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The dramatic typology of the boy servant in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night*, John Lyly's *Gallathea* and Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*.

Of the compendium of dramatic types who inhabit the stage of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, one of the most marginalized, both in terms of the dramatic and critical attention they receive, is the youth in service. Economically dispossessed and sexually subjugated he should be the modern Renaissance critic's dream, but the extent of his invisibility to the noble household in which he invariably serves is mirrored critically. In his essay, 'How to read *The Merchant Of Venice*' without being heterosexist,' Alan Sinfield shows that because the ideological exigency in the play is to secure patrilineage through marriage to a suitable partner, the boys who are exorbitant to the patriarchal system, "because they are less significant" can be "moved around the employment-patronage system more fluently than women" (1996, p132). Indeed Sinfield states that in the *Merchant* the traffic in boys is "casual, ubiquitous and hardly remarkable" (1996, p133). Only occasionally is the experience of the youth in service made the explicit subject of the drama, most famously in *Twelfth Night*, or in the form of the Indian Boy who acts as a fulcrum of dramatic action in *Midsummer Night's Dream,* but, in fact, what Bruce R. Smith identifies as the "Myth of the Master and the Minion…with all the disparities in power that those roles imply: king over commoner, "male" over "female", man over "boy"" (1991, p211) abounds in the early modern theatre. In this essay I hope to analyse the dramatic typology of the boy servant to find out what he represents to the structures of power and ideology that the Renaissance drama both reflected and contributed to. In considering the traffic of servant boys in late sixteenth century plays, I defer to Sinfield's caution not to assume that an "adequately continuous interiority" of thought and action surmount to a character individuation, but rather employ his insight that character operates as "a strategy" of representation in the early modern drama, in which "subjectivity is itself produced, in all its complexity, within a linguistic and social structure" (1992, p66, p78). It is how the depiction of these youths in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *The*

Merchant of Venice, Lyly's *Gallathea* and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* ramify in cultural and sexual discourse of the late sixteenth century which I intend to discuss.

The starting point for indenture into service for the youths of *The Jew of Malta, Twelfth Night* and *Gallathea* is a voyage. In *The Jew of Malta*, the Turkish Ithimore is brought on shore from a slave ship to be sold (II.iii). Viola, cast ashore in Illyria following a shipwreck, dislocated from the expectations of her social status as a gentlewoman and without the protection of her brother, is uncertain where she fits in, "And what should I do in Illyria?" she says plaintively. On hearing of a noble family headed by a woman, Viola's initial hope of entering the Lady Olivia's service until the truth of her "estate" can be revealed is scuppered by Olivia's self-imposed mourning. The only other option Viola perceives as being available to a youngster detached from their familial household is to enter the retinue of another, the Duke Orsino's. This requires not only a change of sex, but for the Duke Orsino to take Viola for a "eunuch", a term during her very first appearance anticipating the sexual ambivalencies to be caused by Viola's travestied youthful body (I.iii.3, 44, 56). For the displaced boys of *Gallathea* , Robin, Raffe and Dicke, the sense of their being cast adrift is heightened by their risk of expulsion from the socio-economic order if they do not find masters. Without apprenticeships they will have to live in the woods, becoming 'wild men'(I.iv.13), or turn thieves. Robin exhorts his brothers to, "live by cozenage; we have neither Lands, nor wit, nor Maisters, nor honestie", and Dicke sings, "The trade of pursing neare shal faile/ Until the Hangman cries strike saile" (I.iv.92-3). This mode of introducing the 'youth in service' into the drama has a particularly sexual resonance when considered alongside Smith's identification of the 'Myth of the Shipwrecked Youth' in his delineation of six scenarios from literary sources through which male/male desire could be voiced in Shakespeare's England. In "a time and a place apart" he writes, "free reign can be given to desires that normally are held in check" (1991, p121). Like the inherent notion of carnival contained in the holiday title of *Twelfth Night*, the shipwrecking of Viola signifies the sexual polymorphism to follow.

The boys of *Gallathea* provide the comic sub-plot to an equally, to borrow Freud's phrase, polymorphously perverse romance narrative inspired by Ovid's *Iphis and Ianthe* - in which two girls disguised as boys fall in love with each other, and are also

the objects of desire of Diana's beguiled nymphs. Restoration of the 'natural' order occurs at the end of the play when one girl is transformed into a boy and the nymphs are thoroughly chastised. Moreover the play was one of a series written by Lyly for the Children of Paul's, so all of parts would have been played by choirboys. The sexual explicitness of the dialogue given to them suggests the truth, at least in part, of Julia Briggs' assertion that the boy's acting companies' "charm lay in the piquant contrast between what they were and what they played" (1997, p277) – even if, as Stephen Orgel contends, contrary to the puritan antitheatricalists fears, the female audience's desire was as much titillated as the male's (1996, p79-82). But sexual licence and erotic androgyny is only granted to travestied aristocratic females in these plays (for the pleasure of aristocratic audience's for whom the boy's companies primarily performed) who are safely and appropriately paired off at the end (although Lyly confounds this convention by showing the untransformed female lovers leaving the stage together). The youths who are in service out of economic need rather than incredible circumstances in *The Jew of Malta, Gallathea* and *The Merchant of Venice* do not invite the same sexual comparisons as boys playing aristocratic girl/boys; they are not ingles, catamites or ganymedes wooing men for the audience's pleasure – and yet their sexual subordination is produced through stratifications of age. They are boys but they are distinctly not beauteous or the perceived objects of sexual desire. They do not share the corollary looks constructed as belonging to noble children of a certain age, such as Ovid's cross-dressed Iphis with a face,"As eyther in a boay or gyrle of beawtie uttered much" (1965, p245) because the class they belong to are not protagonists in what Smith terms the "literary," " imaginative" or "poetic discourse" of romance (1991, p15-29).

Even when cross-dressed as a boy, Portia is implausibly also a doctor of law (III.iv.49-51), an elevated position signifying her gentle status despite appearances, and naturalising her true nobility. Viola/Cesario's eloquence in wooing provokes Olivia to enquire of his "parentage" (I.v.281). She cannot believe he is a 'mere' servant. Unlike the wandering boys of *Gallathea,* Viola is always certain that eventually her gentility and her gender will be "deliver'd to the world" (I.iii.42), and that her period in service will only be temporary. Robin, Raffe and Dicke have no such surety, within the order of primogeniture only one of them will inherit their father's Mill, and until that time all are at risk of dispossession from society unless

fortune provides them with Masters. As the Mariner tells them when they land in Lincolnshire, "if your fortunes exceed not your wits, you shall starve before ye sleepe" (I.iv.68-9). The servant's lot is depicted as one of chance and happenstance – "'Tis but fortune, all is fortune" says Malvolio (II.v.23) – and the second time the audience sees Raffe he is already in danger of vagrancy and starvation, "Call you this seeking of fortunes when one can find nothing but byrds nestes?" (II.iii.1-2). He is lucky enough to find a master in the form of the Alchemist but this is portrayed as a somewhat opportunistic alliance. The arbitrariness of meetings between masters and servants is also expressed in *King Lear* with Kent's proposing of himself into the service of the king. When Lear asks if Kent "knows" him, he replies, "No, sir, but you have that in your countenance which I would fain call master" (I.iv.23-4). The first question Raffe's new Master asks him to ascertain his worthiness to serve is, "Canst thou take paynes?" (II.iii.104) – a question suggesting the specifically physical subjugation of the servant and dependence on a master's kindness in early modern culture. In *Gallathea* these "paynes" take the form of malnourishment. When the brothers reunite after twelve months has elapsed, Raffe tells them that at the Alchemists's house he, "had a full head and an empty bellie" (V.i.61-2). In this respect, and augmented by the fact that the three trades Raffe learns during the play prove useless to him, his mastered state is portrayed as no better then that of his brother Robin's, who has become a masterless man during the course of the year, and has, "had almost no meat but spittle since I came to the woods" (V.i.31-2).

A more positive, though delimited, representation of the experience of domestic service for the sixteenth century youth is found in Launcelot Gobbo of *The Merchant of Venice* – one of the many types of 'boy' circulating though the play; alongside the cross-dressed Jessica, Nerissa and Portia, we may count the retinue of boys Bassanio collects in II.ii in preparation to woo Portia. Again economic deprivation is the cause of Launcelot's indenture into service, as a "poor man's son" (II.ii.44) he has no other choice, but in his transfer from the household of Shylock to Bassanio's we observe his gradual journey up a hierarchy of servitude. Launcelot objects to his father calling him a "poor boy" when he negotiates a position for his son in Bassanio's retinue. "Not a poor boy sir, but the Rich Jew's man" (II.ii.117), says Launcelot, trying in this reformulation of selfhood to rid himself of the subordinate economic and social associations of being a boy indentured into service for the first time. It transpires that

Shylock has already placed Launcelot in Bassanio's household, and Bassanio, in providing him with a "more guarded" livery (II.ii148), has promoted him from clown to the position of his Fool, the highest status he can arguably hope to achieve in a household. Here we are presented with an image of service as a career in which there is room for progression, but this is partly dependent on Launcelot's sexual maturity as signified by the beard Old Gobbo notices he has grown (II.ii.89-90).

In terms of the construction of Launcelot's experience as a servant *boy*, however, there is a repetition of the notion of hunger, although this time the unkindness of the master is racialised, "my master's a very Jew…I am famish'd in his service. You may tell every finger I have with my ribs" (II.ii.100-103). Despite Shylock's contradiction of this when telling Launcelot that in Bassanio's house, "thou shalt not gormandise/ As thou hast done with me" (II.v.3-4) - the question of who is telling the 'truth' is one for production - this episode evinces the structural inequality of the place of working class servant boys in the hierarchy of the household. Perhaps the notion of hunger resonates even more strongly when considered in relation to the theory that malnourishment in the boy's acting companies postponed the onset of pubescence and the breaking of the actor's voices, thereby keeping them attached to the companies for longer. In *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas' premise for selecting slaves is their physical build, saying, "I must have one that's sickly, and be but for sparing vittles" (II.iii.124-5). While the basis of Ithimore's entry into service is slavery and therefore distinct from the paternal negotiation or opportunity which precedes the indenture of the other boys considered (although we might recall the legal action bought against Henry Evans by Thomas Clifton for the forced impressment of his son into the Children of St Paul's (1977, p24-5)), Ithimore's "meane" birth (II.iii.166) and fragile build are metonymic for his subordinate status of boy to a master. The additional way in which he represents a 'boy' – particularly in light of his racial status as a Turk - is revealed by Smith's recovery of the word 'boy' as a term of contempt, meaning rogue or slave, and that the shared subjection of these different senses of servant and rascal is "a distinction in power vis-à-vis a social or moral superior (1991, p195).

As Alan Bray has demonstrated in his frequently cited relation of the case of Meredith Davy, a master who sodomised his five year old apprentice, the position of the boy

within the structure of Master/Servant relations in the early modern period is analogous to the position of women in the patriarchal households (1982, p48-9). According to Lawrence Stone, the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century marked a transitional period from the family of the late middle-ages, characterised by kinship and clientage, to the restricted nuclear family. Stone argues that the trend was substantiated by external ideological enforcement of the dominance of the male head of the household, for instance, the "emphasis placed by the state and the law on the subordination of the wife to the head of the household as the main guarantee of law and order in the body politic" (1979, p202). Although Stone has been criticised (see Ingram, p127-138), his model of the early modern patriarchal household illuminates the structural asymmetries which result in the sexual subjugation of youths in service, which Lisa Jardine ascribes to the fact that the youth's "sexuality signifies as *absence of difference* as it is inscribed upon the bodies of those equivalently 'mastered' within the early modern household, and who are placed homologously in relation to the household's domestic economy" (1996, p66). Jardine's observation that this represents an "*ungendering* of submissiveness and docility" (1996, p68) is an important insight for feminist Renaissance critics as it shows stereotypical feminine qualities were a condition of service and not of gender. She points out that, in the same way as Renaissance women, "Outside the household the dependent boy (the 'youth') is also constructed via the patriarchal household, as 'at risk' – more legitimately in transit 'on business', but also in his transactional availability, sexually vulnerable" (1996, p67). It is perhaps this knowledge as much as her developing feelings for Orsino that belies Viola/Cesario's hesitation when the Duke asks her to deliver his love suit to Olivia (I.iv.18-20). This analogous subservience of boys and women has significance in terms of the boy's acting companies too because, as Jardine writes, "playboys, by their very profession are both adept at standing in for girls and vulnerable to the sexual attentions of actors and playgoers" (1996, p75).

Moreover Stone's identification of a decline in clientage and his connection of the transition of the family with the movement from a feudal society to a capitalist one, facilitates interpretation of the anxiety about an increasingly mobile labour force during the period. When the Alchemist discovers his boy Peter has run away, he describes the boy to Raffe as, "the veriest theefe, the arantest lyar and the the vildest

swearer in the worlde, otherwise the best boy in the world; he hath stolen my apparel, all my money, and forgot nothing but to bid mee farewell" (p451). In the dramatic typology of the servant boy we can see evidence of a changing ideology of service. When we first encounter Launcelot Gobbo he is struggling ethically with the loyalty he owes to his master and whether his Shylock's mistreatment of him quits him of his duty. Ultimately Shylock's perceived racial inferiority is the enabling factor for Launcelot to break his contract of trust with him, "certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnation, and in my conscience, my conscience is but a kind of hard conscience, to offer to counsel me to say with the Jew" (II.ii.25-8), but the ability for servants to take account of their own interests is an intervention into a previous economic structure of service based on gratitude and custom.

In line with Bray and Jardine's contention that the boy occupies a similarly subordinated position as a wife or child in the Tudor household, the dramatic type of the servant boy can hope to be incorporated into a familial role as the end-point for his good service. Barabas exploits the notion of a servant being accepted within the family to encourage Ithimore to new levels of murderousness in *The Jew of Malta.* Barabas claims Ithimore will replace Abigail as his child after he has poisoned his biological daughter, "Oh trusty Ithimore; no servant, but my friend/ I adopt thee here for my onely heire/ All that I have is thine when I am dead/ And whilst I live use half; spend as my selfe" - although he duplicitously claims after his servant has left the stage that he shall "ne're be richer than in hope" (IV.iv.42-45, 54). Similarly, the construction of economic security as a reward for loyalty in service appears in *Twelfth Night*. Orsino promises Viola/Cesario that if he successfully woos Olivia on his behalf, "thou shalt live as freely as thy lord/To call his fortunes thine" (I.v.39-40). The financial freedom a loyal servant can hope to enjoy is concomitant with that of a wife or child, again demonstrating the physical subjugation that inheres in the construction of youths in domestic service. There is also an additional sense of such rewards, as Barabas' use of the word "friend" suggests. In the transition from servant to friend the homosocial, Christian privilege of financial credit, such as Antonio offers to Bassanio so that he can afford to woo Portia (I.ii.177-85), becomes available to the boy.

However whether this is simply a fantasy of social mobility and status transformation in the discourse of master/servant relations is unclear. Certainly, the only servant who is acquitted of service and privy to their master's wealth in the plays being discussed is Viola, and this is in her role as a woman and future wife - although the blurring of her continued obligations as a boy in service in the final scene obfuscates whether Viola/Cesario leaves the stage as Viola or Cesario. *Twelfth Night* is a play steeped in discourses of sexuality and service competing with the forces of family and procreative heterosexuality. When Malvolio reprimands Sir Toby Belch for his late night noisiness, Sir Toby reminds him of their relative positions to the head of the household, "Art any more than a steward?" (II.iii.113). Viola/Cesario also exploits the rhetoric of the service to a different end, this time to rebuff Olivia;

Olivia: What shall you ask of me that I'll deny,
That honour sav'd may upon asking give?
Viola: Nothing but this, your true love for my master.
Olivia: How with mine honour may I give him that
Which I have given to you?
Viola: I will acquit you.

(III.iv.213-217)

Yet, the relationships that are depicted as particularly socially disturbing in the plays are those that represent, to reapply Goldberg's statement on *Edward II* and the critical overdetermination of the significance of cross-dressing, " a travesty of class and not gender" (1992, p121). Malvolio's very contemplation of a romantic relationship with Olivia is enough for Sir Toby to declare, "Here's an overweening rogue" – evoking the shared sense of 'rogue' and 'boy' and therefore denoting his social status (II.v.29). Jardine argues that it is Antonio and Olivia's inversions of the age dynamic which make their "erotic pursuit[s] indecorous" (1996, p75), but is there really, as she and other critics would have us believe, a tying up of all the erotic loose ends within the multiple heterosexual couplings and the enforced acquiescence of Olivia at the end of *Twelfth Night*? Sinfield suggests not. His essays on both *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant* signal ways in which Olivia and Portia's marriages are disrupted by the continued presence on stage of their husbands' respective Antonio's (1992, p52-79; 1996, p122-139). Jardine's use of the word "indecorous" implies an alternative

coupling of a more decorous, presumably more natural, erotic nature. Yet the difficulties in securing men and women in holy matrimony in Shakespeare's "comedies", and the ease with which the depictions of relationships between an older aristocratic man, and his younger friend, circulate through the texts of *The Merchant* and *Twelfth Night* verify Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's assertion that, "In any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power" (1985, p25).

Alan Sinfield shows that the effusively homosocial relationships between Antonio and Sebastian, and Antonio and Bassanio, are not necessarily precluded by the marriages with which the plays end, writing that same-sex passion was demonised in literary discourse only if, "it was allowed to interfere with other responsibilities. Otherwise, it was thought compatible with marriage and perhaps preferable to cross-sex infidelity" (1996, p132). Contrary to Alan Bray's estimation that homosexual subjectivity did not appear until the 'mollies' of the seventeenth century (1982, p13-14, p16-17), we can see evidence of well-defined subjectivities in the forms of homoerotic pederasty –master/servant relations, pedagogue/pupil and older and younger aristocrats – throughout the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In a revealing if short episode in Dekker, Ford and Rowley's *The Witch of Edmonton,* the mutual exclusivity of homosocial and marital relations is exposed. Susan, the bigamist Thorney's wife, does not perceive a problem with her new husband disappearing with his page (the cross-dressed Winifred) the moment she appears (III.ii38-41). Indeed, knowing the closeness of their relationship she tells Winifred that on their return , "Thou mayst be servant, friend, and wife to him….Tis all but sweet society, good counsel/ Interchanged loves, yes; and counsel-keeping" (III.ii.73, 77-8), thereby making explicit the correlation between the positions of servant, friend and wife in the early modern patriarchal household. That one can be married and have a boyfriend exists implicitly in the inscription of discourses of sexuality in the plays of the period, and it is not only cross-dressing that exhibits homosexual structures - although the cross-dressing of women does produce desire (We might recall in *The Roaring Girl* Sebastian's claim that "a woman's lip tastes well in a doublet" (IV.i.47) – a play which also identifies the subjectivity of the aristocratic queer in its naming of the character, Sir Beauteous Ganymede). Yet there is a notable silence surrounding the

homosexual potentiality in relationships between ‘friends’, and masters and their servants, homosocial structures in which homosexual acts could and did take place. Jonathon Goldberg’s model of a deconstructive reading of Renaissance texts, which I have employed in defining the dramatic typology of the boy servant to reveal the specific class and sexual subjugations which produce his role, helps the critic to reveal, not the sodomite, but “sodometries, relational structures precariously available to prevailing discourses” (1992, p20) thereby enabling us to understand what frames these silences.

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