealer*, Widge's opportunity to become Ophelia is described as a *salvation*, whereas Nick's physical changes regarding his voice and beard are described as a *threat* and a *betrayal* that lead to his failure to perform as a man; and in *King of Shadows*, Nat is consistently bullied by the hypermasculine Roper because of his supposed feminine sensibilities but nevertheless learns to embrace his true self.

Furthermore, each of these historical novels focuses on the homosocial aspect of the early modern theatre in order to offer their protagonists an alternative family that they often choose over their biological ones. As a result of this social environment, these novels also feature complex relationships between the boy protagonists and William Shakespeare-as-character that blurs the social boundaries between parent and child, master and servant, lover and beloved, and friend and friend, a relationship also depicted somewhat erotically. In so doing, these Shakespeare boy books do embrace many hallmarks of boys' fiction—such as the hero's removal from home, his procurement of worldly experiences, and his participation in dangerous and exciting conflicts—but they also include more unconventional characteristics, most significantly feminine, sensitive, and cross-dressing protagonists who develop intense and intimate cross-age relationships with adult males. Thus, whereas the boys discussed in my first four chapters critique and subvert ideal masculinities through narratational strategies, such as wit and behavior, these boys challenge similar ideals by embracing alternative boyhoods.

CHAPTER VIII

“a delicate and tender prince:”

HAMLET AS THE MODERN BOY

Despite being the most well known, frequently performed, and repeatedly quoted work of Western literature, *Hamlet* seems an unlikely candidate for adaptation for young readers, because it is counterintuitive to contemporary constructions of childhood. While the Ghost does offer the sort of supernatural element popularly found in children’s and young adult literature, there are no young characters in the narrative with whom a young reader might identify, the sexually explicit bantering is ubiquitous, suicide is glorified as “sleep. . . Devoutly to be wish’d” (3.1.60, 63), and by the play’s end the protagonist is responsible for eight grisly deaths. Such events are often excluded from children’s and sometimes even young adult culture. They represent the sort of acts and expressions in books that are frequently banned in schools and libraries.¹

Yet recognizing *Hamlet*’s potential for young readership, Megan Lynn Isaac articulates how the play “seems like an especially ripe text for revision by young adult authors; the themes embedded in this single play serve as a virtual catechism for the field of adolescence” (66). Indeed, reasons for the drama’s potential as children’s or young adult literature are manifold. Hamlet is a student fraught by one parent’s death and another’s recent remarriage. Confused by a complicated romantic relationship and plagued by feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy, Hamlet attempts to find and

¹ According to David Booth, “Prior to the rise of ‘new realism’ in the 1960s, the general consensus about children’s literature was that difficult topics such as death, racial conflict, or sexual permissiveness were taboo and therefore simply did not appear. . . . Topics often censored include sexual content, language, violence, homosexuality, race, and religion. . . . In a 2009 survey of librarians, . . . 87 percent said the main reason they avoid certain books is because they include sexuality or sex education” (28-29).

understand his identity as he struggles with the wreckage of his home life, including living with a new step-parent. Moreover, these issues prompt his examination of the legitimacy of suicide in such a painful world. Nevertheless, we understand Isaac's assessment in 2000 that despite this "thematic richness of *Hamlet*" very few "revisions of the play [appear] in young adult literature," citing only "tangential connections to *Hamlet*" found in Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977), Lois Duncan's *Killing Mr. Griffin* (1978), and Laura A. Sonnenmark's *Something's Rotten in the State of Maryland* (1990) (67).

But more recently there has been a surge in children's literature rooted in *Hamlet*. There are several new picture books—Bruce Coville's *Hamlet* (2004), Adam McKeown's *Hamlet: The Young Reader's Shakespeare* (2004), Christina Lacie's *Hamlet: Picture This! Shakespeare* (2006)—and chapter books—Lisa Fiedler's *Dating Hamlet: Ophelia's Story* (2002), Rebecca Reisert's *Ophelia's Revenge* (2003), Lisa M. Klein's *Ophelia* (2006), Michelle Ray's *Falling for Hamlet* (2011), to name a few. As these titles indicate, though, most of these authors, especially those of chapter books, market their adaptations to young female readers by focusing on Ophelia. As Abigail Rokison suggests, these authors make Ophelia the protagonist, thus giving their Ophelia "far more agency and opportunity for self-expression than her Shakespearean counterpart" (148). "Putting Ophelia at the centre of the story," Rokison explains, "may help to draw girls into what is essentially a male dominated play, and to encourage them to consider Ophelia's treatment and behavior in relation to their own experiences" (148).² While

² I would add that these girl books also work to elevate Ophelia's social status. No longer a helpless victim of patriarchy like their Shakespearean counterpart, these contemporary Ophelia's frequently have the opportunity for self-expression and to demonstrate their agency.

Rokison's explanation helpfully sums up the Ophelia protagonists in the novels by Fiedler, Reisert, Klein, and Ray, it overlooks another string of *Hamlet* adaptations also published during the last decade that focus on boy versions of the Danish prince.

Hence, I wish consider how *Hamlet* has been distributed to boys in contemporary novels such as Matt Haig's *The Dead Fathers Club* (2006), Alan M. Gratz's *Something Rotten* (2007), Gary D. Schmidt's *The Wednesday Wars* (2007), and John Marsden's *Hamlet, A Novel* (2009). Despite this recent surge in *Hamlet*-inspired boy books, few critics mention this phenomenon, opting instead to focus on Ophelia's character. For instance, although Abigail Rokison does briefly discuss how, unlike Marsden, "Gratz and Haig have created novels that can be enjoyed independently of *Hamlet* while also exploring the function of dramatic irony in these texts for readers familiar with Shakespeare's play," she mostly discusses novels, as mentioned above, that focus on Ophelia-as-narrator (9).

Hamlet seems especially ripe for appropriation for boys. Though there is not a young character in the play with whom a child reader might identify in terms of age, *Hamlet*'s identity traditionally has been understood via his relationship to his father, not only King Hamlet but also Shakespeare himself. Critics such as Harold Bloom, who find biography in *Hamlet*, call the Prince "Shakespeare's ideal son," thus following James Joyce, "who first identified Hamlet the Dane with Shakespeare's only son, Hamnet, who died at the age of eleven in 1596, four to five years before the final version of *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, in which Hamnet Shakespeare's father played the Ghost of Hamlet's father" (385). Moreover, as Lee Edelman remarks, "No wonder the question of Hamlet's age exerts such fascination; something prevents him from ever

escaping the role of his father's son," and as I hope to demonstrate below, these contemporary appropriations of *Hamlet* continue in this critical tradition by further emphasizing through fictionalization this father and son relationship (167).

Thus, in my final chapter, I examine how just as Shakespeare turned to the Saxo Grammaticus legend (c.1200) of Amleth in order to consider socio-cultural issues relating to early modern culture (i.e., the nature of revenge, iconophobia, Protestantism, dramaturgy, etcetera), so do contemporary children's authors recognize the opportunity in *Hamlet*, as well as in the character Hamlet, to explore issues commonly related to children's culture, such as gender, maturation, education, and family obligation. As with Shakespeare's boy characters who frequently subvert or challenge early modern ideals of manhood, so do the boys in recent *Hamlet* adaptations create a space for non-normative and non-patriarchal identities to be constructed for boy readers, thus expanding the parameters of how appropriations of Shakespeare use the Bard to offer a range of masculinities. Therefore, in light of these recent *Hamlet*-inspired boy books, I explain how rather than confirming and conforming to the traditional identities, these novels turn to the complexities of Hamlet in order to construct protagonists as introverted, confused, passive, and nervous boys frequently bullied by their hyper-masculine classmates and fathers. The unconventional genders of these boy Hamlets create a space where subjective identities challenge normative gender categories by repudiating the hegemonic authority represented by powerful, influential, strong, and aggressive uncles, fathers, brothers, CEOs, kings, and princes. These unconventional boys exist as antithetical to that community principally by challenging patriarchy and depicting passionate same-sex relationships. As discussed earlier, Shakespeare's boy characters critique ideal

masculinities of their early modern worlds, and I end this project by examining how contemporary boy-Hamlets likewise expose, challenge, and threaten their own contemporary patriarchal cultures, preferring instead more unconventional expressions of masculinity. These novels transcend the formula of popular children's fiction about and for boys by depicting protagonists who are sensitive, caring, nurturing, compassionate, and imaginative.

This chapter focuses on novels by two American authors (Schmidt and Gratz), one British (Haig), and one Australian (Marsden). While Marsden rereffects the story of *Hamlet's* characters, Haig's and Gratz's protagonists are modern figures whose lives mirror those of the play. Schmidt's novel, by contrast, maintains tangential connections to *Hamlet* as the protagonist studies the play in middle school. I begin with Matt Haig's *The Dead Fathers Club*, an appropriation of *Hamlet* that offers the most complex and ambiguous protagonist of the four novels. This boy Hamlet is sensitive, timid, and kind. He suffers from mental illness, not only because of his father's recent death, but also from the physical and emotional bullying he receives from both his father's ghost and classmates. By depicting such suffering, the novel expands the damaging aspects of hegemonic masculinity also to include boys, as opposed to girls and women. I turn to Gary Schmidt's novel *The Wednesday Wars* in order to discuss how *Hamlet* becomes an authority on gender and cultural capital, as the introspective hero of the novel learns from the play how simultaneously to discover his own subjective identity and reject his father's patriarchal control. With the final two novels, John Marsden's *Hamlet, A Novel* and Alan Gratz's *Something Rotten*, I consider how these authors focus on the unconventional relationship between Horatio and Hamlet in terms of a gendered

friendship based on intimate same-sex desire. By depicting a homoerotic boyhood friendship (*Hamlet, A Novel*) and an emotionally intense *bromance* (*Something Rotten*), these novels create an alternative space for these Hamlets to reject their father's hegemonic masculinity and instead find a more rewarding and accepting relationship with Horatio. Collectively, these adaptations of *Hamlet* further demonstrate the range of ways in which contemporary Shakespeare boy books work to make visible the damaging operations of patriarchal masculinity by rejecting the idea of a unitary masculinity and replacing it with a range of unconventional representations. They expose masculinity as a malleable cultural convention and encourage readers to seek out healthier alternatives.

In the quirky and unsettling novel *The Dead Fathers Club* (2006), Matt Haig transports Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to the modern, working-class town of Newark-on-Trent.³ No longer a university student, the Hamlet of this novel is eleven-year old Philip Noble. He is not a powerful prince, though his last name hints at royalty, but rather a deeply isolated, pensive, and introspective young boy living above the family-owned Castle and Falcon pub. In this way, Brian exemplifies what Alice Trupe finds in contemporary YA fiction, a "postmodern hero with weaknesses, an antihero, or an unlikely hero [whom] may well be more satisfying than the classic hero" (107).

Nevertheless, shortly after his father Brian Noble dies in an unexplained car crash,

³ As we will see, *The Dead Fathers Club* is a somewhat experimental novel, not only in terms of its language but also its focus on a young boy's contemplation of and attempt at murder. Readers unfamiliar with the novel may be inclined to conclude that it is not *children's literature*. Though defining children's literature is well beyond the scope of this project, I do want to mention that the eleven year old protagonist, the art design of the dust jacket, the short chapters, and the lower words-per-page ratio are all conventions commonly found in children's novels. Furthermore, the blurb on the back cover identifies the novel as a "crossover" book that "will appeal to adults and children alike," and several similar review comments are included on the author's website. The book has been a part of scholarly discussions about children's literature by Abigail Rokison and Erica Hatelely. Also, the violence is not as concentrated as my discussions may suggest and the novel quite often is playful.

Philip's Uncle Alan, an experienced car mechanic, becomes owner of the pub and begins dating Carol Noble, the boy's mother.

The book begins moments after Brian's funeral. "Dads Ghost," as Philip calls him, appears battered, bleeding, and "wearing the same clothes Dad was wearing the last time [Philip] saw him which was at breakfast on the day he died . . . his T shirt . . . said King of the Castle" (5).⁴ Both Philip and Dads Ghost observe Alan's flirtatious gestures toward Carol during the funeral, how he "kept pouring his words [into her] that made her forget about [Brian]" and how his "big hands . . . were over Mums hands" (1). Dads Ghost then explains how "All ghosts were murdered," and that the car wreck "wasnt an accident" but instead "Someone broke the brakes on purpose . . . someone who knows a lot about cars . . . It was your uncle Alan" (17, 10, 22). When Dads Ghost finally reveals the purpose of his visit—"You must kill him Philip. You must get my Revenge"—the novel transitions, in expected *Hamlet* fashion, to the boy's struggles to balance intense emotions of grief, jealousy, and anger with his father's demands. As he awkwardly bumbles his way through several attempts at murder, Philip broods over a series of questions that guide the novel: Is Dads Ghost telling him the truth? Is Uncle Alan's generosity sincere? Is suicide preferable to a world governed by absolute parental control? Is his father the type of man he must grow up to be?

The most striking departure of Haig's novel from the other *Hamlet* appropriations discussed later in this chapter is the prose. In an attempt to mimic a character described by William Hazlitt as replete with "weakness and melancholy" (63) and by A.C. Bradley

⁴As I will discuss momentarily, Haig intends for his first-person prose in *The Dead Fathers Club* to mimic the voice and thoughts of a young, scared child which for this author and his protagonist means not including apostrophes or commas in the novel.

as suffering from an “excess of the reflective or speculative habit of mind” (75), Haig creates a protagonist who reveals his isolation and confusion through his thoughts. Shakespeare famously uses soliloquies in order not only to, as one critic notes, “render Hamlet’s sense of isolation and alienation in the world of Claudius’s Denmark” (Newell 27) but also to reflect what Matthew Arnold famously regards as “the dialogue of the mind with itself” (1). Similarly, Haig relies on first-person narration and a particular kind of tone and language in order to depict his isolated and introspective boy.

This use of first-person also delivers Philip via his own, idiosyncratic voice, thus offering the first opportunity to see the boy struggling with self-doubt. For the entirety of the novel, we encounter unfiltered and highly self-conscious prose, *sans* punctuation; there are no commas or apostrophes in the novel. Unpunctuated, stream of consciousness narration that permits the focalized reader access to the protagonist’s thoughts is rare in children’s literature. According to Perry Nodelman, despite some important exceptions, “by far the greater proportion of texts for children . . . tell of the main characters’ response through the medium of a third-person narrator” (*The Hidden Adult* 20).⁵ Haig’s narration, however, makes the protagonist more personal and more private, a decision particularly relevant to *Hamlet* since, as Robert Hapgood explains, “a major factor in Hamlet’s longevity has been the Prince’s extraordinary rapport with the audience, an intimacy that Shakespeare enhances by giving him an unmatched number of opportunities to confide his thoughts and feelings, whether to other characters or to the

⁵ Though Nodelman acknowledges that there are several uses of first-person narration in children’s literature, there still may be more than his argument suggests. John Stephens, for instance, identifies Diana Wynne Jones’s *The Spellcoats* (1979) as one of the earliest English-language fantasies to employ first-person, and he further suggests that “Since the 1970s first-person narration has been a majority form in realism because an important strategy in constructing the illusion of realism is to conceal voices or perceptions attributable to an ‘author’ outside the text. First-person narration enables this strategy by apparently eliding any narrating voice that is not the main character’s” (“Narratology” 56).

audience in his soliloquies” (3). Furthermore, with the emphasis on soliloquies, Mark MacLeod calls *Hamlet* “perhaps the most novelistic of Shakespeare’s plays,” and by manipulating the dramatic monologues in such a way, Haig is able to construct his novel and narrator through the uncorrected, seemingly unfiltered, thoughts of an eleven-year old child (81).

Doing so provides the intentionally awkward, comic, and often affecting prose of the young protagonist. For instance, the morning after Philip has gone searching for inspiration in *Murder Most Foul*—a chronicle of the world’s most heinous murders—he contemplates his circumstances in the bathroom before he is visited by Dads Ghost:

In the morning I sat on the toilet. I had been and wiped but I didnt leave the seat. I just sat and watched the dust in the light make a universe with moving stars and planets and gold suns. I sat and stared into Space for I dont know how long not knowing what to do and then after some minutes my dads ghost came through the locked door. He looked at me for a while and didnt say anything. After a bit he said To be or not to be thats the question Philip.

I said What do you mean? and Uncle Alans heavy feet went by the door.

Dads Ghost said You must put an end to this son. There must be an end.

And I said But

But that is all I said because he flickered out. I just sat there a bit more still not flushing the chain and I was smelling my smell and thinking

about what Dads Ghost said and what Dads Ghost meant and I knew he wanted me to kill Uncle Alan very soon. . . . (100-01)

This scene weaves together the existential with the scatological in order to arouse both pathos and humor. As Josepha Sherman and T.K.F. Weisskopf explain in their anthology of subversive, playground folklore, “some of the most fascinating topics for children—and the most taboo for adults—are those dealing with normal bodily functions, especially anything that drips or oozes” (53). They explain further how gross-out rhymes “are incredibly popular . . . and focus on the disgusting, the corporeal rather than mortality or the hereafter” (53).⁶ Thus, as with the hundreds of double entendres found throughout Shakespeare’s canon, Haig’s detailed inclusion of Philip’s morning lavatory experience is meant to elicit laughter from some readers.⁷ Yet Haig does not replace the philosophical with the scatological. Instead, he juxtaposes Philip’s wiping and smelling with the most recognized line in the English language, and by bringing this famous line into the bathroom, the author successfully captures how an eleven-year-old might react to confusing adult speech, both his father’s and Hamlet’s. Moreover, by giving the line to Dads Ghost (King Hamlet) instead of Philip (Hamlet), it becomes a question about

⁶ Hamlet, of course, is also not above ribald humor, such as when he asks Ophelia if she thought he meant “country matters” when he asked to “lie in [her] lap” (3.2.116, 112). While Hamlet’s sexually insulting puns are well known, some critics, such as Eric Partridge, even suspect that Shakespeare slipped in his own excrementous humor:

POLONIOUS. The actors are come hither, my lord.

HAMLET. Buzz, buzz.

POLONIOUS. Upon my honour.

HAMLET. “Then came each actor on his ass.” (2.2.392-95)

Thou “Buzz, buzz” is often glossed as an expression of frustration, Polonius’s reaction and Hamlet’s subsequent response could suggest a rude noise, or *raspberry*, elicited by the Prince to reveal comically said frustration. For more on this flatulent possibility and other “buzzes” in Shakespeare, see Partridge’s classic study *Shakespeare’s Bawdy* (1947).

⁷ For more on the perception that boys enjoy the overtly grotesque, see Annette Wannamaker’s chapter “‘The Battle of the Bionic Booger Boy,’ Bodily Borders, and B.A.D. Boys: Pleasure and Abjection in the Captain Underpants Series” in *Boys in Children’s Literature and Popular Culture: Masculinity, Abjection, and the Fictional Child* (2008).

child's responsibility to a parent, not the nature of existence. Hamlet's existential crises continuously interrupt his quest for revenge, and Dads Ghost invades Philip's private thoughts and reflection, ultimately his conscious, and essentially asks his son, "Are you going to do what I tell you or not?" In so doing, we are reminded of Michael Kimmel's postulation that "The father is the first man who evaluates the boy's masculine performance, the first pair of male eyes before whom he tries to prove himself. Those eyes will follow him for the rest of his life" (130). The Ghost in *Hamlet* thus becomes an ideal symbol for understanding how masculinity is learned and performed under the gaze of other men, since, in this case, it follows these Hamlets anywhere. Ultimately, Haig brings this moment into the bathroom not merely to be subversive or comedic, but in order to accentuate Philip's confusion regarding duty and obligation to his parent and to illuminate the pressures and anxieties that come with performing this type of masculinity.

Despite Haig's peppering *The Dead Fathers Club* with humor often described as *taboo* by adults but *fascinating* by children, he nevertheless maintains a superb voice and tone in order to depict the more difficult aspects of Philip's situation.⁸ Indeed, more than anything else it is the pressure of obligation and duty to Dads Ghost that is most difficult for Philip. As Fred B. Tromly explains about *Hamlet*, "the past shapes the present . . . through the burden imposed by parents on their children, especially the demands that fathers make upon their sons" (153). Such influence is clearly appropriated in the novel.

For instance, in one of the emotionally strongest scenes Philip realizes that as long as he

⁸Another such example of possible humor that might delight a young reader is in the chapter "The Condom Machine" where Philip discusses why his father always refused to say "condom" in front of his eleven-year-old boy: "Dads Ghost only says the Machine. He doesnt say its full name which is the Condom Machine because he must think I dont know what a condom is. A condom is what men put on their willies if they dont want to have babies. They are also used to make water bombs and Dominic Weekly put one over his head at Hadrians Wall and blew it up until it burst" (223). Haig makes sure that if any of his young readers come to his book unfamiliar with condoms they leave knowing at least two tricks.

spends time with Leah (Ophelia) he will “never dare kill Uncle Alan,” thus confirming that though he prefers this cross-sex relationship with Leah, time with her puts him at risk of her feminizing influences (190). At this point in the novel, Philip believes that more than anything he “want[s] to make Dads Ghost pleased again,” though he recognizes how he prefers her company:

And then she picked up her coat and picked up her bag and she kicked me in the back really hard and walked away from me and back to school and I . . . watched her go smaller and smaller until she was a green and grey dot on the yard with all the other green and grey dots and she could have been a girl dot or a boy dot and I kept watching all the others all far away from me screaming and playing and laughing and it was nearly the end of the break so I wiped my eyes and said in my brain Stop crying stop crying. (190, 191)

Philip’s reaction immediately following the ending of his friendship with Leah confirms his frustration over forced obedience to Dads Ghost’s patriarchal and violent demands. Also, Philip’s determination not to cry introduces a gendered aspect of his obedience that I shortly will discuss in more detail.

Another technique Haig employs to resemble Shakespeare’s use of soliloquies is Philip’s journal, and it is through these journal writing activities that Haig first approaches the theme of madness. Early in the novel, Mrs Fell, Philip’s teacher, counselor, and confidante, suggests that he “write everything down [because] when you write with a pen it is like writing with a part of yourself like it is another finger” (76). She continues by explaining how

writing is sometimes easier than speaking even though it takes longer . . . it is easier because you can do it on your own and say things that you are scared to speak unless it was by yourself and if you speak to yourself people think you are mad but if you write the same things they think you are clever. (77)

Mrs Fell's advice thus creates a space for Philip to express his feelings in a way not available to a dramatic Hamlet. Whereas Hamlet's speaking to himself is mostly part of his *antic disposition*, it would be inapt for a novel written in first-person to include a character talking to himself. Never does Philip reference his potential madness, feigned or otherwise, and nowhere is he accused of mental illness. Instead, Haig depicts a boy struggling with the anxiety that emerges from a combination of mourning, frustration, confusion, and, most importantly, the responsibility and definition of becoming a man forced upon him by his family. Therefore, these journal entries, along with the bullying from both Dads Ghost and classmates, provide Haig with opportunities to depict the physical, emotional, and psychological damages of patriarchy.

Yet despite the absence of Philip's self-realization of his developing madness, the emotions and difficulties listed above do create various situations that develop around the theme of mental health and trauma. Haig first explores mental illness through the emotional and psychological difficulties, depicted via sleepwalking and vivid nightmares, of which the boy suffers. Despite mental illness being a traditionally marginalized theme in children's and young adult literatures, it gradually has become common. Writing in 1999, Hugh Crago observed how "the growing popularity of psychotherapy has in turn influenced narrative which has becomes increasingly confessional . . . and increasingly

concerned with abnormal mental and emotional states” (166). Furthermore, in a special forum in *Children’s Literature* (2005) on trauma, Katherine Capshaw Smith discusses the “special position of childhood in relation to trauma writing” by explaining how “Children’s texts seem an especially potent site for exploration of the tension between repression and declaration” (117). *Hamlet*, of course, likewise is a site for such exploration because psychoanalytic and trauma theory are so deeply invested in the play and in Hamlet’s (in)sanity.⁹

Therefore, adapting *Hamlet* for young readers offers the opportunity to juxtapose trauma, sanity, and childhood, and Haig uses Hamlet’s madness to explore Philip’s confusion over duties to a parent and his anxieties over the pressure he feels to mature into a proper, normative boy and man. As Eric L. Tribunella observes, children’s literature often “relies on the contrived traumatization of children—both protagonists and readers—as a way of representing and promoting the process of becoming a mature [and properly gendered] adult” (xi). On one level, *The Dead Fathers Club* appears to follow this common narrative as Philip’s traumatic experiences and apprehension over Dads Ghost transitions into a coming-of-age story. Philip’s normative gendering into a young man should occur by obeying his father, usurping his uncle, and replacing his father as patriarch of the Noble house and eventually the CEO of the family’s Castle and Falcon pub. Indeed, immediately after the funeral, Nan, Philip’s grandmother, explains to her grandson, “Youre not a little bairn now son. Youre the man of the place,” and Philip thinks to himself, “I am 11 so I am not a little bairn and I am not a man” (2). Philip

⁹ Bennett Simon reports that the first psychoanalytic interpretation of the play was in 1778 when Dr. Akenside first asserted that “Hamlet’s insanity is real,” and since then much critical “energy has gone into diagnosing the precise nature of Hamlet’s melancholy and Ophelia’s madness” (707).

remembers Nan's comment two months later when, frustrated by her daughter's hasty remarriage, he overhears his grandmother express to his mother how more than anything she feels "heart sorry of the poor bairn" (227). Philip thinks to himself, "I was a bairn now. I was a man after the funeral but I was a bairn now" (227). This oscillation between being identified as a boy and being identified as a man also exists within Philip's own mind as he repeatedly struggles to transcend his boyhood, however constantly delayed in his actions. Indeed, unlike Hamlet, who feigns madness, Philip's psychological disturbances, which cause him to have nightmares and sleep-walk, the latter of which results in his being bullied and called "skitso," all lead to his visiting the school counsellor and then to a doctor who diagnosis "Panic Disorder" and prescribes "diazepam" (225).

However, in *The Dead Fathers Club*, Haig inverts this common pattern of development in children's literature whereby a boy comes of age as a normative man by instead exposing versions of hegemonic and patriarchal masculinity as damaging constructs for the boy himself. The trauma and suffering that Philip experiences first appear as an obstacle for Philip to overcome if he wishes to fulfil his father's demand and subsequently take his place as the family and business's patriarch. Ultimately, however, the novel exhibits the physical, emotional, and psychologically damaging aspects of hegemonic masculinity, generally the most privileged masculinity that maintains its privilege through "the dominant position of men and subordinate position of women and children" (Connell 77). For instance, instead of fashioning an antic disposition, the anxiety and trauma caused by Dads Ghost and the pressures on Philip to perform hegemonic masculinity occasions nightmares and sleepwalking. The first instance occurs

in a hostel after a field trip to Hadrian's Wall. Away from home for the first time since seeing Dads Ghost, Philip falls asleep while thinking about his father's demand:

And then I started to go to sleep but it wasn't like a real sleep. It was somewhere in the middle of being asleep and being awake and after a bit I heard myself talking and I was talking rubbish and very fast and what I was saying was

kelhamisinnewarkkelhamisinnewarkkelhamisinnewark which is a stupid thing to say anyway because Kelham is not in Newark it is two miles away where Dad died. But I was getting louder and even though I could hear myself I couldn't stop because I wasn't properly awake and then I heard really loud laughing and it was Dominic and I woke up then and I was scared because he had heard and he started saying

kelhamisinnewarkkelhamisinnewarkkelhamisinnewark and then other boys were laughing in the dark and there was nothing else in the UNIVERSE just the laughing.

Dominic said Helmets¹⁰ gone Skitso.

Jordan said Skitso Skitso Skitso.

But that wasn't the end because my eyes were heavy even though my brain was moving fast and I went back to sleep but bad sleep and I had nightmares but I don't know what about and when I woke up I was standing on the wooden floor and the window was smashed and there was blood on my hands and I was screaming something and the light was on

¹⁰ As I will discuss shortly, *Helmet* is a degrading nickname Dominic gives Philip when he sees his circumcised penis in the shower.

and the next thing Mr Rosen was holding my shoulders and saying Its all right Philip its all right calm down and I looked round at the faces and all their eyes were scared even Dominic and all the eyes added up and added up inside me and made my legs weak and I fell onto the floor and there was blackness again. (34)

These sorts of events intensify throughout the novel, particularly whenever Dads Ghost reappears. Philip's dreams become increasingly disturbing and emotionally difficult, and Haig locates sleepwalking and bad dreams as a result of Philip's anxiety over his not maturing or performing as a man but instead representing more feminine characteristics particularly concerning his timidity.

Philip's hesitancy to obey Dads Ghost evokes interpretations of Hamlet's delay that center around his relationship with his father. As Jonathan Gil Harris sees it, the Prince's delay specifically is a result of a son's daunting "task of obeying the Father's law" (137).¹¹ Hesitancy, waiting, reluctance, and inaction are all gendered feminine in *The Dead Fathers Club*, and these descriptions cause us to recall the declaration of another oft-quoted Shakespeare character: "When you durst do it, then you [are] a man" (1.7.49). As Lady Macbeth in speaking to her husband, Philip understands his hesitation in gendered terms. One of the many instances in which Philip questions his own masculinity occurs while reading about Cheryl Crane in *Murder Most Foul*:

¹¹ Reasons for Hamlet's delay are manifold and extend well beyond the limits of this, or any, project. As Paul Cantor warns, we "must be wary of critical approaches which are in effect patronizing to Hamlet, and which cut him down to manageable size" (26). The challenge for criticism, Cantor explains, "is to find a way of explaining the delay in Hamlet's vengeance without undermining our sense of him as a heroic figure" (26). Since I am dealing with Philip, not Hamlet, I will only consider in this project the delay as it relates to father/son relationships.

And the last story in the book was about a woman called LANA TURNER who was a film star in Hollywood ages and ages ago and she won an Oscar which is the top prize and she was beaten up on that night by a gangster man she had sex with. Her child called Cheryl Crane killed the man for REVENGE. And I knew what Cheryl Crane would do to Uncle Alan she would kill him right now. She wouldnt wait and shes a girl.
(99)¹²

Unlike Cheryl Crane, who becomes a sort of idol for the boy, Philip is unable to revenge his parent's murder. Desiring masculine action, Philip repeatedly berates himself for his feminine inaction, often branding himself a wimp. After he observes his uncle's culpable reactions to the film *The Murder of Gonzago* he concludes, "So he did it!! He fixed Dads car for DEFINITE! Dads Ghost isnt lying! He did it! His volcano face was proof. Definite total proof" (175). Philip then, in the spirit of Hamlet's "How all occasions do inform against me" soliloquy in the second quarto, admires the violence and aggression with which the son in the *Gonzago* film executed revenge:

In the last bit of the film the Kings son who was Spiderman killed all the new Kings soldiers and chopped off their heads.

Mum said Oh Philip its a bit violent. Are you sure its only a 12?

I said Yes.

Spiderman had a big fight with his uncle and didnt wait because he wasnt a wimp and he said Prepare to die.

¹² Cheryl Crane is daughter to Lana and Stephen Turner, and at age 14 stabbed her mother's boyfriend, Johnny Stompanato, to death in order to protect her.

They had their swords out and inside my head I was saying Go on kill him! Kill your uncle!

And he did. He killed his uncle and all the Kings men which were there to trap him. And in the end it was just him and his mum and she was not cross with him because she knew the King was bad. (175-76)¹³

A few pages later, Philip again expresses this concern as he lies in “bed thinking if [he] was ever going to do anything about Uncle Alan or if [he] was just a wimpo who does things in his head and not in real life” (179). Philip grows increasingly concerned and anxious over his perceived passivity and cowardice compared to what he perceives as the more traditionally masculine behaviors of action and aggression. Recognizing how he is displacing less bravado than even the girl Cheryl Crane, Philip worries about his feminine inaction.

Philip’s interactions with other boys at school exacerbate such emotions. As already briefly mentioned in the above-quoted passage about Philip’s first sleepwalking experience and the boys tauntingly calling him “helmet” and “skitso,” bullying constitutes one of the more overt themes in *Hamlet* appropriations, particularly in *The Dead Fathers Club*. According to Brett G. Stoudt’s study of hegemonic masculinity and its relationship to violence in schools, “hazing, teasing, [and] bullying” are all “embedded in and mediated through hegemonic masculine values and restrictive to the way boys are ‘allowed’ to perform masculinity” (273, 274). Haig depicts the bullies in the novel, especially Dominic and Jordan, as jock caricatures who excel at sports and physically and

¹³ According to the DVD cover of *The Murder of Gonzago*, the film is “Set in Italy in the blood-soaked days before the Roman Republic” (171). The eleven-year-old Philip calls the prince “Spiderman” because he recognizes Tobey Maguire, the actor playing the vengeful nephew, from Sam Raimi’s blockbuster *Spiderman* trilogy.

emotionally assault Philip. For instance, during the class field trip to Hadrian's Wall, Philip is gobbled, or *spit*, on by one boy while others chant, "Hows your dad?" (31). Later in the novel, he overhears another child whisper, "Hes a fucking fruit and nut that kid" (296). In the most aggressive encounter, two boys assault Philip before proceeding to harass him about his dead father:

[S]omeone grabbed my bag which was over my back and pulled me and started spinning me round. I saw someone laughing and I saw his colours his black Adidas jacket and his pink skinny face and his fish eyes and his black hair and it was Jordan Harper so I knew it was Dominic Weekly who had got me. Dominic Weekly is stronger than Jordan and bigger and wants to be in the army and has SAS in big black ink on his rucksack and I was spinning fast and now saying Please.

Jordan was bent laughing and Dominic said Please what?

I said Please stop.

He said Ok.

And he let me go and I went flying and landed on my hands and scraped them and they were cut and it burnt and I felt tears in my eyes but stopped them in time and Dominic said Ill give you a spade and you can tell your dad.

He gobbled on me and Jordan was laughing. (76)

In addition to the physical and emotional bullying witnessed in this scene, other boys harass Philip in the gym's community showers. Philip recalls one especially humiliating incident that occurred shortly after his circumcision:

In the first week of the new school I had to do Games and it was Rugby so Mr Rosen made us shower. After that Dominic and Jordan called me Helmet because it looks like a helmet on a Roman soldier and Jew Nob and I didnt know why and Dad said Jews have to be Circumsized as well and I said Why? And he didnt know why. (235-36)

These instances, like the many others, clearly position bullying as objectionable. Ironically, however, Philip must develop a similar form of physical aggression if he is going to obey his father's request to kill Uncle Alan. Thus, the book situates aggressive, hegemonic masculinity as something simultaneously aberrant yet needed if Philip wishes to obey Dads Ghost and achieve maturation into normative manhood. In other words, according to the novel, to fulfill his father's obligation, Philip must become like the bullies to destroy Alan and then, as Nan tells him, become the patriarch of the house. Such "harsh competitiveness and bullying," as Monique Chassagnol argues, often appears in British school stories with the intention of "turn[ing] British little boys into true males: dominant, insensitive, tough in body and heart" (203). In a way, then, Philip's predicament resembles how scholars have sought to understand Hamlet's gendered identity compared to Shakespeare's other patriarchs, such as Othello, Macbeth, Prospero, and Lear. Robin Headlam Wells, for example, sums up this critical opinion as follows: "Hamlet's ethical dilemma is expressed in the form of a conflict between two incompatible cultures: the heroic world of classical epic and Norse saga, and the modern world of Christian-humanist values" (73). So it goes similarly with Philip, whom Haig depicts struggling to become an assertive, aggressive, and violent man while simultaneously suffering immensely from that gendered identity.

Though the characterization and structure of *The Dead Fathers Club* closely resembles *Hamlet*, the climax of the novel significantly redirects Shakespeare's narrative. Leah (Ophelia), upset at the recent death of her father Mr Fairview (Polonius), presumably attempts suicide by jumping from a bridge into a river. Philip attempts to save her, but, in a surprising turn of events, Alan saves both children. In so doing, he almost drowns and is in a coma for several days. During his uncle's hospitalization, Philip learns from a news article that the "three men responsible for criminal damage and robbery at various local pubs," including the Castle and Falcon in Newark, "have finally been arrested" (316). Thus, the final pages of the novel suggest either that Dads Ghost was lying or existed only in Philip's imagination. Nevertheless, Alan dies from injuries related to the rescue.

Yet unlike the events in the final scene of *Hamlet*, Philip never directly kills his uncle. Though he is, in principle, responsible for his uncle's near-drowning since Leah jumps into the river because of Philip's actions, the novel ambiguously depicts the final seconds of Alan's life. *The Dead Fathers Club* appears to end as a coming-of-age story, whereby Philip arrives at the following resolution near the close of the penultimate chapter:

When Dad died I believed it was all my fault. But I dont think that any more. You can believe what you want to believe. Thats what I think. . . I could believe what I wanted to believe now so I wasnt going to believe in the Dead Fathers Club and I wasnt going to believe in ghosts that are in pain for ever if you dont help them. (319)

The novel gives the impression that it is coming to an end as Mrs Fell, with “happiness in her smile,” affirmingly pats Philip’s hand, instructs him to “Trust the living,” and with what seems to be the novel’s final words, Philip replies, “And I said Yes” (319).

These penultimate moments suggest Philip has obtained resolution; that he can believe and do what he wants suggests acquired independence. The final chapter, however, simultaneously indicates not only that disobedience (he never kills his uncle) of and independence from Dads Ghost was vital for Philip’s maturation but also that he is solely responsible for Leah’s near-death and Alan’s guiltless death. After all, unlike Hamlet, who directly kills a guilty Uncle Claudius, Philip is indirectly responsible for the death of an innocent Uncle Alan. Indeed, Haig appropriates *Hamlet* in order to complicate deeply gendered roles and issues of child responsibility. While Carol talks to the doctor outside of the hospital room, Philip attempts to talk to Alan’s body:

I said Uncle Alan.

Uncle Alan said beep beep beep beep.

I said Im sorry about the PlayStation.

Uncle Alan said beep beep beep beep.

I said And everything.

Uncle Alan said beep beep beep beep.

I held his hand and watched the tube going into his mouth and the tube going into his blood.

I said You cant die Uncle Alan. Youve got to live. If you live Ill make it up to you. It will be great and we can be like family and everything and we can have a nice Christmas. (326)

Dads Ghost then interrupts Philip's conversation once more by Dads Ghost: "Dads Ghost said inside my head Two minutes Philip. Two minutes to stop the Terrors," and what follows is deeply ambiguous: "[Alan's] hand went twitchy so I put it down and then Dads Ghost came out of my brain and went inside the machine and down through the wires in an air bubble like he was a Changemaker and the screen went beep beep beep beep beee and the steeples went flat" (326, 327). As the doctors rush in with a defibrillator and attempt to revive Alan, Philip notices a bird in the window seat that earlier he observed "was doing nothing just staying still," and the novel concludes:

The bird turns its head in a jerk like a dinosaur and I think it looks at me with its eyes that dont blink and it flies off and into the sky which is too dark to see and the nails keep digging and I do nothing I just keep breathing in and out and in and out. (324, 328)

The novel never confirms if Dads Ghost exists, and though Philip moments earlier claimed that he was no longer going to believe in ghosts of the Dead Fathers Club, he now suggests that it was Dads Ghost who finally killed Alan. Of course, the novel raises a number of unanswerable questions: does Philip kill Alan and create Dads Ghost as scapegoat? Does Philip acquire normative masculinity by resisting Dads Ghost's instruction? Does Philip become a man by taking action and finally killing Alan? Whatever the answers, the ambiguity of both novel and character make *The Dead Fathers Club* relevant to my study of gender in adaptations of Shakespeare. According to Erica Hateley, "appropriations of Shakespeare naturalise normative values, and even make the implied reader complicit in their production . . . [by demonstrating] an emphatic

commitment to patriarchal models of normative gendered subjectivity” (*Shakespeare* 187). By contrast, Haig’s novel maintains the complexities celebrated critically in *Hamlet*, particularly regarding gender and obligation. These complexities and subjectivities are not resolved for Philip or the readers when the novel ends. Instead, they are heightened, and the rest is silence.

Gary Schmidt pens a similarly quirky, imaginative, and insecure boy when he appropriates *Hamlet*. Set against the backdrop of the Vietnam War and the counterculture of the 1960s, *The Wednesday Wars* chronicles the reading habits of seventh-grader Holling Hoodhood who spends Wednesday afternoons discussing Shakespeare with Mrs. Baker, his teacher. Holling lives in suburban Long Island where, as he explains, “If your last name ended in ‘berg’ or ‘zog’ or ‘stein,’ you lived on the north side. If your last name ended in ‘elli’ or ‘ini’ or ‘o,’ you lived on the south side” (2). Thus, he finds himself alone with his teacher each Wednesday since “at 1:45 sharp, half of my class went to Hebrew School at Temple Beth-El, and, at 1:55, the other half went to Catechism at Saint Adelbert’s. This left behind just the Presbyterians—of which there had been three, and now there was one. Me” (3).¹⁴ The ten chapters represent a ten-month school year, and every month Holling and Mrs. Baker discuss a new Shakespeare play on Wednesday. At first, the reluctant boy finds these discussions to be a forced catechism akin to the weekly activities of his Jewish and Catholic classmates, especially since Schmidt juxtaposes Holling’s reading activities with classmate Danny Hupfer’s pending bar mitzvah.

The Wednesday Wars is the only text discussed in this chapter that is less an adaptation or appropriation of *Hamlet* and more a focus on a child protagonist (and

¹⁴ “Me” is a paragraph of its own in the text, and I have added a space after “one” in order to illustrate the author’s pause.

presumably reader) who identifies with Hamlet throughout the novel, particularly in the final chapters. One of the novel's unconventional aspects is that it participates in a type of queering of normative male gender roles by its repudiation of patriarchy. *The Wednesday Wars* resembles what Michael Bronski has identified in the *Harry Potter* books, whereby the series is "profoundly queer in the broader sense of the word" in that it "celebrate[s] a revolt against accepted, conventional life" against those, like Holling's father, who employ patriarchal rule (para. 16).¹⁵ In defining *queer* in such a way, we recall Tison Pugh and David L. Wallace's similar explanation of *queer* as "a foe of ideological normalcy [that] subverts that which cultures uphold as normative societal values" (261). Set against the 1960s counterculture movement, *The Wednesday Wars* invests that nonconformist spirit into Holling as he learns to accept his own identity, despite the pressures of his father to do otherwise. Indeed, by refusing to accept conventional masculinity, as performed by his father, and instead finding comfort and encouragement in his cross-sex relationship with the free-spirited Heather, Holling confronts hegemonic masculinity and seeks instead an alternative and more sympathetic notion of gender.

In the novel, paternal obligation emerges not by way of revengeful murder but in capitalistic terms of inherited responsibility and the family business. Hoodhood and Associates, of which Holling's father is chair, is the assumed future of Holling. According to Heather, Holling's sixteen-year-old sister who epitomizes the 1960s spirit

¹⁵ The use of the word *queer* in this instance follows Tison Pugh and David L. Wallace: "In terms of a critical lexicon for discussing homosexuality, we use *homosexual* to refer to sexual desires and acts between two people of the same biological sex and *queer* more generally to indicate disruption to culturally gendered normativity. Thus, one can be queer without being homosexual; likewise, one can be homosexual without being queer, if a social and ideological environment does not create seemingly inevitable links between same-sex desire and cultural transgression. For example, male homosexuality was not necessarily queer in classical Greece, as it did not always disrupt social and ideological constructions of male normativity" (277).

of a rebellious youth, the boy's destiny has already been decided, and it may be too late for him to find independence:

“Fifty thousand people at the Pentagon, Holling, Fifty thousand. Something big is happening, and it's starting right now. Maybe it's time to think about growing up.”

“So I can become a flower child?”

“So you can become who you're supposed to be: Holling Hoodhood.”

“In case you haven't noticed, I *am* Holling Hoodhood.”

“Isn't it comforting to think so? But when I look at you, you're just the Son Who Is Going to Inherit Hoodhood and Associates.”

“It's the same thing,” I said.

“Only if you let it be the same thing. Why do you let him bully you? Why don't you ever stand up to him?” (37)

At this point, Holling fails to understand his sister's criticism and concern, though as the novel progresses, his father's actions repeatedly affirm Heather's warning about their heavy-handed father. Throughout the school year, Mr. Hoodhood instructs his son to perform well and act professionally at school, since his company may be asked to build the new junior high school and “having a kid in the school is a big plus in making a bid like this. It makes the board members think that we have a deep commitment already” (106). Later, when Mr. Hoodhood realizes that Holling did not provide him with the details of a competing contract company's proposal recently shared at a school assembly, he bitterly explains to his son, “Do you think this is a game? This is the future of

Hoodhood and Associates. Everything rides on this. My future *and* your future” (148). Because of the obligatory pressures and Holling’s attempt to understand his own identity within this context, one of the first Shakespeare characters in which the boy partly identifies is Shylock. “He isn’t really a villain,” Holling tells Mrs. Baker, “He’s more like someone who wants to become who he’s supposed to be” (48). Mrs. Baker asks, “And why couldn’t he?” and Holling responds, “Because they wouldn’t let him. They decided he had to be a certain way, and he was trapped. He couldn’t be anything except for what he was” (48). In this way, the novel begins to position a knowledge of Shakespeare’s texts as a way of establishing one’s subjective identity, and Holling’s maturation into his own subjective identity.

Similar to Hamlet’s family situation is Holling’s parents’ indifference and near absence from their son’s life. When Holling first learns of Mrs. Baker’s year-long plan to force him to read Shakespeare each week, he expresses his concern to his father, “Dad, Mrs. Baker hates my guts” and Mr. Hoodhood responds, “Can you see that the television is on and that I’m watching Walter Cronkite?” (7). Likewise, Mr. and Mrs. Holling do not attend his performance at school as Ariel in *The Tempest*, in both cases electing to watch television at home. What little interaction that does exist between parents and child involves capitalistic endeavors. For instance, Mr. Hoodhood knows Mrs. Baker is “the Betty Baker who belongs to the Baker family . . . that owns the Baker Sporting Emporium” and is in the market for “a new architect [to build] its new building” (7, 9). Therefore, instead of concern over his son’s school troubles, Mr. Hoodhood simply asks, “what did you do that might make Mrs. Baker hate your guts . . . which will lead the Baker Sporting Emporium to choose another architect . . . which will mean that there will

be no Hoodhood and Associates for you to take over when I'm ready to retire?" (8). Similarly, when Heather tells her father she is going to go to Columbia University because it is a school that allows "thinking" and "where students are striking against the war and against racism," her father replies, "You're not going to college . . . You've got a good job, and you're not going anywhere" (201). He continues, "The whole world is going crazy . . . and no place is crazier than college. You'll stay at your job and be safe . . . since [Columbia is] going to shut down classes because their students think that life is all about standing on the streets and chanting slogans, instead of working hard and finally getting what they deserve" (201, 212). Though Heather eventually rebels against their father by running away from home, not until Holling encounters *Hamlet* in the penultimate chapter does he begin to resist his father's authority.

Recognizing this Hoodhood family dynamic, where the children's futures and identities are controlled by the patriarch, helps us to understand *Hamlet's* influence on Holling. Mrs. Baker assigns the text in May, the climatic chapter and month in *The Wednesday Wars*. At first, *Hamlet* is the least interesting play to Holling. "This was slow stuff," he complains, "The ghost was okay, and the gravediggers, but when you write about characters who talk too much, . . . that just gets annoying. So anytime I saw a speech by Hamlet or Polonius or—well, just about anybody—I skipped over it pretty quickly, and I don't think I missed a thing" (215). When he shares his frustration with Mrs. Baker, she explains, "This is the story of a son who is asked to take vengeance for what has happened to his father, who has been dreadfully murdered. But he's not sure that he can trust anyone in his family. What might you do in such a situation?" (216). "Well," Holling replies, "I guess I'd start by looking around for someone to trust" (216).

Indeed, despite some superficial sibling strife early in the text, Holling and Heather become emotionally closer as the novel progresses. For instance, later that afternoon, after Holling returns to an empty house and for the first time since his sister ran away to California, he “realizes . . . that [he] really did love [his] sister” (226). The climax of the novel then occurs when Heather, frustrated by her father’s refusal to accept her as a socially aware and intellectually curious teenager, elects to relocate to California. However, she only travels a few hundred miles before she runs out of money, and their father refuses to help:

On Saturday morning, I told my parents at breakfast that my sister would be at the Port Authority in New York at 10:50 that morning.

They looked at me like I had just chanted Hebrew.

.....

“How is she going to get home from there?” asked my father.

“I guess she was hoping you would go and pick her up.”

“Of course,” said my father. “Of course I’ll drop everything and pick her up. Of course I have nothing else to do.” He stood up. “If she went out in a yellow bug, she can come home in a yellow bug.”

“She’s alone,” I said . . . “She may be out of money.”

“Well, whose problem is that?” he said.

“It doesn’t matter whose problem it is. She can’t get back home unless you go get her,” I said.

He looked at me. “Who do you think you’re talking to?” he said.

“She needs help.”

“Then you go get her, Holling. The car keys are up on my dresser.”

He laughed.

“Okay,” I said.

.....

I went upstairs and got the car keys. The Ford Mustang car keys—
not the station wagon. (230)

For the first time in the novel, Holling subverts his father’s wishes and acts independently, and what follows is a series of comedic events in which Holling is able to help his sister return home. What is most important for my purposes is how he continues to interpret these moments through *Hamlet*. Holling thinks about his sister “wandering the streets of Minneapolis [on her way to California], looking for a way to come home Sort of like Hamlet, who, more than anything, needed to find a home—because he sure couldn’t find himself” (229). When Heather and Holling finally do safely return home, their father sarcastically asks, “Did you find yourself” and Holling replies “She found me” (234). As he reflects on the event later, he thinks to himself, “maybe [Hamlet] never had someone to tell him that he didn’t need to find himself. He just needed to let himself be found. That’s what I think Shakespeare was trying to say about what it means to be a human being in *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*” (234-35).

Holling not only uses *Hamlet* to help him understand his relationship with his sister and father but more importantly, the play mirrors his own rapport with his father. The novel ends after the Hoodhods attend Danny’s bar mitzvah, where Holling enjoys watching how “Danny had become a man” (260). His father, meanwhile, criticizes the event. As they get in the car, he tells Holling,

“I bet you’re glad you don’t have to go through something like that.”

“I guess I am,” I said.

“What do you mean, ‘I guess I am’?” he said. “Would you want to stand up there with all that stuff all over you and chant at everyone?”

“It was a whole lot more than chanting at everyone,” I said.

“Let’s get in the car,” said my mother.

“No,” said my father. He put his arms up on top of the station wagon’s roof. “I’d like to know what Holling thought was a whole lot more.”

My stomach got tight. “He became a man,” I said.

“You think that that’s how you become a man, by chanting a few prayers?”

“You think you become a man by getting a job as an architect?”

My father straightened. “That’s *exactly* how you become a man,” he said “You get a good job and you provide for your family. You hang on, and you play for keeps. That’s how it works.”

“I really do think we should get in the car,” said my mother.

“I don’t think so,” I said to my father. “It’s not just about a job. It’s more. It has to do with choosing for yourself.” . . .

“So who are you, Holling?”

.....

“I don’t know yet,” I said finally. “I’ll let you know.” (260-61)

Whereas *Hamlet* defines family obligation as including vengeful murder—“If thou didst ever thy dear father love / . . . Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder,” the Ghost commands—*The Wednesday Wars* defines family obligation for Holling as unfettered devotion to the family business (1.5.23, 25). His father plans for Holling to follow in his footsteps and one day take control of the family business and become head of the household. However, for Holling to achieve his subjective identity within the world of *The Wednesday Wars*, he must learn to challenge his father’s authority and discover his own subjective autonomy. Thus, the novel’s conclusion, as with the confrontation between Holling and his father throughout the narrative, provides an alternative means for constructing his masculinity. By refusing to accept hegemonic masculinity, as performed by his father, and instead find encouragement and motivation in his cross-sex relationship with the free-spirited Heather, Holling embraces an alternative masculinity that he finds in *Hamlet*.

Whereas *The Wednesday Wars* uses *Hamlet* as a sort of inspirational story that encourages Holling to face his own patriarchal King Hamlet, John Marsden’s *Hamlet, A Novel* is a close adaptation of Shakespeare’s play. More akin to *The Dead Fathers Club*, this novel depicts the oftentimes painful isolation of being a young adult or teenager. Unlike Haig’s text, though, Marsden is much more faithful to Shakespeare’s dramatic narrative and structure. All characters retain their original names, Claudius is Claudius and Osric is Osric, and there are few significant changes to the plot. Yet *Hamlet, A Novel* is not simply a translation of *Hamlet* into contemporary Australian prose. As Marsden explains in an online teacher’s guide to the text, he wrote this novel because he “wanted to understand [Hamlet] better,” and in order to accomplish that task, Marsden chose, as

he sees it at least, to plague his characters with “questions . . . particularly relevant to teenagers” (1).

One major question Marsden’s novel asks, a question supposedly shared by the male readers and similar to other *Hamlet* adaptations as well, is, “What does it take for a boy to become a man?” In a book commercial on YouTube, Marsden explains that he began preparation for *Hamlet, A Novel* at the same time he published in Australia and New Zealand a controversial advice book for boys called *Secret Men’s Business: Manhood: The Big Game* (1998) (Boomerangbooks). Much of the author’s advice focuses on physical expressions of sexuality and the oftentimes combative relationship between child and adult:

One of the reasons it’s difficult to become a man is that you are encouraged in so many ways to remain immature. Schools, and some parents, want to keep you as a child. They feel you will be easier to control if you are still a child, that you will be more ‘biddable’ (more likely to do what you’re told). They might not want to acknowledge that fact that you are now sexually potent. Your father may have been the only sexually potent male in the house up until now, and he could feel threatened. . . . Your mother could be nervous that there is another sexually potent male in the house, and she may try to keep you as her ‘little boy’ for a while longer, so she can keep mothering you. In this situation she wants to deny your growth. This is not in your best long-term interests. (2, 3)

For Marsden, then, maturation specifically involves sexual awareness and a potential confrontation with one's father. The anticipated, "real" boy reader of *Secret Men's Business* is plagued by feelings of inadequacy and suppression of his growth, and this boy reader is fictionalized as Hamlet in *Hamlet, A Novel*.

Indeed, despite the novel's fidelity to Shakespeare's play, Marsden's frequent inclusion of flashbacks permits him the opportunity to create and then explore moments from his Hamlet's boyhood, as entire chapters center around memories and feelings. In so doing, Marsden suggests how childhood moments influence, if not at times altogether explain, aspects of Hamlet's behavior, attitude, and identity. For instance, he describes Hamlet's first encounter with the Ghost from the point of view of a small boy gazing-up at a towering man: "As Hamlet walked toward him, the man in the distance seemed to grow bigger" (21). More specifically, since his father's death, Hamlet has had difficulty recalling more than a few memories from his childhood:

In the months since the funeral the boy had forgotten most of his encounters with his father. During that time it was though his mind concentrated on three images only: his father's terse smile when he gave him the long-legged chestnut colt, the proud hands he laid on his head when Hamlet won his first fight, and the gentle hands that picked him up one night and carried him to bed, when the boy was felled by influenza and went to the doorway of death, lingering, as if would pass through. As if he wanted to pass through. Then he had returned. (21-22)

These memories—a terse smile, a father's pride for his boy having won a playground fight, and gentle hands—represent the few, strangely compassionate moments shared

between father and son. They are pivotal moments from Hamlet's childhood, and one of them, Hamlet's fighting victory, marks his awareness of King Hamlet's desire for a strong, masculine son. Yet as he sees his father for the first time since the funeral, the boy's mind is inundated with images of another sort:

But this meeting, this strange encounter between the two stone lions, brought back a flood of other memories: battles and beatings, painful lessons in riding, tests of strength, and cold, hungry nights spent alone in his tower room when Hamlet had failed those tests. For the first time the boy faltered. He wanted so much to show the silver in his veins. He wanted to be the size of a king, man enough for anything. (22)

These two groups of memories, the former fatherly affection shown to Hamlet after winning a fight and the latter where Hamlet remembers his father's own violent aggression, create a history between father and son. Winning boyhood fights as well as the received beatings from the previously described "gentle hands" establish an aggressive relationship between the pair, so much so that Hamlet interprets the Ghost's instruction to "avenge [his] foul and unnatural murder" as being less about justice or revenge but instead one firmly rooted in obligation (23). As Hamlet contemplates the "charge his father had laid on him," the omniscient narrator explains, "the king had come back from death to rule his son, so that once again nothing existed in Hamlet's life but the decrees of the father, one man using the boy to attack and destroy another man. It was a mammoth fighting a mammoth, using the boy as a weapon" (45). Thus, the novel positions this young Hamlet as a helpless pawn of the adult, male world where Hamlet's identity is marked almost entirely by his family relations.

This sort of conflict in *Hamlet* has long been understood as a conflict of masculine desire. Jacques Lacan notably remarked in his influential essay “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*” (1959) that the play’s primary focus is on masculine desire, particularly on the part of Horatio and Hamlet. Indeed, in addition to the father/son relationship, another same-sex relationship amply probed in the novel is that of Horatio and the Prince. Critics have long recognized the homoerotic potential in the relationship shared between the two university students from Wittenberg, and it is this sort of friendship that Marsden most nearly appropriates.¹⁶ In *Discourse of Friendship* (1657), Jeremy Taylor calls intimate, same-sex friendships “marriages too,” since “friendships are marriages of the soul, and of fortunes and interests, and counsels” (qtd. in Bray 142). Recognizing the intimacy of these sorts of homosocial friendships, Alan Bray, in his groundbreaking work on early modern friendships, explains how a same-sex coupling was often pinnacled as existing “within the network of obligation and kinship that cemented the traditional society of England” (*The Friend* 137). A number of the exchanges between Hamlet and Horatio suggest or confirm this sort of intimate relationship. For instance, in 3.2, Hamlet eloquently refers to Horatio as “Damon dear,” which is, of course, as Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor point out, “an allusion to the story of the ideal friendship between Damon and Pythias,” two Greek men so devoted to each other that they are willing to sacrifice their lives for each other (318). Earlier in the same scene, Hamlet uses gender-bending rhetoric to praise and the express affection for his friend:

¹⁶ See Bruce R. Smith’s *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics* (1995) and Madhavi Menon’s *Unhistorical Shakespeare: Queer Theory in Shakespearean Literature and Film* (2008) and *Shakespeare: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare* (2011).

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice

And could of men distinguish her election,

Sh' hath seal'd thee for herself, . . .

.....

. . . Give me that man

That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him

In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,

As I do thee. . . . (3.2.63-65, 71-74).¹⁷

This passage also helps us to date Hamlet and Horatio's relationship to sometime in the distant past, a time when Hamlet's "dear soul was mistress of her choice" and "seal'd [Horatio] for herself" (63, 65).

Marsden makes clear this lifelong bond between Horatio and Hamlet by likewise situating the origins of their affection much earlier than the time of the primary narrative. Indeed, his Horatio has been an important part of Hamlet's life since childhood: "Horatio, son of a noble penniless family, eight years old when he arrived at Elsinore with his mother, he to be a companion for the prince and she the queen's lady-in-waiting" (9). Their mutual attraction is established early in the novel, first as they walk through a graveyard after having played a rough game of one-on-one football together. Hamlet tosses rocks at random headstones, and when he pegs Horatio's mother's grave, "Horatio caught his hand with a strong grip," and after Horatio's release, Hamlet replies, "You're getting some muscle:"

¹⁷ Hamlet's next words, "Something too much of this" can be understood as a sort of putting distance between himself and the great intimacy of his language, affection, and perhaps confession in the preceding lines (3.2.74).

“You’re strange,” Horatio said.

“I’ve had two fathers in four months, my uncle’s suddenly my stepfather, my mother’s my aunt-by-marriage, my cousins are my stepsisters. You think I should be normal after that?”

“But you’ve always been strange.” Horatio meant no disrespect either, but later he remembered saying it and was shocked at his boldness.

To the crown prince! (8-9).

According to Marsden, then, Hamlet’s peculiarities, his strangeness, existed long before his father’s death and are thus rooted in his childhood experiences and relationships.

Horatio and Hamlet’s relationship is further characterized by subtle homoeroticism when Bernardo, another young teenager living in the court, describes their interaction the night the Ghost visits. Horatio and Bernardo enter Hamlet’s bedroom to wake the Prince, and Horatio, unsure how to wake the Prince, hesitates:

He didn’t know how to do it. He wanted to stroke Hamlet into gentle awareness but thought it would look too much like love. Instead he shook Hamlet’s shoulder roughly, as if here were angry.

Hamlet set up so suddenly that the other two stepped back in surprise . . . “*What?*” Hamlet shouted. His white hair was awry, and his eyes stared at them by saw nothing. Then he focused and became awake.

“What the fuck do you want?”

Horatio laughed at the swearword. (13-14)

After the initial shock, Hamlet calms down and asks why they woke him. “I don’t know how to say it,” Horatio says at first, to which Hamlet replies, “I want you to tell me,” he

said, like a small boy” (14). Horatio finally tells Hamlet about the Ghost, and Bernardo is shocked by the familiarity and intimacy between the two boys: “Horatio sat on the end of the bed. Bernardo sucked in his breath at the daring of it, at the casual relationship that existed between the two. There were rumors about them, but Bernardo was not able to tell the truth from the queer tension that he felt in the room” (15). Thus, not unlike Holling in *The Wednesday Wars*, Hamlet is haunted by his father and his father’s masculine expectations for him to be a man and revenger. However, Marsden also emphasizes his protagonist’s affection for and loyalty to Horatio, thus positioning Hamlet as a boy character caught between hegemonic, masculine responsibility and a same-sex desire that interrupts normative responsibility and duty.

Recognizing the erotic tension that exists between Horatio and Hamlet also helps us to understand how and why Marsden includes anxieties surrounding other aspects of gender and sexuality, such as those depicted through the tense, difficult relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia. When we first meet Ophelia, she is lying in her bed fantasizing about having once seen Hamlet shirtless, chopping wood:

She watched avidly from her window. Horatio had more muscle, but Hamlet was the prettier. They were competing to chop the logs in the fewest number of strokes. How the silver blades had flashed in the sun! How the chips had scattered! And how the drops of sweat shone as they flew though the air.

As she gazed from behind her curtain, Ophelia had imagined them naked, tried to picture Hamlet naked and swinging that ax, and had felt faint at the thought. (41).

Ophelia begins masturbating as she continues to recall this sensual memory and others as well.¹⁸ Yet this fantasy is not the only instance in the novel where Marsden depicts Ophelia's sexuality. After having her advances rejected by Hamlet, the narrator reports of Ophelia,

She would give him everything; didn't he understand that? Did she have to spell it out for him? That was the one thing she could not do. He could have it, but she would not be whorish. He must find it himself and then, expecting resistance, he would be moved and delighted and grateful to find her open. Oh, how open she would be! Everything would be his. She would be his. Let him use her as the means to his fulfillment. Does he not understand the gift that lay waiting and panting and bleeding and ready?

She was huge with her readiness and openness and generosity. Did he not understand that she lay naked on her bed every night, made huge by her willingness? (63)

Marsden's inclusion of Ophelia's sexual fantasies reflects what Katy Stein calls "institutionalized masturbation," whereby female characters in young adult novels "learn about masturbation . . . with the intention of preparing for sex—notably, with a male partner" (415). However, though Marsden's vivid description of Ophelia's desires might confirm, as Stein also explains, that "the mere inclusion of female masturbation in young adult literature is both bold and progressive," Marsden does locate Ophelia's sexual

¹⁸ Such overt sexuality, discussed here and later in this chapter, may at first appear counter to many of the dominant and didactic values in children's literature, but this conservative outlook has begun to slip in recent years. According to Kimberly Reynolds, since the mid-1990s "attitudes to and writing about sex, sexuality and relationships between the sexes [are] one of the most radically changed areas in contemporary children's literature" (114-15).

desire, as the narrator explains, as a place to “Let [Hamlet] use her as the means to his fulfillment” (63). Thus, while I argue that Marsden is much more progressive with his representation of Hamlet and Horatio’s sexual identity, his depiction of Ophelia is much less so. Ophelia’s physical desire to “give [Hamlet] everything” and her willingness for “everything [to be] his,” positions Ophelia as an object, and in this case, a rejected object of male desire (63). Indeed, the chapter ends with a series of questions from Ophelia: “How, then, could a prince, the most beautiful boy in the land, the boy strung as sensitively as a violin, not be drawn to her, drawn to her room, by the energy with which she shone for him?” (64). Her answer comes at the start of the next chapter which begins with Hamlet and Horatio intimate time together: “Hamlet was . . . delighted to see Horatio. He eyed his friend affectionately, noting the new confidence in his posture, the easy way he wore his clothes. Horatio’s mushroom-brown hair was cut short, and he had the stubble of a beard, but his honest dark eyes held the same regard and loyalty for Hamlet as they always had” (66). Put simply, Hamlet rejects Ophelia because he has Horatio.

Such rejection is certainly not to suggest, though, that Hamlet is not attracted to Ophelia. In almost as much detail as Marsden uses to describe Ophelia’s attraction to Hamlet, so does he similarly discuss Hamlet:

Hamlet dreamed of Ophelia. He had hard dreams of her, and soft ones. He dreamed in prepositions: beside, with, on top of, under, in, out. The dreams were unbearable sometimes; they sent him crazy, but he could not stop them, nor did he want to. There were times when he went to the

corridor that ran to her room, but it always seemed something thwarted him, or conditions were not right. (69)

Importantly, one of the things that “thwart” Hamlet from visiting Ophelia is his guilty feeling of betrayal towards Horatio. Furthermore, another reason for Hamlet’s hesitation is his deep fear of masculine inadequacy. Earlier, when Polonius requested that Reynaldo spy on Hamlet and try and understand why he has been acting melancholy, the old man stereotypes Hamlet and all young teenagers:

“They’re all sex-mad at that age. I know what they’re like. Those boys, with their hormones going crazy, wanting to press their bodies into girls, it’s all they think of. Touching them. Feeling them. And worse. They can’t control themselves . . . They’re diseased with lust. Whores . . . I’m always having to talk to Ophelia about her behavior. She’s ripening, you know. You can tell . . . the way she cavorts with the prince. He may be a prince, but that doesn’t make him immune from the sex drive. In fact I think he’s oversexed. Oh yes. I know the type. . . .” (48-49)

Polonius’s rant about the sexual nature of Laertes, boys in general, and Hamlet specifically, mostly depicts the social expectations at once assumed to be a part of a boy or teenager’s normative identity, though also needing to be suppressed. As we have seen, whenever Hamlet attempted to visit Ophelia, “something thwarted him” away, and I wish to suggest that much of Hamlet’s behavior, particularly his repeated attempt to consummate sexually his relationship with Ophelia, is the result of Hamlet’s trying to live up to the hetero-normative, masculine expectations symbolically represented in Polonius’s rant though promulgated by culture more generally.

For instance, Marsden describes his Hamlet as a Peeping Tom who not only pauses at Ophelia's window, but also at the window on the servants' wing. For years he remembers watching "for the assistant cook with the huge prick, the oafish nineteen-year-old stroking himself on his palliase, in the dimness of the candle his cock casting a giant shadow on the wall" (59). The narrator continues, "Hamlet stared at the shadow as much as he did at the cock, wondering and wishing, excited by the awful sight" (59).

Afterwards, Hamlet would then crawl to where the maids bathed "every night in the galvanized tub" (59). His description of these women, because of their sex and age, is far less enthusiastic:

Forty or more years old, breasts like bags filled with water, genitals lost in her giant thighs, the triangle of hair spreading high up toward her navel . . . washing herself with dreamy concentration. The boy felt a deep hunger as he gazed at her. He could never feed at those breasts, could never satisfy her with his little thing. She, always in the room; he, always outside of it. Always in the past, never in the future. (59)

Both the nineteen year-old male cook and the forty year-old female maids incite nervousness, as Hamlet crawls from window to window to look voyeuristically at the servants. At the start of the next chapter, one page after the abovementioned spying, the narrator explains how "time strode onward, and Hamlet became older, filling into the body and shape of a young man, no longer an adolescent. Yet still he did nothing" (61). Thus, Marsden believes that if Hamlet does not act, does not choose, then he remain the "boy" to which he is referred throughout the novel.

When Hamlet finally does act and kill Polonius, Laertes, and Claudius, Marsden uses eroticized rhetoric to depict the Prince's final moments with Horatio. His description of these moments recalls Mark Simpson's argument concerning the prevalence of "buddies" in hyper-masculine war films and how directors and screenwriters, intentionally or not, often juxtapose death with same-sex desire: "Classically, the moment when the buddy lies dead or dying is the moment when the full force of the love the boys/men feel for one another can be shown. And, for all the efforts of the conscientious film maker, the deadliness is thus attached not as much to war as to the queer romance of it all" (214). The Elsinore battlefield in Shakespeare's play, where Hamlet physically and verbally fought Claudius and Laertes, sets the stage for the sort of ending Simpson mentions. In the play, immediately following the deaths of Claudius and Laertes, Hamlet cries out,

Horatio, I am dead,
 Thou livest. Report me and my cause aright
 To the unsatisfied.
 HORATIO. Never believe it;
 I am more an antique Roman than a Dane.
 Here' yet some liquor left.
 HAMLET. As th' art a man,
 Give me the cup. Let go! (5.2.338-43)

As they complete each other's pentameter, Horatio, in an act that recalls Juliet's questioning of her poisoned Romeo, "left no friendly drop / To help me after?" attempts to join his Prince in the afterlife (5.3.163-64). Hamlet, however, requests that Horatio

“tell [his] story” (5.2.348). This final moment between friends, not unlike the one shared between Romeo and Juliet, is unmistakably tender. Horatio wishes to die with his Prince, and when Hamlet does expire he affectionately says, “Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince, / And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!” (5.2.359-60). “Rest” is idealized, lyrical, and similar to what Hamlet wished for in soliloquy: “To die, to sleep— / No more, and by a sleep to say we end / The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to” (3.1.59-63). Yet in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, a flight of angels and rest do not follow Hamlet’s death. Instead, there are drums and a military march as Fortinbras finally invades Elsinore. Fortinbras parades across the stage, as if to suggest that in the final moments of the play Hamlet receives a military procession, since he, like Fortinbras, is a great military prince. Thus, Shakespeare’s ending is deeply rooted in the sort of military, chivalric world discussed earlier in Chapter III, where hegemonic masculine virtues of physical courage, military prowess, and martial honor are privileged and interrupt this final moment between friends.

By comparison, the climax of *Hamlet, A Novel* is much more explicitly invested in Hamlet and Horatio’s relationship, and Fortinbras, as well as the masculinity he represents, is altogether removed. Hamlet lies on the floor, “his head cradled in Horatio’s lap” (228). Horatio looks at the Prince and responds, “I will follow you, beloved friend. There is wine in the glass yet” (228). Instead, Hamlet asks Horatio to “Stay in the world and speak for [him],” and the narrator records that “Horatio marveled that the bright and beautiful prince had come to this,” before Horatio finally agrees: “it shall be as you say” (229). After Hamlet mutters, “‘The rest is silence,’ . . . Horatio held him for some minutes more. He could not feel when life left his friend” (229). The novel closes:

“Horatio sat there another long minute. A servant handed him a cushion, and he placed it under Hamlet’s head. He climbed awkwardly to his feet. He looked down at his friend’s body. ‘Good night, sweet prince,’ he said. ‘May flights of angels sing you to your rest’” (229). Whereas in the play this final moment between Hamlet and Horatio is interrupted quickly by marching drums, not angels, the novel ends with this tender moment, thus reinforcing the centrality of their same-sex relationship to *Hamlet, A Novel*.

Long before the fifth act, however, Shakespeare had alluded to Horatio and Hamlet’s intimate friendship. In 3.2, for instance, Horatio walks on stage immediately following Hamlet’s instruction to the players, and Hamlet cheerfully asserts, “Horatio, thou art e’en as just a man / As e’er my conversation cop’d withal” (3.2.54-55). Citing these lines, Christopher Warley calls Horatio “a figure with a privileged interpretative position,” and editors “regularly gloss ‘just’ as ‘well-balanced,’ ‘honest,’ or ‘well-adjusted,’ and what seems ‘just’ about Horatio is his fairness, equity, reasonableness, faithfulness, honorableness—in short, his ability to deliver an impartial and apparently unbiased account of Hamlet, his story, and the ghost that sets the play in Motion” (1023). Indeed, Marcellus calls Horatio, “he that knows,” and it is Horatio whom Hamlet requests watch Claudius’s reactions during *The Murder of Gonzago* and in his final moments asks him to tell his story (1.1.70). Something is special about Horatio and his ability to communicate, explain, and even stay alive. As Marcellus tells us when they are confronted by the Ghost, “Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio” (1.1.42). As Warley explains, “Horatio’s justness marks him as unusual in a play full of plotting and calculating characters. In his honorable, straight-forward dealing, he is ‘just,’ and “To interpret *Hamlet* is to become Horatio” (1024, 1026).

This Horatio is the protagonist and first-person narrator, of Alan Gratz's adaptation, *Something Rotten*. Indeed, as much as Marsden's *Hamlet, A Novel* is invested in Hamlet and Horatio's relationship, it is Gratz's novel that places Horatio front and center. Subtitled "A Horatio Wilkes Mystery," *Something Rotten* is the first novel in a fiction series reviewed and marketed as mystery and crime fiction.¹⁹ Written in a Chandleresque noir style, the gumshoe is Horatio, and Gratz presents the narrative through his first-person point-of-view. He and Hamilton Prince (Hamlet) are on summer vacation from Wittenberg Academy, a boarding school in Denmark, Tennessee. Hamilton's father has recently passed away and his Uncle Claude (Claudius) has become the new CEO of Elsinore Paper Plant, which has been under investigation recently for poisoning the nearby Copenhagen River. The novel begins in 1.4; two security guards, Bernard and Frank, have asked Hamilton to visit the plant because they have recently found a video made by his father before he died. Hamilton has difficulty watching the video of his father, this "ghost in the machine," but becomes interested when his father tells him that if the guards "show [him] this tape, it means something bad has happened. Something very bad. It means [father] has been murdered" (14, 15). Hamilton then turns to his friend: "Please, Horatio. You gotta help me solve this mystery" (23).

As I have shown, Marsden's novel helps young adult readers to recognize clearly the homoerotic potential often theorized between Shakespeare's Horatio and Hamlet, but Gratz's depiction of the teenagers' friendship appears at times hyper-masculine and perhaps even overtly heteronormative, as he seemingly attempts to erase any potential attraction between his protagonist and Hamilton. Whereas we recognize the homosocial

¹⁹ According to Diane L. Chapman, detective stories and mysteries "rank among the most popular of juvenile genres" with "successful series [having] a protagonist with whom readers can identify" (572-73).

intimacy between Marsden's Horatio and Hamlet as homoerotic, the most revealing way to understand Gratz's depiction of Horatio and Hamilton's relationship is through the lens of what recently has become a somewhat common same-sex relationship in contemporary fiction and film marketed to young males, the *bromance*.²⁰

Michael DeAngelis helpfully defines *bromance* as denoting “an emotionally intense bond between presumably straight males who demonstrate an openness to intimacy that they neither regard, acknowledge, avow, nor express sexually” (1). This definition, as DeAngelis recognizes, contains a number of important paradoxes and contradictions that help us to understand how it differs from heteronormativity:

bromance involves something that must happen (the demonstration of intimacy itself) on the condition that other things not happen (the avowal or expression of sexual desire between straight males). Accordingly, as the phenomenon is presented to audiences, bromance depends upon an elegant yet complex play with what popular media culture has consistently posited as the anticipated and desired outcome of intensifying interpersonal intimacy in heterosexual relationships. (1-2)

At once seemingly conventional, these same-sex relationships, supposedly void of sexual goals, nevertheless complicate performances and expectations of heteronormative relationships in part by depicting a level of intimacy shared between homosocial bonds that is threatened by heteronormativity. According to DeAngelis, “Bromance facilitates intimate bondings between heterosexual men—bondings that are enabled by a newfound

²⁰ David Carnie is often credited with originating the term in *Skateboard* magazine during the 1990s, but it did not appear regularly in the American media until the mid-2000s, as films directed by Judd Apatow, Seth Rogen, Adam McKay, and Todd Phillips grew in popularity.

heteronormative comfort with a more-present-than-ever homosexuality, and that manage this comfort and this homosexuality by attempting to align both of them as closely as possible with the workings of heteronormativity even as they simultaneously reveal the instability of heteronormativity itself as an identity or a practice” (17).

The bromance both affirms and problematizes the depiction of heteronormative relationships. On the one hand, homosocial bonding and close male friendships are key aspects of normative gendering. Locker rooms, trenches, sports teams, and fraternities are distinct places for males to assert heteronormativity, and those males who do so are often awarded the privileges that might accompany the successful performance of hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, however, these relationships become problematic for conventional masculinity when they replace, or at least indicate preference over, a pro-marital and pro-generative heterosexuality. The bromance, however, exemplifies what Eve Sedgwick’s discussion of male homosocial relations posits as a “continuum between homosocial and homosexually” that renders “sexually ambiguous the normative rituals of heterosexual male bonding” (*Between* 1-3). As Michael DeAngelis further explains, the bromance “plays upon these same ambiguities through narrative and marketing strategies that flirt with the notion of such a continuum even as they disavow such flirtations with a convenient recourse to homophobia” (22). Horatio and Hamilton’s relationship in *Something Rotten* dramatizes this paradox not only by depicting their same-sex intimacy as the pinnacle of male relationships, but also in the way that the novel positions women in the periphery or, at best, as malevolent. Indeed, the marginalization and denigration of the female characters, in addition to the male love story, help us to understand *Something*

Rotten's unconventionality as it subverts the traditional trajectory of a union between a heterosexual couple and the initiation of a nuclear family.

Early on, the novel establishes Horatio and Hamilton's bromance by opening in their stereotypical utopia. When Horatio arrives at the Princes' family's mansion to comfort his friend during the summer, Hamilton describes how they will spend their time together in a contemporary, teenage male's paradise: "'We've got video, DVD, even a real film projector. PS3, Xbox, there's a popcorn machine back here, and down here . . .'" Hamilton opened a cabinet, revealing a stash of liquor bottles. 'Voila!'" (20). However, Hamilton's nirvana is soon interrupted when Olivia (Ophelia) begins helping Horatio solve the mystery. According to Jenna Weinman, women in bromances "continue to find themselves shoved to the wayside, reduced to empty shells, or forced into excessively maternal roles while bromance flourishes" (47).

At best, women in these texts are deployed merely as characters "to mediate the relationship between two closely male bonded men," as is the case with Olivia in *Something Rotten* (DiAngelis 17). However, whereas we might expect to see heteronormative identities embrace marriage and procreation, *Something Rotten* positions women, in the spirit of Hamlet's "frailty thy name is woman," as the cause of weakness and needing to be avoided. For instance, in one of their many intimate conversations, Hamilton explains to Horatio what happened between him and Olivia: "I really screwed things up with her, and I know it. I got so mad when Mom married Claude. I felt, I don't know. Betrayed" (198). Horatio, completing his friend's thought, responds, "And if your own mother would betray you, why not every girl in the world?" (198). The novel privileges their same-sex intimacy over heteronormative marriage, which, as clearly

evidenced by the marriages of both Rex Prince and Trudy and Claude and Trudy, often end destructively.

Despite Gratz's multiple and often strangely comedic efforts to create and unambiguously affirm the heterosexuality of his male characters, the possibility, if not likelihood of, a same-sex desire between Shakespeare's Horatio and Hamlet surfaces throughout *Something Rotten*. Much of the relationship between Gratz's Horatio and Hamilton can be understood through the lens of Eve Sedgwick's frequently quoted postulation that "what goes on at football games, in fraternities, at the Bohemian Grove, and at climatic moments in war novels can look, with only a slight shift of optic, quite startlingly 'homosexual'" (*Between* 89). In this way, we recognize Horatio's lure for Hamilton when he notices and describes in detail his friend's physical attractiveness: "Hamilton's got that sort of blond Nordic swimmer's build girls dig. Good chin, hard nose. Dresses sharp. He's well-read, well-bred, and well heeled" (12). At the same time, Horatio worries that his friend needs more time alone to mourn, but when he offers to leave Hamilton in privacy, the youth responds,

"No, Horatio, I like that you're here. You're like the one sane person in my life right now."

We shared one of those weird guy moments where one of us reveals his weak, vulnerable side and neither of us knows quite how to handle it. So we did what we always do: Pretend it didn't happen. (20)

This mutual attraction, we learn, is rooted in their early childhood. Horatio explains how they met: "I'd been friends with Hamilton long enough not to be a player hater. He was the kind of guy who could have easily looked down his nose at somebody like me, but he

didn't. We'd bonded on the baseball field our freshman year, and I'd been Hamilton's unofficial third roommate ever since" (12).

This companionship intensifies throughout *Something Rotten*. As I have discussed throughout this chapter, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* the colossal burden of a son's obligation is placed entirely on Hamlet. The Prince does seek the guidance and companionship of Horatio, who, in turn, repeatedly warns his friend of potential dangers.²¹ Nevertheless, though Horatio consistently appears on stage with Hamlet, ultimately only Hamlet is responsible for the drama's action, particularly regarding revenge. However, in *Something Rotten*, while the same burden is placed on Hamilton by his father, Rex Prince, the youth maintains very little agency in the novel. Instead, Hamilton is intoxicated and alone in his room for most of the novel, so much so that instead of Claude insisting that his nephew return to Wittenberg Academy, Horatio recommends that Hamilton enter rehab.²²

Therefore, by privileging Horatio as protagonist and narrator and elevating his devotion as Hamilton's companion, Gratz deepens Horatio's dedication and support of his friend. Horatio, not Hamilton, is almost entirely responsible for the action of the play. As just one example, Horatio arranges how they will "catch the king." At the local production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the novel's substitution for *The Murder of Gonzago*, Horatio devises a way to encourage the guilty party to call attention to him- or herself. He writes on each of the programs he distributes to his suspects, "I

²¹ For instance, when they first see the Ghost, Horatio advises, "What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord, / Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff / That beetles o'er his base into the sea, / And there assume some other horrible form" (1.4.69-72).

²² Horatio explains to Hamilton, "You do have a problem. . . . I do want to see you get better . . . you don't drink for fun, Hamilton, and you don't drink to relax. You drink to drink" (156, 57).

know what you did to Rex Prince. I have proof. Meet me behind the stage after the pirates attack” (129). Often in appropriations of *Hamlet*—such as novels by Fiedler, Klein, and Ray where Ophelia is the narrative agent—authors reposition the character from whom readers receive the story. In this case, by making Horatio the narrator and elevating his role, Gratz emphasizes how much Horatio is willing to sacrifice for his friend, often risking his life so that his companion can remain at home, and in many ways, Horatio Wilkes’s dedication even surpasses that of his Shakespearean counterpart. Critics such as Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor recognize some of the challenges that come with thinking about Horatio’s dedication: “Clearly established as Hamlet’s confidant in 3.2, he nevertheless does not tell his friend about Ophelia’s madness, which he witnesses in 4.5; the King seems to regard him as an ally both in 4.5 and 5.1” (143). By comparison, Gratz’s Horatio is unquestionably loyal to Hamilton. This Horatio is no longer, as Thompson and Taylor find him in Shakespeare, something of an “impotent bystander” who wants to help Hamlet but is “unable to do so,” instead he almost entirely responsible for solving the mystery and restoring order to Denmark (137). Nevertheless, Horatio’s willingness to face danger on behalf of his friend resembles the ending of another Shakespearean drama, *The Merchant of Venice*, where, like Antonio, Horatio is left alone while Hamilton reunites with Olivia despite Horatio’s devotion.

This discussion of *The Dead Fathers Club*, *The Wednesday Wars*, *Hamlet*, *A Novel*, and *Something Rotten* further demonstrates how the genre of Shakespeare-for-children, far from universally perpetuating essentialist discourses of normative gender and behavior, instead engages with many of the gender complexities not only in Shakespeare texts but those that are also a part of contemporary gender debates about

boyhood. I argue that Haig, Marsden, and Schmidt, though to a somewhat lesser degree, all pen novels that maintain the celebrated complexities of *Hamlet* and Hamlet, particularly regarding gender, obligation, and maturation. Similarly, Marsden's and Gratz's novels are especially strong in their inclusion of the boyhood and youth of their Hamlet and Horatio characters, thus providing a fictionalized account of Hamlet's early life and relationships that helps us to understand his gender identity as an older youth and young adult. Indeed, according to John Stephens, "Children's literature can make a significant contribution to whether or not child readers understand the conflict between the possibilities of forging new subjective agency and the propensity of a hegemonic social structure to respect itself as always already given and inevitable" ("Preface" xiii). The gender complexities, subjectivities, and identities of these boys are not resolved for Philip, Holling, Hamlet, Horatio, Hamilton, or the readers when the novels end. Instead, they are heightened.

CHAPTER IX

“Instruct us, boy:”

CONCLUSION

“What I should really need . . . is a boy who knows Shakespeare.”

--Mr. Goldman – *The Wednesday Ways*

My purpose in “Shakespeare and Boyhood: Early Modern Representations and Contemporary Appropriations” has been to investigate the uniqueness of Shakespeare’s boy characters by exploring the diverse ways the playwright uses them to negotiate, critique, and reject early modern ideals of manhood and also to demonstrate how a similar phenomenon occurs when contemporary authors appropriate Shakespeare for boy readers. I have questioned the prevailing critical notions that these boys and their afterlives in contemporary children’s literature are trivial and indistinguishable, and I have argued instead that removing them from productions or altering their ages emphatically changes how we understand Shakespeare’s scenes, relationships, and even—at times—his dramaturgy itself. Thus, my aim has been threefold: to suggest the complexities and diverseness of Shakespeare’s boy characters; to situate their complexities within competing critical frameworks regarding masculinity studies; and to understand how the contemporary appropriation of Shakespeare in boy books similarly challenges patriarchal and gender norms.

What has most animated my study is the call to continue the work begun in Carol Chillington Rutter’s *Shakespeare and Child’s Play* and in Kate Chedgzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh, and Robert Shaughnessy’s *Shakespeare and Childhood*, seminal texts both published in 2007. These books, the first a monograph dealing primarily with the

theatrical tradition of three of Shakespeare's child characters and the latter a multi-perspectival mapping of Shakespeare and childhood from his time to the present, are the first general studies of this topic. As Anthony B. Dawson proclaims in his review of these texts, together they "successfully open up a new area of study—and there is room for expansion to other places and times" (94). This project was undertaken as an acceptance of Dawson's challenge to expand this topic, and it does so by considering new boys and new genres in the world of Shakespeare and childhood. More specifically, one of these expansions has been to take seriously Kate Chedgzoy's averment that "Children are best understood not as undifferentiated 'they', but rather as diverse and multiple 'I's' and 'you's', as the Shakespearean and other children whose voices echo through the plays and through these chapters insistently remind the adults who think and write about them" ("Introduction" 28). Thus, I have in part sought to explore the alterity in which Shakespeare assigns to his boy characters.

I broached this topic in my second chapter when I argued that Falstaff's Boy symbolically replaces Hal in *2 Henry IV* as the Prince begins his transformation into King Henry V. By positioning the boy as an apprentice in Falstaff's company, Shakespeare is able to use the boy to critique the various ideal manhoods depicted in the play, particularly as they concern chivalric honor and masculinity. I also demonstrated how in the wake of humanism, the classroom became a site of masculine formation. Schoolboys such as William Page and Moth engage with such ideals as the humanist man of moderation not only through their demonstrated use of pedagogical wit but also with how they use that wit to deflate various gender ideals represented by the men in their respective plays. Monarchial boyhood, however, is understood clearly as a threat for

many of Shakespeare's kings, not only to a king's position but also to his masculine identity. In each of the child murders, Shakespeare follows a narrative pattern that includes the anxiety caused by these boys and the changing descriptions of these boys by adults after the boys are murdered. When I turned to contemporary representations of boyhood in Shakespeare, I did so in order to explain how the boys signify gender in the texts and outside them as well, thus permitting me the opportunity not only to understand the myriad of ways Shakespeare constructs his boy characters but also how contemporary authors in turn use Shakespeare to create a space for non-normative literary boyhoods. The popular subcategory of historical fiction in Shakespeare-for-children helps authors to use the crossdressing phenomenon of the early modern stage to position as aberrant the hypermasculine antagonist who attempts to perform as adult males while simultaneously allowing the boy heroes to come of age by performing as women. Moreover, the authors of the adaptations and appropriations of *Hamlet* for boy readers set their nervous, confused, bullied, and passive boy heroes against the more aggressive, macho males represented by the King Hamlet (father), Claudius, and Laertes figures. Meanwhile, the relationship between Hamlet and Horatio that has often been theorized as homoerotic or queer permits another avenue for these authors to create a non-normative boyhood and boyhood identity for the Prince that, for these authors, explains the actions and thoughts of Shakespeare's older Prince Hamlet.

A major contention of this project has been that early modern and contemporary depictions of Shakespearean boyhood, in all of its literary forms, are important as they expand the boundaries of Shakespeare and childhood, and in so doing, they help to define both. In each chapter, I wanted to analyze boyhoods and manhoods in ways that do not

discount diverse boy characters, or even boy readers and thinkers, and simultaneously argue that these boy characters are neither empty receptacles, little women, or unformed, flat, and stock characters. At present, the field of Shakespeare studies maintains an emphatic commitment that, as Rosalind flirtatiously speaks in the *As You Like It*, “boys and women are for the most part cattle of this color” (3.2.414-15), but I hope that her jest does not continue to dictate critical positions on early modern gender and childhood. Instead, I hope that we take more seriously Alexandra Shepard’s remark that “there are gender differences *within* each sex in early modern society” as this contention relates to age broadly and childhood most especially (2). If, as Judith Butler suggests, “The ‘I’ has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation—or a set of relations—to a set of norms,” then it is important that we continue to investigate the child/adult relationships in early modern literature, perhaps especially as they relate to gender (*Giving* 8). Doing so will allow us to better understand the nuanced complexities and diverseness in- and outside the world of Shakespeare and boyhood.

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