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'Generational Drag': All-Child Performances in the Seventeenth and Nineteenth Centuries in Britain

Separated by almost three hundred years and by significant developments in the construction of childhood as an identity distinct from adulthood, the early seventeenth and late nineteenth centuries stand out as periods of intense and popular activity by child actors, and specifically by companies of child actors who played adult roles and deliberately juxtaposed the age categories of performer and character. While much excellent period-specific work has been accomplished during the last twenty years on early modern boy actors and on the 'infant phenomena' of the Victorian stage, there has as yet been no attempt to compare children's professional performance during these two periods. This article contrasts the repertoire of the boy companies of Jacobean London with that of the children's opera companies who toured the UK and Ireland throughout the 1880s performing comic operas such as *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *Les Cloches de Corneville*. It also explores what it meant for children to perform as adults during these two periods, and what the latter reveals about the historical construction and policing of age categories.

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IN ACT 2, Scene 1 of John Marston's *Antonio and Mellida*, the play which probably relaunched the revived Children of Paul's in 1599, two servants, the provocatively named Catzo and Dildo, enter arguing over a capon: 'No capon, no not a bit, ye smooth bully,' says Catzo, unwilling to share the food. 'Capon's no meat for Dildo. Milk, milk, ye glibbery urchin, is food for infants' (2.1.5–7).¹ Catzo's insistence that Dildo be fed appropriate 'infant' fare is somewhat ironic, since the pair spend the rest of the scene engaged in sexually suggestive wordplay associated with adult men. Edel Lamb has argued convincingly that the performance of these roles works against a strict social distinction between such age categories as adulthood and childhood, instead drawing attention to the continuous developmental relationship between boyhood and adult masculinity:

A number of aged, sexual, and gendered identities are present in this complex representation of

Catzo and Dildo as 'infants' (in the dramatic image), 'adolescent boys' (the players performing the roles), and 'men' (the sexually developed characters). The representation of these characters as simultaneously having elements of all three posits a relationship between these states. They are all stages that occur in the development of an adult identity, and, perhaps more significantly, they are stages in the process of achieving the developed and secure masculinity which their names assert.²

The topic of what is suitable fare 'for infants' is visible again in an 1885 review of the touring production of D'Oyly Carte's *Children's Pirates of Penzance*, this time in a way that emphasizes the distinct nature and needs of childhood rather than framing it as part of a 'process' of achieving adulthood. Using terms that resonate with the idea of diet found in the servants' conversation in *Antonio and Mellida*, 'Marguerite', the writer of the 'Ladies Column' in the Dundee *Evening Telegraph*, assures readers that the content of the 'pretty opera' is

suitable for child spectators: 'the fun', she insists, 'is all wholesome and deliciously topsy-turvy', and she goes on to reassure her readers that the child performers are also treated off stage in a suitably age-appropriate manner:

It may interest all parents to know that the tiny actors and actresses are as well looked after, in an educational sense, as their own carefully cherished children. Tutors and governesses accompany the youngsters, and wherever they go the lessons are kept up, sometimes with the stage for a schoolroom if other accommodation is not to be had.³

There is a stark contrast between the 'tiny' cast of the Children's *Pirates* – whose performance is 'wholesome fun' and who, despite impersonating adults on stage, have their childish off-stage identity publicly reinforced in the press by references to their tutors and governesses – and the boy actors of Marston's play, who, despite their ironic discussion of what is suitable 'for infants', explicitly blur the line between childhood and manhood, and frequently stray into what would now be considered unsuitably adult territory.

Separated by almost three hundred years and by significant developments in the construction of childhood as a identity distinct from adulthood, the early seventeenth and late nineteenth centuries stand out as periods of intense and popular activity by child actors, and specifically by companies of child actors playing adult roles, deliberately juxtaposing the age categories of performer and character. The boy companies who captivated London audiences at their private theatres during the Jacobean era have received much scholarly attention; the children's opera companies that toured the UK and Ireland consistently throughout the 1880s less so, although the body of work devoted to these fascinating young performers is growing swiftly. More than one contemporary commentator on the Victorian children's opera companies has suggested that the work of these two historically disparate sets of performers might be considered part of the same tradition. An 1880 *Birmingham Daily Post* review of the Children's *H.M.S. Pinafore*, for example, places

the production in an English tradition dating back to the early modern period:

Some kind of children's revels have been given on the stage from the 'Children of St Paul's' in Shakespeare's days, down to our own, and 'infant phenomenons' were not only favourites with Mr Crummles [Dickens's actor-manager in *Nicholas Nickleby*] but have attracted crowded audiences on many and varied occasions.⁴

More recently, Marah Gubar concluded her article 'Who Watched *The Children's Pinafore*?' with a similar acknowledgement of continuity and a call to compare early modern child actors with their late-Victorian counterparts:

In England, for instance, the tradition of all-child productions stretches back a long way, as any reader of *Hamlet* (1603), Samuel Pepys's diary (1660–69), or John Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* (1682) knows. How fascinating it would be to contrast the exertions of these earlier troupes of 'infant Punks' – to borrow Dryden's pungent phrase – with those of the talented children who enacted *The Children's Pinafore*.⁵

The present article begins the process of answering that call for a comparative discussion of child performers, contrasting the London child companies at St Paul's and Blackfriars during their so-called 'second period' or revival from about 1599–1610 with the children's opera companies that toured the UK and Ireland during the 1880s.⁶ The latter performed Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Pirates of Penzance*, as well as translations of Planquette's *Les Cloches de Corneville* and Lecocq's *La Fille de Madame Angot*, to great acclaim and public interest.⁷ While, of course, child performers worked consistently before and between these two periods, and many notable individual child prodigies emerged, the early seventeenth and late nineteenth centuries are distinct and comparable because of the sustained presence of self-styled 'children's' companies on British stages, performing adult roles. This article explores what it meant for children to perform as adults, and what it reveals about the construction and policing of age categories during these two periods.

Background, Scope, and Aims

Much excellent period-specific work has been done over the last twenty years on both the Children of Paul's and their rivals at Blackfriars, and on the 'infant phenomena' of the Victorian stage.⁸ So far, though, there has been little focus either on taking a broader view of the history of children's performance or on comparing children's professional performance during two distinct historical periods. This gap is understandable. A comparison of early modern and Victorian child performers is tricky for many reasons, not least because of the disparity of evidence available about each period: while there is a wealth of extant reviews and descriptions of the performances of the children's opera companies, evidence of the style and appeal of the seventeenth-century boy companies' performances is almost non-existent. There is also an uneven body of texts to compare: while extant texts of a wide range of seventeenth-century boy company plays are available, the Victorian children's opera companies toured the same one or two productions for a year or more; it is, moreover, sometimes unclear, as in the case of Lecocq's and Planquette's works, which English translation was used and to what extent the libretti of these comic operas were edited and altered for performance by children.⁹

Even the definition of these young performers as 'children' is problematic in a trans-historical study, since what is meant by 'childhood' is culturally and historically dependent, and the question of whether the boy actors of the early modern companies were all what we would describe as 'children', or whether these troupes also contained young men, has been the subject of critical debate. On the early modern boy actors, I concur with the assessments of such critics as Michael Witmore, Edel Lamb, and Lucy Munro that, in the early years of the 1600s, when the Children of Paul's and the Children of the Revels 'began open commercial playing after almost a decade of inactivity', the companies were 'filled exclusively with child actors, prepubescent boys aged ten to fourteen – with some possibly as young as six or seven'.¹⁰

These age ranges are comparable to what we know of the publicized ages of performers in the children's opera companies the early 1880s. The performers of D'Oyly Carte's *Children's Pirates* company, in 1884, for example, were billed as 'twenty girls and twenty-four boys, whose ages range from six to fourteen',¹¹ while in 1886 the ages of performers in Warwick Gray's children's opera company were said to be 'from ten to fourteen'.¹² If, as Edel Lamb has convincingly argued, some of the early modern boy actors aged as the 1600s progressed, but continued to perform as children under the 'institutional category of child',¹³ the same may be true of Warwick Gray's children's opera company, which toured from 1885 until at least 1890, keeping at least some of the same cast members throughout. Minnie Leverentz and Willie Garvey, for example, are mentioned in newspaper reviews of productions from 1886 and 1890.¹⁴ The term 'children's companies' is used, then, for this article's purposes, because, during both eras, these performers were publicly styled and promoted as 'children' and it is likely that many, if not most, of the performers were of comparable ages – between about ten and fourteen – with some younger and older outliers in both cases.

Despite the challenges outlined above, comparison of all-child performance in these two periods is productive and worthwhile. The phenomenon that Lucy Munro and Marah Gubar term 'age transvestism', and Michael Witmore 'generational drag',¹⁵ was a noteworthy staple of theatre entertainment at a time when very different expectations of appropriate childhood behaviour and treatment prevailed; and this can illuminate changing historical constructions of childhood, adulthood, and the relationship between the two. The extent to which late Victorian culture had, as Gubar puts it, 'thoroughly rejected the old view of children as miniature adults, capable of working and playing alongside grown-ups',¹⁶ and, indeed, the extent to which children were viewed as 'miniature adults' in early modern England is complex, and continues to be unpicked by scholars of childhood in both eras.

Yet it is broadly true that, in the earlier period, childhood was constructed in relationship to adulthood in terms of potential: to mature into an adult version of the self was the 'point' of childhood. However, as Catherine Robson puts it, 'the child tended *not* to be seen in relation to his own adulthood' during the nineteenth century, and childhood was increasingly rebranded as a distinct state.¹⁷ Its differences from adulthood no longer consisted of deficiencies to be overcome or of potentials to be fulfilled, but as markers of innocence to be preserved and protected. Child actors in adult roles, who represented aspects of both age identities simultaneously, are figures who make this historical transformation in the relationship of childhood to adulthood particularly visible.

This article combines discussion of the play-texts and libretti performed by children's companies, exploring the possible effects of their performance in adult roles. It sources analyses of existing critical material on early modern boy actors and offers a comprehensive survey of British newspaper reviews of performances by children's opera companies in the 1880s. Looking first at what was considered 'suitable' material for child performers, it argues that the presence or absence of sexual or other 'adult' content in stage roles for children reflects the transformation of childhood, which had taken place in Britain between the early modern and the late Victorian periods, from broadly 'anticipatory' (viewing the child as 'incipient adult') to 'retrospective'.¹⁸ The latter was associated with innocence, opposed to the experience of adulthood, and demanded specific age-appropriate treatment and behaviour.

At the same time, this article questions the idea that the Victorian demarcation of 'childhood' meant that child performers in adult roles necessarily functioned in an uncomplicated way; that is, to cite Ann Varty, as 'a public assertion of the categorical difference between children and adults'.¹⁹ A comparison of the seventeenth-century boy company plays and the operas performed by children's companies in the 1880s reveals that, in both eras, the figure of the child performer in adult

roles highlighted the permeability of the boundary between childhood and adulthood, and the fragility of these categories. My study explores the inversions of age identity that characterize performances by children's companies, and suggests that the results of such reversals are often more complex than the immediate juxtaposition of child performer with adult role would suggest. Dramas performed by children in both eras create theatrical worlds where age identities blur, overlap, and sometimes collapse: age transvestism in casting served both to produce, to question, and to undermine boundaries between childhood and adulthood in ways that are revelatory of each culture's key concerns about categories of age.

(Not) Suitable For Children: Performing 'Adult' Themes

According to Lucy Munro:

The early modern child was less protected than its successors from labour and sex: child actors, for instance, were not only workers in a theatre industry that often offered them only uncertain rewards, but also performers in plays that exposed them to a range of sexual material that would later be thought inappropriate for children.²⁰

The 'adult' content of *Antonio and Mellida* discussed above is typical of the early seventeenth-century boy company repertoire: the plays are laced with sexual language and wordplay and their plots are often driven by gender-cross-dressed disguise that leads to sexual comedy or confusion. In Thomas Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters* (Children of Paul's, c. 1605), Follywit disguises himself as Frances Gullman, a courtesan and the mistress of his own grandfather, who, he tells us, 'gave her a kiss at bottom o'th' stairs'; meanwhile an adulterous couple (Mistress Harebrain and Penitent Brothel) have audible offstage sex while the oblivious cuckold Master Harebrain talks with the actual courtesan in the next room. In John Day's *The Isle of Gulls* (Children of the Revels, 1606), the lustful Duke and Duchess pursue an adulterous assignation with Lisander (in female disguise as

Zelmane), each confident that he or she knows the character's true sex.²¹ And in Ben Jonson's *Episcene* (Children of the Queen's Revels, 1609–10), Clerimont's Boy recounts how the 'gentlewomen' make a gender-fluid plaything of him: '[they] play with me and throw me o' the bed, and carry me in to my lady, and she kisses me with her oil'd face, and puts a peruke on my head, and asks me an' I will wear her gown.'²²

Violence, although less ubiquitous than sexual content, also features. In *Antonio's Revenge*, the sequel to *Antonio and Mellida*, Duke Piero has his tongue plucked out on stage in Act 5, while George Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* (Children of Paul's, c. 1604) is full both of gore and sexual intrigue, including a triple duel and the torture on the rack of Tamyra, Bussy's lover, by her husband.²³ Sex and violence are, then, staple elements of boy company drama, as the young actors step into roles that simultaneously highlight their physical distance from adulthood, while anticipating their attainment of it.

The children's opera companies of the 1880s did not engage with such material and, consequently, their presentations of child actors playing adults do not frame the performers as 'incipient adults' in the same way. Their subject matter is uniformly light and comic, and where the boy companies of the seventeenth century capitalized on sexual content, the Gilbert and Sullivan libretti, in particular, adopt a tone of comic politeness and civility that is often deliberately and self-consciously childish. *H.M.S. Pinafore's* Captain Corcoron famously 'Hardly ever swears a big, big D' (1.178),²⁴ and when, in the final act, he is provoked into uttering the word 'Damme!', the chorus's reaction is one of comic shock:

CAPTAIN: But to seek your captain's child
in marriage,

Why damme, it's too bad!

*During this, COUSIN HEBE and FEMALE RELATIVES
have entered.*

ALL: (*shocked*) Oh!

CAPTAIN: Yes, damme, it's too bad!

ALL: Oh!

CAPTAIN *and* DICK DEADEYE: Yes, damme,
it's too bad.

*During this, SIR JOSEPH has appeared on poop-deck.
He is horrified at the bad language.*

HEBE: Did you hear him – did you hear him?

Oh, the monster overbearing!

Don't go near him – don't go near him –

He is swearing – he is swearing!

(2.346–57)

Potential for violence, too, is neutralized and rendered non-threatening. In *The Pirates of Penzance*, the pirates are singularly unsuccessful since their sentimental resolution to spare orphans has become common knowledge and, as a result, as Frederick acknowledges in exasperation: 'Every one we capture says he's an orphan. The last three ships we took proved to be manned entirely by orphans, and so we had to let them go.'²⁵ The band of policemen, recruited to capture the pirates, are similarly reluctant to engage in violence, being, in their own words, 'in body and in mind . . . timidly inclined' (p. 24), and the final confrontation between the pirates and the police is comically anticlimactic, since the pirates surrender without a peep, when charged to yield 'In Queen Victoria's name!' (p. 29) – the image of Queen Victoria here taking on a chastising, quasi-maternal role.

Despite having been written originally for adult performers, these two operas appear to be seamlessly 'suitable' for children, not only because they do not contain any overtly 'adult' content, but also because their emphasis on duty, manners, and good behaviour, while satirical when performed by adults, can read as uncomplicatedly 'wholesome' and, indeed, even edifying, when played by children. The transference of these adult roles to all-child casts does not necessarily challenge the categorization of child and adult by framing the child as precociously mature, as one might anticipate, but rather reinforces an inherent 'childishness' in the roles. Indeed, to modern eyes, the juxtaposition of childish performer and adult material visible in the early modern company plays seems inverted in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, which, in their original casts, marry adult performers with self-consciously childish material.

Gilbert and Sullivan's operas are, of course, not necessarily wholly innocent. Kevin Clarke claims that the 'witty dialogue and lyrics' contain much 'sexual double-entendre, despite claims of diehard Savoyards to the opposite'; and Peter L. Hays has argued in detail that many of the terms used by Gilbert, particularly in Buttercup's opening song in *Pinafore*, had risqué double meanings in nautical and military circles that, considering Gilbert's background, 'it would almost be impossible for him not to have known'.²⁶ Crucially, though, such interpretations are not central to an understanding of the plot, unlike the dramas of the seventeenth-century boy companies, where they are. 'For those mothers and children in the audience,' Hays argues,

along with any others who knew no better, true, sober, dutiful sailors in authentic, colourful dress costumes upon an authentic replica of a quarter-deck were a gay, probably romantic, certainly jolly sight. For those who better knew the Navy, their ships and men, as Gilbert certainly did . . . there was a certain irony in the lines.²⁷

Hays's assessment suggests a possible dual perspective on *Pinafore* that solidifies the separation of Victorian adulthood and childhood, or, perhaps more accurately, innocence and experience (with 'mothers' and 'others who knew no better' aligned with children). 'Innocent' women and children see an innocent play, while 'knowing' men may see something different, appreciating Gilbert's satire of naval life and possible apprehending risqué double-entendres in the libretto. This contrasts directly with the seventeenth-century boy company repertoire in which it is unlikely that the sexual content, which is often integral to the plots of the plays, went over the heads of many audience members (or, indeed, those of the young actors), and where childhood, as Munro points out, did not necessarily equate with innocence.

This is not to say that early modern boy actors were indistinguishable from adults, since, as Witmore says, 'dizzying plot devices [such as multilayered gender disguises] would have fallen flat if the child's culturally sanctioned distance from adult gender roles and sexualities could not have been both

referenced and then effaced'.²⁸ Yet this culturally sanctioned distance did not preclude the early modern child actor's involvement in, and awareness of, such adult roles and sexualities; the child did not automatically have to be protected from them. Of course, as many Victorian reformers argued, nineteenth-century child actors were not necessarily innocent or protected either, but by 1880 there was great pressure on theatre managers to demonstrate that their younger performers were being shielded 'from labour and sex'.²⁹ And so 'suitability' of material for child performers (as well as for child spectators who were a key part of the audience of the children's operas) became a key focus of those producing, consuming, and reviewing performances by children.

The promptbook and scores of the D'Oyly Carte Children's productions of *Pirates* and *Pinafore* confirm their presumed suitability for children. The scores show the detailed and complex work that had to be done to re-orchestrate and transpose the music for children's voices; no textual alteration was deemed necessary to render these pieces appropriate for child performers or child spectators, and the libretti and dialogue remained uncut. Any 'adult' or controversial content was implicit, apprehended only by 'knowing' audience members.³⁰ Interestingly, though, the 1908 book, *The Story of H.M.S. Pinafore*, a prose adaptation of the play by W. S. Gilbert 'for young readers', undertakes to 'bowdlerize' the text. Captain Corcoron's already euphemistic 'Big, big D', for example, becomes a 'Big, big B', glossed in the notes as 'He meant "Bother!" – a vulgar expression that only the strongest provocation can excuse'.³¹ His concluding promise never (well, hardly ever) to be 'untrue' to his new wife Buttercup is changed to 'I shall never be *unkind* to thee' (my emphasis), removing the merest hint of infidelity. It is fruitful to speculate whether the permanence of the printed book, to which children could return again and again, demanded more censorship than the ephemeral stage performance, which most would only attend once. Such a possibility, of course, raises the question of whether the class of children likely to read *The Story of H.M.S. Pinafore* were thought to be

deserving of more robust protection from unseemly content than those who performed it in 1879–81, which would suggest a hierarchy of innocence among different groups of children, as well as between children and adults, thus complicating binary age-category divisions.

The French comic operas *Les Cloches de Corneville* and *La Fille de Madame Angot*, produced by Charles Bernard and Warwick Gray's children's companies during the 1880s, are a slightly different matter. While they do not contain anything as explicit as the early modern boy company plays, they are more openly sexually suggestive than the Gilbert and Sullivan operas and so more prone to suggest, when performed by children, the trajectory of childhood towards adulthood and the developmental relationship between the two. Set in revolutionary Paris, the plot of *La Fille de Madame Angot* hinges on the dilemma of the titular heroine, Clairette, whether to marry the respectable but dull barber Pomponnet or forsake him for her lover, 'the Bohemian song maker' and political agitator Ange Pitout, who is also desired by Mademoiselle L'Ange – once a schoolfellow of Clairette's and now 'the favourite actress of the Theatre Feydeau' and also the mistress of Barras, one of the 'Directors' of the French Republic. There is no overtly sexual content in the play, but illicit relationships and adultery are implicit and, while the wilful Clairette ultimately chooses to marry the honest Pomponnet, the possibility that she might change her mind is hinted at. *Les Cloches* also implies sexual content when, for example, Serpolette sings a gossipy song in Act 1 in which she accuses the other village girls of having assignations with men:

They say two forms are seen,
At night by eyes so keen,
One form is call'd Suzanne,
The other is a man!
What they say or what they do,
Ladies, I will leave to you!³²

Contemporary newspaper reviews show critics divided on the subject of whether the

material in these operas was suitable for children, with reviewers expressing an ambivalent mixture of praise and surprise at the children's competent, professional performances, but unease over the material performed, often making direct comparisons with the suitability of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. Of Warwick Gray's Children's production of *Madame Angot*, the reviewer from the *Portsmouth Evening News* commented: 'We cannot honestly say that this piece is as well adapted for juvenile representation as the "Pinafore", with its easy songs and almost easier English comedy.'³³ The *Standard* was more explicit in its criticism of Charles Bernard's 1881 Children's production of *Les Cloches* at the Gaiety Theatre:

The experiment is much less satisfactory than it was in the case of Messrs Gilbert and Sullivan's piece. The incongruity of the utterance of the apparently unconscious humour by the youthful exponents of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, had a quaintness which is not found in the adaptation of MM. Clairville and Gabet's dialogue; and the novelty of child players has somewhat worn off. There is also something unpleasant about the faint suggestion of indelicacy in the couplets with the refrain, "'R" gardez par ci', when sung and acted by these little children, notwithstanding that all possible refinement and much grace is imparted to the solos by Miss Carrie Coote as Serpolette.³⁴

"'R" gardez par ci' refers to the song sung by Serpolette when the young men and women exhibit themselves at the village's 'hiring fair', seeking work as servants. In the Farnie and Reece translation (used by Bernard's troupe), it is easy to see how the suggestive lyrics may have seemed inappropriate for a children's company, raising the concern of protecting children from 'labour and sex' highlighted by Munro:

SERPOLETTE: Just look at that, just look at this,
Don't you think we're not amiss?
A glance give there, a glance give here!
Tell us if you think us dear?

MAIDS: Just look at this, &c.

SERPOLETTE: Tho' our cheek be fresh and glowing,
You will find us rather knowing—

MAIDS: Most girls are so!³⁵

Although only implied here, the suggestion that young servants might be available for sexual work alongside their other duties, and the implication that this availability might also apply to the young performers who deliver these lines, resonates with several, more explicit, references to the sexual availability of young servants in the early seventeenth-century boy company plays. In Chapman's *May Day*, for example, Quintilliano remarks upon the appeal, and potential income generation, of Leonoro's androgynous page (who is, in fact, a girl in male disguise):

Afore heaven, 'tis a sweet-faced child, methinks he should show well in women's attire. 'And he took her by the lily-white hand, and he laid her upon a bed.' 'I'll help thee to three crowns a week for him, an' she can act well. Has ever practised, my pretty Ganymede?'³⁶

Meanwhile, in Jonson's *Poetaster* (Children of the Chapel, 1601), Tucca considers selling his two young servants to the actor *Histrion*, for players, exclaiming, 'What wilt thou give me for my brace of beagles here, my little point trussers? You shall ha' them act among ye' (3.4.176–7), only to change his mind because he fears that *Histrion* will 'sell 'em for ingles' (3.4.241).³⁷

In these early modern plays written specifically for child actors, the presumed sexual availability of certain children – servants and actors in particular – is a familiar trope to which the playwrights return frequently, suggesting its popularity and acceptance with private theatre audiences. Witmore observes that 'childish metadrama . . . opened up a number of avenues for connecting with early modern audience, allowing playwrights to create, for example, an erotic frisson around young pages or "Ganymedes"'.³⁸ In the comic operas adopted or adapted for performance by child companies in the 1880s, even a 'faint suggestion of indelicacy' – the knowing and flirty self-promotion of the maids – is enough to cause concern when performed by child actors; any potential 'erotic frisson' is problematic.

However, the concern expressed by the *Standard's* reviewer was not universal. A review of the same production in *The Era*,

published three days later, singles out this scene for special praise:

Miss Carrie Coote was a remarkably sprightly and fascinating representative of Serpolette, and, although so youthful, appeared thoroughly to understand the style of character. Her singing of 'Just look at this and look at that', in the scene of the hiring fair, was rewarded with a double encore.³⁹

While it is reductive to assume that the enthusiastic response to Carrie Coote's performance of this song was solely the result of the suggestive lyrics, we should acknowledge the possibility, as Gubar says, that 'young and old playgoers seem to have derived scopophilic pleasure from watching child actors skilfully inhabit romantic and sometimes overtly eroticized roles (even as their young age and small stature allowed such risqué representations to be deemed respectable)'.⁴⁰ The explicit objectification of 'sweet-faced' children in the early modern plays may have been redirected, by the late nineteenth century, into a more euphemistic appreciation of 'sprightly and fascinating' performers, whose appeal had to be articulated in terms which carefully avoided erotic implications as the identification of childhood with innocence became increasingly culturally entrenched.

While in Bernard's 1880–81 children's production of *Les Cloches de Corneville* seems to have been performed uncut ('It must not be supposed that anything is omitted because of the youth of the performers,' the *Era* review asserts; 'The entire opera is given'), this was not the case in the longer-lived production of Warwick Gray's Children's Opera Company, which toured from 1885 until at least 1890. In an interview with the *Pall Mall Gazette* in December 1886, during the period when the employment of children on the stage was under particularly fierce scrutiny, Gray assured the newspaper's representative of both the care with which his children ('about twenty boys and twenty girls – none of whom is under the age of ten years')⁴¹ were treated, and the propriety of the material they performed:

Both Mr D'Oyly Carte and Mr Bernard ran children's troupes at one time, but ours is the only one

on the boards now, and we have left both of them far behind in length of run. . . . Both the operas we perform are eminently suited to the capabilities of our children. The airs are very catching, and the libretto does not require a scholar to rightly interpret it.⁴²

When pressed by the interviewer specifically on the suitability of *Les Cloches* and *Madame Angot*, as to whether it was 'not strange to ask the children to play comic operas adapted from the French', Gray answered:

It would be difficult if the operas were not cut so as to remove everything that is objectionable. I am perfectly willing to submit the two operas as we put them on the boards to the most fastidious jury of old Puritans that could be induced to attend such a performance; and I should not be afraid of the result for they would not find a single objectionable sentence or doubtful situation left in either work. . . . Nothing can be more innocent. You have all the music and comedy represented by children with a freshness and simplicity which is quite charming.⁴³

I have not been able to establish exactly what cuts were made to the French comic operas when performed by Gray's children's company, but in many ways what matters most is Gray's public insistence that he had made the piece suitable for children, removing every 'objectionable sentence' and 'doubtful situation' and leaving only what is 'innocent', thereby reinforcing publicly the idea of childhood as a 'wholly separate estate from adulthood.'⁴⁴ The appropriateness of the text for child performers, and their treatment as children – Gray pointedly refers to his troupe as his 'family' rather than as his employees in this interview – had eclipsed, by 1886, interest in their precocious performances. Or, perhaps more accurately (since the success of Gray's company shows that the appetite for precocious child performers was undiminished), enjoyment of child performers who broke the boundary between childhood and adulthood on stage had now to be underpinned, counterweighted, by a visible insistence on their off-stage childishness and an explicit demonstration of interest in their welfare.

What emerges from such a survey of the material performed by seventeenth-century boy companies and late nineteenth-century children's opera companies is the contrast

between the centrality of sexual content of plots constructed for early modern boy actors and the sharp focus of attention, in the 1880s, on the suitability of material for performance by children and the insistence on the 'innocence' of their performances. The early modern children's companies were often controversial. They lost patronage and incurred royal wrath for satirizing the new King James I and his Scottish courtiers, and, more generally, they garnered criticism for lewdness and sinful behaviour from the same anti-theatre people who railed against the adult companies. The scrutiny they experienced, however, was not directly linked to their treatment of child performers or to a concern that these performers should be treated in a manner specific to the needs of children. Thomas Heywood's well-known accusation that the playwrights of the boy companies exploited the youth of the performers to make libellous attacks, 'supposing their juniority to be a privilege for any railing, be it never so violent', acknowledges the unique identity of the boy player, and the supposed exploitation of his youthful status, without exhibiting specific concern for him.⁴⁵

The later children's opera companies, on the other hand, operated in an environment where their performers' child identity and the question of age-appropriate treatment were rapidly becoming overriding concerns. The identity of the child performer underwent a reversal between these two periods: the early modern boy companies were actors first and children second, while, for the late Victorian child performers, the assessment by adults of their competency, behaviour, and treatment were all informed by the primacy of their status as children. Yet while this differing emphasis on child performers' identity might suggest that this figure functioned totally differently in these two eras, this is not the case. The enduring popularity of child actors in adult roles suggests in itself the difficulty of viewing childhood and adulthood as completely distinct categories. Furthermore, the operas selected for performance by child companies in the 1880s offer opportunities for playing with age identity in ways that echo the dramas of their early modern predecessors.

'A Little Boy of Five': The Childishness of Gilbert and Sullivan

One of the most interesting aspects of the Children's productions of *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Pirates of Penzance* is the almost unanimous insistence in newspaper reviews that, not only were the operas suitable for children, but they were improved when performed by children. One reviewer of *The Children's Pinafore* commented that 'the opera itself is absurd, and the absurdity is most agreeably intensified by seeing the various characters delineated by these remarkably clever children'.⁴⁶ Another went so far as to declare that in *The Children's Pinafore*, 'every touch of humour in the dialogue appears in stronger colour, every quaint point is made to tell, and in the ludicrous incongruity of the situations there is a charm which is almost entirely wanting when the work is played by older actors'.⁴⁷ This enthusiasm, it seems, was not only due to the contrast between child actor and adult role – what a reviewer for the *Birmingham Daily Post* called 'the ludicrous littleness of the players of the title parts'⁴⁸ – but also to the operas' inherent topsy-turvy focus on age, and age-related behaviours, elements which are heightened and emphasized when performed by children.

Gilbert and Sullivan's plots often hinge on a reversal of status. Percy Fitzgerald notes that 'the author [W. S. Gilbert] is fond of dwelling on a favourite utopian theory – a reversal of the different classes of society, showing the oddities that result from a change of position':⁴⁹ for example, when Captain Corcoran and the lowly tar Ralph Rackstraw are revealed to have been swapped in infancy, or when the eponymous *Pirates of Penzance* are all revealed to be noblemen 'gone wrong'.⁵⁰ But while these reversals hinge on social status, they are often equally embedded in age identity. I would argue, in fact, that *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Pirates of Penzance*, the two Gilbert and Sullivan operas adapted so successfully for child casts, owe much of their entertainment value to a 'topsy-turvy' approach to age – a factor that explains both their easy adaptability for child performers and their immense appeal when performed by children; it complicates the idea

that adulthood and childhood were necessarily distinct and separate spheres during this period, since it draws attention to the fact that the 'adult' characters performed by these children are, in many ways, already childish.

Pirates is suffused with age fluidity. An atmosphere of general childishness is created by the pirates' sentimentality in refusing to attack 'orphans'; by the plot device of an 'apprentice' pirate (Frederick), who is about to come of age and be freed from his indenture; and by the presence on the ship of Frederick's superannuated nursemaid, Ruth. More attention is drawn to inversions of age when Ruth (a woman of forty-seven) longs to marry Frederick, her charge, who has just turned twenty-one, and the pliability and flexibility of age categories come to a crescendo when it is revealed that because Frederick's birthday falls on 29 February, he has not, in fact, reached his twenty-first birthday but is, for the purposes of his indenture, 'a little boy of five' (p. 21), and must remain an apprentice pirate until his twenty-first leap-year birthday in 1940. All of these elements provide amusement when performed by an adult cast, but it is easy to see how an extra layer of incongruity and metatheatrical irony is added when the roles, old and young alike, are performed by children, and the flexibility of age categories dramatized within the plot seeps out into the performance, adding another layer of 'generational drag'.

Pinafore similarly plays with age categories. The presence of Buttercup, who once practised baby-farming, introduces a character similar to the nurse-maid, Ruth, in *Pirates*, while the ship's childish name conjures a nursery atmosphere, as does Sir Joseph Porter's all-female retinue of solicitous sisters, cousins, and aunts, who act as a quasi-maternal restraint on the behaviour of the sailors. A similar sense of age-related disorientation to that created by Frederick's leap-year birthday in *Pirates* is created by what Gayden Wren calls 'the famous "Pinafore age paradox"', the revelation, at the end of Act 2 (lines 466–9), that Buttercup once nursed both Captain Corcoran and Ralph Rackstraw in her 'baby-farming' days, and mixed them up, reversing their rightful social status:⁵¹

In time each little waif
Forsook his foster-mother,
The wellborn babe was Ralph –
Your captain was the other!!!

As well as inverting social status, this plot device collapses the supposed age difference between the characters: Ralph is in love with Corcoran's daughter, Josephine, and we have so far assumed that they are similar in age and that the Captain is a generation older, an assumption which is undermined by the revelation that the Captain and Ralph were nursed by Buttercup at the same time, which, in turn renders 'little' Buttercup presumably at least sixty years old, although, as Wren notes, 'even as directed by the detail-obsessed Gilbert, the roles were never played at those ages'.⁵² This sense of slippery age categories is enhanced by the proposed marriage of Captain Corcoran to his sometime nurse, Buttercup, a union which anticipates the understanding between Frederick and Ruth in *Pirates*. In all of these aspects, the opera renders age categories unreliable and a sort of age-category vertigo prevails, where it becomes impossible and, indeed, unnecessary to apprehend the ages of the characters.

This effect is enhanced by the performance of the roles by children, in which scenario the age differences between the actors are compressed: no actor is the 'correct' age for the character they play, and the idea of age as a constructed, performative category is foregrounded. In this respect, despite having been written for adult casts, *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Pirates of Penzance* play with age in a very similar way to the plays written specifically for child companies in the early seventeenth century, which often drew attention to the gap between performer and character, and called into question the category distinction between adults and children. As Lucy Munro argues, in a statement which could just as easily be applied to the children's opera companies of the 1880s:

While 'adult' companies – comprised of men playing adult male roles and boys aged between around thirteen and twenty-one playing female and juvenile roles – often challenged conventional assumptions about gender and social class in their plays,

children's companies added to the mix a capacity to also render age categories such as childhood, adulthood, or old age fluid or hopelessly confused.⁵³

Similarly, Marah Gubar argues in relation to the nineteenth century that 'age transvestism' – children impersonating adults and vice versa – may have functioned in much the same way as Marjorie Garber 'contends that gender transvestism does: that is to say, not to buttress a binary opposition like male–female (or in this case, adult–child), but rather to signal a "category crisis"'.⁵⁴ The final section of this article will explore this idea of 'category crisis' by considering the ways in which child companies in both eras handled the performance of adult characters, arguing that they applied similar approaches but against different cultural backgrounds and with different results.

(Re)Becoming a Child: Precarious Adulthood On and Off Stage

At the heart of discussion of early modern child actors in the last century has been the question of whether they were believable in the adult roles that they played, or whether the attraction of their performances was limited to parody – of adult behaviours generally, and adult acting styles specifically. The latter position is exemplified in Harold Hillebrand's 1926 assertion that 'surely [Jacobean audiences] found no illusion when boys impersonated men . . . Boys on the stage must have seemed to them largely what boys on the stage now seem to us – masqueraders',⁵⁵ and echoed in Anthony Caputi's discussion of Marston's writing for children's companies, in which he argued that 'children from ten to fifteen years of age were and are naturally fitted by size, voice, and general immaturity to burlesque the adult world'.⁵⁶ Their opponents include Ejner J. Jensen and Ann Blake, both of whom argue that to claim that the early modern boy companies worked only as burlesque or parody and did not create believable dramatic illusion 'amounts to a denial that the plays functioned as drama at all, and it amounts further to an assertion that the audience at these plays participated in an experience fundamentally different from that

of any theatre audience before or since'.⁵⁷ A middle ground is found in the work of Michael Shapiro, who contends that the children's companies could employ different acting styles, ranging from parodic to naturalistic, depending on genre and context,⁵⁸ and Lucy Munro, who argues that 'a variety of performance styles were available, ranging from broad caricature to a more subtle impersonation and negotiation of the potential disparity between actor and role', concluding that 'it is certainly mistaken to argue that the play's appeal was based solely on child actors consciously ranting in oversize parts'.⁵⁹

It is notable that reviewers of the children's opera companies of the 1880s exhibit the same ambivalence as to whether they are witnessing pure parody or naturalistic acting. Many critics comment on the children's skill in 'mimicry'. A review of the touring *Children's Pinafore* in Dundee exemplifies this, drawing attention to the fact that the young performers are not only aping adult behaviours in general but are specifically aping the behaviours of the recent adult performers in their roles:

There is something ludicrously funny in seeing little mannikins boiling over with all the passions that belong by right to men and women, such as the pride and pomposity of a Sir Joseph Porter K.C.B., the hate of a Dick Deadeye, or the sentimental wooing and cooing of a Ralph Rackstraw and Josephine. That they succeed in mimicking to the life their elders is due, no doubt, as much to the sharp intelligence of the children as the judicious training to which they must have been subjected. . . . Master Willie Phillips, as Dick Deadeye, makes a capital hit . . . His make-up is perfect, his actions are well studied from his enlarged prototype, and he infuses a virulent vigour into all he says that contrasts ludicrously with his boyish voice. . . . There is of course nothing original in their style of doing things. Everything is a pure reflection; but no one will say that the image is in any way distorted.⁶⁰

Other reviews also noted that the children's performances were modelled on those familiar from the adult productions of the same operas: Edward Percy, who played the Major General in *Pirates*, was described by the *Western Mail's* reviewer as 'a pocket edition of Grossmith, whose method and style he copies with really marvellous exactitude'.⁶¹

(referencing George Grossmith, for whom the role was written); and a reviewer of Warwick Gray's 'juvenile' production of *Les Cloches* remarked that Victor Gouriet, playing Gaspard the miser, 'looked his part, spoke his part, and made the house see that it was his part to such an extent that we could not help thinking this promising youth a veritable Shiel Barry [the adult who had played the role in London]'.⁶²

Still others, however, saw something that was more than mere mimicry, with *The Era's* review of *The Children's Pinafore* describing the 'freshness and individuality' that was created by 'the original conceptions of several of the characters'.⁶³ The same paper's account of *The Children's Pirates* remarks that, while Edward Percy as the Major General 'generally [adopted] the manner of Mr George Grossmith, there were yet whimsical features showing Master Percy to be quite an original genius when left to his own ideas. Some of his nods, winks, and sudden changes of countenance completely took the audience by surprise'.⁶⁴ We cannot recover what the original audiences of the Children of Paul's or the Blackfriars children's company thought when they saw children and adolescent boys playing grown men and women, but there is no reason why the range of reactions may not have been as varied as those in the 1880s – sometimes seeing originality and naturalism, sometimes seeing parody and burlesque – depending on the material, the individual performer, and also on the spectator's familiarity (or lack thereof) with acting in the adult companies.

Whether the children's performances were perceived as simple mimicry or as something more self-aware, the contrast between child performer and adult role was a key feature of these performances in both eras. It is remarked upon repeatedly in reviews of the late Victorian children's opera companies, who, to intensify this appeal, often cast the smallest children in the roles of the most senior male characters: in *Pinafore*, for example, 'The girl who acted Josephine, Captain Corcoran's daughter, was perhaps fourteen or fifteen . . . Being considerably taller than her father, a good deal of merriment

was excited by that young gentleman calling her “my daughter”,⁶⁵ while numerous reviews of *Pirates* remark on the casting of Edward Percy, apparently ‘a young gentleman aged seven’,⁶⁶ as the Major General: the *Sunderland Daily Echo* commented that ‘he looked like the youngest member of the company, as he certainly was the smallest’,⁶⁷ while the *Hull Packet* described him as ‘a mere dot of a boy’,⁶⁸ and the *Western Mail*, ‘a tiny mite’.⁶⁹ In *Les Cloches de Corneville*, both Charles Bernard and Warwick Gray cast young girls as the elderly miser Gaspard, heightening the contrast between actor and role by adding gender cross-dressing to the generational drag.⁷⁰

We have less evidence of specific casting of early seventeenth-century boy company plays, but it is clear that the contrast between the child performer and the adult, sometimes an elderly one, which were the roles played, was a key attraction. Ben Jonson’s ‘Epitaph on Salomon Pavey, a Child of Queen Elizabeth’s Chapel’ notably claims that Pavy, a child who acted between the ages of ten and thirteen, played old men ‘so truly’ that the Fates mistook him for a real one, ironically leading to his premature death. ‘When the children’s companies were revived in 1599–1600,’ comments Munro, ‘one of the aspects which seems to have most impressed their contemporaries was their performance of age.’⁷¹ From the texts of some of the plays, we know that metatheatrical comments frequently drew attention to the physical status of the child actors in contrast to the roles they played (in, for example, references to cracking adolescent voices or the need to wear false beards to perform adult male characters).

We can infer that such strategies were used to enhance the contrast between the actor and the role at particular moments and to complicate the association of aged characters with maturity and wisdom. Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (Children of the Revels, c. 1609) subverts the prodigal-son genre which it satirizes by making a patriarchal figure, Old Master Merrythought, a feckless prodigal with no concern for his family’s future,⁷² while Chapman’s *May Day* opens with an

old man, Lorenzo, behaving in a way typically associated with lustful youths, plotting to seduce the young Franceschina, the incongruity of which is drawn attention to by Angelo, who scoffs: ‘How now? God’s my life, I wonder what made this May morning so cold, and now I see ‘tis this January that intrudes into it’ (1.1.22–3, modernized). In both cases, having these immature patriarchs played by boys might enhance the sense that their manhood and authority were diluted, and in Jonson’s *Epicene*, the elderly Morose (played of course by a boy actor) is forced to undergo several humiliations that also directly undermine his adult masculine status, including publicly admitting impotence in order to invalidate his marriage and, finally, giving up his estate and making himself his nephew’s ward and dependant. As Lamb argues, ‘Morose’s reversal from the position of independent and adult patriarch of the play to dependent ward demonstrates the precarious nature of adulthood and the potential to re-become a child at any moment.’⁷³

In the early modern plays, ridiculing elderly male characters often takes place within the context of age-gap marriages or liaisons in which an elderly man pursues a younger woman. We see this in multiple boy company plays. In *May Day*, the elderly Lorenzo’s pursuit of Franceschina is supplemented by his attempts to marry his young daughter Aemilia to the elderly but rich Gasparo (‘God morrow, neighbour Gasparo. I have talked with my daughter, whom I do yet find a green young plant, and therefore unapt to bear such ripe fruit – I think I might have said rotten, as yourself’: 1.1.145–8, modernized). In *The Malcontent*, the elderly Bilioso is married to the young Bianca. In *A Mad World, My Masters*, the elderly Sir Bounteous Progress keeps a young courtesan, and comments frequently on his need for aphrodisiacs in order to keep up with her. In *The Isle of Gulls*, this trope is doubled and mirrored, as the Duke and Duchess’s rivalry over the gender-disguised Lisanter/Zelmane is played out in terms that draw attention both to the age gaps and the older characters’ blindness as to their own age and unsuitability:

[DUKE] BASILIUS:

Those fingers tipp'd with curious porphyry,
Staining Pygmalion's matchless imagery,
Like amorous twins all of one mother nurs'd,
Contend in courtesy who should touch me
first.

[DUCHESS] GYNETIA:

Should touch me first? Their strife is undertook
To twine a young bay, not a far-stooping oak.

[DUKE] BASILIUS:

Young bay? Stale jest! That a dry sapless rind
Should hold young thoughts and a licentious
mind!
Were she but gone now.⁷⁴

Age-gap marriages also feature in the late Victorian comic operas performed by children's companies: Josephine is betrothed to the older Sir Joseph Porter in *Pinafore*; reversing the usual gender roles, twenty-one-year-old Frederick, as we have seen, is 'betrothed' to the forty-seven-year-old Ruth in *Pirates*. In the example which comes closest to the language used about such relationships in the early modern plays, *Les Cloches de Corneville* opens with Germaine's guardian, the miser Gaspard, hoping to marry her to the old and wealthy Bailli: 'Little Germaine, hardly out of her pinafores, and that precious old booby of the Bailli who is as old as Methusaleh and looks like a scarecrow' – this a coupling that is explicitly referred to, as in Chapman's *May Day*, as one of 'January and May' (p. 36).

In both eras, the juxtapositions of age and youth remarked on within the world of the plays in regard to these relationships did not exist in the bodies of the actors performing. The dramatic texts deliberately draw attention to discrepancies of age that are negated by the evidence of the audience's eyes, when all-child casts are used. The entertainment value of these scenarios, when performed by juvenile companies, resides, at least in part, in the fact that the Duke in *The Isle of Gulls* is not a 'stooping oak' and the Duchess not a 'sapless rind'; Ruth in *Pirates* is not a woman of 'forty-seven years'; Gasparo in *May Day* is neither 'ripe' nor 'rotten fruit'; and the Bailli in *Les Cloches* is not 'as old as Methusaleh' – when played by an actor 'scarcely in, much less out

of [his] teens'.⁷⁵ But the effect of this conscious creation and collapse of age differences varies in each era. In relation to the early modern boy companies, Edel Lamb has argued that cross-gender casting, the confusions instigated by cross-dress-disguise plots, and, crucially, the performance of old men by younger boys, all combined to draw attention to the precariousness of manhood. The performance of adult masculinity by adolescent boys, and the foregrounding of the parallels between childhood and old age, served to emphasize manhood as a temporary status that could be lost, either through inappropriate behaviour or natural biological decline:

The boy, therefore, exposes the temporal process of becoming an adult and becoming masculine. Moreover this cycle is represented as circular, and old age is often imagined as a second childhood . . . The image of the child raises the possibility that even when adult masculinity has been achieved, the male has the potential to return to this less than masculine state.⁷⁶

The relationship between adulthood and childhood, or, more specifically, between boyhood and manhood exemplified by the early modern boy company plays, emerges as one predicated on a certain anxiety that adult masculinity is precarious and performative, and that childishness remains lurking beneath the performance, just as the body of the boy actor underpins, and to an extent undermines, the adult character he plays. This effect may have been achieved in children's opera company performances: *Pinafore*, in particular, highlights the performative nature of identities such as 'the English Tar' with its insistence on striking the proper 'attitude', and the promptbook of *The Children's Pinafore* indicates that the male chorus's stage business was often structured around stereotypically 'masculine' actions such as collective thigh-slapping.⁷⁷ Evidence from contemporary reviews, however, does not suggest that a sense of anxiety about regression to childish ways was prompted by these performances. In fact, the emphasis in reviews of these productions is their appeal to all ages. The repeated use of the phrase 'children of

larger growth', when talking about adult enjoyment of all-child performances, suggests a very different relationship between childhood and adulthood – one where regression to childishness signals, not an uncomfortable or humiliating loss of status, but, under the correct circumstances, temporary access to a coveted state. Take the closing paragraph of the lengthy review of the dress rehearsal of the D'Oyly Carte *Children's Pinafore* from December 1879:

We have said enough to convince our readers that *The Children's Pinafore* is a thing for everyone to see, whether they are of tender years or are 'children of a larger growth'. Hoary-headed grandpapas will shake their sides with delight; cosy old dames will declare that it makes them feel young again; prim spinsters of uncertain age will relax their rigid muscles and forget there is such a subject as 'Women's Rights'; simpering maidens will give encouragement to bashful swains; and there will be one broad, universal grin of enjoyment on the faces of all those who witness *The Children's Pinafore* at the Opera Comique.⁷⁸

Here, the collapse of age categories, which takes place on stage, is mirrored, in reverse, among the audience, as – watching the age transvestism of the child performers – the adult audience members regress into a happier, carefree, childlike state, forget their age, and 'feel young again'. What Lamb calls 'the potential to re-become a child at any moment' is a key part of the late Victorian children's comic operas, both on stage and off, just as it was a key concern of early modern boy company plays, but by the 1880s this re-becoming is an escape, an entertainment, a privilege, rather than a potential humiliation or loss of status.

Conclusions: Leaving the Door Ajar

Contemporary commentators on the children's opera companies of the 1880s repeatedly describe the effect of their performances as like looking through the wrong end of a telescope or opera glass and seeing a perfect miniature version of the original adult production – a perhaps reassuringly static and fixed way of viewing the child actor as uncomplicatedly 'little' and existing in direct

opposition to adulthood.⁷⁹ This article has argued that, rather than reinforcing a boundary between adulthood and childhood, such performances focus attention on the threshold between them and highlight the impossibility of closing the door between the two states. In both eras under discussion here, the child actor in adult roles acts as a reminder of the fluidity and unfixedness of age categories, the difficulty of establishing where childhood ends and adulthood begins, and which behaviours pertain to each state. In the early seventeenth century, this fluidity found expression in plays that, to later societies, might seem unnervingly adult to have been written specifically for juvenile casts, and which sweep the boy actors up into a world of adult sexual intrigue, while simultaneously mocking the adult characters they portrayed – and potentially the adult men in the audience – with the precarity of their adult masculine status.

By the 1880s, however, with the advent of the idolization and idealization of childhood, the focus on age fluidity had inverted both on stage and off: adult spectators, referred to frequently as 'children of a larger growth', who attended performances by children's opera companies, could marvel at the skill of the child performers and be rejuvenated by their 'freshness and simplicity', recapturing, to an extent, their own youth. They could remind themselves, too, that the door between adulthood and childhood could be left ajar for them to slip back through. But the young performers who provided this playful escapism were now the focus of unease; their status as innocent children was precarious, and potentially threatened by their immersion in the world of theatrical work and by their ability to mimic adult behaviours, however innocuous.

Comparison of child performers in 'generational drag' in these two historical periods reveals the enduring popularity of this phenomenon, and a degree of continuity: despite radical changes in cultural constructions of childhood between 1600 and 1890, theatre audiences in both periods found entertainment value in watching children and adolescents perform as adults in dramas which

foregrounded the potential for ‘age categories . . . to become fluid or hopelessly confused’.⁸⁰ Yet changing cultural contexts fundamentally altered the way in which the figure of the child actor functioned as a touchstone for anxieties about age identities between these two periods: if the ‘category crisis’ of adulthood and childhood signalled by early modern child actors in adult roles related primarily to anxieties about the ease with which men might revert to childish behaviour and lose the status of manhood, in the late Victorian period, anxiety was directed at the figure of the child performer itself, and the concern that professional stage-playing might be an inherently adult role, unsuitable for children. Precocious exposure to adult material was the predominant concern, and fragile childhood, not manhood, was the category at risk of crisis.

Notes and References

1. John Marston, *Antonio and Mellida*, ed. Reavley Gair (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). Both Catzo and Dildo are Italian terms for ‘penis’, while ‘capon’ – a castrated cockerel – carries similar connotations.
 2. Edel Lamb, *Performing Childhood in the Early Modern Theatre: The Children’s Playing Companies (1599–1613)* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), p. 27.
 3. ‘Ladies’ Column’, *Evening Telegraph* (Dundee, Scotland), 4 September 1885 (Issue 2655), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/JE3240117006/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=c32a8100>>, accessed 7 July 2022.
 4. ‘Prince of Wales Theatre’, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 12 October 1880 (Issue 6948), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BC3201238148/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=1032e4a5>>, accessed 1 August 2022.
 5. Marah Gubar, ‘Who Watched *The Children’s Pinafore*? Age Transvestism on the Nineteenth-Century Stage’, *Victorian Studies*, LIV, No. 3 (Spring 2012), p. 410–26 (p. 424).
 6. The children’s company performing at Blackfriars were variously known as the Children of the Chapel Royal, the Children of the Queen’s Revels, and the Children of the Revels during the first decade of the seventeenth century as their patronage changed. For consistency, I refer to them as the Blackfriars company here, except when attributing performances of specific plays to each company.
 7. The D’Oyly Carte opera company introduced *The Children’s Pinafore* to London on the stage of the Opera Comique in December 1879 and toured until summer 1881. The production proved very popular and initiated a trend for all-child opera companies in the UK that persisted throughout the 1880s: Charles Bernard swiftly put together a children’s version of *Les Cloches de*
- Corneville* (Gaiety Theatre 1881, then touring), and the D’Oyly Carte company followed up their initial *Pinafore* success with a *Children’s Pirates of Penzance* (1884–5). The most dogged and persistent children’s opera company venture was that of Mr and Mrs Warwick Gray, who seem to have toured their troupe ceaselessly around Britain and Ireland from 1885 until as late as 1890, performing *La Fille de Madame Angot*, *Les Cloches des Corneville*, and, from 1887 onwards, adding *Billee Taylor* and *Dolly Varden* to their repertoire.
8. On early modern child actors, see, for example: Lamb, *Performing Childhood*; Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queen’s Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Michael Witmore, *Pretty Creatures: Children and Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007). On Victorian child performers, see, for example: Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children’s Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Marlis Schweitzer, *Bloody Tyrants and Little Pickles: Stage Roles of Anglo-American Girls in the Nineteenth Century* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2020); Anne Varty, *Children and Theatre in Victorian Britain: ‘All Work, No Play’* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007); Shauna Vey, *Childhood and Nineteenth-Century American Theatre: The Work of the Marsh Troupe of Juvenile Actors*; and *Entertaining Children: The Participation of Youth in the Entertainment Industry*, ed. Gillian Arrighi and Victor Emeljanow (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014).
 9. The British Library [BL] holds musical scores for the D’Oyly Carte productions of the *Children’s H.M.S. Pinafore* and the *Children’s Pirates of Penzance*, and a promptbook for the *Children’s H.M.S. Pinafore*, which appears to be from the original D’Oyly Carte London production in 1879–80. However, I have so far been unable to find evidence of the texts used in either Barnard’s or Gray’s versions of *Les Cloches de Corneville* or *La Fille de Madame Angot* beyond brief mentions in newspaper reviews, and it seems likely that Gray’s company, at least, performed specially altered versions of these operettas.
 10. Witmore, *Pretty Creatures*, p. 97. See also Munro, *Children of the Queen’s Revels*, p. 39–42, and Lamb, *Performing Childhood*, p. 3–8.
 11. ‘The Children’s Pirates of Penzance’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 24 December 1884 (Issue 6175), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BB3200387683/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=b9a29219>>, accessed 1 August 2022.
 12. ‘Children on the Stage’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 December 1886 (Issue 6778), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BB3200400204/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=dd6b2bdb>>, accessed 1 August 2022. These publicized ages must always be taken with a pinch of salt since managers were known both to reduce the advertised ages of young performer to enhance their precocity and – as demands for legal restriction on the age of child performers grew – to insist they were older than they were to escape prosecution.
 13. Lamb, *Performing Childhood*, p. 41.
 14. See ‘Music and the Drama’, *Burnley Express*, 13 February 1886 (Issue 429), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/IS3242397048/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=8f0951b3>>; and ‘Local Intelligence: Juvenile Opera Company at the Atheneum’, *Lancaster Gazette*, 16 April 1890 (Issue 6069),

<<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/R3209187443/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=88579751>>, both accessed 18 August 2022.

15. Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels*, p. 2; Gubar, 'Who Watched *The Children's Pinafore?*', p. 411, 423, 425; Witmore, *Pretty Creatures*, p. 101.

16. Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, p. 153.

17. Catherine Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 136.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Varty, *Children and Theatre*, p. 15 (referring to contemporary Victorian anthropological views of children's fundamental difference from adults, and child performers' function in making that difference publicly visible).

20. Lucy Munro, 'Queering Gender, Age, and Status in Early Modern Children's Drama', in *Queering Childhood in Early Modern English Drama and Culture*, ed. Jennifer Higginbotham and Mark Johnston (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018), p. 215–37 (p. 218–19).

21. John Day, *The Isle of Gulls*, ed. Raymond S. Burns (London: Garland, 1980).

22. Ben Jonson, *Epicene, or The Silent Woman*, ed. Richard Dutton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1.1.12–15.

23. John Marston, *Antonio's Revenge*, ed. Reavley Gair (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978); George Chapman, *Bussy D'Ambois*, ed. Maurice Evans (London: Ernest Benn, 1965).

24. W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, *H.M.S. Pinafore; or, The Lass that Loved a Sailor*, <https://gsarchive.net/pinafore/pf_lib.pdf>, accessed 17 August 2022.

25. W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, *The Pirates of Penzance; or, The Slave of Duty*, <https://gsarchive.net/pirates/pirates_lib.pdf>, accessed 17 August 2022 (p. 3).

26. Kevin Clarke, 'March of the Falsettos: Streaming Sasha Regan's *Pirates of Penzance* from the Palace Theatre', Operetta Research Centre, 30 December 2020 <<http://operetta-research-center.org/march-falsettos-sasha-regans-pirates-penzance-stream-palace-theatre/>>, accessed 29 June 2022; Peter L. Hays, 'A Slightly Smudged Pinafore', *Journal of Popular Culture*, II, No. 4 (Spring 1969), p. 665–78 (p. 675).

27. Hays, 'A Slightly Smudged Pinafore', p. 668.

28. Witmore, *Pretty Creatures*, p. 101.

29. See n. 20 above; and, for example, Chapters 6 ('Theatre Children and the School Boards') and 7 ('Vigilance and Virtue') of Varty, *Children and Theatre*, for a discussion of the moral crusades and legislation of the 1870s and 1880s, which aimed to limit the use of very young children on the stage, mandate school attendance, and protect young performers (especially girls) from sexual exploitation.

30. See *The Pirates of Penzance* (Children's Version), Full Score, D'Oyly Carte Archive, BL MS Mus. 1824/1/5/3; *H.M.S. Pinafore* ('The Children's Pinafore'), Full Score, D'Oyly Carte Archive, BL MS Mus. 1824/1/4/2; and W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, *H. M.S. Pinafore*, Prompt Book Libretto, Children, BL MS Mus. 1844/1/15.

31. W.S. Gilbert, *The Story of H.M.S. Pinafore* (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1913), <<https://www.gsarchive.net/pinafore/book/index.html>>, accessed 28 July 2022 (p. 16).

32. *The Bells of Corneville; Comic Opera, In Three Acts: Music by Robert Planquette, The Original Dialogue and Stage Business Translated and Adapted to this Edition* (Boston: Oliver Ditson & Co., 1879), <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044040697047&view=1up&seq=11&skin=2021>>, accessed 18 August 2022 (p. 20–1). Though this full score edition does not credit the translators, the text is identical to a later 1912 'Concert Version' (translated as *The Chimes of Normandy*), which credits H. B. Farnie and Robert Reece as the translators (see <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015007853875&view=1up&seq=13&skin=2021>>). An 1881 advertisement for *The Children's 'Les Cloches to Corneville'* indicates that Charles Bernard's company were using Farnie and Reece's translation (see 'Advertisements and Notices', *Leicester Journal*, 16 September 1881 (Issue 6695), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CL3241251517/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=b245184b>>, accessed 18 August 2022).

33. 'Portsmouth and District', *Portsmouth Evening News*, 24 August 1886 (Issue 2883), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/IG3218507749/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=278ef070>>, accessed 18 August 2022.

34. 'The Children's "Cloches de Corneville"', *The Standard*, 9 March 1881 (Issue 17671), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/R3213726971/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=a47c3f17>>, accessed 18 August 2022. Carrie Coote, one of the few children's opera performers whose date of birth is known (due, probably, to her later marriage to Sir William George Pearce), was born in 1870, and so was ten or eleven years old when she played Serpolette in Bernard's company.

35. *Les Cloches de Corneville*, p. 87–8, <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044040697047&view=1up&seq=100&skin=2021>>, accessed 18 August 2022.

36. George Chapman, *May Day*, ed. Robert F. Walsh, in *The Plays of George Chapman: The Comedies*, ed. Allan Holaday (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 3.3.202–6 (modernized).

37. Ben Jonson, *Poetaster, or, The Arraignment, in The Devil is an Ass, and Other Plays*, ed. Margaret Jane Kidnie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'ingle' as follows: 'A lover, a sexual partner; esp. a boy or young man who is made use of as a (typically passive) sexual partner by an older man . . . Also: a young male prostitute' (*OED online*, **ingle**, n.2).

38. Witmore, *Pretty Creatures*, p. 100.

39. 'Children's "Les Cloches de Corneville"', *Era*, 12 March 1881 (Issue: 2216), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BB3204272780/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=e18e62cd>>, accessed 18 August 2022.

40. Gubar, 'Who Watched *The Children's Pinafore?*', p. 411.

41. 'Children on the Stage: An Interview with the Manager of an Infantile Troupe', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 December, 1886 (Issue 6778), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BB320400204/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=dd6b2bdb>>, accessed 18 August 2022. Gray is keen to emphasize that none of his performers are under ten because this is the age under which it was being proposed that children be prohibited from stage work. Earlier in 1886, however, a review of Gray's production of *La Fille de Madame Angot*

- suggested that some of the troupe were younger, calling them 'this company of midgets, whose ages range between seven and thirteen', and mentioning by name 'Miss Florrie Hetherington, a little mite of six years old': see 'Music and the Drama', *Burnley Express* (Issue 429), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/IS3242397048/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=8f0951b3>>, accessed 22 August 2022.
42. Ibid.
 43. Ibid.
 44. Robson, *Men in Wonderland*, p. 136.
 45. Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (London, 1612), G3v, <<https://liverpool.idm.oclc.org/login?url?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/apology-actors-containing-three-briefe-treatises/docview/2248572641/se-2>>, accessed 22 August 2022 (modernized).
 46. 'The Children's Pinafore', *Portsmouth Evening News*, 7 December 1880 (Issue 1145), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/IG3218425738/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=e559aefd>>, accessed 18 August 2022.
 47. 'Children's "Pinafore" at the Theatre Royal', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 8 March 1881 (Issue 2444), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/ID3234831488/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=3cccb59b>>, accessed 18 August 2022.
 48. 'Prince of Wales Theatre', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 12 October 1880 (Issue 6948), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BC3201238148/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=1032e4a5>>, accessed 18 August 2022.
 49. Percy Fitzgerald, *The Savoy Opera: The Operas of Gilbert and Sullivan* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1894), <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.ml1mqb&view=1up&seq=11&skin=2021>>, accessed 18 August 2022 (p. 63).
 50. Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Pirates of Penzance*, p. 30.
 51. Gayden Wren, *A Most Ingenious Paradox: The Art of Gilbert and Sullivan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 66.
 52. Ibid., p. 67.
 53. Munro, 'Queering Gender', p. 217.
 54. Gubar, 'Who Watched The Children's Pinafore?', p. 411.
 55. Harold N. Hillebrand, *The Child Actors: A Chapter in Elizabethan Stage History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1926), p. 271.
 56. Anthony Caputi, *John Marston, Satirist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 102.
 57. Ejner J. Jensen, 'The Style of the Boy Actors', *Comparative Drama*, II, No. 2. (Summer 1968), p. 100–14 (p. 101); see also Ann Blake, "'The Humour of Children': John Marston's Plays in the Private Theatres", *Review of English Studies*, XXXVIII (1987), p. 471–82.
 58. See Michael Shapiro, *Children of the Revels: The Boy Companies of Shakespeare's Time and their Plays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), Chapter 4.
 59. Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels*, p. 52–3.
 60. 'Amusements', *Evening Telegraph* (Dundee, Scotland), 29 March 1881 (Issue 1266), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/ID3240796265/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=706fd93d>>, accessed 18 August 2022.
 61. 'The Children's "Pirates of Penzance" at the Theatre Royal, Cardiff', *Western Mail*, 17 June 1885 (Issue 5021), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BB3205134984/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=340afe61>>, accessed 18 August 2022.
 62. 'Local Intelligence', *Lancaster Gazette*, 16 April 1890 (Issue 6069), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/R3209187443/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=88579751>>, accessed 18 August 2022.
 63. 'The Children's Pinafore', *Era*, 21 December 1879 (Issue 2152), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BB3202470041/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=b3f0ea1a>>, accessed 18 August 2022.
 64. 'The Children's "Pirates of Penzance"', *Era*, 27 December 1884 (Issue 2414), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BB3202482075/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=72d5bdfd>>, accessed 18 August 2022.
 65. 'On Things in General', *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 25 February 1881 (Issue 4048), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/R3212779677/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=71cb10c8>>, accessed 18 August 2022.
 66. *Pall Mall Gazette*, 24 December 1884 (Issue 6175), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BB3200387683/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=b9a29219>>, accessed 18 August 2022.
 67. 'The Entertainments', *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 10 March 1885 (Issue 3564), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/GW3224800359/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=26ce0554>>, accessed 18 August 2022.
 68. 'The Children's "Pirates of Penzance" Company at the Hull Theatre Royal', *Hull Packet*, 5 June 1885 (Issue 5252), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BB3205999168/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=0c4551e5>>, accessed 18 August 2022.
 69. 'The Children's Pirates of Penzance at the Theatre Royal, Cardiff' *Western Mail*, 17 June 1885 (Issue 5021), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BB3205134984/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=340afe61>>, accessed 18 August 2022.
 70. Miss Nelly Howitt played Gaspard in early London performances by Charles Bernard's company (see, for example, 'The Children's "Cloches De Corneville"', *The Standard*, 9 March 1881, Issue 17671), although by June 1881, Master Charles Hodgson had taken over the role on tour (see, for example 'The Children's "Les Cloches de Corneville Company"', *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 25 June 1885). When Warwick Gray's company toured *Les Cloches* in Liverpool in 1886, the role of Gaspard was also taken by a girl, Miss Ethel Hunt: see 'Advertisements & Notices', *Era*, 1 May 1886 (Issue 2484).
 71. Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels*, p. 42.
 72. Francis Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, ed. Sheldon P. Zitner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
 73. Lamb, *Performing Childhood*, p. 39.
 74. John Day, *The Isle of Gulls*, ed. Raymond S. Burns (London: Garland, 1980), 5.1.49–57 (modernized).
 75. 'Theatre Royal', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13 September 1881 (Issue 1051), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/JF3232307826/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&id=a0a670a9>>, accessed 18 August 2022.

76. Lamb, *Performing Childhood*, p. 31–3.

77. On the opening page of Act 1, for example, hand-written stage directions indicate ‘sailors slap their thighs’ no less than four times (Gilbert and Sullivan, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, Prompt Book Libretto, Children, BL MS Mus. 1844/1/15).

78. ‘The Children’s Pinafore’, *Era*, 14 December 1879 (Issue 2151), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BB3202469977/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=a29df75a>>, accessed 18 August 2022.

79. See, for example, ‘Prince’s Theatre’, *Manchester Times*, 28 May 1881 (Issue 1223), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BC3206455863/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=9d5abod1>>, accessed 22 August 2022; and ‘Theatre Royal, “La Fille de Madame Angot”’, *Belfast News-Letter*, 15 May 1888 (Issue 22733), <<https://link-gale-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/BC3202181217/BNCN?u=livuni&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=d83213d1>>, accessed 22 August 2022. These references to opera glasses, telescopes, and changing

dimensions cannot but call to mind Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), in which Alice repeatedly grows and shrinks, and its sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871), in which Alice finds herself accosted by a Railway Guard, who examines her ‘first through a telescope, then through a microscope, and then through an opera-glass’, before announcing enigmatically that she is ‘travelling the wrong way’ (Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, ed. Martin Gardner (London: Allen Lane, 2000), p. 179). While Carroll and *Alice* have often been discussed in relation to Victorian child actors in terms of the stage adaptations of the books, and Carroll’s relationships with the young actresses who played Alice, a broader exploration of the relationship between those books and theatrical children, focusing on the vocabulary of growth and miniaturization in relation to child actors and child characters, and ‘travelling the wrong way’ in terms of age, would be worthwhile.

80. Munro, ‘Queering Gender’, p. 217.