

The ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions,  
Europe 1100 - 1800 presents:

# LITTLE EYASES: EARLY MODERN PLAYS & BOY PLAYERS: 1525 – 1642



Władysław Czachórski, *Actors before Hamlet, 1872-1875*. © National Museum in Warsaw.

"...there is, sir, an aery of children, little eyases...that...are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages...for so they call them... that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose quills and dare scarce come thither." (*Hamlet* II ii 354-60).

This two day symposium will provide an opportunity to reflect on some of the many and complex issues surrounding boy players and boys' plays in the early modern theatre. The event is arranged to coincide with a fully staged production with boy actors from Guildford Grammar School, Perth, of Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, directed by Professor Peter Reynolds (Newcastle University, UK). Professor Reynolds previously directed Ben Jonson's *Epicene* or *The Silent Woman* with another group of local school boys as part of the 2013 ANZSA conference at UWA.

For many years scholars have been intrigued by the activities of companies of boy players who constituted a "rival tradition" to that of the adult players in early modern theatre. Yet, unless you happened to witness a school play in an all-boys school, the scrutiny of the small but significant canon of plays originally written for performance by children/young adults, has long been restricted to the study not the stage. Even today, plays performed in schools by single sex groups of children are, almost invariably by Shakespeare and not by contemporaries including Ben Jonson, Francis Beaumont, John Lyly and John Marston, who wrote specifically for companies of boy/adolescent actors.

A rare exception to this exists at King Edward's School, Stratford upon Avon, where a company of boy actors under the direction of Perry Mills, have staged frequent public performances of boys' as well as adult plays from this period including work by Lyly and Middleton. Moreover, the opening of the new intimate indoor theatre, the Sam Wanamaker playhouse at Shakespeare's Globe, London (2014) has made available a performance space that is the kind of space in which boy players companies would have performed. In April this year, Edward's Boys will perform John Lyly's *Galatea* there, and later in the month a group of young actors (aged 12 – 16) of both sexes will perform Marston's *The Malcontent*.

Date: 13-14 November 2014

Venue: The University of Western Australia

Call for Papers due: 29 August 2014

Proposals to [peter.reynolds@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:peter.reynolds@ncl.ac.uk)

There will be no charge for registration, but since it may be necessary to limit numbers, all who wish to attend in person at UWA should indicate this in advance.

Confirmed participants (in person or by video link) include

- Perry Mills, Director of Edward's Boys
- Dr Shehzana Mamujee, Lecturer in Renaissance Literature, Newcastle University UK
- Mike Pincombe, Professor of Professor of Tudor & Elizabethan Literature Newcastle University, UK
- Peter Reynolds, Professor of Theatre Studies, Newcastle University, UK
- Bob White, Professor of English Literature and Meanings Program Leader, CHE, University of Western Australia
- Penelope Woods, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow (Performance) CHE, University of Western Australia.

*Proposals are invited for papers on any topic from any discipline that increase understanding of how audiences, performers and playwrights made theatre using child/young adult performers in this period. Papers (20 MINUTES) may include a focus on boy players in adult companies; boys' roles in Tudor masks and interludes; the role played by boys in academic drama (school and university) and civic pageantry of the period; early modern plays originally written for children's companies; the training of boy players; child performers in early modern Europe.*