

Dear Colleague:

For several years now I've attended Young Shakespeare's performances of the Master's uncut plays in Madison's parks, and each time I marveled at the competence--nay, the extraordinary skill, the flair--of the performers, aged 8 to 18. I can't help but thank God again for the sex that starts kicking in toward the end of the age span, and so derail these precocious children from purely intellectual and cultural pursuits, for otherwise they, as sophisticated young adults, will appear in my classes, forcing me to prepare more and think harder than I now have to do.

A personal reason for going to these performances is Joshua, a boy I have known since he was about seven. Each year he takes on a new role; each year both he and his role gain stature. This year, at age 16, he takes on the role of Feste, the clown, in Twelfth Night. Joshua's voice is now startlingly low, having changed almost overnight from boyish treble. Voice is our single most personal feature: it projects our total being, body and soul, as distinct from, say, face or any other aspect of our anatomy. What a surprise a boy's voice-change must be for parents who, overnight, have a stranger in their midst!

We are near the end of the play. All the players, except the clown, have left the stage. A spotlight shines on the clown as he sings:

When that I was and a little tiny boy,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
A foolish thing was but a toy,  
For the rain it raineth every day.

But when I came, almost to man's estate,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
'Gainst knaves and thieves shut their gate,  
For the rain it raineth every day.

I sat between the clown's proud parents, and it suddenly occurred to me that if they wanted to hear their son sing--really sing--they would have to come to the park like everybody else. They enjoyed no special privileges. At some stage, their child becomes a part of the public domain and is no longer fully copyrighted. Their child is a gift to the world. Joshua continues to sing:

A great while ago the world begun,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
But that's all one, our play is done,  
And we'll strive to please you every day.

Give us birth, change our diaper, wipe our nose, give us tender-loving care, and "we'll strive to please you every day." Nice.

*Zi-Fu*