



Raising Jack Perverse: On Childhood, Perversity, and James Hearne's Case

—Derritt Mason

The boy, whose story I am about to tell, was named Jack Perverse, and his nature was answerable to his name. —George Burder, Early Piety

Introduction: Jack, James, and the Perverse Child

Jack Perverse was a naughty boy. He did everything a good boy shouldn't do: he caused mischief at school, rushed through his prayers, lied to his parents, and tortured hapless insects. Jack Perverse was punished for his sins: he drowned in a river alongside his equally perverse friend. Fortunately, Jack Perverse was a fictional naughty boy, so had he survived, he never would have grown up into a naughty, perverse real adult.

James Hearne was also a naughty boy; at least, Mr. Bradbury said he was. James Hearne sodomized his fellow apprentice, cavorted in alehouses with older men, and told many lies—at least, so Mr. Bradbury claimed. Then James Hearne accused Mr. Bradbury

of sodomy, and Mr. Bradbury went to court, where he said that James was a naughty, perverse boy who should be punished, just like Jack. But unlike Jack Perverse, James Hearne was a real-life naughty boy, and James had a story that was a bit more complicated than Jack's.

Jack Perverse and James Hearne are two eighteenth-century children—one fictional, one historical—in whom we see a collision between the complex discourses of childhood and perversity. Jack, a character from George Burder's Romantic-era evangelical children's book *Early Piety* (1777), functioned as a cautionary tale for children: obey your parents, behave at school, say your prayers, and respect nature, or the consequences could be fatal. Jack is

a version of the child who is beyond salvation; his untimely fate is foretold by his name. The Romantics, as Frances Ferguson explains, endeavoured to “segment[] the time of their lives into a series of stages and treat[] those stages as if they could be coherently described and predicted,” and texts like Burder’s worked to shape childhood as a legible category of identity (216). Although Jack’s evil is inherent and his fate sealed, he works pedagogically to offer children an alternative to his demise: be good, resist temptation, and preserve your innocence, and you will either grow into a productive adult or, should you die young, you will go to heaven.¹

Hearne’s case is a complex and fascinating precursor to these two overlapping conceptualizations of the child seen in *Early Piety* and other Romantic texts: he is both the dangerous, inherently perverse child who should be prevented from entering adulthood and the innocent child who is susceptible to perversion, a child who must be protected and educated such that he becomes a “normal” (heterosexual, labouring, investment-oriented) adult.² The transcript of Charles Bradbury’s 1755 sodomy trial and subsequent related publications reflect ideas about childhood and perversity that have roots in John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, that were elaborated in Romantic-era literature for and about children, and that persist today in discourse surrounding the regulation of child and youth sexuality.

I have selected this historical case to illustrate how Romantic ideas of childhood and perversity were forming prior to the beginning of the Romantic era and to demonstrate how these ideas transform conceptions of “real” children (like Hearne).³ As I will argue, Hearne’s actual behaviour likely exceeded his representation in the documents related to the trial, but Hearne is nonetheless narrated and read through two reductive tropes: Jack Perverse and his opposite, the innocent child prone to perversion. These paradoxical narratives of childhood perversity have been repeated for centuries, and their continuing purchase in contemporary discourse becomes obvious when they are read beside recent theoretical work on childhood and sexuality. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley’s *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* and Kathryn Bond Stockton’s *The Queer Child*, for example, make productive interventions into what Bruhm and Hurley call the “dominant narrative about children: children are (and should stay) innocent of sexual desires and intentions” (“Curiouser” ix). In 2006, Stephen Harper’s Conservative government drew on such familiar stories to justify an increase in Canada’s age of sexual consent from fourteen to sixteen years, for the ostensible purpose of “prevent[ing] adults from preying on young teens” (“Age”). Today, hegemonic discourses of sexuality remain invested in the notion that every child either contains a nascent Jack Perverse or is vulnerable to corruption by one. I want to challenge

the comfortable familiarity of this narrative, invite inquiry into the slippages and excesses that emerge from oversimplified accounts of child sexuality and perversity, and argue that the way in which children fashion their own day-to-day lives always resists facile categorization and the coherent description and prediction that narratives like Burder's attempt to enact. In other words, the material James Hearne is always in excess of the fictional Jack Perverse.

I begin this essay with an overview of the discourse of childhood and perversity in pre-Romantic and Romantic thought, and with a consideration of how anxieties about perversion manifest themselves in discourses of juvenile delinquency. I then take up two paradoxical narratives of the child and look for their traces in the transcript of Charles Bradbury's sodomy trial and three pamphlets that were published following his acquittal. I argue that, from the interstices of the narratives that alternately construct Hearne as innately and hopelessly perverse and as a child in need of salvation, there emerges a proliferation of other, more complicated stories, including a reading of Hearne as a self-fashioned pervert who deploys his sexuality for the purpose of survival, moving in and out of what sociologist Anthony Giddens calls "pure relationships" (qtd. in Sha 49). In lieu of the reductive versions of Hearne produced through Bradbury's trial, I would like to ask whether Hearne can be seen as a more complicated figure than a child whose identity is

constituted entirely by the adults who endeavour to interpret and narrate it. Did Hearne perhaps take up a perverse sexuality with agency in the midst of adults who were trying to make him work discursively for them in particular ways? Read in light of Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Hearne can be seen as a figure who employed a series of tactics (sexual and otherwise) to "make do" in a space where his movements were limited and defined by his age and by his working-class status.⁴ To illustrate the concept of "making do," de Certeau provides the example of a North African immigrant living in France who brings his own language and living habits to bear on the foreign space in which he lives. "Without leaving the place where he has no choice to live and which lays down its law for him," de Certeau writes, "he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation" (30). As I will demonstrate, Hearne appeared to navigate his relationships with Bradbury and the other adults who both supported and scorned him with a similar type of tactical creativity. The idea of Hearne as a sexual agent was unimaginable and unspeakable in the discourse surrounding Bradbury's trial, and such notions of consent and agency remain silent sources of deep-seated anxiety in contemporary debates about child sexuality.⁵



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Perversity, Puberty, Delinquency, and Romantic Childhood

In her preface to *The Parent's Assistant*, a Romantic-era collection of didactic fiction, Maria Edgeworth tellingly writes: "If we could obtain a distinct and full history of all that hath passed in the mind of a child, from the beginning of life and sensation, . . . this would be a treasure of natural history, which would probably give more light into the human faculties, than all the systems of philosophers about them, since the beginning of the world" (5). Indeed, the project of coming to know the ideal child proved challenging for the Romantics; since the idea of childhood exists only through what Stockton calls a "backward birthing mechanism" on the part of adults, who create and define the category retrospectively, a child's "true" knowledge and motives ultimately remain inaccessible (7). Texts like *Early Piety* and *The Parent's Assistant* undertook the project of fashioning childhood, attempting to know the child by shaping the child's knowledge, but childhood itself always seemed to resist coherence. Even establishing a straightforward legal definition of childhood proved exigent. In her introduction to *Fashioning Childhood in the Eighteenth Century*, Anja Müller observes that dealing with eighteenth-century culture requires "broadness because the terms 'child' or 'childhood' were applied to life stages of varying length, and the duration of childhood depended on the discourse in which the term was used. Childhood as an age of both sexual and moral innocence, for instance, was commonly believed to end at six or seven. Marriage—and thus independence from the parental household—was legally possible for girls of fourteen and boys of sixteen" (4–5). To complicate the issue further, the age at which children were considered to have the rational capacity of an adult was both socially and legally ambiguous. As Anna-Christina

Giovanopoulos illustrates, civil law placed “the age of discretion” for boys at fourteen years; a boy’s father, however, “could appoint a guardian by statute to protect the child, ‘considering the imbecility of judgment in children of the age of fourteen’” (48). Legally speaking, then, a fourteen-year-old was seen as capable of substantial reason but still at risk of childlike foolishness. As a result of these ambiguities, Ferguson claims, children “become the occasion for debating the meaning of the old notion of an age of reason or consent, because the very distinction between childish unreason and adult reason comes to look like the paradigmatic instance of apportioning the world and segregating some persons from others” (217). The impossibility of defining childhood concretely was a source of anxiety for the Romantics since, in practice, children were not transparent to adult understanding. Much of this anxiety revolved around the inherent and/or potential perversity of children.

At its roots, perversity has a definition that exceeds its contemporary association with sexuality. Stockton suggests that “perverts are ‘diverts’ . . . who *extend themselves or linger*. That is to say, perversions are characteristic of people who either extend themselves beyond the normal ‘path’ or linger at midpoints along the way” (25; emphasis in orig.). In his *Perverse Romanticism*, Richard C. Sha draws a similar, yet more concise, definition from the Oxford English Dictionary, which describes perversion as a “turning aside from

what is true or right” (5). Jack Perverse is not a sexual pervert, then, but true to his name in his diversion from the “right,” holy path that a good child would follow. Provocatively, Sha suggests that perversion “is entangled with the history of subversion—‘turning upside down’ (OED)—[which] further makes it rife for critical discovery” (5). In Sha’s view, perversion’s (dangerous) potential lies not only in its “turning aside” from truth, but also in the possibility that the truth itself may be upended.

For the Romantics, childhood was paradoxically an inherently perverse state (an indeterminate “lingering” en route to adulthood) and a confounding “incoherence” from which a nascent perversity could emerge (Sha 80). The uncertainty of puberty seemed to necessitate management: “the problem,” according to Sha, “was that, because sex was a process and because everyone went through puberty, everyone was vulnerable to missteps on the way to heterosexuality” (82). Children thus had to be prevented from making these missteps (or having others cause them to misstep), and puberty served only to complicate the barrier between child and adult instead of delineating it more clearly. Citing the 1771 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Sha reports that puberty was understood as beginning when a child was able to procreate (twelve years for boys, fourteen years for girls) and lasting for at least seven years (107). Seen as a lengthy “moment of biological potentiality in all bodies” without an

established conclusion, a life stage that functioned at best as a precarious threshold between child and adulthood, puberty enabled “the youthful body to be read as full of perverse potentiality” (Sha 241–42). As perverse (and even dangerously subversive) potential was attributed to children—compounded by a puberty of indeterminate length—two particular narratives of childhood surfaced in texts designed to manage children’s behaviour and guide their growth in particular ways. These narratives—about the inherently perverse child, the child beyond salvation, and the innocent child who is endangered by his or her own nascent perversity and/or corruption at the hands of perverse adults⁶—aimed to enable straightforward understandings of childhood and to prevent a child’s diversion from the “true” or “right” path to adulthood.

The first child, embodied by Burder’s Jack Perverse, engages in practices (such as the torture of animal life) that are seen to foreshadow a perverse, criminal adulthood.⁷ Jack Perverse, writes Burder, “was not only idle, but cruel. He used to catch flies on purpose to torment them; and was guilty of that horrid practice of making cockchafers spin, by putting a crooked pin through their tails, and hanging them by a bit of thread, which puts them in terrible agonies” (41–42). To make explicit the correlation between perversity in childhood and criminal adulthood, Burder inserts into the tale of Jack Perverse an interjection from a youth named Master Tender, which allows Burder’s reader to

understand how Jack Perverse would have turned out had he not been punished by death:

And Master Tender could not help saying, “I am astonished at the hardness of that heart, which can take delight in beholding the agonies of poor dumb creatures; as it brings to mind what I once read of the wise Athenians, who condemned a boy for putting out the eyes of birds with a hot needle, judging that such seeds of cruelty would necessarily grow up into more dreadful acts of violence, and endanger the lives of men, and the happiness of mankind: the boy was therefore put to death.” (42)

In this brief story, the “seeds of evil” that exist in the unnamed youth (and perhaps in every child) render him unworthy of a complete transition into adulthood: he is deemed too volatile, too dangerous, and is thus exterminated. Like Burder, Vicesimus Knox theorizes versions of a child with inherent criminal impulses. In *Elegant Extracts* (1824), a collection of English literary standards with didactic aims, Knox counsels children: “When criminal thoughts arise, attend to all the proper methods of speedily suppressing them. . . . By such means you may stop the progress of the growing evil; you may apply an antidote, before the poison has had time to work its full effect” (72). Notably, Knox chooses to use “when” and not the speculative “if” at the beginning of his phrase: perverse

thoughts are understood as intrinsic to every child. This understanding of children justified the application of the death penalty to young juvenile delinquents, a law that was revised in 1796 to prevent children under the age of seven from being hanged. Between the ages of seven and fourteen years, Uwe Böker explains, delinquents were sentenced based on the apparent strength of their understanding and judgment, so the death sentence remained possible for children who seemed to possess adult-like cognitive abilities (135). While laws shifted to recognize that younger children might not be able to engage in moral self-evaluation prior to acting, legislators also left room for interpretation: children could be seen as so knowingly perverse that their total elimination could be legally justified. In addition to being endangered by their own burgeoning perversity, Romantic children were understood as the innocent potential prey of perverse adults who were eager to seduce children into the criminal underworld. This anxiety manifested itself quite visibly in reports on the state of juvenile delinquency.

In 1833, Thomas Wontner published *Old Bailey Experience*, a critique of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century strategies for criminal reformation. He writes at length about juvenile offenders, arguing that corporeal punishment and lengthy prison sentences were ineffective in deterring crime; instead, children should be protected from harmful influences

like penny theatres and chapbooks, or what he calls “the low publications” (298). Wontner considers juvenile delinquency to be, in Böker’s words, “a class-specific phenomenon, with the male child or youth as the target of education, rather than punitive treatment, by middle-class reformers” (136). In spite of Wontner’s critical approach, he nonetheless posits a view of childhood that conforms to the model of the endangered innocent child. As Gary Kelly notes, Wontner “tried to understand the mentality of offenders, but in the end could only see it as a defective or perverse form of his own middle-class consciousness rather than a social psychology of calculated defiance of and resistance to economic and social structures that marginalized and exploited the lower classes” (349). For example, Wontner explains that “the seducers of youth find an able auxiliary in the minor theatres, where they are generally sought. The men know, if a boy has a passion for these low exhibitions, that he is a sure prize . . . in very many instances the offences for which [these boys] stood committed were occasioned by their want of money to gratify this passion” (297). In this case, the dangerous combination of a seductive adult and a child unable to suppress his innate passions produces the perverse criminal child. As Kelly points out, the idea of a child with agency is impossible in Wontner’s narrative. Notably, Wontner uses highly sexualized language to describe how children react to penny-theatre



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performances, alluding to the sexual perversions supposedly entailed by juvenile delinquency:

The mind . . . is taken by storm, and surprised, when they feel as if they had sustained an internal mental explosion—a mine of desires are sprung, of which they heretofore had no comprehension. . . . They then become bent on exploits of some kind, and on the unbridled indulgences of those passions, which at this critical period of their lives are awakened: in this feverish state, there is no one near them competent to reason down their intemperate sensations, and they fall an easy victim into the service of any one who is willing to receive them for initiation into crime. (310)

Succumbing to their natural, passionate urges, blinded by the *jouissance* triggered by an evening at the low theatre, and lacking the critical rationality of adulthood, children are perverted by the adults who would seduce them. “Libidinous desires are early excited,” continues Wontner, “and crime becomes (if not before known) contemporaneous with them” (313).

Toward the end of his essay, Paul Kelleher poses a question raised by the paradoxical relationship between childhood and perversity: “do ‘we’ imagine that the child needs protection from the idea or the representation of perversion, from individuals who qualify as pervers, or from the perversion that is congenital to the child?” (159). I would also ask further: how do children negotiate the theoretical dangers into which they are placed? How, following de Certeau, do children “make do” under trying circumstances? Wontner seems to start down this path in

his discussion of child pickpockets:

This life would be unendurable were it not for companionship, and the only saving clause in their favour, that at night, when quite exhausted, and nearly starved, they are sure to meet with a commiserating friend, whose predations have been more successful than their own, and who never fails to share his crust with those to whom fortune has been less kind. . . . They are deemed hardened because they resort to crime over and over again: the truth is, they have no other alternative. (356)

In this strikingly sympathetic passage, Wontner alludes not only to the sense of culture and camaraderie among pickpockets, but also to children's resilience and ability to formulate tactics for survival. Although this gesture to the agency of juvenile delinquents points to the limits of the innocent-child-in-danger motif that otherwise pervades Wontner's work, it remains undeveloped. Wontner's brief description of community and generosity among juvenile delinquents, however, remains a noteworthy moment of slippage in an otherwise familiar and repetitive story about perverse and corrupted children. It is with this narrative interruption in mind that I move to my discussion of James Hearne and Charles Bradbury's trial.

James Hearne's Case Restated

On 10 September 1755, at London's Old Bailey courthouse, Charles Bradbury was acquitted of the sodomy charges laid against him by James Hearne, a fourteen-year-old apprentice. It is difficult to determine whether the trial was of much public interest at the time: a search of relevant eighteenth-century newspapers and periodicals yields no results. The case seems to have garnered enough attention, however, for Bradbury to surmise that his reputation had been substantially damaged. Following the trial, he published *Mr. Bradbury's Case Truly Stated*, his detailed version of the events, written "to wipe off every Stain injuriously thrown on my Character, and efface every Impression which this malicious prosecution may have made on the Minds of my Friends, to my Disadvantage" (5). In response to Bradbury's pamphlet, a cobbler named John Taylor, who apparently was not implicated in the trial in any capacity other than as an interested observer (and as a would-be investigative reporter), interviewed witnesses from the trial and subsequently published *Remaks [sic] on Mr. Bradbury's State of His Case*, an attempt to expose Bradbury as a liar and a sodomite and give his name a second vigorous drag through the mud. Enraged, Bradbury published a second pamphlet, *The Cobler Undone, by the Loss of his Awl and his Ends*, a venomous reply to Taylor in which he defends himself against the cobbler's "bundle

of defamation” by picking apart Taylor’s arguments with a fine-tooth comb (3). Reading the Old Bailey transcript from Bradbury’s trial and then working chronologically through the subsequent publications, I find that three trends in the overall narrative become clear. First, the dialogue between Bradbury and Taylor eventually degenerates into attempts to prove or to disprove minutiae that seem almost irrelevant to the case itself and into comical slanderous personal attacks against one another. For example, Bradbury in *The Cobler Undone* writes, “John, be advised by a friend, never sit down to write when you come from an alehouse, but go to bed directly, or else take a nod in your stall, till the muddy particles of the fat ale are a little evaporated” (12). Second, the details of the case become increasingly convoluted and bizarre, resulting in an overwhelming accumulation of secondary characters, witness statements, published letters, and disputed events.⁸ Finally, and most importantly for this essay, Hearne is absented from the duelling narratives until he practically ceases to exist. The dialogue between Bradbury and Taylor becomes so focused on proving or disproving Bradbury’s perversion that Hearne is required only as a secondary character—as an innocent child taken up by Taylor as a weapon or as a perverse one used by Bradbury in his own defence. Hearne is either the passive victim of Bradbury’s exploitation or an inherently perverse child whose evil nature is a danger to Bradbury’s reputation

and potentially his life. In other words, Hearne is unimagined (or unimaginable) as an active player in the battle between Bradbury and Taylor; Hearne as a child acting with agency is unspoken or unspeakable. Instead, reductive narratives of Hearne’s identity as an innocent or perverse child become the battleground upon which Bradbury and Taylor’s duel takes place.

There are two versions of the story given in the Old Bailey transcript before Hearne recants and Bradbury is acquitted.⁹ Hearne, first to take the stand, explains that he was raised Catholic in France and met Bradbury (a Protestant minister) when Hearne’s fellow apprentice invited him to hear Bradbury preach at Glover’s Hall. Hearne attended several sermons and claims that Bradbury accosted him one day after asking to speak with him alone: “he took me upon his knee, and dragg’d me by the coat, and kissed me; then he put his hand into my breeches, which were torn; then he got up, and put out the candle, and unbuttoned his own breeches, and bid me play with his y—d.” Approximately one week later, Hearne botched an errand for his master and was refused lodging for the night. Hearne reported the story to Bradbury, who promised the boy that he would find him new employment. Hearne quit his apprenticeship before Bradbury could locate a new position and was subsequently left homeless. Bradbury eventually billeted Hearne with his friends Mr. and Mrs. Whitaker, and Hearne claims that he and Bradbury lay together

at the Whitakers' "four or five times," and each time Bradbury "flung his legs about me, and kiss'd me; and first tried with his finger to enter my body, then he tried with his y—d, and did enter as far as he could, and his s—d came from him." After floating between several other jobs and lodgings and having intercourse with Bradbury once more at the chapel, Hearne confessed to Mrs. Whitaker what had transpired between him and Bradbury. What followed, Hearne claims, was this: Mrs. Whitaker took Hearne to see her friends the Browns, whereupon they called for Bradbury and Hearne made his accusations to Bradbury's face. Bradbury ordered Hearne to recant and threatened to charge Hearne with the theft of candlesticks from the chapel and see him hanged. Hearne agreed to recant, and Bradbury had intercourse with him that very night. Bradbury then suggested that Hearne spend some time in France and, as he arranged for Hearne's passage (through one of his friends, Mrs. Pickering), had the boy locked up in the cellar of another friend, Mr. Kipling. Hearne stayed one month in France, returned, and again charged Bradbury with indecent action. Bradbury retaliated by taking out a warrant against Hearne, who was subsequently brought before one Justice Wright, at which point he once again recanted. Bradbury then ordered one of his friends to take Hearne away to the country for a month.

At this point in Hearne's narrative, he is cross-examined. In the exchange that follows, it is clear that,

in order for Hearne to condemn Bradbury, he must strategically position himself as a child innocent even to the meaning of sodomy. This makes both Hearne and Bradbury legible to the judge—one as an innocent child, the other as the perverse adult who corrupted him:

Q. The first account you gave . . . you say you was [sic] leaning upon the chimney-piece, that he drag'd you on his knee; did he make use of force?

HEARNE. No.

Q. You say he put his hand through a hole into your breeches; did you make any resistance?

HEARNE. No, sir.

Q. When he came to put his hand on your private parts; did you make any resistance then?

HEARNE. No.

Q. What did you say to him?

HEARNE. I said nothing at all to him.

Q. Then you say, he desired you to take hold of his y—d, did you do that?

HEARNE. I did.

Q. Did you do every thing he bid you do?

HEARNE. I did.

. . . Q. Did not you know these things were wrong?

HEARNE. As it came from a minister, I did not.

. . . Q. If any body else had offered those things, should you have thought it a sin?


HEARNE. No sir, I should not.

. . . Q. Then did you not know that sodomy was a crime?
HEARNE. No sir, I did not know that.


Interestingly, this strategy (combined with Hearne's admission that Bradbury did not use force in his seduction) requires Hearne to claim that he did not struggle with Bradbury. In his account, Hearne is so free of perverse sexual knowledge that he acts as a child naively doing what the adult tells him to do. Hearne's story, however, leaves itself open to another (unanswerable) question: is it possible that Hearne was *consenting* to sexual activity with Bradbury? Legally, this question—and the version of a perverse child with agency that it would entail—is unimaginable and unspeakable, and thus remains unasked.

Whitaker, Brown, and several other witnesses testify prior to Bradbury's statement. Bradbury claims that Hearne had confessed "an abominable act he had committed with a man," and upon learning that Bradbury had disclosed this secret to one of Hearne's potential employers, Hearne "threaten'd he would be reveng'd on [Bradbury]" and thus accused Bradbury not "with the act of sodomy, but indecent actions." Bradbury's defence hinges on the narrative of Hearne as a dangerous, perverse child: one corrupted *before* Bradbury knew him and, like Jack Perverse, willing to deceive and threaten. Bradbury's argument is buttressed by Mrs. Pickering's testimony, during which she is asked:

Q. What is your opinion of the boy?
E. PICKERING. I believe he is a very bad boy.
Q. Do you believe it is any difficult thing to make a bad boy recant?
E. PICKERING. I believe not.



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Following Pickering's time on the stand, a man named Lew testifies that he overheard Hearne admitting to Bradbury's innocence near the Old Bailey coffee house. Hearne is questioned regarding this statement, and the trial then concludes with surprising rapidity:

Q. to HEARNE. Is this the truth? had you this conversation in the Poultry-compter? what do you say to it?

HEARNE. Yes, I had; he is innocent.

COURT. You have sworn now he is guilty, how do you reconcile it? do you now say he is innocent?

HEARNE. Yes.

COUNCIL FOR THE CROWN. Has any body spoke to you since you came into court?

HEARNE. No. (He cry'd)

Q. What do you cry for?

HEARNE. My conscience accuses me; and because I have spoke [*sic*] lies.

This sudden and surprising conclusion invites a number of provocative but unanswerable questions, among them why Hearne accused Bradbury of sodomy and subsequently recanted so many times. As Jon Thomas Rowland writes in his reading of the case, the trial "raises too many questions, and suggests too many possibilities, simply to expose the sodomitical Hearne and vindicate the heterosexual Bradbury, as it was meant to do" (89).¹⁰

In *Mr. Bradbury's Case*, the version of Hearne as inherently and irremediably perverse is foregrounded in the Minister's attempt to portray himself as the victim of a dangerous child, whom he describes as "an old Practitioner at his foul Game before he came from France" (17). Bradbury dedicates a significant portion of his book to detailing Hearne's alleged sexual experiences with other men, beginning with the story of "one Mrs D—" who supposedly sought Bradbury out to inform him "that James Hearne had forcibly committed Sodomy on the Body of her Son, a Lad about fourteen Years of Age, and his Fellow-prentice" (9). Bradbury further claims that Hearne confessed that, after having quit his job and finding himself homeless, "he had lain the first Night . . . with a young Man near Strand Bridge . . . and on Sunday-night he had lain with Mr. Gillyman, a Schoolmaster at Kensington, where he had formerly been at school" and had also gone with an older man to an alehouse "in Butcher-row, where the Man kept [Hearne] till very late, and then ask'd him to go and lie with him: and accordingly they went to a House in a Court opposite to Somerset-house, in the Strand, where the man . . . acted in a very beastly Manner" (10–11). Based on these stories, Bradbury finds himself "convinced that [Hearne] was a very vile Lad" and decides that he should warn one of Hearne's potential employers about the boy's proclivity for sodomy, since Bradbury feels "afraid [Hearne] would practice those

bestly Actions wherever he lived, and so not only bring a Scandal on himself, but also on those who should commend him" (11–12). Hearne's discovery that Bradbury had betrayed his trust, Bradbury claims, was Hearne's motive for charging Bradbury with sodomy. But Bradbury's depiction of Hearne shifts from the narrative of the perverse child into the narrative of the innocent child: not only is Hearne intrinsically and permanently perverse, bound to cause trouble in perpetuity, but he is also the seduced victim of Brown and Whitaker's plot to ruin Bradbury. "During the whole Time of my examining [Hearne]" regarding the boy's accusations of sodomy, Bradbury writes, "both Brown and his Wife encouraged him to speak up freely and boldly; which he, finding himself so well back'd, did with an uncommon Assurance, and continued so to do upon their spiring him on with—Well done, James, laughing all the while" (13–14). The Browns, here, are the corrupt adults who lead an already susceptible boy deeper into dangerous perversion.

Hearne's agency appears between the gaps of these narratives, but only as a series of possibilities. In Stockton's discussion of how children seem "queer" to adults due to their opaque reasons for behaving in certain ways, she argues that "the notion of 'children's motives' in the realms of sex and crime is not often a publicly available concept. The law has virtually made the idea of children's motives oxymoronic" (52). Indeed, the suggestion that Hearne may have used

his sexuality in certain ways and with agency—that is, that he potentially had motives for having sex with Bradbury, and then accused him of sodomy and recanted repeatedly—remains unthinkable. I would like to consider the possibility that Hearne was entering into a version of what Anthony Giddens calls a "pure relationship" in *The Transformation of Intimacy*, his examination of the changing shape of romantic love and the increasing democratisation of intimate relationships. According to Giddens, a pure relationship is "a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it" (58). Giddens argues that the eighteenth century saw the emergence of "plastic sexuality," a form of sexuality "freed from the needs of reproduction," which was necessary for emancipatory intimacy, "a transactional negotiation of personal ties by equals" (2, 3). I am not claiming that the relationship between Bradbury and Hearne was mutual and without a troubling power dynamic. Hearne himself says in court, in response to a question about why he continued to go to bed with Bradbury: "I was afraid of him, and I had no other friend but him in the world to stand by me." I draw on Giddens to conjure an image of a relationship based on particular needs that manifest themselves

at particular times, and to suggest that Hearne may have used his sexuality in a “plastic” way to enter into relationships tactically for the purpose of survival, to “make do” given a difficult situation. Outcast by his father for rejecting Catholicism, unable to hold a job, part of the impoverished working class and frequently homeless, Hearne may have based his relationship with Bradbury on an inextricable entanglement of desire, pleasure, fear, and sheer need. In other words, Hearne’s identity—as constructed through the trial and the pamphlets it spawned—exceeds the reductive, innocent-child self he consciously takes up and performs in court for the purpose of prosecuting Bradbury and Bradbury’s equally simplistic narrative of Hearne as an inherently perverse child.

When elements from both Hearne and Bradbury’s versions of the case are assembled, the story about Hearne that emerges is an interesting one. If Hearne indeed confessed to Bradbury that he had previously slept with men, and Bradbury indeed disclosed this secret to one of Hearne’s potential employers, then it follows that Hearne would turn to the Whitakers and the Browns for assistance, since he could seemingly no longer trust or depend on Bradbury. It also follows, however, that Hearne would be conflicted about these accusations if he cared to some extent for Bradbury (regardless of whether or not they actually had intercourse), and would attempt to reconcile with the man he calls his only friend in the world. Taylor’s

Remaks [sic] on Mr. Bradbury’s State of His Case raises a number of other questions in this regard: why was its author—a seemingly random, disinterested party—so invested in proving that Bradbury was a sodomite? Why was there more anxiety around Bradbury’s sexual practices than Hearne’s? It seems to me that Taylor and perhaps other members of the public wanted Bradbury branded a sodomite to foreclose the possibility that Hearne may have demonstrated sexual agency; the perverse child with agency is absent from the discourse surrounding this case. Hearne becomes the battleground where adult anxieties about sexual practice play themselves out. Taylor’s story requires a passive Hearne whose agency cannot be the subject of speculation, since doing so would undercut the perverse adult/innocent child narrative upon which Taylor depends. Regarding Bradbury’s depiction of the Browns and the Whitakers, Taylor writes: “And [is this] the Manner that People are to be treated with, namely, to have their Characters torn to Pieces for endeavouring to assist a poor Boy, who applied first of all to them for Justice to be done him?” (23). For Taylor’s argument to stand, Hearne must be the innocent victim, Brown and Whitaker his saviours, and Bradbury the perverse villain: further complexity is impossible.

When read from a perspective that accounts for the possibility of a type of pure relationship between Bradbury and Hearne, however, Taylor’s text seems to undermine itself at various moments. In Taylor’s



In spite of Taylor's attempts to flatten Hearne and Bradbury into legible tropes, his narrative becomes increasingly ambiguous as the predator/prey narrative slips into something more complex



narrative, Hearne is initially represented as Bradbury's captive: Hearne was "carried from Place to Place disguised in [Bradbury's] Dress, clothed with the Prisoner's own Cloaths, maintained by the Prisoner's Friends . . . all this to keep the Prosecutor out of the Way" (29). Taylor also claims that, while Bradbury was in prison, he nonetheless had friends shelter, clothe, feed, and provide Hearne with "Sixpence a Day . . . for Pocket-money" (29). Interestingly, Taylor also details how Hearne would attempt to visit Bradbury in prison: "[Bradbury] said he heard the Boy was knocking at New Prison gates," Taylor writes, "and that some Woman look'd through the Wicket and asked him who he wanted, on which he reply'd, is Mr. Bradbury here, the Woman said yes, on this the Boy cry'd, express'd a great deal of Concern for him, and went away" (28). This moving passage invites the question: did Hearne miss, care for, and need his captor/captive, his only friend? In spite of Taylor's attempts to flatten Hearne and Bradbury into legible tropes, his narrative becomes increasingly ambiguous as the predator/prey narrative slips into something more complex:

[Hearne] was taken from his Friends that he had applied to in order to bring you to Justice, that you might send him to some of your Friends, and maintained, not like one that had been so wicked as to swear so detestable a Crime against you, but rather like a loving Wife or Child, always living exceedingly well, having one to take Care of him. (35)

What, exactly, is Taylor doing here? Is Taylor trying to prove that Bradbury loved the boy, and thus would have wanted to sodomize him? Why would Bradbury take such good care of a boy who was

repeatedly accusing him of sodomy? And why would Hearne show such concern for someone who had sexually molested him on a number of occasions? Taylor's portrait of Bradbury does not ultimately represent the minister as a predatory sodomite, but rather depicts a compassionate man who still seemed to care for Hearne in spite of the boy's accusations, treating him as a "loving Wife or Child." Through this striking break in his otherwise standard predator/prey narrative, Taylor undercuts his approach to the case: he adds layers of complexity to our reading of Hearne and Bradbury's relationship by depicting Hearne as a boy who actively seeks Bradbury's company and Bradbury as a man whose feelings for Hearne exceed perverse sexual desire.

Taylor's narrative, which largely absents Hearne, ironically makes the boy visible from a more sympathetic and complicated perspective, work that Bradbury strives to undo in *The Cobbler Undone*. In this pamphlet, Bradbury returns to the reductive trope of the inherently perverse and dangerous child to define Hearne:

Hearne was guilty of sodomitical knowledge before I had any acquaintance with him or knowledge of him; which, in the opinion of every judicious thinking man, must plead strongly in my behalf, and that such an experienced practitioner as Hearne was, could easily form a tale . . . to suit the

purpose of malice or revenge, either for himself or his abettors. (23)

By this point, due to Taylor's account of the young apprentice's behaviour, Hearne is already far more complicated than a simple Jack Perverse figure. Prior to Romantic-era attempts to fashion childhood and the subsequent anxieties about perversion these attempts entailed, Hearne emerges as a figure that in many ways *subverts* the two overlapping tropes of inherently perverse/prone-to-perversion childhood that would come to circulate in Romantic discourse. In her contemporary theorization of children's queer characteristics, Stockton observes that children's motives are "more often a living, growing, cubist form of dramatically mismatched feelings and movements from different temporalities and multilayered sideways inclinations" (157). The motivation of this eighteenth-century boy should also be read with such complexity, however. I invite an understanding of Hearne as a more active player than he is in Bradbury's and Taylor's representations: is it possible that Hearne takes up and deploys a plastic sexuality to actively fashion a life that enables his survival and perhaps even allows for moments of pleasure?

Conclusion: Raising Jack Perverse in the Twenty-First Century

Contemporary society continues to silence the

sexual child in its criminalization of certain expressions of sexuality. In 2006, Canada's Conservative government introduced a bill to increase the age of sexual consent from fourteen to sixteen years and began speaking of the "age of protection" in lieu of the age of consent. Although the law was ostensibly introduced to "protect children from adults who prey on them for purposes of sexual exploitation," as Justice Minister Vic Toews argued, it also functions to maintain the unspeakability of the language of sexual agency in the context of children and youth. "One problem with the current law," Toews claimed, "is that adults can claim in their defence that youth consented to sex . . . youth are made uncomfortable testifying in court." Toews's solution, then, is to remove the capacity for fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds to consent to sex *and* their ability to tell their own stories in court, ultimately confining individuals of this age to the reductive trope of the innocent child who is vulnerable to perversion.¹¹ Also notable is the Conservative government's maintenance of the age of consent for anal sex at eighteen years, a clear confirmation of the fact that some forms of perversion are even more undesirable and unimaginable than others (Mendoza).

I am certainly not arguing for a *laissez-faire* approach to the regulation of sexual activity involving children, but I want to highlight the striking parallels between eighteenth-century narratives of childhood and perversity, and contemporary conceptions of

children and sexuality. Many of the same stories and sexual possibilities remain silenced, unspeakable, and unimaginable in legal and social discourse. As Stockton argues, perhaps children are so fervently protected because they are frightening, because "we are threatened by the spectre of their longings that are maddeningly, palpably opaque," and because the very concept of innocence is threatening since it can be so easily lost (126). Indeed, I believe it essential to ask the questions prompted by Stockton: what is at stake in our continued investment in a concept of childhood that sees the child as both innocent and constantly in danger? Why do some possibilities for a self-fashioning, "making-do" childhood remain unspeakable? Is it because the child is too valuable as a symbol of innocence and a vessel for adult hopes and anxieties about the transition into (heterosexual) adulthood? Or, is it because we remain deeply ambivalent about the perverse potential of childhood and thus attempt to impose legible and coherent narratives onto children's ambiguous motives and complex desires—stories similar to the cautionary tale of Jack Perverse? And where do productive gaps between these stories emerge, counter-narratives that can critique and challenge the stories that have become so sedimentary by their repetition through the centuries?

Jack Perverse is a naughty boy, who does everything a good boy shouldn't do. . . .

Notes

¹ Burder's *Early Piety* and other Romantic-era works for and about children teem with Jack Perverse-type characters, many of whom bear names that reflect their "perverse" natures. In *Moral Instruction and Fiction for Children, 1749–1820*, Samuel F. Pickering, Jr. explains that "early children's fiction was rigorously instructive. Although the narratives were often wonderfully entertaining and imaginative, they rarely presented complex views of human nature" (vii). Characters similar to Jack Perverse can be found in an array of texts, including Sarah Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories*, Mary Ann Kilner's works (which include *The Memoirs of a Peg-Top*), and Maria Edgeworth's *The Parent's Assistant*, all of which are morally didactic fictional works for children. Although perversity manifests itself differently depending on the story and character in question, for the purposes of this essay I use Jack Perverse as a figure who represents this recurring fictional trope of the perverse child.

² I am indebted to Jonathan Dollimore's elucidation of the paradoxes of perversity in his book *Sexual Dissidence*. Perversion, he writes, "is very often perceived as at once utterly alien to what it threatens, and yet, mysteriously inherent within it" (121).

³ It is often taken for granted that contemporary conceptions of the child and childhood have their deepest roots in Romantic thought. For example, in their survey of children's literature (which notably begins with Romanticism), Deborah Cogan and Jean Webb cite Mitzi Myers's claim that "the Romantic child is our foundational fiction" (13). Through representations of Hearne in the documents related to Bradbury's sodomy trial, I intend to illustrate how notions of childhood commonly understood to be Romantic

were actually in circulation prior to the Romantic era.

⁴ In chapter three of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau outlines a detailed distinction between tactics and strategies along the lines of time and space. A subject employs a strategy when "it postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats can be managed" (36). A tactic, however, does not entail this sense of exteriority: "the space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power" (37). For the purposes of this essay, I use "tactic" in lieu of "strategy" since it speaks to the way Hearne's actions seem largely improvised based on opportunities for survival in a system that saw him at a disadvantage because of his age and his class position.

⁵ While I do not claim that my analysis of Hearne's specific case can be unproblematically mapped onto contemporary understandings of children, I am hoping to draw parallels between the narratives of childhood and perversity that were at work around the time of Hearne's case and the ways in which children and sexual agency are taken up in contemporary theory and dialogue about age-of-consent legislation. I deal generally with conceptualizations of both male and female children, but the subject of my chosen case study is male, and I recognize that the rhetoric of sexual agency circulates quite differently depending on the gender of the child in question.

⁶ An earlier version of this paradox of childhood perversity

appeared in John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). Locke is well known for his description of the child as *tabula rasa*: "white Paper, or Wax, to be moulded and fashioned as one pleases" (265). However, Locke also argues that children have "predominant Passions and prevailing Inclinations" that can be of "the humbler and meaner sort" (163). It was through a proper education that these less desirable "native Propensities" could be "mended, and turned to good purposes" (163). As John W. Yolton and Jean S. Yolton note in their edition of Locke's text, "the white-paper metaphor must not be taken too literally . . . the stereotype of Locke as believing the mind entirely empty at birth needs to be rejected and replaced by his recognition of traits, tempers, and tendencies, as well as a large number of faculties" (163). A Lockean ambivalence surrounding the balance between children's inherent innocence/malleability and their perverse potential informs the discourse surrounding childhood through the Romantic era to the present day.

⁷ Paul Kelleher's "How to Do Things with Perversion" is a useful account of how Freudian psychoanalysis (and, later, Melanie Klein's writing) built on these Romantic narratives to fuse notions of the criminal and the pervert and to attribute the existence of these loathsome characters to child psychic development gone awry. In Kelleher's words, "the murderous 'pervert,' again and again, is figured as both *interior to* and *anterior to* our conception of the child, phantasmatically surrounding and overtaking any psychoanalytic profile of the 'child'" (167). Kelleher draws on Foucault's lecture "The Dangerous Individual" to illustrate how the child and the pervert converged to create the concept of "the 'natural-born killer': a set of discrete criminal acts, arranged within the evidentiary patterns of a case history, is theoretically redescribed

as the true confessions of the criminal's (or what will come to be the same, the homosexual's) nature" (161). Although the texts described in this essay predate the emergence of psychoanalytic discourses of (homo)sexuality, Jack Perverse and his equally perverse fictional contemporaries worked to characterize what Foucault would later call the natural-born killer: they all demonstrate inherent perverse tendencies that manifest themselves in activities like the violent torture of insects and small animals.

⁸ The letters include a very strange note signed "Beelzebub" that Bradbury apparently received while in prison (*The Cobbler Undone* 35–36). Much space is also spent debating relatively insignificant claims like whether or not Hearne was ever actually held in the basement of Bradbury's friend Mr. Kipling.

⁹ The near-untwistable, tangled web of stories that comes to constitute Bradbury and Hearne's case is so complex that composing a complete and coherent overview would be an arduous and lengthy task; for this reason, I will include only the details that are relevant to an understanding of this paper. Unless otherwise noted, all trial details—quoted directly and paraphrased—are taken from the Old Bailey transcript ("Charles Bradbury").

¹⁰ Rowland provides a Foucauldian reading of Bradbury's pamphlet in "*Mr. Bradbury's Case Truly Stated: A Polyvalent Text*," but the author is uninterested in interrogating how Hearne is represented.

¹¹ The Age of Protection bill also reinforces the notion that *all* sexual activity is necessarily traumatic for youth and children under a certain age. For an insightful discussion and critique of this popular belief, see Bruhm and Hurley, "Curiouser."

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