

- 12 See Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*, (Cornell, 1995), 240.
- 13 Katherine Duncan-Jones (ed.), *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, The Arden Shakespeare (Nashville, 1997).
- 14 Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh, 2006), 143.
- 15 All references to *The English Moor* come from the 1658 edition.
- 16 Giovanni Lomazzo, *A Tracte containing the Artes of Curious Paintinge, Carvinge & buildinge*, trans. Richard Haydocke (London, 1598), 113. This curious comment in the first part of this quotation deserves further investigation—as a precedent for Anne of Denmark's bold appearance in black paint in Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness*.
- 17 All references to Philip Massinger's *The Bashful Lover* are from the 1655 edition.
- 18 Matthew Steggle, *Richard Brome: Place and Politics on the Caroline Stage* (Manchester, 2004), 123–30.
- 19 Ibid, 127.
- 20 Lomazzo, *The Curious Artes of Paintinge*, 99.
- 21 Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women*, 78.
- 22 Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 2005), 13.
- 23 See Peter Cunningham (ed.), *Extracts from the Accounts of the Revels at Court, in the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I* (London, 1842), 84.
- 24 Vaughan, *Performing Blackness*, 14.
- 25 Steggle, *Richard Brome*, 129.

Facing Places in Richard Brome's *The Weeding of Covent Garden*

Much like its namesake square, Richard Brome's play *The Weeding of Covent Garden* deliberately essays into speculative territory, undertaking an imaginative exercise in urban planning on a very public stage. Although Brome's title suggests that Covent Garden was a site not only familiar to audiences, but indeed so long-established and overgrown as to require weeding, this area of London was actually a massive construction project just starting to take shape in 1632–3, when the play itself was likely plotted and performed.¹ With a design commissioned from Inigo Jones, then at the height of his fame as Surveyor of the King's Works, the fourth Earl of Bedford set out to transform a largely undeveloped patch of land, used as pasturage since the times of

Henry VIII, into an architecturally innovative and coherent neighbourhood of roughly twenty acres. Anchoring this planned community would be an elegant residential square modelled after an Italian piazza, a public space heralding a style and function yet unseen in London's urban fabric. Workers had broken ground on the square's west flank with the construction of St. Paul's Church, likely begun in 1631, although the landmark rowhouses along the north and east sides belong to a later period of building spanning 1633–4 to 1637.² Thus faced with an embryonic site undergoing a rapid metamorphosis, a more cautious playwright might have deferred writing about Covent Garden until clearer outlines emerged from the muck of construction, awaiting especially the completion of Bedford's showpiece piazza. Yet by firmly planting his feet on the unfinished ground of 1632–3, by founding his play on a contingent site yet to signify securely in the public imagination, Brome raises cogent questions about the kinds of social script soon to play out in this space of potentiality, a space structurally marked by a destabilizing foreignness. What are the consequences of marrying an alien architectural form to a local *habitus*? For Brome, it seems, such anxieties of spatial miscegenation can be figured by a conflicting notion of the feminine—understood doubly as the gendered body of architecture and as the unweeded sexuality of women within the new Covent Garden.

Bounded by St. Martin's Lane to the west, Drury Lane to the east, Long Acre to the north, and the Strand on the south, Covent Garden stands at the heart of an expanding seventeenth-century London, occupying an area adjacent to the grand residences pushing ever westwards down the Strand. Situating his own impressive house at the southern end of Jones's square, Bedford undertakes a considerable personal and financial investment in his decision to develop Covent Garden, negotiating delicately around James I's ban on new construction in London while paying thousands of pounds for licences and fines. As part of his overarching vision to erect a home neighbourhood virtually *ex nihilo*, a socially and geographically exclusive community lacking even an access road to the Strand, Bedford partners with Inigo Jones to demonstrate cultural sophistication and difference in tangible form.³ No architect could be more suited to Bedford's sensibility than Inigo Jones, the intellectual disciple of Palladio and a court favourite; importing Italian design features yet unseen in England, Jones uses Covent Garden as an urban crucible for his neoclassical architectural principles, designing a community remarkable for its adherence to a single aesthetic. Although Jones's original drawings have been lost,⁴ late seventeenth-century depictions of the central square reveal

rows of uniform brick houses, set over wide vaulted walkways intended as a covered promenade for high society: interestingly, it is these portico houses and not the square itself that Londoners called the ‘Piazza’, a shift in semantics indicating the novelty and foreignness of such architectural elements.⁵ Indeed, while the cosmopolitan Jones clearly knows his way around an Italian ‘piazza’,⁶ the execution of his design would fall to those whose neoclassical credentials were less than stellar, to a cadre of speculators who leased plots of land from Bedford and built for commercial profit. In an effort to enforce aesthetic conformity, Bedford not only stipulated in his leases an extremely detailed set of instructions for builders to follow, but also built a model range of three houses to serve as a visible reminder of the expected results.

This schism between speculative construction and architectural integrity surfaces in Brome’s character Rooksbill, a builder introduced in the play’s first scene. As he and Cockbrayne, a Justice of the Peace, await a potential tenant in Covent Garden, the topic of discussion turns quickly from the aesthetics of Bedford’s development to the promise of cold hard cash:

Cock.	Your money never shone so on your Counting-boards, as in those Structures.	
Rook.	I have pil’d up a Leash of thousand pounds in walls and windows there.	
Cock.	It will all come again with large encrease. And better is your money thus let out on red and white, then upon black and white, I say.	(pp. 1–2) ⁷

In this moment of masculine bonding, Cockbrayne praises his friend’s shrewd investment and cultivation of wealth in choosing to build, envisioning gold as somehow structurally embedded in the shining houses before him. Indeed, in banking on a ‘large encrease’ from the ‘red and white’ of brick and stone, Rooksbill not only deploys architectural components (‘walls and windows’) as sites of hoarding, but also transforms the building itself into a womb generating ever more money, a weeded and constructed garden that dutifully provides a monetary harvest. Such a masculinist logic of production proves no different from the ‘black and white’ of mercantile banking; instead of trafficking in bills of exchange that convert foreign currency at a profit, instead of riskily letting out money to foreigners and travellers, Rooksbill sows exoti-

cism into the home and hearth of central London, gambling that buyers will embrace a foreign aesthetic as representing cultural and financial capital.

While *Weeding* seems to endorse such a means of reaping commercial gains through a domestication of the alien, a more feminine exploitation of the same values proves not to be so easily assimilated into London. Indeed, a gendered imbalance in the registers of Italian culture emerges towards the end of this opening scene, after Cockbrayne and Rooksbill have duly met with the country gentleman, Crossewill, who wishes to occupy one of the new houses in Covent Garden. Just as Cockbrayne is in the midst of allaying Crossewill's doubts about the modest appearance of Rooksbill, advising that 'we have able Builders here, that will not carry least shew of their buildings on their backs' (p. 8), a spectacularly showy personage enters the stage as if in direct counterpoint to these words; 'habited like a Curtizan of Venice' (*ibid.*, s.d.), this flamboyant woman catches the enraptured eye of Gabriel, Crossewill's son, as she emerges from the upper storey of a house and stands 'upon a Bellconie [balcony]' (*ibid.*). Largely unseen in her aerie until Gabriel points out 'that painted idolatrous image yonder' (pp. 8–9), this Venetian courtesan provokes an uproar not only because of her un-English, unchaste, unweeded sexuality on display, but also—oddly—because of her spatial location. Indeed, when the men below finally look up, their astonished reaction pertains more to the balcony than the woman herself:

Cock. O heresie! It is some lady, or Gentlewoman standing upon her Bellconey.
 Bolt. Her Bellconey? Where is it? I can spy from her foot to her face, yet I can see no Bellconey she has.
 Cock. What a Knaves this: That's the Bellconey she stands on, that which jets out so on the forepart of the house; every house here has one of 'hem.
 Bolt. Tis very good; I like the jetting out of the forepart very well; it is a gallant fashion indeed. (p. 9)

Such lexical confusion might well be understandable, since balconies constituted one of the Italian innovations first introduced in London at Covent Garden; thus, not only for Crossewill's servant Bolt but even members of Brome's audience, the term would hold less meaning than *piazza*.⁸ Beyond injecting a teaching moment into the action, however, Brome clearly intends

a bawdy pun on 'Bellconey' as a female body part, a mysterious and foreign erogenous zone that Bolt vainly tries to pinpoint through visual examination. While 'coney' is a common slang term for female genitalia, as used elsewhere in the play, Brome's 'bellconey' seems curiously unanchored: it is both something the courtesan stands on and a 'jetting out of the forepart,' a reference suggestive of the legendary bared breasts of Venetian courtesans. Unlike Rooksbill's discreet concealment of his income source by not showing his buildings on his back, this shockingly public woman not only displays her assets on the forepart, at least by implication, but her body seems to merge indistinguishably with the new architecture, calling into question what kinds of commerce, what kinds of transactions, the new Covent Garden actually demands.⁹

By juxtaposing the sale of Rooksbill's house against the sale of a woman's body, Brome implicates Bedford's urban development in selling out the homeland to a suspect foreignness, focalizing a perceived clash between high Italian architecture and low Italian morals through a consideration of the feminine body. In this obliteration of difference between domestic architecture and its traditionally female occupants, the container and the contained, Jones's fancy buildings shoulder some responsibility for destroying the boundaries that keep a woman chastely continent and a garden weeded, for thrusting out the 'bellconey' as a public commercial stage. Such a persistent outward impulse, threatening the structural integrity that protects a valued interiority, infects even a naïve enthusiast like Cockbrayne as he surveys Covent Garden:

Cock. Marry Sir! This is something like!
 These appear like Buildings!
 Here's Architecture exprest indeed!
 It is a most sightly scituation,
 and fit for Gentry and Nobility. (p. 1)

Privileging the visual above any other mode of apprehension, Cockbrayne absurdly lauds the buildings before him because they 'appear like Buildings,' just as he correlates the site's fitness for certain social classes merely by observing its 'sightly scituation'. Indeed, content with 'something like' rather than the thing itself, Cockbrayne confidently assesses architecture from a purely external perspective: the façades constitute 'Architecture exprest' not only by

articulating classical principles of proportion and harmony, but also by pressing spatial meaning outwards onto an aestheticized exterior.

Such a strong evaluative emphasis on the visible surface almost inevitably leads to anxieties about a feminization of architecture, a sense that essential function has been sacrificed at the altar of 'painted idolatry'; ironically, Inigo Jones himself believed that the clean, orderly lines of neoclassical architecture constituted a 'masculine and unaffected' way of building.¹⁰ In the gendered universe of Brome's play, however, the contamination of unweeded decoration in elements like balconies cannot be detached from a concomitant degradation of femininity into artifice and vulgarity, a femininity that desires to provoke a purely visual and visceral response. In the prologue to *Covent Garden* (1632), a play that seems to offer a satirical rebuttal to Brome, Thomas Nabbes trumpets the difference apparent in his own superior work by homing in on precisely this inability of his rival's to separate spatial and bodily deviance:

Do not expect th'abuses of a Place
Nor th'ills sprung from a strumpet's painted face
To be exprest.¹¹

In this mocking dismissal of Brome, the end rhymes of 'Place' and 'face' neatly encapsulate the problematic coupling that *Weeding* tries desperately to resolve, the conflation of strumpet and building that implicitly turns Rooksbill and Cockbrayne into panders. That is, Rooksbill's meretricious houses function as commodities of exchange, as architectural bodies for hire, by triggering a homosocial exchange involving a builder, a justice who acts as go-between, and that archetypal gull, the country gentleman seeking to settle in the city. Since purchasing one of these gussied-up homes perpetually threatens to detour into purchasing a prostitute, Rooksbill, when angered by Crossewill's perversity during the property transaction, aptly retorts: 'I had rather all my Rents were Bawdy houses' (p. 6).

The painted face of these new Italian houses, then, sullies the vision of gold that irrepressibly radiates from within, the promise of natural increase from wealth solidly leashed up in red and white.¹² Indeed, in contrast to the Petrarchan conceit of intermingled roses and cream, these feminized architectural faces have been spackled over with paint and powder, cosmetics intended to distract attention from the buildings' inherent lack of rootedness in the English soil. Just as the Venetian courtesan, who has just joined the

bawdy house that morning, essays speculatively into a realm of female liberation from native norms of sexuality and labour, indeed voicing a passionate manifesto in favour of a more Italian outlook on gender, the Covent Garden development that enables her escape from these conventions similarly constitutes an experiment in an imported 'progressive' sociality that literally builds upon a traditional English pasturage. The fates of these feminized bodies seem inextricably conjoined, the status of their fertility and productiveness a beacon for how an increasingly cosmopolitan London, a worldly city increasingly penetrated by foreignness, can successfully integrate such alien commerce and culture into its very centre. After all, as Cockbrayne's son Anthony asserts, the courtesan who challenges gender rules should be understood not as one of the punks who crop up later in the play, but rather as an innovative gardener, 'a She-Gallant that had travelled *France* and *Italy* [who would] Plant some of her forraign collections, the fruits of her travels, in this Garden here, to try how they would grow or thrive on English earth' (p. 11). In this description of a brave new woman whose trajectory sounds alarmingly close to that of Inigo Jones's career, Brome questions whether the planting of exotic ideas and values, no matter how highly prized by in some arenas, ultimately proves to be as sterile and unsatisfying as a whore's artificially beautified body. Such an anxiety about the construction of these multiple feminine figures, designed by a human rather than divine architect, ultimately resolves with a trick that lifts the veneer of foreignness to expose a thoroughly native core. Thus, the courtesan on the balcony, despite voicing a defiant manifesto advocating a more Venetian notion of liberated female sexuality and labour, ultimately turns out to be Crossewill's runaway niece, Dorcas, a wronged country girl who has remained chaste all along and simply wants a good English husband; casting aside her foreign identity like an ill-fitting, ill-proportioned façade, this putative Venetian *puta* returns to the fold as an unblemished English rose, her wild ways weeded before her bloom has been irretrievably blighted.

Despite this rather convenient and conservative legerdemain that substitutes one façade for another, Brome's text itself seems unable to eliminate the spectre of femininity that perverts its very structure, its dramatic lineaments. That is, by drawing on the name-brand appeal of Covent Garden, by musing extensively on the meaning of this yet unfinished place, *Weeding* expresses a feminine preoccupation with the dichotomy of place/face that hinders the cultivation of its masculinely well-tended plot, its linear development as a five-act drama. Indeed, Brome's seeming inability to wrench his eyes away from the minutiae of a place, especially evident in its opening scene, has prompted Theodore Miles

to categorize the play as belonging to a set of Caroline works that exhibit ‘place-realism’, a generic characteristic marked by ‘a photographic realism which seems to have been introduced for its intrinsic appeal, rather than for its effectiveness as setting.’¹³ That is, Brome yokes his work to Covent Garden for the sake of greater commercial cachet and audience titillation rather than any literary concern, awkwardly and needlessly injecting passages discussing actual places to the detriment of artistic cohesion. Echoing Miles’s sentiments, R.J. Kaufman’s study of Brome deplores the ‘misguided emphasis’ of place-realistic works that ‘in attaching themselves to over-specified settings, devote too much of their space to descriptive exercises, to exploring evanescent outcroppings of eccentricity, and to minor reformatory suggestions’.¹⁴ As an unassimilated outcropping ruining the play’s proportioned body, as a passing fad foreign to Brome’s corpus more generally,¹⁵ place-realism proves to be an obstacle to fulfilling the proper dramatic trajectory, stopping the temporal flow of events for an irrelevant and inconsequential excursus on space.

Minor, deviant, over-specific, photographic, intrinsically appealing, structurally counterproductive—such terms oddly resonate with Laura Mulvey’s analysis of the glamour close-up in Hollywood cinema. In her classic ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, Mulvey contends that these lingering, soft-focus close-ups of the female body, offered up as an object of desire, serve to arrest and divert the otherwise straightforwardly masculine action that propels the plot.¹⁶ Just as the camera glorifies bodily surfaces by encouraging the eye to roam over every aesthetically enhanced, magnified detail of a specific part, place-realism likewise indulges in a minute exploration of a glamourized and staged terrain, fetishizing sites with passages (truly *loci*) of descriptive extravagance that rove intimately over every contour: in this sense, place-realism might better be called place-hyperrealism for its valorization of a heightened representation, an unattainable potentiality, over any experiences outside the theatrical world. Indeed, beyond a structural feminization that such passages introduce into a concise and masculine text,¹⁷ the subjects chosen by place-realist playwrights tend to be locales problematically associated with femininity; in the case of Covent Garden, whose name derives from a convent vegetable garden that supposedly once occupied the site, the play’s unweeded passages of place-realism conflates a feminized close-up of a problematic *hortus non conclusus*, eminently pleasurable in its luxurious and inherently useless self-absorption, with a more conflicted, scopophilic gaze at the feminine sexuality and feminine architecture on display all around the square itself.

Indeed, by treating Covent Garden as an imported *topos*, physically and discursively, the play arrests the forward motion of construction in the square itself to interject a external note of literary reflection, an aesthetic time-out that moves the attention of Londoners from a real space to the possibilities of a performed, conditional, feminized one. Here, as elsewhere, theatre marries itself to the construction of a new reality.

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Notes

- 1 Dates for the play's composition and first performance have not been established conclusively, although scholars seem to agree on 1632–3 due mainly to internal historical evidence. But if we accept that Thomas Nabbes' *Covent Garden*, first performed in 1632, constitutes a hastily written response to Brome, then an early date seems reasonable. Matthew Steggle's 'Brome, Covent Garden, and 1641' discusses the implications for dating in light of the play's 1641 revival '[s]ome ten years since'; see *Renaissance Forum* 5 (2001): <<http://www.hull.ac.uk/renforum/v5no2/steggle.htm>> (accessed 17 September 2007).
- 2 *Survey of London: The Parish of St. Paul Covent Garden*, vol. 36, F. H. W. Sheppard (gen. ed.) (London, 1970), 5, 30. Dianne Duggan's recent discovery of documentation indicates that, in 1629, the local parish authorities of St Martin's in the Fields had issued Bedford a warrant for a licence to build; see "London the Ring, Covent Garden the Jewell of the Ring": New Light on Covent Garden', *Architectural History* 43 (2000), 140–61. Yet not until 1631 did Bedford obtain a licence to build from the Crown, which had bestowed the property on the first Earl of Bedford in 1552. In return for £2000, Bedford received a warrant in January of 1631, followed by the licence itself in February; Bedford's household accounts show building activity commencing not long afterwards. The first recorded lease of a rowhouse dates from November 1634.
- 3 Duggan, "London the Ring, Covent Garden the Jewell of the Ring", elucidates new links between Jones and Bedford, particularly the choice of a royal favourite as architect as a possible condition of obtaining building licences; see esp. 143–5.
- 4 Duggan tentatively identifies a schedule of measurements as being labelled in Jones's handwriting 'Covent Garden 1629', 144–5; this list of measurements, however, does not correspond with the ultimate shape of Covent Garden.

- 5 Cf. the usage of 'piazza' to designate covered colonnades at markets such as Leadenhall. See Kathryn A. Morrison's *English Shops and Shopping: An Architectural History*, (New Haven and London, 2003), 16.
- 6 Jones's design is indebted to the late sixteenth-century piazza at Livorno, which in turn influenced both the Place Royale and the Place Dauphine in Paris, built by Claude de Chastillon during the first decade of the seventeenth century. Jones likely visited both cities during his trips abroad with Lord Arundel. See *Survey of London*, 64–5.
- 7 Richard Brome, *Five New Plays* (London: 1659). All play quotations are cited parenthetically, and come from this 1659 edition, with line breaks reproduced as in the original.
- 8 Though, of course, balconies were commonly a part of English stage sets, themselves inspired by Italian architecture. Adam Zucker notes how both Brome and Nabbes 'drew upon the technology of their stages (the Cockpit for Nabbes and probably the Blackfriars for Brome) to reproduce the architecture of the Covent Garden piazza'; see 'Laborless London: Comic Form and the Space of the Town in Caroline Covent Garden', *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 5 (2005), 102. Reciprocally, Zucker astutely observes that these same balconies in Covent Garden likely conjured theatrical associations in the minds of passersby.
- 9 Cf. Zucker's analysis of the balconies in both Brome and Nabbes' respective Covent Gardens as eroticized sites of feminine display, 102–6.
- 10 From Jones's notebooks at Chatsworth.
- 11 Thomas Nabbes, *Covent-Garden a pleasant comedie* (London: 1639), Prologue.
- 12 'Leash' here thus signifies not only 'a set of three', as editors usually gloss the term, but also the more common sense of 'restraint.'
- 13 Theodore Miles, 'Place-realism in a Group of Caroline Plays', *The Review of English Studies* 18 (1942), 431.
- 14 R.J. Kaufmann, *Richard Brome: Caroline Playwright* (New York and London, 1961), 15–6.
- 15 Miles, 'Place-realism', lists only six plays written between 1631 and 1635 as demonstrating place-realism. Brome's two contributions to this sub-genre are *Weeding* and *Sparagus Garden*.
- 16 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16 (1975): 6–18.
- 17 We might also think here of Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text*, in which a writerly text defies the masculine logic of progression to embrace a more feminine *jouissance*. It seems to me that the pleasure of such place-centred passages goes beyond what Miles, 'Place-realism', calls 'the pleasure of recognition', 436.