DANGEROUS BOYS

DANGEROUS BOYS AND CITY PLEASURES:

SUBVERSIONS OF GENDER AND DESIRE IN THE BOY ACTOR'S THEATRE

By

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ABSTRACT:

This thesis draws on the works of Will Fisher, Lucy Munro, Michael Shapiro, and other critics who have written on the boy actor on the early modern English stage. Focussing on city comedies performed by children's companies, it argues that the boy actor functions as a kind of "third gender" that exceeds gender binaries, and interrogates power hierarchies built on those gender binaries (including marriage).

The boy actor is neither man nor woman, and does not have the confining social responsibilities of either. This thesis argues that the boy's voice, his behaviours, and his epicene body are signifiers of his joyous and unconfined social position. Reading the boy actor as a metaphor for the city itself, it originally argues that the boy's innocence enables him to participate in the games, merriment, and general celebration of carnival, while his ability to slip fluidly between genders, ages, and other social roles enables him to participate in and embody the productively disruptive carnival, parodic, and "epicene" spaces of the city itself. In these spaces, when gender and age expectations are temporarily overthrown, individual bodies can desire, dress, and perform however they want.

In persistently recognising the boy actor's metabolic ability to metamorphose its gender according to his own, or the individual spectator's desire, and in so doing to explore alternative modes of living and structuring families and other social relationships in the city, *Amends for Ladies*, *Epicoene*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *Eastward Ho!*, *Ram Alley*, and *Bartholomew Fair* offer strategies by which individual bodies in the audience can pursue their own individual alternative modes of living in the city.

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"A thankful [wo]man owes a courtesy ever"!

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ABBREVIATIONS

BTP	*Between Theater and Philosophy: Scepticism in the Major City Comedies of Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton*
CQR	*Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory*
"Defense"	"In Defense of the Marketplace: Spontaneous Order in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*"
"Delusion"	"Delusion and Dream"
"Friendship"	"Mistress and Maid: Women's Friendship in *The New Inn*"
Gender	*Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages*
"Hermaphroditical"	"Hermaphroditical Authority in Jonson's City Comedies"
Humoring	*Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage*
Idea	*The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare*
ILP	*Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis*
"Introduction"	"General Introduction"
"London"	"London and Urban Space"
"Pig"	"The Pig, the Fair, Authorship"
"Prodigal Son"	"Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and the Prodigal Son Plays"
TC	*Theater of a City: The Places of London Comedy*
"Transvestism"	"Transvestism and the Body Beneath: Speculating on the Boy Actor"
"Women"	"Women and Boys Playing Shakespeare"

INTRODUCTION:

City Comedy, Boy Actors, and Marital Structures in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*

"What did a Renaissance audience *see* when boy actors undressed on stage?" ("Transvestism" 64): Peter Stallybrass's question is a variation on a problem that has long perplexed critics pre-occupied with the figure of the boy actor on the early modern stage. Stephen Orgel poses a similar question when he asks "why did the English stage take boys for women?" (2). Juliet Dusinberre broaches the problem again in asking "were [women] there [on Shakespeare's stage] or not?" ("Women" 12). Each of these critics is in some form investigating what an early modern audience really *saw* when it looked at the body of the boy actor. This problem is central to Michael Shapiro's examination of the erotics of boy actors in *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage*, as it is central to Kathleen McLuskie's and Lisa Jardine's negotiations of the representative and the real qualities of the boy actor's body and disguise, and to the critical work that forms the theoretical basis of this study including that of Catherine Belsey, Jonathan Dollimore, Richard Madelaine, David Kathman, Jean Howard, and others.

This thesis builds on the work of these critics to propose that the boy actor possesses an unashamedly "epicene" nature which makes him a productive figure on city comedy's stage. Discursively, the boy actor is already not a "man," and is acceptably allowed (by excuse of theatrical convention) to play a man, a woman, a man dressed as a woman, a woman dressed as a man, a boy or girl, or any other gendered role. The boy actor is capable of taking on various meanings and expressing various – and often non-normative – desires. While his capacity and license to play these roles can only express itself fully on the early modern stage (and particularly so

on a boy company stage), the audience watching can mediate their own non-normative desires by gazing at his body and investing it with their own desires. Individual members of the audience might then take these practices into the "real" city beyond the stage.

I draw this argument from original yet by now familiar ways of reading the boy actor's body. McLuskie understands this body as functioning (on the contemporary stage) primarily at the representative level: "The essentialism of modern notions of sexuality cannot bring together the image of a boy and the image of a coherent female personality, except through camp notions of sexuality as a cohering mode of interpretation" (130). Lisa Jardine argues, opposite to McLuskie:

> The ordinary playgoer does not keep constantly in his or her mind the cross-dressing implications of 'boys in women's parts,' but it is nevertheless available to the dramatist as a reference point for dramatic irony, or more serious *double entendre*... [boy heroines] are sexually enticing *qua* transvestied boys, and...the plays encourage the audience to view them as such. (60-61)

For Jardine, the prevalence of boy heroines who cross-dress as pages draws too much attention to the convention of boys playing women for audiences to ever suspend their disbelief completely in order to read the bodies only at the representative level. Shapiro adds that even when obvious gestures to the convention of boys playing women were absent from a performance, the play texts themselves might have alluded to the convention: "Explicit verbal allusions in plays to cross-gender casting are rare, although any strong marker of gender, any verbal or nonverbal moment of reflexivity, might well have had an effect" (*Gender* 46). Shapiro adds his own negotiation of Jardine's and McLuskie's positions, suggesting that boy actors could oscillate between showing the boy's body beneath and the representative level on the surface,

arousing different erotic desires in the process. Stallybrass reaches a similar conclusion, arguing that the process of undressing calls attention to the process of creating and unfixing gender (again to differing erotic ends): "all attempts to fix gender are necessarily prosthetic: that is, they suggest the attempt to supply an imagined deficiency by the exchange of male clothes for female clothes" ("Transvestism" 77). Richard Madelaine does not entirely dispute Shapiro, agreeing with his comments on the endless ludic qualities of the layered gendered disguise and the potential for diverse erotic effects, but adds the possibility that boy actors approached the task of performing heroines in boy disguise as they would any character with a completely developed psyche, and so suggests, contrary to Shapiro, that both genders could manifest equally in the same body at the same time on stage (increasing the boy heroine's erotic allure).

Most of these critics agree that a contemporary audience cannot truly know what an early modern audience saw when it looked at the body of the boy actor. Shapiro reminds his readers that audiences are too diverse for contemporary critics to make certain claims about how any audience (but particularly a lost early modern audience) reacted to any performance (*Gender* 2-3). Similarly, McLuskie suggests that our concept of performance is always mediated by contemporary concerns with gender (and this mediation is the reason that she draws her conclusions based on audience reactions to contemporary stagings). Roberta Barker follows McLuskie in her survey of various critical readings of boy's bodies (including the ones I outline above), and adds that early modern audiences would have had different erotic tastes than contemporary ones: modern spectators often want to see "real women" and do not want "to be involved in an erotic encounter that challenges the boundaries of their

definitions of self, desire, or morality" (17). James Bulman argues similarly in "Queering the Audience: All-Male Casts in Recent Productions of Shakespeare" that contemporary performances using original practices are necessarily shaped and read through contemporary preoccupations with queer theory and interests.[1] Not knowing audience response is precisely *why* critics return to this problem of how to read the boy actor, and explains why they sometimes approach the question tentatively, and without offering certain answers. I propose, further, that the inability to know the various desires of individuals attending a play is a healthy reminder of the ways in which individual members of the audience can and do make their own meaning of the bodies on stage. The boy actor's already epicene body only further facilitates this process of meaning-making.

The difficulty of understanding the boy actor (and the ways that early modern audiences responded to the boy actor) makes him a productive subject for critical inquiry. The boy actor is inherently tied to gender performance, gender (in)stability, and desire. Attempting to respond to the problem of how to read the boy actor discovers new possibilities of ways in which one can perform gender, and ways in which people can desire. Attempting to answer the question constantly troubles our ability to define gender and desire. This process of troubling gender definitions is an important one given that gender and desire, as many of these critics have argued, is often tied to power relationships. Sigrid Brauner offers a reading of the early modern stage in "Gender and its Subversion," and argues that "gender constitutes all social

[1] Bulman adds that this preoccupation does not mesh well with current attitudes concerning the ethics of children in theatre: seeing children in highly erotic performances intended to explore queer agendas is generally discomforting to modern audiences, while current laws against child labour make an all-boys cast nearly impossible for companies like the Royal Shakespeare Company to accomplish. (575-576, 584-584)

relationships: marriage, family, modes of production, forms of education, and subjective identities. These relationships are expressed in cultural symbols and given meaning in normative contexts" (180). The early modern period, according to Brauner (following Foucault), is "characterized by...the continual discursive production of new forms of (sexual) desires, an increasing sexualization of identity and its saturation with relationships of power" (190). The early modern stage, then, challenged "divinely instituted" and "naturally ordered" gender-power hierarchies in which men are naturally assumed to possess ruling authority. Catherine Belsey argues, particularly, that gender-power dynamics were situated in the early modern period in relation to "distinct meanings of the family" (167).

For Belsey, it is early modern – and particularly Shakespearean – comedy that challenges gender relations and the power dynamics and social structures that rest on these relations. The early modern *stage*, then, poses these challenges, both through its straight representations of women (as Jean E. Howard demonstrates in her reading of the way that whore figures negotiate domestic narratives and challenge masculinity's assumptions to ruling authority, *TC* 128), and particularly through gestures towards the transvestite bodies of boys playing women. As many of the critics cited above have argued, and as I will observe at several points in this study, this body not only parodies male authority – lampooning or burlesquing earnest conceptions of masculinity (and revealing all gender to be performance as it does so) – but it also reveals the limits to the pleasures of performing and defending a dignified authoritative masculinity. Belsey argues that the transvestite figure offers a plurality of meanings that disrupt fixed and definable imaginings of gender (and often does so in ways that were probably pleasurable to male audiences, 182). Madelaine similarly

argues that women's bodies, because they did not possess the illusion of being perfectly definable, were likely perceived by early modern gender discourses as more complex than men's – and boy actors playing women were temporarily allowed to participate in this complexity as "a more privileged role in a patriarchal world" (234). Helen Ostovich, in her introduction to *Epicoene*, concludes that "life among the boys is more fun, so long as no one grows up" ("Introduction" 30) – an argument that separates boy and man as distinct moments on a gendered spectrum, and privileges the ludic boy over the man (and the woman). Madelaine and Ostovich's arguments posit the joyous possibilities of *not* being a man – and suggest that the early modern boy actor undermines not only men's right to rule, but also the ideological privilege of doing so, and thus satirizes the whole of early modern patriarchal discourse along with early modern gender definitions.

In my second chapter on *Amends for Ladies* and *Epicoene* and my third chapter on *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and *Eastward Ho!* I link this discourse particularly with Thomas Greene's "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self." Greene's work provides a convenient and familiar model for discussing the way that the early modern discourse often justifies the adult male's essential privileged position as ruling body. Throughout this thesis, I associate the paradigm of the centred self and its accompanying state and marital structures with terms like chastity, heteronormativity, and rigid adherence to gender signifiers in dress, sex, and behaviour. Chaste, centred, and normative sexual, dressing, and consumption practices are those that consolidate and reproduce rigid distinctions between men and women – distinctions that themselves generally rationalize and defend man's "fixed" power position in state and domestic hierarchies. Cross-dressing, as well as trans-gender performance – along

with an excessive enjoyment of talk, material consumption, and extramarital or recreational (rather than strictly procreative) sex – are "unchaste" and "epicene" because they render the body open, unfixed, and malleable. Associating seemingly innocuous and prevalent practices such as talk, material consumption and sex with more overtly transgressive transvestite and transgender practices, I claim that in a theatrical and capitalist London, "epicene" and "unchaste" practices are far more normal than the normative ones. The normative and distinct male body in its fixed ruling position is always already challenged by London's capitalist environment.

As the above paragraph suggests, my work here places the disruptions which the boy actor creates, in the context of Jacobean city comedy, with the logic that the city itself was a disruptive space. Approaching my work in this way, I am particularly following Belsey, Howard, and Mary Beth Rose. Belsey proposes that the disruptive qualities of the transvestite boy actor and its plurality of meanings operate in "moments of crisis in the order of existing values" (178). Rose and Howard also contextualize their examinations of disruptive transvestite bodies in the context of the growing city with all its anxieties and its own powers of disruption. Rose takes the city as the space that interrogates

> those dissociations and contradictions in Renaissance sexual ideology which romantic comedy evokes but seeks to reconcile and contain...[City comedy dramatists] perceived the city of London as the setting in which those conflicts caused by the political, religious, and economic upheavals that transformed Renaissance England were being enacted most intensely. (43)

Rose reads cross-dressing generally as a practice which examines the relationship "between sexual equality and social mobility" (47). Howard argues in *Theater of a City* that spaces in London (like the brothel, the theatre, and the Exchange) are spaces

of intense anxiety over England's national identity and its ways of structuring social and economic relationships. The city, as I will continue to outline momentarily, was itself a site of crisis in early modern England.

In my own examination of the boy actor on the early modern stage, I want to consider the ways that the city provides an ideal space in which the boy actor can work to reveal possibilities of alternative gender performances and alternative modes of structuring gender-power dynamics. Assuming along with critics like Belsey, Brauner, and Constance Jordan that the family is the basic unit of power relations in early modern England, I consider these alternative modes of structuring gender-power dynamics, particularly in the context of the family. In the city, I argue, the family structured on the model of a father figure with a definable body as the centre or head of the state and surrounded by his obedient servants (wives and children) becomes untenable, and therefore invites its urban participants to interrogate its structure. In city comedy, and particularly the city comedies of boys' companies, this structure is yet more untenable. Will Fisher's proposal that boys constitute a "third gender" from that of men and women has allowed me to consider how both women and men can escape the male-female binary to explore familial and economic structures not based on the binary of male lawgiver-female subject.[2]

It will be helpful to pause and briefly outline the ways that the city works in conjunction with both the theatre and female bodies to function as an anxious space that itself challenges masculinist modes of structuring identities and the codes of

[2] I would be remiss if, in addition to the names cited above, I failed to include Mark Albert Johnston, Laura Levine and Lucy Munro as critics who have influenced the field of study on boy actors. The work of all of these critics will act as my departure points and my touchstones throughout this study. The latter, particularly, has been influential. Munro's work on the boys' company the Children of the Queen's Revels has proved an endless source of knowledge on four of the plays that are the objects of my study.

everyday life. A brief survey of city comedy reveals the extent to which the genre is self-reflective. City comedy constantly meditates on its own generic roots, its role within London's economy (and the truth that theatre itself is a capitalist venture), and the ways that it fashions, performs, and re-performs bodies within the city – including gendered bodies. City comedy has received at least eight book-length studies, as well as numerous articles – both on the genre in general and on particular plays within it.[3] Brian Gibbons's canonical *Jacobean City Comedy* (1968), which traces the genre's parentage in early modern drama, argues for the generic complexity of city comedy, noting that the works of Middleton, Jonson, and Marston (Gibbons claims these dramatists are the main developers of the genre) display generic characteristics shared by citizen comedy, new comedy, satire, morality plays, and even tragedy. Following Gibbons, Anthony Covatta's brief "A Marston-Middleton Rivalry: New Light on the Growth of City Comedy" (1973) considers the personal rivalries between city comedy playwrights, and traces how these rivalries affected the development of the genre. Though not restricted to city comedy, Gail Kern Paster's *The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare* (1985) discusses how forms like the masque and genres like tragedy and city comedy present different conceptions of London (and the way that discourses around these different conceptions of the city create and reject individual subjects). Lawrence Venuti's "Transformations of City Comedy" uses Althusser's method of "symptomatic reading" (99) to place city comedy's development in the

[3] Gibbons identifies the plays within the years 1597 and 1616 as the plays which comprise the bulk of city comedy, with *Bartholomew Fair* and *The Devil Is An Ass* "crown[ing] its maturity" in 1614 and 1616, respectively (18). Gibbons, along with the other critics cited here, have been informative in helping me select which plays to include in this study. I have, however, chosen not to include the three Shakespearean comedies (*Measure for Measure*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Comedy of Errors*) which Paster lists as city comedies proper (*Idea* 178), nor Jonson's Italianate *Every Man In His Humour* and *Volpone*, on the basis that they are neither plays performed by boys' companies nor plays originally and nominally set in London.

context of the development of early modern London itself. Wendy Griswold, in her chapter on "City Comedies" (1986), like Gibbons, traces the development of the genre alongside the development of revenge tragedy, and the revival of both genres in later centuries. Finally, Harry Levin in "Notes Towards a Definition of City Comedy" (1986) traces the classical origins of city comedy (as well as its roots in Italianate comedy and the Coney-catching pamphlet) and its relationship to anatomizing the city and its inhabitants, satire, and allegory.

In addition to generic arguments, critics have frequently discussed the commercial and economic contexts for the genre. This argumentative trend is unsurprising given that London was both the centre of England's economic exchange (and the locus of its trade routes and banks) and (frequently) the location in which city comedy plots take place.[4] Works that fall into this category include Susan Wells's early article "Jacobean City Comedy and the Ideology of the City" (1981), which examines the relationship between commerce and celebration, particularly in the works of Middleton. Continuing the critical trend is Karen Newman's important "City Talk: Women and Commodification" (1991) which considers not only women's roles as commodities (Newman argues that woman's speech functions as signification of their desirability to be commodified), but also their roles as consumers of commodities (and thus active members of early modern economies). Douglas Bruster's *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (1992) considers how all genres of early modern English drama act as responses to London's market (and includes a chapter on city comedy and materialism). In the vein of Wells's article is

[4] With the notable exceptions of Jonson's 1598 version of *Every Man In His Humour* and *Volpone*, and Marston's *The Malcontent*.

Catherine Martin's "Angels, Alchemists and Exchange: Commercial Ideology in Court and City Comedy, 1596-1610" (1993); Martin examines the way that city comedy often functions as a counter-revolutionary response to capitalism (and also the ways that the genre resists this counter-revolutionary attempt). Theodore Leinwand's *Theatre, Finance, and Society in Early Modern England* (1999) reviews the city's preoccupation with credit, debt, mortgages, and ventures in early modern plays, including a number of city comedies. Alizon Brunning's "Jacobean City Comedy and the Art of the Mediating Trickster" (2002) considers the way that wits use alchemy and con games to escape the necessity of labouring for money in the city. Ceri Sullivan's *The Rhetoric of Credit* (2002) directly considers the relationship between theatre, the market, and the movement of bodies as commodities in both. John Twyning's "City Comedy" (2002) is a survey of critics writing on city comedy, and the possible demographic or economic contexts for the genre. Howard's *Theater of a City* (2007) presents London's representation on the early modern stage in the context of economies of credit and growing consumerism of sex and fashion. A final examination of city comedy's economic concerns is Aaron Kitch's recent "The Character of Credit and the Problem of Belief in Middleton's City Comedies" (2007); Kitch examines the relationship between commercial theatre and credit in Middleton's works.

Reflecting the diversity of the busy city itself, studies of city comedy lend themselves to almost any topic, including the development of individual subjectivities. Among these are the female subject (Barbara Millard's "'An Acceptable Violence': Sexual Contest in Jonson's *Epicoene*," Giraldo de Sousa's "Women and Chivalry in Jacobean City Comedy," Ostovich's "Mistress and Maid: Women's Friendship in the

New Inn," and James Mardock's "Hermaphroditical Authority in Jonson's City Comedies"), the male subject (Rose's "Sexual Disguise and Social Mobility in Jacobean City Comedy", and Mardock's *Our Scene is London*[5]), the consumer subject (Leinwand's *The City Staged*[6] and Peter Ayers "Dreams of the City: The Urban and the Urbane in Jonson's *Epicoene*"[7]), the knowing subject (Gale Carrithers's "City Comedy 's Sardonic Hierarchy of Literacy"[8]), and the doubting subject (Mathew Martin's *Between Theater and Philosophy*[9]).

Many studies present the city itself as an organic and developing subject or body. That London is an increasingly central area of England's economic power means that city comedy also concerns itself with questions of nationhood (for example, Claire McManus's "*Epicene* in Edinburgh (1672): City Comedy beyond the London Stage" considers the relationship of city comedy, particularly Jonson's *Epicoene*, to constructions of national identity, and takes "London" to signify both "England" and "Stuart"). Mimi Yiu's "Sounding the Spaces between Men: Choric and Choral Spaces in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene; or, the Silent Women*" (2007) reads the city itself as an "epicene" gender.

To round out critical treatment on the genre is Dieter Mehl, Angela Stock, and Anne-Julia Zweirlein's *Plotting Early Modern London* (2004). This text collects articles that span topics as diverse as the commercial contexts of city comedy (Richard Waswo's "Crises of Credit: Monetary and Erotic Economies in the Jacobean Theatre,"

[5] Mardock considers the way that the act of writing the city simultaneously develops the dramatist's conception of how the male author-figure fits into the city space.
[6] Leinwand considers representations of merchant-citizens, citizen-merchants, gentlemen-gallants, and consuming and consumed female bodies in city comedy between 1603-1613.
[7] Ayers tracks the development of urbane figures in city comedy.
[8] Carrithers considers city comedy's deployment of wit and literacy.
[9] Martin considers how the economy, disease, and confusion of the city contribute to an attitude of scepticism in the genre.

and Zwierlein's "Shipwrecks in the City: Commercial Risk as Romance in Early Modern City Comedy"); city comedy's relationship to romance and prodigal plays (Stock's "Something done in the honour of the city': Ritual Theatre and Satire in Jacobean Civic Pageantry," and Mehl's "*The London Prodigal* as Jacobean City Comedy"); the problems of conversion and family (Alizon Brunning's "'Thou art damned for alt'ring the religion': The Double Coding of Conversion in City Comedy," Alan Brissenden's "Middletonian Families," and Matthias Bauer's "Doolittle's Father(s): Master Merrythought in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*"); and metatheatre and audience involvement (David Crane's "Patterns of Audience Involvement at the Blackfriar's Theatre in the Early Seventeenth Century").

The above does not comprise a complete list of works on the genre:[10] further articles take as their subjects the individual plays of Middleton, Marston, and Jonson, primarily, but also Dekker, Barry, Chapman, Nashe, Beaumont, and Fletcher (I will take up many of these articles in later chapters). It is enough material, however, to reveal that while critics have extensively discussed city comedy's relationships to other genres and to the developing consumer culture of London itself, they have only begun to examine the problem of women's bodies in the city. Leinwand, Howard, de Sousa, Ostovich, Mardock, Millard, and Newman comprise a short list of critics who have written on the subject of women's roles and the space which women occupy in city comedy, both generally and in the particular plays in this study. Leinwand's chapter on "Wives, Whores, Widows, and Maids" in *The City Staged* outlines the

[10] I have left out Janette Dillon's *Theatre, Court and City, 1595-1610* out of respect for Dillon's opening declaration that "This is not another book on city comedy" (1). Dillon's study on the relationship between the Elizabethan and Jacobean court dramas and London playhouses, however, has provided useful background information both on London's history in general and its theatre history in particular.

diffuse critical discussion on women's status in the early modern period. He concludes from this survey that "it should come as no surprise that the women in Jacobean city comedy were not all of one sort" (138). He argues that the diversity of women in city comedy suggests their comparative autonomy relative to the women of Shakespeare's comedy, but ultimately concludes that "Middleton's and Jonson's women...do dramatize the constrained roles made available to them by male typecasters" (140). Reading *The New Inn* alongside other Jonsonian city comedies like *Bartholomew Fair*, *The Devil Is an Ass*, and *The Staple of News*, Ostovich explores, in opposition to Leinwand, the ways that women in Jonson's comedies create "intense friendships" in spite of "differences in class, economic status, or other personal dimensions" ("Friendship" 9), and are able to use these friendships to resist the institutions which threaten to subsume their identities (3). Howard's chapter "Bawdy Houses and Whore Plots" argues, in opposition to Leinwand, that the prevalence of bawdy houses in city comedy suggests the increasing acceptance of women's permanence in London's economy (*TC* 114-115). Newman also considers the place of women in London's economy, both as consumers and commodities to be consumed. As consumers, Newman argues, women are dangerous figures who (like boy actors) usurp male authority (and their willingness to speak, as well as to buy and sell in public, is another signifier of this usurpation). Millard also suggests an increasing collapse of the gap between distinctly masculine and feminine activities. She puts the relationships between men and women in *Epicoene* in their urban context and argues that in London both men and women use sex as a means to gain power. Mardock and de Sousa both take up the question of how women are represented in Jonson's city comedy in particular. de Sousa proposes that Jonson's (and Middleton's) drama

attacks women's sexual freedom in chivalric romance. Mardock, following Ostovich, argues, contrastingly, that Jonson's use of male transvestism is not as "univocally misogynistic as critics often perceive" ("Hermaphroditical" 71).

Each of these studies takes up the problem of women in city comedy from a particular and well-defined angle of investigation: the city's (and Jonson's) acceptance of working women, the freedom women were allowed in enjoying sexual or other pleasure, ways the city allowed women alternatives to being wives and mothers, and to what extent early modern discourse accepted notions like the performativity of gender, or the similarities between men and women. I would like to take up the problems with which these studies are concerned in an extended study that allows me to negotiate the contradictions between the critical positions through the body of the boy actor. How can the city both accept and reject women as active consumers and entrepreneurs? How do early modern city comedies both collapse and redefine the boundaries between male and female bodies, masculine and feminine activities? Finally, and returning to my discussion of boy actors above, how did the theatre itself, with its practice of boys performing women, interrogate the discourses around women in a male-driven economy? Following Belsey, I assume that the boy actor himself was often the vector which collapsed and redefined the boundaries between male and female bodies and activities.

None of the critical work listed above examines the role of women only in city comedy. Millard particularly articulates her argument as taking up Jonson's depiction of the battle between the sexes. Any study of gender in any genre or time period inevitably finds itself discussing how one gender defines, fashions, locates, and performs itself in relation or opposition to the other gender. Considering women in

London in hierarchical relationships with men in the context of family structures, my work here will be no exception. In this approach I am not only particularly following Belsey and Brauner, but also generally critics like Paster and Mark Breitenberg who, in their work on humours theory, the medical discourse drawn from classical tracts of Galen and Hippocrates, and the language of anti-theatricalism, consider the ways in which women define themselves (using rhetorical models, discourses, or ideologies) against the male gender.[11] Stephen Orgel and Laura Levine have also examined how anti-theatrical language structures men's modes of not only defining but also fashioning (the term indicates dress as well as the ways they conceived the structure of their bodies) themselves, and the ways in which they responded to women's self-fashioning (and, in fact, attempted to limit or take away women's rights to fashion themselves).

I have already introduced the final criteria with which this project is concerned. Not only will I examine representations of women by boy actors in city comedy, but I will particularly consider how these female bodies are represented in relation to the institution of marriage. This narrowing of focus, necessary in an examination of female bodies, is not really a narrowing of focus at all. As Rose has observed, early modern comedy tends to naturalize marriage as a logical end for (potentially disruptive) female bodies: "It is true that the genre frequently relies on the romantic comic convention of the desired marriage to conclude the action in obedience to its comic purpose and, in however qualified, deflected, and obligatory a fashion, to establish a festive tone" (50). General critical work on women and feminism in early modern England also tends to discuss women in relation to

[11] I discuss these critics particularly in chapter one.

marriage. Following Rose, it would seem that women are almost always discussed in regards to the institution of marriage – whether they are inside or outside the institution. I argue that early modern theatre, with its custom of male bodies playing women, tends to render uneasy these representations of marriage. This uneasiness occurs particularly in city comedy. The city offers women real alternatives to marriage and motherhood by providing them an economic space where they can operate alongside males. London, with its male-dominated banks and guilds, its female-inhabited shops and prostitution trade, and its theatres, is at once a site where masculine authority establishes itself as normative, where female bodies find economic autonomy outside of marriage, and where the theatre could reflect upon anxieties concerning the challenges to masculine authority.

In discussing representations of women in relation to marriage, then, I am not excluding critical consideration of unmarried bodies, nor suggesting that women's autonomy nor the limitations to their autonomy are exclusively worked through, or the result of, marriage. I simply hold in mind that marriage is a prevalent and domineering presence in the lives of early modern women, and that it is frequently the juridical body which is both the catalyst and resolution for early modern comedic plots. The desire to escape an economically, romantically, or socially unsuitable marriage provides the impetus for the wandering maid in the typical "chaste/chased" maid plot (as in the anxiety around Maid in Field's *Amends for Ladies*); anxieties over marital fidelity, and the possibility that married women might express the same sort of wandering autonomy as they do before marriage is also the driving source of anxious laughter in cuckold plots (*Eastward Ho!*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*), while the tension between the mockery of widow/witch/whore figures outside of marriage, and

the way that they either beat men at their own market con games, or reveal to men their own vicious (male) appetites and corrupt behaviour, is the comedic force in widow plots (*Bartholomew Fair*).

In most of the plays I have listed above, and in several of Middleton's, Jonson's, and Marston's other city comedies,[12] marriage is the ultimate result (for minor characters, at least, if not for the title ones); however, these marriages differ considerably from Shakespearean models in which marriage acts as the plot's resolution. In Shakespearean comedies marriage tends to resolve not only the main plot, but also the subplot(s): the marriage of the lovers at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* leaves all the major characters coupled, and resolves the framing plot concerning Duke Theseus and Hipployta, as well as the mismatched love plot between the four lovers. These marriages are problematic in that they fail to ensure happiness for the lovers – particularly the bewitched Demetrius and the captured Hippolyta. The marriages that conclude *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice* are similarly problematic in that Malvolio and Antonio are both excluded from them. Formally, however, the marriages do resolve all of the plots and subplots of the plays.

City comedy generally tends not to formally resolve its plots through marriage – or, at least, marriage is an imperfect resolution. The extremes of the genre might include Jonson's *Volpone*, which has no final marriage, and *The Alchemist,* whose concluding marriage is a cynical and superficial ending. Most city comedies are somewhere between Shakespearean comedy and Jonson's cynical plays about con artists, where the act of entering into marriage is quite frequently a *part* of the plot's

[12] For example, *The Phoenix*, *The Dutch Courtesan*, *Michaelmas Term*, *A Mad World My Masters*, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, *The Roaring Girl*, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, *Your Five Gallants*, *A Fair Quarrel*, *Bartholomew Fair*, and *The Staple of News*.

resolution, but it is only a part, and generally serves to resolve the problems of only a few of the characters: Moll and Touchstone Jr's frustrated desires in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, along with their parents' desire to construct a suitable social match (the marriage which Moll and Touchstone Jr select for themselves avoids the disastrous marriage trajectory on which her parents have unwittingly set them), or Mary and Sebastian's marriage in *The Roaring Girl*. Neither of these marriages resolves the plot completely, however; the marriages of both Yellowhammer children at the end of *A Chaste Maid* do not resolve the problems of the Kix and the Touchwood Sr families. The marriages at the end of *The Roaring Girl*, of course, leave the title character, Moll Firth, unmarried and prepared to continue her "disruptive" habit of roaring.

I mention *The Roaring Girl* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* because they are paradigmatic (constantly anthologized) examples of city comedy, and because I use them as comparatives in the second chapter of this thesis. I omit them as central objects of study, however, both because they have received a lot of critical attention already, and because they are not boy company plays. Perhaps at this point then, it will be useful briefly to consider how marriage functions in the plays in this study. The six plays I have chosen generally fall into three categories regarding their treatment of marriage. In some, the central problem and its resolution are unrelated to marriage: *Eastward Ho!* is less concerned with marriage than with the financial success of young men, and the methods by which men can accumulate wealth (though financial success does determine the suitability of men as potential sons-in-law). In other plays, the final marriage fails to resolve the central problem: in *Bartholomew Fair*, marriage cannot resolve the problem of Bartholomew Cokes's susceptibility to the fair's cons – and to emphasize this point, Cokes is unfazed by the loss of Grace

that should act as a punishment for his naivety. Nor is the marriage plot directly related to the problem of Littlewit's and Justice Overdo's abuse of masculine authority (the solution to which is complete humiliation). In *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, which opens with two already married couples, marriage fails to overcome the problems of failed fatherhood and the fears of poverty, starvation, and death.

In some plays, marriage is the initial problem that the play's characters must overcome: Morose's threatened marriage to a woman incites Dauphine to concoct his scheme against Morose, while Dauphine's successful gulling of Morose into the position of marrying a boy is the primary obstacle for Morose in *Epicoene*, while in *Amends for Ladies* the compulsion to enter into heteronormative marriage is the source of unhappiness for most of the play's characters. *Ram Alley* is the only one of the three plays where the triple marriage at the end of the play marks an almost full resolution (formally) of the plot – and even those marriages are negotiated through the active performance of Francis the whore, and by the desires of Adriana and Constantia (leaving the problem of women's will unresolved).

The act of marriage itself, then, does not necessarily function as a means of total resolution in city comedy – and we must not expect it to be a mode of resolution when marriage itself is deeply entrenched in the problems of commercial exchange, where bodies are read as commodities to be purchased and sold, and where marriage itself (and the "products" of marriage) can be read in terms of brokerage, trade, and usury.[13] If bodies are commodities to be circulated, and circulation is the *modus*

[13] I am not insisting that marriage is less deeply ingrained in the problems of commodification and trade in other plays – certainly, Natasha Korda and Karen Newman have noted the ways in which the body-money exchange operates in Shakespeare's plays. I am merely suggesting that marriage is more obviously and intricately woven in with problems of exchange when set in an environment that is already deeply and primarily concerned with questions of commodity and trade.

operandi of London itself, in which city comedy takes place, then it may not be surprising that marriage refuses to function as a resolving force at all. As I suggested above, in many of the plays I will examine here, entry into marriage (whether real or feigned) occurs long before act 5, and is the driving force behind the plot's confusion, and thus the obstacle that needs to be rectified. The institution of marriage is just another medium through which bodies/commodities circulate, and so entry into marriage may both introduce or resolve a particular plotline, but it does not resolve the contradictions and instabilities which trade itself causes – and it cannot resolve these problems without suggesting that the entire economic activity of London itself come to a standstill.

City comedy also sophisticatedly represents different types of marriage plots interacting with one another in interesting ways. The plots of Middleton's city comedies cited above, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *The Roaring Girl*, resolve themselves not only through the young couple's marriage (or the parents' acceptance of the young couple's marriage), but this resolution also depends upon the intervention of widows and whores, the wisdom of mothers, the begetting of children to a childless couple, the uncovering of a bastard (the product of sex outside of marriage), and other plots besides. I am choosing to focus my response to the critics who have written on female bodies in city comedy, then, not only by considering the ways that women fit into the genre of city comedy, but also by electing to emphasize the important role that women themselves play in actively restructuring gender hierarchies and pursuing desires outside of heteronormative narratives. In this way women function somewhat like the male prodigals and wits common to the genre. The

anxieties which all of these figures cause, like the anxieties around the boy actor, expose the contradiction, performativity, and inherent ridiculousness of masculinity.

Perhaps these problems I have been outlining can be made more concrete through an examination of one of the genre's most infamous representations of marriage: Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*. For the moment, I want to particularly consider Epicoene's conversation with the Collegiate women and Mistress Otter in 4.3, and Clerimont and Truewit's discussion of female cosmetics in 1.1. The latter scene nicely embodies the two-pronged gender commentary of the play. Morose's intolerance of language extends to men as well as women: "He can endure no noise [...] They say he has been upon divers treaties with the fishwives and orange-women, and article propounded between them. Marry, the chimney-sweepers will not be drawn in [...] nor the broom-men" (1.1.126-133). Noise transcends gender for Morose, with men's noises as offensive as the noises women make. It is because he desires to block out his *male* heir, Dauphine, and his (also male) friends through the marriage that Morose finds himself joined to Epicoene at all: "He thinks I and my company are authors of all the ridiculous acts and monuments are told of him" (1.2.8-10). Morose's desire to obtain a silent wife is already the product of his desire to escape London, and not just London, but the male-dominated world of London's economy.[14] The noises from which Morose seeks to escape are the noises of commerce and trade: not only the food sellers, chimney-sweepers and broom-men, but also the "costardmonger[s]" (1.1.133),

[14] As the pun on Foxe's book implies, in attempting to extricate himself from London's society, he effaces his own identity in any historical sense. The play naturalizes noise as the consequence of living amongst people, and indeed of being any sort of subject at all. Morose's desire to take control of his own history is, further, a sign of his desire to be an active determining body rather than a passive determined body.

"smith" (134), "pewterer's 'prentice" (136-137), and "bearward" (150).[15] By extension, Morose's marriage will free him from having to interact with the young men who run this trade circuit: young men like Dauphine and Truewit who are heavily invested in the con games that allow one to obtain wealth, power, and thus a position of control in the London's various economies (Daw and LaFoole are also heavily invested in these circuits, but their roles as obvious consumers of fashion, as well as their status as easy marks, make them less successful and less likely candidates for the role of top con in the city).

Epicoene's mockery of Morose in act 4 is offensive, however, not merely because he is forced to listen to "her" voice interrogating him, but because that voice emulates the mocking voices of Dauphine, Truewit, and the other tricksters.

> [DAUPHINE]...Take patience, good uncle. This is but a day, and 'tis well worn too now.
> [MOROSE] O, 'twill be so for ever, nephew, I foresee it, for ever. Strife and tumult are the dowry that comes with a wife.
> [TRUEWIT] I told you so, sir, and you would not believe me.
> [MOROSE] Alas, do not rub those wounds, master Truewit, to blood again. 'Twas my negligence. Add not affliction to affliction. I have perceived the effect of it too late in Madam Otter.
> [EPICOENE] How do you, sir?
> [MOROSE] Did you ever hear a more unnecessary question! As if she did not see! Why, I do as you see, Empress, Empress.
> [EPICOENE] You are not well, sir! You look very ill! Something has distempered you. (4.4.17-29)[16]

The feigned innocence that their banal questioning and mock concern disturbs Morose's singular desire to hear nothing seems to needle Morose more than the

[15] Mingled with these sounds are the "coaches [and] carts" (146), "trumpet [and] hau'boys" (139), and the "bells" (156) that mark business hours, church and festival days, and sickness. Truewit and Clerimont primarily list the economic noises of the city, but also refuse to wholly distinguish between these and the noises of festival, of recreation, and institutionalised sacraments like funerals (or marriage, which the play suggests is itself another facet of London's economies).

[16] For the sake of consistency I have silently altered names from the way they appear in the cited texts, removing italicization, expanding abbreviated forms, and placing the names in brackets.

(perceived) gender of the body that needles him (Truewit's belated reminder about the nature of wives is as much an affliction as the fact of the wife itself). Marrying Epicoene who, unbeknownst to him (but like every other character in the play) is herself heavily invested and inextricably located within the social and monetary economies of London, Morose finds himself having brought the public into his previously shut up home.[17] As a result, rather than escaping the noise of the street, Morose finds himself driven out into the street, where he is noisily and publically humiliated by men and women (and men dressed as women) alike. The gender of the mocking bodies, I suggest, almost matters less (at this moment) than the painful immersion into this mockery and the public itself.

If the gender of Epicoene is not as heavily emphasized in the mockery of Morose in 4.4, in the act preceding this mockery, precisely the opposite occurs. Gender commentary becomes heavily visible, but visibly pointed at both male and female genders. Morose's commentary on the "flood" of voices (3.6.2) as the men encounter the Collegiates may seem an obviously pointed remark on the gossipy nature of women. Women like the Collegiates and Mistress Otter exhibit this gossipy behaviour. The only *silent* woman in the play turns out to be not a woman at all. Real women, the play wants to argue, are often shrewish gossips, and these gossip figures are clearly one of the distinct targets for audience laughter in the play.

But men like Truewit and Clerimont are also gossips (as are all the play's men, excepting Dauphine). For all the potential for commentary on women's behaviours, *Epicoene* is primarily concerned with identifying, mocking, and correcting the

[17] Mimi Yiu also argues that Morose, in marrying Epicoene, "marr[ies] the city" (82).

behaviours – and the knowledge – of men.[18] Male vanity, male practices of consumption, and male profligacy are the roots of these same offensive behaviours in women. The play may abject women for their behaviours, but, as with any abjection, what is really mocked and rejected in the women are the qualities which are reflective of behaviours already found in the men (and to which they do not want to admit).[19]

Nowhere is this abjection more prevalent than in Truewit and Clerimont's discussion of female cosmetics in 1.1:

> [TRUEWIT] And I am clearly o' the other side. I love a good dressing before any beauty o' the world...The doing of it, not the manner: that must be private. Many things that seem foul, i' the doing, do please, done. A lady should indeed study her face, when we think she sleeps; nor when the doors are shut should men be inquiring. All is sacred within then. Is it for us to see their perukes put on, their false teeth, their complexion, their eyebrows, their nails? You see guilders will not work but enclosed. They must not discover how little serves with the help of art to adorn a great deal. How long did the canvas hang afore Aldgate? Were the people suffered to see the city's *Love* and *Charity* while they were rude stone, before they were painted and burnished? No. No more should servants approach their mistresses but when they are complete and finished. (1.1.89-108)

[18] Here I agree with McLuskie's reading of comedy in opposition to Munro's. While I agree that *Epicoene* does not provoke a unified audience response, with its specific targeting of female gossips as a subject for criticism, the play also uniformly criticizes the audience by ridiculing them all, though it ridicules different demographics in different ways. Or in fact may criticize men more, since the women are not equally humiliated.

[19] In "Approaching Abjection," Kristeva argues that abjection is the expulsion from the self of perverse and dangerous desires that threaten the juridical bodies that govern us: "Abjection persists as exclusion or taboo (dietary or other) in monotheistic religions...[I]t becomes...a threatening otherness – but always nameable, always totalizeable" (17). Kristeva, in invoking the word "taboo" along with religious exclusions, connects religion with Freudian psychoanalysis: both epistemologies localize threatening desires in a totalizeable body (for example, Eve or the Oedipal mother) that can then be abjected to preserve the body of law. Identifying the female body as inherently flawed allows for the construction of gender hierarchies with male bodies in the position of power.

My theoretical approach for this project is generally undergirded by psychoanalytic and feminist models. Like the marriages that resolve comedy plots, marriage is the act through which the Oedipal drama resolves itself in Freudian theory. In "The Blind Spot in the Old Dream of Symmetry," Luce Irigaray critiques the Oedipal model because it privileges the phallus as the coveted object of male and female desire. She argues that there are real alternatives for women outside of patriarchally-prescribed marriage. As I outlined above, the boy actor in early modern city comedy interrogates gender assumptions in a way that begins to identify those alternatives.

Throughout the play, the woman's dressing room forms an absent presence. This is not uncommon for Jonsonian comedies: Julie Sanders notes the absent presence of the tiring room/birthing room in both *The New Inn* and *The Magnetic Lady*.[20] *Epicoene* is perhaps the originator of the space: the Page's "still to be neat, still to be dressed" song (1.1.77), which introduces the theme of a kind of *sprezzatura* in women's dressing habits, continues as one of the most anthologized of Jonson's poems. Yet though Sanders argues that the dressing room is an inherently female space,[21] and one in which women can fully express the secrets of their sexuality, and while both the Page's song and Truewit and Clerimont's discussion following propose that the secrets of the female's dressing room, along with the arts of their cosmetics, are an inherently female knowledge, the men prove themselves to be quite familiar with what goes on within this space (which the audience never actually sees on stage – though it does witness Clerimont receiving male visitors in *his* dressing room at the play's opening). This fact may be hardly surprising given the double gendering of the phrase "tiring house": a space that is not only a woman's room for dressing herself before displaying herself in front of male spectators (whether in the streets of London, or at the court), but is also a space attached to the entirely male-populated stage. The audience cannot forget that Dauphine's plot depends upon his and Epicoene's ability to infiltrate the "feminine" space of the tiring room. More precisely, the working of the plot depends upon their ability to master the arts of cosmetics and "women's" dressing, much as the revelation at the end of the play (and Dauphine's winning of the

[20] "Elsewhere in the play, of course, we are also made all too aware of that other unseen, 'private' space of the birthing room, where Placentia gives birth to her illegitimate son" (55).
[21] "Mother Chair draws a direct analogy between [the birthing room] space and that of the tiring-house or dressing-room" (55).

con game, and his inheritance) depends upon his ability to reveal that the body of Epicoene is the body of a male.

Even within the inherently "female" space of the tiring room, the arts of cosmetics and female dressing seem not to be skills which women deploy for themselves, but ones which men originate, and then conceal the origins of (as well as their ability to successfully command the arts of cosmetics). Truewit and Clerimont's discussion of the arts of cosmetics indicates their knowledge of the tiring room and these "female" arts, as does Dauphine's ability to deploy those arts in order to triumph in the play's con game.

Ultimately, as I will continue to argue in my second chapter, *Epicoene* (along with plays like Field's *Amends for Ladies*) argues that men are inherently not that different from women. More precisely, the play demonstrates the ways in which the boundaries between male and female bodies are often difficult to discern, and suggests that both men and women are capable of the duplicitous performances necessary to everyday economic and social competition. (On stage, the body of the boy actor collapses the boundaries between men and women collapse even further.) Men have more invested in distinguishing between men and women, however, and in displacing their own duplicity, appetites, and consumption (the things by which patriarchal markets operate) onto the bodies of women. This displacement is necessary in order to preserve a delusion of a definable and stable patriarchy. Already dominated socially and limited economically, women do not always feel (though they often end up competing with each other as well) the same inhibitions against pursuing normally transgressive desires and alternative ways of structuring a family. In considering non-normative alternatives, women – and the boys that play them – often create a

challenge to which the men in patriarchal structures of London's city economy have difficulty responding.

Each of the plays included in this study, and Jonson's comedy particularly, reads cuckolding, con games, and economic duplicity as the very structures which underpin theatre itself.[22] Thus city comedy is a dramatic genre that represents a theatrical space. The boy actors on city comedy's stage point out, once again, the meta-theatre inherent in the genre. Jonson's *Epicoene*, *Bartholomew Fair*, and *Eastward Ho!* (which he wrote with Marston and Chapman), Fields's *Amends for Ladies*, Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and Barry's *Ram Alley*, are particularly reflective of gender performance. These plays, which constitute the body of texts that I examine in this study, are not only meta-theatrical city comedies, but city comedies performed by boys' companies, the Children of the Queen's Revels, and the Children of the King's Revels. I will identify how the boy actor, as Belsey suggests, dangerously and yet alluring unfixes the hierarchical relationships between men and women, and destabilizes notions of masculine authority. The boy actor's ability to slip between the roles of man, woman, or boy, or to occupy all three positions at once, parodies typical gender behaviours, critiques hypocritical or unfair

[22] In this attitude, I follow Mathew Martin's reading of *The Alchemist*, which concludes "The actor [speaking the epilogue] steps from one theatre to another, but it is business as usual: in the same small dark, smoky room he coins appearance into gold. If the audience claps, it has like the gulls willingly traded good money for fiction" (*BTP* 114). Martin provides a clear, but not the only argument that connects the city and the theatre. Meg Twyning's "City Comedy" (2002) argues that the portrayal of market operation is a fitting scene for meta-theatrical city comedy because "'selling became increasingly perceived as theatrical" (364). Melissa D. Aaron's "'Beware at what hand thou receiv'st thy commodity': *The Alchemist* and the King's Men Fleece the Customer, 1610" (2006) notes that "*The Alchemist*...is intimately tied in with the history of the Blackfriar's theater and its takeover by the King's Men" (72). Ceri Sullivan's *The Rhetoric of Credit* (2002) takes as its thesis that "there are close parallels between the 'labile, reflexive, deconstructive' character of [the theatre and the city's market]" (18-19). James Mardock's *Our Scene is London* (2008) follows Martin most directly in its reading that "Jonson's city comedies are often centrally about London as a stage...Theater is shown to be how their city *works*" (45).

masculine attitudes, and ultimately reveals the undesirability of narratives based on heteronormative family structures. The city not only provides the theatrical space for the boy actor to act, but also creates the moment of ontological crisis which intensifies the boy actor's abilities to parody, mock and unfix gender and family. What I will ultimately suggest is that this unfixing, in disrupting familiar ways of living and organizing lives, holds potential for great anxiety – particularly for the men who stand to lose power. The ludic qualities of the boy actors who perform these unfixings, however, and the fun that is inherently found in acts of (especially layered) cross-dressing, and in exploring the erotic possibilities of the boy's flexible gender, offer a counter-balancing incentive to these anxieties. Thus my project aims to consider not only the question of how to read the boy actor, but also why it is important and pleasurable to do so.

Chapter one interrogates the city comedy trope of the widow/whore in *Ram Alley* and *Bartholomew Fair.* While Jonson's Ursula represents the conventionally grotesque whore's body that early modern patriarchy often abjects in order to ensure stable economy and definitions of manhood, the plot's momentum and resolution depends critically on Ursula's presence in the play's marketplace. Barry's play more dramatically shifts the body of the autonomous older woman from the fringes of early modern economic and social operations, into the centre of the play's sexual economy, with Taffata the widow arranging her own marriage. This representation of powerful women in both plays certainly suggests the importance of women not only in city comedy, but also in London's marketplace. *Bartholomew Fair* and *Ram Alley* use these powerful female figures to reveal the extent to which a carnival atmosphere pervades London's everyday operations. Not only does London celebrate talk and

consumption, but it also subverts gender-power hierarchies where men exclusively are in charge of market operations. In *Bartholomew Fair*, the man playing Ursula replaces displaced anxieties about men's cruel and parasitical behaviour back onto men's bodies, while simultaneously revealing that both men and women are capable of participating in the same cheating practices. *Ram Alley* suggests ways in which men and women can potentially escape necessarily parasitic behaviours that characterize typically male-run economies. The women in Barry's play use their awareness of their boys' bodies to unite in a way that works harmoniously with the ways that – representatively – the women in the play also work together to find each other suitable lovers. Ultimately, both plays reveal the difficulties in escaping masculinist market practices, but offer strategies by which we might begin to interrogate them.

Chapter two examines the way that *Epicoene* and *Amends for Ladies* characterize the city itself as what Mimi Yiu calls an "epicene" space. I argue that this space complicates the definitions of male and female bodies as well as gendered market practices, and allows greater opportunities for bodies (including women) to exhibit autonomy. The space does not, though, free women from the limitations of existing in a patriarchal economy. As Natasha Korda observes, however, markets confine and oppress everyone born within them. I apply Korda's argument to heteronormative relationships, families, and desires – assuming, based on early modern discourses around marriage, that the juridical institutions and economies by which patriarchy operates rest on displays of heteronormative desires. But the epicene space of the city complicates the possibility of truly achieving what Thomas Greene calls a "centered" masculine self, or of achieving a chaste maid or chaste wife, and the heteronormative power attendant upon all of these figures. Field's and Jonson's plays,

moreover, use the eroticized body of the boy actor to interrogate the idea that men necessarily want chaste maids/wives, or that women want to be them. The epicene possibilities in the city, then, create cracks in the narrative of heteronormative desire. At the same time, however, the city (and Jonson's and Field's plays) attempts to conceal or reject these possibilities in favour of preserving the status quo of market operations. This rejection of the non-normative leaves both men and women unhappy.

Chapter three further examines the impossibility of achieving the patriarchal narrative of the "centered self." In this chapter, I consider the father (or the monarch) figure in genres like the prodigality narrative, the country house poem, chivalric romance, and tragic plays. In the city characterized by competition and con games, the father who trusts his subjects to maintain his centred position is revealed as naive – and as immature as the body of the boy playing him. The benevolent father figure himself is rare, given that the father, too, is affected by greed, competitiveness, and the need to survive; fathers in city comedy look after themselves, often to the destruction of their families.

In *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and *Eastward Ho!* theatre becomes the mechanism that exposes the city's corruption, as the same theatre that presents narratives like the prodigality play and high tragedy shows itself to be no more than boys taking money from men. The plays then invite the audience to seek alternative narratives and family structures (though the invitation is an uneasy one). These alternatives may be found in the types of relationships that women share with other men and women – and they are relationships that are as fluid as the city itself.

CHAPTER ONE:

Beards, Bawds, and Boys: Gender Satire in *Ram Alley* and *Bartholomew Fair*

At first glance, *Ram Alley* and *Bartholomew Fair* make an odd pairing, particularly in a study on gender and boy company plays. The small body of criticism that exists around *Ram Alley* mostly devotes its attention to the role of women in Barry's play – and it is, of course, a boys' company play (the title page reveals that the "Children of the King's Revels" performed it, 1). *Bartholomew Fair*, however, does not entirely fit the bill. Jonson's city comedy is not a true boy company play: its sole known performance at the Hope theatre on 31 October 1614 was one performed by the Lady Elizabeth's servants, a combined company comprised of actors from previous incarnations of the Children of the Queen's Revels as well as other mixed company plays – and was thus itself a mixed company.

The two plays, however, do share structural and thematic concerns. Both include the double pursuit of a maid and a widow (Constantia and Taffata in *Ram Alley*, Grace Welborn and Dame Purecraft in *Bartholomew Fair*), both feature a central and stationary domicile belonging to an independent woman (Taffata's home and Ursula's booth), both dramatize males chasing after and competing for something which is absent for most of the play (Constantia and her widow mother in *Ram Alley*, absent fatherhood in both plays, the marriage contract in Busy's box in *Bartholomew Fair*). Most importantly, here, both satirize the earnestness with which the plays' male gulls and wits take their masculinity. I will argue that the way that *Bartholomew Fair* represents Ursula as an autonomous woman, the head of her own "family" of prostitutes, servants, and "children" like Mooncalf, and a successful manager of trade (attracting all of the fairgoers – both men and women – to her tent), ultimately allows

the play to produce a satiric interrogation of men's claims to authority. And because the bodies of the actors in the play are (mostly) men rather than boys, when the satire is turned against figures like Ursula, Justice Overdo, Rabbi Busy, and John Littlewit, it is directed against the bodies of *men* particularly. The play does not, however, represent the procedures and strategies by which women can become autonomous Ursula figures. Barry's *Ram Alley*, with its teasing references to and obvious displays of the bodies of its all-boy cast, provides a carnivalesque (and often burlesque) mode of parody that not only interrogates men's earnest pursuit of masculine authority, but also demonstrates the pleasure which can be found in the carnivalesque's abandonment of clearly defined gender (and other hierarchies) hierarchies run by men.

In his oft-cited introduction to *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin describes the atmosphere of carnival, which he equates with "the culture of the marketplace" (6) as celebrating "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order. It marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of the time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed" (10). Critics like Peter Stallybrass, Noel Blincoe, and Paul Cantor have read Jonson's play in the context of Bakhtin's work, exploring ways that Jonson's play both works within and resists the spirit of carnival. All three critics, however, generally accept that Jonson's representation of the fair engages with the spirit of carnival to some degree. Certainly Jonson's representation of the fair inverts power relationships based on rank, legal discourse (which legislates prohibitions), and norms (like age and gender). As an example of this inversion, Blincoe notes how the fair divests Justice Overdo of his legal authority:

> In their passion and zeal to realize certain ends, they effect a stance that contradicts the good of the community. Jonson's fair with its carnival madness proves to be a site where these oppressive and obnoxious individuals [Puritan Busy and Justice Overdo] may be uncrowned and cured of their ill "humours," or as [Leah] Marcus declares, brought back to reason. (68)

Jonson's representation of the fair invokes the same disruptive abilities as the real Bartholomew Fair, which, Stallybrass recounts, was prohibited in 1855 for its tendency to disrupt the city. Citing Robert Chambers, Stallybrass outlines these tendencies: "Originally established for trading purposes, it has long survived its claim to tolerance, and as London increased, had become a great public nuisance, with the scenes of riot and obstruction in the very heart of the city" ("Pig" 33). But the fair seems to have only intensified the already-existing chaos of London. Unlike Bakhtin, I am assuming in this study that the carnival atmosphere of the fair is not a temporally-limited event that punctuates and interrupts the everyday. The productive chaos that is integral to Jonson's fair in particular, and to the carnival atmosphere in general, is an integrated part of London. And given that London perceived itself as "the mart of the world" (*TC* 67), surely the carnival chaos must be integral to London's everyday – at least, it must be so if one believes Bakhtin's other claim that the carnival borrows "the culture of the marketplace." The everyday chaos of the city is the reason why London is ideal grounds for the disruptiveness that accompanies the figure of the boy actor.

Jonson's representation of the fair invokes those other Bakhtinian principles concerning the carnivalesque: it is a space of constant movement, "becoming," and "change." The fair is also a communal space. Cantor proposes that the fair and its market provide a space of "social harmony...not a harmony without conflict, but one in which the tensions among the characters can be worked out as the participants in

the fair come to realize their common economic interests" ("Defense" 43). Cantor also proposes that not only the fair, but the entire early modern period, provided a space where individuals could negotiate with other bodies in their community, their social positions. I will add, here, and following Bakhtin's further emphasis on the communal laughter of the carnival, that Jonson's play extends the possibility of communal (rather than competitive) pleasure to all genders.

Reading the carnival into the everyday of London also further defends the suitability of reading Jonson's play alongside Barry's, where the play's action occurs entirely in the everyday streets of London. It will be further useful to consider the entirety of *Ram Alley* as possessing the same theatrical structure and working towards the same gender commentary as the puppet show in act 5 of *Bartholomew Fair*. In the final and perhaps the most quoted moments of the puppet show, the puppets expose themselves to the Puritan Zeal-of-the-Land Busy:

> [PUPPET DIONYSIUS] *What then, Dagonet? Is a puppet worse than these?*
> [BUSY] Yes, and my main argument against you is that you are an abomination, for the male among you putteth on the apparel of the female, and the female of the male.
> [PUPPET DIONYSIUS]...*It is your old stale argument against the players, but it will not hold against the puppets, for we have neither male nor female amongst us. And that thou may'st see, if thou wilt, like a malicious purblind zeal as thou art!*
> *The puppet takes up his garment* ...
> [BUSY] I am confuted. The cause hath failed me.
> [PUPPET DIONYSIUS] *Then be converted, be converted....*
> [BUSY] Let it go on. For I am changed, and will become a beholder with you! (5.5.81-101).

The moment reveals the folly of common anti-theatrical arguments that claim the convention of theatrical cross-dressing leads to a weakening of masculinity,[23] and possibly the complete reversion of the male to the female gender. In revealing that

[23] See Orgel: "The effeminate stage player here is the agent of a universal effeminacy" (28).

they are genderless the puppets support the claim that theatre works at the level of representation only.[24] In my introduction (and later in my chapter on *Epicoene* and *Amends for Ladies*), I note that boy actors operate similarly on stage as the puppets claim to operate in *Bartholomew Fair* in that they can take on – or come to represent – any gender or sexuality that the individual members of the audience desire (this is the reason that critics have difficulty concluding with any certainty how "an" audience reacts to the body). I will agree here that the malleable body of the boy allows it to function as a representative surface, but add, following Will Fisher, that he also functions as a kind of "third gender" distinct from the gender categories of "man" or "woman." Thus boy actors can potentially exceed the male-female gender binary. In his "The Renaissance Beard: Masculinity in Early Modern England" Fisher writes:

> Boys...were quite literally a different gender from men during the early modern period. Although we currently tend to see the difference between men and boys as being a matter of degree (boys are diminutive versions of men) and the difference between men and women as being a matter of kind (women are entirely distinct from men), we need to remember that in the Renaissance, sexual differences were, as Thomas Laqueur has demonstrated in *Making Sex*, often conceptualized in terms of degree. Thus, the distinction between men and boys would have been analogous to that between men and women. (175)

If boys are a distinct gender from men, then we might expect gender satire worked through the bodies of boys in an all-boy cast to function somewhat differently than gender satire worked through the bodies in a company of mixed actors. As I will propose here, the possibility of performing Ursula as an older "boy" might represent her dominating female authority as a kind of monstrous (to borrow the language of early modern discourse against overly sexual or powerful women such as whores, transvestites, and widows) usurpation of manly authority. It might also point to the

[24] McLuskie, 128.

hypocrisy of masculinist discourse: a clearly gendered male body could have reminded spectators that Ursula's behaviours – and any exploitative strategies she uses, or appetites she displays – are no different than those of the men at the fair.

It is odd, though, to describe Ursula as behaving in a "manly" way, when the site of her operations is one that is characteristically feminine in nature. Like Morose's house, Ursula's booth is a "womb-like" space: it is enclosed, and a place of the excessive appetite (whether for sex, food, drink, or tobacco) that women supposedly possessed.[25] Too, her tent is hot (as a woman's excessive amounts of blood that caused her to menstruate[26]), and it is chaotic (as a woman's body, the movement of her womb, and her passions were supposed to be). Finally, and unlike Morose's house which he tries to close off to the "feminine" city, Ursula's booth is not only located in the midst of the noise, chaos, and commercial transactions of the fair, but it remains open to that noise and commerce. At the centre of this space is Ursula herself – a figure who is, at the representative level, a woman, and who polices the movements of bodies in, around, and through her space. And it is a space that is entirely subject to female rule, and one that might be theoretically terrifying for anti-theatricalists or puritans (because the woman who wields this female power embodies men's worst fears about what woman can be), but which is also attractive to the other fairgoers.

Ursula is not a rebellious chaste maid, nor even an autonomous widow: she is something more overtly threatening to manliness. Ursula is a whore figure, and characteristically embodies an excessive yet unproductive sexuality.[27] Ursula is

[25] *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* represents this female appetite in the christening scene. Similarly, the Littlewits depend on Busy believing the truth of in *Bartholomew Fair* when they use Win's appetite for pork as an excuse to enter the fair.
[26] *Humoring* 92.
[27] Levine, 113-114.

sexually promiscuous: she has participated in the prostitution trade as a "punk, pinnace and bawd" (2.2.65-66) and is the queen of the whores during the play. She is simultaneously sexually barren, however; her trade does not use sex to produce offspring (at least not legitimate offspring that can consolidate male rule, though she does treat Mooncalf with the same sort of care that a master shows his apprentice). Like Moll in Field's *Amends for Ladies*, Ursula's formidable sexuality positions her as a monstrous and thus potentially abjectable figure.

But *Bartholomew Fair* does not and cannot cast out Ursula in the same way that Grace Seldome casts out Moll from her husband's shop. Ursula's booth is a central site of market operations in the fair, and of plot movement in the play itself. Both pig booth and Ursula inextricably belong to the fair. And the fair cannot reject Ursula without condemning the men in the play who engage in similar market behaviour as she does. She is the head of a trade that behaves – economically – exactly like male-run trades (for example, a guild like Touchstone's with its master, journeymen, and apprentices). Ursula, moreover, gathers a profit using similar gulling tricks as men. She outlines these tricks to Mooncalf in 2.2:

> Then six-and-twenty shillings a barrel I will advance o' my beer, and fifty shillings a hundred o' my bottle-ale. I ha' told you the ways how to raise it. Froth your cans well i' the filling, at length, rogue, and jog your bottles o' the buttock, sirrah. Then skink out the first glass ever, and drink with all companies, though you be sure to be drunk. You'll misreckon the better, and be less asham'd on't. But your true trick, rascal, must be to be ever busy, and mistake away the bottles and cans in haste, before they be half drunk off, and never hear anybody call – if they should chance to mark you – till you ha' brought fresh, and be able to forswear 'em. (2.2.85-95)

Like the wits in Jonson's *The Alchemist*, Ursula takes advantage of her gull's appetites to turn a profit. Her methods of cheating – like those that Subtle, Face, and Dol use –

rely on performance (she *pretends* to be busy and not to hear her customers' objections as she takes away their half-filled drinks to recycle at full cost).

The actor's body performing Ursula's could have potentially intensified the play's satire of typically male economic activities. The last play the Children of the Queen's Revels performed was in 1613, and by this point, Nathan Field was 23 years old (and 24 by the time of *Bartholomew Fair*). The company itself had aged 13 years by its closing. Though Munro notes that the company experienced a reincarnation in later years, it existed only as "training ground for the King's Men" (*CQR* 166): that is, older youths and adult men who worked as professional actors in adult or mixed companies. I would propose that the 1614 performance of *Bartholomew Fair* probably featured an older youth – or perhaps an adult actor playing Ursula. The noticeably older age of this male body might pick up another important paradox in the early modern discourse around the autonomous figure (which whores, transvestites, and widows are): "[a woman's] independence within her marriage...is all part of being 'masculine,' but it is also something that women can be – not, to be sure, unproblematically. That tense and fluid situation, however, is translated by modern history into a rigid and settled one where women were excluded from the public world of business, negotiation, and labour" (Orgel 127-128). Within marriage or without, early modern discourse (and modern history) paradoxically figures autonomous women as both hyperbolically feminine and masculine. This unclear gendering recollapses the boundaries between male and female, and arouses fears of consuming sexual desire and desire's threat to masculine productivity.[28]

[28]Breitenberg 172

Even if the boy actor's body were not clearly visible (if it were played convincingly as a woman), the juxtaposition of Ursula surrounded by men performing the same sorts of strategies would clearly point out that she is not behaving differently from them. While the signs of the woman can in fact be prosthetically created on a boy's body, this performance might also be effective if worked through the body of an older youth, or even a man. Such a performance would pick up on the gender anxieties that Ursula represents; moreover, the laughter which such a performance would provoke would indeed be an anxious and cruel laughter. This laughter would be an abjecting laughter on the part of the male spectators – one that attempts to deny the similarities between Ursula and the other males in the play who similarly profit by taking advantage of appetites, slow wits, and dependent female bodies. The laughter might also anxiously recognize the male spectator in the man's body beneath Ursula's costume. Meanwhile, female spectators might laugh cruelly, angrily, and vindictively at that same body. Simultaneously, at the representative level, women in the audience might laugh appreciatively (and with vindication) at Ursula's ability to turn typically male deceptions against the fair's male gulls. (Male audience members might also laugh at the gulls' humiliation, potentially while denying their own vulnerability to such schemes.) The laughter which Ursula particularly and *Bartholomew Fair* generally incites is a satiric, confrontational, and potentially cathartic laughter—but it is also a laughter that – because it is cruel and rooted in gender antagonism and gender anxiety – divides male from female communities.

The satire of the fair is more frequently directed at male bodies. This is particularly true of the puppet show parodying the foolishness of the male fairgoers and policemen. The genderlessness of the puppets in Jonson's play exposes the

falseness of the Puritan Busy's anti-theatricalist objections to the play's "actors"; it also exposes the ridiculousness of Busy himself. That Busy takes the puppets for real men, that he engages them in logical argument (and loses even!) suggests the blindness – and downright stupidity – of his zeal. But Busy is not the only character whom the play absorbs: Bartholomew Cokes himself, as well as Justice Overdo, responds to the play's characters and action as though they are real. The earnestness of Zeal's responses to the play is worth as much mockery and punishment as Cokes's earnest delight at the fair throughout the play.[29]

It is fitting that Cokes invites the puppets along to Justice Overdo's dinner at the end of the play, that they may "ha' the rest o' the play at home" (5.6.100-101). This moment is surely one of further humiliation for Overdo, given that the play parodies him along with the other playgoers. The action on stage, with a plot that devolves into name-calling and fighting, hyperbolically reflects the action of the main play; moreover, the performance of the main play's characters by genderless puppets metaphorically akin to boys (or even younger "genderless" children) reveals those characters to be occasionally ridiculous and childish. Inviting the puppet show home, Justice Overdo is forced to accept the mockery in good humour – in the same way that his wife's public vomiting forces him to quietly own his lack of perception, and lack of ability to outwit either Ursula or the male tricksters in the play. Any anger that Overdo might direct at the puppet show would only further reveal his own impotence, and so Overdo finds himself inviting his own immature and satirized self into his home.

[29] Cokes's delight proves his lack of male authority since he is an automatic victim of the city/fair's economic con games.

The puppets reveal that the "men" who participate in the fair's love quests, disputes, and economic transactions are as "immature" as the puppets, the boy actors playing Win or Dame Overdo, or (at the representative level) the "women" (all three figures that are not gendered "men"). Simultaneously, Ursula's general financial success at the fair suggests that figures who are not clearly signified men can be more adept at "manly" activities and behaviour —like running a trade economy – than men themselves. The general carnivalesque spirit of the fair creates a space where gender and gender behaviour is not clearly demarcated or defined – and where power flows equally amongst all bodies, not just towards intelligent males.

This same carnivalesque attitude characterizes the streets of *Ram Alley*. *Ram Alley* reminds us that the chaos of the fair in Jonson's play represents the everyday chaos of London's streets. The carnivalesque spirit and satire in *Ram Alley* erupts into burlesque at several moments throughout the play. The boy actors in *Ram Alley* frequently devolve into name-calling and fighting. These immature fights, which match the immaturity of their boys' bodies, make it difficult to take seriously their earnest pursuits of revenge against each other, as well as their pursuit of Constantia and Taffata (both pursuits are part of the pursuit of the greatest manliness). The latter activity – the pursuit of the maid and the widow – perhaps invites an even more acute awareness of the immature bodies of the boys. The scene where Sir Oliver hides under Taffata's smock (1605-1674) attests to the licence which boy actors often possessed: because their bodies are immature, they are often allowed to perform scenes that might not pass so easily in front of an audience if performed by adult bodies. Yet there is no real reason for this scene *not* to be shocking: performed by younger "boys" whose ages are approaching the upper limit of the boy actor apprenticeship, a younger

boy playing Taffata and older boys playing the Small-Shankes men, or with all younger boys, the scene remains potentially highly erotic. Only the convention of allowing boys companies more license than adult or mixed companies perhaps affords the play the assumed trappings of innocence.

Yet, as James I discovered in 1605, with the performance of *Eastward Ho!*, boy companies were capable of serious satire.[30] Indeed, the ridiculousness of men's fighting (squabbling) in both *Bartholomew Fair* and *Ram Alley* lies in the fact that the boys are young. The audience is supposed to metonymically associate the boys' immature (or simply youthful) bodies with the behaviours of adult men who try to convey themselves as serious, assured, and in control – but who are really no more than boys. The whole possibility of satire rests in the fact that the boy actors are apparently "innocent."

Perhaps this kind of satire is less harmful and sophisticated than the kind of satire that Beaumont uses in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, when he presents the appearance of disruptive playgoers who are really under the poet's control, or that Jonson uses in the induction to *Cynthia's Revels*, where he offers the apparent rebellion of boy actors against their dramatist.[31] The strategy which both meta-theatrical performances employ is to invite the audience to perceive the boy actors as something they are not (bodies who have escaped the control of the dramatist). This same strategy is at work when plays like *Ram Alley* potentially present a scene like the

[30] Melissa D. Aaron, Janette Dillon ("The Blackfriars Theatre and the indoor theatres," 128), and Peter Stallybrass ("Pig" 74) all note James I's angry reaction to the play, with Aaron recounting that the play was one of three (each of which Chapman, Jonson, or Marston wrote) which James charged as satires. Following Chapman's *The Tragedy of Byron* (1608), James officially disbanded of the Children of the Queen's Revels (Aaron 73).

[31] Claire Busse reads the Induction to *Cynthia's Revels* as an imitation of a rebellion in "Pretty Fictions and Little Stories: Child Actors on the Early Modern Stage": "children working with adults could use assumptions of their artlessness as a means of deception" (84).

smock scene as innocent and youthful entertainment. Like the mockery in *Bartholomew Fair*, however, and the violence in the later proposal scene between William Small-shanke and Taffata, the implied sex in the smock scene is *real* sex – whether performed by boys or not. This sex, and the potential for boy actors to revel in the performance of it, invokes the spirit of carnival and presents it before an audience that is perhaps shocked and offended, perhaps aroused and titillated. This spirit of carnival prepares the audience for the women's proposal of a communal working towards pleasure at the end of the play. (The moment is also more straightforwardly parodic in that it both interrupts what should be a revenge scene and burlesques courtship rituals which adult men might otherwise take seriously.)

The all-boy cast allows the possibility for this burlesque. The boy actors in Barry's play, like the puppets in Littlewit's "motion" (3.4.119), repeatedly gesture towards their strangely gendered state. Interestingly, with the exception of Constantia, the play points to the bodies of the boy actors not through displays of excessive cross-dressing, or disrobing scenes, but by drawing attention to men's beards. Not only does the play include a character named "Beard," but it makes at least seven references to the beards on stage: "What coloured bear'd comes next by the window? / [ADRIANA] A black mans I thinke. [TAFFATA] I thinke not so, / I thinke a redde, for that is most in fashion" (1.1.216-218), "Come let me busse thy beard" (2.1.705), "if you come there, / Thy beard shall serve to stuffe, those balls by which / I get me heat at Tenice" (3.1.1089-1091), "'Tis not your beard shall carry it" (3.1.1309), "Why then burne rage, set Beard and nose on fire" (4.1.2096), "I think youle prove an honest man, / Had you once got a beard" (5.1.2135-2136), "I will home, On with my neatest robes, perfume my beard" (5.1.2293-2295).

As with the meta-theatrical gender references in the other plays in this study, these references in *Ram Alley* draw attention to the performativity of gender in general. In *Ram Alley*, the gender commentary seems equally directed at men as well as women. The play does point to the fact that the "women" in Barry's play – the maids and widows whom men fervently desire, the wives they possess, and the whores they purchase, fear, and reject – are not women at all but boys *playing* women.

The references above, however, significantly point to prosthetics that are signifiers of male gender – and particularly signifiers that mark a *man's* body, distinguishing it from the body of the boy. The second of the references ("Come let me busse thy beard") merely points to the presence of the beard, with William Small-shanke's kiss making the beard momentarily the focus of attention on stage.[32] The other references point to the facial feature's role in gender performance. The first use ("What coloured bear'd comes next by the window?") reveals the way that all beards – even real ones – are a way of performing daily fashion and the most up-to-date representation of masculinity. The seventh reference ("I will home...perfume my beard") performs this same function – suggesting the various roles that men play (and the ways that one can adapt one's beard to play roles such as the lover). The third and fifth uses of the word point to the beard's detachability: a beard can be shaved off and stuffed into tennis balls or thrown on the fire – and this is true of the prosthetic beards which boy actors wear also. The explicit threats in these last two examples – Captain Puff threatens to forcibly shave off Sir Oliver's beard, while Throate's threat of beard-burning is, by double entendre, directed at the beard of Beard himself – suggests the

[32] Though "buss" can also mean "to attire," (OED, "buss" v.2) and thus the use of the word can also carry the same point about fashion that the first and seventh instances carry.

connection between beards as performative signifiers of manliness, and the performance of masculinity itself through displays of violence and brute force (I will return to this point in my discussion, later in this chapter, of the ways that Barry's play uses the beard, particularly, to harness the disruptive or parodic spirit of the carnivalesque). The fourth reference to beards ("'Tis not your beard shall carry it") also performs this role, but adds to it the authority of voice that one's strength and beard lends a man: Sir Oliver suggests that Justice Tutchim's beard does not possess the authority to command the officers to take down Captain Puff. All of the references to the beards on stage point to the various ways that male bodies perform their manliness. In pointing to manliness *as* performance, and pointing to the presence of the boy actors' bodies as they are in the process of performing manliness, the play ultimately makes a distinction between the gender of boys and the gender of men, and suggests that there are no "men" on Barry's stage. The men who pursue maids, wives, widows, and whores in *Ram Alley* are no more men then the maids, wives, widows, and whores are women.

In arguing that the beards in Barry's play make a distinction "between the gender of boys and the gender of men," I am assuming, along with Fisher, that the boy constitutes a third separate gender in *Ram Alley.* While the puppets in *Bartholomew Fair* do exceed the male-female gender binary, similarly functioning as a possible third gender, the gendering of the puppets is yet different from the third gender that boys constitute in Barry's play.[33] The puppets in *Bartholomew Fair* point to the complete *lack* of genitalia under their costumes; the boys in *Ram Alley* point to an

[33] The moment suggests that gender may not be reducible to even three distinct categories: indeed, my point is that there are multiple ways of defining one's own personal gender.

indisputable *presence* of genitalia. This presence is at the heart of the irony in Constantia's cross-dressing. Unlike Epicoene or Princox, Constantia reveals immediately the fact of her disguise:

> In this disguise, (ere scarce my mourning robes)
> Could have a general note, I have forsooke,
> My shape, my mother, and those ritch demeanes,
> Of which I am sole heyre, and now resolve,
> In this disguise of Page to follow him
> Whose love first caused me to assume this shape.
> Lord how my feminine bloud stirs at the sight
> Of these same breeches, me thinkes this cod-peece
> Should betray me. (1.1.2-5)

By declaring "her"self a woman, and expressing fears that she will not be able to fill the codpiece she wears (because as a "woman" she would have no organ with which to fill it), Constantia invites the audience to participate in a knowing laughter. The codpiece "she" wears is, of course, filled, by the penis belonging to the body of the boy actor – who is, both at this declaration and through most of the play, appearing as himself: that is, as a boy. By revealing herself early on, and then remaining a nigh-constant presence onstage (as a boy), Constantia silently reminds the audience that the maid's body which most of the males spend the play trying to uncover is, in fact, completely absent from the stage after all.

In some ways, however, Constantia is not lying when she worries that she will not fill out her codpiece. Although the boy actor may have more of an organ with which to fill the codpiece than a woman, he may not yet possess the maturely-developed penis that an adult actor would possess. And so Constantia's presence potentially marks not only the absence of women from Barry's stage, but also the absence of men. Constantia again becomes a tacit but almost always visible reminder that the "men" who move about him/her are as much boys as s/he is.

If there is any doubt that Constantia's introduction of herself and the immaturity of her body are intended to draw the distinction between the man and the boy (rather than the male and the female only), Adriana swiftly assuages these doubts. Her initial meeting with Constantia points to the presence of the pageboy's penis, but also its "short"comings:

> [CONSTANTIA] Now will I fall a boord the waiting maide,
> [ADRIANA] Fall a boord of me, dost take me for a ship,
> [CONSTANTIA] I And will shoote you betwixte wind and water.
> [ADRIANA] Blurt maister gunner your linstocks to[o] short.
> [CONSTANTIA] Foote how did she know that, dost here sweet hart
> Should not the page be doing with the maid,
> Whilst the maister is busie with the mistris,
> Please you pricke forwards, thou art a wench
> Likely to goe the way of all flesh shortly
> [ADRIANA]... At mine faith, I should breetch thee. Con How breetch me.
> [ADRIANA] I breetch thee, I have breetch a taler man,
> Then you in my time, come in and welcome. (1.324-336)

Constantia initially seems to fear that Adriana sees through her disguise ("Foote how did she know that[?]"), interpreting Adriana's claim that Constantia's "linstock" is too "short" as proof that Adriana knows that Constantia lacks any linstock/penis at all. Adriana, however, is not commenting on Constantia's female gender, but on the male gender of the page boy/boy actor. Adriana's flirtatious promise that she will "breetch" Constantia plays on her acknowledgement that Constantia-the-boy actor does possess a penis after all (one for which the apparently female body of Adriana might one day "breach" itself); the word plays on the custom of breeching boys when they became clearly gendered male, and thus distinct from the "asexual" (at least in customs of dress) infant.[34] Adriana suggests that the pageboy-boy actor playing Constantia is not

[34] The infant prior to the custom of breeching is as genderless as the puppets and thus as distinct from boys as from men and women.

yet mature enough either to wear breeches or to have sex. Constantia does not possess a man's body, but a young boy's. For "her" part, Constantia returns the reminder that Adriana, too, is a boy, when she invites Adriana to "pricke forwards." The moment acutely troubles the distinctions between genders and ages, rendering all signifiers (whether worn or performed) of such distinctions untrustworthy.

The untrustworthiness of gender signifiers on the children's companies' stages is, according to Eleanor Rycroft, what lends the actors the "carnival license of boyhood" (223). On the early modern stage facial hair was a way of indicating and mediating hierarchies of power amongst men (221). On a boy's body, however, which already possessed "indeterminate" (223) signifiers of both youth and adulthood – and indeterminate social positions – prosthetic beards became a means of parodying masculinity (for example, the possibly outrageous disjunction produced by a younger male face wearing Sir Oliver Small-shanke's grey beard), but also of drawing attention to the way that the "natural" beard functioned as a prosthetic signifier and way of performing masculinity in the everyday: "By deconstructing the 'naturalness' of facial hair, especially through the staging of false beards, however, the early modern theatre represented a challenge to the superiority of masculinity itself" (225).[35] Rycroft argues that, among other social roles, a beard indicated "patriarchal authority" and "the male's entry into the patriarchal order as a householder" (224). The man's beard, his status as patriarch and householder, coincide with his entry into marriage. I will return to this coincidence in my reading of Beaumont's *The Knight of*

[35] Mark Albert Johnston makes a similar argument about beards as a performed signifier of masculinity, arguing that in *Epicoene*, "the prosthetic construction of femininity operates superficially to conceal an anxiety about the possibility that masculinity and its prerequisite privileges are also prosthetically constructed and inherently artificial" (413). I take up the problem of male anxiety more particularly in the final chapter.

the Burning Pestle and *Eastward Ho!* For now, I would like to emphasize that the disruptive qualities which the conjunction of the beard and the boy's body creates can be found in other conjunctions of costume, puns or double entendres, and the boy actor's body. The play of words, costumes (cod-pieces and breeches), and the implied (absence of) penis beneath the costume creates as much comic disruption as Captain Puff's and Throate's threats to respectively shave off and to burn Sir Oliver Small-shanke's and Beard's (prosthetic) beards.

Not only did boy actors disrupt and parody earnest representations of masculinity, but they did so with apparent delight. Rycroft reads this disruption as "carnival"esque. Constantia and Adriana's teasing certainly invokes the communal informal laughter of the carnival. The laughter here is a gay laughter in the spirit of shared fun; the boys' threats against Sir Oliver Small-shanke's and Beard's beards is the accompanying cruel laughter that is also always a part of the carnival spirit (Bakhtin 11-12). The references and gestures towards beards, cod-pieces, and bodies in both scenes ultimately poke fun at the normative order of masculinity, while suggesting the potential communal delight that one can find in the non-normative.

The role that the bodies of boy actors play in the type of satiric gender commentary in *Ram Alley* cannot be overemphasized. *Bartholomew Fair* suggests the liberating possibilities of the body not clearly gendered male (especially an adult male): the puppets in Littlewit's motion have the license to parody because they are "only" puppets, and mere representations of men: they make no claims to usurping male authority, so the men who take their manly privilege and bodies seriously cannot dispute with the puppets without revealing the precariousness of that manly authority (the anxiety that it can be challenged and toppled by bodies that are not even "men").

Ram Alley takes the license which the boy's body possesses to new levels. Its boys not only parody men's revenge plots, using references to beards – particularly the beards of old men – to draw attention to this parody, but the boy actors also perform their courtship and seduction with a lot of teasing enjoyment. This enjoyment is important because it both deflates manly authority, and suggests that outside of this authority – once one gives up the attempts to defend this authority – one can participate in a life of communal teasing and sporting that affords pleasure to all. Significantly, it is the women in the play – bodies clearly gendered non-men – who most frequently participate in this sexual teasing and who, at the end of the play, propose a communal rather than a competitive spirit. The "men" continue to assert their authority by humiliating other men and inflicting violence against female bodies.

Constantia and Adriana's teasing conversation in 1.1 introduces this possibility. Adriana points out that she is aware that Constantia is a sexually-immature boy. Rather than acting as a deterrent to future flirting, the observation acts as the moment at which flirting can begin. Constantia flirts back, and later sends the already-claimed Boucher to flirt with Adriana as well:

> why sir, doe not you know
> That he which would be inward with the Mistris,
> Must make a way first through the waiting mayde?
> If youle know the widdowes affections
> Feele first the waiting Gentle-woman; do it Maister...
> Out with all your love-sicke thoughts to her.
> Kisse her and give her an angell to buy pinnes. (2.1.848-867)

Nothing about Adriana's responses to Boucher suggests that she is seriously interested in his attentions, and neither Taffata nor Constantia seems at all jealous or anxious about which of them will marry Boucher. The moment is, like their first conversation, a playful sharing of the pleasures of courting amongst the three women. (Note too,

that Constantia's and Adriana's flirtatious invitations to each other in their introductory conversation are entirely devoid of the violence that characterizes William Small-shanke's invitation to Taffata in Act 4).

Constantia, Adriana, and Taffata's mutual sharing of pleasure turns what ought to be a competitive moment – Adriana's reflections on Taffata's impending marriage – into a philosophical reflection on why it is important for women to assist each other in obtaining good husbands:

> Married women quite have spoyled the market,
> By having secret friends besides their husbands,
> For if these married wives would be content
> To have but one peece I thinke in troth,
> There would be doings enough for us all.
> And till we get an act of parliament,
> For that our states are desperate. (5.1.2327-2333)

Adriana admits that there is a potential competition for husbands amongst women; wealthy women like Taffata have the advantage in the competition against lower status of servants like herself and Vi the chamber-maid. Yet Adriana's attitude towards Taffata is not antagonistic here (indeed, she continues strewing flowers for Taffata's wedding as she speaks).[36] The problem of women who are poorly matched in their husbands, and who thus take away further lovers, points to the necessity of women working together to find suitable sexual matches for one another. Only a cooperative attitude and willingness to share in pleasure leads to the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of women.

While *Ram Alley*'s "women" playfully acknowledge their boyhood and allow it to join them together as a community, the men in Barry's play continue to compete

[36] And though Adriana claims her state is currently desperate, and even moves for legal interference to control wives' sexual activity, to read this moment as earnest anger would be inconsistent with her supportive attitude in her dealings with Taffata in the remainder of the play.

amongst themselves. Throate and William Small-shanke display this competition most furiously, with Throate using violent language to threaten to revenge himself against Small-shanke: "Now let him hang, / Fret out his guts, and sweare the starres from Heaven, / A never shall enjoy [Francis]" (3.1.1331-1333), "I will firke / My silly novice, as he was never firkt" (3.1.1360-1361). Small-shanke and his father, Oliver Small-shanke, of course, also compete with each other over Taffata's body and wealth. Even supposed friends Beard and Small-shanke reveal the limits of their ability to work together: by act 4, Beard reveals his distrust of Small-shanke's friendship: "Sure I am guld, this was no Coccatryce...this surely is the heyre, / And mad will *Smal-shankes* lay in Ambuscado, / To get her now from me, *Beard*" (1935-1939). This distrust is perhaps not sudden: one wonders how sincere Beard is in obtaining the warrant for Small-shanke's arrest in act 3 (1416-1417).

An even more troubling moment of violence may be Small-shankes's "proposal" to Taffata while holding a knife to her throat. Elizabeth Hansen argues that the moment is saved from being merely disturbing by the fact that "the power still seems to reside with Taffeta" (290). Hansen continues:

> She gets what she wants, and Will's antics are represented as the necessary display of sexual potency which leads her to choose the "lusty lad / That winnes his widdow with his well drawne blade" (*R*, 2249–50) as Taffata affectionately calls her new husband, over an old man who, in his son's charitable words, "stinks at both ends" (*R*, 2214). (290)

If it is true that Taffata does indeed desire and play a part in arranging the marriage between herself and William Small-shanke, then Small-shanke's proposal, with a knife to Taffata's throat, is a necessary performance of hypermasculinity to compensate for and conceal Taffata's control of their relationship. That the play

reasserts this kind of masculine authority, however, suggests its unease with its own proposal of the liberation which might accompany a rejection of this same masculine authority. The moment reflects the play's own internal violence. (Field's *Amends for Ladies* manifests a similar conflict.)

Despite its resistance to the idea, however, Barry's play does offer alternatives to masculinist modes of structuring economies. Jonson's play does not offer such a radical alternative economic structure. Ursula not only gathers a profit by selling commodities to desiring men, but also earns money by circulating female bodies. This too is a trade which men commonly practice:

> [GRACE] Then you would not chose, sir, but love my guardian, Justice Overdo, who is answerable to that description in every hair of him.
> [QUARLOUS] So I have heard. But how came you Mistris Welborn, to be his ward? Or have relation to him, at first?
> [GRACE] Faith, through a common calamity: he bought me, sir, and now he will marry me to his wife's brother, this wise gentleman that you see, or else I must pay value o' my land. (3.5.255-261)

Overdo purchases guardianship of Grace in order to profit by the dowry which her suitors must pay, or by alternatively taking her property if she refuses to comply with any reasonable marriage he negotiates on her behalf. This circulation of other women, also like Overdo's circulation of Grace, comes at the potential humiliation and ruin of the women who are caught in the economic circulation as commodities. Ursula and her underlings (the male bawd Whit, and the prostitute Alice) assist Knockem and Edgworth in exploiting the passive Win Littlewit, and in effectively drugging and kidnapping Dame Overdo: "Ursula's ale and *aqua vitae* ish to blame for [her state]; shit down, shweetheart, shit down and shleep a little" (5.4.28-29). The company participates in this exploitation, of course, in order to humiliate Littlewit and Justice

Overdo, both of whom lose the authority of their voice as they are silenced by the discovery of their wives-as-whores: "Let me unmask your ladyship. / [LITTLEWIT] O my wife, my wife, my wife! / [OVERDO] Is she your wife? *Redde te harpocratem!* (5.6.40-42) (with "*Redde te harpocratem!*" meaning, according to Ostovich's notes, a "warning to be silent"). Justice Overdo suffers the worst of the pair:

> *Mistress Overdo is sick, and her husband is silenced.*
> [MISTRESS OVERDO] O lend me a basin, I am sick, I am sick; where's Master Overdo? Bridget, call hither my Adam.
> [OVERDO] How –?
> [WHIT] Dy very own wife, i'fait, worshipful Adam.
> [MISTRESS OVERDO] Will not my Adam come at me? Shall I see him no more then? (5.6.60-64)

Not only does the discovery force Justice Overdo into stunned silence, but it also reverses the power he thinks he gains over the men in the previous scene, when he unveils himself.[37] Rather than bringing the other men to prison for their enormities, Justice Overdo finds himself having to open his home to the entire rabble in a moment of emasculation that he attempts to disguise as hospitality. Ursula, her booth, her trade, and her employee, turn the tables on Justice Overdo, positioning him in the same oppressed and punished roles as the men and women he attempts to rule through legal persecution and punishment. Overdo's own punishment is made all the more humiliating in that it is enacted by a woman-run network of criminals: the typically most oppressed figure returns as a terrifyingly ironic oppressor who operates by same codes as men typically operate in order to secure their own power.

An important final effect of Ursula's participation in (taking charge of) a trade that is almost entirely filled by women, but which functions by the same (unethical

[37] "Stay! Now do I forbid, I Adam Overdo! Sit still, I charge you. / [COKES] What, my brother-i'-law! / [GRACE] My wise guardian! / [EDGWORTH] Justice Overdo!" (5.5.104-107)

and exploitative) principles as do male-dominated economies, is that she fosters the same kind of divisive competition between women that, in all of the previous plays in this study – including *Bartholomew Fair* itself – typically exists amongst men. Alice's entry in 4.5 is telling:

> *Alice enters, beating the Justice's wife.*
> [MISTRESS OVERDO] Help, help, i' the King's name!
> [ALICE] A mischief on you, they are such as you are, that undo us, and take our trade from us, with your tufTaffata hanches...The poor common whores can ha' no traffic for the privy rich ones. Your caps and hoods of velvet call away our customers and lick the fat from us.
> [URSULA] Peace, you foul ramping jade you...You know where you were tawed lately; both lashed, and slashed you were in Bridewell.
> [ALICE] Ay, by the same token, you rid that week, and broke out the bottom o' the cart, night-tub. (5.5.56-73)

Upon seeing the prettier and better-dressed Dame Overdo, Alice flies into a rage, directing her violence at Dame Overdo's physical body. Troublingly, her anger is not only that she cannot compete with "whores" like Dame Overdo, but also that she is trapped in her trade. Alice turns her angry outcries upon both Ursula (who, rather than supporting Alice, tells her to hold her peace), and, significantly, upon juridical institutions like the prison (which, as I observe in my discussion of *Eastward Ho!* in the final chapter, are representations of patriarchal authority). Alice reminds Ursula that she works in tandem with the prison to strip away all possibilities of autonomy for Alice. The prison confines Alice physically while Ursula confines Alice financially by taking what profit she can earn in spite of newer and more attractive prostitutes. In mimicking the operating principles of male economies, Ursula creates a space for women that continues to perpetuate the violence, oppression and unhappiness that men's control of the market and female bodies within the market frequently causes.

This moment of Alice's anger most distinguishes Jonson's play from Barry's. Ursula is in something of an unfair position: she may be able to learn men's strategies for successful participation in a market economy – and this knowledge allows her to participate in this economy as an equal and autonomous person. But successfully participating in this economy means perpetuating (rather than completely subverting) those often exploitative strategies of gulling others, and making money from taking control of less powerful positions (whether their lack of power is owing to their low intelligence, as in the case of Bartholomew Cokes, or owing to their seemingly faultless but default occupation of a disadvantaged social position, like Alice). The play does challenge the justness of normative positions in its humiliation of figures like Zeal and Overdo who take their authority too seriously and abuse it, and by its arbitrary arrangement of Grace to a husband who, as Ostovich observes, offers her little more autonomy than she might have had in Overdo's original arranged marriage to the witless Cokes: "She escapes the trap of Overdo's wardship only to fall into Quarlous's...Her accomplishment lies in preferring an equal match of intelligence to an unequal union which would demean her wit by forcing her to coddle a fool" ("Introduction" 52). The play mocks, but does not overthrow these normative structures; Overdo ends the play humbled, but at least nominally still in charge. Grace does not escape marriage altogether. Women like Ursula cannot express their autonomy in ways that completely overthrow the market structures that conventionally oppress women.

The play does offer hope, however, that women can and do escape a necessarily submissive position in the frequently-exploitative market. It does not however, demonstrate the strategies they can employ in order to make such an escape.

The play does not show (or tell) how Ursula moved from dependent punk to independent bawd. In reading *Bartholomew Fair* against a boys' play like *Ram Alley*, however, we can perhaps infer possible strategies by which one gains autonomy through gender and other performance.

CHAPTER TWO:

Normative Plays: Acting Epicene Desires in *Epicoene* and *Amends for Ladies*

Considering the unveiling of Epicoene in 5.4, Helen Ostovich writes:

> Once Epicoene's peruke is off, do we not look askance at the perukes and gowns of the Ladies Collegiate? Metatheatrically, the boy-actors posit a world which excludes heterosexuality except in terms of coy role-playing and games-playing, a never-never land which assumes that adults have trivial intellects and contract barren or broken marriages, and that life among boys is more fun, so long as no one grows up. ("Introduction" 30)

The audience not only looks askance, but also looks in pleasure at what it cannot help but recognize as the epicene nature of all the boy actors on the stage. On a contemporary all-male stage, this pleasure might involve an audience finding amusement, or even wonder (depending on how successful the male is in convincing us "he" is a girl) at the revelation of the gender-bending. In general, however, the unveiling of Epicoene, and drawing attention to her literally "epicene" body, invites the audience to consider the ways that it can understand bodies in the city to be "epicene." The pleasure of the moment is not only that the "girl" is a boy, but the fact that Dauphine has deceived Morose, his friends, and potentially the off-stage audience (members of the audience who have not been deceived have the added pleasure of being in on the deception). The moment is a serious negotiation of male power, as most of the play's "men" are decentred, caught off guard by what they do not know. The moment is also seriously fun. In this chapter I will argue that the boy actor is literally epicene, and also that he metaphorically represents the "epicene" practices

and desires of all bodies in the city. And while these epicene qualities of city and boy actor threaten stable (masculinist) ways of organizing and knowing family, nation, and bodies, they also offer a lot of pleasure.

In his "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self," Thomas Greene discusses the importance of the image of the circle in Jonson's work. Greene proposes:

> In Jonson, the associations of the circle – as metaphysical, political, and moral ideal, as proportion and equilibrium, as cosmos, realm, society, estate, marriage, harmonious soul – are doubled by the associations of a center-governor, participant, house, inner self, identity, or, when the outer circle is broken, as lonely critic and self-reliant solitary. Center and circle become symbols, not only of harmony and completeness but of stability, repose, fixation, duration, and the incompleted circle, uncentered and misshapen, comes to symbolize a flux or a mobility, grotesquely or dazzlingly fluid. (326)

Critics like Mimi Yiu have taken up Greene's argument in the context of psychoanalysis in order to argue that Greene's centred self shares the qualities of the impenetrable phallus and its associations with a stable and definable masculinity. Greene's argument is useful in a discussion of family and nation in Jonson's plays. As his model of the centred self with its "associations [with] a center-governor [and] house" suggests, Greene's argument provides a useful paradigm (a "norm" 335) for thinking about the way early modern state and marital structures organize themselves, and which, I am arguing throughout this study, boy actors work to subvert in a context of a carnival atmosphere, the chaos of the city and its marketplace, and the theatre. Greene's work outlines a normative paradigm based on men possessing closed off and well-defined bodies, as well as a place in the centre of familial and state operations. The centred self is the man surrounded by obedient servants, subjects, and – most relevantly in this discussion – wives and children.

The men who become de-centred threaten to slide into a humiliating and emasculated state. De-centred men, particularly men in city comedies who allow their houses to be "inva[ded]" (335), become cuckolds, and metaphoric beasts. Greene describes the men at various points as "chameleons" (336), "swallows" (340), "parrots" (342), and a "fox, crow, fly, vulture, and tortoise" (343). Alternatively, the state of the de-centred man might be equivalent to what Ann Christensen, in her reconsideration of Greene's argument, notes as the default position of women: "Jonson's norm for women is established through a rhetorical strategy of simultaneously enclosing his women subjects away from and exposing them to the outside world, deconstructing the center/circle metaphor itself" (2). To describe the de-centred man as both beast-like and woman-like is not necessarily a contradiction: Christensen and critics like Mimi Yiu have both read the women who simultaneously compliment and interrogate Greene's centred man as the fluid and in flux, misshapen, mobile, and grotesque figures who are the inverse of the centred man's stable, reposed, fixed, and well-defined nature.

Each of Christensen, Yiu, and Karen Newman (among others) treat Jonson's women as the negative complements of Jonson's men. Women are malleable, permeable, and inarticulately noisy consumers. Men are fixed, impenetrable, and articulate producers. At least *in theory* they are fixed bodies. Each of these critics also challenges the rigid distinctions between men and women, revealing these distinctions to be discursive differences that cannot be put into practice without revealing internal contradictions and fissures. The negative (and often paradoxical) qualities which supposedly characterize women are what Mark Brietenberg further identifies as displacements of anxieties that men fear about their own gender: "attacks against

women are largely projections of an anxious masculinity whose rhetoric of difference-as-hierarchy was perceived as threatened" (155). Ultimately, Brietenberg notes that men suspect that neither the behaviours (158) nor the desires (169) of men and women are very different.[38] As this chapter will argue, the boy actor in Jonson's *Epicoene* and Field's *Amends for Ladies* proves the truth of these fears. He also productively undoes the displacement of male anxieties onto female bodies by suggesting the pleasure that both men and women can find in gazing at and performing after the epicene manner of the boy actor. Representatively and meta-theatrically, the boy's (or young man's) body in these plays is fully epicene. The boy actor himself plays men and women with equal success. Similarly, the young men within these plays (for example, Clerimont in his dressing room), who may not have been that different in age and appearance from the boy actors playing them, often dress, preen, flirt, talk, and consume in the same ways that women do. The similarities of the behaviours of young men and young women perhaps explains how the boy actor (or, within the plays, the boy playing Epicoene, or Maid playing a page boy), himself not rigorously adhering to either distinctly male or female gender signifiers, can slip seamlessly and convincingly (enough to fool the other characters in the play) into either gender. It may also explain how the characters within the play are able to transfer their desires onto different bodies easily (Clerimont from his ingle to Lady Haughty and back again). Following

[38] Breitenberg generally talks about behaviour and desire in relation to cross-dressing. About the former he notes "cross-dressing women are perceived as hermaphrodites. Hermaphroditism threatens masculinity because its possession of both male and female characteristics presents a case of non-differentiation. This may have activated a deeper fear, as Laura Levine suggests, that there was nothing at the core of male identity. In what is surely an unconscious response to this fear, masculinity projects 'nothing' onto women, then anxiously defends this projection by insisting on supposedly natural differences between men and women" (158). About the latter, Brietenberg observes "For it is precisely that women's desires may in fact be similar to men's that makes their imitation of male apparel so deeply troubling" (169).

Clerimont's example, the audience may itself be able to learn how to inscribe desire onto any body that is also willing to shed its rigorous adherence to sexual signifiers and fully revel in its own epicene capabilities. Certainly Field's and Jonson's plays both invite the audience to read the bodies of their epicene boy actors to reflect each spectator's individual desires.

Greene himself implicitly introduces the ways that men can profit by accepting their epicene qualities. Attempting to adhere to rigid definitions of gender, – particularly definitions that associate masculinity with a stable, fixed, and well-defined state – is dangerous for the early modern man living in a capitalist economy. Capitalism depends upon consumption, upon men opening their bodies to the market, and to trade relationships with other men. To insist upon stability, fixity, and impermeability as conditions of masculinity, in the context of a capitalist marketplace, ensures that men are constantly and unavoidably in a position where they must choose between being poor or being constantly in a state of permeability and malleability – a constant state of de-centeredness – and thus always intensely anxious about the threat to their masculinity. It is not surprising that the plays to which Greene affords a great deal of space when examining city comedies are examples of instances where the centred self is most frequently challenged: *Epicoene*, *The Alchemist*, *Volpone*, and *Bartholomew Fair*. London, as the "mart of the world" and the heart of England's trade transactions, is the space where men are most penetrable and (given the need the genre's emphasis on the trope of disguise and deception as a means of success in city comedies) the most malleable. It is the space where men are likely to be the most anxious about their de-centred state.

Morose is the paradigm of this anxious state. Morose, in his desire to disinherit Dauphine by marrying Epicoene and producing his own male heir exhibits a heterosexual paradigm of desire that attempts to position him as the ruling centred self of the play. Yiu observes, however, that Jonson's play, rather than rewarding Morose for attempting to function as a normative and well-defined example of masculinity, punishes Morose because he refuses to behave in a non-normative or queer manner (what she, using Jonson's own definition of the term, understands by the word "epicene").[39] Morose's crime is not that he overtly possesses wayward sexual desires, nor even that he attempts to disinherit his nephew. According to Yiu, drawing on Greene, Morose merits censuring because in closing himself from the chaotic noise of the city, he seeks to make himself impenetrable:

> Locked into this closet par excellence, Morose feels himself almost secure and in control, possessing a house as though possessing a phallus...By thus disarming his visitors of their contaminating noise, Morose's paranoid insistence on pure and hermetic spaces reveals itself as a power play, an assertion that the master's house must be built to accommodate the master's voice, the master logos. (78)

Yiu observes, however, that Morose achieves his manliness only by paradoxically enclosing himself in a "womb-like space" (78). Morose becomes what Greene describes as a "caricature of the 'centered self'" (335). Morose may possess a masculine control over the (limited) space he inhabits, but this control comes at the price of his self-infantilization. Morose becomes the child in the womb, and so unwittingly opens himself up to the abuse of other men in the play. Proof of his naiviety is his vulnerability to Dauphine's plan. This process of infantilization, Yiu

[39] Yiu introduces her argument with the assertion that "these contradictory and overlapping states of the epicene occupied a conceptual space that corresponds roughly with what contemporary theorists call queer, that catch-all category linked simply to the non-normative" (72).

further observes, accompanies an effeminization as Dauphine, Truewit, and "Epicoene" lump Morose in with the other women in the play: "Morose becomes another feminine figure who fusses to extremes over public appearances of himself" (78). Attempting to defend his centred masculinity, Morose ironically and inadvertently points to how unavoidably epicene both he and his environment is.

Ultimately, Yiu concludes that "Morose's dictatorial domain...constitutes an epicene space that is excessively masculine in its absolutist control and excessively feminine in its physicality, vulnerability, privacy, and irrationality" (79). Yiu further observes but does not comment upon the significance that the city space is one that the play sometimes characterizes as "feminine." Yiu notes that:

> When Morose decides to open his empire to a woman, then, he admits this talking city, with its artificial constructions that speak in discordant tones, a tower of Babel built on injurious feminine noises and thus not well squared; since Morose is in some sense marrying the city, the wife admitted will always already be a shrew. (82)

The city bears all the signifiers of the worst kind of typically unchaste woman: it is fluid and noisy; its limits are not quite definable, nor are the organs (bodies) within it ever perfectly localizable (just like the woman's wandering womb). Moreover, like the body of a woman, the space of London is a node where money, sex, and (masculine) power meet. The space in which men make their fortunes and derive their masculine selfhood, then, is one that is also characteristically feminine. Indeed, Yiu equates it to another "womblike space."[40]

[40] Yiu draws associations between this womb-like space, Plato's definition of the *chora*, and the post-Lacanian response to Platonic thought "the *chora* functions as a passageway that allows Ideals to be present in the physical world by providing a temporary housing, a receptacle, that holds them in place as tangible Bodies in an imperfect, mutable world...The chora thus remains homeless despite providing a home for all, lacking a room of its own in a Woolfian sense. Just as women, according to Jacques Lacan, cannot have the phallus because they *are* the phallus, the chora cannot have a space of its own because it *is* space, because it provides an identity for all the Bodies that inhabit it, because it remedies

Within this womblike space, men themselves trade in an epicene manner. In the city's capitalist marketplace, masculinity depends on opening one's body to the market and profiting from the appetites of other consuming males. Yet even this consumption is often projected onto the bodies of women. Natasha Korda argues that in the burgeoning consumer economy of early modern England it was a wife's task to "consum[e] market goods, or cates, commodities produced outside the home" (278-279) conspicuously but moderately, in ways that consolidated her husband's authority:

> if *Shrew*'s taming narrative positions Kate as a 'vicarious consumer' to ensure that her consumption and manipulation of household cates conforms to her husband's interests, it nevertheless points to a historical moment when the housewife's management of household property becomes potentially threatening to the symbolic order of things. (283)

Korda, in discussing *The Taming of the Shrew*, is not entirely concerned with economic activity in the city or in city comedy. Her argument about the need for women to perform moderate consumption, however, is productive in the space of London. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, according to Korda, women consume on behalf of men, an arrangement that allows women to open their bodies (their mouths, sexual organs, pockets, and wills) in order to consume (food, sex, money, or fashion) on behalf of their husbands, leaving the male body unpermeated, and the binary of female consumer/male producer intact. They also sell goods for their husbands' profit (Grace Seldome in act 3 of *Amends for Ladies,* and Mistress Openwork and Mistress Gallipot from Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* provide examples of such consumers). Men's financial reputations in the city often depend upon their wives being able to master a

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the lack inherent in Ideals unable to exert force in the material world. For Luce Irigaray, this always elusive and excessive quality of the chora constitutes the feminine *par excellence*, that which must be excluded from the logic of any binary opposition, cast outside the plot of masculine constructions. (74-75)

shrewd affinity for business that normatively is a responsibility of the male gender. Finally, in the epicene space of the city and its market, men cannot resist becoming direct consumers: Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* shows Touchwood Sr trading his own semen to Oliver Kix for money, Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* ends with Justice Overdo inviting the play's (largely male) cast to supper, while Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* begins with George, Nell, and Rafe taking their paid seats on the fashionable stage. In the city, the centred self becomes a myth as all characters – even the heroes (tricksters) who outwit the gulls – must allow themselves to be penetrated by the city's market (indeed, as Morose's failed attempt to keep himself from this market proves, men cannot win if they do not allow this penetration).

I propose that the city, in its fluidity, is *truly* epicene – a space where behaviours typically and traditionally "female" (such as the "female" tendency towards gossip, and the female body's permeability to the market) are shared by all bodies. Similarly, behaviours that are typically and traditionally "masculine" (participating in logical discourse, deceiving and cuckolding, and arranging marriages and sexual unions – the job of an early modern patriarch and law-giver) are equally shared by all bodies. The city "equally and correctly denote[s]...either sex" (Yiu 72) to the extent that qualities can no longer be distinguished as masculine or feminine at all. Within this epicene context, the reason that Morose's attempts at seclusion fail is because the masculine centred self that undergirds narratives like the chaste maid, or (to anticipate my argument in the following chapter) country house poems and prodigality narratives, cannot exist in the city, and so in Jonson's city comedy,

Morose's behaviour marks him as an outmoded figure worthy of mockery. To thrive in the city is to become as unashamedly epicene as the city itself.

I understand Jonson's city as perhaps more epicene than even Yiu allows it. Yiu maintains the definitions between male and female behaviours when she suggests that Morose's "feminine" home is vulnerable, private, and irrational, and that the "feminine" city itself is inarticulately noisy (in contrast to men's capacities for reasoned speech), and not clearly definable (in contrast to men's well-defined and centred bodies). Assuming that noise is "feminine," however, Yiu is reasserting assumptions that early modern discourse makes about women: that they are perversely and unchastely noisy. I do accept Yiu's assertion that the city itself is an epicene space in Jonson's play, but think that its very productivity lies in its challenge to our abilities to distinguish between male and female qualities at all. The city may be characterized by shrewish gossip, but this gossip belongs to and sources from both men and women. Both men and women possess the signifiers of what is typically "the worst kind of unchaste woman," but the joke is that these signifiers do not signify "woman" at all, but people in general. Finally, both men and women actively construct their selves and make their fortunes from this epicene city space. This latter point is where my reading of bodies in the city differs most from Yiu's: while she identifies the ways that males achieve their authority by using the feminine in the city, she also assumes that the men in the play consistently displace the feminine and typically "female" behaviours back onto female bodies. Most of the men in the play, however, do not reject or attempt to hide their conspicuous consumption, talk, knowledge of cosmetics, dressing, or their capabilities of deception, but revel in these epicene behaviours as much as the women do: Truewit's knowledge of the time Clerimont spends indulging in "high fare, soft

lodging, fine clothes, and his fiddle" (1.1.23) suggests that Clerimont's activities are hardly secrets; his willingness to provide "company" with "fashionable men" like Clerimont (1.1.34-35) – and that Clerimont's practices of consumption are common enough to *be* fashions – further suggests that such practices are not shameful. The verbal copiousness that characterizes Truewit and Clerimont's discussion of women's dressing rooms and cosmetic practices (a discussion that runs for 46 lines), suggests both a detailed knowledge of and a fascination with those practices.

Jonson's *Epicoene* and Field's *Amends for Ladies* revel in the space's ability to turn all bodies into "epicenes" (in much the same way that *Bartholomew Fair*'s carnival atmosphere revels in the boy actor's ability to disrupt normative practices through burlesque). *Epicoene* celebrates the city as the space of the non-normative – where bodies can pursue personal desires and express themselves in any way that they choose, and in ways that can no longer be clearly demarcated "male" or "female," but are hybrids of both. The city punishes only those men who attempt to reject the city's epicene nature.[41] In *Epicoene* this means punishing Morose who futilely pursues the notion of a centred, impenetrable male body secured by marriage to a chaste wife (another theoretically fixed and defined body that is, in practice, impossible to achieve). Field's *Amends for Ladies* similarly celebrates the non-normative, revealing the unhappiness of those who choose not to pursue normative desires. Field's play differs from Jonson's, however, in that it ultimately insists that its characters continue to enter into normative marital structures that rearticulate the structure of the centred ruling male surrounded by familial subjects, but that they do so while maintaining

[41] When Morose attempts to ridicule Lady Haughty for her liberated sexuality (a sexuality that remains under her control), Epicoene rebukes his sarcasm, naming him "a rude bridegroom, to entertain ladies of honour in this fashion" (3.7.89-90). The crowd's laughter consistently turns against Morose, marking his exclusion from the city's community.

their awareness that they are performing their roles within these structures (all the while privately expressing their personal desires).

The boy actor in both plays is the catalyst that works the plays' celebration of the epicene city and the epicene bodies within it. The boy actor, as in *Bartholomew Fair* and *Ram Alley*, invites the audience to participate in the enjoyment of non-normative and epicene qualities and desires (rather than feeling anxious about them). In *Epicoene* this means joining in with the crowd's mocking laughter of Morose (a laughter that, given Dauphine's ultimate triumph over Morose, they are not asked to quiet by the end of the play), and enjoying listening to descriptions like Clerimont's of his lady's dressing room. Both plays also deliberately gesture towards the cross-dressed boy actors (particularly Epicoene and Field's Frank, and Bould and Widow) in order to invite the audience to gaze at the boy's epicene body and invest the bodies of these boys with their own erotic desires. While both plays show the pleasure and liberation which both women and men experience at performing normally transgressive acts of dressing and sexuality (Maid and Moll in Field's play particularly represent this liberation and pleasure), both plays also particularly emphasize the pleasure that men find in transgressive performance: men like Clerimont *like* dressing up, while men like Bould find a certain erotic potential in playing passive or masochistic roles in sex. Both plays, then, suggest that men like the kind of erotic potential that one can find in imitating and gazing upon the boy's body, which acts as a surface upon which any meaning or desire can be written or acted out. Men *like* acting like boys, who as actors get to dress up and play girls, and who as ingles get to have sexual relationships with men as well as women. The boy actor, however, can manifest his full subversive potential only within the confines of the early modern

stage: even though *Epicoene* does not, at any point within its own plot structure, return to heteronormative marital structures, by the play's end the audience itself returns to the London outside the theatre, where normative structures may be more operative (in a way, then, Field's play offers a more realistic representation of the strategies by which non-normative desires can be expressed). It is up to the individual members of the audience to decide how they will continue to invest bodies (either by reading the bodies of others that they gaze at, or the way that they perform their own bodies) with their own personal and ever-changing desires.

Before beginning my argument proper, I want to pause, momentarily, to comment on the reasoning behind the space that this chapter gives to the discussion of male bodies. Although the epicene city on stage is one that challenges clear definitions of male and female bodies and activities – and is thus the source of many anxieties around masculine authority – in reality it does not function as a space in which there is perfect equality between male and female bodies. Korda concludes her argument optimistically with the offer that learning how to circulate their husband's goods in moderation provided a limited autonomy for women trapped within a patriarchal market. Korda's identification of this opportunity to resist reduction to passive commodities merely is apt, and such opportunities increase in city comedy where market operations are a central concern of the genre. I find Korda's accompanying conclusion troubling, however: "Petruchio, no less than Kate, is subject to the logic of exchange, to the *perpetuum mobile* of commodity circulation...Slightly adapting Marx...[t]he movement of subjects within the play takes the form of movement made by things, and these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them" (297). Korda suggests, quite rightly, that men are also trapped in the movement of

financial and sexual economies that they inherit. I would like to emphasize the importance of paying attention to the idea that the cultural constraints around men do not justify the violence women experience under this same system (such as Petruccio's starving, or his verbal abuse of Kate).[42] While I agree that men, too, are constrained by the economies and legal and other juridical systems in which they operate, I do not conclude that this means they experience the same degree of limitation as women.[43] My reading of Jonson's *Epicoene* and Field's *Amends for Ladies*, and, to a lesser extent, Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, tries to understand the ways in which common city comedy narratives like the "chaste maid-become-chaste wife" plot define the desire of men (as well as women) in confining heteronormative ways that attempt to consolidate a centred masculinity. And while the plays (and my own argument) tend to focus on the way that these heteronormative practices are confining to men – and the way that borrowing the epicene practices of the boy actor are particularly liberating for men – I think it is also important to recall that when heteronormative practices are reinstituted (as I think they are at the conclusion of *Amends for Ladies* and following the conclusion of *Epicoene*, when the audience leaves the theatre) women lose more of their autonomy than men. If the

[42] Korda implies this point, but does not state it overtly.

[43] While reading the city as an epicene space puts forward the logical conclusion that the city cannot operate without the presence and movements of female bodies, the invisible legal and economic rules that order the city and determine its operations also imposes limits upon this movement. The movement of goods within an economy might allow females some autonomy, but females are not allowed to move – and particularly to consume – goods unsupervised and without restraint. The laws which govern trade, determine what bodies can and cannot wear, and the hours that goods can be consumed (or hospitalities remain open) are produced by male bodies and voices, just as male voices produced most economic treatises, religious sermons, and indeed, dramatic narratives. These narratives attempt to control the activity of the female body which threatens male authority. They are, as Butler, Foucault, Irigaray, and Jameson have argued at length, often inconsistent, or otherwise logically unsound. I do not want to take up trying to prove the patriarchal origin of legal and other juridical structures, and the narratives which perpetutate them, but I am assuming that these structures do reflect a patriarchal power structure. Critics who have adopted similar positions regarding the relationship of gender and patriarchal institutions include Yiu, Roberta Barker, Sigrid Brauner, Kathleen McLuskie, and I-Chun Wang.

plays are productive, the reason is that they show men, in addition to women, standing to lose in the strict adherence to heteronormative practices. The plays also reveal the pleasure that men stand to gain, along with women, in adopting non-normative practices. Overall, the plays address masculinist agendas before feminist ones. So while the boy actor in both plays, teasingly and erotically playing out non-normative desires, invites the audience to experience both the pleasure of the non-normative and the violence that occurs when the non-normative is exorcized, he yet cannot stop the exorcism of the non-normative. In *Amends for Ladies* this exorcism occurs on stage at the end of the play in its reassertion of marriage; in *Epicoene*, it occurs when the audience returns to reality outside the theatre where queer desires and sexuality are not as celebrated as they are within the play and where women, particularly, can experience very real violence for disobeying their husbands and fathers, behaving shrewishly, or prostituting themselves.[44]

But in *Epicoene*, neither women nor men are terribly punished for their unchaste epicene behaviours. In 3.4, Epicoene "speak[s] out" (32) for the first time. The moment is a horrifying one for Morose because it marks the destruction of his fantasy of finding a wife who is chaste, silent, and obedient, and who will secure him against two of the three things he fears most: the noise of London, and Dauphine (and company)'s rights to inherit his wealth and thus purchase authority over Morose. Tellingly, the phrase Morose first uses to describe the declamatory Epicoene is "O immodesty! a manifest woman!" (37). The phrase reveals a paradoxical contradiction in Morose's way of thinking about women – one that characterizes much of early modern discourse around women (as I observed through Orgel's work in the previous

[44] Bamford, 15-19.

chapter): at the same time that Morose *desires* a chaste, silent, and obedient wife, he *expects* that women are 'manifestly' sexually open, talkative, and seeking to overthrow their husbands' authority. When Epicoene reveals that she will "govern" her family (47), Morose has two (too many) ready examples of women who have famously done the same: "I have married a Penthesilia, a Semirimas" (48-49). The moment perhaps marks the height of Morose's foolishness – after all, Truewit warns him that women are immodest in their talk, consumption, and sexuality in 2.2. Truewit's warning to Morose about the "goblin *matrimony*" (29) and the wife that accompanies indicates that the other men in the play are aware of the ways in which a wife is an unchaste and therefore dangerous commodity:

> Alas, sir, do you ever think to find a chaste wife in these times? Now? When there are so many masques, plays, Puritan preachings, mad folks, and other strange sights to be seen daily, private and public?...If, after you are married, your wife do run away with a vaulter, or the Frenchman that walks upon ropes, or him that dances the jig, or a fencer for his skill at his weapon; why it is not their fault, they have discharged their consciences; when you know what may happen...If she be fair, young and vegetous, no sweetmeats ever drew more flies; all the yellow doublets and great roses in the town will be there. If foul and crooked, she'll be with them, and buy those doublets and roses, sir...If fruitful, as proud as May and humourous as April; she must have her doctors, her midwives, her nurses, her longings every hour; though it be for the dearest morsel of man. If learned, there was never such a parrot; all your patrimony will be too little for the guests that must be invited to hear her speak Latin and Greek (2.2.29-66)

Most of the reasons Truewit gives Morose explaining why a female can never be chaste are tied to the financial, sexual, and power economies: her uncontrollable sexual desires which are incited by the sports and spectacles of London,[45] the bodies and services she will attempt to consume (and upon which she will spend her

[45] All of these factors are true outside of London, but the city increases access to, for example, vaulters, doctors, teachers, and available sexual partners.

husband's wealth), her inability to enclose her body from desiring eyes (and inviting eyes to view her, she invites London into her husband's home), and that young men will attempt to gain access to the sexual organs which should belong to her husband alone (thus humiliating him).[46] Truewit fails to remind Morose, here, that men too are as "unchaste" as women – as ready to participate in sports, spectacles, spending, and sexual consumption as women. These unchaste behaviours are not so much characteristic of women as they are of city dwellers.

Far from merely pointing to Morose's foolish expectations of women, Morose's quest for a chaste wife is also one more sign of his inability to understand the city itself, and the principles by which it operates. As act 3 demonstrates, a truly chaste wife cannot exist in the city, a space where men and women equally engage in conversation, sex, and trade (both for profit and for pleasure). *Epicoene* dramatizes that the silent body in the city is as much a fantasy as the chaste maid-become-chaste wife's body. Act 3 emphasizes the extent to which no character in Jonson's play is silent. 3.4 opens with the parson's performance of a voice hoarse from "having a cold" (5 *s.d.*), and concludes with the chorus of voices at the end of the scene – a chorus that has gradually swelled throughout the scene – and the final arrangement of which is almost equal parts male and female (the number of "men" and "women" on stage depends how aware individual members of the audience are that Epicoene is a boy playing a girl). All of the bodies on stage take their turn in talking and making noise, and Morose responds with equal horror to the entry of Truewit ("O my torment, my torment!" 3.5.44), of the Collegiates ("O, the sea breaks in upon me! another flood!"

[46] Truewit's warning is compelling partly because it is true – and the Collegiates affirm the veracity of this behaviour throughout the play. Truewit, however, fails to notice that the unchaste behaviours he describes also involve men exerting their own desires. And so men are as culpable as women.

3.6.2), and of Clerimont and his musicians ("this day I shall be their anvil to work on, they will grate me asunder," 3.7.3-4). The final exchange, too, allows each body its equal turn in speech (3.7.21-41). [47]

These same bodies that participate equally in speech also equally engage in kissing ("*as he presents them severally, Epi. kisses them*"(3.6.7 *s.d.*), "I'll kiss you, [Master Morose], notwithstanding the justice of my quarrel," 18-19) – behaviour that surely terrifies Morose, summoning all his fears of plague, as much as it disgusts him for its potential associations with sexuality (and he condemns Lady Haughty's sexuality at lines 83-88). All the bodies on stage also participate in the discussion of the city's fashions, industries, and labours: the act includes references to barbers (3.5.20), chimney-sweepers (3.5.98-99), and colliers (3.5.101), as well as to wedding fashions (3.6.58-59).

To the extent that all bodies are talkative, that all bodies engage in trade and sex and the operations of the city from which Morose desperately wants to escape, all bodies in Jonson's play are "epicene". All bodies take on the characteristics of, and engage in behaviours that are typically displaced onto female bodies (such as gossip). And all bodies participate in activities that are typical of men in early modern comedy

[47] Thus talk itself, as Karen Newman implies, has the potential to be an epicene act. One wonders what the audience not only saw, but heard in this scene, with its particular emphasis on voices. In drawing attention to the Parson's voice at the beginning of the scene, did the scene invite its audience to recall that boy's companies frequently capitalised on the singing talents of its youthful actors – or to hear the lack of difference between the voices of the "men" and "women" on stage? Or even to hear the falseness of a falsetto used to indicate female voices? If the scene does draw attention to the maleness of the voices on stage, it not only insists on the lack of difference between men and women and their roles in the city, but also simultaneously underscores the ways that male bodies perform, suggesting that men, like the chaste woman, are fictions and performances merely. Any sort of power relations based on heteronormativity are discursive constructs. Certainly this is the point that the unveiling of Epicoene's boy's body makes in the play's final scene.

(such as negotiating their roles in marriage, in purchasing sex, and in gulling, cuckolding, and otherwise deceiving).[48]

Jonson's and Field's plays interrogate paradigmatic (and much less heterodox) plays like *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. Middleton's play, while it reveals the anxieties which men have concerning the stability of their authority – and their fears of the uncontrollably leaky and consuming female body – does not challenge the structure of heteronormative marriage on which much of patriarchal authority rests. Not only does the play suggest that Moll *wants* to marry Touchstone Jr. and produce his heirs, but it also sets up all of the families as slightly unorthodox, but consistently happy in their heteronormativity.[49] Oliver Kix forms an arrangement with Touchwood Sr that exchanges money for Touchwood's promise to get Lady Kix with child. Middleton's play delimits the boundaries of family and decodes its usual operations, suggesting that families must be resourceful in order to maintain their structural

[48] Which is not to say that men do not gossip, and women do not negotiate marriage, purchase sex, or practice deception in other plays, but Jonson's play, in emphasising the degree to which men and women all perform these activities, proposes that these behaviours are more normally "epicene" than gender discourse frequently allows.

[49] Gary Kuchar argues that "the shift away from feudal relations towards an economy that is increasingly based on more mediated forms of commodity exchange and fluid social relations" (9) causes anxiety for men. For Kuchar, city comedies represent the man-merchant's simultaneous desire for and anxiety over being cuckolded. Jonsonian city comedies are more concerned with the anxieties attendant upon the prospect of cuckoldry, while Middletonian city comedies like *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* emphasise the potential pleasures of cuckoldry. Allwit, in being wholly aware of his cuckolded position (indeed, in arranging his own cuckolding) regains power over his "cuckolder," Sir Walter – allowing Sir Walter to experience the jealousy and fears of losing property (his mistress) to another man. While I agree with Kuchar's reading of the city as the space which acts as the catalyst for more dynamic relationships among men, and with the potential pleasures in cuckoldry, I do not think this pleasure is entirely rooted in matters of control; as I argue regarding Bould and Widow, the prospect of not being in control is sometimes arousing to men. Moreover, while I agree that *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* "takes the figure of the Jacobean wittol to its dramatic and ideological limit" (25) in the figure of Allwit, I do think that, like the other plays in this study, it makes its challenge to fixed marital structures in ways that are limited by and expressed within heteronormative confines. Finally I think the plays in this study are more subversive to the concept fixed social relations by showing the ways that women actively interrupt and challenge male centredness (not always to the dismay of other males). In Middleton's play women seem to function as dangerous objects that need jealous guarding if they are not to be stolen by other men (Mistress Allwit), or potentially autonomous bodies that are rightfully re-placed under male control (Moll Yellowhammer).

integrity, and that sexuality and fatherhood are commodities that one can purchase, sell, or exchange in London's city economy. The family structures in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, however, remain preserved by Kix and Touchwood's somewhat unorthodox exchange of sex and money. The play asks for a more flexible understanding of family structures, but it does not challenge them altogether. *Epicoene*, however, does begin to challenge these structures. The play mocks the only two male characters who attempt to arrange a heteronormative marriage for themselves: Tom Otter is henpecked throughout and emasculated when his wife joins the Collegiates (3.7.33), and beats her husband in front of the play's other males (4.2.91 *s.d.*).[50] Similarly, the wits not only mock Morose for his attempts to find a perfectly silent wife to act as the conduit for his male heirs, but reveal that that wife is entirely fictional. In *Epicoene*, wives are often loud, consumptive, and emasculating women like Mistress Otter, or they are women like Lady Haughty who are completely in control of their own sexuality, and resist male control, or they are not women at all.

Morose and Captain Otter seem to be the only two male characters bothered by the lack of chaste women in the play. Many of the play's young men do not necessarily desire women at all. Dauphine's unveiling of Epicoene in act 5 is accompanied by an implicit threat of homosexuality: Dauphine reveals that he has "brought up [the boy] this half year at my great charges" (5.4.176-177): one wonders how the pair have spent their time in the past year – and how Dauphine knows the boy "will make a good visitant" (5.4.214-215).[51] The ending suggests the possibility that

[50] I should note that Otter's marriage is normative only structurally – it is a heterosexual marriage between a man and a woman. But in the Mistress Otter has all the authority and money, the marriage is not typically "normative."

[51] Kate D. Levin (134), Ostovich ("General Introduction" 22), Wang (136), and Mary Beth Rose (60) have severally noted the desire that seems to exist between the male wits in the play.

male desire may not fall into a heteronormative pattern. (And what does it mean when the most intelligent, controlled, and centred male selves of the play possess the most epicene desires?)

Potentially more disruptive than the thought that the centred male self may rest not on heterosexual desires leading to the heteronormative marriage that is ostensibly the basis of patriarchy is the possibility that non-heterosexual and non-normative desires may be *normal*. One thinks of the oft critically-reflected-upon ingle of Clerimont (1.1.22), the fact that that the Collegiates are not particularly interested in marriage – except as a means of securing their financial futures – or the audience's potential reactions to the unveiling scene (I consider these reactions below).

The challenge to heteronormative desires and structures is almost as acute in *Amends for Ladies*. Reading *Amends* in this way is somewhat uncomfortable: far from reading the work as an important heterodox moment in early modern drama, critics have generally ignored Field's play, not even undertaking to produce a modern printed edition of the work. The play does receive cursory attention in general studies on city comedy or the companies of boy actors, but no extended body of criticism exists yet.[52] When critics have spared attention to *Amends*, they have generally commented on three moments in the play: Wife's assertion at the beginning and ending of the play that her marital status is happiest, Moll Cutpurse's appearance in 2.1, and the violence of the Bould-Widow proposal scene in act 4.

[52] Two of the articles whose attention is entirely devoted to the works of Field are entries in *Notes and Queries* from more than half a century ago: Peery's "Six Confused Exits and Entrances in the Plays of Nathan Field" (August 1946) and "Frank vs. Frater in 'Amends for Ladies'" (April 1946).

Wife's assertion that to be a wife is "the happiest life" (H4v)[53] is an appropriate frame for the play because it is precisely the tenet that the play wants to challenge. Yet it seems almost too easy to challenge Wife's position: she is, after all, one of the play's most tormented characters. Despite her repeated and genuine displays of faithfulness to Husband, he refuses to return her affection, instead testing her fidelity with greater frequency, and becoming more obstinately convinced that she has committed adultery with his oldest friend.

Wife's own infelicitous marriage aside, Field's play generally does not support her assertion that the happiest position in which to find oneself is a heteronormative marriage. And the marriage that Wife describes in the opening argument *is* heteronormative: "I that have a man / As if my selfe had made him: such a one / As I may justly say, I am the rib / Belonging to his breast" (A3r). Wife reads her marriage in terms of the first marriage between Adam and Eve. The allegory is fitting because Wife's marriage certainly mimics the power structures of the biblical one.[54] Wife's description of her marriage, however, implies that it is one which excludes the "wealth and beautie" (A3r) which both Widow and Maid possess. The Moll scene (in Field's *Amends for Ladies*) proves that Grace Seldome's control over her family's wealth is limited, and Widow states in the final scene that in agreeing to marry Bould, she gives up "lands and goods" (H4r). Most tellingly, Husband tells Seldome that he has "left

[53] Textual references are to the 1638 text, which has more extant prefatory material, but is otherwise the same as the 1618 text.

[54] The first marriage provides the paradigm for early modern marriages generally. Guido Ruggiero writes that "The centrality of marriage as a social institution has already been recognised, and its most important features identified: the emphasis on marriage, especially at higher social levels, as a social and economic institution of the family where the individual desires (and/or love) of the central couple were secondary" (11). Constance Jordan notes similarly that "divine law recorded in Scripture [and] natural law in philosophy" undergird social and political attitudes towards women and the family (65-66).

[Wife] now, as bare, that should I die, / Her fortune (o' my conscience) would be / To marrie some Tobacco-man, shee has nothing / But an old black-woorke wastcote" (D4r). Wife's description of marriage reveals the loss that attends women in the married state (and the potential unhappiness that accompanies that loss).

But the unhappiness in heteronormative marriage is not a female unhappiness only. *Amends for Ladies* plays out at length what *Epicoene* begins to imply: that men, as well as women, are often happier in non-normative pairings. Wife, Grace Seldome, and Ingen excepting, none of the characters display any unhesitating desire to enter into an entirely heteronormative marriage. Even Ingen, in his mock marriage to his brother, shows his readiness to participate in the transgressive gender behaviour and sexual desires that Wife eschews in her opening speech and when she refuses Subtle's sexual advances, and which her sister Grace Seldome similarly eschews when she ejects Moll Cutpurse from her husband's shop.

The Moll scene itself, although it is the moment in Field's play that receives the most critical attention, is one that is almost absurdly brief, taking up only forty lines. Yet the play's subtitle in the 1639 reprinting, "With the merry prankes of Moll Cut-Purse: Or, the humour of roaring," suggests the scene is both popular (and marketable) and also integral to the meaning of the play. Indeed, the scene *is* integral, emblematically condensing within it all of the gender and economic themes which run throughout the play. It will be useful to reprint an extended excerpt from the scene here:

> [MALL] By your leave Master Seldome, have you done the hangers I bespake for the Knight?
> [SELDOME] Yes marrie have I Mistress *hic & haec*, i'le fetch'em to you.

> [MALL]...all's cleere; pritie rogue I have long'd to know thee this twelve months, and had no other meanes but this to speake with thee, there's a letter to thee from the partie...The Knight *Sir John Lovall.*
> [GRACE] Hence lewd impudent
> I know not what to tearme thee man or woman...
> some say thou art a woman,
> Others a man; and many thou art both
> Woman and man, but I think neither
> Or man and horse, as the old Centaures were faign'd.
> [MALL]...I have seene a woman looke as modestly as you, and speake as sinceerely, and follow the Fryars as zealously, and shee has beene as sound a jumbler as e're paid for't...
> *Enter* Seldome *with hangers.*
> [SELDOME] Looke you, heere are the hangers.
> [MALL] They are not for my turne (b'y mistress *Seldome*). *Exit.* (C1v-C2v)

Moll here is an obvious transvestite, as Seldome's teasing address "Mistress Hic & Haec" announces: Moll has both "this and that" – both male and female sexual parts. To the readers of the 1639 playtext, this reference would have taken on a more particular allusion to the popular *Hic Mulier* and *Haec-Vir* pamphlets. Moll is not merely a woman who adopts transgressive dressing practices, but her transvestism is also a signifier of her generally transgressive social behaviour. Wife, of course, draws the obvious conclusion for us that the woman who does participate in transgressive behaviour is nothing more than a monster. Moll alerts the audience to the disruptive transgressive practices (related to gender/sexual activity or not) that recur in Field's play.

But the audience does not need to recall the dangerous behaviour of which the *Hic Mulier* pamphlet warns in order to make the connection between Moll's transvestism and the play's theme of disruption of heteronormative marital structures. Moll's entire purpose in visiting Seldome's shop is, of course, to disrupt the marriage between Seldome and his wife. Moll reveals that she has waited a year to bring Grace

a letter from Sir John Lovall. Fascinatingly, however, Moll does not assume, as Grace does, that extramarital sex is any sort of disruption at all. Her claim that she has "seen a woman...follow the Fryars" and yet act as a whore, suggests that extramarital sexual activities have become encoded into the everyday of London's marriages. Again, Moll suggests that "transgressive" sexual behaviour may be the norm (and that Seldome does not seem troubled by Moll's cross-dressed body enough to stop all business with her perhaps emphasizes the everyday normalcy of her behaviour).[55] Ultimately, Grace refuses to trade or even to interact with Moll, instead commanding her to leave the shop and never return (under threat of arrest). Wife acts as the normalizing voice who demands that London ignore or conceal the customary "transgressive" social behaviours (the voice that demands that extramarital affairs be "found" rather than openly visible). Indeed, most of the characters in the play – who actually do participate in transgressive behaviour – refuse to openly acknowledge this behaviour. Tellingly, Moll leaves the shop without buying the hangers which Husband produces for her. Not only does Wife's expulsion of Moll from the shop reveal the way that the everyday monetary economy excludes non-heteronormative figures from its operations, but the moment also denounces Moll – and by association all sexually-transgressive figures – as unproductive and therefore threatening bodies.[56]

I have suggested that Grace and Seldome's union represents a paradigmatic heteronormative marriage, and one that is, moreover, accompanied by financial stability. Husband and Wife represent a similar heteronormative and financially stable pairing. Unlike Seldome and Grace's rare happy marriage, however, Husband and

[55] Seldome and Grace's family name also reveals that a happy heteronormative marriage is a rare, or seldom-seen thing.

[56] One wonders if Widow is able to negotiate her sado-masochistic marriage with Bould because her amassed wealth means that is somewhat less dependent on market operations than Maid or Wife.

Wife's marriage is, as I proposed above, not felicitous. Not only does Wife hint at her loss of beauty and wealth, but she also spends much of the play submitting to the love tests which Husband inflicts upon her. The love tests, however, reveal Husband's own unhappiness at his inability to properly display his non-normative love for his oldest friend Subtle. Husband introduces his love for Subtle in an interchange with Wife at the play's opening:

> [HUSBAND] we two
> Were Schoole-fellowes together, borne and nurs'd,
> Brought up, and liv'd since like the Gemins,
> Had but one suck, the Taverne or the Ordinarie.
> Ere I was married, that saw one of us
> Without the other, said we walk't by halfes,
> Where deere, deere friend have you beene all this while?
> [SUBTLE] Oh most sweet friend the World's so vicious,
> That had I with such familiaritie
> Frequented you since you were married,
> Prosses'd and us'd your fortunes as before,
> As in like maner you commanded mine,
> The deprav'd thoughts of men would have proclaim'd
> Some scandalous rumours from this love of ours,
> As saying, mine reflected on your Ladie,
> And what a wound had that beene to our soules?
> (B4v – C1r)

Husband and Subtle are not only friends, school-fellows, and brothers (or twins), but also lovers and soul mates, a notion which Husband's description of his relationship with Subtle invokes: Husband's account that they "walk't by halfes" suggests that the two belong in the same body. The phrasing recalls the platonic theory of the split soul (which the *Symposium* describes as a male-female splitting that eventually reunites in sex and marriage).

Subtle's response to Husband's questioning of his long absence suggests the social discomfort with non-normative friendships. Husband, however, persists in his unhappy attempts to offer his wife to his friend – the only way that he can express his

love and desire for Subtle.[57] This persistence threatens to ostracize him (as Subtle fears) from everyday social and economic relations in the city. As with Moll's transgressive dressing, Husband's transgressive desires for another male mark him as a potentially unproductive body – one with whom the play's consumers may not feel comfortable trading, and thus a potentially abjectable body.

Field's play, then, presents its audience with a dilemma: while the play abjects characters like Moll and Husband who eschew the heteronormative chaste maid-becomes-chaste wife and centred-self paradigms,[58] it does not fully accept the characters who display heteronormative desires either. Both Wife and the elder and younger Feesimples pursue heteronormative marriages exclusively (and, in the case of the Feesimples, ones by which they stand to profit financially). But Husband rejects his wife's affections and proofs of fidelity and ends up still not obtaining the amity he desires. The play punishes the younger Feesimple with an even greater severity, however; Bould and Wilstrid abuse him both physically and verbally,[59] and his father disowns him. Finally, "Count" Feesimple finds himself unwillingly married to Whore

[57] Husband's excuses for the love tests become weaker as the play progresses. He begins with the request that Subtle "make [him] kill [his] fond suspect of her, / By assurance that shee is loyall" (C1r – C1v). By his second request, he urges Subtle with greater intensity, even providing a jewel and a sonnet with which to win her, until Subtle notes that the nature of Husband's request has changed, and Husband takes "paines to be a Cuckold" (D4v). When Subtle finally tells the Husband the (concocted) story of how he seduced Wife, Husband asks for greater and greater details "in prose, how [Subtle] got [him] to the matter" (G3v).

[58] Proudly shows a similar rejection of heteronormative values. He jealously guards and pursues his sister, even attempting to murder Ingen when he suspects him as the responsible party behind Maid's disappearance ("I have a sword to bathe / In thy false blood, inhumane murder" E1r). Proudly's jealousy over his sister, when juxtaposed with his false starts at attempting to woo Grace Seldome, suggests that he, like Husband, is caught in a pattern of pursuing and then abjecting heterodox, or taboo desires.

[59] Bould's abuse of the younger Feesimple involves not only his final theft of Maid after getting Feesimple to arrange his own wedding, but also in taking advantage of Feesimple's childhood fear of "the sight of any edge-toole" (B3r). This fear is comically Freudian in structure: the incident occurs in Feesimple's "Father's house" and involves the cook cutting Feesimple's hand when he tries to steal raisins. Feesimple's fear of "edge-tooles" is an obvious castration anxiety, and Wilstrid and Bould, in taking advantage of the anxiety, are continuously humiliating Feesimple's masculinity.

(presumably as punishment for concocting a clumsier scheme than Ingen's to get Maid).

The conclusion places the elder Feesimple in a Morose-like position, symbolically castrated. Significantly, however, Morose ends the play not reintegrated into a family structure – indeed, it is the heterodox Dauphine who achieves his inheritance and ultimately tricks everyone in the play. *Epicoene* suggests, perhaps a bit optimistically, that non-normative male desire can, in fact, exist unproblematically in the city, and even without compromising masculine authority. Field's play performs a much more complicated gesture that potentially reflects the city's epicene space with more realism: it emphasizes that the men who are reabsorbed into marriage are symbolically castrated,[60] and that almost all bodies, male and female[61] who enter a heteronormative marriage end up unhappy, with their desires unfulfilled. At the same time, the play does not allow its characters to escape entry into a heteronormative marriage.

Field's play seems to argue that although most individuals do not necessarily desire normative heterosexual structures and their attending taboos and conditions of exogamy, they find it necessary to pretend to possess these desires. *Amends for Ladies* exposes the chaste maid plot as a heteronormative fantasy that is merely another product of the city's capitalist economy (and one designed to perpetuate patriarchal norms). It may be necessary to consume this fantasy, but if we are not to be entirely

[60] In the case of the Freesimples and Proudly, the pursuit of a chaste and wealthy maid again treacherously turns on them, merely revealing their inability to outwit other males or to manipulate female bodies in the play.

[61] The chaste maid fantasy itself is inextricably connected to the heteronormative desires: every man wants to possess the chaste maid as a symbol of his authority and every woman wants to be the chaste maid so that she can become a wife: Field's play (particularly Husband's cruel testing of Wife, as well as Seldome's inattentiveness to Grace) poses the question of why women desire to play this role.

gulled by the city's spiel, we must admit that personal desires are wider and more transgressive. The trick is to negotiate personal and public desires in order to avoid entirely adopting heteronormative structures as one's own. This process of negotiation is what Field's theatre itself enables its audience to do: to cheer for the concluding marriages of Ingen and Maid, "Count" Feesimple and Whore, Bould and Widow, and Husband and Wife, while at the same time acknowledging the loss of erotic relationships like that between Husband and Subtle, or any kind of real affection between Husband and Wife.

Both plays invite the individual members of their audiences to experience the pleasures of unchaste and non-normative cross-dressing. In *Epicoene* part of this pleasure lies in the way the convincing transvestite behaviour of Epicoene takes in and humiliates Morose for his belief in normative behaviour. Truewit and Clerimont, also, invite a certain amount of pleasure in the opening scene and Truewit's description of the lady's dressing room. One imagines Clerimont in front of his own mirror, practising showing off his own ears, laying out his own hair, and showing off his legs in a way that both mocks and imitates female dressing. And for both the audience (who never gets to see inside Lady Haughty's dressing room) and for Truewit and Clerimont, the scene acts as a substitute for actual entry into Lady Haughty's dressing room.[62] The moment both serves as a (potentially) erotic equivalent for the erotic scene of female dressing, and reminds the audience that a display of female dressing on stage might not look much different from what it sees in a male dressing room – given that all the "women" on stage are cross-dressed boys.

[62] In "Wasting Time in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*," Mathew Martin notes that "the wits' speculations into women's secrets begin in the play's first scene as the result of Clerimont's lack of access to Lady Haughty's chambers" (99). I suggest that the scene acts as a substitution not only for the wits, but also the audience.

Similarly, Field's play uses non-normative dressing to invite its audience to experience, accept, and enjoy its own non-heteronormative pleasures. Consider, for example, the potential eroticism of 5.1 when Subtle describes the seduction of Husband's wife. The scene provides the potential for the two adolescent males to fondle one another on stage: the performance of how Subtle "took her by the hand," "pul'd her by the chin and...kist her," or how Wife "perceiving [Subtle's] readiness mounted, fals...flat upon her backe, cries...aloud" (G3r – G4r). Yet more erotic is Bould's undressing of Widow:

> [WIDOW] Come, undresse me, would God had made me a man.
> [BOULD] Why, Madame?
> [WIDOW] Because I would have beene in bed as soone as they. wee are so long unpinning and unlacing.
> [BOULD] Yet many of us Madame are quickly undone sometime, but heerein we have the advantage of men, though they can be a bed sooner than we, 'tis a great while when they are a bad e're they can get up.
> [WIDOW] Indeed if they be well laid *Princox*, one cannot get them up againe in hast. (E1v – E2r)

One can imagine Bould, as he speaks these lines, undressing his mistress in a striptease that works not only to arouse his own erection (unbeknownst to Widow), but also to answer the criticism of sex that Widow makes in the opening argument:

> And thou [Maid] (though single) hast a bed-fellow
> As bad as the worst husband, thought of one,
> And what that is, men with their wives do doe.
> And long expectance till the deed be done.
> A wife is like a garment usde and torne (A3v).

Widow implies that the longing for sex disappears once the maid experiences it: heterosexual sex is ultimately disappointing for women (or outright "hate[ful]" if one's husband is cruel). Bould, in the undressing scene, reveals that sex is also disappointing to men. In dressing as a woman for the seduction Bould is able to successfully arouse Widow's queer desires, while simultaneously partaking in the

slower and more erotically-charged foreplay that women desire and enjoy. The audience gets to participate in enjoying the display of an apparently lesbian seduction. It is also a gay seduction, however, as the audience is aware that both Bould and Widow are (like Husband and Subtle) really male youths. The seduction scene also offers the possibility of watching two male youths seduce each other *as* women, in women's clothes, and also the possibility of Bould's trans-sexual desire, as he suggests that his cross-dressing could become a permanent state: "Thinke but how finely Madam undiscover'd / Forever you and I, might live all day your Gentlewoman / To doe you service, but all night your man / To doe you service" (F2v). Bould entices Widow and himself with the thought that his female performance might become a permanent reality of their everyday lives together. Finally, the scene invokes a catalogue of transgressive sexual desires that transcend the gender of either partner. This catalogue includes the negotiation of incestuous desires (at two moments in the scene Bould recalls the relationship he shares with his sister: "I lay as by my sister's side" and his mother: "Now God forgive my mother and my sisters" F2v). The catalogue also includes the possibility of a sadomasochistic relationship: not only does Widow enter the scene with the sword with which she threatens to murder Bould, but she also threatens to "crie a rape." Bould points out that this act would lead to his death: "I hope you will not hange me, that were murther Ladie" (F2r). He simultaneously threatens to uphold the rape she mentions: "You...will not put me downe, / I am too gentle, of you I have heard, / Love not these words but force, to have it done" (F2r). Ultimately, Widow leaves Bould unwillingly, with the desire to "spend all the night to sit and talke" (F2v); however untrustworthy she deems Bould, she clearly remains attracted to him. Bould, for his part, seems untroubled (indeed, is

aroused by) the presence of a woman holding a sword.[63] The seduction scene is not only epicene in quality, but it offers endless interpretations and pairings of gendered bodies, according to each individual audience member's desires.[64]

Incidentally, Field's play reaffirms the response that surrounds the critical debate that surrounds *Epicoene*, and the body of the boy actor generally: audiences potentially saw anything they wanted when they looked at the boy actor. Certainly, this response is possible concerning the body of Epicoene. As Reuben Sanchez observes, even an early modern spectator seeing the play at its inaugural performance might be able to guess at the secret underneath Epicoene's peruke – "her" very name enables this guess: "if the audience is aware of what the word epicene means, it may know or suspect that Epicoene is a male" (13). Sanchez also observes, along with Dusinberre, however, that the audience is, of course, already fully aware that Epicoene – or at least the boy actor playing her – is a boy. And when the bodies on stage are at their most representational – that is, in a play not at all metatheatrical in nature or with gender as its central point of discussion – the audience is potentially able to "see" either or all of the genders they desire. The unveiling scene in the final act of *Epicoene* suggests this possibility: even more so do the two unveiling scenes in Field's play, Ingen's de-robing of his "wife" as his brother (a moment which surely invites the audience to also see the triply-cross-dressed body of Maid as a boy), and Bould's revelation to Widow. Both of these derobings occur in the middle of the play (act 3 and the beginning of act 4, respectively), and this, combined with at some of the

[63] The stage directions are unclear about who is the owner of the sword, identifying it as "a *sword*" only (F1r, my emphasis). Either Widow routinely keeps a sword near her bed, or she has taken it from Bould (or Bould has allowed her to take it from him).

[64] Thus I am returning to Dusinberre's position that "The body of the actor becomes a blank page on which gender identity, as opposed to biological sexual identity, can be written" (2).

audience's awareness of Field's earlier experience as a boy actor (and one who potentially played Epicoene),[65] surely invited the audience to practice, for the remainder of the play, viewing the gendered bodies on stage with a polyvalent gaze.[66]

As I suggested earlier, I must be cautious not to be too optimistic about how subversive Field's play is, particularly for women. It liberates men, and shows what they stand to lose by exorcising the erotic and the epicene, but it does not overthrow normative structures altogether. Perhaps a brief return to *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* will prove useful here. I want to be careful not to conclude that Middleton's play creates a narrative of a resistant female: Moll may rebel against her father's desire and command, but she ultimately runs away in order to uphold the pattern of endogamous, heteronormative marriage.[67] *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, however, does suggest that this marriage only works when the right husband is at the head. Touchstone Jr proves himself worthy of marrying Moll when the intelligent and resourceful youth outwits both the gullible father and Sir Walter Whorehound. The latter of these two men, prior to the play's action, refuses to labour or to produce legitimate family. Instead, Sir Walter adds children (whom he refuses to publically acknowledge) to the already overcrowded London population. Sir Walter is both prey to Touchstone Jr's plots and unable to control his future bride. Were Moll married to Sir Walter by the play's end,

[65] Lorraine Helms (70) recalls the possibility that Field played Epicoene. Lucy Munro, in her chapter "The Whitefriars theatre and the children's companies" cautiously notes that "we do not know for certain the role played by Nathan Field, the company's leading actor" (119). Munro does, however, incline to agree with richard Dutton that "the most likely role for Field...is Truewit" (120).

[66] On this point I am also adopting the position of Regina Buccola who argues in "'The top of woman! All her sex in abstract!': Ben Jonson Directs the Boy Actor in *The Devil Is an Ass*" that "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" (16). I am adding to her argument, the possibility that individuals in the audience have some agency in determining exactly what those parts – or the meaning of those parts – are.

[67] Moll proves that women do desire to live out and reproduce narratives like the chaste maid plot, though this desire is not necessarily one which serves them. Figures like Moll and Grace Welborn function as bodies caught in the dominant hegemonic narrative discourse.

one can imagine her becoming an uncontrollable, and thus terrifying, female force. Married to Touchstone Jr., however, Moll's wandering tendencies are tamed and her capacity to disrupt male authority becomes limited. Thus Middleton's play uses the body of the chaste maid to tie together the ability to successfully gull other men (a typical city comedy theme), to achieve financial and sexual prowess and patriarchal impenetrability, to produce legitimate heteronormative family structures, and to maintain economic stability.[68] The fact that an adult company performed the play might have again reinforced the hierarchy of power. The presence of adult male actors on stage would have drawn a firmer distinction between the bodies of the men who rule, and the smaller bodies of the boys playing woman on stage who are in their control.

Similarly in *Amends for Ladies*, having negotiated the power dynamics of their relationship in act 3, Widow allows herself to pursue her desire for Bould and enter into marriage. The marriage that they create is one that is, legally and economically, heteronormative: a heterosexual pairing where the husband controls the household's goods and money. Act 3, however, suggests the extent to which Widow and Bould perform this marriage merely. Yet the performance is problematic because Widow's authority is not publically recognized outside of the private language of their marriage. There is a danger, too, that the audience of the play will fail to recognize the marriage as a performance, and take the concluding marriage as a sincere reassertion of heteronormative structures. I would propose that the play's extended scenes of cross-dressing, its metatheatrical gestures (such as Proudly's self-conscious

[68] The same type of threatening wandering occurs in *Amends for Ladies* when the "chaste" Maid dresses as a pageboy in order to chase after the lover, Ingen, whm she initially rejects.

referencing of his false beard: "shee hath a bigger beard than I by this light," C2v), as well as the parodic references to other city comedies – Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *The Roaring Girl*, and Jonson's *Epicoene*, and *The Alchemist* (the name "Subtle," although a common morality play character, might have invoked Jonson's relatively recent city comedy), tragedies (Ingen's "I love her better then thy parents did, / Which is beyond a brother" references Hamlet's profession of love to the dead Ophelia in 5.1: "I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers / Could not, with all their quantity of love, / Make up my sum" 254-256), and the audience's knowledge of Field-the-boy actor, make it difficult to read the ending as entirely sincere. That the play reasserts the structures of heteronormative marriage, however, in order to perpetuate the financial and masculinist economies of the play world, suggests the resistance which attempts at subverting of heteronormative structures will always encounter.

Epicoene does not enact a similar return to heteronormative marital structures – insincere, parodic, or otherwise. *Epicoene*, in the revelation of Epicoene's male body, and its final dissolution of marriage, rejects the normative altogether. Moreover, the play chooses as its hero a boy actor – or at least a hero who is in body and age, very similar to the boy actor who plays him (unlike the boys playing older men like Morose or women like the Collegiates, the boy actor playing Dauphine requires no prosthetics, and no alteration in his voice). The city's champion is not only one who is non-normative, and dishonest, but also an inherent actor. The play defends the freedom which the boy actor is allowed – the freedom which shedding signifiers of man and woman and becoming like the boy actor allows. But the boy actor himself does not possess the same disruptive license off stage (or even on a mixed company

stage) as he does onstage: to some extent, his challenge to distinct and fixed gender definitions only reigns in the confines of fiction, and not the real city. Read together, both Field's and Jonson's plays interrogate each other: *Epicoene* challenges the need to always return to the performance of heteronormative structures, while *Amends for Ladies* challenges *Epicoene*'s ability to overthrow them entirely. The boy actor in both plays, however, as he did in *Bartholomew Fair* and *Ram Alley*, and as he will continue to do in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and *Eastward Ho!*, does reveal that the degree to which we earnestly perform heteronormative behaviours, and proposes that the individual can negotiate the extent to which he or she is compliant with heteronormative structures. This negotiation occurs when both men and women adopt the epicene strategies of the boy actor.

CHAPTER THREE:

"[B]oundless prodigality": The Boy Actor Interrogates Benevolent Masculinity in the Cities of *Eastward Ho!* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle.*

My previous chapter examined the boy actor as the body which most fittingly represents the epicene behaviours and fashions of London and its marketplace – and suggested the pleasure in adopting this body's strategies. The present chapter picks up on the anxieties which accompanied this pleasure: that epicene practices challenge the concept of a fixed and well-defined male body (whose very fixed and well-defined qualities render him naturally fit to rule). This chapter will also argue that the parodic boy actor on city comedy's metatheatrical stage draws attention to the way that men often only *perform* the role of the benevolent ruling father; men have already adopted the revenue-generating power that the theatre's ability to reshape bodies to make them other than they seem itself offers. Admitting that the unfixing and reshaping of bodies in order to turn a profit is not only a common mode of the theatre but also of the everyday life of the successful London entrepreneur also means admitting the possibility that other unfixed bodies (for example, women's and boy's bodies) may be capable of functioning as authorities – a possibility which means a potential end to men's monopoly on power. The challenge to men's monopoly on power, however, is the very root of the anxiety that rejects the pleasures of the carnival, the epicene, and the theatrical that the boy actor offers and represents.

This chapter will look at Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and Chapman, Jonson, and Marston's *Eastward Ho!* These plays are concerned with narratives that typically celebrate fatherhood: the prodigal son narrative, the country-house poem, romance, and dramatic tragedies like *Hamlet* and *The Spanish Tragedy.*

Eastward Ho! and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* unsettle the father's naturalized dominant position in the gender hierarchy, and his justified right to rule. The plays perform a kind of "reality testing" that suggests that the father who is both centred and a benevolent ruler of his family cannot survive in the theatrical environment of the city. The city is not to blame for this failure, but is itself a product of selfish and deceptive male practices: the same fathers who rule their families also run the city's market and its theatres.

These plays, written for children's companies, use the boy actors to parody the would-be benevolent fathers of prodigality narratives and country-house poems. Having revealed that London's men are inherently corrupt, selfish, and theatrical, however, the theatre offers consoling and anxiety-quelling fictions that represent men as selfless and benevolent providers necessary to their family's survival. But in functioning this way, theatre again follows the same deceptive and selfish agendas of London's con men – taking advantage of men's anxieties about their failings and offering a delusion of perfect fatherhood in order to turn a profit. In working both parody and metatheatre through the body of the boy actor to present prodigality narratives and tragedies of the early modern stage as compensatory fictions that never work in real life, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and *Eastward Ho!* would seem to condemn theatre itself. As in the other plays in this study, however, the pleasure inherent in the parody, and the financial productivity – which the plays emphasize repeatedly – of the theatre in particular (and boy companies were an extremely productive theatrical fashion), and deception in general, makes it difficult to simply condemn theatre, or the city's theatrical (deceptive) practices. Instead, the plays invite the audience to consider the productiveness of replacing the (family) values and

structures in narratives like the prodigality play, country-house poem, romance or high tragedy in favour of the values and structures in narratives more mimetic of the city itself. Family can exist in the city, but it may have to exist along these different (non-patriarchal) modes.

The boy actor in these plays only intensifies the impossibility of achieving the centred father figure of these other genres (in the same way that the boy actor mocked the impossibility of achieving a centred masculinity, a chaste woman and heteronormativity in chapter two). Boy actors in the context of the city become vectors of anxiety. Not only do their immature bodies mock and undermine the seriousness of male bodies in masculinist narratives, but they also mock the earnestness with which the audience receives those narratives. The boy actor playing George in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* particularly exposes theatre as a money-making venture – a con game inhospitable to father or monarchical figures like Hieronymo in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hieronymo*, or the protagonist in *Hamlet*. The latter Kyd play was a part of the Children of the Queen's Revels' repertory (See Munro, Appendix A), and so *Eastward Ho!*'s parodic incorporation of lines from *The Spanish Tragedy* particularly reflects upon the popularity of children's companies' plays (and does so in front of the same audience that went to see such plays). The play reveals that masculinist narratives promising order under the rightful rule of a benevolent father figure are a kind of bait, an empty promise by which audiences have been lured for years. Considering Touchstone's response to Golding's deception at the end of *Eastward Ho!*, or Nell and Mistress Merrythought's willingness to take control of their families in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, however, does suggest a potential reason that men continue to pursue the delusion of

the father figure – alternative modes to structuring families ultimately involve men relinquishing their monopoly on ruling authority (though, the plays argue, they may not deserve this monopoly to begin with).

These two plays treat and allude to narrative genres in apparently disparate fashions. The plays allude to early modern comedy (*Eastward Ho!*'s references to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Dutch Courtesan*, *Amends for Ladies*, and of course, *Westward Ho!*), history plays (*Richard III* and *2 Henry IV*), tragedies (*Hamlet* and *The Spanish Tragedy*),[69] as well as the genres of romance (Petronel Flash and Gertrude, knight and lady, engage in a kind of mock-quest as the head, respectively, to Virginia and eastward towards Petronel's "castle"; Rafe plays the knight hero in his master's pestle play), the country-house poem (about which Merrythought fantasizes), and, of course, the prodigal narrative. I want to use the prodigality play as my departure point here, as this genre is one that is, like its biblical source, entirely concerned with family structures and operations. *Eastward Ho!,* particularly, but also *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, are ironic reworkings of the prodigality narrative in its biblical form. These reworkings reveal much about the state of the family, the role of the father, and the anxieties of males in early modern London. The plays suggest that the competitiveness of London, driven by the need to escape poverty, imprisonment, and death, makes it difficult for a father to extend to his wife and children the kind of generosity, mercy, protection, and hospitality that a father (if he is modelling himself after the biblical father) should extend.

[69] Most of the references occur in 2.1, and are made Quicksilver: *2 Tamburlaine*, 2.182; *The Dutch Courtesan*, 2.1.86; *2 Henry IV*, 2.1.100; and *The Spanish Tragedy*, 2.1.122-127. Hamlet references occur 2.1.146-147, 3.2.59-61, 3.2.77-81. The allusion to *Amends for Ladies* occurs at 3.2.187-188. The allusion to *Richard III* occurs in 3.4, lines 4-5.

Structuring themselves as variations of the prodigality narrative, both *Eastward Ho!* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* posit a particular model of fatherhood and family that is the ideal, or at least the paradigm, by which all families are modelled. This narrative is, of course, drawn from the biblical parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:

> A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to [his] father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth [to me]. And he divided unto them [his] living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, [...] I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But [his father] had compassion [...] and kissed him. And [...] said to his servants, [...] bring hither the fatted calf, and kill [it]; and let us eat, and be merry [...] Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. [...] And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. [...] And he said unto him [...] It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found. (1-32)

This parable, though it begins with an emphasis on the physical – the "substance" that could be both the father's wealth and the body that the son wastes away in "riotous living" – concludes with an emphasis primarily on spiritual matters: the lesson is not only in the prodigal son's repentance and return to his father, but also in the father's free forgiveness and generosity to the returned son. The parable's moral, one must recall, is directed towards the Pharisees, and is thus a lesson on how to govern (in addition to a lesson in how to be a loyal son, citizen, or subject).

John Doebler notes that sixteenth-century German playwrights began adapting the moral of the prodigal narrative to emphasize less "the all-forgiving love of God for repentant sinners" than "the worldly sins that tempt youth" ("Prodigal Son" 333-334). Certainly this trend is also found in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English drama: plays like the anonymously-penned *The London Prodigal*, Middleton's *Michaelmas Term*, and Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*, and his later *The Staple of News*, tend to focus on the son's repentance of his prodigal behaviour. Both *Eastward Ho!* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, however, return the emphasis to the father. Like the original parable, these plays are not only lessons in being a good subject or son, but in being a good father. The plays critique fathers like Touchstone, Merrythought, and George for failing to be truly as merciful and generous in their offer of forgiveness to their offspring (Touchstone), or downright neglectful of the families that need their guidance (Merrythought). The plays also suggest, however, that the biblical model of fatherhood might not be compatible with living in London's social and monetary economies.

Eastward Ho! is immediately a different prodigal narrative from the biblical one. On this point I differ from Doebler who reads *Eastward Ho!* as a "stock pattern of prodigality" which *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* inverts" ("Prodigal Son" 339). I suggest *Eastward Ho!* is less orthodox and far more parodic than Doebler believes.[70] While the biblical parable is concerned with the relationship between fathers and sons (with no mention of wives, mothers, or sisters), in *Eastward Ho!* the prodigal figures are a daughter and son-in-law (Sir Petronel Flash), and another son figure (the

[70] James Mardock in *Our Scene is London* (59) also reads the play as an orthodox representation of the genre. My own reading follows Jill Ingram's argument in "Economies of Obligation," where Ingram reads the end of the play as a "burlesque of tidy morality-play reconciliations" (22).

apprentice, Quicksilver). Touchstone introduces Gertrude and Quicksilver as the play's prodigal figures:

> As I have two prentices, the one of a boundless prodigality, the other of a most hopeful industry; so I have only two daughters: the eldest, of a proud ambition and nice wantonness, the other of a modest humility and comely soberness. The one must be ladyfied, forsooth, and be attir'd just to the court cut and long tail. So far is she ill-natur'd to the place and means of my preferment and fortune that she throws all the contempt and despite hatred itself can cast upon it. Well, a piece of land she has; 't was her grandmother's gift; let her and her Sir Petronel flash out that; but, as for my substance, she that scorns me, as I am a citizen and tradesman, shall never pamper her pride with my industry, shall never use me as men do foxes — keep themselves warm in the skin, and throw the body that bare it to the dunghill. I must go entertain this Sir Petronel. — Golding, my utmost care's for thee, and only trust in thee; look to the shop. — As for you, Master Quicksilver, think of husks, for thy course is running directly to the prodigal's hogs' trough; husks, sirrah! (1.1.76-86).

That Touchstone describes both Gertrude and Quicksilver's wasteful habits together suggests that he reads them both (and not only the male Quicksilver) as prodigal figures. Too, his description of Gertrude adopts the language (for example, "substance") of the original prodigality story.

Touchstone's attitude towards his daughter and apprentice differs significantly from the father's treatment of his son in the biblical narrative. While that father gives the prodigal son his portion of the father's inheritance before the prodigal departs, Touchstone offers no similar gift to either of his prodigals. To Quicksilver he offers nothing more than his own clothing and the return of his original indenture – a gift that is more of a punishment given that it serves as proof of his masterless state and marks him as a vagrant:

> "Eastward Ho" will make you go Westward Ho! I will no longer dishonest my house, nor endanger my stock with your license. There, sir: there's your indenture; all your apparel (that I must know) is on your back; and from this time my door is shut to you: from me be free;

> but, for other freedom and the moneys you have wasted, "Eastward Ho" shall not serve you. (2.1.112-118)

To his daughter, Touchstone gives nothing – her dowry is made up of an inheritance that her grandmother gives her (I will return to this treatment of Gertrude later). A similar absence of generosity, even more significantly, marks Touchstone's attitude towards the prodigals in the play's redemption scenes. In 5.2, Touchstone claims that Quicksilver "was brought up where [grace] grew" (54), a statement which implies he reads his own home, as in the biblical parable, as a place where grace is abundant. His actions in this scene contradict his words, however; Touchstone refuses to read the letters (or even hear all of their contents) which Wolf brings, because he fears that they will make him "weak" (move him to pity, which he describes as a disease): "I do feel mine own weaknesses; do not importune me. Pity is a rheum that I am subject to; but I will resist it" (63-64). Touchstone instead retreats into the system of London's earthly legal system, berating Wolf for failing in his duties:

> I do wonder, Master Wolf, why you should travail thus, in a business so contrary to kind or the nature o' your place; that you, being the keeper of a prison, should labor the release of your prisoners; whereas, methinks, it were far more natural and kindly in you to be ranging about for more. (5.2.17-21)

Touchstone further promises that he will grant his defence of their character (at least, one hopes he will use his voice to *defend* them) in the proper legal season: "when the Sessions come, they will hear from me" (5.2.67). The position of begrudging brother and merciful father in the biblical parable are here reversed: Golding and Wolf have to trick Touchstone into the visiting the prison where, hearing Quicksilver's repentant singing, he is finally moved to pity and pays the bail that releases them from prison.

Through Touchstone, the play deemphasizes the values of mercy and grace which the original parable advocates are necessary qualities in a father figure. Touchstone resists the granting of a kind of divine forgiveness – first observing that such forgiveness has no place in the established legal system of London. Moreover, even once granted, Touchstone's forgiveness is not comparable with the kind of forgiveness the father offers in the biblical parable. There, forgiveness is offered freely, without any exchange of property or wealth, and without being rooted in any earthly institutions (like law courts or monetary economy). In *Eastward Ho!*, even though Wolf and Golding actively convince Touchstone to visit the prison and grant his mercy, this mercy is not enough to redeem them in London society. Wolf still expects Touchstone to pay the bail, while Golding articulates further terms of Quicksilver's (and Security's) freedom:

> [TOUCHSTONE] No more repetitions. What is else wanting to make our harmony full?
> [GOLDING] Only this, sir, that my fellow Francis make amends to Mistress Sindefy with marriage.
> [QUICKSILVER] With all my heart.
> [GOLDING] And Security give her a dower, which shall be all the restitution he shall make of that huge mass he hath so unlawfully gotten. (5.5.161-168)

Eastward Ho! is a prodigal narrative where the father who should be benevolent and merciful only begrudgingly offers his mercy, and where mercy itself is not enough to redeem prodigals: forgiveness involves a gift of money to the state, while complete redemption is not possible until the prodigals are reabsorbed by the juridical institutions (such as law or marriage).[71]

[71] What makes this situation more offensive than Touchstone's dismissal of Quicksilver, is that Venturewell dismisses Jasper without due cause. Jasper is not like Quicksilver, spending his master's "stock and license" on whores, gambling, and uncertain business ventures, but has, according to his own description of himself, behaved industriously and spent modestly:

Touchstone's cautious style of fatherhood operates more or less successfully in *Eastward Ho!* (I will return to the problem of this success later). At least, the play's parody and critique seems mainly directed at the environment of the city itself (and less at Touchstone as an individual). Not so in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, where Venturewell similarly sends away his apprentice with no monetary or other provisions: "I here discharge you / My house and service. Take your liberty, / And when I want a son I'll send for you" (1.1.36-38). (The joke, of course, is that Venturewell does not expect to "want a son," and so his offer is valueless.) I should note that Merrythought does treat his eldest son – if not his wife and younger son – with somewhat more generosity, offering him both ten shillings, and the promise of a place to which he can return: "Hold thy hand: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, there's ten shillings for thee. Thrust thyself into the world with that, and take some settled course. If fortune cross thee, thou hast a retiring place. Come home to me; I have twenty shillings left." (1.1.394-398). This offer yet makes up a meagre inheritance, and points to the dire financial condition of the Merrythought family. Perhaps Merrythought is slightly more culpable, however: allowing his son to leave

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Sir, I do liberally confess I am yours,
Bound both by love and duty to your service,
In which my labor hath been all my profit.
I have not lost in bargain, nor delighted
To wear your honest gains upon my back,
Nor have I given a pension to my blood,
Or lavishly in play consumed your stock.
These, and the miseries that do attend them,
I dare with innocence proclaim are strangers
To all my temperate actions. (1.1.16-25)

Jasper's only "fault" is pursuing Luce – and the play expects the audience to recognise that this is not a crime at all. Indeed, it is Venturewell who invests in a risky venture by choosing the non-industrious Humphrey as his preferred son-in-law. Both Venturewell and Merrythought are marked as fools for failing to recognise Jasper's virtue.

home with no employment, he inflicts the same criminal status of vagrancy on the son as Touchstone inflicts (perhaps more justly) on Quicksilver in *Eastward Ho!* [72]

While the play presents the prodigal narrative as an ideal, Touchstone demonstrates the ways in which this narrative fails when located in London. The play performs what Freud might call "reality testing":

> under the influence of the instructress Necessity, [the ego instincts] soon learn to replace the pleasure principle by a modification of it. For them the task of avoiding unpleasure turns out to be almost as important as that of obtaining pleasure. The ego discovers that it is inevitable for it to renounce immediate satisfaction, to postpone the obtaining of pleasure, to put up with a little unpleasure and to abandon certain sources of pleasure altogether. An ego thus educated has become 'reasonable'; it no longer lets itself be governed by the pleasure principle, but obeys the reality principle, which also at bottom seeks to obtain pleasure, but pleasure which is assured through taking account of reality (*ILP* 444).

If the prodigal narrative is a kind of fantasy or wish-fulfilment wherein a centred and benevolent patriarchal authority and masculinity remains secure (and thus minimizes masculine anxieties – or unpleasures – that this authority is *not* secure), both *Eastward Ho!* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* also simultaneously check this fantasy, revealing it as impossible to realize. Audience members can take pleasure in the fantasy they see enacted on stage at the same time that they sit uncomfortably in the knowledge that the fantasy is merely a pleasurable fiction.

Both the Chapman-Jonson-Marston collaboration and Beaumont's play perform this process of reality testing repeatedly, through many different genres in addition to the prodigal narrative. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* parodies the country-house poem, while *Eastward Ho!* satirizes high tragedy; both plays adopt and

[72] As I observe momentarily, however, Merrythought tends to live in a state of delusion (which perhaps explains his inability to correctly perceive Jasper's virtue – at no point in the play does he pay much attention to either of his sons, nor to his wife). At least Touchstone is cognisant of the environment in which he lives.

rework the quest narrative of the romance genre. Each of these genres is concerned with family, each constructs a world with a benevolent father at the centre, surrounded by content children, wives, servants (or other dependents), and which seems self-regulating. Each of the narratives, however, proves impossible to realize in the city. Though both plays are confident in their metatheatrical satire, and both seem to accept and find the fun in the anxieties of the city, the repeated structure of offering a narrative genre only to deflate it suggests that they remain quite anxious.[73]

Merrythought articulates a vision of a self-regulating patriarchy early in act 1. When his wife confronts Merrythought with the news that both his youth and his finances are spent ("But how wilt thou do, Charles? Thou art an old man, and thou canst not work, and thou hast not forty shillings left and thou eatest good meat, and drinkest good drink, and laughest?" 1.356-359), his eldest son is an apparent profligate ("I pray you, pay Jasper his portion; he's come home, and shall not consume Michael's stock. He says his master turned him away, but I promise you truly, I think he ran away," 1.373-376), his youngest son submits to his wife's rule rather than his own ("No, Michael, 'tis no matter for [your father's] blessing; thou hast my blessing; begone," 1.411-414), and that Mistress Merrythought herself plans to abandon him ("Truly, Charles , I'll begone too," 1.415), Merrythought responds by concocting a story of unceasing wealth:

> How? Why, how have I done hitherto this forty years? I never came into my dining room, but at eleven and six o'clock I found excellent meat and drink o'th'table; my clothes were never worn out but next

[73] In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud posits that "children repeat unpleasurable experiences for the additional reason that they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively" (66). This process of repetition as mastery of everyday anxieties continues in the dreams, fantasies, and fictions of adults.

> morning a tailor brought me a new suit; and without question it will be so ever. Use makes perfectness. If all should fail, it is but a little straining myself extraordinary, and laugh myself to death. (1.362-368)

Merrythought's description is a fantasy. It expresses, in Freudian terminology, "a fulfil[ed] wish" ("Delusion" 26) in which a household maintains itself. As I will argue, Merrythought's description here is not a trivial or whimsical wish, but is a response to "an anxious expectation" (26) that Beaumont's play repetitively articulates: that the male householders will fail in their responsibilities to their family, and that the consequences of such failure will be poverty, hunger, and death.

If Merrythought's articulation here is a fantasy, however, it is one that "assumes control"[74] of Merrythought's behaviour in 'The London Merchant' in a way of which he remains unaware. Merrythought's vision, then, is something beyond fantasy – indeed, it breaches the borders of delusion. Not only does Merrythought articulate his belief in a self-regulating household to his wife, but he actually appears to believe it – never once revealing that he feels anxiety about his financial circumstances or about the welfare of his family. The most telling moment of his delusion occurs when Venturewell's boy informs Merrythought of his son's death, only to hear Merrythought respond in cheerful song:

> [BOY] A coffin, sir, and your dead son Jasper in it.
> [OLD MERRYTHOUGHT] [*sings*]. *Why, farewell he.*
> *Thou wast a bonny boy,*
> *And I did love thee.* (5.180-184)[75]

[74] Freud characterizes delusion as "clearly differentiated from other disturbances. First, it belongs to that group of illnesses which do not directly affect the physical, but express themselves only through psychic symptoms; secondly, it is distinguished by the fact that 'fantasies' have assumed control -- that is, are believed and have acquired influence on actions" ("Delusion" 66)

[75] Merrythought here offers no hints of the underlying anxieties that threaten the fantasy he articulates: the anxieties which underpin the delusion are located elsewhere in the play.

Merrythought's delusion of a happy house seems impervious, even upon encountering tragic news of the death of those who once lived in that house.

Merrythought's delusion characterizes his home as the kind of home that exists in a country-house poem like "To Penshurst." In Jonson's poem, however, the poet describes the self-regulating estate with awe, suggesting that Penshurst figures as an anomalous space which provides respite from the city with a hospitality that is almost too perfect to be credible:

> The painted partridge lies in every field,
> And for thy mess is willing to be killed. [...]
> Bright eels, that emulate them, and leap on land,
> Before thy fisher, or into his hand. [...]
> Thy tables hoard not up for the next day,
> Nor when I take my lodging, need I pray
> For fire, or lights, or livery: all is there. (29-73)

Penshurst certainly could not exist in London with its poverty, disease, violence, noise, and competition for personal gain. Unlike in Jonson's poem, which at least acknowledges that the way that Penshurst provides for its guests is unusual, and that the provision of food and hospitality typically comes at the expense of "man's ruin" and "man's groan" (46), Merrythought's delusion does not acknowledge the trade processes behind placing meat on the table: partridges and carp, and indeed sheep and pigs certainly are not raised in an urban space, the London in which Merrythought lives. Nor does Merrythought's delusion acknowledge the economic transactions that are a part of his acquisition of new clothing: a tailor's bills do not pay themselves, and unless he is willing to participate in a labour-money exchange, Merrythought is not going to be able to feed or clothe himself. The self-sustaining home of his delusion will quickly disappear.

Merrythought, then, overlooks one of the most important figures in Jonson's poem – that of the "lord" who "dwells" (102) at Penshurst and ensures that its visitors and servants both receive generous hospitality. In "To Penshurst" the figure of Sir Robert Sidney functions in the same way that the benevolent father does in the biblical narrative of the prodigal son – and, as in *Eastward Ho!*, in Beaumont's play, this benevolent father from both "To Penshurst" and Luke 15 proves an impossibility in London. As Touchstone shows earlier, moreover, there are financial limits to a father's ability to provide in the city.

Both plays, and particularly *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, show that there are also limits to a father's willingness to provide for his family – to labour and put responsibility over pleasure. Merrythought's delusion reveals his lack of understanding of, and complete disregard for, the economics of the environment in which he lives. His willingness to go to his death (he is after all, already an old man) does not account for the family – the wife and son too young to be yet apprenticed to legitimate work – who will have to live many years in poverty following his death. His speech, with its exclusive use of first person pronouns, marks his narcissism: Merrythought disavows the existence of the very real victims that his delusion creates. As with his attitude towards both Jasper's dismissal and his death, Merrythought is unwilling to take on this responsibility. He is a careless father.

Problematically, "The London Merchant" initially appears to sustain Merrythought's delusion. The play-within-the-play refuses to punish Merrythought by its conclusion and so surprisingly does not violently shatter his delusion that the financial and familial instabilities of his life will work themselves out on their own. The surrounding characters in the play-within-the-play, however, and the

metatheatrical framework of the play *do* critique and fracture Merrythought's delusion, and so I will suggest that Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle,* in its entirety, humours Merrythought's delusion only to ultimately point out, to the external audience, the extent to which that delusion is dangerous.[76]

An admiration for inherent and unearned wealth over labour for one's family is the reason, for example, that the merchant Venturewell, in a plot that is almost the exact opposite of that of *Eastward Ho!*, chooses the incorrect prospective son-in-law. Venturewell chooses Humphrey as a match for his daughter because of his "gentle blood" (1.83), his "language good enough to win a wench" (1.106), and his wealth (1.12). It merits pointing out that the play reveals little about Humphrey (or Jasper, for that matter), and so it is difficult to tell *why* Humphrey is a bad match for Luce (or why he appears a worse choice than Jasper, for whom the play shows its support by allowing him to get the girl in the end). One might speculate that Humphrey's possession of wealth means that he does not have to engage in labour of any sort. Because he does not labour, Humphrey is only involved in part of the city's economy; he consumes: "[I] can pull / Out of my pocket, thus, a pair of gloves [...] They cost me three and two pence, or no money" (1.145-153). Humphrey, however, does not produce.[77]

[76] The delusion is dangerous because the expectation that wealth (and food, and a home) will provide themselves in the city leaves the expectant individual (and that individual's dependent) entirely at the mercy of the often uncaring, always competitive and exploitative city.

[77] Ironically, then, the male that Venturewell (inappropriately) chooses as his son-in-law is a man not so different from Old Merrythought, whose son he *rejects* in Act 1, and against whom he declares an enmity in Act 2: "For this thy scorn, I will pursue that son / Of thine to death" (501-502). The play, then, does condemn the kind of behaviour in which Merrythought participates with his delusion. The play erects both Humphrey and Venturewell as figures deserving of mockery: Humphrey fails to achieve the hand of Luce by the conclusion, while Venturewell, who supports Humphrey over Jasper, experiences briefly the anguish of losing his daughter: "My daughter, she is gone, I know not how, / Taken invisible, and whether living / Or in grave, 'tis yet uncertain to me" (5.249-253). The audience

A more complex similarity exists between Merrythought's delusion and George and Nell's knight fantasy. That is, the play subjects both the pastoral (or country-house) and the romance genres to the same kind of scrutiny based on a confrontation with the city's economic reality. In the pestle play, a grocer apprentice can simply change his clothes – "Hence my blue apron!" (1.262) – in order to become a hero. The adventures the couple demands – visiting a castle, defeating a giant, encountering a beautiful lady, and dying nobly in war – are clichés of the romance genre. They are also acts that need not be rooted in the problems of obtaining money, in the deception of theatre, or in common labour (but Beaumont's play does root these acts in economics and labour). These problems are typical of city comedy plots (and all are markers which, I have suggested, are similarly absent from Merrythought's delusion).

While the father does not figure so prominently in the romance genre as he does in the prodigal genre, the country-house poem, or Shakespeare and Kyd's tragedies (below), it is yet a genre predominantly concerned with male authority, heroism, and community. Susan Baker recalls that the romance genre is a complex means of negotiating two competing injunctions or values given to males: "the preference for celibacy" and the "need for procreation," the latter of which is approved by "marriage as a sacrament, ordained by God, and sexual union as a pervasive metaphor for the human relationship to godhead" (220). Patriarchal authority tacitly undergirds the romance genre, and explains the genre's emphasis on codes of brotherhood and celibacy as male virtues. City comedy's concerns with

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can extend the play's condemnation of Humphrey and Venturewell to Merrythought, who possesses failings similar to Humphrey.

competition amongst males for financial (and sexual) authority, then, are unsurprisingly at odds with the values of the romance genre.

The economic realities of London assert themselves almost immediately in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. In reality, of course, a grocer's apprentice cannot leave his position without becoming a vagrant (as Jasper does within "The London Merchant"). Too, it requires money to possess the horse, arms, weaponry, and castle that are the trappings of a knight errant: the theatre company admits to George and Nell they cannot afford even an approximate representation of these things: "Sir, if you will imagine all this to be done already, you shall hear them talk together. But we cannot present a house covered with black velvet, and a lady in beaten gold" (4.43). The economic problems of city living prove inescapable for George and Nell.

This inescapability is only furthered by George and Nell's response to "The London Merchant." Both the couple and their apprentice, despite their sympathetic responses to the plight of both plays' characters, remain constantly aware that the play they are watching is, in fact, theatre. How else can the audience understand Nell's ability to oscillate between giving advice to the boy actors who act in the play one moment and giving advice to the characters they play the next? The theatre, as Gurr, Lienwand, Howard and others have argued, is itself inextricably located in the city and the city's economic activity. Rafe's theatre of the "ancient castle" (356) in act 2 is certainly built upon an economic space – that of the inn – and of course, Rafe finds himself actually paying the "old knight / Of the most holy order of the Bell" (2.356-357) in act 3. The fantasy that Rafe constructs is not of a knight at a castle, but of a man *pretending* to be a knight while really travelling around a city with taverns and barbers. And he, George, and Nell recognize that a man pretending to be a knight

would still be required to pay for lodging and food. Beaumont's play demonstrates that the city produces individuals who are enthusiastic theatre audiences, but also very good merchants – ones who refuse to violate the principles of trade under any circumstances, and who recognize the legitimacy of theatre itself as a money-producing (rather than escapist) venture.

Both plays draw unabashed attention to the fact that they are capitalist ventures that capitalize on the fashion of boy's companies. In *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, Merrythought's song in response to hearing the news of his son's death is a moment that not only underscores the father's irresponsibility and indicts his carelessness towards his family, but also capitalizes on the talents (the ability to sing) of the boy playing him for the delight of the audience.[78] The response is inappropriate, perhaps, but it is one that the audience probably found entertaining and pleasurable. Merrythought is not the only body in the theatre who participates in an irresponsible hedonism: so too does the audience who might rather see an entertaining rather than moral show, and so too does the theatre company itself who will take advantage of the audience's desire for pleasure to make money which may be used to purchase their own pleasures.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle also capitalizes on the desirability of the boy's body. Nell flirts with her own apprentice, Rafe, as a compensation for her own sexually disappointing marriage. Through their use of double entendres – such as Nell's complaint that George will not "brake [his] tiller" for her (1.130-132), or

[78] Katrine Wong notes the popularity of singing in boy companies in "A Dramaturgical Study of Merrythought's Songs in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*" "The abundance of songs that Beaumont uses to characterize Merrythought follows the contemporary convention that plays written for boy companies tend to contain more musical episodes designed to allow the boy actors to exhibit their musical talents" (99).

George's admission that he had the "fringe of [his] pike burnt off" in service (5.74-75) – both Nell and George give the impression that George is impotent. This revelation renders suspicious Nell's story of her lost child:

> I shall ne'er forget him, when we had lost our child (you know it was strayed almost, alone, to Puddle Wharf, and the criers were abroad for it, and there it had drowned itself but for a sculler), Rafe was the most comfortablest to me: 'Peace, mistress,' says he, 'let it go; I'll get you another as good'. (2.344-348)

Perhaps the first child was also one that Rafe 'got'. The revelation suggests that Nell's care for the young man might extend beyond a motherly nature to a real physical attraction for him. But she is also generally fascinated with the play's boy actors: "Sirrah, didst thou ever see a prettier child? How it behaves itself, I warrant ye, and speaks, and looks, and perts up its head" (1.94-96), "That's a good boy, See, the little boy can hit it; by my troth, it's a fine child" (1.296-297),"But look, look, here's a youth dances" (Interlude 1.35), "That same dwarf's a pretty boy" (2.371), and "Faith, the child hath a sweet breath, George, but I think it's troubled with the worms" (3.303-304). Nell's fascination with, and repeated pointing to, the boys on stage perhaps represents the fascination which early modern audiences generally had for that figure. And like the boys in "The London Merchant," boy companies got the money they asked from their audiences. As Rosencrantz's infamous comment on the "little eyases, that cry out on the top of the question and are most tyrannically clapped for" (2.2326-327) suggests, boy actors were highly successful, for a time drawing larger crowds than adult companies. As Andrew Gurr notes, boys' companies were originally associated with the more expensive indoor stages:

> The first 'private' playhouses came into use [when] Paul's choir school started using a small playhouse...in 1575...The master of the rival boy company to Paul's, the Chapel Children, built a playhouse in a hall in

> the Blackfriars precinct for his boys a year later...Blackfriars [was] an area on the fashionable western side of the city...close to an area where the wealthiest playgoers lived." (26-27)

Although Gurr observes that audiences at these performances came from mixed social classes, he also notes that the indoor theatres and the boy companies they hosted had the reputation of a prestige entertainment. Yet a somewhat more expensive price clearly did not deter audiences who might have taken a perverse pleasure in watching themselves be parodied: in watching boys play older women flirting with younger boys (as Nell does), or fathers strutting about pompously on stage in false beards, giving commands to their "children" and "apprentices." One wonders to what extent the boys reflected satirically on their own adult masters, creating recognizable caricatures of them. Similarly, how much did the boy playing Nell interact with other members of the onstage audience, implicating them in the flirting and appreciation of the boys' bodies on stage? Clearly the parodic possibilities inherent in the boy actor did not automatically deter adult men and women from enjoying the theatre.

Beaumont's play explicitly dramatizes the features of boy companies that must have made them so distinct and popular in *Hamlet*. *Eastward Ho!* more blatantly references *Hamlet*. Chapman, Marston, and Jonson's play uses boys and metatheatre in order to directly parody Shakespeare's play and the earnestness with which dramatic tragedy treats its male fathers, rulers, and heroes. Both *Hamlet* and *The Spanish Tragedy* (the plays that *Eastward Ho!* cites most frequently) are plays that, like the prodigal narrative, are primarily concerned with family – and particularly with fathers and sons. *Hamlet* takes up the problem of a son who has lost his father (and is distraught at the loss); *The Spanish Tragedy* similarly represents a father who has lost his son (and is distraught to the point of madness). *Eastward Ho!* parodies *The*

Spanish Tragedy when Quicksilver enters and recites the play to Touchstone his master/father (2.1.122-127). Touchstone, ironically, and in an opposite response from that which Hieronymo displays at the loss of his son, not only willingly rejects his apprentice/son, but also denies Quicksilver his protection as he sends his apprentice into the world into almost certain poverty (or so his warning that he will go "Westward Ho" suggests). Quicksilver, for his part, is not particularly upset by the dismissal: "Am I free a' my fetters? Rent, fly with a duck in thy mouth" (2.1.119-120), nor does he seem to grasp the irony of the lines he recites.[79] Indeed, Quicksilver seems to recite the lines as a way of antagonising Touchstone. (The lines, moreover, may signify that Quicksilver spends too much time at the theatre, another way of wasting his master's fortune in rioting.) Touchstone's refusal to value the bond he has with his apprentice/son above the money the relationship wins or loses, and Quicksilver's frivolous and thoughtless recitation of Hieronymo's grief parodies and undermines the serious father-son relationship of *The Spanish Tragedy*. The fact that these earnest lines (particularly Hieronymo's "Who calls Hieronymo?" speech) once spoken by adult males are, in *Eastward Ho!* spoken by youths or boy actors with potentially smaller frames, false beards, and higher voices, only heightens the parody in this play: playing to their youth, the boy actors would be able to show these heroic father figures as smaller, less reverent bodies than they might have been in their source plays. Ultimately, parodying the father-son relationship in Kyd's play reveals this relationship as anachronistic, and one which the city resists. To add insult to injury, the play unabashedly shows off the ways it combines popular theatrical trends

[79] Quicksilver speaks lines belonging to both Hieronymo (1.1.120-121) and Don Andrea (2.1.122-127), two characters who suffer the breaking of a bond with another male (Hieronymo's son and Don Andrea's best friend, Horatio). Both suffer this loss because of the treachery of other males at court. Quicksilver, too, participates in antagonistic and competitive relationships with other men.

as well as popular plays like *Westward Ho!* and Kyd's play. Far from using theatre to flatter the authority of patrons, and to edify its audiences in proper citizenship and subjecthood, the play declares itself a theatrical and money-making venture, the product of selfish, competitive, deceptive and weak masculine thinking.

The play performs the same undermining of father-son relations in *Hamlet.* Initially, it might seem that *Eastward Ho!* reaffirms *Hamlet*'s condemnation of the incestuous and disloyal Gertrude. *Eastward Ho!*'s Gertrude, like *Hamlet*'s Gertrude, disdains the father's law by wasting her father's money on wedding feasts and her vain attempts to be "ladified" (1.1.81). If Gertrude is a figure of fun, however, then Hamlet is even more so. Hamlet, in *Eastward Ho!,* is not a hero hoping to avenge his father but a boy (both literally and the character he plays) and a footman, a servant who cannot express his will because he depends on being obedient in order to keep his job (which is his main means of feeding himself). Yet even under the commands of his masters, the footman Hamlet proves himself far more hotfooted than the emotionally paralyzed Hamlet. The footman can at least carry out the commands of his master, running about town to deliver urgent messages. Shakespeare's Hamlet, in contrast, fails to respond to his dead father's command for the most of the play. The messenger's zeal reminds the audience that Shakespeare's Hamlet has as many weaknesses as that play's Gertrude. *Eastward Ho!* dethrones *Hamlet*'s prince as well as the conception of the tragic hero. Potkin's "'Sfoot, Hamlet, are you mad?" (3.2.6) is meant to be ridiculous – and to draw attention to Hamlet's non-heroic stature (which the figure of the boy actor would obviously display in *Eastward Ho!*). The boy actors in *Eastward Ho!* challenge the efficacy of kings and father figures as bodies who inherently deserve to rule.

I have been suggesting that in their willingness to take advantage of the fashionable trend of boys' companies, at the same time that they perform this ridicule, the boy companies performing *Eastward Ho!* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* make a profit. Not only do the bodies of boy actors parody the idea of fatherhood, but they also deliberately reveal to the theatre audience that it just paid money to a collection of boys who will willingly take money from an audience gullible enough to take the action on stage as mimetic of reality. More precisely, the plays suggest that every audience that has ever earnestly paid money in order to benefit from the moral education of a prodigality play, a tragedy, or a morality drama is duped in exactly the same way as George and Nell. In taking money from George and Nell, the boys declare their theatre as operating on the same capitalist and exploitative principles as the failed fathers and prodigal figures who in the everyday city market take advantage of any ready buyers. But the audience is also mistaken if it fully recognizes itself in the figures of the play's on-stage audience, because George and Nell, too, are actors in the play. Their boys' bodies too, mark them as part of the company that takes money from the gulls in the audience. And the company to which they belong has long been the habit of taking money from its audiences, as have most of the dramatist who habitually wrote for the companies: prior to *Eastward Ho!*, Chapman had written eight plays for the Children of the Queen's Revels, and Jonson and Marston three plays each (*CQR*, Appendix A). One wonders how aware the audience might have been that they were paying money to see a play written by the same men and performed by the same company who previously wrote and performed other popular plays like *All Fools, Bussy D'Ambois*, and *The Case is Altered.* Both *Eastward Ho!* and *The Knight*

of the Burning Pestle reflect upon the business of writing a play for a boys' company as a way of obtaining pay.

The realization that the theatre has a history of taking money from willing audience members perhaps invites the audience to share a little in the humiliation that the men in both plays experience when they find themselves learning that the city cares far more about profit than about moral ideals. Watching Touchstone realize he has been tricked into visiting the prison, or Venturewell that he has been gulled by Jasper, the plays once again invite the audience to interrogate convenient endings like Merrythought's success at the end of "The London Merchant" – an ending that rearticulates the delusion of the centred father, and a self-regulating patriarchy, that contradicts all the rules of the competitive market.

The play's reworking of the prodigal narrative, for example, may not entirely indict Touchstone: indeed there are reasons why his cautious bestowal of his generosity, forgiveness, and financial aid may mark him as sensible rather than simply cruel. That Touchstone reads pity as a kind of "rheum" or disease, and that he characterizes the actual moment of his mercy as a "ravish[ment]" (5.5.100), suggests both that he perceives pity as dangerous, and that the inhabitants of the play's London expect and fear that their bodies are sites that can be attacked and harmed (both a ravishment and a disease are physical threats to the body). Indeed, the reason that pity is dangerous is that it opens the body to these physical threats – by marking the sympathetic giver as a fool who is easily parted from his money (recall that Golding *tricks* Touchstone into visiting the prison and, ultimately, spending his money) – or by risking turning the sympathetic giver into an impoverished man who, having unwisely invested in money in destitute bodies that cannot hope to pay him back, finds himself

destitute. Certainly, Touchstone's reasons for refusing to give money to either Gertrude or Quicksilver, and his accompanying warnings to the prodigals, suggest his awareness that charity is yet another form of wasteful expenditure, and one that brings the giver closer to that great threat, poverty:

> Alas! I behold thee with pity, not with anger; thou common shot-clog, gull of all companies; methinks I see thee already walking in Moorfields without a cloak, with half a hat, without a band, a doublet with three buttons, without a girdle, a hose with one point, and no garter, with a cudgel under thine arm, borrowing and begging threepence. (1.1.130-136).[80]

If the prodigal narrative in *Eastward Ho!* does not display the same sort of mercy that the biblical narrative contains, then it may be because the tumultuous conditions of the play world support a kind of individualistic struggle for survival rather than a mutual return of generosity and mercy. The play, moreover, locates this struggle for survival particularly in the city environment; both Touchstone's warning to Quicksilver, and all of the places visited in the play itself, are London locales: Moorfield, Wapping, the Isle of Dogs, St. Katherine's, Tyburn, and Billingsgate. Just as it does not have space for the centred father of the country-house poem, London has no space for the free grace of God, nor the benevolence of the prodigal's father (were such a benevolent figure to miraculously exist).

The plays suggest not that the theatre is responsible for rendering the prodigal narrative corrupt and anachronistic, but that everyday London operates on principles of deception and conning (taking advantage of others), that theatre then imitates. Quicksilver is a good example of this everyday deception: he calls out the falseness of

[80] In arguing that Touchstone recognises the harsh conditions of the city environment in which he lives, I am also adopting a different position from Richard Horwich, who argues in "*Hamlet* and *Eastward Ho!*" that "Touchstone's sense of thrift is [...] too simple, too like a copy-book maxim, to be taken seriously by men who understand the harsh realities of the world" (233).

city morality, but he also fully immerses himself in its get-rich-quick ventures and deceptive trading. Quicksilver entirely spurns his duties as Touchstone's apprentice for the possibility of arms.[81] Quicksilver voices his belief that "How would merchants thrive, if gentlemen would not be unthrifts?" (1.1.32-33). He also notes the "market trend" that the titled are running out of money and will have to sell their land in short order. Quicksilver's observation is a bit belated, however; he does not seem to understand that the situation of the titled in England is already dire – and that the titled are already out of land.

Quicksilver's plan to capitalize on the plight of the wealth-less landed draws attention to a potential reason why prodigality narratives, romances, and country house poems may once have popular – perhaps those genres made sense (more accurately reflected the values of) a medieval England with its property-based social and political systems. In the spreading capitalism and money- and credit-based economies of early modern London, however, the values which these genres espouse show up as all-too-false. With changing economic and social structures comes the need to changing narratives. The pursuit of chivalry, like the pursuit of all idealistic masculinist narratives, in both plays promises relief from the labours of the city; both plays, however, also show the ultimate futility of that dream either because the ideal world represented by the romance genre does not exist, or because, when translocated into the city, the structures of knighthood and the romance genre become intertwined with the economic ventures and competitiveness of London. Quicksilver's schemes to take advantage of the titled by lending them counterfeit money for gambling at the ordinary (1.1.36-40), and later by becoming a merchant, merely show how he, less

[81] Such as when he comes to work inebriated in act 2.

than Rafe, is unable to escape the economic concerns of the city's middleclass. Indeed, Quicksilver himself becomes the body who deceives and corrupts the other males, and thus prevents the realisation of the chivalric code of brotherhood that the romance genre values.

I do not want affix a moral judgement to London's economy however, nor do I think that either Beaumont's or Chapman, Jonson, and Marston's play merely dismisses the city and the theatre's values as "bad." When it comes to opportunities for women's autonomy, as I have suggested throughout this project, social disruptions are productive. In *Eastward Ho!*, Gertrude represents a new figure – the female prodigal. Gertrude is not an entirely positive characterization of women in the city: she unwisely invests in the wrong suitor (though, as I've pointed out, so too does Venturewell). Like Quicksilver, she too foolishly lays her get-rich-quick venture in the landed. Believing Sir Petronel Flash to be wealthy as well as titled (and Gertrude's flaw is that she does not look beyond Sir Petronel's title), she believes that by marrying him she will escape the boredom of life with her frugal and fiscally-responsible father:

> I must be a lady, and I will be a lady. I like some humors of the city dames well: to eat cherries only at an angel a pound, good; to dye rich scarlet black, pretty; to line a grogram gown clean thorough with velvet, tolerable; their pure linen, their smocks of three pounds a smock, are to be borne withal. But your mincing niceries, Taffata pipkins, durance petticoats, and silver bodkins — God's my life, as I shall be a lady, I cannot endure it! (1.2.17-24).

Gertrude is similar to *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*'s Merrythought in that she, like him, desires to happily ensconce herself in an imaginary world of books and clothes that is removed from the everyday labours of London (though unlike Merrythought, Gertrude herself is not responsible for supporting a family). Gertrude

attempts to escape to Sir Petronel's castle and a world of titles and festivity, and one that, further, bears some of the markers of the dream of chivalry: the title, or Sir Petronel's promised castle. The castle, of course, does not exist, and Gertrude finds herself quixotically pursuing an anachronistic lifestyle. The play somewhat condemns Gertrude for living "riotously," and because she is easily taken in by the performance of title which threatens to distract her from becoming the wife of an industrious middleclass citizen. In comparing her with Quicksilver (and in my own comparisons of Gertrude with *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*'s Venturewell and Merrythought) the play merely points out that some women get taken in by the city's cons in the same way that some men do. The condemnation is directed at gullibility rather than gender.

But Gertrude's marriage to Sir Petronel reflects her and her mother's attempts to rebel against Touchstone's authority by choosing to marry (invest in) a source of wealth that does not adhere to his philosophies. Alternatives to Touchstone's centred world allow women a degree of autonomy. (Touchstone's refusal to give Gertrude an inheritance suggests his attempt to regain control over his wife and daughter's expressions of autonomy.) We see this same kind of autonomy practiced more successfully by Mistress Merrythought in the space for control which her husband's carefree and careless neglect of the duties typically associated with fatherhood leaves. Mistress Merrythought does not display the same kind of oblivious naivety to (or deluded rejection of) her London environment as Merrythought shows, but understands the economics of her environment acutely. She displays this understanding in her willingness to deny money to Jasper, whom she believes displays the same marks of irresponsibility as his father:

> Th'art thy father's own son, of the right blood of the Merrythoughts. I may curse the time that e'er I knew thy father; he hath spent all his own, and mine too, and when I tell him of it, he laughs and dances, and sings, and cries, 'A merry heart lives long-a.' And thou art a wastethrift. And art run away from thy master that loved thee well, and art come to me; and I have laid up a little for my younger son Michael, and thou think'st to bezzle that, but thou shalt never be able to do it. (1.307-317)

Despite the play's mockery of Mistress Merrythought, her refusal to believe Jasper's explanation of his dismissal (and her attending support of Humphrey as Luce's suitor) is perhaps the only time that she errs in judgment. Believing him to be a lazy spendthrift, however, she perhaps understandably denies money to her elder, autonomous son, in favour of supporting the dependent Michael.[82] Mistress Merrythought again shows her understanding of the naivety of her husband's vision when she elects to run away from her husband, and to seek work elsewhere: she considers both placing Michael with a tapster in Waltham (3.568-570) and knitting stockings with Michael's nurse (4.183-185). The play suggests that in the city, when fathers fail, their wives can and are willing to take over their responsibilities. Women know the city's competitive environment, and the strategies by which men (attempt to) make money. Women may occasionally fail at making their fortunes – but so too do the men. Given that men are just as unchaste, as open, as malleable, as deceptive as women, given that they are just as taken in by the city's theatrical cons, it makes little sense that men possess a monopoly on ruling authority in the city, nor that the narratives which the city's theatre produces should unquestioningly defend male rule.

Finally, and as my as my previous chapters have argued, the city's chaotic capitalist economy and its use of theatrical deception offers a space where bodies can

[82] Making her behaviour similar to Touchstone's in *Eastward Ho!*, but perhaps more responsible than Merrythought's who offers Jasper greater support than his dependent wife and younger child.

enact desires and strategies that they might not have a chance to in a more stable context where the social and economic roles which bodies are meant to play are clearly defined. The possibility of enacting such desires and strategies is one that arouses pleasure as well as anxieties. The boy actor on city comedy's stage both parodies rigid gender and social discourses and narratives, and represents the undoing of all these narratives, of masculine authority and a fixed self suggest. That the boy actor was inherently pleasurable to watch, that anti-theatricalists feared audiences might imitate his transgressive practices,[83] suggests that audiences often embraced the chaos of the growing city and the revolutions it that attended such growth.

In 4.1 of *Eastward Ho!*, Slitgut climbs to the top of Cuckold's Haven in order to honour the feast of St. Luke. The moment affords him the possibility to comment on all the dissolute, dishonest, and transgressive prodigals in the play. As Slitgut observes the "two mile[s]" (270) of London that his vantage point affords, however, he not only peers out at the travellers in the play, but also down at the theatre audience. The moment invites individuals in the audience to identify themselves in the bodies of the boys/prodigals on stage. And if the audience recognizes itself in the prodigals, and still laughs at them, it shares again in a carnival laughter that celebrates the epicene space of theatre and city, and the epicene possibilities of the boy actors. Indeed, there is little to suggest in the play text that Slitgut's assessment of London is in any way disapproving. To call London a haven of cuckolds, "young swaggerer[s]"(52), and "gallow"men (107) is the same as calling it a haven of "married men" (2), "honest passengers" (14), "m[e]n in...nightcap[s]" (28), and "beautiful wom[e]n" (68). Slitgut's words are not a condemnation, but merely a

[83] Brietenberg, 152

descriptive catalogue of the various deceiving and deceived bodies living together in the epicene city.

CONCLUSION:

London, City of Boy Actors.

"Ben Jonson does not like being in a body. When bodies intrude on his texts, it is usually in the context of their capacity to be degraded, to be ridiculed or to carry contagious disease" (212). Ben Morgan argues that this easily corruptible body in Jonson's drama becomes a metaphor to identify and admonish corrupt practices in literary production. Yet Jonson's poetics of correction fails, according to Morgan, who concludes "If Jonson's work has a moral, then, it is simply that the play-text can never cure the play of its real disease: the always-embodied, always-transactional theatre and the literary marketplace that theatre exemplifies" (220).

This thesis has taken up the problem of bodies in the London marketplace. The plays in this study reveal that bodies in the city, like the embodied texts in the literary marketplace, are inextricably caught in, and infected by, sexual, economic, and theatrical transactions. These bodies are often degraded by their endless appetites and corrupt economic practices, ridiculed for their social pretentions and gullibility, and cowed by fear of plague or sexual diseases. (Morose, miserly, victim of Dauphine's marriage plot, and unable to stand the sound of plague-bells or the attentions of the sexually-active Collegiates, embodies all of these corruptions.)

None of the plays in this study, however, treats the body as merely corrupt and unlikeable.[84] Nor do they pass easy moral judgments upon the city as a corrupting force. I do not entirely agree with Adam Zucker's more optimistic argument (in contrast with Morgan's reading) that Jonson's city comedies offer a poetics of

[84] It seems odd to claim without qualification, as Morgan does, that Jonson does not like bodies, when his work treats them so sensitively.

unification, one that "create[s] a frame of formal harmony" of London spaces that "balances above a network of individual figures; the figures themselves lack purpose without the spatial arrangement produced by the city" ("London" 105).[85] I do, however, think that Jonson's (and Beaumont's, Barry's, Field's, Chapman's, and Marston's) theatrical representations of London do include something of the "meaningful and beautiful" (105) that Zucker argues Jonson's poetics of unification creates.

London is chaotic, noisy, dirty, unpleasant-smelling, over-populated, and, because of over-population, riddled with diseases. The "mart of the world," London is marked by the presence of its prostitution trade, as well as more legitimate commodity markets. The practices in these markets are often deceptive, parasitic, and exploitative. And the city, as Morgan suggests, is inevitable, with its boundaries, practices, problems and anxieties spreading rapidly. The city is more than a space of corruption and anxiety, however. The carnival atmosphere of *Ram Alley* and *Bartholomew Fair*, the productively epicene city in *Amends for Ladies* and *Epicoene*, and the amusingly parodic *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and *Eastward Ho!* reveal that the city, if not entirely beautiful, is at least a space where laughter and pleasure find a home.

The boy actor is a body that can represent both sides of London. Dauphine's use of a boy pretending to be a woman in order to trick Morose out of his inheritance reveals the dangerous capacity of the boy's body to deceive. This boy's body in Jonson's play represents the boy actor's ability to move between the roles (and gender signs) of both men and women – or, as Cutbeard and Otter reveal, to move between

[85] Zucker discusses this relationship between the city spaces of London and its inhabitants in relation to the triumphal arch that Jonson designed for James I's 1604 coronation procession. The arch, according to Zucker, embodies Jonson's understanding of the city in general.

different ages of male and female bodies. The confusion that Morose experiences at the revelation of the boy beneath the girl's peruke represents the confusion that some of the audience members might feel at similar gender or other identity revelations (for example, Bould/Princox's revelation to Widow in *Amends for Ladies*). Dauphine's deceit of Morose, Bould's of Widow, and the theatre company's use of the boy's body to deceive the audience is a means of obtaining financial gain.

The theatre audience is not Morose, however; in most of the plays in this study, the audience is privy to the layers of disguise in which the boy's body participates: Constantia declares her cross-dressed state in her opening lines, Ingen and Frank reveal Frank's female disguise in their conversation at the beginning of 5.1, Justice Overdo confides in the audience his plan to dress as a "fool" (2.1), Quarlous of his plan to pretend to be mad in order to woo Dame Purecraft (5.2.12-13), Quicksilver and Sir Petronel concoct the plan to disguise Winifred on stage and in front of the audience (3.254258), and George and Nell demand that their apprentice take on the role of the Knight of the Burning Pestle. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle,* particularly, in pointing to the boundaries of its own theatre, reminds the audience that the theatre operates on the principle of deception – of bodies and spaces pretending to be something they are not. The audience knows this principle before it enters the theatre: in paying money for their individual seats, members of the audience request the pleasure of being deceived.

Disguise and deception are not the only pleasurable aspects of the theatre of city comedy, nor is the boy actor's ability to disguise himself and deceive other characters within the play, and – occasionally – his ability to deceive the audience the only pleasurable aspect of watching the boy actor. The innocent and carefree nature of

youth that the boy actor embodies is also a source of pleasure. The boy actor is neither man nor woman, and consequently does not have the same confining social responsibilities of either. When he sings and dances, he invites the audience to share in the joy of being a boy. This thesis has argued, to some extent, that not only the boy's voice, but also his behaviours and his epicene body are signifiers of his joyous and unconfined social position. The boy's innocence enables him to participate in the games, merriment, and general celebration of carnival, while his ability to slip fluidly between genders, ages, and other social roles enables him to participate in – indeed, to embody – the productively disruptive carnival, parodic, and epicene spaces. In these spaces, when gender and age expectations are temporarily overthrown, individual bodies can desire, dress, and perform however they want.

In persistently recognizing the boy actor's metabolic ability to metamorphose its gender according to his own, or the individual spectator's desire, and in so doing to explore alternative modes of living in the city, *Amends for Ladies*, *Epicoene*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *Eastward Ho!*, *Ram Alley*, and *Bartholomew Fair* offer strategies by which bodies pursue alternative modes of living. Most of these strategies involve parody and performance. The boy actor uses parody to mock the earnestness with which we often take gender or age roles: *Amends for Ladies* reveals that men frequently behave like immature boys, *Bartholomew Fair* that men's mockery of women comes from anxieties about their own masculinity. Parodic performances of masculinity in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and *Eastward Ho!* also show how fallible men are (about as fallible as they claim women are). The boy actor in these plays not only parodies and mocks men (and men's authority), however; he also demonstrates how relinquishing a monopoly on authority affords a greater scope of

pleasure for men who can learn to follow desires beyond those linked to heteronormative structures headed by a fixed and defined man's body. Fundamentally, the boy actor shows that gender *is* performative – though perhaps not as simply put on or discarded as a peruke or a beard. To take gender for a fixed reality is to miss out on a range of possibilities of what a body can be.

The city is a fluid space, with an economy that thrives on deception. City space itself is a chaotic space (like the space of carnival), and one that demands rethinking about how bodies operate. It is not a space that demands fixity, or perfectly-defined social roles. It is a space, then, that encourages and welcomes its inhabitants to adopt the boy actor's epicene practices as much as the theatre (and the theatre audience) welcomes the boy actor's epicene body.

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