

Department of English & Linguistics Seminar

Aidan Norrie

“Never mistake a civic pageant for *King Lear*” –
Child Actors’ Skill in Elizabethan Civic
Entertainments



Child actors were integral to Elizabethan civic drama, but their role is often overlooked in the current scholarship. I argue that child actors played an important role in the political theatre of Elizabeth I’s civic entertainments because of their function as inherently innocent symbols of the future. Functioning in this way, children were able to counsel the Queen in matters social, political, religious, or economic without causing offence. Unlike adults, children were ‘agents without interests,’ who were able to speak on behalf of the people or City entertaining the Queen. Entertainment devisers protected themselves from political reprisals by employing child actors to deliver counsel in civic events across England during the course of Elizabeth’s reign, and this is particularly visible in the coronation procession of 1559, the royal progress to Bristol in 1574, the Queen’s visit to Norwich in 1578, and during the marriage negotiations with the Duke of Anjou in 1582.

Burns 4 Arts Bldg, Friday 8 April, 4-5pm

All are welcome!