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If Peter Laslett's assertion that children were 'everywhere' in early modern England is correct, it is somewhat surprising that the presence of children on the period's stages and pages has begun to be taken seriously by scholars only comparatively recently.¹ Although, as Deanne Williams's succinct introduction to *Childhood, Education and the Stage in Early Modern England* rightly states, recent years have seen 'a veritable explosion of work on the topic, which has produced a very clear picture of what it meant to be a child in early modern Europe', much remains untapped in examining the importance — centrality, even — of children to early modern English literature, both dramatic and non-dramatic (2).

This timely collection of essays serves as an important reminder of the varying directions in which the children who crop up with startling frequency in the work of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, as well as that of their successors, can take us, affirming the relatively new field of early modern childhood studies as rewardingly rich and diverse.

Taking the increased emphasis placed on children's activity through the founding of grammar schools and rise of the public stage as indicative of early modern English culture's investment in children, *Childhood, Education and the Stage* charts the presence, influence, and representation of children through an impressive range of disciplines, extending beyond the strictly literary to classical humanism, medicine, art, and psychology. As the contributors consistently and successfully demonstrate, the poets and playwrights of early modern England repeatedly turned to the figure of the child, enlisting children in their work as infinitely various signifiers and, just as importantly, as emerging subjects in their own right. Such variety is evident in the very scope of the volume, which deftly ranges from canonical to less-studied drama and poetry to twentieth-century responses. The children under consideration — always appropriately at the forefront of discussion — are equally as varied, with both boys and girls, as both characters and actors, kept continuously in play.

The volume's opening section, 'Shakespearean Childhoods', provides a welcome corrective to traditional readings of the many children who appear in Shakespeare's plays as at best straightforwardly innocent, and at worst merely inconvenient.

Seth Lerer's chapter on 'Hamlet's Boyhood' offers an inventive reframing of a play obsessively concerned with the nature of its protagonist's subjectivity through the tradition of the humanist classroom. Emphasizing the rhetorical nature of Hamlet's multivalent boyhood, Lerer successfully demonstrates that, far from having been left behind him, Hamlet's boyhood 'speak[s] of something ever-present in the play's real time' (21). Joseph Campana's thoughtful examination of trafficked children in *Pericles* offers a markedly different framework through which to view Marina: that of commodification. Campana pleasingly moves beyond the sexual element of human trafficking that has dominated even very recent discussions of early modern boy actors, extending Marina's status as 'trafficked' child and positing her as precarious subject bound up in a complex process of commerce and information exchange. Charlotte Scott revisits the signifying subjectivity of the child, focusing on 'the impossibility of innocence' that defines Mamillius in *The Winter's Tale* and the young princes in *Richard III*. She highlights the potential of Shakespeare's children to provide valuable counterpoints to — and triggers of — the flawed, even villainous, actions of the adults whose world they inhabit (64). Though the children in Scott's chapter are undeniably mediated by adult experience, her analysis convincingly reveals how that experience is equally dependent on the children who insistently reflect and refract it.

A study of characters gives way to a sustained consideration of performers in the book's second section, 'Beyond the Boy Actor'. Lucy Munro's study of children's speech in educational manuals and plays by Shakespeare and Chapman teases out the slippage between child and adult subjects, adroitly establishing that childhood in these plays is frequently figured as a rhetorical construct open to manipulation by playwright and performer. Reading the variant presentations of children's speech in plays performed by all-child as well as mixed acting companies as suggestive of 'the individual child's capacity to manipulate convention and revealing the extent to which childishness could be both performative and performable' (82), Munro shows that even at the level of linguistic convention, childhood is always open to negotiation. Bart van Es's creative reading of Shakespeare's *Othello* against Chapman's contemporaneous *May Day*, performed by the Children of the Queen's Revels, is similarly preoccupied with the complex negotiations at stake in children's performance in its consideration of child actors' portrayal of the distinctly 'adult' themes of adultery and domestic violence that underpin both plays. The extent to which Shakespeare engages with the repertory of the children's companies through his treatment of the dominated Desdemona permits van Es to posit a theatrical culture in which sexualized children and infantilized women were brought into productive interdramatic dialogue. This

notion of Shakespeare's answering the children's company repertory has a nice parallel in Bastian Kuhl's chapter, which presents Lyly's *Love's Metamorphosis* as a satire of the adult stage. Tracing the 'Metamorphoses of Cupid' from Lyly's earlier works, Kuhl reads the 'strikingly grown-up Cupid' of *Love's Metamorphosis* as a provocative statement of the children's company's maturity and performance capability (123), permitting a form of theatrical self-fashioning which adds a welcome further dimension to the ongoing contestations that, the section as a whole demonstrates, defined children's performance in this period.

The following section, 'Boys and Girls', further explores the implications of gendered, animate performance, moving yet further beyond the boy actor to explore the complex dynamic contributed to the drama by performing girls and performed femininity. In his chapter on 'The Further Adventures of Ganymede', Stephen Orgel continues the seminal reading of the liminally gendered boy actor begun in his *Impersonations* (1996) and posits Shakespearean Ganymede heroines such as Rosalind as figures representative not only of passivity and subservience, but of animate arousal and educational excitement. Orgel's analysis of the host of Ganymedes represented in early modern art succinctly demonstrates the figure's erotic and pedagogic potential and appeal to characters and spectators alike. Deanne Williams's chapter on the girl masquer, focusing on Lady Alice Egerton's performance in Milton's *Comus*, ably complements Orgel's discussion of these autonomous Ganymedes and their bearing on the performance potential of the likes of Shakespeare's Rosalind. By situating Egerton's participation in the masque within a longstanding culture which included performing girls as well as boys, Williams presents a refreshing challenge to assumptions of women's and girls' exclusion from the public and private stages of early modern England and Europe. The figure of the girl takes a similarly central position in Douglas Trevor's chapter, also on *Comus*, in which the performing girl is discussed in terms of her physiologically maturing body. Taking his cue from the infamous description of the Lady's seat as being 'smeared with gums of glutinous heat', Trevor inventively explores the masque's concern with female chastity in relation to Galenic medical theory, positing the knowledge-making — and thus educational — potential of the young female body.

The three chapters that form the book's final section, 'Afterlives', constitute a retrospective approach to early modern childhoods. Blaine Greteman's creation of a dialogue between the presentation of childhood in Marvell's 'Young Love' and the religiously-minded tradition of puritanical children's education speaks back effectively to the volume's earlier discussion of the signifying potential of children on Shakespeare's stage. Uncovering shared themes of freedom and voice

in Marvell's work and early puritan children's literature, Greteman reveals how these works participate in an intense politicization of the child that is distinctly absent from the children's literature of later periods. Leaping yet further forward into the realm of psychoanalysis, James Marino's chapter on *Macbeth* spotlights the omnipresence of children — and the protagonist's desire to destroy them and the threatening futurity they represent — in the play. Acknowledging the problem posed by the play to psychoanalytical readings that centre on the agonistic relation between father and son, Marino creatively reads *Macbeth* through the more marginalized Laius complex, positing a tragedy psychologically dominated by the destruction of child heirs. Finally, Elizabeth Pentland's examination of the role of childhood and education in Stoppard's Shakespearean plays circles efficiently back to the discussion of *Hamlet* with which the volume begins. Through her discussion of the distinctly early modern concerns of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Dogg's Hamlet*, *Cahoot's Macbeth*, and *Arcadia* — humanist instruction, the transvestite boy actor — Pentland convincingly demonstrates a twentieth-century dramatic corpus that maintains an 'ongoing engagement not just with Shakespeare but with the interplay of gender, sexuality, education, and childhood across several decades of playwrighting and several centuries of English history' (260).

Pentland's summation of Stoppard's plays is equally applicable to this impressive volume, doubtless of ample value to any scholar of early modern literature, politics, education, or drama. Though no collection can hope to be exhaustive — none of the chapters, for instance, makes reference to the considerable contribution made by children to early modern industry and trade — *Childhood, Education and the Stage in Early Modern England* offers a rounded, impressively researched picture of children's varying roles in the realities and imaginaries of the period, shining a welcome light into several unchecked corners of this increasingly crowded field. Taken either separately or as a whole, the contributors pave the way for countless areas of future scholarly endeavour, establishing new directions and initiating conversations which, like the early modern children on whom they centre, are filled to the brim with exciting potential.

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- 1 Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: Further Explored* (Abingdon: 2005), 185.