

Abstracts: More or Less than Kind – Claiming Kinship in Early Modern Literature

Chairs: Roderick McKeown and Judith Owens

“Living in my glass”: Imitative Mourning in *Twelfth Night* and Bookish Imitation in *The Tempest*

Megan Allen

In Act Three of Shakespeare’s play, we learn that Viola has been imitating her brother, believed dead, as a means of keeping him alive:

He named Sebastian: I my brother know
Yet living in my glass; even such and so
In favour was my brother, and he went
Still in this fashion, colour, ornament,
For him I imitate: O, if it prove,
Tempests are kind and salt waves fresh in love.

My intent in this paper is to interrogate the norms of female imitation by reading Viola’s violation of those norms in *Twelfth Night* through her ongoing physical and behavioral imitation of her twin brother. My argument in this paper takes up the question of imitation; while sons imitate their fathers as part of the prerequisites of the inheritance system of primogeniture, daughters do not seem to imitate their mothers. Prescriptive literature exhorts women to imitate books: Juan Luis Vives, in his *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (1529), explicitly instructs women to imitate textual examples. “A woman,” he notes, “shall learn the virtues of her kind altogether out of books, which she shall either read herself, or else hear read” (“Of the virtues of a woman”). However, textual imitation raised its own problems; in his publication of Mary’s casket letters, George Buchanan scatters Mary across the page by printing her sonnets in two languages. As Katherine Kellett argues, Buchanan’s textual anxiety speaks to the larger cultural fear about the impossibility of knowing whether someone is authentic; *Detectio Mariae Reginae*, she suggests, asserts a common belief that it is impossible to tell the difference between a false and a true woman.¹ In a sense, all women are false copies. However, while bookish imitation was the ideal, Viola’s stated purpose in *Twelfth Night* opens up other possibilities for female imitation; on the other hand, Miranda’s imperfect imitation of feminine norms could indicate that there are things only another woman can pass down. She imitates the letter but not the spirit of the advice books. Miranda’s relationship to her father’s books and her very vague memories of feminine companionship suggest that insisting on bookish imitation is an attempt to elide the female imitative relationship. We certainly never see the women who would be imitated – mothers in relationships with daughters. Juliet’s mother offers an interesting exception to this trend, but raises the question: are we seeing uniquely feminine expectations for her daughter’s behavior in her advice scenes, or just a replication of her father’s perspective?

¹ Katherine Kellett, “Literacy, Promiscuity and the Question of Female Authenticity in Sixteenth Century England,” Gender and Literacy panel, *MLA Conference* Jan 5, 2013.

“More than my father’s skill”; or, What’s inside Helen’s head?

Caroline Bicks

This essay explores the relationship between Helen’s adolescent brain in *All’s Well* and her father’s art and legacy. She has forgotten her father in her opening soliloquy, and replaced him with Bertram in her imagination, but she also claims to store up “the dearest issue” of his practice like a “triple eye.” These mental actions, I argue, are connected to a larger early modern belief in the unique cognitive abilities of the adolescent female mind. Like Miranda’s “beating” mind—which takes in, assesses, and transforms Prospero’s art—Helen’s brain seems to work similar transformations on her father’s renowned “skill.” The essay also considers the theme of incest in the play. Is Helen’s adolescent brain-work a “safer,” more (re)productive way to negotiate the sexual dangers of the father-daughter bond? In what ways does her mind rework not only his medical recipes, but the terms of their kinship more broadly? Her desiring imaginations of Bertram and her appropriation of her father’s art both reveal an adolescent female mind that has been incited in new and inventive ways. Rather than read Helen’s brain as a self-consuming vessel for her father’s art and legacy, then, this essay considers how she regenerates and redirects them to create her own distinct future.

“It shall teach all Ladies the right path to rectifie their issue”: Illegitimacy in John Webster's *The Devil's Law-Case*

Carol Blessing

The highlight of John Webster’s play *The Devil's Law-Case* is a courtroom scene in which widow Leonora falsely accuses her son Romelio of being a bastard and therefore incapable of inheriting his dead father's estate. Martin Ingram's study, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570 - 1640*, finds an increase in the incidence of illegitimate births towards the end of the Elizabethan era. This increase may have influenced the social and economic anxiety portrayed in Webster’s plays, which focus on the issue of legitimacy in not only *The Devil's Law-Case*, but also in *Appius and Virginia*, *A Cure for a Cuckold*, and *The Fair Maid of the Inn*. Further, Duke Ferdinand's concerns about the legitimacy of his sister’s children in *The Duchess of Malfi* contribute to his hysteria. This paper will explore particularly the issue of bastardy in *The Devil's Law-Case*, with reference, as time permits, to Webster’s other relevant plays, and will present the contexts relating to bastardy incidents and laws, intertwined with representations of women and the law in the plays. It is my contention that women are presented as threats to the patriarchy as it shaped both the family structure and political rule of the seventeenth century. The issue of illegitimacy becomes a pivotal point, touching on both home and court, and the ability of women to produce bastards represents their ability to upset established order.

More Like a Mother, More Like a Father: Familial Bonds in Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*

David Sterling Brown

For a dramatic portrayal of productive surrogate parent-child relations at work, and celebrated female power within the domestic sphere, we can look outside of Shakespeare's canon and examine Philip Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, a rich comedy that contains a strong surrogate mother figure, in addition to a final representation of the family that only contains non-biologically related parents and children. Massinger treats the family in broader terms than Shakespeare and he does not punish independent mothers. Moreover, Massinger forcefully employs the surrogate parental figures—Lady Allworth and Lord Lovell—as foils to the play's sole blood father (Sir Giles Overreach), specifically, to emphasize the limits of patriarchy and biological parentage. Attention to the family allows us to read the play's class issues, a favored topic among critics, as conflicts between families within the drama. Doing so enables us to consider parental authority as an important form of power that is acquired, transferable, and socially constructive as well as destructive. What makes a mother? What makes a father? What is a parent? And what does it mean to be a good parent? The play seeks to answer these fundamental questions.

Ravens and Forlorn Children: Animals and Adoption in *Titus Andronicus*

Erin Ellerbeck

As many critics have noted, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, in its myriad references to the vicious, animal-like behaviour of its characters, suggests analogous affinities between the ferocious tendencies of humans and of animals. The play indicates, however, that animals might also serve as models of appropriate behaviour for their human counterparts. Lavinia claims, for instance, that birds may foster young creatures—nestlings and human children alike—that are not their own offspring. This paper will examine Lavinia's avian model of parenthood and the role of adoption in the play's depiction of kinship—a theme of central importance in a play that concerns two warring families. At times Shakespeare portrays adoption as a strategy by which advantageous alliances may be established. But adoption is also depicted as a model of citizenship: throughout *Titus Andronicus*, the practice of adoption is shown to be fundamental to the founding and governance of Rome. An analysis of the play reveals that the capacity to think and to act adoptively—that is, to treat an unrelated person as a blood relative just as animals are said to do—is a mark of successful civic conduct and of virtuous parenthood.

Familial and Misogynistic Doubling in *The Winter's Tale*

Megan Herrold

In this paper, I track the complex intersections between kinship claims and misogynistic censure in *The Winter's Tale*. In this play, following Leontes' lead, social ties between characters are applied and discarded easily and in ways that tie epistemological problems to social personhood. In the intra- and intergenerational drama of the romance, misogyny participates in the doubling and conflation of person that familial bonds also arouse and critique. Whether this conflation is a social boon or threat pivots on the extent to which claims of kinship are taken seriously. I hope to turn this conference paper into my third chapter of my dissertation, currently titled "Productive Misogyny in Early English Romance."

School Masters, *Merry Wives* and Middle Class (Un)kindness

Elizabeth Hanson

My paper will consider the relationship between grammar school master and parents that emerged as gentle, professional, mercantile and some artisanal families set their sons to school. Where early humanists such as Erasmus present parents as obstacles to learning, by the late sixteenth century Richard Mulcaster represents himself in *Positions* as desperately seeking to dissuade parents from their academic ambitions for their children. Mulcaster represents the parental desires as a force of nature which necessity requires him to resist. In this scenario then, the schoolmaster occupies an ambivalent position; parents regard his teaching and the curriculum he inculcates as a means to fulfill their natural parental ambitions, but he must stand for an order that aligns itself with biting 'reality' and expresses itself through the artificial practices of Latin learning. This intersection between the claims of normal parental feeling, which we might call "kindness", invoking the full, early modern semantic range of that term, and an unkind world—an intersection which the schoolmaster polices—is a location invented by and for the bourgeoisie.

In this paper I wanted to consider some manifestations of the schoolmaster's uneasy relation to kindness, and its relation to a proto-bourgeois condition, including the treatment of the Welsh schoolmaster/parson in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. I will suggest that the famous lesson in which Mistress Page frets about the progress of her son while Mistress Quickly reduces Latin pronouns, already mangled by Evans's Welsh tongue, to a salacious vernacular, is not only about gender but also about the way in which the plays asserts the claims of a "middle-class" familial normality against the alien, even unkind, grammar education, the pursuit of which nevertheless marks the family's place in the social order.

The Limits of Nature, Kind, and Kinship in Early Modern England; Or, Shakespeare's Bastards

Sarah Linwick

Nature, kind, and kinship tend to converge conceptually in early modern discourse. Kinds are often construed as categories of nature, and "kind" and "kin" frequently function as synonyms of each other. But in William Shakespeare's *King Lear* (c. 1603-1606) and *The Winter's Tale* (c. 1609-1611), the figure of the bastard tests the limits of nature, kind, and kinship while exposing key disjunctures in the early modern imagination among these concepts. This essay begins by unpacking the titular character's famous denunciation of Claudius as "more than kin and less than kind" in *Hamlet* (c. 1600) to establish certain differences between kin and kind. Subsequently, the essay turns to early modern dictionary entries on "bastard" and "nature" that elucidate the bastard's precarious standing in nature. The majority of the essay compares how characters in *King Lear* and *The Winter's Tale* radically redefine nature to negotiate not only the bastard's status as a kind but also the bastard's relationship to different groups of kin.

Shakespeare and Northernness: the Nephew-Uncle Motif

Julia MacDonald

This paper began in response to the title of a seminar at the Shakespeare Conference in 2006: Shakespeare and Northernness. The nephew-uncle motif dominates Hamlet, the most overtly northern of all Shakespeare's plays, based as it is on the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus. Hamlet and Claudius, nephew and uncle, evoked many other like pairs: Beowulf and Hygelac, Hrothulf and Hrothgar, later Heardred and Beowulf and Hrethric and Hrothmund with Hrothulf; Sigmund and Sinfjötli, Roland and Charlemagne, and Gawain, Mordred, and Arthur. The relationships of these figures are the literary traces of powerful social, political, and economic stresses on the family and society. I will argue that the nephew-uncle motif in Shakespeare's history plays culminating in Hamlet encodes anxieties about powerful destabilizing stresses on inheritance within a royal family arising from the repressed rights of the younger brother in primogeniture. The intertwining of the familial, the political, and the sexual is made explicit by the Ghost, who tells Hamlet, "Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand/ Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched" (I.5.74-75). Perhaps, in the works written after 1066, the motif is also the specter of the old proto-Germanic tradition, which chose the most able man in the royal family as king, not necessarily the eldest son of the dead king. How a man conducts himself in the midst of these stresses defines him ethically. These murderous familial relationships surely resonated with Queen Elizabeth and her people as she had lived for years under a similar tension with her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots, each one's life a threat to the life of the other. Moreover, the royal family was both itself and representative of all families; thus, these "sad stories of the death of kings" were not only the stories of Shakespeare's audience, but, more surprisingly, they are still the stories of our contemporaries, recasting our familial dramas on the stage (Richard II, III.2.152).

Maidservants and Female Companions and their Mistresses in Shakespeare

Marianne Novy

Many of Shakespeare's maidservants, such as Maria and Emilia, are ladies in waiting, also referred to as companions, a relationship with varying degrees of intimacy and subordination. Part of the household, these characters could then also be considered part of the family as then defined. This paper will deal with such relationships in *Much Ado*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, *Othello*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. All these plays show companions performing some form of imitation of their mistresses. In some of them these imitations suggest class-related tension, but in others more admiration and dedication. I will relate them to general questions about female-female relationships in Shakespeare.

Posthumous Children Then and Now: *Cymbeline*, *Calvin's Case*, and *Astrue v Capato*

Terence Reilly

In *Cymbeline*, the configuration of Cymbeline's extended family is perhaps the most complex representation of family relationships in any of Shakespeare's plays. Various perspectives bear this out: Cymbeline has had two wives, two sons, a daughter, a ward, and a stepson; Imogen's relatives include a father, a mother, a stepmother, two biological brothers, and a stepbrother; Cloten--a mother, father, stepfather, two stepbrothers and a stepsister. Even more interesting (at least in the context of this paper) is the character Posthumus Leonatus, identified early in scene one as a posthumous child taken as a ward by Cymbeline. In this paper, I would like to discuss the character of Posthumus Leonatus, and the issues he represents as a posthumous child, within several overlapping contexts. Beginning with an overview of early modern English law and recent American law concerning posthumous children, I will move on to a more detailed discussion of two court cases. The first, *Calvin's Case (1609)*-- known more familiarly as the case of the post-nati (those "born after")--sought to decide the legal status of Scots after James became King of England. The second, *Astrue v Capato*, was heard by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2012, and took up questions about whether children conceived and born after the death of the father were eligible for Social Security survivor benefits. As we shall see, the extremely fluid family dynamics evident in *Cymbeline* (what a number of scholars have identified as characteristic features of romance) are remarkably similar to some of the complex questions and issues concerning inheritance, marriage and death raised in these two court cases.

In Search of Alternative Kinship: The Childless Mother in *All's Well That Ends Well*

Liz Steinway

This essay will consider Helena of *All's Well That Ends Well's* strategic use of reproductive categories within the maid-wife-mother trajectory as it correlates to the relationship between birth and death in the reproductive female body. Reading Helena with an awareness of the complex relationship between pregnancy and death allows us to see how the disruption of the connection between kinship and family is a productive, rather than limiting, factor in our understanding of the play's conclusion. As opposed to shutting off meanings, Helena's manipulation of both death and reproduction opens up possibilities for meaning-making, suggesting that alternative kinship stories are possible. In planning her pregnancy, staging her death, and exiting the stage without actually giving birth, Helena rejects Bertram's demands for the production of a family unit complete with a child and instead forms an alternative kinship group wherein her declaration of pregnancy stands in as the imagined birth of a future child. This strategic use of pregnancy raises important questions about kinship formation, inviting us to consider what it means when the absence of children shapes the status of bodies that are inconclusively pregnant.

Nourishment and Specularity: Elizabeth, Essex and the Public

Frank Whigham

The dyadic gender polity of Elizabeth I and Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, was structured by complex warfare over mutual interpretive vulnerability. This paper concerns a tension Sir Robert Naunton suggested, writing many years after the earl's execution, between "*a violent indulgency of the Queen (which [is] incident to old age, where it encounters with a pleasing and sutable object) towards this Lord . . . [and] a fault in the object of her grace; my Lord himself, who drew in too fast, like a child sucking on an over uberous Nurse.*" In this remarkable passage *uberous* means "supplying milk or nourishment in abundance." The ageing queen, hating the shriveling of post-maturity, is seen here as excessively, *violently* abundant, Essex as greedy (or starving?), their aggressively infantile kinship pathological at both poles. In this paper I explore the discursive field within which early modern culture construed this high-profile relationship, where this parent/child figure intersected with a number of other figurations (erotic, political, age-specific, etc.). The network of allusions converges on a hunger-driven failure to achieve, in due time, the stably distant closeness to which infantile bondedness (from both parental and child poles) must aspire.