REPRESENTING CHILDHOOD: THE SOCIAL, HISTORICAL, AND THEATRICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHILD ON STAGE

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ABSTRACT

Jonathan Chambers, Advisor

In this dissertation I explore the social, historical, and theatrical significance of dramatic representations of childhood. In three case studies, one each on childhood in the Early Modern, Modern, and Contemporary periods, I focus on the relationship between larger social, industrial, and philosophical changes, real-world childhood(s), and dramatic representations of those childhoods in playscripts of the time. At each of the moments highlighted, childhood, and the forces that work to shape it, exist at a moment of crisis. These moments are characterized by the convergence of a variety of narratives of childhood ranging from the established to the emergent and, as such, make space for historically significant representations.

Childhood is not a natural, nor even strictly biological concept. In fact, childhood is a concept that is changed to suit the needs of a given historical context. More specifically, childhood is made up of a series of discourses influenced by shifts in industry, religion, philosophy, and technology, as well as by the changing needs of adults in response to these forces. From being a valuable source of labor and/or income to objects of sentimentality, Western childhood is engaged in a perpetual process of revision. In each my case studies, which are focused on the work of William Shakespeare, Maurice Maeterlinck, and Martin McDonagh, I explore the ways in which each playwright draws on contemporary social tensions to create child characters that are uniquely situated as sites in which historical tensions are negotiated. Ultimately, by

drawing on the organizing metaphor of the blank page that is central to each of history, childhood, and representation, I frame the represented child as the “playscript” of Western society.

Dedicated to Alyssa

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> "A theatre, a literature, an artistic expression that does not speak for its own time has no relevance."
>
> Dario Fo, Nobel Lecture (1997)

A playscript, like all works of art, is not solely a creative endeavor. Working in conjunction with the artistry and craftsmanship of the artist is the influence of context and history. Even beyond the intentionality suggested by Dario Fo in the above quote, a playscript cannot be separated from its context: it, and those creating it, are, and continue to be, forged by the crucible of history. While this might seem obvious, particularly to scholars working under such influences as Neo-Marxism, Feminism, Post-Structuralism, and New Historicism, it bears mentioning alongside Fo's quote for the subjectivity implied by his phrasing. Relevance, after all, is a question of perspective.

Even with the strides recently made in bringing attention to ideas and peoples long marginalized in theatre scholarship, child characters are still often deemed irrelevant objects of study. The acts of iconic figures such as Oedipus, Medea, Othello, and Miss Julie, are considered more culturally revealing than those characters who oftentimes do not even have lines and who, throughout Western History, are generally positioned as lesser. In buying into the perceived insignificance of children, however, scholars run the risk of silencing a vast group of characters, many of whom have significant contributions to offer to our interpretations of dramas, and to our understanding of theatre production and history.

While scholars working in the social sciences have long given attention to what the changing nature of childhood can say about Western society, they are similarly guilty of dismissing a valuable resource: representation. Though the connection between representation

and society may seem obvious, scholars working in the social sciences have been somewhat reticent to explore it, in part because of Philippe Ariès controversial work, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962). In this landmark study, Ariès offered constructions of medieval children based largely on their representation in art. As recent criticism of that work has pointed out, Ariès' approach was limited in that it relied almost exclusively on these representations while discounting significant contextual sources. In what might be considered a response to Ariès, contemporary social scientists studying constructions of childhood have moved away from artistic representation as viable source material on the subject position of the child, focusing instead on more concrete social shifts working at the macrocosmic level, including changes in industry, government, religion, and so on. While these scholars still reference artistic representation occasionally, particularly in terms of the Romantic poets' influence on child rearing in the nineteenth century, they have largely downplayed or ignored the portrayal of children in art.

In response to these exclusions, in this study I forward the notion that child characters are reliable and culturally revealing sources, who are capable of speaking in ways that theatre and social science scholars have yet to appreciate. In doing so, I engage in a historiographical approach inspired by Michel de Certeau's framing of historical inquiry in terms of absence and subjectivity. Inasmuch as both theatre and child, as concepts, are founded on principles informed by the organizing metaphor of the blank page, both can be defined as de Certeau's theoretical void of history; they are shaped by historical discourses and silenced by the subjective writing of the author(s). Drawing on these similarities, I will use the case studies in the chapters that follow to argue that the concepts of history, child, and theatre may be understood as being engaged in a process of continually negotiated conversation: each reflects the historical narratives that shape

the others, the contexts that influence their moments of creation, and the larger social investment in creating and maintaining them as formal categories. By understanding each of these forces as mutable and contingent in relation to the others, and by foregrounding their contextual relationship, I offer a unique approach to the performance of childhood in society, in history, and in drama. In this way, the child can be understood as the playscript of Western History.

Throughout Western history, children have been variously understood as miniature adults, as imps, as cherubs, as a source of labor, as a site of innocence and perceptive abilities, and as the locus of sentimentality. These constructions are not wholly discrete. Constructions of childhood identity appear and disappear, morph and merge with astonishing rapidity. At any given time, these constructions are in conversation or conflict with each other. Furthermore, these constructions are just that, "constructions"; they are not "natural" but specifically created by society to fill a range of complex needs that produce, reflect, and reinforce science, religion, industrial progress, and power structures. These constructions also play an important role in establishing a relatively stable adult identity during a given period. In other words, by framing what is "child" in terms of physical, mental, and behavioral characteristics and through the specific spaces and expectations that society creates for them, the construction of adult is similarly characterized. They become "not-child" as the boundaries for "not-adult" are set in place.

In this dissertation, I consider representations of children in drama by drawing on examples from Early Modern, Modern, and Contemporary Western Drama. By reading these representations alongside contextual forces, I will demonstrate that Ariès' approach, while problematic when over-determined, is not without merit; indeed, my premise is that artistic representation is a key component of understanding what "the child" has meant across history.

At the core of these representations, and of the history of childhood more generally, is drama. As long as there has been drama, there have been significant child characters. From the children of Oedipus and Medea in Ancient Greek tragedy, to the portrayal of the Christ child in Medieval mystery plays, through the many appearances of and references to children in the Spanish Golden Age, Elizabethan England, Neoclassical France, and into Modernism and beyond, children have appeared at important moments across the canon of Western drama. In many cases, these children resonate with considerable force—they act or are acted upon by the adult figures around them in profound ways.

What is perhaps most interesting about the dramatic force of child characters is that they have considerable dramatic power, effecting events in profound ways, even from their relatively abject subject positions. Even though major plot points often hinge on their actions, or on those actions that are done to them, they are generally minor parts, operating on the fringe of the plot, and marginalized. Much of this dramatic power can be attributed to the marginalized subject position of children (both actors and characters) and because of the position that they occupy at the heart of Western sentimentality. Because of this positioning, child characters offer the playwright an opportunity to play with some of the deepest emotions and memories of the adult audience. In this regard, the playwright can, in a relatively short period of time, "raise" a child character in front of the audience. The audience can watch the child "grow," watch the child play, and watch the child learn and interact with his/her parents. Then, when the audience is emotionally invested in the fate of the child, the playwright can manipulate or defy those expectations and hopes to great effect. These factors also contribute to a duality in the nature of child characters: they are often onstage far less than other characters, have fewer lines, and little agency. Yet, they are frequently the agents of significant action in a given plot.

While these aspects and possible effects of childhood representation may be said to operate in most, if not all, plays that feature children in some way, it is important to note that they do not operate in a vacuum. Rather, there are rich contextual forces at work in the representation of children onstage. Put another way, changes in religious, economic, social, governmental, philosophical, or industrial paradigms often result in shifts in the makeup of child roles. This is not, however, to suggest that there is a one-to-one correlation between contextual forces and representations of children in drama. Instead, paradigm shifts prominent in society cause ripples of change—sometime small, sometimes large—in corresponding drama. At times, playwrights absorb these shifts, speak to them, and make them natural in a way that reflects society. At other times, playwrights react against these shifts or against the "status quo" child in general. At these moments, it becomes possible to theorize ways in which representation can, in turn, influence the real world construction of children.

In some ways, the points of change in societal constructions of children fall along similar lines as those traditionally used to define historical and cultural moments (i.e., Renaissance, Enlightenment, Modernism, etc.). At other points, however, it is more nuanced than this. In the Romantic period, for instance, social and governmental constructions of "child" lagged far behind the idealistic visions of childhood offered by the poets. It is also important to note that it is sometimes the reception of children in drama at a given point that shifts, rather than the actual mode of implementation. In other words, it is conceivable that two virtually identical child characters will garner antithetical reactions based on the current social climate (even the makeup of a specific audience).

In this dissertation I endeavor to understand how changing societal definitions of child/childhood alter the way children are represented in drama, and in turn, how these

representations enrich our understanding of childhood and changing social structures. In each of the case studies/time periods that make up the chapters that follow, I rely on a number of questions designed to add depth and specificity to this governing research agenda. These include the following: In what ways are changes in societal constructions of child/childhood matched by representations of child/childhood in contemporaneous drama? How is the changing definition of child reflected, revised, or refuted in contemporaneous drama? How are these social constructions manipulated by playwrights? How do playwrights use emerging, dominant, and receding perceptions of childhood for dramatic effect? How are the representations of children in each period by each playwright reflected or refuted by playwrights from other periods? How are the approaches of each playwright mirrored or countered by playwrights from the same period? What can the representation of children in drama tell us about contemporaneous society and family life? Finally, how do representations of children correlate to greater changes in the landscape of theatrical theory and practice?

During my research, these questions have continually returned me to the relationship between real-world childhood, artistic representations of childhood, and the larger historical forces which help to shape them both. As such, I sought ways of highlighting the relationship between these concepts. By bringing these elements together, I work to show their compatibility and importance as subjects of research while also using each to draw conclusions about the others. The approach I have adopted to help me understand these various complex connections is founded on the work of Michel de Certeau, specifically *The Writing of History*, Judith Butler, specifically "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," and Louis Althusser, specifically "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." By drawing on the notions of presence and absence, performativity, and structural indoctrination offered by these scholars, I define the

concepts of history, childhood, and theatre as being built on similar theories. By pointing to these connections, I seek to unify the language that I use when addressing each, while also highlighting the way that each of these concepts are negotiated in terms of the others.

In *The Writing of History* (1988), Michel de Certeau argues that the historical archive is a "sepulcher" occupied by the ghosts of the past. For de Certeau, these ghosts cannot speak in their own right, instead finding access "through *writing* on the condition that they remain *forever silent*" (1-2). Though the historian seeks understanding, the process of writing, of meaning making, serves to hide the "alterity" of the other, forcing it back into its tomb (2). The problem is not the intention of the historian, or even the methodology that he or she employs. Rather, it is a problem of presence. Though the historian works diligently to find and analyze every document, every fragmented remain of the event or person, the originary presence of the historical moment escapes them. These archival fragments and historical narratives can only shape the contours of the void created by the absence of presence. In de Certeau's words, "the violence of the body reaches the written page only through absence, through the intermediary of documents that the historian has been able to see on the sands from which a presence has since been washed away" (3). Though he or she tries to approach the other, the lack of presence means that he or she can only detect the shape or contours of the void and, at best, to hear echoes of the other(s) "from afar" which "seduces and menaces our knowledge" (3).With the goal of understanding the other, with approaching the presumed "ground of history" which occupies the void, the historian has only his or her own subjectivity to draw on. They must write and, in doing so, silence the alterity of the other. Ultimately, the historian can hope for no more than echoes of presence, echoes of historical truth.

Throughout this dissertation I work to engage with these historical echoes, to revel in their subjectivities, and to offer a viable approach for amplifying them. Neither the study of theatre in terms of history nor the study of "child" through historical context is a new pursuit. In this dissertation, however, I put these concepts into conversation with one another, to act as mirrors reflecting uncertainty and contingency, amplifying them to highlight commonalities and clarify differences. As does "history," "theatre" and "child," operate on the logic of the blank page. Beyond its ability to create worlds before the audience, theatre is grounded in the interpretive subjectivity of the white space of the page and the open space of the stage. Similarly, the concept of child, dating at least back to Aristotle, has been framed by blankness, and by potentiality. Likewise, the practice of history begins with the blank page, and with the quest to write in (and over) the gaps of knowledge. Put another way, each of these is a blank space that is written around, and written upon. Just as de Certeau's historical void, each of these concepts is stripped clean of the presence(s) which helped to create them. A study of theatrical scripts and artifacts faces the lack of liveness, the lack of bodies, and the lack of the intended audience. A study of childhood faces a similar lack of presence, drowned in the language of adults. In this regard, a study of them individually, or even a study taking two together must be content with the "echoes" of presence offered by de Certeau. Considering these concepts together, however, amplifies the echoes of presence while simultaneously highlighting and the traces of what has been lost.

In an effort to more fully align this conception of history and childhood with artistic representation, I make the argument that real-world performances of childhood are constructed similarly to artistic representations. Here performance has a dual meaning. It is not just that the roles are embodied (though that is a major consideration). By performance I am also referring to

the prescriptive nature of the play text *and* the performance of the cultural norms that are present in it. Recent scholarship, including the work of Patricia Pace and Edel Lamb, has worked to categorize childhood in this way by drawing on the work of Judith Butler. These scholars primarily focus on substituting "child" for "gender" in her theory. While I agree that this offers a compelling perspective on childhood, it seems incomplete. What is lacking in these studies is a greater consideration of the structure and scope of Butler's argument and, subsequently, the politics involved.

To get at the idea of performed gender, Butler first draws on phenomenological work of speech acts and social relationships. Citing a variety of scholars, she argues that "social agents constitute social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social sign" (1097). Butler also notes that, implicitly, this makes the social agent both subject and object of the constitutive acts. More simply, she suggests that social identity, rather than being personally defined, is largely dependent on the language, signs, and expectations of society. Butler tracks this idea through the work of Simone de Beauvoir, to assert that gender itself "is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts precede; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (1097). These acts, Butler argues, create an "*appearance of substance*" which social audiences, including the individual subject, buy into. In buying into the fiction of constitution, these performances are then normalized, made to seem natural (1097 & 1099). In making this point, and her larger argument in general, Butler, appropriately, draws on terms that gesture to the theatrical. Throughout, she refers to the performative "script" of gender, the aspect of rehearsal that goes into the constructions, improvisation, and even into discussions of audience and reception.

Ultimately, she concludes that "gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (1103).

Butler also claims that these identities are fluid, historically specific, and contingent on changes to larger social power structures. Further, she asserts that the gender distinctions (as distinct from biological sex), are an important and political part of continued heteronormative control: "heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed … through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with "natural" appearances and "natural" heterosexual dispositions" (1101). When a woman steps out of these "natural" definitions, when she tries to contest or adapt these ideas, she faces punishment (ostracizing or worse) which, in turn reinforces the patriarchal, heteronormative society.

Butler's ideas, and my adaptation of them, offer a conceptual framework for my approach to the child. Subsequently, by moving to define childhood in terms of performance, I shift this study from its topical grounding in the social sciences towards theories that I, and my readers in my discipline of theatre and performance studies, will be more familiar with. Butler's work also helps to validate my use of representation as a viable means of social analysis. In defining child identity as a series of performances, it becomes a construction that is, in many ways, analogous with its dramatic representation. Finally, my adaptation of Butler's theories helps to clarify my approach to the power structures at work in constructions of childhood, the stakes that the adult world has in maintaining a stable and defined childhood, and to how these ideas change over time.

Another way that I approach both the performance of childhood more generally and the artistic representation of these performances is through Louis Althusser's idea of "hailing," first introduced in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." The inclusion of

Althusser offers an additional model by which to approach representations of child, while at the same time drawing these ideas back toward the concepts of "void" and blank page that I am applying to history, theatre, and child.

According to Althusser, subjects are hailed into identity, being, and their place as subjects, by the ideological structures around them. This is both a process of "recruiting" and "transformation." By way of explanation, Althusser offers his well-known policeman analogy, which centers on a policeman calling out to a person and that person, recognizing that they are being addressed, turning around. Althusser argues that by turning around, the person has acknowledged, accepted, and reinscribed his or her subject position (26). As it is with the policeman, so too is it with the greater ideological systems at work in society. On the level of ideological systems, however, the subject is "always-already" interpellated by the ever-present ideology (27).

Althusser's concept of interpellation informs my work by bridging the gap between history and society. Put another way, I draw on Althusser to argue that the experience of the child is not just a void to the study of history, but also a void to society. Adults can only ever re-experience childhood through the imperfect lens of their memories, conditioned by good experiences and bad, modified by trauma and repression, and made hazy by distance. As such, adults have no choice but to understand childhood through interpellation, by hailing the echoes of childhood from their void. As in the case of de Certeau's historian, this attempt, though well-meaning, results in a child constituted in their own image, based on their own subjectivities, which, in turn, silences the presence of the child. Similarly, the playwright's process of creating a child character is steeped in this same uncertainty and comes to the same end. Further, the adult

characters themselves engage in this process as they constitute the children of the play through language, memory, trauma, and violence.

As I have approached the playscripts, I have primarily relied upon close reading, script analysis, and comparative analysis techniques. As I have noted elsewhere, the child characters that I am studying, for the most part, have little stage time and few lines. Several of the characters do not even appear on stage. As such, it has been necessary for me to devote considerable attention not only to those sections in the scripts where the child speaks, but also to those sections where their silence or absence is significant. I have also engaged in extensive archival work on three fronts: 1) to research the plays and their contexts, 2) to the work of other theatre scholars who have also considered the plays, periods, and characters I am analyzing, and 3) to the research on childhood from a social science perspective.

These sources, and this approach, are intended to address the downfalls of Ariès' earlier study and the resituate representation as a viable means of cultural analysis. In this dissertation, I seek to point up the relationship between culture and representation and argue that the latter is inseparable from the former. Regardless of how idealized or otherwise manipulated a representation might be, there will always be aspects of the author/creator's culture embedded within it.

While the ideas of de Certeau, Butler, and Althusser frame my approach to representations of childhood, there are several other scholars whose work has proved invaluable to my study by offering both inspiration and access to the larger subject of historically constituted childhood. One source that is central both to larger discourse on children and childhood and also to my own study, is the aforementioned *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, by Philippe Ariès. In this landmark work, Aries offers a reading of the

role of children in European (particularly French) society. He posits a narrative of societal shifts ranging from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century through which the child moved from more pragmatic and largely agrarian constructions to more modern sentimentalized notions. Aries also gives a survey of child "types" covering the same period.

When writing about the Middle Ages, for instance, Ariès argues that shifts in childhood may be observed in liturgical artwork. Of these portrayals he discusses the child-as-angel, the infant Jesus, the naked child then, finally, the emergence of secular children portrayed in their own right. He then draws connections between Jesus' portrayal as a child and the slow social move toward the sentimentalized child. Likewise, he insists that the frequency with which the baby Jesus is portrayed with Mary reflects and informs a temporary supremacy of the mother-child relationship over the relationship between father and child. As do many of his representation-based suppositions, this analysis suffers from relying only on representation rather than taking into account other contextual sources. When he does incorporate supplemental sources, he tends focus on the upper class or nobility at the expense of approaching what childhood was like for the vast majority of Europeans. His analysis of later secular representations of children as examples of childhood face the same problem—only wealthy parents could afford portraiture, which is his main source of evidence. As noted, Ariès work is important to my study in that his use of representation as a means of analysis has been attacked, and there has been a subsequent dismissal of the value of representation in relation to the history of children.

In contrast to other studies that focus on major societal shifts, Patrica Pace's "All Our Lost Children: Trauma and Testimony in the Performance of Childhood" (2010), centers on the construction of child identity through, among others, the work of Butler and Althusser. In terms

of Butler, Pace argues that childhood identity may be understood as constructed in a fashion similar to gender identity. Rather than being an essential biological reality, Pace follows Butler's theories to insist that "the child's body is not expressive, correlating to some essential biological reality" (234). Instead, there is a constant process of the performative, on the part of both the child and society, to create a "proper" identity.

Pace goes on to frame the identity making process in terms of Althusser's notion of interpellation; a child's identity is "hailed" into being by society. As might be expected by relying on these two theorists, Pace's study acts as important reminder that the process of societal construction of the child is not amoral. Pace's study is significant in terms of my own work, particularly in the theoretical frameworks she brings to bear on the child.

Andrew O'Malley, in his *The Making of the Modern Child: Children's Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth Century* (2003), focuses on shifting constructions of the child that lead into modern, sentimentalized childhood. In his discussion of the rise of the middle class and the ramifications this shift has on constructions of the child, he notes a middle ground construction of the child in which the overindulgent pampering of the rich was attacked while moves were made against the neglect of the poor (3). O'Malley also moves beyond a "less manual labor, more industry" model as others do. For him, there is more at stake than money: "For Children to participate successfully in the new ideological project [of the middle class] of the period, they had to be rendered into subjects whose energies could be controlled and effectively harnessed" (11). Essentially, he positions the child as an "other" that needs to be contained and shaped into the rational adult in an effort to perpetuate the social class of parent. Significant to my thinking, he also includes comments on the supposed blank slate or tabula rasa consciousness.

Also inspirational, if in a different way, is Edel Lamb's excellent *Performing Childhood in the Early Modern Theatre: The Children's Playing Companies (1599-1613)*. While Lamb's work is very different from my own, it is the closest that I have found in terms of method and subject. In the study, Lamb traces the ways in which Elizabethan children's companies actively sought to define and market children *as* children, regardless of biological age. This framing was part of a larger commercial enterprise. This discussion leads Lamb to argue that the definitional processes at work in these companies serve to foreground the concept of "boying." Partially because of the codifying of distinctions between adult and child suggested by these companies, terms such as "childish" and "boy" become more widely used as a pejorative to imply "foolishness, vulnerably and shame" (4). Many of these connotations, and the process of "boying" more generally, may be seen well beyond the bounds of Early Modern acting companies and society.

Hugh Cunningham and Peter Stearns offer excellent books that survey changing definitions of child and childhood. In *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (1995), Cunningham covers factors ranging from economics to social change. Of particular significance in this work is the attention he pays to the influence of the changing patterns of religion in Western civilization. In the section on Christianity, he focuses on the impact of notions such as original sin, including debates between St. Augustine and Pelagius on the subject. In like manner, in his section on the Middle Ages, Cunningham works through criticisms of Philippe Ariès famous work on changing patterns in childhood.

Also significant to my thinking is Cunningham's commentary on the work of Locke and Rousseau, and his analysis of the impact of the Romantics on Western society's perception of children. Regarding the latter, Cunningham works through the increased idealizing and

sentimentalizing of the child in the wake of the Romantic's potent imagery. Finally, Cunningham pays particular attention to the changes that come with industrialization, the rise of the middle class, and the balances sought with an increased demand for child labor. He charts the reactionary outcry (influenced in particular by Romantic sentiment) that led to increased child labor laws, which eventually moved the conception of the child toward the more formal, protected childhood that is dominant today.

Stearns, in his *Childhood in World History* (2011), offers an analysis of shifting patterns in societal constructions of children throughout history. While Stearns does label his study as one concerned with World History, it is largely directed towards Western civilization. Though he does write some sections on other cultures, and works to compare the patterns of other cultures to those of Western civilization, these efforts are mostly unsatisfying, in that they are brief and glancing. Regardless, Stearns' work in approaching Western agricultural, technological, and industrial factors, as well as religious and social issues is excellent. All of these, taken together, provide an interesting and complex narrative about the changing landscape of childhood.

There are, of course, a number of other significant sources that I rely on throughout the chapters that follow. Many of these sources, particularly those related to this history of childhood, receive more in-depth treatment in the first chapter as I work to offer my own narrative on those changes to childhood that seem most relevant to my work on dramatic representations of childhood, and to the working threads of childhood that I establish there.

As the variety of these sources, and the temporal span of my case studies suggest, the scope of my work here is ambitious. As such, I have found it necessary to strictly define the boundaries of my project. While there are many approaches that might feasibly be taken in approaching this information, and while many more historical moments and scripts might be

considered, I think that my approach and focal points are particularly ripe for investigation in that they deal with moments of profound change in both history and theatre. Furthermore, the moments that I have chosen are ones traditionally pointed to as being pivotal to the larger movements of Western society. Selecting these moments for my own study allows me the opportunity to tie my work into these larger narratives, while also troubling the finality of their place in received history.

The first set of limitations to this project concerns the historical narrative that I am constructing about changes in societal conceptions of childhood. To begin, I am not a social scientist. As such, my comments on the historically contingent nature of childhood will largely be limited to a comparative analysis of other scholars, rather than my own original research. It is also necessary, for a project of this size, to establish a "model" of childhood to read against in each period. While I will gesture toward the multiplicity of variables implicit in this process, this approach means that there will be a leveling out of factors including age range, gender, race, class, etc. While I am leery in engaging in a practice that will, to a certain extent, sideline difference, many of the studies I am drawing from offer precedent for this approach. Finally, due to the scripts I have chosen and the scholars that I am drawing on, my work will be limited to Western society and, in particular, Western Europe.

There are also limitations to this project in terms of my approach to representations and theatre. First, by focusing on theatre, I am limiting myself to one type of artistic representation. It is important to note that, while I do gesture in the direction of the child on stage, my primary focus will be on the representation of childhood in playscripts from each selected period. In this way, and by treating the scripts as historical artifacts that record change and reaction, I use them

as a lens through which to view real-world childhoods. While there is much to be said about the representation of children in terms of other media, they are outside the scope of this project.

Secondly, because of my case study approach, I am limiting myself to a relatively small sampling of theatrically significant historical moments and playwrights. The veracity of my claims, as they might apply to other playwrights and periods will be addressed in the conclusion of my dissertation when I am suggesting avenues for further research on this subject. Due to my concern with adult representation, appropriation, and construction of childhood tropes, this project will also be limited (with the exception of *The Blue Bird*) to adult plays, performed by largely adult casts, for adult audiences. Because of my interest in the way children characters are treated negatively in dramatic representation, my case studies will be limited to those plays that engage in a sort of violence to children, be they formally classified as dramas, histories, or tragedies. Comedic children will not be approached in this dissertation. Finally, this project is intended to remark upon the dramatic significance of these characters in terms of contextual constructions of children and, in turn, what these representations can tell us about childhood. As such, I will not offer broader statements about the aesthetic value of each play or to judge them against each other for an "ideal" or "best" construction of childhood. My final restriction concerns more conceptual or theoretical limitations. The most significant limitation in this area is that because of the limited scope of this project, and because of my own limited expertise in such areas, I cannot hope to comment, scientifically, on the psychological impact of these portrayals on the children embodying the roles nor the audience watching this embodiment.

With these restrictions in mind, I focus my readings on three historical moments and playwrights that are found at moments of major change in childhood, theatre, and history. In Chapter 1, "Changing Childhood: Major Shifts in Constructions of Childhood from the Sixteenth

Century to Present Day," I explore the historical forces that have helped to shape childhood. The relationship between Western civilization and its children is constantly in flux. In some periods, society has conceived of the role of children with pragmatism; in these instances, children have been understood as a valuable, if vulnerable, source of labor. At other times, constructions of childhood have been more closely aligned with a "little adult" concept. More recently, the child has become more sentimentalized, becoming an economically useless but emotionally fecund creature that must be protected and provided for above all else. Today, the Internet has helped to create a new space for a tech savvy and "worldly" version of the child. This child is often more technologically knowledgeable than the adult while still being vulnerable to many of the dangers presented by the Internet.

In this opening chapter, I outline some of the more predominant factors that act as catalysts for social change in the construction of children, and I trace the resulting changes that are important to the periods that I study throughout the dissertation. Because I am responding to Philippe Ariès' earlier attempts to use representation as a viable means of understanding the child, I also use this chapter to offer a more in-depth analysis of his work. This reading includes criticism from those in related fields as well as my own analysis of his strengths and weaknesses. In other words, I use this first chapter as a place to bring together prominent work done on the subject of children and childhood in society, along with my own work, to provide a framework for the chapters to come. Part of this framework is found in my suggestion of my own models of childhood that are intended to act as alternatives to the formal categories long drawn on by scholars. Rather than period specific and discrete categories of childhood that can only speak to one type of child in each period, I instead offer "threads" of childhood which are organized around similar traits. These threads are not period specific. Rather, they are emergent, receding,

and renegotiated tropes that can be found throughout history. Finally, I use this chapter to move toward the idea that childhood is a performance in itself and that representation therefore provides an excellent window into these structures.

Chapter 2, "Shakespeare and the Curried Child," is a case study that focuses on Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and *The Winter's Tale*. I begin my case studies with Shakespeare because of the significance of changes to social life in Early Modern England. The changes occurring in this period mark a wholesale shift in the nature of childhood as people increasingly moved to the city and educational systems were formalized. Shakespeare is also an appropriate place to begin this study because of his prominence in the canon, because of the frequency with which he turns to dramatically significant child characters, and because it seems that more scholars have written about his use of children than any other playwright's.

The sixteenth century was a time of great social change in England. During this period, the ideas and art of the Renaissance, which had first come to England at the end of the fifteenth century, began to flourish. From changes in religion, technology, and government to the rise of a proto middle-class of merchants and artisans, to the dissemination of Humanism more generally, this century saw many shifts that bear directly on childhood. This includes a change in familial structure and child-rearing from the nominally matriarchal structure noted above to increased patriarchal control over children. In this period, the family began to be seen as a "prototype of the state," one in which new attention was paid to children as the future of the family and, by extension, the state (Cunningham 42). In brief, this change brought with it an increased emphasis on education (and a subsequent institutionalizing of gender differences), stricter rules of modesty and decorum for children, and a change in the commodity nature of children. Rather than keeping the children at home to act as farm labor, parents often sent them off to Latin school or

similarly given over to the church, trained in the craft of their parents, or apprenticed in a variety of trades (from which the children's playing companies derive).

The child archetype that is defined as a result of these changes is frequently referred to as a little or miniature adult. This child/not-child is one who dresses in adult clothes, who has proper manners, who is expected to practice a trade, who is expected to be a good citizen of both the family and the state—yet, this child is still without agency, still without control over his or her life. This is the construction of child that Shakespeare frequently takes up in his plays. His children move from playful and worldly knowledgeable to the strictest definition of the severe little adult. In further proof of their lack of real agency, however, Shakespeare often writes tragic endings for these child/not-child characters. Some of these, such as Mamillius in *Winter's Tale*, might be attributed to a sad reality of contextual medical conditions—after all, a high percentage of children died in the first ten years of life. Some, however, die or otherwise suffer through no actions of their own. Indeed, Shakespeare's child characters are often his noblest and most doomed to suffer.

In this chapter, I focus on the child characters in the tragedy, *Coriolanus,* and in the romance, *The Winter's Tale*, with some consideration of notable child characters from other works. My goal is to demonstrate that, regardless of genre, there is something violent and tragic about the fate of many of Shakespeare's child characters. Ultimately, I argue that while contextual perceptions of childhood undoubtedly affect the dramatic significance of these characters, the way that Shakespeare "raises" them in front of the reader/spectator serves to make them more stable than actual Elizabethan children. This stability permits a connection not wholly possible in actual society and therefore increases sentimental reactions to the child beyond the boundaries of the period specific child/not-child construction.

In Chapter 3, "The Abject and Latent Child in Maeterlinck," I read Maurice Maeterlinck's portrayals of childhood alongside emergent notions of a romanticized, sentimentalized child more valued for emotional and ideological qualities than as a source of labor. My focus in this chapter is on the way that Maeterlinck, with his Romantic and Symbolist lineage, simultaneously elevates and tortures his child characters.

Romanticism can be understood as a sort of "golden age" in literary representation of the child and childhood. In the writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Blake, there is a great concern with the "sanctity" of childhood, the child's capacity for wonder, and the ability of the child to see differently or beyond as a result of his or her connection to the wild and lack of adult concerns and distractions. Indeed, the child is a logical focal point for these writers; when reacting against the dehumanizing nature of the industrial revolution the child, newly enlisted for cramped, dangerous factory jobs, becomes a natural standard-bearer.

Many Romantics coveted the perceptive abilities of the child and, subsequently, memories of their own childhood. Wordsworth, for instance, wrote of the child as "Nature's Priest," as capable of "behold[ing] the light," before writing that "Man" sees this "vision splendid…die away" (142). In the writing of the Romantics, there is also an implicit call for a greater protection and preservation of the child during this period of development. Subsequent to these calls, and partially influenced by them, there was a greater societal reaction against child labor. During this period and after, there were both literary and social moves towards a protected, economically useless childhood, one in which childhood was a safe space in which the child's primary responsibilities were learning and play rather than providing for the family.

While perception and implementation of these ideas varies according to time, country, and social class (among other factors), there was a relatively stable childhood present, and at

least a proto-construction of an idealized, sentimentalized, protected child by the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of European Modernism. It is interesting then, that a number of Modernist movements, including Symbolism, seem to take up the Romantic child in their own work. That the Symbolists adapt this trope is appropriate. After all, the Symbolists themselves acknowledge that they are, at least in part, aesthetically descendent from the Romantics. Furthermore, much of the Symbolist usage of the child seems to sync with the Romantic approach: there is a focus on innocence, on the child's perceptual abilities, and on the child's connection to the natural/spiritual. Absent from their writings, however, is the Romantic emphasis on social reform. Instead, the Symbolists focus on the acquisitive side of representing children. In my reading of this transition, a protected childhood has been successfully realized; unfortunately, the Romantic hope for the continuation of the child's abilities into adulthood has come to naught. The Symbolists, as members of the socialized, adult world, are now those who the new concept of child protects against. As a result, their writing becomes more avaricious to the point of, in Maeterlinck, a new emphasis on violent interjection, on a conception of a world trying ceaselessly to puncture, rather than protect, the bubble of childhood. In this chapter, I argue that Maeterlinck, in his desire to tap into the incredible perceptual powers of the child now lost to him, engages with and ultimately corrupts literary tropes of the ideal, innocent child and the very real social personification of those ideas.

Finally, in my fourth chapter, "McDonagh and the Digital Child," I move forward to contemporary Western drama. Recent developments in mass communication, especially the Internet, represents their own paradigm shift in aesthetics and social constructions of childhood. In this chapter, I suggest that Martin McDonagh's violence toward a digital construction of child

in *The Pillowman* and the pointed placelessness of the setting may be understood as an allegorical approach to contemporary fears about digital technology.

This chapter opens with a discussion of the current cultural moment and the prevalence of a digitally informed construction of childhood. There have been many attempts in the past decade to quantify these changes. Each of these attempts, however, suffers from the fact that by the time they have been published, they are already hopelessly behind the rapidly changing nature of digital innovation. Instead of subscribing to one of these theories, I instead read across them for common characteristics while also including my own observations and connections. In framing these changes, I will explore the relationship between technology and power structures, aesthetics, child-rearing, and the distribution of knowledge.

At the core of this reading is the notion that the Internet has served to simultaneously invert and strengthen the formalized relationship between parent and child. On the one hand, the child raised with these technologies is often times more knowledgeable about their uses and capabilities. Further, this digital child approaches the world differently, with an almost inherent ability for multitasking and a familiarity with discursivity and association. On the other hand, these children plunge into the digital landscape often blithely unaware of both online and real world dangers, including bullying, fraud, online gambling, trolling, and predators. In this way, they are in need of protection, education, and oversight more than ever before. Because of this uncertain balance, the position of the adult as definer and meaning maker, as authority in maintaining the hierarchy between the adult and child is being challenged in new ways. These concerns are informed by a multiplicity of narratives spanning from aesthetics and authorship to power structures, framed by an emphasis on the onwardness, endlessness, and illusory freedom

of the digital landscape that is most clearly symbolized by the advent of the hyperlink and the hash tag.

I then move to an exploration of the way the technologies and tensions of this moment, particularly those related to children, are reflected in *The Pillowman*. In sum, I argue that the more conventional readings of the play, which focus on questions of authorship, aesthetics, and artistic responsibility, may instead be seen as part of a broader engagement with the tensions and fears of the adult world as digital technologies become more pervasive. These tensions are reflected in McDonagh's portrayal of the pluralism and paradox of the digital child and through his rehearsal of this trope in his adult characters. My analysis of these tensions leads me to offer a new reading of the script based on the notion that the pointed placelessness of the setting, often framed as "an unknown totalitarian state," may instead be understood as a personification of the digital world that allows for the staged negotiation of this new landscape. In framing the script this way, I argue that McDonagh's exploration of authorship, artistic responsibility, and violence may be understood as an allegorical portrayal of larger cultural concerns and fears about digital technology. In my conclusion, I take the issues raised in this last chapter to suggest ways in which the relationship between child and adult will continue to change, and in some ways narrow, as the children of today's digital age themselves become parents.

Ultimately, I use these three case studies to point to the vital and negotiated conversation that takes place between the forces of history, childhood, and theatrical representation. Inspired by the work of de Certeau, Butler, and Althusser, I suggest that each of these concepts, while oftentimes considered distinct from one another, is in fact founded on similar principles and structures. Most predominately, each relies on the organizing metaphor of the blank page, which acts as a subjective and performative space for the creation of meaning. As each of these forces

changes in response to technology, philosophy, religion, government, etc. they influence changes in the others, and vice versa. Adults in Western society, with impulses ranging from the unconscious to the intentional, write their own narratives on these concepts, and seek to enact their own agendas. Because of the relationship between these structures, I forward the notion that the performed childhood(s) in the plays of a given period act as the playscripts of Western History. Because of the position of children in society, their construction as a smaller blank-page inside of the canvas of the play itself, and their lack of agency and voice, these characters are incredible loci on which grater social changes and tensions are projected. In these characters, and especially in their suffering, it is possible to see the forces of society and history at work, to catch a glimpse of contemporary perceptions of childhood, and to track reactions to these changes and to adult expectations of childhood.

CHAPTER I: CHANGING CHILDHOOD: MAJOR SHIFTS IN CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD FROM THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY

In *Childhood in World History*, historian Peter Stearns argues that childhood is an important topic because its history is uniquely situated at the center of significant discourses on human nature and cultural change. Further, he suggests that "childhoods mirror the societies that surround them, and they also help produce these same societies through the adults who emerge from children's socialization" (15). In the same way that childhoods reflect and produce their contexts, so too do representations of childhoods reflect, revise, and even take part in the construction of their real world corollaries. With a few exceptions, however, the viability of the relationship between artistic representation and real childhoods has been downplayed. The inconsistent application of this approach can be attributed, at least in part, to Philippe Ariès' controversial *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962). Drawing on a variety of pictorial representations, Ariès offered constructions of children and families from the Middle Ages. While his work is cited as a landmark study and as one of the first major childhood studies in what is a relatively new field, his foregrounding of artistic representation over documentary sources has drawn criticism. Subsequently, scholars working from historical and social science perspectives have moved away from in-depth treatments of child-centric representation.

There are, undoubtedly, problems with Ariès' reliance on representation and, as such, on his conclusions. The fact remains, however, that representation offers a wealth of information not only on the representational practice and art of a given period, but also on greater social forces and narratives circulating in the corresponding context. In an effort to connect and clarify the relationship between representation and society, it is first necessary to explore these foundational

ideas at greater length. As such, the first section of this chapter is devoted to a reading of Ariès and his critics. The fact that this dissertation seeks to also comment on larger movements of childhood throughout Western History, necessitates a more thorough treatment than is possible in the individual case studies. Because of this necessity, the second and main part of this chapter will be concerned with exploring the educational, industrial, philosophical, and religious forces that have helped to shape, and re-shape, childhood. In the final part of the chapter, I will first review common "categories" of childhood as they have been established by other scholars. There is a tendency in major studies on childhood to settle on a relatively discrete concept of childhood in each "period." A. R. and P. A. Colón, in their *A Socio-Cultural Survey Across Millennia*, for instance, offer "the clergon" as the medieval archetype, "the apprentice" for the Reformation, and so on. While these categories are both evocative and descriptive, they face the problem of condensing an enormous range of experiences and factors into one neat package. Further, they implicitly suggest a clean transition from one period archetype to another. My emphasis on specific threads (as opposed to categories), in contrast, will help point up the fact that the influence of these forces is messy and uneven, and stretches across historical moments. They influence different societies and different segments of society differently and at different rates.

The fact remains that these threads, while artificial, are often grounded in significant events, developments, and ideas that do bear directly on constructions of childhood. These threads, however fraught, also have the advantage of helping to organize material into more digestible concepts. The temporal and topical span of my study therefore necessitates an engagement with these categories that both troubles their appearance of totality and taps into the organizational benefits that they represent. As such, I will conclude this chapter by offering my own "threads" of childhood. Distinct from the work of other scholars, however, the threads that I

create, namely, the invisible child, the curried child, the latent child, the perfect child, and the digital child, are organized around shared characteristics rather than being rooted to specific moments in time.

The task of tracking changes in Western constructions of childhood, particularly when considering these changes in terms of the vast number of competing contextual narratives, is enormous. An exhaustive approach (assuming one is possible) for a topic of this breadth is too great even for a book-length study. In historical and social science treatments of the topic, there are two general approaches. The first involves analysis of one period or idea, and is invaluable for its engagement with a specific context and set of social narratives. Judith Plotz's *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* is an example of this approach at its best. The second approach, represented by studies like Hugh Cunningham's *Children and Childhood in Western Society*, is often shorter than topic or period specific works and often focuses on the contingent nature of childhood across time and space.

While both of these approaches, and their strengths and weaknesses, are well established, neither is appropriate for this study. Both approaches present far larger tasks than I am prepared to engage here, and an attempt to do so would undoubtedly impinge upon my later efforts to create coherent case studies on those topics that I deem most relevant. Instead, I will endeavor to draw on both modalities. To be successful in my later case studies, I must gesture to the larger span of Western shifts in constructions of childhood as well as specific moments and narratives that I believe represent major ruptures and paradigm shifts that directly affect the body and the experience of children. As such, much of my work in this chapter will draw specific narratives out of the greater discourses and read them alongside other notable narratives to suggest how those specific forces work together to create the concept of childhood. Though it should be clear

by this point, it bears mentioning that my reading of the contextual factors in this chapter is not intended to be exhaustive. Instead, and in the spirit of the contingent nature of childhood, my reading here revels in the inconsistencies inherent in such a process and leaves the later chapters to expand upon issues raised here.

Throughout this chapter, I emphasize that "child" and "childhood" are not natural or objective categories. Instead, these concepts are created and revised in real-time in a given society. Further, these concepts are informed by a variety of social and cultural discourses as well as a variety of technological and ideological factors. As these forces change the shape of society, so too do they change the way the idea of child is constructed and valued, the place of the child in society, and the adult needs and desires placed upon the child. As David Buckingham notes in his *After the Death of Childhood: Growing up in the Age of Electronic Media*, "'the child' is not a natural or universal category, which is simply determined by biology … the meaning of 'childhood' is subject to a constant process of struggle and negotiation, both in public discourse and in interpersonal relationships, among peers and in the family" (6). This idea resonates across a number of related fields. Heather Montgomery, for instance, argues that anthropologists "have shown consistently that the idea of a universal child is an impossible fiction and that children's lives are influenced as strongly by their culture as by their biology" (1). These social and cultural forces influence the construction of child at different levels. Some shifts, like changes to the labor force during the Industrial Revolution, are fairly overt. Other shifts, like the debate between Protestants and Catholics over original sin, are more subtle, though just as significant. It is important to note that these larger processes are not consistent or easily defined. Further, they do not represent, necessarily, a direct correlation. Instead, they should be understood as a variety of competing forces and discourses whose influence is

particularly relevant at different points in history and different levels of society. The construction of children is one such nexus.

I focus on this nexus, not only for how changes in society influence constructions in childhood, but also for how a study of childhood grants a unique perspective on those greater forces. Further, my focus on the representation of childhood in drama will serve to point up those changes and a range of possible reactions to them. Even more than the relationship between cultural change and constructions of children, representation should not be understood as directly correlating to each change that occurs. Instead, culture, childhood, and representation should be understood as both conversational and discursive, as part of a larger system of exchange negotiation that is similar to Stephen Greenblatt's notion of social *energia*. In this way, culture may be said to be directly influencing representation while simultaneously influencing childhood which in turn shapes representation. Those writing (and producing, performing, etc.) these representations exist amidst myriad cultural forces that find their way onto the page. In this way, representation, while being influenced by culture and culturally informed childhood, in turn influences those childhoods and that culture.

It bears mentioning that beyond the constructed nature of childhood, it is also a concept that does not necessarily correspond to what might be considered biological childhood, nor is it an entirely benevolent system. Instead, as Montgomery argues, "children may be recognized as children long before birth, or sometime afterward. They may still be considered as child until after initiation, marriage, or indeed, until their own parents die" (3). Further, these expansions, and the system of construction in general, are, as I will discuss more fully later, part of a process in which adults use the concept of "childhood" to define themselves. As Buckingham notes, "'childhood' is thus a shifting, relational term, whose meaning is defined primarily through its

opposition to another shifting term, 'adulthood'" (7). One final note: while it is important to realize the system and stakes at work in the construction of 'child' and 'childhood,' it is also important to remember that the power of these ideas "depends on the fact that they also convey a certain truth: they must speak in intelligible ways, both to children's lived experiences and to adult memories" (10). In other words, even though I work to point up the constructed nature of childhood in both the real-world and artistic representation, the significance of these constructions is that they must approach some sort of essential truth in order to endure.

Ariès and Representation

Since its publication in 1960, Philippe Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* has shaped discourse on historical constructions of children and family life. Even in studies in which his work weathers substantial critique, it remains foundational. In a sense, this reflects the conceptual structure of childhood and adulthood—scholars simultaneously define their work in contrast with Ariès while drawing on the same ideas and terminology. The centrality of Ariès work to this field would, in its own right, seem to make him a worthy place to begin my study. More importantly, however, his use of representation, while not without problems, offers a wealth of opportunity and access to a complicated and historically contingent subject. Because of the controversy, however, this approach has become relatively marginalized. In some ways then, my approach is inspired, if with qualification, by Ariès. In this regard, this section engages with the same definitional process engaged with by those other scholars. Rather than entirely distancing my practice from his, however, here I attempt to mediate a middle ground, a practice of relying on the combination of representation and contextual sources.

The first section of Ariès' study, "The Idea of Childhood," offers an exploration of childhood beginning around the thirteenth century. He notes that prior to the thirteenth century,

there were very few artistic representations of children. He suggests that this lack can be attributed to the fact that "there was no place for childhood in the medieval world" (33) and that "childhood was a period of transition which passed quickly and which was just as quickly forgotten" (34). Around the thirteenth century, Ariès notes a surge in child representation with three discrete representations: the angel, the infant Jesus, and the naked child (34-35). Eventually, by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, these representations encouraged secular representation of the child and two new types of representation: the portrait and the *putto* (36-38).

At this point, Ariès moves into one of his sections that have been framed as problematic. He argues that the lack of consistent child portraiture can be attributed to the death rate and a general ignorance of childhood as an important stage: "it was thought that the little thing which had disappeared so soon in life was not worthy of remembrance: there were far too many children whose survival was problematical" (38). According to this logic, the child was not painted either because it would die or because childhood was too unimportant to memorialize. In one of his more controversial passages, Ariès maintains that, in some regions, the "child that had died too soon in life was buried almost anywhere, much as we today bury a domestic pet, a cat or a dog. He was such an unimportant little thing, so inadequately involved in life, that nobody had any fears that he might return after death to pester the living" (39). By the seventeenth century, Ariès notes that portraits of children had become numerous and that family portraits had become orientated around the figure of the child (46-47). Here again, Ariès offers a controversial point. Drawing on these portraits, he argues that children in the seventeenth century, who had previously been dressed as little adults, had begun to have a dedicated outfit which set them apart

from adults (50). In the balance of the first section, Ariès explores cultural change in games and pastimes and from the immodesty of youth to a more modern conception of innocence.

In the second section, "Scholastic Life," Ariès focuses on changes in the European educational system throughout the Middle Ages and how these changes influenced social and familial conceptions of the child. Here he begins with local church schools and then, in the Carolingian period, the expansion of cathedral schools for the purpose of teaching, scripture, Psalms, theology, etc. (139). Even when these schools expanded to include other subjects, he notes a lack of gradation of curricula and the mixture of ages and skill levels in one group. From here, moving forward in time, he notes the expansion of the school system to include colleges and boarding schools, the influx of more secular subjects and instructors, the expansion and formalization of the school system, the rise and importance of the Jesuit order, and so on. While Ariès is not generally concerned with representation in this section, his work does point up the importance of formal education in establishing boundaries between child and adult, by pulling children away from early farm labor (and therefore working to create a stable childhood), and fostering familial relationships by relieving the necessity of sending the child away on apprenticeships (156). In this section Ariès also approaches the subject of discipline. He notes that between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the increase and formalization of corporal punishment creates further distinctions between adults and children and also serves to extend the period of childhood. Adults, he argues, do not get whipped. Therefore, through all of the school years, the use of the switch serves to point up the helplessness and inferior social position of children (261). Ultimately, Ariès suggests that this formalized extension of the disciplinary system attributed to the alter creation of 'adolescence' as a formal developmental period.

In the final section, "The Family," Ariès brings his argument full circle by tracking the way the family develops alongside the child and the ways in which the two concepts influence each other. In this section he also returns to representation and his earlier comments on family portraiture. Here he notes the emergence of the domestic and interior scenes where none existed previously to argue that, "an analysis of iconography leads us to conclude that the concept of the family was unknown in the Middle Ages" and that "the concept of family, which thus emerges in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is inseparable from the concept of childhood" (353). Finally, in this last section, he tracks the progression of this allegedly emergent concept of family through more conceptions.

As mentioned above, many of Ariès suppositions, indeed one of his core methods has prompted criticism. Hugh Cunningham, for instance, in his *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500*, points out Ariès' prominence and the critiques leveled against him. He notes that "all studies of childhood in the Middle Ages since 1960 have had a common starting point in Ariès claim that 'in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist'" (26) but that "medievalists never seem to tire of proving Ariès wrong" (27). Of Ariès' conclusions about the number of representations of children being contingent on their mortality rate, Cunningham notes two major criticisms. First, he notes that Ariès was unaware of medical sources that naturalistically portrayed children and second, that "Ariès was wrong to try to read off attitudes to childhood from images which are relevant to the history of theology or art, but not of childhood" (28). Cunningham also criticizes Ariès for his somewhat cavalier attitude about medieval parents and the death of children. He argues that "there is in fact a weight of evidence pointing in the opposite direction. There was grief for young children who died" (29). Cunningham insists that,

> It is clear that Ariès rash assertion that 'in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist' cannot be sustained. Nor would such a claim be true of the ancient world … the evidence is overwhelming that in both periods childhood was recognized as a separate stage of human existence. Moreover, the rather smaller body of evidence on actual child-rearing indicates a concern for even very young children, and provides examples of close and loving relationships, especially between mothers and children. (35)

Similarly, Peter Stearns in *Childhood and World History* notes the scholarly tendency to "dispute the idea that traditional Europeans lacked a conception of childhood as a stage of life, with some special needs. Secondly, they vigorously reject the notion that most parents were not affectionate with their children" (11). He goes on to suggest that the major flaw of Ariès (and even those who respond to him) is his tendency to argue to excess.

Beyond these qualms about his use of representation, Ariès makes several other unsupported arguments. While he does offer some corroborating evidence to his early representation based supposition, these are primarily in the form of journals and diaries. My reservation with this is that these are the diaries of the wealthy. Many of his early examples rely on nobility. These are then extended to apply to the rest of society. In his chapter on games and pastimes, for instance, he draws on a diary of a doctor named Heroard:

> We can imagine what a child's life was like at the beginning of the seventeenth century, what games he played, and to what stages of his physical and mental development each of his games corresponded. Although the child concerned was a Dauphin of France, the future Louis XIII, his care remains typical for all that …

> the royal children legitimate or illegitimate, were treated in the same way as all aristocratic children. (62)

The implication here, and in the rest of the chapter, is that the well-documented upbringing of Louis XIII corresponds to the upbringing of other nobility which, in turn, corresponds to the upbringing of more "normal" children.

In spite of these objections, I believe that Ariès' work in *Centuries of Childhood* has much to offer. Most significantly, I disagree with Cunningham's suggestion that "Ariès was wrong to try to read off attitudes to childhood from images which are relevant to the history of theology or art, but not of childhood" (28). I do not argue against his assertion that these sources are relevant to a study of theology. Cunningham, however, seems to overlook the fact that representation is a powerful locus of cultural invisibility and is inseparable from the culture that produces it. Furthermore, especially in the period in questions, the history of theology *is* the history of Western Society. Regardless the topic of that representation, or the ways that the image is manipulated or idealized, there will always be some element of this context. As cultural studies scholars Lorand B. Szalay and Bela C. Maday note in their description of what they refer to as "implicit culture," there are a host of "psychological dispositions, perceptions, and motivations which are shared by people with similar backgrounds and experiences and which lend organization and direction to overt behavior" (110). In this way, representation always has elements that gesture towards the contextual forces that are the concern of Ariès and the investigation I am undertaking in this dissertation.

Constructing Childhood

In this section, I will offer summaries of some of the prominent cultural forces that influence changes in childhood. Out of necessity, I have organized this section into sub-

categories centering on forces that are closely related. These should not be understood as discrete forces or objective categories. Indeed, the ability that these forces have to encourage change in the construction of childhood comes partially from the fact that they overlap. In each of the following sections, I begin with a brief exploration of relevant changes occurring before the fifteenth century and then devote more attention to those changes that fall within the periods associated with my case studies. While these sections are generally chronological, they are not intended to be exhaustive. Instead, I work to highlight those issues that are more relevant to the work I undertake in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. In terms of the case studies to follow, these sections have two functions. First, they give a more in-depth historical framing than otherwise would be possible in each chapter. Second, they build toward the categories of childhood that I establish at the end of the chapter which, in turn, are referenced and explored in the later chapters.

Demographic and Industrial Shifts

Since the fall of the Roman Empire, demographic shifts, especially those concerning movement to and from cities, have exercised a great deal of influence on societal constructions of childhood. Inextricably linked with these shifts, and helping to fuel them, are major changes in Western industry. In the aftermath of the fall, as Stearns notes, there was "growing instability, raids by nomadic peoples, and significant increase in epidemic disease. We can assume that children suffered in many cases" (45). From this point forward, Western civilization settled into largely rural, agrarian, forms of organization. While there still were large city-centers, the majority of the European population lived on farms or in small towns. Stearns goes on to argue that these communities were characterized by sharp distinctions in social classes and by a reliance on agrarian child labor (60). For children, these jobs included small chores such as "furrowing sod, clearing rocks, gathering wood, [and] herding sheep collectively with other

village children" (Colón and Colón 210). As boy children grew older, there was the possibility that they would be singled out to go to church schools as *clergons* (little clerics) or into the budding apprentice system (Colón and Colón 211). While girls in agrarian communities would begin with many of the same chores as their male-siblings, they were soon set, by age twelve or fourteen, into "apprenticeship" with women of the community and, most particularly, their own mothers, to "train for their future roles as household mangers" (Colón and Colón 212). According to Adam Jamrozik and Tania Sweeney, in their *Children and Society: The Family, the State, and Social Parenthood*, these contributions correlate directly with the value parents ascribe to them: the more the child contributes to the family, the more they are valued as family members (14). While a great many aspects of this lifestyle, particularly some of those still to be discussed, can be framed as negative or backward, historians (somewhat nostalgically) have pointed to some aspects that were positive, even better than in more modern communities (Stearns 62).

Beginning with the major city centers of the late Middle Ages, and increasing as populations continued to move away from farms, there was more opportunity for apprentice systems and education. As Colón and Colón note, "for the first time in recorded history, significant numbers of children in these changing societies could aspire to grow up to become other than soldier, clergymen, or peasants tilling fields" (205). This gradual move to cities, which increased dramatically during the Renaissance, and then exploded during the Industrial Revolution, directly influenced childhood experience. As Colón and Colón ague of this more formalized apprentice system, "the hard work and the long hours left little time for childhood play. In effect, the apprenticeship system halted childhood and bypassed adolescence—a concept

and term that in any case was centuries away from being conceived, expressed, or indulged" (220).

At the height of the Renaissance, the formalization of these apprenticeships could take a very different form. From the early sixteenth century through the beginning of the seventeenth, for instance, there were children's theatre troupes across Europe (Colón and Colón 351). Beyond the normal implications of the apprentice system, these companies have extended ramifications for children. Notoriety and new negotiations of gender were added to the balance of learning/exploiting inherent in the system and, as Edel Lamb notes, they "simultaneously produc[ed] a category of childhood that offers the player a distinct sense of being children and reclaim[ed] childhood in a positive light" (5). Stearns similarly notes that these families, often knowingly, sent their children to work for someone who would not be kind to the child (62). In many ways, this process served to separate child from parent, especially in terms of sentimental connection. While there were more opportunities for children, and while they escaped, at least in part, from farm labor, city life was hard and dangerous. Further, before industrialization and the rise of child labor, children were often too expensive to keep. As a result, the move to cities corresponds to an increase in child abandonment (Colón and Colón 322).

By the end of the eighteenth century, the importance and social significance of major cities was solidified as increased industrialization drew in people from the surrounding countryside. As Colón and Colón note, "the mechanical innovations of what we call the Industrial Revolution produced machinery and factories that forced a metamorphosis in the world's rural and urban landscapes and in the lives of the people who dwelled within them" (361).This, of course, would make the position of the child even more precarious. While it might seem strange that the dangerous and exploitative child labor fostered by the Industrial Revolution

blossomed so quickly, it is important to note that, as opposed to now, adults were much more accustomed to seeing young children working at difficult, tedious, and/or what might be considered menial tasks. Cunningham goes one step more with this logic. For him, the system thrived "because industrialization offered a solution to a problem which had long irked the elites of Europe: the idleness of children" (Cunningham 88). This move to industrial, socially sanctioned child labor would, simultaneously, largely dismantle the apprentice system as great quantities of cheap, exploitable labor became a necessity (Colón and Colón 362). Even those children that stayed at home were affected by these changes. As their parents and siblings went to work in factories, they were left with more responsibility and more domestic work (Colón and Colón 376).

More recently, with the relative decline of industry, the advent of a formalized middle-class, and improved modes of transportation, populations have moved away from city-centers in favor of the new ideal: suburban living. This shift, largely fueled by social, ideological, and legislative changes in reaction to child labor, contributes to a system in which children, as a source of income, became frowned upon. Further, "By the mid-nineteenth century, the construction of the economically worthless child had been in large part accomplished among the American urban middle class" (Zelizer 4-5). This shift corresponds and contributes to other major changes in the idea of childhood and for the actual experiences of children in issues ranging from familial structure, to perception of innocence, to education, to the development of "adolescence" as a viable and accepted developmental stage (Stearns 121-130).

From the apprenticeships of Early Modern England, to the factories of the Industrial Revolution across the West, to the eventual dismantling of both of these systems in favor of sentimentalized models based in education, industry has been a perennially powerful force in

shaping Western childhood. Significantly, these forces are never directly referenced in the selected works of Shakespeare, Maeterlinck, and McDonagh that make up my case studies. Indirectly, however, commentary on changing demographics and industry find their way into dramatic representation through more oblique references and through familial structures that reflect the influence of these forces. Ranging from the references to grain rioting in *Coriolanus* to lingering influence and dedication to the apprenticeship system in *The Blue Bird*, these changes in demographics and industry are present as powerful, and pervasive, forces.

Religion

As referenced by a number of scholars, including Stearns, Cunningham, and Colon and Colon, what is perhaps the single greatest force to shape Western childhood is the spread and schisms of Christianity. While there is much to note about other world religions, even in terms of Western Civilization, this sub-section is devoted to pointing to some of the issues raised by Catholicism and Protestantism that were particularly significant in terms of childhood. While there are many dates that could be pointed to as notable in the relationship between Christianity and Western childhood, of primary concern are changes brought by the Protestant Reformation (1517 and following), and the Council of Trent/Counter-Reformation (1545).

One of the most important influences Christianity has had on Western conceptions of childhood is the centrality of the baby Jesus and his earthly family. The stories of the baby Jesus and of familial duty, and the imagery of Mary and Jesus together, shifted Western conceptions of the family and child. As Stearns notes, Christianity, with its stories and ubiquitous artistic representations of the Christ child, gave more symbolic attention to a young child than any cultural system had ever offered before" (Stearns 47) and, in turn, exalted the child. The story of Christ also represents a shift in the relationship between parent and child as well as between God

and follower. Whereas pagan gods had demanded sacrifice, the Christian God is one who sacrificed for his follower's sake—and this while also representing, in Jesus, familial duty and obedience on the part of the son. Finally, and more generally, Christianity "stressed a divine element in every human being—soul, or some participation in the divine essence" which, because of the child's link with the divine, enhances parental responsibility for that child (Stearns 47).

Another influence of Christianity was in its intervention in and censuring of infanticide and child abandonment, as well as in the responses it encouraged in the face of infant death of every kind. These ideas, particularly the calls against infanticide, reflect the residency and awareness of the divine in the soul of even the smallest child. In and of itself, Christian calls against infanticide might not seem extraordinary. After all, most major religions "vigorously opposed infanticide, which had been widely practiced in many areas dominated either by secular or polytheistic beliefs" (Stearns 47). What the Church did do well, however, was setting up a system of accessible venues for parents to drop off unwanted babies or those that families did not have the resources to raise.

Regardless of the cause, religiously conditioned response to child death varies, as does scholarly understanding of them. Ariès, in the controversial passage noted above, suggests that parents were relatively numb, because of the frequency of such occurrences, to the death of a child. At points, he implies an almost callus or indifferent attitude to these events (39). Some scholars support these suppositions (at least to an extent), particularly with the spread of Protestantism after the Reformation in 1517. Colón and Colón, for instance, argue that "Protestant stoicism was expected of parents and children in all aspects of life and in death. Fear of death or grief in reaction to a bereavement were considered inconsistent with the belief in

God's grace and the assurance of an afterlife in heaven" (295). Cunningham, on the other hand, argues that this was more of an attempt at a protective or therapeutic measure rather than an actual lived practice. He asserts that "their grief is unmistakable" (50).

Perhaps the greatest influence of Christianity on social constructions of childhood is the concept of "original sin." This idea, which is renegotiated during the Protestant Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, and the Enlightenment, forwarded the notion that children are born with the perennial stain of Adam and Eve's defiance. At the beginning of Catholic practice, original sin could be wiped clean by infant baptism. These baptisms were to be given in the first week of life in an effort to complete the sacrament before the unfortunately frequent death of the child. This was important because, at least initially, unbaptized babies could not enter paradise" (Colón and Colón 205). On the one hand, this made for uncertainty and fear, particularly in the case of children that die before baptism. On the other hand, this meant that, once baptism was completed, fear over the child's mortality and inherited baseness was somewhat assuaged.

Under Catholicism, this idea had several significant repercussions. First, implicit in the notion is that infants are in need of the same salvation as adults which, by correspondence, raises the status of the young child—"they needed to be brought, as early as possible, into the Christian family of God" (Cunningham 25). Secondly, this suggested the need for a more "punitive" approach to children's discipline and the use of fear and "threats of damnation if children did not toe the mark" (Stearns 60). These concepts, which also fuel a broader concern with discipline and strict upbringing will be amplified further by the Protestant refusal, beginning with Martin Luther's *95 Theses* in 1517, to adhere to infant baptism as a viable method of cleansing of original sin. Ultimately, the Protestants viewed "religion to be a private matter, a personal dialogue between a rational human and God" (Colón and Colón 283). This, of course, precluded

the possibility of infant baptism in that infants are not capable of making an informed decision. As a result, original sin remained with the infant, leaving them sullied and, in a sense, in debt. In turn, the emphasis on punitive discipline and strict upbringing, begun with Catholicism, was heightened with the insistence that "parental duty was to produce good Christian souls, along with good, healthy human beings of limitless potential" (Colón and Colón 284). Further, "moral development began to be equated with good manners and general comportment … children's private and public expressions of good manners were inculcated with rigidly imposed discipline, consistent with the belief that indulging children was a cardinal sin" (Colón and Colón 284). In this way, primary parental metaphors included the child as a plant in need of care and shaping and the child as a young puppy or colt, in need of breaking (Cunningham 7).

At the beginning of (and even into) the Enlightenment (and, to a much smaller extent, even now), these ideas remained entrenched in practicing families, be they Catholic or Protestant. Beginning during the Enlightenment, however, "the church's influence waned concomitantly … intellectual thought was becoming humanistic, relegating to far lesser importance the church's primary concerns of spirituality, salvation, and life after death" (Colón and Colón 282). Ultimately, according to Cunningham, "there was a long-term, if interrupted, decline in belief in original sin, so that by the mid-nineteenth century it flourished only on the margins of Christianity" (58).

The influence of religion is felt strongly in the changing nature of childhood represented in the plays that make up my case studies. Of primary importance here is the somewhat precarious position of childhood innocence based on shifting ideas of original sin. In *The Winter's Tale*, for instance, Mamillius and Perdita are at the center of this debate (which was very much ongoing when Shakespeare wrote it). Throughout the first half of the play, the

characters are sharply divided in regards to their perceived level of innocence, from conversations about the impishness of the young boy's childhood to the perception of inherited guilt put on Perdita by Leontes. When met with the pastoral second half of the play, these concerns become secondary until they are finally dropped altogether in favor of similarly religious themes such as redemption and forgiveness. The influence of religion is felt even more strongly in plays like *The Pillowman*. In this work, religion moves from the status of implicit and assumed to one that is overtly and violently negotiated.

Philosophy and Literature

With the fall of the Constantinople in 1432 and the blossoming of literature and art in Florence, the Renaissance (as the narrative commonly goes) had begun. As Colón and Colón note, this period also represented a relative decline in church control: "intellectual thought was becoming humanistic, relegating to far lesser importance the church's primary concerns of spirituality, salvation, and life after death" (282). Similarly, artists demonstrated a renewed interest in the human figure, portraying with anatomical accuracy, and with "postures that expressed a range of human emotions and an almost haughty display of pride in being *human*" (283). Finally, there was a resurgence of subject and technique based on Greek and Roman examples 283). In Florence, the so-called cradle of these innovations, society and government exalted the child far above the place suggested by their inherent sinfulness in Christian theology. Beyond purely artistic or humanistic motivations, the Florencian outlook on children was informed by an awareness of their value to the state. Similar to Protestant ideas on the family as microcosm, "their proper upbringing was crucial to that future of the state, and their proper upbringing was crucial to that future. But more than this, the family was itself a prototype of the state, and properly-ordered and harmonious relationships within it would themselves be

manifested in similar virtues in the state" (Cunningham 42). This emphasis on the relationship between state and family led, subsequently, to a raising of the father-child relationship over that of the mother-child relationship emphasised by early Christian iconography. In this case the father, as ruler of the family, sought to reflect the power, organizational structure, and deference of the larger "family" of his kingdom or city-state. As the (predominately) male royalty ruled their people, so too did the father rule his family (42).

Cunningham also notes the importance of Italian Renaissance Humanist Desiderius Erasmus to shifts in contemporaneous, and future, ideas of childhood. In a series of books and pamphlets written in the first part of the sixteenth century, Erasmus drew on his own experiences and ancient models (as well as the writings of other Humanists) to offer advice on raising, educating, and disciplining children. Drawing on comparisons to dog and horse training and "tabula rasa" theories, he suggested that children begin (mentally) as shapeless lumps of clay that were still pliable. Drawing on this theory, he encouraged parents to focus on sculpting the "clay" of their child into a "godlike" creature (Cunningham 43). Erasmus emphasized the need for early education to train the powerful abilities of young children implanted by nature (43). While Erasmus wrote in Latin, and for an Italian audience, his works were translated and disseminated throughout Europe and were influential to Protestants and Catholics alike (45).

The Enlightenment is another period of massive change in Western civilization and childhood alike. Two major factors in these changes, and ones that bore directly on the lives of children, were the Industrial Revolution and various, often violent, political revolutions (Colón and Colón 361). The Enlightenment was also a period of major innovation and debate in traditionally held philosophical views. In terms of children, for instance, the previously held beliefs about the child's supposed corruption, weakened during the Renaissance, further declined

in the wake of thinkers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Locke, in his 1689 *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, posits the impossibility of the notion that human beings are born with innate principles. The main thrust of Locke's argument is not actually about the way children's minds function, but rather is an effort to disprove the concept of universally accepted principles among adults. He believed that innate principles are "*Not on the mind naturally imprinted, because not known to children, idiots, &c*. For, first 'tis evident, that all *children*, and *idiots*, have not the least apprehension or thought of them … it seeming to me near a contradiction, to say, that there are truths imprinted on the soul, which it perceives or understands not" (8, emphasis original). In other words, because children cannot perceive these supposedly innate principles, they must not exist. If they do not exist in children, there can be no innate, universally accepted principles in the larger society. The implicit point here is that if there are, as Locke posits, no innate principles hidden in the child's mind at the moment of birth, then assumed "universal" morals must be taught to us at some point—making us, at birth, a "blank slate."

Similarly, Rousseau, in his *Emile*, argues a distinction between "man" and "citizen" based on initial parental impulses and failures. His argument is founded on the notion that as newborns, we possess no cognitive abilities beyond the capacity for sensation. Then, when "we become conscious of our sensations, we are inclined to seek or to avoid the objects which produce them" (12-13). Eventually, children begin to understand which sensations are "good" and which are "bad" through experience and increased intelligence. Rousseau maintains that rather than exposing children to a balanced and varied array of sensations, both good and bad, we fail in parenting by subjecting children to "the bondage of habit," ultimately creating "citizens" instead of "men" (21).

These ideas run alongside an increased sentimentality on the part of parents. The rise of domestic sentiment appeared in familial connections at all levels and resulted in a more apparent emotional connection between the family as a whole and also in an increased recognition of the status of childhood. This sentiment also appeared in changes to naming conventions, including a gradual reduction in the process of reusing the names of recently deceased children. According to Stearns, "these shifts suggested the growing emotional attachment to children and a new belief in their individuality" (Stearns 76).

Beginning at the tail end of the Enlightenment and extending into the nineteenth century, the Romantic movement was also central to shifting societal ideas of childhood. In part, as mentioned above, the Romanic obsession with childhood can be seen as a reaction to the plight of the child in the face of the Industrial Revolution. As Cunningham notes, "Romanticism sought to recover for children a freedom of imagination which utilitarianism would have quashed" (67-68). In many ways, the Romantic approach to children can be seen as reflective of Locke and Rousseau's (and Erasmus) earlier writing on tabula rasa. One major difference, however, is that the Romantics "set out an ideal of childhood in which it was transformed from being a preparatory phase in the making of an adult to being the spring which should nourish the whole life. If adults do not keep the child in them alive, they will become dried up and embittered, Scrooges" (Cunningham 68). There is, in the Romantic representation of childhood, a certain duality in terms of portrayal. On the one hand, there is the direct representation of the child, often in terms of the plight of that child in the newly industrialized world. On the other hand, however, they focused on childhood as an idea, as a space in society and in themselves, as a cherished part of adulthood. As Cunningham notes,

> people began to think of the self as an interior space to which they alone had access, and in its formation childhood and the memories of it were crucial. Childhood, and all it came to stand for, began to have placed upon it a new significance, marked by new interest in children's bodies and minds and the way they developed. Adult interference with natural development was regarded with horror. (70)

In contrast to earlier historical moments, and philosophers such as Erasmus, Locke, and Rousseau in particular, Romantic reform of childhood did not come with any sort of manual or approach. Indeed, the limits of their influence are somewhat difficult to trace if only because it is largely (but not exclusively) a middle class, male, genre. As Cunningham notes, "Children could more easily be reared in the spirit of Romanticism than by the letter of it" (71). Ultimately, Cunningham concludes, Romanticism was much more influential as a body of ideas than as an active force in day-to-day child-rearing within the middle-class home.

For Romantic poets this theme was a nostalgic rewriting of their own childhood memories. Under the influence of Romanticism, people began to understand the self differently, imagining a private "interior personal space" in which childhood and memories of childhood became a dominant, and formative, influence (Cunningham 69). The Romantics also focused on comparisons between child consciousness and nature. Of this focus, in *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, Plotz notes, "to identify childhood with nature means that children are conceived as existing free of the social net. Like flowers and breezes, like birds and stones, children exist outside of the context of cultural institutions—of schools, of the state, and especially of their families" (14). Cunningham adds, "at its heart was a reverence for, and a sanctification of childhood … a belief that childhood should be happy, and a hope that the

qualities of childhood, if they could be preserved in adulthood, might help redeem the adult world" (72). These notions are, in many ways, tied into constructions of tabula rasa used by Locke (though with less severity and utilitarianism) and Rousseau. Where they are different, however, is in the actual "blankness." In both Locke and Rousseau, there is a sense that the child's consciousness is literally a blank slate to be written upon. For the Romantics, however, the child's mind is conceived of as more of a "vault" that contains incredible powers of perception:

> Within the Romantic discourse of essential childhood, the mind of the child is set up as a sanctuary or bank built of valuable but socially-endangered psychological powers: idealism, holism, vision, animism, faith, and isolated self-sufficiency … it is through these powers of consciousness, that the solitary child becomes, especially in the writings of Wordsworth and Coleridge, both the symbolic representative of the creative mind and the repository of creative power to be reclaimed by the retrospecting adult self. (Plotz 13)

This powerful capacity for perception is aptly demonstrated in Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode." In it he writes of memories in which everything he sees, most notably nature, emanates a "celestial" light. The problem, and what becomes the dominant theme of the ode, is that "the things which I have seen I now can see no more" (140). In other words, the perceptive powers that the child has are lost during growth and can only be remembered in dream.

From the end of Romanticism through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, these ideas would and do continue to influence societal conceptions of childhood. As children were more widely considered to be pure and innocent, in need of guidance and protection, and deserving of a protected (and relatively idle) period of development, so to do family structures

alter. As these ideas gain more strength, and meet with more changes in the twentieth century, such as war, televised media, and increased awareness of more insidious dangers to children and toward the end of the century, with computers and Internet, the social necessity for protecting children increased.

The focus on tabula rasa consciousness, childhood innocence, and latent perceptual abilities demonstrated by these theorists is particularly important to the plays of Maeterlinck and McDonagh. As mentioned in the section on religion, *The Winter's Tale* (and *Coriolanus* as well) can be framed as a battle ground between divergent views on original sin. By the time Maeterlinck is writing, however, the influence of Locke, Rousseau, and the Romantics is strongly evident. In *The Blind* and *The Intruder*, the perceptive abilities and innate innocence of children seems a foregone conclusion. Indeed, it is how Maeterlinck manipulates these tropes that make his work so important to this study. Similarly, McDonagh's work is founded on a systematic and institutionalized sentimentalizing of childhood that is a significant expansion of these earlier ideas (in innocence and vulnerability if not in mysticism).

Science and Technology

There are, of course, innumerable developments in technology that have directly or indirectly influenced the childhood experience in Western society. From the invention of the steam engine to the development and popularity of plastic products, technology and childhood is a subject that deserves a book if its own. There are, however, a few developments that, especially in terms of my research, demand special consideration. Namely, these are the invention of the printing press, developments in medicine (taken generally), and the invention of digital technology and communication. It should be noted that, though technology has a tendency to lend itself to positivist narratives, progress is not necessarily better for the life of the child. As

new ideas and technologies are able to protect children from much of what harmed them previously, new dangers are, in turn, created by these technologies. As Stearns notes, "there were, of course, some new problems. Modern equipment posed new accident hazards for children. Household appliances could be dangerous, and cars were a menace" (Stearns 125).

I am offering nothing new by pointing to the significance of the printing press in terms of Western history and its children. It is necessary, however, to briefly touch upon several of the salient features of this development. First, and most generally, the advent of the printing press meant more access to more literature for more people. This, in turn, increased literacy levels among people, particularly, at the beginning, those educated by the Church. This new emphasis on reading can be said, in turn, to refocus Western society toward a point of view that places education as a dominant value. More specifically, particularly regarding the relatively unchallenged cultural dominance of Catholicism, "the development of the printing press increased the number of books that could be published, providing the means to explore new ideas and test ancient philosophical and aesthetic" (Colón and Colón 282).

Of course, the most direct influence that the printing press had upon the experience of children derives directly from the fact that the new availability of relatively cheap, reproducible materials led to, and even created, a new genre of book: the education tract. Now, for the first time, those writers and philosophers deemed marketable, along with those would-be philosophers with the final means and institutions such as the Church (especially in terms of translated Bibles, conduct books, and catechisms), had an efficient new way to spread their ideas to a public that was rapidly becoming more literate (45).

Advances in Western medicine also significantly impact the experience of childhood. In the Middle Ages, especially outside of urban centers, medicine was administered primarily by

women. These women, who learned their craft through domestic apprenticeships drew on knowledge from several generations of relatives and was expected, in turn, to pass it on to her daughter (should she have one). These women acted as midwives, they provided relief for "fever, headache, swelling, toothache, bleeding, and general neuralgia" (Colón and Colón 212), and they eased the pain of those near death. Regardless of their efforts, death rates, particularly among children, were staggering. In the fourteenth century, for instance, a woman had, on average, five live births. Of those children, around fifty percent would die before the age of five (Colón and Colón 226). Even by the Renaissance, these figures were not much improved. In the seventeenth century, for instance, England saw an average mortality rate of 250-350 children, per 1000 live births, under the age of one. France, in the same period, had a rate of approximately 200-400 children per 1000 live births (Cunningham 90-91). Even toward the end of the eighteenth century, the death rate for children remained appallingly high with children constituting, of overall deaths, between 40 and 60% being children. In England, 33% percent of total deaths annually were children under two. Setting aside war, crime, and pandemics such as the plague, the major causes of these deaths were fevers, tuberculosis, and smallpox (369). As Western society approached the twentieth century, however, advances in protocols and medicine began to play a major role in the life expectancy of newborns. In 1892, for instance, Pierre Budin opened a postnatal care clinic in Paris where mothers and children were examined, treated, and educated about, among other things, hygiene and nutritional needs. As Colón and Colón note, "Budin's work contributed to a significant reduction in infant mortality—from 178 to 46 per 1,000 population in five years" (399). With his successful clinic as a model, his ideas and techniques quickly spread across Europe. Moving into the twentieth century, major medical developments,

including those in vaccination, anesthesia, drugs, and disease modalities/cures dramatically decreased the child mortality rates (481).

This drop in child mortality rates is significant not only for the fact that fewer children were dying. As more children survived past their first few years, parents were able to move beyond the pragmatics of continual conception and, as a result, fertility rates and family sizes began to decline across the Western world. This fact, as I have gestured toward briefly, "makes each child proportionally more precious" (Zelizer 11). While this does not necessarily suggest that parents did not love or grieve for their children previously, the relative rarity of child death and smaller families sizes made it possible to grow more emotionally attached with each child, and to spend more time, previously proportioned, with each child. These changes, in terms of chronology, run roughly alongside those Romantic literary responses to the industrial revolution and increased government interest in child welfare, making the decrease in child mortality a pivotal component in the move toward the sentimentalized child more common today. It is also important to mention that medical technology plays in the life, the experience, and the social perception of the child in other ways. Advances in contraception, for instance, as well as technologies such as the ultrasound have all inspired change and debate that directly concerns children.

While I will discuss the impact of digital technologies on the experience more fully in the final chapter, it does need pointing out here that the perception and experience of the Western child has been, and still is, being radically transformed by digital technology including, most particularly, the development of the Internet. Over the past half century or so, more public entertainments, such as going to the movies, have largely given way to domestic entertainment, such as that provided by the family television (a topic for an entire dissertation on its own), and

then into private entertainment as computers and the Internet have moved into dens, studies, and bedrooms. As a result, children have, in a sense, put cracks in the protected childhood created for them earlier in the century by gaining access to the adult world and adult ideas (not to mention adult dangers) (Buckingham 74).

There are, of course, two sides to the influx of these technologies. On the one hand, as Buckingham notes, "we are moving into an era of increasing fragmentation and atomization, in which notion of common culture, the public sphere and participatory citizenship have effectively been eroded" (81). On the other hand, however, he notes a new emphasis "on the liberating potential of new media technologies: they are seen to increase the democratic control of communications, to transform consumers into producers, and to enable new voices to be heard and new forms of identity or subjectivity to be represented" (81). As John Palfrey and Urs Gasser argue in their *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*, there are also very real safety concerns with children and these technologies: "First, there's the psychological harm that can come from exposure to harmful images or from having damaging experiences online … second there's the physical harm that can be inflicted offline by someone who finds his victim online" (85-86). Finally, digital technology has shifted the dynamic between child and adult. While the child is still very much in need of protection they are, at least for the time being, also more knowledgeable about these technologies than those who are trying to protect them.

The advances in medicine and digital technology that I have outlined here resonate most profoundly with the work of Maeterlinck and McDonagh. As mentioned above, the most persistent legacy of medical advances and their increased ability to prevent the death of children, is a corresponding rise in attachment: as infant mortality decreases, its occurrences becomes

more tragic. Both Maeterlinck and McDonagh trade on this shift in sentimentality. Maeterlinck, writing at a time when this shift was ongoing, plays on fears of child death by combining complete stillness with persistent references to the frailty and illness of the children. These references, combined with his almost gothic settings, raise the specter of child death for the audience. McDonagh similarly plays on the presumed health and safety of children by tapping into the newest ailment of the protected childhood: child predators. Fears over child predators and other, similar, dangers are compounded by the fact that they oftentimes stem directly from the second technological innovation mentioned here, the Internet. In my case study on McDonagh, I will suggest that the entirety of his play, of the performed child abuse in it, may be framed by the anxieties of adults in response to these technologies.

Education and Institutional Structures

Though mentioned briefly above, changes in the education systems require particular consideration. Interacting with, and informing these changes, are the greater power structures that, at different (though not discrete) points and to varying degrees have shaped the experience of Western society and its children.

While most Europeans in the Middle Ages were organized, at least nominally, under the banner of a nation, governmental oversight, beyond the local lord or landholder, was limited. There was not, however, a great gap in authority. Where the state was lacking in control over the everyday lives of its people, the Church provided structure, morality, social guidelines, and, significantly, educational opportunities for children across social class. Even peasant children (or at least boy children) had access to some degree of education as the Church established parish schools in an effort to teach these children about, most importantly, the Bible. Beyond this, young boys, even peasant boys, had the possibility of being singled out to become *clergons*.

During this process the boys "studied and mastered Latin in order to compete for scholarships to institutions of higher learning. They frequently studies for the priesthood and were ordained" (Colón and Colón 211). This is not to suggest, however that education was yet a major concern. These opportunities were limited in time and topic area and had little consideration for girl children.

The Renaissance saw a number of changes to educational and institutional structures. Across Europe educational systems, both religious and secular, and fueled by the printing press and Humanist ideals, expanded. Reformation thinkers especially relied on the printing press to expand education and, subsequently, religious upbringing by distributing printed catechisms (Colón and Colón 285). Later, in the Counter Reformation, education began to take on some of the characteristics that are familiar today. These changes, fueled by the rise and ideas of the Jesuit order (formed in 1540), centered around an expanded period of stricter education. Beginning at ten years of age, boys would generally attend school for six years. The curriculum, rather than being focuses solely on religious studies, shifted to a more Humanist bent as school boys learned grammar, poetry, history, and oratory as well as allotted physical education periods. Students were also, for the first time, grouped according to individual progress and content mastery and were further characterized by interclass rivalries. Perhaps most important is that these Jesuit schools were free and open to all social classes with the exception, of course, for young girls who primarily remained home-educated (Colón and Colón). Beyond the general significance of an expanded and (at least partially) institutionalized educational system, some of these changes had further ramifications for Western society. One, the formalized division of children into what we would now call grades, is far from benign. While convenient and efficient, this process also delineates and defines—now, rather than being grouped as a whole, children

were defined more strongly as child and as a *specific* type or level of child. This also puts these ages and skill groups into a hierarchy in which, at each stage, the child is acknowledged as having moved one step closer to adulthood that awaited the end of their tenure and one step further away from the childhood that began it. That this system was free and expansive also meant that the population of educated, literate citizens in Europe was on the rise. This, in turn, allowed for more flexibility of ambition and (within boundaries) more upward mobility.

The Renaissance also saw the beginnings of new ideas of government that would extend into the Enlightenment. While the church remained a powerful force in the everyday lives of people, this period saw the rise of a more structured, more centralized, more controlled city state with, in many cases, ruling monarchies. By around 1600, for instance, "monarchs autocratically controlled England, France, Spain, and Russia" (Colón and Colón 282). With these new structures and governments comes a change to children. For the first time the child begins to be recognized as a resource for the future of the state. Monarchs realized that today's children would grow to become tomorrow's workers and (perhaps most importantly) tomorrow's soldiers. Because of this, governments began to extend their influence further into the domestic sphere. According to Cunningham, this renewed emphasis on the child influenced the entirety of the domestic experience: "the family was itself a prototype of the state, and properly-ordered and harmonious relationships within it would themselves be manifested in similar virtues in the state" (42).

In the Enlightenment, many of these ideas, reinforced by the writings of Locke and Rousseau, continued to expand. With the popularity of these writings, however, there rose a competing pedagogy to the more traditional notion of child-rearing and educating as a process of gardening. These older ideas drew on terms such as "weeding" and "bending twigs," etc. In the

Enlightenment, however, the variations of tabula rasa espoused by Locke and Rousseau suggests that children were "endowed with a capacity for development and growth" which was more closely akin to "Nature than God. The art of child-rearing became one of hearkening to Nature, giving free reign to growth, rather than bending twigs to a desired shape" (Cunningham 58-59). As in the case of delineated grade levels, this renewed interest in children as blank slates also served to, at least to a degree, "mark off childhood as a separate and special world" (65). This special world saw, for the first time, literature designed especially for children (65). The education system (with help from government intervention) would, during this period, become even more prominent in the daily lives of children and families as children, gradually removed from the harsh factory conditions to which they had recently been subjected, needed a new institution to fill their time. As Cunningham notes this meant a transformation in childhood "from being a time of initiation to the workforce to being a time for schooling" (90). Also during this period, building on earlier governmental intervention by strong monarchies, this period saw a rapid increase, particularly between 1750 and 1860, in government programs and intervention in childhood with, especially, an increase in government mandated schooling (Cunningham 122-123). Ultimately, according to Linda Pollock in her foreword to *Picturing Childhood: Constructions of Childhood between Rousseau and Freud*,

> By the end of the [nineteenth] century, primary-school education was compulsory and free, most children were removed from the world of fulltime employment, specific child protection legislation was enacted, and national societies for the prevention of child abuse had appeared. An ideal of childhood as a state to be protected and prolonged had become entrenched for middle-class children and extended, as a right, for the first time to the poorer children. (xv)

It should also be mentioned that many of the economic and governmental systems that eventually guaranteed the movement of children from harsh factory conditions to educational settings were those same forces that helped expose them to those situations in the first place. As industry became a central part of Western society, particularly in Western capitalism, these children, to the eyes of government and business people, were an incredibly valuable, and easily exploitable source of labor.

By the twentieth century, as Viviana Zelizer notes, the twin forces of government and education had helped to establish the "construction of the economically worthless child" (5). Childhood had moved (and was still continuing to move) from a time of economic initiation (in the traditional sense) to a protected sphere in which many of the formative years took place in a different type of government control, the public school. As Stearns notes, "schooling reduced parental controls over children, obviously in favor of agents of the state" (74). Gradually, during this period, these formative years, this protected space, expanded in length. Eventually, this protected space contributed to the idea of childhood expanded to include and adolescence period which allowed for a semi-protected transitional period for children.

According to Cunningham, "Until the nineteenth century policies had been drawn up with a concern either for the child's soul for the future manpower needs of the state. Both of these concerns remained in place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but they were joined by a new one, a concern to save children for the enjoyment of childhood" (137). As Stearns notes, "Modern governments wanted some voice over childhood to help improve health, to encourage adequate supplies of troops and workers; to assure political loyalty, mainly through guiding school curricula; and to protect against certain forms of abuse" (73).

Recent years have seen a continuation of these trends and ideas. In most Western countries, the compulsory system expanded even further and became more standardized. Governments are, in different ways, also working to extend their control. In terms of censorships, for instance, governments have, since the advent of digital technology, pushed ideas like v-chips and Internet blocking software. Yet, as Buckingham notes, despite this search for a 'technological fix', national governments appear ever more incapable of regulating the commercial corporations that now control the global circulation of media commodities- not least those aimed at the children's market" (5).

Like changes in industry, the presence of educational shifts in dramatic representation is somewhat more subtle than the presence of shifts such as religion and technology. Generally, the educational system, and changes to this system, have resulted in an institutionalized process of defining and shaping childhood. From formalized grade levels to the introduction of age appropriate content, the modern educational system operates as a largely government overseen process of controlling the idea of childhood. While the changes brought by the Counter-Reformation are contemporary to the work of Shakespeare, and the beginnings of the more formalized and modern system are present by the time Maeterlinck is writing, these changes might best be represented by McDonagh. In *The Pillowman*, beyond the more general definitional process of the educational system, these changes are present in the "boying" of Michal through his enrollment at a special school (a relatively recent innovation) and also the pervasive and menacing government control of everyday life.

Categories of Childhood

As noted above, my approach in writing this summative history has been built around tracing notable thematic trends that have shaped the Western child throughout history rather than

settling simply for more traditional period demarcations. Traditionally, scholars have offered an archetype child for each period: the *cleregon* for the Middle Ages, the apprentice or little-adult for the Renaissance, and so on. These labels are, however, fraught with problems; most notably they condense all of the inherent difference and change in a given period into one (usually male) construct. I do, however, recognize that there are advantages to such an approach. Most notably, reducing each period into one, evocative, idea facilitates comprehension and debate. They are, in other words, efficient shorthand. In trying to bridge my approach with these practicalities, and with the knowledge that my project also necessarily reduces difference to a certain extent, I will instead opt for a more abstract method of labeling, using what I am calling "threads." The idea with this approach, is that there is a duality and a mutability with each of my threads. Each one refers to some of the more prominent discourses and technologies of a given period while also encapsulating a set of characteristics, or a thread, that can be found, to varying degrees, in the children of other periods. I have selected these threads not only for this duality, but also in that they speak to some of the influence that each period specific construct has on the adults of the same period. In short, rather than positioning one model of childhood as indicative of a given period, I instead offer threads that speak to overlapping, negotiated, and ongoing constructions.

The first of these threads is the "invisible" child. This label is designed to get at, on the one hand, the lack of what, in today's terms, would be considered childhood. On the other hand, this label is designed to gesture to the general lack of structures and individualized concern for the child. Finally, it points to the relationship of the adult to the child in that it speaks the absence brought by rampant child mortality. This is not to buy into the notion that the parents did not care about the children. Rather, it is intended to suggest that the lack of formal classification and the pragmatics of periods in which this child is prevalent, such as the Middle Ages, necessitates a

certain absence of child. In some ways, the "invisibility" of Middle Age childhood cannot exist without the contrasting models that come directly after. Put another way, the lack of a formal period of childhood and institutionalized expectations for childcare fail to have meaning until later structures, influenced by the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, come into common practice.

Some of the major elements of the Renaissance, including the expansion of the apprentice system, the rise of Humanism, the development of the printing press, the continued influence of the Catholic and Protestant Churches, and the beginnings of more organized and pervasive systems of government can be characterized by my second thread: the "curried" child. This thread speaks to the expectations on the child, the way they are raised, groomed, and shaped with strict expectations. The child is curried by the family, curried by the state, curried by the apprentice system, and so on. Further, this thread speaks to the *process* of child-rearing which effects the parents' engagement in the process. As the child is raised with more diligence, so too are the parents required to spend more of their time on that task.

In terms of the Enlightenment, which is frequently pointed to as monumental in the shifting patterns of childhood, I have settled on two threads. The first, the "abject" child, is intended to gesture to the child's role as they are pulled from the more traditional apprentice system and become factory workers. In large part, it is these conditions that lead into the second concept thread, the "latent" child. This idea speaks to the other discourses, most famously represented by Locke and Rousseau, who, with increased vigor, frame the child as being tabula rasa. It also speaks to the Romantic concern with the child's "vault" of perceptive ability that is worn away by society and destroyed by the industrial city.

As the child moves into the twentieth century, it moves toward the thread of "perfect" childhood. With this idea, the move from economically useful and inherently sinful child moves to the precious, sentimentalized, economically useless child of that period. Finally, as this archetype becomes more and more idealized and is, in turn, influenced by digital media, it moves to the "digital" thread of childhood. This is a child at the heart of contemporary Western consumerism and technology, one who is simultaneously more vulnerable and far more knowledgeable than the parents. This is the child who can navigate the world of the next generation while simultaneously working to "kill" those traditional narratives and structures attributed to it.

The threads of childhood that I have established here should not be taken as discrete or codified. In fact, I have approached the concept of childhood with threads because of the way overlap and mix to create the larger "weave" of childhood. A child from the twentieth century can have some element of the "curried" child while the "invisible" child of the Middle Ages is not without its aspects of "perfection." In a sense, the thread of one type of childhood is braided with threads of the others.

In the following chapters, these threads of childhood will appear, interact, and even renegotiate as they are variously emphasized by the ongoing forces of history and society. While I have loosely attached them to periods in this explanation of them, they remain groupings of shared traits rather than discrete and period specific labels. As such, while a representation of childhood in a case study might only fit with one or two of these categories, representations in, for instance, McDonagh, will incorporate and revise each of them multiple times. Furthermore, each of these threads is intended to point up the relationship between artistic representation and history. The topically arranged summaries that I have offered in the second part of this chapter

represent one side of this relationship: I have used a historical survey to theorize the influence of historical and social forces on childhood. In the chapters that follow, I will use these threads to work at this same idea from the other direction. More specifically, I will read a selection of dramatic representation in terms of these threads to offer theories about what these representations say about their moment of creation that moves beyond the available historical information. In this way, these ideas speak to the notion that dramatic representations of childhood can act as the playscript of Western History. They incorporate the narratives that shape society on all levels, they comment upon them, and they react against them.

CHAPTER II: SHAKESPEARE AND THE CURRIED CHILD

A child, if he or she managed to escape the staggeringly high infant mortality rates of sixteenth century England, could expect a childhood full of struggle and danger. Undoubtedly, there was some improvement in the day-to-day life and long term prospects of children. There were, for instance, advancements in medicine and education by the end of the Middle Ages. Similarly, the shifts brought to childhood by the Humanist tracts of Desiderius Erasmus ensured that children were receiving more attention, if not necessarily kindness. The fact remains, however, that Early Modern England, particularly in the newly burgeoning and crowded city, offered a wealth of hazards for the growing child. A child in Shakespeare's plays also faced an existence filled with uncertainty and peril. From violence committed directly to their person, to the pain of having family members disgraced, go insane, or die, however, the Shakespearian child seems fated for even more suffering than their real world counterparts. This is not a fate relegated solely to those child characters in tragedies; in histories and romances, child characters often suffer in some way. Even in the cases where the child character ends up happy, the absurdity, abandonment, and lack of agency of these characters contributes to a system in which they they must often work through trauma above and beyond what an average character might be expected to endure.

On the other hand, these represented childhoods often enjoyed a period of growth and play that is largely divorced from the stark reality of childhood in Early Modern England. While they are doomed to suffer, many are also showered, at least temporarily, with the love and support of the family unit. In many ways, this brief period of peace resonates with more recent conceptions of childhood, including the notion that the child is most valuable as a sentimental figure, one that gives pleasure and fulfillment to the parent. While many of the children in

Shakespeare's plays have the hopes of families and kingdoms pinned on their future labor, they remain, while in that peaceful bubble, an object of affection. As Camillo notes in Act I, Scene 1, of *The Winter's Tale*, it "is a gallant child; one that indeed physics the / subject, makes old hearts fresh: They that went on / crutches ere he was born desire yet their life to / see him a man" (*Winter's Tale* I.i).

In this chapter I will explore these theatricalized Shakespearian childhoods via *The Winter's Tale* and *Coriolanus*. I have chosen these two plays over others not only for the child characters, but also for the way childhood is struggled with and embodied by the adult characters. A significant portion of this reading will be dedicated to comparisons between Shakespeare's staged version of childhood and the real-world inspiration for these images. I will argue that, in some senses, Shakespeare is drawing on prominent notions of childhood from the period, including the framing of the child as a "curried" little-adult through apprenticeship, responsibility, and an emphasis on Protestant discipline. From there, I will explore the way he moves beyond these ideas and beyond the stark reality of Early Modern childhood to create a stable childhood for these characters in which they are "raised" in front of the audience.

There is some scholarship on the function of children in Shakespeare's plays. R. S. White, in *Innocent Victims: Poetic Injustice in Shakespearean Tragedy,* asserts that children are used to make specific points because, in tragic scenes, their status as victims is instantly accepted by the audience (46). Similarly, Ann Blake, in "Children and Suffering in Shakespeare's Plays," focuses on them for their status as innocents and the effect of this innocence on the audience (294). Finally, Janie McCauley, in her "The Function of Child Characters in Shakespeare's Plays," argues that children in each of the genres serve a different function, from sympathy to hope. While these are productive approaches to childhood, they do not move beyond the actual

moment of crisis for the child character. At least as significant as the climatic points is the period leading up to them, when the child remains innocent and happy.

In my reading of these characters, these early segments often act as a safe space in which the child is "raised" in front of the audience. An audience is usually given a wealth of contextual clues when introduced to an adult character. From the way the character is dressed, to the way that character speaks and acts, to the political and familial relationships establishing during the exposition and course of the action of the play, adult characters are often designed in such a way that the audience immediately has some impression of them (whether correct or not). In contrast, children characters are only, as White and Blake point out, defined by their innocence. Because of this, I argue, Shakespeare builds in brief domestic scenes that act to raise the child for audience, to let them know what type of child this is. Even in cases where the child does not participate in onstage play and raising, adults often reference the child and share anecdotes about that child's growth and mannerisms.

Here "raise" has multiple meanings. First and foremost, I am talking about raise in the sense of bringing-up or rearing a person (*OED* 11, d). Raise can also refer to the actual act of creation, "to bring into existence" (*OED* 9, a) and to "restore (the body, soul, etc., of a dead person) to life" (*OED* 2, b). These definitions speak to the larger processes at work. In addition to the fact that the child is being reared on stage in these early, domestic moments, the child is being created from the blank slate of the page with the "soul" and "life" necessary to facilitate later tragedy. This is even more so the case when the child performer is considered. Similarly, raise can also refer to the arousal of passions, to "instigate (a person or persons) to do something or to some feeling" (*OED* 4, a). This too, is apt. While raising the child as a character, the

playwright is also preparing the audience for feeling and action, even if it is only in shared pathos and condemnation for the later perpetrators of ill deeds.

By drawing on the reality of Elizabethan childhood while simultaneously minimizing the dangers to such a childhood, Shakespeare is able to raise a child that is capable of bypassing the period's pragmatic response to death. In manipulating, and moving beyond, period conceptions of childhood, Shakespeare is able to write the child as a powerful tool for the transmission of ideas, and commentary on other characters, while creating a larger dramatic payoff when the child ultimately suffers. I will use this argument to suggest that Shakespeare's representations of children can be understood as valuable historical resources that reflect contextual negotiations of religion, philosophy, and industry, while simultaneously building on emergent notions that become more prevalent in the Enlightenment. In this, these representations can be understood as a palimpsest: each child character is a parchment from the previous text has only been "partially erased" and the revised notions of childhood have "been superimposed on [the] earlier writing" (*OED* 1). These child characters bear the weight, and the traces, of the childhoods and the changes that come before and those that are still happening.

Childhood in Elizabethan England

In Chapter 1, I outlined a number of forces that influenced social conceptions of childhood in Elizabethan England. In this section I will first draw those narratives together to track the change from the predominately "invisible" thread of childhood prevalent in the Middle Ages to the Early Modern emphasis on "curried" childhood. This reading will point up important characteristics of childhood that Shakespeare manipulates in creating, and torturing, many of his child characters. From there, I will move into a discussion of the sixteenth century English family as a prototype of the state in order to point up the larger significance of parent-child

relationships, especially those involving members of the aristocracy. Finally, I will explore the variety of ways in which Shakespeare addresses these ideas, from his creation of child characters above and beyond his source material, to his use of them to build moments of powerful dramatic impact.

By the end of the Middle Ages, Europe was experiencing major population shifts from feudal estates and small villages to city centers. With this shift came new opportunities for apprenticeships and education, while also bringing with it new dangers. Though the changes were slow, this move meant that children were facing an expanded range of career and life opportunities. Especially for lower class male children, who could previously expect to be confined to the status of agrarian peasant, soldier, or minor clergy, these cities offered a wealth of possibility, both good and bad (Colón and Colón 205). The mere fact that more formal centralized governments, with their necessary bureaucracies, were being established offered a new career path for even children with at least some church education. In many ways, these new opportunities meant less "childhood" for children. With cities came the expansion of the apprentice system. Because this change allowed and/or forced children to enter the workplace before they otherwise would, it served to reduce childhood play and bypass the adolescent period. In a sense, children in the apprentice system moved, in the space of a day, from child to adult, from the unstructured play and mischief of the city child, to the responsibility and discipline of a working professional (220).

In largely Protestant countries such as England, these changes were met with an emergent notion of strict upbringing derived from Reformation ideas and, in particular, changes in the concept of Original Sin. Previously, under the authority of the Vatican, the child was baptized within the first few days of his or her life. In this case, Original Sin, inherited from Adam, was

assuaged—the child was, in effect, saved and was beginning life with a clean slate. The Protestant refusal to engage in infant baptism, however, meant that the child remained stained by Original Sin. This, coupled with the fact that the child was too young to engage in a meaningful personal relationship with God meant that there was no way for the child to move beyond Sin. Parenting strategies and disciplinary measures reflected these changes. Ultimately, the emphasis on punitive discipline and strict upbringing, though present already, was heightened by the insistence that "parental duty was to produce good Christian souls, along with good, healthy human beings of limitless potential" (Colón and Colón 284). Because of this spiritual mandate, the comparison of parents to gardeners became a primary metaphor of parenting: the child was considered a plant in need of shaping (and sometimes a horse in need of breaking) (Cunningham 7).

By the sixteenth century, the education system in England had seen considerable expansion, and it continued to grow throughout the period. This change was not confined to England but, instead, was taking place across Europe with expanded religious and secular educational systems that were fueled by the printing press and Humanist ideals. Reformation thinkers especially relied on the printing press to expand education and, subsequently, religious upbringing by distributing printed catechisms (Colón and Colón 285). Beginning in the sixteenth century, this expansion was met by the Counter Reformation. During this period, the Jesuits introduced a number of structural characteristics that remain a core part of contemporary education in the West. Included in these shifts was an expanded period of education for young boys with a new emphasis on Humanist inspired topics over those largely religious ones of previous generations. Students were placed into groups of the same age, given grades, and

encouraged to compete against one another. Increasingly, this system began to become both free of charge and open to all social classes (Colón and Colón 304).

The formalized division of children into grades is far from benign. While convenient and efficient, this process also delineates and defines; rather than being grouped as a whole, children became strictly defined as child and, moreover, as a *specific* type or level of child. Further, this puts these ages and skill groups into a hierarchy in which, at each stage, the child is acknowledged as having moved one step closer to adulthood that awaited the end of their tenure and one step further from the childhood that began it. That this system was free and expansive also meant that the population of educated, literate citizens in Europe was on the rise. This, in turn, allowed for more flexibility of ambition and (within boundaries) more upward mobility.

Protestant morality and the establishment of more centralized and organized secular governments combined to create another important influence on the life of the child. Protestant discipline fostered a domestic structure in which the familial structure was aligned with spiritual duties and expectations. This shift saw a move towards the notion that a child's duty to God was reflected and practiced by the duty paid to the head of the house. Similarly, it was increasingly seen as the duty of the good Protestant father to use his household as a nursery of the church. In this model, it is through discipline that the father would train the child for service to God (Cunningham 46).

This idea was expanded to include the responsibility of the father to raise the child as a good citizen of the state, because "good order in the state was dependent on good order in the family" (Cunningham 54). This change was met by a new interest, on the part of the state, in the lives and upbringing of children. The newly centralized and autocratic, not to mention militarily focused, states of the Renaissance required a continual supply of tax payers, of bureaucrats, and

of soldiers. Governments, more than ever before, began to realize that long term continuance and supremacy required investment and interest in making sure children, upon reaching adulthood, would meet these expectations. In this way the proper upbringing of the child "was crucial to that future of the state … but more than this, the family was itself a prototype of the state, and properly-ordered and harmonious relationships within it would themselves be manifested in similar virtues in the state" (Cunningham 42). In this case, the father, as ruler of the family, sought to reflect the power, organizational structure, and deference of the larger family of the kingdom or city-state. As the (predominately) male royalty ruled their people, so too did the father rule his family (42).

The convergence of these ideas in sixteenth century England created an almost contradictory construction of childhood. On the one hand, childhood was diminished by the very real adult expectations put on children by apprenticeship, Protestant morality, and the notion that their familial role was crucial to the success of both the state and of the church. On the other hand, this period saw a marked increase in formal recognition of childhood as an important biological and formative period. The formalization of the education system, and especially the organization of that system into grade level for the first time defined, both a concept of childhood, and the specific stages of childhood that must be passed through to become not-child. In other words, the place of child was defined, in contrast to the idea of adulthood, by the establishment of concrete benchmarks and structures required to attain the latter title.

Furthermore, this period saw an increased recognition of childhood in the commercializing of playtime. While toy stores began to appear as early as the thirteenth century, toys remained both rare and expensive—only wealthy families would be able to shop in such establishments (Colón and Colón 208). During the Renaissance, however, fueled by the move to

cities and the increase in disposable income in the average family, toyshops specializing in cheap toys were becoming more and more common. Along with these changes continued a grim reality: the death rate of children was still staggeringly high. In the seventeenth century, for instance, England saw an average mortality rate of 250-350 children, per 1000 live births, under the age of one. France, in the same period, had a rate of approximately 200-400 children per 1000 live births (Cunningham 90-91). This sad fact added to the paradoxical construction of the Early Modern child. On the one hand, as noted above, more attention than ever was being paid to the idea and implications of a structured childhood as well as, to an extent, the emotional value of children. On the other hand, parents still had to be prepared for the unfortunate likelihood that their children would die. How they reacted to these deaths is somewhat less clear. By the end of the Middle-Ages and the beginning of the Early Modern, some suggest that those in Protestant countries demonstrated an almost cold detachment in the face of these tragedies. Colón and Colón, like Ariès, maintain that "Protestant stoicism was expected of parents and children in all aspects of life and in death. Fear of death or grief in reaction to a bereavement were considered inconsistent with the belief in God's grace and the assurance of an afterlife in heaven" (295). As noted in Chapter 1, many scholars, including Cunningham, disagree with this assessment, instead arguing that the coldness can be perceived as a coping technique (50).

Most commonly, the child of this period is referred to archetypically as a little or miniature adult. This child/not-child is one who dresses in adult clothes, who has proper manners, who is expected to practice a trade, and who is expected to be a good citizen of both the family and the state; yet, this child is still without agency, and still without control over his or her life. While the label of miniature adult does speak to the side of childhood influenced by the apprentice system, Protestant discipline, and the conception of family as microcosm of state, it

fails to speak to the sentimentality and familial relationships that, as Cunningham points out, were undoubtedly present. In other words, the significant flaw of this model is that it focuses on the aspect of discipline and duty over the fact that childhood was becoming recognized as an important concept. Instead, I offer the concept of the "curried" child.

My usage of "curry" here is specifically intended to reference the process of grooming livestock (especially horses) (*OED* 1, a). I chose this thread for the fact that period texts, including those by Erasmus, refers to the process of raising children in terms of both horticulture and horse-breaking. Beyond this, however, to curry an animal speaks to both tenderness and discipline. On the one hand, it means to "rub down, or dress with a comb" (*OED* 1,a). On the other hand, it can mean, "to beat or thrash one's hide for hum, give a drubbing to" (*OED* 3). In other words, the elements mentioned above and, additionally, the rise of humanism, the development of the printing press, and the continued influence of the Catholic and Protestant Churches helped to shape the notion of parenting as a process of currying in which the child is continually shaped and disciplined to meet strict standards. As the child is raised with more diligence, so too are the parents required to spend more of their time on that task. As I move forward to my reading of *The Winter's Tale* and *Coriolanus*, this thread, along with my greater focus on Shakespeare's onstage raising of child characters, will help to nuance conceptions of the child as the narrative moves toward tragic climax. In turn, this nuanced conception of the child will help to point out the effectiveness of the dramatic climax in terms of real-world fears about child mortality.

It is important to note that the children in Early Modern England and in Shakespeare's plays cannot be reduced solely into the "curried" thread of childhood. The forces acting upon society, and upon childhood, work over time. They negotiate with each other, and with previous

cultural changes to shift social norms. At any given time, the concept of childhood is a negotiation of these forces, of previous forces ongoing, and of forces just beginning to influence society. In Shakespeare's work, for instance, there are many backward-looking references to the "invisible" child that was prevalent during the Middle Ages. This child can be seen in youthful servants, such as Lucius in *Julius Caesar*, to the apprentice like Master Gunner's Son in *Henry VI, Part 1*. These are children who are meant to blend into the background, and are not referenced in terms of more formal concepts of childhood. They are, in some ways, non-entities. It is also possible to draw comparisons between Shakespeare's child characters and forward-looking, later models of childhood. There are certainly qualities of the abject to many of his children while others, such as Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, embody the renewal and hope that might be found in the latent or perfect threads of childhood. Regardless, curried childhood, with its mixture of discipline and lightheadedness is the prevailing model in Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare's Childhoods

Shakespeare takes up the "curried" child in many different variations. His children move from playful and worldly knowledgeable to the strictest definition of the severe little adult. Regardless of portrayal, however, most of Shakespeare's curried children are doomed to suffer in some way. Indeed, Shakespeare's child characters are often his noblest and those most doomed to suffer.

There is some question in the work of other scholars as to what degree Shakespeare actually represents real world childhood. One side of this debate, typified by Ann Blake in her "Children and Suffering in Shakespeare's Plays," suggests that he is less than accurate at portraying Early Modern childhood as it was. She argues that Shakespeare does not draw on "the contemporary religious and educational sense of the imperfections of childhood. These children

are tender-hearted and loyal, brave, and idealistic. Moreover, they are free from adult vices and emphatically innocent" (293). In support of this claim, she draws on some of the same notions of grooming or breaking associated with childhood at the time. For Blake, a more accurate representation of contextually informed childhood would be Caliban.

On the one hand, Blake's allusion to Caliban is apt. Prospero, after all, seeks to raise Caliban with language and with culture: he rewards him when he succeeds and punishes him severely when he fails. On the other hand, however, this comparison is fraught with problems. Perhaps most significantly, in that she confuses discipline, order, and stoicism, for a lack of sentimentality, emotional well-being, and affection, Blake seems guilty of judging Early Modern childhood with contemporary sensibilities.

Regardless, Blake does acknowledge the significance of child characters and the frequency of their suffering. She points out that, "With one exception, William Page, who has the good luck to live in a comic world in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, all Shakespeare's named children are fated to suffer. Their youth, weakness, and innocence ask for protection but they meet instead with cruelty and violence" (295). Blake connects these child deaths to earlier miracle plays and suggests that these moments are intended to offer a new perspective on the larger plot through an invitation of the audience's pity (301-304).

Janie Caves McCauley, in her *The Function of Child Characters in Shakespeare's Plays*, asserts that Shakespeare did in fact represent a number of prevailing cultural discourses related to childhood. McCauley begins from much the same place as Blake: with the notion that children were inherently sinful and in need of grooming and harsh discipline. From there, however, she focuses on the result of this practice in society. For McCauley, it is because of this perception of childhood, that children were encouraged to "grow up as quickly as possible to take [their] place

in the adult world" (16). Further, she argues that the use of the not-child figure in Shakespeare is specifically in keeping with conventions: "in Renaissance England the real child was expected to conduct himself like a man" (18). She goes on to note that, in Shakespeare, this perception finds its way into child characters who learned eloquence and precision at a young age, were precocious, and "sharp-witted" (30). In direct contrast to Blake, McCauley maintains that the elements that seem to strip the parent-child relationship of sentimentality actually invest it with more. She notes that the figure of the child was steeped with symbolic value to the parents: "The child was, by way of association, a source of tender emotions for his parents. Renaissance writers frequently allude to the child as a copy of his parents, one stamped as a coin with their image" (43). Ultimately, McCauley concludes that, "whereas his predecessors and contemporaries usually employ children in their plays as mere objects of pity or laughter, Shakespeare uses the child character throughout his career as a means of articulating important recurring themes" (235).

McCauley argues that children in each of the genres have specific functions that cater to larger, genre specific themes. In the histories, for instance, their primary function is to dramatize the "consequence[s] of disorder" and, ultimately, to gain audience sympathy (5). Beyond this basic idea, the children in the histories can serve to defy, and even thwart, those forces that attempt to repress them and others. McCauley also suggests that the children of the comedies are primarily used to represent an "inverted master-underling relationship." (5). This reflects the balance between appearance and reality that runs through the comedies (5). In the tragedies, children "represent the force of good that intimidates and ultimately destroys evil in a group of plays that center on the struggle between goodness and evil" (5). Finally, in the Romance comedies, McCauley observes that children serve as a force of renewal and reconciliation (5-6).

While each of these scholars raises significant issues in terms of the way children function in Shakespeare's plays, each is limited in that the focus on the children is primarily in terms of a convenient plot device that sets innocence against some form of corruption. What is lacking in this construction is a broader consideration of contextual child and the way that Shakespeare is able to reflect, nuance, and transcend the bleak reality of childhood before he re-incorporates this reality in a climactic moment of child suffering. In constructing childhood as he does, Shakespeare is able to create a heightened or idealized version of real-world childhood that simultaneously speaks to the realities and fears of the period while also demonstrating and manipulating sentimental connections and desperate hope.

In the early scenes of hope, Shakespeare creates and stages an ideal domestic environment, freed from reality. In these staged domestic situations, the child is often everything (and more) that the conscientious family might hope for. They are mature and act as little adults, while also finding time for bits of mischief. Furthermore, these childhoods are safer than real-world childhood. Until the later rupture of happiness, these children play and grow free of fear, hunger, pain, and so on. In these moments, Shakespeare raises his child characters before the audience: they see the child acting out both the tenderness and discipline of the proper curried child on the way to adulthood. Because this childhood is relatively secure, however, Shakespeare may conceivably get the audience invested in a way that the real world practicalities of infant mortality do not allow. This, in turn, feeds into the later dramatic suffering of these sympathetic figures.

Coriolanus and *The Winter's Tale*

Written toward the end of Shakespeare's career, *Coriolanus* is traditionally understood in terms of its central conflict between patrician ideals and plebian necessities. The play is set in the

early Roman Republic, soon after the expulsion of the Tarquins. The city is experiencing a grain shortage and the plebians are suffering. War erupts with a neighboring tribe, the Volsicans. Caius Martius leads the Roman army to defeat his rival, Tullus Aufidius, at the city of Corioles and is granted the name Coriolanus for his victory. Upon returning to Rome, he is greeted as a hero and offered the consulship. Tradition dictates, however, that he go out and humbly plead with the plebeians for their endorsement. At first, they endorse him, until two tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius, convince them that Coriolanus is an enemy of the people. When they tell him of the plebeian's change of heart, Coriolanus rages against the idea of popular rule. Brutus and Sicinius declare him a traitor for his words and Coriolanus is driven into exile.

In his desire for revenge, Coriolanus goes to his erstwhile enemy, now camped at Antium. Aufidius is planning a new campaign against Rome and welcomes Coriolanus to the cause. Aufidius quickly becomes jealous, however, as Coriolanus' reputation soon overshadows his own. The two soon lead their army to Rome where Coriolanus ignores the pleas of his closest friends. Finally, Virgilia, Volumnia, and Young Martius (his wife, mother, and son) successfully convince him to turn back. Coriolanus and Aufidius return to Antium, where Coriolanus is hailed as a hero. Aufidius, slighted, declares Coriolanus a traitor and has him killed.

Because of the way *Coriolanus* is adapted from Plutarch's *Lives*, and because of the way it reflects contemporaneous social issues, the script is particularly significant. In "'There is a World Elsewhere': Tragedy and History in *Coriolanus,"* Patricia Meszaros notes that an overall theme of the play is "the steady onwards roll of history" (274). This movement is reflected in the politics of Rome as it goes through the transitions that span *Coriolanus*. She goes on to argue that this thematic element might indicate that,

> *Coriolanus* may have been Shakespeare's attempt to translate a sense of momentous political change in England into dramatic terms, following the Renaissance habit of using the past both to illuminate the present and to distance it for objective consideration. What the play reflects, in my view, is Shakespeare's peculiarly acute vision of the way in which political history—the fate of the *polis*—and tragedy—the fate of the individual—are interrelated in such a period of momentous change. (274)

One of the often cited examples of the relationship between concurrent events and the Roman story is the Midlands food riots of 1607. This took place toward the beginning of James I's reign (connecting with the political change emphasized by Meszaros), at a time of "exceptionally bad harvest and soaring food prices, a cycle that had begun in the last years of Elizabeth and which the Poor Law Statutes of 1598-1601 only exacerbated" (Parker 34). It is also important to note that these revolts, rather than being led by disaffected gentry as was frequently the case, were, in fact, peasant uprisings. The target of the riots was the enclosure system, which forced small holders off of their property (Parker 35).

The connections between *Coriolanus* and contextual events indicate a desire on Shakespeare's part to include relevant elements that audience members would recognize, and react to, from day-to-day life. In this spirit, contextually informed representations of children, particularly with their noted visibility in society, are important. The fact that Shakespeare chose to add an Elizabethan construction of child along with his other contextual adaptations is significant. If the child were presented in an older construction, a construction perhaps more closely aligned with classical constructions of child, his arguments, and pleas, might be less effective. While Young Martius only has one line, his presence, and his childhood is evoked at

several significant points. The first is in the Act I, Scene 3 discussion between Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria. In the scene Valeria describes an episode in which Young Martius is "playing:"

> *Val.* A' my word, the father's son. I'll swear 'tis
> a very pretty boy. A' my troth, I look'd upon him a'
> We'd'sday half an hour together; h'as such a confirm'd
> countenance. I saw him run after a gilded butter-
> fly, and when he caught it, he let it go again, and after
> it again, and over and over he comes, and up again;
> catch'd it again: or whether his fall enrag'd him, or
> how 'twas, he did so set his teeth and tear it. O, I
> warrant, how he mammock'd it! (*Coriolanus* I.iii)

In response to this somewhat disturbing story, Volumnia responds, "One on 's father's moods." And Valeria adds, "Indeed la, 'tis a noble child" (*Coriolanus* I.iii). First, Volumnia's response constructs Young Martius as "little adult" through her comparison of his moods with the moods of an adult. More significant, however is that this exchange follows a passage in which Voliumnia describes her upbringing of Martius in terms of "danger," war," "cruelty," and "man-child" (*Coriolanus* I.iii)

Young Marius' most prominent appearance, when read alongside these earlier references, demonstrates how important it is that he be portrayed as a little adult. In Act V, as Coriolanus' army sits at the gates of Rome and as the other supplicants have been turned away, Volumnia arrives with Virgilia and Young Martius. While he is disturbed by their arrival, and his mother's

chastisement, Coriolanus remains determined until his young son, acting well beyond his years, threatens action:

> *Vir.* Ay, and mine,
> That brought you forth this boy, to keep your name
> Lying to time.
> *Boy*. 'A shall not tread on me;
> I'll run away till I am bigger, but then I'll fight. (*Coriolanus* V. iii.)

Of this interaction, Ann Blake argues,

> [Young Martius's] brave words in a barely understood situation raise a smile and break the tension of the scene with an easily recognized moment when parents are amused by their child, and indulge him. Out of this pathetic humour emerges Martius's symbolic role. As Coriolanus struggles to remain unmoved by ties of country and family the presence of the child makes it less and less possible for him to maintain an unnatural distance from his mother and her demands. (300)

In this moment, Young Martius is presented as an adult, defender of Rome. Coriolanus is faced with a younger version of himself. This, coupled with the fact that Early Modern children were frequently clothed as adults and the boy's threat to fight against his father, seems to remind Coriolanus of his place, of his duty: In other words, he recognizes his sins because he sees a littler version of himself, identical in clothing, temperament, and upbringing, who wants to fight against him.

Interestingly, this construction of child is not confined to the tragedies. In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare constructs a similar child. Further, as in *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare begins *The Winter's Tale* by placing that child into a protected, stable childhood and raises him in front of

the audience. *The Winter's Tale* begins with the King of Sicilia, Leontes, asking his childhood friend, King Polixenes of Bohemia, to extend his stay in Sicilia. Polixenes is initially reticent to stay until Leontes' wife, Hermione, pleads on her husband's behalf. Polixenes capitulates and Leontes is immediately stricken with jealously and suspicion. Leontes decides to kill Polixenes and orders his advisor, Camillo, to poison him at dinner. Instead, Camillo warns Polixenes and they flee Sicilia. Next Leontes accuses his wife of adultery and suggests that the baby she is carrying is Polixenes'. He throws her into prison while he sends messengers to the Oracle at Delphi for confirmation of his suspicions. In the meantime, Hermione gives birth to a girl, which her friend, Paulina, brings before the king. Enraged, Leontes sends his advisor Antigonus to kill the child. After he leaves, the messengers return from Delphi to reveal that the child is, in fact, his. In quick succession, Leontes' young son, Mamillius, succumbs to a sickness and dies while Hermione faints and is reported dead. Elsewhere, Antigonus abandons the newborn child on the shore of Bohemia before being eaten by a bear.

The second half takes place sixteen years later and revolves around the son of Polixenes, Prince Florizel, as he falls in love with a country girl named Perdita. Unbeknownst to anyone but the old sheep sheerer who rescued her, Perdita is, in fact, Leontes daughter. After Polixenes forbids his son from courting Perdita, the two young lovers, aided by Camillo, flee to Sicilia. Polixenes follows and there is a reunion between he and Leontes in which Perdita's true identity is revealed. Finally, Paulina unveils a "statue" of the long deceased Hermione which comes to life to reveal Hermione, very much alive.

As in the case of *Coriolanus*' Young Martius, Shakespeare positions Mamillius as a curried child: simultaneously in training for adulthood and maintaining the innocence and purity of youth. References made by other characters in the play speak to both aspects of this

childhood. In Act I, Scene 1, for instance, Archidamus refers to Mamillius as "gentleman." In response, Camillo speaks to the aspect of purity, calling Mamillius "gallant child" and noting that he "makes old hearts fresh" (*Winter's Tale* I.i). Later, as Leontes is musing over his jealously, he refers to Mamillius as a copy of himself: "They say it is a copy of mine. Come captain / We must be neat; not neat, but cleanly, captain" (*Winter's Tale* I.ii).

Similarly, Mamillius' onstage actions are an embodiment of both aspects of this childhood. In the same passage that Leontes begins to compare himself physically to Mamillius, he also turns to the metaphor of an egg. The first time he references an egg is directly after a reference to the cuckold's horns he suspects that he is wearing: "Thou want'st a rough pash and the shoots that I have,/ To be full like me; yet they say we are/ almost as like as eggs; women say so—(*Winter's Tale* I.ii). In this moment, and in the rest of the passage, he doubts the truthfulness of women. In turn, this casts doubt on not only the side-by-side comparison of the two, but also on the subject of paternity, adroitly raised by the use of "egg." Shortly after this passage, when questioned by Hermione and Polixenes, Leontes begins a passage about the deceptiveness in seemingly benign objects and actions. Toward the end of this passage, Leontes comes back to "egg," this time citing an idiom:

> *Leon.* Mine honest friend,
>
> Will you take eggs for money?
>
> *Mam.* No, my lord, I'll fight.
>
> *Leon*. You will? Why, happy man be 's dole! (*Winter's Tale* I.ii)

"To take eggs for money," according to the *OED*, is "to be put off with something worthless" ("Egg" 4, a). By quoting this idiom, Leontes is not only pointing up the duality of deception and motherhood that he did a few lines earlier, he is also setting up an interaction very like the one

between Young Martius and Coriolanus. Just as Young Martius proclaims to his father, in front of an army, that he would fight against injustice, so too does Mamillius proclaim, in front of noble company, that he too would fight injustice. In this moment Mamillius, like Young Martius, becomes not only the perfect example of both little-adult and curried child, but also becomes his father, now in temperament as well as in appearance. Unfortunately, whereas Young Martius' actions shake Coriolanus from his path, Mamillius' only serve to encourage Leontes.

At the beginning of the next scene, Mamillius embodies the other side of the sentimental child. He enters with Hermione and her attendants to Hermione's exasperated remark that Mamillius "so troubles me,/ 'Tis past enduring (*Winter's Tale* II.i). Mamillius quickly demonstrates the reason for his mother's exasperation as he rambunctiously tells a story and flirts with the attendants. Here Mamillius balances his more sentimental, innocent, childlike framing with a more adult interaction. When the first lady approaches to play with him, Mamillius protests that "you'll kiss me hard and speak to me as if/ I were a baby still" (*Winter's Tale* II.i). When he moves onto the next attendant, he is charming and even flirtatious as he jokes about her appearance. Finally, when asked to tell his "wisdom" to the assembled ladies, he moves back in the direction of the childlike, choosing a tale of "sprites and goblins" over a sad story (*Winter's Tale* II.i).

Throughout these passages, the audience is presented with an abbreviated version of Mamillius childhood that speaks to the expectation that he be properly curried. At some points, such as the playfulness of his Act II, Scene 1 entrance and his later storytelling, Mamillius epitomizes childlike innocence that slides into the mischievousness of youth. At other points, such as the conversation with his father, he demonstrates the bearing and resolve of an adult. For both Mamillius and Young Martius, these passages allow for a "safe" childhood. The children

remain essentially innocent, sentimentality is permitted, responsibility and discipline are demonstrated, and there is no real danger.

Playing Child

Once the stable childhood is staged, however, Shakespeare does not simply move to the suffering that ultimately follows. Instead, he takes the conceptions of childhood established by these representations and traces it through adult actions and characterizations. In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare is able to use a combination of memory, characterization, and self-indictment to summon a less wholesome side of child than that represented by Mamillius. In Act I, Scene 2, for instance, Polixenes and Leontes joke to Hermione about the antics of their shared youth. Polixenes opens the exchange temporally:

> We 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. (*Winter's Tale* I.ii)

Here, Polixenes not only begins the story of their childhood, but describes them in terms of timelessness. On the one hand, Polixenes frames the idea of childhood as everlasting and eternal. On the other hand, he seems to speak with a certain wistfulness—where once he assumed childhood to be eternal, now he realizes that it was fleeting. In this way, he also foreshadows the doom that is to come: the eternal boyhood connection of the two Kings could be no more than a temporary, naïve dream. Hermione responds by asking, "was not my lord / the verier wag o' th' two?" (*Winter's Tale* I.ii). Significantly, in this joking jab, Hermione inadvertently plants some of the suspicions that will fuel Leontes childish antics to come: notably, wag has connotations beyond basic mischievousness. It also implies a degree of the effeminate and homosexual

(*OED*). In this moment then, Hermione simultaneously "boys" her husband in front of his old friend and (perceived) competitor, while also suggesting that Polixenes is more manly. In the following line, Polixenes responds with mock innocence as he describes the innocence and purity of their upbringing. In doing so, however, he draws parallels to the characterization of Mamillius seen earlier:

> *Pol.* We were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' th'
>
> sun,
>
> And bleat the one at th' other. What we chang'd
>
> Was innocence for innocence; we knew not
>
> The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream'd
>
> That any did. Had we pursu'd that life,
>
> And our weak spirits ne'er been higher rear'd
>
> With stronger blood, we should have answer'd heaven
>
> Boldly, "Not guilty"; the imposition clear'd,
>
> Hereditary ours. (*Winter's Tale* I.ii)

Like Mamillius, raised before the audience as a perfect curried child, Polixenes jokingly suggests that he and Leontes not only were innocent, but also were incapable of even imagining wrongdoing.

In this passage, both friendship and shared childhood are reaffirmed. Almost immediately after it, however, Leontes becomes suspicious of his wife's success at convincing Polixenes to extend his stay. As Leontes begins to contemplate the possibility of infidelity, he turns toward jealously and rage. The importance of childhood to these suspicions, first raised by the conversation with Polixenes, are reinforced by Leontes' conversation with his son about

paternity. Later in the scene, he muses over the fact that some say he and Mamillius' noses are copies. Which, in turn, makes him begin to suspect that Hermione's coming child is not his own.

In these moments, the memories and actions of both Kings allow them to temporarily become child, to very different results. As John Pitcher notes in his introduction to *The Winter's Tale*, "Shakespeare also examined the connections between childhood and adult regression. This is seen first in Polixenes, when he recalls his childhood with Leontes" (33). Beyond the fact that it helps set Leontes on the path to suspicion and jealously, Polixenes' journey back is largely innocuous. In the case of Leontes, however, his journey back to childhood ends up being all too real, and full of consequence: "Leontes outsmarts himself. His lie—that he had gone back involuntarily to his own pre-pubertal moment (green coat, muzzled dagger)—was supposed to hide his ugly thoughts. But that image of himself as a powerless little boy is what this grown-up man has indeed made himself" (Pitcher 35). In contrast to Polixenes, then, Leontes' reminiscence has only demonstrated the failings of his character and, in turn, increased his suspicions.

A comparable adult embodiment of childhood, with similar results, can be seen in *Coriolanus.* As I have previously noted, the physical presence of Young Martius has a powerful effect on the narrative of *Coriolanus*. There is, however, another "child" present in the script: Coriolanus himself. Every time he speaks to his mother or of his mother, or every time she speaks of him, the heroic Roman hero is reduced to the status of a child. In turn, he exhibits childlike behavior that adversely affects his own life even more profoundly than the pleas of his son.

That he has childlike tendencies does not go unnoticed in other scholarly treatments of the script. According to Frank Kermode's introduction to the *Riverside* version of the play, Coriolanus has been described as "a schoolboy crazed with notions of privilege, and possessed of

a ‘demented ideal of authority’” (1440). The childish qualities present in Coriolanus’ character and actions are most evident in his relationship with his mother. Kermode writes: “Coriolanus’ subservience to his mother is a mark of immaturity not only in family relationships but also in elementary politics: he is the ungoverned governor, the ill-educated prince” (1441).

Throughout the play, Volumnia is somewhat obsessed with maintaining her domestic control of Coriolanus. Indeed, the exchange between Coriolanus and Young Martius would not be possible except for Volumnia’s efforts to extend the domestic sphere to the battlefield. There are two conditions present in this scene that allow Volumnia the ability to extend this influence. First, the composition of the scene itself acts as a sort of negotiated, liminal space. On the one side is the Volsican army with little to stop its advance. On the other side is Rome, civilized and structured. The confrontation between Coriolanus and his family takes place between these two forces. Because of the representational power of each force (order vs. conquest, etc.), the space in between them becomes a site of the indeterminable and of potential. Secondly, Volumnia is able to enact her domestic control because she literally brings the trappings of the domestic sphere out into the liminal space between army and city. Specifically, Volumnia brings all of Coriolanus’ closest family members with her. During the confrontation, he is approached, in succession, by his mother, wife, family friend and, finally, his son. With this move, Volumnia takes everything that makes the domestic sphere what it is (except private) and extends it onto the field of battle:

> *Cor*. My wife comes foremost; then the honor’d mould
> Wherein this trunk was fram’d, and in her hand
> The grandchild to her blood. But out, affection,
> All bond and privilege of nature, break!

> Let it be virtuous to be obstinate.
>
> What is that curtsy worth? Or those doves' eyes,
>
> Which can make gods forsworn? I melt, and am not
>
> Of stronger earth than others. (*Coriolanus* V.iii)

In this moment, as Coriolanus is surrounded by those who are dearest to him, the domestic manifests and allows Volumnia and, especially, Young Martius, to be able to change his mind. According to Kenneth Muir, in his *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays*, Coriolanus' ultimate reaction to their pleas is a major departure from the Plutarch source text. He notes: "Whereas Plutarch's Coriolanus is thinking only of the shame of surrendering to his mother, Shakespeare's hero knows that the surrender will lead to his own death" (251). He goes on to point out that in Shakespeare, Coriolanus is portrayed more sympathetically. Further, Plutarch condemned Coriolanus for giving into his mother, while Shakespeare "tacitly approves" (251). Here again, it is possible to see the influence of contextual models of discipline and familial duty. Coriolanus' Early Modern duty to his mother is even stronger than his anger with Rome.

Beyond the basic influence of family members, however, Volumnia is able to use the extension of the domestic sphere to enact a "re-boying" of Coriolanus that she has been building to throughout the play. In Act I, Scene 3, for instance, she tells her daughter-in-law that that she "was pleas'd to let him seek / danger where he was like to find fame. To a cruel war I sent him…I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child than now in first seeing he had prov'd himself a man" (*Coriolanus* I.iii). Soon after, when the story of Young Martius' encounter with the butterfly is related, Volumnia points out the similarities between that action and that temperament and that of Coriolanus. This offers another disturbing revelation into the relationship between Volumnia and the notion of the child or childlike. This passage offers,

obliquely, that children can be counted on to cause destruction and to kill—but that they must be directed and harnessed in these efforts. Coriolanus is no different. Later, after reports of his triumph and his injuries reach Rome, Volumnia shows less regard for his actual health and happiness than she does for what it will buy him in society:

> *Vol*. I' th' shoulder and I' th' left arm. There will
> be large cicatrices to show the people, when he shall
> stand for his place. (*Coriolanus* II.1)

Volumnia, then, is not afraid to manipulate her son and others, particularly through the use of childlike vulnerability. This type of manipulation is heightened by her interaction with him during the climatic plea—even though it has already been made clear the extent to which she holds the authority and is able to control Coriolanus, she gets on *her* knees to him and plays the supplicant. In this moment, she inverts their relationship to reassert her own—the absurdity and impropriety of his mother in supplication reaffirms the fact that it is *his* duty to heed her wishes. As she points out before he finally relents, "There's no man in the world more bound to's mother" (*Coriolanus* V.iii).

The Suffering Child

In *The Winter's Tale* and *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare begins by representing an onstage childhood that can be understood as both safe and perfect in terms of contextual realities. In these staged childhoods, the child characters play and grown. They are both precocious and steeped in the ideal Protestant notion of the curried child. Then, Shakespeare takes the threads established in these moments and assigns them to adult characters. In the case of some, like Polixenes, the traits of childhood are sentimental and innocuous. Coriolanus and Leontes, however, embody those aspects of childhood that are far less desirable: they are petulant,

emotional, and they act out without consideration or thought of possible repercussions. Because of this, and in keeping with the strict disciplinary ideology of the time, they must be punished.

The repercussions for their actions happen at two levels. First, they directly suffer in that their actions cause their own misery: loved ones die, public shame is earned, or both. Beyond this, however, there actions lead to the destruction of the stable childhoods established earlier. In that they embody the "dark" side of childhood, and that they do so from positions of power, these scenarios may be seen almost as pedagogical: if the child remains undisciplined and predisposed to traits that are childlike in worst of ways, then the purity, protection, and potential of childhood becomes ruptured. At the very least, the children paying for the childish behavior of their progenitors suffer. As McCauley notes of *The Winter's Tale*, "it depicts the death of a child as punishment to the protagonist for his inhuman actions towards his family" (195).

The safe childhood and potential of Mamillius ruptures most noticeably. In Act III, Scene 2, as the trial of Hermione approaches its climax, Cleomenes and Dion return from the Oracle with Apollo's verdict, which the officer of the court reads:

> Hermione is chaste;
> Polixenes blameless; Camillo a true subject; Leontes
> a jealous tyrant; his innocent babe truly begotten;
> and the king shall live without an heir, if that
> which is lost be not found. (*Winter's Tale* III.ii)

At first, Leontes is unable to accept that, in his fit of childish rage and jealousy, he was mistaken. As he begins to denounce the oracle, however, a Servant enters to announce that, "The prince your son, with mere conceit and fear / of the queen's speed, is gone / … is dead" (*Winter's Tale* III.ii). As his mother stands accused of infidelity, he takes to sickness and quickly dies. This

tragedy makes Leontes realize that he has been wrong, that he has been acting the child and that he is being punished for it. It is too late; not only is Mamillius dead and Perdita lost, but Hermione swoons and is ultimately pronounced dead.

Though he does not die, Young Martius similarly has his protected childhood ripped away in payment for his father's childish behavior. Young Martius' protected childhood is ruptured by the fact that he must become adult in the scene with his father. While he has been talked about in terms of the curried child throughout the play and, indeed, Volumnia and Virgilia observe those characteristics that will benefit him as he grows, he is a figure of childlike play. When brought before his father, and his father's victorious army, however, he acts far from the child. Instead of being scared, he proudly proclaims that "'A shall not tread on me; / I'll run away till I am bigger, but then I'll fight" (*Coriolanus* V.iii). In this moment, recognizing the childishness of his father's actions, he fulfills the destiny suggested by Volumnia: he becomes his father. Significantly, the mothering that happens after this is not directed at the physically immature Young Martius. Instead, Volumnia chastises the grown man with the mentality and spite of a child. With the motherly shaming that he receives from Volumnia and the act of Young Martius effectively taking his place as protector of Rome, Coriolanus turns back.

Thought Young Martius is alive, and he has changed the course of history, he must still suffer. First, he must now live in the adult world. Though still young in body and education, his actions were that of an adult and there is no returning to innocence. Second, he must suffer in that his father remains a traitor to Rome. Worse still, as illustrated by Volumnia and Virgilia earlier, he even looks and acts like his father. Finally, even the small consolation of having his father survive his campaign is lost: led by Aufidius, Coriolanus is murdered for his betrayal.

All, however, is not without hope. If Shakespeare is pointing to the less desirable qualities of childhood as that which can destroy the perfect ideal childhood, he is also pointing to the power of childhood to redeem. Mamillius, though dead, becomes a powerful catalyst for the redemptive second act. As McCauley notes, "Although the child Mamillius has died as innocent victim of his father's guilt, the effect of his charm is felt throughout the play" (203). Elsewhere, she maintains that is specifically Mamillius' death that "imitates a course of action that finds its culmination in penitent husband's reunion with the wronged Hermione" (196).

More significant still is the fact that Perdita takes the opposite trajectory of her now deceased brother. Rather than moving from protection and innocence to suffering, she moves from suffering to a state of purity and rejuvenating power. According to McCauley, "When this infant grows to maturity she will, significantly, fall in love with a prince who is her dead brother's age and who, therefore, in a sense counterbalances his loss. Thus, although a child is the victim of his parent's evil in the first part of the play, it is also a child who becomes the means of renewal in the second part" (McCauley 203). Thought she began abandoned and grew happily (albeit with a life of lies), her act of restoration in turn restores her own idyllic place with her biological family. In doing so, she also helps restore the friendship of Leontes and Polixenes, as well as the status of Camillo. Through this conclusion, Shakespeare manages to soften Mamillius' death and, by extension, the harsh realities of infant mortality. In a sense, *The Winter's Tale* suggests a possibility beyond the pragmatics of Early Modern childhood; the literal death of children as well as the more figurative death of children can occur through lack of discipline and giving into the worst of childlike qualities. If the child survives, however, and maintains, like Perdita, some sense of that youthful purity, s/he can become the balm to greater cultural issues.

In both *The Winter's Tale* and *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare takes up contemporary childhood in his portrayal of "curried" children. These curried children, through debates over original sin, the apprentice system, the beginnings of the formal education system, the increased need for good citizens for bureaucracy and military duty on the part of the government, and by the framing of the family unit as a microcosm of the state, receive new attention as figures in need of constant grooming and discipline. Shakespeare, however, does not confine himself to this model of childhood. In both *The Winter's Tale* and *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare incorporates the "invisible" childhood which was prevalent in the period directly preceding his own, and the emergent "abject" child that would come to prominence during the industrial revolution. To an extent, the children in his plays even embody traces of the perfection and deadliness that come with more recent models.

Notably, these models of childhood are not just presented onstage as finished products. Instead, through onstage game playing and discipline as well as adult references and conversations, the children are "raised" through each of these models into, temporarily, a childhood far more secure than the stark reality of Early Modern England. Simultaneously, Shakespeare also takes his adult characters and "boys" them through discussion and action to the extent that they become child. As I have mentioned elsewhere, two of the most fundamental characteristics of childhood are the socially expected performances and speech acts of a given period, as well as the larger system of interpellation. At key moments in *The Winter's Tale* and *Coriolanus*, both Leontes and Coriolanus are not only classified (interpellated) as children by those around them, they also accept this classification by their childlike responses. Significantly, the protected childhoods established by Shakespeare do not rupture because of outside

influences. Instead, they rupture when the adults take from the younger characters the mantle and characteristics of childhood.

Shakespeare's use of contemporary constructions of childhood in these two plays is notable beyond their ability to build dramatic tension. Beyond the boundaries of the script, they may be understood as historical artifacts that comment on the greater state of society and childhood. On the one hand, Shakespeare relies on many of the most prominent period traits of childhood. In doing so, he offers a picture of historical childhood that moves beyond the pamphlets, journal entries, and statistics that survive. Further, in writing these children for performance, he allows modern audiences the chance to connect, at lease tangentially, with earlier models of childhood. On the other hand, Shakespeare incorporates counter narratives, such as earlier and emergent models of childhood which, in conjunction with the statement made by the tragic endings for these characters, point to ongoing tensions and changes in Early Modern childhood. These constructions, and these tensions, will find reflection in the next chapter, as the emergent tensions from this chapter, along with the persistent traces of earlier models, meet with changes brought by the Enlightenment and the Romantics.

CHAPTER III: THE ABJECT AND LATENT CHILD IN MAETERLINCK'S STATIC DRAMA

Enlightenment thinking and the industrial revolution, dating back to the seventeenth century, dramatically changed the perception of childhood held in Western society. From the threads of invisible and curried childhood prominent during the Early Modern period, the child was thought of variously as a blank slate, as a convenient source of easily exploited labor, and, eventually, as a powerfully perceptive innocent deserving of a protected period of childhood. By the end of the nineteenth century, each of these narrative threads had been established, reacted to, and actively negotiated by adults and governments that attempted to grapple with the quickly changing landscape of technology, industry, warfare, and philosophy. What resulted was a powerfully diverse tapestry consisting of overlapping narratives and conceptions of childhood. It is in this context that Maurice Maeterlinck began his experiments to create a viable form of Symbolist theatre based around a "static" aesthetic.

With this context in mind, it is not surprising that child characters factor heavily into his early attempts. From the infants of *The Intruder* (1890) and *The Blind* (1890) to the children in *Pelleas and Mélisande* (1892), *Death of Tintagiles* (1894), and *The Blue Bird* (1909) to the adolescents in *The Seven Princesses* (1891), *Princess Maleine* (1889), and *The Betrothal* (1918), many of Maeterlinck's most well know scripts demonstrate a fixation with childhood. Though these representations constitute one of the most expansive collections of child characters since Shakespeare, these portrayals have been given remarkably little attention. Instead, Maeterlinck is most remembered for the atmospheric, symbolic, and spiritual qualities of, especially, his early works. These early works, of which *The Intruder* and *The Blind* factor prominently, are framed as being among the first dramatic reactions to realism and naturalism.

While these qualities and his placement in the dramatic canon are undoubtedly important, scholarly focus on his static drama has resulted in an imbalanced view of Maeterlinck in which his later work is often considered as lesser and his use of child characters is downplayed. The marginalizing of his later body of dramatic literature is frequently justified by supposed philosophical and aesthetic changes in his work. These changes, as the narrative goes, were spurred by his relationship with actress Georgette Leblanc and his alleged move away from Symbolism. The script that is perhaps most indicative of the supposed changes in Maeterlinck's aesthetic is *The Blue Bird*. This Christmas "fairy play" is seen as everything that static drama is not: it is full of energy, hope, movement, growth, and happiness. Even more significantly, this play demonstrates a major shift in the other aspect of Maeterlinck's theatrical legacy that is often overlooked: his representations of childhood. In direct contrast to the darkness and suffering of his earlier plays, the children in *The Blue Bird* seem to live largely happy lives.

In this chapter, instead of subscribing to the narrative binary scholars have established between Maeterlinck's early, static work and his later fairy plays, I argue that that *The Blue Bird* represents a historically significant change in Maeterlinck's tactics rather than one in his aesthetics or philosophy. In making this argument, I will offer a child-centric reading of Maeterlinck's work which will place *The Blue Bird* as the third installment in a trilogy begun by *The Intruder* and *The Blind.* This reading will suggest that the move to fairytale offered Maeterlinck a new space in which to allegorically rehearse Symbolist values in an attempt to revitalize the then stagnant Symbolist theatre. Further, this reading will suggest that *The Blue Bird* is not only a significant approach to those ideas and aesthetics present in Maeterlinck's static work but that, in some ways, it represents a maturation of them.

I begin this chapter by reading Maeterlinck's portrayals of childhood alongside then-emergent notions of a romanticized, sentimentalized child more valued for emotional and ideological qualities than as a source of labor. I will use this comparison to point up the ways that Maeterlinck, with his Romantic and Symbolist lineage, simultaneously elevates and tortures his child characters. In previous Romantic conceptions of the child, it is only the adult who suffers because they cannot return to the perceptive ability, innocence, wonder, and creativity of childhood. In Maeterlinck's *The Intruder, The Blind,* and *The Blue Bird* (and, to a lesser extent, *The Interior* and *Pelléas and Mélisande*), however, it is the child who suffers for these abilities. This section will also point to the ways that Maeterlinck, in corrupting these tropes, variously draws on and renegotiates the abject and latent threads of childhood prominent by the end of the century, the older threads of the invisible and curried child, while also incorporating the emergent thread of the perfect child that would come to the fore by the middle of the twentieth century. From there, I read *The Intruder*, *The Blind*, *The Blue Bird,* and *The Betrothal* with these threads in mind to suggest that Maeterlinck does not move away from static drama, Symbolism, and the suffering child, but rather begins to renegotiate and recombine these threads to pursue similar aesthetic goals. Ultimately, I will argue that the secure, protected childhood sought by many of the Romantics has been achieved and that Maeterlinck finds himself on the outside of this new socially enforced period of innocence. Because of this, Maeterlinck's attempts to tap into the incredible perceptual powers of the child result in a corruption of earlier Romantic threads, and new social realities.

This reading hinges on Maeterlinck's conflicted portrayal of children during his career. While the number of child characters alone makes Maeterlinck's work noteworthy, what is more significant is the way that he uses them as ideological "sounding boards," as figures with which

to demonstrate the gradient nature of socialization on the perceptive abilities of human kind. The infants of Maeterlinck's plays demonstrate an unparalleled ability to sense forces beyond the comprehension of adults. As these infants begin the process of socialization, they gradually lose these abilities. It is not until they are very old (standing on the threshold of this world and the next) or lose baser sensory abilities (as in the case of blind characters) that some measure of those abilities are regained.

Pre-Symbolist Childhood

As outlined in Chapter 1, the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries saw vast changes in the societal construction of children. Many of these changes may be attributed to changes in agriculture, industry, medicine, governmental, and the rise of the urban middle-class. Throughout this period there were also changes in philosophy and science, with a burgeoning of Humanist thought, the rise of Enlightenment thought and, later, the rise of Romanticism. Each of these changes would come to influence the social constructions of, and relationships to, childhood. In the work of Locke, Rousseau, and the Romantics there is a concern with the state of childlike consciousness. More specifically, each of these modes of thought advance, to a greater or lesser degree, a blank slate or "tabula rasa" conception of the child's mind. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Symbolists would also draw upon and modify this notion.

Maeterlinck was writing at a time of great change in Western definitions of childhood. Even into the early eighteenth century, society still constructed its notion of "child" based on a largely agricultural model. Children were seen principally as assets, as labor, and as security for when the parents would reach advanced age. Even small children would be used for household chores and for watching even younger children. Especially outside of cities, these traditional agrarian structures helped to extend and reinvigorate invisible and curried notions of childhood.

As the growing middle class became more and more centered in the cities, societal perceptions of children began to shift towards education and sentimentality. As Viviana A. Zelizer notes of the United States in her *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*, "By the mid-nineteenth century, the construction of the economically worthless child had been in large part accomplished among the American urban middle class" (5). Rather than providing valuable help and ultimately assisting in raising revenue for the family farm, young children began to be delegated chores more for educational purposes than to serve practical ends. As such, rather than being part of a vital labor force, children became economically worthless. Instead, the emphasis became the "love and emotional satisfaction" of their company (3-4). Adam Jamrozik and Tania Sweeney, on the other hand, disagree that the product of this shift is a fundamentally useless child. In their *Children and Society: The Family, the State, and Social Parenthood*, they argue that the shift is one towards specialized education with the aim of supporting the otherwise dominant social class. In other words, the shift from an agricultural to an urban model (and eventually suburban) is to instill necessary values and skills for the furthering of their own social group (4).

These changes encouraged the expansion of the abject thread of childhood. As factories required more and more cheap labor, and as the continual development and expansion of machines necessitated workers small enough to work in cramped conditions, the children recruited into factory life faced incredible misery, exposure to substances that affected their health, and, in many cases, death in factories that were still generations away from modern safety requirements. Literary reactions to these horrors quickly followed and, in the Romantics, found purchase as a concept of childhood steeped in innocence and latent abilities. These latent

children came to represent the perceptual abilities, memories, and wonder, which adults, similarly trapped in factories, began to covet.

As noted in the first chapter, these societal trends were reflected across the Western world as multiple governments enacted, for example, child labor laws. Furthermore, as medicine became more advanced, there was a large drop in infant and early-childhood mortality rates. Whereas parents previously had to be prepared for the unfortunate likelihood of their child dying during birth or infancy, medical advances provided the luxury of becoming more attached to each child. This, in turn, made for not only greater parental grief in the event of a child's death, but also a higher level of social bereavement. Because of lowered mortality rates and an increase in the size of the middle class (which did not require the larger home-centered workforce), the rate of reproduction also dropped, making each child relationally more precious (10-11). Ultimately, Zelizer claims that conceptions shifted so that "properly loved children, regardless of social class, belonged in a domesticated, nonproductive world of lessons, games, and token money. It was not a simple process. At every step working-class and middle-class advocates of a useful childhood battled the social construction of the economically useless child" (11-12).

By the time Maeterlinck began his writing in the late nineteenth century, the position of the child had shifted from one of utilitarianism to one emphasizing emotional connection. Moreover, as the child of a successful notary in Ghent, Maeterlinck enjoyed all of the privileges of the "useless" child—especially since his father was successful enough to retire early, live off of investments, and pursue hobbies through most of Maeterlinck's childhood. Though his father was considered a strict authoritarian who cared little for the arts, his mother fostered his creative spirit, even paying for the publication of his first book of poetry (Knapp 20-21). Thus

Maeterlinck lived a childhood akin to the emotionally connected, useless child rather than the utilitarian model.

The literary Romanticism which helped to inform Maeterlinck's own childhood as well as his writings, may be understood as a sort of "golden age" in literary representation of the child and childhood. In the writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Blake, there is a great concern with the sanctity of childhood, the child's capacity for wonder, and the ability of the child to see differently or beyond as a result of his or her connection to the wild and lack of adult concerns and distractions. Indeed, the child is a logical focal point for these writers; when reacting against the dehumanizing nature of the industrial revolution, the child, newly enlisted for cramped, dangerous factory jobs, becomes a natural standard-bearer.

Many Romantics coveted the perceptive abilities of the child and, subsequently, memories of their own childhood. Wordsworth, for instance, wrote of the child as "Nature's Priest," as capable of "behold[ing] the light," before writing that "Man" sees this "vision splendid…die away" (142). In the writings of the Romantics, there is also an implicit call for a greater protection and preservation of the child during this period of development. Cunningham, for instance, observes that "at its heart was a reverence for, and a sanctification of childhood … a belief that childhood should be happy, and a hope that the qualities of childhood, if they could be preserved in adulthood, might help redeem the adult world" (72). Subsequent to these calls, and partially influenced by them, there was a greater societal reaction against child labor. During this period and after, there were both literary and social moves towards a protected, economically useless childhood, one in which childhood was a safe space in which the child's primary responsibilities were learning and play rather than providing for the family.

Symbolism and Childhood

While perception and implementation of these ideas varies according to time, country, and social class (among other factors), there was a relatively stable childhood present by the end of nineteenth century and the beginning of European Modernism. This "new" childhood was built on a proto-construction of an idealized, sentimentalized, and protected child. It is interesting then that a number of Modernist movements, including Symbolism, seem to take up the Romantic child in their work. That the Symbolists, including Baudelaire, Maeterlinck, and Mallarmé, appropriated this thread is appropriate. After all, the Symbolists themselves acknowledge that they are, at least in part, aesthetically descendent from the Romantics. Furthermore, much of the Symbolist use of the child seems to replicate the Romantic approach: there is a focus on innocence, on the child's perceptual abilities, and on the child's connection to the natural/spiritual. Absent from their writings, however, is the Romantic emphasis on social reform. Instead, the Symbolists focus on the acquisitive side of representing children: a protected childhood has been successfully realized but, unfortunately, the Romantic hope for the continuation of the child's abilities into adulthood has come to naught. In attempting to approach the innocence and latent abilities of the child, the Symbolists were part of the adult world that childhood was protected *against*. As a result, their writing is more avaricious in pursuing these ideals. In Maeterlinck, this leads to attacks on childhood and a shift in the framing of childhood that finds the socialized, adult world ceaselessly trying to puncture, rather than protect, childhood.

The Romantics and the Symbolists both demonstrate a thematic concern with childhood. In fact, the relationship between the two groups is strengthened by the fact that artists like Charles Baudelaire, who is often framed in terms of his membership with both groups, similarly

draws on the spiritual power of childhood. In his "The Painter of Modern Life," he writes that "*The child sees everything as a novelty; the child is always "drunk." Nothing is more like what we call inspiration than the joy that child feels in drinking in shape and colour*" (104, emphasis original). Here Baudelaire, in comparison to Maeterlinck's later work, offers an optimistic side of the innocence and supposed *tabula rasa* capabilities of the child. As did the Romantics, Baudelaire believes that it is possible to recollect, if not re-live the perceptive potential of the child. In much of Maeterlinck's work, especially *The Blind* and *The Intruder*, this joy and these attempts at recollection are replaced by the screams of infants as their abilities begin to be ripped from them.

The relationship between the two groups is reinforced by the way the Symbolists framed themselves philosophically. As Anna Balakian notes, the Symbolists accepted Swedenborgism as a point of philosophical origin for their movement (11). One of the core ideas of Swedenborgism is that every "natural, physical vision had its penumbra of spiritual recognition" (13). In other words, everything carries with it a certain degree of the spiritual connection, even communication, between the earthly and the divine. It is not direct communication, however, but rather communication through symbols (13). Throughout the later part of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, Swedenborg's ideas were popular in a number of different artistic movements. Part of the reason for this popularity is the inclusionary nature of the philosophy itself:

> It was not the originality of Swedenborg's theories that made it such an attractive cult, but rather Swedenborg's ability to sum up and popularize so many parallel mystical notions that were inherent in the cabbalistic and hermetic cults. According to Blake, not a single new truth was discovered by Swedenborg: his

> precepts had all been conceived earlier; his philosophy was a synthesis of all the occult philosophies of the past. (12)

Here again, Baudelaire provides the point of connection between Romantic and Symbolist demonstrating throughout his work the spiritual influences and vocabulary of Swedenborg (31). In some ways, Balakian goes on to suggest, Symbolism and Romanticism are the same cult, with only different motivations: "The Romanticist aspired to the infinite, the Symbolists thought he could discover it, the surrealist believed he could create it' thus the word "infinite" meant something different to each" (Balakian 16).

The use of child characters in analyzing Maeterlinck's historical position and relationship to his context is particularly appropriate. As in the case of the Romantics, connected by Baudelaire, through the Symbolists to Maeterlinck, the perceptive abilities of the child demonstrate Maeterlinck's particular definition of and relationship to the concept of the infinite. Children are also important to Maeterlinck's works because of the relationship he establishes between the combined forces of socialization/intellect and those of innocence/intuition.

In each of his static works those characters that are cut-off, in some way, from society and the intellectual, logical pursuits of humankind that are able to perceive the fourth-dimension. This creates a sort of parabolic expression of the perceptive abilities of humans. Infants, newly born (and therefore directly connected to the beyond) and without socialization or even higher control over language, movement, and thought, most easily perceive beyond. As the child moves towards adulthood, he or she loses most or all of these abilities. Here, the parabola flattens into an extended plateau. It is not until the adult gets older, and therefore approaches death again, or loses a distracting sensory faculty, such as eyesight, that they regain some level of connection with the beyond (Halls 45). Unfortunately, both of these cases have a consequence: while the

subject is regaining some abilities (traveling back up the parabola as it were), they also are moving toward a rapid demise. Somewhat reminiscent of the Romantics, there is also a divide between adults who live in the city and those who live in the country. City living, with its overwhelming sensory and intellectual distractions, makes profound perception impossible.

Maeterlinck's work demonstrates an interesting balance of archetypal child categories which draws on, and renegotiates, not only those that are prominent during his own time, but also those that are most evident in the writing of Shakespeare. Because of the suffering that the child characters in many of his plays endure, there is certainly an element of the Enlightenment/Industrial Revolution abject child. As were the children in early European factories, the children in Maeterlinck are positioned almost as resources to be exploited. Similarly, the thread of latent childhood would seem to apply to a certain extent. Maeterlinck, after all, seems fixated on the perceptive powers of these innocent creatures. Finally, with Maeterlinck's temporal, geographical, and economic context figured in, the emergent conception of the perfect child, valued by adults for sentimental value, would apply; this is especially apparent in *The Blue Bird*. In many ways, the multiplicity of Maeterlinck's approach to the child is appropriate to the nature of European society at the end of the nineteenth century. He was living and writing at a point in a time when the forces that influenced many of these changes were still exerting considerable force and were meeting those forces that were helping to shape the modern notion of the perfect child. Ultimately, in that he draws on each of these models, Maeterlinck's practice reflects the speed, change, and uncertainty of the larger Modernist period.

Intruder and *Blind* and Perception

As noted above, my contention is that the aesthetic differences between *The Blue Bird* and Maeterlinck's earlier static drama represent a change in tactics rather than a change in

philosophy. To make this point, I contend that *The Blue Bird* may be understood as the final installment in a trilogy begun by *The Intruder* and *The Blind*. In this sense, I suggest that Tyltyl and Mytyl are the grown up versions of the previously mute, motionless children from *The Intruder* and *The Blind*. Whereas those earlier children, by the end of the plays, have uttered for the first time and are therefore just starting on the inevitable path to socialization and perceptual blindness, *The Blue Bird* offers a snapshot of this process from a decade later. This reading is not intended to be a definitive statement of authorial intent. Instead, I use the comparison of these works as a framework to point up elements of Maeterlinck's earlier static practice and Symbolism that may go unnoticed because of his use of fairy-tale story line.

The Intruder is, at its most basic level, a play about a family that is waiting. Some are waiting for a relative from a far-off convent to appear, some are waiting for something more profound, and some are waiting because they do not know what else to do. The tone is generally subdued and movement is kept to a minimum—the Father, the Uncle, the blind Grandfather, and the Three Daughters are fearful of waking up the newborn or his dying mother, separated in rooms on either side of them. Each character, to a greater or lesser degree, struggles with the silence and with concern until a presence is sensed traveling through the yard, into the house, up the stairs to the sitting room, and, ultimately, to the mother's sick room. This presence is the specter of death and its arrival is heralded by the cries of the previously mute child as it senses death taking its mother.

While the story is relatively straight forward, there is, running through the dialogue and events, incredible tension as each character struggles with conceptions of the beyond. As I noted briefly above, the reactions of each character as they are confronted with the beyond and with the approach of death, is contingent on their level of social and environmental distracters. The most

well-known and remarked upon example of this idea in *The Intruder* is the Grandfather. On one hand, the Grandfather is able to sense the beyond, with relative acuity, because his age and frailty place him on the threshold between this world and the next. More significantly, however the Grandfather is blind. This disability separates him from the other members of the household. He is isolated from them and their way of interacting with the world. In addition, the Grandfather's blindness frees him from some of the distractions of adulthood and from a primary agent of intellectual engagement. Because of his "exile" from the visible world, and, symbolically, from the "realm of Ideas," he turns to senses and feelings which, subsequently, allow him to sense the other universes (Knapp 43).

This establishes a framework in which each character's ability to sense beyond is contingent on their socialization and distractions. The uncle, admittedly a "city man," mutters "that is the reason I do not like the country" (51) when the conversation turns to the silence of the night. As the most distracted in the room (his city life is filled with social and industrial distractions) he perceives the specter of death least of all. The father, at least accustomed and comfortable with the silence of the country, sees/feels flashes of the truth at points during the play. Finally the daughters, as women, are naturally disposed to feel the presence of death. This perceptive ability is, according to Linn Konrad in her *Modern Drama as Crisis: The Case of Maurice Maeterlinck*, because women, as the creators of life, occupy a unique, transient position between life and death (11).

Significantly, the infant character is absent from all social interactions, even those that might result from proximity. The baby remains offstage, not even to be heard until it senses death at the end of the play. The baby is also described as being essentially static. The Uncle, for instance, refers to him as a "wax baby," noting that he has "hardly moved" (13). The infant's

isolation, combined with his static qualities and the word "wax" (which evokes *tabula rasa*) makes for a creature that is capable, according to the framework Maeterlinck establishes with the other characters, of profound contact with the beyond. As Knapp points out, "the purpose of Maeterlinck's broader usage of the static is to "permi[t] the intrusion of occult forces" (42). After the initial descriptions of the infant, he is forgotten by the characters. His presence is only evoked by the hushed tones of the characters. It is not until the end, when the clock strikes midnight and the specter of death approaches his mother, that the child reminds the characters of his presence—he screams in anguish for fear of his mother's death or, alternatively, as the death of his mother grants him life.[1]

Maeterlinck's approach here is one centered on suffering. Though the child is an "above" average human in terms of perception, his reward is to feel the pain of his mother. His heightened senses are shattered by the event. He is so scared or sad for what he perceives that he vocalizes for the first time—setting him on the path to socialization, distraction, and subsequent "blindness." This loss of perception is, perhaps, necessary for Maeterlinck and his characters. According to Jethro Bithell, "death is not so much a catastrophe as a mystery. It casts its shadow over the whole of our finite existence; and beyond it lies infinity" (39). In other words, the child must lose its perceptive ability and the shadow of death must be cast over it so that it can eventually experience the infinite mystery of death. This framing suggests that the only way to truly understand what lies beyond is to pass into the realm of death: and the early suffering of these characters puts them on track for this greater fate.

The baby in Maeterlinck's *The Blind* meets a similar fate. The play revolves around a group of blind people (one of whom has a mute infant) sitting in a clearing near the body of a

[1] Thanks to my colleague Lance Mekeel for suggesting the second portion of this reading.

dead Priest. The Priest, prior to dying, led the blind characters out from their home for a walk in the woods. Most of the play consists of the blind characters, not yet knowing about the body in their midst, arguing about where the priest has gone and when he will return. When the stranded seniors finally discover his body they begin to panic and, much as in *The Intruder*, they feel the specter of death approach.

As in *The Intruder* the baby remains silent and immobile until the climax of the show when, once again, he is brought to life by the specter of death. Here again, Maeterlinck builds in a complete lack of distracters for the child. Through growing hysteria and rapidly deteriorating weather the baby remains asleep. He or she is completely unaffected by the larger world because of his or her relationship with the dream world. The mother of the sleeping infant is also characterized as mad and deaf in addition to being blind. As such, similar to the physical space between mother and child in *The Intruder*, the baby lacks a communicative relationship with his parent. Unlike in *The Intruder*, however, the baby in *The Blind* is directly addressed, and ultimately called upon to help them in their plight. The baby is the only one in the circle that can see—both literally and metaphorically.

It is significant here that while the baby in *The Blind*, like the one in *The Intruder*, is representative of tabula rasa and static consciousness, Maeterlinck plays with adult perception of the beyond. Rather than each character perceiving differently based on their level of societal "white noise," the characters in *The Blind* are more blind, perceptually, for their blindness. As opposed to the Grandfather in *The Intruder*, who is both socially isolated and somewhat acclimatized to (or at least resigned to) his blindness, the characters of *The Blind* are in a social group of similarly disabled people. These characters, rather than attempting to sense beyond,

feel the need to fill every silence with conversation. As the Third Blind Man says towards the beginning of the show, "I am afraid when I am not speaking" (67). This constant conversation, and constant distraction, acts to block whatever might be gained by the "advantage" of blindness. Here too, Maeterlinck illustrates his almost sadistic relationship with the idea of the pure, un-socialized child. As in the case in *The Intruder*, the child's heightened sensitivity will only bring him pain. First, the appearance of the specter of death shatters the child's innocence and perfection. And, though the baby has begun the process of social initiation through vocalization, it is too late. When the young blind woman asks, "What do you see?" (113), death is approaching and the child cannot lead them to safety and cannot take the place of the deceased priest.

In many ways, the Priest may be understood almost as standing in as "father" to the adult characters of *The Blind*. The characters of *The Blind* are, essentially, children. Much as Leontes and Coriolanus perform childhood through the implication of the other characters and through their own, immature actions, the characters in *The Blind* are implicated, and implicate themselves, as children. The very fact that they need the guidance of another to guide them through life suggests that they are children in need of parenting. As the play continues, they accept this framing as they variously panic and squabble at each new development. Unfortunately for them, however, they are missing the important part of childhood: that is, even in their blindness, they do not have the ability to perceive anything outside of their own fears. In some ways, the fate of these characters correlates to the larger arc of the plays that I am focusing on in this chapter. In their blindness and need for guidance, they are as children on the cusp of socialization. The father, as is his socially ordained duty, takes them by the hand to lead them thought the spiritual wilderness of the island/mind to help them arrive at the comfortable safety of socialized adulthood/their rest home. In this, however, the father fails. He only gets them as

far as the midpoint between the loss of perceptual abilities and the beginnings of socialization. Then, without leaving them the tools to move in either direction, he leaves these orphans adrift, and doomed.

Maeterlinck wrote these plays in the last part of the nineteenth century. At that moment, social conceptions of childhood were moving away from the Enlightenment informed abject child and the Romantic latent child and into the dominant thread of Western childhood throughout the twentieth century: the perfect child. It is important to note, however, that the earlier threads of the curried and invisible child, were still present. Most significantly, the fears and fragility associated with those earlier children were still present. While medical advances had contributed to a significant decline in early infant mortality, the fears regarding this possibility actually *increased*.

The representations of childhood in *The Intruder* and *The Blind* speak to the multiplicity of changes in childhood narratives and the increased sentimentality of infant life in more than just their suffering. It is not just that the children of these plays are suffering but that Maeterlinck's approach to these children, as well as the setting and the atmosphere of his plays hearkens back to these "darker" periods of childhood. These elements, invoke the color pallet and the composition style of a Rembrandt painting. The colors are rich and dark, often in earth tones. The composition and lighting often focuses around a central subject bathed in light, leaving much of the rest of the painting in shadows. *The Intruder* certainly meets this style with its setting of "a gloomy room in an old chateau" to conversations about the atmospheric qualities of the misty moonlit yard, to the "big Dutch clock," that will eventually peal in announcement of midnight, and the mother's death. Significantly, as in a Rembrandt, the singular source of light, and what it illuminates, is important in *The Intruder*. From the beginning, the three Daughters,

the semi-seer-like characters of the play, try to get The Grandfather, the character nearest to actually being a seer, to sit under the light, to become the focal point of this tableau. Later, the Uncle, the least perceptually inclined character, blithely assures the Father that "there is no danger." The Father, perhaps sensing that something is not right, responds by noting that the lamp is "not burning well this evening" (98). Light, the source of focus and the representation of illumination and awareness becomes the harbinger of doom to come. Throughout the rest of the narrative, the lamp and its light are referenced at key moments.

Taken together, these elements represent a medieval-like setting that is common in Symbolism. Similarly, the setting of *The Blind* is shrouded in mystery and heavy with the weight of the past. In a sense, it is almost a twisted, static, tragic version of the pastoral style particularly present in Early Modern Europe and into the writings of the Romantic. Pointedly, this connection to the medieval, which is present throughout Maeterlinck's work, was referenced when he is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, in a speech given by C. D. af Wirsén:

> Those who have travelled through Belgium only by train or car cannot appreciate the intimate and fascinating charm which characterizes the Flemish plains-strewn with monuments in stone whose facades recall the lacework that Flemish peasant women do on their lace pillows, sitting on the thresholds of their houses. Often one hears, in the calm of the countryside, strong, deep voices singing slow and dreamy chants. And in the old towns of Flanders with their winding and picturesque streets, the silence of night is interrupted at regular intervals by the clear sound of bells which, silvery and poetic, impart a sense of medieval times, of centuries of glory, heroism, and prosperity. (Wirsén)

In this then, Maeterlinck uses symbols, setting, and atmospheric language to evoke medieval memory on the stage of late nineteenth century Paris. With this memory, however, comes very real fears that are still present in the minds, and realities, of the audience. Up until the moment of utterance, the baby in both *The Intruder* and *The Blind* remains the perfect picture of innocence. Indeed, the baby evokes the conception of childhood coming into the fore by Maeterlinck's time. This baby, however, rests amidst all of the trappings, atmosphere, and danger of medieval Europe. In a sense, this shifts the pre-scream babies in these plays all the way back to medieval conceptions as well. They are essentially invisible children. While they do not have the free rein of older medieval children, they are an example of the tightly swaddled and left forgotten babies common during that period. They stay completely still in their invisible swaddling cloths allowing the adults go about their business and dealing with their adult worries. At the moment death approaches, however, each baby screams. In this moment, the scream becomes the wail of barely suppressed history. It catapults conceptions of the child from medieval invisibility through the abject and latent conceptions of the enlightenment and back to the perfection expected of babies by the end of the nineteenth century. When it arrives, however, it brings with it, and highlights for the modern audience, the tragic potential lurking under the smiles and giggles of the new, "perfect" child.

Blue Bird/*Betrothal* and Aging

The Blue Bird is commonly framed, in terms of aesthetics and philosophy, as representative of the end of Maeterlinck's Symbolist period, as a demonstration of the continued influence of Georgette LeBlanc, or as both. In this regard, it is notable that many books on Symbolism and Symbolist theatre, including Anna Balakian's *The Symbolist Movement*, and Frantisek Deak's *Symbolist Theater*, do not discuss Maeterlinck beyond the turn of the century.

In other words, to these authors, outside of his static and marionette forms, Maeterlinck is either no longer a Symbolist or one whose writings had, by that point, lost significance. Those books that do move beyond Maeterlinck's earlier works tend to emphasize the influence of LeBlanc on this process. Bettina Knapp, for instance, suggests that "with Georgette as his constant companion, Maeterlinck was no longer the victim of corroding despair; nor did he continue to find mankind's lot so utterly without value … a sense of mitigating hope could be discerned as his life, for the first time, took on warmth and peaceful tone" (87-88). More significantly, Knapp suggests that his relationship with Georgette, as demonstrated by his later writing (of which *Blue Bird* is part), demonstrates a move away from Symbolism (92).

At a glance, the plot of *The Blue Bird* would seem to support its framing as, at the very least, a departure from Symbolism. The script begins with two young siblings, Tyltyl and Mytyl, gazing out from their parent's poor shack at the Christmas Eve festival next door. Eventually, a fairy enters and sends them on a quest to find the blue bird of happiness. The fairy gives the children a diamond that, when turned, unlocks a magical world. It also enables the children to perceive the "true" nature of things. When they try it, the household items and pets around them come to life/sentience, and become their companions throughout the play. During their quest, they encounter a number of magical worlds, including the Land of Memory, a place where their deceased relatives now exist happily. Their journey also takes them to the Land of Night, The Forest, The Palace of Happiness, a Graveyard, and the Kingdom of the Future in which they encounter all of the children yet unborn. In each location they search for the mysterious Blue Bird, only to fail each time. Upon waking the next morning they realize that they had it all along; their sad, lonely turtle-dove has become a vibrant shade of blue. In a final act of maturity, they give it to the sick little girl next door who is miraculously healed by its presence.

This summary, without further analysis, suggests that *The Blue Bird*, while dealing with some important issues, is most easily defined as a Christmas coming of age fairy tale. This notion is strengthened by its conception and its production history. Because of the circumstances surrounding its creation, the script tends to be pigeon-holed by the fact that it was written in response to the request for a Christmas tale for children by a Parisian newspaper editor (Mahony 104) and is referred to by Maeterlinck as a "fairy play." It also contains many elements that might be expected in both a Christmas story and a children's story—adventure, magic, sentimentality, transformation, the spirit of giving, and so on.

Its position within the seasonal repertoire has been largely conditioned by its production history. In the fall of 1908 it was staged by Stanislavski at the Moscow Art Theatre. From there it moved to the Haymarket Theatre in London for a December staging in 1909 and a revival in the following year (Bithell 143). Soon after its success in England, *The Blue Bird* began appearing on American stages. Throughout the rest of the century, it was produced with some regularity. In 1919, an Opera version of *The Blue Bird*, with music by Albert Wolff, premiered at the Metropolitan Opera House. Recent years have seen a decline in major American productions of the script. This decline, perhaps attributable to the large cast and demanding technical requirements, has not shifted it from its place as a Christmas offering. In December of 2000, for instance, there was a production at the New Jersey Shakespeare festival, and another in December of 2007 at Urban Stages in Philadelphia.[2]

This narrative seems even more appropriate when contrasted with the aesthetics and atmosphere of scripts like *The Intruder* and *The Blind*. Even with the surface differences, however, the common narratives, that *The Blue Bird* was a departure from Symbolism and/or a

[2] Though usually staged as a holiday play, this is not always the case. In April of 2009, for instance, it was staged at EgoPo Classic Theater in Philadelphia.

result of Georgette LeBlanc's influence, do not hold up to close scrutiny. The supposed changes in tone can be attributed to a change in tactic rather than one in aesthetics.

Even without this reading, however, the script is very clearly full of many of those same tropes and techniques that Maeterlinck uses earlier. While still focusing on its fairy tale elements, for instance, W. D. Halls notes *The Blue Bird*'s allegorical significance and the incomprehensible secrets of the universe that the bird represents (84-85). Knapp, similarly, works through each of the major symbols and themes of the script and, in particular, notes the symbolic and spiritual significance of the transformative diamond. She goes on to suggest that this gem, and the hat that it is fixed to, permit "an idea to take root, unmolested by outside forces" (121). This notion acts as an extension of Maeterlinck's earlier focus on *tabula rasa* consciousness and perception. Finally, the level of activity and energy in *The Blue Bird* might be pointed to as distinct from static drama and that Tyltyl's rush toward knowledge implies a level of agency. I suggest, however, that he has no more agency, and no more control in the face of fate, than do the characters in *The Intruder* and *The Blind*. His quest, and the knowledge that he is doomed to receive is not really of his own volition but instead are determined by society. In this, his rush toward the future becomes as banal as the conversation between the Uncle and the Father in *The Intruder*.

Scholarship forwarded by well-known Maeterlinck scholars, such as Bettina Knapp, suggests that Maeterlinck's bliss over his relationship with LeBlanc was such that it could not help but change his aesthetics and that she, as an actress, necessitated the creation of larger, more interesting female roles. While I do not necessarily take issue with the second part of this logic, the notion that this relationship suddenly changes the previously dour Maeterlinck so profoundly that it inverts his aesthetics and philosophy, seems suspect. The first fault that I find with this

logic is that LeBlanc was drawn to Maeterlinck in the first place because of her "fascination" with the occult. Indeed, her first exposure to him was through his writings (Knapp 87). In other words, the very reason that she first became enamored with Maeterlinck was *because* of his well-known philosophy and aesthetic. Secondly, LeBlanc herself, while presenting herself as an outgoing, carefree socialite, suffered from deep physiological trauma. She had an unhappy childhood, and was raised by parents prone to depression. She herself suffered from depression, especially after her separation from her first husband. This particular bout was strong enough that she spent time in a sanatorium. It is in this context, when she was at her most miserable, that her enthusiasm for the occult brought her to Maeterlinck (Knapp 87).

Outside of the relationship, Maeterlinck also was dealing with emotional and physical issues during the period when he wrote *The Blue Bird*. His father died in 1904 and, while Knapp suggests that this did not overly distress him because "they never had had a close relationship," this does not preclude the possibility of more profound emotional impact. During this time, Maeterlinck also became more troubled and more ill with the eventual diagnosis of "neurasthenia" for "nervous exhaustion stemming from some unconscious emotional conflict" (129). While a biographical reading such as this is difficult to quantify, there seems to be enough tragedy in Maeterlinck's life during this transitional period to, at the very least, balance the euphoric and transformative power of the happiness that is emphasized by Knapp. Even if Maeterlinck was happier with LeBlanc in his life, the combination of her enthusiasm for the darker aspects of his writing and her own psychological issues, along with his own trauma and illness during the time he was writing *The Blue Bird*, suggests that such happiness was fleeting and, perhaps, unlikely to influence his writing to the extent suggested by other scholars.

In contrast to these earlier, static, works the youthful Tyltyl and Mytyl of *The Blue Bird* are the main characters rather than acting as offstage anomalies. Further, they demonstrate a level of socialization and vitality far above the "wax" children of Maeterlinck's static work. Because of their age, and because of *The Blue Bird's* framing as a coming of age story, it is possible to read the two siblings as the *same* small children from *The Blind* and *The Intruder*—only ten years older. They have already experienced the breakdown of the purity of their infancy and are now going through rituals that will help them become fully socialized, and fully distracted, adults. They have been given names, are bursting with the desire to communicate, and are generally concerned with the frivolous, distracting wants of fully acclimatized humans.

One of the most interesting scenes in the play, and one of the most telling in terms of the becoming-man status of Tyltyl, is Act III, Scene 1: The Palace of Night. Before the children's arrival, the Cat holds a conference with Night. The Cat, in an attempt to further his own agenda, warns Night of the children's quest. Night remarks, "What times we live in! ... I cannot understand man, these last few years ... what is he aiming at? Must he absolutely know everything" (94). Here then, impetuous curiosity becomes the defining trait of mankind—a trait which Tyltyl, in his transitional state, is particularly susceptible. Light, supposedly a benevolent force, here aids in Tyltyl's move toward socialization. As Night tries to protect all of Nature's secrets from Tyltyl, he demands access to them, on the grounds that Light has told him that Night cannot withhold knowledge from man.

As the scene goes on Tyltyl, in a sequence reminiscent of "Bluebeard," opens up each of Night's locked rooms to gaze upon, and know, the secrets within—and this after Night warns him that they contain "all the evils, all the plagues, all the sicknesses, all the terrors, all the catastrophes, all the mysteries that have afflicted life since the beginning of the world" (99). The

scene ends in a spectacularly morbid fashion. Tyltyl, now closer to being a man after experiencing each of the terrors locked in Night's domain, enters the final, forbidden room. Inside he finds bluebirds beyond counting. He and his sister, along with Bread and Dog catch them by the handful, only to find, once they escape, that the birds have all died in the sunlight. When he notices, Tyltyl's first reaction is to "fling" the birds down in anger. The scene closes with Dog asking if the dead birds would be good to eat.

The implications of the children's transition into adulthood are emphasized by Act III, Scene 2: The Forest. The scene begins with the devious Cat warning the trees in the forest of the children's imminent arrival. The Cat curries favor with the trees and points out that Tyltyl is the son of a wood-cutter and that he is in search of the Blue Bird, long kept safe by the trees of the forest. As the children approach, Cat tells the trees to kill them and summons the other animals of the forest to sit in judgment on them. After the trees dispose of the loyal and protective Dog, Tyltyl, though a small child, assumes the role of a man. On one hand, he becomes the representative of his father. The Oak, elder tree and judge, begins the "trial" by listing all of the family he has lost to Tyltyl's father. Ultimately, Tyltyl becomes the representative for all of humankind: "THE OAK: This is the first time that it is given to us to judge Man and make him feel our power" (142). In following pages, the tress and animals each come forward to list the ways in which they personally represent the best method of executing Tyltyl, from the Bull's offer to gore him in the stomach to Ivy's offer to provide a noose.

This scene represents an important step on Tyltyl's road from pure, blank-slate consciousness to fully socialized adult. In addition to standing trial in the name of man, as a man, he also begins to embody man's position in the world—as destroyer, as enemy of nature. As the trees and animals advance to exact their revenge, he draws a knife and lashes out at the natural

world around him. In response to this, to man's inclination to stand against nature, to seek to cut it down, the Horse is seized with panic and yells, "Ah, no!... That's not fair!... That's against the rules!... He's defending himself" (152)! As nature overwhelms the little man, the dog (his most loyal companion) breaks free and comes to his rescue. Ultimately, however, the battle only ends when Light arrives, the diamond is turned, and nature is restored to its proper place. Tellingly, as Tyltyl nurses his wounds, Light tells him, "You see that Man is all alone against all in this world" (159).

If the play is understood from this perspective, with the children as unfortunate extensions of previously pure infants, then the traditional readings of the script, whether as a Christmas story or a children's story, are displaced in favor of a much darker tale. Gone is the exuberant adventure through the various realms of the world; gone as well is the traveling through time and space to innocently meet relatives and view children yet to be born. Thematically, the incorporation of the trauma experienced at the children's brutal awakening into the world of socialization, and its extension, creates a version of *The Blue Bird* that, while still fantastical, is much darker, and is filled with solemn lessons that build on Maeterlinck's earlier philosophy. In particular, Tyltyl's character would be changed dramatically—he would shift from a bright inquisitive child representing man's intelligence (the traditional reading) into the personification of everything wrong with the human race. His role in the play would become the personification of the timeline that Maeterlinck is struggling against with the children in *The Intruder* and *The Blind.* Instead of a tale of growth and transformation filled with lessons that adults would do well to mind, *The Blue Bird* would be a much darker, more morbid tale detailing the step-by-step grinding of socialization (and therefore distraction and metaphorical blinding) of children once perceptive enough to sense the very specter of death.

As I argued in chapter 2, the creation of child characters such as these allows the opportunity to "raise" the child onstage. In a relatively short time, the audience can watch the child grow and play. They can watch the child learn to interact with the adult characters in the play. In the case of Shakespeare's child characters, the creation of this "stable" childhood in contrast to contextual reality, allows him maximum dramatic impact when those children ultimately suffer. When read as one larger story of socialization, these plays suggest that Maeterlinck is drawing on the same approach—only to a very different end. Rather than establishing a safe childhood and then snuffing it out, Maeterlinck begins with the dangers and fears of a childhood more closely related to that of Shakespeare's times. Then, though tragedy is suffered in terms of the adults, the infants manage to, against all odds, survive. At this point, on the surface, Maeterlinck seems to suggest that the story of these two children ends happily. They grow, they experience, they get married, and they start families. There is, however, a much grimmer implicit meaning to these transitions. For Maeterlinck the infancy of these characters, however fraught, is the best they can hope to achieve. After they utter, and after they grow and socialize, they are taking part in a slow purgatory of sense and perceptual deadening that takes them further and further away from their connection to the spiritual plane, to the beyond. Now, instead of sensing the beyond, they are blindly rushing towards the resurgence of that relationship that comes as they approach death.

As his biggest commercial and critical success, it is perhaps only natural that Maeterlinck later wrote a sequel to *The Blue Bird.* Some scholars, including Bettina Knapp, suggest that *The Betrothal* was written after encouragement from Maeterlinck's then fiancé, Renée Dahon (134 & 151). *The Betrothal* is fairy tale along the same lines as the earlier *Blue Bird* but with one major

difference. Rather than seeking the mystical Blue Bird of happiness, Tyltyl is in search of his future wife.

The beginning of the script finds the Fairy Bérylune once again imposing on Tyltyl's sleep. She reveals that it has been seven years since the events of the earlier play and that it is now time to find Tyltyl a wife. After some prodding, he reveals that he is in love with a surprisingly large number of village girls. Though he only can think of five, the Fairy adds one more, the mayor's daughter. There is also a seventh girl, one whose face is not revealed until the end because Tyltyl cannot remember her (this is a dream after all). Rather than a diamond to see the "truth" of the world, this time the fairy grants Tyltyl a sapphire that allows him to see the true beauty of each girl. As in the case of *The Blue Bird*, Tyltyl travels from location to location, this time looking for help in choosing the proper bride. Along the way, all of his ancestors, as well as all of his future descendants weigh in on his choice. Ultimately, Tyltyl finds that his true love, and his future wife, is the unremembered girl from the beginning—who turns out to be the little girl healed by the Blue Bird seven years earlier.

When my reading of *The Intruder*, *The Blind*, and *The Blue Bird* is applied to *The Betrothal*, it is possible to see that Tyltyl is, if not a completely socialized adult, almost finished with the process. Gone is the child who could sense the approach of death, who, pure of socialization and distraction was capable of perception beyond the real. Within the first few pages of the script, for instance, it is revealed that Tyltyl is now working with his father in the forest, committing the very sins that he was put on trial for in *The Blue Bird*. Furthermore, though he is once again journeying in a magical world separate from his own he fails to understand the meaning of Destiny, his guide. Both his earlier perceptive abilities and his learned, adult reason fail him. Throughout the play he continually denies knowledge of the

seventh, undefined girl, who is representative not only of his future wife, but also of that limitless knowledge and awareness that he once had access to. Destiny continues to shrink and become weaker until he must be carried around. Tyltyl is now too old, too socialized and distracted to sense the meaning of things beyond in ways that he once could.

In *The Betrothal* there is also a revelation as to what happens to the perceptive abilities of, according to my read, the children from the earlier plays. In the Abode of the Ancestors, Tyltyl and his Great Ancestor have this exchange:

> THE GREAT ANCESTOR: Everything you see—this square, that prison, the church, those houses, we who live in them—all this is really only inside yourself…. People barely see it, they don't even suspect it; but it's true.
>
> TYLTYL: I should never have thought there was so much room inside myself and that it was so large….
>
> THE GREAT ANCESTOR: It's much larger really; there's a great deal that you don't see

This exchange is notable for two reasons. First, as the Great Ancestor points out, people can rarely see beyond (or inside). In fact, for the most part, they do not even suspect that it is there. This aligns with the perceptive abilities of, for instance, *The Intruder*. The Uncle, the city man, does not suspect the presence of the beyond that the Grandfather, blind and comfortable with silence, can briefly experience. Tyltyl who, in his pristine innocence, could fully experience the beyond, now does not even suspect. In many ways, he has become more like his Uncle than his Grandfather. Secondly, this passage would seem to suggest that the "beyond," or at least perceptions of it, moves from the exterior to the interior as the child is socialized. While the child

could previously sense the exterior force of impending death, now he can only hope to brush the vast beyond that is contained inside of himself.

In each of *The Intruder, The Blind, The Blue Bird*, and *The Betrothal*, Maeterlinck draws on different threads of childhood to work toward a staged Symbolist aesthetic. In *The Intruder* and *The Blind*, Maeterlinck focuses on the abject child and the latent child that became prominent in the century leading up to the moment at which he was writing. Rather than simply using these threads, however, he twists them to create tortured versions of the original ideals. As I have suggested, this move seems to be an extension and revision of his Romantic legacy. Whereas the Romantics coveted the latent perceptual abilities of children, they also sought the creation of a protected childhood in which those abilities could be nurtured and extended. Maeterlinck, writing well after the peak of Romantic reform, is now excluded from that protected childhood that has been, at least in part, realized. This, combined with the emergence of the perfect child, leads Maeterlinck toward a violent attack on that childhood and those abilities. While Maeterlinck seems to have tempered the violence of his static approach by the turn of the century, I instead suggest that scripts like *The Blue Bird* and *The Betrothal* may be understood instead as the continuation of those earlier sufferings.

From the more overt attacks on childhood in the earlier plays, through the more subtle approach demonstrated after the turn of the century, Maeterlinck's representations of childhood are highly conflicted. In light of the fact that this period is particularly meshed in the overlapping of receding, emergent, and renegotiated threads of childhood, I suggest that Maeterlinck's Symbolist scripts function as an embodied negotiation of these tensions. As the agrarian lifestyle continued to fade and the industrialized, dirty, fast moving city of the Modernist period came to the fore, the child characters of Maeterlinck speak not only to the rapidly changing experience of

childhood, but also to the larger uncertainty of the adult world as it faced changes that would dramatically alter the landscape of Western society.

CHAPTER IV: MCDONAGH AND THE DIGITAL CHILD

In the last two decades, technological innovation has become an increasingly powerful influence in the way childhood is conceived by society. Of these innovations, the development and widespread dissemination of the Internet has been perhaps the most influential, bringing with it paradigm shifts in aesthetics, communication, conceptions of agency, and notions of authorship, as well as in the day-to-day life of children. In approaching this period, I will argue that Martin McDonagh's violence toward a digital construction of childhood in *The Pillowman* and the pointed placelessness of the setting may be understood as an allegorical negotiation of contemporary tensions and fears fostered by the uncertainty of digital technology and Web 2.0.

This chapter begins with a summary and brief exploration of available scholarship on *The Pillowman*. Then I offer an explication of the characters that focuses on the ways in which each embodies and struggles with childhood trauma. Next, I lay out a framework of digitally informed childhood in the current cultural moment, organized by the themes of onwardness, authorship, plurality, and vulnerability. Finally, I offer a reading of childhood in *The Pillowman* that works to incorporate this context. Ultimately, I suggest that, rather than trying to classify any one character as *the* Pillowman, the Internet can be understood to serve this function in that it, more than any of the characters, balances the good and the bad, the hope and the danger, the agency and the control of digital interaction. Throughout this chapter I argue that the model of childhood that is currently prevalent may be understood as a digital childhood which not only incorporates new elements, but also references and embodies elements of the other childhoods discussed in this dissertation.

The Pillowman begins in an interrogation room in an unspecified "totalitarian fucking dictatorship" (18) where Katurian, a writer, is being interrogated by Ariel and Tupolski. As the

interrogation proceeds, the detectives reveal that Katurian's stories tend to feature the brutal death of children and that these stories are being acted out in the community. One little girl is still missing and Katurian, as the prime suspect, is being interrogated. As the detectives question Katurian about the stories, the writer finds out that his "spastic" brother is being held in another room and that he has confessed to killing the children. During this first interrogation sequence, Katurian is physically abused by Ariel while the more verbally abusive Tupolski, the self-proclaimed "good cop," leads the questioning. Katurian's stories factor heavily in this scene with Tupolski making Katurian read "Three Gibbet Crossroads" and "The Little Apple Men," which serve to incriminate him in the copy-cat murders.

In Act I, Scene 2, the action moves beyond the interrogation room to a placeless, memory-tinged story sequence related by Katurian. The story, "The Writer and the Writer's Brother" is a semi-autobiographical piece about parents who keep a little boy locked away to be tortured every night so that his screams will give his brother, a budding writer, nightmares. The parents believed that the nightmares would help the writer's work become twisted and dark and somehow more artistic. In the first version of the story, the writer breaks through the wall to find his laughing parents with the machines they used to simulate torture. It is not until he comes back many years later that he finds the corpse of his brother clutching a story, written in blood. In the second, "somewhat more self-incriminating" (24) version, Katurian reveals that the writer in the story is him, and that he did find his brother, still alive. In this version of the story, Katurian smothers his parents and spends the rest of his life caring for the brother who had endured such torture.

Act II, Scene 1 takes place in a prison cell near the interrogation room. It opens with Michal, bored, listening to the sounds of Katurian being tortured. After Katurian is thrown into

the cell with his brother, he convinces himself that Michal had not killed any children and that it was all lies on the part of the detectives. Eventually, however, Michal reveals that he had, in fact, killed the children after hearing Katurian's stories and that it was actually Katurian's fault for writing, and reading, such terrible things. After Katurian yells at Michal and hurts his feelings, Michal responds by claiming that he enacted one final story: "The Little Jesus." Katurian reacts in horror and eventually gets Michal to fall asleep by reciting "The Little Green Pig,' his one story that doesn't contain violence. After Michal falls asleep, Katurian smothers him and then offers a confession to the detectives—on the condition that his stories are spared. This scene also contains the story "The Pillowman," a story about a creature made of pillows that travels to the past selves of people on the verge of suicide. The Pillowman helps the children commit suicide while they are young, so that they can avoid a life of suffering. At the end, depressed by his job, the Pillowman goes back to help the younger version of himself commit suicide. The last thing the Pillowman sees is the children he had previously helped as an adult. Now that his adult self never existed, and therefore could not help them, each of those children returned to a life of suffering.

Act II, Scene 2, once again transcends the prison cell to relate the story of "The Little Jesus." As in the case of the Act I sequence, Katurian narrates the story as it is acted out in grisly detail. As the name indicates, the story revolves around a little girl who is convinced that she is the next coming of Christ. After her relatively tolerant parents die, she is given to foster parents who hate Christianity and hate her. When she refuses, even after a series of abuses, to give up her convictions, the foster parents decide to see just how much like Jesus she is by making her suffer though the major tortures of the Passion.

Act III returns to the interrogation room and centers on Katurian's fabricated confession. Before Ariel rushes off the find the "Little Jesus" girl, Tupolski reveals that Ariel's brutal treatment of Katurian stems from Ariel's own past of sexual abuse. In Ariel's absence, Tupolski narrates a story for Katurian in which Tupolski is portrayed as wise sage who protects the normal people from their blindness to danger. In this sequence, it is revealed that Tupolski had an abusively alcoholic father and that his own son had died in a fishing accident. After Tupolski shares these traumatic experiences, Ariel reenters with the girl—who is still alive, painted green, and carrying several green piglets. The revelation that she was not put through "The Little Jesus" but, instead, "The Little Green Pig," leads the detectives to realize that Katurian is innocent. Ultimately, however, they still resolve to execute him for the murder of his parents and to burn his stories in retribution for his false confession. The show ends with Katurian re-telling the story of "The Pillowman" as it applies to Michal. In this revision, the Pillowman comes to Michal who decides to bear the years of torture for his brother's sake. Before Katurian finishes the story he is shot by Tupolski. After Tupolski leaves, Ariel, perhaps because of his own troubled past, decides not to burn Katurian's stories.

Reception and scholarly approaches

Critical reception of the play has primarily focused on four, overlapping areas: violence, allegory, authorial responsibility, and audience complicity. Interestingly, the child characters, and the broader theme of childhood, find remarkably little treatment across reviews and scholarship. Of these four themes, the one mentioned most often is the play's violent content. *The Pillowman* is, without question, violent. From the beatings and electric shock torture that Katurian receives, to the onstage smothering of Michal, to the enacted moments of child brutalism from Katurian's stories, violence is omnipresent. In part, reactions to this violence are

framed by McDonagh's position within British drama. Throughout his career he has occasionally been referred to as part of a new wave of "angry young men" of British literature or, more recently, as a "new brutalist" along with other British playwrights such as Sarah Kane. These attempts at categorization, and the response to McDonagh's violent material, remain prevalent in newspaper reviews of the play's world premiere at the Royal National in 2003. Susannah Clap, for instance, writing for *The Observer*, uses language such as "stomach-churning," "disturbing," and "grisly" (Clap). Michael Coveney, in his *Daily Mail* review, refers to the production as "an overblown, rip-roaring version of horror stories told for cathartic release" (Coveney). Reviews of the Broadway production at the Booth Theater (2005) also mention violence, but without the same sense of expectancy found in London reviews. In the *New York Times*, Ben Brantley even offers a warning for American audiences who, it might be assumed, had less exposure to McDonagh's work than those in Britain: "advisory note: severed fingers and heads, electric drills, barbed wire and premature burial all figure prominently" (Brantley).

Scholarly criticism has approached the violence in *The Pillowman* differently, offering instead responses that seek to contextualize the violence in terms of other mediums, genres, and cultural debates. One such debate that finds at least brief mention across scholarship is the larger cultural concern with violent material in the media. While discussions over the possible influences of graphic or inappropriate material have been part of discourse since Plato's *Republic*, these issues have been inflamed most recently by television, video games, and the Internet. Noël Carroll, in his "Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman*, or the Justification of Literature," draws on this both in terms of the play's central rhetorical debate and the possible effect of watching that debate played out, in violent detail, for the audience He points out that while Western society has moved beyond, for instance, a fear of men weeping in public, the

issue of censorship in literature and visual media is still prevalent, "Some today fear that bad role models on page, stage, and screen will encourage violent behavior and/or sexual misconduct. Indeed, many fear that violence in the various media will encourage imitation" (Carroll 168).

Maria Doyle, in her "Breaking Bodies: The Presence of Violence on Martin McDonagh's Stage," frames the question of violence by reading across McDonagh's work. For her, McDonagh's particular use of onstage violence may be attributed to his use of filmic reality and seamless illusionism to violent moments. She argues that by bringing filmic conventions to the stage, McDonagh's "chosen medium of theater shapes both how violent actions must be framed and how audiences position themselves emotionally and intellectually in relation to the present moment" (94). This, for Doyle, can have a profound impact on the audience because of the way this violence is nested within multiple frames and stories. Similarly, Laura Eldred, in "Martin McDonagh and the Contemporary Gothic," points to filmic convention to position McDonagh. For her, his work can be understood by framing it in terms of classic and contemporary horror films, and it is in that tradition that McDonagh uses violent episodes in concert with the past traumas of his characters to manipulate the audience's sympathy for even the most brutal of characters (116).

Beyond violence, each of these scholars also draws attention to the notion of authorial responsibility that is central to *The Pillowman*. Carroll, for instance, uses his initial discussion of the play's violence to springboard into a discussion of this theme. Beyond the basic debate over authorial responsibility, what is significant for Carroll is that McDonagh essentially tricks his audience into sympathizing with Katurian. Before the murders, and their inspiration, are revealed to the audience, Katurian claims, "The *only* duty of a storyteller is to tell a story" (8). Framed in terms of a repressive government obviously bent on severe censorship, this is an attractive idea

that likely appeals to an early twenty-first century, Western theatre audience. As Carroll points out, however, the narrative quickly shifts as atrocities, and his connection to them, are revealed. As the play continues, this debate swings back and forth with characters seeming to take one side or another, or even seeming to switch over the course of the play. For Carroll, this balance contributes to a more specific iteration of the questions of authorial responsibility: "if literature inspires harm, can the gratification it affords ever be enough to justify it—can literary pleasure ever cancel out the wrongs that may be incurred in the pursuit of the potential delights of literature" (174)? Ultimately, for Carroll, the real weight of McDonagh's work comes from the fact that as the debate moves back and forth, McDonagh leaves the question unanswered (178).

Hana and W.B. Worthen, in their "*The Pillowman* and the Ethics of Allegory," also give particular attention to authorial responsibility and the ramifications of representing violence onstage. For them, the work is allegorical and, as such, it assumes a rhetorical, metaphorical, and even metonymic relationship with the world beyond the stage. In relying on this allegorical approach, the play "enables a new kind of reality to come into being" (156). Drawing on this framing, Worthen and Worthen suggest that the significance of violence in *The Pillowman* is found in its excess and the tone of the work. For them, this serves to muddy the actually purpose of theatrical representation of violence by "deny[ing] us a larger perspective on dramatic and theatrical purposes of violent representation" (155-156). Ultimately, Worthen and Worthen argue that, "*The Pillowman* tends to blur the distinction between allegory and *allegoresis*, or allegorical *interpretation*" (165). Put more simply, Worthen and Worthen insist that the excess violence in *The Pillowman* denies the audience the aesthetic distance necessary to interpret the allegory itself.

The final major theme explored in the scholarship on *The Pillowman* centers on the notion of audience complicity. Ondřej Pliny and Eamonn Jordon, for instance, note that "the audience of *The Pillowman* can hardly ever be sure about the status of what they are told- but fact or fiction, they still find themselves deep in the tenets of the take which unravels in front of them, as the lure of the uncanny is enormous and we essentially *want* to believe in it" (218). Similarly, Laura Eldred, in her "Martin McDonagh and the Contemporary Gothic," suggests the audience is able to enjoy something like *The Pillowman* because it affords them an opportunity to "abject the world of the play, to interpret the world of the play as radically other … something definitely 'not like us'" (127). By being both repelled by the violence and by reveling in it, however, the audience is implicated in the debate taking place during the production to the extent of being, in Eldred's words, "a bloodthirsty bunch of voyeurs" (127).

The issues of violence, representation, authorial responsibility, allegory, and complicity raised by these scholars are, without a doubt, central to *The Pillowman*. Indeed, as I move forward I will be drawing on some of these same ideas to act as a framework for my own approach. What they are lacking, however, is anything more than a cursory acknowledgement of contextual factors. While they primarily restrain themselves to mentioning cultural concerns with represented violence before moving into aesthetic issues, I will push beyond this approach to explore what this script means in terms of contemporary childhood, and culture, as it is shaped by the digital revolution and, in particular, the Internet.

Child and Childhood in *The Pillowman*

In *The Pillowman*, some of the most significant representations of children are not literally the appearance of the child onstage, but rather the way the adult characters embody childhood and, in so doing, struggle with their own past traumas. Further, at several key

moments, the adult engagement with childhood is such that the child is invoked more profoundly than if one was onstage at that moment. Because of the centrality of these adult characters to the idea of childhood in *The Pillowman*, in this section I will offer an explication of the various ways that they struggle with and embody childhood. In these readings I will also suggest ways in which each of these characters can be understood as an allegorical portrayal of adult reactions to the fear and uncertainty that are part of their digitally informed context. In doing so, I will gesture toward the discussion of digitally informed life and childhood that follows and also to my larger framing of *The Pillowman* as allegory.

Michal

Michal is the most prominent example of this complex engagement with, and embodiment of, childhood. According to the script, Michal, like Katurian, was a promising, intelligent child until he was locked away by his parents to be tortured—all for the sake of giving Katurian nightmares to contribute to his artistic abilities. While this torture left him "retarded," it also serves, in the way that McDonagh represents him, to arrest his mental progress; it essentially freezes his cognitive abilities, reason, and judgment at the level of his pre-torture, eight-year old self.

As in the case of childhood throughout Western history, and especially since the Middle Ages, one of the primary markers of childlike status is the framing and definition implied by the formalized education system. Just as children are traditionally made not-adult, and broken into ranks that progress toward the "achievement" of adulthood, so too is Michal classified by his status as a student. This status is further reinforced by the fact that his actions and thoughts, because of his violently halted development, are those of a child. As Katurian insists, at several points at the beginning of the play, "my brother's at school" (12). The school, in question,

according to Katurian, is a "special" school for those with learning disabilities (11). When Katurian realizes that Michal is in fact next door, and believes that Michal is being tortured, his thoughts turn to the fact that Michal will be scared because he is "alone in a strange place" (12), refers to him as a "child" (18), and says that "he doesn't speak to strangers" (20).

Pointedly, that is not the only reference to school. Later, in the same scene, Tupolski gives Katurian the very incriminating "The Town on the River" and asks him to stand and read it aloud. Just as he is about to start, Katurian pauses and says, "this feels like school, somehow." (16). Tupolski responds, "Except at school they didn't execute you at the end. (*pause.*) Unless you went to a really fucking tough school" (16). Much in the way that Edel Lamb describes education, growth, and masculinity in Early Modern England, Michal and Katurian are both "boyed" in this first scene (4). As Katurian "boys" Michal, so too do Tupolski and Ariel "boy" Katurian.

When the audience actually sees Michal for the first time, the perception of childlike status is reinforced. His first appearance, in Act 2 Scene 1, opens with Michal trying to remember the words to "The Little Green Pig" while Katurian's screams echo in the background. Rather than expressing sympathy for Katurian, as someone who grew up being tortured (an experience that he remains fully cognizant of), Michal mimics one set of screams then another. Finally, he says, "oh shut up, Katurian! Making me forget the little green pig story now with your screaming all over the place" (26). Michal's irritation quickly wears off and, in a pointedly childlike turn, quickly devolves into boredom at the fact that he has to wait alone: "I wish they'd hurry up and stop torturing ya. I'm bored. It's boring in here" (26).

These childlike mannerisms and mood swings are reinforced throughout the scene. When Katurian makes a wry joke about women as Michal is complaining about his "itchy arse," for instance, Michal fails to understand:

> KATURIAN. Yeah, but could you keep telling me about it, because it's really keeping my spirits up.
>
> MICHAL. My, really? No, you're just being stupid. You can't have an arse keep your spirits up, can ya?
>
> KATURIAN. It depends on the arse.
>
> MICHAL. What? Stupid. (29-30)

By this point, McDonagh has already framed Michal as child. He has defined him in terms of his disability, his position as a young school boy, and his response to a variety of events, including his boredom during his brother's torture. This exchange, however, may be understood to push beyond mere lack of comprehension—Michal does, after all, demonstrate incredible perception throughout the scene. In this context, Michal might be understood to have said: "What? Stupid. Girls are gross." As the scene continues, these markers of childlike immaturity continue to appear, including Michal's insistence on bedtime stories, his fixation on tangential (and childlike) details in those stories, his propensity for childlike guile/mischief (34), the way he places blame on Katurian for his own actions (34-35), his overestimation of time (36), his faulty logic (36), his reaction to insults (36-37, 40), his tantrums, and his pathological inability to understand the ramifications of his violence actions. In these moments, McDonagh is very clearly drawing on threads of childhood and expectations of children in representing the "retardation" of Michal.

Most significantly, and central to the debate about authorial responsibility inherent in the play, is Michal's complete inability to distinguish fact from fiction, or to distinguish story telling from instruction and/or encouragement. While Michal demonstrates this throughout the storytelling segments of Act 2, Scene I, the most pointed moment occurs when Katurian asks Michal why he killed the children. Michal responds, "*you* know. Because you told me to" (34). In the exchange that follows, Michal repeats the sentence several times, ultimately noting, "I wouldn't have done anything if you hadn't told me, so don't you act all the innocent. Every story you tell me, something horrible happens to somebody" (35). This inability to distinguish fiction from reality, when mixed with his fatigueless and notably childlike curiosity ultimately propels him to action. As Michal says, "I was just testing out how far-fetched they were. 'Cos I always thought some of 'em were a bit far-fetched. (*Pause*.) D'you know what? They ain't all that far-fetched" (35).

McDonagh's framing of Michal in terms of the childlike can be said to reflect larger cultural responses to those with cognitive or personality disorders. McDonagh, however, pushes this framing further in the relationship he establishes between Michal and his past. Specifically, Michal is also boyed by his past traumas. Because of these experiences, Michal, when faced with reminders of his past, essentially "becomes" child. Even though his body is that of a man's, these moments transform him into the child that he was before his torture began. Similar to the case of Leontes, Coriolanus, and even the characters from *The Blind*, Michal is violently interpellated as child by his parent's abuses and, in carrying out similar atrocities and lapses in "adult" judgment; he tacitly accepts that label and performs childhood.

Beyond this framing, and because of Michal's inability to distinguish fact from fiction, he may also be understood as the character that embodies the inadequacy and inexperience of adults

as they try to understand digital technology. Parents, whether in pride, embarrassment, or ignorance, often make mistakes when interacting with the technologies that come so easily to their children. Even as Michal claims that Katurian, by reading him stories, "told [him] to" go and enact them, many adults find themselves protesting that the "pop-up" told them they had to "act now" or that it warned them that a free virus scan had found tens of thousands of critical errors that could only be erased by clicking one simple link. These real-world adults, like Michal, are frozen in what might termed a "digital infancy." Regardless of their efforts to learn and understand, many can only blunder blindly and disastrously, regardless of their good intentions. In doing so, they accept the labels of incompetence put on them by the "experts" (i.e., their children).

Ariel

Ariel, like Michal, is defined in relation to childhood. Though it can usually be assumed that an adult and/or adult character is the product of his or her childhood, McDonagh capitalizes on this process by continually injecting traumatic fragments of Ariel's childhood into his interactions. At the beginning of the play, Ariel seems a one-note adaptation of the traditional hard-boiled detective with an emphasis on brutality and even short-sightedness. Beneath these traits, however, is a series of childlike traumas that are slowly revealed. The most apparent manifestation of this trauma is that whenever the issue of child brutality comes up, Ariel's immediate response is to inflict pain on Katurian, whether it be with his hands or with electrodes. Beyond this, however, are frequent references, made largely by Tupolski, beginning in the first scene and continuing as the play moves forward. In Act I, Scene 1, after supposedly torturing Michal, Ariel returns and Tupolski comments that, "Ariel had a problem childhood, see, and he tends to take it out on all the retards we get in custody" (18). It is telling, however, that Ariel did

not in fact harm Michal. Instead, he asked him to yell in pain and then rewarded him with a ham sandwich. Ariel, haunted by his own past, sees Michal as a child and so refrains from brutalizing him. Toward the end of the scene, Tupolski brings up Ariel's past again, and Ariel reacts with anger.

The next insight into Ariel's past comes in Act III with the revelation that the final little girl was supposedly killed mimicking the action of Katurian's "The Little Jesus" story. Rather than lashing out at Katurian as he has done throughout the play, Ariel's immediate reaction is to cry softly before he begins to ramp up in anger (51). Just as he is about the start torturing the writer again, however, Katurian reveals that "The Writer and the Writer's Brother," which tells part of the story of Katurian and Michal's past, is partially autobiographical. In response, Ariel first softens, but then begins to get worked up again and launches into a story about how, regardless of his morally questionable police brutality, he is fundamentally good because he is on "the right side. The child's side" (53). After this speech, when he forces Katurian to his knees to begin torture again, Katurian finally connects the dots: "and who was the first one who told *you* to kneel down, Ariel? Your mum or your dad?" (54). Ariel argues with Tupolski about the fact that he has hinted at these issues and finally says:

> ARIEL. I've never said a word about my problem childhood. I wouldn't *use* the phrase "problem childhood" to describe my childhood.
>
> TUPOLSKI. What phrase would you use? A "fucked by your dad" childhood? (54).

Shortly thereafter, Tupolski goes on to reveal that Ariel's torture began when he was eight and that Ariel, like Katurian, ended up smothering his father.

Because of this past, and because this past is continually made present in the interrogation scenes, Ariel remains incapable of escaping his childhood or to stop attempting to imagine a perfect innocent childhood protected by people like him. Furthermore, Ariel's sexual abuse began at the age of eight—the same age that Michal was when his abuse began. In this way, Ariel acts as an analogue to Michal. Ariel was put into the same situation and, unlike Michal, was able to take action to remedy that situation. Unfortunately, it was too late. As with Michal, Ariel's ability to reason and judge was impaired by the continual torture and his violent escape from it. In this way, both Michal and Ariel are trapped in their childhoods and respond violently as a result. But, whereas Michal seems unaware of the full repercussions of his actions, Ariel realizes and even revels in the fact that he sometimes uses "excessive force on an entirely innocent individual" (53).

Michal, when tortured by his parents, had to be saved by someone else. As such, his regression into childhood involves attempts to "save" children a la the Pillowman. Ariel, on the other hand, managed to use violence to rescue himself from the horrors of his childhood. Because of this response, Ariel's regressions to and performances of childhood embody the reactionary anger and impulsiveness that encourage people who would normally be considered well-adjusted and "normal" to engage in some of the most hurtful Internet "trolling." Just as Ariel's past trauma and his role as a police officer in a totalitarian state give him the protection to engage in these violent outbreaks, so too does the anonymity of the Internet facilitate the impulsive and abusive "troll."

Tupolski

Tupolski, on the other hand, works against these other interactions with childhood. He too is obsessed with it and tortured by it. Instead of reliving childhood, however, he is tortured in

a different way. Tupolski's trauma comes from the fact that his son died at an early age. Whereas the Romantics and the Symbolists mourn for the loss of their own childhoods, Tupolski mourns for the loss of his son's. The first reference to childhood with Tupolski is his comment about his father's violent alcoholism and his own subsequent habit. This, alone, is enough to traumatize many adults and scar/ruin their memories of childhood. After this revelation however, in Act III, Tupolski tells an elaborate story about how he, through intense calculation, is able to intervene in the life of a child who is in danger of being hit by a train. In this story, the child is completely oblivious, laughing and playing, before Tupolski's actions save him. In some ways, this resonates with Katurian's "Pillowman" story. Indeed, Tupolski even references that story as one he sort of likes because "there was something gentle about it" (62). This connection is strengthened by the fact that Tupolski's son's death was accidental and that he was alone and that when talking about "The Pillowman," he goes on to say that there is something reassuring in the thought that if a child died alone in an accident "he had this kind soft person with him, to hold his hand and whatnot. And that it was the child's choice somehow" (62). Immediately after this exchange, Tupolski's emotional barriers go back up and no more mention is made of his own trauma-ridden relationship with childhood. Significantly, however, it is during this interaction that Tupolski puts the battery and electrodes back in the cabinet, signaling the end of Katurian's torture (62).

Regardless of the glimmers of genuine emotion and sentimentality that Tupolski occasionally shows, he personifies a practiced air of apathy and cynicism. In contrast to Michal's outward inability to distinguish fact from fiction and to Ariel's violent responses, Tupolski's character responds to the traumas of childhood by putting up barriers and internalizing. This is perhaps one of the most common adult responses to changes brought by digital technology. As

David Buckingham notes, "children's expertise with technology gives them access to new forms of culture and communication that largely escape parental control" (5). Without control, and short of engaging in the reactions demonstrated by Ariel and Michal, Tupolski typifies the attempt to regain authority and control, not by outward assertion, but by feigning indifference. In a similar fashion, parents frequently turn to performances of cynicism and apathy in the face of the digital child's abilities. If they can, through these performances, devalue the thing that makes them uncomfortable and challenges their authority, the fact that they do not understand it becomes irrelevant.

Katurian

As with Michal, Katurian's obsessive and painful relationship with childhood is overtly discussed and represented, and is a major focus of the play. Katurian's adult self has been profoundly shaped by his childhood. While Michal was physically tortured, to the point of becoming "spastic," Katurian seemingly endured and rose above the emotional and psychological torture he experienced. The first, and most apparent effect that this childhood has on Katurian's character is, of course, his twisted stories and his particular focus on the brutalization of children. Beyond this, however, it is possible to see the impact that the abuse he suffered, his reaction to his own role in Michal's torture, and the act of killing his parents has had on him.

Throughout the play, Katurian demonstrates a fixation with the duality between surface appearances and what is underneath. Put another way, Katurian has a fixation with the relationship between explicit and implicit meaning. As with Michal's inability to understand the difference between right and wrong (or the repercussions of actions), Katurian demonstrates an inability to understand when to take something at face value and when to look beyond. Near the

beginning of Act I, Scene 1, for instance, Katurian rants about authors who write political sentiments into their work: “Please, Fuck off. You know what I say? I say if you’ve got a political axe to grind, if you’ve got a political what-do-ya-call-it, go write a fucking essay” (8). In this passage, in addition to protesting the idea that he includes anything beyond the story in his work, he also blithely assumes that it is possible to write a story objectively, without political meaning. Later in the same scene, Katurian utters a line that is a hallmark of this type of thinking: “you can draw your own conclusions” (10).

A bit further on in Act I, he makes the same assumption about truth. When he takes Tupolski at his word about Michal, Tupolski replies, “Katurian, I am a high-ranking police officer in a totalitarian fucking dictatorship. What are you doing taking my word about anything” (18). Even with this reminder, however, Katurian falls into the same trap. He believes everything that the detectives say about his brother and the murders. When he first confronts Michal in Act II, Scene I, he finally sees that he has done so and realizes that no real proof was offered, and that he cannot take Tupolski at his word. This epiphany, however, comes too late and is as doomed as his earlier conviction. Also, while having this epiphany and pointing out that the first rule of storytelling is “don’t believe what you read in the papers” (28), he takes his brother at his word that he did not kill the children.

The balance between truth and appearance only becomes more unstable as Katurian begins to lie. Ultimately, this can be understood as a significant portrayal of the painful childhood he has endured. While Michal’s abuse has made it so that he cannot tell the difference between right and wrong, between storytelling and instruction, so too did Katurian’s nightmare and illusion-riddled childhood make it so that he is unable to maintain the boundaries between

what is said and what is meant. In other words, that which makes him a good writer detracts from his ability to critically engage with the world around him.

Katurian's childhood torture also finds a place in his confusion between the narrative structure of storytelling with the events happening to him in real time. Just as in the case of his stories, there can be no happy ending for Katurian because he does not want one. Pointedly, in Act II, he takes both sides of the same argument. Initially, he responds to Michal's assertion that Katurian reminds him of the Pillowman because he helps little kids die,

> KATURIAN. The Pillowman never killed anybody, Michal. And all the children that died were going to lead horrible lives anyway.
>
> MICHAL. You're right, all children are going to lead horrible lives. You may as well save them the hassle.
>
> KATURIAN. Not all children are going to lead horrible lives. (36)

Even while protesting, however, both his actions and writing more clearly align with Michal's outlook: "Did *you* lead a horrible life since you was a child? Yes. Erm, did *I* lead a horrible life since I was a child? Yes. That's two out of two for a start" (36). Put in the context of the entire play, in which all of the characters have suffered in relation to childhood, this sentiment might not be as fraught as it seems. Katurian's essentially nihilistic view is reinforced several pages later as they discuss "The Writer and the Writer's Brother." At this point, Katurian notes, flying in the face of his earlier view, that "there are no happy endings in real life" (41).

Finally, Katurian's trauma can be seen in the way he handles the very grim situation in which he finds himself. Throughout the play, Katurian has one overriding obsession that trumps all others—the desire to tell a good story, full of drama and twists. In the early story sections, for

instance, he is very particular about quantifying the quality of his work. After Tupolski summarizes "The Three Gibbet Crossroads," Katurian declares:

> KATURIAN. That's a good story …
>
> TUPOLSKI. It's your best story, you say?
>
> KATURIAN. No. It's *one* of my best stories
>
> TUPOLSKI. Oh, it's *one* of your best stories. You have so many.
>
> KATURIAN. Yes (*Pause.*) My best story is "The Town on the River." (15)

Significantly, it is not Katurian's best story in terms of aesthetics (or not only). Instead, channeling his parent's results oriented approach to child rearing, it is his best because it is the only one that has been published. In Katurian's mind, that makes it the best story. As the play continues, he becomes more and more frantic about preserving his stories and about preserving his dramatic ending. After it is revealed that he did not in fact kill the children, Ariel gives him a chance to take back his confession about killing his parents as well:

> ARIEL. The only killing we can definitely pin on you is the killing of your brother. In light of the extenuating circumstances, I doubt it highly that you would be executed for it. I would therefore think very carefully before admitting to the killing of…
>
> KATURIAN. *I* killed my parents. (*Pause*.) *I* killed my parents. (65)

Faced with the possibly of freedom, Katurian instead commits himself fully to be executed. Just as he notes later on of Ariel's later second thoughts about burning Katurian's stories, to be spared would have "ruined the writer's fashionably downbeat ending" (69). In this moment, his parents get the last word. Rather than saving himself and moving on with his life, he must obtain, and live in, the twisted aesthetic that his parents created for him.

The blurring of boundaries that is so prevalent in Katurian's character can be understood as another adult reaction to digital technology and digital children. Throughout the play, Katurian struggles with distinguishing the difference between implicit and explicit meaning. This inability, in turn, often leads him to false assumptions that only serve to make his situation worse. Those parents who do not succumb to the protective apathy of Tupolski or the types of violence typified by Ariel and Michal often try to find ways of reconnecting with their children using the new technologies and mediums that their children favor. The problem is that these parents often struggle with the boundaries and conventions of disclosure and identity that make up so much of the Internet and of Web 2.0. In other words, these are the parents who fail to understand the difference between explicit word choice and the ever changing, implicit, Internet variants on these words. They often comment on their child's Facebook wall, or they try, without success to hashtag something in a program other than Twitter. More recently, with the wide spread dissemination of smart phones, they often run into problems with auto-correct features, reply-all functions, and digital shorthand when composing text messages and emails. In and of themselves, these seem modest concerns. Put together and framed in terms of greater atmosphere of fear described here, however, this difficulty with the boundary between implicit and explicit contributes to a system in which parents miss the significance of danger signs and interactions not only for themselves, but for their children as well.

The Writer and the Writer's Brother

Beyond the adult embodiment of childhood, *The Pillowman* also includes several direct representations of childhood. The first, in Act I, Scene 2, occurs in the story sequence Katurian narrates and participates in, "The Writer and the Writer's Brother," which is a semi-autobiographical account of Katurian and Michal's childhood. The story begins with Katurian

sitting on a bed in a playroom, with another room just barely visible, next to it. As he begins to tell the story of his parent's sick experiment, they enter and, "*after caressing and kissing Katurian, enter the adjoining room*" (23). Then, the noises of torture begin. Here, Katurian shifts more directly into the scene for moments, embodying his younger self: "(*To Mother, in a boy's voice.*) 'What were all those noises last night, Mama?'" (23). Through the next set of lines, he switches between young Katurian and adult narrator with his mother answering questions:

> KATURIAN. (*Boy's Voice.*) Oh. Do all little boys of my age hear such sounds of abomination nightly?
>
> MOTHER. No, my darling. Only the extraordinarily talented ones.
>
> KATURIAN. (*Boy's voice*.) Oh. Cool. (23)

Ultimately, while Katurian (now fourteen) is awaiting the results of a story competition, a note is slipped under the door, written in blood, from his brother. Katurian breaks through the wall, only to find his laughing parents. Apparently, they had staged the tortures to help him win a writing competition. It is not until many years later, when he decides to go back to where he grew up, that he finds the hidden body of his brother. In his brother's broken hand was, "the sweetest, gentlest, [story] he'd ever come across … it was better than anything he himself had ever written" (24). This is where Katurian's story story ends. The real-world autobiographical inspiration for the story, however, is very different. The real ending, as Katurian points out, is far more incriminating. When, as a child, Katurian broke down the door, he found his tortured, mentally handicapped brother. That night, he explains, he held a pillow over his parents' faces, one at a time, until they died (25).

This scene contains two key details that necessitate further exploration. First, the fact that Katurian kills his parents with a pillow changes readings of his later "Pillowman" story. With

this act, he becomes a version of the Pillowman; with soft pillows and determination he comes to rescue the child. In this same sense, however, it is possible to see the terrible regret that Katurian feels about his past. Pointedly, in the story that he actually writes, the Pillowman comes before the life of torture to release the child from future suffering. In the "real world," the Pillowman is too late; the suffering has already occurred. In this same vain, his later smothering of Michal, again with a pillow, may be understood as an act of completion, of a broken covenant made right again. In this, he rescues Michal, still very much a child, in mind if not in body, from the reality of what he had done.

Secondly, Katurian's explanation of Michal's story as "the sweetest, gentlest thing he'd ever come across" (24) is telling. "The Little Green Pig," after all, seems completely out of character for Katurian's writing. Even more significantly, when Michal is faced with torture once more, this time his brother's torture, he shuts out the noise and the reality of it by, essentially, compartmentalizing as he attempts to remember his "favorite" story, "The Little Green Pig." In fact, it is "The Little Green Pig" that Michal first wants him to read in their scene, not "The Pillowman." It is only after Katurian dismisses it as "silly" that Michal agrees on "The Pillowman." In the play, the authorship of "The Little Green Pig" is never directly stated; it is assumed, of course, that it is Katurian's. If it is not, however, if these other elements stated here point to it actually being Michal's story and, further, a protection against torture, it adds another twist in the debate over authorial responsibility.

The Internet/Digital Child

Even without further analysis, the childlike traits and obsessions of these characters, along with the actual child characters, make *The Pillowman* one of the most significant dramatic representations of children and childhood in the past several decades. While the comments of

other scholars and the readings that I have summarized provide a significant insight into childhood, they do so largely within the frame of the play itself. What these readings are lacking is a consideration of greater culture shifts that have dramatically impacted the way socierty understands its children.

As I have outlined throughout this dissertation, each moment in history is replete with forces that work with and against each other to shape and reshape the concept of childhood. Of these forces, especially since the Middle Ages, technology has been a major factor. From the printing press, to the invention of industrial machines and, later, medical procedures, each of the cultural moments that I have discussed are partially shaped by concurrent technological developments and had profound impact on the conception of the child and childhood. Undoubtedly, of contemporary technological innovation, the most influential to social conceptions of children is the development and rapid evolution of digital media and, in particular, the Web 2.0 Internet. In approaching the influence of these changes, I will first offer an outline of some of what I see as the major characteristics of Web 2.0, roughly grouped under the headings of onwardness, knowledge and authorship, vulnerability, and plurality. As I outline these traits, I will also point out the ways that they contribute to the creation of the paradoxical and pluralist child that McDonagh adapts in *The Pillowman.*

Because the changes brought by the Internet are ongoing and rapid, an exhaustive commentary on them would be impossible. Furthermore, there is a lack, at this point of satisfying cultural theory to account for this moment. While formulations ranging from "Automodernity" and "Altermodernity" to "Digimodernism" and "Hypermodernism"[3] have much to offer, each

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[3] For more, see Samuels, Robert. "Auto-Modernity after Postmodernism: Autonomy and Automation in Culture, Technology, and Education," (2008). Bourriaud, Nicolas. "Altermodern," (2009). Kirby, Alan. *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture* (2009), and Lipovetsky, Gilles. *Hypermodern Times* (2005).

suffers from the fact that by the time each book on the topic is published, they are hopelessly out of date. For the same reasons, more established formations, such as those grouped under the umbrella of PostModernism, also fall short. In the case of Post-Modernism especially, the fact that the bulk of its foundational writing was completed before the Internet was widely available troubles applications of its principles to the current moment. That noted, each addresses issues that find their way into the theoretical sketch I am offering here to act as a frame for the final stage of my reading of *The Pillowman*.

Onwardness

Central to the Internet, and particularly the innovations of Web 2.0, is the process of perpetual movement that comes with digital experience. In *Digimodernism*, Alan Kirby uses the term "onwardness" to discuss the way the Internet is always ongoing and incomplete and that the user/author is thrust into the continual process of creation (52). As a practical example of this quality, Kirby points to the structure of blogs. Previously, in journals and diaries, the reader would be faced with a chronological series of entries beginning with the earliest date. When accessing a blog, however, the reader is confronted by the most recent entry in a process of perpetual construction and emergence (111).

What is lacking from this discussion of onwardness, however, is a greater exploration of hypertext and the ways it shapes the digital experience. While he does mention hypertext, Kirby does not mention the ways in which new forms of social media that have come with Web 2.0, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, have expanded the experience of hypertext. According to the *OED*, "hypertext" is a "text which does not form a single sequence and which may be read in various orders; *spec*. text and graphics which are interconnected in such a way that a reader of

the material can discontinue reading one document at certain points in order to consult other related matter" (hypertext). The hypertext experience is one of discovery and of potential frustration, of a user starting a search, etc. with a specific goal in mind. As the user journeys further, however, s/he finds his or herself skimming through dozens of pages that become less and less related to the original topic with each step. It also ties into the ephemerality of the digital experience. The nature of hypertext and, by extension, the internet, is one which the user cannot recreate the same path, the same journey through its expanse. Further, the definition of hypertext also gestures towards the multitude of access points allowed by the Internet.

This framing somewhat shifts Kirby's "onwardness" from being primarily concerned with the ongoing project of the Internet itself, as a thing that its constantly being added to and updated, to one that focuses on the way the user is propelled forward, experiencing an oftentimes unwilling "flow" that takes them further and further away from their intended goal. This process, and this speed, is heightened by the innovations of Web 2.0. With Twitter, for instance, a specialized type of hypertext, the hashtag, has come into common usage. With the hashtag, users can decide what grouping their tweets might fit into and place hashtags next to them; Twitter then makes those into hyperlinks. When a user clicks on the new hyperlink, s/he is propelled to a larger grouping of tweets that are organized, loosely, by topic and hashtag. The onwardness and discursivity of the journey is complicated still further by the fact that users can embed multiple hashtags in each tweet. What this means for the user then is that at each click they are faced with almost unlimited options. Some clicks will keep them within the loosely arranged, largely temporary discursive formation of the first tweet while others will propel them to other similarly temporary discursive formations. This system, which has been replicated in different ways by other social media websites, makes for an almost limitless number of topically arranged

discursive formations that are linked in innumerable ways, which propel the user along them endlessly. Even if the user turns off his or her computer, many will still be carrying traces of the journey (through "liking" and "favoriting") and even instant, remote access to it with his or her smartphone.

Knowledge & Authorship

As Kirby discusses in both "The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond" and *"Digimodernism*," the Internet has dramatically changed the dissemination of knowledge and opportunities for authorship. In the former, Kirby suggests that the "pseudo modern" moment has shifted concerns with authorship from a fetishizing of the author to a fetishizing of the recipient to the extent that the recipient, and all other recipients, are granted the authority to continually co-author the narrative in real time (2). In *Digimodernism*, he expands upon this idea to argue that the death of the author and the interpretive agency of the recipient, once metaphorical, is now a core principle in culture. Now, from documents, videos, and ideas, posted on the Internet, to viewer-guided call-in television shows, the user becomes author and is able to rewrite the ongoing narrative (51). Kirby also points to the new freedoms and constraints that the Internet offers in terms of authoring personal identity. On the one hand, using the example of chat rooms, Kirby suggests that the user is able to suspend or revise identity on a continual basis (106). On the other hand, however, as suggested by John Palfrey and Urs Gasser in their *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*, these identities become ever present, viewable by anyone with the right equipment, and are difficult (if not impossible) to erase (22).

Here again, these ideas suffer somewhat from their lack of consideration of new social media. In recent years, the paradox of authorship and identity as both mutable and un-erasable

has become even more prevalent. Using the various forms of social media, authors can enter almost any type of discussion. They can even create aspects of popular culture by authoring "memes" that point up issues in society and entertainment. On one's Facebook page, or through a Twitter account, (to name only a few) a user can create a fantasy identity. The problem, however, is that these acts of authorship are almost impossible to erase and more and more these acts of authorship bleed beyond the boundaries of the digital world as potential employers, for instance, scrutinize a candidate's digital interactions.

These issues are particularly relevant to the formation of childhood. As Palfrey and Gasser note, the children and teens engaging in these practices right now are the first generation of what they call "Digital Natives." In other words, they are the first generation raised with the ways these technologies affect issues such as language, authorship, and identity. As such, they see the world very differently than those who lived (or even remember) a time before these changes. One example of this is the comfort that Digital Natives have with multitasking (239). Where once, the thought of working on homework while listening to music while chatting, etc. would have been strange, children raised with digital technology do not find anything strange about it. In fact, some have trouble focusing without the multiple stimuli (2). In many ways, this change reflects the discursive nature of the Internet itself. Because these children were raised in an environment of endless information overload, it seems natural to have a similar experience in other aspects of their lives.

Vulnerability

Because of their experience and expertise with digital technology, the subject position of Digital Natives is dramatically altered. Perhaps most significantly, children raised with the Internet are often, at least in related areas, more knowledgeable, worldlier than their parents.

Where the parent might click on a suspicious pop-up or accidently download something that they should not, the digital child knows to avoid, or purposely access, such obvious traps. Similarly, when something goes wrong with the computer, the parents go to the child to have it fixed. As Sarah Holloway and Gill Valentine note in their *Cyberkids: Children in the Information Age*, "young people's technical competencies often exceed those who are charged with protecting them" (8). Buckingham goes further, arguing that not only is the digital child more knowledgeable about these technologies, but that they are also capable of using them as a means of subversion: "now it is adults who are believed to have most to lose, as children's expertise with technology gives them access to new forms of culture and communication that largely escape parental control" (5). In this way, the established power structure between parent and child becomes inverted with the child becoming not-child to help the parent who has become, in their digital infancy, not-adult.

At the same time, however, the Internet offers a wide range of dangers for the digital child that he or she might not be prepared for or recognize. From sexual predators and gambling schemes, to online bullying and identity theft, there are still dangers that the child is especially vulnerable to, and which are exacerbated by the child's otherwise natural (if still naive) confidence in digital interaction. In fact, as Palfrey and Gasser note, "parents and teachers of Digital Natives worry a lot about digital safety—far more than Digital Natives themselves do" (83). In this way, the power relationship between parent and child begins to flip back toward the parent. Similarly, the child faces another vulnerability. Oftentimes the agency granted by authorship, access, and anonymity is, in fact, consciously structured by corporations and governments. In other words, while some discursive digital journeys are what they seem, others are influenced by ad purchases and ghost postings to continually circle the user back to their

product. Kirby suggests as one possibility: “These texts do not give consumers ‘what they want’; instead the downtrodden are manipulated into imagining they desire what is politically expedient to give them” (125).

Plurality

With these factors in mind, I argue that the digital child can be understood as pluralist, even as a hyper version of childhood that offers a discursive journey through the changes of each previous period. As children venture more and more into the adult world at an early age, the invisible child may be found in the increasing tentativeness of child as a concept. The curried child may be found in the duality of playfulness and parental guidelines on the appropriateness of content and time management. The abject child may be found in the dangers posed to children by the Internet. The latent child may be found in the ability and potential of the child to interact and innovate in ways that their parents might not be able to understand. Finally, the perfect child may be found in the struggle to regulate Internet time and usage as parents try desperately to maintain some semblance of innocence and protected childhood.

On the one hand, as noted, the shift to digital childhood brings with it a child who, in some ways, is bizarrely knowledgeable and worldly. In addition to the fact that they know about the Internet, often to a much greater extent than their parents, they are also shaped by structure of the Internet. They create texts and identities in ways children never have before and are capable of multitasking and understanding the mutability of the knowledge that is highlighted by the Internet.

At the same time, however, because of the dangers offered by the digital world, and because of the anxiety of this generation of parents over the fact that they do not know much about it, the child has become increasingly sentimentalized. New attempts have been made at

restricting what the child may view, including "technological fixes" such as attempts to tighten ratings systems, censorship, v-chips, and Internet blocking software (Buckingham 5). There is also a very real concern that Internet danger can seep into the real world—online predators can meet their victims in person, comment board bullies (trolls) can cause enough harm that someone takes their own life, and attempts at identity construction can be seen by other students, for instance, and have real world ramifications.

As with the Internet, however, the current construction of child moves ever onward. It is possible to see emphasis on the Early Modern curried child in the expectation of good citizenship in online conduct. With the next "click," the child faces the invisibility of the Middle Age childhood as the boundaries been adult and child texts become malleable, and in turn destabilize the idea of childhood. And, like the latent child, replete with wondrous creative powers, the digital child has countless opportunities to play and create using the variety of tools and utilities offered by the Internet. Finally, there is a shift in trust. The Internet has brought culture to a place, more than ever before, in which the most innocuous appearances often hide the most terrifying of boogeyman—as is made clear by the parent figures of *The Pillowman.*

Digital Pillowman

At the beginning of this chapter, I outlined some of the work scholars have done on *The Pillowman.* For the most part, this work was concerned with McDonagh's staged negotiation of authorial responsibility. While these works are important for their approach to violence and authorship, they do not consider the prevalence of represented children and the threads of childhood that undergirds almost every moment of the play. I worked to remedy this by offering readings of each of the characters in terms of their own experiences and struggles with childhood. In this final section, I will draw the performances of childhood in *The Pillowman*

together with the contextual changes in childhood to suggest a deeper sense of self and social reflexivity in McDonagh's work. In doing so, I will draw on the pointed placelessness of *The Pillowman* to suggest that it can be understood as an allegorical representations of those contemporary fears and tensions.

Before pursuing this analysis, however, it is important to point out some of the structural elements of the text that resonate with those same tensions. First, the setting: as noted above, McDonagh offers no more than, *"Police interrogation room*" (5) and Tupolski's later, and very general reference to the "totalitarian fucking dictatorship" (18). With these directions, McDonagh makes a rhetorical move very similar to Katurian's scripted protests about interpretation—it seems that McDonagh, at least nominally, is interested in telling a story and "we can draw our own conclusions." When the script is read in terms of its context, however, this bareness and lack of identifying markings finds its parallel in the instability and vastness of the Internet. Even if Internet users know what web pages they are on, chances are they do not know what servers are hosting their interactions or in what mainframes and cloud services the data, and their signals, are bouncing around. In some ways the interrogation room is ideally suited for this aspect of the Internet. Under the bright central light, the user thinks he or she knows where he or she is, but the further away from the light they travel, the more darkness sets in and the more gritty corners are found.

Secondly, the script itself is structured to operate in a way that reflects the Web 2.0 experience. In the very first moments of the script, the audience is in comfortable territory. They have purchased a ticket (clicked on the first hyperlink) and have started to watch what begins almost as a conventional hardboiled detective "whodunit." Beginning with the first conversations about aesthetics and authorial responsibility, however, the experience begins to take unexpected

turns. But the audience, immediately clicks another link: it buys Katurian's story. From there, the twists begin to come faster and faster and, like the experience of digital interaction, it draws the audience onward to each subsequent twist. Even at the end, the production lacks a conventional ending, the journey remains unfinished. Katurian does not stay dead. Instead, in another twist, he gets up to finish his story. In a sense, it is almost as if both characters and audience give up in acknowledgement of the fact that, with the final convention of death being broken, the story could continue to go on, and continue to be revised. This, in and of itself, is another way that the script reflects digital innovation. The narrative, as it is being pushed forward at a breakneck speed, is continually revised. Even by the end, the audience is left without a firm sense of what was ""truth," or at the very least the original story, and what was built on by the characters during the show.

The Crucifixion of Digital Childhood

For the most part, beyond commenting on the brutality of the scene, scholars and critics have not devoted much attention to "The Little Jesus" sequence at the end of Act II. The story itself is concerned with a little girl who is convinced that she is Jesus, much to the concern of her parents and, in turn, the disgust of her abusive foster parents, played by the same actors who play Michal and Katurian's parents in Act I, scene 2. As Katurian is narrating, the little girl begins to act out the scene, beginning with donning "a very false beard and a pair of sandals" (46). As the story goes on, the little girl, who has been slipping out and "consorting with the type of person her mummy and daddy didn't deem suitable for a six-year-old to be consorting with" (46). As might be expected by this point in *The Pillowman*, the little girl's parents, on the way to pick her up from another of her expeditions, die gruesomely. The child, rather than reacting as might be expected, instead practices stoicism: "she cried one single tear, and not a single tear more, as she

thought Jesus would've done if he'd lost his parents in a vehicular beheading" (47). The State ships the little girl off to foster parents who react badly to the girl's piety, conviction, and certainty. As the scene continues, Katurian narrates the quick descent from verbal and more standard physical abuses to outright torture—beginning with their reaction to her attempts to heal a blind-man (played by Katurian) by rubbing dirt and spittle over his eyes. At this point, the foster parents take a new tack: if she wants to be just like Jesus, then she should experience the same suffering that Jesus did. At this point, they begin to take the little girl through the major sufferings of the passion: "*The dreadful details of the following are all acted out onstage*" (47).

This gruesome and profoundly disturbing section includes a crown of thorns fashioned from barbed wire, whippings, cross bearing, crucifixion, and, ultimately, live burial in which the girl "*slowly, scrapes her fingernails down the lid*." Between each suffering, the foster parents would ask her, "do you still want to be like Jesus" and, her conviction unflinching, she would reply "yes I do" (48). Instead of rising in three days, however, as the foster parents snidely suggested she might, her grave in the woods is only encountered by one person—a blind man who "sadly not hearing a horrible scratching of bone upon wood a little way behind him," never even noticed it (49).

The experiences of this child character are frontloaded and resonate profoundly with contemporary changes and fears largely fueled by the rapid and pervasive expansion of Internet availability. There are several key aspects to this particular portrayal of child. First, the child begins the piece without fear or concern for consequence. Even before her suffering begins, she ventures out to do the work of Jesus without hesitation. More significantly, she is doing this outreach in places, and with people, that any average little girl might be expected to fear: "She could be forever found walking amongst the poor and the homeless, consoling the drunks and the

drug addicts" (46). This absolutes fearless and heedless onwardness is characteristic of today's digital child. S/he enters the world without concern for computer viruses, bullying, or real world predators. The Little Jesus in *The Pillowman*, like the digital child, pushes ever onward concerned only with personal intentionality and efficacy. Her reactions later, then, are especially significant in light of this contextualized response. When faced with the abuses of her foster parents—akin to the viruses and predators of the digital world—she does the opposite of the reasonable, adult response. She continually doubles-down, saying over and over again "Yes, I do" rather than buckling under the pain and horrific abuses. Just as digital children are not deterred by those digital setbacks that seem insurmountable to their parents, the girl presses onward. Indeed, the child in "The Little Jesus," like her real world analogs, does not know how to live any other way, cannot accept an identity devoid of those digital influences or, in the little girl's case, her deeply held messiah identity.

Secondly, both sets of parents, biological and foster, demonstrate a crippling fear in the face of this unknown, somewhat foreign and/or alien identity. The real world child's digital and real world identities are, to them, seamlessly integrated—especially since the social networks of Web 2.0 in which personal information, tastes, beliefs, politics, rants, and even minute-by-minute locations are available for the world to see. Both sets of parents, however, cannot reconcile the dual identity, the incongruous merging of adult Jesus and child body. Even more significantly, the child's world is one in which identity may be changed or feigned in certain aspects. In her mind, then, it is not incongruous to play child one moment and adult the next. Because of the parent's unfamiliarity with these tropes, they react badly to these, scolding and punishing her in the case of her biological parents, and abusing and, eventually, killing her in the case of the foster parents.

The little girl in *The Pillowman* is also comfortable in her own knowledge, however fraught. On the one hand, the digital child is one who generally does know more about new media interactions than his or parents. On the flip side, as gestured to above, this child also might know a little less than they think they do. In *The Pillowman*, the little girl, in some aspects, does actually know more about the world. She sees the evil and the need expressed by so many who live abjectly and she wants to help, rather than turn a very adult blind eye. On the other hand, she remains naïve in several significant ways. Beyond the very real dangers that are present, the most significant false knowledge that she possesses is that her attempts at miracles have no efficacy, culminating in her rubbing spittle and dirt into a blind man's eyes to heal him, which, of course, it does not.

Finally, as discussed above, the digital child is immersed in an experience built on authorship and plurality. The digital child writes blogs, updates Facebook, Tweets, etc.—literally crafting and re-crafting identity and culture. The perfect example here is the concept of "meme." A meme is, "an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture" ("Meme"). These often take the form of jokes and/or parodies that become viral sensations before continually being edited, rewritten, and even parodied themselves. In digital culture, even the youngest computer literate age children can participate in this phenomenon. They can take cultural elements and revise them before sending them out again. Furthermore, this child can revise other revisions or combine different memes and cultural ideas for whole new sets of meaning. In *The Pillowman*, the little Girl embodies this digital trend in her conception of Jesus. Most notably, Katurian notes that, when her parents would bring her home from one of her dangerous and peculiar adventures, she would be throwing a tantrum, to which her parents reply that, "Jesus never stamped and screamed and threw his dollies about" (46). To

this, the girl would reply, "'That was the *old* Jesus! Get it'" (46)? Similarly, when her evil foster parents finally corner her about her insistence that she is Jesus, she says, "'*Finally* you fucking get it'" (46). These are, of course, very out of character for a figure like Jesus. To the little girl, however, with her comfortably merged digital identity, the contradiction does not seem strange. For her, it is a revision of the idea of Jesus, essentially a meme of Jesus's experiences.

Who is the Pillowman?

It is difficult to classify one character as *the* Pillowman. In a sense, each of the major characters embodies aspects of the story. In Act II, Scene 1, Michal says that "he's a very good character. He's a very very good character. He reminds me a lot of me" (36) to which Katurian reacts in anger and disgust. Katurian embodies the Pillowman: he smothers his brother (with a pillow) and his stories involve the death of children which, regardless of torture, spares them from a long existence of misery. Ariel's past, and his story about the old policeman getting candies for being on the side of children represents his own variation of the story that revolves around taking action rather than giving in to the inevitable (and again provides a foil for Michal). Finally, Tupolski embodies the side of the Pillowman that tries to find hope in the misery of child death. With so many elements and iterations of the Pillowman scattered amongst the characters, however, there is no definitive answer to the question.

I suggest that context offers one possible answer. More specifically, I suggest that the Internet can be understood as a Pillowman sort of figure for both the events of the story and real-world digital interactions. The Pillowman of the story blurs boundaries and social mores as he acts in a way that, upon consideration, is simultaneously morally reprehensible and, perhaps, praiseworthy. By killing children before their suffering, the Pillowman is both merciful and

engaged in a practice that goes against every custom of Western society. In this, he offers both good and bad; he offers daggers concealed within a gift.

The Internet offers a similarly paradoxical and oftentimes questionable gift. On the one hand, the Internet has brought communication and information sharing to a new level. Furthermore, the Internet, and especially Web 2.0, has brought agency to many marginalized groups and peoples with its wealth of authorship opportunities and the organizational capabilities that became central to uprisings such as the "Arab Spring" of 2011. On the other hand, however, the Internet has brought and continues to bring new dangers that far outpace the protective abilities of authorities. The Internet brings with it a new type of pervasive consumerism and new attempts by various governments from China (with their content firewalls) to the United States (S.O.P.A.) to restrict civil liberties.

Internet comment boards offer a succinct example of the paradoxical morality of the Internet. To many, they represent the worst the Internet has to offer—they are a breeding ground for abusive behavior including extreme ignorance, the worst sort of polemical politics, racism, and sexism. They offer the mean-spirited the anonymity to create a digital identity based on these tortures which can have consequences that bleed beyond the Internet and into everyday life. On the other hand, comment boards can offer surprising reminders of humanity as people rally to shut out those who would abuse, be it with abuses of their own, empathetic response, or reasoned and researched arguments. Even in the abuse, however, there can be a gift that mirrors the gifts offered by the Pillowman. Frequently, on YouTube (for instance), aspiring artists post what they genuinely believe to be inspired performances which, charitably, would be classified as "bad." In these cases, the backlash from commenters ranging from trolls to people who might otherwise consider themselves "nice," is severe, polemical, and emotionally harmful. While the effects of

such abuse could potentially damage the artist permanently, it is also conceivable that these would-be artists might get the reality check they so desperately need which, in turn, might help prevent much more public embarrassment and long-term suffering. This is not to suggest that these behaviors should be encouraged or that they are fundamentally good. Nor should this suggest that we should be engaged in such a system of vitriolic censorship. Rather, I mean to suggest that even the worst abuses and morally questionable acts, like those carried out by the Pillowman, may act as a surprising kindness.

In this way, the Internet itself can be understood as a Pillowman. In this, each character acts as a facet of the Pillowman and each character acts as a representation of specific aspects of contemporary digital fears with the end result being staged consideration of the Internet itself. This notion is strengthened by McDonagh's somewhat ambiguous ending. Just as the evidence about aesthetic and authorial responsibility is roughly balanced by the end of the script, so too are the strengths and weakness of the Web 2.0 Internet. As with the play, the question of authorial responsibly on the Internet remains contested. On the one hand, it has brought voice and at least a degree of agency to many who would not otherwise have it. On the other hand, the Internet has become a place where people can do and say terrible things without regard for the consequences.

CONCLUSION: THE PLAYSCRIPT OF WESTERN HISTORY

Throughout this study, I have sought to demonstrate how, in the course of Western history, children have acted as a locus of adult desires and a repository of adult assumptions and ideas. Some of these desires, assumptions, and ideas, such as those concerned with innocence, nostalgia, and potentiality, might be classified as innocuous. Others, ranging from the acquisitive to the sexual, are taboo and/or harmful. In any given period, the role of childhood in society, and even the definition and/or idea of childhood, shifts as the needs of the adult world shift and react to changes brought about by the forces of politics, religion, industry, technology, medicine, and so on. Because children and the idea of childhood are swept up by these shifts, and because they have little agency with which to resist these forces, they may be understood as the playscript of Western history. By this I mean that the narratives of history are written into the lines and actions of child characters. As the playscript of history, these child characters record not only the greater narratives of history and the influence of their own context, but also the subjective responses and revisions of each of the playwrights, who are similarly informed by their context. Through this process of revision, these characters may also be said to reflect contextual concerns with predominate social and historical narratives. Finally, inasmuch as these characters are intended to be performed, they give presence to this history.

Western drama, like Western history more broadly, is similarly fixated on the child. In scripts and characters ranging from the princes, servants, and apprentices of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, to the static infants of Maeterlinck and the suffering children of McDonagh, representations of childhood play significant roles in many canonical scripts of Western drama. Even with this centrality, however, the driving impulse behind this study is my contention that, with some exceptions, scholars have overlooked the potential of child characters as objects of

study. Based on the notion that each of theatrical representation of childhood, real-world childhood, and history are founded on similar notions of the blank page, I have worked to put them into productive conversation. I have argued that by understanding the contingent nature of each of these forces, and by exploring the ways that each influence the other, I am able to propose a fresh approach to the study of children on stage, in life, and throughout history.

In my first chapter, "Changing Childhood: Major Shifts in Constructions of Childhood from the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day," I offer a survey of those forces that have had a profound impact on both the day-to-day life of children and on societal constructions of childhood. In so doing, I explore demographic shifts, industrial innovation, religion, philosophy, literature, science, technology, education, and government from the Middle Ages to the present day. One of the major foci of this chapter was to use these summaries as a way of framing the case studies that follow in the balance of the dissertation. Beyond this, however, I also work against some of the more common archetypes of child established by those working in related fields. Rather than subscribing to labels such as "little adult," "apprentice," or "clergon" that are narrowly defined and period specific, I posit "threads" of childhood that bring together common traits that can be found, to a greater or lesser degree, from children across the span of Western history. Instead of traditional archetypes, I suggested as categories or tropes the "invisible" child, the "curried" child, the "abject" child, the "latent" child, the "perfect" child, and the "digital" child. Each of these threads overlaps and mixes in each of the periods that I studied. Further, each of these threads is intended to speak to the process of child rearing and the active negotiation of childhood as a concept rather than reducing it down to one common, period specific trend.

In the first chapter I also explore the controversial work of Philippe Ariès in his *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. Ariès attempted to use artistic representation as his primary source as he analyzed family life in France dating back to the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, his reliance on representation over other, corroborating sources has caused a great deal of controversy in the social sciences, particularly as the work of other scholars has gone a long way toward disproving the validity of his theories and findings. In response to the fraught nature of Ariès' work, social scientists and historians have moved away from representation as a viable means of analyzing the history of childhood. In this section, I argue that, while his work was not without significant problems, representation should not be discounted as a valuable historical resource.

In Chapter 2, "Shakespeare and the Curried Child," I present case studies on Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and *Coriolanus*. Each of these plays is significant to this history of childhood because, on the one hand, they have child roles that mirror concurrent trends in Early Modern society. On the other hand, these plays have significant *adult* representations of childhood, as adults in both struggle with past traumas and current crises. In both plays, during these moments of crisis, the idea of childhood is foregrounded with the result being that the adult characters, in a sense, are *boyed* and *become* child again.

My case studies on *The Winter's Tale* and *Coriolanus* also highlight the way Shakespeare created child characters in relation to real-world Early Modern childhood. Ultimately, I suggest that Shakespeare drew on contemporaneous models to "raise" a child character in such a way that it transcended the stark contextual realities of child mortality. In doing so, Shakespeare is able to move past the pragmatic apathy of his audience, which allowed for a much larger dramatic payoff when these children ultimately met with suffering or death.

In Chapter 3, "The Abject and Latent Child in Maeterlinck's Static Drama," I present a re-reading of Maeterlinck's canonical dramatic work with the intention of bridging his distinct aesthetic periods. In *The Intruder* and *The Blind*, Maeterlinck creates infant characters that are static, until they scream as they feel the approach of death. In these moments, and in his framing of the adult characters, Maeterlinck sets up a system in which those with less connection to socialized, adult society had a stronger connection to the beyond. The static children, completely without interaction and new to the world of the living, are thus most in-tune with the spiritual world.

I carry these ideas into my reading of his later fairy plays, *The Blue Bird* and *The Betrothal*, to suggest that these plays, which are usually considered as distinct from his earlier work, may be understood as extensions of them. In making his case, I argue that the children in the fairy plays can be viewed as the slightly more grown-up version of the infants from the earlier plays. By making this link, I move the fairy tales away from the light Christmas fare that they are commonly classified as and to a later stage of perceptual deadening in which each child, having uttered as death approached, is now completing their transition into the socialized, adult world. In this chapter, I also suggest that Maeterlinck's acquisitive and sadistic approach to the idea of childhood may be understood as a corruption of the earlier Romantic ideal.

In Chapter 4, McDonagh and the Digital Child, I turn to the contemporary work of Martin McDonagh. The focus of this chapter is on the influence that recent developments in mass communication, and in particular the Internet, have had on social constructions of childhood. I argue that McDonagh's *The Pillowman* can be understood as a response to the digitally knowledgeable child and the adult anxieties about these children and technologies. This reading suggested that the placelessness of the setting and the characterization of the child

character are part of an allegorical representation of these contemporary fears about digital technology. In making this argument, I traced some of the changes that the Internet has influenced in contemporary childhood through the tropes of onwardness, knowledge, authorship, vulnerability, and plurality. Ultimately I suggest that this child was one of paradox and contradiction, and one that was vastly different that those that have come before while also managing to clearly reference each of the earlier models.

The changes and influences outlined in these case studies are ongoing. The forces of economics, religion, technology, philosophy, and industry are not discrete and definable, but instead continue to structure society and each other. In recognition of this fact, this dissertation is intended to speak to three prominent moments of change in which the overlapping and negotiated nature of these forces, their influence on constructions of childhood, and their revision of the prevailing economic and emotional "use value" of children is particularly overt. As I have discussed throughout this study, the fact that these forces are prominent and that they do have significant influence on real-world childhood is well documented. In this dissertation I have worked to move beyond this structure to explore the influence that these forces, and these real-world constructions of childhood have on dramatic representation. Operating on the notion that these forces, even beyond more overt references, operate and influence representation at a more implicit level, I have also attempted to flip the more traditional approach to the relationship between historical inquiry and representational reactions. In other words, if historical inquiry and real-world childhoods can help to explain contemporary representation, representation can, in turn, help to explain real-world childhood and history.

In making the connection between these forces, I relied on the notion that dramatic representation, history, and real-world childhood are alike inasmuch as each can be understood

in terms of the blank page and in the language of performance. Drawing on the work of Michel de Certeau in *The Writing of History*, I framed my argument with the notion that the historical child is essentially a void that, regardless of the good intensions of scholars and parents alike, can only be approached with adult knowledge, memory, and nostalgia. Because no amount of research can fill the absence of real presence necessitated by such a void, the historian can only hope to reach echoes of historical truth. In crafting this dissertation, and by using theatre as a cornerstone, I attempted to amply those echoes by working to reflect real-world childhood, theatrical representation, and history off one another.

Similarly, by drawing on the work of Judith Butler in "Performative Acts of Gender Constitution," I made the argument that real-world childhood, like gender, can be understood as a series of socially prescribed performances rather than as a biological absolute. By framing real-world childhood in this way, I sought to make it more accessible to theatre theory and to side-by-side analysis with my selected scripts. In further support of this, I also used the work of Louis Althusser in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" to suggest that the child is not only a void to history, but also to greater social structures. This move was intended to further aid my comparison between representational and real-world childhoods.

In defining the forces of history, childhood, and representation as similarly founded on the blank page, and by tracking the relationship of these forces through three distinct time periods and playwrights, I have worked to show that theatrical representations of childhood can be understood as the playscript of Western history. In these characters, it is possible to see the active negotiation of childhood. Not unlike a traditional narrative arc, the representations of childhood explored in this dissertation move from a state of stasis, through a journey that revels in and conforms to expectations of childhood, challenges and refutes these expectations, and

often moves to theorize new and/or emergent models of childhood. Because of this journey, represented childhoods demonstrate the artificiality of the many treatments of childhood that conceptualize it as uniformed, accepted, and discrete during each period of Western history.

The significance of these representations as "playscripts," however, moves beyond their narrative relationship to history. Even when these representations can be said to be conforming to period expectations and norms, the fact that they are intended for performance makes for history that is living and speaking. Rather than being only archival, these representations resonate with dramatic force and presence. Even if this presence is contingent and in danger of being suppressed in performance by modern sensibilities, expectations, and subjectivities, the act of performing a childhood informed by and raised in history is profoundly important to the study of Western society.

Finally, the fact that these representations were, and continue to be, part of a rich performance tradition of Western society suggests that the significance of these "documents" moves beyond their ability to illuminate greater cultural change. As Stephen Greenblatt suggests in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, the boundaries between these influences, documents, and representations are permeable. That is, the forces that I have outlined here do not move to the theatre and stop. Instead, they are taken in by the theatre and, in the process of revision, renegotiation, and performance, carry those narratives back into society (14). In this regard, it is possible to suggest that these representational revisions exerted influence not only in their own historical moments, but also, in that they have retained "an illusion of life," continue to influence audiences today (8).

It is important to note that this dissertation is only intended as a larger survey of the significant relationship between history, childhood, and theatre. This subject is, without question,

vast. Because of the limitations I put on this project to make it feasible, there is still a great deal of research and writing to be done on this, and on related topics. By necessity, and because of the narrative that I was working to create, I confined this project to drama and society in Western Europe. Even more specifically, I confined my writing to the writing of three canonical playwrights from three specific periods. Beyond the wealth of possibilities for further study in different time periods and playwrights in Western culture, there are a great many significant representations of children in drama from across the world. Further research could also work to nuance issues of gender, class, race, and ethnicity in relation to this topic. While I have tried to speak to these nuances where possible, the scope of this project, and the resources from the periods I write about here, necessitated my more general focus on childhood (which, as a result, frontloads the male upper/middle class experience). While I did suggest possible audience responses to the representations of childhood highlighted in this dissertation, this is a subject that could benefit from a fuller consideration of the dramatic, rhetorical, and psychological force of performed childhood, both on the audience and on child performers. Finally, the fact that my final case study speaks to the present moment should not suggest that the renegotiation of childhood is in any way complete. The forces outlined in this dissertation will continue to influence childhood. Indeed, I am excited to explore the recognition of childhood that will undoubtedly occur when the digital children that I outlined in the last chapter become parents and grandparents themselves.

In this dissertation I have worked to bring the social science emphasis on contextual forces together with concerns of presence and performance that factor prominently in theatre studies. I troubled the traditional framework of study that applies contextual forces to the study of dramatic literature by also suggesting ways that, as informed by those forces, dramatic

literature serves to trouble the uniform categorizations established by many scholars. Further, I have suggested that these dramatic representations themselves can exert influence on real-word childhoods and events. Ultimately, while this study can only hope to be the first steps in a much larger project, my framing here of represented childhood as central to understanding history, society, and theatre, will provide the structure and inspiration for further study on what has been an under-explored aspect of theatre history.

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