



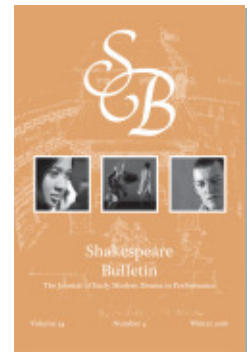
PROJECT MUSE®

---

*The Woman Hater* Presented by Edward's Boys (King Edward VI School) (review)

Harry R. McCarthy

Shakespeare Bulletin, Volume 34, Number 4, Winter 2016, pp. 719-723 (Review)



Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/643820>



Fig. 5. Aurea Tomeski as Valeria, Amaia Arana as Virgilia, Anthony Joseph De Augustine as Young Martius, Jacqueline Antaramian as Volumnia, and Greg Derelian as Caius Martius Coriolanus, with (pictured in background from left to right) Javon Johnson and Aidan Eastwood as Volscian Soldiers in the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's 2016 production of *Coriolanus*, directed by Brian B. Crowe. Photo courtesy of Jerry Dalia.

The production commenced with noisy shouts and an angry mob, but it finished in silence. Crowe changed the ending by presenting two parallel scenes. Downstage left, Coriolanus was slain in slow motion by Aufidius and Volscian soldiers as the Romans silently gathered upstage right. Volumnia proudly held out the garland crown with both hands to welcome Coriolanus home. Suddenly, she glanced down and gasped, as if in abrupt realization that Coriolanus was dead. With this gasp, the play ended.



### *The Woman Hater*

Presented by **Edward's Boys (King Edward VI School)** at the **University of Oxford Catholic Chaplaincy**, Oxford, United Kingdom. March 10, 2016. Directed by Perry Mills. Produced by Suzie Vogiardis and Richard Pearson. Set by David Troughton. Costumes by Amanda Wood. Movement by Struan Leslie. Music directed by Ben Dennes. With Finlay Hatch (Duke of Milan),

Jack Hawkins (Oriana), Joe Pocknell (Count Valore), Daniel Power (Laz-  
arillo), Charlie Waters (Julia), Daniel Wilkinson (Gondarino), and others.

HARRY R. MCCARTHY, *University of Exeter*

Vivacious, virtuosic, and vaunted by eccentric academic types throughout the land, the Stratford-upon-Avon-based company Edward's Boys have more in common with their seventeenth-century counterparts than meets the eye. Though the haircuts are more Louis Tomlinson than lustrous lovelocks and the costumes more likely found in Topman than the tiring house, the troupe, made up exclusively of boys aged between twelve and eighteen from King Edward VI School, has been transporting audiences back to the candlelit playhouses of early modern London for over a decade. Along with such well-known works as *Richard III* and *Henry V*, the Boys' repertoire has featured rarely-performed plays by Dekker, Ford, Lyly, Marlowe, Marston, and Middleton (though, curiously, no Jonson save for some privately workshopped scenes from *Epicoene*). Beaumont's *The Woman Hater* (written for the Children of Paul's in 1606), the latest in this line of lauded performances, is perhaps their most successful transportation yet.

Unperformed since its first outing on the stage at Paul's over four hundred years ago, Beaumont's daring city comedy proved ideal fare for this remarkably talented group of performers, as ever under the direction of deputy headmaster Perry Mills. Its classic tropes of gallant chases girl, girl vows chastity, misogynist faces humiliation, and—perhaps less classic—glutton finds fish head provided the perfect raw material for the comic exploitation, biting satire, and insistent innuendo for which the original boy companies became famous. On the night that I attended in Oxford, what was lacking in audience numbers—surely an unfortunate by-product of the play's performance at the distinctly unatmospheric, fluorescently-lit University Catholic Chaplaincy—was more than made up for in enthusiasm and laughter on both sides of the stage space.

For all their atmospheric authenticity, historical recreation is not what the Boys are about. For this production, Mills and his team opted to give Beaumont's play that curiously perennial setting: 1950s Italy. Unlike with so many other stab-in-the-dark attempts to update early modern plays, however, here the razor-sharp two-tone suits and polka dot dresses added value. The image-obsessed, Mafia-esque world—where paparazzi lurked in every corner and priests rubbed shoulders (and more) with pimps and prostitutes—brought to life in the bare, catwalk-like performance space provided the ideal setting for a play with conspicuous consumption,

rampant misogyny, and patriarchal promiscuity at its heart. As well as aiding the seamless transformation of adolescent boys into (as my companion put it) “sexy ladies” via Marilyn Monroe wigs, dangerously high heels, and pencil skirts, Amanda Wood’s costumes greatly contributed to the production’s physical comedy. Daniel Power’s delightfully gluttonous Lazarillo elicited many a cringing laugh thanks to his grease-splattered, flour-dusted tuxedo—the pockets stuffed with knives, forks, ladles, and even a gravy boat—while Daniel Wilkinson cut a fine figure as the deliciously camp, woman-hating Gondarino in a far-from-fetching mustard kimono, mismatched knitwear, and trousers tight enough to get him into trouble in the hilarious seduction sequence in act three, scene one (of which more below).

Clothes maketh not the man (or boy), however, and when it came to acting these boys had even more substance than style. It seems unfair, when discussing a company which is at its strongest as a tightly-knit ensemble, to single out particular performers, but to overlook the contributions of certain individuals in such a character-led piece would be an equal injustice. As is so often the case with *Edward’s Boys*, no one was denied the chance to steal the show: the relatively minor part of Lazarillo’s Boy, for instance, was brought center stage on more than one occasion thanks to Ritvik Nagar’s seemingly endless repertoire of wide-eyed expressions, capable of cutting through even the most overblown of Lazarillo’s gourmand-tastic speeches: no mean feat when said speeches were delivered with Power’s unique, unflagging relish. Charlie Waters, a blonde vision in gravity-defying heels (chapeau to whoever taught him to walk in them), should also be credited for filling out the slight role of the prostitute Julia and bringing a greatly-appreciated subtlety to the art of female impersonation that was somewhat lacking in Jack Hawkins’s older, slightly uncomfortable Oriana. That said, the tantalizing glimpse Hawkins’s performance offered into the dynamics afforded by a female lead being taken by a boy on the threshold of manhood cancelled out any awkwardness in the performance itself.

While female impersonation might be of particular interest to academic spectators, it was the Boys’ comic dexterity that got the majority of Oxford’s audience members going. Audience interaction played a major—and welcome—part in the production; Joe Pocknell’s charismatic Count Valore, whose masterful machinations kept the plot moving and the audience afloat, proved expert at it. Always on hand with a cheeky wink or knowing smile, he quickly had the audience at his beck and call even when it came to that most unwelcome of instructions, to leave their



Fig. 6. Jack Hawkins as Oriana, Isaac Sergeant as Gentleman, Daniel Wilkinson as Gondarino, Abhi Gowda as Waiting-woman, and Adam Hardy as Gentleman in Edward's Boys' 2016 production of *The Woman Hater*, directed by Perry Mills. Photo by Mark Ellis, courtesy of Edward's Boys.

seats: "all the gallants on the stage, rise . . . all the gallants on the stage, rise! . . . Don't make me ask you again!" (Bonus points to Mills, by the way, for insisting on the authentic pronunciation of "gallant.")

The standout moment of the night, however, came in act three, scene one, when everything the Boys do best—physical comedy, music, and innuendo—came together in perfect harmony as Oriana tormented and seduced the embittered, frigid Gondarino (Fig. 6). Pinned to a throne-like chair (the production's only piece of moveable scenery), Wilkinson's *Woman Hater* looked on with delectable terror, emitting moan after sexualized moan as servants shook maracas in his face and Hawkins's Oriana—seemingly given a new lease of life by the music—sang a rendition not of Beaumont's "Come sleep, and with thy sweet deceiving," but of Bob Merrill's "Mambo Italiano." The rousing, foot-stomping performance was a far more seamlessly integrated musical interlude than any of the production's other offerings ("That's Amore" is likely to jar with just about anything). By the time it had ended and Gondarino, a women's

magazine covering his crotch, had slunk away, the audience was glad of the interval to recover. The only comic disappointment of the night was the fact that the play's main talking point—Lazarillo's coveted umbrana head—never appeared, and was instead represented by a sickly green light emitted from a suitcase. Perhaps by the point of the big reveal, however, the audience had simply laughed enough already.

After watching this performance, it was easy to see why *The Woman Hater* has not been performed for over four hundred years: it takes a company with the energy, versatility, and acumen that Edward's Boys possesses in abundance to pull it off. At the current rate, we may not see another production of it until the year 2426. I doubt that even then, however, it will be quite as good as this.



### *Tempest Redux*

A co-production of **The Odyssey Theatre Ensemble** and **The New American Theatre** at the **Odyssey Theatre**, Los Angeles, California. February 10–April 23, 2016. Adapted, directed, and choreographed by John Farmanesh-Bocca. Set by Christopher Murillo. Costumes by Denise Blasor. Lighting by Bosco Flanagan. Sound by John Farmanesh-Bocca and Adam Phalen. Video by Thomas Marchese. Produced by Jeannine Wisnosky and Ron Sossi. With Mimi Davila (Miranda), Shea Donovan (Ariel), Dennis Gersten (Antonio/Trinculo), Gildart Jackson (Alonso/Stephano), Willem Long (Antonio/Caliban), Charles Hunter Paul (Ferdinand), Dash Pepin (Adrian/Caliban), Briana Price (Ariel), Jack Stehlin (Prospero), Brenda Strong (voice of Ariel), and Emily Yetter (Ariel).

LINDA McJANNET, *Bentley University*

John Farmanesh-Bocca, founder of Not Man Apart Physical Theatre Ensemble and Shakespeare Santa Monica, is an actor-dancer-director-choreographer devoted to physical theater in which dance and movement, from the gymnastic to the quotidian, play a prominent role. Like his earlier adaptations of *Pericles* and *Titus Andronicus*, *Tempest Redux* retained most of the play's dialogue but blended it with movement in creative and arresting ways. *Tempest Redux* also demonstrated, even more than his previous work, his mastery of all aspects of theater and his ability to present a radical interpretation without sacrificing humor and accessibility. I attended the performances of 7 and 8 April 2016; my comments on the director's intentions and contextual information draw on my interview