Performing The Maid's Metamorphosis, then and now

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Abstract

This essay opens by probing what can be extrapolated about the early performance history of the anonymous comedy *The Maid's Metamorphosis* (1600), performed by the Children of Paul's, based on its title page statement, internal evidence from the play, and contemporary letters. It argues it may have been conceived as part of the nuptial festivities for Anne Russell and Henry Somerset, Lord Herbert (Blackfriars, 16 June 1600). Then it moves to consider what the recent revival of the play by Edward's Boys (spring 2024), in England and in France, may reveal of the portability of this show.

Keywords

The Maid's Metamorphosis; Edward's Boys; The Children of Paul's; practice-based research; pastoral comedy; classical reception

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In 1600, the first and only early modern edition of the anonymously written play *The Maid's Metamorphosis* was printed, as its title page attests, by Thomas Creede for Richard Olive.[1] This title page also stakes a claim about the play's early performance history: it is said to have 'bene sundrie times Acted by the Children of Powles'. This essay opens by probing just what we can – and cannot – extrapolate about the early performance history and contexts of *The Maid's Metamorphosis* based on this title page statement as well as internal evidence from the play itself. From there, it moves to consider the recent revival of *The Maid's Metamorphosis* by Edward's Boys after a gap of over 400 years. In so doing, we reflect on the evolution of their show as it developed from early rehearsals and went on to be staged at venues across the UK and France in March 2024.

Elizabethan performance contexts

Associated with London's foremost ecclesial entity, St Paul's Cathedral, the Children of Paul's was a company of boy choristers who, in addition to providing liturgical music for services, were also well established as occasional theatrical performers. By the early Elizabethan era, these boys were, under the directorship of Simon Westcott, regularly entertaining royal and aristocratic audiences in private venues, including at court. This was an historical moment during which, as Bastian Kuhl phrases it, children's companies made a curious transition 'from what were effectively troupes of amateurs who were recruited from the eponymous boys' choirs to professional enterprises in a fiercely competitive theatrical environment'.[2] The Children of Paul's, sometimes performing in collaborative ventures with the Children of the Chapel Royal, rose to a place of cultural prominence by the 1580s before entering nearly a decade of dormancy. As one contemporary text somewhat enigmatically phrases it, 'the Plaies in Paules [had been] dissolved' by 1591.[3] Though they remain opaque, the motivating factors for this 'inhibition', as Reavley Gair speculates, may well have been 'essentially political' in nature.[4] It is a hiatus that ended in late 1599, however, when the Children of Paul's resumed their theatrical activities under the direction of choirmaster Edward Pearce, possibly with financial backing from William Stanley, the sixth Earl of Derby. The Children of Paul's likely made their theatrical re-entrance at the turn of the seventeenth century with a performance of John Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* (printed 1602). *The Maid's Metamorphosis* is one of four additional plays that this children's company is known to have staged over the following year or so, the others being *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (printed 1601) and *Antonio's Revenge* (printed 1602), both by Marston, and the anonymously penned *The Wisdom of Doctor Dodypoll* (printed 1600).[5]

It is well established that the Children of Paul's performed in a space that was located within the cathedral precincts. Indeed, we can find a 1603 reference to this children's company operating from 'a private house' that had been 'of a longe tyme keepte vsed & accustomede for yt purpose [i.e. as a playhouse]'.[6] In the group's second, post-1599 incarnation, then, the Children of Paul's continued to perform in a particular space that had long been used for this purpose. Precisely where in the environs of St Paul's Cathedral this 'house' was located, as well as its dimensions and architectural characteristics, have long been matters of conjecture and debate, however.

Nearly one hundred years ago, Harold Newcomb Hillebrand admitted to being stymied by 'baffling uncertainty' when it came to actually determining 'the place in which Paul's boys set up their theatre', a position echoed in Michael Shapiro's 1982 lament that 'knowledge about the playhouse at Paul's remains in a provisional state'.[7] Small gains were made at the turn of the twenty-first century when both Herbert Berry and Roger Bowers independently came to similar conclusions about the likely location of the playhouse: it was

almost certainly not a stand-alone structure, but rather a large room within the almonry that stood adjacent to the west wall of the chapter house's cloister.[8]

Estimates of this venue's capacity have varied wildly, both pre- and post-Berry's and Bowers's work. On the lowest end, Roze F. Hentschell finds it 'unlikely … that the hall could have held more than a few dozen audience members', while Lucy Munro allows for '50 spectators' and Carol Chillington Rutter imagines audiences of 'barely 100'.[9] On the other end of the spectrum, Andrew Gurr suggests a figure of 'two hundred bodies or less', an estimate more or less replicated by Siobhan Keenan's 'as few as 200', and Helen Ostovich raises this number to 500.[10] Put simply, the primary performance space used by the Children of Paul's has been conflictingly characterised both as 'one of the smallest of contemporary playing venues' in early modern London with a stage 'hardly big enough to swing a cat' and also as a venue whose 'stage … could have just about rivalled in size … that of the second Blackfriars'.[11]

When it comes to the internal architecture of the performance space itself, the picture is similarly hazy. If we accept that the Children of Paul's primary performance venue was a room of indeterminate size, very likely located in the almonry on the cathedral grounds, then it seems relatively safe to assume it probably functioned as a 'multi-use hall' that was put to a variety of other, more prosaic uses beyond *ad hoc* playhouse: it may well have served, for example, as a social and educational space for the choristers as well as their main rehearsal venue.[12]

An examination of the repertory of playtexts known to have been performed by the Children of Paul's yields little firm evidence about their performance space's internal characteristics. Following this line of enquiry, José A. Pérez Díez has drawn some general conclusions: the stage must have had a number of doors to facilitate entrances and exits, a probable discovery space in the centre, an understage area, and so on.[13] However, even basic facts such as the exact number of stage doors available have proven to be hot topics of scholarly debate. In 2.2 of *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, stage directions indicate that Mopso enters '*at one door*', Frisco '*at the other door*', and Joculo '*in the midst*'.[14] Later in 3.2, these same three characters are said to enter '*at three several doors*'. Whereas scholars such as Tim Fitzpatrick and Leslie Thomson would argue that these stage directions do not necessarily indicate that there were three stage doorways available, Mariko Ichikawa has taken an opposing view.[15] Other key questions include the depth, height, and even the basic orientation of the stage, which might well have been, as Pérez Díez notes, set up along different lines of orientation in the rectangular hall.[16] The mysteries abound. Was there a screen or *frons scenae*? What was a permanent fixture in the room, and what was mobile or capable of disassembly?

One thing we can say with great certainty about the Children of Paul's main performance space is that we still know very little about it at all. But it also merits noting that this was not the sole venue in which the Children of Paul's performed their plays. There is evidence to suggest that most if not all of the group's performances were, in some sense, designed to be mobile. It is worth considering the initial conception and development of the playhouse at St. Paul's in the early Elizabethan era: 'Westcott … established a fee-charging indoor playhouse for his choristers to use when they rehearsed plays for Court performance, so that spectators … might well have fancied themselves as one step away from participating in Court revelry'.[17] From the beginning, then, the dramatic productions at St Paul's were not only performed commercially by the boy actors in their own space: they were also meant to be staged in other venues with alternative layouts and architectural peculiarities of their own. As Michael Shapiro aptly reminds us, the Children of Paul's 'appeal' for early modern audiences 'depended at least in part on the notion that they were purveyors of theatrical entertainment to the Court'.[18]

It is relatively easy to trace records of performances delivered by the Children of Paul's for the benefit of royal spectators. We know, for instance, that the children's company performed at court as part of Queen Elizabeth's 1600–1601 season of winter revels. It is trickier, however, to determine the extent to which the Children of Paul's received occasional commissions to perform for aristocratic audiences in private residences elsewhere. In the particular case of *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, a longstanding theory holds that this play was originally conceived as part of the nuptial festivities for Anne Russell (daughter of the widowed Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell) and Henry Somerset, Lord Herbert. The couple was married in Blackfriars on 16 June 1600 in the season's most high-profile aristocratic wedding.

This wedding play hypothesis seems to have originated with Frederick Gard Fleay in the late nineteenth century and has been intermittently revived in subsequent scholarship. The prologue of *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, Fleay believed, would have been 'quite suitable to this occasion, [and was] by no means [intended] for a public audience'.[19] Fleay read much into the play's concluding lines, 'when their wedding chanced / Phoebus gave music and the Muses danced'. More particularly, he argued that the text of *The Maid's Metamorphosis* is here referencing an elaborate muses' dance known to have formed part of the Russell-Herbert wedding festivities. Contemporary personal correspondence, including two letters written by Rowland Whyte to Robert Sidney in the summer of 1600, provide some insight into what this entertainment entailed. In a missive dated 14 June, Whyte describes the preparations underway for a 'memorable Maske…of .8. ladies' in which the female masquers would include sisters of the bride and groom (Elizabeth Russell and Blanche Somerset) alongside six other royal Maids of Honour. According to Whyte, these eight ladies were meant to 'dawnce to the Musiq Apollo bringes' in the guise of muses and then a 'fine speech' would be delivered 'mention[ing] … a nineth [muse] much to her honor and praise'. In a later letter dated 23 June, Whyte briefly comments on the overwhelming success of this 'very delicate' production, in which Queen Elizabeth herself was successfully 'woed … to dawnce' along with the masquers.[20] Presumably, the queen took on the symbolic role of ninth muse in these festivities, as corroborated by a 24 June letter from John Chamberlin to Dudley Carleton wherein the author mentions 'the maske of eight maides of honour and other gentlewomen in name of the muses that came to seek one of theyre fellowes'.[21]

Fleay's conjecture that *The Maid's Metamorphosis* was an occasional production for the Russell-Herbert marriage was tentatively revisited at the turn of the twentieth century by R. W. Bond: he reasoned that *The Maid's Metamorphosis* 'may have been given on the Tuesday or Wednesday night of the same occasion, and that the last line of the Epilogue may refer to the masque of the preceding Monday night, June 16'.[22] Since that time, the theory has been endorsed occasionally by others, including Hillebrand, who found '[t]he fairy, masque-like quality of the play...well suited to a marriage', and Peter Saccio, who more tentatively describes the work as having been *'possibly* commissioned as entertainment' for the Russell-Herbert wedding.[23]

Whether or not this appealing wedding play theory is in fact true, it is worth reflecting that the plausibility of this hypothesis derives not only from internal suggestions within the text and tantalising hints of corroboration found in contemporary personal epistles, but also from the fact that the Children of Paul's are known to have entertained aristocratic audiences in venues beyond their own space in the precinct of St Paul's Cathedral. It is with the portability of the Children of Paul's and their theatrical repertoire in mind, then, that we turn to the second part of this essay.

Performing *The Maid's Metamorphosis* in 2024: Our rehearsal diary

Following the possible staging of *The Maid's Metamorphosis* for the Russell-Herbert nuptial festivities in June 1600, as well as the 'sundrie' additional shows in the Children of Paul's own playhouse, there is no reason to believe this work was performed again for a period of over four hundred years. This all changed, however, when Edward's Boys, the renowned all-boy troupe of King Edward VI School in Stratford-upon-Avon (KES), took on this little-known work for their 2024 performance season. This revival of *The Maid's Metamorphosis* stemmed from a series of fortuitous events. As two academics with longstanding interests in the reception of Ovid in early modern England, we became mutually interested in this play in 2019, and, aided by an Irish Research Council/Campus France Ulysses Grant, began to work on co-editing and linguistically modernising the text in 2020. In June 2022, an early version of our modernised text served as the basis for a reading facilitated by Robert Crighton, Artistic Director of the Beyond Shakespeare Company, with assistance from Daniel Yabut.[24] Shortly thereafter, we secured a contract with Manchester University Press's Revels Plays series for our edition and successfully persuaded the Director of Edward's Boys, Perry Mills, that *The Maid's Metamorphosis* merited serious reconsideration. Aided by a pre-existing partnership agreement between KES and the Institute for Research on the Renaissance, the Neo-classical Age, and the Enlightenment (IRCL) in Montpellier, we were able to enter into a collaborative relationship with Mills and Edward's Boys and were able to benefit from the IRCL's Artist in Residency Scheme.[25] This collaboration has proved mutually enriching, aiding both with our own preparation of the forthcoming edition and Edward's Boys' preparation for the 2024 performance season.

In the autumn of 2023, we shared our linguistically modernised version of the play and drafts of our textual apparatus for the edition-in-progress with Mills. In early 2024, we were subsequently invited to sit in as observers for some of the boys' initial rehearsals of *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, both online via Zoom and in person at their school in Stratford-upon-Avon. This enabled us to watch Mills and the boys making some of their earliest decisions about how they would interpret various facets of the play. During this period, we also produced more supporting materials: an essay about the play that was later published in the Edward's Boys' programme and an educational pack with additional information about *The Maid's Metamorphosis* that was disseminated to French middle school teachers whose students would later attend free performances of the show in Montpellier.[26]

In March 2024, Edward's Boys began a run of performances that staged *The Maid's Metamorphosis* at various locations across the UK and France. This included two shows on the premises of the boys' own school (13 March, 17 March), two at external schools (Dartford Grammar School, 14 March; City of London Boys' School, 23 March), one at Magdalen College, Oxford (16 March), and one at The Dream Factory in Warwick (15 March). The French leg of this tour brought *The Maid's Metamorphosis* to Montpellier, where the play was performed once at the public Théâtre Jean-Claude Carrière (26 March) and once at ENSAD, or École Nationale Supérieure d'Art Dramatique (28 March). We were very fortunate to see most of the performances throughout this international tour as well as the pre-show rehearsals that were conducted in each new location. This enabled us to witness Mills and the boys as they explored and assessed each new space and then expertly adapted aspects of their show in accordance with the particularities of each venue. And the venues had particularities! Over the course of their tour, Edward's Boys performed for intimate audiences of just a few dozen (Oxford; ENSAD) as well as to a packed theatre of 550 (Jean-Claude Carrière). They occasionally worked on thrust stages (Dream Factory; London Boys' School) and accommodated their performance to the demands of spaces as disparate as a

school sports hall with tiered seating for audiences of between 130 and 170 (KES), an intimate black-box studio (ENSAD), and even a university lecture theatre (Oxford).

As observers, we became fascinated both by the evolution of the show as it moved through space and time and also by the group dynamics between Mills and the boys as the necessary adaptations were negotiated. We also found that the historical playing conditions of the Children of Paul's were never far from our minds as we watched Edward's Boys in action. Whereas Hentschell, for example, has conjectured that '[r]ehearsing and performing plays undoubtedly distracted from the … liturgical singing lives' of the Children of Paul's and that the periodic 'conversion of their singing and residential hall to a performance space was likely disruptive', we found ourselves wondering if the truth might have been more complex.[27] As we followed the contemporary company, we were struck by how the boys' work on the play was integrated into their schooldays in both temporal and spatial terms and also by the ways in which their sophisticated textual analysis and impressive feats of memorisation undoubtedly drew on and reinforced skills being honed elsewhere in their educational curriculum.

It was not only on Edward's Boys' home turf that we found ourselves speculating about the earlier performance conditions and techniques of the Children of Paul's. Like their early modern predecessors, Edward's Boys also regularly take their shows on the road. As Mills and the boys toured *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, they had only a few precious hours in which to rehearse in the run-up to each performance. After a preliminary assessment, they worked together with great efficiency to fine-tune the blocking, choreography, and timing – including more complex dance routines, but also the most basic of entry and exit cues – to ensure that the show would produce similar effects under different performance conditions. Early in the run, blocking at Dartford proved challenging, for example, as the stage was narrower and much deeper than that of the boys' own school. This particularly impacted the play's spectacular fairy scene (a personal favourite for many of the actors, who saw it as 'a chance to let go').[28] The fairies' movements had to be carefully restricted in this space, while at The Dream Factory the very next day, this same scene was completely reblocked so that the fairies' dance would appear multidimensional and dynamic on the venue's thrust stage – a variation that some actors felt made the scene more vibrant, but that would not be fully replicable when the group moved back to proscenium-style stages in some of their later performances.[29]

One of the elements of the show that evolved the most during our period of observation was undoubtedly the cast's use of stage property sticks. These were used flexibly as staffs, but also to represent edifices and natural features. Notably, these sticks were also used to help create the onstage animate forest that served almost as a character in its own right and added significantly to the show's overall air of Ovidianism.[30]

This idea of playing with the forest emerged in the play's earliest rehearsals: actors impersonating trees would serve as an internal audience of sorts, reacting to the action taking place in their midst while simultaneously fostering a sense of ensemble by keeping most of the actors onstage at all times. As Mills explains, 'the trees add a dynamic, and an atmosphere, a stake'.[31] But this also meant the play's audience would need to be 'taught how the forest works'.[32] This education sometimes involved clever interplay with the dialogue, as for instance in 1.2 when Gemulo (Cameron Spruce) is looking for his mischievous servant Mopso (Justin Karki) and comments, 'I think my boy be fled away by charm'. This moment was staged so that, behind Gemulo's back, the audience sees Mopso playing hide and seek with his master: he appears in view and then deliberately blends his own body into the surrounding woodland, turning into yet another onstage tree. To avoid a cluttered downstage at Dartford, it was necessary to reblock these humanoid trees so as not to block the audience's view, while elsewhere, such as the expansive stage in Jean-Claude Carrière, the

sentient forest had to stagger itself into panorama formation to fill the space, creating the effect of a tableau.

Another element we followed with interest was the show's expansive and ever-evolving use of echo. This is a feature of *The Maid's Metamorphosis* in which we had a pre-existing interest stemming from our ongoing editorial work. From the beginning, we were curious to see how the play's acoustic dimensions might play out in performance. This includes not only the play's remarkable number of songs,[33] but also its conspicuous repetition of cries by various characters seeking the lost maid Eurymine and its paradigmatic use in Act 4 of an echo scene – a stock device used widely in early modern drama.

From the start, Mills shared our own sense that the auditory setting for this pastoral work would be crucial. Sound and echo were, in fact, explicit points of discussion in an early rehearsal when we joined Mills and the boys in Stratford in January 2024. There was a constructive conversation about the meaning of Ascanio's opening lines in the echo scene, as he (Thomas Griffin) and Joculo (Enrique Burchell) seek Eurymine (Adriel Vipin) in the pastoral landscape:

> Shall then my travel ever endless prove
> That I can hear no tidings of my love
> In neither desert, grove, nor shady wood,
> Nor obscure thicket where my foot hath trod –
> But every ploughman and rude shepherd swain
> Doth still reply, unto my greater pain?

We came to the shared conclusion that the rustic servant boys Mopso and Frisco (Joseph Valiaparambil) are being invoked in Ascanio's complaint that he is being mockingly echoed by 'every ploughman and rude shepherd swain'. This insight directly led to Edward's Boys' decision to use on- and off-stage echoes strategically throughout the production. In the course of the same rehearsal conversation, we also considered the punctuation of an ensuing line that reads 'it is the Echo, boy' – asking ourselves whether, in fact, this might alternatively or additionally be read as 'it is the Echo-Boy'. Is the echo in this play a natural acoustic effect, the mythological nymph of Ovidian tradition, or a mischievous Echo-Boy, a fairy in the woods? This entire range of possibilities was eventually activated in performance.

As Ascanio laments in despair in 4.1, the early modern text assigns repeated lines and phrases to an ambiguous speech prefix identified only as 'Echo'. For the play's director and performers, this raised interesting questions about whose voice should be heard delivering the echoed lines. Our discussion culminated in the decision that the part of 'Echo' should be voiced by the prophetic figure of Aramanthus (Rufus Round). This, we agreed, would add new meaning to Joculo's accusation, later in the scene, that Aramanthus is the 'fellow…that mocked us all this while'. As the show continued to develop, a later decision was taken to include additional deific voices in this scene that would create a more dynamic, polyphonic effect: both Juno (Tom Wood) and Iris (Charlie Harwood) reappeared onstage to help Aramanthus deliver the lines attributed to Echo. This was replicated elsewhere in the play, with the goddesses reappearing each time the seer Aramanthus delivered a 'prophecy'. This established a sense that the character of Aramanthus is functioning as an instrument of the goddesses, with the interplay of multiple voices hinting at a complex relationship between divine and human action and desires.

Over time, the company continued to experiment with their delivery of 4.1's crucial echo scene, as they also incorporated new echoes and echoing effects at other moments in the play. In dress-rehearsals, as well as on opening night, the more substantive echo scene of Act 4 was foreshadowed in Act 1 by the comic replies of three successive voices when

Gemulo passingly remarks that for shepherds 'the Echo daily sings'. Prior to the Dartford performance, however, a further decision was made that these disembodied responses should, in fact, be delivered in less of a staggered manner and instead blend together – thereby achieving something closer to Ascanio's description in 2.1 of 'prattling Echo' who 'the last word's accent [will] no more prolong / But bear that sound upon her airy tongue'. As one of the boys would later explain, it was a way to 'add a mystical quality not just like an echo, but some kind of prophecy'.[34]

The play's soundscape continued to evolve as the Oxford show made use of the unusual lecture theatre space, with additional echoes playing on the wooden auditorium's configuration. A side door with direct access to the outdoors enabled the boys to also incorporate offstage music in a new manner: oboe and trumpet players for 'A Hunt's Up' in Act 1 were stationed outside the venue in the gardens of Magdalen College, Oxford (as opposed, for example, to an indoor corridor used for the same purpose in the Dartford performance). The fact that the Oxford audience could hear the music drifting in from beyond, while also catching glimpses of this natural exterior – including the silhouettes of live trees – through the open door, created a sense of continuity between the sentient staged forest and the wider landscape beyond the confines of the lecture theatre.

Unsurprisingly, Edward's Boys' process of continual revision also incorporated learnings from past performances based on the director's notes and the earlier responses of prior spectators. Some modifications were predictive: as the show moved from the UK to the continent, a smattering of French-language jokes crept in to appeal to the new demographic. A comic '*arrête*!' made its way into a scene in which one character pelts another with acorns, and a reference to '*le chien*' was added to a routine where Joculo prances across the stage in imitation of a little dog.[35] Other modifications emerged more organically as the run progressed. In a Dream Factory rehearsal of a scene where Aramanthus (interpreted in this production as blind) begins to recount his tragic backstory to Ascanio, the actor unintentionally came very close to hitting his interlocutor with his stick (a prop that was, at that moment in the play, being used to represent a blind man's staff). Perceiving the humour, he added an exaggerated version of this move to subsequent performances. Another particularly effective moment of physical comedy that emerged out of the same mid-run rehearsal and was integrated into later performances involved sticks that were being used to represent the lintel of the door in Eurymine's rustic cottage. When entering the scene, the actor playing Gemulo was shown to be too tall for the constructed doorway, and the ensemble cast pointedly raised their sticks for his entry.

We witnessed theatrical problem-solving unfold in real-time on several occasions in the course of Edward's Boys' rehearsals and performance run. Upon their arrival at the lecture theatre in Oxford, for example, the group was faced with a dismaying 'DO NOT MOVE THIS PIANO. MANY THANKS' sign affixed to a piano that indeed took up a good deal of the stage area. Entirely unfazed by the obstacle, Mills gamely responded to the challenge by asking the boys, 'How can we incorporate it? Can this be a cave?'[36] Other modifications to the show were costume-related. A custom-made rainbow wig intended for Iris never made it to the stage at all, as it proved to be incompatible with the dazzling series of backflips and somersaults undertaken by international ballet dancer Harwood, who played the goddess. Pointed, hand-painted ears that had been made for the play's fairies eventually suffered a similar fate: as the Assistant Stage Manager Esme Cornish would later put it, they were simply 'thrown in the bin' at the final UK performance in London, as they invariably failed to stay affixed to the actors' own during the vigorous fairy dance scene.[37]

We wish to conclude this essay by coming back around to doors and the contentious, unresolved question of just how many might have graced the early modern performance space in the almonry at St Paul's. Questions of doors also presented a particular puzzle for

Edward's Boys throughout their 2024 run. Upon entering each new venue, one of the first things that the company explored was the number and availability of doors so that they could rework entrances and exits accordingly. The level of modification required varied considerably. In Oxford, for example, the actors often had to exit downstage left through an exterior door, which took them outside (in the rain!). The actors' re-entry from alternate points, which occasionally included the back of the room, involved harried dashes in and around the building itself. Doors also proved tricky as the boys prepared for their final performance of the tour, an intimate show in ENSAD's black-box studio. As they began to rehearse, the actors discovered that they were having significant difficulties hearing cue lines from behind the two entrance/exit doors located in direct view of the audience at the back of the stage area. As a result, they realised it would be necessary to leave these doors slightly ajar at some points, and an impromptu system was devised to determine which actors would be responsible for ensuring that doors were appropriately cracked or sometimes closed throughout the performance. When rehearsing the play's final scene, one of the play's Muses (Ilija Lazic) exclaimed 'I go, divine Apollo!' and rushed offstage enthusiastically in response to the god's command that he retrieve Eurymine. In the course of his hasty exit, the actor initially forgot to close the door – and belatedly returned to view to do so with an emphatic bang several seconds later. The comic potential of this moment of frustration was immediately apparent, and it became a gag that was replayed and further exaggerated that evening in the company's final performance. It is thus that even tiresome doors offer new possibilities for a group as creative and adaptable as Edward's Boys.

To conclude, the ongoing malleability of *The Maid's Metamorphosis* as the teenaged actors of Edward's Boys took their show from venue to venue in 2024 reminds us that the Children of Paul's, too, may well have adapted their own delivery of this same work to suit different audiences and performance contexts. Perhaps it will never be known definitively whether *The Maid's Metamorphosis* featured as part of the Russell-Herbert wedding festivities in June of 1600, but we nonetheless like to imagine that this play might have moved beyond the almonry at Paul's. Indeed, then as now, *The Maid's Metamorphosis* may have been successfully performed in other spaces, with varying numbers of doors.

Notes

[1] *The Maydes Metamorphosis* (London, 1600; STC 17188).
[2] Bastian Kuhl, 'The metamorphoses of Cupid: John Lyly's *Love's Metamorphosis* and the return of the children's playing companies', in *Childhood, Education and the Stage in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Preiss and Deanne Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 121.
[3] 'The printer to the reader', in *Endimion, The Man in the Moone* (London: I. Charlewood for [Joan] Broome, 1591), sig. A2. STC 17050.
[4] Reavley Gair, *The Children of Paul's: The Story of a Theatre Company, 1553–1608* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 112.
[5] Martin Wiggins in association with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama* (*1533–1642*): A *Catalogue*. Vol. 4: 1598–1602 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), entries 1218, 1227, 1231, 1239, 1271.
[6] Quoted in Herbert Berry, 'Where was the playhouse in which the boy choristers of St Paul's Cathedral performed plays?' *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 13, 2001, p. 101.
[7] Harold Newcombe Hillebrand, *The Child Actors: A Chapter in Elizabethan Stage History* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1926), p. 112; Michael Shapiro, 'The Children of Paul's and their playhouse', *Theatre Notebook*, 36, 1982, p. 11.
[8] Berry, p. 113; Roger Bowers, 'The playhouse of the choristers of Paul's c. 1575–1608', *Theatre Notebook* 55(2), 2001, pp. 78–81. The complementary conclusions of Berry and Bowers seriously challenged and largely overturned earlier, less persuasive arguments about the location of the space presented by Gair, pp. 44–74.
[9] Roze F. Hentschell, '"Our children made enterluders": choristers, actors, and students in St Paul's cathedral precinct', *Early Theatre* 19(2), 2016, p. 188; Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queens Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 16; Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Playing with boys

on Middleton's stage – and ours', in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, ed. Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 98.
[10] Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 338; Siobhan Keenan, *Acting Companies and Their Plays in Shakespeare's London* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 134; Helen Ostovich, 'Early modern theatre history', in *Teaching Shakespeare and Early Modern Dramatists*, ed. Andrew Hiscock and Lisa Hopkins (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 14.
[11] John A. Astington, 'Why the theatres changed', in *Moving Shakespeare Indoors: Performance and Repertoire in the Jacobean Playhouse*, ed. Andrew Gurr and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 16; Rutter, p. 98; José A. Pérez Díez, 'The 'playhouse' at St Paul's: What we know of the theatre in the Almonry', in *Old St Paul's and Culture*, ed. Shanyn Altman and Jonathan Buckner (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), p. 198.
[12] We borrow this description of the space as a 'multi-use hall' from Hentschell, p. 183.
[13] Pérez Díez, pp. 208–13.
[14] Throughout this essay, citations of the (modernised) playtext derive from our unpublished edition-in-progress of *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, the version of the text also used by Edward's Boys in their 2024 season.
[15] Tim Fitzpatrick, *Playwright, Space and Place in Early Modern Performance: Shakespeare and Company* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 254–8; Leslie Thompson, *Discoveries on the Early Modern Stage: Contexts and Conventions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 230–3; Mariko Ichikawa, ''At three doores', 'at three seuerall doores', and 'at the middle dore': Three stage directions referring to three stage doors', *Theatre Notebook* 74(2), 2020, pp. 82–98; Mariko Ichikawa, '"All the doores": A stage direction indicating more than two stage doors', *Theatre Notebook* 76(1), 2022, pp. 2–13.
[16] Pérez Díez, p. 207.
[17] Michael Shapiro, 'Boy companies and private theaters', in *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 317.
[18] Shapiro, 'Boy companies and private theaters', p. 314.
[19] Frederick Gard Fleay, *A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama, 1559–1642*, vol. 2 (1891; New York: Burt Franklin, 1962), p. 324.
[20] 'Letters from Rowland Whyte to Sir Robert Sidney, May-June 1600', in *John Nichols's The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I: A New Edition of the Early Modern Sources*, vol. 4, ed. Elizabeth Goldring et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 124–5.
[21] 'Letter from John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, 24 June 1600', in *John Nichols's The Progresses*, IV, p. 126.
[22] R. W. Bond, *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), III, 338.
[23] Hillebrand, p. 294; Peter Saccio, *The Court Comedies of John Lyly: A Study in Allegorical Dramaturgy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 226 [emphasis our own].
[24] A recording of this session is available: Beyond Shakespeare Company, '*The Maid's Metamorphosis* | Second Look (Beyond Shakespeare Exploring Session)', www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vVzCXrSw64&list=PLflmEwgdfKoLyxnNkL5c0vEyeyzaws_56 (accessed 29 March 2024).
[25] For the director's notes on this production, see, in this issue, Perry Mills, 'Failing, to find the maid: Staging *The Maid's Metamorphosis*'. A podcast with details about this collaboration is available: l'Institut de recherche sur la Renaissance, l'âge Classique et les Lumières, 'Perry Mills en conversation avec Janice Valls-Russell, Agnès Lafont et Lindsay Ann Reid (2024)', Phonothèque 'De Puck à Figaro', https://audioblog.arteradio.com/blog/176766/podcast/226821/03-perry-mills-en-conversation-avec-janice-valls-russell-agnes-lafont-et-lindsay-ann-reid-2024 (accessed 29 March 2024).
[26] A copy of our programme essay (entitled 'The Maid's Metamorphosis or the Metamorphoses of the Maid?') has been archived here: http://hdl.handle.net/10379/18107 (accessed 8 August 2024).
[27] Hentschell, p. 191.
[28] Cameron Spruce (Gemulo), Edward's Boys workshop in Montpellier, 27 March 2024.
[29] Callum Maughan (Silvio) and Cameron Spruce (Gemulo), Edward's Boys workshop in Montpellier, 27 March 2024.
[30] Movement for the production was choreographed by Struan Leslie.
[31] Perry Mills (Director), Edward's Boys workshop in Montpellier, 27 March 2024.
[32] Mills, Edward's Boys workshop in Montpellier, 27 March 2024.
[33] See Mills, 'Failing, to find the maid', in this issue.
[34] Rufus Round (Aramanthus), Edward's Boys workshop in Montpellier, 27 March 2024.
[35] For a review of the Montpellier-based performances, see the performance review authored by Alice Marion-Ferrand, Janice Valls-Russell, and Jean Vivier in this issue.
[36] Perry Mills, rehearsal at Magdalen College, Oxford, 16 March 2024.
[37] Esme Cornish (Assistant Stage Manager), Edward's Boys workshop in Montpellier, 27 March 2024.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Perry Mills and the Edward's Boys for sharing their performance process with us.

Funding

We received financial support for this project from a variety of sources. In addition to the Irish Research Council/Campus France Ulysses Grant that facilitated our early editorial work on the playtext, financial support for the performance run was offered by: the private families of Edward's Boys; University Paul-Valery Montpellier 3, Department of Anglophone Studies, College of Languages (UFR2); University of Galway, College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies; and the Artist in Residency Scheme at the Institute for Research on (IRCL), a joint research unit of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3, and the French Ministry of Culture.

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