Zeitschrift: SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature
Herausgeber: Swiss Association of University Teachers of English
Band: 31 (2015)

Artikel: In the company of Edward's Boys
Autor: Mills, Perry / Mills, Alex
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-583903

In the Company of Edward's Boys

Perry Mills and Alex Mills

Since 2005, Edward's Boys from King Edward VI School, Stratford-upon-Avon, have been performing plays from the neglected repertoire of the early modern boys' companies.[1] Under the direction of Perry Mills, Deputy Head of the School, Edward's Boys have staged Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage,* Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan*, Dekker and Webster's *Westward Ho!,* Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, Middleton's *A Mad World My Masters* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside,* Lyly's *Galatea*, as well as extracts from Lyly's *Mother Bombie* and *Endymion.* Edward's Boys have toured extensively, by invitation, to the universities of Warwick, Oxford, London and Cambridge, the Royal Shakespeare Company Swan Theatre, Middle Temple Hall, and at Shakespeare's Globe's Bear Gardens and Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. In this essay Perry Mills discusses Edward's Boys with his son, Alex Mills, who acted with the company.

Perry: I will explore here the educational value of the Edward's Boys project and occasionally reflect on what it might offer the academic world. It seemed sensible to collaborate on this essay in order to give a sense of replicating the complementary contributions of the teacher/director and the student/actor. And, like all wise teachers, I propose to supply the intellectual stimulus and the startling insights, thereafter leaving the bulk of the work to the student . . .

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[1] King Edward's is a selective boys' state school also known as K.E.S. and "Shakespeare's School," since it is the grammar school in Stratford which Shakespeare would have attended.

Drama and Pedagogy in Medieval and Early Modern England. SPELL: Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature 31. Ed. Elisabeth Dutton and James McBain. Tübingen: Narr, 2015. 275-293.

Figure 1. David Biddle (Chorus) in *Henry V* (2013).

Audience members often pose the question: "How do they do it? How do boys, just boys, learn these very tricky plays?" And the simple answer is there in the question: learning is easy for boys. It is not something that is scary. They are used to encountering things they do not immediately understand – they learn these parts alongside German and Biology and Physics, etc.

The familiar teacher/pupil dynamic is the model for how we work. I am perfectly aware that I am something of a "linguistic dinosaur." I am not trained in theatre; I am an English teacher who does plays. All I have ever learnt about drama has come from watching, reading and doing plays. The only way I can approach the early stages of rehearsal is for us all to sit at desks and read and re-read and re-read the text. And throughout this "process" we talk about everything – what the words say and what they might mean. The importance of the text is only challenged by the need to tell the story as clearly as possible. We interrogate every line, every word, even the silences. Even the filthy jokes. In fact, particularly the filthy jokes. We are, after all, boys. And then it goes back in its box.

The aim is for the boys to take over the language, possess it as their own. And then we might feel ready to try to put it on its feet. By this

stage, decisions concerning "blocking" are usually pretty straightforward. As one parent commented after an early production by the company, "What a wonderful way to learn!"

Alex: Edward's Boys begin each rehearsal period by focusing closely upon the play's text. It has been said of John Marston's writing that "Those who seek consistency and wholeness will be disappointed, not only when they seek it across his canon but when they look for it within single scenes or even lines" (Wharton 105-6, quoted in Ryan 145). Plays such as Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* expose the children to the ambiguities and intricacies of language, as they consider the possible meanings of lines, thereby developing sensitivity to complexity. As Elisabeth Dutton comments on the 2012 performance of Dekker and Webster's *Westward Ho!* (c.1604), it is clear that "the boys understand every line" ("Review").

Humanist rhetorical education likewise focused upon language and its potential for various interpretations: intriguing insight into the ways in which early modern youths were taught linguistic competence is offered in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside.* Though listed as originally performed by Lady Elizabeth's Men, the company would have been augmented by boy actors because, as Lucy Munro states, when the Children of the Queen's Revels disbanded in "early 1613, they were merged with the adult Lady Elizabeth's men" ("Coriolanus" 82). John Jowett writes that whilst *Chaste Maid* was "performed by an adult company," Edward's Boys "demonstrated that Middleton's experience writing for younger actors shows through in this play" (Jowett, "Review"). With nineteen female characters, the play has a strong youthful presence: children are frequently onstage or the subject of the play's action, such as the Kixs' inability to conceive. By using children for all the parts, the Edward's Boys' production emphasised the prominence of education within the play. One of the Allwits' children (or rather Mrs Allwit's and Sir Walter's) is able to "make a verse / And is now at Eton college" (Middleton, *Chaste Maid* 4.1.148-149). The production's opening saw the cast, wearing school uniform, file on stage to form a choir – a nod towards the chorister background of the Children of Paul's. After a choral number, the cast dispersed about the stage, breaking into catches of Thomas Ravenscroft's sixteenth-century street-cries, in organised chaos. This beginning highlighted child-identity in a manner reminiscent of Induction scenes, as in Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels.* The children were very clearly taking control of the stage, the playing space. At the play's ending, the

choir reformed, with the school-children of the opening emerging recognisably behind their costumes.

In *Chaste Maid,* the character of Tim Yellowhammer offers particular evidence about educational practices: he is a developing male youth, not quite a man, and "[t]he reference to Tim's size indicates that the part was probably played by one of the Queen's Revels boys" (note to 4.1.121-124, Middleton, *Chaste Maid* 73). In the Edward's Boys staging, the actor playing Tim was sixteen, roughly the age of early modern University students, and possibly of the original Queen's Revels actor. Tim is, as his parents proudly announced in unison in the Edward's Boys production, "the Cambridge boy" (1.1.44). The grating pride in their pronouncement provided familiar satire, indicating the Yellowhammers' social climbing in a manner consistent with the production's 2010 setting, with the son's study at "Uni-vers-i-tay" (as affectedly pronounced by his mother, Maudline) providing an opportunity to show-off.

Figure 2. The Final Chorus from *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (2010).

Tim (bespectacled and constantly weighed down with books in this production) visits his family in Cheapside, accompanied by his university tutor. Though he is a university student rather than a school pupil, Tim's education is in the same humanist vein of rhetoric. In the play, Middleton offers a direct depiction of learning in progress: the form of a university debate opens 4.1. Peter Mack notes that "To obtain a degree, students had to participate in disputations" (97), and that the teaching of the rhetorical technique of *utramque partem* (the ability to argue, convincingly, on each side of a dispute), encouraged control over linguistic

complexities. During this debate in this scene, on whether a fool is a rational being, both characters appear fools. Tim declares to his mother that "By logic I'll prove anything" (4.1.39), yet can prove nothing. Tim's former inability, related by Maudline, to answer the simplest question of *"Quid est grammatica"* ("What is grammar?") invites open mockery (4.165).

However, whilst ridiculing a formal system of early modern education, the city comedy, through the witty complexity of its rude, fast-paced wordplay offers an alternative route to linguistic skill. In the final scene, Tim begins to understand not the language of university debate, but that of the bawdy and playful city. The puns and jokes of this play are linguistic plurality in action, and to be proficient at recognising the plurality of language, the potential for "both sides" of a matter to be almost simultaneously present, is a profitable ability. This is something the members of Edward's Boys have developed through performing plays such as *Chaste Maid*, Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters* and John Lyly's *Endymion*, relishing the learned puerility: a licence to speak filth in public. It would be surprising if a similar effect was not realised for the original boy-players.

Perry: Of course, boys will be boys – but in adult companies like Lady Elizabeth's Men, boys were deployed not just to play boys but also to play women. Perhaps I should say a few words about boys playing girls. It's really not a problem. Edward's Boys don't attempt to impersonate women. They're not illusionists. They're actors playing parts. It's simply a question of ACTING – or perhaps I should say PLAYING. They aren't kings or generals or murderers either yet they play those roles. During a Question and Answer session following a performance of scenes from Lyly's *Mother Bombie*, a particularly earnest PhD student posed a long, convoluted question concerning puberty, sexuality and gender politics to the twelve year-old George who had just performed the role of Livia. When she eventually stopped he simply shrugged and said, "I'm still just a bloke underneath."

The actors know that if you are a member of Edward's Boys you will, at some point, play a girl. There are as many ways of playing women as there are women. High voices and false breasts are not only unnecessary; they are frequently positive obstacles. They only serve to highlight the differences/inadequacies. Anyway, some women have deep voices and flat chests. Wigs were ditched by two of the three female characters in the course of the run of *A Mad World My Masters*. The

important thing is to TELL THE STORY of the character, just as you do with any other part.

The reaction of the audience is of course worth taking into account. The first time we mounted a (nearly) full production of *The Dutch Courtesan* there were gasps from certain members of the audience as the first female characters entered in the second scene. The shock value was audible, but that was probably as a result of the subject matter as much as the fact that boys were playing female roles. However, within a few scenes the audience calmed down, got used to the novelty, and started to respond to the twists and turns of the story. By the moment in Act Two when Freevill slapped Franceschina across the face in anger, the auditorium was utterly silent. Now it's just something we do, everyone is used to it. And our school community has learned from the experience. That is of course educational in itself.

Still, we often encounter disbelief that some of the actors were not *really* girls. "But, that one, surely, that one was a real girl?" is not an uncommon reaction. The actor playing Katherine in *Henry V* met particular resistance to the acceptance that he was, indeed, a boy. Generally, of course, the audience know; and then they forget – until they remember, often, I would suggest, when we choose to remind them.

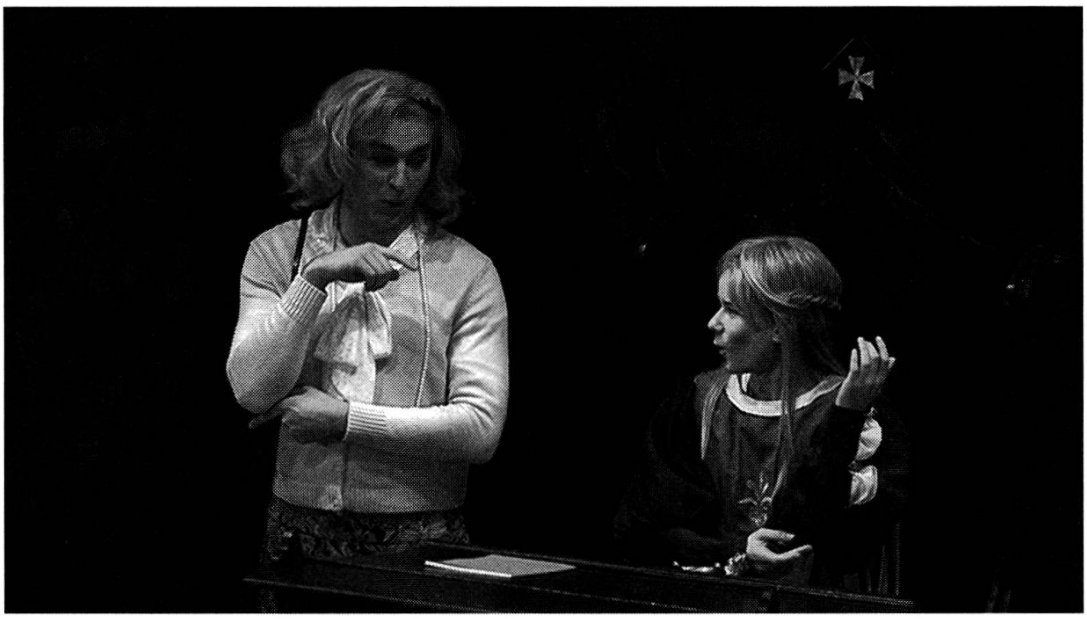

Figure 3. George as Katherine in *Henry V* (2013).

That kind of reaction accounts for what I call "double-seeing." As so often in drama, an audience is encouraged to see the play through a series of different lenses, practically simultaneously.

Alex: So gender is just one aspect of a character's identity and has to be played, just like any other characteristic. Edward's Boys' rehearsal process is the main period in which the actors explore character identity. Although, as Tiffany Stern discusses, it is anachronistic to talk of the rehearsal room as a place where "magic and creation can happen," since early modern rehearsals were very limited owing to the pressure of the number of performances companies gave (Stern, *Rehearsal* 8), the work achieved through Edward's Boys' rehearsal is relevant nonetheless. Identity exploration has been viewed as significant in early modern education. Carol Rutter cites the importance of the process of *ethopoeia*, which means "character making" or "impersonation" in early modern education (*Shakespeare and Child's Play* 61). Children were required to learn a speech and perform it, imitating the identity of the speaker. In *Ludus Literarius*, John Brinsley explains that students should "utter every dialogue lively as if they themselves were the persons which did speak that dialogue" (cited in Gibson 23). The aspect of *ethopoeia* which most interests Rutter is the use of works such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*, which provided "a vast range of hugely charged emotional speeches spoken by women" ("Learning Thisby's Part" 16) for the early modern schoolboy to impersonate, with an invitation to see things from a feminine perspective – "the schoolboy studies the grammar of emotion" (*Shakespeare and Child's Play* 68).

The company has taken various approaches to playing women, just as with the male roles, and, over the years, has established an audience than has become ever more willing to accept the different portrayals of the female roles. Young boys have played both genders, as have older ones. Whilst there is no evidence that boys of eighteen played female roles in the children's companies, Edward's Boys have helped show that they can. As with the original companies, "any actor might be called on to play either male or female parts" (Senapati 126). The ease with which a boy may become a girl on stage was exemplified in the production of *Chaste Maid* when onstage, after the opening song, the actor playing Maudline simply placed a dress over his school uniform, recalling Follywit's boast in *Mad World* – "Come, come, thou shalt see a woman quickly made up here" (Middleton, *The Collected Works* 3.3.96-97). As Stern has said of Edward's Boys, "Their productions revel in cross-gender and cross-age casting. Both emerge as equal constructs, creating scenes that are touching, outrageous and wild by turn" ("Expert Opinion"). This recognition of the constructed nature of identity is a powerful realisation for any child.

All parts involve identity play, affording various perspectives, none the same as the actor's own. Thus, over the years of the Edward's Boys project, the novelty of boys playing girls has given way to a wider recognition that the female roles are performed by the same process of acting as any of the male roles. This was most likely the case in the early modern theatre, with boys acting girls as the norm. Playing female and male roles have been equal challenges, and this would have been so for the original companies, "For boys were quite literally a different gender from men during the early modern period" (Fisher 235). Indeed "Childhood and youth were often aligned with femininity" (Lamb 30), so there is a sense in which the boy is allied with both genders, yet the same as neither. Will Fisher states that "when boy actors donned beards in order to play the parts of men, they would have been as much 'in drag' as when they played the parts of women" (231). Despite also being young and male, Edward's Boys bear little relation to Freevill. Even the actor playing Tim was, of course, not being himself.

In both male and female roles, the plays toy with notions of the boy in a process of identity development from child to man. Kate Chedgzoy describes the importance of the "pure intrinsic pleasure of play . . . the temporary provisional opportunity to inhabit another self in the act of pretending to be someone else, acting a theatrical role, and thus expand the performer's sense of the possibilities of selfhood" ("Shakespeare in the company" 190). Performative-play is central to these identity games. Necessarily entailed in an exploration of character identity is an exploration of the actor's own. This breaking down of barriers of identity-constructs in the free-play of rehearsal and performance has been of great importance in Edward's Boys, and why might this not have been so for the original companies, if not as an impetus behind the performances, as a consequence of instead?

Perry: Then again, who cares? We are most definitely not attempting to "explore Original Practices," whatever that phrase may mean. We are not trying to show how boys' companies must or might have done it. We simply aim to put on a good show using these largely unperformed and frequently excellent plays with an all-boy company. If, sometimes, people choose to think to themselves that maybe that was how it was done in 1588 or 1605 then perhaps the project – casting, rehearsals, staging as well as performances – does offer occasional "glimpses" into possibilities.

I prefer at this point to quote Professor Tiffany Stern on the subject:

> We all know that there were boy companies in the time of Shakespeare. Watching the extraordinarily talented boy company of King Edward VI School, however, is a revelation. The boys have the age-range, voices, physicality, and androgynous beauty for which the plays they perform were actually written . . . Skilful instrumentalists and actors, the boys also bring contemporary music and modern gesture to their performances, resulting in productions that are youthful, energetic and distinctly "now" as well as "then." That is what is amazing about Edward's Boys: they combine the best of the past and the present to create a wholly new and extraordinary theatrical experience ("Expert Opinion").

The original focus of the project – boys as girls – has shifted. Subsequently, we explored the repertoire of the boys' companies, but now the interest primarily rests in the educational power of this model. An extraordinary, self-regulated process of apprenticeship, whereby the younger members of the company learn as much from the older performers as they do from me, is now the primary focal point. For me, as the English teacher who does the plays, this was an unexpected development, but now it is utterly central to the enterprise. I focus on it explicitly and exploit it relentlessly. We are all learning from each other.

Figure 4. Photo of Jeremy as Neptune in *Galatea* (2014).

At the beginning of a production we have "The Big Meeting". Everyone is welcomed and helped to feel part of the enterprise. We also take time to make the new members of the company aware of the tradition, and of how we work. And why. The performance, for example, is truly collaborative: control is given over to the boys – they run the show. They manage all the responsibilities. There is no prompt; a student acts as Stage Manager; a student conducts the band – all of whom are students. This is what we do it for.

Significantly, they learn how to behave off-stage as well as on-stage. They develop a highly positive sense of self – which is NOT the same as arrogance. There is no self-indulgence since they are all aware that they are doing a "Job o' Work": I drum into them that acting is a set of tasks, like any other job. Self-discipline is evident at every turn. They want to do themselves justice and they don't want to let anyone down – they all want to get it right.

This is what Jonny wrote at the age of twelve after performing the role of Bianca in *The Dutch Courtesan*:

> I really enjoy touring because it's fun and brings the cast out of the usual places and so forces us together as a school – and we always seem to have such fun. The fact these plays give me friends in other years who I probably wouldn't have talked to or come across before is really good. Since the play I have had loads of Facebook friend requests from people in it which I just found really nice.

Edward's Boys has become what the Headmaster at K.E.S. has proudly dubbed the "best vertical tutor group in the school." (The vertical tutor group system is one which allows for boys across the age range to interact). The first time I became powerfully aware of this phenomenon was during our production of Lyly's *Endymion* in 2009. The cast were all twelve year-olds, but the Stage Manager, Oliver, was seventeen and had worked on several plays with me, even before the project started. During the final run-through at the Inigo Jones Rehearsal Room 3 at Shakespeare's Globe, I was distracted by problems concerning the filming we were undertaking of the event. I asked Oliver to take notes for me on the run. Afterwards he approached and proffered a couple of pages of scrawl. "Why don't you give them the notes?" I suggested. He did, and to my surprise I could hear my voice through his, my obsessions with textual details, my idiosyncrasies, my weak attempts at humour.

After the first run of performances of Lyly's *Galatea*, in March 2014, we put the production to bed for six weeks before reviving it for a performance at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. Another experienced

member of Edward's Boys asked if I would mind if he sent me a few notes he had taken over the course of the initial run, in case they might prove helpful . . . I readily agreed and received three typed pages of A4 full of brilliant insights, suggestions and wit. They were subsequently passed onto the company and ensured the production matured and improved.

Alex: The dynamic of a group putting on a play builds a company, and over years a sense of continuity has been created. As individual actors have increased in "audacity," so the strength of the ensemble has developed. The cast learns from the director, the Deputy Head at the school, but more intriguingly, the older, more experienced members of casts have taken on something of a mentoring role, passing on tips and inspiring confidence in the younger cast members. In turn, through the mentoring process, the more experienced amongst the cast gain confidence, and a mutual respect is established (see Rutter, "Playing with Boys" 105-106).

Figure 5. Ollie with kids in *Chaste Maid* (2010).

In 2009 a cast of twelve-year-olds performed Lyly's *Endymion.* In the following year several members of that cast became key players in *Chaste Maid.* By the time of *Antonio's Revenge* in 2011, many original, long-standing cast members had left the school. Consequently, younger boys took on larger roles and became mentors themselves. Gordan McMullan has described the "remarkable experience" of seeing "the younger boys in the group grow up to become experienced actors" suggesting "the

development curve that must have been a significant element in the fluid and generative repertoire of the Elizabethan/Jacobean boys' companies" ("Expert Opinion"). This system that has built up has notable similarities to that of apprenticeship in the early modern adult playing companies.

Perry: Edwards' Boys is a boys' company. We put on plays that were written to be performed by boys. Except when we don't. In 2013 we staged Shakespeare's *Henry V*, an adult company play, at the Royal Shakespeare Compaby Swan Theatre in order to commemorate the school's 1913 production of the play. The school had been invited by the actor-manager Frank Benson to mount the production to complete his cycle of the first tetralogy of English History plays and two performances took place in the Stratford Memorial Theatre. The School Archivist discovered photographic evidence of the performance and then his researches revealed that the entire cast had subsequently fought in the First World War; and that seven of that cast had died. At first I was unsure why I should direct *Henry V* with an all-boy group. The 1913 K.E.S. cast featured both sexes; indeed the Chorus was performed by a professional actress.

And then I thought about that cast, and how all those Old Boys went off to fight in a real war in Northern France within a few years. I imagined a couple of them meeting up by chance the night before the Battle of the Somme – or Ypres – and greeting one another as old friends. "Old Boys." What would they talk about? Inevitably (I felt) they would swap memories of that production where they had played at being soldiers who fought a famous battle in a field not many miles from where they were sitting. They might even quote a few half-remembered lines. Now they were supposed to be real soldiers. Had they now grown into the role? Do soldiers ever really feel they are doing anything other than playing at it? I can only surmise that meeting up with an old school friend at such a time would be comforting.

The production now had a context: the fact that they were boys – and boys from a school – became central to our interpretation. I soon realised that the production needed to take place imaginatively in Big School ("Shakespeare's Schoolroom") and that the Chorus, inevitably, was the aged schoolmaster recalling the fallen that he had taught so many years before.

Alex: In staging Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Edward's Boys took on what Bart Van Es has argued is a "form of drama both practically and ideo-

logically unsuited to the [children's] indoor stage" (211). *Henry V* is a very well-known play of professional adult theatre, and was performed by the boys in an adult space, usually inhabited by professional adult actors. Indeed, the self-consciously theatrical Chorus was played by the adult actor Tim Pigott-Smith, a former K.E.S. pupil. The Chorus possesses a shaping role, as the audience is asked to accept that the story is mediated through the role: "Admit me Chorus to this history, / Who Prologue-like your humble patience pray / Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play" (1.0.32-34). The discrepancy in ages between the Chorus and the other actors emphasised this controlling aspect, with a seemingly inherently hierarchical relationship established between the mature Chorus and the immature boy players. The performance explored a relationship similar to that of a schoolmaster and his pupils, with the children breaking free through theatrical performance. The production demonstrated the theatrical value of Edward's Boys to a wider audience, explicitly engaging with the educational idea of play which have been at the forefront of previous productions. There was a sense that the boys were claiming the stage – the Royal Shakespeare Company at that.

Figure 6. Henry V et al. (2013).

Moreover, returning to Edel Lamb's idea of foregrounding the child (25), using boys highlighted themes of identity growth and development associated with childhood. Henry's development is at the centre of the play. His character's progression from wild youth to inexperienced king is followed over *Henry IV*'s two parts. In *Henry V*, Henry grows into this new role. Throughout this evolution, Henry's youth simultaneously

haunts and aids him. The Dauphin, notably, interprets Henry's past as weakness. Griffiths notes that "In adult discourse terms like 'boy' or 'lad' belonged to a vocabulary of insult . . . [with] their association with immorality and inadequacy" (quoted in Munro, "Coriolanus" 91). Thus the gift of tennis balls is a visual "boying" of King Harry. Henry does not take this insult lightly, wishing forcefully to show that the Dauphin is guilty of "Not measuring what use we made of . . . wilder days" (1.2.266-268). The play demonstrates the use Henry did make of his youth, for he has the capacity to not only play the King, a role which he learns after resolving to "Be like a king" (1.2.274), but also in conversing amongst ordinary soldiers, as in 4.1. Henry recognises the theatrical construction of identity through development, and therefore could be seen as the embodiment of an actor who is experimenting with role and identity. This aspect was endowed with a further significance in this production, with Henry being played by Jeremy Franklin. Franklin's first role in Edward's Boys was, suitably for Henry's youth, part of Follywit's wild gang in *Mad World.* His playing of various roles, including female, has developed his acting range. In a mirroring of Henry's progression, Franklin has developed through the mentoring system outlined above to become a leader of Edward's Boys. Incidentally, Franklin hopes to make the transition from boy-player to professional adult actor, as Nathan Field managed in the seventeenth-century (Lamb 118).

Perry: As we come towards the end of this essay, let us attempt to gather together some reflections on the educational impact of the project on the boys who take part in it. It is obvious that the boys develop a remarkable linguistic facility, skills of performance, and an awareness of early modern drama, which are pretty unusual for most teenagers. They also discover that it is acceptable to aim high. The sense of achievement is often palpable: we are working on challenging material and any success is a result of hard work as well as talent and teamwork. They appreciate the meaning of the phrase "The best you can be is seen as exemplary."

Furthermore, a very powerful development is experiencing the "other" point of view, what is sometimes termed "alterity," looking at the world through others' eyes. One mother of an Edward's Boys stalwart commented thus:

> It seems to me that the boys (and not just the ones actually playing the female roles) were encouraged to explore, deeply, various issues surrounding women. As young men – particularly in an all-boys school – this is a really

> important part of their education. What a great opportunity the theatre offers, both in rehearsal and on stage, to explore and discover these things.

Edward's Boys enjoy their (albeit fleeting) power: they perform at Oxford University! At the Royal Shakespeare Company Swan Theatre! At the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse! These are their moments in the limelight, so to speak, a wonderful reward for all that hard work and self-discipline. The ephemeral quality in part reflects the nature of theatre, of course, but it is also evidence of the fact that it soon passes. One thing you can be sure about with boys – perhaps the only thing – is that they will, in some sense, grow up. Many ex-members of the company experience a powerful sense of nostalgia.

Recently, I have come to understand the fundamental importance of the school itself in all of this: the institution, its expectations, its educational aims and objectives, the hierarchies which are all laid out. It was beautifully encapsulated for me in a conversation with a colleague who was expressing his admiration for the work:

> "Would you give it all up, if you could, and just direct Edward's Boys?"
> "No, never, not at all. It would entirely change the way we work, our relationship, the dynamic."
> "Ah, I see. It works because, day-to-day, you also tell them off for being naughty."

Indeed, the games we all play have complex rules.

These boys are given licence to "play" – but they also know why we are all doing it. The best image I have for how it works is to imagine choirboys – either side of the vestry door. In the church they appears as angels; in the vestry they are little devils. They know when and how to turn it on and off.

It is essential that the boys have a space in which to play – and explore and fail and perform – within the context of the ensemble. That sounds like education to me. They want to get it right. They want to understand and learn. They also want to have fun – we all do! And then we move on from doing all these odd plays . . . because first lesson tomorrow is Physics . . .

Figure 7. Backstage at the Bear Garden, Shakespeare's Globe (*Dutch Courtesan*, 2008).

I shall conclude by exploiting another alumnus of Edward's Boys, one of Alex's contemporaries, Owen Hibberd, writing a few days after performing the role of Malheureaux in Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* at the invitation of Globe Education a few years ago:

> I cannot believe how well the play was received. Everywhere we went we had people congratulating us, some even saying that it was the best thing they had seen in years. When we were at the reception after our performance at the Globe I found myself talking to an elderly couple who had seen the play and thoroughly enjoyed it. They even offered to buy the whole cast drinks they enjoyed it so much! We talked for a long while about the play and it came up in conversation that, for them, the most remarkable thing was how seeing us at the reception they found us all unassuming and "just boys," but on stage apparently it was as if our personalities and auras were ten times larger. My reply was something along the lines of saying how, at the end of the day, that's all we are: just boys, really.

Edward's Boys have received academic and critical acclaim for their work exploring the repertoire of the boys' companies from the early modern period. There is an archive of all their performances available on DVD. For further details, please consult www.edwardsboys.org

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