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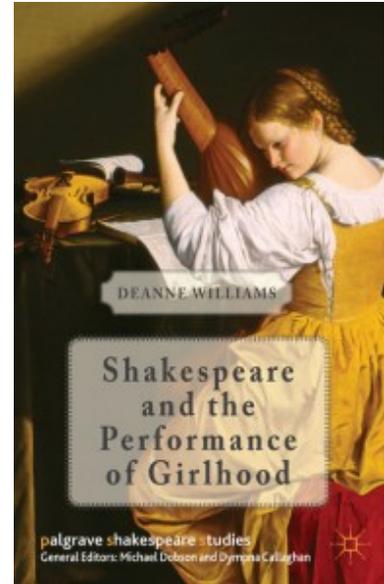
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Deanne Williams, *Shakespeare and the Performance of Girlhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). ISBN: 978-1-137-02475-6, pp. 296, £55.00.

Reviewed by Nadia T. van Pelt

[1] Over the years, many studies have been conducted on women in Shakespeare, such as Marjorie Garber's *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* (1981), Lisa Jardine's *Still Harping on Daughters* (1983), Phyllis Rackin's *Shakespeare and Women* (2005) and Dymrna Callaghan's *Shakespeare without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (2000). The work under review finds itself informed by such studies, and seeks to contribute to the discourse by reconsidering a number of Shakespeare's characters and plays through the notion of 'girlhood', hereby claiming a distinction from woman and boy characters (p. 2). In section one of this book, Williams proposes that 'girlhood' in Shakespeare's work is not a biological or essentialist category, and defines it as a performative identity that is 'relevant beyond the limits of gender as well as age' (p. 14). Importantly, this work also addresses historical girls that are depicted in Shakespeare's plays, and positions the performances of these girl characters within the cultures that staged them. Finally, it is Williams' objective to reflect upon 'the impact of Shakespeare's girl characters on the history of early modern girls as performers, patrons and playwrights', as such readdressing 'women's cultural contribution' to their respective societies (p. 1). Thus, the second and third sections in this book address what Williams refers to as the 'afterlives' of 'Shakespeare's girls' in Milton's *Comus*, in the masques of Elizabeth Stuart, and in entertainments by the seventeenth-century girl dramatists, Lady Rachel Fane (1613-1680), and the sisters, Lady Elizabeth Brackley (1626-1663) and Lady Jane Cavendish (1621-1669).



[2] Williams' study opens with a chapter on the nature and identification of girl characters in a number of Shakespeare's plays. For example, *Henry VI, Part One* – Williams shows – reveals an 'English perspective' on Joan of Arc, which presents her as a girl rather than as a saint (p. 25). Julia and Silvia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* are cast as 'peevish' and 'perverse' at moments of girlish rebellion (p. 36), as is Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew*, in contrast to the heroine of *Romeo and Juliet*, who is read as an 'imaginative and active participant in love' (p. 50). Indeed, it is Romeo, Williams avers, who is 'transformed' into a girl through his relationship with her (p. 50). *Romeo and Juliet* is, in this chapter, identified as the play in which Shakespeare introduces a 'new' kind of girl who is different from the girls in his early plays, in that she is more flexible, resistant and mutable, and 'dramatize[s] the limitless possibilities of girlhood itself' (p.51).

[3] The second chapter is concerned with a historical and biographical study of the child-bride who was dramatically represented as the Queen in *Richard II*: Isabelle de France (1389-1409) who, at age seven, married Richard II (1367-1400) who was

twenty-nine. The chapter observes that Enlightenment and Victorian interpretations of Shakespeare's character in which she is represented as an 'unhistorical adult' influence today's adaptations of *Richard II*, and it seeks to reinsert the understanding of this character into the medieval and early modern historical context, in which 'it is possible, albeit unusual, for a little girl to be both a wife and a queen' (p. 53). By imagining the theatrical possibilities of boy actors playing a child queen, Williams invites students and scholars of Shakespeare to 'read' and 'imagine' the Queen as a girl rather than as a grown woman (p. 72).

[4] Chapter 3 has as a starting point the lute that is mentioned in the stage direction from the first quarto version of *Hamlet* (1603): 'Enter Ofelia playing on a Lute, and her hair down, singing'. Contextualizing the presence of the lute in Q1 with other works by Shakespeare in which the musical instrument appears, Williams reveals the prop to be ambiguous, signaling both 'obedient daughterhood' and the 'mastery and control' of girls knowing their own minds in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and offering an association with a broken heart as well as with cheering up in *Henry VIII*. In *Hamlet*, the lute may also signify 'daughterly duty' and 'sexual power' (p. 76). While the Ofelia in Q1, which can be associated with female performance, is given 'greater agency' in the play, and is 'in charge of her musical skills' (p. 90), Ophelia in Q2 does not play the lute, and is more overcome by emotion and madness. Williams associates the Q1 Ofelia with an Elizabethan vision of the character 'aligned with the self-conscious performances and self-mastery of characters such as Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew* or *Rosalind in As You Like It*', while she places the Q2 Ophelia alongside 'theatrically tragic women' such as the Jailer's Daughter in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and the Duchess in *The Duchess of Malfi*.

[5] In Chapter 4 Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* is explored as staging Queen Elizabeth I's girlhood, but also as shaping 'Shakespeare's subsequent dramatizations of girlhood' in *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* (p. 96). This chapter contrasts the girls in Shakespeare's early plays to those in the later plays; the latter presenting independence as 'key to their identities' (p. 124). Furthermore this chapter explores the idea that the 'conception of girlhood' in these plays may extend to 'boys, fathers and even spirits' (p. 124).

[6] Chapter 5 is concerned with girls' active involvement in Jacobean masques, following scholarly discourse which discusses Queen Anne's involvement in court masques, along with women of her court. Princess Elizabeth Stuart participated in *Tethys' Festival* (1610) as well as in other courtly entertainments, and was a patron of her own theatre company, the Lady Elizabeth's Men, who performed plays such as Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* and Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. These plays dealt with topics of virginity and 'wronged innocence' (p. 137), perhaps suitable to the taste of their young patron. As a princess, Elizabeth performed her girlhood before the public eye, performed her family's royal sovereignty, and played an important role in the prominence of performances by girls (p. 129). Williams claims that in the performance of the self and the royal body, Elizabeth was influenced by the depiction of girls in the theatre, including Shakespeare's girls.

[7] Milton's *A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634), known as *Comus*, forms the focus of chapter 6. *Comus* alludes to sexual scandal around the Egerton household, but, as

Williams argues, especially draws attention to the theatricality of girlhood; indeed, this chapter suggests that the performance ‘constitutes an extended reflection upon the implications of girls as performers in the Stuart court masque’ (p. 149). The lead part was performed by the then fifteen-year-old Lady Alice Egerton, who was to speak as well as sing, showing a contrast to earlier girls in masques who had a more ornamental function. The discourse of chastity in *Comus* finds analogues in Shakespeare’s dramatizations of virginity (p. 168), and through this discourse, ‘explores what it means for a girl to appear on stage.’ Williams interprets the debate between the Lady and Comus as ‘a defense of the girl performer against popular anti-theatrical commonplaces about immorality and the lewdness of the stage’ (p. 149).

[8] Central to chapter 7 is Lady Rachel Fane (1613-1680), who was to be the Countess of Bath in later life, and who created her own entertainment entitled *May Masque* (1627) for performance at Apethorpe Hall in Northamptonshire, celebrating her family life at home, not unlike Milton’s *Comus* celebrated the Egerton family at Ludlow Castle (p. 173). Rachel’s frame of reference was the court masque, and her work shares motifs with Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Furthermore, her work can be aligned with closet dramas such as Elizabeth Cary’s *Tragedie of Miriam* (1613) and Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612-13). Placing Rachel Fane’s work in this context, this chapter importantly shows the remarkable differences between *May Masque* and its contemporary and antecedent analogues in fore-fronting the love between parents and children, and between siblings, over erotic love, hereby recognizing Fane’s ability to adapt the literary conventions in which she wrote to transform them into something that was appropriate to her own performance context and social situation.

[9] Girl playwrights’ adaptations or transformations of older and contemporary plays and masques are also central to chapter 8, which examines *The Concealed Fancies*, written by Lady Elizabeth Brackley (1626-1663) and Lady Jane Cavendish (1621-1669) while they were living in captivity as a result of their family’s political position during the Civil War. Where Jane and Elizabeth were inspired by court masques (p. 191), and perhaps looked toward Shakespeare for ideas about marriage (Williams suggests for example, in *The Taming of the Shrew*), *The Concealed Fancies* directly engages with the difficulties of the sisters’ own social and political circumstances through the fictive characters called Luceny and Tattiney. Their courtship of their father, William Cavendish, with the much younger Margaret Lucas (soon to be Margaret Cavendish) can be found represented through the characters of Lord Calsindow and lady Tranquility, and nostalgically reflects on ‘the witty and sophisticated court cultured besieged by Civil War (p. 199). The chapter argues that girlhood in this *roman de clef* can be associated with ‘the vulnerability of the Royalist cause’ (p. 207). Williams links the education of daughters in this period to the ‘out-of-touch’ decadence of the elite during the last years of the reign of Charles I and Henrietta Maria, leading up to the revolution. Educating girls to the extent that they may write their own plays, indicates extreme leisure. Furthermore, Williams views it as an ‘expression of royalist theatricality, with the transgressive image of the performing girl as symbol of its utter indifference to puritan sensibilities’ (p. 207).

[10] *Shakespeare and the Performance of Girlhood* offers an original approach and an important contribution to the existing literature on Shakespeare and woman’s history. If this illuminating and entertaining study has a weakness, it is that it perhaps overstates the

importance of the influence of Shakespeare's girls on later dramatic works and on the styles and approaches of girl dramatists. Indeed, in her conclusion, Williams carefully nuances this notion by pointedly speaking of 'analogues' (p. 209). The findings in this study help enrich the notion of (young) women as participants in and contributors to their local and national cultures in relation – and at times in contrast to – the representation of girls in plays written by male authors. The study of Jacobean girl dramatists who staged and performed images of family life in the contexts of their own households will be of particular interest to scholars and students of early modern drama and social history.

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