

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Naomi Miller and Naomi Yavneh, eds, *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). vi+248pp. ISBN: 978 1 4094 2997 5.

Jamie M. Jones
Texas Woman's University
jjones38@twu.edu

Naomi Miller and Naomi Yavneh's *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood* begins to fill a gap in early modern scholarship with regards to the discussion of the intersections of gender and childhood. Miller and Yavneh note in their introductory comments on the volume that there is a lack of texts that address childhood in the Early Modern period, and many of those do not address gender (pp. 1-2). Though the articles in the volume hail from an array of disciplines and are quite fascinating, issues of gender and childhood are sometimes only present in the periphery. Though gender and childhood are not centerpieces in all of the chapters, the text is a much needed contribution to Early Modern studies.

The text is divided into three thematic parts, 'Conceptualizing Childhood: Loss and Celebration', 'Imprinting Identity: Education and Social Training', and 'Transitional Stages: Growing Up and Growing Old'. Chapter one is an intriguing essay by Patricia Phillippy, titled 'A Comfortable Farewell: Child-loss and Funeral Monuments in Early Modern England'. Phillippy sets forth the argument that Early Modern parents were not detached from their children, as has been posited in other literature, and that parental attachment and mourning is evident in the funeral monuments established in memory of their children, as well as in the monuments of parents. Though there is much discussion of the lives of children and the ways in which their memories were carried on after death, the reader is left with many questions about the potential impact of gender on the selection of funeral monuments and memorials, as well as the ways in which the children were remembered by their parents.

Continuing the theme of child and parental death, chapter two presents Carole Levin's chapter, 'Parents, Children, and Responses to Death in Dream Structures in Early Modern England'. The chapter centers on Thomas Hill's *The Pleasant Art of the Interpretation of Dreams*. Throughout the chapter, Levin makes the case that parents and children shared a deep bond, which is evidenced in the various dreams experienced by parents and children alike (p. 46). Levin's discussion of gender, while brief, is interesting. She notes that 'while daughters were far less valued than sons, they were also far less threatening' (p. 44), which is demonstrated by the dreams about 'conflicts between fathers and sons' (p. 44), as opposed to dreams that resulted in sadness at the loss of a daughter.

Yavneh's chapter 'Lost and Found: Veronese's *Finding of Moses*' explores 'the paradoxical salvation of a child through his abandonment' (p. 53) in Venice, using Paolo Veronese's painting, 'Finding of Moses', as an allegory for this phenomenon. Like Phillippy and Levin, Yavneh echoes the idea that Early Modern parents were attached to their children and that the parents' willingness to abandon their child at a time when the command for 'midwives to kill all male babies born to the Hebrews' (p. 53) is evidence of this attachment.

Part I is wrapped up with Katherine Larson's chapter, "'Certein childeplayes remembred by the fayre ladies": Girls and Their Games'. Larson's chapter is by far the most uplifting chapter of Part I and represents the 'Celebration' that is juxtaposed with loss. The exploration of games played by the upper echelons of society presents one of the clearest assessments of the intersectionality of gender and childhood in the text. Larson discusses the types of games played by males and females both as children and as adults. Games allowed children of both genders to subvert gender norms (p. 71), and allowed adults the brief opportunity to return to childhood, to 'escape from every day responsibilities' (p. 73), as well as to 'facilitate the negotiation of political or erotic relationships and create alternative avenues for agency' (p. 73). The multifaceted nature of games was such that they could be a way of stepping outside of gender norms, but games also reinforced social and political hierarchies.

Larson's chapter begins the transition into Part II, which focuses on 'Imprinting Identity: Education and Social Training', by presenting one way in which youths were educated in the way of social and political hierarchies. Chapter five takes a brief turn from the sociopolitical and focuses on the emergence of pediatrics with Marie Rutkoski's 'The Facts

of *Enfance: Rebelais, Montaigne, Paré, and French Renaissance Paediatrics*. Rutkoski, via 'Francois Rebelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532), Michel de Montaigne's "Of a Monstrous Child," and Ambroise Paré's *Oeuvres*' (p. 90) presents evidence that an 'effort at consolidating an approach to child-care was being made in Renaissance France' (p. 100) and that medical professionals treated the illnesses of children, yet had not pinpointed the need to treat children differently than adults.

Chapters six and seven focus on the personal correspondences and documents of Louise de Coligny and Anne Dormer, respectively. In Jane Couchman's "'Our little darlings": Huguenot Children and Child-rearing in the Letters of Louise de Coligny', she looks at discussions of education and discipline in Louise de Coligny's letters. Couchman posits that differences in the rearing of boys and girls are revealed in de Coligny's correspondences. Operating in part under the guidance of Philippe and Charlotte Du Plessis Mornay, Louise de Coligny's daughters were educated in the ways of becoming upper class wives and mothers, whereas her son received a more diverse education in history, language, and mathematics, and served in 'the king's entourage' (p. 110). Interestingly, Couchman notes that discussion of religious education in the letters is somewhat sparse because it was taken for granted that Louise de Coligny would educate her children in the catechism (p. 109). Play, as discussed by Larson in chapter four, seemed to occupy a large role in the education of both males and females (pp. 109, 113). Following Couchman's discussion of Louise de Coligny's methods of childrearing is Sara Mendelson's chapter, 'Anne Dormer and Her Children', which presents Dormer's correspondence and personal documents as insight into the education of her children. Of note in chapter seven is Mendelson's brief discussion of Dormer's belief in the impact of birth order and gender on her children (p. 122).

Kathryn Moncrief's chapter, "'Obey and be attentive": Gender and Household Instruction in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*', serves as a transition between the focus on correspondence and personal documents and the role of literature and theatre in the education of children. According to Moncrief, 'the play, like the conservative educational tracts and prescriptive guides devoted to the construction of an obedient wife and well-ordered household, ultimately validates the early modern preoccupation with preparing daughters for married life' (p. 137). Throughout the chapter, Moncrief draws clear connections between *The Tempest* and popular childrearing literature of the time, which uphold the idea that Prospero's methods of rearing Miranda do adhere to the common social beliefs of the time.

Following Moncrief's look at the rearing of a female child in *The Tempest*, Caroline Bicks's chapter, 'Producing Girls on the English Stage: Performance as Pedagogy in Mary Ward's Convent Schools' offers the reader a rare look at young women in plays. Bicks focuses on 'student productions' (p. 139) in which young girls were trained 'in theatrical performance and public speaking' (p. 139). Given the traditional expectation that females be reared to become wives and mothers, Ward's approach to education was subject to criticism because she provided females with a voice and the ability to adapt to their surroundings as needed (p. 145). Bicks achieves her goal of 'contribut[ing] to and complicat[ing] current understandings of early modern English girls and girlhood' (p. 139).

Chapter ten, Carole Collier Frick's 'Boys to Men: Codpieces and Masculinity in Sixteenth-Century Europe' ushers in Part III of the volume, 'Transitional Stages: Growing Up and Growing Old'. Frick presents an inquiry as to the purpose and function of codpieces as worn by young men. She argues that, at its onset, the codpiece was a symbol of virility, which over time became a matter of fashion (pp. 173, 179). Frick makes the interesting point that the inclusion of the codpiece in fashion resulted in clearer distinction between male and female youths, thus stabilizing the 'mutability of sex' (p. 171) that had been previously exhibited via their attire.

Frick's analysis of the codpiece is followed by Diane Purkiss's chapter, 'Marvell, Boys, Girls, and Men: Should We Worry?', in which Purkiss highlights Andrew Marvell's preoccupation with young females in his poetry. Purkiss's observation that males belong to two worlds is interesting, especially since it follows Frick's discussion of the stabilization of gender through the codpiece. As infants and young boys, they are of the feminine world, as is highlighted by the attire of 'long gowns' (p. 188), and as they grow older, they enter the masculine world, which is sometimes marked by 'the putting on of doublet and hose' (p. 188). The idea of males existing in two worlds seems somewhat integral to the overall argument of Purkiss's chapter because Marvell uses the feminine to depict Cromwell 'as a good father of the household' as well as a strong military leader.

Marvell was not the only writer to use youths as a vehicle for his message. In Emilie Bergmann's chapter, 'Martyrs and Minors: Allegories of Childhood in Cervantes', she explores Miguel de Cervantes's inclusion of youths in his texts as 'plot devices' (p. 203). According to Bergmann, children are a method of 'justifying' (p. 195) the thoughts and actions of characters in Cervantes's texts, as well as a means of engaging the emotions of

the audience (p. 198). This chapter highlights the growth of children into adults, as well as the function of children in Cervantes's writings.

Julia Alexander, like Bergmann, looks at the function of children in paintings in her chapter, 'Portraiture and Royal Family Ties: Kings, Queens, Princes, and Princesses in Caroline England'. Anthony Van Dyck, the artist whose paintings are discussed in the chapter, created representations that showed 'the royal children pose[d] in the guise of adults' (p. 217). The portraits of the royal family were strategically placed throughout the public spaces in the palace, thus making Van Dyck's representations of the children 'visual stand-in[s]' when the children were not present. This, according to Alexander, shows 'how portraits of regal children had been traditionally used as agents in the propagation of dynasty' (p. 220).

Bringing the text full circle is Gregory Colón Semenza's "'Second Childishness" and the Shakespearean Vision of Ideal Parenting'. He posits that 'second childishness' is presented as a 'masculine experience' (p. 224) in which aged men become reliant upon their children. Semenza builds his argument by focusing primarily on *King Lear* and the ways in which the aged characters embody the idea that 'childishness and maturity are as much states of mind or modes of behavior as biological phases of the life cycle' (p. 224).

Though gender and childhood are not always central foci of the text, the various essays in the volume highlight the idea that parents cared for and were emotionally attached to their children. This, in and of itself, makes the volume a valuable contribution to early modern studies because of the extant view that parents were often emotionally detached from their children. Miller and Yavneh have compiled a volume that represents a broad cross-section of discussions of representations of gender and childhood in funeral monuments, popular texts, paintings, games, medical guides, personal correspondence, fashion, and literature. As Alexander notes in chapter thirteen, 'inter- and cross-disciplinary study of childhood can only enhance our understanding of the ways in which children figured and were figured – in all senses – in the early modern world' (p. 221). Miller and Yavneh's efforts are very much 'inter- and cross-disciplinary', and help to fill a gap in the existing literature on gender and childhood in early modern studies.