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Recovering Disability in Early Modern England

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“There is no suff’ring due”

Metatheatricality and Disability Drag in *Volpone*

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In the opening of Jonson’s *Volpone*, the title character describes how he applies “ointment for [his] eyes” and impersonates symptoms and ailments as a form of manipulation: “Now, my feigned cough, my phthisic, and my gout, / My apoplexy, palsy, and catarrhs . . . this is my posture” (1.2.124–26).¹ While this description works as a comical instance of metatheatricality on the Renaissance stage, it simultaneously works as a performance of disability drag—a term introduced by Tobin Siebers to indicate instances in which an able-bodied person performs as a person with a disability.² The use of disability drag in *Volpone* is particularly notable, however, for this layered, metatheatrical deployment of imposture: unlike an able-bodied actor who performs as a character with a legitimate disability,³ the suffering body’s credibility in this early modern play works reciprocally with the character’s staging of able-bodiedness.⁴ *Volpone*’s lack of legitimate disability at the play’s outset—alongside the overt performance of an ailing body—undercuts the perception of disability as a material and lived bodily condition.

Volpone’s metatheatrical staging of disability drag brings issues of corporeality or bodily deceit to the forefront. His bodily imposture makes problematic Jonson’s representation of the disabled body: a disconnect surfaces between his character’s decision to appear ailing on stage while simultane-

ously choosing to acknowledge his able-bodiedness to the audience, and this disconnect poses a problem regarding the legitimacy of disabled bodies in early modern culture. More specifically, a fracture develops between the actor's bodily performance, which is an intentional fiction, and the real or lived body, as the stage fiction can lead to the perception that the lived body and its apparent disabilities, too, are unreal. Interpreting Volpone's metatheatrical representations of disability drag on the early modern stage thus calls for return to a question raised by Ato Quayson: "What happens to our interpretation when we examine the status of disability within a representational system in which *the discomfort of disability is not accounted for?*"⁵ Quayson's question resonates in *Volpone* because the play positions "discomfort" as a satirical performance of stereotypes related to disability—stereotypes that do not address the physical or mental suffering that may accompany a bodily condition. Moreover, the staged mimicry of discomfort in *Volpone* offers a metadramatic representation of comedy as "another site for disabled body viewing" that "hinge[s] upon narrow ideas about unacceptable bodies that encourage freak-show like titillation."⁶ In *Volpone*, the suitors who experience the "freak-show like titillation" brought about by Volpone's "unacceptable" body are in fact victims of a con artist. Volpone's false and exaggerated coughs, paired with his token "sick dress," thus allow the play to become a metaspectacle, a mimetic image of the outwardly unnatural construction of discomfort or pain and its observation by other characters on stage as well as the audience.

Much of my reading of *Volpone*, particularly in social or cultural contexts, is indebted to Mark Breitenberg's *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*⁷ and Gail Kern Paster's work in *Humoring the Body* and *The Body Embarrassed*,⁸ as these texts focus on the material fluidity of early modern selves. But while both critics engage the staging or fashioning of bodies (through humoral and gendered perspectives), the metatheatrical performance of the disabled body—along with its social and physical resonances—deserves further investigation. Representations of false disability in the dramatic sphere, after all, can expound on contemporary attitudes toward offstage interpretations of disability as imposture. Jonson's depiction of the body in *Volpone* satirizes the credibility of disability; Volpone's body sends one message to the characters on stage and another to the audiences who recognize the metatheatricality of that same body's performance.

In addition to questions of material corporeality and bodily construction that come about with *Volpone's* metatheatrical use of disability drag, I focus on this play for its insight into how wealth and social status affect the credibility of the drag performance. The imposture of disability in *Volpone*,

alongside its references to the containment of syphilitics near the drama's conclusion, accentuates the manipulation—through bodily deceit and disguise—of social practices or institutions intended for the ailing poor during the early modern period while also highlighting attempts to contain or control those disabled bodies. Volpone, exposed for feigning illness among people who desire to see his “sick dress,” portrays physical impairments as performances negatively spurred by greed and manipulation, and his treatment of disability as performance influences early modern social structures that contain poor pox sufferers within hospitals for the *Incurabili*. And, again, although the metatheatricality of this play reinforces social models of disability, its deployment of disability drag calls into question the embodied nature and, at times, painful bodily *experience* of disability that can, in reality, affect people of all social strata.

Social Stigma and Dismantling Disability Drag

Volpone is a fictional representation of disability drag; he is also a figure of wealth. Performances of disability imposture were not limited to the early modern stage, and responses toward those of lower social standing who engaged in disability drag often involved physical and visual objectification.⁹ Exposure of the drag performance rendered the impostor's body a spectacle and became another tool for denying the physically embodied nature of disability (and disease) while perpetuating the notion that it was largely performative. French surgeon Ambroise Paré's *On Monsters and Marvels*, for example, recalls a beggar feigning illness.¹⁰ In “The Imposture of a Woman Beggar Who Pretended to Have a Canker on Her Breast,” Paré's brother spies a begging woman with “a great amount of foul matter” flowing out onto a cloth in front of her breast. The brother then describes the beggar as “plump,” and he claims her face has a “good lively color,” which seems to indicate sound health. Thinking the beggar is an impostor, Paré's brother physically uncovers the woman's breast and finds a “sponge soaked and imbued with animal blood and with milk” that is “conducted through fake holes” in an “ulcerated canker.” He then knows for “sure that the canker is artificial.”¹¹ The brother's visually charged assessment of the beggar's body resembles an invasive and penetrating medical gaze,¹² but it strays in the undoing of an impostor's symptoms, thereby reversing a diagnosis of cancer into health—and a bodily condition into an artificiality.

The beggar presents herself as “hideous” and laden with “foul matter,” but she does not present herself (and, by extension, her breasts) as prepared

to be "uncovered" as a medical patient seeking a diagnosis or treatment might.¹³ Paré's beggar, as an object of social derision and skepticism, puts an image of illness on display by means of her disguised body—and though not in a theater, she engages in acting, and in spectacle, through her dress and performance. However, insofar as she does not intentionally situate her naked breasts as observable objects, this account deviates from the theatrical in its physical undoing of costume and construct. The brother separates the beggar's plumpness and color from her other observable bodily symptoms, taking it upon himself to expose her feigned illness and disguise. Because the brother has "[taken] some warm water and [has] fomented the breast, having moistened it," and later has "found the teat healthy and whole and in as good condition as the other,"¹⁴ he crosses the border between passive observer (akin to an early modern audience member) and physically invasive violator. The safe distance of "theatricality" collapses in his exposure of, and attendance to, her healthy breast. The beggar's disability drag is violently dismantled.

Although bodily exposure can lead to anxiety for spectators, the unveiling of the beggar's healthy breast arguably makes onlookers and the surgeon *less* anxious, as exposing a drag performance confirms the idea that pain, illness, and disability (particularly among someone of a lower class) are constructed tools for self-promotion and, further, evidence of a lack of moral character. Moreover, exposing disability as performance helps secure the viewer's own sense of health; in this case, the beggar's ailment no longer reminds one of his or her own physical vulnerability. As such, the beggar's undoing confirms Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's sense that starers perceive disability with "fascinated disbelief";¹⁵ rather than validating an illness or an onlooker's perceived susceptibility to a bodily condition that may result in pain or discomfort, the female beggar's exposure fosters the incredibility of her illness while simultaneously validating her low social status and subsequent punishment. Her disability drag, in turn, is "providing an exaggerated exhibition of people with disabilities but questioning both the existence and permanence of disability."¹⁶ At the same time, the perception that her disease lacks materiality is bound up with the perception that her performance puts a strain on the larger social body.

More specifically, the construction and exposure of disability as performance in "The Imposture of a Woman Beggar" places observers in a position of power and promotes the containment and isolation of marginalized figures after situating them on visual display. Paré concludes the narrative about the beggar by indicating that his brother "condemned the slut to get the whip," prior to banishing her from the country.¹⁷ Here, the abject beggar

who feigns disability becomes even more abject: she is cast out of the country's boundaries due to the surgeon's exposure of her able body. This social domination over those of abject classes—particularly among persons with a disability, real or impersonated—reflects vexed attitudes toward beggars during the early modern era. As William Carroll explains, “Of the genuinely poor, diseased, and destitute there was little dispute: it was a Christian duty to give them relief”; nevertheless, many “were united at least in their perception that the wandering poor were a real social and spiritual problem and that the existing system had not contained them.”¹⁸ The cultural preoccupation with beggarly infiltration and the focus on helping only the *genuinely* poor and ailing adds yet another dimension to Paré's depictions of the beggar (and, arguably, of other marginalized persons): the performance and construction—and subsequent deconstruction—of the beggar and her cancerous disguise demands that those in positions of power decide and determine the fate of disabled individuals (even those feigning disability) primarily by visual dissection.¹⁹ The dismantling of the beggar's drag evidences how the disabled poor are made objects of derision, skepticism, and intrusive spectacle, while other more wealthy impostors—such as the fictional Volpone—are allowed, at least initially, to maintain agency and control over their disguises and dis/abilities.

Undressing Volpone's “Sick Dress”

Instances of disability drag in *Volpone* are manifested not by beggars and other socially abject characters but rather by the upper echelons of early seventeenth-century society, and this reversal demonstrates social hypocrisy toward the affluent impostor as opposed to the abject impostor. Volpone, a wealthy character in disability drag, is perceived unconditionally by his fellow onstage onlookers as embodying both legitimate and wholly material disability. Yet this perception, as we will see, does not extend to offstage audiences who cannot—for their insider status—witness his disabled body as a corporeal truth; in Volpone's metatheatrical construction of his sick guise, early modern viewers continue to perceive his disability as lacking materiality. More precisely, bodily materiality—or, to recall Quayson, the discomfort of disability—is not merely disregarded or undermined in Jonson's play; rather, the onstage viewers who believe Volpone is in pain are scathingly labeled, as the character Mosca puts it, “harpies” (1.2.123). Their initial belief in Volpone's material discomfort counters Elaine Scarry's notion that pain fosters disbelief; though sufferers are certain of it, she explains, others

remain in doubt of that person's experience.²⁰ While Scarry's assertion might illuminate the surgeon's undoing of the female beggar's costume in "The Imposture of a Woman Beggar," Volpone's suitors trouble her claim, for they *desire* to see the character in "sick dress" and wholeheartedly believe that he is "turning carcass" (1.2.90). Volpone's performance of ailments makes him a spectacle of bodily suffering that suitor-spectators such as Corbaccio and Voltore pay to stare at in *fascinated belief*. And because Volpone is described in the Argument's opening line as wealthy and as one who "feigns sick" (1) as a means of gaining wealth and gifts from various potential heirs, an intentional hypocrisy emerges in which Jonson employs a disability drag most often considered characteristic of the early modern poor and desperate to the wealthy and privileged.

In this employment, Jonson creates an important distinction between Paré's beggar and Volpone. In Paré, the beggar's dismantled drag permits viewers to distance themselves from an often anxiety-inducing disabled body that supposedly has the potential to become a drain on social wealth. Here, instead, Volpone explicitly recounts his scheme to "delude" (1.2.123), by pretending to approach death:

This draws new clients daily to my house,
 Women and men of every sex and age,
 That bring me presents. . . .
 With the hope that when I die . . .
 it shall then return
 Tenfold upon them. (1.1.76–81)

Volpone, from the outset, frames his ostensibly disabled body as a commodity, a symbol not of the depletion of wealth or status but of its possibility. As such, Volpone's drag performance fosters indulgence, belief, and even celebration of his (illegitimate) pain. Volpone's elaborate description of his costume, or "sick dress," and performance of "Uh! [*coughing*] uh! uh! uh! O" (1.2.124–29) offer a comparable theatricality and demonstration of disability as the female beggar's. Yet his social position does not undermine but rather legitimates his "disability" when he encounters those who would attempt to believe, observe, or diagnose his condition: Volpone's potential heirs express assurance and excitement over his seemingly impending death and distribution of wealth, and as Mosca lists Volpone's symptoms to Corbaccio while observing Volpone in costume, Corbaccio exclaims "good" five times (1.4.42–48).

While Corbaccio identifies with the representation of bodily discomfort in Volpone's "Uh! [*coughing*] uh! uh! uh! O," the same cough-laden excla-

mation prevents the audience from identifying with or understanding this pain. Instead, the performance becomes for them a mere imitation of what Paster calls an unintentional “bodily event.”²¹ The theatricality of Volpone’s discomfort satirizes an individual’s attempts to master the ailing body since Volpone *is* actually in control while his body appears to be suffering and uncontrollable.²² Moreover, Volpone’s falsely ailing body remains on display, but, unlike Paré’s beggar, no one attempts to undo his costume or guise; Volpone eventually strips his disguise autonomously (5.12.83). During these scenes of observation and excitement surrounding Volpone’s outwardly dying body, audiences likely recognize the metatheatricality: an able-bodied actor plays an able-bodied Volpone who feigns turning “carcass.” Disability is, yet again, rendered wholly performative.

Further, the implications of disability drag as an imitation of a body approaching death in *Volpone* would have a particular discursive resonance with early modern audiences given alternative definitions of “carcass” circulating at the time. The *Oxford English Dictionary* glosses “carcass” in its spiritual contexts as “anything from which the ‘life,’ ‘soul,’ or essence is gone.”²³ Based on this characterization, Volpone-as-carcass becomes both a physical shell and a spiritual vacuum: Volpone’s “essence is gone.” And even though I read much of Volpone’s disability drag performance in terms of the character’s dialogue and actions within the play itself, this fundamental notion of a lack in essence matters especially in the context of Volpone’s overarching performance and its place in a cyclical, repetitive Renaissance theater characterized by actors’ consecutive performances.²⁴ The comedy, first performed by the King’s Majesty’s Servants, starred Renaissance actor Richard Burbage as Volpone.²⁵ Burbage’s performances in other play cycles (such as Shakespeare’s *Othello*) as an able-bodied person, but also his repeat performances as the able-bodied Volpone who feigns illness, complicate the nuances of his staged imposture. The recurrence of disability drag performances by either the same actor in an uninterrupted period or a different actor reinforces the perception of deception, construction, and performativity of the material body—and echoes Volpone’s self-description as “carcass.” Volpone, already void of “life” or “essence,” cannot suffer; the character, embodied by the well-known able-bodied actor playing him, is a construct, too, and this construction renders any potential suffering on his part strictly performative as well.

Whereas Volpone’s credibility amidst other characters arguably does little to undermine the negative treatments of socially abject characters in the play, his lack of credibility amidst early modern audiences—both in his character’s performance of sick dress and in his player as a known, able-bodied person—does much to undermine positive and credible treatments of socially

powerful yet morally corrupt characters. In other words, Volpone, in spite of his wealth and status, is through his greed and performance of illness nothing more than an impostor and an upper-class rendering of the beggar figure. The Avocatore claims that Volpone, "by blood and rank a gentleman," cannot receive the punishment that those of lower social statuses may endure (5.12.118); yet the play's later description of Volpone's character undercuts this elevated rank, as the Avocatore uses the term "imposture" to characterize Volpone's performance—a term explicitly likening him to Paré's beggar-impostors.²⁶

Volpone, "by feigning lame, gout, palsy, and such diseases," must "lie in prison, cramp'd with irons, / Till [he] be'st sick and lame indeed" in the *Incurabili* hospital (5.12.120–24). Through this punishment,²⁷ the Avocatore condemns Volpone to a space where his *criminal* body will be contained, and yet his insistence that the Fox becomes "lame" emphasizes contemporary denotations for the term, including crippled, impaired, and maimed,²⁸ and hence indeed marks Volpone as a person with a disability. Furthermore, Volpone's relocation to the hospital of the *Incurabili* situates him in a place typically reserved for impoverished syphilitics. According to Kevin Siena, hospitals of the *Incurabili* initially served to isolate and care for victims of the pox during this time: "Italians . . . define[d] the disease as 'incurable' and develop[ed] special hospitals to cater to the poor so afflicted." Siena explains that with the growth of mercury treatments for venereal disease came the perception that the pox could be treated, but he adds, "The *Incurabili* hospitals continued to provide the most important service of housing and treating the infected poor."²⁹

As a result, Volpone's containment among the Italian poor near the drama's conclusion plays with the conventional social ordering of early modern bodies. The punishment evidences how the judges have a *desire* for Volpone to become truly "lame indeed." Unlike the beggar whose guise of disabling illness is stripped away, Volpone's drag intentionally is reassembled by a social institution (the judicial system); the wealthy Volpone in his disability drag is forced into a place for people with "real" disabilities. The judges in the play hence reconstruct the *construct* of disability for Volpone in order to justify his corporeal performance. This reconstruction is, again, an exact inversion from what happens to Paré's female beggar; her body is violated and her drag costume torn apart in ways that disrupt the distance between observer and observed. *Volpone's* judges, who must also look, dissect, and decide his character's fate, take the opposite approach: though the drag has been exposed to everyone on stage by this point, the judges endeavor to reinstate the suspension of disbelief underscored in his consistent theatrical-

ity. The stage and its characters are (once more by way of metatheater) reassembled and redressed. Isolated and contained like the beggars—and, in the case of *Volpone*, the impoverished syphilitics—of their time, abject subjects are not redeemed through Jonson's treatment of *Volpone*, particularly the socially abject who may be ailing. A wealthy person, exposed for imposture among people who want to believe his "sick dress," destabilizes the important materiality of bodily suffering among all social strata—in the hospital of the *Incurabili* or elsewhere. The play's final aim to make someone "lame indeed" increasingly betrays unequal social structures and a perverse pleasure in theatricality rather than honest attention to individuals' actual material conditions and suffering.

Paré's "The Imposture of a Certain Beggar Who Was Counterfeiting a Leper" further substantiates the tenuous and socially hypocritical sense of justice made visible in *Volpone* through performances of false disability. Like the female beggar, the "big knave of a beggar" in Paré has a face that "shows no sign of leprosy."³⁰ The same brother from the previous narrative again strips this beggar and "condemns him to get the whip." This false leper then undergoes public torture and death: he is "banished forever from the country by the halter," and "the people [have] shouted at the top of their voices to the executioner: 'Strike, strike, officer! *He can't feel anything: he's a leper!*' wherefore at the voice of the people the executioner was cruelly bent on whipping him so hard that shortly afterward he died" (emphasis added).³¹ The spectacle of this beggar's death is distinct, of course, from *Volpone*'s public condemnation but private punishment. Regardless, however, the viewers' *denial* of the beggar's ability to feel discomfort or pain—coupled with their paradoxical reinforcement of his feigned status as a leper—parallels how he and the Fox both are linguistically made "lame" while, in many ways, perceived simultaneously by audiences as incapable of actual physical suffering.

Volpone's ending, too, affirms the perceived instability of disability and pain while underscoring its performativity. *Volpone* usurps the Epilogue of the drama, reminding audiences again of the metatheatricality of his punishment to ail among the poor:

The seasoning of a play is the applause.
 Now, though the Fox be punish'd by the laws,
 He yet doth hope, *there is no suffering due*,
 For any fact which he hath done 'gainst you;
 If there be, censure him; here he doubtful stands:
 If not fare jovially, and clap your hands. (1–6, emphasis added)

Volpone once more asserts to the audience that the entire drama is a performance; he seeks to detach his character's legal punishment from physical embodiment, claiming, "there is no suffring due." "Due," implicating both monetary payment and justice, works in this instance as another pun that allows Volpone's character to escape the condemnation of the masses by calling for applause over "censure." Finally, the character also escapes material embodiment of any kind by invoking the third person. No longer does the actor playing Volpone refer to his body and actions using "I" or "me"; he instead affirms detachment by invoking "he" and "the Fox." This detachment becomes further compounded by the invocation that "here he . . . stands." Audiences see an actor playing Volpone, and the actor acknowledges that a representation of the character stands before them. The speaker fails to link materially to the body he enacts. By concluding the drama in this way, Jonson utterly eliminates the potential for legitimate representations of discomfort or suffering and reinforces the initial problem of material embodiment revealed in disability drag and its metatheatricality.

VOLPONE FAILS to redeem the material credibility of the ailing body in both social and corporeal spheres by satirizing disability and its discomfort and rendering the disabled body a tool for exaggerated performance, spectacle, and manipulation. Moreover, images of ailments, particularly when revealed as costumes and performances on the Renaissance stage, remind audiences of the metatheatricality of disability—even when the drama ends. The notion of disability as performance gets internalized: as Volpone's character asks his audience to "censure" or "clap," viewers are encouraged to look, unveil, and pass judgment. While some spectators may "jovially" applaud the drag performance of illness *onstage*, *offstage* and in "real life" these sorts of judgments likely lead to punishment and containment of those who were either truly disabled or socially abject.

The metatheatrical manifestation of disability drag in *Volpone* destroys the boundary between actor and audience. This destruction ironically empowers viewers outside dramatic spheres while disempowering the object of their view—as is the case with Paré's beggars. The spectator's gaze becomes rooted in skepticism and disbelief, and people with physical or mental ailments become spectacles for analysis and eventual containment. As a result, the metatheatricality of drag performances such as Volpone's extends beyond the stage, both shaping Renaissance ideologies around disability and discomfort and reflecting early modern social structures that encouraged the elimination of impostors and containing of syphilitics. Lastly, it is worth noting that

disability drag is not unique to *Volpone*: Antonio feigns mental illness in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*, and Beaumont's *Knight of the Burning Pestle* employs boy actors to play adult men who then transform into characters such as George, a dwarf, and Sir Pockhole, a syphilitic. These Renaissance dramas, among others such as Shakespeare's *King Lear* (in which Edgar famously fashions himself into a beggar with mental illness), can serve as a broader cultural window into how disability drag, particularly when acknowledged as a metadramatic performance, often problematically engenders doubt about the lived materiality of disability in the early modern period.

Notes

1. All references to this work come from Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, ed. Brian Parker and David Bevington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999). Subsequent citations appear within the text.

2. Siebers explores the idea of disability drag as well as passing: the choice to hide disability or to make it visible. In terms of disability drag, Siebers has also suggested that viewers of the performance perceive disability as temporary or merely a construct. See *Disability Theory*, 114–16.

3. An example of this type of drag performance (one lacking metatheatricality) in early modern contexts might include, for instance, the amputation of Lavinia's hands in *Titus Andronicus*.

4. It could be asserted that most performances of bodily discomfort in comedic genres are metatheatrical in their imitation of suffering for laughter. However, *Volpone* takes the metatheatricality even further by exposing and explaining his performance of discomfort directly to the audience.

5. Quayson defines discomfort as a “euphemism for the broad range of perturbations that afflict the character with disability, from embarrassment to physical discomfort to pain, both mental and physical”; see *Aesthetic Nervousness*, 54. Because *Volpone*'s metatheatrical performance of disability hinges on his mimicry of “discomfort,” this type of disability drag conflates with other fakers of bodily ailments, including the illness faker and the deathbed faker.

6. Mitchell and Snyder, *Cultural Locations of Disability*, 166. As Mitchell and Snyder have argued, “disabled bodies have been constructed cinematically and socially to function as delivery vehicles in the transfer of extreme sensation to audiences” (162, italics original). In the case of *Volpone*, the “transfer of extreme sensation” to the spectators happens within the plot, rather than to the viewers offstage.

7. Breitenberg posits that the early modern male body's construction is rooted in regularity and fluidity, arguing that it is a “signifier of cultural tensions and contradictions”; see *Anxious Masculinity*, 3.

8. Paster, *Body Embarrassed and Humoring the Body*. She argues that how one's body comes across in early modern culture owes as much to the passions and Galenic humors—and one's struggle for control over them—as it does to “the realities of social . . . hierarchy everywhere in the period” (*Humoring the Body* 21).

9. While there are various early modern examples of anxiety about false disability and illness, similar instances can be seen as early as the medieval period. For scholarship on such accounts and cautionary tales toward disability counterfeits, see, for example, Metzler's *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 151–52.

10. Paré, *Monsters and Marvels*.

11. *Ibid.*, 74–75; chap. 22.

12. This term is from Michel Foucault, who characterizes the medical gaze as a process of extrapolating various symptoms or signs of illness that then pieces them back together to form a holistic diagnosis; *The Birth of the Clinic*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 14.

13. A facet of this surgeon's gaze can be explained via Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's *Staring*: "Staring is a conduit to knowledge. Stares are urgent efforts to make the unknown known"; she adds, "Knowledge gathering is the most productive aspect of staring in that it can offer an opportunity to recognize one another in new ways" (15). Though I conflate this instance of staring with the gaze due to the surgeon's diagnostic approach, Garland-Thomson distinguishes between the two actions: "The stare is distinct from the gaze, which has been extensively defined as an oppressive act of disciplinary looking that subordinates its victim" (9). For Garland-Thomson, the process of staring, especially when the object of the stare returns the look, has more reciprocity between subject and object.

14. Paré, *Monsters and Marvels*, 75.

15. Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 20.

16. Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 116.

17. Paré, *Monsters and Marvels*, 75.

18. William Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 27.

19. Lindsey Row-Heyveld has drawn attention to early modern disability as "particularly effeminizing" within the social hierarchy and framed this feminization around passivity, claiming that "persons with disabilities became objects to be acted upon" ("The Lying'st Knave in Christendom," n.p.) Row-Heyveld also emphasizes the paranoia about counterfeits who used false disability to garner charity.

20. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4. Quayson also uses Scarry's point in order to explain how discomfort can produce doubt: "The one not in pain may entertain some doubt about the veracity or intensity of what the bearer of pain claims to be feeling" (*Aesthetic Nervousness*, 79–80).

21. Paster, *Body Embarrassed*, 12. She further asserts that "bodily events that . . . we ordinarily regard as trivial . . . might in the humoral body be fraught with significance as *unwilled* alterations of the body's internal state" (12, emphasis added).

22. Volpone's controlled imposture of suffering becomes even more complex at the outset of act 5. Privately, Volpone confesses that his "left leg 'gan to have the cramp," claiming "some power had struck" him "with a dead palsy" while performing as ailing for an audience (5.1.5–7). While this could be taken as a legitimate performance of discomfort, the character's emphasis on a public performance versus a private expression of pain remains a product of metatheatricality; the audience still observes the able-bodied actor making this claim. After expressing this discomfort, moreover, Volpone turns to wine as a means of controlling the pain, saying he "shall conquer" and "prevent" any "villainous disease" (5.1.9–13).

23. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), def. 4.

24. In *Disability Theory* Siebers argues, “When actors play disabled in one film and able-bodied in the next . . . the audience also knows that an actor will return to an able-bodied state as soon as the film ends” (116).

25. See Brian F. Tyson, “Ben Jonson’s Black Comedy: A Connection between *Othello* and *Volpone*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29 (1978): 61.

26. This is not the first instance in which Volpone has been equated with the immoral beggar-impostor. Bonario discovers Volpone’s disguise earlier in the play, and Volpone responds, “I am unmasked, unspirited, undone, / Betrayed to beggary, to infamy” (3.7.77–78).

27. Stephen Greenblatt projects a similar reading onto Volpone’s punishment, contending that the sentence prohibits the Fox’s constant metamorphoses and disguises until “his being finally and irrevocably assumes the shape of his mask”; “The False Ending in *Volpone*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 75 (1976): 102. Still, while Volpone’s mask is indeed one of sickness, it retains its wealthy status, making it a slight departure from his character’s earlier performances.

28. See *OED*.

29. Kevin Siena, *Venerable Disease, Hospitals, and the Urban Poor* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 64. Jonson sets *Volpone* in Venice, rendering Siena’s reading of Italian hospitals geographically applicable to the drama. At the same time, the application to English society also comes across for, as Siena posits, “The Italian hospital records pre-date London ones, but it is likely that the chronology of the English response parallels the case . . . in Italy” (64).

30. Paré, *Monsters and Marvels*, 76–77, chap. 23.

31. *Ibid.*, 77.