

Seminar: Queering Childhood
Shakespeare Association of America 2016
Abstracts

Urvashi Chakravarty, George Mason University
“I Had Peopled Else”: Shakespearean Anti-Natalisms

This paper explores the problem of anti-natalism in early modern literature, focusing in particular on the ways in which generation, succession and lineage—or the lack thereof—carry larger implications for novel literary and political formulations of kinship and community. The refusal of natality, I argue, constitutes a queer resistance to heteronormative social imperatives, radically reimagining childhood in and as its own absence. The queerest childhood, in other words, is the one that is non-existent. In this way, my paper engages Lee Edelman’s critique of ‘reproductive futurism’ as underwriting a fundamentally conservative social order and political imaginary. From the imagined futurity of ‘Calibans’ overrunning *The Tempest*’s island to *Macbeth*’s spectral ‘heirs’ and *Richard III*’s lopped family tree, this paper interrogates the ways in which Shakespeare’s plays frequently and paradoxically marry an insistence on lineal descent with its very refusal. The question, of course, is: why? My paper attempts to argue that the condition of anti-natalism anticipates and articulates new forms of reproductive futurity: in the fictions of family that underwrite the structures of service and, eventually, servitude. In so doing, this paper suggests, by means of an intersectional methodology informed by both queer theory and early modern race studies, that Shakespeare’s queer anti-natalisms enable and generate incipient depictions of the sociality of slavery, a slavery founded on the rhetoric of benevolent parent-masters and their beatific slave ‘children’.

Bio: Urvashi Chakravarty is Assistant Professor of English at George Mason University. Her current book project, “Serving Like a Free Man: Labour, Liberty, and Consent in Early Modern England,” explores the problem of slavery in early modern English literature and culture’s iterations of “free service.”

Amy Eliza Greenstadt, Portland State University
Plato’s Closet

In *An Apology for Smectymnuus*, Milton details what several authors from Ovid to Paul taught him about the value of male chastity. Yet he demurs when recalling his encounter with “the divine volumes of Plato ... where, if I should tell ye what I learnt of chastity and love ... it might be worth your listening, readers, as I may one day hope to have ye in a still time.” Half a century earlier, Shakespeare’s Adonis is similarly coy when, rejecting Venus, he lectures her on the difference between love and lust: “More I could tell, but more I dare not say; / The text is old, the orator too green.” The “text” to which Adonis refers is almost certainly Plato’s *Symposium*. Milton and Shakespeare likely elide this source because its portrayal of pederasty as the highest form of love was dangerous in a Christian society that condemned man-boy love as sodomy. Although we currently accept Foucault’s characterization of sodomy as an “utterly confused category,” nonetheless it seems that in early modern England pederasty was a particularly closeted subject within male homoerotic discourse. What relationship might this coded language of allusion have to the modern closet? And what does it mean for queer studies that our own

society, like that of Shakespeare and Milton, widely considers sex with minors immoral?

Bio: Amy Eliza Greenstadt is an Associate Professor at Portland State University, where she has recently moved from the department of English to the School of Theater + Film. She has published a book entitled *Rape and the Rise of the Author: Gendering Intention in Early Modern Europe* (Ashgate, 2009) and is currently researching a new book with the working title, *Pricked Out: Genital Alienation in the Renaissance*. Her articles on Shakespeare and other period writers have appeared in journals such as *Shakespeare Quarterly* and *ELH*.

Dan Keegan, University of Wyoming

“Queering Anthropogenesis”

In the final scene of *Hamlet*, Horatio argues that he is "more an antique Roman than a Dane." Or, at least, that is what he says in all modern editions. The word is printed “anticke” in the Second Quarto and “Antike” in the Folio and First Quarto. His classical suicide risks being diverted into an antic disposition.

This moment foregrounds what Italian philosopher Paolo Virno characterizes as linguistic potentiality: a generic faculty for speech as such. For Virno, potentiality comes to the fore in moments when the fact of speaking drowns out the content of speech, as in religious ritual, the babbling of children, or the "anti[c]ke" tongue-slips of adulthood. These moments, he argues, restage the drama of anthropogenesis--our coming-into-possession of language.

Virno's discussions of potentiality suggest ways of rethinking the relationship between writing (and, indeed, literature) and performance, a relationship that continues to prove problematic for early modernists and for theatre and performance studies. It connects this question to, among other things, the curious dynamics of childhood. In what ways is the anthropogenesis of the performer--their seizing on language--connected to the anthropogenesis of the child? This paper examines this question in early modern drama and culture, exploring the queer potentialities in language acquisition.

Jess Landis, Franklin Pierce University

“Swarming through Shakespeare: Staging Male Adolescent Group Identities”

Adolescent young men proliferate the early modern stage, or, as Kate Chedgzoy remarks in “Shakespeare in the Company of Boys,” they “swarm” through the drama as well as the historical reality of the period (184). In Shakespeare, such a swarm takes to the streets of Verona, causing havoc and heartache in *Romeo and Juliet*; another cavorts and threatens in shadowy alleyways in *The Merchant of Venice*. Contrastingly, groups of young men in comedies such as *Love’s Labors Lost* and *Much Ado about Nothing* convene for some verbal sparring and sheepish admissions of heteronormative romantic inclinations. In non-Shakespearean drama, namely city comedies, young men come together to flaunt their spending power and fashion sense. Comparing the different functions of these “swarms” of young men on the early modern English stage reveals a

confusing complexity when it comes to the social roles and mores of the period's adolescent boys. Male adolescents try on versions of early modern masculinity to impress other young men. Peer pressure pushes them to questionable actions and violence in tragic instances, and into marriage and familial responsibility or boosted social capital in others. Plays of the period often hold up for particular inspection those young male characters who fail to conform, or who perform a queer bastardization of masculinity. This paper uses these queer examples to explore how the early modern theatre reflected and shaped the behavior of young men as members of peer groups. It argues that the English stage was an ideal vehicle for sussing out the rules governing masculine bravado among adolescent boys, especially as it was marked by sexual prowess and violence.

Bio: Jess Landis is an Assistant Professor of the Humanities at Franklin Pierce University in New Hampshire. Her scholarship concentrates on gender and early modern drama. Specifically, she is interested in representations of transgressive and deviant masculinity in young male characters, a focus she developed while completing her dissertation on the fop figure in Renaissance drama.

Gemma Miller, King's College London

“Queering Childhood and Performing Camp in Sam Mendes’s *Richard III* (1992)”

Sam Mendes’s production of *Richard III* at Stratford-Upon-Avon’s The Other Place presented a “queer” performance of childhood that transgressed boundaries of both age and gender. By casting adult women in the roles of the two princes, Mendes turned the early modern theatrical practice of age and gender cross-casting on its head to startling effect. The two actresses doubled as Lady Anne and Queen Elizabeth, presenting naturalistic performances in these female roles that contrasted with their anti-mimetic performances as the two young princes. Dressed in the generic school-boy uniform of long trousers, white shirt and tie, the actors adopted performative strategies that resulted in a presentation rather than an imitation of childishness. Self-consciously violating multiple boundaries of age, gender and acting styles in this way amounted to a performance in quotation marks which was self-aware, transparent and transgressive. What made this performance of childhood particularly “queer”, rather than merely anomalous, was the interpretive context provided by Simon Russell Beale’s Richard. In a production that was otherwise remarkably “straight”, his flamboyantly “queer” Richard blurred boundaries of gender and sexuality with an arch knowingness that was quintessentially camp. Like the two young princes, his was a performance that relied on citation, quotation and self-reflexivity, creating the frisson of heterodoxy that is the natural corollary of the camp aesthetic. In this paper I argue that, as a dramatic counterpoint to Richard and his “queer” performance of camp, the cross-cast princes transgressed boundaries to foreground the artifice of childhood as a social and political construct. The “queer” children of Mendes’s production not only disavowed narratives of childhood as a discrete temporal state, but disrupted the idealized iconicity of childhood that has shadowed this play for so many generations.

Bio: I first became interested in Shakespeare’s children when I was studying for my MA in Shakespeare and Contemporary Performance at Birkbeck College, University of London. My initial interest was sparked by the debate surrounding the missing Macbeth child. The question

'how many children had Lady Macbeth' was initiated by L. C. Knights in 1946, and has since taken on a life of its own, providing material for lively scholarly debate ever since. The theoretical question about authorial intent interested me less than how directors and actors account for this missing child in performance. I wanted to explore *how* this memory is transformed into a stage reality and *what* this reveals about society's conceptualisations of childhood more generally. When I began researching modern productions in the United Kingdom, I uncovered an increasing tendency to foreground the Macbeths' childlessness as a central organizing principle. Not only did I find that the riddle of the Macbeth child took on more prominence in the last forty years, but that representations of *all* of the children in *Macbeth* had become somewhat of a directorial obsession. Inspired by the work of Carol Chillington Rutter and Katie Knowles among others, I began looking into the contemporary performance of childhood in a number of different Shakespeare plays. I am now in the second year of my PhD at King's College London, working under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Munro. My research is focused in particular on the relation of childhood to questions of temporality and futurity and is concentrated, for reasons of word and time constraints, on four Shakespearean plays: *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, *Titus Andronicus* and *The Winter's Tale*. I hope to expand this research to contemporary productions of a far broader range of early modern plays in the future.

Melanie Mohn, Princeton University

Being in the "Between": Maturation, Delay, and Queer Temporalities

In contrast to early modern assumptions about the process of maturation and the "ages of man," my paper examines a set of examples of dramatic figures who frustrate or refuse these narratives—characters whose developmental patterns are disrupted or delayed, and in particular, characters who seem suspended between times.

Although Jaques outlines a familiar developmental paradigm in his set piece on the "seven ages" in *As You Like It*, the play itself unfolds in a time between these stages—for the play's adolescent characters, already on the threshold of adulthood, Arden becomes a kind of "meantime" or "meanwhile," a place for—to use a term native to the play—"hanging" out. Beyond delaying their maturation, this alternative temporal state becomes a "queer temporality" that enables a more experimental set of relations. Thorough attention has been paid to the play's thematization of the transvestite stage, but I suggest that Rosalind's disguise as the boy Ganymede—a figure I will read with reference to Marlowe's *Dido*, and alongside scenes of dandling Cupid in Lyly's *Sapho and Phao*—expands the scope of what is queer in this play, aligning age with questions of gender, desire, and orientation.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the forest outside Athens assumes a similar function. Here, too, we experience a kind of suspended time, suggested by the play's use of "love-in-idleness"; again, Titania's Indian boy becomes a figure of youth who is simultaneously an object of desire. Alongside other scenes of eroticized children on stage, I will also consider figures of frustrated or arrested development, most prominently Mamillius in *The Winter's Tale*. Ultimately, through a broader reading of regression and delayed maturation, I hope to consider "delay" itself as something queer—a source of anxiety, but also perhaps pleasure.

Bio: I'm in the middle of a dissertation, tentatively titled *Adolescent Poetics: Narratives of Development in English Literature*, which explores the often uncomfortable association between poetry and the figure of the child or immature adolescent, and which is informed (in part) by queer theory. My focus is on sixteenth-century lyric poetry, but I'm planning a coda on Shakespeare and hoping to work through some of these ideas in our seminar.

Bethany Packard, Transylvania University
"Precocious Play Time in John Webster's *The White Devil*"

Child characters might be expected to reinforce heteronormative models of cultural reproduction, but in John Webster's *The White Devil* Giovanni serves as a locus for reconsidering such assumptions. During Giovanni's first scene, Cardinal Monticelso gives a speech to Bracciano and Francisco, the father and uncle, figuring the boy as their mutual hope for the future, "a casket / For both your crowns,"¹ and thus the reason for present amendment of their behavior. This version of Giovanni may seem of a piece with Lee Edelman's sense that: "the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust."² However, Giovanni rejects the patriarchal and heteronormative presumption that he will become a version of his father or uncle and maintain their society into the future. Webster marks Giovanni as precocious, indicating swift development, but his temporality isn't simply accelerated. In this early scene, Giovanni is wearing a miniature suit of armor and seems to be playing war, mimicking his elders and learning their values. However, Webster doesn't turn child's play into a precursor of adult politics; the playwright doesn't divide one from the other or present them as a linear progression. The adults play games, too, and everyone's play has serious ramifications. Giovanni's martial costume presages his uncle's dress-up plotting and his father's death during a tournament by poison beaver. He is so precocious that he foreshadows; his elders copy him. Early modern child figures are often expected to recall the past, fortify the present, and guarantee the future. Through an array of contradictory expectations that are anything but linear, child figures supposedly support the illusion of a standardized progression from past to future. Giovanni's precocious play challenges the teleology of growing up.

Bio: I have been interested in representations of 16th and 17th century childhood since graduate school, so I would gravitate toward a seminar that mentions childhood in any context, I must admit. However, I'm hoping to take advantage of the seminar focus on childhood studies and queer theory to bring together issues that have been on the edges of my writing for a while and with some newer interests. Ever since my first exposure to Edelman's *No Future*, I've been bothered by an early reference to Ariés and Stone that seems to rely on their work for the historical development of a sentimentalized since of "the child." While not central to Edelman's big argumentative tenants, that early foundational move just irks me, as it seems to really oversimplify attitudes toward childhood and the characters I work with. So, I'm hoping to scratch that itch, in a sense, and to take more seriously why it bothers me, and what that means for my work. I've also long been interested in the way child figures are freighted with recalling their parents' pasts and carrying their values into the future, but games and play are a new area for me.

¹ Webster, I.ii.100-101.

² Edelman, 11.

I'm going to try to bring together child's play and queer temporality and do it through a character that I find really puzzling, one I'd like to spend more time on: Giovanni in *The White Devil*. I also think Flamineo makes some potentially really useful statements about childhood. I'm personally more familiar with *The Duchess*, so I decided to write on *The White Devil* and to teach it next semester for senior seminar as well. I'm looking forward to the seminar prep bleeding into my teaching.

Rachel Prusko, University of Alberta

"Use your legs, take the start, run away": Age Queerness, Servant Mobility, and the Example of *The Merchant of Venice*

Taking as a working example *The Merchant's* Lancelot Gobbo, this essay will consider the possibility that the figure of the adolescent, mobile servant in Shakespeare works to queer the early modern child. First, I will suggest that the Shakespearean drama frequently unsettles 'child' as an age category, as 'child' characters (understood as such by their fellow characters, readers, and audiences) are often in their adolescent years. Engaging Robin Bernstein's concept of age queerness, and Kathryn Bond Stockton's theory of the 'queer child,' I will hypothesize that instability around the question of age helps create non-normative subjectivities and enable adolescent self-fashioning in Shakespeare.

Belonging to a highly mobile group, the adolescent servant stands as a particular example of age queerness and unstable subjectivity. Youth and service, closely associated in Shakespeare's England, were categories construed by early moderns in static terms: disobedient and rash, young people required subordination through a fixed period of service; service was a "vital agency of social discipline" (Griffiths, *Youth and Authority* 76). However, as Keith Thomas and Patricia Fumerton have shown, apprentice and servant mobility was common, resulting in an unstable population of young people. And as Judith Weil suggests, many Shakespearean servant characters may "be treated as exciting borderline cases at work in unstable conditions" (*Service and Dependency* 6). I will consider *Merchant's* Lancelot as one such unstable young character, and examine how his plan to run away and the uncertainties surrounding his age contribute to a queering of the early modern child as a social category.

Bio: I first became interested in topic of queering childhood in 2011, when I was doing coursework for my PhD. I took a graduate seminar on the 'queer child,' which eventually led to an article, "Queering the Reader in *Peter and Wendy*." This research in turn informed a dissertation chapter on Marlowe's *Edward II*, which read the young prince in this play as queer in terms of his resistance to the normative subject position his parents attempt to impose. I have a continued interest in this line of analysis as I turn my attention to apprentice and servant characters in Shakespeare; I'm hoping that my paper for this SAA seminar will evolve into an article on apprentice and servant mobility.

Brittany Chataignier Renard, University of California, Riverside

"Making a Racket: The Material Construction of Youth through Sport on the Early Modern Stage"

In this paper, I build off of historical and theoretical studies of early modern childhood as well as more focused work on children's theatrical companies to consider how the aging bodies of boy players in children's companies were materially (re)constructed to be childish. Taking as its basis the fact that the average boy player in a children's company would have been seventeen years old by 1605, the larger trajectory of this essay is twofold: 1) to use the study of children's theatrical companies as a lens through which to reconsider the boundaries of childhood itself in early modern England—to queer childhood, both conceptually and materially; and 2) to argue that, in using stage properties like rackets, cards, blindfolds, hunting clothes, and chess pieces, the boy players quite literally played on the stage during their performances, participating in a discourse of sport that was central to early Jacobean culture in a remarkably material fashion. That is to say, for children's theatrical companies, materials of *play* also functioned as materials of *youth*, and the material incorporation of sport allowed for a re-construction of the aging boy player's body, queering that manly body so that it appeared more child-like through its association with props of youth. My intention is to participate in already established conversations which consider early modern children to be queer but to also shift the conversation in such a way that sexuality and eroticism are included but not necessarily the central or sole means by which queerness is qualified.

Bio: I am currently an ABD graduate student at UC Riverside, and I've been working on my dissertation, *Things in the Theater: Bodies and Objects in Early Modern Performance*, for about three months. The work that I'll be presenting in this seminar comes from my project's second chapter, which itself is based on an article that I wrote as part of my PhD Qualifying Exams. My approach to the dissertation is to use different kinds of theory where appropriate and, in thinking about children's theatrical companies, I've repeatedly turned to queer theory for a language to use in describing how players' bodies were performed and understood. I look forward to learning from other seminar members in this regard—"child" players are the figures in which I am most interested—but I am also excited that this seminar will provide me with exposure to a larger, broader conversation dealing with early modern childhood and queerness, which I can then bring back to my own work, making it stronger and more historically and theoretically responsible.

M. Tyler Sasser, University of Alabama

"The Queer Pedagogy of Moth and Boyhood in *Love's Labour's Lost*."

In this conference paper, I consider how the formation of martial 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*.

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 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.” 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.

Bio: M. Tyler Sasser recently completed his Ph.D. at The University of Southern Mississippi, and currently is an Instructor at the University of Alabama. His research primarily focuses on the intersection between Shakespeare and contemporary children's literature. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, *The Shakespeare Newsletter*, *Tennessee Williams Annual Review*, *Children's Literature*, *Children's Literature in Education*, and *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*.

Christine Varnado. SUNY-Buffalo
“On the Queerness of Lost Children”

Following on Kathryn Bond Stockton’s notion of the queer child as a “still ghostly child” who haunts literature, hinting at an absent presence of something unspeakable -- of sexuality, waywardness, adulthood, or death -- I propose a paper examining the queer dimensions of dead or lost children in Shakespeare. If, as Stockton asserts, the specter of the queer child puts into question the idea of childhood itself, I want to ask what questions about the nature of the child are opened up by the specter of child loss. I plan to trace these questions through two plays that summon dead, lost, and disappeared children: *Macbeth* and *The Winter’s Tale*. There are received readings of both plays that posit some form of child loss as a catalyst for tragedy, but I am more interested in the epistemological and ontological uncertainty both plays maintain around their dead, lost, never-existed, and projected future children.

In *The Winter’s Tale*, the little breast-baby boy, Mamillius, who dies after his mother is sent away, is paired with the lost-and-found Perdita, whose status as the natural child of her parents is the basis of the play’s exploration of heredity. In *Macbeth*, the spectral child to whom Lady Macbeth has “given suck” -- but who no longer seems to exist -- is juxtaposed with Macduff’s slaughtered babes, and with Macduff himself, unnaturally not “of woman born.” In both plays, the dramatic function of the lost or non-existent child is distributed across multiple characters. In both plays, there is a problem of descent -- whether it will happen, how to suss it out -- and the queer “unlineal” children who populate the text are branches with no buds, who throw the world out of order. My paper will explore the connection between these overlapping, undecided groupings of children and the plays’ models of how reproduction works. What is queer about lost children? How do they pose questions about what a child is, how a child happens (and un-happens), and how biological life enters (and leaves) the world? What does reading the lost children in Shakespeare as queer children open up in our thinking about reproductive futurity and its vexed relationship to queerness? How do they complicate the definition of childhood, the definition of queerness, and the notion of life itself?

Bio: As an early modern literature scholar teaching in a gender and sexuality studies program, I am concerned with questions of queerness in the past, and how we read structures of desire, history, and relationality in past and present texts together. I mostly do this through queer theory, and through the affordances it opens up in our notions of reading and its ability to analyze affective, dramatic, and psychic structures in texts and in the world. My first book is about re-defining queer affect and queer desire in early modern drama and prose. This SAA paper comprises some thoughts towards my second book project, currently in its formative stages, about the problem of reproduction -- the question of how life enters the world -- in both early modern drama and present-day culture and politics. My exploration of this question is largely centered on the problem of the child.

Melissa Welshans, Syracuse University

“This Sounds Like Doomsday”: Moll Cutpurse, Girlhood and Queer Time in Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl*

Recent scholarship of Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton’s *The Roaring Girl* (1611) has illuminated the ways in which the titular character, Moll Cutpurse, presents a challenge to early modern social hierarchies beyond her famous sartorial transgressions. For example, scholars such as Theodora Jankowski and Adrienne Eastwood draw useful attention to the implications of Moll Cutpurse’s status as an unmarried woman—an anxiety-provoking social category in early modern England. Yet not only is she marked as an unmarried woman, she is a particular *type* of unmarried woman—a “girl.” As Jennifer Higginbotham argues, the category of girlhood had the power to challenge “the boundaries of the early modern sex-gender system” precisely because girlhood was marked “as a time of relative freedom compared to womanhood, which even in its idealized form was nonetheless signified as a time of containment” (63). Moll, as a “girl,” exists in a sexually and socially liminal space. In this paper I will continue an exploration of Moll’s “girlhood” and consider its relationship to the otherwise straightforwardly heteronormative time of *The Roaring Girl*. By resisting marriage herself and remaining a “girl,” Moll presents a queer challenge to the linear temporality of the early modern life cycle. Yet importantly, Moll resists marriage only in its current iteration. She suggests at the play’s conclusion that she might consider it if it became a more equitable institution, to which Lord Noland replies, “This sounds like doomsday!” In other words, the realization of Moll’s ideal marital conditions would bring about the end of time itself. By utilizing scholarship of early modern childhood, the human life cycle, and contemporary queer theory, I will attempt to offer new insights into the implications of Moll’s status as an unmarried “girl” within the heteronormative temporality of *The Roaring Girl*.

Bio:

I am a PhD candidate in English at Syracuse University, writing a dissertation titled *The Many Types of Marriage: Gender, Marriage and Biblical Typology in Early Modern England*. I became interested in this topic while working on my dissertation, where I argue that marriage, especially for women, could be understood through the pattern of fulfillment and supersession usually ascribed to biblical typology. In my larger chapter on *The Roaring Girl* (still in progress), I am working through Moll’s challenges to heteronormative temporality. I am excited to have the opportunity to explore Moll’s characterization through the lens of “queer childhood”!

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