

A Valediction

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'The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there.'

The past to which L. P Hartley's haunting observation refers is not only a time when people behaved in quite unfamiliar ways, but also a time when the narrator of the story recounted in *The Go-Between* was himself a child. From the perspective of the adult, childhood can seem like a foreign country. Everything is still recognizable but has an unfamiliar flavour. The details have changed with passage of time. But the tragedy that unfolds in the novel is one in which a boy has played a crucial role in precipitating because he had only a child's understanding of events in which he was involved. Children often play a major role on the stage of adult affairs, even though it is a role they may not realize they are playing.

When I was a boy, children in hotels were given 'high tea' at 5.00 pm and were then put to bed before the adults went down for dinner at 7.00 pm. Vale View Hotel in Ambleside still exists, but the building is much grander in the memory than it is in reality, and I remember descending the three flights of stairs between my bedroom and the hotel dining room as a very grand adventure. But I was determined to discover where my parents went after I was tucked up in bed. I made my way down the red-carpeted stairs and aimed for a doorway to a brightly lit room where I could hear the sound of people having a good time. At three years old in my striped pyjamas I cannot have cut a particularly imposing figure, but when I opened to door and stood there amazed to see people eating dinner, in a matter of seconds everyone turned to look at me. Undeterred, I said in a loud voice, "So this is what you do when I'm in bed!" I remember my sense of surprise and resentment that people should enjoy themselves without me. I was immediately at centre stage. Some amused and admiring guests even came over to greet me until my embar-

rassed but proud parents scooped me up and whisked me back up to bed.

I am in a nostalgic mood because this piece will be the last thing I write for *Kiyo* before I retire. To be honest the research on which the paper was going to be based is still in an early stage, so this is little more than a modest valediction to all my colleagues and friends at Konan over the last thirty years. The planned paper was to build upon *Stories* (2009)¹ in which I looked at the importance Shakespeare assigns to human experience being fictionalized and passed on in story to the next generation, in the hope that the horrors of the past might be avoided in the future. As Cicero observed, "To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child." The irony is, however, that literature seems to fail in its mission of changing the human heart, instead confirming to the new generation that their sufferings are part of a cycle of human pain which we must acknowledge and understand but from which we can never break away. In preparing to write this paper, I began to realize the importance of children in Shakespeare's plays, and the surprisingly large number of roles he wrote for them. The envisaged paper will be entitled *Shakespeare's Children*, and will attempt to demonstrate that their impact can be much greater than the number of lines assigned to them might imply. His use of child roles (and child actors for that matter) also challenges some of the myths about childhood in the early modern period—most notably the idea that it did not exist. In this paper I offer a few preliminary reflections on the subject, before I have to resign myself to '... second childishness and mere oblivion...', the inevitable conclusion of our progress through Jacques's seven ages of man (*As You Like It*, Act II Scene vii).

We all have our 'exits and our entrances', but I cannot claim that my albeit theatrical entrance in the Vale View

Hotel dining room had quite the same impact as Ellen Terry's entrance as Mamillius at the age of eight in Charles Kean's *The Winter's Tale* at the Princess's Theatre in London in 1856. Children tend to become the centre of attention when they venture on to the adult stage, and this may not be only, or even primarily, a function of what they say. Despite a long and illustrious career, Terry's childhood debut was never forgotten.² The clarity with which she herself remembered the experience in later life, and the impact her performance had upon audiences, suggest that children have a very special place in the theatre, one which may be disproportionate both to their acting talent, and even to the significance of the roles in the play as a whole. Perhaps we are genetically programmed to notice the child in all its vulnerability, drawn to watch over its play on the stage as we are in life.

A significant number of children play a similarly important role in many of Shakespeare's plays, though it is up to the director to decide how much prominence to give them. As I noted in my discussion of *Titus Andronicus*,³ the stage directions do not even make clear when Young Lucius should enter. We do not, for example, know whether he is on stage from the start of Act V Scene iii, but it is of crucial importance for the director to decide whether he should be a silent presence on the stage for the whole scene or enter just before he has lines to deliver. Indeed directors seem more aware of the impact of child roles than scholars, perhaps because the route to understanding their importance does not lie primarily in the text itself but in its realization on the stage.

The significance of children as observers of adult life, their role in processing this information and transmitting it to the next generation of adults and the frequency with which they become victims of adult cruelty were issues taken up in *Stories*. The elderly are destined to take the long view simply as a result of the habit of looking back at the past. And it is the implication, for those who have no belief in the afterlife, that we can live on through our grandchildren, both in their memory, and through their actions which we may hope to have influenced. There is the hope that our mistakes and suffering will be healed and restored in the happier fates of our grandchildren.

Few of Shakespeare's plays better illustrate this than *The Winter's Tale*. The play has a fascinating history,

being one of the most frequently staged of Shakespeare's plays in recent years. It has seen a surprisingly wide range of approaches and interpretations, but one character who seems to survive in every incarnation is little prince Mamillius. The play has an interesting history in performance. It was rarely presented in the 18th Century, largely because it violated both the classical unity of time and the 18th Century sense of what was reasonable. Adaptations of *King Lear* in which neither Cordelia nor Lear die at the end were also popular. In Richard Bentley's 1732 rewrite of *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve left Eden with 'social steps and sure'. Their descendents had, after all, been promised redemption and eternal life. Milton's evocative phrase, 'with wandering steps and slow', may have less theological merit, but suggests he possessed a sense of theatre which Bentley clearly lacked. *The Winter's Tale* was sometimes presented minus the first three acts, a tradition initiated by David Garrick's celebrated 1756 adaptation, *Florizel and Perdita, a Dramatic Pastoral*. Charles Kean's 19th Century production in which Ellen Terry made her debut involved a major rewrite too, Kean feeling that the opening scenes in which 'four people say goodbye' were tedious, and replacing them with a extravagant Greek celebration, including a hymn to Apollo with wine-tasting and dancing. But how significant that Terry herself in her autobiography does not recall these elements, instead remembering Mamillius at play and his relationship with his father and mother. 'Four people saying goodbye' is exactly what the first scene of the play is about, and Shakespeare's text needs no embellishment.

Early in the 20th Century, there was a celebrated performance of *The Winter's Tale* (directed by Henry Beerbohm Tree in 1906) but the play did not appeal to modernist critics, and it was not until the post-war period that it became a staple of the Shakespearean stage, starting with Peter Brook's 1951 production in which John Gielgud played Leontes. When I was at Oxford, my tutor suggested that as there was a renewed interest in the play I might like to write about it. Certainly from the 1960s on it has seen a remarkable number of productions, and many of them have been ground-breakingly innovative. In 1969, three year's after I graduated, I saw Trevor Nunn's celebrated Royal Shakespeare Company production of the play. In the last decade there have

been numerous productions in Britain and the United States. The RSC has offered two separate productions in the last couple of years, and are mounting a new one as I write. They are also experimenting with a version for toddlers. Directors have felt released rather than constrained by the elements of fairy tale in the happy ending with its unlikely resurrection of Hermione, in part because it opened the text to powerful symbolic interpretations, many on imaginative stylized sets. Some have perversely reversed Shakespeare's intended messages, making Leontes' Sicily a sun-soaked, idyllic place rather than the wintery court it most surely is. Perdita has been presented as a girl damaged by her impoverished upbringing and Leontes and Hermione after the reconciliation as lost souls, now both old with no real hope of happiness or meaningful future. Yet in even the most determinedly revisionist production, if you look through the production photographs, all seem to have one thing in common: there is invariably a photograph of the scene in which Mamillius appears, often with his father.

It is a remarkable piece of theatre. The play starts with a moving evocation of the innocence of childhood, as Polixenes reminisces to Hermione about the time when he and Leontes:

... 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.

(Act I Scene ii, ll. 126-9)

They were like 'twinn'd lambs that did frisk in the sun';

... what we changed

Was innocence for innocence; we knew not
The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream'd
That any did.

(Ibid., ll. 133-6)

Even as this innocence is evoked, Polixenes and Hermione acknowledge that it is changed by time, and that as we grow into adults, we experience a 'fall'. Carnal knowledge displaces innocence, and the innocence of childhood proves illusory. Mamillius's presence on the stage as Leontes' jealousy takes hold is a key element in the scene. Children represent their parents' hopes and symbolize their awareness of their own loss of innocence. Polixenes says that his young son, Florizel, is 'all my mirth', and

... makes a July's day short as December,
And with his varying childness cures in me
Thoughts that would thicken my blood.

(Ibid., ll. 252-4)

The hope that the child can cure the adult is suggested in Act I Scene i when Archidamus is talking to Camillo about Sicilia's young prince:

... it is a gallant child; one that indeed physics the
subject, makes old hearts fresh: they that went of
crutches 'ere he was born desire yet their life to see
him as a man.

Archidamus: Would they else be content to die?

Camillo: Yes; if there were no other excuse why
they should desire to live.

Archidamus: If the king had no son, they would desire
to live on crutches till he had one.

(Act I Scene i, ll. 37-41)

The physical presence on stage of the little boy in the next scene is invested with huge significance. Seen as possessing curative powers which are believed to invigorate the old, symbolizing by his physical presence the romantic ideas Polixenes has about childhood innocence and invulnerability, Mamillius becomes the focus of his father's jealous conviction that his son represents the unfaithfulness of his wife and betrayal by his friend. The claim that Mamillius has the ability to 'physick the subject' proves bitterly untrue in the case of Leontes, for whom he symbolizes the sickness of sexual betrayal. Instead of curing his father, he is destroyed by him.

The ambivalence of the role Mamillius plays in these opening scenes is made all the stronger by the suggestion that he is in fact more knowing than the innocent lambs of Polixenes' memory. Boys were generally 'breeched' at about the age of seven, but Leontes contemplating his son remembers the time when he was as yet unbreech'd. And yet Mamillius now seems to have acquired the status of a young male prince judging by the way Hermione's ladies taunt him in Act II Scene i. This scene might appear to be intended as a dramatic contrast to the scenes which surround it, an ironic interlude which intensifies the horror of what follows. But as so often in Shakespeare, what appears incongruous on the surface proves to contain elements which make it relevant to the central issues of the drama.

Hermione, heavily pregnant, tires of having to enter-

tain Mamillius, and asks her ladies-in-waiting to take over. Mamillius seems almost flirtatious, rejecting the one who treats him like a 'baby still', kissing him and hugging him. He then teases the other about her make-up, precociously aware of the measures taken by women to make themselves physically attractive, and scornful of the element of dishonesty in it. The ladies threaten to reject him as their lord, and pay their respects to the 'fine new prince' that will be born 'one of these days'. Then, they say, he will change his attitude and 'wanton' with them. The sub-text of sexual play is disturbing in the context of Leontes' jealousy, and the tragic consequences of physical attention and betrayal are suggested immediately when Hermione returns to look after her son, suggesting he might like to tell her a story. Mamillius suggests that a sad tale is best for winter, and claims to have one involving 'sprites and goblins'. Seconds later, Leontes learns that Camillo, reluctant to carry out his master's instruction to murder Polixenes, has escaped with him. His response to the news is one of the most quoted speeches in the play:

There may be in the cup
A spider steep'd, and one may drink, depart.
And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge
Is not infected: but if one present
The abhorr'd ingredient to his eye, make known
How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides
With violent hefts. I have drunk,
And seen the spider.

(Act II Scene i, ll. 648-55)

This is a remarkable statement, because contrary to his intentions, Leontes unconsciously conveys the idea that the source of his jealousy is psychological rather than real. Without seeing the 'spider', there are no ill effects from drinking from the cup. Leontes believes that seeing the spider is a metaphor for learning the truth about Hermione's betrayal. To us it is confirmation that Leontes' jealousy has been generated by a process of auto-suggestion. And throughout, Mamillius is telling his mother a tale of 'sprites and goblins' on the other side of the stage, while the real horror story is playing itself out a few feet away, a story which will shortly lead to Mamillius's death. His story of sprites and goblins foreshadows that of the spider in the cup. Even before he has finished telling his tale to his mother, Leontes

demands the boy be brought to him, claiming that too much of Hermione's blood is in him. He then orders that the boy to be taken away and denied access to her, though there is no stage direction to make it clear at what point he ceases to witness his father's grotesque accusations of his mother. A sad tale for winter indeed.

Mamillius's innocent story is interrupted by Leontes's own horrific fictions. It is only Mamillius's death which finally shocks Leontes into seeing the truth. After the show trial of his mother, the oracle of Apollo at Delphos is delivered by Cleomenes and Dion, and read out by the officer of the court. Hermione's innocence is vindicated, but Leontes immediately denies the truth of oracle. This is one of several significant changes which Shakespeare made to the narrative as it appeared in his source, Greene's *Pandosto*. The instant Leontes defies the gods, we learn that Mamillius, denied access to his mother and overwhelmed with grief that she has been put on trial by his father, has died. Leontes is immediately chastened to such a degree that he accepts his guilt and recognizes Hermione's innocence. But it is (or seems to be) too late. His baby daughter has been abandoned, his son is dead, his friends and loyal servants estranged and his wife has collapsed in a coma which Leontes (and the audience) believe to be death.

Mamillius's presence on stage, and the lines he is assigned, offers dramatically powerful opportunities to the directors. The irony of Mamillius having the ability to heal the sick while being doomed to be consumed by Leontes' disease suggested a striking device to Greg Doran in his 1999 RSC production of the play, with Anthony Sher as Leontes. This version is set in the Edwardian period in a court which appears to evoke that of the Romanovs. Tsar Nicholas's son, Alexei, suffered from Hemophilia B. Normally it is taken for granted that Mamillius must be robust and literally represent the idealized picture that is drawn of him by Camillo and Archidamus when talking of him before he appears on stage. Doran challenges this by putting the boy in a wheelchair, instantly recasting all the speeches made in praise of Mamillius's health and potential as some kind of paranoiac flattery in a court where all are in denial of the truth. Doran may have seen the wheelchair as an external visible symbol of the true reality of Mamillius's situation as a figure doomed from the start, highlighting the

futility of the huge investment being placed in the boy and his future by the court and the people. Doran also challenges convention by having Mamillius played by the actress who in Act IV takes the role of Perdita. This is less justifiable, as Shakespeare insists on the finality of Mamillius's death as a tragedy that cannot be redeemed. Perdita is not Mamillius reincarnated but a symbol of the promise of a restoration which is possible if Leontes is able, as Paulina requires, to 'awake his faith'.

Yet Doran's experimentation with the role of Mamillius illustrates the fascination that directors have with child roles. Few characters in *The Winter's Tale* have been the focus of greater imaginative attention. From Trevor Nunn's 1969 rocking-horse version which presented the court from a child-centric point of view, until Edward Hall's 2005 production set the play in an indeterminate time frame, so that elements from earlier ages could coexist within the modern world, directors have regarded the presentation of the child Mamillius as central to their interpretations. Hall places the boy in his pyjamas at the centre of a dark space with terrors lurking just outside the candle-lit space where he plays with his toys, sitting next to an over-sized hourglass. Into his world burst the adults, and Mamillius moves to the margins, surveying the adult world with what critic Dominic Cavendish⁴ called 'a haunted, horrified look' in which the 'latent anxieties of a boy about what will be expected of him as a man' were played out.

The production record of *The Winter's Tale* testifies to the importance of child roles in Shakespeare, and to his recognition of children as a distinct category in society. Yet there was a time when this was rarely recognized. There have been two misunderstandings which influenced thinking on Shakespearean child roles in recent decades, and they need to be dispelled at the outset. The first is the idea that childhood is a modern construct and that it was not a category that was recognized in early modern Europe. The argument goes that in the Middle Ages children were simply regarded as small adults, and were expected to undertake scaled-down adult roles from an early age. Some went further. Philippe Ariès and Lawrence Stone⁵ suggested that high child mortality rates meant that adults did not 'invest too much emotional capital' in them. They were expendable, ephemeral, 'smelly and unformed' and 'inadequately involved in

life'. Patricia Fumerton's postmodern critique of Renaissance subjectivity, *Cultural Aesthetics*,⁶ also rehearses these arguments. Carol Chillington Rutter in *Shakespeare and Child's Play*,⁷ summarizes them follows: '[Fumerton] cites "the "mereness" of the child in modern culture placing children among what the Elizabethans and Jacobean found to be "trivial", "ornamental".'

The second misunderstanding is evident in Marjorie Garber's claim that there are very few children in Shakespeare's plays. She suggests that the few we find are 'terrible infants' and we are relieved when they leave the stage. Her book, *Coming of Age in Shakespeare*,⁸ is described as citing examples from virtually the entire Shakespeare canon. In fact she focuses on young Martius in *Coriolanus*, Macduff's son in *Macbeth*, the Princes in the Tower in *Richard III*, and of course, Mamillius in *The Winter's Tale*. But there are another fifty or so children in Shakespeare's plays.

To be fair, criticism has moved on since these extreme views held currency. Linda Pollock offered her book *Forgotten Children*⁹ because she felt that 'the history of childhood is an area so full of errors, distortion and misinterpretation that I thought it vital, if progress were to be made, to supply a clear review of the information on childhood contained in such sources as diaries and autobiographies.' Currently, the topic of childhood has become prominent in Shakespeare studies. *Shakespeare and Childhood*,¹⁰ edited by Kate Chedgzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh and Robert Shaughnessy, and Rutter's book focussing on children in performance, *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, both published in 2007, have opened up fascinating new avenues for study. It is no surprise that Rutter's book chooses Mamillius for its cover which features a photograph of Declan Donnellan's highly acclaimed 1999 production of *The Winter's Tale* in Russian with the Maly Drama Theatre of St. Petersburg, which was mentioned earlier.

In *Stories*, I focused on the role of Young Lucius in *Titus Andronicus*, a role which Garber should surely have considered including in her book. When one looks through the canon, it comes as something of a surprise just how many roles Shakespeare did write for children. But it shouldn't, given that the acting companies included boy actors who needed on-stage experience. Technically speaking, many of the successful acting companies were

part of the aristocratic households of their patron, so the often-quoted 1563 Statute of Apprentices may not in practice have applied to this category of trainee. But ‘sharers’ in the companies certainly had younger boy actors attached to them, although little is known about their daily lives. We can assume they received training in every aspect of performing and would have a lot of work to do behind the scenes, especially when the companies were on tour. They could depend on their actor patrons to try to ensure that the playwrights included roles for their boys. The hapless Francis is in *Henry IV Pt. I* may well have been played by a young apprentice actor of around the same age, and we may speculate that he was similarly harassed and mocked within the acting company as his character is in the play. Yet in time, the older boys established themselves as leading actors in their own right, taking on major female roles upon which the success of the companies depended. As they acquired status in the companies, writers created roles with certain boy actors in mind. In Shakespeare’s youth and again in the early Jacobean period, acting companies formed entirely of boys enjoyed considerable popularity, but, if Hamlet’s disapproval of these companies is, as we assume, a reflection of Shakespeare’s own position, their appeal had little to do with the mature acting skills clearly possessed by the boys in the adult companies who were called upon to play roles including Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Gertrude and the Player Queen. Hamlet grills Rozencrantz about the child companies in Act II Scene ii ll. 329–35:

What, are they children? Who maintains ’em? How are they escoted? Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing? Will they not say afterwards, 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 against their own succession?

For all that, Rozencrantz confirms that the boys ‘carry it away’, even taking on roles such as Hercules. Despite the lack of detailed records, there are sufficient materials to support a number of fascinating recent studies which have explored the economic and social status of the boy actors and speculated about their daily lives. Their importance in the life of the companies suggests that their roles in the plays were also accorded some prominence,

even if the number of lines allocated to them was relatively small. They also represent many different stages in children’s development—unborn children, infants and undersized pages, boys just before puberty trying to ready themselves for the roles they will have to play as adults, thoughtful adolescents puzzling over that world, and young people in their teens involved in betrothal and marriage. A wide range of social backgrounds are also represented.

All this suggests that Shakespeare’s view of childhood was not so very different from our own. The idea that the Elizabethans did not see childhood and growing up as a long process of development over time is, of course, challenged by Shakespeare’s own ‘Seven Ages of Man’ speech in *As You Like It*, Act II Scene vii, which was referred to above. Jacques’s seven-stage analysis appears to have had its roots in Ptolemaic philosophy. As there were seven stars in the sky, Ptolemy tidily proposed seven ages in the life of a man. Other Elizabethan writers proposed a different number of divisions, but they all suggest there was a clear sense of childhood and adolescence being phases through which people must pass on the route to adulthood. The old Shepherd in *The Winter’s Tale* famously wishes that young men would sleep from the ages of 16 to 23, because there is nothing ‘in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancients, stealing [and] fighting.’ (*The Winter’s Tale*, Act III, Scene iii, ll. 60–63). The divisions of these phases were no more rigid than they are to day. But complaints about the indiscipline and wildness of youth imply a clear recognition that ‘youth’ exists. And there was no shortage of young people. According to Keith Thomas, by the time Shakespeare died, 30% of the population was under 15.¹¹ The Elizabethans were as concerned about the transmission of culture and the maintenance of traditional standards as the older generation is today. Children and young people, far from being an ignored or an invisible class, played a similar range of complex roles in every aspect of daily life as they do now.

Surviving stage plots (though regrettably none for Shakespeare’s plays) provide evidence that some contemporary plays required as many as ten boys in performance. Few of these boys have an individual profile, but a famous spoof letter purporting to be written by ‘Pyg’ who was Edward Alleyn’s ‘boy’, suggests that he

took on roles in skirts and in doublet and hose at the same time (See note 15). Another boy called Nathan Field graduated from a succession of bit parts to portray leading women before finally undertaking principle male roles. In an article posted on the Internet, Rutter suggests that the lack of information about his child actors is partly Shakespeare's fault:

"He's textually remiss with his children, vague in stage directions, casual in acting assignments. He fails to enumerate precisely *how many* 'children, disguised as before' are to be mustered by Parson Evans to impersonate his fairy 'oofs' at Herne's Oak in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Or *how many* diminutive extras might serve Titania in her fairy band. (Are Mustardseed and Cobweb children?). Or *how many* lads might suddenly spring up in the Forest of Arden alongside the two choristers of 'It was a lover and his lass' to turn Hymen's marriage hymn into Elizabethan Andrew Lloyd Webber. Perhaps he wanted 'as many as can be'—as the stage direction in *Titus Andronicus* puts it."¹²

Despite the difficulties with the detail, the list of named children formally appearing in Shakespeare's plays is surprisingly long. They represent the different social classes and are drawn from every age group. There are at least five infants, Edward V in *Henry VI Pt. 3*, Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, Marina in *Pericles*, Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* and Elizabeth in *Henry VIII*. In addition to these infants, eight pregnant women appear on the stage, and while some children remain unborn at the end of their respective plays, others, such as Tamora's bastard son conceived with Aaron the Moor, did in a recent production make a powerful and disturbing appearance on stage in the final scene. Hermione is pregnant with the child Leontes believes, when it is born, to be Polixenes' bastard, but which becomes the agent of ultimate reconciliation. Anne Boleyn's appearance in *Henry VIII*, pregnant with Elizabeth, shortly to be executed for treason, must have been a powerful moment for the first audiences. We should perhaps include here Titania's changeling child (stolen from an Indian King) in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, because although the infant does not usually appear on the stage, it is the cause and the focus of the conflict between Oberon and Titania.

There are twenty-six children who are working for

their living in some way, mainly as pages or servants. Many of them have only a few lines, but some nevertheless play important roles. Falstaff's page in *Henry IV Pt. 2* has less than 30 lines, but appears in seventeen scenes. The same page reappears in *Henry V* where he has an important role. Other significant players in this group include Brutus's boy, Lucius, in *Julius Caesar*, and the hapless 'lily-livered' boy at the end of *Macbeth*. These roles are sometimes given to adult actors, but something important is surely lost. Shakespeare seems conscious of the way children are involved in adult affairs, and the way adult affairs impact upon and sometimes destroy young lives. To replace a child actor by an adult actor detracts from the richness of the scenes in which they appear.

Some characters we would consider children are seen as young adults in Shakespeare, of course. But the issue of sexual maturity was not ignored. Juliet is just on the verge of her fourteenth birthday, but her father initially suggests to Paris that he might 'let two more summers wither in their pride' before marrying her. In the event Paris is too good a prize to lose and the marriage is arranged immediately. The role of the Player Queen in *Hamlet* would have been taken by a boy, but apparently by one old enough for Hamlet to joke that he has grown by the 'altitude of a chopine' (a kind of stiletto heel) and to hope that his voice 'be not crack'd within the ring' (*Hamlet* Act II Scene ii, ll. 405).

Possibly the most interesting group is that comprising eight young people from the ruling class, who are in many cases innocent victims drawn into the rivalries and conflicts of their parents' generation, some painfully aware of their own vulnerability and appealing to their would be killers to spare their lives. Several of these children appear in *Richard III*, notably Edward Plantagenet (22 lines) and the Princes in the Tower, Richard, Duke of York (39 lines), and Edward, Prince of Wales, later briefly Edward V (36 lines). Two other aristocratic children both play important roles, Mamillius in the *Winter's Tale*, and Young Macduff in *Macbeth*. Both of these boys are described as 'eggs', and both are crushed as victims of their conflicts. Young Lucius in *Titus Andronicus* has a unique role in the play which I discussed in *Stories*. In this group, the character with the most lines in Arthur in *King John* (a play popular with the Victorians, but one which is rarely performed today,

though I recall it was an examination text in my last year at grammar school). Arthur is given a total of 121 lines.

Arthur's principle scene is one of the longest of the scenes where innocent children confront their would-be assassins. As Kate Chedzoy observes, "Shakespeare's plays are often painfully aware that accession to adulthood in a world where they may be caught up in power plays or required to shoulder military responsibilities at an early age can issue in the brutal termination of the possibilities for growth and potential that childhood symbolizes."¹³

Historically, the fate of Arthur, Duke of Brittany, is unknown. Son of King John's elder brother, and named by Richard I as his heir, Arthur was imprisoned in Rouen Castle at the age of sixteen, and was probably assassinated there. Shakespeare portrays his powerful mother, Constance, Duchess of Brittany, as an archetypal grieving matron. King Philip of France is dismissive of her pain, believing she is as fond of grief as she is of her child. But her words are resonant with conviction, so much so that it has been suggested that Shakespeare wrote the speech after the death on his own son, Hamnet, at about the same age as Arthur in *King John*, though it is possible that the lines were written before he lost his son:

Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form...

(*King John*, Act III Scene iv, ll. 93-7)

This is not the portrait of a child which is easy to reconcile with the claim quoted earlier that Elizabethan adults did not 'invest too much emotional capital' in them. Part of the evidence for this view seems to be drawn from a study of the stiff portraits of aristocratic families lining the walls of stately homes. This does not seem to me to prove that children in the flesh were regarded as miniature adults and denied an independent existence. The presentation of children in formal portraits was a matter of artistic convention. The pictures had a clear dynastic agenda and were intended to strengthen the myths surrounding the monarchy or the aristocracy. To say that this proves that children had no childhood is to confuse propaganda with truth. A well-known portrait of Henry

VIII's young son Edward by Hans Holbein shows him as a prodigiously healthy infant holding a rattle which seems to represent a royal sceptre. There is a formal Latin inscription written by Sir Richard Morrison, doubting whether Edward can surpass the glories of his father, but hoping he may equal him in deeds and asserting that should he exceed his father's achievements he will be the greatest monarch in human history. The second celebrated portrait by an unknown artist of the Flemish school shows Edward as a strikingly handsome, broad-shouldered boy of about eight or nine years old, wearing the Prince of Wales's feathers in his cap, and a gold crown on a pendant round his neck. He also sports an impressive codpiece, suggesting a virility way beyond his years, clearly representing a hope for the continuity of a healthy, vigorous Tudor dynasty. But Edward was not as strong as his portraits suggested, and died at the age of fifteen of bronchial pneumonia, possibly complicated by tuberculosis. His half-sister, Mary, succeeded him but reigned for only five years before succumbing from ovarian cysts or uterine cancer, which she had originally hoped might be a pregnancy. Royal and aristocratic portraits tell us little of the reality of life for Elizabethan children.

In contrast with the royal portraits of Shakespeare's day, the Victorians were fond of dynamic, romantic illustrations of scenes from Shakespeare's plays, and the scene between Prince Arthur and Hubert in *King John* was a particular favorite. The play was often staged in the 18th and 19th Centuries, and its popularity may explain, as Richard Altick suggests, why there are at least thirty-five surviving paintings depicting scenes from the play, including those by Henry Fuseli, Alexander Runciman, James Northcote, John Opie, George Henry Harlow, and William Yeames.

The greatest tragedians lined up to play King John, and equally distinguished actresses were keen to have a shot at the role of Constance. Richard Altick writes: "Charles Kemble's production at Covent Garden in 1823, with sets and costumes by the antiquarian James Robinson Planché, was so laden with 'authentic' details that the whole play seems to have consisted of a series of old engravings, monumental effigies, and illuminated manuscripts brought to life. Significantly, almost half of the paintings were produced after this year."¹⁴

These illustrations suggest that the Victorian audience was happy to see the play in production as a series of impressive set pieces, but in the post-war period, the play as a whole has not been thought to merit frequent production. The power of a play as theatre and the complexity of the characterization appears for the modern audience be rooted in the words of the text, not in the staging or the costumes, nor even in the existence of powerful set pieces at various points in the play. Yet as Arthur's role is one of the longest child roles in the Shakespearean canon, the text rewards close study. He is one of several young aristocratic characters in Shakespeare who are verbally precocious, and who engage with older characters, at moments when harm is intended them, in a striking way, hoping that, as a last resort, they might be able to persuade those who threaten them to accept, as it were, a different view of history. Children are crucial to the transmission of culture, and some of Shakespeare's children offer an alternative perspective even if their contribution is brief and transitory. One of Shakespeare's concerns in *Titus Andronicus* is the role of the child in the creating and transmission of national myths. The perspective of the child may challenge that of the leading protagonists. The child is often the victim of adult conflicts, and is aware of its own vulnerability in the power play of the adults in their lives:

Which is the side that I must go withal?
I am with both; each army hath a hand;
And in their range, I having hold on both,
They whirl asunder and dismember me.

(*Ibid.*, Act III Scene I, ll. 253-6)

These are lines given to Blanche, grand-daughter of Henry II, lamenting that she will be personally torn apart by the dynastic dispute. Arthur realizes that he, too, is endangered by the insecurities of the King, who sees Arthur as a dangerous rival. He is given a temporary reprieve, but not simply by appealing pitifully for mercy. The key factor is his ability to persuade his would-be murderer to look at things differently. He promotes an alternative view of their joint history which ultimately prevails and earns him a reprieve. In Act II Scene i of *King John* Arthur finds himself as a pawn in the power play between his grandmother, Eleanor, and his mother, Constance. Arthur begs his mother and his grandmother to 'be at peace', but as A. J. Piesse suggests,¹⁵ 'the notion

of the mother's child... is made clear before the child speaks for itself'.

Shakespeare often suggests that the murder of a child arouses moral scruples in both the character who orders the assassination, and in the man chosen to carry it out, a man who is portrayed as not inherently evil, but as an opportunist who sees the commission as a chance for advancement. The desire of the initiators of the crime to extricate themselves from the moral responsibility for it can result in a reversal of the murderer's fortunes after the event. The historical archetype for this is Henry II's remorse for the death of Thomas à Becket, a death which the four knights who cut him down in Canterbury Cathedral believed the king desired. Henry disowned them and spent the rest of his life trying to atone for Becket's death. Shakespeare's King John is ambivalent about the need to eliminate Arthur, Duke of Brittany, but as son of John's elder brother, he was considered by some to be the legitimate heir of Richard I, and posed a threat to John's claim to the throne. Hubert has been a loyal servant to John, who speaks fulsomely of his love for him after the Battle of Angiers:

Come hither, Hubert. O my gentle Hubert,
We owe thee much! within this wall of flesh
There is a soul counts thee her creditor
And with advantage means to pay thy love:

(*Ibid.*, Act III Scene iii, ll. 19-22)

John creates a climate of affection and obligation which makes it difficult for the object of his love and patronage to refuse the murderous commission when it comes. Hubert is initially slow to realize what loyalty will entail. John is unequivocal. Arthur is

a serpent in my way;
And whereso'er this foot of mine doth tread,
He lies before me: dost thou understand me?
Thou art his keeper.

(*Ibid.*, Act III Scene iii, ll. 61-4)

Hubert is reluctant to face up to the implications of this, and replies:

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

KING JOHN: Death.

HUBERT: My lord?

KING JOHN: A grave.

HUBERT: He shall not live.

JOHN:

Enough.

I could be merry now. Hubert, I love thee.
Well, I'll not say what intend for thee.

(Ibid., Act III Scene iii, ll. 64-8)

There is no reason to believe that even a pause is intended before Hubert's 'He shall not live'. Allegiance to the king was a powerful motivation. In due course, Hubert arrives at the room where Arthur is held with the 'executioners', ordering them to 'heat the irons' and to enter when he gives the signal and bind the boy. The horror of the planned act raises scruples in the First Executioner, who hopes the warrant Hubert has 'will bear out the deed' (Act IV Scene i, l. 6). Hubert is dismissive and calls Arthur on to the stage. There then follows a remarkable exchange. Hubert greets him with 'Good morrow, little Prince', but the 'little prince' shows an adult grasp of his political situation:

As little prince, having so great a title

To be more prince, as may me. You are sad.

HUBERT: Indeed, I have been merrier.

Arthur finds it difficult to understand why someone not in his predicament should have any cause to be unhappy. If he were free of his dynastic burden, he would be happy just to keep sheep—Shakespeare recalling his own Warwickshire childhood, perhaps. Arthur is well aware that his Uncle John 'practises more harm' to him, and regrets that an accident of birth endangers his life: "Is it my fault that I was Geoffrey's son?" Then in a touch that excited the Victorian taste for sentimentality, he wishes he had been Hubert's son, so Hubert would love him. The line is slightly more complex than it first appears. Had Arthur indeed been Hubert's own son, he would indeed have been safer. But although Hubert has been caring for him like a father, Arthur knows that relatives—even a father—cannot be trusted. For his part, Hubert is afraid the boy's 'innocent prate' will awaken his mercy, and in an aside to the audience decides on quick action. Arthur recognizes the tension in Hubert's face and asks if he is sick—"You look pale today". Arthur's intuitions are again in evidence:

In sooth, I would you were a little sick,

That I might sit all night and watch with you.

I'll warrant I love you more than you love me.

(Ibid., ll. 29-31)

Arthur is laying claim to ties and obligations which de-

pend upon a different history, as it were—a family history rather than a political history. Caring for the sick and mutual affection within families are 'feminine' qualities, and we are reminded of the Elizabethan tradition of raising boys with their mothers until they were 'breeched'. Arthur has passed that stage and is required to be a player in a man's world, but his construction of a different history for his relationship with Hubert turns out to be something with which Hubert has difficulty dealing. Hubert concedes as much when he fears 'womanish tears' may cause him to lose his resolution. For his part, Arthur knows that his hope of survival depends on awakening just these human feelings in Hubert.

Moved by the boy's affection, Hubert seeks to excuse himself from the very sense of personal accountability to which Arthur is appealing, and shows him the King's commission, asking him to read it for himself. This appears to be a defensive action, an appeal to the boy's understanding—forgiveness, even. This seems an inappropriately unmanly appeal for sympathy from a man who has assumed he can succeed in the tough world of *realpolitik*.

Arthur gives the impression of being reluctant to read the paper, and Hubert asks if he is having trouble with the handwriting. He is only a boy after all. "Is it nor fair writ?" he asks. Arthur replies: "Too fairly, Hubert, for so foul effect." He has indeed read it:

ARTHUR: Must you with hot irons burn out both my
eyes?

HUBERT: Young boy, I must.

ARTHUR: And will you?

HUBERT: And I will.

(Ibid., ll. 39-40)

One can see why a Victorian audience would have been delighted by this scene. But Arthur's response is not simply sentimental. He, too, can use his version of history to manipulate and shape his destiny. He recalls an occasion when Hubert was suffering from a headache. Arthur had bound his head with a handkerchief that a princess had embroidered for him. He had never asked for it to be returned. There were other occasions when Arthur had cared for him:

Many a poor man's son would have lain 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, an if you will:
 If heaven be pleased 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.

(Ibid., ll. 50-58)

The discussion continues for a total of 130 lines. Half way through Arthur's pleading, Hubert makes a lacklustre attempt to return to the task in hand. He gives the signal and the executioners appear. Arthur begs not to be bound and for the men to be sent away:

And I will sit as quiet as a lamb;
 I will not stir, nor wince, nor speak a word,
 Nor look upon the iron angrily.
 Thrust but these men away, and I'll forgive you,
 Whatever torment you do put me to.

(Ibid., ll. 75-83)

The executioners, much to their relief, are dismissed. But despite his promise, Arthur is not silent, and Hubert has to remind him of it. Arthur increases the moral pressure on Hubert by making an indirect reference to New Testament, wishing there had been even a 'tiny mote' in Hubert's own eye which might have the power make him aware of the enormity of what he plans to do to Arthur's eyes. The evocation of the gospel weakens Hubert's resolve further. Arthur, possibly sensing things are moving in his direction, points out that the iron has gone cold. Hubert responds with little conviction: 'I can heat it, boy'. Arthur's intuitive masterstroke is to suggest that he will be unable to heat it, as the iron has been doused through the effect of Hubert's own grief. The 'breath of heaven' has extinguished the fire, and the iron itself is therefore more merciful than Hubert claims to be. The claim that Hubert lacks all human sense of pity, when he quite clearly does not, seems to tip things in Arthur's favour, and Hubert abandons his commission. Putting himself in no little personal danger, he sends word to the King that it has been successfully executed. It is as if the male narrative in which Hubert believed he was the leading player, has been subordinated to an alternative narrative which is concerned with the emotional interaction of individuals. In this case, political imperatives prove weaker than human obligations, and the sense of a shared responsibility that all adults have for

the care and well-being of children.

Hubert fails in his commission, but King John believes it has been successfully executed, and begins to regret his rashness. Salisbury comments that:

The colour of the King doth come and go
 Between his purpose and his conscience,
 Like heralds 'twixt two dreadful battles set.
 His passion is so ripe it needs must break.

And Pembroke observes:

And when it breaks, I fear will issue thence
 The foul corruption of the sweet child's death.

(Ibid., Act IV Scene ii, ll. 76-81)

Pembroke's fear of a hostile reaction proves prophetic. Hubert senses a second opportunity to advance his self-interest, an urgent matter in view of his failure to succeed in his first commission. Fearing the public reaction, John begins to have second thoughts about the wisdom of killing Arthur, and tries to shift the responsibility to Hubert. Why, he asks, was Hubert so keen to see Arthur dead?

I had mighty cause

To wish him dead, but though hadst none to kill him.

(Ibid., Act IV Scene ii ll. 206-7)

John argues that it is 'the curse of kings to be attended / By slaves who take their humours for a warrant.' One imagines Henry II may have used the same sophistry after the murder of the archbishop. Hubert initially resorts to the same technique of distancing himself from taking moral responsibility for his own actions and shows the King the commission he had given him. John cannot deny his order but argues that if Hubert (a man 'by the hand of nature marked' for evil purposes) had not been at hand he would never have had the idea of ordering the murder. John's despicable moral weakness and evident unsuitability for kingship could hardly be clearer. He accuses Hubert of acting with despicable self-interest: to be 'endeared to a king' he 'made it no conscience to destroy a prince'. Hubert takes this as his cue to admit that he did not in fact carry out the commission, but he is careful not to explain to the king why he failed, implying that he had simply felt it was in the king's best interest. But the real reason lay in the strength of Arthur's personality and his appeal to the man's humanity. Hubert does not admit to having had any scruples, but seeks to

cover himself by claiming that the ordinary people are appalled by Arthur's assassination (though it is far from clear how they would have heard of it).

Once Shakespeare has explored the relationship between Arthur, Hubert and the king to his satisfaction, he seems to lose interest in the narrative, and it is difficult not to see the scenes involving Arthur as a set piece of the kind that made the play popular with Victorian audiences, but rendered it less satisfying to modern taste. In the event, John's relief is exceedingly short-lived. As soon as John orders the good news that Arthur lives to be conveyed to 'the peers', the boy dies in an attempt to escape from the castle in which he is imprisoned. His hope that the ground might prove more merciful than the king is sadly dashed as he falls to his death. As mentioned earlier, the fate of the historical Arthur is uncertain, but he appears never to have left Rouen Castle where he was imprisoned. Shakespeare resolves the issue quickly and, some might say, in an unsatisfactory way, by the device of the fall, given the investment he has made earlier in the role of Arthur. (Arthur's main scene is the longest child scene in the whole of Shakespeare, and only Moth in *Love's Labours Lost* has more lines in total: 159 against Arthur's 121.)¹⁶ We must assume that Shakespeare was interested in the confrontation itself, in the humanity that must exist in the most ruthless and self-interested of murders, and the clash between two different worlds of value, the world of political imperatives, and the world of human obligations—different 'histories' so to speak—in which, on this occasion, Arthur's view of the world prevailed. Once that has been addressed, Arthur is quickly disposed of.

And yet *King John* ends with the succession of another boy prince, John's own young son Henry, who succeeded as Henry III and reigned for 56 years as arguably one of the most successful English monarchs. Henry's role in production is often doubled with that of Arthur, using the same actor (or actress). This device might enable members of the audience who notice it to console themselves with the idea that Arthur has been miraculously 'revived'. But the narrative is inconclusive, Arthur's actual death being a morally insignificant event compared with his earlier survival when faced with the threat of torture and murder. Clearly Shakespeare was interested in the long confrontation between the boy and Hubert for

its internal dynamics rather than the consequences of the event in the play as a whole. On the face of it, this doesn't seem to confirm C. L. Barber's suggestion that 'Shakespeare's art is distinguished by the intensity of its investment in the human family, and especially in the continuity of the family across the generations.'¹⁷ In the scenes featuring children, Shakespeare sometimes seems interested in local effects which may not be of central significance to the themes of the play as a whole, but which are no less important for that. Shakespeare's children show vigorous independent existence performing a wide variety of roles. One is willing to abandon his patron for a better master. One acts as interpreter for his ignorant master on the battlefield. Another reproaches adults for a failure of care (the boys with the baggage in *Henry V* being massacred by the retreating French). Another is willing to deceive his higher class master in an act of loyalty to women of his own class. One young lad begs not to be given a women's role in a play at a time he believes his voice is breaking. Boys endure the incompetent instruction of their schoolmasters. They discover remarkable rhetorical skills to fight for their lives when faced with the threat of assassination. One bravely tries to defend his mother from the murderers sent to destroy her. Others carry crucial messages at considerable danger to themselves. On occasions, the child role is central to the theme of the plays in which it is found. We recall Young Lucius confronted by atrocities, but trying to make sense of his experience and be optimistic about the future, and Mamillius, ironically linking the fairy-tale world of his childhood where the feminine had dominated with the destructive fantasies of his father through unwittingly providing a metaphor for the horror of jealousy in his talk of sprites and goblins. 'From the beginning of his career, with the *Henry VI* plays, to the end, with *The Winter's Tale* and *Henry VIII*, [Shakespeare] put his close observations on stage, writing astonishing parts for boys—boys of seven years old and upwards—parts that trained them up for the stage by giving them a significant place in the story, a place that, as the director Terry Hands has said, "takes us to the heart of Shakespeare's mystery".'¹⁸

Beatrix Campbell, the campaigning journalist and author, writes: "A society in which adults are estranged from the world of children, and often from their own

childhood, tends to hear children's speech only as a foreign language, or as a lie." This cannot be said of Shakespeare. He has a good ear for children's speech and recognizes it as an alternative account of the world we live in, but one that has validity and importance equal to that of our own.

1. In Konan University's *Kiyo* (2009).
2. Ellen Terry's biography, *The Story of My Life* (London, 1908) p. 12.
3. *Stories: Kiyo* (2009).
4. *Daily Telegraph*, 1st February, 2005.
5. *Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London 1977).
6. *Cultural Aesthetics* (Chicago, 1991) p. 218.
7. *Shakespeare and Child's Play: Performing Lost Boys on Stage and Screen* (Routledge, 2007) p. xiii.
8. *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* (London 1981) p. 30.
9. *Forgotten Children* (Cambridge, 1984).
10. *Shakespeare and Childhood*, Kate Chedgzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh and Robert Shaughnessy eds. (C. U. P. 2007).
11. *Age and Authority in Early Modern England* (London: British Academy, 1976).
12. The article can be downloaded from <www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/capital/.../rutter/carol_article.doc> (20th February, 2012).
13. Kate Chedgzoy in *Shakespeare and Childhood* p. 14.
14. Richard D. Altick, *Paintings from Books: Art and Literature in Britain, 1760-1900* (Ohio State University Press) p. 283-4.
15. A. J. Piesse, "Character Building: Shakespeare's Children in Context", in *Shakespeare and Childhood* (see note 10 above).
16. Moth is a special case, probably written with a particular boy actor in mind, Edward Alleyn's boy Pyg, yet now thought to be too demanding for modern boy actors. The role is routinely played by young women, young men, adult dwarves, or even cut completely. Shakespeare's Moth is perpetually irreverent, making fun of everyone in the play, of whatever class. See *Love's Labours Lost*, Act I Scene ii where Moth spars with his master, the ponderous Don Adriano de Armado. Assigning the role to an adult actor, or worse, cutting the role completely seems incomprehensible. We cannot know whether Pyg created the role of the 'acute juvenal', but he must be portrayed as 'a kid who's stuffed with quips and quiddities and smart answers.' (See Carol Chillington Rutter in The International Globe Shakespeare Fellowship Lecture, 2007.)
17. C. L. Barber, 'The Family in Shakespeare's Development: Tragedy and Sacredness', in Coppelia Kahn and Murray Schwartz, eds., *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays* (Baltimore, 1980) p. 188.
18. Carol Chillington Rutter (see note 15).