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2004

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Adam Zucker, *University of Massachusetts - Amherst*

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Author(s): ADAM ZUCKER

Source: *Renaissance Drama*, New Series, Vol. 33 (2004), pp. 37-62

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#) for [Northwestern University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41917386>

Accessed: 09-09-2015 18:00 UTC

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The Social Logic of Ben Jonson's Epicoene

ADAM ZUCKER

NEAR THE END of act 4 of Ben Jonson's *Epicoene* (1609), Dauphine, one of the play's three heroes, is sized up by Lady Haughty, the dean of a women's club known as the Collegiates: "He seems," she claims, "a very perfect gentleman" (4.6.12).¹ Haughty's tastes are often bitterly ridiculed in *Epicoene*, but here she issues a judgment that jibes neatly with those of the play and its most privileged characters. With one unexpected gesture at the end of act 5—the removal of a boy actor's wig—Dauphine reveals himself to be the most perfect, powerful gentleman in the play's social world. The action that inspires Lady Haughty's rather conventional compliment is similarly noteworthy. While being watched by a small sequestered audience that includes Haughty, Dauphine doles out a series of kicks and tweaks to two helplessly deceived characters who assume they are being abused in private by one another. Having been told that Dauphine has personally arranged the plot that permits these blows to go unpunished, the women who witness his performance immediately turn their erotic attention to him. Lady Haughty's pronouncement, then, uses the commonplace status designation of "gentleman" to express an allocation of sexually invested social power to Dauphine, and the scene as a whole works to establish his position of privilege within the world of the play.² In and of itself, this process is not remarkable: social identity is always partially a product of the intersection between performance and interpretation, and in the early modern period, status was often explicitly linked to material forms

of public appearance and behavior.³ But as Dauphine's specific actions might suggest, Jonson's engagement with this process in *Epicoene* is far from routine. By what set of standards could tweaking a blindfolded man in the nose lead to the title of "perfect gentleman"? What sort of status is this?

In order to answer questions like these, it is necessary to look beyond the common analytical frameworks used to make sense of status difference in early modern London.⁴ The most familiar methods of expressing and ordering the heterogeneous social relations of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England are not up to the task: neither the traditional hierarchy of orders and degrees with its political and occupational rankings nor the economic categories of a more modern class-based understanding of status seem to have much to do with the logic that ratifies Dauphine's authority in *Epicoene*. Sirs John Daw and Amorous La Foole (the kicked and the tweaked, respectively) are, like Dauphine, titled; all three men are knights, and thus all possess a form of privileged political status. None of them work for wages, yet all maintain residences in a fashionable neighborhood in London; all three would thus seem to possess a form of privileged economic status.⁵ But while Dauphine is a "perfect gentleman," it is obvious from the moment Daw and La Foole appear on stage that the social power that should adhere to their titles and incomes is completely absent. They are abject characters, and by the time audiences and readers reach act 4, the abuse Daw and La Foole receive at the hand (and foot) of Dauphine fits seamlessly into the comic imperatives of the play. A different sort of status formation is at work in *Epicoene*, a logic of social power that uses differences in taste, differences in cultural competence,⁶ to supplement, compete with, and at times disguise the developing economic and political relations of early modern London.

The social logic set out in *Epicoene* is partially based on individuals' relationships to and within the vast field of acts, objects, spaces, and knowledge that constituted Jacobean urban culture. Jack Daw's lack of status, for example, is articulated through his aesthetic judgments and his literary ignorance: on the most basic level, he deserves to be kicked because he "pretends only to learning" (1.2.73). Early in the play, Clerimont and Dauphine goad Daw into a discussion of classical authors during which he first ridicules Seneca and Plutarch as "Grave asses! Mere essayists!" (2.3.46) then runs through a catalog of no fewer than twenty other authors

in order to dismiss them (53–65). The responses of the gallants to this list are telling:

DAUPHINE

What a sackful of their names he has got!

CLERIMONT

And how he pours them out! Politian with Valerius Flaccus!

(2.3.66–67)

Daw ends up seeming foolish for two obvious reasons. First of all, he has bad taste, or, at least, he has standards that are so indiscriminately negative that they seem to be no standards at all. Second, he is unable to arrange knowledge into historical categories; the gallants rip into him for including Politian, a fifteenth-century humanist, in a list of classical authors. But beyond these academic quibbles, Dauphine and Clerimont also attack Daw through metaphor; they figure his relationship to culture as one of blind accumulation. Authors' names become commodities in a sack, goods to be poured out and displayed as the occasion arises. When Dauphine asks Daw which writers he appreciates as "authors," he responds with a sequence of four titles, three in Latin and one, "The King of Spain's Bible," in English, presumably to drive home the joke to audience members with small Latin (73–74). Daw's already benighted status is further degraded as it becomes evident that he has misread the simplest material elements of print culture. In short, it is not bad enough that Daw commodifies knowledge—he can't even consume these commodities correctly.

Whereas John Daw fails to parlay into status his investment in early modern literary culture, the oft-praised Truewit is a mogul of taste. Instead of blindly accumulating and randomly displaying signs and commodities of sophistication, Truewit has an active relationship to them; he reworks knowledge for his own ends and, in doing so, sets himself apart from those who lack his performative skill. Take, for example, his cynical exhortations to Morose suggesting that suicide would be preferable to marriage (2.2.19–31). The Juvenalian source of this particular diatribe reads in part, "Can you submit to a she-tyrant [domina] when there is so much rope to be had, so many dizzy heights of windows standing open, and when the Aemilian bridge offers itself to your hand?"⁷ Truewit's formulation recasts the arcane in familiar terms:

Marry, your friends do wonder sir, the Thames being so near, wherein you may drown handsomely; or London Bridge at a low fall with a fine leap, to hurry you

down the stream; or such a delicate steeple i' the town as Bow, to vault from; or a braver height as Paul's. (2.2.19–23)

A similar transformation takes place in Truewit's discourse on cosmetics as he puts forth the Ovidian position that women, while they should do everything in their power to enhance their appearance, must not let their lovers see them preparing themselves (1.1.108–21; based on passages from *Ars Amatoria*, III). But rather than merely letting Ovid speak for him, Truewit supports a classical argument with a contemporary example:

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. (1.1.116–21)

This urban refiguration of classical sentiment speaks to Truewit's improvisational skill, his capacity to resituate knowledge so as to make it rhetorically useful; in short, it marks him as “witty” in all the ways that Daw fails to be. And just as Daw's problems are partially based on his inappropriate relationship to the objects and exchanges of the print marketplace, Truewit's status is inflected by the material city to which he constantly refers. His claim to social power is signified by his ability to remap the rhetoric and content of classical texts onto common social and physical topographies of London.⁸

This observation runs counter to a line of reasoning that has—up until quite recently—dominated analyses of the play's comic heroes.⁹ Beginning with John Dryden's claim that Truewit “seems mortified to the world by much reading” and that “the best of his discourse is drawn not from the knowledge of the town, but books,”¹⁰ critics have tended to focus on the ways in which Truewit and his cohorts are disconnected from the day-to-day matrices of London life. One modern reader of *Epicoene* has stressed the “playful detachment” of the gallants, noting their “independence” from “all positions, values, and convictions”;¹¹ another points out that they have “no commitment to the larger social hierarchy of which they are nominally a part”;¹² a third distances the gallants from economic relations by calling them “above mercenariness, mere gain” and goes on to depoliticize their status, claiming, “The king might create a duke, but not even he could create a gentleman.”¹³ By mystifying the link between cultural competence—or “wit,” as both the play and the majority of its

readers call it—and other kinds of social and economic relationships, claims like these reproduce one of the primary ideological fantasies of the play.¹⁴ *Epicoene* is widely regarded to be the first “West End comedy,” or the first play to deal exclusively with the concerns of “polite society.” It is also, however, the first English play set in London to imagine that wit and taste might exist apart from or eclipse entirely other structures of city life that generate status. Contemporary critics, vested in well-developed forms of the cultural capital that was only beginning to emerge in Jonson’s London, have tended to take this premise of the play at face value, treating tastefulness as a transparent sign of inherent status, or as a social form detached from the material world. But while Truewit’s knowledge is drawn from books, this knowledge becomes socially functional in the play only when it is projected onto the familiar landmarks that structured Jacobean urban space. As the local details of Truewit and Daw’s performances begin to suggest, wit, even in Jonson’s fictional version of London, always has a material historical context.

Though this may seem to be a fairly self-evident point, the playful, offhanded quality of witty performance often works to mask the link between cultural competence and broader social relations, especially under the gaze of the tasteful literary critic. Jonas Barish, for example, an extremely skilled close reader of the play, argues that Truewit’s multiple rhetorical positions make him resemble “a disembodied intelligence flickering over the action” of *Epicoene*, “lighting up its dark corners.”¹⁵ Here, wit is figured as a sort of will-o’-the-wisp: visible, powerful, but without material substance. On the opposite end of a theoretical spectrum is the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, which positions wit and taste as essentially materially determined phenomena: “The ideology of natural taste owes its plausibility and its efficacy to the fact that, like all the ideological strategies generated in the everyday class struggle, it *naturalizes* real differences.”¹⁶ These “real differences,” for Bourdieu, are always economic: the flow or “distribution of symbolic capital” masks the distribution of “legitimate capital” so that “the balance-sheet of a power relation” is misrecognized as differences in taste.¹⁷ While one would be hard-pressed to find signs of a late capitalist “class struggle” in Jacobean London, the terms of Bourdieu’s argument should push us to examine the material relations that are implicated in and help produce both early modern cultural competence and the social power it signifies. After all, a great deal of social labor goes into the organization of taste and its appearance as an effortless or playful form of status. My reading

of the intertwined roles of literary culture, urban space, and gender in *Epicoene* is an attempt to excavate some of this labor, to denaturalize early modern wit and taste by attending to the multiple intersections between “disembodied intelligence” and “real differences” that constituted status in the changing scene of seventeenth-century London.

Recent work in social history can help to clarify why a logic of power organized around cultural competence might have first dominated a dramatization of London in 1609. Historians charting out expressions of status have stressed an emerging dynamism in Tudor and Stuart England’s understanding of social power, and with good reason.¹⁸ Early modern texts repeatedly engage with forms of social difference by experimenting with the structure of status hierarchies,¹⁹ by exploring how status itself might be signified or produced,²⁰ and, at times, by bitterly critiquing or attempting to regulate those who disregarded the boundaries of conventional hierarchies.²¹ The causes and effects of this dynamism are multiple and always subject to debate, but it seems clear that conservative forms of social description became increasingly unwieldy with the expansion of a market for nonessential commodities. As Joan Thirsk has argued, this expansion, which began in the 1540s and was still underway in the early seventeenth century, was characterized not just by an increase in the sorts of goods available in the shops and stalls of London but also by a diversification in the quality of these goods such that a wider economic range of producers and consumers was able to participate in commodity exchange.²² Although the emphasis in recent scholarship has been on mobility in the upper echelons of society,²³ it’s worth keeping in mind that simple goods such as lace and starch had many more buyers and sellers in early modern London than did an estate in Essex. Despite the difference in degree, the acquisition of a brass pot or a pair of worsted stockings by an apprentice bowyer could have a social effect analogous to the purchase of a silk doublet by a young student at the Inns of Court or a knighthood by a wealthy goldsmith: with each purchase, an individual altered his or her position within the increasingly complex and ultimately interdependent social, cultural, and financial economies of the city. The classical hierarchy of degrees did not disappear, as Keith Wrightson notes,²⁴ but it was simply unable to encapsulate the flows of power within this early form of consumer society. Other ways of imagining and expressing status began to develop alongside the political or occupational categories of older classification schemes, at times supplementing the social relationships described within

them, at times offering more flexible or adaptable alternatives, and at times obscuring older modes of status entirely.

City comedy, the group of plays to which *Epicoene* belongs, is notorious for its interest in the ways in which the explosive elaboration of London's markets affected social relations in the city.²⁵ Earlier examples of the genre usually invoke a political hierarchy of orders and degrees to structure their populations (we always know who has a title, for example, and who doesn't), but these conservative expressions of rank are often complicated by scenes that explicitly stage acts of commodity production, consumption, and exchange, linking marketplace savvy and wealth to the acquisition of social power. In Thomas Dekker's *Shoemakers' Holiday* (1599), for example, Simon Eyre's astonishingly rapid rise through the hierarchy of city government is fueled by the purchase and sale of the undervalued contents of a single Dutch carrack, and in Thomas Heywood's *2 If You Know Not Me* (1605), Thomas Gresham's stature in a nascent global marketplace is instantly consolidated as he buys from a Russian trader a pearl equal in value to the average yearly wage of 750 journeymen cloth-workers, grinds it into a powder, mixes it with wine, and, with a toast to the onlooking Queen Elizabeth, literally consumes it. Other city plays tone down the economic hyperbole that made Eyre and Gresham early modern urban legends, but they always foreground the ways in which social power might be produced or dissipated through the material practices of London's marketplaces. The transformations of Frank Golding in Heywood's *Fair Maid of the Exchange* (1602) and Richard Easy in Thomas Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* (1606) are representative: although both characters lack general authority at the outset (the former is the youngest of three brothers vying for the hand of the same woman, and the latter is a naive out-of-towner destined to be parted from his rentier income), propitious marketplace alliances permit both to achieve a noticeable level of control by the end of their respective plays. Golding joins forces with the Cripple of Fanchurch, a heroically hardworking East End pattern maker, allowing him to outsmart his older brothers and win the hand of the eponymous Fair Maid, who had been in love with the Cripple and his work ethic; Easy, partnered with the savvy wife of the merchant who had swindled him out of his land, is by the end of *Michaelmas Term* a member of the *relanded* gentry (a rare breed on the Jacobean stage), the juridically sanctioned lover of the merchant's wife, and an unexpected beneficiary of the binding contracts of early modern credit finance. Both Golding and Easy, then, gain an element of status that

has nothing to do with degree but is instead contingent on a successful, active relationship to the practices of the marketplace.

The logic of social difference laid out in *Epicoene* often competes with—if not masks entirely—the economic logic that structured earlier city plays. Prefiguring the interests of later Jacobean, Caroline, and Restoration London comedies in a way that no play had before, *Epicoene* stages a city devoid of material labor. The workers, shops, and commodity exchanges that help to organize the status narratives of almost every city comedy written before 1609 (and many written after) do not appear on stage in the play, and the intricacies of London's literal marketplaces, while they are referred to at various points in the dialogue, are never explicitly acted out. In fact, it sometimes seems that social power in *Epicoene* is contingent upon the ability to ignore economic activity entirely.²⁶ Daw's trouble with literary culture is again a case in point. When Dauphine and Clerimont question him about the clunky lyric poetry that he composes and proudly recites, Daw anxiously insists on the difference between himself, one of a number of "Wits that write verses and yet are no poets" and the "poor fellows that live by it" (2.3.100–101). As the two gallants make clear, however, a different sort of relationship to textual production is possible:

DAUPHINE

Why, would you not live by your verses, Sir John?

CLERIMONT

No, 'twere pity he should. A knight live by his verses? He did not make 'em to that end, I hope.

DAUPHINE

And yet the noble Sidney lives by his, and the noble family not ashamed.

(2.3.102–6)

Daw's bad taste stems in part from his inability to distance textual production from its material manifestations; he threatens the play's fantasy of effortless wit and laborless status by constantly letting the acts and objects of financial exchange and commodity consumption shape his relationship to the cultural sphere. For Dauphine and Clerimont, however, poetic text can produce a form of social power that has nothing to do with a literal marketplace. By punning on "live," the tasteful duo deflect attention away from the commercial aspects of authorship and position a lasting reputation as the desired effect of verse, a quantity clearly tied up in the production of status both for authors and for readers who stake their own

claim to sophistication by constructing and properly invoking a literary hierarchy.

Although the play can imagine a literary text (and a form of status) unspoiled by the drab realities of buying and selling, that is, while it can fantasize about a form of social privilege imagined in direct opposition to what is presented as crass financial concerns, in some ways the economic engine of the print marketplace makes the gallants' cultural investments possible in the first place. Dauphine's nod to the reputation of Philip Sidney is particularly suggestive here, since Thomas Newman's 1591 edition of *Astrophil and Stella* paved the way for a broad range of authors to bring their own lyric work to the press.²⁷ This surge in print publication made its mark on the cultural scene of London by permitting the relatively widespread dissemination of the durable texts that came to be read as literary. Were it not for certain marketing decisions by publishers such as Newman to print and sell lyric verse, or, from the demand side, were it not for the desire of a viable number of consumers to purchase printed lyric verse, there might have been no broadly accepted literary status system in 1609 London. The printer's devils and reams of paper—or more generally, the labor and materials—that helped to create Tudor and Stuart literary culture have no place in the dramatic action of *Epicoene*, and it might seem somewhat pedantic to bring them up at all. But their absence, as natural as it may seem to be, is a facet of the play's comprehensive urban fantasy. Mirroring some of the broader social processes at work in the play, the economic logic of the print marketplace is obscured by a logic of cultural distinction.

Despite Jonson's notorious interest in the link between literary text and social authority (a link, it has been argued, that he himself was partially responsible for forging in the seventeenth century),²⁸ cultural competence in *Epicoene* is not only a function of its characters' familiarity with things bookish. Rather than simply setting out a series of differently literate Londoners, *Epicoene* consistently situates its characters in relation to the spaces of London itself to render and reinforce its social hierarchy. Truewit's analogies between his city and ancient Rome gesture toward this dynamic as they transform abstruse intellectual knowledge into functional wit. But, as *Epicoene* amply demonstrates, urban space is not just something to be cataloged or described in playful orations. It is lived in and moved through, the a priori site of social interaction and thus the physical matrix of the performances that produce cultural competence. Henri Lefebvre has

famously argued that social space is both “a *product* to be used” and “a *means of production*.”²⁹ Though the terms of his analysis are taken from political economy, they hold true for the mechanisms of status formation put to use in *Epicoene*. If, as Lefebvre goes on to suggest, “networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it,”³⁰ the same might be said of the early modern struggle to forge an understanding of status that was responsive to a physically, socially, and economically expanding urban scene. To rephrase Lefebvre: a social logic of cultural competence fashions certain kinds of space and is likewise determined by them. As it transforms this social logic into the stuff of comic narrative, *Epicoene* reveals some of the ways in which conceptions of and relationships to the material spaces of the city can structure and be structured by emerging modes of wit or taste.

Like most city comedies, *Epicoene* is filled with references to specific London streets and place names. But while the plays written before it (and, again, many written after) tend to focus on the streets and shops in the central and eastern parts of the city, the action of *Epicoene* is limited to the small stretch of land between the city wall and Westminster that would come to be known as the West End.³¹ This neighborhood has developed a reputation in recent historiography as a magnetic center of early modern financial and cultural capital.³² With the concurrent growth of centralized markets for land, luxury goods, marriages, and legal services, the Ward of Farringdon Extra and points west became over the course of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the seasonal, if not permanent, home of a significant portion of England’s moneyed population. But—and this fact often gets lost in readings of city plays in general and *Epicoene* in particular—the neighborhood between the court and the city was home to more than just a collection of law students, courtiers, landowners, and recently knighted grocers. Bridewell Prison was one of Farringdon Extra’s more prominent civic landmarks, and much of the residential development in the area (as in the rest of the city) took the form of tenement subdivisions that housed poorer laborers.³³ Of course, this economic range is completely absent in *Epicoene*—or flattened—as it must be, if the social fantasy of the play is to hold up. Power relations in *Epicoene* are staged through an emphasis on taste, not on economic or political status, and if a play based on this premise is going to engage with urban space, it must do so in an exclusive fashion. Part of the work of the play, then, is the evacuation of social variety from Farringdon Extra.

Predictably, the lack of economic and political difference in the spaces of the city clears the way for an exploration of the ways in which those spaces might be invoked in the creation of a sense of taste. Though written in a more sarcastic vein, Thomas Dekker's mock courtesy pamphlet, *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609), makes a similar move. The subjects of Dekker's satire—the young social aspirants of London—are advised to walk relentlessly about the city in order to prove their reputation; from St. Paul's to the theater to a tavern and to bed (these are just a few of the locations noted), a route through urban space helps Dekker map out possible motions through social space. Each location provides an opportunity to stake a claim to cultural competence by being observed engaging in one or more of the leisurely pursuits Dekker simultaneously lists and ridicules, among them smoking, eating oysters, and conspicuously cleaning one's gums.³⁴

The most well-known stop along Dekker's suggested route is an unnamed indoor theater. Dekker advises his fictional readership³⁵ to pay the higher entrance fees necessary to acquire a seat upon the stage of a playhouse,³⁶ and, recommending a combination of loud conversation, gaming, and general rowdiness, he puts his readers on the path to achieving a "conspicuous eminence":

As first, all the eyes in the galleries will leave walking after the players, and only follow you, the simplest dolt in the house snatches up your name, and, when he meets you in the streets, or that you fall into his hands in the middle of a watch, his word shall be taken for you; he'll cry "He's such a gallant," and you pass: Secondly, you publish your temperance to the world, in that you seem not to resort thither to taste vain pleasures with a hungry appetite; but only as a gentleman to spend a foolish hour or two because you can do nothing else.³⁷

With tongue firmly in cheek, Dekker outlines a program of self-production that will lead to the creation and maintenance of a particular identity, named first "gallant" then "gentleman" above. Instead of the explicitly sexual power encoded in Lady Haughty's similar appraisal of Dauphine, a modicum of practical urban power is acquired along with these labels: those who have publicly established themselves as gallants in the theater will not, Dekker snidely suggests, be subjected to inconvenient questioning by London's night watches. The acquisition of this status and its attendant element of power is made possible in part by a spatial dynamic (i.e., where an audience member sits in relation to the stage) that in turn relies on a logic of expenditure (i.e., how much one paid to occupy that space). But rather

than emphasizing this economic logic, Dekker presents the rather thin division between those who attend plays “to taste vain pleasures with a hungry appetite” and those who attend “to spend a foolish hour or two” because they “can do nothing else” as a function of how one (mis)behaves from an expensive place on stage. Since *The Gull’s Hornbook* is primarily a satire, the work of public performance is framed as fantasy or entertainment: “observe your doors of entrance, and your exit, not much unlike the players at theaters,” Dekker advises, “keeping your decorums in fantasticality.”³⁸ But the joke here shows that managing one’s relationship to urban spaces—knowing when, where, and how to display one’s self—could help produce and signify forms of cultural competence that competed with or obscured entirely a hierarchy made possible by money.³⁹

Social difference in the seamlessly elite West End world of *Epicoene* is similarly linked to spatial practice in a way that tends to render irrelevant political and economic modes of status. But where *The Gull’s Hornbook* is primarily concerned with sites in which large numbers of people gather, most of *Epicoene* takes place in private chambers and homes.⁴⁰ On one level, the possession of a private residence in London would have been a sign of status in and of itself due to the wealth needed to buy or rent personal quarters in the city. But, as is the case with the audience members sitting on stage in Dekker’s theater, distinctions are drawn between wealthy characters in *Epicoene* based on how they act within their privileged space. The play famously opens in Clerimont’s bedroom, and for the entire first act his servants and friends come and go bearing news from around the city as he dresses himself (1.1.sd 1). The singing, the leisurely debates over leisure itself, and the gossip of the scene all work to create a sense of privilege for the gallants. Beyond these behaviors, as Emrys Jones has argued, the different ways in which people enter and exit Clerimont’s private room also help order the social world of the play. Truewit and Dauphine are welcomed unannounced, whereas La Foole is admitted only after he requests permission; Jones claims that this regulation of entrance creates a sense “of inner and outer” that he links to the opposition between “superior and inferior” and “élite and multitude.”⁴¹ But while Clerimont properly polices the boundary between public and private space, *Epicoene* features two characters, Morose and La Foole, whose styles of urban living are less than socially successful. The former is a residential introvert, the latter an extrovert, and their relationships to urban space, or, more precisely, the types of permeability they allow between public and private

spaces, distance them from cultural competence and the social power it brings.

Though one of the obviously moneyed characters in the play, Morose's status is most blatantly figured through his inappropriate hermetic desires. He lives on a street too narrow for coaches to pass by, limiting his social engagements, and he does everything in his power to shut out the noise of the city that surrounds him. The image of a man with nightcaps piled high on his head, a man sequestered in a house with a "flock bed" padding its front door and "quilting" on its staircase (2.1.10, 26), pushes the boundaries of humorous hyperbole, even for Jonson. But the more details we learn about Morose's phobias, the more it becomes clear that they have less to do with noise itself and more to do with the material practices that create that noise. He is described as detesting all manner of tradesmen, from a "costardmonger" to a "pewterer's prentice" (1.1.143-54); he has violent hysterical fits at the sound of a public entertainer, like a "bearward" or a "fencer" (1.1.166-73); the constant ringing of church bells commemorating plague deaths "has made him devise a room with double walls and treble ceilings" (1.1.175-80); the tumult of his wedding feast drives him to the uppermost reaches of his attic (4.1.18-23); and finally, the "several voices of citations, appellations, allegations, certificates, attachments, intergatories, references, convictions, and afflictions" that make up the scene at the law courts force him back to the relatively "calm midnight" that is the feast back in his home (4.7.12-18). Indeed, when Morose himself ticks off a few of the major landmarks of London, he does so with an agenda quite different from Truewit's:

And that I did supererogatory penance, in a belfry, at Westminster Hall, i' the cockpit, at the fall of a stag, the Tower Wharf—what place is there else?—London Bridge, Paris Garden, Belinsgate, when the noises are at their height and loudest.
(4.4.12-16)

While Morose, like Truewit, seems to have a good grasp of "the knowledge of the town," there is a crucial difference in the way these two characters perform that knowledge. What emerges in the case of Morose is a portrait of a man isolating himself from an entire system of behaviors, from the markets, entertainments, juridical establishments, and general social practices and locations that constitute seventeenth-century London. The lengths to which he goes to shelter himself from everything around him mark him as a type of urban monster, a metropolitan hermit, deserving not

only of scorn but also of humiliation. Morose is an emblematic figure in a play obsessed with sidestepping various material relations. His hysteria is a hyperreactive mode of taste, a sense of distinction so minutely receptive to the possibilities of the urban scene that it has been crushed by the mass of cultural products and production that flood the world around him. By positioning Morose as an oppositional figure against the aims of its heroes, and by punishing him mercilessly, *Epicoene* helps mediate the pressures of this mass, subsuming them under the seemingly laborless forms of wit that bring the gallants their social authority, and that permit them to dominate their satirized other.

Whereas Morose is ridiculed for his attempts to seal himself within his home, La Foole is guilty of failing to contain himself (or, at least, of failing to allow his apartment to contain him). His own particular brand of foolishness results in part from being excessively talkative (1.3.49–1.4.64), but along with his tendency to run off at the mouth, the play inflects and defines La Foole's social behaviors by imagining him in his urban element:

He does give plays and suppers, and invites his guests to 'em aloud out of his window as they ride by in coaches. He has a lodging in the Strand for the purpose, or to watch when ladies are gone to the china-houses or the Exchange, that he may meet 'em by chance and give 'em presents, some two or three hundred pounds' worth of toys, to be laughed at. He is never without a spare banquet or sweetmeats in his chamber, for their women to alight at, and come up to, for a bait. (1.3.32–40)

As opposed to the tasteful Clerimont, whose chambers are open to friends, but who is shown simply receiving his guests as they arrive, La Foole expends all of his effort trying to drag guests into his home. The boundary between his lodging and the public spaces of the West End is repeatedly broached in all the wrong ways as he shouts out his window, chases after potential visitors, and brings serving women up to his rooms with promises of food. If Morose is too isolated from the city in which he lives, La Foole, even from within the confines of his home, is too much in it. He is a “wind-fucker,” as Clerimont's bitter epithet has it (1.4.74), a character who stands to gain little satisfaction from his rapid movements through urban space.⁴²

The extrusion of La Foole out of his residence and into the main public thoroughfare of the West End combined with his verbosity and his laughable expenditures distance him from social power by marking him as tasteless. But, less obviously, they also do so by marking him as feminine. Karen Newman has read the early modern commercial zones of Farringdon

Extra—the Strand, the New Exchange—as sites in a gendered discursive network that produces images of unruly femininity in part by linking excessive “female talk” with the conspicuous consumption of luxury commodities.⁴³ La Foole’s low status is articulated through this network, registering the ways in which the tropes of gender can circulate within expressions of cultural competence. This discursive interpenetration becomes especially prominent later in the play as the men whose social performances are lacking are branded with a form of sexual lack: Daw and La Foole undergo a symbolic castration when their swords are taken away from them (4.5), and Morose is made to proclaim his own impotence (5.4.41: “I am no man, ladies”).

Gender was, of course, a fundamental element of status in early modern London, and like other forms of social power the codes and performances around which masculinity and femininity were organized were slowly transformed along with the spaces and economic relations of the city. Newman traces out the signs of a cultural anxiety evoked by the entrance of women into the public spaces and financial transactions of early modern London’s developing commodity markets; she reads in *Epicoene* a “discursive slippage between women’s talk, women’s wealth, and a perceived threat to male authority” under early capitalism.⁴⁴ With the conspicuous lack of outright commodity exchange on stage, however, the dramatization and mediation of this threat in *Epicoene* often takes place in the arena of taste. The play constantly reminds its audience that if urban social power is based in part on performances that express cultural competence, then it is available to women, who could take on the role of the sophisticate and co-opt its attendant privilege. One of Truewit’s misogynist rants meant to persuade Morose to remain unmarried plays off of this possibility. Here, fears of sexual and economic excess are linked to a less familiar concern that one’s wife might become too witty, too tasteful, and thus, by implication, too powerful:

If [your wife is] 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, and you must lie with her in those languages too, if you will please her. . . . [S]he may censure poets and authors and styles, and compare ’em, Daniel with Spenser, Jonson with tother youth, and so forth; or be thought cunning in controversies or the very knots of divinity, and often in her mouth the state of the question, and then skip to mathematics and demonstration, and answer religion to one, in state to another, in bawdry to a third. (2.2.71–75, 112–20)

The Collegiates, Mistress Otter, and the disguised boy Epicoene act out this fantasy almost to the word, encroaching upon the privileged position of the three gallants: Haughty, upon meeting Epicoene, proclaims to her associates, “and she have wit, she shall be one of us!” (3.6.49–50), establishing the women of the play as potential arbiters of taste. With this in mind, Truewit’s famous pronouncement that the Collegiates “cry down or up what they like or dislike in a brain or fashion with most masculine or rather hermaphroditical authority” (1.1.75–77) seems to register an anxiety generated not only by new possibilities for women in an expanding public sphere, but by the more specific possibility that once in this public sphere, women might use taste, “what they like or dislike,” to stake a claim to a traditionally masculine authority.

Epicoene negotiates this threat to some degree by calling on the cultural matrix that inarguably brings all of its characters together: the spaces of the city of London. We never learn precisely where the Collegiates reside (Truewit locates them “i’ the town” and claims that they “live from their husbands” [1.1.72–74]), but the way in which they manage the relationship between their private residences and the social scene outside of them is more important than topographical realism here. As with Morose and La Foole, the permeability of the boundary between public and private space becomes emblematic of an individual’s position in a social hierarchy. In the case of the Collegiates, however, residential penetration is linked to sexual penetration, creating a forcefully eroticized urban identity. In act 5, Haughty, Centaure, and Mavis all attempt to seduce Dauphine, and all of them do so by offering him access to their “chambers” (5.2.18–19, 35–36, 57–59). The bawdy overtones are not coincidental. Private space, an expensive sign of wealth or economic status, becomes a figure for the Collegiates’ private parts, linking this form of social power to fears of feminine sexual excess. The space of the “chamber” is a transfer point where the social or economic control implicit in a woman’s possession of a private room is reinscribed as unruly desire or immorality. Drawing on the same discursive network that permits Truewit’s vision of the culturally adept woman to touch on both economic and sexual anxiety, *Epicoene* uses emerging elements of urban culture to discredit the Collegiates as licentious.

Along with this eroticization of the Collegiates’ private spaces, *Epicoene* mediates the threat to masculine authority posed by feminine judgment by putting that judgment itself to work in the consolidation of the social

order of the play. I began this discussion with evidence of Lady Haughty's discerning eye: at one point, she calls Dauphine "a perfect gentleman" (4.6.12). As I briefly noted, this seemingly simple assessment is the result of the complex plot staged by the three gallants in the fourth act that leads to the humiliation and physical debasement of Daw and La Foole. Truewit uses the language of theater to describe the plot, calling it a "tragicomedy between the Guelphs and the Ghibbelines" (4.5.27–28), and he insists it be performed in front of a particular audience:

CLERIMONT

Shall I go fetch the ladies to the catastrophe?

TRUEWIT

Umh? Ay, by my troth.

DAUPHINE

By no mortal means. Let them continue in the state of ignorance, and err still; think 'em wits and fine fellows as they have done. 'Twere sin to reform them.

TRUEWIT

Well, I will have 'em fetched, now I think on't, for a private purpose of mine; do, Clerimont, fetch 'em, and discourse to 'em all that's past, and bring 'em into the gallery here.

DAUPHINE

This is thy extreme vanity now; thou think'st thou wert undone if every jest thou mak'st were not published.

TRUEWIT

Thou shalt see how unjust thou art presently.

(4.5.215–25)

Truewit's "private purpose" is to manipulate the women in the play, to shift their erotic attachment from Daw and La Foole to Dauphine. The very fact that the Collegiates and their followers would accept the attentions of two social pretenders casts aspersions on their taste; likewise, their susceptibility to Truewit's ploy becomes the grounding for the play's most blatant critique of feminine judgment: "all their actions are governed by crude opinion, without reason or cause; they know not why they do anything" (4.6.58–59). This scene, however, has more significance than its narrative use as a proof of feminine caprice. As Jonson's stage directions indicate (4.6.sd 1–3), Clerimont leads every single female character in the play (including the one whose boyish identity will be explicitly revealed) to the tarras above the main stage, where they serve as a dramatized audience for Truewit's "tragicomedy." The scene has all the makings of an Elizabethan play within a play, and like similar components in *Hamlet* or *The Spanish*

Tragedy, it functions as a moment of revelation. *Epicoene* is no revenge tragedy, however, and the revelation here is of a cultural crime or aesthetic imposture, rather than of physical violence.

As Truewit directs the entrances, exits, and mock battles of Daw, La Foole, and Dauphine, the women, silent perhaps for the only time in the play, take in the show. Lady Haughty's first lines following the small drama register its efficacy: "Centaure, how our judgements were imposed on by these adulterate knights!" (4.6.1-2). The overall effect of the scene is to reaffirm the social order of the play, not only by placing Dauphine at the center of attention but also by assigning theatrical roles to the characters on stage. Whereas Truewit and his cohorts are marked as producers of a disciplinary plot, or as tasteful agents, the women are integrated into the social hierarchy as spectators—spectators who ultimately conform to the standards of taste imposed by the three protagonists and who read their performances precisely as they are meant to be read. Like the groundlings in Dekker's unnamed theater in *The Gull's Hornbook* who recognize the "conspicuous eminence" of a boisterous man on stage, the women of *Epicoene* underwrite a cultural economy by being the complicit audience through which the status of Truewit, Clerimont, and Dauphine is made manifest.

This quasi-theatrical scenario nicely articulates the basic social logic of the play: the three gallants move smoothly through their urban world, ordering their environment and the people in it. Their privilege (and other characters' lack thereof) is contingent on a series of performances that are bound up in the material exchanges, spaces, and discourses of the city around them. But the intricate convolutions of this tie are usually pushed out of focus in *Epicoene*, as its denouement makes clear. As the play nears its end, Dauphine, promising his uncle relief from matrimonial discomfort, removes the wig of the actor playing Epicoene. The metatheatrically obvious suddenly becomes an unexpected twist in the narrative: Morose has married a boy and is thus not legally married. With the nullification of his wedding vows, the terms of a contract Morose has just signed are met; Dauphine becomes his heir, receiving a yearly allowance of £500, or one third of Morose's income (the details of the contract are carefully recited at 5.4.164-76). Truewit reads this revelation and its results as a decisive gesture of waggish triumph: "Well, Dauphine, you have lurched your friends of the better half of the garland, by concealing this part of the plot!" (5.4.208-10). Like many of the textual moments I've described here, Truewit's exhortations would make an immaterial sort of wit out to

be the natural, obvious determinant of status in the play. From his perspective, the unveiling of the boy Epicoene is a masterstroke, the epitome of the sort of playful gesture that throughout the play has emblemized the gallants' control within their environment. If his lines are taken at face value, Dauphine's power would appear to be the result of nothing more than some delightful trickery. As I have been arguing, however, performances of wit, taste, and/or cultural competence are constantly in tension with and made meaningful by a vast field of objects, spaces, and knowledge that produce social power or make status recognizable. The sudden appearance of paper contracts on stage and the explicit discussion of income and inheritance in the final scene begin to register this tension by reasserting economic practice and financial need—so often obscured by the demands of tasteful performance—as crucial elements of the play's narrative. Dauphine may be witty, but his status, his "garland," is equally proven by the allowance he has won for himself by the end of the play.

Further undermining the breezy tone that colors Truewit's declamation, the decisive effects of Epicoene's transformation suggest that Dauphine's success is a product of his ability to manipulate the signifiers of gender upon the body of a boy. In this way, the end of *Epicoene* elaborates on the social potential of the open sexualities set out in its first scene. If Clerimont's bedroom is a space that helps signify a tasteful hierarchy in the play, then contributing to his own leisured power in the scene is his "ingle" (1.1.23), a youngish boy who, when he's not too busy warbling love songs penned by Clerimont, slips in and out of bedrooms and erotic scenarios with both men and women. In the active life of this ingle, the transferable materials of gender inspire a number of homoerotic arrangements: in a woman's wig, the boy is kissed by women (1.1.14–15); in a boy's apparel, he lies "above a man" (1.1.10). Clerimont seems nervous about his ability to compete with the academy of women and their dresses ("you shall go there no more, lest I be fain to seek your voice in my lady's rushes a fortnight hence" [1.1.19–21]), and his lack of control over the costumes and visitations of the boy puts their master/servant relationship in danger of sliding into the disorderly realm of the sodomitical.⁴⁵ Dauphine, on the other hand, as Mario DiGangi points out, has proven his own status in part by successfully manipulating both the gender and the desire of his own retainer: he "has chosen his young companion wisely and it pays off in his intellectual, social, and financial mastery over all the wits and asses of the play."⁴⁶

Ultimately, then, the fashioning of Epicoene is Dauphine's crowning performance. It's a move that amplifies and in some sense literalizes the social process that brings meaning to Truewit's Londonization of Juvenal and Ovid: a seemingly abstract form of knowledge is made (in)to matter as out of the obscure grammatical term "epicoene," which refers to Latin and Greek nouns that can "denote either sex."⁴⁷ Dauphine tastefully materializes Epicoene, an eroticized body that, by carrying the properties of two genders, permits his social successes. True to form, however, the labor invested in the fashioning of Epicoene is never explicitly staged. The audience first learns of Dauphine's efforts in his easy flourish as he uncovers his creation at the end of the play, and the sudden shock of the revelation itself shifts attention away from the work, the scheming, the rehearsals that would have made that shock possible in the first place. Like the labor and materials of the print shop, this sort of work has no place in the master plot of *Epicoene*. Other characters discuss their machinations at length, from Clerimont's page, who sends noisy entertainers under Morose's windows to provoke him (1.1.166–73), to Truewit himself, whose project for effecting the punishment of Daw and La Foole is charted out step by step (4.4.159ff.–4.5). But the "better half of the garland" belongs to the character in *Epicoene* whose efforts at trickery are completely absent from the play, and whose social power thus appears to be an entirely laborless production.

In this final scene, then, a form of status made legible through a seemingly effortless performance of wit or good taste is structured by—and mystifies—an intersection of economic and erotic practice. To be a "perfect gentleman" in the world of *Epicoene* is to exist at the nexus of elaborate intersections like this one, intersections that frequently work to obscure the materials out of which they are composed. But as natural or playful as they may seem to be, the triumphs of Dauphine and his fellow gallants are never the result of some kind of socially aleatory cleverness. In *Epicoene*, as in the many later English plays that would take up its social logic, cultural competence depends on an ability to successfully manage the fluid set of knowledge, objects, and behaviors that could be put to use in the formation of status in the spaces of an ever-expanding London.

Notes

Thanks to Alan B. Farmer, Zachary Lesser, and especially Jean Howard for their thoughtful readings of earlier drafts of this essay.

1. All citations of the play are from *Epicoene, or The Silent Woman*, ed. R. V. Holdsworth, *The New Mermaids* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990).

2. By "social power" I mean to suggest a general manifestation of privilege that takes the form of control over and within a given environment. Discussions of this element of power often invoke a "status" hierarchy in order to systematize for logical analysis what is in practice a nearly infinite set of fluid relationships. I have no interest in creating a static set of categories, however, so I will use the term "status" primarily to refer to social power itself, rather than to the specific classifications or ranks of a given hierarchy.

3. See, for example, Alan Hunt's discussion of sumptuary legislation in *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), and Frank Whigham on the rhetorical performances of courtly contestation in *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

4. The authority on early modern expressions of social difference is Keith Wrightson, whose broader analysis in *English Society, 1580-1680* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982) is refined in two essays that attempt to chart out the meanings and social purpose of what he terms "the language of sorts": "'Sorts of People' in Tudor and Stuart England," in *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, ed. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 28-51, and "Estates, Degrees, and Sorts: Changing Perceptions of Society in Tudor and Stuart England," in *Language, History and Class*, ed. Penelope J. Corfield (Cambridge, Mass.: B. Blackwell, 1991), 30-52.

5. Economic status as I'm defining it here is not based on financial wealth alone (Dauphine cannot be considered wealthy until the end of the play), but on relationships to and within shifting modes of early modern production. In this regard, Daw, La Foole, and Dauphine are on equal footing; they all fit into the *economic* category of "gentleman" put forth by William Harrison as those who "live without manual labor." William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. Georges Edelen (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), 114.

6. I've taken the term "cultural competence" from Pierre Bourdieu's work in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), a book that I'll have the opportunity to discuss in more detail both in the main body of this piece and in notes, below. The idea is used in a number of ways in Bourdieu's sprawling discussion (see, for example, pp. 65-70, 85), but it generally suggests a skill made manifest in the performance of a critical relationship to cultural products—products that range from privileged forms of literature, art, architecture, and philosophy to less obviously valued (but still socially productive) texts, objects, spaces, and knowledge. To have cultural competence is to recognize the social value of these products and to make this recognition public in a seemingly effortless fashion. As may already be apparent, I will use the term "culture" in its broadest sense to refer to a set of socially determined and

determining acts, objects, spaces, and ideas that compose the material and textual traces of a given community. The breadth of this definition registers some of what might be at stake in the kind of analysis I've set out to perform here: "There is no way out of the game of culture," Bourdieu asserts at the beginning of *Distinction* (12), but left open to players is the option of rigorously examining the historical development and purposes of the rules.

7. Juvenal, Satire VI (30–32) in *Juvenal and Persius*, trans. G. G. Ramsay, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940).

8. For a related discussion of the role of London topography in *Epicoene*, see Janette Dillon, *Theatre, Court and City, 1595–1610* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 124–36. Dillon reads Truewit's references to city sites (along with those of Morose, which I discuss below) as "part of a nightmare that refuses to be suppressed" in the play (128): the knowledge that economic relations—linked conceptually to the idea of the "city" as opposed to the "court" or the "town"—always produce the value of the goods that structure the fashionable world of the West End. I am less concerned than Dillon with the moral thrust of *Epicoene*, and I am not sure that the spaces of the city are necessarily an incompletely repressed scene of anxiety in the play (as I've already begun to suggest, a proper engagement with them can have positive social effects), but the shape of her argument has positively influenced mine.

9. Along with Dillon, recent critics who have worked against this trend and shaped my own work include Karen Newman, "City Talk: Women and Commodification in Jonson's *Epicoene*," *English Literary History* 56(3) (1989): 503–18; Jonathan Haynes, *The Social Relations of Jonson's Theater* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. 34–98; and Mathew Martin, *Between Theater and Philosophy: Skepticism in the Major City Comedies of Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 58–77.

10. John Dryden, *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, ed. George Watson (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1962), 180.

11. Michael Shapiro, "Audience vs. Dramatist in Jonson's *Epicoene* and Other Plays of the Children's Troupes," *English Literary Renaissance* 3 (1973): 416.

12. P. K. Ayers, "Dreams of the City: The Urban and the Urbane in Jonson's *Epicoene*," *Philological Quarterly* 66(1) (1987): 80. Ayers's essay is, in fact, more sensitive than most to the link between urbanity and a historical urban scene (see note 13 below).

13. Emrys Jones, "The First West End Comedy," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68 (1982): 247, 232. Like Ayers (see note 11 above), Jones is generally an astute reader of the social relations set out in *Epicoene*. The fact that these critics would make these claims in arguments intelligently invested in the play's historical context speaks both to the endurance and the deep familiarity of the social processes structuring the play's engagement with modes of taste and wit.

14. The word "wit" had a wide range of reference in the early seventeenth century; I will use it here as it is mainly used in the play (and in modern criticism thereof) to denote a combination of intelligence, cleverness, and originality that creates a desirable social effect, or to label a person who possesses that combination of qualities (see *OED* defs. 5, 7, 9 and 10). Martin Butler, writing about Caroline plays heavily influenced by Jonson, makes a key distinction between different sorts of wit in city comedy, distinguishing between

"wit" as a social value ('accomplishment' or 'breeding') and "the 'wit' of Middleton's heroes which represents their capacity to swindle." Martin Butler, *Theater and Crisis, 1632-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 159. Like *Epicoene* itself, I am more interested in the former definition, but as the end of the play suggests, these two kinds of wit are tightly interwoven in Jonsonian comedy. Readings of *Epicoene* that specifically take up the "wittiness" of Clerimont, Dauphine, and Truewit include W. David Kay, "Jonson's Urbane Gallants: Humanistic Contexts for *Epicoene*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 39 (1976): 251-66; L. G. Salinger, "Farce and Fashion in *The Silent Woman*," *Essays and Studies* 20 (1967): 29-46; Michael Shapiro, "Audience vs. Dramatist"; Philip Mirabelli, "Silence, Wit, and Wisdom in *The Silent Woman*," *SEL* 29 (1989): 309-36; and, more recently, Mario DiGangi, "Asses and Wits: The Homoerotics of Mastery in Satiric Comedy," *English Literary Renaissance* 25(2) (1995): 179-208. I would single out DiGangi's essay, to which I will return below, for its complex vision of the social relationships that allow an individual to be recognized as a "wit"; he uses the distinction between orderly homoeroticism and sodomy in master/servant relationships to do so—homoerotic mastery becomes a figure for social authority.

15. Jonas Barish, *Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 157.

16. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 68. Bourdieu's vocabulary should be approached with caution by cultural historians of Tudor and Stuart England, since the relevant portion of his work is based on the study of the practices of a bourgeois community in 1960s France and, therefore, its unqualified application to the population of seventeenth-century London runs the risk of being anachronistic. The economic mode fueling and mystified by the social dynamic laid out in *Distinction* had yet to fully develop in Stuart England, and the technologies and institutions of the twentieth century (mass media and public museums, for example) that have provided access across a broad social spectrum to aesthetic fields and cultural products were either nonexistent in the first half of the seventeenth century or, in the case of the book trade, in early stages of development. That said, elements of the dynamic under investigation in *Distinction* were clearly gaining purchase in Tudor and Stuart London as its population became more and more integrated into an expanding commodity marketplace (see my discussion on p. 42).

17. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 172.

18. Keith Wrightson claims of "the language of sorts," a mode of social description that developed over the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: "Adaptable to context and responsive to change, it expressed the plasticity of social identity, the mutability of social alignments, the clash of interests, and the power relations of a dynamic society." Wrightson, "Estates, Degrees, and Sorts," 51-52. Wrightson's work implies that modes of social description are linguistic forms active within and responsive to their historical context, rather than being static, objective, and accurate reflections of power relations. See also Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), and "Social Mobility in England, 1500-1700," *Past and Present* 33 (1966): 16-55; and Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege*.

19. See, for example, Harrison, *Description of England*; Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum* (London, 1583); Thomas Wilson, *The State of England Anno Dom. 1600* (London, ca. 1600).

20. The courtesy book or conduct manual is the most prominent example of the type. See Whigham's excellent analysis of the genre, *Ambition and Privilege*, and his useful catalog of editions of Elizabethan courtesy texts (199).

21. See, for example, the infamous polemic of Phillip Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses* (London, 1581), and, for a juridical perspective, Tudor sumptuary legislation, analyzed most recently by Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions*.

22. Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). In an important admonition, Derek Keene notes that "something like a mass market in cheap manufactured goods had already come into existence in London by 1300." "Material London in Time and Space," in *Material London, ca. 1600*, ed. Lena Cowlin Orlin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 59. However, the scale on which this market functioned was clearly transformed by the sixteenth-century developments charted out by Thirsk.

23. See Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, and F. J. Fisher, "The Development of London as a Center of Conspicuous Consumption," in *London and the English Economy, 1500-1700*, ed. P. J. Corfield and N. B. Harte (London and Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press, 1990), 105-18.

24. Wrightson, "Estates, Degrees, and Sorts," 44 and ff.

25. While there have been several notable attempts to mark out the definitive characteristics of Tudor and Stuart city comedy—see, for example, Brian Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968 and 1980); Alexander Leggat, *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); and most recently, Theodore Levin, *The City Staged: Jacobean City Comedy from 1603-1613* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986)—I will use the designation in its broadest sense to denote a play obviously set in London that relies predominantly on comic narrative elements (i.e., romance, intrigue, the "untying of the knot of all the error") to produce and make sense of the complexities of an urban setting. (The knot metaphor is from a text widely read in Tudor and Stuart grammar schools, Donatus's "On Comedy," which can currently be found in *Medieval Literary Criticism: Translations and Interpretations*, ed. O. B. Hardison et al. [New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1974], 45.) A broad definition is necessary here simply because comedies interested in London took on a variety of forms. Civic chronicle comedies such as *The Shoemakers' Holiday* (1599) and *2 If You Know Not Me* (1605) mythologize London sites and citizens as they imagine the interdependency and fantastical harmony of a vast spectrum of urban types ranging from manual laborers to the monarch (see David Scott Kastan, "Workshop and/as Playhouse," in *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, ed. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass [New York: Routledge, 1991], 151-63, for a discussion of the social fantasy presented by *The Shoemaker's Holiday*), while plays often named as "typical" city comedies such as *Michaelmas Term* (1606), *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1611), and *The Dutch Courtesan* (1603) devote a good deal of narrative energy to the agents of London's growing consumer marketplace (e.g., shopkeepers and their wives, retail customers, and usurers), repeatedly dramatizing moments of financial exchange and basing plot lines on the potential dangers thereof.

26. In this regard, *Epicoene* hints at the emergence of what Bourdieu has called the "aesthetic disposition," a facet of social power that is manifested by "a generalized capacity

to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends, a durable inclination and aptitude for practice without a practical function" (*Distinction*, 54). It's also worth noting that Mistress Otter, the only character in *Epicoene* with an immediate connection to mercantile exchange, is an object of particular scorn in the text. Like Daw, she makes obvious the labor of fashion, especially as she chastises her bear-loving husband for failing to wear his ruff and band, for his low-brow fetishization of his drinking cups, and for generally lacking the gentlemanly attributes she covets (3.1).

27. See Arthur Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), esp. 228–37, and David Scott Kastan, "Impressions of Poetry: The Publication of Elizabethan Lyric Verse," in *Approaches to Teaching Shorter Elizabethan Poetry*, ed. Patrick Cheney and Anne Lake Prescott (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2000), 156–60.

28. See, for example, Richard Dutton, *Ben Jonson: Authority: Criticism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); and Douglas Brooks, *From Playhouse to Printing House: Drama and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. 104–39.

29. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1991), 85.

30. *Ibid.*

31. See Jones, "First West End Comedy," 217–28, for a concise history of the neighborhood and, interestingly, its name, which predates the earliest reference in the *OED* (1807) by at least 140 years.

32. See Fisher, "Development of London," and R. Malcolm Smuts, "The Court and Its Neighborhood: Royal Policy and Urban Growth in the Early Stuart West End," *Journal of British Studies* 30(2) (1991): 117–49. For a broader view of the development of London, see the essays collected in A. L. Beier and R. Finlay, eds., *London, 1500–1700: The Making of a Metropolis* (Harlow: Longmans, 1986), especially R. Finlay and B. Shearer's work on demography, "Population Growth and Suburban Expansion" (37–59). Also, see Lawrence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. 1–21, 63–122, and 212–93, for his work on an urban culture predicated, in part, on different sorts of mobility.

33. See Norman G. Brett-James, *The Growth of Stuart London* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1935), and A. L. Beier, "Engine of Manufacture: The Trades of London," in *London, 1500–1700*, 141–67. On the relations between rich and poor more generally in Covent Garden and surrounding West End parishes, see Jeremy Boulton, "The Poor Among the Rich: Paupers and the Parish in the West End, 1600–1724," in *Londinopolis*, ed. Mark S. R. Jenner and Paul Griffiths (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 197–225.

34. Thomas Dekker, *The Gull's Hornbook*, ed. R. B. McKerrow (London, 1904; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1971). Of course, Dekker's pamphlet is a lengthy joke, and the information therein should be taken with a grain of salt. But since most printed satires rely on common knowledge to ground their humor, *The Gull's Hornbook* is likely a good indicator of the interests of the community for which it was published.

35. I use the word "fictional" here to differentiate between the readership Dekker invokes both in the prefatory material of the work and in his address throughout and the wide range of

book buyers who might purchase the pamphlet for entertainment value, or for a voyeuristic glimpse of a profligate world that may be condemned and/or envied.

36. Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*, 3d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 158-59.

37. Dekker, *Gull's Hornbook*, 53.

38. *Ibid.*, 34.

39. For more on this topic, specifically as it relates to a slightly more developed form of theater culture, see Michael Neill, " 'Wits Most Accomplished Senate': The Audience of the Caroline Private Theaters," *SEL* 18 (1978): 341-60.

40. Jones, "First West End Comedy," 240-47.

41. *Ibid.*, 245.

42. The *OED* defines "windfucker" as a type of kestrel, or a windhover, a bird that beats its wings in midair but makes no forward progress.

43. Newman, "City Talk."

44. *Ibid.*, 510.

45. On the link between "sodomy" and social disorder of various forms, see Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). For a discussion relating Goldberg's work to the problem of master/servant relations as depicted in early modern drama, see Mario DiGangi, "Asses and Wits," 181-84. On the erotics (homo- and otherwise) of *Epicoene*, see DiGangi, "Asses and Wits," 184-87, and Bruce Barbour, " 'When I Acted Young Antinous': Boy Actors and the Erotics of Jonsonian Theater," *PMLA* 110(5) (1995): 1014-17.

46. DiGangi, "Asses and Wits," 186.

47. "Epicene," *OED*, def. 1.