

*Early Modern
Literary Studies*

***The Taming of the Shrew and Henry IV, Part 2* by William Shakespeare and *The Fair Maid of the West* by Thomas Heywood, performed by the American Shakespeare Center, Blackfriars Playhouse, Staunton, Virginia. 2 September - 28 November 2010.**

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Kevin Donovan, "Review of *The Taming of the Shrew and Henry IV, Part 2* by William Shakespeare and *The Fair Maid of the West* by Thomas Heywood, performed by the American Shakespeare Center, Blackfriars Playhouse, Staunton, Virginia. 2 September - 28 November 2010." *EMLS* 15.3 (2011): 12. <http://purl.org/emls/15-3/revdonov.htm>

The Taming of the Shrew directed by Jim Warren assisted by Aaron Hochhalter and Emily Gibson. Costumes designed by Jenny McNee. Fights directed by Colleen Kelly. Stage properties by Sam Koogler. Production stage management by Jay McClure. With Benjamin Curns (Petruchio), Jeremiah Davis (Pedant, Huntsman), Sarah Fallon (Katherina), Emily Gibson (Hostess, Widow), Allison Glenzer (Tranio), John Harrell (Baptista Minola, Haberdasher), Ginna Hoben (Bianca), Paul Jannise (Vincentio, Curtis), Chris Johnston (Biondello), James Keegan (Grumio, Lord), Daniel Kennedy (Christopher Sly, Hortensio), Patrick Midgley (Lucentio, Huntsman), René Thornton (Gremio, Page, Tailor).

Henry IV, Part 2 directed by Ralph Alan Cohen assisted by Brett Gamboa, Aaron Hochhalter, Emily Gibson, and Asae Dean. Costumes designed by Jenny McNee. Fights directed by Colleen Kelly. Stage properties by Sam Koogler. Production stage management by Jay McClure. With Sarah Keyes Chang (Falstaff's Page), Benjamin Curns (Pistol, Archbishop of York), Jeremiah Davis (John Duke of Lancaster, Lord Bardolph), Sarah Fallon (Lady Percy, Humphrey Duke of Gloucester, Earl of Surrey), Emily Gibson (Lady Northumberland, Peto, Davy), Allison Glenzer (Mistress Quickly, Earl of Warwick), John Harrell (Lord Chief Justice), Ginna Hoben (Doll Tearsheet, Lord Hastings), Paul Jannise (Lord Mowbray, Thomas Duke of Clarence),

Chris Johnston (Justice Silence, Poins, Earl of Westmoreland), Bob Jones (Bardolph), James Keegan (Sir John Falstaff), Daniel Kennedy (Justice Shallow, Earl of Northumberland), Patrick Midgley (Prince Hal), René Thornton (King Henry IV).

Fair Maid of the West directed by Jim Warren assisted by Aaron Hochhalter and Emily Gibson. Costumes designed by Erin M. West. Fights directed by Colleen Kelly. Stage properties by Sam Koogler. Production stage management by Jay McClure. With Benjamin Curns (Forset), Jeremiah Davis (Sea Captain), Sarah Fallon (Alderman), Allison Glenzer (Clem), John Harrell (Captain Goodlack), Ginna Hoben (Bess Bridges), Paul Jannise (Carrol), Chris Johnston (Joffer), James Keegan (Roughman), Daniel Kennedy (Mayor of Foy, Alcade, Sea Captain), Patrick Midgley (Spencer), René Thornton (Mullisheg King of Fez).

1. The American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, Virginia, is famous for its replica of Shakespeare's Blackfriars theater. The company is committed to performing Shakespeare and his contemporaries in a mode of "original practices": the house lights remain on during performances, there is little use of stage scenery, considerable doubling of roles, etc., though women play the women's (and some men's) roles. ASC is a repertory company, with several plays in production during any given week. Their productions are generally characterized by an energetic and youthful atmosphere, perhaps partly due to their close proximity to and association with Mary Baldwin College. Most members of the cast sing or play a musical instrument, and the company plays and sings covers of rock or pop songs with some thematic connection to the plays before the shows and during intermissions. The fall 2010 season featured Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, and *Henry IV, Part 2*; Thomas Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West*; and John O'Keeffe's 1791 comedy, *Wild Oats*. Unfortunately my schedule prevented me from seeing *Othello*, and *Wild Oats* falls outside the purview of this journal, so my review concerns only the remaining three; if it is partial, I hope it is fair.
2. The first of the three was a matinee performance of *The Taming of the Shrew* on 16 October. The play's induction, which frames the play proper as part of an elaborate joke played on a drunken tinker, was Slyly welded onto the pre-play skit-cum-address-to-the-audience which is standard practice at the Blackfriars. The blurring of the boundaries between Sly's play world and the audience began when Daniel Kennedy as Sly tottered onto the stage and seemed to interrupt Emily Gibson's address. Wearing a ratty basketball shirt, a baseball cap turned backwards, and black high-top sneakers ripped at the toe, he was the only character dressed in clothes that might be found on the streets of Staunton, the others wearing historical costumes. The blurring of boundaries continued with Sly's reference to "Ellie the barmaid at the Blackfriars theater"

and her polka-dotted socks instead of “Marian Hacket, the fat ale-wife of Wincot.” In contrast to Sly, the induction’s lord and his huntsmen wore pink jackets, top boots, and top hats while the characters in the play proper wore Renaissance costumes.

3. The director’s notes in the program announce that this production is staged entirely in a rather old fashioned spirit of fun and play: *Shrew* is characterized as “an Elizabethan farce” in which Kate and Petruchio fall in love at first sight. Rather than being brutally dominated and broken as in a number of recent stagings (most disturbingly in Conall Morrison’s 2008 RSC production), Kate experiences liberation and happiness when she learns to “play the game” with Petruchio. Various directorial choices reinforced this interpretation of the play. Thus Petruchio’s seemingly casual brutality to his servants was greatly tamed in this show. His beating of his servant Grumio in his first onstage appearance, for instance, was rendered innocuous by various means, not least by casting in the role of Grumio a big man with a powerful build, James Keegan, who seemed to give Benjamin Curns’s Petruchio nearly as good as he got. In fact the servant characters in this play—for instance, Allison Glenzer’s Tranio—behaved with little or no deference to their masters, though the production of John O’Keeffe’s *Wild Oats* which the company performed the night before the *Shrew* provided a clear reminder that even in the late 18th century a servant’s sitting in his master’s presence was considered an intolerable impertinence. Grumio and the servants of Petruchio’s household in act 4 seemed to play games with Petruchio as much as did Sarah Fallon’s Kate once she agreed to address old Vincentio as a “young budding virgin.” Thus in the well known speech in which Petruchio announces his plan to woo Kate undaunted by her reputation for shrewishness (“Think you a little din can daunt mine ears? / Have I not in my time heard lions roar?” etc.) Grumio cheerfully provided appropriately comic sound effects for the roaring of the lions, the raging of the sea, booming of cannonfire, and so on. In act 4 scene 1, when Grumio, Curtis, and the rest of the servants (including most of the cast dressed in blue coats) were anticipating the arrival of Petruchio with his bride, their speeches were delivered in a playfully knowing fashion; rather than being anxious and frightened of their master, they were clearly in on the joke.
4. The broad comic tone was reinforced in other ways as well. The role of the page boy of the induction who pretends to be Sly’s lady wife was given to René Thornton, the tallest man in the cast and bearded like the pard withal. (Since Thornton as Page and Kennedy as Sly also doubled as Gremio and Hortensio, they deftly slipped away from the stage for a quick change of costume before I.i.) Allison Glenzer’s cross-gender playing of Tranio was likewise played deliberately broadly, with comically exaggerated swaggering. While it is

common for actors to direct lines at particular members of the audience in the Blackfriars, where audience members are visible to each other, there were more such moments than usual in this production, notably when Petruchio declared his willingness to marry any woman provided she carried a sufficient dowry: “Be she as foul as was Florentius’ love, / As old as Sibyl, and as curst and shrowd / As Socrates’ Xantippe” (I.ii.69-71).

5. All of which prepared for the softening of Petruchio’s taming of Kate. Petruchio’s declaration “I am the man was born to tame you, Kate” was delivered in an exaggeratedly hectoring tone in contrast to his previous exchanges with her, exaggerated because it was meant to be overheard by Baptista Minola, who had just entered. Apparently Kate was already being invited to “play the game” with him. Broadly comic too was the delivery of Petruchio’s famous speech in III.ii when he carries Kate off following the marriage service (“She is my goods, my chattels,” etc.), which was delivered in a broad parody of Southern backwoods preaching, with Petruchio literally thumping a bible. In the final scene, when Kate’s eloquent praise of wifely submission climaxes with her offer to place her hand beneath her husband’s foot, Petruchio stopped her from placing her hand there and took it up with some tenderness. The cap he had bidden her throw to the floor he placed on his own head; as with his earlier madcap antics, he did not take himself too seriously or stand upon his dignity.
6. The production of *Henry IV, Part 2* that night moved at a brisk pace. Before the play began, a long sheet was unwound from the backstage wall, providing a written summary of the main events of *Richard II* and *Henry IV, Part I* relevant to the start of the play’s action. For the induction John Harrell as Rumor rose through a trap door at center stage. The leather cap with twisted horns which he wore suggested Rumor’s diabolical status as did his black robe stuck with leather tongues of various sizes. The play as a whole was competently performed but not especially memorable. The inevitable cuts to the script were skillfully made, though I missed the dying king’s warning reference to the “stings and teeth” of his “friends” in his final speech of advice to his son Hal, lines which deepen the dark view of politics informing Henry’s injunction to “busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels.” The arrest of Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet by Fang and Snare, often cut, was retained. Somewhat surprisingly, Ginna Hoben’s Doll seemed less desperate than defiant in this scene. The claim that she is pregnant was retained but not the reference to her faking the appearance of pregnancy with a pillow.
7. The most memorable feature of the production was the staging of the epilogue, delivered by James Keegan, stepping out of his role of Falstaff, a character who

had likewise just been displaced from his accustomed role as the prince's dog. He stepped onstage to address the audience holding at arm's length the fat-suit he had worn as Falstaff, and for a short time waltzed the suit about the stage while delivering some of the lines most explicitly referring to the epilogue's being spoken by a dancer. It was an intriguing decision that breathed new life into what can seem the most expendable of Shakespeare's epilogues.

8. It is always a treat to see a rarely staged play by one of Shakespeare's contemporaries. Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West* was published as two plays, parts one and two, in 1631. The scholarly consensus is that the sequel was composed long after the first part, which is usually dated during the last years of the reign of Elizabeth. The ASC staged the first part only, a self-contained and somewhat artless adventure story of "a girl worth gold." A brief summary of the plot may be welcome. Bess Bridges begins as a lowly serving maid in a Plymouth tavern in love with a gentleman named Spencer. Early in the play Spencer kills a man whose insulting behavior to Bess understandably enrages him. Forced to flee, Spencer and his friend Captain Goodlack join Essex's expedition to the Azores. When false news of Spencer's death reaches Bess, she fits out a pirate ship, the *Negro*, with the money which Spencer has left her in trust, and sets out to take revenge on the Spaniards whom she blames for his death. Meanwhile she has passed some extravagantly theatrical tests of her honesty and her fidelity and has demonstrated her physical courage as well by donning man's attire and humiliating a roaring but cowardly bully. Bess sets out with a band of faithful companions, including the clownish drawer Clem, the swaggerer Roughman (reformed after his humiliating discomfiture by Bess), and Goodlack (who also has reformed from his earlier treacherous behavior toward Bess and Spencer), and she triumphs over various foreign ships. The climax of the plot occurs when she enters the North African port of Fez, ruled by Mullisheg. Mullisheg is entranced by Bess's beauty and considers adding her to his harem, but her virtue inspires him to treat her honorably and bountifully—"Lust shall not conquer virtue." When she is reunited to Spencer, who had been brought to Fez by a friendly merchant while recovering from his wounds, all ends happily. Some final laughs are provided by Clem, who had eagerly embraced Mullisheg's offer of social preferment to the position of chief eunuch of the palace before belatedly recognizing the cost entailed. It is not a subtle play, least of all in its boastful patriotism, but played with brio it proved a crowd pleaser. And the scenes showing Bess's vulnerability to insults and sexual harassment while working in a public house were especially affecting.
9. Ginna Hoben as Bess was suitably earnest, plucky, and loving as required by the plot. Allison Glenzer played Clem as an overgrown guileless child, an interpretation prepared for before the show when she circulated through the

theater introducing herself to audience members and shaking hands: “Hi! I’m Clem!” Patrick Midgley’s leading-man good looks served him well as Spencer (he also played Prince Hal, Lucentio, and Cassio this season). A high point of the performance was Bess’s exposure of the cowardice of Roughman, played by James Keegan, which climaxes with her treating him as a lackey and asking him to “Untruss that point.” In reading the play I had assumed that the point in question (used to fasten doublet to hose) was part of her own male costume, but in this production Roughman was ordered to undo a lace on his own clothing, causing his trunk hose to drop to the floor, thereby revealing a pair of dayglo-colored Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle undershorts. It was not a subtle moment, but it was undeniably funny and appropriate to the broad humor of this play and this production.

10. Potentially tricky issues in the representation of the play’s most exotic ethnic Other, Mullisheg, were handled deftly by René Thornton, who also played Othello this season. The role has elements of absurdity in Mullisheg’s indulgent erotic fantasies, but the predominant note is exotic splendor and princely magnanimity. The Barbary Moors are certainly presented much more sympathetically than the cruel and haughty Spaniards, who bear the most ethnic animus in the play. Mullisheg wore flowing, colorful robes, and entered ceremoniously, with the similarly attired bashaws Joffer and Alcade beating out stately rhythms on tambourines. In the Blackfriars’ stripped-down theatrical mode of playing, these choices were effective.
11. All in all the experience of the plays was one of pleasant pastime in good company, thoroughly enjoyable though not really challenging (had I seen *Othello* this judgment might have been different). I look forward to returning to the Blackfriars for another season.