

The book's major line of argument goes in and out of focus in ways that will discomfit the reader. It juxtaposes moments of confusion and contradiction, even moments where one feels the logic will not bear close scrutiny, with eloquent and deeply perceptive passages. In spite of these structural problems, the book will likely be influential since King links texts in highly original and provocative ways which deserve further attention. Her analyses are full of fruitful speculations that will be difficult for those interested in her subject to resist, even though a great deal of clarification of critical questions, and of subjective responses to both magic and science (and even theological strictures) across time, remains to be performed.

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**Edel Lamb. *Performing Childhood in the Early Modern Theatre: The Children's Playing Companies (1599–1613)*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Pp xii, 189.**

Edel Lamb's first book opens by identifying the absence of critical attention hitherto paid to the 'complex and various implications of what it means to be a child' in the early modern children's playing companies (10). *Performing Childhood in the Early Modern Theatre* proceeds to examine the repertoires of the Children of Paul's and the Children of the Queen's Revels in an effort better to understand how conceptions of childhood identity might have been produced through the practices of early modern theatre companies. The range of approaches here impresses; close textual analyses of a wide range of less well-known plays, thoughtful considerations from a performance perspective of what children's bodies might have signified onstage, and a focus on the marketing practices of individual child actors and the theatre companies to which they belonged all work to support Lamb's proposal that in early modern England there was an 'identity particular to the *child player*' (12).

Perhaps the book's most significant contribution is the close attention it pays to the ways in which playwrights enabled their boy actors and their audiences actively to engage with the phenomenology of a theatre in which children were attempting to 'mould' their bodies into the 'cast' of the adult

parts they played (19). If a sometimes infelicitous disjunction between a child's ability to recite the lines of adult characters and his inability to display a body that would be suited to the expectations of a certain kind of theatrical realism is acknowledged in plays like John Marston's *Antonio and Mellida*, so too is the capacity for this same disparity to produce a multivalent 'fictional body' — an imaginative play between role and actor — that would promote audience reflection on the cultural meanings of childhood (23). Lamb suggests, for instance, the indexical richness at work when plays point to those parts of the boys' bodies that are concealed beneath their costumes. When the dialogue of Marston's characters Cazzo and Dildo trades in sexual innuendo, the boy actors' 'underdeveloped' bodies reinforce the play's infantilizing portrait of the pair (26). At the same time, their bodies also call attention to a disparity between the version of masculinity that the characters' discussions of sexual activity attempt to represent and the 'bodily inadequacy' of 'that which is empirically present on the stage' (26). Lamb argues, then, that the boy actors are involved, not only in a performance of childhood, but also a performance of becoming adult: a performance grounded in a present failure but adumbrated by the promise of an eventual offstage maturation.

Turning to focus on the children's companies as institutions, the book harnesses Roslyn Knutson's *Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare's Time* (Cambridge, 2001) and her model of theatre companies as commercial enterprises in order to identify the ways in which the children's companies' methods of 'recruiting, marketing, and maintaining' actors might have influenced the dramatic construction of childhood (44). Drawing on legal texts (specifically, the oft-cited case of Thomas Clifton, whose father Henry claimed he was illegally impressed into the Children of Paul's acting troupe) as well as play texts, Lamb argues that the child actor is 'constructed variously as an eroticized commodity and skilled performer' (44), and shows how plays sometimes relate the practice of staging boy actors 'through the discourses of slavery, prostitution, and homoeroticism' (53). The author also finds, however, that the 'ways in which child players were valued by their managers and audiences altered as the practices of the playing companies evolved', and points, for example, to the Children of the Queen's Revels' shift from the practice of impressing choristers toward a short-term apprentice system. Unlike the professional adult companies who apprenticed boy players within the official London guild structure, the children of the Queen's Revels were apprenticed *as* players, and 'thus had a distinct identity as ... apprentice[s] to the theatrical profession' (57). Moreover, the companies used

the individual identities of the players as child actors to market themselves as *children's* companies. Showing the various techniques they employed to maintain the public's perception of them as children's companies long after many of the actors who played for them had advanced to adulthood, Lamb demonstrates the interest companies had in 'preserving childhood' (65).

The book's exploration of early modern metaphors that link theatrical performance with the development of children and their cultural identities covers more familiar critical ground. Lamb shows how the perception that children were disposed to imitate others exacerbated concerns about imitation central to early modern anti-theatrical discourses. If the adult actor was vulnerable to being transformed into the roles that he played, the child performer was even more at risk. Indeed, Lamb argues that the regular performances in which the boy players participated may well have encouraged experimentation with identity and broadened their offstage possibilities for selfhood. Further developing the cultural intersections between playing and education, the book suggests that the children's playing companies — organizations where children were trained both to sing and to act — operated like 'substitute schools ... in which youths were brought together for formal education and training' (102). The repertories rather consistently present the child actors as schoolboys in the process of being educated; they mark the stage as a place where the offstage education of players can be displayed, with the performances themselves serving as a sort of supplementary training and education.

*Performing Childhood's* final chapter traces the lengthy acting and playwriting career of Nathan Field to show how his start as a boy actor for the Children of the Queen's Revels led to a 'pervasive cultural image of Field as a child and as a player' throughout his adult professional life (119). Lamb connects the ways Field represents himself in his own writing and the manners in which he was remembered by other playwrights after his death with the local audience's memory of Field as a well-known child actor. Memorial accounts of Field and other players who started their careers as children 'privilege their experiences as child players' but also view the children's companies as institutions that eventually helped the boys to develop an 'adult identity' (140).

As provocative and thoroughly researched as Lamb's book is, it is not without limitations. One of the book's stated goals is to redeploy Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* to investigate whether or not childhood 'is constructed in the same way as gender' (8): a fascinating proposal. There are places in *Performing Childhood*, however, where one suspects that the author is not

maintaining adequate conceptual distance between a Butlerian notion of performativity that is concerned with processes of identity formation and the more spontaneous performative possibilities that take place onstage. On Butler's terms, at least, the performance of a play is scarcely analogous to the continual and often coercive performance of cultural norms that give stability to an identity category like gender or, as Lamb's book would have it, childhood. While the book is less self-conscious about such theoretical distinctions than might be desired, it does at least identify a similar conflation precisely where early modern discourses on childhood development and theatrical performance intersect. If insights into early modern subject formation are not among the book's strong points, *Performing Childhood* more than makes up for any lapses with the new critical avenues it opens for exploring just how deeply invested early modern children's theatre companies were in thinking about and rearticulating early modern ideas about childhood.

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**Scott Newstok (ed).** *Kenneth Burke on Shakespeare*. Indiana: Parlor Press, 2007. Pp lv, 307.

In his thoroughly informative introduction to *Kenneth Burke on Shakespeare*, its editor Scott Newstok observes that 'it's self-evident ... how influential Burke has been for a particular field, yet paradoxically the field does not seem to recognize fully this influence' (xxi). He doesn't specify the field. Burke's range was considerable, from a general philosophy of language that has affinities with Ludwig Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin to poetics (or 'theory' as we would now term it), rhetoric, religion, sociology, history and music. Newstok's comment is as appropriate to the field of Shakespeare Studies as to any other.

Ignored by critics and scholars outside the USA and passed over by 'American intellectuals' unwilling to 'come to terms with their native theoretical roots' (xxi), Burke should have been quite easy to follow or imitate. His 'dramatistic' theory of language as 'symbolic action' should certainly have offered a fruitful framework for Shakespeare criticism, and there is a deceptive simplicity about his way into a Shakespeare play through a bold sum-