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Behn's Jonson

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When the players of the Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin, staged Ben Jonson's *Volpone* in 1676, they knew they were doing something wrong. Fearing that their audience's taste for pre-Restoration plays was waning after fifteen years of theatrical activity in the Irish capital, the company decided to offer a novel version of Jonson's great comedy, taking advantage of their venue's music loft above the proscenium by supplementing the text of the original play "with a Consort of Hautboyes [...] added to the Musick". As can be seen from a manuscript prologue to one performance of the play, their decision was taken neither lightly nor ungrudgingly:

> Did Ben now live, how would he fret, and rage,
> To see the Musick-room outvye the stage?
> To see French Haut-boyes charm the listning Pitt
> More than the Raptures of his God-like wit.
> [...]
> Musick, which was by Intervals design'd
> To ease the weary'd Actors voice and mind,
> You to the Play judiciously prefer,
> 'Tis now the bus'ness of the Theatre.
> [....]
> The Fox above our boasting Play-bills shew,
> Variety of musick stands below.
> This fills the Pitt so full, and solid sense
> Is clear outweighed by empty circumstance.
> So to charm beasts Orpheus in vain did use
> The lofty Transports of his heav'nly Muse,
> Till waving those, all Fidler he appear'd

And Drew with Musick the unthinking Herd.[1]

While acknowledging that it was the variety of music rather than comic action that could now be relied on to pack the Irish playhouse, the prologue reveals the company's enduring loyalty to older figures and forms of stage comedy; it condemns their musical embellishments even as it defends earlier, established forms of stage music as a critical safeguard for the actor's craft, by enabling players to recuperate mid-performance. If Restoration theatrical decorum comes under intense scrutiny in the Smock Alley prologue, it is telling that it is being debated not just in terms of music but through the figure of Ben Jonson himself. Jonson would, we are assured, have raged at such musical innovations since – like an Inigo Jones masque set – they subordinate the verbal to the non-verbal, and inhibit a strictly rational appreciation of humour, wit or "solid sense". Music, even when as transporting as that of Orpheus, is merely a means of herding up an audience; it numbs powers of critical discrimination and charms the vulgar into an unthinking collective response.

This anti-populism partly echoes the notoriously pessimistic evaluation of theatre audiences – endlessly distractible and inattentive to verbal artistry – proffered by Jonson himself late in his career in plays like *The Staple of News* (1625) and *The New Inn* (1629). In this essay I will suggest that the 1676 prologue's characterisation of Jonson as a linchpin for a discussion of audience taste and capability, as a lens for viewing the competing merits of the verbal and the non-verbal in Restoration theatre, is one that Aphra Behn would have recognised. Behn, like many of her contemporaries, used Jonson as a guide for considering the competing merits of comedy in a Horatian or Renaissance humanist mode — which

could offer profit as well as delight — alongside more immediately physical varieties of comic theatre such as farce. I will argue that Behn used Jonson to negotiate a workable model for her own distinctive Restoration comic practice, but that this has been partly occluded by a critical tendency to privilege John Dryden's and Thomas Shadwell's reflections on Jonson in their epochal disagreement about the relative status of the humours and wit in stage comedy.[2] If Behn's indifference to this humours debate has meant she has been marginalised in most modern discussions of Restoration comic theory, her sensitivity to Jonson's place in contemporary controversies about the relationship between discursive and embodied performances or, more precisely, comedy and farce, demands that her involvement in the establishment of Jonson's Restoration heritage be re-evaluated. Behn's comic practice drew on an intimate knowledge of Jonson's oeuvre and sought to harness the ludic energy of farce, which thrived through its ability to provoke a laughter freed from moral responsibility, for a comic theatre with clear ethical purpose. That practice was best expressed in *The Second Part of The Rover* (1681), a play that is profoundly moral in its excoriation of both the patriarchal marriage system and the libertine ideal but is also irreducibly farcical in key aspects of its staging.[3] This play also offers us a glimpse of a Behn who knew her Ben far better than her contemporaries and later generations of critics have generally recognised.[4]

II

Jonson is a familiar yet forbidding figure for the analysis of humour, wit, characterisation, and plotting in seventeenth-century stage comedy; he was also a key reference point in discussions of the propriety of farce on the Restoration stage.

Farce was an extremely influential form in Restoration theatrical culture owing to the immense popularity of touring *commedia dell'arte* troupes and entertainments as well as the influence of Molière on the plotting and stagecraft of the period's comedy.[5] Whatever its ultimate route into England, from the 1670s onwards farce was frequently arraigned and invoked as the stunted, vulgar, and monstrous alternative to a mimetic stage comedy that, if not always decorous, at least had an appropriate sense of its commitment to a truthful representation of the world. "Is there anything more common", William Congreve opined to John Dennis, "than to have a pretended Comedy, stuff'd with such Grotesques, Figures and Farce Fools? Things, that either are not in Nature, or if they are, are Monsters, and Births of Mischances[?]".[6] Dennis held a similar view and, troubled that the laughter provoked by farces was self-indulgent rather than ethical, described farce as a "Monstrous Extravagance, [... which] cannot be thought to concern an Audience; and [therefore] cannot be supposed to instruct them".[7] Thomas Shadwell insisted that Jonson had much at stake in these debates; inveighing against the "*Usurper Farce*" in the prologue to his comedy *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), Shadwell enjoined his audience and fellow dramatists to "*Pray let a Comedy once more be grac'd:/ Which does not Monsters represent, but Men,/ Conforming to the Rules of Master* Ben."[8] Shadwell was thus instrumental in ensuring that it was Jonson who was summoned to offer Restoration comedians, disturbed by the popularity of farce or distracted themselves by the itch of popularity, the best chance of protection against theatrical degeneracy or knockabout stage foolery.

Edward Ravenscroft's earlier commendatory poem to Edward Howard's *The Six Days Adventure, or the New Utopia* (1671) counterpoised Jonson and farce in precisely these terms:

In every Scene he [Jonson] writ we find
With Pleasure Profit joyn'd,
And every comedie
he did intend
An Errata *Page should be,*
To show men faults and teach 'em how to mend.
[...]
Now Comedy to Farce gives place,
Which but its Zany is, and pleases more
With its Grimace
Than all the Arts of Comedy before:
Yet is but Comedy turn'd Ridicule.[9]

The actor's "Grimace" was synecdochic for everything that was excessive, self-consciously physical, anti-naturalistic and, apparently, anti-Jonsonian in the performance of farce. Thus Dryden, who thought that farce "*consists principally of Grimaces*", professed to "*detest*" the mode as "*monstruous and chimerical*", lamenting the "*ridiculousness of* [its] *habit and Grimaces*" when compared with a comedy consisting in "*natural actions, and characters*".[10] Despite his own misgivings about the mixing of comic and tragic elements in Jonson's oeuvre, he also wrote a prologue and epilogue for an Oxford performance of *Epicoene* by the King's Men in July 1673 in which he claimed that he had fled to the university from "th'infected Town" to escape an outbreak of farce in the capital.[11] Dryden took refuge in an old university and a dead laureate because farce, antithetical to both, he claimed, had "quite Debauch'd the [London] Stage with lewd Grimace;/ Instead of Wit, and Humours"; the deformations of plague and theatre that season had become identical as "Nature was out of Countenance, and each Day/ Some new-born Monster shewn you for a Play".[12] However, it was Dryden's brother-in-law, Edward Howard, who gave the most striking examples of the way in which Jonson was thought to work as a salve against the infectiousness of Restoration physical theatre. In the preface to *The Women's Conquest* (1671), he denounced the "vulgar folly" of those who thought that

comedy consisted in "a Scaramuchio [...] making a wry face or gesture" arguing instead that "Farce cannot be allowe'd to be Comedy" since "the chief end of Comedy is [the] improvement of manners".[13] Instead he offered his audience Jonson as the guarantor of the very best comic values, going so far as to summon his furious ghost on-stage in the prologue to fulminate against the contemporary farce craze:

> *Did I instruct you (well ne're half an Age)*
> *To understand the Grandeur of the Stage,*
> *With the exactest Rules of Comedy,*
> *Yet now y'are pleased with Witts low frippery,*
> *Admitting Farce, the trifling mode of* France,
> *T'infect you with fantastick ignorance,*
> *Forgetting 'twas your glory to behold,*
> *Plays wisely form'd, such as I made of old* [?][14]

Howard's Jonson worked angrily on two fronts. He defended the nation and its theatre from the debasing invasion by the French under the cloak of farce; contemplation of his work also offered individual theatre-goers immunity from a virulent strain of farce-induced ignorance.

It is easy to understand why Jonson was thought both antidote and enemy to physical entertainments such as farce. In his epistle 'To The Reader' in *The Alchemist* (1610), Jonson bemoaned "the concupiscence of dances and antics [that ...] run away from Nature", a theme he reprised in the induction to *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) and which was echoed by Shadwell in his preface to *The Royal Shepherdess* (1669).[15] Likewise, when imagining the most fitting threat to courtly order in his final Whitehall masque with Inigo Jones, *Love's Triumph Through Callipolis* (1631), Jonson used the anti-masque to conjure forth a group of "certain sectaries, or depraved lovers" who "leap forth below [...] with antic-gesticulation and action after the manner of the old pantomimi" and who then "dance over a distracted comedy of

love, expressing their confused affections".[16] That this was at least partly imagined as farce's threat to meaningful resolution and true understanding can be seen in Inigo Jones's costume designs for these parts, very carefully modelled on those of *commedia dell'arte* roles such as "a fantastical lover Scaramuzo".[17]

Jonson, thus painted, was farce's implacable foe. However, there were several Restoration dramatists - Behn included – who rethought and reassessed the relationships between farce and the more respectable traditions of English stage comedy represented by Jonson. In his correspondence with Congreve, for instance, John Dennis wondered whether Jonson's comedies always actually returned the Horatian ethical profits that they promised. *Epicoene*, he contended, lacked "the very Foundation of a good Comedy [...] For it seems to me to be without a moral [...] Morose's character, which is too extravagant for Instruction [is] fit [...] only for Farce".[18] Congreve replied that the play "has been Condemn'd by many as Unnatural and Farce".[19] Nahum Tate, by contrast, applauded the farcical qualities of Jonsonian comedy. A writer of several farces himself, Tate offered a vigorous defence of the form in the expanded preface to the second edition of *A Duke and No Duke: A Farce* (1693). Alongside Aristophanes, Plautus and Molière, figures Tate regarded as continental masters of the form, English theatre had its own eminent proponent of an intellectually committed, artistically adventurous variety of farce:

> Reason and Experience convince us, that the best Comedies of *Ben Johnson* are near a-kin to Farce; nay the most entertaining parts of them are Farce it self. The Alchymist, which cannot be read by any sensible Man without Astonishment, is Farce from the opening of the First Scene to the end of the Intreigue [...] *Volpone's* playing the Mountebank in the *Fox* is Farce; and Sir *Politick's* turning himself into a Tortoise.[20]

Some of Tate's contemporaries disagreed with this analysis, preferring to see Jonson as the custodian of a naturalistic comedy, aesthetically and ethically strict. Tate countered that view by maintaining the distinctiveness and capaciousness of a theory of farce with Jonson at its centre: "The whole business [of Jonsonian comedy] is carry'd on with Shuffles, Sham and Banter, to the greatest degree of Pleasantness in the World. For Farce (in the Notion I have of it) may admit of the most admirable Plot, as well as subsist sometime without it." [21]

III

Contested though Tate's notion of the relationship between Jonson and farce undoubtedly was, it was less idiosyncratic than he imagined. His arguments were prefigured and, to a degree, shared by Aphra Behn who had begun working through these ideas twenty years previously in the early 1670s and continued to do so until her death in 1689. If Behn and Tate shared the position that the anti-naturalistic excesses of farce were artful rather than monstrous, what distinguished Behn's vision of farce from Tate's theory was her sense that, at its best, farce might be harnessed for a theatre that was morally committed as well as entertaining. Like so many of her contemporaries, whenever Behn discussed farce she also frequently invoked Jonson; however, rather than merely opposing the two varieties of stage comedy and professing allegiance to one or the other, she concentrated on the contemporary audience's misapprehension of Jonsonian comic effect and principle. Behn plotted the generic coordinates for her second play, *The Amorous Prince* (1671), pitched somewhere between comedy and tragicomedy, by finding some accommodation in her own dramatic practice between the twin influences of Jonson and farce. Her

prologue divided the audience for the play into two: first, those "*grave Dons who love no Play/ But what is regular, Great* Johnson's *way/ Who hate the* Monsieur *with the Farce*" and "*the rest*", "*Who swear they'd rather hear a smutty jest/* [...] *then a Scene/ Of the admir'd and well-penned* Cataline;*/ Who love the Comick Hat, the Jig and Dance*".[22] In attempting to appeal somewhere between these two constituencies, Behn feared that she had alienated both of them: "*Not serious, nor yet Comick, what is't then?/ Th'imperfect issue of a Lukewarm brain*".[23] The characteristically teasing self-deprecation here only partly conceals a frustration at the rigidity of audience response and the period's genre categories.

Behn's preface to *The Dutch Lover* (1673) is equally pointed in its use of Jonson in order to criticise the ways in which audience preconceptions about the limits and purpose of comedy in the Restoration could be stultifying. The preface, which connects Behn's affection for the unlearned "immortal Shakespeare" with a non-aristocratic woman's right to write, is also protestation of some artistic allegiance with Jonson:

> *I am inform'd his* [*Jonson's*] *Learning was but Grammer high* [...] *and it hath been observ'd that they are apt to admire him most confoundedly, who have just such a scantling of it as he had; and I have seen a man, the most severe of* Jonson's *Sect, sit with his Hat remov'd less than a hairs breadth from one sullen posture for almost three hours at the Alchymist; who at that very excellent Play of* Harry *the Fourth (which yet I hope is far enough from Farce) hath very hardly kept his doublet whole.*[24]

The satiric targets here are those Restoration Jonsonians who saw only verbal precision and severity in an author whose best comedy was the very antithesis of that. Just as the disorderly tavern scenes between Hal, Poins, and Falstaff in *I Henry IV* demand that we recognise that there is comic pleasure in bodies and their interaction (as well as in riotous, witty discourse), so too, Behn implies, the delight

of Jonson's *Alchemist* resides chiefly in the farcical intrigues and improvisational postures of Subtle, Face and Doll. Determined, cramped solemnity in the face of this for three hours is shown to be as ridiculous as reducing the complexity of either a Jonson comedy or a Shakespeare history play to a farce.

Behn's discomfort with prescriptive genre labels found pithiest expression in her remark that "*I think a Play the best divertisement that wise men have; but I do also think them nothing* [...] *who do discourse as formallie about the rules*".[25] It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that her idea of farce and her sense of what physical comic theatre might achieve, were both capacious and radically unconcerned by contemporary labels or preconceptions on the topic. Behn's *The False Count* (1682), despite its debts to Molière's *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659) and *Les Fouberies de Scapin* (1671), is hardly a "*slight Farce*", as the play's epilogue has it.[26] Though there is much situational physical comedy in the frustration of the hopes of the uxorious old husband Francisco and his avaricious daughter Isabella, we are never allowed to forget the drama's moral scheme even amidst its most conspicuously farcical moments. The play concludes with the chimney sweep and eponymous character, Guiliom, removing his aristocrat's disguise and triumphantly claiming the kiss and dowry due to him from the gulled Isabella, now an odious rich wife who will never love her new husband. It is the merchant Antonio who extracts the moral marrow:

> GUILIOM: Hang Titles; 'twas my self you lov'd, my amiable sweet and charming self: in fine, sweet heart, I am your Husband; no Vicount, but honest *Guilion* the Chimney sweeper.---I heard your Father design'd to marry you to a Tradesman, and you were for a Don; and to please you both, you see how well I have manag'd matters.
> FRANCISCO: I'll not give her a farthing.
> GUILIOM: No matter, her love's worth a million; [...] I'm sure she'll be content to carry my Soot-basket after me.
> ISABELLA: Ah! I dye, I dye.
> GUILIOM: What, and I so kind?

> [GUILIOM] *Goes and kisses her and blacks her face.*
> ISABELLA: Help; murther, murther!
> [...]
> ANTONIO: [...] You base born Beauties, whose Ill manner'd Pride,
> Th'industrious noble Citizens deride,
> May you all meet with *Isabella*'s Doom.[27]

The blackening smudges of the tradesman – utterly terrifying to parvenus like Isabella and her father – have been a farcical leitmotif for the entire play, fuelling smutty banter, announcing a low-born character's physical presence on-stage and sullying the pristine sets and costumes of refined society. Here, though, they also bear the impression of a comedy that is avowedly reformist in outlook, which seeks to chasten the pride and regulate the manners of its audience.

Behn's ambitions for farce, as glimpsed in *The False Count*, and her desire to elevate the form to a comparable footing with comedy, can be read more clearly in her dedicatory epistle to *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687). Despite protesting to her dedicatee, the Marquis of Worcester, that her three-act farce, populated with stock *commedia* characters like Scaramouch and Harlequin, was "a humble offering", she very quickly revealed much grander goals behind the play:

> A very barren and thin hint of the plot I had from the Italian [...] 'Tis now much altered, and adapted to our English theatre and genius, who cannot find an entertainment at so cheap a rate as the French will, who are content with almost any incoherences, howsoever shuffled together under the name of a farce: which I have endeavoured as much as the thing would bear, to bring within the compass and possibility of nature.[28]

The confidence behind this radical re-imagining of farce's possibilities partly comes from Behn's knowledge that the form, especially its Italian variety, had been intensely popular at Charles II's court. (In April 1683, the king even issued orders for the

construction of a bespoke theatre for *commedia dell'arte* performance at Windsor Castle.)[29] Behn's farce utterly refutes influential Restoration assumptions about the form's exaggerated, unrealistic monstrousness to affirm instead the value of a spectacularly entertaining physical theatre "brought within the compass and possibility of nature". *The Emperor of the Moon* thus refuses to give its audience the kind of fare offered by Edward Ravenscroft's Italophilic farce *Scaramouch* (1677), a beguiling but occasionally tangentially related series of set pieces in which the rapid to-and-fro of comic dialogue is only ever offered as the unlikely and unimaginative servant of the brilliant, unscripted improvisational play of skilled performers.[30] Rather, Behn's play gives us a causally explicable plot which unites two pairs of young lovers with *commedia* characters in a battle of wits against an ageing, restrictive patriarch, Doctor Baliardo. The farcical gulling of the Doctor is pursued with the goal of enabling him to prefer the pleasures of family, the possibilities of love and the imaginative potential of the young above the solitary, isolating pursuit of vain study – a fact recognised when he says he will burn all of his books, renouncing the "monstrous lies" of occult philosophy in favour of a good party with the happily betrothed. Even at the most incredible and grotesque moment of the play, in the prologue where the actor Thomas Jevon speaks into the mouth of a fabulous gigantic head, an expensive and curiosity-quickening prop in which he claims the United Company have recently bought part-share, Behn refuses to leave her audience marvelling at the exaggerations and embellished displays of a performance that will bring forth monsters (or their parts). Rather, she insists that her audience see a humorous but truthful representation of the ingenious human interactions which have brought the spectacle into being in the first place, making the actor operating

this oversized puppet "on a twisted post" hard of hearing, and thus unable to conceal his involvement behind the scenes.[31]

IV

Behn's ability to forge a variety of theatre that was physical, diverting and yet morally responsible, which traded on an idea of farce brought within "the compass and possibility of nature", was given its most complete expression in *II Rover*, a play which showed that Behn precisely understood the mechanics of Jonsonian comedy, especially *Volpone*. Behn may well have seen *Volpone* in performance given its prominence in the repertory of the King's Company in the 1660s and 70s.[32] It is telling, then, that in one of the most uproarious moments of physical comedy in *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678), Behn should also quote *Volpone* directly. At the moment where Sir Credulous Easy "starts up" from his hiding place a basket, Behn prepares for the moment of discovery by having Wittmore, anticipating stashed cash rather than a concealed foolish Knight inside, open the basket and intone the famous opening lines of the earlier play: "Good morrow to the day, and next the Gold, open the Shrine, that I may see my Saint".[33] That Behn was also reading *Volpone* when composing her pair of *Rover* plays has been suggested before by both Janet Todd and Mark Thornton Burnett who have noted Blunt's echo of Jonson's Corvino in his threats of extreme violence against women in *I Rover.*[34] There is further evidence, too, from *II Rover* with its farcical mountebank plot half-lifted from the first part of Killigrew's *Thomaso,* which itself was egregiously plagiarised from *Volpone* where the eponymous hero first appears disguised in a Venetian piazza as Scotto of Mantua in Act II scene 2. Even if, as Elaine Hobby has demonstrated, Behn sometimes took insufficient care to differentiate her own words in *II Rover* from those of Killigrew in *Thomaso*, it is

striking that in her rewriting of the mountebank scene, she went to considerable lengths to distance the text of her own play from that of her source.[35] In the speech where Willmore vends his potions and powders, for instance, not one of the words belongs to Killigrew (whereas in the equivalent scene in *Thomaso,* practically every word voiced by Killigrew's mountebank is taken from the mouth of Jonson's Volpone).[36] Editing Killigrew and Jonson out so carefully at this point could only be done with an intimate knowledge of the text of *Volpone* and, perhaps, some sense of Killigrew's own nervousness about the status of his plagiarised scene. When he prepared the King's Company to stage his *Thomaso* plays shortly after the Restoration he cut the entirety of the mountebank plot from his production plans.[37]

While Behn's understanding of *Volpone* caused her to cut Jonson's words out of *II Rover* at this particular point, Jonson's play exercises a transformative influence elsewhere in her drama, especially in its physical comedy. Amongst the most noticeable stylistic differences between *II Rover* and the Killigrew source are the *commedia dell'arte* qualities of her play. Behn introduces a Scaramouch as well as new speaking parts for a Harlequin and two Mexican heiresses – one a dwarf, the other a giant – and involves these characters in varieties of physical fooling reminiscent of the original Italian form. The impulse to insert the physical comedy associated with those characters may well originate with the contemporary popularity of *commedia dell'arte* which, as Montague Summers and others have noted, swept through London and the court with the famous Italian Scaramuccio, Tiberio Fiorilli between the early 1670s and 1683.[38] But it may also come from Behn's astute reading of *Volpone*'s own farcical qualities. Critics routinely remark that when Willmore disguises himself as a mountebank in Act III of *II Rover*, he looks a lot like Rochester in his Alexander Bendo phase, an outrageous three-week impersonation in 1676 of a travelling Italian

quack; but he resembles much more closely Jonson's Volpone whose most flamboyant impersonation is to transform himself into a famous mountebank called Scoto of Mantua, who, in addition to his quackery, was one of the stars of a *commedia dell'arte* troupe that once performed before Elizabeth I.[39]

Even if, as we saw earlier, Nahum Tate enjoyed the farcical qualities of *Volpone* in 1693, the idea that Behn had ventured to find physical comedy there ten years previously might come as a surprise given the high seriousness and forbidding masculinism of the humanist pieties that introduce the play. In his dedicatory epistle Jonson claimed that it was the comedian's role to "inform young men to all good disciplines, inflame grown men to all great virtues, keep all men in their best and supreme state".[40] However, careful consideration of those characters often described as Volpone's surrogate or parodic family – Nano, Androgyno, and Castrone: the dwarf, hermaphrodite and eunuch – reveals a rich seam of comedy which, in common with farce, has an irreducibly physical basis. The cruelty of that humour, drawing as it does on normative ideas of monstrosity and bodily perfection, is amplified when the physicality of Nano the dwarf is emphasized for comic effect. Volpone typically summons his dwarf with an imperative to do nothing more than entertain both him and the audience with songs and dances, as a counterpoint to the satirical main action or a resting point for the lead actor. On one occasion Nano offers the following "sport" in response to Volpone's demand that they make "the wretched time more sweet":

> Nano: First for your dwarf, he's little and witty,
> And everything, as it is little, is pretty;
> Else why do men say to a creature of my shape,
> So soon as they see him, "It's a pretty little ape"?

> And why a pretty ape? But for pleasing imitation
> Of greater men's action, in a ridiculous fashion.
> Besides, this feat body of mine doth not crave
> Half the meat, drink and cloth, one of your bulks will have.[41]

While we might want to probe the troubling ways in which human bodily difference is being explained here through a discourse of animal imperfection, in Jonson's theatre Nano's emphasis on the materiality of his "feat" body is played as a diverting interlude or laugh.

Nano's presence looms large in Jonson's mountebank scene, where Jonson has him thrust onto the stage before Volpone's grand appearance as Scoto, as a kind of diminutive warm-up act for the star turn. Volpone's order to his dwarf to "Mount" the platform before he ascends continues a riff on the term "mountebank", but it further reminds the audience of the physical reality of Nano's size:

> [*Enter Volpone on the stage, disguised as a mountebank*]
> Volp: [to Nano] Mount, zany. [*Nano mounts the stage*]
> Gregge: *Follo, follo, follo, follo, follo.*
> Sir Politic: See how the people follow him! [42]

As Gordon Campbell has shown, the humour of this scene resides in Sir Politic's misapprehension that the Venetian crowd are devoted "followers" of Nano the dwarf when they're actually deriding him as a "madman" in their mother tongue, mocking Nano's bodily difference by means of very different set of normative assumptions.[43] It is not the crowd's cruelty, or the gap between their repeated word and the different ways of being it condemns which is dwelled upon here; we are

meant to pause instead at that gap in Sir Politic's knowledge of foreign languages, that silly misprision born entirely of English ignorance. In much the same way, we are meant to see Lady Politic's polite treatment of Nano – she is the only character who treats him remotely humanely – as yet another example of her ridiculous wrong-headedness.

It is this use of physical theatre in a profoundly moral comedy that I suggest Behn imitated and re-inflected in *II Rover*. Having Jonson's play behind her enabled her to develop her own mountebank-driven narrative in a drama that might also unite farce and moral purpose in a way which was utterly distinct from the dramaturgy on offer in her source, Killigrew's *Thomaso*. The key to unlocking all of this is Behn's own use of a dwarf and a giant as embodied sources of comedy. Neither of these characters is, I would argue, an example of radically resistant or idealized femininity but rather, in the play's own terms, physical "monsters", antitypes of the glamorous actors that the Duke's Company used in the lead roles of the 1681 production. If we read these characters carefully, they bring with them a certain amount of ethical profit but also a very good deal of farcical delight, however cruel or unattractive. One of Behn's most striking deviations from Killigrew in *II Rover* is to bring her giant and the dwarf on stage — in *Thomaso* the dramatis personae tells us they "are onely mentioned"— and give them speaking parts.[44] Exactly how the role of the giant was originally performed at the Dorset Garden theatre must remain a matter of some conjecture, since in the 1681 quarto, the giant and the dwarf are, frustratingly, among the small number of speaking parts not cast.

However it was done, the physicality of these roles was evidently regarded as a potential box-office draw, with Behn's prologue trailing the fact that the play had "*Monsters too*, [...] *for show*".[45] The giant first appears in the following exchange:

GIANT (to SHIFT): What, does the Cavalier think I'le devour him?

FETHERFOOL: Something inclined to such a fear.

[...]

[*Enter SHIFT with a ladder, sets it against the GIANT and bows to FETHERFOOL.*

SHIFT: Here, Seignior, Don; Approach, *Mount,* and salute the Lady.

FETHERFOOL: (*aside*) *Mount!* Why 'twould turn my brains to look down from her Shoulders; but hang't, 'Gad, I will be brave and venture.

[*Runs up the ladder, salutes her, and runs down again*

And Egad, this was an adventure and a bold one.[46]

If Behn is probing the heroism of exiled cavalier groups in this scene – how bold were their adventures on the continent in the 1650s? – the primary appeal of the episode is as slapstick farce. Just as Jonson's Nano had to "mount" a stage to accentuate his diminutive size, so here, when Behn's cavaliers consider the multiple meanings of that very same imperative, they simultaneously reveal the bawdy cast of their imagination and the astonishing physicality of the giant woman on stage, something accentuated by the repeated use of a ladder as a prop.

Slightly later in the same scene, when the gigantic heiress has retired, a different giant takes the stage purporting to be the former's supersized suitor. He is really the cavalier Hunt, played by John Richards on the shoulders of another unnamed actor:

Enter HARLiQUIN, *Ushers in* HUNT *as a Giant*

FETHERFOOL: Hah, some o'ergrown rival, on my life!

[...]

WILLMORE: (*aside*) 'Tis *Hunt*, that Rogue

> [...]
> Conduct him to the Ladies.
> *He* [HUNT] *tries to go in at the door*
> I am sorry you cannot enter at that low Door, Seignior, I'll have it broken down.
> HUNT: No, Seignior, I can go in at twice.
> FETHERFOOL: How, at twice, what a Pox can he mean?
> WILLMORE: Oh, Sir, 'tis a frequent thing by way of Inchantment.
> HUNT, *being all doublet, leaps off from another Man who is all Britches, and goes out, Britches follows, stalking.*[47]

When Richards-as-Hunt and the unnamed actor playing this arrestingly re-imagined breeches, or "Britches", role offer us a glimpse of their considerable acrobatic skills, they also probably reveal how Behn's giant woman was performed at other moments in the play by unnamed members of the Company. Indeed, identical acrobatic skill was required from the United Company actors embodying a later, farcical stage giant. In Act II of William Mountfort's *The Life and Death of Doctor Faustus, Made into a Farce* (1688) a giant is summoned from a magic circle and when dismissed promptly "leaps in two" in order to leave the stage for dinner with a Scaramouch and a Harlequin.[48] Behn's giant scenes are, likewise, intensely farcical, but they are also wryly, self-referentially so; just as she would reveal the mechanics of the gigantic head in the prologue to *The Emperor of the Moon,* Behn here probes the depths as well as the surface of physical comedy. She lays bare the device which brought her giants into being for a theatre audience and invites us to applaud the physical prowess required of actors to sustain the illusion and knockabout comedy of stage gigantism.

In doing this, Behn goes much further than Jonson ever did with his dwarf, eunuch and hermaphrodite who are abruptly dismissed before *Volpone*'s denouement

by Mosca and told to "Go recreate yourselves abroad, go sport".[49] Behn's "monsters" are unmissably onstage in her final scene, both witness and party to its rakish, patriarchal atmosphere as they are married to Hunt and Shift. These new husbands placate their enraged guardian by cutting him an equal share with them on the marriage deal: they give him a third of their new wives' combined dowries. However there is more than just monetary profit for rakish cavaliers in all of this. In juxtaposing the loveless, effortless incorporation of the giant and the dwarf into the marriage system with the humorous but effortful physical reality of their staging in the play's finale — both giant and dwarf wander around the stage and talk in its final moments — Behn encourages her audience to think about the values of a system which must put a price on any and every woman's body.[50] It is this insistence on the connection between the physical and the ethical in Restoration theatre which is the true fulfilment of a vision of farce that Behn had been entertaining for the best part of a decade. Ten years previously, heralding the arrival of Edward Howard's play *The New Utopia* (1671), she generously described its author as a playwright of sublime insight and "*Method*", one who, following in the slipstream of "*mighty* Ben", "*from rude Farce* [...] *Comick Order brought*".[51] She might, more appropriately, have been describing herself.[52]

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Notes

[1] Robert Gayes Noyes, "A Manuscript Restoration Prologue for *Volpone*", *Modern Language Notes*, 52.3 (1937), 198-200 (p. 199). For the suggestion that the prologue was for a Dublin rather than a London performance see Pierre Danchin (ed.), *The Prologues and Epilogues of the Restoration, 1660-1700: Part I, Volume II* (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1981), p. 696; William Van Lennep, "The Smock Alley Players in Dublin", *ELH*, 13.3 (1946), 216-22 (p. 222). On the Smock Alley theatre and its audiences, see Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 12-20.

[2] On the Dryden-Shadwell controversy, and Jonson's place within it, see Brian Corman, *Genre and Generic Change in English Comedy, 1660-1710* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); idem.,

"Thomas Shadwell and the Jonsonian Comedy of the Restoration", in *From Renaissance to Restoration: Metamorphoses of the Drama*, ed. Robert Markley and Laurie Fink (Cleveland, OH: Bellflower Press, 1984), pp. 127-52; Paul Hammond, "Flecknoe and *Mac Flecknoe*", *Essays in Criticism* 35 (1985), 315-29.

[3] On the moral force of *II Rover* see Susan J. Owen, "Sexual Politics and Party Politics in Behn's Drama, 1678-83", in *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 15-29. For a contrary view see Loring Pfeiffer, "'Some for This Faction Cry, Others for That': Royalist Politics, Courtesanship, and Bawdry in Aphra Behn's *The Rover, Part II*", *Restoration*, 37.2 (2013), 3–19.

[4] For a notable exception see Carolyn D. Williams, "'This Play will be mine A[rse]': Aphra Behn's Jonsonian Negotiations", in *Jonsonians: Living Traditions*, ed. Brian Woolland (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 93-106.

[5] On Restoration farce see Peter Holland, "Farce", in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 107-26; Albert Bermel, *Farce: A History from Aristophanes to Woody Allen* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982); Jessica Milner Davis, *Farce* (London: Methuen, 1978); Leo Hughes, *A Century of Farce* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956); idem., "Attitudes of Some Restoration Dramatists toward Farce", *Philological Quarterly*, 19 (1940), 267-87. On *commedia dell'arte* troupes in England see Eleanore Boswell, *The Restoration Court Stage, 1660-1702* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1932). On Molière's relationship to European farce see Richard Andrews, "Molière, *Commedia Dell'arte*, and the Question of Influence in Early Modern European Theatre", *Modern Language Review*, 11.2 (2005), 444-63; Cordelia Gundolf, "Molière and the *Commedia Dell'Arte*", *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 39.1 (1973), 22–34; John Wilcox, *The Relationship of Molière to Restoration Comedy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938).

[6] William Congreve, "Mr. Congreve to Mr. Dennis concerning Humour in Comedy", in John Dennis, *Letters upon Several Occasions* (London, 1696), pp. 80-96 (p. 83).

[7] John Dennis, "To Mr. Congreve", in *Letters upon Several Occasions*, ed. by John Dennis (London, 1696), pp. 76-79 (p. 77).

[8] Thomas Shadwell, *The Squire of Alsatia* (London, 1692), sig. A3^{r}.

[9] Edward Howard, *The Six Day Adventure; or, The New Utopia* (London, 1671), sig. a4^{r}.

[10] John Dryden, *An Evening's Love; or, The Mock Astrologer* (London, 1671), sig. χ1^{v}.

[11] John Dryden, "Epilogue", in *Miscellany Poems* (London, 1684), pp. 265-67 (p. 265). Dryden was disappointed by Jonson's mixing of comedy and tragedy in *Catiline* and *Sejanus*; see Dryden, *Of Dramatick Poesie* (1668), pp. 30-31.

[12] Dryden, "Epilogue", p. 266

[13] Edward Howard, *The Women's Conquest* (London, 1671), sigs b3^{v}- b4^{r}, b3^{r}

[14] Ibid., sig. c3^{v}.

[15] Ben Jonson, "The Alchemist", in *Ben Jonson: The Alchemist and Other Plays*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 213. Unless otherwise stated all references to Jonson's comedies are taken from this edition. Thomas Shadwell, *The Royall Shepherdess* (London, 1669), sig. A1^{v}.

[16] Ben Jonson, *Loves Triumph through Callipolis Performed in a Masque at Court 1630* (London, 1631), p. 2.

[17] Kenneth Richards, "Inigo Jones and the *Commedia Dell'Arte*", in *The Commedia Dell'Arte from the Renaissance to Dario Fo*, ed. Christopher Cairns (Lewiston: Mellen, 1988), 209-25 (p. 212).

[18] Dennis, "To Mr. Congreve", pp. 76-77.

[19] Congreve, 'Mr Congreve to Mr Dennis", p. 87.

[20] Nahum Tate, *A Duke and No Duke: A Farce* (London, 1693), sigs c2^{v}-c3^{r}.

[21] Ibid., sig. c2^{v}.

[22] Aphra Behn, *The Amorous Prince* (London, 1671), sig. A2^{r}.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Aphra Behn, *The Dutch Lover* (London, 1673), sig. a1^{r}.

[25] Behn, *Dutch Lover*, sig. A4^{r}.

[26] "Farce" was also privileged on the title page of one printing of the first edition: *A Farce Call'd the False Count; or, A New Way to play An Old Game* (London, 1682), sig. K1^{v}.

[27] Ibid., pp. 64-65.

[28] Aphra Behn, *The Emperor of the Moon*, in *The Rover and Other Plays*, ed. Jane Spencer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 275.

[29] Virginia P. Scott, *The Commedia dell'Arte in Paris, 1644-1697* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), p. 160.

[30] For examples of such disconnected *commedia* fooling see Edward Ravenscroft, *Scaramouch* (London, 1677), pp. 3, 5, 12.

[31] Behn, *Emperor of the Moon,* pp. 32-33.
[32] On Restoration productions of *Volpone* see William Van Lennep et al., *The London Stage, 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments and Afterpieces, together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960), I, 56, 86, 113, 242.
[33] Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy* (London, 1678), p. 88.
[34] Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (London: Pandora, 2000), p. 477; Mark Thornton Burnett, "Behn and Jonson", *Notes and Queries* 39.4 (1992), p. 464.
[35] Elaine Hobby, "No Stolen Object but Her Own: Aphra Behn's *Rover* and Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso*", *Women's Writing*, 6.1 (1999), 113-27.
[36] Aphra Behn, *The Second Part of the Rover* (London, 1681), p. 23; Thomas Killigrew, *Comedies and Histories* (London, 1664), p. 361; Jonson, *Volpone*, 2.3. 215-25.
[37] See Marcus Nevitt, "Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso* as Two-Part Comedy", in *Thomas Killigrew and the Seventeenth-Century English Stage*, ed. Philip Major (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 113-132 (pp. 121, 128-31).
[38] Montague Summers, *The Playhouse of Pepys* (New York: Humanities Press, 1964), p. 112; Scott, *Commedia dell'Arte in Paris*, pp. 157-60.
[39] On Rochester as Alexander Bendo, and Behn's reflection on that, see M.A. Katritsky, *Women, Medicine and Theatre, 1500–1750: Literary Mountebanks and Performing Quacks* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 153-54, 170. On Scoto of Mantua and *commedia* see K. M. Lea, *Italian Popular Comedy: A study in the Commedia dell'Arte, 1560-1620,* 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), II, 360-61.
[40] Jonson, *Volpone*, "The Epistle", p. 3.
[41] Jonson, *Volpone,* 3.3. 9-16.
[42] Jonson, *Volpone,* 2.2. 27-29.
[43] Gordon Campbell, ed., *Ben Jonson: The Alchemist and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 448.
[44] Thomas Killigrew, "Thomaso", in *Comedies and Tragedies*,pp. 311-82 (p. 312).
[45] Aphra Behn, *Second Part of the Rover*, sig. A2^{r}.
[46] Behn, *Second Part of the Rover,* pp. 34-5.
[47] Behn, *Second Part of the Rover*, pp. 37-8.
[48] William Mountfort, *The Life and Death of Doctor Faustus, Made into a Farce* (London, 1697), p. 13. Mountfort echoes Behn's fun with the farcical breeches role, by having his characters of Harlequin and Scaramouch "complement the Breeches'" (p. 13). On the 1688 dating of Mountfort's play, which is later than the *London Stage* date, see Robert D. Hume, "The Date of Mountfort's *The Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*", *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen*, 213 (1976), 109-11.
[49] Jonson, *Volpone*, 5.5. 11.
[50] For a reading of the symbolism (rather than the staging) of Behn's monsters see Jacqueline Pearson, 'Slave Princes and Lady Monsters', in *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1996), pp. 219-34 (p. 222).
[51] Aphra Behn, "To the Author of *The New Utopia*", in Edward Howard, *The Six Days Adventure; or, The New Utopia* (London, 1671), sig. a2^{v}.
[52] I am grateful to Frances Babbage, Lyndsey Bakewell, Robert D. Hume, Tom Rutter, and the editors for discussion of this article.