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Soliloquies and Self-Fashioning in *Volpone*: An Empirical Approach

Introduction

A fundamental and profound distinction between elements of a script is that between a *passage of dialogue* in the sense of a *speech directed by a character at the hearing of one or more other characters* and a *soliloquy* in the sense of a *passage not directed by the character at the hearing of any other character*. In the course of a long-term investigation, I discovered that conventions governing soliloquies have varied over the course of theatrical history. For example, during the medieval and early Renaissance periods, soliloquies by characters engaged in the action often contain explicit acknowledgments of the presence of playgoers. Plentiful, conspicuous, unambiguous, varied, and overwhelmingly one-sided evidence demonstrates that the convention radically changed in the late 1580s and early 1590s. Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, and Shakespeare established in no uncertain terms that

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soliloquies by characters engaged in the action of their plays represented self-addressed speeches as a matter of convention.¹ Other dramatists followed suit, and the convention remained firmly in place until the closing of the theaters in 1642.

That soliloquies represented self-addressed speeches as a matter of convention is illustrated by the balcony episode in *Romeo and Juliet*. Romeo overhears Juliet's soliloquies, so the words spoken by the actor who portrayed Juliet must have represented words *spoken* by the character rather than words merely passing through her mind. Juliet's soliloquies were also obviously meant to represent *self*-addressed speeches rather than speeches she knowingly addressed to playgoers. If Romeo had been depicted as witnessing Juliet engaged in the very public act of announcing to a large assembly of strangers that she loves Romeo, that staging would have utterly destroyed the intimacy of the episode. In fact, Romeo eavesdrops on Juliet's most private speeches, when she thinks she has no listener other than herself. As a matter of convention, whenever a character in a late Renaissance play speaks a soliloquy, playgoers were in a situation analogous to that of Romeo in the balcony episode: they eavesdropped on the self-addressed speech of the character.

Late Renaissance plays are also pervaded by *asides*, each of which has the defining characteristic that it represents a *speech that the character guards from the hearing of at least one other character*. Some asides are directed at the hearing of one or more other characters; they are *shared asides*. Some asides, such as Romeo's speeches guarded from the hearing of Juliet in the balcony episode, also qualify as soliloquies in the sense of speeches not directed at the hearing of any other character. Such speeches are *soliloquies guarded in asides*.² Like other soliloquies, soliloquies guarded in asides represented self-addressed speeches. In the first scene of *King Lear*, when Cordelia says, "Love, and be silent" (62),³ she is not giving advice to playgoers; she is telling *herself* what to do.

Regular playgoers of the period were often reminded of the particularities of the convention of self-addressed speech because most plays of the period employed the convention frequently and conspicuously. In *Volpone* (1606) Ben Jonson employed the convention in daring and sophisticated ways.

Soliloquies as the Representation of the Spoken Words of Characters

The most conspicuous evidence that soliloquies represented the spoken words of characters rather than their unspoken thought is that, whenever an eavesdropper is present, he overhears the soliloquy of a character unaware of his presence. This happens with astonishing frequency in late Renaissance drama. Even soliloquies in asides represented speeches. Guarding a soliloquy in an aside was a skill, and like any other skill it could be done well or poorly. If a character in the presence of other characters failed to guard a soliloquy adequately, it could at least partially be overheard. This type of situation occurs with astonishing frequency in late Renaissance drama.

An example occurs in 2.6 of *Volpone*. Mosca has told Corvino that he might lose the estate of Volpone to another would-be heir, who has offered to let his daughter share Volpone's bed. In a soliloquy initially guarded in an aside from Mosca, Corvino talks himself into offering his own wife. But he becomes so focused on his private deliberation that he inadvertently lowers his guard, and Mosca begins to overhear the speech, as Mosca says to himself in a soliloquy guarded in an aside from the hearing of Corvino.

I hear him coming.
(74)⁴

That is, "I overhear him arriving at the decision to order his wife to share a bed with Volpone."

The play contains many other instances in which the conventions governing soliloquies and asides operate in subtle or convoluted ways, as in the following exchange:

Corbaccio: I may have my youth restored to me, why not?

Mosca: *Your worship* is a precious ass!

Corbaccio: What sayest thou?

Mosca: I do desire *your worship* to make haste, sir.

(1.4.129–31, italics added)

Mosca is playing a practical joke on Corbaccio for his own amusement. He allows Corbaccio to hear the words "your worship" but

guards the rest of the sentence. He then cleverly substitutes an innocuous assertion for his derogatory remark. This brief episode illustrates important features of Mosca's implied hypothetical psychology. If Mosca had slightly miscalculated, Corbaccio might have heard the entire speech and realized that Mosca is not his devoted agent. Mosca's desire to mock his dupe is so strong that he takes an unnecessary risk to do so. Jonson did not invent the type of situation in which a character plays a practical joke on another character by allowing the character to overhear part of a soliloquy. Shakespeare included a similar situation in *Richard III*, written over a decade earlier than *Volpone*.

Richard: So wise so young, they say do never *live long*.

Prince Edward: What say you, uncle?

Richard: I say, without characters fame *lives long*.

(3.1.79–81)

That soliloquies represented speeches rather than the unspoken thoughts of characters has profound implications. In the Christian Bible, one of the proofs of the divinity of Jesus is his supernatural ability to perceive directly the thoughts of human beings. Daniel Dyke, a contemporary of Jonson, wrote,

The Lord onely hath preserved this as a prerogative royall to himselfe, exactly to know the depth of our hearts.⁵

Late Renaissance dramatists refrained from giving playgoers the fantasy experience of having the power to read minds that the Christian god maintained as his own royal prerogative.⁶

Soliloquies as the Representation of *Self-Addressed Speech*

Late English Renaissance drama is also pervaded by conspicuous, varied, unambiguous, and overwhelmingly one-sided evidence that soliloquies by characters engaged in the action, including soliloquies guarded in asides, represented *self-addressed* speeches rather than audience-addressed speeches. In a soliloquy guarded in

an aside in 3.4, Volpone gives a command. As in later quotations, each verbal marker of self-address is emboldened.

Profess obstinate silence.

(86)

The character is not commanding disruptive playgoers to keep quiet. He is commanding himself to appear comatose in the desperate hope that this will eventually discourage and get rid of the excruciatingly talkative Lady Would-be.

In a soliloquy guarded in an aside during a conversation with Sir Politic Would-be, Peregrine makes a statement that indicates he is unaware that he is a character in a play.

O, this knight,
 Were he well known, *would be* a precious thing
 To fit our English stage. He that *should* write
 But such a fellow, *should* be thought to feign
 Extremely, if not maliciously.

(2.1.56–60, emphasis added)

It is a dramatic irony that, *unbeknownst to Peregrine*, he and Sir Pol were in fact characters in a play being performed on an English stage at the very moment he speaks.

The most common verbal markers of self-address in soliloquies in late Renaissance drama are *apostrophes* in the sense of *passages addressed to imaginary listeners*. Apostrophes are understandably very rare in speeches directed by a character to the hearing of other characters because it is incongruous to address an *imaginary* audience if one is addressing an *actual* audience other than oneself. In sharp contrast, apostrophes occur very frequently in soliloquies. The obvious explanation for this huge differential is that soliloquies represented self-address rather than audience address. Because he has no actual listener other than himself, it is not incongruous for a character engaged in self-addressed speech to address an imaginary audience. Indeed, for a speaker without an actual intended listener other than himself, the impulse to conjure up an imaginary listener is hard to resist.

Apostrophes pervade soliloquies in *Volpone*. In the following passages, each verbal marker of an apostrophe (the identity

of the addressee, a second-person pronoun, or a command) is emboldened. When Volpone prepares for a deception of Voltore, he facetiously addresses elements of his feigned illness.

Now, my feigned **cough**, my **phthisic**, and my **gout**,
 My **apoplexy**, **palsy**, and **catarrhs**,
Help, with **your** forcéd functions, this my posture.
 (1.2.124–26)

After Bonario rescues Celia from Volpone's clutches and the young people leave, Volpone addresses an inanimate object:

Fall on me, **roof**, and **bury** me in ruin!
Become my grave, that wert my shelter!
 (3.7.276–77)

This conspicuously recalls Faustus's final soliloquy:

Mountains and hills, come, come and fall on me,
 And hide me from the heavy wrath of God!⁷
 (5.2.76–77)

In 5.3 Volpone eavesdrops on Mosca's humiliation of the dupes. Volpone's asides are soliloquies, not speeches shared with Mosca. In some he addresses Mosca in apostrophes.

Be busy still.
 (16)

He is hypothetically urging Mosca to keep conducting the inventory of the estate with feigned disregard of the outrage expressed by the dupes. In line 21 he addresses Mosca by name.

After placing the plate just acquired from Lady Would-be in the treasure trove, Mosca addresses the latest acquisition:

Stand there and **multiply**.
 (1.4.2)

Regular late Renaissance playgoers were so used to hearing commands in soliloquies directed at imaginary listeners or at the speaker himself that it would not have occurred to them that Mosca was directing these commands at themselves. Mosca repeatedly expresses contempt for Corbaccio under his very nose

in apostrophes in soliloquies spoken in Corbaccio's presence but guarded from Corbaccio's hearing. When Corbaccio tells Mosca that Voltore's ulterior motive in giving Volpone a plate was to be named Volpone's heir, Mosca surreptitiously mocks Corbaccio for having the same selfish motive.

By **your** own scale, **sir**.
(1.4.67)

Other instances in which Mosca mocks Corbaccio in apostrophes guarded from Corbaccio's hearing include the following.

Corbaccio: I know thee honest.
Mosca: **You** do lie, **sir!**
Corbaccio: And—
Mosca: **Your** knowledge is no better than **your** ears, **sir**.
(1.4.122–30)

Mosca similarly reviles the unscrupulous lawyer Voltore in an apostrophe in a soliloquy in 4.6.

All is **yours**, the devil and all, / Good **advocate!**
(93–94)

That Mosca repeatedly, emphatically, and angrily mocks the dupes in apostrophes implies that his motivation for doing so is not simply to amuse himself. Mosca and Volpone make fools of other characters in part to convince themselves of their own superiority.

Mosca and Volpone are not the only characters to use apostrophes to release aggression. In a soliloquy guarded in an aside, Nano mocks Lady Would-be for exhibiting more concern about her hair and dress than for her reputation (3.4.27). Mistaking the foolish behavior of the Would-bes as a plot to humiliate him, Peregrine apostrophizes his imagined antagonist, who is offstage:

Well, wise **Sir Pol**, since **you** have practiced thus
Upon my freshman-ship, I'll try **your** salt-head,
What proof it is against a counter-plot.
(4.3.22–24)

In other words, "Sir Pol, since you have taken advantage of my inexperience, I'll test your supposed wisdom by launching a

counter-plot." These have been a mere sampling of the 42 verbal markers of self-address in the play.

In addition to verbal markers, the play contains other kinds of evidence of self-address. Jonson set up an implicit contrast between unambiguously self-addressed speeches by characters engaged in the action and the explicitly audience-addressed speeches that begin and end the play. The prologue, spoken by a choral character who does not interact with characters engaged in the action, contains an explicit audience address ("your pleasure," line 8). At the very end of the play, after the fictional action has ended, the actor who had portrayed Volpone steps out of his fictional role to ask playgoers for applause ("fare jovially, and clap your hands," 5.12.157). At no point between the prologue and epilogue does any character acknowledge the presence of playgoers. In setting up this contrast, Jonson was following in the footsteps of Marlowe, who set up a conspicuous contrast between the explicitly audience-addressed prologue to *Doctor Faustus* and the very next speech, a long soliloquy by the title character that is explicitly and insistently self-addressed. The medieval and early Renaissance convention whereby characters who interact with one another also engage in audience address is parodied in the play-within-the-play written by Mosca and performed by Nano and Androgyno. That convention had been regarded as amateurish since the early 1590s. Shakespeare poked gentle fun at the outmoded convention in plays-within-plays in *Love's Labor's Lost* (circa 1591) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (circa 1595).

The most important evidence that soliloquies in late Renaissance drama represented self-address as a matter of convention is characterization. If a soliloquy had represented a speech knowingly addressed by the speaker to playgoers, that knowledge would have been a component of the character's implied hypothetical psychology. The character's motive in speaking would have been to inform, to entertain, to provoke, to manipulate, or otherwise to have an effect on a large group of strangers. In fact, soliloquies depict characters engaged in a huge variety of *self-directed* activities. Among the motives for speaking to oneself were to justify one's actions to oneself, to congratulate oneself on a successful endeavor, to revile oneself for having made a mistake, to rouse oneself to action, and so on. In many soliloquies, a

character is depicted as attempting to talk himself into a belief. That is a profoundly different psychological, rhetorical, and dramatic situation from one in which a character seeks to convince a large assembly of strangers to share a belief. Formulating a plan is a different activity than announcing a plan.

That a character has no listener other than himself highlights a division of the character into a speaking self and a listening self. As a result of this division, self-addressed speeches in plays by leading late Renaissance dramatists are often as dynamic and various as exchanges between characters. A soliloquy is no less an interaction than an exchange with another character; the speaker interacts with himself. In numerous instances a character reacts against what he has just heard himself say. For example, Hamlet rants and then reviles himself for having done so:

Bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murdered
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words.
(2.2.580–85)

Countless soliloquies implicitly convey self-division by various means, including self-contradictions, abrupt transitions, incongruities, and conspicuous omissions.⁸

The late Renaissance convention of self-addressed speech was employed unambiguously in countless episodes in plays by every major dramatist from about 1590 to 1642. Many plays contain dozens of unambiguous markers of self-address, as well as other kinds of evidence. This pervasively reinforced convention could have been overridden only by an unambiguous and conspicuous signal of audience address. The benefit of any doubt would have gone to the convention. Having witnessed countless instances in which characters engage in unambiguously self-addressed speech, regular playgoers would have assumed that that convention was in operation unless unambiguously and conspicuously violated. Regular late Renaissance playgoers were so used to hearing forms of the word “you” in soliloquies unambiguously addressed to imaginary audiences or to the speaker himself that it would

not have occurred to them that the speaker of a soliloquy was using the word to address themselves. Major dramatists rarely if ever overrode the convention. The obvious explanation for this extraordinary restraint is that the convention of self-addressed speech was so artistically significant and productive that dramatists did not want to weaken it even a little by an occasional violation.

For their part, playgoers of the period evidently experienced a voyeuristic kind of pleasure in eavesdropping on the most private speeches of characters and were not interested in what a character might say to themselves if the character knew that she was merely a character in a play. Dramatists designed numerous episodes in which characters on stage experience that voyeuristic pleasure. In the balcony episode, Romeo delays making his presence known to Juliet because he wants to prolong the exquisite pleasure of overhearing what Juliet says to herself in secret.⁹

Self-Addressed Speeches and Self-Fashioning

Some soliloquies in *Volpone* quite explicitly dramatize an attempt by the speaker to fashion a private self that he can admire. Some soliloquies dramatize an attempt by the speaker to refashion an acceptable private self after a setback. Many soliloquies guarded in asides are brief reactions to contingent circumstances. But even these soliloquies are elements in the character's fashioning of a self for self-consumption. For example, Volpone and Mosca try to convince themselves that they are superior beings, clever knaves who outwit foolish dupes. Each time one of these characters mocks an individual dupe in a soliloquy guarded in an aside in the presence of the dupe, the speech, however brief, serves to reinforce the speaker's self-image as a superior being.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, Volpone has more soliloquies (37) than any other character. These speeches occupy a total of 127 lines: 23 are only a line or two long; a dozen are between three and seven lines; and two are much longer (21 and 17 lines). The twelve that he speaks when he is alone on stage occupy 78 lines; the 25 that he guards in asides occupy 49.

In his first and longest soliloquy (1.1.70–90), Volpone reviews details of the con game not as a public-spirited effort to inform thousands of strangers but because he enjoys reminding *himself* of his devilish cleverness. In his worldview there are two kinds of people, knaves and fools. To be a fool, to be fooled, is contemptible. To fool others, to outsmart others, is admirable. The self that Volpone fashions for himself in this 21-line soliloquy is a proud, confident, resourceful, and self-sufficient knave.¹¹ He is both the boastful articulator of that self and the appreciative consumer of the articulation. In retrospect, the confident self that Volpone fashions for himself in his first soliloquy turns out to have been a self-deception. Late in the play, when his schemes backfire, he panics and makes foolish mistakes. It eventually becomes apparent that a major motive for the fraud itself and for his gleefully describing it to himself in a self-addressed speech was to convince *himself* of his superiority to others.¹² Ironically, the scheme itself, Volpone's self-glorification, and his eventual desperation to humiliate the gulls implicitly stem from a deep insecurity.

In retrospect, Volpone's omission of any mention of Mosca in his long self-addressed review of the scam is conspicuous. The speech also contains the following retroactively incongruous assertion:

I have no wife, *no* parent, child, *ally*
 To give my substance to.
 (73–74, emphasis added)

Volpone's self-addressed assertion that he lacks an ally is at odds with Volpone's effusively affectionate expressions of admiration for Mosca's performance of his role in the scam: "Excellent Mosca! Come hither, let me kiss you" (1.3.78–79). This fulsome expression of appreciation directed at Mosca's hearing is at odds with Volpone's omission of any mention of Mosca in his earlier long soliloquy. At the time of the later speech, a playgoer who recalled the soliloquy might infer that Volpone is conning Mosca into believing that Mosca is his ally and heir in order to obtain Mosca's necessary assistance in perpetrating the imposture. If so, Mosca would be just another dupe to Volpone, just another fool supplying gifts or, in this case, services in return for the false expectation of inheriting Volpone's estate.

That explanation of Volpone's hypothetical psychology turns out to be inadequate, however. Volpone praises Mosca not merely to his face but in self-addressed speeches: "O, my fine devil" (5.3.46); "Excellent varlet" (77). In retrospect, the explanation for Volpone's retroactively conspicuous, incongruous omission in his first long soliloquy of any mention of Mosca's role in the imposture is that Volpone the con-artist was conning *himself*. If Volpone allowed himself to think of Mosca as a full-fledged ally, that would be an acknowledgment that Mosca deserves a much more substantial share of the proceeds of the ongoing imposture. Volpone wants to convince *himself* that *he* deserves the lion's share of the proceeds of the con game and that Mosca is an utterly loyal hireling who is content in that role. Volpone's ongoing self-deception about his relationship with Mosca is implicit in one of the self-addressed speeches quoted earlier in this paragraph:

O, *my* fine devil!

Volpone tells himself that he possesses Mosca, that Mosca is not self-possessed, that Mosca is incapable of pursuing goals of his own that might conflict with those of Volpone.¹³ It is a profound dramatic irony that, in their deceptions of the gulls, Volpone and Mosca are adept at enlisting the cooperation of their dupes' capacities for self-deception ("I hear him coming") but deceive themselves into believing that they themselves are immune to self-deception. Volpone's ongoing self-deception about Mosca carries a price. By blinding himself to the possibility that Mosca has an independent will, Volpone also blinds himself to the likelihood that Mosca might regard himself as a full-fledged partner who deserves an equal share of the proceeds of the scam. Volpone is thus unprepared when Mosca eventually does demand an equal share.

After Bonario rescues Celia from an attempted rape by Volpone, Volpone gives voice in a soliloquy to a desire for self-annihilation:

Fall on me, roof, and bury me in ruin!
 Become my grave, that wert my shelter! O!
 I am unmasked, unspirited, undone,
 Betrayed to beggary, to infamy – .

(3.7.276–79)

It turns out that the supremely self-confident self he fashioned in the privacy of his self-addressed speeches early in the play was based on wishful thinking. When Volpone now says, "I am unmasked," he means that his *public* image of a respectable magnifico will be replaced by that of an inept would-be rapist. It is a dramatic irony that this circumstance has also unmasked his *private* image of himself as a devilishly clever knave. That private image was no less a mask than his public disguises.

After the threat of public exposure of his attempted rape, Volpone needs a sustained effort at self-reconstruction to revive his confidence and sense of superiority. That effort is depicted in his second long soliloquy (5.1.1–17).

Any device now, of rare ingenious knavery,
That would possess me with a violent laughter,
Would make me up again.

(14–16)

His self-confidence can be restored only by a fresh demonstration that he can make fools of others, that he is a master of "ingenious knavery." In a series of soliloquies guarded in asides in 5.3, Volpone gives voice to his sadistic enjoyment of the humiliation of the gulls (9, 11–12, 15–20, 21–22, 23–26, and 63). His self-respect as a knave, his sense of his own superiority, requires not merely the repeated humiliation of fools but the repeated articulation of that superiority in self-addressed speeches, along with his repeated hearing and savoring of those articulations. One of Volpone's soliloquies in 5.3 contains an incongruous assertion: "They never think of me" (17). Somewhere in the convoluted hypothetical mentality of Volpone there survives a desire to be loved! Like many cynics, Volpone is a disappointed sentimentalist.

In a series of soliloquies late in the play Volpone gives voice to self-condemnation.

I am caught / In my own noose – .
(5.10.13–14)

To make a snare for mine own neck! and run
My head into it, willfully! with laughter!

.....

Out of mere wantonness! O, the dull devil
Was in this brain of mine, when I devised it.
(5.11.1–5)

The focus of these passages is not on the horror of punishment but on *his own responsibility* for the imminent disaster. In attempting to make fools of the gulls, he has made a fool of himself. That is a devastating realization for someone whose self-image is that of a supremely adroit knave.

At the time it occurs, Volpone's long mock-prayer to his gold at almost the beginning of the fictional action (1.1.3–27) might seem to be the functional equivalent of a soliloquy. Volpone seems to be wholly focused on his treasure and oblivious to the presence on stage of an as-yet unnamed servant. If Character A becomes oblivious to the presence of Character B on stage, the spoken words of Character A are not directed at the hearing of Character B, and the passage thereby fulfills the criterion of a soliloquy. Such situations occur with surprising frequency in late Renaissance drama.¹⁴ But in light of Volpone's vexed attitude toward Mosca dramatized later in the play, it becomes implicit in retrospect that Volpone's mock-prayer was not a genuine soliloquy, that Volpone would not have become oblivious to the presence of Mosca. Volpone heavily depends upon Mosca's skills of manipulating the gulls but does not want to share a substantial portion of the proceeds with his parasite. In his mock-prayer Volpone *pretends* that in communing with the treasure he has become oblivious to Mosca's presence. He actually speaks in order to impress on Mosca that the proceeds of the scam are the rightful possession of Volpone alone and, by implication, that Mosca should expect to receive no more than a generous payment for services rendered. The most conspicuous method by which Volpone attempts to con Mosca into believing that Volpone is speaking only for his own hearing is by addressing the gold in a long, insistent series of apostrophes, which are a hallmark of *self-addressed* speech.¹⁵ The passage is a feigned soliloquy. Feigned soliloquies occur with surprising frequency in late Renaissance drama. In the second scene of *King Lear*—first performed a year or so before *Volpone* by the same company in the same theater—for example, Edmund allows his brother Edgar to overhear a feigned soliloquy in which Edmund expresses a belief

in astrology in order to mislead his brother into thinking he is fatalistic and therefore passive when in fact Edmund is about to execute a plan to supplant his brother as Gloucester's heir.

Not surprisingly, the second most prolific soliloquizer in the play is Mosca. He speaks 21 soliloquies that occupy a total of 75 lines. In an early soliloquy guarded in an aside from the hearing of Volpone, Mosca addresses an apostrophe to the plate that Lady Would-be has left and that Mosca adds to the horde:

Stand there and multiply.

(1.4.2)

Having a short time earlier overheard Volpone's ode to *his* gold, Mosca establishes his own independent relationship with the treasure, even to the extent that he gives it hypothetical commands, as if *he* were its master. Furthermore, it is very doubtful that Mosca, already dramatized as a cynical rogue, wants the plate to "multiply" because he unselfishly hopes that his beloved master's wealth will increase. It is much more likely that he hopes for the multiplication of the treasure because he expects eventually to acquire a portion commensurate with his contributions to the enterprise. This very brief passage in a self-addressed speech is Mosca's secret retort to Volpone's long speech in which he laid claim to sole ownership of the treasure. It is a very subtle foreshadowing of Mosca's eventual demand for an equal share. In most of Mosca's other brief soliloquies, he mocks individual dupes (Corbaccio in 1.4 and 4.6; Corvino in 2.6; and Voltore in 4.6).

The longest soliloquy in the play (35 lines) is not spoken by the title character but by Mosca just after the latter has pulled off the glorious feat of maneuvering Corvino into arranging his own cuckolding. Mosca speaks the first 33 lines of the soliloquy while alone onstage (3.1.1–33) and guards the final two lines in an aside after he notices the entrance of Bonario (3.2.1–2). Howard Marchitell aptly describes the speech as "Mosca's celebration of his talent."¹⁶

This soliloquy should remind playgoers of Volpone's first genuine soliloquy (1.2.70–90), which could be described with equal aptness as his "celebration of his talent." Each of these long

self-addressed speeches gives voice to the speaker's pride in his clever, adroit knavery. Conspicuous absences from the two speeches are ironically complementary. In *Volpone's* extended attempt to convince himself of his own cleverness in perpetrating the hoax, he never mentions Mosca even though Mosca does most of the work. In Mosca's even longer soliloquy he never mentions *Volpone* even though Mosca could not have perpetrated his knavery against the dupes without the tantalizing lure of *Volpone's* reputation for wealth. Each of the conmen sees the situation from his own selfish, narcissistic perspective. In the privacy of his own self-addressed speech, each fails to acknowledge his dependence on the other. Mosca's long self-congratulatory soliloquy also resembles *Volpone's* first soliloquy in its self-deceptiveness. Like *Volpone*, Mosca is an overconfident conman who cons himself. The hubris that he exhibits in the speech will cloud his judgment and eventually lead to his exposure and punishment.¹⁷

That Mosca gives voice to the longest soliloquy in the play is one of numerous factors by which Jonson implicitly establishes Mosca as a rival to the title character, his social superior, in dramatic importance and psychological interest. This recalls how in *Othello* (first performed two or three years before *Volpone*) Iago, largely as a result of his self-addressed speeches, ironically rivals the title character, his military superior, in dramatic importance and psychological interest. Mosca's conspicuous rise in prominence as a character in the play, partly as a result of his long soliloquy, foreshadows his eventual rivalry with *Volpone* within the fictional plot for possession of the ill-gotten treasure.

Mosca's giddy self-admiration in his long soliloquy as a result of his successful manipulation of Corvino might have reminded regular patrons of the King's Men of a similar soliloquy spoken by Richard of Gloucester in the immediate aftermath of his successful manipulation of Anne in the second scene of *Richard III*.

Richard: I do mistake my person all this while!

.....

Since I am crept in favor with myself,
I will maintain it with some little cost.

(1.2.252, 58–59)

Mosca: I fear, I shall begin to grow in love
 With my dear self, and my most prosperous parts,
 They do so spring and burgeon.

(3.1.1–3)

Like Richard, Mosca is an adept deceiver who ridicules his dupes in soliloquies, some guarded in asides in their presence.

In the course of the soliloquy Mosca extols not merely his own virtues but those of parasites in general. Conventional opinion condemned parasites; the designation itself is a pejorative term. Mosca turns conventional opinion upside down. Rather than expressing guilt or shame for being a parasite or making excuses, he talks himself into believing that parasites are actually superior beings.

This aspect of Mosca's soliloquy might have reminded regular playgoers of Edmund's soliloquies in the second scene of *King Lear*. In his long first soliloquy Edmund attempts to turn conventional opinion on its head by turning birth out of wedlock into a condition superior to birth within wedlock.

Why brand they us
 With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?
 Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take
 More composition, and fierce quality,
 Than doth within a dull, stale, tired bed
 Go to th' creating a whole tribe of fops,
 Got 'tween asleep and wake?

(1.2.9–15)

Mosca perpetrates a similar inversion of conventional values by raising above ordinary people a group whose very designation, like "bastard," is a pejorative term.

O! your parasite
 Is a most precious thing, dropped from above,
 Not bred 'mongst clods and clodpoles, here on earth.

(3.1.7–9)

According to Edmund, a bastard is born from "the lusty stealth of nature." According to Mosca, a parasite is born "Out of most excellent nature" (3.1.32). Each speaker's notion of

“nature” is a setting in which predators feed on prey, in which knaves manipulate fools. From this perspective, it is natural and commendable for a parasite or a bastard to employ whatever means are necessary to improve his lot. Edmund and Mosca each justifies to himself his practices as natural and legitimate responses to the inherently unjust, hierarchical structure of society.

Mosca, Richard, and Edmund share other significant attributes. Each engages in a series of deceptions. Each is a radical loner; although each forms alliances, he does so for entirely selfish reasons. None of the three needs or wants a loving or friendly relationship. None needs the approval of others, and each is proud of his independence. In his self-addressed speeches each attempts to fashion a confident, self-sufficient self. If any of their speeches had been knowingly addressed by the character to playgoers, that would have muddled the hypothetical psychology of the character. Instead of depicting a character engaged in attempting to fashion *for himself* a self that is wholly *independent* of others, the passage would have depicted a character engaged in a public-spirited effort to keep thousands of strangers up to speed about his mental state.

Mosca’s three soliloquies in 5.5 mark a turning point in the play and a watershed in his relationship with Volpone. Rather than mocking the targets of their scam in soliloquies guarded in asides, as he has done frequently in earlier episodes, Mosca now gives voice to his determination to outfox Volpone in two soliloquies guarded in asides from Volpone (4–5, 6–9) and in a longer soliloquy after Volpone’s exit (12–18).

Other than Volpone and Mosca, the character in the play who has the most soliloquies is the subplot figure Peregrine. He has eleven self-addressed speeches that occupy a total of 28 lines. All of his soliloquies give voice to his bafflement, amusement, or anger at the antics of Sir Pol and Lady Would-be. In the soliloquy quoted above (4.3.22–24) in which he convinces himself that Sir Pol has made a fool of him and decides to inflict retribution, he engages in self-deception. Peregrine has seen enough of the Would-be’s to infer that the most likely explanation for their behavior is simply their stupidity rather than malice. Like other characters in the play, Peregrine’s dread of being made a fool of clouds his judgment.

A conman depends on the active participation of his victim, on the victim's inclination to engage in self-deception. This is illustrated by soliloquies spoken by the dupes Corbaccio and Corvino. In a soliloquy guarded in an aside from the hearing of Mosca, Corbaccio talks himself into believing that Mosca is both intelligent and committed to serving Corbaccio's interest: "The very organ to express my thoughts!" (3.4.116). This soliloquy guarded in an aside complements the soliloquies guarded in asides in which this supposed "organ" for the expression of Corbaccio's thoughts ridicules Corbaccio.

After being told by Mosca that a physician has offered his daughter to rejuvenate Volpone, Corvino is afraid of losing the inheritance of Volpone's estate, an inheritance on which he has been counting. In two soliloquies inadequately guarded from the hearing of Mosca, Corvino talks himself into offering his own wife. He tells himself that the matter is inconsequential: "The thing in itself, / I know, is nothing" (2.6.69-70). The chief passions he exhibits are competitiveness, fear of being outmaneuvered, and outrage that an interloper at the last minute might deprive him of his rightful inheritance:

Wherefore should not I
As well command my blood and my affections,
As this dull doctor? In the point of honor,
The cases are all one of wife and daughter.
(70-73)

if this doctor, who is not engaged,
.....
Offer his daughter, what should I, that am
So deeply in? I will prevent him: Wretch!
Covetous wretch!
(75-79)

Corvino's outrage at the covetousness of the doctor blinds him to his own covetousness. The self-image of a wily conniver that Corvino fashions in these self-addressed speeches is comically and ironically at odds with his inept failure to guard those very speeches adequately in asides, a failure that enables Mosca to overhear them.

Bonario is another gull, deceived and manipulated by Mosca, although in his case the source of his gullibility is willful naivety and sentimentality rather than blind greed. After he openly accuses Mosca of “baseness” (3.2.8), Mosca generates tears that provoke a soliloquy guarded in an aside by Bonario:

What! does he weep! the sign is soft and good;
I do repent me that I was so harsh.

(18–19)

It is disturbing that Jonson here makes fun of a character for having a generous, compassionate impulse. After Mosca eloquently expresses a desire to repent, Bonario draws a false conclusion in a soliloquy guarded in an aside,

This cannot be a personated passion – .

(35)

Jonson dramatizes the disturbing fact that any passion can be personated (feigned) by an adept impersonator. After Bonario decides that Mosca is trustworthy, Mosca tells him that his father plans to disinherit him. Although he agrees to test the accusation, Bonario tells himself in a soliloquy,

Yet / Cannot my thought imagine this a truth.

(3.6.5–6)

This again dramatizes willful naivety. In his brief times onstage, Corbaccio’s character flaws have been conspicuous. As Bonario was growing up and since reaching adulthood, he must have observed countless examples of Corbaccio’s selfishness, greed, insensitivity, stupidity, and other flaws. In order to fulfill the conventional obligation of a son to respect his father, Bonario makes an effort to blind himself to the daily evidence of his father’s shortcomings.

Sir Pol does not speak any soliloquies until after he has been publically humiliated in 5.4. He comes to terms in private with a new public identity:

O, I shall be the fable of all feasts,
The freight of the gazette, ship-boys’ tale;

And, which is worst, even talk for ordinaries [that is, gossip
in taverns].

(82–84)

On some occasions, a person is forced to face facts. Even here, though, there is a hint of pride at the prodigious extent of his notoriety.

Though brief, the last two soliloquies in the play are disturbing and thematically significant. During the final scene of the play (5.12), which takes place in the court, it momentarily seems as though Mosca has inherited Volpone's estate and has thereby become a highly eligible bachelor. This situation provokes two soliloquies guarded in asides by the Fourth Avocatore.

A proper man; and were Volpone dead,
A fit match for my daughter.

(49–50)

It is a match, my daughter is bestowed.

(62)

These speeches resemble earlier soliloquies guarded in asides in which dupes express their confidence in Mosca's reliability and their desire for a material windfall. The Fourth Avocatore is as greedy, crass, stupid, and gullible as those dupes. Instead of being rare symptoms exhibited by a few aberrant individuals, these character flaws are dramatized as infecting a majority of people and here are exhibited by a high public official whose professional obligation is to arrive at wise and impartial judgments.

The two most important characters who do not have self-addressed speeches are Lady Would-be and Celia. In each case, the absence of self-addressed speeches is the result of particular features of the character's implied psychology. Lady Would-be suffers from sociopathic logorrhea. To her, speech is a means to impress herself on others, not a means to engage in self-reflection. Nor is she psychologically capable of guarding a soliloquy in an aside. Guarding a soliloquy is a form of self-censorship: a character makes a judgment that an assertion would not be appropriate to share with an interlocutor. Lady Would-be lacks such an internal censor. She is an obsessive, compulsive talker who says whatever pops into her head. Lady Would-be does not have any soliloquies

because she lacks a private self; her selfhood is entirely spent in the incessant public speech she inflicts on others.

It also significant that Celia does not have a soliloquy. She does not reflect on her situation because to do so would be too painful. Like Bonario's father, Celia's husband is dramatized as a monster. As his wife even for a short time, Celia has presumably observed many instances of his selfishness, crassness, stupidity, and other despicable qualities. Celia is implicitly incapable of the degree of self-deception that would be required to talk herself into believing that her husband is an honorable man. On the other hand, she cannot acknowledge his failings even in a self-addressed speech because she has internalized the conventional injunction for a wife to honor her husband. So Celia rigorously suppresses any impulse to engage in self-reflection. Celia has suppressed her private selfhood; internalized conventional platitudes occupy the space where her independent judgment, her independent self, might have existed. In contrast to Lady Would-be, Celia is continuously engaged in an extreme form of self-censorship. Celia is also incapable of guarding a soliloquy in an aside. Guarding a soliloquy is a form of concealment, and Celia does not possess the requisite secretiveness.

The Experiment

Because of the English Civil War, London theatrical activity was banned in 1642. When theatrical activity resumed in 1660, a new set of stage conditions arose. The complex set of conventions that governed soliloquies and asides from around 1590 to 1642 were not revived and were forgotten. Two fallacies eventually arose to explain soliloquies in late Renaissance drama. The notion that at least some soliloquies were meant to represent the unmediated innermost thoughts of characters gained wide currency in the Romantic period. At other times, including at present, the dominant hypothesis favored by both theater professionals and scholars has been that a soliloquy was meant to represent a speech knowingly directed by the character to playgoers.¹⁸ Each of these hypotheses is refuted by plentiful, conspicuous, unambiguous, varied, and overwhelmingly one-sided evidence found in late Renaissance plays. A sampling of this kind of evidence in *Volpone*

has been supplied above. Many plays of the period contain as much or more such evidence.

The fact that in countless successful post-Renaissance theatrical adaptations of plays by Shakespeare and other late Renaissance dramatists soliloquies have been performed as audience-addressed speeches has no bearing on the issue of stage practices of late Renaissance theaters. Members of a post-Renaissance theatrical company have the artistic freedom to make whatever changes they wish in their adaptations of late Renaissance plays in order to pursue their own artistic vision, and the result should be judged on its own terms as a work of art. But the artistic freedom to change a feature of a play to suit a new artistic vision should not be confused with a freedom to make false assertions about the original staging of the play. Changes should frankly be acknowledged as changes. Post-Renaissance practices should not be projected anachronistically onto late Renaissance drama as supposed “original practices” in the face of massive evidence that late Renaissance dramatists engaged in a different set of practices. There have been countless highly acclaimed post-Renaissance adaptations of late Renaissance plays in which female characters have been performed by actresses. That does not change the fact supported by the body of relevant evidence from the late Renaissance indicating that female characters were portrayed by male actors. There is vastly more evidence from the late Renaissance that soliloquies represented self-address as a matter of convention than that female characters were played by male actors. A social historian would not use evidence about twenty-first-century marriage customs as the basis for assertions about seventeenth-century marriage customs. Similarly, a theater historian should not use evidence about post-Renaissance performance practices as the basis for assertions about performance practices in the age of Shakespeare and Jonson.

In 2016, Brent Griffin, the Artistic Director of the Resurgens Theatre Company, generously offered to use a performance of *Volpone* by the company to test whether a modern theatrical company could employ unfamiliar and complex late Renaissance conventions governing soliloquies so that the operations of the conventions would be intelligible to modern playgoers.¹⁹ Members of the company enthusiastically accepted the challenge. An epithet

for this particular performance of *Volpone* was *The Experiment*. I had numerous fruitful conversations with Brent, who also directed the production, and other members of the company about these matters and participated in rehearsals. As a result of those experiences and the performance itself, I learned a number of quite specific and important lessons about the means by which a twenty-first-century company can bring to vivid life 400-year-old stage practices. Among those lessons are the following.

(1) A hand signal indicating a soliloquy guarded an aside is not necessary as long as three conditions are met: (a) that the character is obviously aware of the presence of the other characters, (b) that the speaker is at a distance from the other characters, and (c) that the dramatic context makes obvious the intention of the speaker to guard the speech in an aside.

(2) A hand signal is necessary only if the speaker guarding the soliloquy is in close proximity to the character or characters from whom she is guarding the speech or if the intention of the character to guard the speech is not obvious from the dramatic context.

(3) If the speaker is at a certain distance from the characters from whom she is guarding the soliloquy and if the intention of the character to guard the speech was obvious from the dramatic context, the actor can signal a soliloquy guarded in an aside by a slight turn of her head while gazing at the characters from whom her character is guarding the soliloquy.

(4) If the character is still further away from the characters from whom she is guarding the speech, if the intention of the character to prevent the other characters from hearing what he is saying is obvious from the dramatic context, and if the other characters do not look in the direction of the speaker, playgoers would not need any other signal.

(5) Rather than there being one and only one kind of hand signal, performers can devise distinct variations to convey information about the character's personality and situation. When *Volpone* (Thom Gilliott) was suffering from the onslaught of Lady Would-be's verbiage, Thom indicated *Volpone's* suffering and desperation by stretching his fingers tautly from one another. Hayley Platt appropriately relaxed and slightly separated her fingers when she gave voice to Mosca's comically impish soliloquies in asides. Ty Autry as Bonario used a more formal kind of hand signal, with

his fingers tightly held together, that reflected Bonario's rigid and austere personality.

(6) I had always assumed that all the characters from whom a character was guarding a soliloquy would have to be on one side of the speaker because the hand signal was unidirectional. Thom opened my eyes to the possibility that a character could guard a soliloquy from characters on both sides by using both hands.

(7) If an actor shows no indication that the character he is portraying is aware of the presence of playgoers, this conspicuous absence is sufficient to convey that a soliloquy is self-addressed.

(8) Thom and Hayley demonstrated that a talented actor can bring to life the dynamism of self-addressed speeches by various means—body language, gesture, movement, direction of gaze, vocal modulation, pauses, handling of props, etc. Each actor portrayed the character not merely as a speaker but as a listener. For example, on occasion Thom briefly paused in mid-soliloquy and adopted a subtly pensive demeanor and thereby suggested that Volpone was considering the implications of what he had just heard himself say.

An informal survey of playgoers conducted by the Artistic Director demonstrated that at least some playgoers understood the operations of the convention and enjoyed the experience of eavesdropping on the most private moments of a character, when the character was unaware of any listener other than himself. I am profoundly grateful to Brent, Thom, Hayley, Ty, and the other members of the cast and crew for making *The Experiment* a success.

Conclusion

All told, *Volpone* contains 87 self-addressed speeches by twelve characters that occupy a total of 276 lines. Of that total 24 are unguarded in their entirety, and 61 are guarded in asides in their entirety. One soliloquy (2.6.68–73) is initially guarded by Corvino from the hearing of Mosca, but by line 70 Corvino ceases to guard the speech adequately and Mosca begins to overhear it. One soliloquy by Mosca is unguarded for 33 lines (3.1.1–33) and ends with two lines (3.2.1–2) guarded from an entering character

(Bonario). The total number of unguarded lines in soliloquies is 156. The total number of lines guarded in asides in soliloquies is 120.

In this masterpiece Jonson imaginatively employed the pervasive and deeply entrenched late Renaissance convention of self-addressed speech to construct characterizations and to develop themes in ways that would not have been possible without strict adherence to the convention. None of the distinguished critics who have explored the issue of selfhood in the play has recognized how important to the development of that theme are the huge number of self-addressed speeches in the play, speeches in which characters fashion their most private selves for their own hearing alone.²⁰ In the vast majority of those speeches, the speaker gives voice to his sense of superiority to, contempt for, mockery of, or competitiveness with other characters. Jonson thereby implies that most people regard selfhood as *a zero-sum game*.²¹ Characters in *Volpone* behave as if they can acquire a quantity of selfhood only by taking it from someone else. Jonson pervasively and brilliantly employed the convention of self-addressed speech to dramatize his profound pessimism and cynicism.²²

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NOTES

1. See my article "The Origin of the Late Renaissance Dramatic Convention of Self-Addressed Speech," *Shakespeare Survey* 68 (2015): 131–45.

2. For an account of the amazingly complex, precise, and rigorously adhered-to set of conventions governing soliloquies, asides, and eavesdropping, see my essay, "Guarded, Unguarded, and Unguardable Speech in Late Renaissance Drama," in *Who Hears in Shakespeare? Auditory Worlds on Stage and Screen*, ed. Laury Magnus and Walter W. Cannon (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 17–40.

3. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

4. *Volpone*, in *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*, ed. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1979).

5. Daniel Dyke, *The Mystery of Self-Deceiving*, in *Early English Books, 1641–1700* (1614; Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1983), 2.

6. For extensive catalogues of evidence demonstrating that soliloquies in late Renaissance drama represented the spoken words of characters, see my book *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquies* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), chapters 4 and 5. For a refutation of the post-Renaissance sentimental cliché that soliloquies represented the “innermost thoughts” of characters, see my article “Dialogic Self-Address in Shakespeare’s Plays,” *Shakespeare* 8 (2012): 312–27.

7. Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus, A-Text*, in *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

8. For many more examples of interactive elements in soliloquies, see Hirsh, “Dialogic.”

9. For extensive catalogs of evidence demonstrating that soliloquies in late Renaissance drama represented self-address by convention rather than audience address, see Hirsh, *History*, chapters 4 and 6; and “Late Renaissance Self-Address Fashioning: Scholarly Orthodoxy versus Evidence,” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 27 (2014): 132–60.

10. This confirms in a very specific way a generalization made by Frances Dolan, “‘We Must Here Be Fixed’: Discovering a Self behind the Mask in *Volpone*,” *Iowa State Journal of Research* 60 (1986): 355: “In *Volpone* Jonson examines what would happen if we were self-made and were responsible for perpetuating ourselves moment to moment.”

11. Howard Marchitell, “Desire and Domination in *Volpone*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 31 (1991): 290, makes the more general point that *Volpone* “will make himself . . . by making fools of others.” Howard Felperin, “Quick Comedy Refined: Towards a Poetics of Jonson’s Major Plays,” *Southern Review* 13 (1980): 159, describes *Volpone* as “the artist as sublime egotist,” who regards his imposture “as a way of exalting himself above his fellow men.”

12. The implied distinction between *Volpone* as the speaker of his soliloquies and as the listener of those speeches provides precise evidence for a general intuition expressed by Stephen Greenblatt, “The False Ending in *Volpone*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 75 (1976): 94:

Volpone speaks about himself and to himself with that odd combination of engagement and detachment that characterizes most Western self-consciousness from precisely this period to the present time.

One conspicuous way in which Jonson and other late Renaissance playwrights dramatized what Greenblatt describes as a division between “engagement and detachment” in consciousness was to imply a distinction between the speaking self of a soliloquizer and the character’s listening self.

13. Volpone is also capable of self-deception in speeches directed at the hearing of other characters. L. A. Beaurline, “*Volpone* and the Power of Speech,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 6 (1973): 73, points out that in Volpone’s attempted seduction of Celia, he “is taken in by his own rhetoric.”

14. For example, Portia becomes so preoccupied with the safety of Brutus, whom she addresses in an apostrophe in a soliloquy in the presence of her servant Lucius, that she becomes momentarily oblivious of his presence and consequently ceases to guard her soliloquy adequately in an aside (*Julius Caesar* 2.4).

15. Sophisticated dramatists did not always include a genuine soliloquy in an aside in which the feigner of a self-addressed speech describes his tactic. They expected playgoers to realize either at the time or retroactively on the basis of the overall dramatic context that the speech must be or must have been feigned. For example, when Iago brings Othello onstage to see Cassio and Desdemona together, he says, “Hah? I like not that” (3.3.35). Iago pretends that he is talking only to himself but he actually speaks to mislead Othello about his state of mind. Iago does not explain his tactic in a genuine soliloquy guarded in an aside. That Volpone’s ode to his gold is a feigned soliloquy would have been suspected by regular patrons of the King’s Men even at the time it occurred because the nameless servant onstage was probably portrayed by an actor who had played major roles in earlier productions.

16. Marchitell, “Desire,” 293.

17. Thomas M. Greene, “Ben Jonson and the Centered Self,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 10 (1970): 339, has rightly described this speech as “auto-congratulation” but misleadingly asserts that it is an “accurate self-appraisal.”

18. For an informative history of ways in which twentieth-century actors performed soliloquies, see Mary Z. Maher, *Modern Hamlets and Their Soliloquies* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992).

19. The performance was not a test to determine whether soliloquies were designed by late Renaissance dramatists to represent self-address or audience-address. As indicated earlier, plentiful, varied, conspicuous, unambiguous, and overwhelming one-sided evidence from the late Renaissance period itself demonstrates conclusively that soliloquies were self-addressed speeches as a matter of convention. Also as indicated

earlier, evidence generated in a later age of theatrical history cannot be used to test an hypothesis about theatrical practices of an earlier age.

20. According to Greene, 337, *Volpone* "is one of the greatest essays we possess on the ontology of selfhood." Greene focuses almost entirely on the *public* selves that characters fashion to manipulate their fellow characters. But an equally important aspect of Jonson's exploration of the theme of selfhood is his dramatization of ways in which a given character fashions his most *private* self when he thinks he has no witness other than himself. As the title of his article indicates, Lawrence Danson, "Jonsonian Comedy and the Discovery of the Social Self," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 99 (1984): 179–93, was not concerned with the private selves that characters construct for themselves in self-addressed speeches.

21. This is in accord with the more general point made by Katharine Eisaman Maus, "Satiric and Ideal Economies in the Jonsonian Imagination," *English Literary Renaissance* 19 (1989): 45, that "social life in Jonsonian comedy is a zero-sum game." Compare Greenblatt's description of characters in *Every Man in His Humor* and *Volpone*: "isolated monads, locked in their own egotism and scheming" (91).

22. For a catalog of other pessimistic and cynical elements in the play, see my essay "Cynicism and the Futility of Art in *Volpone*," in *New Perspectives on Ben Jonson*, ed. James Hirsh (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), 106–27; rpt. *Literary Criticism from 1400 to 1800* 158 (2009): 22–33.