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Regina Buccola

'The top of woman! All her sex in abstract!'[1]: Ben Jonson Directs the Boy Actor in *The Devil is an Ass*

Shakespeare and Jonson are typically taken to be a study in contrasts – contrasts designed to privilege Shakespeare. Despite the fact that we have virtually nothing written in his hand, save, perhaps, portions of the intriguing *Thomas More* manuscript, Shakespeare is generally regarded as a *playwright*-for-performance, while, taken at his own surly word in the prefatory bashings of the public theatre audience that accompany the print versions of many of his plays, Jonson is widely considered *poet*-who-flouts-performance.[2] Critics typically assert that Jonson trades in the latter, reserving the former and all that it might reveal about early modern theatrical practice for Shakespeare.[3] Anthony Hammond explains that 'Dramatic documents may be classified (broadly) in two ways: as documents designed to be working tools towards the production of a play and as documents intended to present a reading text for a different public.'[4] Jonson is usually understood as trading in the latter, reserving the former and all that it might reveal about early modern theatrical practice for Shakespeare. This contrast is, however, capricious since some of the same logic used to reject the theatrical authority of Jonson's published play texts could likewise be leveled at the surviving texts of Shakespeare's works. Since we don't, in fact, have any of the scripts which Shakespeare prepared for rehearsal with the Chamberlain's or King's Men, those versions of the scripts that we have (and their few stage directions) are every bit as liable to the charge of 'fictional' authorial intrusion which is used to dismiss as unrevealing Jonson's more abundant stage directions.[5]

Like Shakespeare, Jonson wrote for a theatre in which he also, in his early career at least, performed. It is probably foolhardy to completely discount the relatively copious and abundant stage directions that Jonson provides on the grounds that he (allegedly) disdained the theatre as beneath his aspirations as a poet. As both Michael Warren and Anthony Hammond note, while Jonson is typically presumed to add stage directions in his printed plays with a view toward stimulating his readers' imaginations,[6] in fact his 'revisions for publi-

cation tended to the extreme of removing stage directions, even exits, in the interests of his vision of the published text as decontaminated of its theatrical provenance'.[7] The general assumption seems to be that Jonson removed anything and everything that might be revelatory about the staged versions of his plays.

Although Alan C. Dessen applies the project only to Shakespeare, my approach here is akin to his choice 'to accept the extant quarto and Folio texts as relevant and useful evidence about stage practice and theatrical vocabulary' regardless of the provenance of those texts on the assumption of 'a shared theatrical vocabulary' among authors and players.[8] It seems possible that the Jonson who saw Shakespeare on the boards in his plays and who wrote, by 1616, masque roles for princes and queens as well as their imitators in plays on the public stage recreates semi-realistic (in the sense of realizable) stage directions in his published plays. In Margaret Jane Kidnie's view:

> What the dramatic text can therefore provide us with is an ideal performance as imagined by the author and shaped by the dominant theatrical conventions of the historical and cultural moment of the play's creation as literature ... [M]odern readers can only glimpse among the extant textual fragments the ideal performance as envisioned by the early modern playwright.[9]

Kidnie's construction of the dramatic text as theatrical artifact, like my own, acknowledges the possibility that dramatic literature bears some tangible relationship to theatrical conventions.

The by now ingrained stereotype of the curmudgeonly Jonson who played Salieri to Shakespeare's Mozart is also, of course, possibly closer to the truth; perhaps Jonson wove an idealized version of the action in his published *Works* unhindered by the realities of what early modern costumes, actors, even the audience itself could and could not manage as he did so. Such a construction of Jonson's published dramatic corpus, though, leaves twenty-first century scholars of early modern theatre little with which to work. If we are going to continue to read the works of Shakespeare – published in many instances seemingly without his oversight — as indicative of early modern theatrical practice, their cryptic stage directions notwithstanding, then it seems that we ought also to accord Jonson, who is far more loquacious on the subjects of scene and action, some respect in the area of dramatic convention as well. Robert Weimann suggests that 'Jonson almost certainly endorsed "acting" as distinct from "playing" for its closer proximity, not to say submission, to the authority of the dramatist's text'.[10] This distinction is, in fact, metatheatrically

drawn in *The Devil is an Ass* when Merecraft incites Fitzdottrel to a better performance of demonic possession with the instruction, 'act a little' (5.8.70). Indeed, Jonson's frequent forays into meta-theatrics in plays like *The Devil is an Ass* and *Epicoene* offer internal evidence of his intimate knowledge of the realities of life on the early modern stage. One of the bits of meta-theatre to which Jonson turns in both of these plays is the staged spectacle of a man portraying a woman within his theatrical fiction just as they 'really' did on the stage for which he wrote.

Working from the premise that Jonson's copious stage directions and meta-theatrical dialogue have a thing or two to tell us about early modern theatrical practice, I will use one of his well-padded published plays to consider anew the question of the cross-dressed boy actor. The argument here will proceed from the most likely instances of authorial intervention in the form of stage directions that are, admittedly, more suggestive of imaginative fiction than stageable action, to the more subtle instances of dialogue and characterization that more convincingly, perhaps, reveal glimpses of early modern theatrical conventions surrounding the boy actor of female parts. While stage directions in published plays could refer to unstageable business that merely enhances the action imagined by the reader, and dialogue could have been added to the published text, Jonson likely would not have added entire sub-plots and their attendant characters to a published play. As I will demonstrate, Jonson draws careful distinctions among the female characters in the play that will be the subject of this essay, *The Devil is an Ass*, suggesting a range of performance styles for the boy actor. The meta-theatrical discussion of cross-dressed performance in *The Devil is an Ass* coupled with the sheer variety in its female characters make this play a fascinating artifact chronicling the range of the boy players' abilities and what playwrights and stage managers expected them to be able to do.[11] I maintain that one can use Jonson's play texts to salvage some clues regarding the ways in which boy actors played female roles.

This play, like so many Jonsonian comedies, stages the fears of the antitheatricalists.[12] The crucial logical move that Jonson makes with respect to antitheatrical hysteria in *The Devil is an Ass* is to make the heroine a character who avoids affairs and is faithful to her fool husband, a man who *has* fallen prey to the alleged corrupting influences of the theatre, from social climbing aspirations to effeminacy to demonism.[13] As I will argue, everything about this heroine suggests that she was likely played persuasively, convincingly, perhaps one could go so far as to say realistically. Jonson thus puts on the stage an indictment of the many excesses attributed to the theatre, but

renders them visible only by giving the moral upper hand to a female character whose appeal rests, in large measure, on her believability which is, in its turn, reliant on the great skill of the boy actor playing her – on, that is, theatricality.[14]

'A lady of spirit, or a woman of fashion!' (4.4.156)

Ben Jonson visits the issue of the cross-dressed male performer repeatedly and explicitly in plays such as *Epicoene*, *Bartholomew Fair* and *The Devil is an Ass*. It probably bears noting that this last play was not popular in the theatre – after its initial performance in 1616 at Blackfriars, there are no other reliable records of performance until 1972.[15] Given the play's lack of popular appeal, a certain irony might colour reading this text as any sort of indicator of the nature and quality of the cross-dressed representation of women on the early modern stage. Ample political reasons, however, explain why the play was shunted off of the stage without calling its quality (or the performances it requires) into question.[16] Perhaps more to the point, Jonson did not write it in anticipation of a lack of popular appeal or a short run. He originally wrote *The Devil is an Ass* with the aim of putting it on the stage, a venue in which he performed himself just as we know Shakespeare to have done.

In *The Devil is an Ass*, a male character, Wittipol, impersonates the widow of a Spaniard to seduce the play's stock fool, Fitzdottrel, and trick him into signing over his property to his wife, whom Wittipol craves for his own lover. Prior to Wittipol's cross-dressed seduction of Fitzdottrel, Jonson stages the city gallant's window-casement courtship of Fitzdottrel's wife, a scene rife with both dialogic cues for erotic interactions including kissing and fondling, and Jonson's own, likely fictional intrusions masquerading as stage directions, such as, 'He grows more familiar in his courtship, plays with her paps, kisseth her hands, etc' (2.6.70). Of course, in the original production of this play, her 'paps' and 'hands' belonged to a boy actor.

Numerous editors of this play speculate that the role of Wittipol was taken by a maturing Richard (Dick) Robinson – a renowned boy actor of female parts – in the 1616 London debut of *The Devil is an Ass* at Blackfriars. The play devotes considerable discussion to how the actual Dick Robinson would play a cross-dressed part and much meta-theatrical stage business about the costume Wittipol wears in his cross-dressed role, along with speculation about the believability of this faux actor's performance as a faux woman. Much of this stage conversation suggests that boy actors could, in fact, successfully 'play' women both on the stage and in the private company of male and female companions.

The play also suggests, however, other varieties of cross-gendered performance, and thus, I will argue, a range of possibilities for the portrayal of women on the early modern stage. I would like to build upon Kathleen McLuskie's moral typology of early modern staged representations of women to further suggest the performance styles likely to be appropriate to each. McLuskie argues that, 'For a woman character to be adequately represented on the stage, the category of woman must be disintegrated into the components of the moral typology – chaste lady, courtesan, married love, nuptial strife – which equally depend upon systems of signification.'[17] In *The Devil is an Ass*, this typology runs a gamut from Mistress Fitzdottrel's strained loyalty to a foolish husband to Wittipol's adoption of her identity while still attired as a man.

In her rejection of Wittipol's advances, Mistress Fitzdottrel stands as the chaste lady, a status which augments her role as the play's sympathetic heroine. Hailed by Anne Barton[18] as the first genuine heroine in Jonsonian comedy, the performance style accompanying such a role would likely be as realistic and convincing as possible.

In their contemptuous rejection of any notion that they be devoted to their husbands, the Ladies Tailbush and Eitherside are virtual courtesans, obsessed with sex and cosmetics. Arguably not only the play's depiction of these gossiping, social climbing city women eager to cuckold their husbands, but also Wittipol's hilarious stint as the Spanish Lady would be played in a style not unlike contemporary camp, which turns on glimpses of the male body beneath the feminine fashions and affectations. Early in his courtship of Mistress Fitzdottrel, Wittipol renders her a virtual ventriloquist's dummy, speaking as if in her person of her long-suffering status as the wife of a fool without altering his male costume. This is an utterly symbolic representation which makes no effort to mimic 'female' costume or behavior. Indeed, the plot of this comedy hinges on a theatre audience's ability to 'read' the play's varied manifestations of gender performance, because the meta-theatrical commentary in this play turns on the success with which the characters themselves are able to play their various roles and on the extent to which they are capable of being 'genuine'.[21]

Think of the recent independent film *American Splendor* in which a single 'person' is trifurcated: cartoon caricatures of a character share the screen with an actor playing that character along with the actual person being portrayed.[22] Clearly, the viewer can distinguish among these three representations but, equally clearly, if one has entered the theatre for enjoyment, one accepts each of these representations of the character on its own terms. They are, therefore, differentiated, and yet the same. All three of them are Harvey Pekar. As Carol

Chillington Rutter argues, taking issue with Stephen Orgel's seminal essay 'Nobody's Perfect, Or, Why Did the English Stage Take Boys for Women?', 'The English stage didn't "take" boys for women any more than it "took" commoners for aristocrats or Richard Burbage for Henry V. It did "take" players for the parts they played.'[23] What I am suggesting is that the varied representations of women in *The Devil is an Ass* were all apparently recognizable to the theatre audience as 'women' within the context of the play. That such is the case suggests that, just as directors Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini can assume that their film spectators are capable of reading documentary footage of an actual person, an actor's portrayal of that person and a cartoon of that person as, in some measure, all representations of the same person, Jonson seems to have been able to assume that his audience at Blackfriars would simultaneously recognize the range of characters he presented to them as women, and be able to distinguish the kind of women that they were on the basis of their varied representations because they had been socialized to read such a range of performance styles in the staged portrayals of women by boy actors. Thus, I am proposing a combination of Stephen Orgel's notion of early modern cross gendered performance – 'represented as all but impenetrable'[24] – and its campy corollary among critics such as Lisa Jardine who maintain that the boy actor beneath the woman's part was always titillatingly visible.[25]

'Hell is / A grammar school to this!' (4.4.170-1)

All of the play's numerous plot lines converge in the figure of Fitzdottrel, a country gentleman in the city hell bent on social climbing, and willing to use witchcraft, demon worship, get-rich-quick scams and the virtual prostitution of his own wife to do it. He adopts a minor devil, Pug, on a 24-hour visit to London as his page. He also makes a trade with Wittipol, the city gallant in love with his wife, of a cloak in which to attend – what else? – a production of *The Devil is an Ass*. In exchange, Wittipol gets fifteen minutes to talk to Mistress Frances Fitzdottrel uninterrupted, albeit chaperoned by her husband. Wittipol quickly figures out that her husband has forbidden her to reply to him, and takes the opportunity to speak for her, excoriating Fitdottrel as a fool who deserves to be made cuckold. Thus, by the end of the first act, Jonson has brilliantly served up the central fears of the antitheatricalists: class and gender role confusion, male effeminacy manifested in sartorial excess, female sexual incontinence, and magical practices that will by play's end shade into witchcraft and demonism along with (in what is, perhaps, the play's most clever

move) the inverse fear: that demonic possession itself is nothing more than theatrical illusion.[26]

While I fully agree with the cautionary note sounded by Kathleen McLuskie about taking the antitheatricalists at their word, some of the salvos in the antitheatrical debate regarding cross-dressed performance are consonant with the range of performance styles that Jonson's play evinces. Given the play's wicked and witty send-up of antitheatrical fears, such boundary blurring on Jonson's part may be by design[28] Nevertheless, the parts that Jonson wrote would need to have been played regardless of the authorial intention behind creating such a range of female 'types.' First, Thomas Heywood, himself an actor, scoffs at the proposition that anyone would be deluded into a sexual attraction to a boy actor portraying a woman. In an oft-quoted passage, Heywood demands, 'But to see our youths attired in the habit of women, who knowes not what their intents be? who cannot distinguish them by their names, assuredly knowing, they are but to represent such a Lady, at such a time appoynted?'[29] The reference here to names opens up the possibility that the male name reveals the ruse behind the performance, rather than the biology of the performer, or the quality of the performance itself. This concept of naming is highly relevant to *The Devil is an Ass,* in light of the name-dropping that occurs with respect to the renowned boy actor, Dick Robinson, celebrated, as we shall see, for his ability to delude even private audiences into believing that he is a woman.

Perhaps the most vehement of the antitheatricalists, Stephen Gosson, took particular umbrage at the negative example offered theatregoers by the actors and their performances, predicated on lies and deceit. After launching the typical invective against cross-dressing based in Deuteronomy 22:5, Gosson rails:

> All that do so are abomination un [sic] the Lord, which way I beseech you shall they bee excused, that put on, not the apparrell onely, but the gate, the gestures, the voyce, the passions of a woman: All which like the wreathinges, and windinge of a snake, are flexible to catch, before they speed; and binde uppe cordes when they h[ave] possession. Some there are that think this commandement of God to be restrayned to them, that goe abroade in womens attyre and use it for ingglinge, to shadowe adulterie.[30]

When the man that would cuckold Fitzdottrel moves to strike in the attire of a woman, the foolish fop is completely taken by the ruse and, indeed, sends his wife to learn of 'her' how to be a proper lady. What Gosson's invective

suggests and Jonson's play implies is that accomplished boy actors did much more than personate women via prostheses such as elaborate costumes and cosmetics. They were able, apparently, to mimic the vocal timbre, gestures, and mannerisms identifiable in the period as 'female.'[31]

Jonson, however, begins his exploration of cross-dressing and cross-gendering in *The Devil is an Ass* by setting both ends of the boy actor performance spectrum off against each other. When Wittipol cashes in on his promised opportunity to talk with Fitzdottrel's wife, he quickly deduces that Mistress Fitzdottrel has been forbidden to reply to him and, in a confusing bit of stage business, arranges to speak on her behalf.[32] In the text, Jonson's stage direction at this juncture reads, 'He sets Master Manly, his friend, in her place' (1.6.148n). A hubbub ensues, as both Fitzdottrel and Manly protest Wittipol's questionable actions since he is supposed to maintain a decent distance from Mistress Fitzdottrel. Moving to place Manly where she had stood is likely perceived as a violation of the suggestive rules of engagement to which he has agreed: 'always keeping / The measured distance of your yard or more / From my said spouse' (1.6.67-69).

In response to the fracas, Wittipol explains, 'This is for your wife' (1.6.152), as if to say 'I am doing this on your wife's behalf, since you have mandated her silence.' When Manly protests, 'You must play fair, sir' (1.6.151), Wittipol seemingly ignores him: 'Stand for me, good friend' – a request that is followed by the stage direction, 'And [Wittipol] speaks for her' (1.6.152, sd). Recent editors such as Peter Happé and M.J. Kidnie indicate in their notes that they regard this scene as necessarily one way from start to finish: either Wittipol stands for Mistress Fitzdottrel throughout, requiring that Jonson's stage direction be amended to 'He sets his friend, Master Manly, is *his* place' (Kidnie's emphasis, 1.6.148n) or Manly stands in her place with Wittipol adopting a feminine falsetto voice from behind her (Happé's interpretation at 1.6.152n). Let us consider at this juncture Alan C. Dessen's terms of performance analysis: '(1) what did a playgoer at the original production actually see? (2) how can we tell? and (3) so what?'[33] The text seems to suggest that Wittipol intends to have Manly stand in for Mistress Fitzdottrel, presumably by her side, while he speaks on her behalf facing the two of them, thus enhancing the persuasive force of his impassioned speech designed to persuade her to adultery. Apparently, Wittipol does not return to his prescribed position, 'The measured distance of your yard or more' from Mistress Fitzdottrel, until he has finished speaking 'as' her, at which juncture Jonson observes, 'He shifts to his own place again (1.6.193 sd). What Jonson's audience saw at this moment was the onstage adoption of a female role by a

clearly male actor without aid of either costume or feminine cosmetics, addressing a character intended to be perceived as a sympathetic heroine played, presumably, on the realistic end of the cross-dressed register but also known to be portrayed by a boy.[34]

One of the ways in which Jonson depicts the obtuseness of Fitzdottrel is in his radical inability to differentiate between genuine human motivations and behavior and their fabrications. Although his page, Pug, really is a self-proclaimed devil who appeared from hell while Fitzdottrel was attempting to conjure, Fitzdottrel does not believe him. Having witnessed first-hand the wiliness of Wittipol's courtship of his wife in the scene in which he speaks for her, Fitzodottrel cautions his devil-page:

> Lock the street doors fast and let no one in ...
> No lace woman, nor bawd that brings French masks
> And cut-works. See you? Nor old crones with wafers
> To convey letters. Nor no youths disguised
> Like country wives, with cream and marrow puddings. (2.2.155, 162-5)

While all of these figures – lace-women, bawds, even old crones – would be familiar figures on the streets of seventeenth-century London, 'youths disguised like country wives' gives one pause. Fitzdottrel seems to anticipate here the possibility that Wittipol will attempt to woo his wife by cross-dressing. Yet Fitzdottrel fails to discern that this is what is happening when Wittipol makes his spectacular appearance as the Spanish Lady. Instead, Fitzdottrel declares the cross-dressed Wittipol, 'The top of woman! All her sex in abstract!' (4.4.244).

In what initially threatens to play out as an elaborate game of saying no while meaning yes, Mistress Fitzdottrel responds to this visit from Wittipol by sending him an invitation to rendezvous via the devil-page, Pug, which is encrypted in a negative 'theatre review,' of sorts. She directs Pug to 'wish him to forbear his acting to me / At the gentleman's chamber window in Lincoln's Inn there / That opens to my gallery' (2.2.52-54). What Mistress Fitzdottrel has done is couch the script for an assignation in the seemly language of a rebuff. Proving himself aptly named, Wittipol takes the cue and appears shortly to play the scene for which Mistress Fitzdottrel has set the stage.

The stage direction for this scene, played at either adjoining or facing windows, directs Wittipol to fondle Mistress Fitzdottrel's breasts: '*He grows more familiar in his courtship, plays with her paps, kisseth her hands, etc.*' (2.6.70).[35] Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson note this stage direction as both 'unique' and 'probably fictional'.[36] Contemporary evidence, however,

leaves open the possibility that such stage directions were not fictional, but carried out to the letter. Once again taking under advisement the fact that these observations appear in an antitheatrical tract, consider the fulminations of I. G. in *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors*. Seizing on the action of the performers that Thomas Heywood so celebrates in *An Apology*, I. G. expresses horror at the 'active demonstration of cosenage, whorish enticeing, all kind of villainy, and hypocrisie; with embracing, clipping, culling, dandling kissing; all manner wanton gestures, and the like.'[37] Venomous spew of a confirmed theatre opponent or no, this description might well indicate the action called for during Wittipol and Mistress Fitzdottrel's rendezvous.

Then, too, there is the fact that the vast majority of Jonson's stage directions in *The Devil is an Ass* are simply reinforcements of actions suggested in the dialogue. So, for example, the stage direction 'He turns his wife about' precedes Fitzdottrel's line, 'Wife, your face this way, look on me' (1.6.228 sd). After an impetuous insult from Wittipol, Fitzdottrel has the ominous line, ''Slight, if you strike me, I'll strike your mistress' which is followed by the stage direction 'strikes his wife' (2.7.16 sd). I concede that the presence of stage directions that are more probably theatrical, such as these, does not render all of Jonson's directions so.

Beyond the stage direction to Wittipol to fondle Mistress Fizdottrel's 'paps,' Jonson's verse at this point also constitutes a lewd set of directions regarding what the actor playing Wiitipol is doing to the actor playing Mistress Fitzdottrel as he delivers the lines.[38] At this juncture in the Oxford edition of the play, Margaret Jane Kidnie observes, 'Jonson's fictional, as opposed to theatrical, stage direction elides the gap between the character and the body of the boy actor playing Mistress Fitzdottrel' (2.6.70n). While stage directions from this era are almost always opaque when they exist at all, Jonson fills the gap between the character of Mistress Fitzdottrel and the body of the boy actor playing her with the lines he puts in Wittipol's mouth.[39] Indeed, Wittipol's speech is a bawdy blazon, rendered well nigh pornographic by the proximity of the body he anatomizes. After a decorous apology for speaking on her behalf that morning, Wittipol rejoices:

> That since Love hath the honour to approach
> These sister-swelling breasts, and touch this soft
> And rosy hand, he hath the skill to draw
> Their nectar forth with kissing; and could make
> More wanton salts, from this brave promontory
> Down to this valley ... (2.6.71-76)

Wittipol might very well touch 'this soft / And rosy hand' as he refers to it. Half a breath later, the repetition of the verbal pointer 'this' seems to undermine the hypothetical nature of the verb 'could' – these sexually charged lines suggest the desire to mount a wanton assault first on Mistress Fitzdottrel's breasts, and then on her crotch.

Noting the large number of stage directions that call for some sort of violation of the body (usually either in the form of torture or murder), Dessen opines that the evidence suggests such events were likely staged, 'despite the obvious practical difficulties.'[40] If the hacking off of hands or heads could be stage managed in early modern England, why not 'embracing, clipping, culling, dandling kissing'? When addressed to a boy actor wearing a padded doublet and skirt worn over a wide farthingale, such lines could be quite suggestive without calling attention to the fact that the body beneath the woman's weeds lacked both a 'brave promontory' and a 'valley.'[41] Bear in mind, too, that this play was not performed in an outdoor venue where 'physical and visible discomforts, inescapably features of the game of illusion-making in broad daylight, made Elizabethans more aware than modern audiences in cinemas have to be that what they are watching is a deception.'[42] Rather, it was staged indoors, at Blackfriars, where the absence of natural lighting as well as the seating arrangements aided theatrical illusion. Yet, clearly, even when delivered to the face of the long-sought lover, these lines need not be accompanied by the actual physical contact for which Jonson's published stage directions call in order to achieve their effect. Helen Ostovich helpfully provides a detailed description of this scene in the 1996 Royal Shakespeare Company production of *The Devil is an Ass* at the Swan, in which Mistress Fitzdottrel was played by a woman: every time a body part was named, 'he almost touched [her] ... his hands approaching within centimeters and then skittishly avoiding contact ... He conveyed extreme desire with almost balletic elegance. She was mesmerized, almost swooning in response, as was the audience.'[43] Such an effect could have been similarly achieved in Jonson's own day, with a boy actor capable of providing a convincing performance as a woman in every respect but the anatomical.

Let us return, therefore, to the big picture. Wittipol and Mistress Fitzdottrel are the hero and heroine of *The Devil is an Ass*. As such, they are sympathetic characters; consequently the performance of Mistress Fitzdottrel's role must be distinguished from that of Wittipol's campy rendition of a Spanish Lady in the fourth act and, obviously, from the earlier scene in which he stands in and speaks for her with the aid of no costume at all. To do so, the actor playing Wittipol need not grope prosthetic breasts on a heavily

made-up boy tricked out like a department store mannequin. Jonson has written a script that clearly delineates the characters, regardless of the physical attributes possessed by the people playing them.

'I ha' my female wit,/ As well as my male' (4.4.154-155)

If present-day scholars are correct, the actor playing Mistress Fitzdottrel was paired in this play with a formidable stage presence, that of the mature boy actor, Dick Robinson, renowned in life and in this play for his convincing portrayals of women (2.8.64n).[44] In one of his many meta-theatrical sleights of hand, Jonson is thought to have written the part of Wittipol for Robinson, an in-joke rendered the more humorous when he reprises the cross-dressed parts that he played as recently as the preceding year as the Spanish Lady. The two principle aspects of the successful boy actor of female parts that Robinson would likely have lost by the date of this play (1616) are his conveniently androgynous vocal timbre, and his diminutive size. Discussing the limitations of modern conceptions of acting and character development, such as Method acting, in the effort to recover early modern performance styles, W. B. Worthen argues:

> These practices clearly contextualize character in ways probably undesirable – even unimaginable – on Shakespeare's more open, public, and interactive stage. As epilogues, soliloquies, and various versions of direct address to the audience imply, enactment of "character" in the Renaissance may have been a more collaborative or even collusive activity, one in which the seam between actor and character may well have been visible ('indicated' in Method terms) for good effect – patronage, crowd management, and so on.[45] Whether Robinson played Wittipol and, thus, the Spanish Lady or even, perhaps, Mistress Fizdottrel herself, Jonson opens the seam between actor and role wide. Given Robinson's popularity, this seems designed to achieve precisely the promotional effects that Worthen suggests from within the play. Since anyone seeing such 'promotion' would already be at the play, its aim seems to be to celebrate the skill of the boy actor.

Jonson also stages the 'casting call' for the part of the Spanish Lady. The discussion that is had there about the best actor for the job is open to many different interpretations, running parallel to the range of options for the performance of the boy actors as women that I set forth at the outset. Two of the con men working on Fitzdottrel decide to 'get a witty boy' to pose as the Spanish Lady with whom they well know the fop will be utterly taken (2.8.57).

Suggesting that this performance need not be convincing, one of them cracks, 'anything takes this dottrel' (2.8.59). The response to this is the suggestion, 'Why, sir, your best will be one o' the players' (2.8.61) and, shortly, Dick Robinson specifically is singled out:

> A very pretty fellow, and comes often
> To a gentleman's chamber, a friend's of mine. We had
> The merriest supper of it there one night –
> The gentleman's landlady invited him
> To a gossip's feast. Now he, sir, brought Dick Robinson
> Dressed like a lawyer's wife amongst 'em all
> (I lent him clothes), but to see him behave it,
> And lay the law, and carve, and drink unto 'em,
> And then talk bawdy, and send frolics! (2.8.65-73)

This speech might mean that Dick Robinson can not only convincingly play a woman on the stage, but also in person – and before women, at that. It might also mean that this performance was farcical, and perceived to be a performance by all that were present. Nevertheless, it revisits the ability of the boy actor to transcend gender, class ('lawyer's wife') and social proprieties ('talk bawdy').

This same discussion of Robinson's talent also sets up several scenes in which Wittipol appears before Fitzdottrel – who hates him and who has earlier in the play felt it necessary to beware of such cross-dressed trickery – as well as the crooked Merecraft and a group of self-absorbed city ladies in the guise of the Spanish Lady and goes unrecognized of any save his best friend, Manly, and the astute Mistress Fitzdottrel. At this meeting, two other female characters share the stage with Wittipol (disguised as the Spanish Lady) and Mistress Fitzdottrel: the suggestively-named Lady Tailbush (who has an equally suggestively-named servant, Pitfall, assiduously avoiding the advances of Merecraft and Pug) and Lady Eitherside, the wife of the play's moronic representative of the judiciary. These city ladies are cosmetic-wearing, fashion-mongering, man-hunting trulls who deliver lines like: 'If nobody should love me but my poor husband, / I should e'en hang myself' (4.4.97-98).[46] To approach McLuskie's notion of a moral typology for female performances from another direction, consider Gurr's assumption of 'stock performances, stock responses and stereotyped characterization'[47] for all roles, not just women's parts. In *The Devil is an Ass*, Jonson depicts at least three 'stock' women: admirable heroine, cross-dressed man, and sexually voracious cit.

The play's con-men position Wittipol as the Spanish Lady for their own purposes, but he quickly makes the project his own, hissing in a stage whisper

to his friend Manly, one of the widow Tailbush's suitors, that he has come 'To show you what they are you so pursue' (4.4.4). The audience is then treated to a pair of scenes in which Wittipol instructs these women in the latest Spanish fashions, including how to walk in ciopinnos (the high, cork-soled shoes that Wittipol wears in campy overcompensation for his height),[48] and recipes for a cosmetic application, repeatedly punningly referred to as a 'fucus'.[49]

The viciousness of Jonson's satire comes through most clearly here. Antitheatrical fears are presented at their most extreme in these scenes, in which cosmetic-laden women eager to cuckold their hapless spouses play host to a cross-dressed man on the sexual prowl with a particular appetite for a married woman. This man playing at being a woman is set directly off against the devil playing at being a man. Wittipol and Pug are linked, cleverly, not only by their impersonations, but by their costumes: like Wittipol, Pug is, to some extent, cross dressed, attired, as he is, in the suit of one of Lady Tailbush's male servants, 'specially made for wenching (V.i.36-37) and ... the whore's shoes "with a pair of roses, / and garters" (V.i.43-4)'.[50] The effeminate Fitzdottrel takes note of the decorative shoes when he meets the devil, concerned that 'those roses / Were big enough to hide a cloven hoof' (1.3.8-9). Indeed, Phillip Stubbes felt that such shoes were hallmarks of the devil, railing on 'Corked shoes, Pinsnettes, Pantoffles, & suche like for women.'[51] Like the incompetent devil whom he puts to shame with his deceptive prowess, Wittipol is sporting footgear held to be common to whores and demons, which is much admired by Lady Tailbush (4.4.68-77).

Wittipol spends his time with the ladies answering their pressing queries about Spanish cosmetics applications, yet another of the devil's doings according to early modern antitheatricalists. Stubbes fumes:

> For, dooe thei thinke, that the God of all glorie, and who onely decketh and adorneth the Sunne the Moone, the starres, and all the hoste of heaven with unspeakable glorie, and incomparable beautie, can not make them beautiful and faire inough (if it please him) without their sibbersauces? And what are thei els then the devills inventions, to intangle poore soules in the nettes of perdition?[52]

Touting various cosmetic recipes like a multi-lingual Avon representative while cross-dressed and ready to incite Mistress Fitzdottrel to adultery, Wittipol has outdone the devil.

Both Lady Tailbush and Lady Eitherside are played consistently for laughs. The humor of such scenes would be underscored by a staging in which the quality of Wittipol's performance as the Spanish Lady is rendered analogous,

via costume, cosmetics and performance style, to that of the Ladies Tailbush and Eitherside, leaving Mistress Fitzdottrel the only 'real' woman on the stage. The humour that inheres in Wittipol's performance, as well as in those of the Ladies Tailbush and Eitherside, would, conversely, be undermined if it were indistinguishable from that of the boy actor playing Mistress Fitzdottrel, a woman whom the play asks us to take seriously.[53] As James Mardock observes, 'the sheer proliferation of gendered artifice serves to foreground the virtues of those characters who escape satire, i.e., Mrs. Fitzdottrel and Manly'.[54] This distinction is the more clearly drawn when the quality of the gendered artifice is varied, built upon a more subtle style of performance for the heroine than her ludicrous stage counterparts.

Furthermore, this distinction emerges less in what Mistress Fitzdottrel is directed to do via stage directions than the character that emerges from her conduct and her compelling appeals for assistance in dealing with her horrendous marital situation. As Jonas Barish observes, Jonson 'works to make his dialogue less ornamental, more lifelike, obedient to the twists and turns of the thinking mind, but at the same time he enlarges its role, making it do duty, it would almost seem, for the element of spectacle he has so strenuously downgraded.'[55] Once her foolish husband sends her off for a private tête-á-tête with the Spanish Lady, Mistress Fitzdottrel takes matters into her own hands, and informs the still disguised Wittipol that she wants him for a friend and ally, rather than a lover. Astutely assessing her dire situation, she declares, 'My fortunes standing in this precipice, / 'Tis counsel that I want, and honest aids: / And in this name I need you for a friend!' – a request which Manly leaps out from behind the arras to second (4.6.24-6, 28-30).

Finally, the Spanish Lady ruse occasions an on-stage unmasking, in which Wittipol 'discovers himself' (4.7 sd). One might profitably pose here the question that Helen Ostovich asks of an analogous moment in a play similarly complex in its treatment of gender, *Epicoene*: 'Once Epicoene's peruke is off, do we not look askance at the perukes and gowns of the Ladies Collegiate?'[56] Jonson asks us to look askance at the women running with gusto the 'schools of abuse' depicted in each of these plays. A different regard is reserved for Mistress Fitzdottrel, however, which must inhere in the way that the role is performed. As Richard Cave notes, '*Acting* for Jonson meant *impersonation* to the fullest degree; none of his disguised characters is ever detected till they choose to reveal themselves and then it is the totality of the disguise (voice, accent, vocabulary, dress, manner, deportment, posture) that is commented on; admiration for the metamorphosis is invariably coloured by awe and shades of fear.'[57] For an audience to fully appreciate the humor that inheres

in the fact that Fitzdottrel and the Ladies Tailbush and Eitherside unduly admire Wittipol's camp performance of the Spanish Lady, this impersonation must be of a kind and quality distinct from that of the boy actor portraying Mistress Fitzdottrel. Where Wittipol reads as a parody of women whose substance is constituted by their cosmetics and clothes, Mistress Fitzdottrel must convey a self that is woman to the core, regardless of the biological sex of the actor playing her.

She is also, as noted at the outset of this essay, a chaste woman. Although she arranges an assignation with Wittipol, it turns out that she wants his help in recouping the financial losses she has suffered since marrying Fitzdottrel. Andrew Gurr notes, 'Jonson might well have thought that the seductions of love and the seductions of stage action did the same job of overwhelming the powers of reason.'[58] Here, Jonson stages both kinds of seduction, but the powers of reason prevail in both instances. Jonson's cruelly realistic ending may well be another reason for the play's lack of popularity: people tend to want to see love prevail at the end of a comedy, rather than reason. Note again the year of this play – 1616. By this point in his career, Jonson was fully ensconced in the Jacobean court and had been routinely writing parts for actual female performers. I think it no coincidence that this is the juncture at which Jonson writes a convincing heroine for the public stage – a woman who can hold her own in the company of an effete clothes horse like her husband, parodically masculine 'cits', and the flamboyant, cross-dressed Wittipol.

Now that we have Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in Southwark staging all manner of cross-cast productions, the range of performance styles that Jonson seems to require here has begun to emerge as quite logical. Consider, for example, the Globe's *Twelfth Night*. In the U. S. tour of this play, audience members were invited to arrive at the theatre early, to watch the all-male cast layer on face paint and lace themselves up into authentic Elizabethan garb.[59] Despite having watched the actors' metamorphoses from men into women, few of the audience members spent the company's two hours' traffic of the stage thinking about the fact that a man was playing Olivia. Artistic director Mark Rylance played her in a manner designed to exaggerate the foolish austerity of the character, an attribute accentuated by his overt falsetto voice and his fluid, skirt-draped walk, which made him appear to be rolling across the stage on a set of casters. Viola, on the other hand, was played by Michael Brown with much greater nuance, quiet speech serving in place of falsetto, even when she was in her 'woman's weeds' at the outset. Far from thinking of her as a man, I and most members of the audience were, rather, aware throughout that 'he' was supposed to be a woman, even in doublet and hose.[60]

Even though we cannot recreate the notions of gender and its associated bodily conduct that prevailed in Jonson's London, we could learn much from modern cross-gender cast productions of *The Devil is an Ass*. Since the Globe does stage non-Shakespearean drama, perhaps such an opportunity will be afforded us sooner rather than later.

Notes

I wish to thank Jonathan Walker, James Mardock, Helen Ostovich, and two anonymous readers with *Early Theatre* who provided generous feedback on earlier incarnations of this essay.

1 Ben Jonson, *The Devil Is An Ass and Other Plays*, ed Margaret Jane Kidnie (Oxford, 2000), 4.4.244. Subsequent act, scene, and line references will appear parenthetically in the text and will be derived from this edition of the play unless otherwise noted.

2 To consider only two of many examples, Michael Warren distinguishes Jonson from Shakespeare, cautioning that, 'in the case of Jonson we have to be aware of the possibility, and in places of the certainty, of the authorial presence mediating between the theatrical event and the page.' See 'The Theatricalization of Text: Beckett, Jonson, Shakespeare', *New Directions in Textual Studies*, ed Dave Oliphant and Robin Bradford (Austin, 1990), 41. Peter Happé notes that 'Jonson's purpose with regard to marginal notes ... was twofold: to give stage directions, but also to signal or underline events in a way which is not aimed at performance so much as to reading the book.' See Ben Jonson, *The Devil is an Ass*, ed Peter Happé, The Revels Plays (New York,1994), 41.

3 See, for example, Andrew Gurr, 'Hearers and Beholders in Shakespearean Drama', *Essays in Theatre*, 3.1 (Nov. 1984), 30; Robert Weimann's discussion of Jonson as exemplar of the distinction between print plays (elite) and performance of plays (popular) in *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture vol. 39, (Cambridge, 2000), 125-7; and, finally, consider Jonas Barish's assessment that 'Jonson, despite a lifetime of writing for the stage, never arrived at a comfortable modus vivendi with his audiences'. See *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Los Angeles, 1981), 133 as well as 137 for his version of the page vs stage controversy with respect to Jonson.

4 Anthony Hammond, 'Encounters of the Third Kind in Stage-Directions in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama', *Studies in Philology* 89.1 (Winter 1992),

72. Edward Pechter also discusses the 'stage vs page' controversy as it relates to Jonson in 'Textual and Theatrical Shakespeare: Questions of Evidence', *Textual and Theatrical Shakespeare: Questions of Evidence*, ed Edward Pechter (Iowa City, 1996), 18-19.

5 The reference to 'fictional' stage directions is from Alan C. Dessen, 'The Body of Stage Directions', *Shakespeare Studies*, 29 (2001), 28, to indicate a juncture at which 'the author of a stage direction slips into a narrative mode so as to tell the story rather than provide instructions for an actor.' Challenging even the possibility of recovering Shakespearean theatrical practice, Margaret Jane Kidnie points out, 'whereas the script is regularly transformed into or enters performance, performance can in no way be seen as contained within the script.' See 'Text, Performance, and the Editors: Staging Shakespeare's Drama', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51.4 (2000), 464.

6 See, for instance, Andrew Gurr's claim that 'Ben Jonson was notoriously specific, even though his printed texts regularly added more, as their publication made clear, than was originally supplied on the stage.' In 'Shakespeare and the Visual Signifier', *Reclamations of Shakespeare*, ed A.J. Hoenselaars, Studies in Literature vol. 15, (Atlanta, 1994), 13. In 'Stage Directions as Evidence: The Question of Provenance', Alan C. Dessen notes the unreliability of 'staging signals in Jonson's printed plays ... because of Jonson's own distinctive practice of augmenting his texts for a reader.' See *Shakespeare: Text and Theater*, ed Lois Potter and Arthur F. Kinney (Newark, 1999), 235. However, Dessen goes on to maintain that 'to build edifices composed of elements found only in Jonson's signals would seem unwarranted, but to draw upon such materials when they do correspond to comparable terms used by other playwrights (as part of a shared vocabulary) would seem appropriate.' See 236.

7 Hammond, 'Encounters of the Third Kind', 73 fn 5. Warren notes, 'Jonson suppressed a great deal in his revisions and, I will suggest, obscured the theatrical reality while giving details of the plays' theatrical histories', in 'The Theatricalization of Text', 41. Picking up on the assumption that Jonson perceived the theatre as a contaminant, Alan C. Dessen characterizes Jonson as a poet who 'reclaimed' his work from the players 'and self-consciously prepared reading texts unconstrained by the limitations (or "contamination") of the playhouse (so that for most of Jonson's plays any sense of the original performance text has been blurred if not lost).' See *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge, 1995), 7.

8 Dessen, *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary*, 13.

9 See Kidnie, 'Text, Performance, and the Editors', 465 and 467.

10 Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice,* 132. Weimann goes on to note that, by the seventeenth century, a shift had begun to occur 'from body-oriented playing to text-oriented acting, without the latter, of course, ever quite engulfing the former ... [A] perception of a difference between such "playing" and such "acting" was in the air by 1600' (133).

11 Michael Shapiro and Susan Zimmerman also argue for a range of interpretations of female roles by the boy actors. See Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 7 and 33; and Susan Zimmerman, 'Disruptive Desire: Artifice and Indeterminacy in Jacobean Comedy', *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed Susan Zimmerman (New York, 1992), 55.

12 For general overviews of these concerns, see Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage*, 29-47; Jean Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (New York, 1994), 93-128; and Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization, 1579-1642* (Cambridge, 1994), 73. For a discussion of Jonson's response to antitheatrical pressures, see Richard Burt, *Licensed by Authority: Ben Jonson and the Discourses of Censorship* (Ithaca, 1993), especially chapters 2-3.

13 As W.B. Worthen observes, 'In the popular imagination, of course, actors were routinely associated with prostitution, gambling, vice, "effeminacy," and even with Satan.' See 'Staging "Shakespeare": Acting, Authority and the Rhetoric of Performance', *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*, ed James C. Bulman (New York, 1997), 27 fn 9.

14 Stephen Greenblatt, on the other hand, maintains that, in this play, 'the anti-theatrical Jonson has all too clearly won the war'. See 'Loudon and London', *Critical Inquiry* 12.2 (Winter, 1986) 342.

15 For a detailed discussion of the play's stage history, see Peter Happé, 'Introduction', *The Devil is an Ass* (New York, 1994), 21-2. The play was not included in Jonson's 1616 folio *Works*, and was not published until 1640 (after Jonson's death). For more on the complex publication history of this play, see Happé, 1 and 35-7.

16 Both Leah Marcus and Robert C. Evans offer thorough discussions of the topical aspects of the play that might have precipitated its suppression. See Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago, 1986), 85-105 and Evans, 'Contemporary Contexts of Jonson's *The Devil Is an Ass*', *Comparative Drama* 26.2 (1992 Summer), 140-76. William Savage Johnson notes, in his edition of *The Devil is an Ass*, Yale Studies in English vol. 29 (New York, 1905), lxiii, that the folio

edition of James' *Daemonologie* appeared in 1616, the same year that Jonson staged *Devil* at Blackfriars. As Johnson points out, this connection suggests one possible reason that the play was suppressed.

17 Kathleen McLuskie, *Renaissance Dramatists*, Feminist Readings Series (New York, 1989), 110. For a spectrum of performance styles for 'wooing scenes that used boy actors in disguise' (as boys) that is linked to generic conventions, see Henk Gras, 'Enchanting Metadrama: Shakespeare's Use of the Boy Actor in *As You Like It*', *Reclamations of Shakespeare*, ed A.J. Hoenselaars, vol. 15, Studies in Literature (Atlanta, 1994), 53-4.

18 See Anne Barton, *Ben Jonson: Dramatist* (Cambridge, 1984), 224, as well as Helen Ostovich, 'Hell for Lovers: Shades of Adultery in *The Devil is an Ass*', *Refashioning Ben Jonson: Gender, Politics and the Jonsonian Canon*, ed Julie Sanders (New York, 1998), 155; Claude Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, *Ben Jonson Revised* (New York, 1999), 94; and James Mardock, 'Hermaphroditical Authority in Jonson's City Comedies', *The Ben Jonson Journal* 9 (2002), 69-86, esp. 81.

19 See Grace Tiffany, 'How Revolutionary Is Cross-Cast Shakespeare? A Look at Five Contemporary Productions', *Shakespeare: Text and Theater*, ed Lois Potter and Arthur F. Kinney (Newark, 1999), 120, who asserts that 'virtually all Renaissance dramatic productions ... were designed to sustain the audience's illusion that female characters *were* female'.

20 This style of performance is beautifully summed up by Linda Phyllis Austern: 'The Elizabethan or Jacobean actor, then, simply conveyed a male or female bodily image by literally giving life to the strongly dualistic ideas codified by gender theorists. He made good use of the costumes, properties, and gestures through which each gender was identified until the clothes almost literally made the man or woman.' See '"No Women are Indeed": The Boy Actor as Vocal Seductress in Late Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century English Drama', *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture* (Cambridge, 1994), 87.

21 Elizabeth Shafer notes these features of the play as well, and calls for further consideration of their implications – a call to which I am responding in this essay. See 'Daughters of Ben', *Ben Jonson and Theatre: Performance, Practice, and Theory*, ed Richard Cave, Elizabeth Schafer, and Brian Woolland (New York, 1999), 174-5.

22 Dir. Shari Springer Bernam and Robert Pulcini, Perf. Paul Giamatti, Hope Davis, Harvey Pekar (Fine Line Features, 2003).

23 See *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (New York, 2001), xiv.

24 See *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge, 1996), 18-19, as well as Richard Cave, 'Acting in Jonson', in *Ben Jonson and Theatre*, ed Cave et al, 59.

25 See Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters*, 2nd ed (New York, 1989), 20-9.

26 On class and gender role confusion, see Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Los Angeles, 1981). On male effeminacy, see Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations*, 27-9; and Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1996), 150-74. For discussions of female sexuality and magic, see Stephen Greenblatt, 'Loudon and London', 336-7; Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing*, 108; Robert C. Evans, 'Contemporary Contexts of Jonson's *The Devil Is an Ass*', *Comparative Drama* 26.2 (1992 Summer), 140-76; and Leah Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth*, 85-105.

27 See *Renaissance Dramatists*, Feminist Readings Series (New York, 1989), 111-12.

28 Linking such moves in Jonson to his disdain for the degradations to which he presumably felt that theatrical staging subjected his poetry, Robert Weimann avers that such aping of antitheatricalist propaganda in Jonson's plays 'must be seen as antihistrionic rather than anti-theatrical depradations' (*Author's Pen and Actor's Voice,* 63).

29 Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors (*1612), introd. Richard H. Perkinson (New York, 1941), C3v. Original spelling, capitalization and punctuation have been maintained in quotations from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts.

30 Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in five Actions, Proving that they are not to be suffred in a Christian common weale, by the waye both the Cavils of* Thomas Lodge*, and the* Play of Playes*, written in their defence, and other objections of Players frendes, are truly set downe and directlye aunsweared*, (London, nd), E3-4.

31 After listing several neutral observers of cross-dressed performances on the seventeenth-century stage including John Manningham, Henry Jackson, Simon Forman, and Abraham Wright, Bruce R. Smith notes, 'Every one of these informants writes about the fictional female characters he saw as if those female characters were female persons.' See 'Making a Difference: Male/Male "Desire" in Tragedy, Comedy, and Tragi-Comedy', in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed Zimmerman, 129. For additional testimony to the 'realistic' success of the boy actors' performances, see Joy Leslie Gibson, *Squeaking Cleopatras: The Elizabethan Boy Player* (Stroud, 2000), 193-4.

32 A number of critics have discussed the ways in which this scene stages the suppression of women, including: James Mardock, 'Hermaphroditical Authority', 80; and the following essays in *Ben Jonson and Theatre*, ed Cave et al.: Richard

Cave, 'Directing Jonson', 72; Brian Woolland, 'The Gift of Silence', 129-30; and Julie Sanders, '"Twill Fit the Players Yet": Women and Theatre in Jonson's Late Plays', 185.

33 *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary*, 218. Consider too the cautionary note he sounds in asking of early modern playwrights, 'do we understand their shared theatrical vocabulary well enough to dismiss apparently fictional signals that could indeed be theatrical ... ?', 222.

34 Helen Ostovich, in 'Hell for Lovers', 168, makes the interesting suggestion that at this juncture the actor playing Wittipol 'stands in physically as well as verbally for Frances, simulating her posture and her pitch as he echoes her thoughts'. As this is an important scene for establishing audience sympathy for Mistress Fitzdottrel, such a staging would have to be pursued with care.

35 The space 'aloft,' above the doors for entrances and exits, could be used to represent facing or adjoining windows as easily as the tiring house. Indeed, after Fitzdottrel interrupts Wittipol's rendezvous with his wife, Jonson directs '*Fitzdottrel enters with his wife as come down*' (2.7.28 sd); Kidnie notes at this juncture, 'this stage direction indicates that the Fitzdottrels descend from the balcony to enter the main stage from the tiring-house doors' (2.7.23n). Dessen, *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary,* 141, cites this direction, however, as one of the 'odd or unique examples [that] may be unreliable as a basis for extrapolation'.

36 *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580-1642* (Cambridge, 2000), 38.

37 I[ohn] G[reene], *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors* (1615) in *An Apology for Actors*, introd. Richard H. Perkinson (New York, 1941), 56.

38 Hammond also considers the significance of stage direction implicit in theatrical dialogue, in 'Encounters of the Third Kind', 75. See also Dessen, who asserts that 'Dialogue evidence is far more plentiful [than surviving accounts of early modern performances], but, whether for the body or other concerns, this material represents shifting sands, not bedrock ... [A]re such descriptions substitutes for what cannot be bodily displayed to the playgoer?' ('The Body of Stage Directions', 27).

39 For further consideration of the staging of erotic scenes using boy actors as women, see Peter Stallybrass, 'Transvestism and the "Body Beneath": Speculating on the Boy Actor', *Erotic Politics*, ed Zimmerman, 64-83.

40 See 'The Body of Stage Directions', 33.

41 See Gibson, *Squeaking Cleopatras*, 35-42 for a discussion of women's attire in early modern England. Sharing my sense that the lines here suggest a highly physical performance, Elizabeth Schafer, 'Daughters of Ben', 174, asserts, 'This stage

moment, as Jonson envisioned it, had a boy player, playing Frances, presenting "breasts" to be caressed by a fully grown male player, Dick Robinson, playing Wittipol'. See also Kathleen McLuskie, *Renaissance Dramatists*, 102.

42 Andrew Gurr, 'Staging at the Globe', *Shakespeare's Globe Rebuilt*, ed J.R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Cambridge, 1997), 160.

43 'Hell for Lovers', 181 fn 46. See also Peter Happé's discussion of this performance in 'Staging *The Devil Is an Ass* in 1995', *The Ben Jonson Journal* 2 (1995), 239-46.

44 See Happé, 'Introduction', *The Devil is an Ass*, 21. For a different view, see T.W. Baldwin, *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company* (Princeton, 1927), 224-5, who contends that Robinson was chief apprentice in 1616, taking the principal female parts. This opinion raises the very interesting possibility that Robinson, in fact, played Mistress Fitzdottrel, in which case the praise heaped upon Robinson in the play would constitute an onstage rave review of his performance.

45 W.B. Worthen, 'Deeper Meanings and Theatrical Technique: The Rhetoric of Performance Criticism', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40.4 (Winter 1989), 454-5.

46 See James Mardock, 'Hermaphroditical Authority in Jonson's City Comedies', *The Ben Jonson Journal* 9 (2002), 69-86 for a discussion of the subtle ways in which Jonson deploys gender-based stereotypes in his complex cross-dressed roles in part, seemingly, to challenge their validity, and Gibson, *Squeaking Cleopatras*, 44-7 for the early modern grounding of 'realistic' female performances in gender stereotypes.

47 Andrew Gurr, 'The Elizabethan Stage and Acting', *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, vol. 2: *The Age of Shakespeare*, ed Boris Ford (New York, 1982), 248.

48 Gibson, *Squeaking Cleopatras*, 39, identifies chopines as 'little wooden stilts which would not only protect the shoes but keep skirts out of the filth and mud'; see also Hamlet's greeting to one of the traveling players: 'What, my young lady and mistress? By'r Lady, your ladyship is nearer to heaven than when I saw you last by the altitude of a chopine' (2.2.408-10). The context makes it clear that the youth's advancing years are soon going to make it difficult to convincingly cast him in female parts. See *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York, 1997).

49 According to Annette Drew-Bear, 'The word fucus itself implies deceit. This Latin term, which originally meant red dye, rouge, or false color, was used by seventeenth century and classical writers not only to signify paint or cosmetic for beautifying the skin but also to imply pretense, disguise dissimulation.' See

Painted Faces on the Renaissance Stage: The Moral Significance of Face-Painting Conventions (Lewisburg, 1994), 86.

50 See Happé, 'Introduction', 20.

51 Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomy of Abuses* (London, 1583), sig. 40. Consider, too, that Mary Frith is depicted wearing just such rosette-adorned shoes along with elaborate garters for her billowing pants in the woodcut that served as the title page for the 1611 edition of *The Roaring Girl*. See Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, New Mermaids, ed Elizabeth Cook (New York, 2000), 1.

52 See *The Anatomy of Abuses*, sig. 33.

53 One might consider here the casting choices that Helen Ostovich proposes for *Volpone* and *Epicoene*: 'While it is quite likely that in *Volpone* an adult clown played Lady Would-be as a "dame" role, leaving Celia for a conventionally androgynous boy-actor, we cannot be so sure about how Jonson loaded the dice in *Epicoene*. Did larger, older boys play the Ladies Collegiate as grotesques? Or was Mistress Otter the only grotesque "dame"?' See *Jonson: Four Comedies*, ed Helen Ostovich (New York, 1997), 27.

54 'Hermaphroditical Authority', 81.

55 See *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 136.

56 See *Jonson: Four Comedies*, 29.

57 See 'Acting in Jonson: a Conversation with John Nettles and Simon Russell-Beale', *Ben Jonson and Theatre*, ed Cave et al., 59.

58 'Hearers and Beholders', 33.

59 McLuskie notes that 'The "realishness" of the boy players' femininity was asserted not only by the self-enclosed, self-referential visual and verbal indicators, but by its contrast with what it was not' (104). In the case of Mistress Fitzdottrel, this contrast is externalized: rather than heightening her femininity by having her appear cross dressed in the manner that McLuskie suggests here, Jonson heightens it by contrasting it to Wittipol's obvious masquerade of femininity, which is received as true by his onstage audience in the same way that his performances as a cross-dressed boy actor might have been taken for 'true' by the theater audience now enjoying the joke.

60 So, for example, Alice T. Carter found 'Michael Brown's Viola/Cesario, equally attractive as both female and male'. See 'Globe Theatre Stages "Twelfth Night" Exactly as Intended', *Tribune-Review*, 14 November 2003 (http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/tribune-review/entertainment/s_165093.html) 19 February 2004.