

Abstracts for “Child’s Play” SAA 2021, Bethany Packard and Gemma Miller

Putting the ‘Play’ in ‘Players’: Games and/as Practice in Boys’ Performance

Harry McCarthy

Though completed across the water from England before the conversion and opening of the first London playhouses, Peter Brueghel the Elder’s “Children’s Games” was to some extent given life on the early modern English stage. Of the eighty or so activities vividly depicted in the 1560 painting, over a dozen were depicted on the stages of early modern England through performance by boy actors. In this paper, I consider the professional stage of early modern London as a site not only of plays, but of *play*, harnessing the natural propensity of its young actors towards play, gaming, and competition in the development of skilled performance. I draw on contemporary educational writings by the likes of John Brinsley, Thomas Elyot, and Richard Mulcaster which expound the virtues and pedagogical values of play and games, suggesting that play formed an important part of boy actors’ training in this period. To unpick the dynamics of play in/as performance, I turn to a cluster of seventeenth-century plays written for boy performers which bring games and play explicitly on stage, exploring how these scenes function as playful entertainment in their own right while also developing skills that are transferable to more conventional stage performance. Informed by theatrically-minded close reading and practical experience of staging some of these scenes in a Research in Action workshop at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, I hope to provide a new, more ludic angle on the question of actor training in this period.

Playing with Roman Comedy: Playwriting and Performance as Game in John Lyly's *Mother Bombie* (1594)

Jeanne H. McCarthy

John Lyly's *Mother Bombie* (1594), written for the all-children's playing troupe associated with St. Paul's, reworks a number of Terentian and Plautine New Comedy devices including scheming neighbors, lost natural children, adoption, clever trickster servants seeking their liberty, blocking father figures, a disobedient son and daughter, crossed love, and the fortuitous discovery of natural parentage via birthmarks or signs. Its three main plots involve three sets of young lovers, a wet nurse, and four father figures who interact before houses in a space expanded by chance meetings in a tavern and a demand for payment for the misuse of a borrowed horse. The problems in the play stem from the fathers' wishes to arrange their children's marriages via trickery or assertions of authority. Four boy servants are independently asked to work out two of the desired matches, which are complicated by the undisclosed intellectual disability of two of the would-be lovers and the resistance to parental authority by two others. The servants collaboratively engage in a number of "cosenages" to achieve their ends, all aided by the conventional revelation of a child exchange in infancy. While there are no board games or what Gina Bloom calls "gameplay" within the plot, status games and competition, and play involving drunkenness, surveillance, and disguise speak to the playwright's reworking of the "rules" of classical New Comedy in his Englished dramatic entertainment. The critical apparatus of game and play offers a new framework for exploring Lyly's notions of theatrical playing as well as his political and social critique of a broken community that too strictly upholds its codes regulating economic survival. The children evade the limitations to their happiness and freedom that their elders wittingly and unwittingly intend by virtue of their education and capacity for wit. The play imagines childhood as a playground for wit and ingenuity in which the rules that inform the brazen and crass world can be reworked within the golden realms of poetry and learning.

What's in a Game?: Handy-Dandy, War, and Foreign Relations in *King Lear*

Jonathan Baldo

Of the sources that Shakespeare appropriated in writing his tragedies, children's games that he most likely knew from his Stratford childhood have received little attention. Like the diminutive people who play them, they are all too easy to overlook. Yet they play key, if diffident and unobtrusive, roles in more than one great tragedy. *Macbeth*, for instance, bears a striking resemblance to the classic game of morra, or odds and evens. In this paper I plan to show how the ancient children's game of handy-dandy, referred to by Lear in his recognition scene with Gloucester, not only connects a multitude of motifs in the play (the play begins and ends with a game of handy-dandy) but also helps to account for some key differences between the quarto and folio texts of the play. Handy-dandy serves as a powerful image both of the play's treatment of war between England and France, and of foreign relations between Britain and France in the early years of James's reign.

Young Men and Old Boys: Immaturity, Prematurity, and Metatheater in Shakespeare's Late Roman Tragedies

Dan Moss

Throughout Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, neither the King's Man playing the hero Martius nor the apprentice boy actor playing his mother Volumnia seems capable of acting his age. Critics from Coppélia Kahn and Janet Adelman to Eve Rachele Sanders and Lucy Munro have observed an intricate reciprocity between the latter's apparent preference for a younger, more virile role than that of elderly matriarch and the former's uncanny resemblance to a toddler ("before him he carries noise, and behind him he leaves tears"). My chief claim is that this reciprocity between the adult actor's man-child and the boy actor's crone-man is primarily metatheatrical in its inception and design, and is indeed only half the story, as their metadramatic interplay is not confined to the five acts of *Coriolanus*, but is instead conjoined to the complementary interplay in *Coriolanus'* companion piece, *Antony and Cleopatra*. Adapting Gina Bloom's account of "progression" toward and "regression" from manhood in *The Winter's Tale* to the late Roman tragedies, I argue here that the King's Men's principal boy exchanges a dynamic of immaturity in *Antony and Cleopatra*—that is, an aging boy's metadramatic desire to remain young and retain a starring role—for one of prematurity in *Coriolanus*, impatiently usurping the leading man's role. Meanwhile, the starring King's Man (probably but not certainly Richard Burbage) takes the opposite route from prematurity—Antony's weird insistence that he is too old for empire—toward immaturity in the form of *Coriolanus'* reversion to boyhood.

Apprentices and 'Play' in Early Modern England

Lucy Munro

My essay examines apprenticeship and 'play' in Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, first performed by the Children of the Revels around 1607, through the lens of two aspects of its original context: the cultural visibility of apprentices as players of a variety of illicit games and as participants in theatrical play; and the use of apprenticeship within the Revels company itself. Building on the work of scholars such as Mark Thornton Burnett, Matthew Kendrick, Tracey Hill and Edel Lamb, it argues that the apprentice, Rafe, inhabits an intersection between civic and theatrical apprenticeship, and between different modes of 'play'.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle refers repeatedly to apprentices' play, from civic theatre to the festivities of May Day, from the sanctioned musters of Mile End to the rough play of combat and the riots of Shrove Tuesday. These activities form a backdrop against which Rafe's actions are stage-managed by his master and mistress, George and Nell, which not only raises questions about the extent of the apprentice's control over his own play, and his ability to 'grow up', but also invokes the figure of the master who cannot control his household and encourages it to indulge in play. Rafe's playing also comments metatheatrically on the uses of apprenticeship by the Revels company, whose Blackfriars playhouse is itself positioned as an unregulated household. These unregulated civic and theatrical households combine to create a space in which the lines between licit and illicit play are blurred and playing is not merely sanctioned but compulsory. The very play that enabled apprentices to challenge and resist adult authority instead appears in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* as a means of control.

Childhood Prefigured

Russ Bodi

While Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* only includes young Lucius in the latter acts of the play, Julie Taymor uses the boy to frame the entire drama, first at play and later in anticlimactic action. From the boy's nightmarish perspective, audiences witness Rome as would a child reared amid trauma. We first encounter Lucius demonstrating Roland Barthe's classic pronouncement that "Toys literally prefigure the world of adult function," as he plays with animate toy soldiers in battle, complete with explosions and violent, angry motions, not to mention flying food. Moreover, at the film's ambiguous conclusion, we see young Lucius carrying Aaron's child toward a rising sun, leaving the viewer to speculate about young Lucius's intentions. Is Lucius the same vicious player we initially met, or have the violent overthrows of family and royal leadership transformed him into a more sentient and compassionate person? Taymor's playful treatment of *Titus* articulates the importance of childhood, even in the most bizarre situations.

Examining Taymor's drama through the prism of play and game theories, we gain insight into the significant role that young Lucius, a survivor of a game that likely represents Rome's sense of "deep play," and the rationality of which anticipates analysis through Game Theory. Young Lucius demonstrates how play mirrors adult social order and serves as a coping mechanism for a boy whose coming of age becomes compromised.

'Youthful sportes': Plays and Playing in the Fane household

Edel Lamb

In the 1620s and 1630s the teenage Rachel Fane wrote a number of plays and entertainments to be performed by the young Fane siblings in their family home at Apethorpe. This paper builds on existing scholarship on Fane's drama as childhood writing to consider these performances as a form of child's play. Evaluating the ways in which Fane represents these performances, which spanned the genres of masque, tragedy, comedy and pastoral, as 'delight / to fill the night' (O'Connor 183) and 'youthful sportes' (O'Connor 175), it reads these examples as instances of children's participation in the world of theatrical play but also as sibling games. It explores the ways in which children's play as creative writing, performance and youthful sport forms a crucial part of this household in terms of entertainment and as a form of shaping familial relations and elite adult identities. These performances function, as do many texts by children in the period, to demonstrate the child author's and young performers' acquisition of elite cultural production and education. But this paper also attends to the significance of child's play as emotional remedy. Reading the performances in the context of the family's experiences of death, it argues that child's play in this instance has a significant role in dealing with grief. It argues for these examples of youthful entertainment as evidence of emotional experience but also, in Susan Broomhall's words, as one of the 'structuring tools doing the work of emotional management' (7)

